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Social movement organizations and changing state architectures: Comparing women's movement organizing in Flanders and Scotland

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the impact of restructuring processes on the organizational structure and lobbying strategies of women's movement organizations (WMOs) in Belgium (Flanders) and the UK (Scotland). We argue that devolution/federalization and the resultant creation of new, intermediary levels of governance offers a devolution/federalism advantage to WMOs. Multi-level governance multiplies access points, allowing for accumulation of funds, limited forms of venue shopping and avoidance of veto players. Nevertheless, a set of push and pull factors draws WMOs towards the regional level thereby 'abandoning the centre'. These changes are driven by centrifugal dynamics that characterise the processes of devolution and federalization in these cases. In the long run, these may erase the devolution/federalism advantage, and also pose questions about state-wide women's citizenship and gender solidarity.

There is an established literature examining the impact of federal institutions on outcomes in terms of government, democracy, management of diversity, and public policy (Erk 2006). However, the central research question for feminist scholars has been the impact of different sorts of state architecture on activist women's strategies to progress women-friendly public policies (Vickers 2010). In particular, attention is paid to the formal division of powers and policy terrains, and how variations in form affect the political opportunity structure within which women's movement organisations (WMOs) stake claims, and the consequent impact on women's status as citizens and on strategies for feminist engagement with the state. The concern is with "if and how federal mechanisms can be operated to achieve women-friendly outcomes" (Vickers 2011a: 259), studied in single cases (Haussman 2005) or comparatively (Bashevkin 1998, Vickers 2011b, 2010; Chappell 2002; Haussman et al. 2010).

Feminist scholars debate the double face of federalism. Starting with the negative face: empirically, many federal systems are not only "welfare laggards" but also "gender equality laggards" as compared with their unitary counterparts (Vickers 2010). Feminists argue this is because of institutional fragmentation and the federal characteristics and logic of divided powers and multiple veto points. Multiple levels of government may weaken state capacity to enact and protect women's rights and weaken the capacity of organized women, including feminists, to lobby effectively across multiple levels. Research suggests that meso levels may act as veto players using a federation's division of authority to obstruct federal led reforms (Haussman 2005, Vickers 2010). Furthermore, jurisdictional overlaps and blurred boundaries may enable political elites to dodge policy responsibility for gender equality (Haussman 2005, Vickers 1994, Vickers 2010, Vickers 2011a,b). Rolling back gender equality policies or implementing policies which negatively impact on women's lives by one government in a

federal state might incite others to follow the example, resulting in what federalism's critics classify as the 'race to the bottom'.

The potential federalism advantage – or positive face of federalism - also rests upon the defining characteristics of federalism: those of vertical power divisions and multiple governance sites. Federal state architectures are premised to "offer choices that may be unavailable in more centralized polities" (Constatelos 2010: 477). In this scenario, positive competitive dynamics may be harnessed which lead to policy innovation at sub state level with multiple opportunities for policy learning and emulation both horizontally and vertically. These may give rise to a 'race to the top' in terms of progressive public policy. According to Vickers (2011b) this 'federalism advantage' is most easily realized in centralized, symmetrical federations.

Feminist scholars taking a conditional approach point out that characteristics that result in negative effects of federalism in one case may, in other cases and circumstances, be positive. For example, Bashevkin (1998) argues that in economic and political 'hard times', WMOs and their policy agendas fare better in federal systems than in unitary systems because there is no overall veto player. Similarly, Chappell argues the interplay of different levels in federal systems can slow down or stymie radical efforts at one level to unravel progressive social policy in conservative times. This is particularly the case in symmetrical federations with strong networks of women's policy agencies (Chappell 2001, Chappell 2002).

Most literature to date has studied federal systems with crystallized state architectures. However, the sets of opportunities and constraints offered by newly federalizing or devolving states may be qualitatively different. As Chappell explains, political opportunity structures

and institutional dynamics vary over time and across cases, "the relationship between feminists and political institutions is both interactive and dynamic" (2002: 269). Periods of institutional (re) structuring are also double-faced from the perspective of WMOs. Whilst positive outcomes are not guaranteed, being included at a stage when structures and their underpinning values are (re) negotiated may enable feminists to 'lock in' progressive elements thus counteracting historic gender imbalances (Vickers 2010). Thus periods of change may present a momentum for new institutional arrangements to include new, previously marginalised, actors and perspectives, and to adopt and institutionalize policy innovations that promote gender equality.

Devolving and federalising systems also have a negative face. They create potential learning costs associated with newness whereby key actors must familiarise themselves with new state architectures and emerging institutional logics. When state restructuring is designed as political accommodation of territorial or ethnolinguistic identities, there are further costs and dilemmas for civil society actors. Groups need to position themselves vis-à-vis incentives to comply with the dominant territorial identities and territorial elites that may: squeeze the political space available for the organisation and expression of other sorts of identities (Erk and Anderson 2009; Huysseune 2009; Rebouché and Fearon 2005); demand territorial loyalty at the expense of cross-border/cross-community solidarities (such as women's movement solidarities) in return for recognition and possible influence; or view projects like gender equality as "undermining the coherence" of ethnolinguistic or territorial projects (Rebouché and Fearon 2005:163). Examples also abound where new arrangements, driven by ethnolingustic or peripheral nationalisms, "actually allow particular ethnonational groups to further their own sexist ideologies" under the guise of political and cultural accommodation and protection (Rebouché and Fearon 2005:164).

This article focuses on the implications for WMOs of the creation of new intermediary levels in processes of devolution or federalization. The central question is: When states devolve or federalize, how do WMOs reconfigure in order to address the new opportunities and constraints presented? To what extent do WMOs capitalize on the new institutional logics created by federalizing and devolving processes with regard to multi levels and what costs are incurred? We examine WMOs in two cases, Belgium and the UK, and focus on the regional levels of Flanders and Scotland.

The next two sections set out the key features of state restructuring in the cases and the methods and data, the subsequent ones describe developments in Flanders and Scotland, and analyze the implications of the federalization and devolution for the organizational structure and repertoires of WMOs.

STATE RESTRUCTURING AND SUBSEQUENT ARCHITECTURE

Neither Belgium nor the UK is a classic federation. However each has recently undergone far-reaching processes of federalization or devolution, making them interesting cases to study change. The current Belgian state architecture is distinctive in its double constituent state level structure. In order to accommodate ethnolinguistic and territorial differences, *territorial* regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels Capital Region) and *linguistic* communities (Dutch-, French- and German-speaking) were created (Van Dyck 1996). As a result of a series of federalising reforms from 1980-2001, the regions and communities gained extensive powers and policy competences (Swenden et al 2006; see table 1). From 1995 onwards, the

communities and regions were enabled to create their own political and administrative institutions. Whilst the overall picture is one of substantial complexity and fragmentation, in the case of Flanders, the Flemish community and Flemish region are fused in a single set of institutions (Deschouwer 2005; 2009) responsible for most areas of social policy.

Unlike Belgium, restructuring processes in the UK have not resulted in a formal federal structure but rather devolution through the creation of new parliaments and legislative assemblies for its minority nations of Scotland and Wales and the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland. As a 'union state' rather than a unitary state there is a tradition of territorial differentiation and devolution managed within an overall system of administrative standardisation (Mitchell 2006; Tierney 2009). With political devolution in the 1990s, substantial powers and responsibilities formally vested in the Westminster parliament were transferred to newly created elected bodies within individual home rule settlements (Hazel and Rawlings 2005; see table 2).

Changes in state architecture are important, as they designate vertical and horizontal power allocation and impose new opportunities and constraints for civil society, including social movements, seeking access and influence in policy-making processes. Devolution in the Scottish case is by means of the 'reserved powers model', whereby specifically enumerated powers are retained by the Westminster government (Hazel and Rawlings 2005). In the case of Belgium, policy competencies transferred to the regions are specified in the constitution. While policy competencies are formally exclusive in most cases, in practice there are overlapping responsibilities between the levels.

The restructuring in both cases is characterised by asymmetry, creating in Scotland and Flanders powerful regional actors vis a vis other regions, and with strong centrifugal pressures which fuel political demands for ever greater powers to be transferred (Deschouwer 2005; Tierney 2009). In the case of the UK, the outcomes are also asymmetric with regards to the centre, which retains responsibility for a mix of residual UK-wide and English function. Thus, the dominant partner in the Union – England – continues to be governed from the centre (Jeffery 2009).

Table 1: Indicative Division of competencies between Belgian state and sub-state level

Federal level	Communities (Flemish, French, German)	Regions (Brussels, Flanders, Wallonia)
The major powers of the federal state are not explicitly listed in the constitution or in special majority laws. This means that in practice the *residual powers* belong to the federal level. Major policy competencies include: · most aspects of Justice · most aspects of Social security and labour law. · Monetary policy · Security and defence. · Civil law, including immigration and nationality · Foreign affairs.	*Person related matters:* · Education. · Cultural matters (defence and promotion of language, arts, libraries, radio and television broadcasting, youth policy, leisure, tourism, etc). · 'Personalized' matters (health prevention policy, assistance to individuals, etc). · Youth justice	*Territorially bound matters:* · Economic affairs (excluding monetary policy etc). · Employment policy. · Economic development and planning · most aspects of transport · Agriculture · Environment (protection, waste policy). · Rural development and nature conservation · Housing. · Local and provincial authorities

 Source: Deschouwer 2009

Table 2: Division of indicative competencies between UK state and Scottish sub-state level

Central level	Devolved Level (Scotland)
'Reserved' Matters as set out in Sch 5 of Scotland Act 1998. Includes: · Constitution · Foreign Affairs · Defence · Fiscal and monetary policy* · Immigration and Nationality · Employment legislation · most Energy matters · most commercial law · Equal opportunities ** · Abortion	*All policy areas not reserved to the UK government under Sch.5, including*: · Health · Education and Training · Economic development · Justice and Home Affairs · Local Government · Social work · Housing · Environment · most aspects of transport · Agriculture, fisheries and forestry · sports and the arts *tax varying powers **Equal opportunities (as set out in the exceptions to the Reservations)

Source: Hazel and Rawlings 2005

The extensive restructuring of the Belgian and UK state architectures is primarily a *political* accommodation of territorially distinctive identities and communities (Deschouwer 2003, 2009, Jeffrey 2009). However, such accommodation of territorial cleavages can, paradoxically, exacerbate centrifugal pressures by 'entrench[ing], perpetuat[ing] and institutionali[zing] the very divisions [they are] designed to manage' (Simeon 1995:257). In Belgium, Flanders is the driver behind centrifugal regionalism, calling for an end to fiscal and financial solidarity with its Francophone counterpart, the poorer post-industrial Walloon region. It promotes a model of "Flemish-style pragmatic" governance that is neo-liberal and managerialist (Huysseune 2009: 7). The centrifugal dynamics are of a different nature in the UK with Scotland stressing devolution as an expression of its greater attachment to social democracy and as a buffer to the neo-liberal reforms of successive central governments

(Keating 2010), but equally result in growing territorial identification and widespread public support for more autonomy (Tierney 2009).

MAPPING WMOS IN FLANDERS AND SCOTLAND: METHODS AND DATA

The focus of this exploratory comparative study is on WMOs that: are *autonomous* groups rather than *integrated* organisations such as women's sections within political parties and trade unions or formal parts of the state's *women's policy machinery*[i]; function as *umbrellas* – coordinating member organisations' activities and advocacy and aggregating their preferences; have a broadly *progressive* gender equality seeking agenda; and that are *generic* (in contrast to organisations focusing on particular issues, such as gender based violence). Thus the organisations selected are concerned with inserting gender perspectives across all policy areas (economic, social and political) and with generic gender equality policies (including equality legislation, gender mainstreaming policy instruments, quota provisions and so on).

In Belgium/Flanders the selection was straightforward: the study comprises the two Flemish autonomous umbrella women's organisations: *Nederlandstalige vrouwenraad* (NVR) and *Vrouwen Overleg Komité* (VOK). The former, NVR, is one of the two successors to the former pan-Belgium national women's council (the other one being the francophone *Conseil de femmes francophones de Belgique*, CFFB). The latter, VOK, is a product of 1970s second wave feminism (Woodward and Mulier 1999). In addition, the newer Flemish women's organization for migrant women *Steunpunt allochtone meisjes en vrouwen* (ELLA vzw) was interviewed (see table 3). Supplementary interviews were conducted for context with a representative of the federal women's equality advisory committee *Raad van de gelijke*

kansen voor mannen en vrouwen, and a representative from one of the Francophone umbrella

organisations, *Comité de liaison de femmes* (CLF*)*. Eight interviews were carried out between

summer 2010 and spring 2012 (see Appendix).

For the UK/Scottish case, selection was trickier as there is not a direct comparator to the

Belgian or Flemish women's councils, given the fragmented and decentred character of the

women's movement (Bagguley 2002). Scottish organisations (past and current) were selected

that met most of the criteria outlined. Interviews were held in the summer and autumn of 2011

with actors from two UK organisations, the *Women's National Commission* (formerly the

official UK women's advisory body) and the *UK Joint Committee on Women* (through which

UK WMOs participate in the European Women's Lobby (EWL)); and five past and present

Scottish umbrella organizations, *Engender* and its pre devolution predecessors (*Scottish*

Convention of Women (SCOW), *Scottish Joint Action Group* (SJAG), *Women's Forum*

Scotland (WFS)), and the Scottish government sponsored advisory body, the *Scottish*

Women's Convention (SWN). In addition, supplementary interviews were conducted for

context with representatives from two Scottish advocacy coalitions, the *Scottish Women's*

Budget Group (an off-shoot of *Engender*) and the *Stop the Gap* coalition, and with the

English based UK organisation, the *Centre for Women and Democracy* (see table 4). A total

of ten interviews were conducted[ii] (see Appendix).

Table 3: The Flemish WMOs and the governments/levels they lobby

	Federal level	Sub-state level (Flanders),				
	in charge of: gender equality, and also justice, social security, civil law	**Community**, in charge of: gender equality, and also education, cultural matters 'personalized matters (health prevention, assistance to individuals); …		**Region**, in charge of: gender equality, and also of economic affairs; employment policy; housing; …		
		Dutch speaking*		Flanders*	Wallonia	Brussels Capital Region
ELLA vzw- Flemish migrant women's organisation		X		X		
NVR – Flemish umbrella women's organization (formerly part of Belgian Women's Council)	X	X		X		X
VOK- Flemish umbrella women's organisation	X	X		X		X

- The Dutch-speaking Community and The Flemish Region are institutionally merged.

Table 4: The UK/ Scottish WMOs and the governments/levels they lobby

	Central UK level In charge: of gender equality, social security and benefits, macro economic policy, employment law, equality law, asylum and immigration, abortion…	**Scottish level** In charge: of gender equality*; and also most social policy areas including health, education, housing, civil and criminal law…	**European level** In charge: of gender equality; single market and services; employment policy, social affairs…	**International** In charge: of monitoring UK compliance with international conventions, eg CEDAW and obligations eg UN Platform for Action…
Women's National Commission (WNC)	x	x	x	x
UK Joint Committee on Women (UKJCW)			x	
Engender (and its predecessors)	x	x	x	x
Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)		x		

* as set out in specific exceptions to the reservations (Section 5 of the Scotland Act 1998)

Interviews and documentary materials (organisational websites and literature[iii]) were analysed across three themes: 1) How did organisations respond to state reconfiguration and devolving/federalising logics, and with what effect on their organisational structures and strategies? 2) How did WMOs understand new logics including divided powers, venue shopping and multi level games and what were the costs and benefits of playing new games? 3) Does the experience to date of WMOs in these new systems suggest a federalism advantage or disadvantage?

BELGIUM - FLANDERS

The universe of the women's movement in Belgian is small: beyond the umbrella organisations studied, and integrated women's sections connected to political parties and trade unions, most groups are based around single issues or are service oriented (Amazone et al. 2002; Wiercx and Woodward 2004) [iv]. Prior to federalisation, women's movement organisations came together in ad hoc alliances and through the Belgian National Women's Council, the principal umbrella of women's organisations, which played a coordinating role across language communities.

From the late 1970s onwards, in parallel with ongoing processes of state reconfiguration and federalization, Belgian WMOs divided along the linguistic cleavage creating Flemish and Francophone organizations. This fragmentation and division was in line with broader trends that saw Belgian political parties, and other civil society actors and organisations, disbanding their state-wide structures and reconfiguring as Flemish or Francophone entities over this period. Newer WMOs were established as unilingual from the start, whilst longstanding WMOs, including the Belgian National Women's Council, split into Dutch-speaking (NVR) and French-speaking (CLF) organizations in 1979.

Since then there has been no formal coordinating structure for WMOs to work at central level or across linguistic divides. The last remaining pan-Belgian structure, the federal women's equality advisory committee (*raad van de gelijke kansen voor mannen en vrouwen*) serves as a committee of experts to the federal ministry. It is corporatist in composition drawing upon the social partners such as business, labour unions and professional bodies.[v] Unlike the UK

WNC (see later), the committee plays no coordinating or integrative function for WMOs, nor does it have a representative role as the aggregator of WMO preferences.[vi] However, not withstanding the ongoing process of fragmentation, incentives remained for the linguistically divided WMOs to operate *grosso modo* in the still-unitary Belgium state at least until the creation of the communities and regions in the mid 1990s. There was only one government and one women's policy machinery to lobby. Central state ministers were, and still are, responsive to demands from the WMOs. So, in order to be effective, especially when seeking to attract state funding, WMOs from both linguistic communities needed to join forces.[vii]

The political landscape and institutional incentive structure was transformed in the mid 1990s, with the creation of new regional and community architectures. Along with substantial powers over most areas of social policy, Flanders also assumed responsibility for equal opportunities and created new gender equality architecture, including a women's policy agency, to implement gender equality policies (Celis and Meier 2011; Hondeghem and Nelen 2000). Both the federal and the regional governments are now in charge of policy areas of central importance to WMOs, both have responsibility for aspects of equal opportunities and gender equality, both have women's policy agencies, and both are sources of funding for WMOs.[viii]

Federalisation – and the creation of the Flanders government as a new and powerful regional player - has provided new points of access regionally and has multiplied the opportunities for Flemish WMOs to lobby and influence policy and legislation. State reconfiguration has also opened up government to WMOs and the chance to participate in consultations and governance type arrangements. For example, the Flemish government is committed to gender mainstreaming as a policy approach and has systematically integrated the perspectives of WMOs in the development of policy over the past 15 years (Wiercx 2005). WMOs have

responded to the opportunity by, for example, producing expert policy briefings and analysis. Whilst recognising the dilemmas of co-option, WMOs nonetheless argue that such insider strategies have enhanced their influence on the regional government.[ix]

Flemish WMOs have also responded to new institutional logics, including divided powers and multiple venues, with new strategies. According to the interviewees, WMOS are practiced at navigating the complex institutional arrangements and play multi level games, targeting their interventions at the most appropriate level for the policy in question in terms of lobbying politicians and officials, and tailoring advocacy communications to different audiences. For example, the NVR produces separate memoranda for the Flemish, Brussels, federal and European elections, with attention to the different policy competences and spheres of influence.[x]

However, these multi-level strategies require a high level of professionalization and resources for WMOs and is therefore accessible only for larger organizations.[xi] Newer and smaller organisations argue that, without adequate staff and resources, they are squeezed out of multi-level games. Consequently, organisations like ELLA vzw - which promotes the agenda of migrant women – are required to prioritize Flanders as their primary domain of action in order to maximise their influence with the limited resources at their disposal: "At the federal level we are not known. If you want to influence policy making, you need a mandate, […] either because of your strength of numbers or because of your expertise. We have it based on expertise, but only in Flanders".[xii]

The new gender equality architecture opens up opportunities for Flemish WMOs to play multi-level funding games, and accumulate sponsorship from different levels of the Belgian

state. The Flemish umbrella organisations receive funds from both regional and federal government levels for their activities, and also – similar to their Francophone counterparts – from the Brussels government. There are different incentive structures: the federal level does, on occasion, incentivize cross community working or federal-regional joint funding; in some cases, regional governments only subsidize if another regional or community government also contributes, as in the case with some commemorative events such as the women's march.[xiii] The Flemish government has over time become the most important source of funding for Flemish WMOs (Wiercx and Woodward 2004). This has further reduced the incentives for cross community working or organising at the federal level.

UK – SCOTLAND

Perhaps surprisingly there was not a dramatic reconfiguration of WMOs in response to changing state architecture in the UK as a result of devolution post 1999. Although there are a number of organizations with UK-wide remits and memberships, women's groups have been organised primarily by sector (specialising in health, violence against women, etc) and/or on a territorial (sub-state nation) or local basis since the 1970s and the emergence of second wave feminism. In response to the institutions of administrative devolution that existed for many decades prior to political devolution, WMOs from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were already required to play multi level games; lobbying the Westminster parliament and government *and* their respective territorial ministries and administrations (Mackay 2010).

Organisations from around the UK came together through ad hoc and time limited alliances around specific issues (Bagguley 2002), and also through membership of the Women's National Commission (WNC). The WNC is the official all-UK umbrella structure, which

coordinates and represents the views of women's organizations to central government. Comparatively speaking, it sits somewhere between the Belgian autonomous women's councils and the Belgian women's equality advisory committee in that, although staffed by civil servants and sponsored by government, since its restructuring as a non-departmental public body (NDPB) in 1998 it has autonomous lobbying and agenda setting roles. As well as providing a rare coordinating mechanism for a fragmented women's sector (Squires 2007), an important plank of WNC work since the UK ratified the international women's human rights instrument CEDAW[xiv] in 1986 has been to coordinate the UK NGO Shadow report to the UN monitoring Committee[xv].

In anticipation of devolution, new Scottish organizations such as Engender were created in the early 1990s to promote a generic feminist agenda, displacing or incorporating older organizations such as the Scottish Convention of Women (which lobbied at UK and Scottish level), the Scottish Joint Action Group (which worked at Scottish, UK and international level), and Women's Forum Scotland (formed in the 1980s to engage with institutions of the European Union).

Whilst some other UK wide interest groups and social movement organisations did create Scottish offices in the run up to devolution, or shortly thereafter, in order to be best placed to influence new levels of government, this was not the case for WMOs with UK wide remits. Neither did the WNC reconfigure immediately to take devolution into account, despite the longstanding grievances of Scottish WMOs (and those from Wales and Northern Ireland) about the lack of attention paid to territorial differences by the WNC.[xvi] This reflects the general pattern of adhoc and uncoordinated response to devolution in the UK by government, political parties, public bodies, and civil society alike (Jeffreys 2009).

The gender equality architecture of the UK underwent significant change as a result, firstly, of the return to power of a social democratic government in 1997 and, secondly, devolution. Prior to this, the UK was comparatively unusual because it lacked a formal women's or equality policy machinery structure inside government.[xvii] Following on from the creation in 1997 of a Women's Unit (now the Government Equalities Office, GEO) inside the UK government, each devolved administration created its own equalities policy machinery located within government, which consults with equalities organizations, including WMOs.

As in Belgium, both central and regional levels are charged with policy responsibilities in areas of priority for equality-seeking WMOs. Both state levels have specialist policy agencies with responsibilities for gender equality policies (McLaughlin 2007). Entities at both levels can sponsor WMOs and their activities, although in contrast to Belgium, UK central government has not been a significant source of funding for WMOs pre or post devolution; rather WMOs have been more likely to be locally funded through grants or service contracts from local authorities, public bodies, and charities, or through European Union project funding.[xviii]

These developments have changed the policy and political landscape for WMOs and would seem to make multi-level games inescapable. However, taking advantage of this changed state architecture requires a multi-level strategy that is resource intensive. Unlike their Flemish counterparts, Scottish WMOs have not systematically addressed both levels of government. Although they have utilised the multiple new access points and mechanisms offered by the Scottish parliament and government (Mackay et al 2005), they have been relatively absent from the UK level arena, undertaking very little direct lobbying of central government

departments, the GEO or Westminster on reserved matters, and responding on an ad hoc basis to UK level consultations.[xix] Neither do UK WMOs report routinely lobbying or engaging with the devolved levels of government.[xx]

Unlike their Belgian counterparts Scottish WMOs have not strategized to accumulate funding across levels, in part because of limited incentives.[xxi] Devolution has, however, created greater access to state funding at the Scottish level. Although modest, the regional Equality Unit now provides funding for some of Engender's core costs. In addition, the Scottish government sponsors a new umbrella organization, the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC), set up in 2003 (initially under the auspices of Engender) with the remit to "communicate and consult with women in Scotland to influence public policy".[xxii]

Restructuring has created multiple new points of access and enhanced opportunities for WMOs in Scotland to lobby and be consulted about developments in public policy and legislation. WMOs have promoted gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of gender perspectives in the Scottish budget process and spending plans (McKay et al, 2002), lobbied the parliament to use its powers to impose general equality duties on public bodies (Georghiou and Kidner 2007), secured improvements in public appointments processes, and influenced the development of a progressive national strategy to end violence against women, amongst other issues (Mackay 2010).

Although WMOs in Scotland have withdrawn from substantial engagement at UK level, Scottish WMOs have continued and intensified their engagement with the european and international levels. For example, Scottish WMOs participate along with Northern Irish, Welsh and English umbrella bodies in the EWL through The *UK Joint Committee on Women*

(UKJCW)[xxiii] The UKJCW has enabled Scottish WMOs to play an equal role with those from the other jurisdictions in reaching consensus positions to promote in Europe, thus maximising influence at this level. However, it is notable as a coordinating structure in both its rarity and its attentiveness to territorial identities.[xxiv]

DISCUSSION: MULI-LEVEL POLITICS AND CENTRIFUGAL DYNAMICS

WMOs have reconfigured in order to address the opportunities and constraints presented by new institutions and gender equality architecture. In both Flanders and Scotland they have capitalized, to an extent, on the new institutional logics created by federalizing and devolving processes with regard to multi levels, divided powers, and the opportunities for venue shopping. There has been an increase in access points creating an apparent federal or devolution 'advantage' with multiple new links to more proximate and accessible levels of government, in addition to those already existing at the centre.

Many of the issues crucial to the lessening of gender inequality (feminization of poverty, gender based violence, gendered pay gaps and occupational segregation, work-life balance, under representation of women in political and public life etc.) are addressed by more than one level or domain of government and require horizontal and vertical action. This implies the need for WMOs to play multi-level games. Studying these thus sheds light on what institutional arrangements and changing political contexts mean.

Playing multi level games in respect of addressing both the regional and federal levels is most evident in the case of Belgium. Flemish WMOs engage with both levels of government to lobby and maximise funding; they are able to cash the federalism advantage by accumulating subsidies from plural governments[xxv], thereby avoiding veto players. This is markedly less the

case in Scotland: Scottish WMOs have not systematically addressed both levels of government. Although they have utilized the multiple new venues offered by the Scottish parliament and government to impact upon Scottish politics and policies, they have been relatively absent from the UK level arena.

In contexts where policy competences and regulatory powers are divided between regions and the centre rather than shared, strategies of (vertical) venue shopping or level hopping are somewhat limited. Furthermore, opportunities for horizontal shopping (or defection) are circumscribed, given the strong territorial – and, in the case of Belgium, ethnolinguistic-identities that have driven federalization/devolution.

However, in describing their practice, it is clear that that Flemish WMOs work with the logic of the multi-level system to reframe issues and pursue different aspects of the same broad policy agenda. If they meet a block at one level, they will adapt their agendas to pursue other more accessible policy goals.[xxvi]

Scottish WMOs venue shop in the sense that they reframe some reserved issues as devolved, or they lobby for the devolved level to mitigate the worst effects of UK policies, such as economic cuts and deficit reduction policies. For example, rather than lobby the current UK Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition government about its refusal to implement various parts of the 2010 Equality Act (passed by the former UK Labour administration), Scottish WMOs and their allies have instead focussed upon strengthening the operation of the legislation by means of the Scottish 'specific duties' which lie within the jurisdiction of the Scottish parliament and government.[xxvii]

Scottish WMOs have not entirely eschewed multi-level games but they play them beyond the state. They aim to influence the UK government internationally *through* the CEDAW reporting processes (through the WNC and autonomously through their ECOSOC[xxviii] status and the submission of their own Shadow reports), for example on issues of funding and coordination mechanisms, and *via* Europe (through the EWL), for example, on issues of violence against women, and trafficking.[xxix] Thus they adopt classic transnational social movement strategies of boomerang or venue hopping (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Whilst the Scottish organisation Engender places engagement at European and international levels as a key dimension of its activities,[xxx] these strategies are do not feature prominently in the repertoire of their Flemish counterparts.

The study suggests that new, fluid structures provide different opportunities and constraints and present different logics to those of long-crystallised federations. Scottish WMOs played a more active role than their Flemish counterparts in the processes leading up to devolution/federalisation, as part of a wider mobilisation of civil society (Brown et al. 2002). In both cases, however, issues of women's political participation and claims for gender equality became coupled with political aspirations for self-determination. WMOs and gender equality agenda were thus part of the 'winning coalitions' in each case. As such, progressive gender policies have served as 'shorthand' for symbolising the aims of each new polity to present themselves as modern, inclusive and relevant.

In the case of Scotland gender equality was part of the dominant politics of the centre-left and discourses of 'new politics' embodying values of accountability, openness and participation, power-sharing and equal opportunities (Mackay et al 2003). In the case of Flanders the then-innovative gender mainstreaming approach was introduced as part of the regionalist discourse

of a Flemish style of efficient modern governance (Celis and Meier 2010), opening up the policy-process to WMOs as 'partners' and experts. This counter intuitively has resulted in Flanders, where traditionally the Christian-democratic party is dominant, having more progressive gender equality policies than Wallonia where the more leftist Social-democratic party dominates government coalitions; and the meso level in both Scotland and Belgium being more open to WMOs and more progressive than their respective centres.

But processes of restructuring also present new costs and dilemmas. For example, over and above the classic costs of playing multiple levels, there are transitional costs. In both Flanders and Scotland, changes in state architecture have created considerable coordination and learning costs in terms of grasping how to work with a new set of institutions at regional level, and working at central as well as regional level. As one Scottish interviewee put it, "For the first few years of devolution we had our heads down focussing on the Scottish parliament and government – we didn't look up - […] things were changing so fast and we struggled to keep other connections alive."[xxxi]

The most striking findings of the study are the centrifugal dynamics which encourage WMOs to 'abandon the centre' in preference for the new regional arenas. In the thirteen years since devolution there has been little coordinated action at UK level involving WMOs from Scotland or the other devolved jurisdictions, with the exception of limited joint engagement around violence against women and women's political representation. All interviewees, from both Scottish and English-UK organisations, observed that Scottish WMOs had become 'disassociated' from the UK level and had let a vacuum develop around joint interests in reserved matters and possibilities for joint working around devolved issues.[xxxii]

There are a number of push and pull factors which help to explain the phenomenon, which is most marked in the case of Scotland but also increasingly evident for Flanders. On the push side: in each case the centre is characterized as problematic for territorially-based WMOs. The difficulties relate both to formal state architecture and the political dynamics and relationships between centre and region but, in each case, add up to centrifugal pressures that create disincentives for WMOs to engage with the centre or to co-ordinate with WMOs across communities or levels.

The UK centre is monopolized by the numerically, economically and politically dominant partner in the Union – England – which continues to be governed from the centre and is largely unaffected by devolution. Scottish WMOs report widespread ignorance and indifference to devolution – and the distinctive territorial perspectives and views it may generate- by the UK GEO, other UK government departments, and English/UK women's organizations: "They don't know how to deal with the UK-ness of the UK post-devolution, and they don't see devolution and the devolved jurisdictions as their concern."[xxxiii] According to Scottish interviewees, interventions from the periphery would have limited impact on the UK process, "there is little sense that our additional commentary is welcome."[xxxiv] It was argued that contributions about distinctiveness or divergence from the centre were viewed as irrelevant or having little by way of transferability to the English or UK policy context by both government and UK/English WMOs. Thus there are ever fewer incentives to incur the costs necessary in order to engage with the centre and the WMOs who inhabit the political space at the centre.[xxxv] This confirms that for WMOs as for other regional actors in asymmetric structures, the price of devolution is loss of influence at the centre.[xxxvi]

These centrifugal tendencies have been exacerbated by the paucity of coordinating structures (either government led or autonomous). In particular, the UK Coalition government's decision to abolish the WNC as part of its cost-cutting exercises in 2010/11 has left a structural gap and leaves the UK women's sector without a coordinating structure across the four nations or a formal voice to central government. Although the WNC had been slow to respond to the changed landscape, it had formally adopted a four-nations approach in 2008, including appointing Commissioners with specific remits for the devolved jurisdictions, and specific budgets (WNC 2010:14) [xxxvii]. Although interviewees reported improved responsiveness to territorial perspectives, there was too little time for effective coordination to be developed before the organization was abolished.[xxxviii] The abolition of the WNC also removes the central mechanism for reaching consensus on a UK NGO Shadow Report to CEDAW.

Whereas the UK centre might be characterized as powerful, indifferent and crowded, the Belgian centre is described increasingly as weak, ineffectual and 'empty'. Deschouwer (2005:97) argues ongoing processes of Belgian federalization – and the accompanying territorialisation and fragmentation of formerly state wide political parties and other political players - has "institutionaliz[ed] the inability to make decisions" at the centre. Furthermore, there are few political incentives for political actors to form bridges across the ethno-linguistic divide or to govern Belgium as a unified state. The resulting paralysis – for example the prolonged crisis of 2010-11 when parties failed to agree a governing coalition after the 2010 federal elections -has resulted in an "'emptying' of centralised political power" and the disappearing of the political centre. This study demonstrates these disintegrative pressures are also evident amongst civil society organisations like WMOs; incentives to engage with the federal level or across community have dissipated in the absence of a full functioning centre or any pan Belgian coordinating mechanisms or structures.

The federalising and devolving processes also have an impact on WMOs with levels beyond the federal. Whereas organising around international institutions such as the European Women's Lobby (EWL) or CEDAW reporting provides a spur for Scottish WMOs to work with other devolved nations and with the English/UK centre, no such incentive exists for Flemish WMOs and their Francophone counterparts. Counter intuitively, perhaps, WMOs have little motivation to work on consensus positions. The Belgian place on the European Women's lobby is rotated between NVR and its Francophone counterpart (CFFB). However, when consensus is impossible, the different WMOs simply submit separate standpoints to the EWL. In the case of shadow reporting on CEDAW, which is given high priority in UK/Scotland , the Flemish – and Francophone – WMOs have taken the comparatively unusual decision to opt out of these autonomous processes. Instead they contribute to their respective regional government's input into the official Belgian state report to CEDAW, thus negating the necessity to engage with WMOs from other communities[xxxix].

The increased orientation of WMOs in Scotland and Flanders towards their territorial governments is furthered by important pull factors: the ease of cooperation within the region (including, in the case of Scotland, long established networks), and the ongoing downloading of many policy competences that are also crucially important to women's lives like health, housing, education, childcare, economic development and social welfare services. The establishment of women's or equality policy machinery and equality policies by the new Flemish and Scottish government provide conducive contexts for lobbying and collaboration. In the case of wealthy Flanders, generous state provision of financial resources attracts WMOs. In the case of Scotland, the relative precariousness of funding at all levels forces women's organizations to be selective about which level to address. Scottish and some

Flemish WMOs argue that they have chosen to concentrate energies at the level at which they have most potential scope for influencing policy in terms of both proximity and access.[xl]

To be sure, there are positive outcomes from this regional focus, including close linkages and the good potential for influence. However such alignments have a more negative face. An observed trend in Flanders, although not yet in evidence in Scotland, is that regional governments can and sometimes do act as veto players demanding exclusivity of project funding or territorial focus.[xli] Increasingly, too, interviewees observe that, since the Flemish government has become their major sponsor, it requires a "return on its investment" from Flemish WMOs.[xlii] In particular, there is increased scrutiny of regionally sponsored organisations to ensure they do not spend "disproportionate" time on federal matters.[xliii]

Over reliance on one level brings with it other potential pitfalls including co-option. This is particularly so for the professionalized and institutionalized Flemish organizations: "we lose the ownership of our work"[xliv]. Many of the issues crucial to the lessening of gender inequality are addressed by more than one level or domain of government and require horizontal and vertical action. However, there is the increasing danger that regional WMOs neglect important policy domains still charged to the centre: leaving issues unaddressed in an 'empty' centre, as in Belgium; or, leaving English (nominally UK) organizations to speak for UK women on reserved matters, which Scottish WMOs perceive they do so from a perspective that is inattentive to the territorial interests and contexts beyond the centre.[xlv]

CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzes the impact of restructuring processes on the organizational structures and lobbying strategies of women's organizations in Belgium (Flanders) and the UK (Scotland).

In answer to the question: have the processes of devolution and federalisation been advantageous for the Flemish and Scottish women's movements; the picture is mixed. The findings tend to confirm the 'conditional approach' (Chappell 2002), emphasizing the ways in which particular institutional arrangements interact with specific social and political contexts. We argue that devolution/federalization and the resultant creation of new, intermediary levels of governance offer a devolution/federalism advantage to WMOs. Multi level governance multiplies access points, allowing for accumulation of funds, limited forms of venue shopping and avoidance of veto players.

New institutions provide qualitatively different opportunities and constraints to those offered by crystallised federations, and this exploratory study points to distinctive costs, dilemmas and logics that emerge in these fluid contexts. In particular, a set of push and pull factors has drawn WMOs towards the regional level thereby 'abandoning the centre'.

The wider literature suggests that restructuring driven by ethnolingustic or peripheral nationalism has negative consequences for gender equality and constrains the potential political space in which WMOs can organise and campaign. However, the findings suggest the need to adopt a 'conditional approach' on this question, too: outcomes are dependent upon particular institutional configurations and relations between WMOs and political institutions. In conditions where WMOs are well connected with regional political elites; where gender equality is a goal congruent with regionalist and/ or nationalist aspirations; and where access to policymaking for WMOs is facilitated by technocratic (in the case of Flanders) or democratic (in the case of Scotland) discourses, the lure of the regional level is strong.

Nonetheless, in the case of both Flanders and Scotland, centrifugal dynamics appear to diminish the potential for policy learning and joint working vertically across levels and horizontally across jurisdictions. This reduces the likelihood that federalization/devolution will fuel a 'race to the top' across the wider polity with respect of gender equality.

Furthermore, if these trajectories persist the likely outcome is that any devolution or federalism advantage arising from multi-level interactions will dissipate as WMOs choose – or are forced – to operate at just one level. In such scenarios, the veto potential of the regional level increases. Moreover, the leverage of territorially-based WMOs is reduced on many issues (such taxation and social security, macro economic policy, immigration and nationality policy, and abortion) that are of crucial importance to campaigns for gender equality (and its intersection with other dimensions of inequality such as race) and that are still assigned to the centre.

The fragmentation of WMOs and centrifugal dynamics of territorialization also raise questions about the implication of devolution and federalism for statewide women's citizenship and broader concerns about gender solidarity (Mackay 2010). In other words, territorial identity might trump gender identity and lead to territorially differentiated and distinctive gendered citizenship in the different parts of the UK and Belgium. This is indeed the concern of one of the francophone Belgian interviewees:

> "What is the essential identity of feminists? It is fighting patriarchy! And that patriarchy is identical at both sides! But that is not how the story will go. We will end up by saying 'I prefer the Flemish patriarchy above the Walloon patriarchy'."[xlvi]

Appendix: List of interviews

Belgium:

Interview 1: 25/6/2010, Ghent, VOK

Interview 2: 28/6/2010, Brussels, NVR

Interview 3: 13/7/2010, Antwerp, ELLA vzw

Interview 4: 14/9/2011, Brussels, NVR

Interview 5: 17/4/2012, Brussels, NVR

Interview 6: 18/4/2012, Brussels, NVR

Interview 7: 18/4/2012, Brussels, Raad van de gelijke kansen voor Mannen en Vrouwen

Interview 8: 2/7/2010, Brussels, CFFB

UK:

Interview 1: 30/8/2011, Leeds, Centre for Women and Democracy,

Interview 2: 30/8/2011, Edinburgh, Engender, SWC

Interview 3: 31/8/2011, Glasgow, WNC

Interview 4: 31/8/2011, Edinburgh, SWC

Interview 5: 31/8/2011, Edinburgh, SCOW, SJAG, WFS, Engender, WNC

Interview 6: 1/9/2011, Edinburgh, Engender, UKJCW, WNC

Interview 7: 1/9/2011, Glasgow, Close the Gap

Interview 8: 1/9/2011, Glasgow, Engender, UKJCW

Interview 9: 1/9/2011, Glasgow, Scottish Women's Budget Group

Interview 10: 4/11/2011, London, WNC

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[xix] UK Interviews 2,5,6,8,9. See also, for example, Engender annual reports at http://www.engender.org.uk; SWC

annual report 2011 at

http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Annual%20Report%202011.pdf

[xx] UK Interviews 1, 2,10.

[xxi] UK Interview 2

[xxii] http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/about.asp

[xxiii] An all-UK co-ordinating body comprising four regional umbrella organizations, each taking turns to lead

UKJWC and represent the UK at EWL.

[xxiv] UK Interviews 6, 8.

[xxv] BELG Interview 3

[xxvi] BELG Interview 2.

[xxvii] UK Interviews 3, 4, 7.

[xxviii] As NGOs with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council

[xxix] UK Interviews 2, 6, 7.

[xxx] See http://www.engender.org.uk/pages/50

[xxxi] UK Interview 6.

[xxxii] UK Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4,5,6,7,8, 9, 10.

[xxxiii] UK Interview 8.

[xxxiv] UK Interview 8.

[xxxv] UK Interviews 2,6,7,8,9

[xxxvi] We thank one of our anonymous referees for this point.

[xxxvii] UK Interview 3, 10

[xxxviii] UK Interviews 2, 3,6,7, 8,

[xxxix] BELG Interviews 5, 6

[xl] UK Interviews 2, 7, 8; BELG Interview 3

[xli] The respondent requested anonymity

[xlii] BELG Interview 1, 2.

[xliii] BELG Interview 1, 2.

[xliv] BELG Interview 1; see also BELG Interview, 2.

[xlv] UK Interviews 1, 8, 9.

xlvi BELG Interview 8