

Gender, Politics and Scientists

Lucas MONTEIL

At a time when gender is on the debating table, the *Dictionnaire genre et science politique* [Dictionary of gender and political science] does more than just summarise current knowledge in the field. The book reminds us that politics has always had gender-related divisions that define it, and that the recent inclusion of gender issues in the political arena raises new questions.

Reviewed: Catherine Achin and Laure Bereni (eds), *Dictionnaire genre & science politique. Concepts, objets, problèmes*, Paris, Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2013. Contributors: Lucie Bargel, Laurie Boussaguet, Marion Charpenel, Sébastien Chauvin, Ioana Cîrstocea, Marielle Debos, Magali Della Sudda, Mathias Delori, Delphine Dulong, Olivier Fillieule, Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Sophie Guérard de Latour, Bertrand Guillarme, Cécile Guillaume, Alban Jacquemart, Sophie Jacquot, Anna Jarry-Omarova, Alexandre Jaunait, Jane Jenson, Clémence Ledoux, Alice Le Goff, Karine Lempen, Amélie Le Renard, Sandrine Lévêque, Bérengère Marques-Pereira, Elisabeth Marteu, Camille Masclet, Frédérique Matonti, Marion Paoletti, Lorena Parini, David Paternotte, Bibia Pavard, Anna Perraudin, Gwenaëlle Perrier, Anne-Sophie Petitfils, Sophie Pochic, Marion Rabier, Juliette Rennes, Anne Revillard, Michèle Riot-Sarcey, Magalie Saussey, Réjane Sénac, Mariette Sineau, Philippe Teillet, Manon Tremblay, Anne Verjus. 700 pp, €25.

There is a striking concordance in the fact that, just as the notion of gender is establishing itself as an unprecedented focal point in the political arena, this important collaborative dictionary has been published under the editorship of Catherine Achin and Laure Bereni. It summarises the contributions brought about by this encounter between gender and political science, and marks a vital stage in the development of gender studies within the field of social sciences in France¹.

Concordance does not necessarily mean coincidence, however. Now, as always, internal shifts within the scientific field appear to depend on political movements. If gender studies are such a visible part of political science today, it is because issues of “sex” are becoming increasingly politicised: from second-wave feminism in the 1970s to the debates and mobilisation that centred on equality in the 1990s and, more recently, the targeting by right-wing, reactionary and fascist political movements of the very concept on which these studies are based.

The primary interest of this Dictionary of gender and political science, however, lies specifically in the fact that it highlights the scientific consequences and significance of this process of politicisation. Namely, it shows and summarises, through the case of political science, the contribution that gender-focused studies have made to instituted research disciplines. First of all, therefore, we shall focus on the history of this encounter as it is reproduced in the book. We shall then try to underline two main ways in which it makes its contribution to knowledge in political

1 The conference held in May 2002 at the French Political Science Association (AFSP), organised by Pierre Muller, was an important step in promoting this encounter. It also gave rise to a collaborative publication: Christine Bard, Christian Baudelot and Janine Mossuz-Lavau (ed.), *Quand les femmes s'en mêlent. Genre et pouvoir*, Paris, Éditions de la Martinière, 2004.

science: first, the critical reassessment of the concept of “politics” in the light of that of “gender” – in other words, its “rebirth”; second, the paradigm shift towards the co-construction of gender and politics, as an alternative to their secular exclusion.

Gender, from politicisation to political science

The important task of historicising the encounter between gender studies and political science is carried out by Laure Bereni and Catherine Achin in the introduction to the book. This is notable in its highlighting of the link between the politicisation of gender issues and the inclusion of the concept in political science. The authors focus in particular on two strictly political events that boosted the acceptance and development of studies on women and gender in France as a result of political and media demands. First, the celebration of the bicentenary of the French Revolution, which provided an opportunity to question the role of women in the events that established democratic modernity. Second, the process of collective mobilisation in support of political equality, which resulted in the adoption of the French gender parity law in 2000. These “demands, which are largely exogenous to the academic field,” (p. 22-23) first of all created a favourable context in which to highlight research carried out previously, and marginally, on women and power in the wake of second-wave feminist mobilisations; it was also a favourable context for female researchers, well established in their fields, to reflect on this question, as well as for specialists on the subject to contribute as a way of legitimising the implementation of new measures promoting gender equality. At the same time, the authors stress that this process thus primarily concerns philosophy and history, and it was only after the parity law had come into force and made a significant impact on the very functioning of the political game (p. 32) that gender issues really began their gradual acclimatisation in all the sub-fields of the discipline: political/state socio-history; political philosophy/theory; international relations; the sociology of political organisations (parties, trade unions, social movements, etc.); the sociology of political behaviours; analysis of public action, and so on.

In other words, in order for political science to truly incorporate gender within its sphere, it is first necessary for feminism to truly transform the political field. Arguably, while “political science” is not the only political science (in the sense previously defined as a political construction of disciplines), it maintains a relationship of dependence and specific proximity with the political field in the strictest sense: a well-established science of the State, it shares its sociological characteristics – reflected by its very weak feminisation – and its ideological characteristics, such as its normative and highly institutionalist vision of “politics” (p. 17). And the authors underline the fact that, paradoxically, the discipline’s blindness towards the strictly political nature of the social relationship of gender did not disappear during the critical turning point in which, from the 1980s and particularly 1990, French political science – influenced by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu – embarked on a process of sociologisation and historicisation of political inequalities (of class) that was unprecedented in Europe.

However, the originality and value of this Dictionary of gender and political science (to which female representatives from all fields of political science have contributed, as well as specialists from other disciplines and all generations) is the very fact that it does not hold on to a demonstrative summary of gender as a legitimate political, and therefore scientific, subject: it confirms the vital quality of gender as an agent that is as much political as it is scientific². In general

2 From 2000 to 2010 in particular, a number of collaborative works and French-language textbooks took a synthetic approach to studies on gender, with different points of departure and perspectives (feminist theories, sociology, gender studies, etc.). See in particular: Christine Guionnet and Érik Neveu, *Féminins/Masculins. Sociologie du genre*, Armand Colin, 2004; Laure Bereni, Sébastien Chauvin, Alexandre Chauvin, Anne Revillard, *Introduction aux études sur le genre*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2012 [2008]; Isabelle Clair, *Sociologie du genre*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2012; Elsa Dorlin, *Sexe, genre et sexualités*, Paris, PUF, 2008; Lorena Parini, *Le système de genre : introduction aux concepts et théories*, Ed. Seismo Zürich, 2006; Margaret Maruani (ed.), *Femmes, genre et sociétés. L'État des savoirs*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005; Ferrand Michèle, *Féminin masculin*, Paris, La Découverte, Repères

terms, it systematises its heuristic scope by summarising the many contributions and empirico-theoretical reviews to which the accumulation of gender-focused studies on the aims of political science have led³. While it would clearly seem that one of the mainsprings of the contribution that this gender perspective has made to the discipline is, paradoxically, its basic *interdisciplinarity*, reflected in this dictionary, here we shall concentrate on two ways in which our understanding of “politics” is significantly altered by the concept of gender.

The (re)birth of “politics”

As far as political science is concerned, when it comes to gender studies it is not simply a question of taking on new subjects: as with the movement that led female historians away from the history of women towards that of gender, the aim is no longer to study what was previously unknown but rather to take a different approach to analysing what was believed to be known. First of all, this movement had a major impact on the discipline, whose development had centred on the study of “politics”: while the contemporary politicisation of gender has led to its growing incorporation into the political purpose, it has also brought about a critical reinterpretation, through the politological perspective on gender, of the categorical construction of “politics” which had long since been accepted unquestioningly by academic professionals and was based primarily on the opposition between the public world of men and the private world of women. The authors remind us that studies on the gendered nature of the division between the “public sphere” and the “private sphere” “have highlighted the role of gender in legitimising the hierarchical separation between the two spaces, and in naturalising the boundaries between what is political and what is not” (p. 39).

The turning point, highlighted at several points in the book, derived from political philosophy: indeed, it was the historical conceptualisation of “politics” that was weakened. Sexual contract theories, among others, have shown that “the exclusion of women from democracy, far from being a case of ‘morals’ lagging behind ‘principles’, forms the core of the modern political order”. Furthermore, while it is no longer possible to disassociate the social contract from the sexual contract, as Carole Pateman [concludes](#), the “gendered structuring of ways of thinking and of defining politics” (p. 39) does not belong in the past. Particularly if we share Susan Okin’s view that “theories of justice, especially those of John Rawls, scarcely acknowledge the power relations at work within the family, which is nonetheless considered a vital space in which the political subject is established” (p. 40). These theories maintain that it is the heads of families, and not individuals, who are collaborators of the original position – which prevents a mobilisation of the principles of justice that violate traditional gender roles and male supremacy” (Bertrand Guillaume, “Contrat social”)⁴.

Developed only recently by philosophers, this critique of the androcentric nature of the traditional definition of “politics” has nonetheless formed the basis for feminist and gender studies in the wake of second-wave feminist mobilisations. It shows that the political order is based on a sexual order, which is itself an issue of power relations that has become deeply hidden. However, by condemning the universalisation of the political experiences of men, the critique also reassesses

series, 2004; Dominique Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, Christine Planté, Michèle Riot-Sarcey, Claude Zaidman (ed.), *Le Genre comme catégorie d'analyse. Sociologie, Histoire, Littérature*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003.

These books have played a very significant role in reinforcing knowledge of women, “sex” and gender, and, while they generally share the point of view of studies on feminism or gender, they have sometimes adopted that of instituted disciplines of the human and social sciences (primarily sociology) with regard to gender. However, to our knowledge none had ever combined the two points of view so systematically before, or, more specifically, tried first and foremost to highlight the contributions of the former to the specific purposes and questionings of the latter.

3 The impressive bibliography included at the end of the book provides an enlightening record and a privileged tool for both current and forthcoming research projects.

4 Even so, it is interesting to note that, as Bertrand Guillaume points out, John Rawls himself acknowledged the relevance of Susan Okin’s criticisms, and incorporated them into his system – a perfect example of the recognition of a gendered reorganisation of political theories.

those of women, which helps us to understand the strictly political dimension of activities and spaces that has thus far been consigned, along with its female actors, to a sphere that is both outside and inside politics and whose scope is subsequently considerably broader. Alongside the increasingly well-documented records of female participation in wars and revolutions, Bereni and Achin cite overlooked examples of women taking collective action after being excluded from formal political citizenship, in spheres that lie on the boundary between public and private. In religious, social and philanthropic organisations where their presence has been tolerated, they have therefore played a key role in political history, for example in constructing the social State. While this gendered reconceptualisation of politics underpins the dictionary as a whole – which, in return, gives politics a new scope – it hinges on the illustration, running throughout the book, of a major paradigm shift: from the a priori exclusion of gender and politics, which went unchallenged for a long time, towards the increasingly systematic study of their coproduction.

Gender and politics: from exclusion to coproduction

One of the key elements in this book is its systematic highlighting of the dual process of the political production and productivity of gender, following the work of Joan Scott⁵. However, although the function of gender as a “privileged language signifying power relations” – a focal point of Scott’s thought – is admirably illustrated (particularly in the articles by Anna Jarry-Omarova and Élisabeth Marteu, “Nation / Nationalisme” [Nation/Nationalism], and by Marielle Debos, “Conflits armés” [Armed conflicts]), right down to its most “material” effects, the book does not stop there: the political productivity of gender is understood through its uses as a concept, or *political signifier* – its key role in the discursive constructions of power – and as an *instituted and instituting social relationship*, that is, a vital aspect of political processes, a constituent element of the logics of action, public policies and institutional organisation both in France and at international level, as well as their product.

We could cite the example of the recent implementation of measures aimed at promoting “male/female” equality both in France and internationally (see, for example, Réjane Sénac, “Quotas/Parité” [Quotas/Parity], and Amélie Le Renard, “Mondialisation” [Globalisation]). However, these policies, geared towards gender parity, reveal precisely the deep-rooted “overlapping of social problems that gender embodies in an exemplary and particularly forceful way, but which is not inherent to it” (p. 404): here, the sectoral conception of public issues, including within analyses of public action, does not oppose the need for a global, “intersectoral” approach to gender equality (Gwennaëlle Le Perrier, “Politiques publiques”). This shows the degree to which gender, particularly because it involves a cross-disciplinary system of provisions and standards, is both an established and establishing element, albeit invisible, of public policies as a whole. If, in order to alter the state of gender relations, it appears necessary to rethink all public policies, it is because gender participates in and is derived from any political construction.

These developments are in line with other subjects and concepts shaped by gender specialists, such as intersectionality, which are given specific dictionary entries of their own but also constitute key elements of books presented in other dictionary entries. We might note, for example, what paradigmatic movements have in common, aimed, on the one hand, at highlighting relational overlapping and mutual construction between social relations (relations of class, race and gender in particular), that is, their consubstantiality⁶, and, on the other hand, at analysing the coproduction of gender and politics, that is, a decompartmentalisation or disordering of the social

5 Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5. (Dec., 1986), pp. 1053-1075. (In French, “Genre : une catégorie utile d’analyse historique” translated from English by Eleni Varikas, *Les cahiers du GRIF*, n°37-38, 1988 [1986], p. 125-153.) On this point cf. p. 144 et seq. (French version).

6 Kergoat Danielle, “Dynamique et consubstantialité des rapports sociaux”, in Dorlin Elsa (ed.), *Sexe, race et classe : pour une épistémologie de la domination*, Paris, PUF, 2009.

sphere, informed by feminist epistemologies, particularly those in a minority. The second movement, however, in a sense goes beyond the first: the first analyses relations of coproduction between social relations, leading us to consider problems together that so far had been conceived independently, and aims in particular to go beyond the dominance that has been conferred on one relation or the other depending on the context (Sébastien Chauvin and Alexandre Jaunait, "Intersectionnalité"); the second, meanwhile, does not focus its analysis so much on the relational overlapping between social relations but rather on their relationship with institutions in and through which they are instituted, with gender gradually establishing itself in this analysis⁷.

The *Dictionnaire genre et science politique* is a tool of major interest, efficiently informing us of the importance of gender for any academic analysis of politics. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the unequal representation of theoretical propositions highlighted here, and it is regrettable that the focus on the overlapping of gender and other social relations, within the different entries, should be so irregular. Finally, we might question the observation that political science lags behind when it comes to integrating gender perspectives through the human and social sciences, which, convincing as it might seem from a historical point of view, should perhaps be questioned today: can it not be said that the extreme politicisation of gender issues in recent years has encouraged this discipline to invest in them? Certainly, the institutionalisation of gender studies in France today seems as much under way as it is under debate, as demonstrated by the number of seminars and conferences being held on the subject, particularly at the Université Paris-8, which was already a pioneer in the field⁸. In this respect, it is clear that this dictionary demonstrates the importance of a scientific institutionalisation of gender, a perspective that is firmly anchored in an exchange between the disciplines, which, far from developing to their detriment, only increases their scope.

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7 Although studies of race are less common than those of class, there is an enlightening example of an analysis of this process of political coproduction, combining race and gender, in Fassin Éric, "Des identités politiques. Jeux et enjeux du genre et de la race dans les primaires démocrates aux États-Unis en 2008", *Raisons politiques*, 2008/03, n° 31, p. 65-79.

8 The conference entitled "Histoire des femmes, histoire du genre, histoire genrée...", held on 5 and 6 December 2013, focused on the backwardness shown by the historical discipline when it comes to recognising gender studies. With regard to the institutionalisation of gender studies, the issue was recently discussed at the seminar held by LabToP postgraduate students, "Politiques de la scientificité 3", and at the international conference "Le printemps international du genre — Enjeux politiques et savants de l'institutionnalisation et de l'internationalisation d'un champ d'études", held on 26 and 27 May 2014.