

The Field of Women's Advocacy

Thinking the Cross-sectional Dimension of Women's Collective Struggles

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the concept of “Field of Women's Advocacy” (FWA), drawing from my thesis work on the campaign for gender parity in political representation throughout the 1990s in France (Bereni 2007a).

Let me start by defining briefly the concept before going into my demonstration. The Field of Women's Advocacy designates the configuration of organized groups and their participants mainly or exclusively devoted to the advancement of women, whatever may be their vision of women's advancement and the social site in which they mobilize. The main characteristic of the FWA is its cross-sectional dimension: first, it includes several, conflicting visions of women's interests, that I propose to designate as “streams” (from the French “*mouvances*”); second, it encompasses actors from several social arenas, that I have called “poles” (from the French “*pôles*”: 1-women's organizations in civil society (*autonomous organizations pole*); 2-women's party sections and women in public office working on gender issues (*political party and electoral pole*); state apparatus in charge of women's status (*state pole*); women's studies and feminist sub-field within the academia (*academic pole*). I argue that the FWA is more than a juxtaposition of individuals and groups struggling for women's advancement in different ways and social sites. While being heterogeneous and conflictual, the FWA has a relative autonomy from the rest of the social space, based on structural social ties between its members. These ties stem from the existence of common sites of socialization, the interlocking of organizational networks (e.g. umbrella organizations), and the multiple positioning of some members. I will demonstrate that this concept is helpful to account for the structural conditions of the success, but also the failures, of women's collective struggles in the political arena.

The FWA is an inductively built concept. It draws from a singular, empirical case, which is the campaign for gender parity in France in the 1990s. It has not been confronted yet with collective discussion outside the French academia. Nor has it been empirically tested in other contexts or in a comparative perspective. The aim of this paper is to submit it to collective discussion in order to assess its contribution to the literature on women's and feminist movements.

My presentation will be divided in two parts.

First, since the concept of FWA has been built from the case of the campaign for gender parity, I will present the main characteristics of this campaign, emphasizing the empirical aspects that led me to elaborate the concept.

Second, I will give a detailed presentation of the concept. I will show that it is indebted to the existing literature on women's and feminist movements, but also that it has a specific theoretical value compared to existing concepts on women's movements and feminism.

1. THE CAMPAIGN FOR GENDER PARITY IN FRANCE (1992-2000)

At the beginning of the 1990s, with barely 6% of women in Parliament – the same proportion of female parliamentarians as at the first general elections after enfranchisement, in 1946 –, France lagged behind most European countries in terms of the political representation of women. In this context, like many other countries in Europe and beyond, and with the support of several international institutions (such as the U.N. and the European Commission), France witnessed the rise of women's collective struggles for a better female presence in political bodies. The campaign started in 1992, when three women's rights advocates published a book that made the case for the new motto of "parity" ("*parité*" in French), i.e. the demand for a law imposing a fifty-fifty representation of the sexes, in all representative assemblies (Gaspard, Le Gall, & Servan-Schreiber 1992).

In the following years, a flurry of new women's groups (including "Parité", "Parité 2000", "Parité-infos", "Assemblée des femmes") and networks of women's organizations (such as "Elles Aussi", "Réseau Femmes pour la parité", "Demain la Parité", "Réseau Femmes et Hommes pour la parité") were created around the motto. From 1993 to 2000, they pressured political parties, government leaders, and the media, using various – mainly conventional – venues, including conferences and meetings, petitions, manifestos, letter-writing campaigns to political leaders, newspaper articles, demonstrations in front of the Parliament, etc (Sineau 2003; Scott 2005; Bereni 2007b; Lépinard 2007).

1.1. The paradoxical success of the campaign for gender parity

This campaign led to the adoption of two major institutional reforms at the end of the decade: in 1999, the Parliament passed a constitutional amendment that entitled the law to take positive action measures in order to enhance equality between men and women in elected offices. One year later, in 2000, a law (known as the "parity law") mandated a 50-50 representation of women and men among candidates at the elections with a list system (local, regional and European) and financial penalties to political parties that would not respect the 50% quota in their candidacies for the legislative elections¹. Leading to two major

¹ In the "*Loi constitutionnelle no 99-569 du 8 juillet 1999 relative à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*", the French Parliament voted an amendment modifying two articles of the Constitution. First, to the article referring to sovereignty the following provision was added (article 3): "The law favors the equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective functions"; second, the article about political parties (article 4) was made to specify that they "contribute to the execution of the principle set forth in the last section of Article 3 under the conditions determined by the law" (*Journal Officiel*, 9 July 1999, 10175). The "*Loi no 2000-493 du 6 juin 2000 tendant à favoriser l'égal accès des femmes et des hommes aux mandats électoraux et fonctions électives*" provides 1) a legal requirement of *parité* for the party list system (most notably for local, regional and European elections) and 2) financial incentives through the public funding of political parties for the legislative

institutional reforms, the campaign for parity can be considered as a success. The purpose of my thesis has been to account for the paradoxical dimension of this success. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1990s, the chances of institutionalization of the parity claim seemed very thin. First, the motto was supported by a handful of women's movement activists, located at the margins of the political field. This marginality of the movement for gender parity reflected the numerical weakness of the French women's movement, its internal divisions, and its state of abeyance since the early 1980s. It was also linked to the very low representation of women – and even more of advocates of feminism – in political party elites and in elected office (Opello 2006). Alongside its numerical and political marginality, the movement for gender parity faced a major discursive obstacle: at the moment it emerged, the claim of parity was largely considered by the dominant actors of the public space (politicians and intellectuals) as totally incompatible with the rhetoric of republican universalism, supposed to be the very essence of French political identity (Scott 1997; Fassin 1999; Bereni et Lépinard 2004, Scott 2004; Scott 2005; Bereni 2007b; Lépinard 2007). In spite of these strong obstacles, parity shifted in less than ten years from a utopian claim to a consensual reform. To account for this paradoxical success, several factors should be taken into consideration: the pressure of international organizations, especially from the European institutions, played an important role in the legitimization of parity in the public space. Other factors more specific to the French political and discursive context in the 1990s should also be mentioned, like the increasing competition between the main political parties around the ways to solve the “crisis of representation” (Jenson et Giraud 2001), and the internal transformation of the Socialist party from “old” to “new” left (Bereni 2007a). However, along with these factors, the legitimization of parity should also be explained by the characteristics of the campaign. More exactly, I showed in my thesis that the cross-sectional structure of the movement for parity, gathering actors from various social and ideological backgrounds, was a key factor in the success of the campaign, likely to compensate its weaknesses and the resistances it faced.

1.2. A cross-sectional campaign

When it appeared in the early 1990s, the claim of parity attracted activists who had in common to be already involved in collective struggles for the advancement of women, but who strongly diverged in the ways they defined women's advancement and the social sites where they mobilized. In terms of ideological commitments, the emerging movement for gender parity overcame certain divides inherited from the 1970s second wave of feminism: from then on, there had been a drastic gap between the radical feminists groups born in the aftermath of May 68, and the moderate, first-wave women's organizations. Violent conflicts also occurred among radical feminists, between “anti-essentialists” (committed to Beauvoir's universalist vision of women's liberation) and “differentialists” (praising the social and symbolic value of sexual difference) (Duchen 1986; Picq 1993). In 1992, the first parity groups attracted a wide array of women's advocates: radical (both anti-essentialist and differentialist) feminists, members of first wave women's organizations – for example catholic women's organizations –, socialist and liberal feminists. In addition to this variety of ideological backgrounds, the campaign for gender parity encompassed activists who mobilized for the advancement of women in various social arenas: during the first years of the campaign, before the parity reform was placed onto the governmental agenda (1992-1997),

elections. For elections using list systems (municipal, regional, European and some senatorial elections), parties are required to submit lists with equal numbers of men and women in a defined order. A financial incentive is used for the legislative elections (using a single member district electoral system): State subsidies to each party are reduced in proportion to the gap in the number of male and female candidates nationwide.

women's organized groups from the civil society, outside the political parties and the state institutions, were the centre of gravity and the driving force behind the campaign. However, it should be noticed that from the very beginning, the movement for parity was strongly linked to women's party sections. Several leaders and rank-and-file activists of the "autonomous" groups in favor of parity were multi-positioned, located at the same time in women's party sections, mainly in the left wing parties (Socialist Party, Green Party, Communist Party). Besides, from the first years of the campaign, feminist academics and experts were also present in the campaign, providing a feminist expertise likely to challenge the dominant republican discourse opposed to positive action. Some of the leaders of the parity movement were themselves academics or had access to the public space as intellectuals. Other feminist scholars, who were not members of the women's organizations devoted to parity, regularly participated to the campaign (by speaking in meetings and conferences, publishing articles and books...), as renowned specialists of women and gender issues. Finally, even before parity was set onto the governmental agenda (in 1997), state instances in charge of women's status were not absent from the campaign, even though the issue of political equality was not at the center of their concerns (Bereni & Revillard 2007). In 1995, under the pressure of women's organizations, the "Observatoire de la parité", a new consultative state machinery devoted to the issue of parity, was created. Two prominent actors of the campaign for gender parity, Roselyne Bachelot (head of the women's section of the Gaullist party) and Gisèle Halimi (head of one of the leading feminist organizations engaged for parity, "Choisir la cause des femmes"), were appointed at the head of the instance, and produced a public report which played an important role in the following institutionalization of the reform of parity (Baudino 2005). The cross-sectional dimension of the campaign for gender parity strengthened after the new elected Prime minister, the socialist Lionel Jospin, announced in June 1997 his will to amend the Constitution in order to advance the parity reform. In my thesis, I argue that the agenda setting of the parity reform, far from resulting in a decline of the campaign, triggered its revival as well as an intensification of its cross-sectional dimension. In the months following June 1997, new women's groups and organizations from the civil society joined the movement. The women's sections in political parties, especially in the left-wing parties – which came into office – took a growing part in the campaign. At the same time, new, sometimes influential female intellectuals and academics specialized on the women's question appeared in the public space (including philosopher Sylviane Agacinski, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's wife) to support parity, helping to resist the rising criticism against the claim. Finally, the involvement of women's rights apparatus within the state notably increased – as it could be expected – during the governmental and parliamentary making of the parity reform: the Observatory of Parity, joined by the Secretary of State in charge of women and the newly created (in 1999) women's rights Delegations in the two Chambers of the Parliament, constituted crucial sites of pressure in favor of a more constraining definition of the parity reform. The cross-sectional dimension of the parity campaign was not only attested by the joined mobilizations of women's organized groups coming from different social sites. One of the most striking characteristics of the campaign, especially after the claim was set onto the governmental agenda, was the increase of the degree of cooperation between those different actors. Activists from women's party sections and women's autonomous organizations gathered in a network called "Réseau Femmes & Hommes pour la parité" in order to pressure the parliamentary process. Together with female parliamentarians involved in women's party sections or in the Chambers' women's rights Delegations, they organized several public demonstrations in front of the Senate (which turned to be the biggest obstacle to the constitutional reform) and launched several petitions. Cross-sectional mobilization could also be observed within the Observatory of Parity itself: its members included feminist academics and experts, members of women's party sections,

female parliamentarians inserted in women's advocacy networks (in their political parties, within the parliamentary arena and beyond) and femocrats.

I have demonstrated that the cross-sectional dimension of the campaign for gender parity was largely accountable for its political success. Conflicts and dissensions arose, but globally, especially from the moment of the agenda setting, in 1997, the cross-sectional dimension of the campaign turned to be a strategic resource, likely to compensate its numerical and political marginality. This finding led me to set a more general analytical question on women's collective struggles: what were the structural conditions that could account for the emergence of such a cross-sectional campaign? At that point, it appeared very clear to me that the cross-sectional dimension of the gender parity campaign was derived from a pre-existing, cross-sectional configuration of women's advocacy actors, coming from various ideological and social backgrounds and yet linked together by social ties and common commitments. This configuration of actors spilled over the borders of the women's movement, as it is commonly defined in the academic literature as well as in the common language. Therefore, my empirical findings on the case of the gender parity campaign led me to elaborate the concept of Field of Women's Advocacy.

2. THE FIELD OF WOMENS' ADVOCACY

The concept of Field of Women's Advocacy is indebted to certain conceptualizations produced by the literature on women's movements and feminism, which has emerged as a new body of research in social sciences in the past two decades, at the intersection of the field of social movements and the field of gender and politics.

Two categories of research within the literature on women's movement have played an important role in the development of the concept. First, the FWA was built in the framework of studies that have coined analytical definitions of women's movements, feminism and feminist movements for comparative purposes. Second, the concept of FWA is derived from a subset of research emphasizing the blurred boundaries of the women's movement: studies on women's mobilization *inside* political institutions (like political parties and the State) and research on women's cross-sectional alliances (such as "strategic partnerships" and "triangles of empowerment") in the political arena.

This presentation will allow me to show to what extent the concept of FWA is linked to certain concepts coined in the existing literature on women's movements, as much as to suggest to what extent it is distinct from them. I will especially explain why I chose to distance myself from the concepts of (women's) "movement" and from that of "feminism".

2.1. Defining women's advocacy

The term of FWA is the English translation of the French "*espace de la cause des femmes*". First, I would like to vanish a linguistic ambiguity that may arise from the use of the phrase "women's advocacy". By using it, I don't refer to a form of protestation that would be specifically contained and institutionalized. This category encompasses all forms of protests on behalf of women and for the advancement of women, ranging from the grassroots autonomous women's groups using disruptive tactics, to the more institutionalized women's organizations using conventional means of action (which may be described as "interest groups").

In the past decade, a growing body of literature concerned about comparative perspectives on women's movements has established analytical definitions of women's movements, feminism, and feminist movements. There is agreement among women's movements scholars

on neither a general definition of women's movements nor on the content and the opportunity to use the term feminism as an analytical label². However, several scholars concerned about setting forth a general framework for comparative research have converged in making an analytical distinction between women's movements and "feminist" movements. They tend to consider women's movement as a broad category, and feminist movements as a subcategory of women's movements. According to Beckwith, for example, women's movements are "a subset of sociopolitical movements that are characterized by the primacy of women's gendered experiences, women's issues, and women's leadership and decision making. The relationship of women to these movements is direct and immediate; movement definition, issue articulation, and issue resolution are specific to women, developed and organized by them with reference to their gender identity" (Beckwith 1996: 1038). In a similar perspective McBride and Mazur define women's movement as "formal and informal organizations who present claims reflecting women's movement discourse – identity with women as a group; explicitly gendered language about women; and representation of women as women in public life" (McBride et Mazur 2008). Women's movements are often defined as a set of *collective actors* (from informal groups to formal organizations) mainly or exclusively *composed of women*, and especially at the leading positions; additionally, scholars of women's movement tend to agree on the general idea that women's movements are composed of women "acting as women". It means that women's movement actors explicitly identify to women as a group, and consider that women's collective identity is a legitimate basis for specific – gendered – claims in the public space. In this regard, as Beckwith puts it, "women's movements' are distinguished from 'women in movement'" (Beckwith 2000: 437). This definition of the women's movement is very broad. Historical and comparative studies indicate that women mobilizing as women may pursue a wide variety of goals depending on their conceptions of gender identities and roles (Ferree & Mueller 2004). They may sometimes defend a very conservative definition of women's roles and gender relations.

Many women's movements scholars have considered it useful to elaborate a more restrictive category within women's movement, which they often call "feminist movement". While there is an agreement on the fact that feminist movements are women's movements with "feminist" discourse and goals, there is more dissension over the meaning of feminism. For Beckwith, "feminist movements, as much of the research indicates (either implicitly or explicitly), are distinguished by their challenge of patriarchy. Feminist movements share a gendered power analysis of women's subordination and contest political, social, and other power arrangements of domination and subordination on the basis of gender." (Beckwith 2000: 437). According to McBride and Mazur, "the feminist movement is composed of women's movement actors presenting a particular women's movement discourse, feminism, in social and public arenas". This particular feminist discourse is defined by three cumulative criteria: "1.the goal of changing the position of women in society and politics; 2.analysis that seeks to challenge and change women's subordination to men through gender equity; 3.analysis that seeks to challenge the structures of gender based hierarchies" (McBride & Mazur 2008). These definitions share the idea that feminist movements explicitly recognize and challenge – to various degrees –the existing gender hierarchies. The main difficulty that feminist movement theorists are faced with is the risk of essentializing of the category of feminism, especially on the basis of the dominant definitions of feminist activists and theorists from the occidental context. For this reason, some scholars refuse to use it as an analytical category in their empirical research, particularly when it comes to women's collective struggles in the South.

² For an in-depth presentation of these debates, see for example (Basu 1995; Molyneux 1998; Beckwith 2000; Mazur 2002; Ferree et Mueller 2004; Heywood 2006; McBride et Mazur 2008).

In order to avoid the risk of essentializing of the category of feminism, other women's movements scholars stress the necessity to assess the feminist dimension of women's movements discourses in their historical and cultural context: as Vargas et Wieringa put it, "the demands themselves are not subversive ; their subversive character is determined by the sociological context in which they are raised. [...] For example, the demand for women's education is commonplace nowadays but a century ago the same demand triggered violent reactions" (Vargas et Wieringa 1998: 5). In order to take into account this dimension, feminist movements scholars have emphasized the conflictual dimension of feminist movements. Feminist activist may strongly differ in their ways of challenging gender hierarchies, depending on the context in which they mobilize and their ideological commitments. Some feminist movements historians choose to use the term "feminisms" in the plural (Gubin, Jacques, Rochefort, Studer, Thébaud, & Zancarini-Fournel 2004). Finally, it must be said that women's movement and feminist movements are archetypal categories, which are inevitably inter-twinned in practice. The women's/feminist movement distinction should be adapted to the specific characteristics of empirical cases.

The concept of FWA borrows many aspects of the general definitions of women's and feminist movement given above. The FWA is composed of groups and institutions mainly or exclusively composed of women, who mobilize as women. FWA's actors are committed to the aim of achieving women's advancement, which means that: 1) they are not satisfied with the existing situation of women (or particular subcategories of women: single mothers, workers, nuns...); 2) they attribute this unsatisfying situation to some sort of gender injustice (deriving from being a women, not only of other social characteristics – age, ethnicity, class...); 2) their main or exclusive goal is to redress the unfair situation that (some) women are suffering. I chose to use the phrase "women's advocacy" rather than "feminism", because the first term allows me to encompass a wider variety of actors struggling for the advancement of women. Like in many other contexts, a quite important part of the actors mobilized for women's advancement in France are reluctant to label themselves "feminists". The word feminism is closely associated to the second wave of women's collective struggles, which appeared mainly, in the early 1970s, as a radical. Women's organizations inheriting from the first wave consider the term as a stigma. The campaign for gender parity, as I wrote above, attracted a large array of women's groups, with very different visions of what it means to advance women's status, and many of them refused to be associated with feminists. The term "women's advocacy" seems to be a more neutral descriptive category, encompassing a larger array of definitions of women's advancement than the term "feminism". I don't give up the term of "feminism", but I keep it to characterize a subcategory of the FWA. Feminist members of the FWA are those who not only express their concern for the advancement of women, but who consider gender hierarchy as a structural, cross-sectional characteristic of the social world (whereas other members of the FWA may focus on certain categories of women, or limit their criticism of gender hierarchies to certain social themes). I call "radical feminists" those who struggle for drastically changing the general social structures in which gender hierarchies are embedded.

This definition of FWA allows me to include a great diversity of actors struggling for the advancement of women. Conflictuality around the definition of women's advancement is a structural characteristic of the FWA. This conflictuality reflects the intersectionality of the category of women, and also the overlapping of collective struggles for the advancement of women with other collective struggles and political visions. As I said in the introduction, I call "streams" the dominant ways, at a particular time, to define the advancement of women: in France nowadays, FWA participant may label themselves as radical, reformist, liberal,

socialist, queer, postcolonial, universalist, differentialists... Far from being exclusive from each others, these labels interweave, forming different ideological clusters on different women's issues.

2.2. Beyond women's movements: The cross-sectional dimension of the FWA

So far, my definition of the FWA is very similar to the main definitions of women's and feminist movements provided by the literature. The originality of my concept rests more on another dimension: its cross-sectionality. As I wrote in the introduction, by using the concept of FWA, I distance myself from the existing definitions of women's movements, which tend to consider that women's movements coincide with the women's organizations and groups in the civil society. In my definition, women's groups and organizations in the civil society are one of the "poles" of the FWA. I consider this pole as the most central pole of the FWA. It is often the driving force of women's struggles. However, three other poles make-up the FWA: the political party and electoral pole (women's party sections and women in public office working on gender issues); the state pole (state apparatus in charge of women's status), and the academic pole (women's and feminist studies sub-field within the academia). As I will show, this cross-sectional dimension of the FWA is inspired from existing studies emphasizing the blurred borders of women's movements. However, the concept of FWA goes further.

2.2.1. Extending the borders of women's movements

In the last 15 years, some women's movements scholars have explored the spillover of women's collective struggles beyond the arena of civil society. In this respect, women's movement research has challenged traditional definitions of social movements, focusing on disruptive, "contentious confrontation" with "elites [and] authorities" (Tarrow 1994: 1). Two subfields of research on women's movements have been particularly helpful to think the cross-sectional dimension of the FWA: 1) the literature on the feminist mobilizations *inside* institutions; 2) the literature on coalition building between women from different social sites for advancing women's concerns in the political arena.

An example of study on feminist activism *within* institutions is the work of Katzenstein (Katzenstein 1988, 1990). She argues that feminist protest should not be equated with autonomous "street" protest. Conventional, unobtrusive feminist activism could also emerge within dominant institutions. In the same perspective, studies on feminist activism inside the main political institutions have developed since the end of the 1980s. Political parties and the State have been particularly placed under scrutiny. These studies have challenged the idea of a rigid border between women's movements and political institutions. They have showed the continuum of mobilizations from autonomous women's movements to women's party sections or women's instances within the State.

Some studies on feminism and political parties have emphasized the interplay and the overlapping between the women's movements and political parties through the "double militancy" of women's movements activists, within political parties *and* in autonomous organizations. As Beckwith puts it, double militancy refers to "the location of activist women in two political venues, with participatory, collective identity and ideological commitments to both" (Beckwith 2000: 442). These works have stressed the emergence of intersecting collective identities, as feminists and as socialists for example (Jenson et Sineau 1995; Della Porta 2003). Other studies have focused on women's groups and sections within political

parties, assessing at what conditions and to what extent they bring about feminist ideas within parties (Lovenduski et Norris 1993; Perrigo 1995; Opello 2006).

Reflections on the blurred borders of women's movements have also developed through the studies on feminism and the State (Hernes 1987; Franzway, Court, et Connell 1989; Eisenstein 1990; Eisenstein 1995; Stetson et Mazur 1995; Gelb et Palley 1996; Waylen 1998; Mazur 2002; Banaszak, Beckwith, et Rucht 2003; Banaszak 2005; Lovenduski 2005). The category of "State feminism" designates those instances devoted to the advancement of women's status within the state. Civil servants working in these instances, often called femocrats, work as "movement insiders" (Banaszak 2005): they contribute to the development of "feminist policy" (Mazur 2002) that promotes women's status and strikes down gender hierarchy.

These studies on women's individual and collective mobilization inside institutions have been very useful to think the cross-sectional dimension of women's collective struggles, which is at the center of the concept of FWA. They have pointed out the existence of a gray zone between women's movements and political institutions. However, these studies don't challenge the traditional definition of the women's movement, still located outside political institutions, or at least outside the State. Presenting the RNGS³ theoretical framework, McBride and Mazur write: "while there may be women's movement actors who enter state arenas and individuals in state institutions who articulate movement discourse, official state organization – bureaucratic agencies, legislative committees, ministries – are not women's movement actors" ((McBride & Mazur 2008). The concept of FWA is distinct from these conceptualizations in the sense that it includes state organizations officially devoted to women's rights.

Beside studies on feminist activism inside political institutions, an other source of inspiration for the concept of FWA has been what Holli calls the body of research on "women's co-operative constellations", defined as "any kind of actual co-operation initiated or accomplished by one or several groups of women in a policy process to further their aims or achieve goals perceived as important to them." (Holli 2008: 169). Women's alliances in the political arena for advancing women's issues have received several appellations: the most famous concepts are, in order of apparition, "strategic partnerships" (Haalsa 1991, 1998), "transnational advocacy networks" (Keck & Sikkink 1998) "triangles of empowerment" (Vargas & Wieringa 1998), "feminist advocacy coalitions" (Abrar & al, 2000), and "velvet triangles" (Woodward 2003)⁴. These concepts draw more or less directly and explicitly from existing categories on public policy networks, especially the concepts of "iron triangles" (Hecllo 1978) and of "advocacy coalitions" (Sabatier et Jenkins-Smith 1993). These concepts designate exclusive, stable alliances between a small number of actors located inside and outside the state, that strongly influence the design and application of some public policy sectors. While concepts on women's alliances in the political arena have often in common the use of the metaphor of "triangle", they somewhat vary in their content. They refer to different historical and political contexts, to more or less stable forms of cooperation, to weak or powerful structures, to different scales of government (from national to international) and, last but not least, to different sets of actors. For example, Haalsa coined in 1991 the concept of "strategic partnership" drawing from the Norwegian case. It designates the alliances forged on

³ Research Network on Gender and the State.

⁴ For an extended overview on this literature, see (Mazur 2002; Stoffel 2005; Holli 2008).

certain pragmatic issues considered as important for women, between three categories of actors: party women (and women politicians), women bureaucrats and women in the autonomous women's movement. Used by Vargas and Wieringa, the concept of "triangle of empowerment" refers to «the interplay between three sets of actors – the women's movement, feminist politicians and feminist civil servants (femocrats).» Triangles of empowerment, "bridging civil society and the state, [...] articulate women's demands, translate them into policy issues and struggles to widen political support for their agenda." (Vargas & Wieringa 1998: 3-4) Another concept is that of "velvet triangle", coined by Alison Woodward to designate the alliances built among actors of the gender equality public policy sub-sector within European institutions. It includes three actors: "the organizations of the state, of civil society and universities and consultancies" (Woodward 2003: 84). Holli (2008) has stressed the ambiguities and limitations of these concepts on women's cooperation in the political arenas. What position is given to academics and experts in these triangles? Do these triangles link together individual or collective actors? What are their relationships to women's movement? Do these triangles work as structures of power, comparable to male-dominated configurations (such as iron triangles), or are they structurally marginal and weak (as the term "velvet" in "velvet triangles" tends to suggest⁵)? Finally, it is also unclear whether these configurations are stable, and how they sustain themselves through time.

The concept of FWA tries to clarify many of these points. First, the FWA is composed of a set of collective actors working for women's advancement. The link to women's collective struggles is clear. Individuals are part of the FWA in so far as they have a commitment in any group, organization, or institution that is explicitly and mainly engaged for the advancement of women. Second, contrary to women's cooperation "triangles", the FWA includes four distinct poles. The arena of (feminist) research and expertise on women, that has become more and more institutionalized in many countries in the last 20 or 30 years, is clearly identified as one pole of the field (the academic pole). Members of women's party sections and feminist women in public office⁶ are conflated in the same category (the party and electoral pole). Last but not least, as I will demonstrate it in the following sections, the concept of FWA intends to overcome some of the strongest ambiguities and limitations of the research on women's cooperation in the political arena, since it allows to think both the conflictuality and the potential convergence of women's collective struggles, and, thus, its structural strengths and weaknesses regarding the achievement of feminist goals in politics.

2.2.2. Thinking the FWA as a social field and as a social network cluster

The concepts of "social field" and that of "social network's cluster" help understand the way I built this concept.

I use the term "field" rather than "movement" to designate the configuration of actors pursuing women's advancement in different social sites. I thought that the term of movement was not satisfactory. First, it implicitly refers to the set of actors that are outside political institutions, or at least outside the state. Second, it also tacitly refers to a certain degree of

⁵ The concept of velvet triangle was both inspired by the concept of 'iron triangle' and by the concept of 'velvet ghetto', which refers to a marginal position in male-dominated structure of power. See (Ghiloni 1988).

⁶ Their commitment to the advancement of women may be assessed by their belonging to any group devoted to the advancement of women, including in the parliamentary arena.

alignment of perceptions and of coordination between its participants. It does not enough put the emphasis on dissension and on the fact that some women's actors may be in a state of abeyance.

The term "field" is borrowed to Pierre Bourdieu, although in a critical way. The field is one of the core concepts of Bourdieu's social theory (Bourdieu 1990). Fields are social arenas in which social "agents" are competing around desirable social resources. There are many different fields (economic, religious, political...), which have a certain degree of autonomy from the rest of the social world. In each field there is a specific "capital" (desirable resource: "political capital", "religious capital"...), unequally distributed between social agents, and around which the competition is organized. Members of each field have a corresponding "habitus", a set of interiorized dispositions that make them think and act in a way that reflect their social position within the field and also the structural and contingent specificities of the field. Members of the field share the same "illusio", i.e. the conviction that the game is worth being played. In French, I use the term "space"⁷ rather than "field" to mark my distance from certain aspects of the concept of field, which is dominant in the French social sciences. In English, I prefer to use the term "field" rather than "space" or even "arena". The concept of field does not have the same theoretical weight in the Anglo-Saxon academia, and I think I can use it more freely, borrowing certain features while giving up others. I borrow to the bourdieusian concept of "field" the idea of a social space that is relatively autonomous from the rest of the social world, based on a set of shared dispositions to act in the specific "game" that is played around the advancement of women, and the common belief that this game deserves to be played. I also borrow to the concept of field the idea of a structural interdependence between the actors and the idea of a structural competition between them. However, I argue that the FWA is not exactly a field in Bourdieu's terms, because it crosses different social spaces that have their own social dynamic. Therefore the degree of autonomy of the FWA from the rest of the social world may substantially vary through time.

The way I use the term "field" in the concept of FWA is also linked to the theories of social networks. The FWA is a "cluster" (Barnes 1969) in terms of social ties, which means that the density of social networks is higher within the FWA than in the rest of the social world. The FWA is a relatively small world, in which actors are frequently linked together notably because of the tangle of organizational networks, the existence of common events (conferences, meetings, etc.) and the double militancy of certain members (who link together different social sites).

2.2.3. Thinking the structural strength and weaknesses of women's collective struggles

I argue that the concept of FWA is a contribution to the literature on women's movements and on women's cooperation for achieving feminist goals in the political arena. One of the limits of the research on women's "triangles" is to focus on existing alliances, which leads to take for granted the existence of converging interests between actors, and to under-estimate conflictual interests and lack of cooperation.

The concept of FWA allows to think the structural social conditions of the emergence of such alliances as well as of their non emergence or failure. The FWA is the social field *from* which

⁷ I borrow the term "*espace*" to existing French concepts that borrow certain features of the concept of field while giving up other aspects (Mathieu 2007).

women's alliances arise (or not). This perspective puts the emphasis both on the heterogeneity and on the potential convergence of women's struggles. It does not take for granted the idea of «sisterhood» and of «common interests» between women. In many historical contexts, the centrifugal forces take the advantage over the centripetal dynamics of the FWA. Dispersion, latent and actual conflicts between actors within the FWA prevail. In other words, if we think in strategic terms of success/failure of women's struggles, the structural features of the FWA often account for its weakness, and reinforce the marginality of the advocates of women's interests. However, the FWA is also characterized by the tangle of social ties between its members and by a degree of convergence around certain general discourses and goals on women. These features may, at certain historical conditions (external opportunities), around certain issues and for a temporary period of time, transform the FWA into a structure of power. To sum up, the structural characteristics of the FWA may count as an opportunity regarding the efficiency of women's collective struggles in certain context, and as a weakness in others.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Field of Women's Advocacy helps thinking the structural cross-sectional dimension of women's collective struggles. It extends existing efforts to emphasize the spillover of women's movements beyond the borders of civil society.

As I said in my introduction, the concept of Field of Women's Advocacy was coined in an inductive manner, drawing from the particular case of the campaign for gender parity in France in the 1990s. To what extent could this concept be extended beyond this case?

Before launching the discussion on this question, I would like to add some brief reflections the historical contingency of this concept. The category of Field of women's advocacy is closely linked to the process of institutionalization of women's collective struggles in the past thirty years in many countries. In civil society, a growing part of women's autonomous groups have tended to turn towards the political institutions to achieve their goals (Banaszak, Beckwith & Rucht 2003). In the State arena, specific apparatus devoted to women's advancement have been set up in many countries (Steton & Mazur 1995). Specific departments, journals, formal and informal networks between specialists of women and gender have emerged within the academia in many countries. Finally, women's sections within political parties and within political assemblies (Parliaments) have spread out all over the world. Not only have these groups committed to the advancement of women in various social sites gained stability and a higher degree of institutionalization, but the relations between them have become more systematic.

Therefore, I think that the concept of FWA is a structural specificity of the contemporary context of women's collective struggles, even though there has been a long historical tradition of cross-sectional struggles between women for advancing women's views and interests.

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