



UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES, UNIVERSITÉ D'EUROPE

UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES
Département de science politique



Master Thesis (MT)
Master programme 120 ects

Feminism :
A comparative analysis of its perception and its daily application with respect to men inside vs outside a feminist organisation that reshape patriarchy

presented by
DEZÉ, Géraldine (000442000)

Under the supervision of Ingrid SALVATORE (LUISS Guido Carli)
and David PATERNOTTE (ULB)

To obtain the degree of
Master en Sciences Politiques: Relations Internationales, à finalité Monde

Academic year 2017-2018



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« N'attendez point des secours des hommes, auteurs de vos maux. Apprenez qu'on ne sort de l'esclavage que par une grande révolution. »

(Choderlos de Laclos)

Gender equality is an undertaking for men that can be creative and joyful. It is a project that realizes high principles of social justice, produces better lives for the women whom men care about, and will produce better lives for the majority of men in the long run. This can and should be a project that generates energy, that finds expression in everyday life and the arts as well as in formal policies, and that can illuminate all aspects of men's lives.

(CONNELL 2005, p. 1819)

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Eventually, a work on feminism cannot exhaustively thank all women and men who paved the way for women to have access university, to teach, or to actively contribute to changing society; thanks to them, subjects such as the one of my master’s thesis can now be addressed in an academic discipline.

A special thought to my dad who passed away last year. He is deeply missed.

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Introduction

“We want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality. And we don’t just want to talk about it, but make sure it is tangible.” Emma WATSON¹

*“Men’s relation to feminism is an impossible one”
(HEATH 1987, p.1)*

In 2012, I was animating workshops to young and early teens girls about sex education, their right to say “no”, self-esteem, and reproductive rights in a township in South Africa. And outside I could see little heads bobbing up and down, as the boys looked indoor so to understand what was going on. Each time the meeting was over, the boys were asking why they could not be involved in these meetings. This “what about me?” question echoed in my head since. On an international scale, I have more and more noticed famous men, from Barack Obama to Patrick Stewart, and other celebrities, actors, or political figures claiming to be feminists. As the reader may know, this year, the word ‘feminism’ was on everyone’s lips. Indeed, it was named as Word of the Year for 2017 by the American dictionary Merriam-Webster (MERRIAM-WEBSTER online). Unfortunately, the reason of this ‘sacrament’ is due to a very sad and gloomy scandal, the “Harvey Weinstein scandal”, that would have a snowball effect into France² and other European countries. To what extent shall men be implicated in feminism?

This research addresses a particular aspect of the nature of feminism : the relationship of men to feminism; it also hopes to provide insights into men’s attitude in respect of feminism. It asks how the positions of men implicated in feminism and of men more generally, in relation to gender equality and feminism, are to be understood. This masters’ thesis engages in the debate about the opinions of men and their involvement in feminist practices today through exploring and comparing the experience of men involved in feminist organisations and men who are not.

¹ Ambassador of the HeforShe campaign, Emma Watson pronounced these words on September 20, 2014. Her discourse had a huge impact on the media and the public opinion, bringing to light that feminism was a matter for women and men.

² The #MeToo² movement, and #BalanceTonPorc² (in France) were events contributing to breaking a taboo about the sexual harassment of women. The year 2017 and the beginning of 2018 were in fact rich in events regarding gender inequalities, sexual harassment, women’s oppression and inequality.

At the same time, it also debates what “men can offer to feminism and what feminism can offer men” (Tarrant), *i.e.*, how feminism is relevant to men.

Heath’s (1987) definition of feminism for instance relates it to a process of *becoming* a feminist, acknowledging that it is a “social-political reality, a struggle, and commitment” (HEATH 1987, p. 1). The question of men’s relationship to this cause became controversial in so far as the commitment to promoting gender equality in society had been largely that of women. Some scholars’ analyses, emanating from either men or women, discourage the presence of men in feminist groups, and claim the impossibility of their *being* feminist and indeed tend to reproduce domination in the internal dynamics of the group. For instance, according to Prof Stephen Heath, from the University of Cambridge, “women feminists are truly the ‘subjects’ of feminism, its initiators, its makers, its force” (HEATH 1987, p. 2). Men were then excluded from the ‘second wave’ of the feminist movement for gender equality. Since women are the ones oppressed by gender inequalities, men’s participation leads many to fear reproducing the macrosystem (patriarchy) in the microsystem (feminist groups). Fortunately, interest is growing again as regards the role of men in feminism and gender equality both from women’s and men’s perspectives. Some then claim that feminism is an impossible mission without men. Others, such as Sally Cline and Dale Spender depict a “cultural tendency to reflect men at twice their natural size” (CLINE & al., 1987 in BOJIN 2012) as we are living in a patriarchy of structured male privilege.

The aim of this research is not to analyse what feminism is *per se*, but rather to understand the complexity of the phenomenon that appears *a priori* against men. The difficulty of feminism is due not only to its polysemy but it is also due to the fact that it is multifaceted. The first challenge of feminism is to realign its struggle and awareness by facts; the second is to include men in the struggle.

Men’s engagement in feminism

« Les femmes sont capables de tout ce que nous faisons et les maintenir dans l’ignorance se retournera contre les hommes eux-mêmes » (Voltaire)

Nowadays, we can observe more and more men (for instance Barack Obama or Justin Trudeau) asserting to be feminist. The American actor Mark Ruffalo released an open letter in order to defend abortion rights. Before he passed away, Alain Rickmann said “ there is nothing wrong with being a feminist, I think it is in our mutual advantage”. But they are far from being the

only ones ; these men are and were not the sole to defend women's rights and gender equality. This assumption has begun to change and for a decade and researches proves that some men have, in fact, been part of the process since its very first beginnings. Indeed, this engagement in the feminist cause can be retraced at least since 17th-18th century. I deliberately retained three emblematic men names who got engaged in women's rights and inequalities, John. S. Mill, Nicolas de Condorcet, and Léon Richer.

It is important to comprehend how social and historical contexts had a profound impact on the evolution of the feminist movements because those elements constitute a first explanation of men's engagement. This section will try to map locations and episodes, although not exhaustive, with the focus on targeting the dynamic of these engagements: where can we place and locate feminist men in History? We will apply the temporality of the "three" institutionalized and well-known waves of feminism as recommended by Michael S. Kimmel (1992), bearing in mind that the involvement of men in feminist organisations has its temporality on its own, indeed, *per se* (Alban Jacquemart). The aim is not to isolate them from their principal origins (*i.e.* history of feminist movements), because men's engagement is not a separate movement; it has to be conceived as a certain intertwined continuity of feminism. Thus, by inserting them in these successive "waves" as feminism is historicised, we will be able to grasp the transformations, and to a certain extent, the true meaning of it and of men's engagement.

One of the most recent studies about this is one by Alban Jacquemart, a French lecturer in Political Sciences at the University Paris-Dauphine, who adopted a socio-historiographical approach and a long perspective so as to trace this improbable engagement and the evolution of the role of men in French feminist movements (JACQUEMART 2015) since the Third Republic until now. Though the aim of this research is not to explore the history of men in feminism, it is nonetheless important to realise that this commitment has crossed national borders in Western world (France, Britain, the USA, ...).

The first wave of feminism is rooted in the late 19th century and early 20th century. This period coincides with the Industrial Revolution and the socialist ideas that spread throughout the social classes including the labouring classes. This wave is characterized by the focus on women's suffrage, where a decisive event took place during the Seneca Falls Convention³ in the USA in July 1848 that gathered three hundred men and women (RAMPTON, 2015). In Great Britain, the

³ The first women's right Convention to discuss the condition and rights of women.

liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill was a precursor of women's rights and their condition arguing that the oppression of women remains a pattern of each society. *The Subjection of Women* published in 1869 advocates a perfect equality between male and female, outlines the necessary changes to be made especially in three major fields : society and gender construction⁴, education, and marriage. The opening paragraph illustrates from the outset his opinion :

“The object of this Essay is to explain as clearly as I am able grounds of an opinion which I have held from the very earliest period when I had formed any opinions at all on social political matters, and which, instead of being weakened or modified, has been constantly growing stronger by the progress reflection and the experience of life. That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other - is wrong itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.” (J.S Mill, 1869, Chapter I).

Mill served as a Member of the Parliament in Great Britain from 1865 to 1868 and became the very first to put women's suffrage on the agenda. His 1861 *Considerations on Representative Government* defends the idea of a universal (although gradual) suffrage, especially in Chapter VIII⁵. He claims that women have the same rights as men to vote in order not to be governed by individuals and politicians that do not represent them equally : “ men, as well as women, do not need political rights in order that they may govern, but in order that they may not be misgoverned”. But still, women's suffrage was supported both by men and women (JOHN AND EUSTANCE, 1997).

In France, attempts at the structuration of feminist movements can be noticed in those same years, be it associations or journals. Considered as the “the father of French feminism”, Leon Richer was a solicitor working in a notary office and published in 1850 « Lettres d'un libre penseur à un curé de village »⁶ in which he stipulates his convictions :

« [L]a femme est, au point de vue intellectuel, notre égale ; elle l'a prouvé toutes les fois où elle a été mise dans les conditions de le faire. Si elle est restée aussi longtemps notre inférieure, si, de nos jours encore, elle marche bien loin derrière nous, cela tient uniquement à ce qu'elle a été constamment tenue à l'écart de tout ce qui pouvait élargir son esprit » (RICHER 1868 in JACQUEMART 2015, p.60)

In 1869, he published the first edition of a journal, *Le Droit des femmes*, entirely focusing on women's moral, intellectual, and civic emancipation that gathered 16 men and 7 women (JACQUEMART 2015 p. 60). He congratulated himself on this initiative by claiming: « c'est la

⁴ This substantive is anachronic but describes best the progressist ideas of J.S. Mill at that time.

⁵ “All human beings have the same interest in good government; the welfare of all is alike affected by it, and they have equal need of a voice in it to secure their share of its benefits”.

⁶ “Letter from a freethinker to a village priest”.

première fois qu'en France, le droit de la femme est solennellement et publiquement affirmé ; c'est la première fois que des hommes et des femmes, appartenant aux diverses classes de la société, se sont groupés et entendus pour proclamer d'un commun accord, sans fausse honte, sans défaillance, à la face même du préjugé qui rit et qui raille, la nécessité d'arracher promptement la femme à toutes les servitudes qui pèsent sur elle – servitude du corps et servitude de l'intelligence ! » (*Le droit des femmes*, n°15, 17 juillet 1869 in JACQUEMART 2015, p.65).

Earlier on, Nicolas, Marquis de Condorcet, and author of *Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité* (1790), was a precursor of gender equality : «ou aucun individu de l'espèce humaine n'a de droits ou tous ont les mêmes» . This gender equality appears to him as an evidence and a requisite for the equality of rights (LÓPEZ PARDINA 2007, p.139) in the public arena. In 1790, he made a speech in the National Assembly calling for the recognition of the same rights for both sexes, and in doing so, extending citizenship to women. He pre-empted the opposition arguments with a spectacular counter attack :

« En prévision des objections possibles, selon lesquelles par exemple les femmes n'ont pas le sens de la justice, il affirme que ce sens s'acquiert grâce à l'éducation. À l'objection selon laquelle les fonctions publiques les éloigneraient des tâches que la nature semble leur avoir réservées (élever les enfants, s'occuper des maris), il soutient que ce n'est pas une raison pour leur refuser un droit, et, par conséquent, que cela ne peut être le fondement d'une exclusion. » (LÓPEZ PARDINA 2007, p.139).

The laws of September 1792 on secularisation and divorce constituted the Pandora's box for the traditionalists. The woman can chose her husband and divorce. The French Revolution turned the traditional world upside down: this period overthrew the gender hierarchy thanks to a political decision (MALBOIS 2002) and brought the sexual factor into politics. The French Revolution favoured women; it did not keep them as lifelong minors and recognised them as a legal entity, contrary to the *Ancien Regime*. At that time, women became human beings in their own right while, attaining and exercising their political and legal rights.

From the women's side, a French and feminist journal, *La Française*⁷, acknowledged many years later the achievement of Condorcet in these words : « jusqu'à ce jour [ce qui] a été obtenu pour la femme vient de lui » (*La Française*, n°11, 30 décembre 1906) and Simone de Beauvoir declared him the « le véritable fondateur du féminisme » (DE BEAUVOIR 1949, p. 205) 40 years

⁷ Or *Journal de progrès féminin*, is a journal directed by Jane Misme giving a national audience to the women suffrage.

later. Christine Delphy and other scholars investigated the link between women's social position and the feminist analysis of gender relations. She argued : « l'oppression est une conceptualisation possible d'une situation donnée; et cette conceptualisation ne peut provenir que d'un point de vue, c'est-à-dire d'une place précise dans cette condition: celle d'opprimée » (DELPHY 1998, p. 281). In this sense, the *stricto sensu* definition of feminism in its essence is the struggle, a way of rethinking society *by women for women and on behalf* of them (DELMAR, 1986). So, how is feminism understood by men? How has feminism changed men's perspective?

Research questions and aims: the study

I do not have any particular experience in feminist activism. This is precisely the origin of my idea in starting this research. It adopts a multidisciplinary approach. The added value of this research is its multidisciplinary approach. Political science did not really have a focus on this subject, therefore I have turned to look at literature produced in other disciplines and fields, *i.e.* sociology, gender theory, feminism theory, as well as altruism as a political action in social movement theory.

Male activism in feminism seems not only paradoxical but socially implausible. *A priori* these men get involved against an organizing system that are favorable to them. By struggling men are abandoning their privileges, *i.e.*, their power over women for a better political parity or an equal distribution of domestic work. This study hopes to contribute to enriching the debate, to a better understanding of the remaining points of resistances so as to deconstruct fears and received ideas about feminism and men's potential participation and support for the feminism cause. Hence, it is a question of taking into account the effects of feminism on men, how they perceive this cause and to what extent they say they endorse this cause and make it theirs.

The research question is the following : ***How do men (inside or outside a feminist organisation) understand feminism, introspect it, frame it in their daily lives and become actors for reshaping patriarchy ?***

This research hopes to be pertinent, original but above all to bring something new. By doing so, it intends to mingle both normative and descriptive discourses. Indeed, men were interviewed (cf. part II.) so to elaborating their understanding of feminism (and depicting

several types of it), why they feel rejected, why they are (or not) against it, with the intention of being a feminist or not. The originality of this master's thesis is to give voices to men engaged in a feminist organisation or not in respect of feminism from a men perspective.

Thesis structure

This master's thesis is divided into three parts. The first part presents the theoretical framework with respect to feminism throwing to lights its history, its challenges and its takes of this concept. It mobilises key concepts orbiting around it, and questions what being a man is through the gender and the masculinity lens and question if men involved in feminism (inside and outside an organisation) is altruism. Eventually, it goes into details to understand how a men can possibly be a feminist who ignores he is one. The second part presents the methodology mobilised to collect the data around the research question. Having interviewed 8 men, whose 4 of them are involved in a feminist organisation and whose 4 of them are not, I used the qualitative approach. The third and last part presents the analysis and the results. After briefly having presented the interviewees, I evaluated their self-reflection in the face the public debate of the recent events such as the #MeToo campaign. Then, it went to the questioning of feminism as a praxis and how feminism has impregnated interviewees's life in the private and professional spheres by personal convictions or not. The third point attempts to give a definition of feminism that start to be first exclusive, then inclusive; this inclusivity leads the analysis to evaluate if and how feminism is reshaping patriarchy.

PART I : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The simple and minimalist definition of feminism is given by bell hooks⁸ : “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (HOOKS 2000, p.viii). According to this, to what extent are men involved? The “Man Question” in this section interrogates and retraces the role of men as both objects and subjects in this movement. Accordingly, this section stems from debates about the engagement of men in feminism, and how far this cause can include (or not) the opposite sex. Some argue that men cannot participate⁹ whereas others argue that the association of men in feminism is an indispensable step for the success of the cause. The well-being of women is the aim of feminism. Women have largely contributed to putting gender issues on the social and political agenda. However, it remains true that men have actively supported this cause (KIMMEL & MOSMILLER 1992), mainly claiming the term of pro-feminist¹⁰ sympathy. Nonetheless, M. Messner, an American sociologist, underlines that this male activism “never got much beyond the level of a loosely connected national and international network of men, most of them academics and therapists” (MESSNER 1997 in MESSNER 2004, p.74).

Feminism : what’s in a name ?

This part aims to retrace historically the three waves of feminism, with the intention of preparing the ground for the reader, followed by an analysis of its definitions and its stakes. Feminism has changed throughout time as have its claims, and indeed, desiderata. This evolving cause provides a debate that still persists today, *i.e.* the impossibility of framing it in a single definition or classification. Nonetheless, its aims remains the same.

The three waves of feminism

Feminist movements emerged in the 20th century in Western countries. They are so diverse, so substantial that it is impossible to describe them faithful and accurately. Most feminist (women and men) came from the upper middle class, because they had the means and resources but more importantly, education. That is why some of them have been accused of elitism or lack of

⁸ Under her real name, Gloria Jean Watkins is a feminist and American writer who decided « bell hooks » as her pen name.

⁹ Participation should not be understood in this research as the participation in an association but rather a support in the cause

¹⁰ Pro-feminism means supporting the feminist cause but without being an effective member of the feminist movement or organizing.

realism; and this argument remains one of the main criticisms addressed to them by the working class women at home and by feminists of emerging countries.

Feminists of the first wave (1830s – early 1900s) had in common to struggle for equality between men and women (gender equality) and to fight against discrimination that women suffered from. This wave was also characterized by women's fight for equal contract and property rights. But very soon, the feminist movements added to their agenda a twofold purpose, dividing itself between an egalitarian and a dualist approach: “pour le premier courant, il faut se battre au nom de l'égalité entre tous les êtres humains; pour le second il faut revendiquer l'égalité dans la difference” (CRÉMIEU 2014, p.55). The latter included, among other things, specific laws for women (and mothers) regarding their jobs. This opposition remains today but we are here addressing universalist and differentialist approaches (CRÉMIEU 2014). The first wave of feminism had political consequences. Women started to protest to gain political power (i.e. the right to vote), but not only that. In parallel, most of these women were inspired by Evangelical Protestantism (in UK and in the USA) and were engaged in issues such as alcoholism, prostitution, and the abolition of slavery. For instance, when slavery was abolished in the USA in 1865, black men had the right to vote but not black any more than white women: this accelerated the rise of the feminist movement (CRÉMIEU 2014, p.56). By then, the seeds were planted: women had a political agenda which would contribute to changing society just as much as men, if not more. What did they demand? Among other aspects of subordination of women to men, their priorities were the right to education and the right to vote. Often taken for granted today, yet to obtain this right was hard work and a long struggle for women in those days. Ségolène Samouiller et Kareen Jabre highlight in *Le livre noir de la condition des femmes* (2006): “c'est leur nature même [des hommes] qui est symboliquement violente. Le droit de vote remet en effet en cause une des prérogatives essentielles des hommes: le monopole de la gestion de la cité” (SAMOUILLER & al. 2006, p.48). The right to vote was thus a matter for the *polis* (the city), to be managed by both men and women. Feminists demanded laws regarding marriage and inheritance as well as their eligibility to official positions. Between 1850s and 1950s, major evolutions took place, e.g. an overall generalisation of education in primary and high school for girls and the secularisation of this education.

The second wave took place between the 1960's and 1980's and mainly focused on the workplace, reproductive rights and sexuality. In our collective memory, this period is often considered offensive. A result of the aftermath of World War II was the strong come-back of the traditional ideal of the housewife, mother and spouse : “ en effet, dans les années d'après-

guerre, pour favoriser le retour à l'emploi des soldats démobilisés, les autorités prônent le retour des femmes à la maison et le taux d'activité de ces dernières reste stable ou baisse, le travail des femmes, qui existe depuis toujours, restant limité aux femmes seules et à celles des classes défavorisées" (CRÉMIEU 2014, p.62). Feminism was a social movement excluding men from its activism, and accepted and/or involved only women. This non-mixed *modus operandi* contributed to "negative connotations" of feminism, accused of 'mysandrim' and 'gynocentrism'. The 1960s were characterised by a new age class: the babyboomers. They are at the roots of anti-establishment protests. A lot remained to be done and feminism at that time continued to claim equal rights, such as sexual freedom, access to contraception and legalisation of abortion, and equality within marriage. "The personal is political" was one of the cult mottos of this movement. A record of articles, unique in its kind *Our bodies, ourselves* had a huge impact in the 1970's, while the feminine anatomy started to be studied, providing a great deal of information about anatomy, sexuality, rape, self-defense, maternity, menopause, etc. (CRÉMIEU 2014, p.62). This feminism was multiform. Debates between egalitarian (or universalist) feminists and differentialist feminists were reinforced, creating a schism between them. Opposition took place between liberal feminists clamouring for reforms and socialist feminists advocating revolution. Black feminism emerged from black American women suffering sexism, racism and poverty. The concept of intersectionality was then developed, that takes into account all the complex and multiple dimensions that an individual experiences. August 26th 1970 marked the beginning of the *Mouvement de libération des Femmes* (MLF) in France when a dozen women laid a wreath under the Arc de Triomphe for the Unknown Soldier's wife ("il y a plus inconnu que le soldat inconnu : sa femme"¹¹). A particularity of this movement is that they were not only helping themselves, but more broadly, all women, by creating family planning, feminine unions, cooperative kindergartens, etc. (CRÉMIEU 2014, p.64). This was an remarkable change in Western-European society and female employment rate increased. Moreover, they designed and promoted *Women Studies* as an discipline aiming at in-depth knowledge of the condition of women throughout History.

The 1980s were marked by the *backlash* of feminism in the USA. Feminism was a victim of its success in most developed countries: women thought that feminism had won and gave access to equal rights; but such was not the case! Here again, feminists are still divided in some debates, regarding the abolition of prostitution or in the legalizing of it (*pro-porn*), embodied in *King Kong Théorie* by Virginie Despentes in France. One of the successes of the feminist

¹¹ Someone is more unknown than the unknown soldier : his wife.

struggles nowadays is the creation of ministries or other structures in charge of improving women's rights, characterizing the advent of State feminism (CRÉMIEU 2014).

Having briefly retraced its history, one cannot deny that the feminist movements were present on all fronts, be it social, economic or political; however with the ultimate and common goal of reversing the patriarchal structures that are confined in each level of our society. I will now turn to the plurality of definitions.

Between women's emancipation and gender (in)equality

One of the crucial aspects of feminism is its heterogeneity of meaning. Feminism cannot be uniformly defined; we should, indeed, talk about feminisms¹² (let us name a few of these forms : liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, moderate feminism, universal vs differentialist feminism, black feminism, eco-feminism and so on). When the word 'feminism' appeared in France at the end of the 19th century, it was to designate the feminisation of men. Appearing in 1837 under the pen of utopian socialist Charles Fourier as a political need and not as a biological property, the fact of the matter is that feminism has been endowed with different meanings depending on its socio-historiographic footprint and the targets raised by women. Not all feminisms and feminists agreed upon its definition and more often than not, disagreed with each other¹³. Considered either as a doctrine, or a social movement, or a dogma, or a whim, feminism is a complex notion to comprehend: the more precise and framed we tried to define it, the more data we lose as well as variables and factors inherent to it; on the other hand, the less we try to fix it all in a single framework, the less we know what we are talking about. Consequently, representations of this movement change according to a historical focus. On the one hand, feminism has been a militant ideology in the name of which Olympe de Gouges and the suffragettes – to name but these, as well as men (John S. Mill, Léon Richer and Nicolas de Condorcet for instance) have struggled; on the other, it is (mis)understood and assimilated to groups of militant misandrist radicals.

However, it is now understood at least as a social movement that embodied ambiguities. The philosopher and essayist Françoise Collin highlights the complexity of feminism : « c'est un mouvement social et politique qui concerne la moitié de l'humanité, mais qui n'a ni fondateur ni fondatrice, ni doctrine référentielle, ni représentantes autorisées, ni parti, ni membres

¹² To simplify the language, we will nonetheless still use the singular term of feminism.

¹³ On its means, sometimes ends and the inclusion of men for instance

authentifiés par quelque carte, ni stratégies prédéterminées, ni territoire, ni représentation consensuelle [...] » (COLIN & KAUFER 2005, p.7). Hence, the task to define it seems not easy. Though its end is the emancipation of women¹⁴, its tools and the means of realising it are differently designed. That is why it is of crucial importance to bear in mind that feminism is not singular at all, with regard to place, epoch, and the theory it defends.

The very struggle of feminism nowadays (*i.e.* post-feminism), is the “man question” in its movement. Scholars and feminist have questioned to what extent men should be involved in the movement, if they should, why and how they should. Some authors agreed on this vision that feminism concerns both genders, whereas other strongly disagree. Feminist struggles shifted from a struggle of women, by women, for women to a plural movement that challenges diverse forms of domination (LOOTVOET 2015), be they ethnical, economic, political, etc.

“(…) en devenant féministe, c’est-à-dire en devenant sensible à toutes les discriminations, à tous les comportements, des plus subtils aux plus grossiers, qui dénoncent l’inégalité entre les sexes, les femmes allaient se heurter à des difficultés encore plus profondes que celles des militants noirs qui s’affrontaient aux problèmes du racisme. Car il est impossible de cerner la question du féminisme, de la mettre entre parenthèse, de la traiter comme une revendication annexe qui ne saurait affecter les autres problèmes. Le féminisme est partout et remet en question jusqu’à l’ordre de la nature. Il ne suffira plus de quelques réformes pour le satisfaire.” (GROULT 1977, p.182)

Valérie Lootvoet, director of the *Université des femmes* in Brussels outlines (LOOTVOET 2015) indispensable characteristics to understand feminism and its consistency: (1) the will to put an end to patriarchy and radically change man-woman relationships, and (2) fighting violence against women by non-violence.

Shira Tarrant is an American professor of gender politics, feminisms, masculinity, sexuality and pop culture. She is seen as an “unconventional feminist” because she tries to redefine gender rights. In her book and thesis, *Men and Feminism*, she defends the idea that feminism concerns men, and questions the dominant version of sexuality and masculinity that we, women and men, are surrounded with in our everyday life with media, TV-shows, advertisements, politics, and so on. She goes as far as declaring that feminism is a “(social) movement that seeks equality of opportunity for all people regardless of gender (...). It is a political perspective that

¹⁴ And still, the term emancipation remains vague...

uses gender to critically analyse power - who has it, who does not, who abuses it, and why.” (TARRANT 2009 p.3). So, feminism can be defined “as a way for women and men to do “social justice work while using a gender lens” (LABATON & LUNDY in TARRANT 2009 p.3) and points out discrepancies at multiple levels either in the public or the private sphere¹⁵.

The core of feminism is to advocate social justice, focusing on women’s interests and inequality *vis-à-vis* men. So women were the very first “subjects” of feminism. But the question remains how feminism can be conveyed to men so that men can ideologically support this cause, as Bojin accurately raised the question: “how can men contribute to “proposals for change” in meaningful, authentic ways which do not seek to dominate women’s inherent right to lead the feminist movement ?” (BOJIN 2012, p.9). While I have tried to bring into light the complexity of defining feminism, I shall nonetheless retain the definition that suits me best for this research, *i.e.* feminism is a philosophy that aims to reach gender equality and to figure out a world that is not dominated by patriarchy¹⁶.

Being a Man: what’s in a name?

Gender & Masculinity

“On ne naît pas femme, on le devient” (Simone de Beauvoir)¹⁷

By this deconstructionist statement, S. de Beauvoir expressed the sociological dimension of gender, and by extension, their identity. This approach will be adopted by other scholars (Ann Oakley, ...). Following what we have just developed, feminism is unavoidably intertwined with male power. This concept has been largely theorised and conceptualised by feminism and its theories.

“Jusqu’à une période récente, toutes les sociétés étaient convaincues que les caractéristiques, les aptitudes, et les goûts des individus étaient déterminés par leur sexe, qu’il existait une nature féminine et une nature masculine. Parler de genre c’est affirmer que ces caractéristiques sont

¹⁵ Indeed, some dramas take place behind the closed doors such as domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, likewise : unequal pay, racism, homophobia, restrictions on reproductive choices as well as in the public arena.

¹⁶ which “literally means ‘rule of the fathers’ and in Western culture comes from the Old Testament, where all power was given to male elders. Today, its meaning is more general: male domination of all the major institutions of society including government, religion, education, the economy, the military and the media” (KAUFMAN & al. 2011, 112).

¹⁷ “One is not born a woman but rather becomes, one”.

des constructions culturelles et sociales.” (CRÉMIEU 2014, p.66). Gender is thus a new theoretical concept that defines our sex (or us) depending on our social relationships, our social class and not our biologic essence. It is acquired, constructed, and taught through social institutions (school, friends, religion, family). Ann Oakley defines it as follows: “sex’ is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. ‘Gender’, however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’” (OAKLEY 1972 p.16). Gender became the sexual orientation rather than the biological sex. Militants all gather within the LGBT (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals) community. Nowadays, the term ‘gender’ is used to refer to the distinction between men and women in the Anglo-Saxon world, to stress the socially and constructed nature of the binary distinction; putting aside the term ‘sex’ still used in the French language¹⁸.

From my perspective, feminism covers three theoretical principles that specify why feminism is not just a social movement of women for women. The first principle is that (1) biological sex does not determine a person’s identity; that (2) feminism has to be understood also as a political movement and then (3) that it is a social and a political movement “concerned with the patterns of domination and the politics of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation” (TARRANT 2009 p.6). In its essence feminism is a movement *of* women, *by* women and *for* women and seems to be evolving. But still, we can ask where men fit in because there is plenty of room for them. One sort of feminism points out that masculinity and femininity are social constructs we learn and not what we were born with (TARRANT 2009). Paraphrasing de Beauvoir, one is thus not born feminist, rather, becomes one. Paradoxically, her essentialist philosophy may contradict her claim. It appears to me that feminism cannot gather just half of humanity just as machism has done hitherto. If feminism and feminist theories want to improve our current society, and achieve a touch of social justice, how can it be done without involving men in the movement...?

One of the claims that feminism makes is that sex does not define women as inferior humans, and consequently be allowed to restrain women to domestic or other unrewarding activities. Nor does it claim that men and women are the same : “if we think of feminism as something that women do or believe in, then we conflate feminism with women” (TARRANT 200, p. 16-17). Previously, essentialist theories assumed that our behavioural traits and our identity are inherent to our biological sex. Nowadays, nearly the entire society agrees that this thought is

¹⁸ in the usual sense

outdated, rather, that gender is even taken for granted (Tarrant 2009) and part of our daily routine. Nonetheless, is feminism not adopting the same essentialist point of view as the opponents it had challenged to change the mentality ? The question should be raised. As stated earlier, being a woman does not make one automatically a feminist. Feminism is not something one carries in one's genes, rather, it is a political (even philosophical and educational) way of thinking (Matthew Shepherd). Once one becomes feminism-conscious, one uses a particular lens that can help to understand the world (TARRANT 2009, p.15). Since gender roles are not rigid and set, they can be changed.

Nevertheless, some scholars, such as Diane Richardson, Professor of Sociology at Newcastle University, asserts that biology (sex) should not be disconnected from gender, and thus culture : “the body is not free from social interpretation, but is itself a socially constructed phenomenon. It is through understandings of gender that we interpret and establish meanings for bodily differences that are termed sexual difference” (Richardson, 2008, p.7).

Masculinity : a mirror of feminism's ambiguities

From the 1990's onwards, the emergence of studies about men and masculinities was correlated with a growing interest in men's relationships to feminism. Before masculinity became a field of study *per se*, it is important to be reminded of the sources of it : feminist critical theories, the school of critical thought and ethnographic studies. Shepherd emphasises that “the study of masculinity would never have come on to the agenda without the critical influence of feminism (and) worryingly, much of contemporary writing on 'masculinity' tries to repay very little of this debt of knowledge to feminism” (SHEPHERD, 1997, p. 120). The English sociologist H.J. Morgan published *Discovering men* in 1992 about men and their gendered individuality; he showed how scholars have studied and have been influenced by the feminist critique in analysing the social construction of masculinity (MORGAN, 1992). R.W Connell has also questioned the potential participation of men in feminist movements. Publications and research multiplied from the 2000's, defending not only the possibility but the necessity of their participation (JACQUEMART, 2015; CONNELL 1993). We usually distinguish between the complicit (men benefit from male domination without effectively taking part in it) and the subordinated masculinity (men are submitted to male domination, as are homosexuals for example) (LE MONDE SELON LES FEMMES 2017, p.21).

John Stoltenberg, a feminist radical activist¹⁹, and a member of the National Organization for Men against Sexism, wrote *Refusing to be a Man : Essays on Sex and Justice* in 2000²⁰. He founded *Men Can Stop Rape* in 1987, and *My strength is not for hurting* in 1997 addressing men directly (and young men in particular) to prevent sexual aggression. Masculinity is, according to him a determinant social construction that entrenches sex. Stoltenberg disagrees with Richardson and explains that biology does not matter (see below). Leo Thiers Vidal is a Belgian researcher who studied the social sex relation under the direction of Christine Delphy. His PhD (« De l'Ennemi Principal aux principaux ennemis: Position vécue, subjectivité et conscience masculines de domination ») illustrates how activist was against domestical violence against women and children. Thiers Vidal goes even further, postulating that this made-up masculinity is perpetuated through a necessarily aggressive sexuality : « les hommes développent un type de sexualité fondé sur la violence, l'humiliation, la pression, et le contrôle « afin d'avoir une masculinité », tandis que « sera ressenti comme sexuel/sensuel ce qui renforce l'identité masculine » (THIERS VIDAL, 2010, p. 54).

Raewyn Connell is a transgender Australian sociologist at the University of Sidney. She developed the social construction of masculinity (*Masculinity* 1995, 2005) and conceptualised hegemonic masculinity. Referring to Gramsci's writings that stress on the notion of hegemony as she defines masculinity as 'configurations of gender practice', or 'gender projects' (2005, p.72), correlated to her theory of gender relations that assumes that gender is not a matter of identity (micro) but rather a large-scale social construction. This relational understanding of masculinities is what we will retain in this research.

“Hegemonic masculinity is the way of being a man that is most ‘culturally exalted’ (2005, p.77) in any one place and time, and it serves to legitimise men’s dominance over women and the power of some groups of men over others. In its current form in Western cultures, hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual, white, and middle-class; gay men (and some heterosexual men) are subordinated in relation to it, and black and working-class men are marginalised by it.” (CONNELL 2005 in BAILY 2012 p.39-40).

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has been vigorously criticised (HEARN 2004, CONNELL and MESSERSCHMIDT, 2005, Beasley, 2008) identifying the structuralist foundations (WHITEHEAD 2002) in it and in feminist theories of patriarchy, while hegemonic masculinity is “never illuminated” (WHITEHEAD 2002, p.93 in BAILY 2012). Alongside this critique, Beasley

¹⁹ Leo Thiers Vidal defines radical feminism as « cette forme de féminisme qui, en particulier par sa focalisation sur toutes les formes de violences sexuelles – dont le viol, les agressions sexuelles, la pornographie et la prostitution – cherche à exposer et éliminer à la racine l'oppression dont l'origine se trouve dans la suprématie masculine et le genre hiérarchique » (THIERS VIDAL, 2010, p. 52).

²⁰ « Refuser d'être un homme : pour en finir avec la virilité », translated in French in 2013.

underlines the blurring of this concept, arguing that “there is a slippage between the meaning of hegemonic masculinity as a political mechanism for legitimating men’s domination of women, as a description of dominant forms of manhood, as a reference to actual groups of men, and as the specific characteristics or personality traits associated with those men” (BAILY 2012, p.40). But the most relevant critique of examining the construction of masculinities in this research is that of Hearn that questioned the semantics of masculinity itself, and that the term “men” should prevail. It includes examining different types of men and their practices, directly related to the potential power they exercise daily. The challenge here is to keep in mind the cultural factor of their conduct.

Connell replied that ‘masculinities’ should maybe just be reformulated. Thus ‘masculinities’, seems to be as controversial and evolving as its opposite, ‘feminism’ term. What the reader should be aware of is that hierarchical relations pre-exist and that they are constitutive of our society which is largely dominated by male patterns through ‘[c]ultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalisation, and the marginalisation or delegitimation of alternatives’, rather than force (BAILY 2012).

What we should retain here is that the term ‘masculinities’ must be redefined according to social evolutions. In a nutshell, masculinity essentially refers to the three following dimensions : (1) cultural representations and social practices correlated to “being a man”, (2) a certain ideology about what men *should* be, and (3) daily life practices of “being a man” and manners to express it (LE MONDE SELON LES FEMMES 2017, p.21). In this research project, the purpose is to investigate their awareness of their privileges of masculinities, or if those are considered non gendered and just framed in a cultural context by them (cf. Part III); I will try to show whether their practices reproduce or challenge traditional gendered relations.

The idea now is to explain how is it possible that men can be sensitive to the cause that is against them. This involvement has been analysed in sociology as altruism. The following section interrogates if this commitment and its understanding to feminism is altruistic or not.

An altruistic approach of the commitment to feminism

“Altruism is not . . . an agreeable ornament to social life,
but it will forever be its fundamental basis. How can we really dispense with it?”
Emile Durkheim

This study is also adding an extra variable to this participation in feminism: the notion of solidarity as employed in social movement studies will be mobilized in this section. In the social

interaction process, Florence Passy explains that individuals tend to re-evaluate their opinions about solidarity and their own participation accordingly. A solidarity movement is a sub-part of a social and political movement. What if feminism is a sign of solidarity, and altruism ? Though one can presuppose that solidarity connects the groups that share common interests or enjoy mutual recognition and support (BAYERTZ 1999, 17-19), others identify another form of solidarity (or altruism) “where one individual or group makes “the concerns of another person or group, which faces a special plight, its own” (RIPPE 1998, p. 357 in CROWE 2011; PASSY 1998). The participation of male in feminism falls between those two conceptions, and as Crowe underlines, the “full engagement with the feminist project therefore requires [men] to move beyond self-interest and treat the viewpoints and concerns of women as important in their own right” (CROWE 2011, p. 51).

One of the pioneers of this altruistic logic in social movements is Florence Passy, a lecturer in the Political Sciences Department at the University of Geneva. She wrote *L’action altruiste*, a book in which she explains this peculiar political commitment that regards a minority of groups mobilised in the defence of the other people’s interests. She develops a theory of commitment and integrates utilitarian and structuralist tools. In her view, altruist action is the result of several constraints : structural, cultural, the person’s perception of this political commitment, and especially opportunities that are given by sustained relations with sectors close to solidarity.

« Altruism takes on a political and collective form with the emergence of the solidarity movement. Individuals who are involved in this movement defend the interests, rights, and identities of others. (...) The acts of political mobilization by those in the movement do not serve their own interests. » « In contrast, participants in labor, civil rights, gay, women’s, ecology, and antinuclear movements—only to mention a few examples—obtain from their actions new collective goods or at least prevent new “collective bads,” to the extent, of course, that mobilization is successful. » (PASSY 2001)

Why do members mobilise, and contribute to the public good when it is not in their interests, and will not receive the benefit of their involvement ? Passy calls this “the participation paradox” : “the provision of public goods that can be used by the people who pay for them is less puzzling than the provision of public goods that are never to be used by the people who pay for them” (PASSY, 1998, p. 455). In our case, this is really interesting as men’s participation will not *a priori* bring them any benefit. In her case study (the Swiss Third World Solidarity organisation, the “Déclaration de Berne”²¹), Passy analyses these altruists with two

²¹ The DB is an organisation that has been working with international and economic decision-makers about global inequalities since 1968.

elements: (1) an integration of rational choice theory and research in social networks and symbolic interactionism in a theoretical “model”, (2) and identity theory. The former proved to be inadequate²² and assumes that the latter might explain the phenomenon because rational choice is lacking in taking into account the individual differences; so, the interest an individual may have in the mobilisation in public welfare will be taken for granted, and not as a given.

So why are people more interested in one cause rather than another? The answer is: the socialisation that is a variable, never ending, process (Passy). In our case, we will try to evaluate how feminist sensitisation was “weighted”, influenced by this process, *i.e.* the social network (cf. Part III). One first step in the explanation is that participation is mainly beyond the control of the individual : being “born and raised” in a specific social environment and a second is being surrounded by other individuals that share the same interest once you enter the political organisation. These two elements are mutual reinforcements and intertwined with each other : “together, the socio-cultural and relational context determine whether an actor comes to face the decision whether or not to participate” (PASSY, 1998, p. 455-456). The last step is the most important one : the decision to participate (or not) and to what degree. *A priori* perceived as a purely rational and sensible choice, it is very finely analysed by Passy that the perceived efficacy (by the individual) is *a fortiori*, the key variable to this participation correlatively with the social environment. So how can identities be modelled ?

Though the life-organisation of participants is not what I will be dealing with, it is however part of identity theory as the individual structures himself through alterity and reciprocity. At this point, ideas from the social identity theory come in. The social identity theory brings out the psychological processes that are implied in social change. Social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept derived from his or her membership in some social group, along with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (TAJFEL, 1981 in BURN & al 2000, p. 1082). Psycho-sociologists point out that empathy and moral reasoning are core values and characteristics of altruism (PILIAVIN & CHARNG 1990, in PASSY 2001). In this work, I retain the motivational approach definition of altruism as “ a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare” (BASTON & SHAW 1991, p. 108) rather than the behaviourist one that stress the do’s of the individual without taking into account his/her motivation, indeed,

²² The first explanation is tautological because “people contribute to public goods because they want to feel good or avoid feelings of guilt”, and the second because the social environment of the “altruists” is not animated by rational choice incentives.

his/her incentives. In my study, of why men devote themselves to, or incur costs for, women's welfare, we will try to apply Charles Tilly intentions' explanations on the table below:

| | | Harm or Benefit to Other | | |
|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|---|-------------|
| | | -1 | 0 | +1 |
| Harm or Benefit to Actor | +1 | EGOISM | | COOPERATION |
| | 0 | | | |
| | -1 | DESTRUCTION | | ALTRUISM |

Fig1. Individual choices among Harm and Benefit for Actor and Other

The table assumes that the individual makes a personal binary choice (yes/no) anticipatively and rationally in weighing the pros and cons. Tilly seems to posit individual choice as an *ex ante* act while some rationalists (Hardin 1995, Shubik 1993) would emphasise egoistic incentives; indeed, self-preservation (Clutton-Brock & al 1999). Tilly asks : “what differentiates situations in which a given actor (a) gains benefits while another actor sustains harm (egoism), (b) gains benefit while another actor likewise gains benefits (cooperation), (c) sustains harm while another actors gains benefits (altruism) ?” (TILLY, eds. PASSY 2001, p. 28). It is impossible to give a simplistic answer regarding our reading grid as it is a matter of relational and contextualised-framed process.

Shawn Meghan Burn, Roger Aboud and Carey Moyle from California Polytechnic State University carried out a study in 2000 on 276 University students applying social identity theory to feminist consciousness and activism. They assume “people may agree with the goals of the movement, but may avoid labeling themselves as feminists for fear of being associated with this socially stigmatized label” (BURN & al 2000, p. 1081, BREINLINGER & KELLY, 1994; BUSCHMAN & LENART, 1996; JACOBSON, 1981). In her research Burn suggests that the gender concept is part of the social identity that women are proud of “while simultaneously triggering backlashes from men against these efforts” (BURN & al 2000).

“This may occur because awareness of women’s gender pride and of gender equality efforts may increase the salience of males’ sex-category membership and contribute to an in-group–out-group dynamic (us–them enemy perceptions).” (BURN & al 2000)

Their results demonstrate that participants were more willing to agree with feminist ideas than qualifying themselves as feminist. The question is to see if, more than a decade later, this can still be applied to men. This will be analysed in part III.

To be or not to be a man and a feminist : from the ‘no’ to the ‘yes’

Should the question be : how to interest men in feminism ? One of the barriers to the engagement of men in gender equality is the fear of losing male privileges (Meuser) and this ‘danger’ “ may lead to high pressure towards conformity and passivity among men and against men’s involvement in gender equality issues” (SCAMBOR, WOJNICKA, & BERGMANN, 2013 in BERGMAN & al. 2014). The challenge is to show the male benefits of gender equality for men and to convince them that this ‘resignation’ is actually win-win for both parties, men and women, and “worth the risk” (BERGMAN & al. 2014).

Generally, few men express acceptance of feminism: instead, many men express a reticence and/or a lack of interest feminist ideas and movements because of the danger of losing their normalised²³ privilege. For a man to engage in feminism is difficult, because feminism is *a fortiori* not about them. Victim of its success and generalisation feminism varied historically and culturally (OFFEN, 1988 in BAILY 2012) and its contours are still debated: “the question of who is “inside” or “outside” feminism will never be settled once and for all: such definitions remain a matter for concrete political debate” (MOI 1989, pp.182-83 in BAILY 2012 p.23). Hence, feminism is either a political and social movement that concerns only women (cf. the introduction, the definition of Delmar) or it encompasses everybody and feminism is then a social and political movement aiming at putting an end to the subordination of women (TARRANT 2009) and promoting women’s interests. Indeed, as dialectical logic teaches us, the existence of a thing, of a phenomenon depends on its opposite: “asserting the existence of a thing also asserts the existence of its opposite”. So feminism had always dealt with men and the male-female relationships and what “to do about men” in their struggle.

So, how can men support the feminist project? This very practical question is a question raised by Jonathan Crowe, professor of Law at Bond University in Australia. Two challenges may

²³ So normalised and insitutionalised that they cannot even enumerate one they should be dispossessed of.

face men who are engaging with feminist concerns. First, the discourse may seem alien since it does not deal with their concerns and men (may) rapidly conclude feminism is about opposing them (CROWE 2011). Consequently, “in order to engage with feminism on its own terms, men must learn to *be for others*; they must enter into a discourse that exists primarily to advance the interests and hear the voices of a group to which they do not belong” (CROWE 2008a; CROWE 2008b, in CROWE 2011 p.50). The second challenge is the feeling of being blamed. Deliberately or not, men – and to some extent, women – are perpetuating the patriarchy and the oppression of women from the most invisible acts to the worst ones. It will continue until they grasp their responsibility in changing, and/or in engaging the feminist project. He pursues:

“The crucial point is that men can choose what side of this struggle they are on. They can order their individual actions to either endorse or, as far as possible, combat the patriarchal social order. The myth that feminism is against men encourages them to shirk this responsibility, by making it seem there is nothing constructive they can do to support the feminist project. On the contrary: there are things that each man can do to help advance feminism. And, at this individual level, each person is only to blame to the extent that she or he fails to act.” (CROWE, 2011, p.50)

But, it should not stop there. Assuming that only women can be feminists relies on the essentialist approach as predetermining a role to women and another to men in our (patriarchal) society. Just being a woman does not make a person a feminist; *ipso facto* being a man does not automatically defines him a macho. Matthew Shepherd, an English professor at the University of Sheffield attempts to demonstrate the contribution of men to feminism theoretically and daily by rethinking the notions of masculinity, and claims that says: “feminism cuts across sex” (SHEPHERD, 1998).

This is not about me

Faced with a cause that appears against you and your privileges demands that certain barriers be overcome (see 1.3). These barriers are mainly men themselves in order to achieve social justice. Does feminism need to be deconstructed, indeed, reshaped that men can demystify it, or understand it, or making it more concrete and specific ? The first barrier of this feminist identity paradigm is rooted only in female experience (see HEATH 1987, KIMMEL 1992, STANLEY & WISE 1993, LETHERBY 2003 in BAILY 2012). BRIGHT Magazine is a digital journal promoting editorial independence on certain topics such as health, education and social impact; Bisi Alimi, a male journalist, wrote in their columns that men *cannot* be feminists, but rather *allies* (by qualifying these men as “femally”) of the movement: “I come from the school of thought that feminism is a lived experience. If you have not lived a day in the shoes of a woman (or

a trans woman), you cannot label yourself a feminist (...)" (BRIGHT MAG 2017, online). On the other hand, rather than using the term "ally", bell hooks suggests that men are "women's comrades in struggle". Alimi bases his argument on making a parallel with race-ethnicity and the sexual orientation:

"A white person who stands against racial injustice cannot call themselves "black." A straight person who allies with LGBT people wouldn't say they are "LGBT." Likewise, I do not believe that men can suddenly take on and understand fully the issues that women face. I believe that every man is a sexist. Every man has the potential to make remarks that are sexist, express opinion that put women at a disadvantage, or act with inappropriate force. They may not mean to do so, as it's (sic) a form of unconscious bias. Unconscious bias also means that every white person is, to a degree, racist and every straight person is at least a bit homophobic." (BRIGHT MAG 2017, online)

In his opinion being a feminist means to embody this lived experience: "if you have not personally been cat-called, victim-blamed, or made to feel uncomfortable at your job because of your gender identity, then you have no legitimate right to call yourself a feminist". This point of view would require a separation of our gender categories within which the shared living experiences of women and men are not questioned by each other. By doing so : I could no longer continue this research because I am not a man and I might be incapable of analyzing their experience of men and feminism. The question is : do we need to live, to crystallize an injustice in order to remove it ?

But men are not the only ones who think feminism is not about them. Christine Delphy is a French sociologist who was the co-founder of Mouvement de Libération des Femmes²⁴ and of the journal *Nouvelles Questions féministes*²⁵ that she co-edited with Simone de Beauvoir. We owe her the famous quote "Je ne suis pas une féministe, mais ..." ²⁶ and her theory about domestic work as a distinct mode of production of capitalism. To her, the (gender) mixity biases the definition, the political objectives and the description of the oppressed (DELPHY 1977 in AROMATARIO 2016). It is paramount that the subjects of the oppression express *by* themselves and *for* themselves, out of range of those who dominate. Indeed, for her, the dominant male can neither understand nor hear the voice of the oppressed. It is the women's responsibility to organize their resistance and to elaborate their reflection (AROMATARIO 2016, p.8). The Second wave of feminism (1960's – 1990's) retrieved this argument. The period is characterized by the growing self-consciousness of minority groups around the world and the self-determination of

²⁴ The Women's Liberation Movement is a French and non-mixed feminist movement that calls patriarchy into question. It was created around the end of 1960's and the beginning of 1970's.

²⁵ New Feminist Issues

²⁶ "I am no feminist, but ..." was the documentary's film on her life

ex-Western colonies. Nonetheless, this principle expanded into every social space and social class, taking individuality into account. The characteristic of the Second Wave is that it “drew in women of color and developing nations, seeking sisterhood and solidarity and claiming ‘women’s struggle as class struggle’ ” (RAMPTON, 2008, p.8).

Alongside this idea, Simone de Beauvoir had already pushed the argument a step further in her philosophical essay *The Second Sex* (1949) because of the intrinsic essence of the difference between men and women. One should not deny that this idea was a blessing and that it was at the origin of the so-called second wave of feminists separatist. S. de Beauvoir was the precursor of existentialist feminism and unwittingly the pioneer of the construction of the gender paradigm (MALBOIS 2002). The very well-known assertion “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” is at the core of this, emphasizing that women should go beyond, indeed, transcend their personal situation and should choose economic, personal and social freedom (Tarrant). Working outside the home was the first guarantee and condition of independence for a woman. Women would and could only define themselves when they got rid of the masculine perspective on their own perspectives. Including men in the struggle would reinforce the values of patriarchy in this peculiar space that women have long struggled to build on :

“That penetration is often looked upon with suspicion: it can be taken to be yet another interruption, a more or less illegal act of breaking and entering, entering and breaking, for which those men must finally be held to account. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked by those men, with them, for them, is, to what extent is their irruption (penetration and interruption) justified; is it of any political use to feminism; the related but I hope distinct question, to what extent is it wanted? (SMITH 2013 p. 33-34)

As it is underlined, many feminists are sceptical about the real involvement of men in feminism, and this perception is variable (BERGMAN & al 2014): the possible work in partnership of men and women thus fluctuates over time. Feminism appears to be about and for women, and thus appears to be necessarily against men’s interests. Jonathan Crowe develops the argument that its realisation would “certainly deprive men of specific privileges they have historically enjoyed by virtue of their gender” (CROWE 2011, p.51). For a century, privileges (or rights?) such as voting, or being democratically elected, having access to public office and the integration of women in the labour market are instances of this loss of privileges. Katarzyna Wojnicka, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Gothenburg has published books and scientific articles on masculinities, feminism, and men’s social movements. In the article she published in 2011, she argued that men’s reluctance (such as the father’s right²⁷) was due to the belief that feminism

²⁷ Groups who believe that men and boys are disadvantaged by existing institutions or policies.

“had gone too far, resulting in structural disadvantages for men in general” (WOJNICKA, 2011 in BERGMAN & al 2014, p. 67). For others scholars, the reason for men’s resistance seems clear : “the material benefits provided by the patriarchal dividend, the ideological belief in male supremacy, the deeply embedded psychological fear of change and the resentment by those men who seem not to have benefited from the patriarchal dividend”. (CONNELL 2003, p.10)

On the other hand, many feminist organisations have stressed that the role of men in feminism is paramount. This is the case for instance of *AWSA-Be*²⁸, a Belgian feminist and secular association of women and men. Lately in 2017, it published a pedagogical guide “Moi, homme féministe du monde arabe : la place des hommes dans les mouvements féministes du monde arabe”²⁹, listing the importance of the behavior, and crucial ideas (or stereotypes) that men should and can change and adopt in order to reach gender equality, wherever men are. The motto of the association is that feminism is a struggle of every person regardless his or her culture, race, ethnicity, religion : “il ne faut pas être homosexuel pour lutter contre l’homophobie, il ne faut pas être étranger pour lutter contre le racisme et non, il ne faut pas être une femme pour lutter contre le sexisme et le patriarcat” (AWSA-BE 2017, p.6). The interests and approaches described below are developed to demonstrate that feminism is not only a political activity but that it is a manner and a matter of being.

It is in my interest too

What men do either in private or public life is not commonly seen either as gendered or political, “or about making gender relations and gender divisions more or less equal or unequal” (EGEBERG HOLMGREN & HEARN 2009). Indeed, it is not even perceived as a “political activity”, those actions just happen and are not related to gender inequality, so they are not even *gender conscious* (Egeberg Holmgren) about the way men may reproduce inequality, as it is strongly embodied in our everyday life, be it in the economic, social, cultural or legal spheres. It is so equated and normalized. However, it is not an absolute truth: there are men that are *gender conscious*. This relationship of men to gender equality is depicted by Michael Messner, an American sociologist of gender. He proposed to map their gender-consciousness. Briefly, he strongly believes that supporting the feminist movement and putting an end to sexism is in the best interest of men. In his triangle model, the first corner of the triangle is the institutionalized acknowledgment, indeed the recognition, by men and the opposition to this situation, and thus

²⁸ An in-depth description of the association is to be found under part II. 2.3.

²⁹ “I, a male feminist in the Arab world : men’s place/role in feminist movements in the Arab world”.

their gender-consciousness of men towards feminism; the second corner is the recognition of the 'costs of masculinity' (the idea that men are actually also living a tough situation that needs some changes, such as men's and fathers' rights) and the third is the recognition of the differences between and inequalities among men³⁰. Despite the fact that the model produces a less nuanced analysis and not a continuum (see below), it points out complexity, contradictions, and ambiguities of positions³¹ and motivations of men "en particulier lorsque l'on pense à la question des différences/inégalités et aux nombreux types *différents* de différences, d'inégalités et de positions « intermédiaires » parmi les hommes dans les différentes sociétés. Ce modèle souligne l'impossibilité de réduire les politiques de genre à une dimension « gauche/droite »" (REYMNANTS & al 2007, p.19). And this allows political openness to many gender policies, on work, family, sexual relations, for instance. Moreover, Messner supports a position in the middle of the triangle "where different organisations' policies and ideologies can meet (REYMNANTS & al 2007, p.19).

Messner strongly contributed to the development of "man and masculinity" as an academic discipline, *i.e.* how male privileges, be they political, economic or cultural, are part and parcel of American society. Messner asks, in "On Patriarchs and Losers: Rethinking Men's Interests" (2004) if there is effectively or not an interest and a role for men in feminism; and according to him there is an interest for everyone, female and male : " it also creates opportunities (...) to rearticulate their interests" (MESSNER 2004, p. 87). What is really interesting in Messner's analysis is that men's interests as such cannot be reduced to a rational deduction or a calculation of cost and benefits. Men do not have strictly objective interests as they are human, moved by emotions, norms, socialization; rather, they "formulate" them because it is the result of a social and institutional discourse produced in a context in which they are tributary and producers of these discourses.

³⁰ It exists gender-linked « masculine activities » that highlight the differences between men in terms of sexuality, race, religion.

³¹ Of course, these different positions can be embodied by men as individuals, or a group of men, organisations or governments.

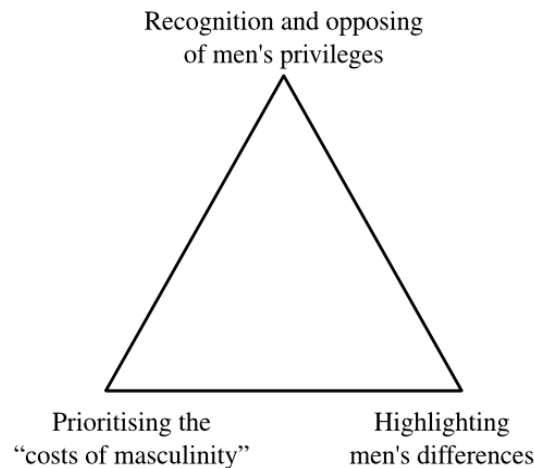


Fig 2. The triangle (adapted from Messner 1997)

Messner theorises and argues that those men “who support feminism, who support gays and lesbians as straight people, who support people of color as white people” make a positive and political statement (MESSNER 2000, p.102 in BERGMAN & al 2014). This positive and altruistic involvement will be developed below, but it is interesting to comprehend how an interpenetration of individuals, independently of their ethnic origins, sexual orientation, etc. demands of them that they are able to step outside of what they know and experience. It can lead to a certain equilibrium, and maybe, social justice :

Today’s shifting gender regimes of social institutions – especially those that encourage boys and men to interact with girls and women in ways that foster respect and empathy – can provide an emotional foundation for *a dis-identification* with the narrow interests of dominant men and a commitment to take action with girls, women and other men who are interested in building a more equitable and just world. (MESSNER 2004, p. 87)

It follows that men must become aware of and affirm that “I [a man] am not where they [women] are” (HEATH 1987, p. 1). Nonetheless, this position may be twofold : either you adopt a certain modest and humble attitude, or you consider – again- yourself as dominant and thus reinforce men’s domination over women.

Continuum

The 2007 report of the Belgian *Institut pour l’égalité des femmes et des hommes* establishes this continuum as another interest that men might have in gender equality. It illustrates this is as a continuity between men who actively defend gender equality, men theoretically in favour of it but passively men who do not feel involved in it, and men hostile to it. So, the attitude of men

to feminism varies according to this continuum starting from frank hostility, developing into a moderate hostility and a vague interest (REYMANANTS & al 2007; EGEBERG HOLMGREN & HEARN 2009), arguing that gender equality and/or feminism are obsolete issues, eventually leading to a really organized or convinced (pro-)feminism. This approach suggests that we look at the evolving interest of men in feminism on a Right/Left wing axis. Indeed, men can be openly hostile to feminist ideas, whereas other men would adopt a neutral position of ignorance (“I do not know what this is really about”). And according to G. Reymenants³² this argument of ignorance is undoubtedly the most predominant among men: they will be enthusiastic about political programmes implementing gender equality for women to obtain more privileges (or rights?) and advantages (REYMANANTS & al 2007, p.18-20), yet without effectively, practically, changing their everyday behaviour/attitude towards women in order to create a new social harmony.

This idea is illustrated by a famous Swedish and Norwegian survey during the 1980’s that established “a third of men as traditional and hostile to gender equality, a third in favour of gender equality and in some way active in their lives, and a third ‘in principle’ in favour but passive and unaffected” (EGEBERG HOLMGREN & HEARN 2009, p. 405). This illustration is also mentioned in the 2007 report. It is worthwhile noting that it is indeed a 1980 survey and that it will be, in contrast, very interesting to see if there is any evolution of these responses between the 2007-2009 period and today. The argument of ignorance -mentioned in the Belgian report- will, however, be nuanced in my analysis (see part III.) : men tend to adopt a definition of feminism or, at least have an idea of it, by defining it in relation to themselves. Indeed, the weakness of this continuum is in reflecting plural dimensions. On the one hand, men can be pro or anti gender equality regarding the benefits for women, but on the other hand, they can be pro or anti gender equality regarding the benefits for men (EGEBERG HOLMGREN & HEARN 2009); and that men would be interested “in gaining more for themselves than in general moves to societal gender equality, with ‘gender equality’ agendas appearing to offer opportunities to benefit men, without much concern for women” (EGEBERG HOLMGREN & HEARN 2009, p. 405). This disposition will also be analysed in Part III. It cannot be contested that one learns a lot from placing oneself in another person’s shoes; yet, the lived experience is still imperfect and incomplete.

³² Main authors of the report “Les hommes et l’égalité” from the *Institut pour l’égalité des femmes et des hommes* in Belgium.

In this respect, men certainly have something to lose from the feminist project as well as much to gain. Besides the promise of mutual respect and equality-based relationships, feminism promises an opportunity to challenge traditional conceptions of social roles in society adopted by men and women : “the task of pursuing such a rich and vibrant social environment, along with the fulfilment that may be gained from genuinely equal relationships, is surely inspiring as well as right” (CROWE 2011, p. 51).

Another element to mention is how men feel concerned about *women's inferiority* when it concerns their acquaintances. During my literature review and interview process, the degree to which men claim to be in favour of feminist issues with respect to the women of their acquaintance was worth noting. Men usually realise women's oppression when exemplified by a woman they are close to (mother, sister, daughter). Bisi Alimi perfectly explained it : “to be [a feminist], you have to see beyond those women with whom you are close (i.e., don't just stand up for your daughter) and recognize that *every* woman is a human with equal worth” (BRIGHT MAG 2017, online). Shira Tarrant supports this argument that men's participation in feminism is not an extra channel for “protecting our women” (TARRANT 2009, p.17); it is not for chivalry. Conversely, it will perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Thus, men are inevitably involved with (the future) of feminism : “ it promises them richer and more fulfilling relationships with women, children and each other” (KIMMEL 1998, p.59). As Michael Kimmel puts it, feminism ‘takes as its starting point that gender relations are constructed in a field of power’ (1998, p. 63).

Chapter conclusion

This first section went into details about the theoretical concepts that needed to be mobilised and defined for the research, and in reflecting the interests and discordances of feminism, masculinity and the potential involvement, but above all, understanding of men in such a cause. I explored the limits and the benefits of men *being* a feminist and how they can contribute to changing the imbalances in losing their “sacrosanct” and timeless privileges. Altruistic behaviour and the social intent help the reader to understand this change of attitude of men ready to reach a better (but not perfect) equilibrium between men and women.

I tried to demonstrate that feminism, as well as masculinity, need constantly to be redefined, so that they can be as inclusive as possible. Indeed, masculinity and feminism need (new) methodological and theoretical tools to be reinvented outside the relation of power ratio “as soon as we do not consider this relation as a fatality” (CORBIÈRE & al. 2005, p. 353 in JACQUEMART, 2015, p. 42). Feminism should be understood not as a social and political movement but above all a philosophy that tries to reach social harmony by struggling against the economic, legal and also behavioural disparities that mostly affect women.

As Crowe underlines, “perhaps the only real way for men to expand their knowledge and understanding of feminist issues and concerns is to cultivate close, trusting and respectful relationships with women. In this way, men may be privileged to gain a certain level of access to female perspectives” (CROWE, 2011, p.51). This is what this research will try to analyse and demonstrate in its third part.

Part II : Methodological Framework

Nagy Hesse-Biber is a professor of Sociology and the Director of the Women's Studies Program at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts and her focuses include "women and body image, qualitative research methods, mixed research methods, feminist pedagogy and methodology" (online). She stresses an important point that researchers must be aware of during their field study : "as grappling with their social biography and its role in the research process, they find that ideological and personal beliefs muddy the water of knowledge production" (HESSE-BIBER 2012, p. 561). Hence, I had to adopt, like the interviewee, by the way, a self-reflexive position and; I also had to be aware of the implications this research might have. Furthermore, the feminist approach has an "excavating role" (Online interview, Sage Publications, 2009) in a sense that it digs and bring to light new knowledge that was yet conceptualised.

Moreover, Hesse-Biber addresses a second element of feminist research *i.e.* that the positionality is the "recognition of (the) shifting nature of power relations from site to site" (HESSE-BIBER 2012, p. 563). Hesse-Biber does not give concrete tools of the feminist methodology. Nonetheless, as a female researcher, I have to say that the power relationship with my research participants appeared to be *a posteriori* well-balanced. This is perhaps partly a result of their commitment to gender equality for ones, and simply respect and politeness for the whole group of interviewees. Nonetheless, their responses may have differed had they been interviewed by a man.

May I say here that I have not yet come to a clear and well-defined opinion about men's engagement, but understanding feminism above all as feminism is intertwined with many different concepts and targets. In addition, as Kate Bojin well described it, I had the same feeling as she had of being "caught in the middle" as my research is focusing on the experiences of men regarding feminism. Leyland clearly explains this mixed feeling "and the confusion of being a woman feminist taking on masculinity studies while feeling as if she has abandoned feminism" (LEYLAND 1983 found in BOJIN 2012, p.20). Nonetheless, I firmly believe this focus on men (as non involed feminist or not) is an important investigation "as they inherently have institutional privilege (*sic*) as men, but can also utilise this privilege (*sic*) to promote a women's rights agenda" (BOJIN 2012, p.20).

Selection of cases and recruitments participation

I decided to focus my research on two sample groups: the first one is composed of 4 men individuals effectively working (full-time employee or volunteer) in a feminist organisation while the second one, also composed of 4 men individuals, is not. This was meant to be diversified in order to shed light on different perspectives and to obtain a complete understanding of my case study, *i.e.* their self-reflection as men with regard to feminism.

Men having experience in pro-feminist organisation are not numerous in Belgium. Consequently, I recruited participants according to the following restricted criteria: the participant is identified as a man currently working in the field of feminism, gender justice and/or gender equality³³. The table below sets out the distribution of those interviewed according to the feminist organising, the total exceeding 10 because of the multi-membership of some militants.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| AWSA-BE | 2 |
| Le Monde Selon Les Femmes | 2 |

Fig. 3. Number of men interviewed according the organisation they are involved in

Recruiting participants fulfilling these criteria, *i.e.* having experience in working/volunteering with feminist organisations, was not an easy task, and indeed, a challenging one. I screened as much as possible “staff members” of feminist organisations and then discovered *Le monde selon les femmes*, within which Castor was working. Then and thanks to word of mouth, I obtained the contact details of Polux, Minos and Palemon. I mailed them a brief presentation of my thesis proposal asking if they would accept to be interviewed. Face-to-face interviews were scheduled between January and March 2018. I created a set of opened questions, but I realised that questions could change, or be added during the interviews to gain clarification. It was clear to me that I had to apply a conversational approach to my interviews (see below) in order to establish a confident relationship. None of my interviewees had the questionnaire beforehand.

³³ Such as population and demography, (anti-)violence, sexual and reproductive health, health, education, development, economic justice, etc.

To start with, I explored their personal and professional experience in (pro-)feminist organisations, these being based in Brussels (Belgium). They work as full-time employees or as volunteers within the non-profit sector dedicated to women's right issues. Since I was not studying the structure *per se* and the impact of men on its activism, I did not make any difference between associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or auto-financed associations, or even structures composed of volunteers only. As a matter of fact, it is worthwhile underlining that this research project explores their opinions as individual men and not as representatives of the organisations. Nonetheless, a brief presentation of their organisation will be mentioned to illustrate the policy of the organisations in which these men are involved in, with a view to shedding light on how participants' perceptions match those of the organisations. But the reader's attention is again drawn to the fact that "mixed" feminist associations lack visibility in Belgium; therefore, my selection of cases was restricted. After getting in touch with several associations, *Le monde selon les femmes* and *AWSA-Be* were among those who responded.

Le monde selon les femmes

This 23-year-old feminist NGO is active mainly in the development and permanent education sector. Its vision is "celle d'un monde où l'on aurait transformé les rapports de domination entre les femmes et les hommes et entre le Nord et le Sud en relations construites sur l'égalité et la solidarité » (mondefemmes.be, online). Making no difference between North and the South, *Le monde selon les femmes* addresses any institutions or individuals likely to play a key role in either in the market or the non-market sector. Initially, its activities mainly consisted in regular meetings between women working in the cooperation sector in order to exchange views about the visibility of women in NGOs and in cooperation projects in which they were in insufficient numbers. Today, it offers training and seminars for diverse organisations. In addition, it carries out research into health, sexual rights and reproductive rights, sustainable development, etc.

AWSA-Be

AWSA-Be, the Arab Women's Solidarity Association composed of men and women of Arab, Belgian and other origins was founded in 2006. *AWSA-Be* "is a feminist, secular and mixed association which takes action for the promotion of rights of women from the Arab world, whether they are living in their country of origin or elsewhere" (awsa.be, online). *AWSA-Be* is

“a mixed secular association which promotes the rights of Arab women, whether they are living in their country of origin or elsewhere. The association has no national, political or religious affiliation” (awsa.be, online). The association is not affiliated to any form of national, political or religious ideology and was created according to AWSA International which was founded in 1982 in Egypt. The association further “supports the liberation of women from any political, social, economic or religious domination” (awsa.be, online) throughout pedagogical tools and workshops. The main goals are (1) to encourage intercultural exchanges, (2) to promote the rights of women from the Arab world and (3) to encourage their emancipation and to improve their image (awsa.be, online) through their participation in several international and national projects, cultural events or festivals that promote peace, equality and gender justice. In so doing, they “suggest a large range of regular and continuous activities in which women and men can participate: conferences, training, events supporting Arab artists, solidarity events, Arabic language lessons, a choir and many more” (awsa.be, online).

Interviews

Interviews played a key part in perceiving how this phenomenon is understood by the participants. The inputs of interviewees permitted the gathering of pertinent responses so that we could formulate precisely our research question and tackle the problematisation. We chose the qualitative method because it emphasises the principal actor’s point of view “afin d’analyser des phénomènes sociaux les concernant” (DE LIMA & al., 2009). Pierre Olivier De Sardan explains that during interactions between the researcher and the person/population studied, the interview process highlights their daily life, their routine, and the experience of the person interviewed throughout the conversation (DE SARDAN 2008, p.41). Nonetheless, it is not about “a feeling”, but a rigorous know-how (DE SARDAN 2008, p.44) so that the quantitative and qualitative do not contradict each other.

An interview is a verbal exchange : “c’est une technique de collecte d’informations orales, un évènement de parole qui se produit dans une situation d’interaction sociale entre un enquêteur et un enquêté » (SAVERESE 2006, p.10). I proceeded to semi-directive interviews. It allows the researcher to establish a predefined framework within which the person interviewed can still freely express herself/himself. It frames the dialogue alongside building an immediate relationship between individuals (BACHIR & al. 2000, p.32), giving access to common representations at a micro level (DE SARDAN 2008, p.54). I noted that this kind of interaction

between two individuals (that *a priori* do not know each other) can actually be fruitful and enriching. Interviews are also a tool with which to shape problems, contradictions, perhaps tensions I had not yet considered; nor the actors themselves.

According to the research topic, the theoretical approach and the time frame used, interviews may be a privileged instrument for data collection (COMAN & al. 2016 p.110), particularly for certain sub-disciplinary fields in the political sciences, such as political sociology or international relations (COMAN & al. 2016 p.110). Ramona Coman and Amandine Crespy listed aims in which the interview process might be pertinent³⁴: (1) drawing a political career (be it professional/personal) of the actors, (2) understanding the logic of reasons for taking part in politics, (3) analysing values, beliefs, and representations of the actors (engagement/disengagement), (4) mapping the actors and identifying networks and roles within groups. The semi-structured interviews turned out to be not uniform or identical.

Semi-structured interviews

I resorted to semi-structured interviews with my participants. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in building a relationship. Their holistic nature “strives to understand a phenomenon as a whole; and it assumes that the whole is understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts” (PATTON 1980, p.49). I preferred this methodology because it is people-oriented, as participants are forced into self-reflection and self-criticism. By so doing, they contribute to the improvement of women’s rights and better understanding from their critical point of view. Both my samples demonstrated a strong will to improve women’s rights.

From a practical point of view, all interviews were audio recorded. It helped also to transcribe the testimonies so that no information was missing. Furthermore, and to ensure confidentiality, all the names of the interviewees were modified. Interviews lasted from 1 hour to 4 hours. The literature review and methodology books helped me to create interview guidelines allowing me to address my hypothesis. I carefully transcribed responses from all my interviews, and did not avoid stressing silence and hesitation before and between their answers; this in order to enhance the unique aspects of the male experience. Indeed, silence can be revealing and is doubtless crucial in collecting data.

³⁴ These aims are initially listed in French, and only those relevant for our case study have been retained.

Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

When I conducted this research, I was guided by the three principles: of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. I assured all my participants that data would be collected and treated only by me. Before beginning the interview, I carefully told the participant that he would be given a pseudonym before the printing of the master thesis and that I was the only person to hear the interview and to treat the data. I nonetheless wanted briefly to present them (see part III) as it seems to me significant to understand how they became involved with feminist ideas or how they found themselves implicated in this, be it through activism or not. I deliberately chose to mention the age of the participants because age and social-economic background are significant indicators to analysing an individual career. Because this master's thesis deals with individual perceptions and variations in understanding feminism, I found it difficult to change participants' names in order to preserve anonymity for people who may know them, such as colleagues or other feminist activists (be they male or female). However, I do not think it created bias or compromised my research study. The interview process requires me to respect confidentiality. As previously mentioned it, I was obliged to select people speaking my mother tongue (*i.e.* French) so no information was compromised by a language bias and a relation of trust could be installed. Indeed, Kirsch (2005) explains:

“Appreciating the undivided attention, sincere interest, and warmth shown by skillful interviewers [...], participants can easily reveal intimate details about their lives that they may later regret having shared. [...] Participants may forget – or repress – the knowledge that what they are sharing is being recorded and will later be analyzed and published in some form or another” (KIRSCH 2005, pp.2164-65).

In the case where a participant revealed to me private information (if this was relevant to my research obviously), I carefully avoided including it.

Reflexivity and reflections on the interview process

This section examines some methodological difficulties with which I was confronted at various levels during my research but also some strengths. As I was reading a double master's degree in Belgium and in Italy, the very first methodological obstacle encountered was the location of my selection of cases: where should I do my field research? Selecting my research field in Italy would be, at first glance, more obvious since I was finishing my studies in Rome; but I had to take account of the language barrier for the interview process. Speaking the same language is

paramount in order to establish mutual trust between those interviewed and the interviewer. Indeed, we are all obviously more at ease speaking in their mother tongue. Moreover, it facilitates the declarations of the interviewees as well as the understanding and then interpreting their views. I thus decided, with the agreement of both my master thesis teachers, to do my research focus in Belgium. That leads us to my second difficulty which was to handle the interview in my mother tongue (French), to extract significant data, and to analyse them in another language, English, so as to demonstrate the results of my research study. Furthermore, I am aware that this obstacle might puzzle the reader.

Hence, my spatial-temporal frame was limited to Belgium. I was restricted to a very short time in Belgium to make my interviews, especially regarding men involved in feminist associations (settling an appointment at their best convenience and mine). This time constraint leads to my second methodological obstacle, that is somehow related to the previous one, *i.e.*, the lack of diversity (in terms of male and female) members in these associations in Belgium. I had to “jump” from association to association to find Belgian associations including men on their staff. I realised how some feminist associations were very reluctant to admit this principle and were still heirs of the third wave of feminism (when feminists decided to fight for their rights without men). Then, I could established that ... men engaged in feminist groups are not significant in numbers. When I started reflecting about the engagement of men in feminism, I thought it would be challenging to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods for this research. Nonetheless, qualitative method is as valid and enriching as the quantitative, if not more; so authors, such as Hudson et Rumbles (2014) explain it very well: “the majority of studies have taken a quantitative approach without exploring the qualitative aspects that would enable us to understand the true feelings and effects that organisational change has on an individual” (HUDSON & al., 2014, p.1). Thus, qualitative method, throughout the semi-structure interviews process can reveal much more than pure and “cold” data. And it did: it provides “rich, original voices which can be used to construct research narratives that the method is of invaluable quality” (NEWTON 2010 p.6), leading to a malleable scientific and rich interpretation of the phenomenon.

The challenge in my research was to extract significant data from a small sample of individuals interviewed. The strength, however, was particularly the in-depth interviews, in a context of a case study, and of the semi-structured interview. On the other hand, the interview process can reveal some challenges. One difficulty I met during my research was the fact that as a woman,

and talking about feminism, women's rights, equality with males may seem perilous. I had to "trust" what they confided to me, while being aware that they were men talking about a delicate subject, declaring opinions to a woman. Furthermore, as I was willing to study the individual process of men adhering to feminist ideas, this was the only material I could base my research on, by confronting it with the literature. It thus implies – and it is important to keep this in mind – trusting the interviewees' declarations, granting them a certain scientific value as rigorous and observable data. Indeed, the argument is "that only by developing intimate, trusting and empathetic relationships will respondents feel able to disclose the truth" (GOMM 2004, p.68 in NEWTON 2010). However, this trust implied "filtering" their declarations and their capacity for reflexivity and reflexion. I cannot deny nor prove that their answers would have differed if they had been interviewed by a man. Jacques Hamel (2007), in his article "Réflexions sur la réflexivité en sociologie" invites us to think twice about the potential competence of the individual interviewed to do "spontaneous sociology" or "practical sociological logics" (HAMEL 2007 in AROMATARIO 2016 p.33) that Giddens and Garfunkel can recognize them and allow them "to act coherently but also to justify and analyse their own actions" (AROMATARIO 2016 p.33). Nonetheless, this "potential sociological" knowledge amassed in each individual constitutes a "common knowledge".

Not being familiarise with the Belgian feminist associative network (mixed or non-mixed) was an obstacle that turned out to be an asset. Indeed, I adopted an axiological neutral approach, and I was not biased by any influences or advices by people from this background. I had to do everything on my own, like an explorer discovering the "unknown parts of the Earth". But what I found most difficult during the interview process was to put myself in their (men's) shoes, talking about a subject that concerns "my" inequality and oppression as a woman... The tables were turned : I had to understand their experience of feminism in the same way that I asked them to understand it as men. I am not saying that it would have been easier to talk about a subject that concerns them by their nature or their own and lived experience – despite the fact that feminism should be and is a matter of interest for them-.

Finally, I had the same methodological obstacle as A. Aromatorio, a Belgian researcher who studied the (non-)mixity of feminist groups in Belgium. The difficulty was to find a well-balanced equilibrium between the knowledge I had accumulated during my research and theirs without underestimating them. Being vigilant was paramount when the time came to analyse (cf. part III) in order to adopt a necessary distance between my categories of thought and discourse, and theirs (AROMATARIO 2016 p.33). However, it was very stimulating to put this

aspect in perspective and to bring light to the male perception of feminism. The aim of this research is above all to produce knowledge and to give some sense to the seeking of that knowledge. This material is meant to be observed and analysed as is also focus on how I managed to mobilise it. And finally, I have to admit that this double master's degree and its research study was a challenge in itself as I had to deal with both master's thesis supervisors coming from different cultures, working practices and methodology. Nonetheless, I really do hope my work contributes to a better understanding of an underrated phenomena.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that I encountered strong benefits during my research study. I learnt not to generalise about men's understanding of feminism. I also learnt that, regardless of my *a priori* position, men do know something of feminism and the gender inequalities. They tend to include themselves in this cause. They are conscious that they are "game changers", and I realised it as well.

Chapter Conclusion

In this section, I outlined my methodology so as to demonstrate my intellectual reasoning and reflexive approach to the study. I tried to be as accurate as possible so that the reader could contextualise my research and understand my analysis that follows in the next section (see part III.). I briefly recalled my hypothesis and why it was convenient to adopt a feminist approach in my interview process, and why I have chosen this methodological tool, outlining its pros and cons. I briefly presented my participants and described the feminist associations they were engaged in (for those who were); and I acknowledged their right to their ensuring the confidentiality of data because of the local and inter-knowledge of the network. I have also discussed the methodological obstacles during my research process. On the other hand, I enumerated the "added value" that this work brought me, even on a personal level, both as a student and as a woman. In the next section, I will interpret my data.

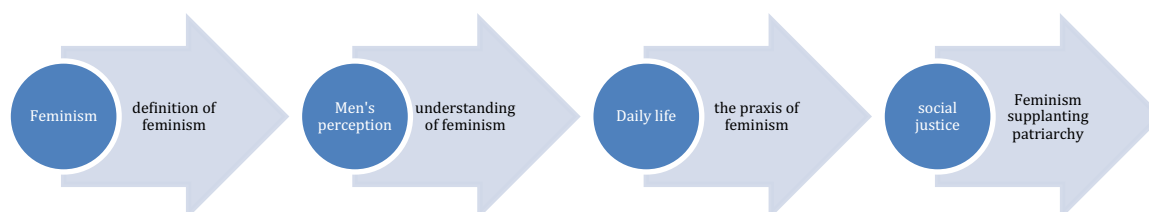
PART III : ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In our patriarchal society, it is commonly thought improbable that men can support feminism; however, “men do respond positively to feminism” (Hearn 2001).

This chapter is divided into four sections in which I aim to contribute to the ongoing debate about men’s relationship to feminism, and how they can support the cause, and this using the empirical methodologies already referred to, *i.e.* the interviews. I will highlight the attitudes and practices interviewees claim to adopt in pursuing this objective. We will see how feminism has different meanings for them, and that they also tend to adopt a harmonized conception of it so that they can include themselves in it. It is important to bear in mind that this section focused on two axes : first (1) the definition of feminism (*i.e* from exclusive to inclusive) to their understanding of it, second (2) how their understanding of feminism revealed to be a praxis that is applied in their daily life, that leads to a new reshaping of the patriarchal system. This section reveals difficulty of understanding feminism as an abstract concept: do we do feminism or do we just practically live that sometimes may look similar and be applied to the concept?

After briefly having presented the interviewees, I evaluated their self-reflection in the face the public debate of the recent events about the #MeToo campaign. Secondly, it went to the questioning feminism as a praxis and how feminism has impregnated everyone’s life in the private and professional spheres by personal convictions or not. The third point attempts to give a definition of feminism that start to be first exclusive, then inclusive; this inclusivity leads the analysis to evaluate if and how feminism is reshaping patriarchy.

The reader will find it easier to understand the common thread of this section with the help of this following axe :



About the male participants

Involved in feminist organisation

Castor

Castor is 31 and comes from a middle-class background. He was born and raised in Belgium and received a Catholic education. He read for a bachelor's degree in social sciences. After his graduation, he worked for the ecologist political party in Belgium (Ecolo!) as an administrative coordinator for approximately ten years. He was then recommended to *Le monde selon les femmes* (LMF) by one of his colleagues. Ecolo! is the first political party that brought gender issues to the political agenda in Belgium. He espoused feminists' ideas already in Ecolo! and "even before, during his childhood thanks to his parents' education". Working for the LMF was thus a natural step for him. He is working as an administrative assistant in the organisation; but to him "his work is more than executing administrative tasks".

Polux

Coming from a "privileged background" as he put in, Polux is half Spanish and half Belgian. At the age of 25, he obtained a bachelor's degree in Arab Philology in Barcelona (Spain) and his master's degree in Sociology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL) in Belgium. He says that his father is at the root of his sympathy and engagement in feminism. He worked as a volunteer in *AWASA-Be* for one year for his master's thesis as he was doing participant observation. He worked for *Le monde selon les femmes* for six months and was in charge of doing research. Polux is enthusiastic about "the world that is drastically changing" and the fact that we are witnessing one of the most important debates about sexism as a result the Harvey Weinstein scandal. He is convinced this paves the way for a long struggle in which he wishes to participate.

Minos

Minos is a member of the General Assembly of the *Le monde selon les femmes*. In parallel, he is a teacher and a Master's Coordinator in Liège (Belgium) and is a Faculty Member at the Univeristé Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). When he was a student, he went to Nicaragua and started to work at the International University in Nicaragua and decided to do applied research in Sociology. He was imbued with Marxist ideology at that time when asymmetric power relations as well as patriarchy and capitalism were being questioned. Before this experience, he

described himself as “naïve” and did not “realise how biased he was as a white man” in his interactions with others and specifically women.

Palemon

Palemon is 37 and his half Belgian and half Austrian. He is a lawyer specialised in foreigners’, migrants’ and refugees’ rights. He has studied Law and Philosophy. In his last year in Philosophy, he met a Lebanese who taught him some rudiments of Arabic. He pursued his studies in an association, AWSA-BE within which he was introduced to feminism. He then became an active member of the association at its creation, giving training and other workshops about feminism. He now considers himself as an observer member of AWSA-BE. Coming from a bourgeois background that he qualifies as ‘conservative’ and traditionalist, he was not made sensitive to by feminism by its entourage at all. Indeed, feminism even had a bad reputation in the eyes of his entourage.

Not involved in a feminist organisation

Ulysses

Ulysses is 25 and working in a call centre. He has always had a keen interest in immigration because he comes from a migrant family. His origins are Sicilian, but his parents moved to France before he was born. He said he has been active several times in immigration matters. He did not hesitate to accept my interview because it completely matched with his family background and political ideas.

Achilles

Coming from a modest, indeed, poor economic background, Achilles is 30 and is South-African by his mother. She had early made him aware of ethnic inequalities and these topics are his interest “rather than feminism or women’s interests”. He is not particularly concerned by the cause, but he is the only one that asked me to be interviewed because he wanted to express his views all the same.

Hercules

Hercules is an Sicilian student. He has studied economics and claims to be a “*genrist*”, *i.e.* someone “interested in gender issues regardless of our sex”. He is keen on writing and was really interested to be interviewed in order to see how his traditional background and education

might affect his responses. He is not working for the moment but he has worked in a Belgian bank as a financial analyst.

Jason

Jason comes from a middle-class background in Switzerland and has studied Political Science. *A fortiori*, he does not claim to be very interested in such social issues as feminism, but rather, in environmental issues (and seeking solutions). He has been raised by three women : his grandmother, his mother and his sister. His grandmother left the Franco regime in the early 1960’s and he says she has been a model to him because she had the courage of her convictions. He accepted this interview because “for once, someone asks our opinion”.

Men in feminist organisation are not numerous, indeed difficult to find when you are not part of the Belgian feminist network. So the individuals I recruited for my interviews were chosen according to the following criteria :

- (1) Being part a feminist organisation; for those in the feminist organisation obviously (4/8)
- (2) Being in a minimum 1 year relationship, in order to have a good overview and reflexivity of their actions in the daily routine (8/8)
- (3) Both partners (preferably female³⁵ with respect to their companion) work (8/8)

The male participants (in and out of a feminist organisations) are summarised in the table below.

| Member of an organisation | Non-member of an organisation |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Castor | Ulysses |
| Polux | Achilles |
| Minos | Hercules |
| Palemon | Jason |
| Total : 8 interviewees | |

Fig. 1. The total amount of interviewees

³⁵ Far be it from me to stigmatize same sex relationship, on the contrary. But, as explained throughout this work in order to analyse how men apply feminism in their everyday lives towards women, as they are considered the first oppressed by gender inequalities.

Feminism in the heart of the public debate : between self-reflection of men and speech release of women

I could not talk about men and feminism without evoking the tumult of the year 2017. The Harvey Weinstein scandal and everything that followed up (the #MeToo Campaign, #BalanceTonPorc, etc.) was a turning point in the harassment of women, the sexist behaviour that gangrenes society and the will to change from both men and women side. This section is above all aimed at analysing the self-reflexivity of men towards women regarding some sexist behaviours. Even though I am aware that a scientific work should not be influenced by news in order to adopt some distance from the phenomenon, the declarations of the interviewees are the proof that it affected them deeply – for some of them at least.

Self-reflection of men in the face of feminism

First of all, I want to warn the reader that this section does not intend to push the interviewee to any kind of denunciation neither to fall into some sort of sensationalism. This would bend the rule of the scientific nature of this research. Instead, I am trying to highlight how this public debate was seen by the interviewees. Modern feminism cannot dispense with a rigorous reflexion on sexism towards women. It appeared interesting to me to ask the interviewees their opinion and to receive feedback on this debate, to understand what it brings in term of interpersonal relationships.

As someone in a non-mixed feminist organisations argued in mixed organisations (*i.e.* composed of men and women) men tend to interrupt during meetings and have more visibility than women (JACQUEMART 2015, p. 120), that leads to a reinforcement of sexism and male domination. It illustrates that the interviewee member of a feminist organisations was more prone to be aware of a change of attitude.

« Euh ... C'est très difficile à dire. *J'essaye de me comporter correctement* ... j'essaye de me remettre en question...enfin surtout quand c'est nécessaire. Je fais des erreurs comme tout le monde, mais je pense que c'est important *d'en avoir conscience. Je pense que je suis attentif* à ce genre de chose, à ne pas rabaisser une femme, et je pense que si ça avait été le cas ça aurait été dit très rapidement par mes collègues par exemple, ce qui n'est pas le cas. » (Castor)

The experience of Castor is important. He is a member of a feminist organisation so he would have been the very first informed of inappropriate behaviour by his colleagues. The same goes

for Polux and Palemon. It clearly demonstrates that they integrated and absorbed themselves of the feminist lens. Furthermore, their declaration really illustrate that men can be allies of feminism (cf. Part 1, p. 18-21). It corresponds to the triangle of Messner, especially “the recognition of and opposition to men’s privileges”.

« C’est vrai que de *manière introspective* je *faisais attention à ce que je disais et faisais dans l’association pour ne pas établir des rapports de pouvoir*. Par exemple, je faisais très attention à *ma prise de parole* et à ma manière de parler pendant les réunions et quand je m’adressais aux collègues. Même si personne ne m’a fait de remarques, je me suis surtout mis la pression moi-même. J’ai vraiment fait un travail sur moi. *C’est un peu une double contrainte*. » (Polux)

« Oui, en tout cas réfléchir et *se remettre en question* c’est vraiment le cœur de la chose. Le fait est que *c’est excessivement inconfortable pour un homme. On doit systématiquement questionner ce qu’on fait et donc remettre en question « notre spontanéité »*. C’est essentiel parce que le féminisme est fait quelque part en destination des hommes parce que sans changement de comportement de la part des hommes il n’y aura pas de changements réels de la société. » (Palemon)

On the other hand, views were divided as far as the « out » interviewees are concerned. For instance, Achilles and Ulysse never questioned themselves and could not say whether they had had any inappropriate behaviour. This is because the behaviour of men is so normalised that it thus become invisible to them.

Thus, men ‘out’ of the organisations illustrate what has been developed in point 5.1. “This is not about me” in the part 1. Men ‘out’ simply not seem to question themselves and to overcome barriers.

« *Je me suis jamais vraiment posé la question pour être honnête*. Je pense qu’il faudra une conscientisation sociale, et que la population change par rapport aux idéologies. » (Achilles)

« Oui sûrement. Même si *je n’ai pas d’exemple* qui me vient tout de suite à l’esprit. » (Ulysse)

Interviewees not in a feminist organisations could not be self-reflective about their own behaviours perhaps because they do not experience any correction from women. Feminist

organisation is a space and an environment that favours reflection also from men's side (when it is as mixed association). It is one of the benefits of the mix of feminist organization. Being part of an association, *i.e.* a feminist organization in our case, influences the behaviours and the view of its members. It is a leverage for the members to adopt a change in attitude as they say, and to be more aware of attitudes that enhances a sort of dominant role in interpersonal relations. However, to what extent did the public debate on sexism and harassment did or did not “affect”, or at least help to contribute to some mental and behavioural changes among the men ?

The speech release (of the #MeToo campaign) and its impact

The end of 2017 was marked by a terrible scandal for one and a release for the others. The famous American producer, Harvey Weinstein is accused of rape, sexual aggression and sexual harassment. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. The impact of #MeToo, an hashtag transformed into an activist campaign, was spread all over the world by associations and by both women and men. It led to a snowball effect: thousands and thousands of women started to attest to similar stories on social media.

As explained in Part I (p.18), feminism has always dealt with men as it constructed itself in reaction to the social roles of men and women. In my opinion, this public debate brought and placed men at the core of the feminist debate; it questioned not only men's perception of feminism but it pushes them to get out of their comfort zone. The reader can understand that interviewees responses with respect to this debate are quite similar to the previous part (their self-reflexion of their behaviour) : interviewees ‘in’ feminist organisations see the benefits of this phenomenon/movement as it forces men to push their limits and to reinvent their social codes, whereas interviewees ‘out’ are quite reluctant to do so and do not see the effects of it, nor consider it a release of speech but rather as an overreaction of denunciation.

« Je remarque quand ça *fait réaliser pas mal de chose chez les hommes, j'en parle beaucoup* plus avec des amis avec qui je n'en parlais jamais, des amis garçons. Je vois que ça commence vraiment à prendre de l'ampleur et les hommes commencent vraiment à avoir un avis sur ça, à prendre position c'est chouette. *Il est temps de s'allier et qu'on demande aux féministes ce que l'on peut faire.* » (Palemon)

Palemon is the only one « surfing on the wave » of the debate to sensitize his male acquaintances in order to put it in perspective with the news.

« *Cette réflexion est arrivée trois ans avant pour moi par exemple*, en arrivant ici [chez AWSA-BE]. Et donc j'ai pu constater ce même questionnement dans mon entourage au moment de ce hashtag. J'espère que cela va se poursuivre. Après je ne sais pas si on peut parler d'une nouvelle vague du féminisme mais je trouve ça important qu'on en parle, *je pense que c'est très positif même si c'est très inconfortable car du coup on va se demander « tiens, mais est-ce que moi dans mon comportement il y a des choses qui posent problème? »* (Polux)

« La motivation d'origine pour moi a un peu d'importance, mais c'est surtout *l'impact qu'il a suscité.* » (Castor)

« C'est un nouveau *canal de libération* et de prise de parole de la part des femmes. » (Minos)

The statements of Polux, Castor and Minos clearly demonstrate that they integrated and impregnated themselves of the feminist lens. They demonstrate a will to change : there was a 'before', and there should be an 'after'. Their participation in a feminist organisation positioned themselves in a posture of realisation of their dominant role and that it needed to change even though "it is uncomfortable to them" as Polux said. They already felt concerned about it. But did this help to enhance a step further their self-reflectiveness?

Achilles and Hercules denounce this movement as an "harassment by the media" and consider that it was not an appropriate way to tackle the problem. They took a more top-down approach of this debate (cf. point 5) as if the changes may be possible and influenced from the top rather than from a social group.

« J'ai perçu le mouvement #MeToo *comme un acharnement médiatique* dans le sens où je pense *que ça a été surfait*. Bien sûr il y a des problèmes sociétaux et des gens qui méritent d'être reconsidéré au sein de la société. Or ici c'était juste du scandale et pas une conscientisation de fond. C'était plus sporadique et intermittent. Pour moi, je l'ai vécu comme *un effet de mode*, d'ici un an on n'en entendra plus parlé. Ça ne va pas rester profondément inscrit selon moi. » (Achilles)

« Ouais... c'est parti d'une affaire, tout le monde a pris conscience qu'on pouvait parler sans être emprisonné, que sur Twitter on peut exprimer des choses, il y a eu *certainement des cas de délation*, un *effet de mode*. Les gens ont pris conscience que les réseaux sociaux pouvaient les dénoncer et quand ils ont vu que d'autres femmes ont eu le courage de dénoncer quelqu'un, surtout des personnes importantes, cela a encouragé d'autres à le faire, il y eu un effet boule de neige (...) » (Hercules)

« Ce que j'ai essentiellement remarqué moi avec ces phénomènes c'est que globalement les hommes ont pu constater que ça arrivait dans *leur entourage* et que ce n'était pas des concepts abstraits. Justement, il y a cette image des féministes qui sont des chieuses et des bruleuses de soutien-gorges, et qui n'apportaient rien mais là justement les hommes ont pu réaliser que « *ma sœur, ma mère*, d'autres femmes proches ont été harcelée » et/ou a subi des inégalités de manière complètement arbitraire . Et donc je pense que ça a servi de *déclencheur et une réflexion chez pas mal d'hommes*. » (Ulysses)

Ulysses for instance refers to the fact that this debate made him realise practically speaking (“ce n'est pas des concepts abstraits”) that sexism and/or inappropriate behaviours (without naming it as harassment) happened to women in their female social networks (“entourage”, “ma soeur”, “ma mère”). This echoes Shira Tarrant who argues that men's participation in feminism is not an extra canal for “protecting our women” (TARRANT 2009, p.17); it is not chivalry and that it will perpetuate gender stereotypes. In the same way, Bisi Alimi said that “to be [a feminist], you have to see beyond those women with whom you are close (i.e., don't just stand up for your daughter) and recognize that *every* woman is a human with equal worth” (BRIGHT MAG 2017, online).

But the similar point amongst the interviewees was that this campaign helped *other men* to realise their (potential) misbehaviour. At no moment did they mention either *what* or *how* it affected *them*. Polux even ‘confessed’ that (t)his reflexion happened three years ago... and then was it finished? Alban Jacquemart says that men in organisations adopt a form of « self-congratulation » of their extraction of the oppressors mass (JACQUEMART 2015 in AROMATARIO 2015, p. 81).

The limit for men (engaged in feminist organisations) might be their participation itself : it is not because they are members of one such organisation that they behave and think properly in a everyday life. These elements confirm the importance of including men in feminism as a collective identity/body: because this hard deconstruction of their (non-)conscious gendered-attitude, both from men in and out a feminist organisation, brings a potential loss of their privileges (JACQUEMART 2015, p. 27 & p. 214).

Feminism as a tool of practical life : the connecting vessels

As we have understood, feminism is not just a cause or sympathy with its ideas. Indeed, in order to reach gender equality, feminism should be the means to reach it in one's everyday life. This part analyses in depth how the family model had an impact in men's participation in domestic life among the interviewees, and their tendency to the reproduction of this distribution. Ian Law wrote an essay entitled "Adopting the Principle of Pro-Feminism" and encourage men to confront the timeless and imposed habits of male dominance in relationships and daily life : "it is important that men listen and understand others, instead of feeling as if guys have to solve problems, come up with solutions and keep control of decision making" (LAW in TARRANT, 2009, p.140); cooperation does not mean losing control. Law supports this idea that men should take over responsibility for what has been traditionally and wrongly considered as "women's work". In the same manner that feminists, and more broadly, women have convinced men and society that they can do what men do, men can do the same for "women's work" (Gloria Steinem). The risk ? "The double burden of working inside and outside the home (...) will continue to be the problem most shared" (TARRANT 2008 p. 90).

The family model and the figure of the father at the root

Since the mid-19th century, the integration of women in the job market structurally changed Western societies. Studies and surveys confirm that women worked more whereas men proportionally did not increase their domestic work (Institut, 2015): « Dans de nombreux pays européens, les hommes ont la plus grande partie du travail rémunéré à leur actif alors que les femmes doivent s'acquitter de la majorité des tâches ménagères et relevant de l'éducation des enfants (...) qui plus est, les femmes effectuent plus de tâches ménagères et familiales que les hommes même quand elles exercent une activité rémunérée à temps plein ». Alban Jacquemart (2015) exposed two factors that explained men getting involved in the cause of feminism, or at least espousing its ideas : the first one, minor but direct, is having being raised by a feminist or emancipated woman, and the second, correlated to the first one is the absence of paternal model that thus demanded mothers to be self-sufficient.

The declarations of the interviewees below showed me on the contrary that their fathers, from both my samples, took part in domestic work.

« (...) et à la maison, *tout le monde participait*, y compris mon père aux tâches ménagères. » (Ulysses)

« *[M]on père participait* à la vie familiale, jouait avec nous, nettoyait, et cuisinait. » (Castor)

« [J]e voyais vraiment qu'il y avait une *vraie répartition des tâches entre ma mère et mon père*. » (Polux)

« A la maison, *c'est mon père qui cuisinait*, et ma mère nettoyait. » (Jason)

It seems that this model is assimilated by the individuals and that it is obvious they will reproduce the same dynamic. Furthermore, Achilles underlines a very interesting aspect of this distinction with respect to domestic work and is aware of a gap between his generation and the previous ones. Young men integrate, find it natural (he says it is “inné”) to participate in domestic life.

« Par exemple avec ma copine, les tâches étaient automatiquement partagées, c'était inné, je pense que c'est générationnel et ça touche toutes les classes sociales. On est tous en train de changer par rapport à ça. » (Achilles)

This gap is generational (Minos) that reproduces a model of the old bourgeoisie and also cultural as Hercules explained.

« *Mon père ne participait pas à l'entretien* de la maison, c'était encore l'héritage de la tradition bourgeoise sûrement » (Minos)

« Bon je vais rentrer dans le cliché du stéréotype (sic) italien, mais non en Sicile c'est très rare qu'un père prenne part à la vie du foyer, même encore aujourd'hui. *Mais non mon père était un ancien gradé de la marine donc bon, peu de chance pour ma mère d'espérer qu'il fasse quoique ce soit*. » (Hercules)

Polux's father who is at the root of his involvement in a feminist organisation as he told, did not only participate in domestic tasks with his mother but was also mindful to teach respectful values to his son; as Polux said :

« Oui c'était assez tôt [his feminist involvement]. Avec mon père c'est venu très tôt, avec les valeurs de respect quoi. Ça c'était vraiment le mot clé dans mon enfance et adolescence. Il me parlait de consentement ... et puis il l'incarnait dans la vie de tous les jours. Je le voyais participer aux tâches ménagères, dans la cuisine, dans le soin des enfants etc. donc je voyais vraiment qu'il y avait une vraie répartition des tâches entre ma mère et mon père. Et même les enfants. » (Polux)

Polux's father was raising his children with honourable example embodied them at the same time (participation in the domestic life). Seeing the concrete application of a model taught by a parent is very likely to be automated, absorbed and reproduced by the child. Polux's father struggled with stereotypes. Thus and conversely to what Jacquemart studied, I observed that most of my interviewees were directly influenced by their father, by the actions and

participation to domestic and by discourses. Nonetheless, exception still exist nowadays but this is a minority.

We can also observe a sort of continuum of men's gender-conscious position from the father to the son, as "from those men actively supportive of gender equality onto those in favour, in theory, but who do not do anything in particular, to those 'not bothered', onto those actively hostile" (Messner 2004, p. 76) developed by Messner. In this perspective, how does men can practice feminism in their everyday life, and what does it mean?

Participation in domestic life...

In "Can Men Be Allies of Feminism?", Nighat Gandhi, a sufi³⁶ wanderer writes that "housework is work that is unacknowledged as work since most of it is unpaid work done by women". Practically speaking, what does this participation mean? Shira Tarrant says that one way for men to participate in domestic work is "by bringing our politics home". In doing so, this involves "feminist or antisexist men's full participation completely in housework – doing dishes, changing diapers, mopping floors (and yes, equality also includes women taking out the trash and fixing busted pipes)" (TARRANT 2009, p.141). She also underlines the difference between sympathy and active participation : "passive sympathising for an overworked female partner, "helping" around the house, "babysitting" one's own children, or sharing the work only after someone else asks is not the same thing as showing initiative, rolling up the shirtsleeves and taking care of business" (TARRANT 2009, p.142).

Several research projects have been carried out on the subject, and some of them quantified the time spent and the scope of men's domestic work. One of them is the very recent French survey of May 2018 " les Français et le partage des tâches ménagères: à quand la révolution ménagère?". The IPSOS Institute³⁷ demonstrates that society is far from being equal despite some significant changes that took place over the last 50 years; they even shifted to a "reasonable and integrated inequality" between women and men (IPSOS 2018, online). According to this survey more than 1 French citizen out of 2 (55%) – and especially men (63%) – consider that gender inequality regarding domestic tasks is no longer a problem within the home. The aim is not to compare the quantified data according to my research sample, but instead it is to highlight men's integration (both 'in' and 'out' of a feminist organisations) and execution of domestic work. Indeed, the interviewees were unanimous : when asked if they

³⁶ Sufism is the esoteric branch of Islam, qualified as the "Islamic mysticism".

³⁷ Ipsos is a global market research survey in France and worldwide.

participate in domestic task and to what extent, men are not only participating but are enrolled in an equal sharing of the domestic life. And I tried to figure out what kind of participation it was : divided? Fully endorsed? General chores or one task particularly ? a rolling-kind ?

« Oui **je participe aux tâches ménagères** de mon foyer. Et avant quand je vivais en coloc avec des filles, c'était mixte et elles étaient très attentives à m'impliquer les tâches domestiques, mais surtout nous aussi. Il y avait un **roulement**. » (Palemon)

« (...) En ce qui me concerne, par exemple **je pends le linge, je vide le lave-vaisselle**, et **j'essaye de nettoyer**, même si c'était ma compagne qui garde l'initiative de la lessive. » (Ulysses)

« - Ben clairement à la maison **c'est moi qui fait la cuisine tous les jours**, parce que ma copine ne sait pas cuisiner (rires), mais parce que ça me détend aussi.

- *tu as toujours cuisiné avec ton papa ? ou c'est quand tu as emménagé avec ta copine que tu as commencé à cuisiner ?*

- quand on a emménagé, avant (silence)... ben en fait je réalise que je participais pas vraiment. Je nettoyais juste ma chambre. » (Jason)

« [D]ans ma vision des choses, je dirai que tout ce que je fais, ben **...n'importe qui devrait être capable de le faire, comme cuisiner, faire la vaisselle ou mon propre linge si tu veux rentrer dans les clichés**. Par exemple avec ma copine, les tâches sont **automatiquement partagées**, c'est inné (...). » (Achilles)

At first glance, everything responds to the basic hypothesis : men do participate in domestic work, both those in and those outside a feminist organisations in each and every field of domestic life (cleaning, cooking, and the laundry). But if we go deeply in the analysis and make a comparison with the abovementioned argument, one weakness of Tarrant's discourse is perhaps to be too 'simplistic' : while Tarrant seems to adopt a down-to-earth discourse of their participation, *i.e.* stressing that "they will do this and that willingly and this will be okay" as if it is, already, taken for granted.

On the other hand, Jonathan Crowe goes a little further and advances that it is not so simple as that. This change of attitude first requires a change of mentality, indeed, of the psychology of men, as "it is tempting for men to shirk this burden by either becoming defensive — denying its existence or the scope of the problem — or seeking solace in expressions of guilt" (CROWE 2008, p. 7). Indeed, according to this May 2018 IPSOS survey, those little phrases that free oneself from its responsibility are : "I will do it, but later", "I already do other things in the

house”, “I don’t have the time”, and “I do not do it as well as you do” (IPSOS 2018, online).

Yet, regarding the declarations of men involved in feminist organisations, this can be discussed: they do not act as though, guilty or demonstrate ill will to escape the problem when asked if this is a burden for them.

« ***Je n’ai aucun souci*** à partager les tâches domestiques de la maison. Ça n’a pas de sens que je travaille pour l’égalité des sexes et qu’en privé, je ne l’applique absolument pas, sinon j’ai l’air d’un imbécile. » (Castor)

« Et donc à titre plus personnel, je pense qu’en ce qui concerne la répartition des tâches j’avais des automatismes que j’avais, et qui n’avaient jamais été remis en question et ***j’en suis plus conscient maintenant*** et j’essaye aussi de le faire souligner à mon entourage ... ce qui n’est pas toujours une chose super évidente (rires). Par exemple je remarque que dans une fête de famille les femmes sont dans la cuisine et les hommes se retrouvent autour de la table ce qui est systématique, et ça va me faire réagir. Ce qui n’était pas le cas avant, je le remarquais pas. ***Y a des automatismes qui maintenant moi m’interpellent alors qu’avant non.*** » (Castor)

« Non, déjà en Amérique Latine j’étais impliqué. ***C’est des automatismes que j’ai fait en sorte d’adopter*** et aujourd’hui je ne me pose pas la question en fait. » (Minos)

« Je participe au même niveau qu’elle quoi ... fin bon ***c’est normal*** je pense ***je ne me revendique pas pro-féministe pour rien hein*** (rires). » (Polux)

« Quelle question ... ***ben non*** [les tâches domestiques ne sont pas une charge] ! ***Sinon on n’avance pas!*** » (Palemon)

Two (Castor and Polux) out of four of the interviewees underline their involvement in a feminist organisation as a potential explanation regarding their participation in domestic tasks. It is obviously in the continuity of their convictions. Castor is the only one practicing introspection when comparing himself to the past and observing differences. For the other two (Minos and Palemon), it is implicitly mentioned. Nonetheless, it is not the same regarding the ones “out” of the feminist organisations. It is not spontaneous, nor inherent. As long as it does not perfectly illustrate Crowe’s statement, *i.e.* avoiding the ‘problem’, yet they participate when they are reminded to do so.

- *C’est toi qui le fait spontanément ou c’est un automatisme ?*
- Mmmh ... un peu les deux j’avoue. Je fais pas gaffe avant qu’elle me le dise... » (Achilles)

- « *Est-ce que tu vois ça comme une charge en plus pour toi ?*
- Ben oui, *c'est vrai que c'est chiant* de nettoyer, et faire tout ça *mais ça fait partie de l'entretien d'un ménage*, non ? » (Hercules)

The same goes for Jason regarding his childhood:

- « *tu as toujours cuisiné avec ton papa, ou c'est quand tu as emménagé avec ta copine que tu as commencé à cuisiner ?*
- quand on a emménagé, avant (silence)... ben en fait je réalise que je participais pas vraiment. Je nettoiais juste ma chambre vite fait comme un mec quoi. »

The abovementioned IPSOS survey outlines three factors that explained this slow evolution of male participation in domestic work : (1) the professional investment of women, (2) the investment of men, and (3), the 'letting go' of women who learn to delegate (IPSOS 2018, online). The first one will be analysed in the next section, however we can say that the second and the third factors can be retained here as 50% of participants declare taking the initiative to take part in the domestic work, and the other 50% tacitly demonstrate that their companion tell them to do the task instead of doing it themselves, for instance.

But one of the strongest arguments they put forward is their will to transmit a balanced and healthy model of domestic tasks within the home. That is perhaps the real evolution. Achilles underlines it very well, qualifying this evolution as generational and global :

- « Par exemple avec ma copine les tâches sont automatiquement partagées, c'est inné. Je pense que c'est *générationnel* et ça *touche toutes les classes sociales*. *On est tous en train de changer par rapport à ça.* » (Achilles)

This “reasonable and integrated inequality” of women is nonetheless real and is still in place in most households, yet we cannot deny the will of some men to change the game at home and in their professional life, and to adopt a balanced division of tasks.

- « Je pense que c'est vraiment une vision arriérée le 'la place de la femme est en cuisine'. J'ai personnellement aucun souci à cuisiner. Mais c'est vrai que c'est 50-50 avec elle. » (Hercules)

- « Y a des *automatismes* qui maintenant moi m'interpellent et *dans ma vie quotidienne* j'adopte cette rupture. » (Castor)

The specificity of Castor is that he is adopting a double reflexivity because his participation in a feminist organisation entails questioning his actions, and what he calls “his automatism”. On the other hand, for the other interviewees, it appears more implied and integrated.

At a micro level, domestic tasks are traditionally based on sex as illustrated by Castor when describing a family feast. How is it possible to adopt a new approach without this sex-related consideration ? It came out that three tasks were especially mentioned by my interviewees: the daily shopping, laundry, and cooking. Their declarations demonstrate that it is possible to get rid of the feminine connotation of these three tasks and thus that they are not gender-related to women only. One of the stimulating factors is that interviewees (Jason, Minos and Hercules) realized that the execution of a task is part of a chain, especially for those who cook: if one is in charge of the cooking, then it is obvious for them to do the shopping as they know what ingredients are missing and needed.

« Comme ma copine ne cuisine pas à la maison, *je sais ce qu’il manque* dans le frigo ; mais elle est aussi très organisée donc je sais pas si je peux dire que « je suis responsable de ça et elle de ça », c’est très équilibré et complémentaire. » (Jason)

« Je cuisine toujours à la maison et comme je n’ai pas forcément un emploi du temps très chargé au travail, je fais les courses. Mais ma femme fait le linge. » (Minos)

« J’aime bien nettoyer et faire le linge, est-ce que parce que je suis maniaque ? (rires). » (Hercules)

« Je cuisine un peu aussi, avec mes parents, quand j’étais petit on cuisinait ensemble. *Je cuisinai 1 fois par semaine et c’est devenu un réel plaisir maintenant.* Pour le linge, j’avoue je n’aime pas ... quand j’étais étudiant par exemple, je laissais cumuler jusqu’à ce que je n’avais plus rien à me mettre. » (Castor)

This illustrates how the « chain » approach is less and less sex-related and if one task of the chain is so, the following ones are so as well. This observation was also made by the Institut de l’égalité des chances : « les hommes qui cuisinent trouvent qu’il est normal de faire les courses » (p.54). This “de-gendering” process can be explained by several factors, established by the Institute:

- Visibility : men endorse more visible tasks such as shopping and medical visits: « plus les hommes seront nombreux à les assumer, plus les autres hommes seront stimulés à le faire. Par ailleurs, l'exécution de ces tâches peut influencer sur l'accomplissement de tâches invisibles qui font partie intégrante d'une chaîne ».
- Tolerance : if tasks accomplished by men are traditionally reserved for women, tolerance for eventual mistakes will play a decisive role.
- Execution and control : linked to the previous factor, the execution is endorsed by men and the control by women. This factor helps in transmitting the role of the task progressively. The Institute analyses that young men establish their own list of shopping compared to older ones (p.55). This is a perfect illustration of what has been said by Jason who is responsible for the shopping and for the cooking.
- *home alone*: men carry out domestic tasks when they are home alone, especially when they have children. But this point could not be analysed as my interviewees with the exception of Minos have no children.

As we can observe, some men prefer some domestic tasks to others, such as cooking and shopping. On the other hand, as underlined by the declarations of interviewees, they do not mention laundry nor cleaning the house, except for Hercules. This is also identified in the Institute's survey and others such as IPSOS. We can conclude that men establish a sort of hierarchy regarding the execution of a domestic task. It is undeniable that their participation at home has an impact in their companion's professional life. To conclude, the aim of increasing women's participation on the job market depends on the equitable and proportional increase of domestic work accomplished by men (Institut).

... In order to boost companion's professional career

We have seen that interviewees declare that they help their companion in domestic life and equally share the burden of work; we will now focus on professional life, especially to what extent men are ready to sacrifice their professional activities for the sake of their companion. Jonathan Crowe believes that this change of attitude “requires them [men] to make fundamental changes to their actions and attitudes, altering their personal and professional lives in potentially burdensome ways, without the prospect of any immediate shift in the wider social order” (CROWE 2008, p. 52). To what extent is this declaration true ?

As previously explained, I chose male participants having a relationship in which both partners are professionally active. Indeed, this was more interesting because their everyday life (*i.e.* the personal and the professional sphere) illustrates better my research analysis as these adjustments operate concretely in those two spheres. That is why this part focuses on : paternity leave and boosting their companion's career. Of course, this present part is intertwined with the previous one as one depends on the other. That is precisely where the “connecting vessels” term is used.

Rather the point is to understand why women are relegated to less important work positions « dans les emplois les moins qualifiés, les moins rémunérés, enfermées dans le temps partiel, soumises à d'importants retards de carrière, prises au piège dès qu'il s'agit de maternité. La dite « discrimination salariale pure » sous-estime les obstacles auxquels se heurtent les femmes au travail, ne rend pas compte de la multi-dimensionnalité des inégalités de genre. » (SILVERA 2014, p.50-51) and the main explanation is that maternity still is a « trap » for women who wish to pursue a career (SILVERA 2014, p.110). As far as the interviewees were concerned, the declarations were mitigated.

Minos was the only father of my sample and so he was the only one able to give me examples. He clearly declared that for him maternity leave is one of the big issues of the job market system, in the sense that men could not benefit from same number of days off as women.

« Moi je trouve ça honteux que les hommes n'ont que quelques jours, je crois que c'est à peine 2 semaines c'est ça non ? Si la balance était déjà rééquilibrée à ce niveau-là, ça changerait déjà beaucoup. » (Minos)

The reader could not miss what happened last May and June within the French parliament about the possibility to extend (and to pay) paternity leave. This was one of an electoral campaign promises of Emmanuel Macron. The aim was to encourage fathers to take its paternity leave³⁸ “Pour “éviter que la totalité des soins, la totalité de l'angoisse repose sur la mère” (FRANCEINFO 2018, online) says the french Député (LFI) Bastien Lachaud. The problem ? The financing, of course ! In the same way that the capitalist system is pointed out as the root of women inequality (see below) by Delphy, the impossibility for men to have access to an equal paternity leave to women is also the fault of capitalism.

³⁸ That is between 11 and 15 days for men against 14 to 16 weeks for women.

Besides this, it does not seem difficult for the other persons to project and to imagine a situation of the other interviewee to become a father; except Hercules who kept literally silent and asked me another question. Palemon and Castor, both from feminist organisations, declared they both agreed not to have children with their companions for the moment. Nonetheless Palemon said something that will not escape the reader :

« C'est horrible parce qu'à vous écouter, et en y réfléchissant ... **je l'aurai fait s'il y avait un enfant. Sinon non.** (Rires). **Pour l'enfant c'est plus évident pour bouleverser et aménager mon horaire.** » (Palemon)

The burden of a child might stimulate Palemon, member of an association, but otherwise (and maybe?) it would have been difficult for him to accept it now as they do not have children. Ulysses, Jason and Achilles had already strong opinions even though different.

« Ben.... Si je peux prendre un congé de paternité, et si mon entreprise le permet, **ça ne me dérangerait pas.** Autant de temps qu'il le faudrait. Il faudrait vraiment que j'adore mon travail pour ne pas prendre un congé de paternité ! » (Ulysses)

« Ah alors moi clairement j'aime trop les enfants donc j'espère que je pourrai négocier un prolongement. Mais je n'aurai pas de souci à faire le congé paternité solo et que ma copine reprenne le taf normalement. » (Jason)

« Je sais pas j'ai déjà du mal avec les bébés, je sais même pas si on en fera... Mais bon, a priori j'ai pas envie de prendre un congé de paternité. **Je le prendrai si ça m'arrange.** » (Achilles)

Achilles here adopts a more individualistic point of view (“si ça m’arrange”) because he is not fond of with babies, so does Jason who on the contrary really fancies them (“j’aime trop les enfants”). These two quotes highlights that men react according to basic preferences (should we say instincts?) and Achilles’s will is not a necessary “anti-feminist”.

In Western society, indeed all societies, wage inequality is the very first illustration that gender inequality persists. We have previously seen than maternity leave might be one of the factors explaining this, but it is only the visible part of the iceberg. Indeed, another explanation is a critique made by Christine Delphy in the sense that the capitalist system rests on inequalities.

Rachel Silvera is the co-director of the MAGE³⁹, a research group concentrating on the job market and gender, and is a specialist on the issue of professional equality in terms of salary, and the articulation between home and work. In her book *Un quart en moins: des femmes se battent pour en finir avec les inégalités de salaires* (2004), she argued that gender inequality is not just about wage inequality. Nowadays, women tend to work as much as men. However, women's salaries are on average 20% below their male colleagues (IPSOS 2018, MICHON 2015). The official reasons are that they would not work as long as men and simply because they do not occupy the same position as men (SILVERA 2014).

Then, comes the motto “equal pay for equal work”, claimed by many feminists, and lately taken back by Hollywood actresses by the way. Christine Delphy argued that this cause is promoted by feminist that unwittingly put forward the economic equation hidden behind it : « l'exigence d'un salaire égal atteste que l'argent est un pouvoir, mais tout en ignorant étrangement la réalité du système capitaliste qui repose sur l'inégalité. « À travail égal, salaire égal » ne fait pas avancer la cause des femmes qui abattent une quantité disproportionnée de travail domestique dans les couples hétérosexuels, et ce en dépit de ce qu'elles pourraient gagner de plus que leur partenaire masculin. »

Achilles seems clearly aware of this disparity and would not appreciate it if the relationship were reversed.

« *Oui ça m'embêterait qu'elle gagne plus que moi* pour la même charge de travail. Mais pas si elle est hiérarchiquement supérieur à mon poste par exemple. Parce qu'elle aura un salaire équivalent à sa fonction et sa charge de travail, charge que je n'aurai pas. Tout travail mérite salaire et une charge de travail plus importante mérite un salaire plus important. Par contre si on a le même statut ça me gênerait parce que c'est une inégalité de traitement. Et pour changer ça, j'irai voir mon patron pour que ça change. » (Achilles)

According to Delphy the adepts of this equation bypass the means of access for women to have an equal work: “l'éducation des femmes n'est pas un effort individualiste, mais requiert des efforts et la restructuration des systèmes” (DELPHY 2018, online). Women who claim this equal pay fail to criticise capitalism *per se* and fail to acknowledge the nonsense of claiming this equal pay in a system that is fundamentally unequal. In this sense, Silvera agrees with Delphy's

³⁹ Acronym for « Marché du travail et Genre »

point that is to understand why and how women are relegated to less qualified and less well paid jobs, relegated to part time jobs “and trapped in maternity”. This salary discrimination underestimates the obstacles women are confronted with and does not represent the multi-dimensionality of gender inequality.

If men do not change their behaviour, women will not be able to gain space in the labour market, without having to assure a much more significant workload to attain this level of participation in work. This condition will be obtainable simultaneously in the intervention (quantity) and in the nature of the task (quality) that men and women will endorse and accomplish at home. It can happen that men earn less than their female companions. Minos is the only interviewees that said he earned less :

« Ben, si vous voulez de nous deux ***je suis celui qui gagne le moins***, et mon épouse est cadre. Je pense que c’est un bon exemple, non ?
(Minos) »

Minos is perhaps the only one that accepts this situation (being less well paid) because of his feminist values. He sees that being less paid than his wife is a concrete example that women can earn more than men without the latter perceiving any injustice. This is because “it is a fair way to turn the table” because it is “un bon exemple”. On the other hand, interviewees did not react the same way as Achilles who clearly disapproved that such an inequality might happen to him.

« ***Oui ça m’embêterait qu’elle gagne plus que moi*** pour la même charge de travail. Tout travail mérite salaire et une charge de travail plus importante mérite un salaire plus important. Par contre si on a le même statut ça me gênerait parce que ***c’est une inégalité de traitement***. »
(Achilles)

By his quote, I can understand that the motto ‘equal pay for equal work’ matters as far as he is concerned, as far as inequality suits him; and as Ulysses and Palemon say :

« Je pense qu’il vaut mieux arriver à un rééquilibrage, à une mise à niveau et pas passer d’une injustice à une autre. » (Ulysses)

« Je vais sans doute réagir. Si on offre un privilège à une femme plutôt qu’à moi alors qu’on est à compétence égale, ***je ne vais pas accepter la situation et je vais tenter de rééquilibrer l’injustice***. » (Palemon)

This may implicitly mean how equality should be attained for women, without passing by a possible reversal of privilege. In other terms, gender equality should be immediately attained and caught up, in theory. The limit of this reasoning is that it may let it to be thought that women did not fight as they should have to reverse the balance, and it leaves a doubt with respect to what they consider a just society, willing to be part of the process (women from one side and men on the other, that is exactly how some feminists claim it should be). But this process appears double: men will still be between the two regarding attaining social justice, as a long process far from their concerns and that will follow its own course and secondly still place themselves in this non-mixed feminism deliberately or not. Nonetheless, interviewees are aware of their privileges as they can even name at least one of them, that is the most debated nowadays.

- *Tu peux me citer un de tes privilèges par exemple ?*
- Ben je dirai déjà le salaire. » (Ulysses)

« Alors pour moi un privilège que j'ai en tant qu'homme c'est ... **le salaire et l'accès à l'emploi**. Ouais, clairement. C'est corrélé en plus. Mais après je sais pas trop tu vois parce que j'ai lu aussi que les femmes avaient plus de chances d'être prises pour un boulot parce qu'on les considère organisées, administratives, etc. Donc je sais pas trop en fait. » (Jason)

When I have asked them what other privileges they might be aware of possessing *vis-à-vis* women they could not say me another one. However, it is undoubted that our society is gendered-based and that the reference is a (white) man. This will be further developed. What all the interviewees demonstrate is their concern about social justice and about building equality between men and women, but the barrier is still porous to understand to what extent they feel concerned about women's inequality, rather than worried about losing their privilege and facing an inequality with respect to women. Rightly, the next section will focus on this understanding of feminism, that they characterised in three stages.

(Attempts of) definitions of feminism

What I am trying to highlight here is that feminism still encompasses different meanings and misunderstandings that inevitably contribute to misconceptions. It demonstrates how the semantics still have influence because a word gathers in itself a myriad of meanings, inherited from the past. This section is aimed at providing three typologies that cover feminism in respect

of my research participants, starting with the feminism from which they feel excluded, then moving to an inclusive one.

An exclusive feminism

Christine Delphy considers that « nous n'avons pas à placer les hommes au cœur de notre mouvement » (DELPHY 2017, online). When men were asked to give a definition of feminism and how they perceive it through the different discourses of our society (the media, universities, and the feminists themselves or anything else), the given definition was quite coherent in respect of the responses from men involved and those not involved. This given definition of feminism is about women and should only involve women in this struggle and that it should not concern men as the dominant in society.

- « Pour moi, ***on n'est pas vraiment invité*** ... enfin, je veux dire que l'image que j'en ai moi d'un point de vue extérieur, c'est que les hommes sont les méchants. » (Achilles)
- « Mmmh... je sais pas j'ai pas vraiment une définition du féminisme mais des féministes oui. Mais elle n'est pas très bonne.
C'est-à-dire ?
Ben en gros elles sont un peu ***agressives***, elles se mettent à poil parfois, et elles vivent dans une ***bulle complètement déconnectée du monde*** et le moindre truc qu'on fait est bon pour dire qu'on est ***macho***. » (Hercules)
- « Alors pour moi déjà qui suis peut-être d'une autre génération que vous, l'idée que j'ai du féminisme ... c'est celle du MLF⁴⁰, donc j'ai une compréhension de ce mouvement ***exclusivement féminin***. » (Minos)

These three quotes reveal that the image portrayed and conveyed either by the media, schools, or simply by the History of feminism is “violent” (cf. Hercules), and men have difficulty on projecting themselves in this movement because it is exclusively feminine. It can be assumed that feminism in 2018 (modern feminism) is still the heir of the second wave of feminism when women deliberately excluded men from the movement in both mental and societal representations, but only in some aspect. These declarations are the proof that feminism is still believed to be destined for women while in other terms the feminism of 2018 needs to be addressed to men; otherwise women are the enemy. Christine Delphy says that this other side of the coin is double-edged because “si les femmes ne parlent pas d'aider les hommes, elles sont égoïstes ” (DELPHY 2017, online). She further develops that : « le slogan « égalité des

⁴⁰ The Mouvement de Libération des Femmes is a French and non-mixed feminist movement that calls patriarchy into question. It was created around the end of 1960's and the beginning of 1970's.

sexes » ne traite aucun de ces sujets lorsqu'on l'utilise pour parler de ce que le féminisme veut dire pour nous. Le principe d'égalité de genre implique littéralement de respecter des constructions socialement imposées plutôt que les droits humains, plutôt que nos droits et nos expériences, et sape notre capacité à remettre les femmes au centre de notre propre mouvement. Le féminisme est d'abord et avant tout un mouvement pour les femmes » (DELPHY 2017, online).

The limits of this thought is exactly what the interviewees declared because it can generate a misunderstanding, a misconstruction (thought) of feminism as “anti-male” and as “the exclusive domain of women” (Elerick 2015, online). This conveyed rupture tends to discourage people to identifying themselves as feminist, or at least as allies or pro-feminist. Polux timidly names himself an ally.

- *Tu te qualifierais d'homme féministe ?*
- Haha c'est la grande question ça ! Je dirai plutôt que je suis *allié* alors, parce que c'est un terme qui fait débat encore chez les féministes. Mais bon... (Polux)

Same for Castor, who “never *naturally* called himself as feminist” but rather a pro-feminist (see part I.)

« C'est une vaste question... *Naturellement, je ne me présente jamais comme féministe, mais j'ai des valeurs féministes et je suis pro-féministe* : pour moi le féminisme est essentiellement un combat de femmes. Le « pro » en terme de valeurs et d'investissement ne change rien, c'est simplement que *on n'a pas la même application en tant qu'homme parce qu'on ne vit pas les mêmes inégalités qu'on combat*. Et je pense que ça résume ce sentiment-là. » (Castor)

The word *naturally* echoes what Delphy and other feminist exactly defend. Castor is hence adopting a sort of distance between inequalities experienced by women because men are *naturally* not women whom he is not rightly allowing himself to defend. In my opinion, this “*naturally* idea” defended by Delphy that one cannot defend a cause because one does not embody the inequality one defends is symmetrically opposed to the naturalist and essentialist theories that, in the same way, confined women morally, socially and politically in straightjackets from which feminists tried to free themselves. It is then an never ending spiral. This obstacle is, as the social and developmental psychologist George Elerick says “obscures how individual experiences (for example, a mother being over-looked for promotion because

of her assumed lack of commitment to work) are linked to systemic gender bias, and constitute a barrier to individual and collective action.” (ELERICK 2015 online).

« Oui, en tout cas réfléchir et *se remettre en question* c’est vraiment le cœur de la chose. Le fait est que *c’est excessivement inconfortable pour un homme. On doit systématiquement questionner ce qu’on fait et donc remettre en question « notre spontanéité »*. C’est essentiel parce que le féminisme *est fait quelque part en destination des hommes* parce que sans changement de comportement de la part des hommes il n’y aura pas de changements réels de la société. » (Palemon)

Palemon also points out how his spontaneity (his naturalness) is tested. In addition, I think he also highlights the ambiguity of feminism which implies only women, is destined at the same time in reaction against men. Feminism kept its own conceptions that opposed one with another. An example is that academic community, or simply, people reinvent new terms that suits them : “ally”, or “pro-feminism”. Hercules for instance names himself a “genrist” (see below).

Yet, feminism is not only opposing men to women, or an approach of one feminism to another. It even contrasts itself, geographically speaking, opposing the North to the South. In developing countries, “feminism” is avoided because Western-connoted (Basu 1995) Palemon and Castor talk about it.

« Mais il n’en reste pas moins que le *féminisme dans beaucoup d’endroits du monde reste très négativement connoté*. Mais on travaille avec beaucoup de partenaires *dans le Sud* et je sais notamment que dans certains pays en Afrique les acteurs de terrain qui travaillent un peu de la même manière et sur les mêmes thématiques que nous *ne vont pas se définir comme féministes* simplement parce que ce mot, une fois lâché, *la discussion est terminée et vont réagir très négativement*. » (Castor)

« Moi chez ASWA, j’aime beaucoup l’idée que ce soit un combat féministe avec un angle d’approche « monde arabe » parce que *ça ouvre des perspectives à d’autres niveaux et ça donne un autre regard sur le féminisme*, et voilà je m’y retrouve complètement dans ce féminisme-là, même je ne sais pas exactement le définir (rire). (Palemon)

Finally, the argument that any oppressed social group should emancipate itself independently has been depicted in the first section, including its limits. It has been picked up by some feminist groups, arguing that the oppressors cannot be liberators. One could not deny that this idea is

very seductive in its simplicity; however, it questions its concrete application. Starting with the acknowledgment that men are aware of their limits in their understanding of (some) inequalities experiences by men is already a cornerstone, as Crowe asserts. Nonetheless, it does not prevent men wishing for social change and to be part of it. Indeed, interviewees proved that they are more willing to be included themselves in the gender equality struggle, and not seen as enemies.

From an altruism feminism to an inclusive one

The benefits of altruism

But do the semantics really matter at that stage ? Are these ontological principles a barrier in pursuing a common goal? As previously seen, in the theoretical part (Part I), I tried to apply feminism to an altruism reading grid. Altruism thus is a motivated individual act which stems from intentions (Passy 1998). In this tradition, Bar-Tal (1985-86) provides a definition of altruism based on five characteristics of human behaviour: “altruistic behaviour (a) must benefit other persons, « (b) must be performed voluntarily, (c) must be performed intentionally, (d) the benefit must be the goal by itself, and (e) must be performed without expecting any external reward” ».

Note that this section is trying to emphasise that feminism is a sort of altruism as its aim is to endorse an action that will not benefit the actor who carried out the action. What we can retain here is that the interviewees’ understanding feminism is above all gathering the elements defined by Bar-Tal, being part or not part of a feminist organisation. The ambiguity here is precisely to understand if it is the identification with feminism that provide the incentives to be altruist in feminism or if it is just a noble cause that anyone can endorse without specifically identify themselves to the feminism ideas.

- *Pour toi un homme féministe c’est quelqu’un qui milite ?*
- Ben non par forcément. Mais quelqu’un qui ne milite pas ça fait pas non plus de lui un anti ou de non féministe, tu vois ?
- *Ce serait plus de l’ordre de l’altruisme par exemple ?*
- Mmh. Oui voilà, je pense qu’on est tous altruiste en fin de compte. ***C’est ça les rapports humains.*** On fait évoluer les choses pour son prochain. (Jason)

Since (political) altruism is a way to give voice and to rebalance the power between those who dominate and those they oppress, it thus benefits the latter in the short run when the benefit is

obvious. Palemon seems aware of that : what altruism does in sub-structure is to benefit to the dominants (the larger) group then in the long term. So, here we go again with the ever ending spiral.

« (...) les hommes ont tout à y gagner de perdre de leur privilèges, ça serait déjà plus saint dans nos rapports. C'est un peu bateau ce que je vais dire ... mais ce qu'ils perdraient c'est une partie du pouvoir et du coup à terme **ils vont y gagner** (...) (Palemon)

Altruism appears thus to help recognise power relations between individuals, in this case, between men and women. This recognition for instance is the explanatory factor for Polux to deconstruct his behaviour and social codes so that it can benefit society.

Et puis après ensuite tu déconstruis sur **comment** (*sic*) est-ce que toi dans ta vie quotidienne **tu peux aider à réaliser cette égalité**.
(Polux)

Burn & al suggests that the pride coming from a group comes from “ a disadvantaged group [that] justifies equality struggles” (Burn & al). The complexity is once again, here : men (in or out a feminist organisation) who are at minima interested in or identify themselves with feminism, or gender equality, are themselves part of a minority group of the minority group that seeks changes.

« Ce qui est sûr c'est qu'elles font vraiment tout pour qu'**on se sente utile**. Et puis le change c'est d'avoir des **rapports égalitaires** » (Minos)

I noticed a sort of ‘collective self-esteem’ of interviewees interested, from near and far, in the feminist cause. As far as Minos is concerned, he underlines how horizontal are the relationships with his colleagues, that makes him feel useful, namely, a core element of the association that automatically has an impact on his self-esteem aggregated to the other ones of the team. The notion of self-esteem identity helps to understand why in practice, individuals, groups have to more or less focused on a common core that will be make sense. It is the same for Ulysses who feels “closer to women” when he is conscious of gender power relations, or injustices. He says:

« Un jour j'ai été témoin de certaines choses dans les transports publics. Moi du coup, je suis intervenu directement, même si d'autres personnes étaient intervenues avant moi. J'ai réagi directement comme s'il s'agissait d'une de mes amies, donc c'était normal pour moi. Je sentais un **rapport de proximité** entre tout le monde » (Ulysses)

Feminism targets actions of each and every one, from the individual level to the organized and institutionalised. Now we will see how men can really feel included in feminism by its definition and goals.

Inclusivity : two sides of a same coin ?

Shira Tarrant stresses that men should very much feel part of feminism (2009). After having asked interviewees what was their opinion and definition of this “given” feminism conveyed by the dominant discourse, I had asked them to reformulate *their* own definition of feminism in which they would recognize themselves. I presumed I would get very eclectic definitions especially regarding the groups “in” feminist organisations and the ones “out”, but it was not the case. Nonetheless, I noticed that equality was at the centre of their respective definition. In her famous speech pronounced in front of the UN Women in 2014, the young actress Emma Watson claimed “if you are in favour of gender equality, then you are feminist”. Using this reasoning, Inga Schowengerdt, a social and developmental psychologist in Boston University, completed her PhD in which she studied the “use of extracurricular math and engineering programs as a means of increasing girls’ participation and persistence in STEM⁴¹”. She defends the idea that feminism is about equality and not a particular gender. On the other hand ‘women’s rights’ are not mentioned, nor ‘women’s emancipation’, which is the root of feminism according to another definition of feminism. What we are witnessing is that feminism has shifted and it is now encompassing not more, but different stakes than it used to do compared to previous waves. In this direction, Shira Tarrant says that involving men in feminism “means holding men personally and institutionally accountable for the sexist abuse of power” (TARRANT 2009, p.18). The collected declarations echo exactly this formula.

- « Alors je pense que le féminisme dans son essence la plus pure et de ce que moi j’en tire en tout cas, c’est que c’est un mouvement qui vise à **donner des droits égaux aux hommes comme aux femmes**. Par contre je pense pas que ça soit quelque chose qui vise la suprématie de la femme sur l’homme, je pense pas que ça implique plus de droit aux femmes qu’aux hommes, mais juste **une égalité pure et parfaite**, de droit et de fait et sociale entre les deux sexes. Un peu comme une considération juste au sein de la société. C’est la vision que je me suis donné du féminisme et que j’ai envie de défendre. » (Achilles)
- « Pour moi le féminisme c’est **l’égalité** ; mais sinon, ma définition du féminisme c’est un combat pour la **justice sociale** quoi. Pour moi le féminisme est très incluant maintenant. » (Polux)

⁴¹ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

- « Pour moi le féminisme, et la définition dans laquelle je me retrouve le plus facilement c'est d'offrir une *égalité de droits et d'opportunités* à tous les individus quel que soit leur genre et leur sexe. Je pense que si on va à la racine, c'est vers ça qu'on tend. Et ça permet de dégager les aspects péjoratifs que les gens ont vis-à-vis du féminisme. » (Castor)
- « Donc pour moi le féminisme, c'est revendiquer *l'égalité* hommes-femmes, tant dans la *vie politique que dans la vie quotidienne*. » (Ulysses)
- « Un mouvement composé dès ses origines par des femmes et des hommes, qui vise à instaurer *une égalité* entre hommes et femmes. Par l'effet historique, on appelait ça féminisme mais maintenant on est dans un processus d'égalisation, on devrait parler *d'égalisation genriste*. C'est ce à quoi j'aspire d'ailleurs. » (Hercules)

From interviewees' declarations we can observe that they emphasize their will to be included in feminism and that they claim the equality of both genders. 'Equality', 'Equality of opportunity', 'gender equality' and 'social justice' are mentioned in each of these declarations. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author, stresses that the expression gender equality or human rights are terms that englobe 'feminism'; but one should not forget feminism as such, because human rights/gender equality deny the specificity and the singularity of the women's struggle. Hercules, for instance, does not consider the female sex as an oppressed one and, on the other hand, adopt a perfect integration of the equality already granted. In other terms, it is more willing to ignore the past ("the past is the past"), and to making gender inequality invisible.

What is similarly noticeable is the tension toward a universalist approach (as the one of feminism) of a new modern feminism, but without passing by women's inequality as a matter of fact. In other terms, it is observed a tendency, in deed a process, from the interviewees, to universalise feminism, that makes them enter in it without the need to "recognise" in the very first step that there are *de facto* inequality towards women that need *de facto* to be recognise. And this, does not justify any claim from organisations to reverse the game ('je pense pas que ça soit quelque chose qui vise la suprématie de la femme sur l'homme'). We can think that this universalisation is operated with the aim to tackle the stereotypes that is due to them constructed by feminism. To sum up, three characteristics composed their definition of feminism that are the following :

1. Theoretical tools ('justice sociale, 'égalité d'opportunité, 'égalité pure et parfaite')
2. That should operate in the public and private sphere

But this question is actually a debate among scholars and feminists, arguing that gender equality obliterates women's struggles. For instance, Christine Delphy opposes the inclusion of men in feminism. She defends the idea that making feminism more inclusive, *i.e.* encompassing the opposite sex (the oppressors) makes us forget the very principle and unique foundation of feminism: the patriarchal system of the society in which we are living. Again according to her, if we still consider feminism as gender equality, it is a way to defend equality in a gendered system, *i.e.* that social constructions are imposed and accepted by us : « nous défendons en fait l'égalité dans un système genré, soit un respect identique pour le masculin et pour le féminin, mais pas pour les êtres qui vivent, respirent et existent. L'expression « égalité des sexes » fait disparaître les femmes comme sujets, alors que celles-ci sont physiologiquement assujetties, et le sont souvent par le biais de constructions genrées qui justifient notre oppression» (DELPHY, online, Oct. 2017).

Historically speaking, patriarchy reinforced differences between women and men to justify women's subordination ; what she underlines is that women do not need to be considered equal to men. Indeed, she points out that the problem is here: men's privileges, men's rights, or simply, the condition of men *should not be* the standards that women should try to achieve⁴². By the way, we will see below how this egalitarian equation is seen as one of the claims of today's feminist motto "Equal pay for equal work", that is actually at the root of the capitalist system, that embodies inequalities. So, as Delphy argues, women do not need to be perceived equal to men but rather, " comme dignes et légitimes non pas en dépit de nos différences, mais *en raison* de nos différences". The tendency to generalise, or to replace feminism with equality is a trap according to Delphy. She says that men created patriarchy and draw advantages from it "otherwise, they would struggle by our side to end it". Feminism constructed itself around this very emancipation because women were oppressed. It is not presumed that interviewees are taking for granted that women's equality is on the same level as men equality. Feminism imposed itself as a necessary cause and it has evolved throughout time, has changed its definitions, aims and objectives.

These 'strategies' to encompass men in the gender equality process are similar to the two registers of commitment that motivate the commitment of men according the humanist register, which would be a register of commitment in the name of a universal equality between the individuals, justifying to mobilize for women at the same level as other inequalities; and the

⁴² See in section 2.4.

identity register, which proceeds from the deconstruction of gender identities and promotes a struggle in the same direction (JACQUEMART 2015, pp. 126-133 in AROMATARIO 2015). That is exactly what the interviewees declarations depict in this section. Now I will turn to the next section that is aimed at analysing how this new universalist/humanist approach of feminism is or is not wishful thinking and hoping to change the cogs of the patriarchal system.

Feminism replacing the patriarchal society

Patriarchy implies men and yet most men do not use this word in their everyday life, nor perceive their acts as gendered. According to bell hooks, “men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women’s liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences.” (HOOKS, n.d., p.1). Disparities of the political system found their fundamentals in what bell hooks calls “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. That is one of the reason why I intend to interview white men so to evaluate their degree of concern of disparities and their consciousness of their privileges.

“the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and women are deprived of access to such power. It does *not* imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influences, and resources” (FRENCH 1985, p.239 in WILSON, 2000 p.1494.)

This section will go into details to analyse to what extent does feminism proposes a renewal of society in terms of abolishing male privileges. It will try to analyse which kind of privileges the interviewees were aware of having and how they design new tools and ways if changing mentalities that promote a feminist society through tools, such as the education.

The social justice at the expenses of losing privileges

Men's role in feminism is very important because it will allow men and women to adopt new social conduct, combined with its codes aiming to be egalitarian. Connell for instance theorised that gender is a large-scale social structure and "not just a matter of personal identity" (BAILY 2012). So is that the case for men's role in society.

Elsa Dorlin (DORLIN 2013), whose research is based on feminist philosophies, gender and sexuality, declares that « le féminisme a pour ambition de révolutionner la société », and that feminism is a 'praxis of oneself'⁴³.

« *Incarner* le féminisme en tant qu'homme, donc *dominant*, c'est une *déconstruction* par rapport à soi-même et *ses pratiques*. Donc c'est un peu un travail de *déconstruction structurelle*. Tu te rends comptes des inégalités structurelles qu'il y a au niveau du sociétal et l'institutionnel et aussi en tant que toi-même comment tu te situes et comment tu reproduis ces inégalités. Et puis après ensuite tu déconstruis sur *comment (sic)* est-ce que toi dans ta vie quotidienne *tu peux aider à réaliser cette égalité*. (...) C'est pas facile parce qu'on a pas de référent dans la masculinité que celle de *la domination*. » (Polux)

Polux mentioned two important things : first, feminism has to be fully taken into account by men, indeed, embodies as theorised by Dorlin. Second, feminism makes it possible for men to become aware of his dominant position which needs to be deconstructed both at a micro and at a macro level (the structures). Feminism can be thus a sort of a medium that pushes men to enter into a sort of "dilemma". For instance, it led Polux to realise that there are inequalities created and perpetrated between women and men (by the system, the structures, the institutions, the discourses, the normalisation of the socialisation) in general⁴⁴, and that he was part of this chain as well⁴⁵. That is the point that we can differentiate from the other interviewees out of a feminist organization that are still keeping a distance from the "men that misbehave" as a distinct entity or social group, without being aware they are part of it.

Minos, for instance, is aware that he is privileged because of his gender.

« *Oui les hommes vont perdre des privilèges*, car la société est comme ça. *Si une situation d'inégalité venait à se produire dans la vie de tous les jours, puisque je sais que je suis privilégié* [n'a pas fini sa phrase]. Je ne

⁴³ Pratique de soi

⁴⁴ « C'est pas facile parce qu'on a pas de référent dans la masculinité que celle de la domination ».

⁴⁵ « C'est une déconstruction par rapport à soi-même et ses pratiques ».

trouve pas bien de jouir de privilèges qui sont injustes, donc *je suis pour perdre ces privilèges*. » (Minos)

Jonathan Crowe (CROWE 2008) said nearly the same thing about men engagement (be it activist or not) in feminism: “a useful starting point would be to recognise the necessary limits of their knowledge and experiences (...) The feminist outlook is premised on knowledge and understanding of women’s experiences — and, put simply, these are experiences men cannot have” (CROWE 2008, p. 49-50). Moreover, it applies to Polux and Palemon who could not perfectly understand women experiences, but they recognise this limit because they see themselves as part of those who oppress.

« Ah ça c’est difficile à dire ... *on en a conscience quand on les perd !* (rires). Non mais sinon, oui les hommes ont tout à y gagner de perdre de leur privilèges, ça serait déjà plus saint dans nos rapports. C’est un peu bateau ce que je vais dire ... mais ce qu’ils perdraient c’est une partie du pouvoir et du coup à terme ils vont y gagner une meilleure prise de décision dans les différents niveaux de la famille jusqu’au gouvernement... » (Palemon)

Palemon could not tell which privilege he benefits as it appears invisible to him. And these quotes demonstrate that the loss of male privileges are *de facto* a core element of their activism, that obviously justify their participation in a such organisation. It is implicitly understood that their activism is already a form of change of society within which they agree to re-balance the gender roles that they practice in this space. On the other hand, Jason, who is out of a feminist organisation, does not perceive it like this. In his opinion, being aware of these privileges is not a sufficient element for starting to change things (he did not forget to remind us that he cooks), but rather it is something that we practice over time.

« Oui ben on nous rabâche suffisamment les oreilles que les hommes ci et ça... Mais au final ça peut créer vraiment plus de division entre les hommes et les femmes je trouve. C’est pas en tenant toujours ce discours que ça va changer les choses, tu vois ? Mais vraiment dans la vie de tous les jours, comme moi qui cuisine par exemple. » (Jason)

Hercules was following more or less the same reasoning as Jason but pointed out something else.

- « Mmmh, Oui le savoir c’est bien. Mais ensuite quoi ?
- Tu peux par exemple rejoindre un collectif ... ?
 - Non. Fin si mais c’est pas assez. Pour moi le féminisme c’est pas ça justement. Fin oui, c’est une discipline à part entière et tout ça mais j’veux

dire moi *entant que mec je dois pouvoir le normaliser* comme discours dans mon moi. Pour qu'à la fin il devienne invisible dans mon système de pensées tu vois ?

- *Comme ?*
- Par exemple, depuis que j'ai quitté la Sicile⁴⁶, ça ne me vient plus à l'esprit de décrire une personne par sa couleur de peau tu vois ? Quand on raconte une histoire à quelqu'un. Alors que je sais qu'avant je l'aurai fait. Donc je pense que *le féminisme doit faire ça chez nous.* » (Manu)

Hercules outlines and advances a very interesting argument putting feminism in perspective with an ethnical argument, without realising that feminism has done one part of its job here. If we adopt a broad definition of feminism, it advocates each and every equality be it ethnic, religious, racial, gender, economical. Here, with respect to what Jason and Hercules declare, it still seems difficult to normalise the "equality discourse" in terms of sex, yet is the very first, advocated by feminism as well as the equality of race. These declarations prove that feminism is operating to change our interpersonal relationships and their social representations. Men recognise that they benefit from some privileges and that they are willing to abandon them so as to achieve social justice. Feminism is not just an isolated concept orbiting around our society but it is multidimensional and at a multilevel (from the individuality to the societal structures). The second section will now see what the interviewees designed as key elements that can emancipate women from their burden and achieve social justice.

Disempowering in order to empowering

Feminism patriarchy's leverage is the empowerment of women whereas patriarchy's one is disempowering men. Castor responds to this idea and demonstrates that he has given up one the most central privileges on men, *i.e* a job that assures him leadership. In addition, he underlines how logical it is according to him, according to a men who is prone to assume feminist values :

En étant le seul homme ici, étant un poste *sans responsabilité*, enfin je veux dire « de pouvoir », je n'ai pas la main sur tout ... *c'est complètement logique je trouve*. Je ne parlerai pas de matriarcat pour autant, c'est-à-dire que je ne sens pas une domination des femmes sur les hommes ici, au contraire. Il y a une mise à équivalence. (Castor)

⁴⁶ And before, Manu lived in England, France and Germany.

Feminism aims to make men lose power, and this conquered power makes it possible to be recycled in autonomy, in power over oneself. Thus, women gain freedom as well as men. Castor's statement suggests to think that his autonomy, indeed his liberty, is not entrained because of a loss of power illustrating that his liberty is not an individual good. Rather, it is a collective one (cf. altruism) shared experiences by everyone ("il y a une mise à équivalence"). Disempowering for empowering enables a positive liberty : the more one is free, the more we all will be.

When men (will) accept to tip over the trend and work with less responsibilities in the hierarchical structure, this constitutes the very first solution to balance the power between women and men. Now, how could this disempower operate so it can contribute to the whole society ? Throughout parenting and school education. As previously described earlier referring to the #MeToo campaign, Achilles did not hide his suspicion with respect to its real impact, putting the doubt on the ephemerality. To him, the real tool is instead, the education and the awareness in the long term. His opinion is shared more or less with the other interviewees both in and out a feminist organization as Minos and Jason declare.

« [M]ais je pense pas que la mouvance qu'il y a eu pourra changer quelque chose, ce n'est pas une solution. Le réel changement pour moi c'est la **conscientisation, par l'école, les médias** surtout. » (Achilles)

« On en revient toujours à **l'éducation**, ça reste la clé des changements. » (Minos)

Minos, however, did not neglect the social impact of women's release of speech that happened on the social media, it was for him "a channel of expression as the others that raised voice to silence". The only difference with Achilles, Jason thinks that feminism will be achievable in two phases ; (1) thanks to an education that passes by a mass awareness, that is possible throughout the medias, and (2) by a politicisation (*i.e.* the political level).

« Faut une **conscientisation de masses**. Ça doit se faire à travers les médias ou la télévision parce que ce sont deux choses qui **influencent énormément l'opinion public** en ce moment. Ensuite par un **acheminement politique** c'est-à-dire implémenter des décisions qui irait vers l'égalisation de droit, mais ça devra passer par le politique. (Jason)

Gilles Lazimi is a doctor and a lecturer at the Université Pierre Marie Curie in France and declares that : « si on veut l'égalité renforcer l'égalité entre hommes et femmes, c'est l'éducation de nos garçons qu'il faut changer ». He advocates this as a gage to a happy society. I presented this quote to the interviewees and ask them to tell me what they think about it. The

interviewees outside the feminist organisation replied unanimously that is what not only the education of young boys but of young girls, whereas men's responses from a feminist organization recognise that educating boys will break the stereotypes.

Outside :

« Que les garçons soient les seuls à être visés pour changer, c'est un peu du *sexisme inversé* non ? (Jason) »

« Ben non là on retombe dans la *dérive qu'on est les méchants*... si on lutte pour une égalité en droit et en fait, les hommes et les femmes doivent le faire avec *les mêmes outils*. » (Achilles)

« En respectant ce que je t'ai dit tout à l'heure, que j'étais genriste, je pense donc que l'éducation doit être *pour tous les genres* ». (Hercules)

Inside :

« Le féminisme vise les hommes, ça nous concernait depuis le départ. C'est une bonne idée je trouve. *C'est un mal pour un bien*. » (Castor)

« J'irai même plus loin. Le problème d'un certain féminisme c'est qu'en nous séparant, *il contribue lui-même au renforcement de la virilité des hommes* ». (Minos)

Jacquemart analyses that feminism helped the men in organisation to get rid of the stereotypes about virility straightjacket. What Minos declares is really interesting as he emphasises how a sort of feminism that is not willing to include men, pushes them to reinforce themselves in the century identity established by virility. And precisely, the ambiguity of this quote is : one the one hand, it is estimates a good idea to teach boys to break stereotypes with regard to them, one the other, we isolated them in the educational process. Minos and Castor's opinions reveal the ambiguity that gender is victim of stereotypes that needs to be deconstructed side by side but with a specific focus on men.

Chapter conclusion

As a reminder, this section was elaborated according to two axes : first (1) the definition of feminism (*i.e* from exclusive to inclusive) to their understanding of it, second (2) how their understanding of feminism revealed to be a praxis that is applied in their daily life, that leads to a new reshaping of the patriarchal system. This section reveals difficulty of understanding

feminism as an abstract concept: do we do feminism or do we just practically live that sometimes may look similar and be applied to the concept? It demonstrates how feminism is still a very ambiguous term, again hard to define and to agree upon. Feminism is pulled between its homogenisation of one group and targets and between the unification and enlargement of its stakes and members.

If a comparison should be made, there is just not except that gender deconstruction was much more internalised in men inside a feminist organisation than the men outside of it. Otherwise, men all declared to be willing to bring a stone for building social harmony between women and men. Indeed, what men lose in power, they win it in freedom. Supporting feminism actively or personally is just, logic and democratic.

Conclusion

*“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all”
(Aristotle)*

Concluding thoughts and research implications

The results obtained throughout this research project make possible and answer to the research question asked in the introduction: ***How do men (in or out of a feminist organisations) understand feminism, interiorise, identify with it, frame it in their everyday lives and become actors for reshaping patriarchy ?***

Theoretical developments brought a deep questioning about the subjects of feminism : the deconstruction of gender leads to a precise problematic about the identity of men and about the possibility of their mobilising in feminism⁴⁷. It asks how men’s identity can encompass feminist identity, how it can embody it in everyday action according to its defined goals. Having explored the personal and to a certain extent the political experiences of eight men, four of whom were and four of whom were not involved in a feminist organisations, this research analyses the challenges and possibilities of men identifying themselves with feminism and even to embody it. As a result that on a general basis, men in feminist organisations find out alternative gender practices and try to annul the identity constructions separating genders. Men outside of a feminist organisation throw light on institutional structures responsible of gender inequality and try to redefine themselves by accommodating their actions to their social environment.

It is important to observe that the ambiguities, indeed, the contradictions of feminism do not delegitimise the aims that were revealed to be complementary. The common denominator for the eight interviewees reveals their willingness to meaningfully participate in shared spaces, be they “animated” by the feminist viewpoint or not. Indeed all of them declared it necessary to engage in continuous critical self-reflexivity recognizing and respecting at the same time women’s experience. Interviewees showed that feminism appears to follow a certain continuity that was first addressed to women, then addressed to gender equality. In the third stage,

⁴⁷ This consideration became a strategy for the feminist associations choosing or not choosing the mixity principle, namely welcoming men within their organisation.

feminism contains in itself the core aim of reshaping society in order to dismantle the patriarchal system.

In this research, feminism was not defined as a social movement, but rather as a cause, a life philosophy, a set of behaviours and actions. Nowadays, feminism still embodies ambiguities due to its etymology, its history, and its means of actions. Feminism precisely remains women-centred in its essence and terminology: women as the oppressed, women as the victims of inequality, women as the sexualised ones, women in their social relations with respect to men, in sum. However, the reader cannot deny that feminism tries to filter misconceptions held by individuals. It was seen to be understood and identified by men with different approaches (pro-feminism, ally, supporter, or even simply feminist!), be it in or outside a feminist organisation. In the same way that its concerns women, feminism shows itself to be multifaceted and is constantly being revamped. Its repertoire contains a peculiar plasticity of its own, that constantly helps it reinvent itself, investing different spheres of stakes. Interviews and declarations confirmed that a cause can only be heard, appropriately when it is inclusive, when it is clear that everyone can contribute to it. Feminism offers a societal project that is about each and every one. A combined approach of gender studies and feminism allows the reader to understand the multiplicity of the subject matter and its echoes in social identity theory at both micro and macro levels. From our perspective, feminism covers three theoretical principles that specify why it is not just a cause of women for women : (1) feminism is not just a social and political movement, (2) biological sex that does not determine a person's identity, and (3) it is concerned with "patterns of domination" (TARRANT 2009, p.6).

Men's involvement in feminism, be it in an organisation or in their simple routine makes it possible at to the individual, the social and maybe the most important, the contextual level. In other words, social identity theory reveals in this research how the individual structures through alterity and reciprocity, constructed his own set of principles and actions. The social level reveals important things such as the altruistic behaviour that men adopt so to benefit others, *i.e.*, women and more largely society as a whole. But the contextual level is the crucial one because it demonstrated how men question a certain image of themselves that is transmitted to them through their actions and their reciprocity. That makes their improbable men participation in everyday feminism possible. This back and forth between the three levels constitutes in the end the contextual changes possible to build on social justice and a better balance of roles between men and women, and so questioning the basis of patriarchal system. The interviewees declarations explain how they are constantly readapting and permanently working to reinvent

themselves (introspection and self-reflexivity). Moreover, this research cannot talk about the place that men have in feminism without touching upon the public debate that recently happened after the shock wave of the Harvey Weinstein scandal followed by movements on social media that questioned once again but for a larger audience the part played by men in feminism, namely how a men can be partisan of this cause as well.

Feminism cuts across several dimension of individual's life, leading them to act accordingly but also to transform the way they perceive themselves as well. The analysis showed how feminism contributed to deconstructing stereotypes. And this feminist identity operates for men in feminist organisations and outside, revealing an identity process on gender in the long term. In other terms, interviewees illustrated and confirmed that despite the persistence of the female and male identity poles, they prove that gender is reshaping itself. The deconstruction of gender and of stereotypes is not yet complete because it depends on multiple factors.

The notion of identity of self-esteem helps to understand why in practice, individuals and groups have to more or less focus on a common core that will be make sense collectively speaking and will allow either the mobilisation in the case of men in organisations, or a certain sympathy for feminism ideas for the others because there is a common goal that will benefit everyone.

Feminism as a cause has this very specificity that it touches one of the central categories in the intelligibility of our identities. On the one hand, feminism rests on a subject which is moving and on the other, it is reorienting toward a goal that is precisely questioning, deconstructing the matrix from which it is constituted. Henceforth, feminism acts not as a simple transformation but as a “permanently revolution” that obliges us to envisage heterogeneity and fluctuation as the basis of identity.

Limitations of the study

The limits encountered in this research are linked to the nature of the subject itself, already met in the theoretical and analytical part. Analyses were made of the involvement of men in feminism but few tend to demonstrate the complexity between the understanding of feminism by men, how they (think) apply it, wittingly or not, and how it contributes step by step to changing the patriarchal system. As a consequence, the theoretical framework helps to understand the overall stakes that exist around the binary question “can men *be* feminists?”

rather than questioning *their* approaches, *their* understandings, and thus *their definition and embodiment* of feminism. That is why a deductive approach was used (see below).

Men's experience with respect to feminism and how they understand it, apply it, lie at the core of this research. I deliberately did not interview women involved in a feminist organisation as this kind of research has already been done. Furthermore, the interviewees were all white, heterosexual men, coming from a middle class, comfortable background from 25-40 years old. It is thus not possible to extend it to other social classes nor to other ethnicities and cultures. It would have been interesting to explore this kind of intersectionality of men and between them as some men live different experiences according to their ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic situation and culture, etc. Unfortunately, this could not have been carried out because of the difficulty of finding participants in a feminist organisation as I was not part a feminist organisation network and, what is more, abroad. Furthermore, may I apologise to the reader for the bilingual content of this research. As this research project was submitted both in Brussels and Italy, I had no choice but to write in English. On the other hand, I had no choice but to proceed to French-speaking participants so as to establish first a climate of trust between the interviewees and myself and because people are more at ease speaking in their mother tongue (and my Italian was not that good so the idea of interviewing Italians was soon evicted). As far as the writing is concerned, it was a real challenge to write such a work in another language than my mother tongue with respect to the level of abstraction, the necessary distance and the analysis of the interviews conducted in French. One cannot deny the difficulty to passing a message in a foreign language.

This research does not have the pretention of being generalised as it was done in a delimited spatial-temporal timeframe; what is more, with a restricted sample. Perhaps it would be interesting to expand this analysis to a larger number of participants so that it might be more representative. In terms of the questionnaire, I had to adapt my questions for men inside and outside a feminist organisation. As I was not focusing on the organisational project of an association, my questions were thus personal demanding a certain introspection from them. My methodology was qualitative and deductive as I started from a research question and tried to apply it to the study of my observations, namely, my interviewees. Moreover, it was a challenge to well-balanced this research project that intends to be more analytical and descriptive from what was observable, with the fear to not fall into a normative approach.

Further lines of reflexions

In order to further continue this work project, it might be interesting to study this topic in comparison with Italy. It is a country with a history, cultural context, and social representations different from Belgium. Secondly, using the intersectionality concept might throw light on different results than mine as previously mentioned with men coming from different economic, social, and religious background. Last but not least, transgenderism has been put in the public space and gained more and more in visibility. Developing the stakes of feminism with respect those of transgenderism will undoubtedly raise as yet unexplored questions.

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