

LUISS 

Degree Program in Political Science

Course of Sociology

“LIBERTY, EQUALITY, SOLIDARITY”:
Sisterhood, a new ideal of Feminism?

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Academic Year 2022/2023

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my family and my dear friends for their unconditional support. Thank you for encouraging and supporting me, thanks to Mamou for her proofreading. Thank you to Célia for her wise advice, to Amélie for her warm presence and Ambre for her flawless discipline.

I would also like to thank my thesis directors, Mr Champeaud for his warnings. He knew how to push me to my limits so that I could give the best of myself, and Mr Sorice for his benevolence.

I would also like to thank the whole educational team at Sciences Po Bordeaux and LUISS, Carole Lin for her support throughout the year. I would also like to thank the entire team at the Sciences Po library.

ABSTRACT-KEYWORDS

Abstract :

My work focuses on an analysis of the concept of sorority in the western world nowadays. We will do a historical review of organized violence directed towards women, and we will then examine how the first contemporary feminist theories modeled an ideal of sorority to counter this violence. Then we will look at the concrete application of this feminist paradigm in the western world. Finally, we will highlight the flaws of this paradigm and how it is an unattainable ideal that can be exploited for potentially dangerous purposes.

Keywords: feminism; sorority; sisterhood ; female empowerment ; oppression; equality; solidarity; freedom; patriarchy; sexist and sexual violence; social inequalities

INTRODUCTION

“*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*” is the motto of the French Republic and was originally presented by Maximilien de Robespierre in his speech at the Constituent Assemblée on the 5th of December 1790¹. This motto was questioned in 2018 when the High Council for the equality between women and men (HCE) recommended finding a more inclusive term who will guarantee an equal share of power . The HCE² judged this an “*opportunity to recognize more equality between men and women as a fundamental principle of the public powers organization and our society*” . This investigation followed up a petition of the “*Parlement féminin*” feminist group, which was widely relayed, which incited among other things a reflection on the use of the term “*fraternité*”. Indeed, this motto engraved on every town hall front, symbolized the French Republic since 1848 and was written into the 1946 and 1958 Constitutions. If we bends over its signification, we must come back to the very first article of the 1789 “*Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*”³ which stipulated that men are born and remain free and equal in rights; and in the “*Fête de la Fédération*” at the Champs-de-Mars, on the 14th of July 1790 which displayed the term “*Fraternité*” on the flags of the federated men (les Fédérés). Thus, if the terms “*Liberté*” which defines itself by the will to determined yourself without suffering from any restrain, and “*Égalité*” meaning united and fair, are inclusive in their original conception, “*Fraternité*” in the contrary is the link which establishes relations between brothers. It can also represent the expression of the affective and moral link which unites siblings and where there can be brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, the term “*fratrie*” is derived from the latin *frater*, meaning brother. But, a motto, in its definition , represents an entire people to unite it by common values, it is not designed

¹ Balmary Dominique, “La fraternité”, *Études*, Février.2 (2019), 31–42, https://www.cairn.info/load_pdf.php?ID_ARTICLE=ETU_4257_0031&download=1 [accessed 8 April 2023]

² Haut Conseil à l'égalité, “CONSTITUTION garante de l'égalité femmes-hommes”, Projet de constitution révisée, 22 mars 2018, https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/constitution_garante_ehf-v3.pdf, [accessed 8 April 2023]

³ “Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen”, 1789 <<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/contenu/menu/droit-national-en-vigueur/constitution/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789> > [accessed 9 April 2023]

to divide, and this choice excludes women by definition. In addition, since the XVIIIth century, the institutionalization of the exclusion of women in society has been reinforced by a methodical masculinisation of the French language. At that time, women are forced to get used to a masculine lexical universe who will forge their societal conceptions. We then observe the suppression by the National Assembly of certain terms such as “*poétesse*”, “*médecine*”, “*professeuse*”, “*philosophe*”, “*peintresse*” etc... Claude Favre de Vaugelas in his work *Remarques sur la langue française* (1647)⁴ declared that the “*masculine gender, being nobler, must predominate everytime the masculine and the feminine lie together.*”⁵ From this moment, we also distinguish a symbolic exclusion because the few women who had access to the necessary education to the exercise of these professions, did not even consider them because of this grammatical exclusion. To adopt a non-discriminatory language and to use the term “*Solidarité*” or “*Adelphité*” as recommended by the HCE would then come under demasculinization of the language and not its feminization.⁶

Moreover, to counter this term judged more separative than inclusive by some, we see the appearance in the 70’s, of counter-motto streamers “*Liberté, égalité, sororité*”⁷ coming from the new feminists paradigms. The MLF (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes) is inspired from feminists theories coming from across the Atlantic in the end of the 60’s, who introduce the term “*sisterhood*”, a sort of feminine “*fraternité*”, to oppose it from “*brotherhood*”. It includes for example the term “*sororité*” in its *Hymne des Femmes* to allow women to unite and gather around an essential cause, equality of rights. Sisterhood is a concept which refers to a sense of solidarity and community among women. It is based on the idea that women share common experiences and challenges and that, in working together and supporting each other, they can acquire equality and empowerment. Sisterhood can be expressed in different ways, including friendship, mentoring, activism and community building.

⁴ UNINE Université de Neuchâtel, ‘Argument Historique’, *Unine.Ch* <<https://www.unine.ch/epicene/home/pourquoi/argument-historique.html>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

⁵ Pascal Gyax, ‘Du sexisme de la langue française et de l’importance du langage épïcène’, Assises Romandes de l’égalité, *Youtube*, 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXd7j6uGcLc&t=1s>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

⁶ Eliane Viennot, “Féminiser la langue française ou revenir sur sa masculinisation, Conférence Agora des Savoirs, Montpellier, *Youtube*, 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdXYGclemm0>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

⁷ Mannoorettonil, Agnès, ‘La sororité, pour quoi faire ?’, *Études*, Décembre.12 (2021), 91–104 <<https://doi.org/10.3917/etu.4288.0091>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

However, nowadays and since the successive denunciations of sexual assault such as #Metoo and #balancetonporc, sorority detractors are denouncing a more communitarian fourth feminist wave.⁸ According to them, this wave is not characterized by solidarity claims who will unite every human being without any distinction of race, beliefs and sex, around universalist values who would include everyone in the fight against oppression. On the contrary, it would be characterized by systematic exclusion of the fight, every non-feminin individual. So, we will see: to what extent can sisterhood, coined by feminist paradigms, be considered a new tool of solidarity in the world nowadays? Does sorority unite or divide society?

⁸ 'Comment la "sororité" est-elle née? – Choses à Savoir', *Podcasts Français* <<https://podcasts-francais.fr/podcast/choses-a-savoir/comment-la-sororite-est-elle-nee>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

CHAPTER 1 : THE BIRTH OF SISTERHOOD, A NEW PARADIGM OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Section 1 : FROM THE INVISIBILIZATION OF WOMEN TO INSTITUTIONALIZED AND ORGANIZED VIOLENCES IN EUROPE

1. The progressive invisibilization and guilt of women in patriarchal societies

Marylène Patou-Mathis, in her book *L'homme préhistorique est aussi une femme* (2020)⁹, highlights the fact that, in Europe, women have been traditionally associated with the notion of property for about 12,000 years. However, previously, the notion of “*patriarchy*” as a family scheme, based on male kinship and the preponderant authority of the father, was not proven in history. In fact, this anthropological foundation did not appear until late in the 19th century, and, paradoxically, it is rather assumed today that the Palaeolithic societies were “*matrilineal*”. According to Hannah Arendt, “*L'idéologie c'est l'enfermement dans la logique d'une idée, la science, cette expérience du réel devrait donc nous en préserver*”. Indeed, science should not assume that social structures were similar in prehistoric times. Nonetheless, the first prehistorians of the nineteenth century, wishing to model our western societies, applied a biased vision of prehistoric man. They imagined women symmetrically dedicated to domestic interior work, related to children and invisibilized the supposed major role of Neolithic women. According to pre-historian Marylène Patou-Mathis, matrilineal societies, on the contrary, are characterized by the transmission of goods by women without domination, i.e., “*par exemple au niveau des activités, il n'y a pas les femmes qui gouvernent, qui prennent le pouvoir et les hommes qui suivent, comme c'est le cas pour les sociétés patriarcales*”. This notion of the objectification of the woman, first possessed by the father through the bonds of blood, then by the husband through the bonds of marriage, thus emerged only from

⁹ Patou-Mathis, Marylène, 'Quand au juste commence l'histoire de l'invisibilité des femmes?', podcast “*Sous le soleil de Platon*”, *France Inter*, 8/08/2022: <<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/podcasts/sous-le-soleil-de-platon/sous-le-soleil-de-platon-du-lundi-08-aout-2022-8267804>>

the Neolithic period characterized by a strong transformation of society. Indeed, it is at this time that we see the emergence of agriculture and livestock farming, and that we begin to really grasp the process of procreation. In this economy, the assets accumulated by farmers and ranchers will then be bequeathed to their descendants, so that to ensure a security in filiation it is necessary to ensure the fidelity of women. To sum up, before the Neolithic era, the notion of the useful role of man in procreation was not proven and therefore control over female bodies was not established. However, increasingly since then, the correlation between goods and control of the woman's body partly explained why the woman's role ended up being limited to procreation. Its value also started to depend on its ability to give birth or not and the independence of women was thus considered problematic and increasingly repressed. This invisibility will continue and gradually strengthen in the feudal society of the Middle Ages.

Originally, the term sorority comes from medieval Latin "*soror*" which refers to a "*religious community of women*"¹⁰ placed under the protection and authority of man. Much later we found a derivative of this term in the religious spheres with the word "*sestralité*" used by the scouts. Medieval religious communities of women organized themselves in groups, they established their own rules, shared knowledge and educated themselves independently. The term "*sorority*" was then not fundamentally linked to male domination and was restricted to the religious private sphere. Besides, in the Middle Ages, in Europe, there were communities of semi-religious, semi-secular women called "*Beguines*". These groups, composed exclusively of independent women, often widows, were nevertheless excluded. That is why Beguines often lived alone or in a convent, although some might live in hamlets under the direction of a "*great mistress*"¹¹. Living in the city gave them some freedom. These women's groups can therefore be akin to a de facto sororal group, that is, a group based on a solidarity between women who granted particular importance to sharing, conviviality and mutual assistance in a non-mixed environment¹². If sorority as a feminist paradigm is not yet theorized as such, the Beguines still live in non-mixity, are self-sufficient and emancipate from the established

¹⁰ 'SORORITÉ : Etymologie de SORORITÉ' <<https://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/sororit%C3%A9>> [accessed 10 April 2023]

¹¹ Helvétius, Anne-Marie 'Les béguines', *Presses de l'Université Saint-Louis*, 1993 <<https://books.openedition.org/pusl/13328>> [accessed 10 April 2023]

¹² W. SIMONS, 'The Beguine Movement in the Southern Low Countries : A Reassessment', *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, 59, 1989, pp. 63-105, surtout pp. 67-68

male order. As a matter of fact, they lived on apostolate¹³ and manual labor; they founded micro-cities composed of shared houses, common libraries and vegetable gardens to feed themselves freely. The first theoretical definition of “*sorority*” with a political dimension was in fact coined by the French writer Rabelais in the 16th century in his “*Tiers Livre*”, chapter XXVII. The sorority then becomes “*a community of women having a relationship, ties, quality, status of sisters.*”¹⁴ However, this group of women, by allowing the Beguines¹⁵ to escape the influence of society, especially in the form of forced marriage, displeased the religious authorities as well as the urban authorities. Hence, intimidation and growing hostility of the Church then pushed these communities to submit to existing rules (Franciscan or Augustinian) or to dissolve gradually at the end of the Middle Ages. Here, if we can start from the premise that these institutional violences are sexist it is because the lifestyle of the beguines, yet not innovative in itself, was perpetuated by certain groups of men and repressed by the authority of the Church. The reason is that beguines were perceived negatively because independent women are difficult to control and so potentially dangerous for religious institutions. And the intention of the Church to control spirits and bodies is even exacerbated during the witch hunts in Europe.

2. *The Witch Hunt: the persecution of independent women*

From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the witch hunt took place and symbolized the paroxysm of patriarchal institutional violence against women. Patriarchy¹⁶ is a political or social system in which the father holds authority and in feminist theories this sexist system is considered oppressive in all areas of women’s lives. As for witchcraft, it is a religious belief that is defined as “*the*

¹³ apostolat: activité désintéressée impliquant du dévouement et de l’abnégation
<<https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/apostolat/4601>>

¹⁴ Jarry, Charlotte, ‘Sororité, adelphité, intersectionnalité : de quoi parle-t-on ?’, *Oxfam France*, 2021
<<https://www.oxfamfrance.org/inegalites-femmes-hommes/sororite-adelphite-intersectionnalite-de-quoi-parle-t-on/>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

¹⁵ Cette organisation est décrite en détail par W.Simons, “The Beguine Movement’, *University of Pennsylvania Press*, pp.91-96, 2001

¹⁶ ‘Définition de Patriarcat - Dictionnaire - Encyclopædia Universalis’
<<https://www.universalis.fr/dictionnaire/patriarcat/>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

exercise or invocation of so-called supernatural powers to control persons or events, practices generally involving witchcraft or magic.”¹⁷ At that time, women were increasingly demonized and stigmatized by the Church, accusing them on the one hand for religious reasons and on the other for political reasons. Indeed, women are believed to be at the origin of original sin and “*the idea that women are the most sexual and luxuriant representative of the human species is widespread throughout the European culture of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of modern times*”¹⁸. That is why it was believed that they should be politically controlled by the Church. Thus, “*Accusées de gâcher les récoltes, de se changer en animaux pour commettre des méfaits voir de danser avec le diable*”, (dance with the devil) as noted by *Le Monde* in a post devoted to the recent pardon of the Scottish Parliament granted to the latter, about the 4,000 women tried and burned for witchcraft in Scotland between the 16th and 18th centuries¹⁹. Concretely in Scottish law, a “*Witchcraft Act*” existed and authorized persecutions, arrests and mass killings of witches from 1563 to 1736. Indeed, contrary to what one might think, the witch hunt did not take place in the dark hours of the Middle Ages but was still practiced in modern times. It should be added that witch hunts have existed in a context of profound instability, wave of organized social rebellion (jacqueries), and civil and religious wars. For instance, when the two Christian currents radicalized and clashed in turn with the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, the climate of social tension increased and promoted aggression against women in Europe. More specifically, these hunts were carried out by modern Men of Church and Law, in an organized and meticulous way, as Mona Chollet demonstrates in her book *Sorcières: la puissance invaincue des femmes*. She points out that intellectual obscurantism reached its climax when the book *Malleus maleficarum* was published in 1487. This misogynistic work reinforced the hatred towards women and not only by criticizing their intellectual inferiority and superstitious character, but also with their sensuality, concluding that “*all witchcraft derives from the lust of the flesh, which in women is insatiable*”²⁰. In other words, independent women, because they were seen as frightening, were despised and characterized by “*mermaids eager for pleasure*”. In fact, the authorities also feared that they would become sexually independent, that they might turn away

¹⁷ M.Lewis, Ioan and Burton Russell, Jeffrey, ‘witchcraft’ <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/witchcraft>>

¹⁸ P.Levack, Brian, ‘the Witch-Hunt in early modern Europe’, third edition, *Longman*, 1987

¹⁹ ‘Les Victimes Des Chasses Aux Sorcières Entre Le XVIe et Le XVIIIe Siècle Bientôt Officiellement Innocentées En Ecosse’ <https://www.lemonde.fr/big-browser/article/2021/12/20/en-ecosse-les-victimes-des-chasses-aux-sorcières-bientôt-officiellement-innocentées_6106826_4832693.html> [accessed 10 April 2023]

²⁰ Kramer, Heinrich (Institoris, Henricus); Sprenger, Jakob ‘*Hammer of Witches: Malleus maleficarum*’, 1487

from the Church and social uniformity. In addition, if we know today that the hunt for sorcerers (men) also existed, persecuted women still represented 80% of those arrested, especially accused of participating in Sabbaths. Moreover, the trials were not fair and expeditious as about 50% to 75% of the accused were sentenced to death. In order to purify their souls, they were often burned alive, and some villages even ran out of wood, due to the growing number of witch persecutions. Others were even thrown into the water with a ball hanging from the foot. If the accused sank, then she was innocent -but dead- and then she was granted forgiveness. If she stayed on the surface, she was considered guilty. To put it differently, the presumption of innocence was replaced by the presumption of guilt and the accused, who was often a poor and illiterate peasant, could not defend herself in the face of such incredible accusations. The judges were also looking for a 'devil's mark' on the bodies and then a simple mole or birthmark on the body could be held against them. The unfortunate were then tortured and confessions were torn from them under pain. However, although the Church perpetrated mass orchestrated femicides, due to lack of source, its crimes hardly passed to posterity. In this regard, Catherine Clément, in her book « *Le Musée des sorcières* »²¹, notes that “*les génocides du XXème siècle ont plongé dans l'oubli ce long crime contre l'humanité que fut la chasse aux sorcières en Europe et dans ses colonies*”. A figure is difficult to establish because of the lack of a legal document, but the number of victims is now estimated to be up to 100,000. In Germany, in the village of Würzburg, organized madness even affected minors because a quarter of the 160 accused between 1627 and 1629 were children. Not surprisingly, the term “*crime against humanity*”²² is thus used today by some experts on the subject such as the philosopher Catherine Clément cited above. The European Parliament has also called on the European Parliament to recognize these acts of violence not the result of a sudden and popular rage, but the institutionalized violence of the leaders in power throughout Europe. The latter then shouts in an interview for France inter “*Quand un magistrat , Pierre de Lancre, descend de Bordeaux, se transforme en inquisiteur, et qu'en quatre mois, il brûle 80 femmes! Comment appeler cela autrement?*”. Finally, in the 18th century, executions and persecutions were gradually reduced and in 1872 the last execution for witchcraft took place. At that time “*in many jurisdictions witchcraft had ceased to be a crime*”²³. The thing is that prosecutions were decreasing owing to new ways of proceeding in trials and the change

²¹ Clément, Catherine, 'Le musée des sorcières', Paris:Albin Michel, 2020

²² 'La chasse aux sorcières : un crime contre l'humanité ? Avec Catherine Clément', France Inter, 2020 <<https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/la-chasse-aux-sorcieres-un-crime-contre-l-humanite-avec-catherine-clement-4454600>> [accessed 10 April 2023]

²³ P.Levack, Brian, 'the Witch-Hunt in early modern Europe', third edition, Longman, 1987

in people's views about the supernatural in most European countries. In addition, the economic and social conditions of centuries of persecution change as one moves from feudal to capitalist bourgeois society. However, these religious persecutions have forged the modern imagery of the witch for so long that the idea of the independent and tempting woman is still topical ...

Today, even though the witch hunt itself no longer exists in Europe, it continues to exist elsewhere in the world, particularly in parts of Asia and West Africa. In Saudi Arabia, for example, witchcraft is still punished with death, and in Nigeria, 'witches' are being pursued, following doctrinal excesses of evangelical Christianity. A survey by National Geographic reveals the extent of the phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa, India and Papua New Guinea in 2020. To give you an idea of the scope of this phenomenon, it is estimated that more than 2,500 people have died in India on charges of witchcraft. It is worth noting that superstition is widespread, and the risks of tensions linked to gender inequality in remote and less developed villages are therefore looming. Likewise, we can witness that some women are still accused for the same grounds as in the Renaissance in Europe: a poor harvest, a cow that no longer produces milk, a stillborn child, etc.

Section 2 : FROM THE INVISIBILIZATION OF WOMEN TO INSTITUTIONALIZED AND ORGANIZED VIOLENCES IN EUROPE

1. When sorority takes on a dimension of political struggle

Even if the Witch Hunts end, the '*witches*' will only be rehabilitated much later, in the feminist imagery of the 1960s, which erected it as a symbol. Feminist groups such as the WITCH²⁴ (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) or the « *New York Radical Women's* »

²⁴ Yasmin, Seema, 'Witch Hunts Today: Abuse of Women, Superstition and Murder Collide in India', *Scientific American* <<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/witch-hunts-today-abuse-of-women-superstition-and-murder-collide-in-india/>> [accessed 10 April 2023]

« *Radical Women's Women's Radical Women* » even theorized sorority and patriarchal mechanisms of oppression by reinterpreting the image of the witch.²⁵ However, we should not forget that already before that, there were more or less successful attempts by women to assert their rights on the political and intellectual scene. Already during the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges tried to assert women's rights by writing "*The Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizens*" (1791), in which she addressed "*her beloved sisters*", but ended up guillotined. In France, during the French Revolution, there was a very macho climate that described politicized women as "*knitters*", thereby excluding them from the political game while they produced plays, went up to the Assembly, wrote complaint books and correspondences to public statements, carried out marches and demonstrations in collective and united ways. Despite all, there was still a brief moment of freedom when some widows participated in the "*Etats Généraux*" and others enjoyed their right of association by forming women's clubs in non-Gender diversity, where a form of solidarity between women was expressed in the face of common oppressions. The "*knitters*"²⁶ were soon expelled from the assembly and even whipped if they tried to meet five people in the street. This political repression continued throughout the 19th century, regardless of the political regime. Under the Napoleonic Empire, for example, they had to fight for fundamental rights such as civil capacity or education. Indeed, the civil code of 1804 gave all rights and authority to the patriarch of the family who dominated and subdued his wife, considered inferior "*in the name of the family and its stability*"²⁷. At that time, the notion of brotherhood, now wanted as universal, was therefore not universal. Indeed, suffrage was restricted to male, hence women's desire to be included and heard. It was not until the 1948 HRDC that the "*Fraternity*" was defined as universal for citizens.

It was not until the second half of the 19th century that women came together in the consciousness of being sisters of struggle and rebelled against the injustice of universal suffrage reserved for men: this was the first feminist wave. This movement began in the United Kingdom with the "*Women's Social and Political Union*" founded by the feminist Emeline Pankhurst, also called the "*suffragists*" or "*suffragettes*" (a sexist term used in the press to discredit them). Over time, it managed to integrate women in the political landscape, but considering the time it took for the

²⁵ Chollet Mona, "Sorcières, La puissance vaincu des femmes", Paris, *Éditions Zones*, 2018

²⁶ Larrère, Mathilde, and Aude Lorriaux, 'Les femmes en politique, depuis quand?', in *Violences sexistes et sexuelles en politique*, Débats (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018), pp. 9–15
<<https://doi.org/10.3917/cnrs.benba.2018.01.0009>>

²⁷ 'Égalité et droits des femmes dans la sphère privée', *vie-publique.fr*, 2022 <<http://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/19592-egalite-et-droits-des-femmes-dans-la-sphere-privee>> [accessed 11 April 2023]

movement to grow and spread throughout Europe, it was not after half a century later that most female Europeans acquired the right to vote. The two world wars also undoubtedly convinced the political authorities of the importance of women in society. The war revealed a shortage of male labour, especially in the supply jobs in factories, and the authorities resigned themselves to mobilize women on this war effort. France was one of the last to grant this fundamental right to its citizens in 1944. Conversely, in the United Kingdom, thanks in particular to shocking actions based on provocation and civil disobedience (destruction of windows, explosion of mailboxes etc.), and after many legalized police violence such as the “*Temporary Discharge for Ill Health*” which strongly suppressed the hunger strikes started by feminists by forcibly feeding them in prison and also called the ‘*Cat and Mouse Act*’ of 1913 by journalists, the British suffragist movement was much more successful. That is why, as early as 1918 and after the derby accident in 1913 killing the suffragist Emily Davison, a martyr of the WSPU, the British won the right to vote from the age of 30 and then, in 1928, they were allowed to vote with their majority (21 years) like men. To come back to the situation in France, it was frequent to read in the press statements such as “*Si l’on donne le droit de vote aux femmes, bientôt les boeufs voudront voter*” (Le Figaro, 1890) or in the Senate “*Les mains de femmes sont faites pour être baisées, pas pour mettre un bulletin dans l’urne*”. The latter, which sums up the majority thought of the time, was written by Alexandre Bérard in response to the proposals for legislation to grant women the electorate and eligibility in 1919²⁸. This fear of men giving political rights to women was intrinsically linked to entrenched sexism. They considered women more likely to be influenced and their judgment being distorted by clerical authorities as evidenced in the book *Les femmes en politique, depuis quand?*²⁹

2. Sisterhood introduced as a new feminist paradigm in the 1960s

²⁸ ‘Contre Le Vote Des Femmes : Florilège - Histoire - Le Suffrage Universel - La Conquête de La Citoyenneté Politique Des Femmes - Assemblée Nationale’ <<https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/histoire/le-suffrage-universel/la-conquete-de-la-citoyennete-politique-des-femmes/contre-le-vote-des-femmes-florilege>> [accessed 11 April 2023]

²⁹ Larrère, Mathilde, and Aude Lorriaux, ‘Les femmes en politique, depuis quand ?’, in *Violences sexistes et sexuelles en politique*, Débats (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018), pp. 9–15 <<https://doi.org/10.3917/cnrs.benba.2018.01.0009>>

According to the writer Joëlle Marchal in *Fraternité, sororité, adelphité*,³⁰ the term sorority entered the mores when women gradually became aware of the necessity of their union for their emancipation. The “*sorority*” was then theorized from the 1960s as an ideal to be achieved, that is, the representation of a perfect type, of an absolute model. Historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues that it is a “*means for political and economic action based on the shared needs and experiences of women*.”³¹ This term was therefore thought by liberationists as transcending race, gender and cultural differences through the unique experience of being a woman. Sorority is used as a guideline for second-wave feminists. According to historian Bibia Pavard, this new wave is “*more focused on the struggle of women against patriarchy and for freedoms*”³². In France, Benoîte Groult in his book “*Ainsi soit-il*” in 1975 theorized the feeling of friendship between women in “*feminine brotherhood*”³³. At the same time the word “*sorority*” will be used by the feminists of the “*Women’s Liberation Movement*” in their hymn, “*Alone in our misfortune, women/Each other ignored/They divided us, women/ And our separated sisters.*” These feminists advocated for social equality to obtain equal pay, the right to open a bank account and independence from their husbands. They also fought against patriarchal violence and promoted the right of women to dispose of their bodies³⁴. As evidence in the change of mentality, we can mention the enactment of the “*Neuwirth Law*” in France, in 28 December 1967, which authorizes contraception or the “*Veil Law*” of 17 January 1975 which authorizes abortion.

However, it should be noted that sorority, as a theory according to which there is a “*sister-to-sister*” relationship between all women, appeared initially in the United States³⁵. American feminists published various innovative works such as Robin Morgan in her book “*Sisterhood is powerful*” in

³⁰ Marchal, Joëlle, ‘Fraternité, sororité, adelphité’, *La chaîne d’union*, 101.3 (2022), 44–51 <<https://doi.org/10.3917/cdu.101.0044>>

³¹ Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth, “The Personal is Not Political Enough”, *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1979-80) [accessed 9 April 2023]

³² Pavard, Bibia, ‘Faire naître et mourir les vagues : comment s’écrit l’histoire des féminismes’, *Itinéraires. Littérature, textes, cultures*, 2017–2, 2018 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.3787>>

³³ ‘La « sororité » n’est-elle qu’une fraternité au féminin ?’, *Le Monde.fr*, 4 March 2020 <https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/03/04/la-sororite-n-est-elle-qu-une-fraternite-au-feminin_6031727_3232.html> [accessed 9 April 2023]

³⁴ ‘L’évolution des droits des femmes : chronologie’, *vie-publique.fr*, 2023 <<http://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/19590-chronologie-des-droits-des-femmes>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

³⁵ Morgan, Robin, ‘Sisterhood is powerful: an anthology of writings from the women’s liberation movement’, *New York: Vintage Books Edition*, 1970

the 1970s or Betty Friedan with *“The Feminine Mystique”*³⁶ which claimed that women are not mere housewives, as suggested by the American capitalist and puritan consumer society of those years. According to this ideology, women also had to be a perfect wife and mother so that they were confined to this role. There was really no room for *“women”*. However, the Redstocking manifesto women broke such a taboo and directly alluded to their oppression *“Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings whose only purpose is to enhance men’s lives...”*³⁷. Some feminists who participated in the writing of *“Sisterhood is powerful”*, the founding work of the sororal movement, then formed the Redstockings collective and called on women to unite to free themselves from the yoke of patriarchy, it is the *“final liberation”*. Later *“Sisterhood is global”*³⁸ built as a suite of *“Sisterhood is powerful”*³⁹, will be an essay with a contribution of 80 women from all over the world. In France, the birth of the MLF enabled women to see beyond the *“masque étouffant qu’on leur imposait de porter au nom d’une certaine idée de “LA” femme”*. The sorority was then perceived as a tool of liberation from the classical yoke of femininity⁴⁰.

In feminist theories, the fight against gender discrimination takes an important place in think tanks. Sexist and sexual violence, if they can be physical and psychological when they are pushed to the extreme; manifest themselves from the handling of language as we observed with the masculinization of the French language in the seventeenth century. Indeed, as the writer Jacques Attali stated, *“a society is defined by the language that structures it and gives meaning to the information exchanged there”*. Thus, the will in the years 60-70 to claim an identity partially erased and to be able to define itself independently became essential for the feminists of the second wave. This linguistic discrimination was also repeated by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in *La domination masculine*⁴¹ where he wrote that *“language are hidden mechanisms of social domination”*. Indeed,

³⁶ Friedan, Betty ‘The feminine mystique’, *Harmondsworth:Penguin Books*, 1982

³⁷ Brownmiller, Susan, *“Sisterhood Is Powerful”*, *The New York Times*, 15 March 1970, section Archives<<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/15/archives/sisterhood-is-powerful-a-member-of-the-womens-liberation-movement.html>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

³⁸ Morgan Robin, *“Sisterhood Is Global: The International Women’s Movement Anthology”*, 1984

³⁹ Morgan Robin, *“Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement”*, *Random House*, 1970

⁴⁰ Bernheim, Catherine, and Geneviève Brisac, ‘Liberté, égalité, sororité, ou : le troisième mot’, *La Revue d’en face*, 11.1 (1981), 3–10

⁴¹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *“ La Domination masculine”*, *coll. Liber, Seuil*, 1998, pp. 69 et 96.

the symbolic violence of domination, when it is directly integrated into language, is then more accepted because it is directly internalized: “*The characteristic of the dominant is to be able to have their particular way of being recognized as universal*”. Thus, the “*Brotherhood*” of the motto would be universal only because the dominant generalizes it as such, it is not a reality in itself.

After having identified and denounced the oppression, the feminists of the second wave fought for their cause. In terms of solution, these feminists proposed in their writings several strategies of “*liberation*” starting from the principle that “*gender equality is the necessary utopia of feminism*”⁴². Thus, feminist sorority is nothing but a theoretical resolution built on a utopia, that is, an ideal that does not take into account reality, or at least that tries to change that reality.

At that time, the struggle was focused on the denunciation of patriarchal oppression and the acquisition of rights just like men: financial, legal, sexual freedom etc... However, according to Geneviève Brisac and Catherine Bernheim, to “*name oppression is one thing*”, but “*propose new values*” is another. Therefore, we will now wonder how have today’s feminists reclaimed this paradigm by proposing new values?

⁴² FRAISSE, Geneviève, ‘FÉMINISME - Histoire du féminisme’ (Encyclopædia Universalis) <<http://www.universalis-edu.com.proxy.sciencespobordeaux.fr/encyclopedie/feminisme-histoire-du-feminisme/>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

Chapter 2 : THE NEW SORORITY PARADIGM USED AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY AGAINST PATRIARCHAL VIOLENCES

"It is time to bring to our republican motto the point of view of this second half of humanity, because without us it is only a view of the mind" proclaims the Women's Foundation⁴³. We will see how sorority is applied in practice, how it manifests itself in our current western societies compared to the rest of the world. This solidarity between women seems to exist in practice thanks to committed women who share a common experience and background, to counter gender oppression.

SECTION 1: THE ROLE OF THE ACTUAL FOURTH FEMINIST WAVE IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

1. An ideal of sisterhood spread through the democratization of mass media

On 8 March 2007, a politician highlighted the flaws in Republican inclusiveness in her election speech. Indeed, Ségolène Royale, a presidential candidate, highlighted the omission of women in the motto "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*". This is the first time that such a high profile personality has questioned republican universalism. The democratization of the mass media, accessible to all in the 21st century, reinforced the weight and visibility of feminist theories, as well as their critics. The fourth wave rediscovered the term sorority from the popular American sororities, after several decades of oblivion. With the arrival of the internet and social networks, information circulates more quickly and the #Metoo movement gives a new lease of life to the word. Whether in the press, in the cinema, on the radio, in books or on social networks, feminism is becoming important in politics but also trendy. But the most important thing about this democratization is that what used to be an individual experience becomes a collective experience through the networks and thus becomes political. Since the 1970s, the term "*sorority*" has been reworked, the theory revised and updated, and above all, after a period of oblivion, the rise of social networks has allowed the notion of sorority to resurface and become popular. This is what the historian Bibia Pavard⁴⁴ describes as the fourth wave which "since the 2010s" "*would be carried by online activism*". Moreover, today, feminism is defined

⁴³ 'La Cité Audacieuse - Fondation des Femmes', <https://fondationdesfemmes.org/> <<https://fondationdesfemmes.org/la-cite-audacieuse/>> [accessed 12 April 2023]

⁴⁴ Pavard, Bibia, 'Faire naître et mourir les vagues : comment s'écrit l'histoire des féminismes', *Itinéraires. Littérature, textes, cultures*, 2017–2, 2018 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.3787>>

in several ways: "*firstly, it designates the movement for women's rights, the fight for equality and legality, a pressure group, therefore, that acts on patriarchal institutions*" and it is also a "*global movement of women's public opinion as a whole*"⁴⁵. According to Chloé Delaume in her collective work "*Sororité*" (2021)⁴⁶, she defines sorority as "*a horizontal relationship, without hierarchy or birthright. A relationship between women and women, neither daughter nor mother*". This book brings together several women from different backgrounds to talk about their experience of sisterhood; in particular, we find artists, journalists and authors who do not always agree with the concept of sisterhood established above. This notion, according to some, would allow to consider sisterhood as a tool of feminine power, to rethink what it means to be a woman today, to question the relationships of domination and to imagine the world of tomorrow. This wave is changing the paradigm of sisterhood; as we see with the #metoo and #balancetonporc scandals a more aggressive mindset to tackle the prejudices and discriminations of patriarchal society. In 2016, these #s that emerged after the Weinstein scandal allowed sorority to go beyond the spheres of activism and to be widely relayed on the networks by associations such as "*Nous Toutes*"; then by the general public. These revelations came as a shock wave to the entire international community and made certain circles such as politics and the media aware of the importance of cases of sexist and sexual violence in the spheres of power. As part of this thesis, I had the opportunity and the chance to interview the French MP for the Amiens constituency, Barbara Pompili, from the presidential party "*Renaissance*". The latter has twice been a member of the government, once in 2016 as the first female Secretary of State in charge of biodiversity. We talk about the place of women in politics and her experience in the field, and she recounts her media "*hazing*". In 2012, when she had just been appointed co-president of the Green group, which was a first for a woman, the newspaper Libération published an article on her. However, despite the important content of the interview due to its progressive scope, the photograph used for the article was a picture of the MP with "*a little cleavage*" "*very sexy*" which "*reflected the "no, but we know why she's here" side*", in other words the sexist cliché that women should have sex with politicians to obtain a position of high responsibility. She herself describes this moment as "*very violent*": "*I was sent back to my condition as a woman who was a bit of an object*" and "*it was damaging my political career*". She also mentions the time when, as a young woman, she wanted to work as a parliamentary assistant but the recruiter, a politician in front of her, even before reading her CV,

⁴⁵ Braidotti, Rosi, Jacqueline Aubenau, and Joëlle Meerstx, 'Pour un féminisme critique', *Les cahiers du GRIF*, 28.1 (1983), 36–44 <<https://doi.org/10.3406/grif.1983.1398>>

⁴⁶ Delaume, Chloé, 'Sororité', *Éditions Points*, Avril.8 (2021), [accessed 8 April 2023]

asked her to "*put on more lipstick next time*", thus referring her not to her acquired skills but to gender stereotypes rooted in society. She then mentioned the impact of social networks and the various whistleblowing movements that have made it possible to realize that "*a large number of politicians ... if they continued a certain number of practices, they were putting their professional political future at risk*". During the exchange, the notion of impunity was mentioned, because when sexist acts and sexual violence were committed before, they were hushed up or ignored; but when the cases broke out, this made it possible to reduce these acts. However, she emphasizes that "*we are not done with this type of behavior...*". She also highlights the solidarity and empathy of politicians, especially women, who have come to support her in the face of such situations of ordinary sexism. The fact that they are confronted with the same situations creates a de facto link between the women politicians, which is considered a benevolent solidarity by the MP but not a "*sisterly link*". The sisterhood recognises itself as a shifting body politic and its popularization also involves its widespread dissemination on entertainment platforms and in art. The seventh art in particular will appropriate this conception, recently with Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Girl on Fire* (2019), Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019), or with books such as⁴⁷ Alex Ohlin's *Copies non conformes* (Gallimard, 2021), Daisy Johnson's *Sisters* (Stock, 2021) and Mathilde Janin's *Soror* (Actes Sud, 2021). These works tell the stories of heroines, often initiation stories, with an infatuation for an ideal sisterhood, produced by women. Apart from the use and liberation of speech on social networks, sisterhood is manifested in the creation of concrete plans to curb the sexist and sexual violence still present in the different strata of society and especially in the upper echelons. This political violence, as we have seen, has its roots in the French revolution when women were excluded from the right to vote, which was not granted until 1944 and only exercised in 1945. Reforms such as quotas are slow to be put in place....

2. Individual, governmental and corporate initiatives that allow the sisterhood to materialize

This is how the Observatory of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Politics was formed, in order to respond concretely to accusations against politicians. This association brings together students and several fields of study on an international scale and conducts surveys such as 2022,

⁴⁷ Mannooretonil, Agnès, 'La sororité, pour quoi faire ?', *Études*, Décembre.12 (2021), 91–104 <<https://doi.org/10.3917/etu.4288.0091>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

where a national barometer was set up to take stock of sexist and sexual violence in France⁴⁸. It also mobilizes the public authorities so that legislation evolves on these subjects. This organisation has addressed 8 measures to be implemented within the French National Assembly such as training for MPs on sexist and sexual violence, the lifting of parliamentary immunity in certain cases of complaints for "harassment, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, violence against children", the sanctioning of sexist remarks, the reform of the listening unit, the reporting of all cases of sexist or sexual violence to the public prosecutor, the suspension of the loyalty clause in the event of violence or the introduction of support (legal, financial and psychological) for victims. These demands were transmitted in an open letter to the Prime Minister and the President of the National Assembly.

Other individual, associative or entrepreneurial initiatives are also taking place, as did the Sorority Foundation a few years ago with the creation of *The Sorority*⁴⁹ application. This association, which has been awarded the "*Prix du Grand Public Génération Égalité Voices 2022 ONU Femmes France*", aims to ensure "the safety and development of women". It therefore helps to combat domestic violence, intra-family violence and street harassment. The application fights through several actions: "*by listing and contacting victim support associations, by accompanying and training the police to listen to victims and help them in a concrete way, by proposing security kits in shops and places where people mix, by listing places of refuge in the territory to develop solutions for listening, support and accommodation for victims, by proposing awareness-raising actions*". The application works in such a way that when a woman is assaulted or feels in danger, she can trigger a security alert on the application which sets off a shrill cry for help. This helps to counteract the "*shock effect*" during an attack, and the app also sends the person's location to other women around them so that they can come to her aid or alert the authorities. This freezing effect is, according to psychotherapist Jan Gysi⁵⁰, an instinctive reaction of the body that will create an inability to move, to create and suppress defensive behavior automatically to avoid the risk of injury to the body and ensure the survival of the

⁴⁸ 'ACCUEIL | Jointhesorority' <<https://www.jointhesorority.com/>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

⁴⁹ The Sorority : Agir ensemble contre les violences et pour l'égalité', *ONU Femmes France*, 2022 <<https://www.onufemmes.fr/agenda-festival-generation-egalite-voices-2022/2022/6/1/the-sorority-agir-ensemble-contre-les-violences-et-pour-lgalite>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

⁵⁰ '«Une réaction complètement normale»', *Amnesty International Suisse* <<https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/themes/droits-des-femmes/violence-sexuelle/docs/une-reaction-complementement-normale>> [accessed 9 April 2023]

individual. Sisterhood as mutual support between women who are victims of the same oppressions applies here.

SECTION 2: A COMPLEXIFICATION OF THE STRUGGLE FOR A PLURAL AND INCLUSIVE SORORITY

1. An inclusiveness problem

Shortly after the theorisation of sorority, some feminists wanted to flesh it out to make it more inclusive. This is when ecofeminist, lesbian and Afro-feminist theories came into play, and intersectionality, introduced in Critical Race Theory⁵¹ by law professor Kimberlé William Crenshaw in 1989, was created. According to Rokhaya Diallo, intersectionality is a political reflection that "*describes the fact that not all women live in the same conditions. Some find themselves at the intersection of several types of exclusion*". It allows a greater number of women to continue to identify with a feminist movement that was initially predominantly white and bourgeois but is now much more inclusive. We will see, however, how the convergence of struggles is sometimes complex. The injustices are then perceived as common mechanisms. With intersectionality, which considers the complexity of social inequalities, we see an attempt at convergence between feminism and other struggles: socialism, eco-feminism, anti-racism, LGBT movements, etc. For intersectionality, in theory, discriminations are experienced simultaneously and are mutually constructed, they should not be hierarchical. So if we follow this logic we can be oppressor (white) and oppressed (woman). Feminists like Bell hooks in *From Margin to center* do not argue for a rejection of sisterhood as political solidarity but for a diversification of the movement⁵². A total rejection would risk weakening the movement; therefore, according to her, it would be necessary to come together in the face of a common oppression and to analyze lucidly these oppressions that run through the movement,

⁵¹ Crenshaw, Kimberlé W., and Magali Bessone, 'Démarginaliser l'intersection de la race et du sexe : une critique féministe noire du droit antidiscriminatoire, de la théorie féministe et des politiques de l'antiracisme', trans. by Sophie Beaulieu, *Droit et société*, 108.2 (2021), 465–87
<<https://doi.org/10.3917/drs1.108.0465>>

⁵² 'Au fait, d'où vient cette "sororité" sans cesse invoquée par Marlène Schiappa ?', *L'Obs*, 2018
<<https://www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/notre-epoque/20180611.OBS8006/au-fait-d-ou-vient-cette-sororite-sans-cesse-invoquee-par-marlene-schiappa.html>> [accessed 5 April 2023]

without falling into communitarianism. This criticism of communitarianism would later be made by the detractors of sisterhood. At that time, some went even further in the convergence of struggles, such as Adrienne Rich in her *Lesbian Continuum*. She theorizes a causal relationship between heterosexuality and the oppression of women; that is, according to this theory, if women were not constrained by this norm, they would be more likely to be lesbian because there would be "*intense and privileged relationships between women*"⁵³. Along with capitalist critiques, we see the advent of ecofeminism. The term has its roots in the 1980s, but was initiated by the biologist Rachel Carson in 1962, who was one of the first to denounce pesticide pollution and to question the treatment of the environmental issue. To be an ecofeminist is to see "*the links between the exploitation and brutalisation of the earth and its people on the one hand, and the physical, economic and psychological violence perpetrated daily against women*"⁵⁴, declared Women and Life on Earth, the first US ecofeminist collective, founded in August 1979 following a nuclear accident by women active in anti-nuclear, alternative energy, peace and women's organization struggles. There are also debates about gender neutrality which are divided into two camps: the differentialists, who recognise a female specificity, a kind of gender difference; and the universalists, who refute a gender difference.

Intersectional struggles are therefore useful because they allow for greater representativeness, however, by putting too many boxes and categories in place, sisterhood can also become diluted. The concept of sisterhood cannot then be imposed as a homogenous feeling and experience, because women are different. Furthermore, the fact that sisterhood is constructed as an ideal to be achieved and not as a truth in itself may have been disappointing, because despite progress, certain inequalities have persisted. "*In the words of Geneviève Fraisse, "sorority"*⁵⁵, *displayed as a political concept, had the effect of spreading feminism among various social classes; but this utopia had its setbacks and its predictable recuperations*"⁵⁶, in fact, despite efforts to open up and include "*inequalities have persisted*". Nevertheless, the concept of intersectionality is being debated because, according to some specialists, it has an identitarian approach. That is, it refers to individuals to their identity, they are

⁵³ Ricordeau, Gwenola, 'Rich Adrienne, La contrainte à l'hétérosexualité et autres essais', *Genre, sexualité & société*, 5, 2011 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/gss.1938>>

⁵⁴ 'Collection: Women and Life on Earth Records | Smith College Finding Aids' <<https://findingaids.smith.edu/repositories/2/resources/770>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

⁵⁵ 'Collection: Women and Life on Earth Records | Smith College Finding Aids' <<https://findingaids.smith.edu/repositories/2/resources/770>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

⁵⁶ Idem

only boxes and not individuals in their own right. This reduction of identity is particularly decried by republican universalists, i.e. individuals who assume that there is a truth shaped by reason which considers a unique whole where people cannot be isolated, and therefore placed in boxes (black, white, etc.).

2. Living sisterhood through new practices

With the emergence of the fourth feminist wave, intrinsically linked to the new modes of communication, we see the rise of New Age feminism, which encourages women to reconnect to their "*sacred feminine*", their sensitivity and their capacity to feel. This personal development aspect sometimes allows us to reach a wider public, even if it condemns us to depoliticise the struggle. Women's circles and so-called "spiritual" retreats in non-mixed gender allow for a common experience to be shared and a more attentive and understanding ear to the problems common to women. New ge feminism, which is widespread in the United States and Europe, is not a scientific approach but a spiritual one and aims to be independent and to take up precepts from pre-existing practices and beliefs. This current, when merged with sisterhood, is inspired by matriarchal societies and proposes that women develop self-knowledge. However, this trend is questionable, this eclectic and often profit-oriented trend and the advent of "*Girl Power*" does not benefit women and their rights so much as it does capital. If the feminist merchandise (t-shirts, mugs, posters, etc.) allows the movement to broaden its horizons and go beyond the activist milieu, it does not allow for a concrete and effective fight against institutional and cultural patriarchal discrimination. And if women's circles in non-mixed gender, during yoga retreats, can be practised and even essential to the liberation of the word, allows women to feel more at ease; one cannot forget that this trendy side of sisterhood also leads to a depoliticisation. Because of this, the term sorority is nowadays quite overused, criticised and marketed. The fact that the word is used in pop culture allows for its democratisation, but takes away some of its connotation of social and political struggle.

This patriarchal model seems to be at the end of its tether because it reproduces non-biological but cultural inequalities that put women in difficulty personally and professionally because of injunctions and stereotypes... and sisterhood can be a solution or at least an alternative to a current

patriarchal world established on the mechanics of violence towards minorities and especially women. However, and this is where the theoretical concept of sisterhood comes up against, the struggle of "*women*" would assume that women are a united and homogeneous group. This is not the case. The social category "*women*" does not exist and feminist movements are crossed by different ethical, socio-economic, religious, racial and sexual orientation conflicts, so the convergence of struggles seems complex. Apart from the glimmering of a certain "*union*" of women in all circumstances, in a struggle against a form of discriminatory social organization, patriarchy, we then find an ambivalence and an incoherence linked to the plurality of women. By magnifying the line of the critique of intersectionality, "*Can a white, millionaire, far-right woman really be in solidarity, be "soror" with a black, left-wing, poor woman?"* For if one follows the logic of feminist sisterhood then yes, they would support each other by virtue of being women. However, according to other logics, notably social struggles, they are radically opposed by their social condition and their way of conceiving the world. So, a clear understanding based on being a "*woman*" biologically and having a cultural experience as a "*woman*" should be enough, but it is much more complex than that in reality.

CHAPTER 3 :

SISTERHOOD, AN UNATTAINABLE IDEAL AND A POTENTIAL DANGER FOR DEMOCRACY

« *Loving women for who they are, each and every one of them, and not for what is expected of them in the name of some ideal* »⁵⁷. As Catherine Bernheim beautifully puts it, it would be a pity in politics to refrain from thinking or to always agree in the name of the fact that the interlocutor is a woman. We will therefore look at the complexity of sisterhood and how, when instrumentalized, it can become a potential danger to democracy.

SECTION 1: THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SISTERHOOD PARADIGM

1. Sorority is powerful but not easy: a difficult convergence of struggles

"*We must measure the danger of the concept: through sisterhood arises independence, even self-management*" Chloé Delaume, in her collection "*Sorority*"⁵⁸, explains that the latter is not easy, because the differences in class and interests are real. However, in a movement that was initially thought to be simple and uniform, misunderstanding is sometimes hard to conceive. Already in movements like the MLF in the 1970s, sisterhood could be oppressive because it forced women to be one, to be a homogeneous group with a political project. But the ideal could also destroy each woman's individuality: "*At every GA, as soon as the shadow of a disagreement began to appear, someone would stand up, with an anxious eye and a pastoral voice, to remind us that we are all sisters in oppression and that, as a result, we mustn't fight* ». Sisterhood, while it may be useful to feminism in some struggles, as bringing women's voices together allows for greater impact, remains an ideal, not a reality. Solidarity between women, at all times and on all issues addressed by feminism, is really utopian, as women are not a homogeneous social group. While this ideal may therefore sometimes be useful, it is nonetheless open to criticism in theory and practice. First of all, on the theoretical level,

⁵⁷ Bernheim, Catherine, and Geneviève Brisac, 'Liberté, égalité, sororité, ou : le troisième mot', *La Revue d'en face*, 11.1 (1981), 3–10

⁵⁸ Delaume, Chloé, 'Sororité', *Éditions Points*, Avril.8 (2021), [accessed 8 April 2023]

starting from the premise that there is "*a relationship of similarity, of solidarity uniting women who partially share the female condition*"⁵⁹ is a bias, a point of view and not a reality in itself. This paradigm of solidarity only holds if women share this point of view with each other, which is not the case for all of them. The member of the French National Assembly, Ms. Pompili, interviewed for this report, recognises the usefulness, even the necessity, of feminism in politics, especially when it comes to giving women the same rights and opportunities as men. It also underlines a certain solidarity that allows women from quotas to feel supported and therefore more legitimate in politics, in an environment where the glass ceiling is still present. The glass ceiling is "*the image that reflects the difficulty and obstacles for women to access positions of power in companies*".⁶⁰ However, the sorority also advocates a fight for women's rights by women, which the MP refutes: "*I am one of those who have always supported the HeForShe*⁶¹ *movement to defend human rights, it is not just about women.*"⁶² HeForShe is the United Nations' global solidarity movement for gender equality, which emphasizes the importance of men in the fight against sexism. Indeed, Ms. Pompili does not deny that women can support each other when they share common experiences, such as gender discrimination or sexual and gender-based violence, but she points out that in politics "*you must not exaggerate, everyone stays in their own party*". As feminist theories sometimes naively suggest, there is no such thing as a feeling and impulse of solidarity between women that transcends the rest of political thought. Moreover, in recent years, she has witnessed a radicalisation of part of the movement, which is becoming 'communitarian'. Thus, in some cases, feminists seem to have wanted to create a sisterhood to counterbalance the sisterhood, but have fallen into the separatism they denounce.

"The author and poet Kiyémis highlights here the impossibility of "sisters" being united because of the internal divisions that run through the concept of sisterhood. Indeed, the difficulty of converging struggles (racial, social, etc.) in activism is said to be due to the invisibilization of minority

⁵⁹ Sommes-nous des brebis édentées?, tract du Mouvement des femmes, 1973

⁶⁰ Landrieux-Kartochian, Sophie, 'Les organisations face au plafond de verre', *Revue française de gestion*, 173.4 (2007), 15–30 <<https://doi.org/10.3166/rfg.173.15-30>>

⁶¹ 'Home Page', *HeForShe* <<https://www.heforshe.org/en>> [accessed 13 April 2023]

⁶² 'SORORITÉ : Définition de SORORITÉ' <<https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/sororit%C3%A9>> [accessed 13 April 2023]

women by so-called "white and bourgeois" feminists. "This notion of sisterhood emerged in the feminist movements of the 1970s, carried by white, bourgeois and privileged women. All of a sudden, they were sending the injunction to other women to always hold hands. When a black woman experiences racism or a precarious woman experiences class discrimination, they cannot be asked to hold hands with their oppressors," said journalist Lauren Bastide. Sisterhood has been theorised as a question of common oppression and has not taken into account, according to Bell hooks⁶³, the different oppressions of class and "race"; to say "we women" is to erase a different experience for racialised or poor women and white, middle-class women for example; the experience is not always the same. In practice, therefore, the term is debated, as at the Vancouver Indochinese Women's Conference in 1971, where sisterhood proved to be "Powerful, but not easy". American women at the conference agreed in principle to build an anti-war, anti-racist and anti-imperial sisterhood based on sisterhood but these issues actually divided them. It is clear that a unified women's movement without disagreement cannot prevail because there is no such thing as global sisterhood for them, transcending race, gender and cultural differences. The sole basis of a common experience of gender-based oppression is not enough to be united in a political struggle. Women's oppression is multiple and diverse according to the singularities of each woman and we must not fall into the trap of ignoring the fundamental inequalities and differences in the experiences of each woman. According to Candice Klein "Sisterhood was powerful in theory; nonetheless, its practice was difficult and complicated"⁶⁴. Indeed, the subcategories of minorities could not agree because they were divided within themselves, such as the fact that American women of colour refused to accept sisterhood from white women if they refused to take responsibility for their role in the oppression of black women etc. However, according to the author, this does not mean that "sisterhood has failed but that through conflict it has evolved »⁶⁵.

Moreover, not all second wave feminists appropriate this notion of sisterhood, such as materialist feminists like Christine Delphy. The materialist current refutes the natural existence of the group 'women' and argues that it exists only because of oppression. The current is derived from Marxism and is anti-essentialist, so for them women do not exist "in themselves"⁶⁶. Women, as a social

⁶³ Hooks, Bell, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women", *Feminist Review*, n23, 1986

⁶⁴ Klein, Candice, "'Sisterhood Is Powerful, but Not Easy:' Conflict, American Imperialism, and Splintering at the 1971 Vancouver Indochinese Women's Conference' (Simon Fraser University, 2018) <<https://summit.sfu.ca/item/17970>> [accessed 8 April 2023]

⁶⁵ Idem

⁶⁶ Delphy, Christine, "Pour un féminisme matérialiste", *L'Arc*, n61, 1975, p.61-67

group, exist only because they designate themselves as such. This category of "*gender relations*" would be the result of the domination of one group over another. Finally, this "*sorority at all costs*" also leads to abuses, particularly in the legal framework, where media tribunals, reinforced by the era of social networks, would like to replace justice.

2. *The danger of the media court*

Sorority, when instrumentalized to malicious ends, is a pitfall for democracy. Nowadays, the apparent democracy of the internet shows us that social networks are a place of supposed freedom where anyone can express their opinion, without fear of repression, within the limits of respect for others. However, we notice that with the advent of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and more recently Tiktok, we are moving towards a society of reaction, especially since #Metoo. The algorithms and configuration of these platforms are designed to encourage a reaction to a comment, rather than a structured debate (limited number of words, short formats). In the case of public accusations, widely reported in the media, such as the Richard Berry affair in 2021, feminist associations argued that the presumption of innocence of the accused does not prevent us from believing the presumed victim, nor from giving him or her any form of support. Moreover, it is necessary to recognise and hear the voice of the victims. Nevertheless, when citizens become accusing judges in the press and on social networks and take the place of justice, the fundamental principles of law are undermined. So when a society is gagged and its principles flouted, it is legitimate to ask about the state of democracy. For LeMonde, *'The media court has ended up contaminating the judicial order'*, the newspaper quotes the investigation opened despite the statute of limitations. This frenzied desire to satisfy the greatest number of people can be seen as a drift of sorority. So in this kind of case, sorority feminists have a kind of obligation to defend the presumed victim, as a matter of principle, because she is a woman. In the name of this solidarity "*at all costs*", we are entering into the confines of a single thought. There is a desire not to contradict each other because we support the same project and should therefore unite with one voice. "Let's remember that originally "*sorority*" meant that we needed to unite to get things done. Later, it became the obligation to be nice to all women. This is what the feminists Bernheim and Brissac were already denouncing in 1981⁶⁷. Indeed,

⁶⁷ C.Bernheim & G. Brissac , "Liberté, Égalité, Sororité", *La revue d'en face*, n11, 1981

in the most extreme cases, the "*sororal*" feeling can be diverted and used as a means of silencing dissident voices, the authors added in Liberté, Égalité, Sororité of a "*We will therefore have to learn to keep from sorority only what allows us to move forward* ». Thus, what should perhaps be kept from this notion is the will to support each other between women and more globally between people who are victims of oppression, while including men in this struggle. Non-mixity can work in part because it creates a safe space, but mentalities will not change if non-mixity is total. This is also why, as we shall see, living together in society and at school is so important: it allows for dialogue and an evolution of mentalities towards more equality.

SECTION 2: THE DERIVES OF SISTERHOOD IN PRACTICE NOWADAYS

1. The potential difficulty of sorority in the school system

First of all, it can be noted that sorority, in an effort to protect women from the various gender-related discriminations they may encounter in society, can be applied in the education system. In the Anglo-Saxon system today, in Australia, Ireland or New Zealand in particular, or even in France until the second half of the 20th century, boys and girls are separated at school. In France, before the Haby law (1975) making co-education compulsory in primary and secondary education, the two genders were often separated, and the very gendered educational courses were not the same for boys (handling weapons etc.) and girls (sewing, cooking, etc.). In Australia, Ireland and New Zealand⁶⁸, however, some institutions still advocate non-mixing as a factor in the development of children, particularly girls, who could have a calmer school climate. According to this logic, when co-education is introduced for practical reasons, it does not ensure gender equality and stereotypes persist, according to the detractors of co-education. These schools argue that girls gain more confidence, go into less gendered occupations and perform better at school. However, scientifically, these supposed benefits have not been proven, at least not any more than in mixed schools, and we can reflect on the relevance of such a system. Indeed, in an article on single-sex schools, the newspaper

⁶⁸ Smyth, Emer, "Single-sex Education: What Does Research Tell Us ?", OpenEditionJournals, 2010

LeMonde⁶⁹ speaks of "*ideological, even communitarian withdrawal*" and "*a symbol of inequality*". This debate raises a real republican question, which advocates living together and not separation according to gender or other criteria (skin colour, religion etc.). This separatist vision is a step backwards for the defenders of republican democracy and raises several problems. On the one hand, one of the major problems would be the risk of exclusion and reinforcement of stereotypes due to ignorance of the other, "*segregation and separation of the sexes have long been the major vector of male domination and still are in some countries*"⁷⁰. This separation, in the manner of the Jim Crow Law "*separate but equal*", "*equality in difference*"⁷¹, can only reinforce gender stereotypes "*it is paradoxical for the school institution to affirm gender equality and to invite pupils to overcome stereotypes and, at the same time, to separate them*"⁷².

On the other hand, this non-mixed upbringing could create an inability to communicate with the other gender later on, in a multi socially and multiculturally diverse mixed working world. This raises the question of the real usefulness of sisterhood applied as such in the feminist struggle, because if it excludes men from all sides, then men who also want to fight discrimination would not be able to do so because of their gender. And if we apply this principle to other struggles such as the fight against racism, it also seems counterintuitive to leave black people alone to fight against discrimination perpetrated by white people. Indeed, in order to eradicate racism, it is necessary to have a universal struggle by all, and also to educate and raise the awareness of all to the problems mentioned. To make a nation is then undoubtedly not easy when we do not all fight together to move towards a more just society. Thus, if at school, certain non-mixed time slots can be beneficial "if girls or boys are more comfortable playing certain sports or talking about their sexuality in single-sex groups, there is no need to take offence"; on the other hand, drastic school separation can prevent true equality where everyone has an open field of possibilities.

⁶⁹ 'La non-mixité à l'école, une option pédagogique encore taboue', *Le Monde.fr*, 2 March 2020 <https://www.lemonde.fr/m-perso/article/2020/03/02/la-non-mixite-a-l-ecole-une-option-pedagogique-encore-taboue_6031545_4497916.html> [accessed 13 April 2023]

⁷⁰ Duru-Bellat, Marie, 'Mixte ou pas ?', *L'école des parents*, 593.6 (2011), 28–29 <<https://doi.org/10.3917/epar.593.0028>>

⁷¹ Idem

⁷² Idem

2. American sororities part of Greek Houses are a mirage of equality

Originally, American sororities were created by young women students as a first claim for equality. Indeed, student organizations are called "*fraternity*" for men and "*sorority*" for women, but the second term was coined after the first one because originally colleges accepted only young men. These generally non-mixed organizations have their roots in North America at the end of the 18th century and their name is usually composed of a Greek or Latin motto. They provide for the integration of students and the provision of extra-curricular activities. Fraternities became important in the 1870s, especially for middle-class boys, as they were able to build up a network for the future professional world. Women also wanted to take advantage of this networking system and founded the first sororities called Gamma Phi Beta, in 1874 at Syracuse University in semi-clandestine and IC Sororis in the US in the state of Illinois. This model of fraternities was later imported to Europe and developed in the 20th century, notably in France with Khômmiss Polytechnique, Breaking Lion's Université Lyon III. The term "*sorority*" used by Professor Frank Smalley to modify the term "*women's fraternities*"⁷³ was to be introduced and allow women to establish themselves as equals in the university environment. Initially, women were considered illegitimate and inferior, so gaining a foothold in the academic arena seemed complex. They had to overcome "*restrictive social customs, unequal status under the law and the underlying presumption that they were less able than men*" according to *Adventure in Friendship: A History of a Panhellenic Conference*⁷⁴. Thus, living as "*sisters*" allowed them to engage in extracurricular activities, to network, and to support each other in a predominantly male university environment. Nowadays, however, the way sororities operate seems to be questioned after several scandals revealed by the media. Between sexist dress codes, physical discrimination and cases of sexual assault, the image of sororities has been gradually eroded. In the wider student community, whether sororities or fraternities, there are abuses related to the

⁷³ Ph.D, Fran Becque, 'Women's Fraternities, Sororities, and Dr. Frank Smalley', *Fraternity History & More*, 2013 <<https://www.franbecque.com/womens-fraternities-sororities-and-dr-frank-smalley/>> [accessed 13 April 2023]

⁷⁴ National Panhellenic conference "Adventure in friendship: a history of the National Panhellenic conference", 2009

objectification of women. Thus, the sense of solidarity among women is not intrinsically the problem but the abuses that occur under the guise of sisterhood. While sorority organizations start from a good intention, i.e., formed as a tool to help integrate women into academia, they are often a reflection of a misogynistic society. Between problematic parties and initiation rites called hazing ranging from simple alcohol consumption to sexual abuse... University organizations are far from slogans such as "*Love of learning is the guide of life*". In 2010 a study published by Willis, a major fraternity insurer⁷⁵, revealed that the various US Greek Houses were dangerous for the health and lives of students. It showed that sexual assault accounted for 15% of Greek House incidents (Appendix 2). To prevent this, in 1972, a Title IX amendment was put in place to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in state-supported education programmes. But this does not seem to be enough, as according to former US President B. Obama, one in five female students is still sexually assaulted during her studies. "*In this 100% male environment, where aggressive homophobia and denigration of women reign, boys need to prove their masculinity through hetero sexual acts*" and therefore sexual humiliation and rape are almost common practices" explains Caroline Rolland-Diamond, lecturer in American history and civilisation at Paris-X University, in an article in *Libération*.⁷⁶ "*The campus sexual assault study*"⁷⁷, released in 2007 by the Institute of Justice, shows that the majority of sexual assaults on campus were committed in the context of Greek House parties. Thus, the so-called sorority university institution created to achieve equality now seems very controversial. These are hidden behind a much darker reality and since the accusations of sexism linked to the #MeToo movement, and of racism with the Black Lives Matter protests many students are calling for the outright abolition of these American Greek houses.

⁷⁵ Flanagan, Caitlin, 'The Dark Power of Fraternities', *The Atlantic*, 2014
<<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/03/the-dark-power-of-fraternities/357580/>>
[accessed 13 April 2023]

⁷⁶ Bardeleben, Elvire von, 'États-Unis : Sex and the campus', *Libération*
<https://www.liberation.fr/cahier-ete-2015/2015/08/21/etats-unissex-and-the-campus_1367141/>
[accessed 13 April 2023]

⁷⁷ National Institute of Justice, "The Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) Study", final report, October 2007

CONCLUSION

"Never forget that it will only take a political, economic or religious crisis for women's rights to be challenged. These rights can never be taken for granted. You must remain vigilant throughout your lives," Simone de Beauvoir reminded us in 1974, almost prophetically, about the Veil law. She warned women about the fragility of the acquisition of social rights for minorities, and how struggles won can be swept away with a wave of the hand when democracy trembles. Today, democracies mired in a morass of uncertainty, weakened by a global pandemic, a climate crisis and multiple social crises, are faltering. Last year, a study by *The Economist* highlighted the democratic decline in 2021 (index at 5.37) compared to 2020 (index at 5.28) as the biggest democratic decline since 2010 "*the results reflect the negative impact of the pandemic on democracy and freedom around the world for the second year running, with the considerable expansion of state power and the erosion of individual freedoms*"⁷⁸. Indeed, the British group's study counts only twenty-one countries with "*full democracy*" status, out of a total of 165 countries. Some minorities such as the Uighurs are arbitrarily locked up and enslaved, others such as the indigenous peoples of the Amazon are driven off their land, and even the US is challenging the right to abortion in some states. Basic human rights: the freedom to think, to do, to live, to dispose of one's body are rapidly wavering in an atmosphere of tension. The social rights hard won by political actors such as the pro-choice feminists of the 1970s cannot be sustained without solidarity. Yet sisterhood, theorized in the twentieth century as a new paradigm in the Western world and then reworked around the world; an ideal sometimes dreamt of and sometimes hated; held in sanctity by some and demonized by others; now seems to be in part a remedy for oppression for some. It continues to be one of the central elements of fourth-wave feminist discourse, and its popularity on social networks continues to grow. Indeed, this is probably due to

⁷⁸ Une étude s'alarme d'un recul de la démocratie dans le monde en 2021', *Le Temps*, 10 February 2022 <<https://www.letemps.ch/monde/une-etude-salarme-dun-recul-democratie-monde-2021>> [accessed 13 April 2023]

the fact that sisterhood, as solidarity between women, in practice creates a safe place in an often oppressive patriarchal society. Women are encouraged to speak freely about their experiences as women in non-mixed circles, without fear of judgement and with a careful and proactive ear. In practice, too, laws and civic initiatives are put in place to enable women to move about as calmly as possible, to move safely in the street or to move in the workplace without facing a ceiling. However, this solidarity is not a watered down version of universal brotherhood in which women have one voice. Thanks to the different political visions in particular, women debate, sometimes have heated exchanges with divergent or even opposing concepts. But in reality this is healthy, as it is part of the democratic process based on the exchange of views, as there is no such thing as unity in all points of view. On the other hand, when the voices are never dissident, are not plural and united but unique, relayed by "*the good word*", then we come up against the pitfall of sisterhood. Indeed, as the MP Barbara Pompili pointed out, "*I am a feminist, I am a woman, I am free, I have never taken orders from anyone and I have always refused to be subjected to anyone's diktat, including my 'sisters'*". This diktat can indeed arise when women are essentialized, i.e. reduced to their sole condition as women. Some community discourses overlook the fact that women are sensitive and intelligent beings with complex identities and diverse experiences. So, isn't restricting these identities reproducing the violence decried and fought by feminism?

Thus, in order to avoid the various drifts, whether due to sexism or to a desire to fight against this discrimination, which lead to exclusion and the total rejection of the other, we should move towards solidarity between all, a humanity... In 2018, according to the High Council for Equality, the solution for a more egalitarian society may lie in "*adelphity*" or "*solidarity*". Adelpity⁷⁹ is a non-gender-neutral and universal Greek term meaning "*children born of the same mother regardless of their sex*". To try to establish a harmonious and egalitarian relationship between women and men in a society, it is essential to be able to identify plural struggles where each citizen would fight against the discrimination of minorities whether they are of race, religion, gender, orientation etc... This reconciling universality of adelphy, has already been used in the tribune against transphobia, Libération, February 26, 2020 "the noun adelph is spreading to overcome any assignment to a gender: To you, my sister, my brother, my adelphe"; and the Manifesto of the Watchdogs⁸⁰ against macho

⁷⁹ 'ADELPHE : Définition de ADELPHE' <<https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/adelphe>> [accessed 13 April 2023]

⁸⁰ 'Manifeste', *Les Chiennes de Garde* <<https://chiennesdegarde.fr/qui-sommes-nous/manifeste/>> [accessed 13 April 2023]

violence 8 March 1999 by Florence Montreynaud introduces the word "*We, women and men acting for freedom, equality, adelphity and tolerance, demand that a law against sexism be passed in our country*". Changing a word in a motto or in everyday language cannot, on its own, stop gender issues or reduce the wage gap and domestic violence. However, as we have seen with Bourdieu, words shape thinking and thus indirectly the society in which we live. Thus, putting men and women back together on an equal footing would already be a symbolic step towards the end of the divisions between a fraternity that is intended to be universalist but still connoted as masculine and a sorority that is intended to be all-embracing but controversial, thanks to "*adelphité*"⁸¹. "*Adelphité*"⁸² would then perhaps make it possible to build an ideal of society where "harmonious relations between all human beings, free and equal in dignity and rights, in fact as in words, reign.

⁸¹ d'universitaires, un collectif d'associations et, 'A toi ma sœur, mon frère, mon adelphe', *Libération* <https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/02/26/a-toi-ma-soeur-mon-frere-mon-adelphe_1779666/> [accessed 13 April 2023]

⁸² Marchal, Joëlle, 'Fraternité, sororité, adelphité', *La chaîne d'union*, 101.3 (2022), 44–51 <<https://doi.org/10.3917/cdu.101.0044>>

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APPENDICES TABLE

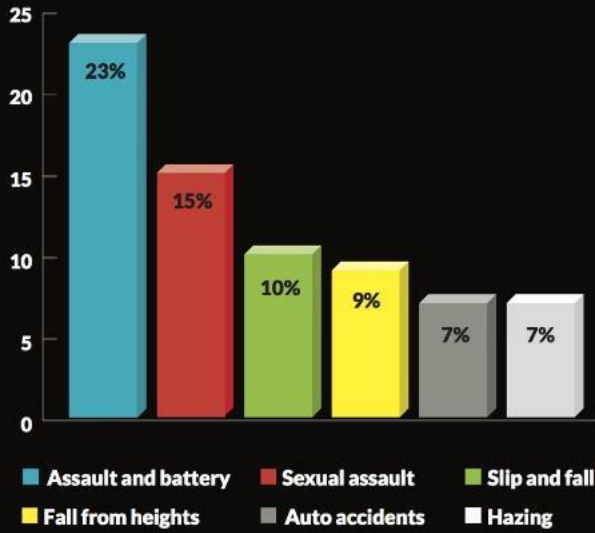
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Appendice 1



FRATERNAL DISORDER: THE MOST-COMMON CLAIMS

The bruised or catatonic pledge may be an emblem of fraternization gone awry, but hazing causes only a fraction of the problems at Greek houses. A 2010 analysis by Willis, a major fraternity insurer, based on a sample of liability claims, shows the range of incidents now commanding national attention.



Appendice 2

APPENDICE 3

ITW Barbara Pompili

Bonjour, pourriez-vous vous présenter ?

Je suis Barbara Pompili, je suis députée de la circonscription d'Amiens, depuis une dizaine d'années maintenant, je suis une écologiste engagée depuis 20 ans et j'ai la chance redoutable d'être par deux fois membre du gouvernement, une fois en 2016 en tant que secrétaire d'Etat en charge de la biodiversité et la première femme en charge de ce sujet ce qui était très important pour moi et puis ministre de la transition écologique... et j'avoue que revenir à une vie de parlementaire et revenue à une liberté de parole: et je n'ai pas dis je suis une femme.

Votre avis sur la différence de traitement entre les hommes et les femmes en politique ?

Elle a évolué, j'ai du recul et cela évolue dans le bon sens, au départ c'était un monde très masculin, alors il l'est toujours, ou les femmes n'étaient intégrées que grâce à un mentor (famille etc) ou grace aux nouvelles lois sur la parité qui permettait de mettre des femmes à des positions importantes, quelque part il y avait la sensation que les femmes étaient la presque par effraction. Cela se ressentait dans la manière dont on était traité, je me souviens de mon bizutage, j'étais co-présidente de groupe (avec François de Rugis) et j'étais la première en 2012. Ils étaient en panique totale car le règlement de l'Assemblée ne prévoyait pas cela, tous les 6 mois chacun prenait la place de Président, depuis cela s'est banalisé et j'ai eu droit à mon "portrait" dans Libé(ration). Il avait fait mon portrait, j'attendais avec impatience et j'étais fière d'apporter ma toute petite pierre à l'édifice du féminisme en politique. Et le journal sort et ils mettent une photo, la photo était r prise un jour ou il faisaiit chaud, j'avais un petit décolleté et la photo était très sexy et renvoyait le cote "non mais on sait pourquoi elle est là", cela a été très violent car j'ai eu l'impression de m'avoir fait avoir comme un bleu et que j'ai été renvoyé à ma condition de femme un peu objet, alors que si j'avais voulu poster ma photo moi meme je l'aurais fait mais la cedla s'accageais tout mon parcours politique... tout ça était balayé.. paradoxalement cela m'a ouvert les portes car j'ai pu en parler et cela ma permis de voir en tant qu'élue à quel point ma condition de femme gouvernait encore mon action politique... après je me suis rendue compte par d'autres baiis que les femmes n'étaient pas traitées comme les hommes, typiquement pendant ma co-présidence je discutais avec des interlocuteurs, et aujd avec la premeire ministre on la compare encore avec edith cresson, on lui dit qu'il faut dépasser la "durée de vie" d'Edith Cresson mais tout cela n'a pas de sens, on est 30 zns après, le monde a changé et malgré tout on continue de faire ce genre de chose et le mode de vie des politiques a peu changé, je me rappelle qu'on se battait contre les réunions à 18h, la pire heure pour les femmes parce qu'on est très souvednt chargé de famille et on s'occupe des enfants, ce petit moment familliale ou on se retrouve avat d'aller se coucher c'est un moment très compliqué pour les femmes, donc je me battaos pour que l'on ai des réunion avant ou après, et aujd tout cela n'a pas beaucoup évolué meme si le tl travail a quand meme fait évolué les choses. Donc les choses ont bougées/évoluées mais on est encore loin du compte, dans le parti présidentiel les fmeme pol ont du mal a avoir un pouvoir réel, un pouvoir d'affichage mais pas réellement de pouvoir réel.

Elisabeth Borne est-elle plus facilement attaquée parce qu'elle est une femme ?

Les débats a l'AN ont atteint un degrés de violence jamais vu qui ne sont pas liés je pense pas au fait que eb est une femme, O.Dussopt était plus souvent au banc et victime d'une violence qui était assez terrible. Après j'ai vu durant d'autres 49.3, avec M.Valls c'était déjà cela mais moins violent alors je n'arrivbe pas a savoir si c'est le fait qu'elle soit une femme ou que de manière générale les débats se sont intensifiés en terme de violence. Ce qui est sur c'est que c'est une question ouverte, je n'ai pas forcément la réponse.

Votre avis sur les quotas ?

Il y a la théorie, l'idéal est la réalité, en politique on a de belles et idées et le moment de les mettrent en oeuvre car nous sommes dans un monde complexe ou tout n'est pas balnc ou noir donc en théorie je suis contre en pratique je suis pour. Contre car très humiliant et pour car les quotas permettent que les femmes soient dans la place à aprtit du moment ou elles sont dans la place les choses évoluent. Le plus dur c'est

pour celles qui essuient les platres, dont ma génération fait partie parce que ça accentue quelque chose de très bintégrée culturellement par les femmes qui est de prouver qu'on sait faire, on a cette légitimité qui n'est pas acquise à cause des quotas ; j'ai passé les 10 dernières années de ma vie à prouver que je suis compétente mais maintenant on reconnaît que je suis élue non pas parce que je suis une femme mais parce que je fais le boulot. La présence des femmes se normalise mais cela sera vraiment normalisée lorsque l'on aura des responsabilités qui seront prises et exercées à même niveau, j'étais choquée de la composition actuelle du gouvernement, ou j'ai bien vu comment cela s'est passé. L'immense majorité des ministères à haut niveau ont été donnés à des hommes et parce qu'il faut respecter la parité on a créé pleins de secrétariats d'Etat dont certains n'étaient pas réellement justifiés car 1: il fallait intégrer les minorités de la majorité d'Etat et 2: les femmes. Et donc la plupart des secrétaires d'Etat sont des femmes et les ministres à des postes importants sont des Hommes. C'était moins visible lors du précédent quinquennat, je trouve que cela s'est aggravé, la normalisation on est loin d'y être et on a encore beaucoup trop d'affichage par rapport à la réalité de l'exercice du pouvoir. Il y a eu progrès mais le chemin est encore loin, loin d'être terminé.

- femmes, vision plus féminisme = permet de faire évoluer les lois d'une manière différente ou liée d'une manière transpartisane ?

Non il ne faut pas exagérer, chacun reste dans son parti, après j'ai toujours été très gênée parce que je n'aime pas, j'ai souffert d'être renvoyée à ma condition de femme donc ça m'énerve de devoir à chaque fois me positionner politiquement en tant que femme et d'ailleurs je le fais peu. De temps en temps je le fais parce qu'il y a des "cliquets" à passer pour les droits des femmes, je ne rejette pas l'idée de le faire, car temps que l'on est pas arrivée à une égalité des droits et des pouvoirs, il faudra le faire et malheureusement .. En revanche je me bats contre le communautarisme quel qu'il soit . Donc je pense que si aujourd'hui il peut y avoir une manière de voir féminisme c'est très culturelle, on a aussi été élevée en tant que femme et ça nous imprègne malgré tout, par exemple quand je fais une réunion les hommes veulent tous participer pas les femmes et quand je demande aux femmes pourquoi elles répondent "si mais cela a déjà été répété", et je l'ai entendu très souvent, moi je trouve que les réunions qui sont présidées par des femmes sont souvent plus efficaces que celles par les hommes; cela me gêne de le dire mais elles sont plus "tac, tact, tac" (droit) .. Mais après sur les questions des droits des femmes il peut y avoir des partis qui sont très réfractaires aux droits des femmes et y compris sur la protection des droits des femmes même des partis dirigés par des femmes , je pense notamment à l'extrême droite. Je suis très française et donc très attachée à ce qui fait nation et le principe même c'est en théorie : tout individu est un individu et a les mêmes droits et devoirs que tout le monde et de même manière que l'on refuse de voir les religions, les origines etc et donc pareil pour le sexe. Donc je suis très gênée par ce qui se passe en ce moment, une sorte de communautarisme qui vient notamment des pays anglosaxons et que on intègre un peu trop facilement à mon goût. Je n'ai pas envie de me retrouver dans une case où je suis "blanche", "femme", "athée" et je te parle à toi "homme", "noir" "protestant", je te parle à toi et je n'ai pas envie de parler avec une étiquette et on est dans un monde où j'ai l'impression que le combat féministe a été un combat pour l'égalité des droits, ça n'a pas été forcément un combat pour l'indifférenciation mais pour que les femmes puissent avoir leurs places dans la société au même titre que les hommes et j'ai jamais été dans un combat pour tout communautariser. De la même manière que je déteste quand les gens disent "ouais toi t'es mon frère et tout, "toi t'es ma sœur" ça me va pas du tout moi ça"

On est sur un sujet bien compliqué, on le voit bien mais je pense que aujourd'hui on est obligé de mettre des quotas mais il faut faire attention à ne pas trop balkaniser tout ça . Mon combat pour l'égalité c'était que un jour on puisse me parler comme une personne qui fait son travail et pas comme à une femme, pour moi le monde parfait serait un monde où je peux m'exprimer que je sois, noir, blanc, homme, n'importe quoi, on écoute ce que j'ai à dire et pas qui je suis. Donc tant qu'on y est pas il faut faire ce combat mais par contre je ne veux pas qu'on arrive dans l'excès inverse qui est que on est plus une personne mais un bout de communauté. Chez les jeunes il y a ceux qui disent "je dois décider de mon genre presque" et donc ce qui partait de quelque chose de positif et que chacun puisse se définir comme il le souhaite et donc qu'il ne soit pas rejeté pour ce qu'il est. Il y a beaucoup de transgenre qui ont subi une forme de discrimination. Donc avoir une ouverture à la liberté de l'autre de se définir comme il le souhaite c'est très important mais d'abord après on part dans un truc où en gros si vous vous trompez vous vous faites presque insulter par la personne en face de vous qui dit "non mais attends..." et je.. je trouve que ça va à rebours de ce qu'on a fait pour qu'on soit considéré comme une personne et pas un être sur patte. Je trouve que je crois en la complexité de ce que je suis

Sororité est notion politique, mais qu'en est-il en pratique ? Existe-elle ?

Oui et non, je déteste ce mot sororité, qu'il puisse y avoir une solidarité entre femmes lorsqu'il s'agit de défendre nos droits oui, j'ai pu en être témoin, même si je n'ai jamais été aussi heureuse que lorsque j'ai vu des hommes venir défendre nos droits. Je fais partie de ceux qui ont toujours soutenu le mouvement "He and She" pour défendre les droits humains et c'est pas seulement l'affaire des femmes. C'est l'affaire de tous de défendre les droits des femmes comme quand on défend la lutte contre racisme, il ne peut pas y avoir que les noirs mais il faut qu'il y ait tout le monde mais j'ai pu expérimenter une forme de solidarité avec les femmes lorsque nous étions confrontées à un certain nombre de problèmes. Par exemple quand j'ai eu mon histoire de pgoto j'ai eu un certain nombre de collègues qui sont venues me voir en me disant "oh toi aussi tu l'as vécu, c'est pas évident" donc comme on ressentait les mêmes choses on pouvait s'entraider ça c'est vrai. Par contre ce que j'ai pu voir c'est que comme j'étais membre du parti des verts à l'époque, la lutte pour l'égalité des droits on était plutôt en avance, le premier groupe paritaire à l'Assemblée, on a eu des femmes qui ont dirigées ce parti très très vite donc on était plutôt sur le haut du panier en terme de défense et à ce moment là on se rend compte que lorsque les femmes ont acquise une certaine égalité vis à vis des hommes, la je peux vous dire que la sororité n'existe plus mais quelque part je trouve que c'est plutôt positif car quelque part les bagarres, les luttes de pouvoir, les coups de Jarnac, sont les mêmes que entre hommes donc l'expérience m'a plutôt montré qu'elle disparaîtrait s'il y avait une égalité.

Pourquoi ce mot vous dérange, préférez-vous l'adelphité ?

je découvre ce mot, c'est solidarité entre tous ou humanité et fraternité j'entends bien la racine mais j'ai tendance à me l'accaparer, cela n'appartient pas seulement aux hommes et j'ai souvent essayé de récupérer des mots aux hommes. Pour moi la sororité entraîne vers quelque chose qui ne me plaît pas, vers une société qui se construit en montant des catégories de personnes les unes contre les autres. On a lutté à juste titre pour l'égalité des droits et on continue de le faire, pour que toute l'humanité ait les mêmes droits, espoirs, opportunités et je ne suis pas d'accord avec le fait de re-fragmenter cette humanité en catégories. On est en train de créer quelque chose qu'on a combattu, on a combattu quelque chose dont on était victimes historiquement qui est absolument évidente et que je ne mets pas du tout en cause mais on a combattu cela et quelque part on le retirerait d'une autre manière et c'est gênant, j'aime pas, ça me va pas.. certains m'ont traités de masculiniste pour avoir dit ça, je le réfute totalement je pense que je suis l'une des premières féministes.. je suis une femme, je suis libre, je n'ai jamais pris d'ordres de personne, j'ai toujours refusé de subir le diktat de qui que ce soit y compris de mes "soeurs".

L'environnement masculin aurait un impact positif ou négatif sur les femmes ?

Plutôt positif car dans ce cas là on se sert les coudes mais c'est comme toute minorité en fait, dès qu'on se retrouve en minorité, une minorité qui peut être un peu écrasée par une majorité on peut avoir tendance à se serrer les coudes, c'est beaucoup plus dur quand on arrive en majorité. D'ailleurs c'est assez marrant car on pourrait faire le parallèle entre le fait d'être dans un parti d'opposition et de majorité. Quand on est dans l'opposition on est tous d'accord pour être contre, tous unis, après quand on arrive en majorité et qu'on doit exercer la responsabilité alors là c'est beaucoup plus compliqué et ça peut vite faire du mal. C'est marrant. Oui quand on est des femmes dans un monde d'homme et que les hommes sont supérieurs en droits, évidemment oui.

Qu'en est-il des VSS en politique ?

Je pense qu'il est particulièrement sujet à ce genre de violences : en soit le milieu est violent, l'un des plus violents qui existe. Un milieu où le pouvoir des hommes est encore très très implanté et de ce fait là cela engendre ce genre de VSS. Après que le mouvement metoo est passé par là, ça a pris une grosse claque dans la figure d'un certain nombre de personnes. Différence avant après car un grand nombre de responsables politiques ont pris en compte que s'ils continuaient un certain nombre de pratiques ils mettaient en danger leur avenir professionnel/politique. Cela était banalisé et beaucoup de femmes se sentaient responsables de ça ou peut-être pas assez fortes pour répondre. Il faut être forte pour se confronter à ça, avoir les épaules et les reins solides et tout le monde ne les a pas, ceux qui sont plus costauds résistent. Quand je suis arrivée en politique, certains ont essayé de me faire des coups mais cela n'a pas marché car j'avais eu la chance d'avoir un background solide. A l'époque je voulais devenir assistante

parlementaire et j'avais eu un député en face de moi qui n'avait même pas regardé mon CV et qui m'avait dit "vous savez vous devriez vous mettre plus de rouge à lèvres". Voilà donc j'ai connu ça mais je n'avais pas de fragilité particulières donc ça ne m'a pas empêché de vivre mais je connais d'autres gens qui ont très mal vécu ça et je connais des gens qui au delà de ça ont vécu des agressions sexuelles et des viols etc donc on passe à quelque chose de 10 fois plus grave. On rentre dans une autre dimension mais qui est quand même l'expression d'une époque où ces choses là se faisaient et où il y avait une certaine impunité pour ça. Maintenant cela existe beaucoup moins et tant mieux même si on est loin aussi sur ça , on a pas finis

Le mot de la fin ?

ne pas être dupe, ce combat pour l'égalité n'est jamais terminé , (simone) il faut avoir toujours ça a l'esprit mais ne jamais perdre de vu notre idéal et en tout cas le mien en tant que femme c'est d'arriver à la fin à ce que chaque 'individu, chacun avec sa richesse, chacun avec sa spécificité, nous puissions enrichir notre vie dans un cadre où tout le monde aurait les mêmes droits et les mêmes chances . Cela ne s'arrête pas aux droits des femmes, également aux personnes handicapées etc ... Cet idéal là, j'essaie de continuer de le construire et certainement pas en fragmentant encore plus la société qu'elle ne l'est déjà.

