

Women, Mobilization and Political Representation

Oana BĂLUȚĂ

University of Bucharest, Romania

oana.baluta@gmail.com

Political representation of women has been an important area for theory production and consistent research since the middle of the last century. There is a wide and engaging literature on gender and politics addressing various topics from voting behavior, obstacles women face when entering politics, strategies used to increase women's political representation, the role of women's movements, policy outcomes when women enter politics etc. Pamela Paxton, Sheri Kunovich and Melanie M. Hughes when selectively reviewed the literature on gender in politics focusing on women's formal political participation, they notice that „our knowledge of women in politics is still expanding. Indeed, the literature on women in politics could be described as exploding” (Paxton, Kunovich, Hughes, 2007, p. 264). **However, some contexts were more opened for researches than others and became more visible for scholars and the wider public.** These contributions are highly valuable since they developed complex theoretical, epistemological and methodological instruments and stream of thoughts. The authors conclude that future directions for research should include as well the perspective of **globalizing theory and research:**

“Future research must globalize our present understanding of women's political participation, representation, and impact by (a) determining which theories developed in the West apply to the non-Western context, (b), and (c) investigating whether these newer theories apply to other regions or globally” (Paxton, Kunovich, Hughes, 2007, p. 275)

Nevertheless, despite expanding the arguments for a politics of presence, women have actively **mobilized** outside the realm of politics to better pursue their interests, sanction politicians for not addressing substantive representation, urge them to elaborate a gender sensitive agenda or women ‘just’ mobilized to support various causes (environment, LGBTQ, anti-globalization etc.). The evolution of technology and communication platforms made their mobilization more flexible.

For this issue of the Journal, we solicited contributions (theoretical or empirical) on women's and men's participation as members of political parties, political candidates, and activists pursuing gender interests or women's interests. Papers that examine social media as a mobilization tool for politicians and activists were welcomed. We were also interested in strategies embraced by politicians and activists to reach their goals, coalition making, alliances or autonomous strategies when pursuing a gender sensitive goal. Of particular interest have been intersectional approaches to political representation, political and civic engagement.

I should express my gratitude towards the editorial team of the Journal as they welcomed my proposal for a political representation dedicated issue intertwined with mobilization. Different contexts, either editorial or more activist ones, gave me the opportunity to argue for **a more professional approach of women's political representation**, one that doesn't fall under the umbrella of: *I have opinions on the topic and as I am in a position of authority I communicate my beliefs despite many volumes and analysis and arguments about women and political representation that substantially deconstruct my sayings*. As following - just to offer some examples- this issue addresses the above mentioned *know-it-all flaws* as the articles work with a typology of representation, distinguish between gender political representation and women's political representation, and extensively present normative arguments supporting descriptive representation. The articles adequately clarify and then operationalize the concepts, making the issue an instrument that can hardly be neglected in contemporary debates that raise the interests of academics and activists (not exclusively).

Most of the articles focus on Central and Eastern Europe and the "Muslim world", propose individual case studies or include comparative approaches, deal with nowadays debates, political and activist struggles or go back in time to better reveal specificities of the present, work with descriptive and substantive political representation or focus on women's mobilization for representation and legal reforms; some articles include empirical case studies or engage into an intellectual and argumentative exercise. I shall briefly reflect on the author's contribution, yet the substance of their articles can only be grasped by an authentic individual encounter with of their work.

Elena Brodeală's study, *Women and politics: the impact of the European integration process on women's political representation in Romanian*, explains the increase of women's parliamentary presence in relationship with the integration of Romania into

European Union. She argues that women's presence in politics started to be seen as a "European value" necessary for Romania's EU accession, thus urging decision-makers to adopt certain legislative measures and lately on argue in favor of gender quotas "although there was no such legally binding requirement from the EU". Nevertheless, in the end, if we turn to political practice, the European argument turned out to be just one political or strategic discourse as all attempts to adopt quota were unsuccessful.

If the above mentioned article focuses on previous attempts to introduce some quota provisions, *Creating and feeding discourses on political representation of women. Can MPs and NGOs join hands on quotas?* critically addresses the most recent initiative of MPs in Romania who try to introduce legislative gender quotas for 2016 local and national elections and with The Call for Action of Gender Equality Coalition. Thus, my article moves further and reflects on both the struggle of NGOs and MPs supporting descriptive and substantive representation. I argue that a critical reflection on the aims and arguments of the NGOs and MPs may reveal not only if collective action is possible, but it can also tell us more about its limitations. This discussion may help identify some potential inner weakness of their arguments and invite the parties to strengthen them during the coming public and political debate.

The third study addresses the extent in which a connection could be established between the mechanism of selection by lot - a mechanism which, according to the author, is beginning to take shape within the field of theoretical political philosophy - and the feminist perspective on women's political representation. As the author argues in her article, *A feminist perspective on political sortition*, it may pose the advantage of avoiding negative criticism attached to quotas. As far as I am aware of (and the author supports the idea), her article is one of the first attempts binding the subject of political lottery with feminist political theory. Some other works may have been published in languages that are not so accessible.

The mobilization of women in Central and Eastern European countries: how contextual elements shaped women's NGOs from Romania and Poland engages in a comparative approach of mobilization of women outside the realm of politics and inside NGOs in Romania and Poland. Andrada Nimu analyzes some of the most important contextual elements that shaped their activities, interests or causes and presents both similarities and differences between the communist legacies in the two countries, the effects of democratization and economic change, the civil society development and Western

funding, elements of national culture, as well as transnational and EU actors. In her conclusive remarks, she elaborates on how different contextual elements have impacted women's movements in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

As announced by the title itself, the geographical, cultural, religious and political landscape changes in Alina Isaac Alak's article, *Modern States, Legal Reforms and Feminism(s) in Muslim countries*. The author includes a brief presentation of the family code reformation that was generated by the formation of the modern states in the Middle East and then describes the ways in which the presence of Muslim women in Muslim majority countries' societies is perceived and analyzed and the strategies women use in their struggle to gain more political and social rights. Here, the readers will also find a welcoming critical reflection on the generalization involved in the expression „the status of women” in Islam.

This issue also includes two book reviews in correlation with the main topics: political representation and mobilization of women. *Gender, Conservatism and Political Representation* edited by Karen Celis and Sarah Childs addresses the challenging topic of whether conservative women representatives act for substantive representation of women. The volume represents an important contribution to the study of conservative women's presence in politics, one that discusses the distinction between the substantive representation of women and the feminist perspective on substantive representation. This demarcation is one to be further on considered as the above mentioned individual articles notice particular expectations when various parties support that women's descriptive representation stands for more substantive representation.

The second book edited by Andrea Krizsan and Raluca Popa includes an analysis of women's movement for domestic violence policy changes in four Central and Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Romania. The volume explains that women's movements are the main actors in policy change mainly in anti-domestic violence policies. *Mobilizing for Policy Change. Women's Movements in Central and Eastern European Domestic Violence Policy Struggles* also emphasizes that some patterns of movement are more favorable to progress than others and the strategies to support change were diverse, even inside the countries, across time.

If I come back to our intentions when launching the call for papers, I may say the articles we received and further on accepted cover some of the aspects emphasized at the beginning at this editorial. As far as I am aware of, the issue of AnALize stands as the

most recent publication focusing on *Women, Mobilization and Political Representation*. It is the case that **this issue comes out in a very interesting and vivid political and activist context** (that we have not anticipated, but welcome its presence) with two parties mobilizing their energies to enhance descriptive and substantive representation of women in local and national Romanian politics.

At the end of a few months of working to cover the issue, I am hopeful that future calls for papers on mobilization and political representation will be followed by articles addressing environment, intersectionality and other challenging topics.

I would like to express my gratitude to our peer-reviewers for their time, attention and comments.

© 2015 AnA Society for Feminist Analyses
New Series. Issue No. 5 (19)/ 2015