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The other identities in ethnofederations

Women's and sexual minorities' advocacy in Belgium

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Abstract

This article considers the impact of ethnofederations on social identities that cut across ethnic divisions. Based on a series of in-depth interviews focusing on the structure and operation of women's and LGBT movements and organizations in Belgium, we demonstrate that these groups experience a 'federalism advantage' with regard to fund raising. This allows them to elicit funds from different governments. However, in lobbying for policy change, the constraints of a dominant ethno-linguistic identity means that for identities traversing the ethnic divide, the result is a 'federalism disadvantage': a neglect of policy competencies situated at the federal level. The Belgian case thus highlights the fact that ethnofederations may create important thresholds for social movements representing social identities other than ethnic ones.

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1. Introduction

Ethnofederations are on the rise in many parts of the world (Hale, 2004; McGarry and O’Leary, 2005). They are an accommodation of “territorially based ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences in a divided society” (Erk and Anderson, 2009: 191) and are marked by power sharing arrangements between conflicting communities (Burgess and Pinder, 2007; Erk and Anderson, 2009; O’Flynn and Russell, 2005). Territories are especially salient in ethnofederations because they are not merely territories with administrative and/or political powers; they are the ‘home base’ of ethnic, cultural and/or linguistic identities formed by cleavages, which are highly competitive and conflictive. At the same time as being a survival strategy of the state, ethnofederalism also accommodates ‘centrifugal regionalism’, a continuous demand for the transfer of competencies towards the sub-state level, which might result in the collapse of the state in the longer term. Hence, whether and how ethnofederalism promotes state survival (through pacification) or, on the contrary, state collapse (as a result of war and ethnic conflict) is a main concern of ethnofederalism scholars (Erk and Anderson, 2009). Much of the ethnofederalism literature focuses on power sharing arrangements, mechanisms to represent ethnic minorities, and the status of minorities (Burgess and Pider, 2007), and on how specific nationalist movements seek congruence between demos and state (Erk, 2008). The existing literature is thus very much focused on the impact of the federal state architecture on the dominant territorially based ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities.

Nevertheless, even in ethnofederations where ethnic identities are evidently politically dominant, they are never the only source of social identity important to citizens. Gender and sexual orientation, for instance, are basic features of people’s social and political identities. But in ethnofederations ethnic identities can be in conflict with other social identities. Except for the rare cases where social identities are intertwined with nationalist projects, territorial dominance tends to suppress women’s interests (Vickers, 1994, 2009, 2010, 2011; Chappell, 2002a; Grace, 2011; Teghtsoonian and Grace, 2010; Sawer and Vickers, 2001). Institutionalisation of ethnic identities is found to damage cross-communal relationships amongst women by treating ethno-national communities as monoliths (Celis, Mackay and Meier, 2012; Rebouché and Fearon, 2005). In this sense, ethnic group values tend to trump women’s concerns. Thus demands for gender equality can be represented as contradictory to the normative expectation that all members of the group are collectively and equally committed to their culture (Béland and Lecours, 2008; Yuval Davis, 1998; Okin, 1999).

This specific detrimental effect of ethnofederations is added to other negative effects of federal state architectures on the enhancement of gender equality (Chappell and Curtin, 2012; Chappell, 2002a, 2002b; Sawyer and Vickers, 2001; Vickers, 2012, 2010, 2011; Banaszak and Weldon, 2011). Assuming a hierarchy between competences and denying the dynamic interaction of issues across levels of governance and the intrinsic multifaceted nature of policy problem the exclusive division of power between federal and sub-state entities is reported to be disadvantageous to women and gender equality (Chappell, 2001; Irving, 1994, 2008; Gray, 2006; Mettler, 1998; Resnik, 2001; Baines, 2006). Also, an exclusive division of power might lead to inequality among women, disadvantaging the ones living in poorer or conservative sub-states (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2012; Celis and Meier, 2011; Riedle, 2002; Teghtsoonian and Chappell, 2008; Vickers, 2010). Furthermore, federalism increases the operating costs of women's and other social movements striving for a promotion of interests across the federation (Hausmann, 2005; Bashevkin, 1998; Smith, 2008).

However, it should be noted that other feminist studies on federalism have shown that the multiplicity of entry points or venues also opens up opportunities and provides for a 'federalism advantage' (Chappell and Costello, 2010; Franceschet, 2010; Hausman et al., 2010). Whilst poorer or less progressive sub-states might block off policies of particular interest to women, the women's movement can 'venue shop'. This allows them to progress in some sub-states, which then might have a contagion effect on policies pursued by poorer or less progressive sub-states. Whether or not there can be a federalism advantage very much depends on the features of federal systems. For instance, in symmetric federations women fare well with a cooperative form of federalism since it facilitates learning and innovating dynamics across the system (Chappell, 2002a, 2002b; Chappell and Costello, 2010; Pally, 2006). In asymmetric federations women fare well with a competitive form of federalism, at least if the competing governments are interested in pursuing women's policies in order to gain their support (Vickers, 2011; see also Sauer and Lang, 2013). The studies on the gendered effects of ethnofederalism mentioned above seem to suggest that ethnofederalism that tends to lock women within their ethnic group limits federalism advantage.

Building from the scholarship on ethnofederalism and the feminist studies of federalism, this article considers what ethnofederalism does to cleavages and identities other than the ones structuring the ethnofederation and fuelling centrifugal regionalism. Can social groups that cut across the ethnic divide capitalize on a federalism advantage, or do they predominantly experience negative effects? The article presents the findings of how the Belgian ethnofederal

state architecture impacts on social movement organizations mobilising and lobbying for equality, justice and an improved status for women and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people). Based on this single case, this research has been designed to inform a broader set of cases, i.e. cross-cutting social identities in general and other ethnofederations that experience centrifugal regionalism, such as Scotland, Wales and Northern-Ireland in the UK; Catalonia and the Basque Country in Spain; Northern Italy in Italy and Slovenia in the former Yugoslavia (Huysseune, 2009). The selection of one older (women) and one newer social movement (LGBT), and by the inclusion of organisations that feature distinctive agendas, divergent histories and different relationships to the state (i.e. the LGBT movement was only more recently politically recognised by the state), provides external validity to the research. External validity is also enhanced by an analytical focus that is not specific to gender or LGBT. In sum, this article considers whether organizations that lobby for the needs of groups that cut across the ethnic divide are able to maintain their networks and cooperation across ethnic divisions, or do they sacrifice their own identity that transcends the ethnic divide and, instead, conform to the institutionalized ethnic identity? In this respect we analyse both structures and strategies (with respect to fund raising and policy change) in an historical perspective. The analysis shows that ethnofederations can and do create important thresholds for social movements representing other social identities thereby nullifying the ‘federalism advantage’ these organizations can experience. Further, as the Belgian case shows, ethnofederation can pose an important ‘federalism disadvantage’. Before discussing these findings, the next section introduces the reader to the Belgian ethnofederal state.

2. The Belgian case: on-going institutionalisation of ethno-linguistic identity

The Belgian state architecture reflects the pacification of (never significantly violent) tensions and antagonism, between ethno-linguistic groups (Deschouwer, 2005, 2009). The broad state architecture had been set down during the first state reform of 1970; Belgium has officially called itself a federation since 1993 and the current structure was established in the 1990s. The Belgian federation is characterized by a set of specific features, one of the most important being its double sub-state structure (Swenden and Jans, 2006). Due to divergent aspirations of the two major language groups, the Belgian federation is structured along a dual logic, that of regions and that of communities (Van Dyck, 1996).

The regions follow the logic of a territorial federalism. The Belgian federation is divided into three regions, covering Flanders, Wallonia and the region of the capital, Brussels. These

regions are territorially defined - covering the Belgian territory without any institutional overlap – and are in charge of territorially bound policy areas (see table 1 below for specific competencies). The communities follow the logic of ethno-linguistic identities and cover the Dutch, French, and German speaking populations. Communities are in charge of cultural and ‘personalized matters’ (see table 1 below for specific competencies). Whilst this is a non-territorial form of federalism, limits are set to the radii of activity of the communities. For example, while the institutions of the German-speaking community maintain jurisdiction of members of their community living in the Eastern Cantons of the Walloon region, those of the French-speaking community deal with the remaining citizens of Wallonia, French-speaking citizens in Brussels and those of the Dutch-speaking community with citizens in Flanders and the Dutch-speaking citizens of Brussels. In short, a French speaking citizen living in Flanders still falls under the remit of the institutions of the Dutch-speaking community and vice versa

The dominance of the ethno-linguistic identity in the Belgian federal state architecture manifests itself in other important respects. While all regions and communities initially disposed of their own institutions (legislative and executive), the Flemish region and community merged their institutions, labelling them the Flemish Community (extensively contributing to the asymmetry of the Belgian federal state architecture). On the French side regions and communities did not merge, but increasingly efforts are designed to increase the linkages between the French speaking in Brussels and Wallonia. Similarly the German Community has steadily increased its competencies in regional matters when it comes to the German-speaking Eastern Cantons. The Federal Senate is a senate of the communities and comprises specific community senators. Both at the federal level and in Brussels the smaller ethno-linguistic group disposes of a guaranteed representation, both in the legislative and the executive (Pilet and Pauwels, 2010). Similarly, each ethno-linguistic group utilises specific mechanisms to protect a non-violation of their interests.

Political parties were already divided along linguistic lines in the 1960s/1970s and new parties are Flemish or francophone from the start. The green parties are an exception to this rule, being the only parties that currently cooperate on a structural basis across the linguistic divide (for example, they constitute one parliamentary group in the House of Representatives). Also trade unions and employer organisations have Flemish and Francophone branches. And the media have been split along linguistic lines since back in the 1960s and constitute completely unrelated institutions addressing different public opinions.

Like in many ethnofederations ‘centrifugal regionalism’ puts the state arrangements under continuous stress. Centrifugal regionalism is fuelled on the one hand by the interests of economically privileged communities, questioning the solidarity with less wealthy communities, and on the other by claims about cultural superiority and about higher levels of socio-economic and political performance (Huysseune, 2009). In Belgium, Flanders is the more economically powerful community and the Flemish nationalist movement and political parties consistently argue for ending the solidarity with the poorer Wallonia. This self-identity building rhetoric in Flanders presents Flemings as “hard working”, “willing to make sacrifices” and focused on pragmatic governance, compared to Walloons who are portrayed as “ideological dreamers” associated with corrupt and weak governance (Keating et al., 2003: 84; Huysseune, 2009: 7).¹ This articulation of Flemish identity by Flemish movement activists clearly sympathise with both Catholicism and conservatism, which are the historically dominant political ideologies in Flanders. Wallonia, in contrast, is more leftist and anticlerical. Wallonia features a belated and weaker identitarian tradition, and historically identifies itself more with the Belgian nation. Recent Walloon identity affirmations present Wallonia as a “pluralist and tolerant” region, in contrast to the “narrow-minded and xenophobic” Flanders (Huysseune, 2009: 7).

3. Women’s and sexual minorities’ advocacy in Belgium

In developing the first concern - identifying the specific impact of the Belgian federal state structure on political activism with respect to gender and sexual identity - the key question is whether, and to what extent, women’s and LGBT organizations experience a ‘federalism advantage’. With regard to the second - whether and how far movement organizations privilege their dominant ethno-linguistic identity over their gender and LGBT identities - the central question is, how far the negation of substantive features of social identities independent of ethnicity, demonstrates a ‘federalism disadvantage’

The women’s and LGBT movement organizations are, like the majority of the civil society organizations in Belgium, divided along the linguistic cleavage. This involved the creation of both Flemish and French organizations, predating the establishment of the federal state architecture in the 1990s. The shift from “national social movement industry towards two regional movement industries” (Van Laer, 2009: 235) was partly the result of transferring

¹ These identity claims are not supported by fundamental differences in value patterns between Walloons and Flemings (Hooghe, 2009).

responsibilities to the sub-state level in the late 1970s. Both the women's and LGBT movement organizations adapted to that architecture and in fact have replicated that structure in their own organizations. In some cases, the structure of the social movement organization even reflects the dual logic of the Belgian sub-state level (communities and regions).

The major women's organizations are the political women's sections of the Flemish or French political parties and the four Flemish and Walloon umbrella organizations: the Flemish Women's Council *Nederlandstalige Vrouwenraad* (NVR), the French Women's Council *Comité de femmes francophones de Belgique* (CFFB), both grouping plural women's organizations, the French *Comité Liaison des Femmes*, also composed of affiliated women's groups and the Flemish *Vrouwen Overleg Comité* that groups individual members. The French Women's Council CFFB falls together within the borders of the French community. It has a sub-structure focusing on Brussels and a sub-structure dealing with issues particular for the Walloon region.

However, not all women's organizations are members of umbrella organizations. For instance, ELLAvzw, a women's organization focusing on issues of relevance to (mainly Islamic) migrant women and funded by the Flemish government to act as a spokesperson for migrant women, is no longer² a member of the Flemish Women's Council NVR. Given the political salience of migrant women's issues, the unique position of ELLAvzw and its strong ties with the Flemish government, should still be considered one of the central women's organization in Flanders.

The LGBT movement also has some major umbrella organizations incorporating most of the LGBT organizations (Borghs and Eeckhout, 2010; Paternotte, 2008, *forthcoming*): the Flemish umbrella organization *çavaria*; the French organizations *arc en ciel Wallonie*; and a bi-lingual Brussels organization *Regenbooghuis Brussel/Maison arc en ciel Bruxelles*. The latter has, similar to the CFFB, a Flemish sub-structure that works together with the Flemish organization *çavaria* and a French sub-structure working together with the Walloon organization *arc en ciel Wallonie*.

These Belgian women's and LGBT movement organisations, at least in theory, can address the multiple levels of the Belgian federation both with their funding requests and their demands for policy change. The first is due to the fact that equality policies fall under the

² ELLA vzw stopped being a member of NVR because Ellavzw is not a traditional member organisation and because of disagreement on NVR's standpoints regarding ethnic minority women (e.g. concerning the Islamic veil) (*int.* 8).

competency of all levels and have state agencies (e.g. ministers and administrations) in charge of equality and equal opportunities (Celis and Meier 2011). The second is due to the fact that both type of organisations have demands related to the competencies of the various levels, as table 1 illustrates.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

We now investigate whether the women's and LGBT movement organisations actually use the potential of the Belgian federal structure, and the role ethnofederalism plays in this. Our analysis therefore focuses on the strategies and experiences of the movements themselves, and not on the official stances of the political and policy actors at multiple levels. Given the scarcity of studies on the Belgian women's and LGBT movement in general, and more specifically on their behaviour, perceptions and strategies related to the complex state architecture in Belgium,³ this study is based on a series of in-depth interviews conducted in the summer of 2010 with nine respondents representing and speaking on behalf of *all* the major women's and LGTB movement organizations (see annex 1 for the full list).⁴ The semi-structured interviews include questions about the history of the organization's structure, their networks and functioning. The following sections discuss the findings that we have organized according to the two main policy and policy actors and are oriented toward actions and activities, i.e. their search for funds and their lobbying for policy change.

3.1. The federalism advantage in the women's and LGBT movements' search for funds

The Belgian women's and LGBT movement organizations all draw their financial resources from multiple governance sites, which can be considered to be an important federalism advantage. The Belgian case highlights the possibility of receiving financial support from another level in case financial support drops, is insufficient or inaccessible at the initial level. For example, the Walloon LGBT movement organization *arc en ciel Wallonie* addressed the

³ For that reason triangulation of the interview data with primary and secondary sources was, unfortunately, not possible.

⁴ Because the article is interested in how the women's and LGBT movement organizations react to and anticipate dynamics at work within an (ethno)federal system, including the not official and unintended ones it relies on the perspective of the organization themselves. This research focus requires it being based on their 'subjective' story. To counter this subjective dimension, key informants of *all* the major women's and LGTB movement organizations were interviewed which results in an exhaustive overview guaranteeing internal validity.

Walloon Region for financial support because the budget of the French Community was already taken by another LGBT movement organization *Tel Quels* (*int. 9*). While the regions are in charge of socio-economic policy competencies they subsidise (part of) the French LGBT umbrella organization, while other, similar organizations, are mainly financed by the communities formally in charge of person related competencies. In this respect, some respondents consider the Flemish situation as advantageous because it is less complex with the community and region being merged in one institution (*int. 1 and 3*). Others consider it to be more dangerous because “one can become a hostage of that one minister” and it is more complex but safer to be able to address two ministers and administrations for funding (*int. 2 and 3*).

Similarly, many movement organizations (with the explicit exception of ELLA vzw; *int. 8*) also address both one or several state levels and the federal level for funding. According to some of the interviewees, French women’s organizations particularly, more often address the federal level for financial support given the limited resources for gender equality at the Walloon region and French community in comparison to the revenue that is available at the level of the Flemish community (*int. 1, 5 and 7*). This especially explains the period 1995-2004, when the Flemish equality policy agency was established (covering both gender and sexuality). After the 2004 elections the other regions and communities, with the exception of the German community, appointed a Minister or State Secretary in charge of equal opportunities and since then have had a cabinet or administrative staff in charge of equal opportunities. However, some of them are only formally in charge of gender issues, and most of them dispose only of limited funds.

The Belgian case does not show a flexible picture of revenue streams whereby movement organizations are sometimes financed exclusively from one level in the federation and at other times exclusively from another. With the exception of CFFB, all the organizations studied draw the most fundamental and structural funding from the state level (mainly communities, sometimes regions) and federal funding is, again with the exception of CFFB, only supplementary and project-based (*int. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9*).

Notwithstanding the advantage that the plurality of governments generates for accumulating revenue, all interviewees emphasise the fact that federal settings complicate life for the civil society organizations. As long as a movement follows the logic of the state architecture and of the structure of political and social actors, there is no problem. For example, ELLA vzw, the Flemish movement organization for girls and women of a foreign origin (*int. 8*) solely

functions within the context of the Flemish region and community (though it sometimes also operates in the Brussels area). They argue, not only that there is no French speaking partner to cover the French side of the country, but also that the situation is different in the other parts of the country. It therefore only relies on the Flemish community for funding, which makes their work less complex.

The situation becomes more complicated once the language cleavage has to be bridged. An interesting case in this respect is the Brussels rainbow house (*int. 6*). It solely operates in the Brussels region, but has the ambition to be bilingual in its approach. Although Brussels formally is a bilingual region, it demands considerably greater effort for the Brussels rainbow house to function as a bilingual organization. This is explained by the fact that many issues they tackle fall under the remit of the communities. Since part of its basic functions are already subsidized by the community structure in charge of bilingual matters in Brussels (GGC/COCOM), project subsidies have to be asked for separately at the Flemish (VGC) and French (COCOF) community structures operating in the Brussels region. This confronts rainbow house with the challenge of finding compatible revenue streams, several demands for one and the same project, and a double (or triple) project administration.

Paradoxically, even in a region officially considered to be bilingual, an organization aiming to be so, has to a large extent work through the unilingual community institutions. In the case of the Brussels rainbow house, the basic logic of the state architecture definitely fragments and complicates the efforts by the LGBT movement organization trying to function in a formally bilingual region. Matters of language, even within such a region, are primarily dealt with by each community separately (*int. 6*), it would be highly unlikely, if not impossible, to get subsidized as a bilingual social movement organization. None of the communities would finance such an initiative and the federal state level does so only to a very small extent.

3.2. The federalism advantage for the women's and LGBT movements' activism and lobbying for policy change

When it comes to activism and lobbying for policy change by the social movement organizations, the federalism advantage – i.e. venue shopping to avoid veto players - is less pronounced. Respondents from the women's and LGBT movements all stress that their activism is primarily 'problem driven' not 'level driven': they address specific governments or parliaments because of the policy domain the movements demands relate to at a certain

moment in time (organizing a workshop or awareness raising campaign, developing a project on, for instance, stereotypes in schools, lobbying for legislation on, for instance, double family names, etc) (see also table 1). They approach the political levels and actors who have jurisdiction over the issue they have on their agenda. When it is a federal matter, they approach MPs, Senators, cabinets and ministers at the federal level. If it is a community matter those of the communities, and if it is a regional matter the regional ones. The LGBT movement today is very much focused on the sub-state level, but during and prior to the 1990s the most important claims of the LGBT movements were fought at the federal level (*int. 5, 6 and 7*). For example, the advent of civil marriage and of granting adoption rights to same-sex partners and couples within a broad anti-discrimination act were all federal matters. Consequently they concentrated on the federal level, not because the federal level was more open than the sub-state level (Borghs and Eeckhout, 2010; Meier, 2009; Paternotte, 2008). Similarly, the major umbrella organizations joined forces in the 1990s to co-organize the Belgian Gay and Lesbian Pride. Since 1996 Pride is organized on an annual basis, and on each occasion a memorandum is released, containing demands regarding both federal and community competencies.

The women's movement still focuses very much on the federal level, since many of the issues they work on fall under the remit of the federal state (*int. 3, 4, 8*) (see also table 1). Funding for specific projects is also asked for at the policy level in charge of the policy field they tackle. If the women's movement launches a campaign on education, it will target the communities, in particular the ministers in charge of education. For matters of equal pay it addresses the federal ministers. Organisations' problem driven approach is also evident during elections, whereby the bigger organizations particularly the NVR produce separate memoranda for different governments (*int. 2*; see also Wierx 2005).

Social movement organizations address, then, the different levels of the state architecture as a function of their political agenda. While their structure and basic funding are primarily dependent on the state level, this is less the case with their lobbying and activism. This does not involve much venue shopping, a possibility that seemed to bypass the movement organizations' imagination (*int. 1, 5 and 6*). Although they considered it theoretically possible, they acknowledged never to have put it into practice and expressed that they found it a "difficult thinking exercise". In all cases where policy issues fall under the remit of one policy level, a lack of access to that policy level would imply a (temporary) stop in activism

regarding that topic. According to our respondents, this was the most dominant scenario in their everyday life and not one where they could resurrect activism on a specific subject by addressing another policy level. Arguably, failure at one policy level would not necessarily imply that they could not continue lobbying for other issues related to equality situated at another policy level, since all policy levels are in charge of equality? (*int. 5, 6 and 7*) However, in the case of shared policy domains between the federal and state level, their activism would be transformed rather than simply transferred (*int. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7*). Since the federal and the state levels each have their competencies, it is not easy - arguably impossible - to move from one level to another in order to lobby for the same cause.

Regarding the option to reorient activism when facing a blockage at one policy level, the Belgian case further draws attention to the fact that such reorientation can be horizontal. The above-mentioned example of the Walloon LGBT movement organization that shifted from the French Community towards the Walloon Region illustrates this point (*int. 9*). Another example is the finding that both the Flemish and the French movement organizations are able to receive funding for their projects from the Brussels' government (*int. 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6*). The same goes for lobbying these governments. Nevertheless, there are limits to this horizontal shift in that there is a strict partition between Flanders on one hand and the French and Walloon governments on the other. A Flemish movement organization would never receive money from the French Community or the Walloon Region or could not successfully lobby them with their demands, and vice versa (*int. 6*). This is even highly unlikely with a partner from that region/community (with the exception of Brussels).

Also, on the vertical axis, the federal level cannot orient all available funds to movement organizations operating in only one state nor can it prioritize the demands of the movement organizations belonging to one of the sub- states above others (*int. 2 and 3*). They are obliged to safeguard a fair distribution of material and non-material resources over organizations from the various regions and communities. Hence, the extent to which movement organizations can compensate financial or political drawbacks with federal funds and political support is limited. This explains the weak position of the French movement organizations when not utilising the support of their own community/region. Furthermore, when moving from the state to the federal level, specific issues arise. For instance when a Flemish movement organization goes for federal funds or policy change it is compelled to cooperate with a French partner (*int. 1 and 4*). That partnership may not be immediately evident because of different agendas, views and culture (see the next section). The federal minister in charge may

be found to be less accessible because of a different language, political affiliation and networks being less developed (*int. 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9*). Consequently ‘moving up’ from the state to federal level might entail a drastic change in the nature of political activism (e.g. relating to the territorial scope, the consensus with the agenda of the cooperating movement organization and adaptation to the other government’s agenda) (*int. 3*).

3.3. Women’s and LGBT movements facing institutionalised ethno-linguistic identity

The two previous sections discussed the impact of federalism on social movement organizations. We now turn to the more specific question about the competition between social identities and, more precisely, to the issue of how the dominant ethno-linguistic identity affects gender and LGBT; the two social identities that cut across the ethnic divide. Regarding the funding and lobbying of the women’s and LGBT movements this section shows that ethnic identity dominates other expressions of social identity. We demonstrate that this results in both movements being incentivised to deny the fact that their social identity has any relationship to the ethnic one.

In return for funds or political support, governments expect a focus on the ‘own group’ and deny the ethnicity-transcending nature of the groups’ issues (*int. 2, 3, 6, 7 and 9*). For instance, the Flemish and the French governments expect that their financial support is used for actions related to the Flemish French territory/population, respectively. That poses a limitation to any attempt to complement existing funds by attracting money from other levels because it would affect the exclusive focus on one territory/group. On one occasion there was an explicit prohibition on accepting supplementary funds from another government because of the risk of jeopardising the original funds (*int. 6; two other interviewees requested anonymity at this point*). The Brussels rainbow house was also not allowed to translate an awareness-raising brochure into French, because it had been financed with Flemish money and contained a preface by the Flemish minister (*int. 6*). Importantly, the preface was not to be taken out of the brochure but it was politically impossible to translate it with money coming from another authority. This veto power over the use of revenue by sponsor authorities complicates the Belgian movement organizations’ search for funding and limits the federalism advantage they could experience.

However, the obverse can also occur. When an initiative crosses state borders, sometimes one government only agrees to subsidize if another government at the same state level contributes

(*int. 1, 4 and 6*). For instance the organization of Gay Pride has been at risk from 2012 onwards, since the Flemish authorities refuse funds on the basis that the French Community does not contribute to the same extent (*int. 5, 6, 7 and 9*). Furthermore, competition between the Flemish and the Brussels ministers in charge of equality policy resulted in a bidding war to support Gay Pride (*int. 6 and 7*).

When it comes to activism and lobbying, social movements face specific challenges relating to the ethno-linguistic organization of the Belgian federal state architecture. The organization of the political and social spectrum along ethno-linguistic lines does not necessarily make the significance of gender or sexuality more difficult to accept as a political issue (at least not in other terms than those of political representation, see Meier, 2003, 2010). As several representatives of the LGBT movement said during the interviews, it is not politicians that are the hard ones to convince. However, the organization of the political and social spectrum along ethno-linguistic lines increases the resources to be invested to constitute a front and win the case (*int. 1, 2 and 3*).

Both the women's and the LGBT movement organizations confirm that being linguistically separate organizations results in having different perspectives on specific matters (*int. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9*). For example, Flemish and French LGBT movement organizations differ on whether LGBT people should be entitled to donate blood (although most of their leaders do take that position, at least on a personal basis) (*int. 6*) whilst the question of civil marriage and legal adoption by same-sex partners was more of a claim in Flanders than in the French speaking south of the country (*int. 5 and 6*). Similarly, ELLA vzw argues that the French side has a different view on the issue of violence against women (focusing exclusively on women, while the Flemish civil society and other policy actors also focus on men) (*int. 8*) and the CFFB pointed to the fact that women and entrepreneurship is more of an issue on the French side (*int. 4*). Furthermore, in the case of Flanders it pays dividends for the movement organizations to adopt an exclusively sub-state focus. As mentioned above, Flanders is a relatively rich sub-state and of all Belgian governments provides most funds to the women's and LGBT movement. This has allowed the Flemish movement organizations to professionalize, but simultaneously has made them state-dependent and weakened their ties with society (*int. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7*). By contrast, the Francophone women's movement is comprised of smaller grass-roots organizations, but is less well funded. In general, the Flemish movement organizations are perceived to be more pragmatic, whereas the

francophone ones are seen to be more activist (*int. 1, 2, 4 and 7*).⁵ Furthermore, and strongly related to the previous point, Flanders has the only government that applies a policy strategy that systematically includes the women's movement (*int. 2*). More specifically, since 2005 it applies the Open Method of Coordination that requires all political and policy actors in the Flemish policy domains to enhance equality.⁶ Consequently, the women's movement is systematically involved in defining the gender equality goals and strategies in the various policy fields.

Divergent policy priorities, opportunities in influencing politics and policy, views and culture increasingly hinder cooperation between the movement organizations from the two linguistic communities (*int. 2, 3, 4 and 6*). The diverging agenda's and culture increasingly widen the gap between women's movement organizations of the different language communities and, consequently, jeopardize joint lobbying of the federal government, applying for federal funds and cooperation in European (*int. 2*) and supranational initiatives. In addition, the absence of a federal umbrella structure in both movements that could facilitate consensus within the framework of federal actions, often places an extra burden on the shoulders of the organizations. It involves bringing the movements together across the ethno-linguistic divide. Consensus is sometimes impossible, resulting for instance, in separate standpoints for the European Women's Lobby.⁷

Overall, the women's and LGBT movements in Belgium are constrained by the logic of ethnofederalism. Gains in terms of money and access to politics and policy by adapting to the federal state architecture come at the price of giving up part of their own identity. As a representative of the women's movement put it:

“Qu'elle est l'identité première de féministes? C'est de s'opposer au patriarcat! Ce patriarcat est unitaire des deux côtés. Ça devrait être notre première identité, mais ça ne va pas se terminer comme ça. Ça va se terminer en disant 'j'aime mieux le patriarcat wallon ou le patriarcat flamand'. C'est exactement comme pour le

⁵ These findings confirm earlier studies on divided protest public with Walloon protest being more direct, radical and left-wing and Flemish protest being more pragmatic, in favour of strategic lobbying and tending to operate in more formal organizational structures (Van Laer 2009: 250).

⁶ See: <http://www.gelijkekansen.be/Wiewerktmee/BinnendeVlaamseoverheid/OCM.aspx>

⁷ The Belgian coordination of the European Women's Lobby comprises three women's organizations: the Francophone organizations (CFFB and *Comité Liaisons des Femmes*), and the Flemish NVR (the VOK used to be a member). The CFFB and the NVR each in turn chair for two years and coordinate the Belgian standpoint for the EWL.

mouvement d'ouvrier. Les ouvriers flamands, jusqu'à la guerre 14-18, ... ils savaient que le patronat est le patronat. La préoccupation du patronat est de faire du profit. Ce n'est pas de faire du profit en flamand ou en français. C'est comme si maintenant ils préfèrent être dominé par un patronat qui fait du profit en flamand qu'en français. C'est quelque chose comme ça. Ce glissement de l'identité est absolument spectaculaire et probablement dramatique. C'est effrayant et ça va nous arriver aussi. Pour l'instant nous avons encore l'impression qu'il y a *un* patriarcat, mais on va finir par croire qu'il y a un patriarcat qui est plus ou moins mieux que l'autre et je trouve ça effrayant." (*int. 3*)

4. Conclusion: the faith of other identities in ethnofederations

How does an ethnofederal state architecture shape the possibilities for other identities engaging with the state? Our analysis of the structure, fund seeking and lobbying activities of the Belgian women's and LGBT movement organizations points to the limitations of ethnofederalism for social identities other than those shaping the ethnofederation.

Firstly, it strongly inhibits, and in the long run might even erase, the federalism advantage that these groups can experience in a federal system. Our analysis of the women's and LGBT movement showed that they adapt their organizations to the federal state architecture. Notwithstanding the practical inconveniences of copying the federal state architecture into their own, this allows these organizations to successfully address multiple state levels with their funding requests and political demands. In other words, to some extent it allows them to cash in on the federalism advantage.

Nevertheless, this structural adaptation to the territorial configuration of the state also opens the door for the social identities within these territories to enter the political arena, and this in turn undermines the federalism advantage. More accurately, it generates the space for these organisations to develop the specific ethnic identity that they had from the start, but was neutralised by the previously federation-wide organisational structure. The split allows for differentiating cultures, divergent political agendas and a different praxis of state-society interactions. This dynamic is in some cases also strengthened by sub-state governments' requests for exclusivity in return for financial support. Thus the organizations are incentivised to adopt in a more pronounced manner their ethno-linguistic identity, to become primarily *Flemish* or *Francophone/Walloon* organizations, not only in a territorial sense (how they are

structured), but also identity-wise. The exclusive Flemish organization ELLAv zw is a good example of inscribing gendered identity into the Flemish one: notwithstanding that ethnic minority women's issues are evidently not limited to the Flemish territory, they opt for a Flemish organization, with a Flemish agenda and cooperation with the Flemish government. The same tendency is visible with the other movement organizations studied. The net result of being confined to the state territories is that these organizations operate as though they are within a unitary state, thereby losing the federalism advantage of having multiple access points and the possibility to avoid veto players.

Secondly, ethnofederations, as the Belgian case demonstrates, might even result in a major federalism *dis*advantage for other social groups in that the federal level tends to become inaccessible for their lobby activities. Federal competencies become more difficult, unattractive and costly (in terms of coordination) to lobby as the linguistically divided organizations drift apart. Their core concerns being gender and sexual equality however, requires them to lobby the federal government: not doing so leaves many important policy areas unaddressed and cannot be but a drastic loss of impact of these movements. Civil society organizations that need to operate at the federal level, but fail to do so because of their ethno-linguistic identity, not only lose a federalism advantage they also experience a specific federalism disadvantage. The Belgian cases of the women's and the LGBT movement organizations operating in an ethnofederation based on ethnic-linguistic identity indicate that these mechanisms do exist and increasingly retract federal policy domains from the demands for taking gender and sexual equality into account.

The broader implications of these findings are that in ethnofederations the dominant identities have the potential to hinder the state-society relations of other social identities. The Belgian case demonstrates that social movements seeking to advance the status of social groups other than the one the federal state is built upon can be undermined. Hence, the ethnofederalist character of federations and especially the strength of centrifugal regionalism is one of the important conditions determining whether federalism has positive or negative implications for other social identities. In many federations the social identity and political cleavages on the grounds of which the state architecture has been/is being designed, is of a fundamentally different nature from the political cleavages associated with movements based on other social identities. Our analysis strongly suggests that ethnofederations potentially impose a supplementary threshold for social groups other than those structuring the state architecture, its rules and processes.

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Annex 1: List of interviews

Interview 1: 25/6/2010, Ghent, Vrouwen Overleg Komité (VOK, Women's reflection committee, Flemish umbrella organization regrouping women's organizations defining themselves as pluralist)

Interview 2: 28/6/2010, Brussels, Nederlandstalige vrouwenraad (NVR, Dutch speaking women's council, major Flemish umbrella organization regrouping women's organizations)

Interview 3: 30/6/2010, Brussels, Comité de liaison de femmes (CLF, Women's liaison committee, French-speaking umbrella organization regrouping women's organizations defining themselves as pluralist)

Interview 4: 2/7/2010, Brussels, Comité de femmes francophones de Belgique (CFFB, Committee of Belgian French-speaking women, major French umbrella organization regrouping women's organizations)

Interview 5: 7/7/2010, Ghent, Fonds Suzan Daniël (Foundation Suzan Daniël, foundation archiving, documenting and studying the Belgian LGBT movement)

Interview 6: 9/7/2010, Brussels, Regenbooghuis Brussel/Maison arc en ciel Brussel (Brussels' rainbow house, major umbrella organization of Brussels LGBT organizations)

Interview 7: 9/7/2010, Antwerp, çavaria (çavaria, major umbrella organization of Flemish LGBT organizations)

Interview 8: 13/7/2010, Antwerp, Kenniscentrum gender en etniciteit (ELLAvzw), Support office foreign girls and women, major Flemish umbrella organization for foreign girls and women)

Interview 9: 15/7/2010, Brussels, Arc en ciel Wallonie (Arc en ciel Wallonie, Rainbow Wallonia, major umbrella organization of Walloon LGBT organizations)

Table 1: Division of policy issues in the Belgian federal state and issues of the women's and LGBT movement

Major policy competencies (Deschouwer 2009)	Issues of the Women's movements ⁸	Issues of the LGBT movements ⁹
<p>Federal level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most aspects of justice - Most aspects of social security and labour law - Monetary policy, security and defence - Civil law, including immigration and nationality - Foreign affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - violence against women, divorce policy, prostitution - personalisation of social security rights, gender equality in employment (e.g. wage gap), feminisation of poverty, reimbursement of contraceptives, abortion law and policy, work-life balance for women with children, gender quota for company boards, women entrepreneurs, charity work - gender effects of income taxes, alimony for divorced women - recognition of gendered motivations for asylum - women in development cooperation, policy and peace enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - homosexual marriage, equal treatment homosexual couples, adoption rights and recognition rights of new-borns in homosexual couples - equal treatment on the labour market (especially the public sector) - legal framework for co-parents - right to donate blood - violence against LGBT - adaptation of the parental leave system to LGBT parents - possibility to change sex on official documents on simple demand - recognition of sexual motivations for asylum

⁸ Based on the 2007-2009 memoranda for the respective elections at the various governmental levels of NVR (http://www.vrouwenraad.be/p_80.htm), VOK (<http://www.vrouwendag.be/standpunten/memoranda>), CFFB (<http://www.cffb.be/archive/>). See also the overview established by the NVR of the standpoints of the Belgian women's movements, also including information concerning the CLF: http://www.vrouwenraad.be/media/docs/pdf/eisen_vrouwenbeweging_fed_reg.pdf

⁹ Based on the 2007-2009 memoranda for the respective elections at the various governmental levels of arc-en-ciel Wallonie and Coordination Holebi Bruxelles <http://arcenciel-wallonie.be/web/acw/images/production/memorandum%20regionales%202009.pdf> ; <http://www.arcenciel-wallonie.be/web/acw/infos/156-un-besoin-de-changements.html>; and the 2009 memorandum of the Holebi Federation of 2009.

		- recognition of importance of equal treatment of LGBT in international relations
<p>Communities (Flemish, French, German) <i>Person-related matters:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education - Cultural matters (defence and promotion of language, arts, libraries, radio and television broadcasting, youth policy, leisure, tourism, etc.) _ “Personalized” matters (health prevention policy, assistance to individuals, etc.) - Youth justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gender neutral education, training for women, gender studies, glass ceiling in universities, Islamic veils at schools - gender stereotypes and the presence of women in the media - women’s physical and mental health issues, violence against women - child care facilities and policy (in relation to work-life balance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - anti-discrimination campaigns in schools, support for sexuality studies - anti-discrimination campaigns through culture and sports - the inclusion of gay and lesbian couples in child adoption policy - Special care for aging LGBT - policy on HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) - financial support for scientific research on LGBT and gender
<p>Regions (Brussels, Flanders, Wallonia) - <i>Territorially bound matters:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ Economic affairs (excluding monetary policy) _ Employment policy _ Economic development and planning _ Most aspects of transport _ Agriculture _ Environment (protection, waste policy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - women and employment, Islamic veils in public office - gendered aspects of housing and mobility, security in the public space, women’s shelters - women entrepreneurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fighting LGBT discrimination in employment - fighting LGBT discrimination in housing

<ul style="list-style-type: none">_ Rural development and nature conservation_ Housing_ Local and provincial authorities		
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