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► **To cite this version:**

Magali Della Sudda. From Watchmen to Sentinels, structuring: Transnational dynamics and European collective action in local activism structuration. Circulations et réseaux transnationaux en France et en Europe des années 1960 à nos jours, Bruno Dumons; Olivier Dard, Dec 2019, Lyon, France. halshs-03104305

**HAL Id: halshs-03104305**

**<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-03104305>**

Submitted on 8 Jan 2021

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# From Watchmen to Sentinels, structuring : Transnational dynamics and European collective action in local activism structuration

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For several years now, the role of international movements in social movements has been considerably highlighted<sup>1</sup>. This chapter offers a reflection on national and transnational dynamics by means of a local case study. In this specific configuration of a local institutional context unfavourable to the contestation of gender equality policies, a collective will invest the urban space in a spectacular and sustainable way, forging links with European protests to show its opposition and try to put this cause on the agenda. These findings are based on a survey of a group of activists of around 30 people in a metropolis in the south-west of France (in-depth interviews, participant observations) and on the collection of data from social networks (Facebook) between 2013 and 2020.

Over the last two decades, gender equality policies have been implemented in Europe. They aimed at establishing formal and real equality between women and men and between same-sex and heterosexual couples. International conventions and institutions, whether international or non-governmental organisations, have thus defined frameworks and benchmarks that States have transposed into their national legislation. The transnational dimension of gender equality policies was highlighted at an early stage<sup>2</sup>, originating in feminist collective action repertoires<sup>3</sup>. This egalitarian dynamic in turn gave rise to strong resistance which was described as “anti-gender campaigns”<sup>4</sup> or “anti-gender crusade”<sup>5</sup>, as a counter-movement<sup>6</sup>. In

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<sup>1</sup> SMITH Jackie, « Transnational Social Movements », in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> PATERNOTTE David, *Transnationalisation/Mobilisations transnationales* in *Dictionnaire. Genre et science politique*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> RUPP Leila J., *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1998. For catholic organisations and conservative social movements Bruno Dumons, « Pour une histoire transnationale du « catholicisme au féminin » (XIXe-XXe siècles). Circulations missionnaires, dévotions spirituelles, révolutions sociales et sexuelles », *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, n° 3, septembre 2020, p. 423-45; DELLA SUDDA, Magali, « L'internationale blanche. La Fédération internationale des Ligues féminines catholiques », *Bibliothèque du CRH Pratiques du transnational: preuves, terrains, limites*, n° 1, 2011, p. 79-100; DELLA SUDDA, Magali « Réseaux catholiques féminins. Une perspective de genre sur une mobilisation transnationale. », 12-13, Spring 2013, <http://genrehistoire.revues.org/1872>.

<sup>4</sup> KUCHAR Roman & David PATERNOTTE, Ed., *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: mobilizing against equality*,

France, the lay Catholics played a crucial role in a “counter revolutionary” protest rooted in “observant Catholicism”<sup>7</sup>. Among the initiators of the protest, activists with a professional background in communication shaped the collective action as a spectacular event<sup>8</sup>. The *Manif pour Tous*, which refers to both an association of different social movement organisations<sup>9</sup>, and the conservative social movement against the Taubira bill and equality policies led by Najat Vallaud-Belkacem Minister of Women's Rights (16/08/2012-16/05/2014) then Minister of National Education (26/08/2014-17/05/2017). Among the groups that make up the Demonstrations for All (*Manif pour Tous*), the “Watchmen” (*Veilleurs*) movement was born in Paris in the spring of 2013. Faced with the passing of a law that seems inevitable, some opponents try to challenge the public by gathering in the evening with candles in Paris and the provinces. Students from the *École Normale Supérieure*<sup>10</sup> in Lyon bring texts for a public reading. The vigils are seated, punctuated by singing, and reveal a Catholic socialisation marked by the passage into scouting as the *Song of Hope* testifies<sup>11</sup>.

On 19 June 2013, following the arrest of a “Watchman” called Nicolas Buss during a demonstration against same-sex marriage, one of his comrades stands in front of the Ministry of Justice on 24 June 2013. Silent and alone on Place Vendôme in Paris, he quickly drew media coverage via social networks<sup>12</sup>. The “Standing Sentinels” distinguished from the seated protesters by their position and silence. The standing and silent position is a distant echo of the protests that take place in Turkey with the figure of Duran adam, the man standing up to authoritarian power<sup>13</sup>. The arrest and detention of Nicolas Buss, a young demonstrator, for

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London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> GARBAGNOLI Sara & PREARO Massimo, *La croisade « anti-genre »: du Vatican aux manifs pour tous*, Petite Encyclopédie critique, Paris: Textuel, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> CORREDOR Elizabeth S., « Unpacking “Gender Ideology” and the Global Right’s Antigender Countermovement », *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44, 3, 2019: 613-38.

<sup>7</sup> RAISON DU CLEUZIQU Yann, *Une contre-révolution catholique: aux origines de La Manif pour tous* (Paris, France: Éditions du Seuil, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> DELLA SUDDA Magali, *Les avatars de la Manif pour Tous : recompositions autour des questions de genre*, Mémoire d’habilitation à diriger les recherches, Pessac, Institut d’études politiques de Bordeaux, 2020, tel-03093897.

<sup>9</sup> ZALD Mayer N., ASH Roberta, « Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change », *Social Forces* 44, n° 3, 1966, p. 327-41; CAIANI Manuela et DELLA PORTA Donatella, « The Radical Right as Social Movement Organizations », *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> This prestigious academic institution trains students to become academics or civil servant. It recruits and trains French elite.

<sup>11</sup> BALAS Marie, TRICOU Josselin, « “Nous, maintenant, on veut poursuivre cette occupation de la rue” : les catholiques attestataires entre contre-culture, mission et défense patrimoniale », *Social Compass*, 66, n° 1, 2019, p. 62-74.

<sup>12</sup> RASCHINI Elisa, « Entre espace urbain et espace numérique. La mobilisation immobile des Sentinelles contre le mariage homosexuel », in *Mots. Les langages du politique*, n° 110, 2016, p. 31-47.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* The Watchmen refer to the mobilization of Taksim Square, where Erdem Gürdüz, dancer and choreographer, chose this performance to challenge authoritarian power. His performance, put online, is quickly distributed on social networks.

three weeks “revived the movement”<sup>14</sup>. The university holidays, synonymous with the return home or holiday resort of these young men and women from good families, is an opportunity to publicise the movement by moving the mobilisation sites. In the manner of the Catholic leagues of the last century which took advantage of their summer to give conferences in the holiday resorts, the “Veilleurs” swarmed in the provinces on the occasion of a “Tour de France des Veilleurs”<sup>15</sup>, following the name of a famous national cycling race that takes place every summer in France. The local version will be launched in the summer of 2013. The first three “Veilleurs” are students, enrolled at the Right-wing party “Union for a Popular Movement” (UMP)<sup>16</sup>. In August, a rally is held in front of the National School of Magistracy (ENM) in Bordeaux<sup>17</sup>.

The Standing Sentinels quickly took the name of “Sentinels”, which thus came into being in the second phase of the social movement, after the vote on the Taubira law and its promulgation in May 2013. The weekly vigils followed the demonstrations that had been taking place at a sustained pace until May 2013. They continued until 23 March 2020, the date of confinement. The Parisian Sentinels” changed their name and created their Facebook page on 23 August 2013. A Facebook page Local Sentinels (“Sentinelles - Locales”) was quickly created and diffused this name change. The choice of a new term refers to the need to distinguish between groups that do not have the same purpose. The strategy of the “Sentinels” is international, it aims to broaden the focus to “the Human” and should allow the movement to continue outside of demonstrations. While the Watchers deploy their action at a local level.

**Distinction and international intermediation: from “Watchmen” to “Sentinels”.**

The “Sentinels” leaflet explains the logic behind the group's transformation.

Why “The Sentinels”?

- out of solidarity with Italy and Spain who share the same struggle (Sentinelle in piedi, Centinelas de pie)
- to avoid confusion between “Vigilors” and “Stand Up Vigilors”, and to leave the “Vigilors” their specificity and the influence they deserve.
- to draw up a manifesto and broaden our struggles, always in the interest of Man and our civilisation.
- to give a second wind to the movement, in all the cities of France as well as in Paris.

<sup>14</sup> THOMASSET Flore & CHARRIER Pascal, « Nicolas Buss, militant de la Manif pour tous, libéré », in *La Croix*, 9 July 2013.

<sup>15</sup> KOVACS Stéphane, « Les Veilleurs partent à la rencontre des Français », in *Le Figaro*, 9 August 2013.

<sup>16</sup> In Depth interview, man 38 years old, care worker, 4 May 2020.

<sup>17</sup> LES SENTINELLES et DPC 2013, *Les Sentinelles - Vidéo Dailymotion*, Paris, DPC 2013.

The action is defined as an individual, non-concerted act - there is therefore no organisation supported by a legal or de facto association, nor any prior meetings, as in the case of the Places movement<sup>18</sup> - and the mode of action is not exclusive, as explained in the explanatory note :

What change?

Standing awake is a free and spontaneous mode of action. It belongs to no one. Everyone who wants to stand upright does so for their own reasons.

The Sentinels will mainly keep the standing vigil mode of action. However, they will also be able to expand their mode of action in the future. Projects are being considered and everyone is invited to participate!

Those who do not want the Sentinels' manifesto can rest assured that they will be able to continue to stand vigil freely for their cause. »<sup>19</sup>

Beyond the label effects, how can the effects of the transnationalisation of protest be observed at the local level? Does this global dynamic have consequences on the strategy, tactics or content of claims? The case of a local Sentinel group that we followed from 2014 to 2020 sheds light on the localised uses of transnational and international circulations and the constitution of a local space of contestation. Between the reappropriation of forms of collective action, contents and discourse and the empowerment of protests at the local level, the limits of transnational dynamics are observed.

### **From the local to the transnational space, the peregrinations of the vigils**

The form of protest, the silent vigil as practised by the Sentinels is a mode of action chosen as a distinctive gesture that mobilises the urban space as a stage. In this sense, it is localised and inscribed in a spatial framework that participates in its spectacularisation and dramatisation<sup>20</sup>. This militant performance takes place in the heart of the historic city, between two buildings that house the local political power headquarters, the town hall, and the religious power headquarters. The gathering place of the local group observed is located between the former bishop's palace, now the seat of the town hall, and the cathedral.

### **The Vigil : a collective action between individual performance and the emotional system**

The vigil consists of showing up at a fixed place and time agreed in advance and which the public can keep up to date with via social networks. The choice of Friday evening is not made

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<sup>18</sup> COHEN Yves, « Les foules raisonnables. Notes sur les mouvements sans parti ni leader des années 2010 et leur rapport avec le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. », in *Politika*, 11 July 2018.

<sup>19</sup> LES SENTINELLES, *A retrouver sur Les Sentinelles - Officiel www.facebook.com - Pourquoi les Sentinelles?*, <https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/>, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013.

<sup>20</sup> TILLY Charles, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, « Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics », 2008.

explicit, probably due to a trade-off between the multiple commitments of the participants and the need to be seen by the public. As on a theatre stage, the “Sentinels” take place at the agreed time.

The first vigil is an opportunity to have the instructions explained and to learn how to behave. When I come, one of the animators - because there is officially no spokesperson or person in charge - regularly suggests a location to me. The choice of placement is either affinity or strategic depending on the configuration. An electric candle is provided for participants who have forgotten their light. The candle is part of the scenography and aesthetics of the collective action, both religious and secular. It is the symbol of the hope of Christians who "witness" by their presence in the city and follow in the footsteps of the apostles. While some tickets invite you to multiply the reading material to pass the time, the "Sentinels" invite you above all to take a book with you. The choice of books is up to the participants. However, a closer look reveals some topical readings of conservative intellectuals - *Les Déshérités* de F.-X. Bellamy, the *French Suicide* of the polemist Eric Zemmour- or edifying readings.

To be effective, this action of witnessing must be carried out in forms that require provisions. Watching requires a physical ability to remain standing and immobile. This discipline of the body is all the more effective as it is based on a specific socialisation - silent retreats regularly practised by "Sentinels", the immobile station of former soldiers -. The performance is all the more remarkable as it reproduces itself independently of weather conditions: frequent bad weather is mentioned exhaustively, signalling the determination of the participants. Each vigil is a test of endurance to defend the cause that transcends special interests: that of the family and the child.

The sensations experienced are silenced, as are the emotions. The emotional work consists, in the vigil, in containing their expression between the participants. Silence is the rule, except with the audience. Dialogues are conducted in a peaceful manner. I witness an interaction between a group of young gay activists and one of the "Sentinels". The interlocutor, involved in an LGBT student association and the Young Socialist Movement, expresses his dissatisfaction. The presence of the "Sentinels" hurts him, he explains, initiating a discussion on the register of wounded sensitivities<sup>21</sup>. During the interaction, as with others I have observed, the 'Sentinels' show a mastery of their emotions, the tone does not rise, which helps to avoid the violent expression of the conflict. This self-control is the necessary condition for

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<sup>21</sup> On this register, first mobilised by Catholics to have cultural works banned, then by other players , see FAVRET-SAADA Jeanne, *Les sensibilités religieuses blessées : christianismes, blasphèmes et cinéma 1965-1988*, Paris, Fayard, 2017.

carrying out an action as non-violent and whose corollary is the absence of a service of order - contrary to certain vigils of the "Vigilantes" - with readings aloud and songs - in Paris or in the provinces.

### **Special places**

In Paris, the first vigil took place in front of the Ministry of Justice. In the provinces, the event was organised according to a strategic choice guided by the need to have an audience. The first local vigil was held on the Place de la République, in front of the Palais de Justice (Court of justice). This place is not very busy. It was quickly moved to the esplanade located between the town hall and the cathedral. It takes on a strategic dimension: "The choice of the appointment at 7 pm every Friday seems decidedly happy, because at this time of the day there is quite a lot of traffic [...], and people seem to want to approach us more willingly. Indeed, there were 7 of us and practically all of us were entitled to questions about why we were there"<sup>22</sup>. The square is "not just a place. But a revealer of something", as one Sentinel explained to me. "In front of the Town Hall, a public institution" or a "court of justice", one addresses the representatives of the State and the political authority. Sentinels have "spontaneously" envisaged a vigil in front of a Family planning centre to oppose abortion and prevent women from accessing contraception: "We can demonstrate in front of a Child and Mother Health Protection Center"<sup>23</sup> where "the girls who are going to have an abortion" go and because the pill is distributed there<sup>24</sup>. But this option was not chosen because the place is not very busy, I am told. One can also add the potentially criminal character of the hindrance to abortion and care that has led to the transformation of the modes of action of Catholic groups opposed to abortion by the chaining of clinics or prayer chains. Using a strictly legalistic repertoire of action, the Sentinels do not wish to commit any criminal act.

Being located between the place of local power - the town hall - and the place of religious power - the cathedral - also refers to the authorities to which the protest is addressed. The municipal team, although belonging to the UMP, a party where several Sentinels are active, is indifferent to the cause of the Sentinels. The mayor, in particular, has taken a stand in favour of the Taubira law and adoption by homosexual couples<sup>25</sup>. However, he has one of the

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<sup>22</sup> Brief account of the Sentinels vigil, Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> 2016.

<sup>23</sup> These centres are founded by local administration. They provide health care for infants and mother and sometimes family planning. They differ from Family Planning and Planned parenthood centers managed by private associations.

<sup>24</sup> DELLA SUDDA Magali, *Observation, Sentinels vigil Friday 7 March 2014*, « carnet de terrain 25/05/2013-27/05/2016 », 2014.

<sup>25</sup> ARAMBOUROU Clément, DELLA SUDDA Magali, BUGNON Fanny, et al., « When male heterosexual leaders politicize gender and sexual issues: The logic of representation in the 2014 Bordeaux municipal election campaign », in *French Politics*, n° 1, vol. 14, 2016, p. 83-100.

founders of the local Demo for All (*Manif pour Tous*) in his team and several elected officials who have taken part in Parisian and local events. In March 2014, he will receive the “Sentinels” as part of the Grenelle de la famille. The following evening, a Sentinel evoked the attitude of the edile: “the end of the vigil was enhanced by a distribution of mulled wine and by a number of considerations about the forthcoming municipal elections. A question was asked: why has the Mayor pretended not to see the Sentinels camped out every Friday evening for more than 6 months in front of the gate of his town hall? We have not found a satisfactory answer”<sup>26</sup>. As for the Archbishop, he tacitly disavowed the movement by refusing to receive its representatives and by opposing the distribution of leaflets via the diocesan network. During this spring vigil, “four ecclesiastics” passed by the group who “offered to join us for the vigil. No doubt taken up by other commitments, the proposal was not accepted”. A Sentinel then gave each of them “the explanatory document on the Sentinels of which they were unaware”<sup>27</sup>. The contrast with this priest of the Fraternity of Saint P., who joined the vigil on the occasion of his visit, confirms the isolation of these lay people in the local religious space<sup>28</sup>. These words of a Sentinel, notable and well inserted in the local networks, testify to the difficulty for the group to be a respectable and legitimate interlocutor by the diocesan authority:

“Perhaps one day [the new Auxiliary Bishop] will have the kindness but also the audacity to come and greet us? An audacity (and kindness ...) that local politicians have not had, at least until now. Whether or not they feel a national destiny. Trembling no doubt at the idea that a compromising photo would ipso facto put them in the nauseous category of ‘homophobic, reactionary, racist’ ...”<sup>29</sup>.

The local group is returned to a minority and marginal protest status not only in the public and political space, but within the local religious institution itself. It is, moreover, to the bishop of a neighbouring diocese that the "Sentinels" turn in their notes, when they seek the approval of the Hierarchy, or to the Italian episcopate, supporting the Sentinels in piedi in a manifest way. Thus we find the recourse to the international or outside world characteristic of minority groups in their space.

In the heart of the city, the 'Sentinels' therefore chose to stand with their backs to the cathedral and in front of the political power, but without verbally expressing their claim to authority.

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<sup>26</sup> Brief account of the Sentinels vigil, Friday, March 21<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Brief account of the Sentinels vigil, Friday, June 27<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>28</sup> DELLA SUDDA Magali, *Observation, Sentinels vigil, 29 January 2016*, « carnet de terrain 04/2015-16/10/2016 ».

<sup>29</sup> Brief account of the Sentinels vigil, Friday, 22 April 2016.



The circle was not chosen because it implies a choice between looking inwards or outwards. No reference is made to the Franciscans who initiated these movements in a completely different cause several years ago. It is more of a practical reason. There must be three metres between the two, so that the vigil cannot be considered as an unauthorised gathering on the public highway. The silent, standing position, which requires a certain discipline and physical condition to resist the weather, as many notes indicate, also refers to the incorporation of specific provisions.

### **The secular translation of a religious habitus**

Vigil is an individualised collective mode of action, as Elisa Raschini points out<sup>30</sup>. It is addressed to individuals and its primary objective is to “bear witness”: “The presence of the Sentinels in the heart of the city does not constitute a demonstration of strength, nor of invective, nor of hatred. It peacefully testifies to the participants' convictions regarding the cause of the family, the child and our civilisation. This goal may concern you, and not necessarily your neighbour”<sup>31</sup>. It is also a device that reminds everyone of this status: the three-metre separation between people, silence, and calls to order if a member of the group discusses too long with the others are part of this individuation. On several occasions, during the vigils, I am thus friendly scolded for discussing too long or too closely with a Sentinel. This mode of action, which convokes a posture that is not “natural” - remaining static in a silent standing position - is based on the incorporation of specific gestures. The vigils of the Watchmen, who comment on texts, sing and repeat the song of Hope, bear witness to a Catholic religious socialisation and a reinvestment of know-how in the movement. They are based on the presence of a group. On the other hand, the presence of several people is not essential for the standing vigil of the Sentinels. Thus, this Sentinel will stand alone on 25 March 2016. Beyond the protest, it is the demonstration of a discipline of body and soul to the public opposed to the public authorities: “Indeed, vigil is not only necessary for society, it is also and even primarily a physical and metaphysical means of resisting an indifference that makes our minds sluggish, that kills our will and diminishes our humanity. Our vigils are only one of the possible forms. They are a response to a necessity of human life”<sup>32</sup>. Exemplarity is therefore more important than numbers. As a Cistercian wrote to one of the participants: “The important thing is not to be many, but to be one with Christ and let him make us artisans and

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<sup>30</sup> E. Raschini, « Entre espace urbain et espace numérique. La mobilisation immobile des Sentinelles contre le mariage homosexuel », art cit.

<sup>31</sup> Nextcoming Sentinels vigil, Friday 1er avril 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Nextcoming Sentinels vigil, Friday 3 juin 2016.

mediators of life”<sup>33</sup>. A spiritual exercise as much as a protestant one, the silent vigil bears witness to a religious habitus. But it is not the only one. The vigil is also presented as a tool for personal development, all the more indispensable as modernity weakens the capacity for discernment. The individual is caught up in the debilitating devices of the media, modern entertainment or institutions<sup>34</sup>.

The reappropriation of his capacity for action and reflection confiscated by a weakening modernity is a classic register of Catholic militancy. It refers to virility - which is not synonymous with masculinity but with strength and tenacity<sup>35</sup>. At a vigil, one participant explained that “the Sentinels are different from the Watchmen”. There is no reading aloud. The participants are turned towards silent action – “No chatting, no out loud reading”<sup>36</sup>. She insists on this absence of collective discussion, a sign of the intensity of the action: “we don't have a debate”. This echoes the words of this other Sentinel: “The Sentinels vigil, we don't go there for socialising. We go there for the Family!”<sup>37</sup>.

Silent vigils are presented as being more effective in attracting the public's attention. One respondent thus explains that people are “taken aback” and come to ask questions more easily than during the Watchmen vigils, where “nobody stops”<sup>38</sup>. Silence and standing places each individual in a speaking position with the audience, while the magisterial character - one reader and the others listen - seems less suitable for the elderly of the Sentinels. This choice of silence also participates in an a posteriori rationalisation: in the absence of people likely to lead the vigil – “The one who was in charge of this at the Sentinels has moved away”<sup>39</sup> - the form of collective action changes. The determination of the repertoire of action seems to obey a practical sense more than injunctions from the Catholic Hierarchy or international organisations involved in anti-gender campaigns.

### **A respectable protest**

Another determining factor in the choice of this repertoire is the implicit transaction with law enforcement agencies. Weekly gatherings are not declared in the prefecture. However, they take place every Friday in front of the officers without their intervention. This Sentinel of the

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<sup>33</sup> Nextcoming Sentinels vigil, Friday 29 avril.

<sup>34</sup> Nextcoming Sentinels vigil, Friday 8 avril 2016.

<sup>35</sup> AUDOIN-ROUZEAU Stéphane, BAECQUE Antoine de et BARD Christine, *Histoire de la virilité*, Paris, France, Points, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> DELLA SUDDA Magali, *Observation, vigil Friday October 10<sup>th</sup> 2014 with X. Itçaina*, « carnet de terrain 25/05/2013-27/05/2016 ».

<sup>37</sup> S.N., 18h00 -> pas envie d'y aller; 18h15 -> j'y vais; 18h30 -> j'y suis; 19h30 -> fier d'y être allé !, <https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/>, 7 November 2014.

<sup>38</sup> M. Della Sudda, *Observation, vigil 10 October 2014 (with X. Itçaina)*, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Informal discussion. The young lady was a student in Master of Literature, like many Watchmen in Lyon.

first hour explains to me that his first vigil in Bordeaux took place with the “French Spring” – a radical Right-Wing organization named after the Arabs springs in 2014 - and ended at one o'clock in the night under the water cannons<sup>40</sup>. Following this, and in order not to disturb the local residents, a more respectful mode of action of public order was adopted by the Manif pour tous and, subsequently, the Sentinels. Silence allows “the cops to leave us alone”<sup>41</sup>. During the vigil, it is thus recommended to “keep away from each other so as not to disturb the pedestrian traffic, but also to avoid giving the police a pretext for dealing with an unauthorised demonstration”<sup>42</sup>.

This mode of action derives its effectiveness from the lack of hold it offers to the adversary: “The Sentinels offer a mode of protest that undermines the political software of the ruling oligarchy. Let's show them that we're not giving up: form groups of friends and join us!”<sup>43</sup>. The repertoire of peaceful and “useless” action occasionally gives rise to protest. It is expressed on social networks and, more subtly, in vigils.

For example, this inhabitant of a commune was outraged by the poster indicating a free telephone number, Ligne Azure, to answer teenagers' questions about gender and sexuality: “At the beginning of our movements' action, we ruled out modes of action which could lead to violence: we feared civil war... But now, without breaking completely with this principle, I believe that we need to make an ‘example’ and launch a real ‘attack’ against [the commune]”. However, the attack is limited to communication actions without physical violence: “Massive towing, mass SMS and e-mails, etc.”. No one in [our city] should be unaware of what is happening! No gifts should be given: the words used should provoke fury”. But whose objective is to deprive the adversary of his ability to act, including in court, to have his rights recognised: as he refers to the creators of the Azure Line as 'pedo-criminals, he claims “We must call a spade a spade, but with evidence that will dissuade anyone from replying in court: there must be things in the texts that the French State cannot afford to display in a court of law”<sup>44</sup>. The lack of structuring of the group into an association, the reduction of its activity to an act of presence - a testimony of resistance -, without collective decision-making, without a spokesperson, de facto defuses the desire for collective action which is referred to other organisations, such as the Manif pour tous.

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<sup>40</sup> It followed the demonstration of 17 April 2013 organised by the “Manif pour tous” and the French Spring.

<sup>41</sup> In Depth interview, man 38 years old, care worker, 4 May 2020.

<sup>42</sup> LES SENTINELLES LOCALES, *Petit rappel : Prochaine veillée des Sentinelles, associés pour l'occasion aux Veilleurs et à toutes les personnes inspirées par les actions LMPT : vendredi 29 novembre à 20h30*, <https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/>, 28 November 2013.

<sup>43</sup> S.N., *Nous étions plutôt nombreux ce soir. Imaginez que nous soyons 100, 200 ou 500 !*,

<https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/>, 7 mars 2014.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. Local action and transnational networks

The collective action of the local Sentinels, reduced to the vigil in the local space, is nevertheless articulated to international groups. Although the relations between the Sentinel groups in France are never mentioned, reference is regularly made to vigils organised abroad. The history of feminism has shown how the international level of action has been a means of bringing the demand for women's suffrage around the locks of national assemblies<sup>45</sup>. Catholics, in particular, have followed this dynamic by investing various commissions of the League of Nations (League of Nations) and then being represented at the United Nations (UN) to advance their cause<sup>46</sup>. The transnational dynamic remains a background element in the collective action of today's Catholic organisations. The geopolitics of these networks is not necessarily reduced to the usual channels of the Holy See.

### Transatlantic Circulations

Various studies have shown the role of the Think Tanks of the US Christian Right at the beginning of the Demo for All<sup>47</sup>. Michael Stambolis, in his dissertation, revealed the role of experts from the think tanks of the US religious right in building a secular argument against marriage and adoption by homosexual couples<sup>48</sup>. Blandine Chelini-Pont in this volume has explored the transnational circulation of U.S. religious right. Shortly before the start of the protests in September 2012 and the first national demonstration in Paris on 18 November 2012, a small group of “pro-life” leaders and activists travelled to the United States. Christine Boutin, then president of the French Christian Democratic Party (PCD) and a fervent opponent of the Civil Solidarity Pact (PaCs), accompanied by Franck Margain, vice-president of the PCD, Béatrice Bourges, president of the Collectif pour l'enfant (Coalition for Kid), who had taken part in the first meeting to organise the demonstration for all in September 2012, and a former student of Sciences Po, the writer Pierre Jovanovic<sup>49</sup>. The purpose of the trip of

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<sup>45</sup> LES SENTINELLES LOCALES, *La propagande du « genre » résumée en une affiche !*, <https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/photos/>, 27 August 2015.

<sup>46</sup> L.J. Rupp, *Worlds of women*, *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> DELLA SUDDA Magali, « Réseaux catholiques féminins. Une perspective de genre sur une mobilisation transnationale. », in *Genre & Histoire*, Printemps-Automne, vol. 12-13, 2013 ; DELLA SUDDA Magali, « L'internationale blanche. La Fédération internationale des Ligues féminines catholiques », in *Bibliothèque du CRH*, 1 pratiques du transnational: preuves, terrains, limites, vol. 1, 2011, p. 79-100.

<sup>48</sup> GONZALES Philippe, *L'oecuménisme de combat des évangéliques et des catholiques conservateurs aux USA*, Lausanne, s.n., 2015.

<sup>49</sup> MORRISON Robert, *FRC Blog - Our French Connection*,

a delegation of Catholic politicians to the United States is to meet representatives of the Family Research Council and instigators of the “values bus” operation also supported by the Heritage foundation. This conservative think tank was one of the first to produce notes, guidelines and recommendations to influence federal policy in a conservative direction<sup>50</sup>. The values bus is being launched in the spring of 2012 and consists of running a bus to publicise the ideas - in this case reducing the debt by reducing the federal government's field of intervention and abolishing social protection, as well as the war against women waged by the Obama administration<sup>51</sup>. The scheme will be renewed in France in March 2013, with a double-decker bus chartered by the Manif pour Tous to oppose the passing of the law<sup>52</sup>.

In Europe, it is also the association CitizenGo, founded in Madrid in 2013 to oppose gender equality policies, which is launching the “Free Speech Bus” on the roads of European capitals in March 2017. The know-how developed in the United States can also be seen in the renewed use of the law. Since 2013, the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) has been helping to structure the movement around law and fundamental freedoms, for example by supporting recourse to the European Court of Justice. Gregor Puppinc, who heads the ECLJ hopes, by bringing a draft resolution before the European Court of Human Rights, to obtain not only the condemnation of “police repression”, but above all a change in legislation<sup>53</sup>. The North American influence is not the only one, however, and seems to concern national bodies more than local groups, which are more inclined to turn to other European referents.

### **The Italian mirror: the Sentinel in piedi**

At the local level, these movements are much less visible among the activists of the Demo for All or the Sentinels. The latter insist more on the European dynamics of protest. The use of the word Sentinels, preferred to Watchmen, denoted a communication strategy aimed at other European countries and “to facilitate the internationalisation of the movement”<sup>54</sup>. The choice

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<http://web.archive.org/web/20170626223852/http://www.frcblog.com/2012/10/our-french-connection/>, 19 October 2012.

<sup>50</sup> MEDVETZ Thomas, « Les think tanks aux États-Unis », in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n° 1, 176-177, 2009, p. 82-93.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.heritage.org/budget-and-spending/commentary/how-and-why-the-values-bus-rolls>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/France/La-Manif-pour-Tous-en-bus-sur-les-Champs-Elysees-2013-02-22-914029>

<sup>53</sup> PUPPINCK Grégor, *Manif pour tous : la répression policière sur la sellette*,

<http://fr.aleteia.org/2014/09/13/manif-pour-tous-la-repression-policiere-sur-la-sellette/>, 13 September 2014 ; FOLTZENLOGEL, Christophe, « Témoignages de victimes de répressions policières ». Témoignages, Paris, European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ), June 2013.

<sup>54</sup> STAMBOLIS-RUHSTORFER Michael, *The culture of knowledge: constructing « expertise » in legal debate on marriage and kinship for same-sex couples in France and the United States*, PhD, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2015.

of name allows for easy translation into European languages. The creation of the local Sentinels makes explicit reference to the Italian Sentinelle in piedi and the Spanish Centinelas de pie. In this town of Southern France, links with Latin countries are highlighted. The choice of this name is part of a movement of solidarity<sup>55</sup>. This is what justifies the new name of the Standing Watchmen which was different from the Watchmen sitting down to comment on texts or sing<sup>56</sup>.

The Sentinelle in Piedi were founded in Brescia, in the north of Italy, on 31 July 2013<sup>57</sup>. Catholicism in the north of the peninsula is still strongly structured by the networks of Catholic action and implanted in different social environments, especially the local small-business and local economy leaders<sup>58</sup>. The women who initiate the movement explicitly refer to the Standing Vigilantes, as reported by the sociologist Nicolà Righetti. Like their French counterparts, they declare themselves apolitical, without a spokesperson and driven by the cause of the child and the family. The discursive approach proposed by N. Righetti highlights the uniformity of the anti-gender framing, which links the movement to transnational dynamics. The bill tabled in September 2013 by Ivan Scalfarotto, Secretary of State of the Renzi government and gay activist, aims at fighting homophobia and transphobia<sup>59</sup>. The Sentinel in Piedi se mobilise on the register of freedom of expression, a theme reinvested by the Alt-right and the religious right in the United States<sup>60</sup> and which can be found in the appropriation of the "free speech movement" - a protestant and progressive movement born in Berkeley in 1964-65 - by CitizenGo. This theme is also found in France expressed in the form of the denunciation of "political correctness"<sup>61</sup>, but also of the totalitarian aspect of the genre. The Italian monthly vigils are organised with the support of the dioceses, unlike the French case where the Episcopate, with the exception of bishop Aillet from the diocese of Bayonne, bishop Rey from the diocese of Fréjus-Toulon and Monsignor Barbarin, Archbishop of Lyon.

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<sup>55</sup> COURTIAL Marie-Madeleine et LES SENTINELLES LOCALES, *La presse parle de notre action - Media-Presses-Info*, <https://www.facebook.com/>, 21 December 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Les Sentinelles, « A retrouver sur Les Sentinelles - Officiel [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) - Pourquoi les Sentinelles? », art cit.

<sup>57</sup> Les Sentinelles et DPC 2013, *Les Sentinelles - Vidéo Dailymotion*, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> ITÇAINA Xabier, *Médiations catholiques en Europe de Sud : Les politiques invisibles du religieux*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> RIGHETTI Nicola, « Watching over the Sacred Boundaries of the Family. Study on the Standing Sentinels and Cultural Resistance to LGBT Rights », in *Italian Sociological Review*, n° 2, vol. 6, 2016, p. 265.

<sup>60</sup> Anti-gender campaigns are linked to a fight for freedom of expression. Although the genesis remains to be seen, we can nevertheless detect a US origin in the reappropriation of the progressive protest of the "Free Speech" born on the Berkeley (California) campus in 1964-1965. In the autumn of 2017, a European campaign entitled Free speech bus will be launched via the CitizenGo platform to fight against gender ideology and the supposed obstacles to freedom of expression in the name of anti-discrimination policies.

<sup>61</sup> SCALFAROTTO Ivan, *Contrasto all'omofobia e alla transfobia - Disegno di legge S. 1052 - 17<sup>a</sup> Legislatura*, s.l., s.n., 2013.

The Italian movement benefits from an organisational support that allows it to have a website. This site, which will be updated in 2020, is laid out for smartphones, reflecting a concern to reach a younger audience than the one concerned in France. It is aimed at a young audience, with a modern layout, from which religious references are absent. It highlights the spectacular figures of the movement, which has been calling for 512 vigils since 2013, in 130 communes with 60,000 people. The strategy of the figures, which cannot be verified, distinguishes the Sentinelle in piedi from their French counterparts with more modest numbers.

### **Building European collective action**

In January 2014, the local Sentinels will relay a European call to demonstrate: “EUROPEAN Mobilisation against LGBT and anti-family projects on February 2nd! In Paris, Madrid, Bucharest, Warsaw, Brussels...”<sup>62</sup>. This mobilisation takes the shape of a demonstration in each capital city in order to influence the June elections. “Children First” is being organised in all European states to oppose the gender equality agenda. The local Demo for All organises the movement of people, the Sentinels are invited to participate. The approach of the European elections in spring 2014 accentuates the references to the Italian mobilisations. “With one million People gathered in Rome on June 21<sup>st</sup> to defend the marriage between man and woman, the Father-Mother-Child filiation and to reject the ideology of gender, the Demo for all Italia offered the people the opportunity to express their pride in being faithful to the values of the nation”<sup>63</sup>. The narration of the demonstration, whose scenography borrows from the Demo for All its strategies of reappropriation and subversion, shows the reactionary dynamics of the movement and dramatises the outcome of the elections. The European policies of gender mainstreaming and equality are presented as a civilisational threat that calls for a counter-offensive through the ballot box, according to a long-proven register<sup>64</sup>. It is because States have adopted legislation in favour of equality between couples that Catholic movements need to unite and act at an international level. The European election campaign shows the structuring of the - virtual - action between Sentinels from different European countries, confirming the transnational dynamics of anti-gender campaigns<sup>65</sup>. However, it should be stressed that this dynamic is essentially discursive and is more a label effect than an

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<sup>62</sup> Une des Sentinelles locales, *La prochaine veillée des Sentinelles locales, c'est vendredi 9 mai à 18h30 (et jusqu'à 19h30)*, <https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/>, 8 May 2014.

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/actualites/7705>. Included in the ticket of the local Sentinels of 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2014 “La recherche du bien commun, une source d'espérance intarissable !”

<sup>64</sup> LMPT & LES SENTINELLES LOCALES, *Mobilisation EUROPÉENNE contre les projets LGBT et anti-famille le 2 février ! A Paris, Madrid, Bucarest, Varsovie, Bruxelles*. <https://www.facebook.com/sentinelleslocales/photos/>, 6 January 2014.

<sup>65</sup> KUHAR Roman et PATERNOTTE David (Ed.), *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: mobilizing against equality*, London etc., Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017.

effectively transnational social movement in the sense that it is not accompanied by the physical movement of the participants.

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The observation of the Sentinels at the local level reveals transactions and accommodations between groups participating in the contestation that a national approach would not allow to grasp. The strategic dilemmas on the evolution of social movement once the Taubira law was adopted gave way to collective action of various forms. Among them, the vigil makes it possible to structure a group of people who share a certain number of social properties, an observant Catholic sociability and a political conservatism whose partisan expression ranges from the Right-Wing Republican (former UMP) to the “Navy Blue Rally” (coalition of National Rally former National Front and small parties) and the Christian Democratic Party. These men and women, older than the national leaders of the Demo for All, are going to reappropriate a repertoire of action born a few months earlier in Turkey, to protest against policies that threaten the family and the child: the standing vigil. This protest performance requires a number of socially situated provisions. The observant habitus is reinvested to bear witness to the peaceful and silent resistance to gender equality policies. Although obeying a militant practical sense, this collective action is shaped by transnational and international dynamics. North American influences can be seen mainly in the national frameworks of protest, while at the local level, reference is readily made to the Italian Sentinelle in piedi, whose spectacular images of silent vigils circulate on social networks and are actively relayed by the local Facebook group. After replicating the vigil in the squares of Italian city centres, the Sentinels have supplanted their French counterparts in terms of numbers. These dynamics and comparisons thus invite us to deepen the conditions in which the frameworks, contents and actions within the movements opposed to gender equality policies circulate and are appropriated.