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## Sexual and reproductive rights movements and counter movements from an interactionist perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Empirical studies examining opposing movements' interactions and strategic choices have expanded in the literature on social movements, especially in the field of conservative social movements, and especially concerning sexual politics. Here we start by discussing an alternative way of thinking about how movements are caught in interdependences with other movements and more generally their environment, based on the Eliasian concept of 'configuration'. We think such a configurational approach offers a theorization of the structuration of society, enabling us to better apprehend the complex relationships between various allied and opposed actors. We then illustrate our argument by showing how it could effectively serve to think about the relational space of social movements in the field of sexual and reproductive rights, that is, the system of coordinates defining their situation in relation to each other at a given point in time. To do this we draw on existing literatures and the contributions in this special issue.

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No one can follow a soccer game who concentrates on the performance of one team without taking into account that of the other team. One can only understand the actions and the feelings of one team's members if one observes independently the other teams' actions and feelings. One must distance oneself from the game to recognize that the actions of each team are constantly intertwined and that, therefore, the two opposing teams form a single configuration.

(Elias & Dunning, 1994, p. 70)

Is any action of an authority that bears on movement/countermovement interaction part of the movement or countermovement? Stated differently, how does one differentiate political and authoritative action from movement/countermovement action? [...] We maintain the distinction between authoritative action and social movement (or countermovement) action. However, to the extent that state action is largely directed to carrying out pro or anti-social movement actions, we have a conceptual difference with little empirical relevance.

(Zald & Useem, 1983, p. 19)

If the idea that social movements are embedded in multi-level interdependences is not new and nowadays largely accepted (see Rucht, 2004 for a review), the theoretical, methodological, and empirical consequences of this embedding nonetheless remain

understudied. Until recently, the strong structuralist substratum of contentious politics theory has curbed efforts towards a relational and interactionist perspective on movements and their relationships with allies, adversaries, and third parties. Movements are still often pictured as facing contexts made of structural characteristics, but rarely of individual and collective actors actively pursuing their own agendas and caught within a series of interdependent relationships. As McAdam and Boudet (2012) state, the field of social movement studies has expanded dramatically through the past three decades. But its focus has become increasingly 'movement centric'. By this, they mean that: 'Instead of situating movements in a fuller constellation of political and economic forces and actors, movements and movement groups increasingly came to be the central animating focus of the field' (McAdam & Boudet, 2012, p. 22).

Recent attempts to address this problem have converged on the development of more relational models. This is the case, in particular, of Fligstein and McAdam's conceptualization of strategic action fields (2012). The authors draw on Bourdieu's concept of fields as spaces of struggle opposing incumbent actors and their challengers. Their perspective opens up possibilities for approaching the various interactions between social movements and their targets – and the interactions among their targets too – in a much more dynamic way. Equally important are Jasper's repeated calls for the analysis of strategic interactions between players across different arenas (Jasper, 2004, 2006; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015). Jasper's proposal is distinct in so far as it emphasises the micro-level of the 'game' of moves and counter-moves between players, who can be either individual or composite (e.g. organizations). Players strategically choose the arenas in which they oppose each other or collaborate with each other – for instance, by filing court cases in the judicial arena, lobbying for regulation in the legislative arena, or publicly denouncing practices in the arena of the mass media. Both perspectives, with their respective focuses on the meso-level of fields or the micro-level of individuals and their interactions across arenas, offer complementary tools for studying social movement dynamics (Duyvendak & Fillieule, 2015).

Here, we develop these lines of thought in order to further reflection on what used to be called 'counter movements', and are now more commonly termed 'opposing movements'. First, we discuss the blossoming literature aiming to theorizing the relational space of social movements, before setting out our own conceptualization of these interdependences, articulating a configurational approach largely inspired by an interactionist interpretation of Elias' powerful concept of 'configuration'. We then focus on one area in particular where the heuristic value of the concept can be best illustrated: the area of sexual and reproductive rights related struggles. If empirical studies examining opposing movements' interactions and strategic choices have expanded in the social movement literature (see Dorf & Tarrow, 2014 for a review), it is mostly in the field of conservative social movements, and especially when regarding sexual politics (Altman & Symons, 2016; Bernstein, 1997; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, & Andersen, 2009; Stone, 2012; with respect to the LGBT rights movement; Esacove, 2004; Fetner, 2001, 2008; Halfmann, 2011; McCaffrey & Keys, 2000; Meyer & Staggenborg, 2008; Munson, 2008; Rohlinger, 2002, 2006; Staggenborg, 1991; Zald & Useem, 1987 on the abortion debate; Crowley, 2009 on fathers' rights). In this particular context, the concept is especially helpful because it provides a framework for analyzing struggles that are not centred specifically upon government, and which mobilize actors that can operate as challengers in a variety

of situations without being themselves identified as social movement actors (e.g. religious institutions, professional associations in the medical field and various moral entrepreneurs); and struggles in which alliance as well as conflict networks are highly heterogeneous and transversed by multiple intra-network conflicts. The exploration we suggest of interactive dynamics between movements defending sexual rights and their opponents advocates a pure and simple abandonment of the notions of counter and opposing movement.

### **The relational space of social movements**

The rise of state building, capitalism, urbanization, and communications provided the impetus for the development of the division of labour, first labelled by Durkheim, 1893/1964 'social differentiation', denoting the historic process that affects society and which suggests a greater complexity of social relationships, due to the division of labour and the resulting increase in interdependencies between individuals. This increasing complexity is the result of the repeated creation of previously non-existent specialized structures. Numerous theoretical perspectives attempt to account for this structuring of the social world in more or less independent spaces, from fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), to organizational fields (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983), sectors (Scott & Meyer, 1983), games (Scharpf, 1997), networks (Diani & McAdam, 2003), or in the case of the government, policy domains (Knoke & Laumann, 1987) and polity systems/subsystems (Sabatier, 2007), and in the economic realm, markets (Fligstein, 1991, 2001).

Social movement scholars have also tried to conceive of movements as specific social orders, drawing particularly on the path-breaking work of McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977), who coined the concepts of social movement organizations (SMOs), social movement industries (SMIs), and social movement sectors (SMSs). This powerful trilogy has the advantage of stressing the fact that within the same SMI, various SMOs can compete with each other even if they mobilize in relation to the same demands. At a broader level, SMIs are also competing with each other and, finally, the SMS is equally in competition with private, public, and voluntary sector activities, all of which make demands upon and seek to lure the wider public.

Equally powerful is the concept of multi-organizational fields (MOF) (Curtis & Zurcher, 1973, 1974), which denotes all organizations with which a protest movement interacts. The value of this ecological concept is threefold: it stresses that social movements always act under 'exogenous influence or contamination and can (not) operate in an interorganizational void' (1973, p. 60); the shape and size of a movement's organizational field is not random, but stem from existing economic, political, and societal cleavages; and that the dynamics of the organizational field are nonetheless largely unpredictable, as they depend on the logics of interaction between protagonists. The concept is not solely focused on organizations, and provides us with a new way of looking at the mobilization of individuals, who can belong to multiple intersecting SMOs and SMIs (Fernandez & McAdam, 1989; Fillieule et al., 2004). In the same vein, Klandermans (1990) proposes a distinction between supporting, opposing, and neutral segments of a social movement's environment, whilst Kriesi (1985) and Della Porta and Rucht (1995) suggest a distinction between a movement's 'conflict system' and its 'alliance system'.

In parallel, scholars have started to recognize that organizations are not the only mobilizing structures in social movements, and that social movements do not have members but participants (e.g. Diani, 1992; Oliver, 1989). *Inter alia*, the concepts of submerged networks (Melucci, 1989), ideologically structured action (Zald, 2000), social movement networks (Diani & Bison, 2004; Diani & McAdam, 2003), and social movement communities (Buechler, 1990; Lichterman, 1995; Taylor & Whittier, 1992) have helped to conceptualize the diffuse nature of protest activities and their moving structures.

In recent years, the influence of Bourdieu's theory of structuration on social movement scholars has brought to the fore the powerful concept of field to describe the complex relationships and interactions amongst contentious movements. To our knowledge Crossley (2003, 2006) was one of the first to use the notion of 'fields of contention,' followed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012), who speak of 'strategic action fields,' not to mention the numerous French scholars whose intellectual training drives them naturally to refer to Bourdieu's concepts, which they adopt (Péchu, 2006 on 'activist fields') or adapt to the empirical reality they are studying (e.g. Bereni, 2012 on the 'space of women's advocacy'). More generally, French scholars have long paid particular attention to interaction dynamics within different fields, hence mostly avoiding the so called 'movement centric bias' (Fillieule, Agrikoliansky, & Sommier, 2010; Fillieule, 2016, for a review).

In Bourdieu's works (1989/1996a, 1992/1996b), a field is defined as a social sub-world, a sphere of social life which, over time, has become increasingly autonomous and distinct from other fields, with its own specific social relations, issues, resources, and *illusio*. The concept of field is certainly one of the most powerful we have today to examine the historical process of structuring our societies. Nonetheless, not all varieties of relationship fall within fields, and their forms of structuration and modes of functioning fail in particular to fully account for protest activities and their interactions with other social actors. As discussed at length elsewhere (Duyvendak & Fillieule, 2015), field theory (and its various proposed reformulations) may well accurately describe certain very hierarchical social sub-spheres, generally those where some actors exercise power over some sector of the social realm. Yet, protest activities themselves are rarely part of a given and specific field. Contention is generally not limited to a circumscribed and relatively stable sphere of activity, held to be more or less autonomous from other fields. Most of the time, contentious activities develop at the margins or intersections of multiple pre-existing fields, depending on the issues at stake, as well as on the individual or collective actors they mobilize or target.

In general, we are sympathetic to theoretical proposals which aim to go beyond the deeply unrealistic definition of movements' environment that has long dominated the field (i.e. the notion of political opportunity structure). As Jasper notes, these proposals nonetheless treat protest groups and other players asymmetrically, reducing the latter to the 'environment' of the former, 'a structural trick that reduces the agency of all players except protestors. [...] All players confront dilemmas, make choices, react to others and so on. We can only understand contention when we pay equal attention to all of them.' (2004, p.5; see also Walker, Martin, & McCarthy, 2008).

Such theoretical departures thus remain too firmly anchored in a structuralist epistemology: it is only through a paradigm shift towards an interactionist conception of the structuration of society that it is possible to theorize the space delineated by social movement mobilization, a space itself potentially shifting over time due to the fluidity

of protest interactions. In both its symbolist (as developed by Blumer, Mead, and Strauss), and rhetorical and dramaturgical versions (Goffman and Gusfield), the interactionist tradition draws particular attention to the links between individual, meso, and macro social levels, as well as to strategic interaction, which from a dynamic and processual perspective rejects all structuralism. It is consequently able to characterize forms of collective action according to their malleability and permeability to change in relativist and nondeterministic terms (Blumer, 1969, p. 50).

At the very heart of the interactionist conception of the structuration of society lies the concept of worlds and subworlds. The social world is defined, deliberately vaguely, as a network of actors cooperating to accomplish specific activities (Strauss, 1978, pp.122–123). Approached in this way, the activities of cooperation and competition may be distributed along an axis, from the most routine, formally organized and strictly repeated activities, to the most unstable, rapidly changing ones. One consequence of this approach is to deny the operational value of descriptions which establish strict boundaries and watertight classifications. Any individual or collective actor may at any moment be involved in a given world or subworld. The notion of a world accordingly has the advantage of being more inclusive than that of a field in not limiting the boundaries only to dominant actors. All actors are part of a given world where they have a stake in the accomplishment of a task (Becker, 1974, p. 767). It follows from this that a world is not strictly speaking a structure nor an organization, but rather a network of individuals who cooperate so as to allow a given product to exist. Nonetheless, people caught in the same world may have divergent interests and, while the concepts of coordination and cooperation are central, they fall along a continuum, from entirely conflictual relationships to those of pure coordination.

The notion of a ‘world’ is associated with that of an ‘arena’. In its dramaturgical and rhetorical version, the term ‘public arenas’ appeared first in Gusfield’s *Symbolic Crusade* (1963) to designate the space of status struggles over the issues of the temperance movement, and then in *The Culture of Public Problems* (1981), where Gusfield studied controversies around the public problem of drunk driving. The concept of an arena is generally used as a synonym for the notion of ‘venue’ in social movement studies, especially since more and more scholars in the field are rightly paying attention to literature on social problems, in which there exist in society, in a permanent and structured manner, different public arenas, such as, for example, the media arena, the political arena, the legal arena (e.g. Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). On this basis, an arena can be defined as a space both concrete (that is, from a dramaturgical perspective, the place and time of the staging of interactions, for example, the street or a courtroom) and symbolic (that is from a rhetorical perspective, the site of polemics or controversy, of testimony, expertise, and deliberation) which brings together all the actors, individual or collective, participating in the emergence, definition, and resolution of a problem. It is precisely this conception of an arena that is defended by Jasper (2006), even if for him the concept is thought in a theoretical framework closer to game theory than to interactionist sociology.

Thanks to their underlying epistemology, the concepts of world and arena appear to be much more suitable for theorizing the interactive dynamics of protest. This theoretical position has been put forward by Duyvendak and Fillieule (2015, p. 308): in their view, the two concepts allow a radical distance from structuralist bias without falling into an overly strategic perspective that would lead to neglecting the historical and institutional dimension of any interaction chain.

However, one difficulty remains unsolved. The concept of world, which insists above all on co-operation, even if it is conflictual, with the aim of achieving a common goal, is unable without heavy modifications to account for the opposition between alliance and conflict networks. For this reason we suggest substituting the Eliasian concept of ‘configuration’: indeed, it seems to us that Elias’s ‘configurational sociology’ (Elias & Dunning, 1994, p. 272) offers a theorization of the structuration of society which enables a better understanding of the complex relationships between various allied and opposed actors. In the following section, we briefly discuss this approach, and how it can help us think about the relational space of social movements, that is, the system of coordinates defining their position in relation to each other at a given point in time. Such a position produces an effect on all the individual or collective actors involved who themselves, through their actions, contribute to modifying this situation.

### **An interactionist interpretation of the concept of ‘configuration’**

In *Was ist Soziologie ?* (1970), Elias develops the concept of ‘configuration’ (in German, *Figuration*.) Here, Elias argues that society constitutes a network of interdependencies amongst individuals. From this relational perspective, which doubtless more strongly influenced field theory than Bourdieu would ever acknowledge, the web of relations of which society is comprised resembles a game, that is, a dynamic competition. This game metaphor indicates that social life is competitive and that the different partners are in relations of interdependence which sometimes settle into a ‘balance of power’. The evolution of societies is explained by the modifications to this equilibrium through individual actions and the effects they engender, like chain reactions. These chain reactions, in turn, modify the game and the players. Elias sees in the configuration

The overall always changing figure formed by the players; it includes not only their intellect, but their entire person, actions and reciprocal relations. [...] This configuration creates a collection of tensions. (Elias, 1970/1978, p. 157)

A certain number of characteristics of the concept of configuration lead us to defend its use in considering the interdependencies formed among social movements and society at large, and which connects them. We enumerate them briefly below.

The game model allows us to explain the meaning of the notion of interdependence, understood as reciprocal and fluctuating relationships of dependence, marked by competition and rivalry (between more or less powerful individuals or groups, which can be equated to a ‘power struggle’). Indeed, over time, the game results in a provisional ‘balance of tensions’. When this equilibrium is disturbed, when one player becomes too powerful, the game is restructured. The social world is much like a net, the form of which shifts when the tension between its strings changes:

A net is composed of multiple strings joined together. Nonetheless, neither the whole of this network nor the form which each of the different strings takes can be explained based on a single one of these strings, or by all the different strings in themselves; they can only be explained by their association, their interrelations [...]. The shape of each string changes when the tension and the structure of the entire network change. Yet, this net is nothing more than the bringing together of different strings; and, at the same time, inside of all this, each string forms a unit in itself; it has a particular place there and assumes a specific form. (Elias, 1987/1991, p. 70–71)

Thus, the configuration resembles the notion of a ‘force field’ in Bourdieu’s terms. Nonetheless, while the configuration associates interdependence and domination, as does Bourdieu, it offers an inverse logical connection. The relations of interdependency may, occasionally, be seen as dominance relationships. Still, the primary principle is not domination, but rivalry, which is much more realistic when considering the relations between associated and opposed social movements, or those between social movements and the rest of their environment (the state, the market, public space, and so on).

In *Was ist Soziologie ?* Elias offers an essential explanation for the constraints of interdependence. He suggests that the game itself creates constraints in that it pushes for a ‘progressive escalation of reciprocal tensions’, for a ‘gear spiral’ beyond the control of the actors (Elias, 1970/1978, p. 21). If the forces present are not too unequal, the game really takes on the character of a process: no single actor is in a position to influence the outcome. Since multiple actors play, the game takes a direction that none of the players had foreseen (Elias speaks of a *contingent process*). The game becomes uncontrollable and generates its own constraints, since its course always directs the actors’ tactics. Therefore, while being provoked and perpetuated by the acts of each actor, the game creates unforeseen effects, both on the actors’ attitudes and on how it itself unfolds.

Finally, Elias suggests that configurations of interdependent relations are forged around two types of game. The former, classically labelled in sociology as ‘composition effects’ or ‘emerging effects’, bring us back to effects that were not hoped for in advance by any actor, were produced from an unforeseeable combination of blows, occurred both simultaneously and successively and, once unleashed, had constraining effects for all. (The confrontations between the upper bourgeoisie and the nobility under the Ancien régime in France and the 1789 Revolution are paradigmatic examples analyzed in *Court society* (Elias, 1969/1983). The other type of game refers to strategic games, the ‘choices which take into account conjectured or anticipated choices of other agents’ (Elster, 1989, p. 26). As a consequence, strategic decisions made by the involved actors are only part of the story since claims, targets, and the choice of action sites, but also tactics and organisational choices, are also the direct product of composition effects.

The fact that exchanges of blows are as much the product of conscious strategies as composition effects does not at all mean that the configurations are not structured by rules,<sup>1</sup> in the same way, of course, that football is played with a respect for the written and codified ‘laws’ which define what players are allowed and forbidden to do with the ball. This does not prevent players from taking initiatives, to the extent that every game is different, even if fans of this sport readily track similar and recurrent moves from one game to the next (Elias & Dunning, 1994, p. 263).

Here, and without contradicting Elias’ epistemology, we can refer to Becker’s concept of ‘conventions’ (Becker, 1974, pp.770–771) to show that, beyond the more or less universally accepted and imposed rules of intervention in a given society (reflecting laws, norms and mores), each configuration is characterized by its own rules. A logical consequence of the structured character of society is that the modalities by which configurations are constituted and function also correspond to conventions, explicit or implicit, rhetorical (which refers to the notion of frame) and dramaturgical (which refers notably to the notion of tactical repertoires). Action can only be grasped in the concrete circumstances of a co-presence, in fully considering the requirements stemming from mutual involvement in social relations and the inherent uncertainty in the sequential



unfolding of exchanges. Nonetheless, these circumstances are preordained: while the course the action will take cannot be predicted, it always falls within a particular context which one can characterize as a collection of conventions, that is significant elements of orientation which impose a certain regime of obligations on those who participate.

The conventions which constrain the functioning of configurations partly stem from the conventions which rule society at large, but also from those internalized by individual or collective players involved, depending on their own history, memories, and culture. Even more crucially, conventions are not equivalent to the arithmetical sum of conventions characterizing the social realm and the actors involved. The very morphology of configurations (i.e. the form taken at its core by the networks of alliance and conflict) and their dynamics (i.e. the entrance or departure of players, as well as the shifting of borders in social space) determine a space always specific to the relationships between actors, so that the conventions are both a restrictive framework for action and a strategic issue in the struggle for actors. They seek to have the conventions to which they are most attached or which serve them best prevail over those put forward by their adversaries, indeed their allies.

Last but not least, and as a consequence, conventions are inevitably idiosyncratic and set in patterns. From this perspective, studying a contentious configuration is also an attempt to disentangle settled and mutually recognized conventions from those linked to innovation and invention (Fillieule & Tartakowsky, 2013; Mariot, 2011).

### **Making sense of interactive dynamics between social movements**

In this section, we explore the reciprocal dynamics between movements defending sexual rights and their opponents using the concept of configuration. We start by arguing that in a configurational approach, the concepts of countermovement or opposing movements are no longer useful, before establishing a series of mechanisms which, beyond the irreducible heterogeneity of arenas and configurations, appear recurrent in battles over sexual and reproductive rights.

The notion of countermovement emerged in a systematic fashion at the end of the 1970s, as the 'progressive' mobilizations of the previous decade found themselves confronted with what would soon be called the Moral Majority, very often resulting from a collaboration between conservative movements (Mottl, 1980, pp.620–624). The most emblematic scenario is the conflict opposing 'pro-choice' and 'pro-life' movements, but scholars also reinterpreted earlier conflicts in the light of this new categorisation.

Nonetheless, the definition of countermovements as inherently conservative appears excessively normative (Turner & Killian, 1972, p.318), obscuring both the fundamentally reactive dimension of the countermovement, and its political signification. This, indeed, is the argument made by Lo (1982), Zald and Useem (1983), and others in their wake. Here, the countermovement is defined by its dependence on and reaction to an initiating movement, as well as by its ensuing sustained interactions with the initiating movement that Zald and Useem characterize as 'a sometimes loosely coupled tango of mobilization and countermobilization' (1987, pp.252–253).

More recently, the notion of 'opposing movements' has emerged. Indeed, it is around topics linked to sexuality – principally homosexuality – that this expression was originally created. Bernstein, who seems to have initiated the expression in a 1995 paper, distinguishes 'opposing movements' from 'routine opposition' which concerns 'polity

insiders' (that is, those who, due to their institutional position, have the ear of 'policy-makers'), while the former are external to the policy domain (Bernstein, 1997, p. 539). The concept was subsequently developed by Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) as an alternative to the notion of countermovement (see also Dugan, 2004). Finally, for Fetner, it is simply a matter of 'two movements fighting against each other' (Fetner, 2008, p.xvi), an *a minima* definition which allows one to consider that so called countermovements are sometimes initiators. This is, indeed, well illustrated by the fact that gay marriage became a mobilizing issue for the LGBT movements as a reaction to the conservative campaigns in courts. According to Fetner, 'this issue has also mobilized the lesbian and gay movement in response, including many lesbian and gay people who had not previously been involved in activism.' (Fetner, 2008, p.112; see also Pinello, 2016; Dorf & Tarrow, 2014).

Overall, as we see, no definitive criterion of what would constitute a counter or opposing movement can truly withstand analysis. The criterion of conservative orientation is ideological; of dependence and reaction, empirically unfounded; of relational interdependence, ultimately difficult to accept, given that most canonical definitions of a social movement insist on the importance of 'sustained interactions' (Tilly, 1978). There therefore remains only the idea of sustained interactions with another movement, as opposed to sustained interactions with public authorities, a distinction which would by inference lock us back into an outdated definition of social movements as challengers opposed by essence to the state (see Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015).

For this reason, we propose to completely abandon these notions, which serve to obscure rather than clarify the phenomena which they intend to differentiate. Rather, we maintain that any social movement is always constructed on the basis of the demand for new rights or the defense of acquired rights, always gives rise to an awakening or mobilization of contrary interests, be they overtly or discreetly expressed, and always stems from civil society or through association with political actors, but also with actors from other fields (including legal, religious, medical, academic, media). Of course, there are situations in which opposition is more visible, more concentrated, and more sustained than in others, but this difference is only one of degree, not of nature, and, in our view, does not call for a specific conceptual vocabulary. This is especially the case given that the literature already includes the concept of spillover, which precisely points at the multiple dynamic effects of social movements on one another (Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Whittier, 2009). These effects are usually classified in two broad categories (Bernstein & Taylor, 2013): 'spillover across movements and diffusion within movements or the spin-off of social movements within the same campaign'.

In terms of the construction of the research object, this means that we are no longer satisfied with studying a given movement and the putative effects of opposing movements on its structuration, tactics, frames, identities, networks, and success chances. We know this constitutes a fundamental shortcoming in much of the literature, which less studies movement/countermovement dynamics than the multiple effects of countermovements on one specific movement. Therefore, instead of studying 'the impact of the religious right on the lesbian and gay movement' (Fetner, 2008, pp.121–122), or (less often) the impact of the LGBTQ movement on conservative movements (Burke & Bernstein, 2014; Stone, 2016), or of the 'pro-choice movement' on the 'pro-life' movement (Munson, 2008), we examine configurations (as defined by Elias) that are more or

less stable across time and whose contours, like internal lines of construction, are formed and modified over time depending on the sustained interactions at play.

The success of a given mobilization around a given problem thus results from the capacity of actors to enlist other actors, to have them in some way enter the game and to create a coalition which necessarily keeps the problem on the 'agenda' of institutions and organizations which can provide a response, whether this be from a particular sector of the state, from private operators acting in the market, or from institutions such as churches. Other actors oppose these groups for various reasons, and try hard to prevent this being placed on the agenda since they fear that it will lead to an action contrary to their interests, one which might benefit from the complicity of institutional agents and political managers reluctant to deal with a 'hot' question which would disturb their routines, and could ultimately lead to the challenging of positions they occupy in their respective worlds.

To study the actions of opposing movements on a specific issue from the configurational perspective of functional interdependence, one would thus ideally need to first describe the fundamental structures which imbue all the events of a given configuration with a specific orientation and morphology, before studying all the stakeholders present, and the interpenetration of their successive actions with the same degree of depth. The form of exchanges over time and across different arenas is inseparable from the product of both agentic strategies and of composition effects whose outcomes, by definition, are unforeseen by the actors involved.

The dynamic description of the exchange of blows within a given configuration occurs at a number of related levels but we can break it down analytically into several broad categories: the actors, venues, frames and issue selection, identities, tactical repertoires, and modes of internal organization of each alliance network.

Depending on national context, the stakeholders in a given configuration will not necessarily be the same nor have the same weight nor the same level of resources. Thus, in terms of sexual rights, and as a function of complex historical and cultural factors, the centrality of a particular component of the religious, political, academic, or medical domain will not be the same. The result is that each configuration is constrained by the specific rules of the game and conventions which determine what is possible. This is brilliantly demonstrated by Halfmann (2011) in a comparison of confrontations over abortion rights in the U.S.A., Great Britain, and Canada: while there is an opposition between a 'pro-choice' and a 'pro-life' movement in all three countries, in the American case political parties engaged heavily with the issue, while the medical profession stayed out of the fray; in contrast, in the British and Canadian cases, political parties avoided the issue, keeping abortion off political and policy agendas afterwards, while medical associations defended the provision of abortion services. Quite similarly, Stambolis-Ruhsdorfer (this volume) shows in his comparison of the US and French contexts that once judges and lawmakers are called to adjudicate cases and draft legislation on gay families' rights, they require compelling justifications to do so. Activists therefore turn to expertise, but in different ways which are constrained by contextual differences.

The venue in which a particular battle is fought is, equally, a key determinant of contest, and site of national contextual difference. As Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) argue, venue shifts can change the political context in which a particular form of activism is challenged. Here again, Halfmann shows that in the USA (or in a less dramatic way,

Germany), one of the most important venues where actors interact is the judicial arena, the Supreme Court playing a central role through decisions which can be ‘transformative events’ modifying the balance of power and tension between actors. Meanwhile, countries like Canada, Britain, and France determine abortion policy through legislatures rather than courts, thus reducing controversy by promoting negotiated outcomes that carry more democratic legitimacy than court-made policies.

Of course, because the choice of venue is both a prior condition and an outcome of struggle, movements are never totally free to choose the most favourable venue. More generally, the literature on conflict over abortion rights in the USA shows how counter-movement strategies have forced numerous venue shifts (e.g. Fetner, 2008; Staggenborg, 1991). More recently, Wilson (2013b) showed how the development of legal capacity by the pro-life movement forced abortion rights groups to develop their own legal capacity, and took conflict over pickets outside abortion clinics into the courts and off the street, ultimately harming efforts by rights activists to create buffer zones.

In sexual politics, a major way that venue shifts and new actors have come into play is by bringing policy challenges to different levels of the state in federal systems, and to supranational institutions like the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU). Bob (2012, 2015) analyses conflict at the UN between a transnational activist network promoting gay rights and another such network, related to the global right wing. He shows how the two collective actors emerged and acted in response to each other and to the specific characteristics of the UN venue. Ayoub and Paternotte (2014); Ayoub, 2013; Ayoub (2014, 2016) have explored the processes of transnational LGBTQ mobilization;<sup>2</sup> they show that the EU, the Council of Europe, and a transnational activist network have fostered change by propagating LGBTQ rights and by introducing the issues into the domestic discourse of various European states. As a result, Europe is the region where LGBTQ rights are the most developed: nine of the fourteen countries that recognize same-sex marriage at the federal level are European, and Europe has emerged as a distinct space for sexual citizenship. However, this phenomenon is not restricted to Europe, as exemplified by recent scholarship on debates surrounding LGBTQ rights in Africa; in this issue, Broqua shows that in Ivory Coast and Senegal, where controversies occur in specific national situations, their development is strongly linked to the ‘international’ context, both as actors and, more generally, as figures of reference. Similarly, Currier’s discussion of Liberia shows in this same issue how the transnational diffusion of LGBT rights has indirectly affected anti-LGBT organizing, prompting a grassroots group of religious leaders to mobilize against same-sex sexualities and marriage.

Equally, anti-LGBT mobilizations have also tried to build enduring cross-border networks through European institutions and activist networks, formal and informal. If, as Ayoub (2014) rightly states, conservative resistance movements have experienced difficulties in building cross-border ties as strong as the LGBTQ constellation ‘because their philosophies are rooted in nationalism’, things have changed dramatically recently with the internationalisation of familialist movements or of the Christian right, with roots in the United States (Buss & Herman, 2003; Girard, 2004); mobilization against homosexuality in Uganda is an edifying example (Demange, 2012). Further, organizations from various countries across North and South have formed networks and campaigned for the UN to take a stance against certain reproductive and sexual rights (Bob, 2012; Chamberlain, 2006). Specifically, the fight against homosexuality has become

transnational, with a particular presence in the South, at the same time as the struggle for equal rights has spread (Anderson, 2011; Weiss & Bosia, 2013). More recently, in the protracted mobilization against the legal recognition of same sex couples (Carnac, 2014), *anti-gender* mobilizations have spread across Western and Eastern Europe (Paternotte, 2015; Paternotte, van der Dussen, & Piette, 2015; Ayoub and Chetaille, this volume). Finally, a further level of polarization concerns a process of norm internationalisation: for example, for several years now, the norm recognizing sexual and identity gender orientation as deserving international protection under the rubric of human rights has been contested in countries defending radically opposed concepts (Altman & Symons, 2016; Symons & Altman, 2015).

A third element of configurations relates to the numerous ways in which issue definitions and meanings result from both the explicit strategies and the composition effects of uncoordinated activities of various actors. As a consequence, issue selection is not here studied through the concept of framing, which overemphasizes the intentional aspects of meaning making without taking into account composition effects nor the constraints defined by the conventions at play in a given arena (see Jasper, 1997; Halfmann, 2011 for a similar critique).

Four crucial mechanisms lie at the core of issue selection dynamics. First and very logically, there is a strong interdependence between the discursive strategies of opposing camps. Choosing which issue to fight for at a given point always involves estimating the preferences of constituents and public support, but also the ways opponents themselves frame their arguments. This produces a series of mechanisms, principally including what we may call a *diverting effect*, and an *isomorphic effect*.

The *diverting effect* emphasises that some movements can divert the agenda of their opponents by imposing their own campaign themes or forcing them to drop some claims; this is clearly the case for same-sex marriage, which was not a top priority for the LGBT movement in the US before the religious right's massive campaign to reinforce the legal exclusion of same-sex couples (Fetner, 2008). Following the same logic, Staggenborg (1991) argues that in the US, had it not been for the anti-abortion movement, the pro-choice movement might have been able to broaden its goal after legalization to encompass issues such as national health insurance.

The *isomorphic effect* emphasises that movements will try to imitate their opponents' framing of social issues when those framings prove to be efficient. For example, in the USA, the Religious Right has appropriated minority rights claims, including an emphasis on religious freedoms and Christian victimization (Burke & Bernstein, 2014; Stein, 2001; Stone, 2016; VanderStouwe, 2013).

Second, as many scholars have noted, conflict between opposing movements exacerbates intra-movement battles over issue selection and framing strategies. For example, Bernstein's work on the identity deployment of lesbian and gay activists (1997) concludes that the form of opposition impacts the way identities are deployed by activists. Again in the US, the 'Moral majority' put a lot of pressure on the LGBTQ movement to downplay the radical aspects of the movement and community, pushing for the exclusion of the least respectable groups (e.g. the National Man Boy Love Association, NAMBLA), but also of the least consensual and most stereotypical attitudes and looks: women who look 'masculine', and 'effeminate' men who are relegated to the background and condemned to invisibility (Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Ghaziani, 2008; Ghaziani & Baldassarri, 2011; Stein, 2001).

As a result, the development of ‘we’re just like you’ campaigns, in Europe as well as the US, focusing on white, middle-class lesbians and gays in families with children – what Fetner (2008, p. 96) calls a ‘sameness strategy’ – contributed to blurring the diversity of the LGBT community, undermining queer critiques of marriage and, more generally ‘difference strategies’ (Duggan & Hunter, 1995/2006, p. 62–64).

Third, issue definitions often accompany a simplification process seeking to create a hodgepodge of disparate ideas united under the embrace of a straw man. As Fetner shows, Anity Bryant<sup>3</sup> served as the representation of lesbian and gay oppression in the new rhetoric of the lesbian and gay movement at the end of the seventies. A strategic choice by national organizations ‘who advised lesbian and gay movement organizations to use Bryant as a stepping stone to their claims’ (Fetner, 2008, p. 39). More recently, so called ‘gender ideology’ has been the straw man the Moral majority invented to fight against women and LGBTQ rights, in the wake of the 1994 conference on population and development in Cairo and the women’s conference in Beijing in 1995. By labelling mobilizations in favour of the right to abortion and sex for nonreproductive purposes (including same-sex relations), sexual education in schools, and transgender rights, as part of a ‘gender ideology’, the Catholic church was able to drag a number of actors behind its cause, putting family and life at the very centre of the debate, and simplifying issues around caricatural oppositions. In his discussion of the anti-gender controversy in France and the internal dissent it provoked inside the Catholic church, Carnac (this volume) gives a strong example of that simplification process.

Fourth, the way an issue is defined will have a direct effect on which potential allies will join or be solicited to join the fray in the alliance network, as well as in the opposing network. For example, the US pro-life movement began with a narrowly religious opposition to abortion from Catholic doctrine that ‘was not capable of mobilizing individuals and groups outside the church. Only with the development of an ideology about the relationship of abortion to family life and the role of women in society was the antiabortion movement able to draw on a broader constituency.’ (Zald & Useem, 1987, p. 255). Here again, tactical interdependence is crucial. When one movement succeeds in securing the integration of a powerful actor into its alliance network, opponents will appeal to similar collective actors to back their cause. This was clearly the case after Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition emerged at the end of the 1980s in the US and developed a successful strategy to take over the Republican Party. As a result, the LGBTQ movement found itself pressured to align with the Democratic Party in order to have a seat at the table in the political field (Halfmann, 2011).

Finally, to complete the study of a given configuration, two more dimensions must be mentioned: *tactical* repertoires, and modes of internal organization of opposed networks. McAdam (1983) was one of the first to show, in his analysis of civil rights movement strategies, how movements continually devise new tactics in order to adapt to their targets and opponent strategies, but he focused on interactive dynamics between movements and authorities. The notion of *tactical* repertoires, elaborated by Taylor and Van Dyke in the line of Tilly’s concept of repertoire, and defined as ‘interactive episodes that link social movement actors to each other as well as to opponents and authorities for the intended purpose of challenging or resisting change in groups, organizations, or societies’ (2004, p. 266) better explains how movements can shape the tactics of the movements they oppose. In this vein, a number of case studies reveal the tactical interdependencies of

opposing actors (Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Fetner, 2008; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Munson, 2008; Whittier, 2004; Zald & Useem, 1987, among others). Staggenborg (1991) offers a crystal clear illustration of the interdependence of tactical repertoires as well as organizational structures in her classical book on the US pro-choice movement. She shows how after 1977, movement tactics became increasingly institutionalized as movement organizations began to establish themselves as political insiders. Women's liberation groups started to decline organizationally when major national organizations like NARAL and NOW started to build the structures needed to employ institutionalized tactics for a long-term battle with the anti-abortion movement. This organizational change was consonant with a tactical shift, as recourse to direct action and demonstrations receded. It was the new strategy of the anti-abortion movement in the 1980s (Hershey, 1986) that helped revitalize the grass-roots pro-choice movement and push large organizations like NARAL and NOW to sponsor a range of activities beyond conventional political tactics, including demonstrations or the 'Freedom Caravan for Women's Lives' in 1989 (Staggenborg, 1991).

## Conclusion

In this text, we began with a discussion of the various ways in which the literature attempts to take account of relations of cooperation, competition, and opposition between social movements and diverse components of their environment. We argue that the theoretical propositions advanced to describe and reflect on this environment, even when they attempt to free themselves from the unrealism of political process theory to defend a less structuralist and more procedural conception of this relationship, remain inadequate. We see this clearly in mobilizations over sexual and reproductive rights. Indeed, in this context, the centrality of visible interdependencies between opposing movements has led to the creation of a specific vocabulary (countermovement, opposing movements, etc.) to be able to take into account an empirical reality which is difficult to study with the classic instruments from the model of contentious politics. In common with a growing number of similar analyses, we advance a resolutely interactionist approach to studying social movement dynamics. Indeed, the powerful concept of configuration as forged by Elias offers a particularly heuristic instrument for the analysis of movements and their development within their environment.

Finally, our proposition is intended as a reminder that clearly one of the most effective means of fighting the 'movement-centric bias' (McAdam & Boudet, 2012) of social movement literature is to build on the concepts forged by the great sociologists, rather than construct catalogues of specific notions understood only in the limited world of social movement scholars.

## Notes

1. Rules of intervention are generally understood as stemming from the law (Gusfield, 1981, chapter, p. 2), from learned mechanisms defining conduct and organization (McPhail, 1991; Wright, 1978 on crowds and riots; Fillieule & Tartakowsky, 2013 on demonstrations) and from more implicit constraints, notably with respect to decorum and civility (Turner, 1969 on the public perception of protest).

2. And see also (Carstocea, 2006; Chetaille, 2011; Kollman, 2009; Kuhar, 2011; Paternotte, 2011; Paternotte & Kollman, 2013; Réдай, 2012; Stychin, 2001; Wilson, 2013a).
3. An American singer, Anita Bryant became known in the seventies as an outspoken opponent of gay rights in the US. In 1977, she ran the 'Save Our Children' campaign to repeal a local ordinance in Dade County, Florida that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

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