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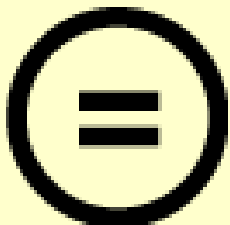
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**Feminism and Theories of Masculinity**  
**in**  
**Contemporary France**

by

Gill Allwood

A Doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

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*In memory of Dr. Andrea Cady,  
who supervised the early stages of this thesis.*

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## Abstract

This thesis examines theories of masculinity produced by feminist activists and intellectuals in France. These theories are situated, firstly, within the context of a history of the French women's movement and the production of feminist theory and, secondly, within the context of a broader debate on masculinity which is currently taking place amongst journalists, men's groups and non-feminist intellectuals. Two specific areas of French feminism, in which a growing interest in men and masculinity can be identified, are examined in detail. These are academic feminist theories of gender and feminist activism around the problem of male violence. The research demonstrates why feminists active in these areas developed an interest in the study of men and masculinity, and analyses the theories which have resulted from these developments.

It shows that gender theorists have placed an increasing importance on both terms of the relation between men and women, and on the nature of the relation itself. It explains the growing awareness in recent years of the necessity to study men as gendered subjects, no longer considering them as a gender-neutral norm from which women are seen to differ.

Certain trends are identified in the way French feminists have approached the problem of male violence, including a shift in emphasis from the victim to the perpetrator. The current interest in the prevention of male violence necessitates an analysis of its causes, which involves a consideration of the links between violence, masculinity and male power.

As well as considering the contributions made by French feminists to the masculinity debate, this thesis argues that, despite media assertions of the 'death of feminism', there is still feminist activity in France; that the term 'French feminism' is attributed very different meanings in and outside France; and that the split between the women's movement and feminist research, as well as the lack of exchange between French and Anglo-American thought, could be hindering the development of feminist theories of men and masculinity.

## Acknowledgements

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Whilst I wish to thank all of these people for their help, it must be stressed that I take full responsibility for the interpretation of their comments and for any mistakes which remain in the text. All translations are mine, unless it is otherwise stated.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANEF Association des études féminines

APRE Atelier production/reproduction

ADAM Association pour la disparition des archétypes masculins

ARDECOM Association pour la recherche et le développement de la contraception masculine

ATP Action thématique programmée

AVFT Association contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail

BIEF Bulletin d'informations des études féminines

CEFUP Centre d'études féminines de l'Université de Provence

CNRS Centre national de la recherche scientifique

FMH des femmes en mouvements - hebdo

LCR Ligue communiste révolutionnaire

MCM Mouvement pour la condition masculine et le soutien de l'enfance

MFPF Mouvement français pour le planning familial

MLF Mouvement de libération des femmes

NOF Nouvelles questions féministes

OCT Organisation communiste des travailleurs

QF Questions féministes

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research is an examination of the ways in which French feminists, both activists and theorists, have addressed the subject of masculinity. It can be expected to enable us to draw certain conclusions about French feminism today; the ways in which ideas about masculinity have been produced; the characteristics of French feminism which have affected this production; the relationship between the feminist and non-feminist aspects of the masculinity debate; the ways in which French feminism is perceived in and outside France; and finally, the continuities and discontinuities between theories of masculinity in France, Britain and the United States.

The aim of the research is to demonstrate how and why some French feminists have become interested in the study of masculinity and what they have contributed to the debate. Firstly, the research aims to show which French feminists are interested in masculinity and how they are situated in relation to other French feminists. Secondly, it aims to show how they became interested in masculinity, by tracing the developments in their other areas of concern which led to a realisation of the necessity of theorising masculinity. Thirdly, it aims to establish what French feminists have contributed to an understanding of masculinity. Fourthly, it aims to discover the current state of feminist theories of masculinity and how they might develop in the future. And finally, it aims to describe the relation between feminist and non-feminist theories of masculinity.

The purpose of this introduction is to explain how these objectives will be achieved, why they are important, how the research was carried out and how its findings are to be presented. It begins with an attempt to explain the relevance of this research by situating it in relation to the current literature on French feminism and masculinity.

### The Study of French Feminism

French feminism seems to have held a certain fascination for many non-French observers and has consequently been the subject of numerous publications. British and American interest was stimulated by a special issue of Yale French Studies which appeared in 1981, and by New French Feminisms, a collection of articles by French feminists edited by two Americans, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, published in the same year.<sup>1</sup> The representation of feminism in these two publications was distorted by an over-emphasis on a certain type of theory produced by a small number of French intellectuals heavily influenced by psychoanalysis and semiology. As a

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<sup>1</sup>Yale French Studies, no. 62, 1981 and Marks, Elaine & de Courtivron, Isabelle (eds.) New French Feminisms. Brighton: Harvester, 1981



result, French feminism acquired a reputation for being more theoretical than its British or American counterparts, and its 'exoticism' attracted the attention of many social and literary theorists and critics, particularly in literature departments in American universities.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, this interpretation was not entirely unfounded. As Claire Duchén explains in Feminism in France, the intellectual context in which French feminist theory has developed differs from the British in its greater interest in psychoanalysis, linguistics and philosophy, in the greater respect accorded to intellectuals in France than in Britain, and in the anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian ideals highlighted by the events of May '68, and present in left-wing and feminist thought.<sup>3</sup> French feminist theory may therefore have a more intellectual appearance than its British or American counterparts. However, this is a broad generalisation and one could argue that it does not justify the unbalanced selection of texts which many British and American academics have chosen to call 'French feminism'. This is an argument which will be expanded on and supported in more detail in chapter 2. What is necessary here is simply to explain that this is one of the reasons why the English-language literature on French feminism concentrates mainly on just one aspect: theories produced by a relatively small number of French women intellectuals, who may or may not describe themselves as feminist. Examples of English-language critiques of these theories abound: Toril Moi's Sexual/Textual Politics<sup>4</sup>, French Feminist Thought: A Reader<sup>5</sup>, and The Kristeva Reader<sup>6</sup>; Susan Sellers' Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France<sup>7</sup>; Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky's Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture<sup>8</sup>; and Elizabeth Grosz's Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists<sup>9</sup> are just a small selection. The effect of this selectivity is that it obscures any other type of French feminism. Publications on poststructuralism,

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<sup>2</sup>This is well documented. See, for example, the introductions to Duchén, Claire, French Connections: Voices From the Women's Movement in France, London: Hutchinson, 1987, & Moi, Toril, French Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987. It is also often mentioned in books and articles which then go on to concentrate on only one aspect of French theory which has been constructed as 'French feminism' outside France. See, for example, the introduction to Fraser, Nancy & Bartky, Sandra Lee (eds.), Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency & Culture, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992

<sup>3</sup>Duchén, Claire, Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand, London & New York: Routledge, 1986, pp. 68-9

<sup>4</sup>Moi, Toril, Sexual/Textual Politics, London & New York: Routledge, 1985

<sup>5</sup>Moi, Toril, French Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987

<sup>6</sup>Moi, Toril, The Kristeva Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986

<sup>7</sup>Sellers, Susan, Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France, Basingstoke & London: MacMillan, 1991

<sup>8</sup>Fraser, Nancy & Bartky, Sandra Lee (eds.), Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency & Culture, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992

<sup>9</sup>Grosz, Elizabeth, Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989



psychoanalysis, Lacan and Foucault far outnumber those which concentrate on the French women's movement and the ideas produced within it.

The most comprehensive and accessible English-language account of the history of the French women's movement between 1968 and 1981 is Claire Duchen's Feminism in France.<sup>10</sup> As well as explaining the relationship between the different groups and the main events and achievements of the movement, Duchen discusses some of the major theoretical debates which dominated the movement during the 1970s. Jane Jenson has also written clear and informative articles on the French women's movement, concentrating on its diversity and the splits between the different groups.<sup>11</sup> The collection of writings by French feminists edited by Claire Duchen, French Connections,<sup>12</sup> aimed to correct the overemphasis on psychoanalysis and semiotics which was found in New French Feminisms, to stress the similarities between French and British feminisms, and to publish feminist thought which emerged directly from the women's movement. No other British or American authors have focused their work either on the history of the second-wave feminist movement in France nor on its theoretical production, although there are articles such as Siân Reynold's 'Whatever Happened to the French Ministry of Women's Rights?'<sup>13</sup> which, whilst concentrating on a more specific question, provide useful insights into many aspects of French feminism.

In French, two histories of the movement have recently been published: Monique Remy's De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes<sup>14</sup> and Françoise Picq's Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement.<sup>15</sup> Although comparable in subject matter, the books by Remy and Picq have different emphases. Remy concentrates entirely on written sources and consequently pays more attention to those debates which took place in print. Picq, on the other hand, a feminist activist from the very beginning of the movement, concentrates more on the history of the movement as she and her sister activists knew it.

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<sup>10</sup>Duchen, Claire, Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand, London & New York: Routledge, 1986

<sup>11</sup>Jenson, Jane, 'Ce n'est pas un hasard: the varieties of French Feminism', in Howorth, Jolyon, & Ross, George (eds.), Contemporary France: A Review of Interdisciplinary Studies, London: Pinter, 1989, pp. 114-43; Jenson, Jane, 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', in New Left Review, no. 180, 1990, pp.127-60

<sup>12</sup>Duchen, Claire, French Connections: Voices From the Women's Movement in France, London: Hutchinson, 1987

<sup>13</sup>Reynolds, Siân, 'Whatever Happened to the French Ministry of Women's Rights?', in Modern and Contemporary France, no. 33, April 1988, pp. 4-9

<sup>14</sup>Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: L'harmattan, 1990

<sup>15</sup>Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993



Like Duchén's Feminism in France, both of these books concentrate more or less exclusively on the period between 1968 and 1981, the period referred to by Picq as 'les années mouvement' ('the movement years'). Some of the reasons why little attention has been paid to the movement of the 1980s and its theoretical products are immediately obvious: the feminist dynamic slowed down in France from about 1978 and especially when the Socialists came to power in 1981; institutional support and funding for feminist research has always been limited in France; publishers have not responded to feminism in France as they have in Britain and the United States; and many feminists who entered academic institutions became reluctant to advertise their feminism.

Although much has been published on French feminism, a review of the literature shows that most of it considers only the period 1968-81 and that the Anglo-American literature concentrates heavily on a particular variety of French feminism. This research extends the period under consideration to the present day; focuses on an aspect of French feminism which has received less attention in Britain and the United States than the 'French feminists' Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva; and examines examples of the production of ideas from the movement and from feminist research, highlighting the relationship between them.

### **The Anglo-American Literature on Masculinity**

The decision to concentrate on masculinity as the focus of this research was due to a massive and relatively sudden growth in interest in the subject on the part of British and American feminists and pro-feminist men during the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> During the 1980s, an interest in understanding masculinity could be found in men's groups, gay studies and feminism. Men's groups emerged as a response to feminism, although their attitudes towards it varied from anti-feminist and non-feminist to pro-feminist. While anti- and non-feminist men's groups, which often organised around issues of fatherhood and men's rights, paid little attention to the study of masculinity, pro-feminist men were more interested in seeking to understand, at first, the way in which they were

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<sup>16</sup>The surge in Anglo-American publications on men and masculinity in the late 1980s/early 1990s includes Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990; Hanmer, Jalna, 'Men, Power and the Exploitation of Women' in Hearn, Jeff & Morgan, David (eds.), Men, Masculinities and Social Theory, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 21-42; Canaan, Joyce E., 'Is "Doing Nothing" Just Boys' Play? Integrating Feminist and Cultural Studies Perspectives on Working-Class Young Men's Masculinity', in Franklin, Sarah; Lury, Celia & Stacey, Jackie (eds.), Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies, London: Harper Collins, 1991, pp. 108-25



constrained by masculinity<sup>17</sup> and, later, the effects masculinity had on women and on other men.<sup>18</sup>

The increasingly visible feminist interest in men and masculinity during the 1980s could be explained as a feminist response to theories being developed within the new men's studies. However, feminists such as Jalna Hanmer are suspicious of this chronology and insist that men's studies should not be allowed to claim the study of men and masculinity as its own. Feminism had been engaged in a critique of men and masculinity through analyses of male violence, sexual difference and patriarchy before the emergence of men's studies. Hanmer writes:

The Women's Liberation Movement began with a critique of men. They were always present, explicitly and implicitly. To reduce women's studies to the study of women and the differences between us is to deny our origins.<sup>19</sup>

She argues that it is important for feminists to insist that they have always been concerned with men and masculinity, to maintain a critical interest in this subject, and to be wary of the motivations and interests represented by 'men's studies'.<sup>20</sup>

Some authors have explained why a study of masculinity is important to feminism. In the introduction to a special issue of Women's Studies International Forum, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise write:

Any feminist concerned with understanding the nature of women's oppression is necessarily concerned with *men*. It's all very well to examine pre-history, the formation of the unconscious, constructions of gender, and so on in explaining 'why' women are oppressed; but the 'how' of the situations involved is that it's males who do it - they articulate, through their 'thought, word and deed' the 'how' we're concerned to describe and analyse. So, for those of us concerned with this 'how', there's no escape from turning our attention towards actual male behaviours, actual male sexism, rather than abstracting these into discussions of 'structures' and 'systems' and their operations. Until we know how it is that men do sexual politics, we can't stop them; and we know for sure that they won't stop themselves, for they've far too much invested in the successful continuation of patriarchy.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>For example, Tolson, Andrew, The Limits of Masculinity, London: Tavistock, 1977 & Metcalf, Andy & Humphries, Martin (eds.) The Sexuality of Men, London: Pluto, 1985

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Hearn, Jeff & Morgan, David (eds.), Men, Masculinities and Social Theory, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990; Hearn, Jeff, 'Reviewing Men and Masculinities - Or Mostly Boys' Own Papers' in Theory, Culture and Society, vol. 6, no. 4, 1989, pp. 665-90; and Morgan, David, H. J., Discovering Men, London & New York: Routledge, 1992

<sup>19</sup>Hanmer, Jalna, 'Men, Power and the Exploitation of Women' in Hearn, Jeff & Morgan, David (eds.), Men, Masculinities and Social Theory, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 21-42 (p. 26)

<sup>20</sup>Hanmer, Jalna, 'Men, Power and the Exploitation of Women' in Hearn, Jeff & Morgan, David (eds.), Men, Masculinities and Social Theory, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 21-42

<sup>21</sup>Wise, Sue & Stanley, Liz, 'Sexual Sexual Politics - An Editorial Introduction', Women's Studies International Forum, special number on 'Men and Sex', vol. 7, no. 1, 1984, pp. 1-6 (p. 2)



Some feminists argue that a study of masculinity is important to the larger feminist project of understanding and challenging male power; and that it is only through understanding masculinity that feminists can devise strategies for challenging male dominance. In a book entitled Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, Lynne Segal writes that 'feminist interest in men and masculinity is readily intelligible. It is part of the search for an explanation of men's power over women.'<sup>22</sup> Caroline Ramazanoglu, in a lengthy critique of the 'men's studies' literature, argues that in order for studies of men and masculinity to be of use to feminism, they need to be incorporated into theories of gender relations and power, areas which, she claims, are underdeveloped in 'men's studies':

The problem for feminism in asking what you can do with a man is one of the politics of social transformation. Critical studies of masculinity face us with the theoretical question of whether gendered relationships can be changed, and the political problem of what changes should be made and how they can be achieved. Reconstructing masculinity, recognising social divisions between men and acknowledging men's pain is only part of the process of making men less powerful in relation to women and to each other. Changing masculinity for the better, in feminist terms, implies reconstructing gender relations as explicit, shared or complementary, rather than as naturally unequal, or hidden power relations. Understanding the social character of men's power is then central to any reappraisal of masculinity, but it is this area which is first, underdeveloped in the literature, and second, developed in isolation from feminist work on power.<sup>23</sup>

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the masculinity debate evolved within feminism and men's studies with a certain amount of interaction between the two. This debate was the starting point for this research, which began by asking whether a similar debate was taking place in France. Was the need expressed by Anglo-American feminists to understand masculinity in order to bring about changes in the power relations between women and men also felt by French feminists? Are there any factors specific to French feminism which mean that the debate is taking place in different terms? In a book published in 1983, Regard sur les Françaises, Xe-XXe siècle, historian Michèle Sarde addresses the question of the specificity of French women and French feminisms, denying that the notion of national 'mentalités' is a myth. There are differences, she states in the introduction, between the way American and British women (and men) behave and relate to each other. Criticising feminists who present their analyses as universally valid, instead of considering what is culturally specific about them, Sarde devotes the rest of the book to exposing these differences.<sup>24</sup> The question of what is specifically French about the theories examined here is clearly by no means

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<sup>22</sup>Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990

<sup>23</sup>Ramazanoglu, Caroline, 'What Can You Do With A Man? Feminism and the Critical Appraisal of Masculinity', in Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 15, no. 3, 1992, pp. 339-50 (p. 346)

<sup>24</sup>Sarde, Michèle, Regard sur les Françaises, Xe-XXe siècle, Paris: Editions Stock, 1983



straightforward, and conflicting views are held by many of the authors whose work is discussed here. This is therefore a question which will recur throughout the thesis.

### **Investigating French Feminism and Masculinity**

The first important task of this research is to identify what is meant by French feminism, and, more specifically, which types of French feminism are to be examined. In order to do this, it is necessary to describe the diversity of French feminism and to examine the various ways in which it has been represented by feminists, non-French observers, and non-feminist writers in France, including intellectuals, journalists and members of men's groups. Focusing on specific types of feminism, in particular radical feminist theory and practice and a certain type of academic research, yet situating them in relation to other aspects of feminism and to various interpretations of it, this research enables a discussion of the meanings of 'French feminism' and 'post-feminism', both in and outside France. In particular, it considers the construction of a certain type of French feminism by Anglo-American academics, the declaration of a post-feminist era by French journalists, and the repeated attempts by feminists in France to re-define their purpose and *raison d'être*. It discovers a great number of inconsistencies and conflicts in the way feminism is represented.

The research investigates various aspects of the masculinity debate in France. Before concentrating on the contributions made by feminists, it discusses those made by men's groups, journalists and intellectuals.

The debate on masculinity in France emerged in the 1970s from newly-created men's groups. As in Britain and the United States, men's groups began to appear in France in the early 1970s as a response to feminism. The form this response took varied from anti-feminist reaction to pro-feminist searches for ways to respond positively to the questions raised by feminism, and these variations were reflected in the diversity of men's groups. Many feminists at this time insisted that, although masculinity was a problem which needed to be investigated, it was men, not feminists, who should be doing this. However, a few began to respond critically to early publications and conference papers by men involved in men's groups, and it was these critical responses which were the first attempts by feminists to address the subject of masculinity explicitly.

During the 1980s, masculinity also became an increasingly popular subject for journalists and authors of books which were expected to reach a wide audience. These



include Evelyne Sullerot's Quels pères? Quels fils?<sup>25</sup>, Elisabeth Badinter's XY: de l'identité masculine<sup>26</sup> and collections of articles in Le nouvel observateur, L'évènement du jeudi and L'express. Examining examples from each of these categories enables us to consider the relationship between feminist and men's groups' analyses of masculinity. This research identifies an initial hostility and suspicion on the part of feminists towards men's attempts to explain masculinity, followed in recent years by evidence of a certain, if limited, amount of co-operation between them, for example, joint publications such as BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin<sup>27</sup> by the Centre d'études féminines de l'Université de Provence and the Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, which is edited by pro-feminist male researcher, Daniel Welzer-Lang.

It also enables us to examine some of the characteristics of the popular manifestations of the debate and, in particular, the representation of feminism which underlies many of the arguments in these publications. Thus, it is demonstrated that feminism is portrayed by the authors of these books and articles as something which was relevant in the 1970s, but which, having achieved its aims, no longer has a rôle. Moreover, feminism is said to have caused many changes, including the destabilising of masculine identity. Many of the popular interpretations of masculinity are concerned with how men have coped with this and with their loss of power and rights. It is interesting to contrast this assessment of the impact of feminism with the way in which it is perceived by feminists themselves.

These popular interpretations of masculinity also often contain implicit or explicit comparisons with Anglo-American feminism. American feminists in particular are represented as ridiculously extreme. French women are told by the authors of these books and articles that this is dangerous for national gender relations and fortunately unnecessary in France, where, it is alleged, men and women understand each other better. The effect of this opposition between French and American feminism is that many problems are hidden by it. For example, Elisabeth Badinter implies in XY: de l'identité masculine that male violence is not a problem in France, as it is in the United States, thus denying the experiences of many French women and silencing those who are trying to raise public awareness of its existence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992

<sup>26</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992

<sup>27</sup>Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992

<sup>28</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992, *passim*



In the chapters that follow, feminist contributions to the masculinity debate are examined in detail. Two areas of feminist concern in which a particular interest in masculinity can be identified are taken as examples, and the way in which the interest developed, the importance of the theories produced and the contributions made to an understanding of masculinity are discussed.

The first set of theories examined are the attempts by feminist intellectuals to explain gender relations. One strand of the development of feminist thought about gender relations is traced from the work of feminists involved during the 1970s with the radical feminist theory journal Questions féministes to the continuation of this work by the research group APRE (Atelier production/reproduction) in the 1980s. The growing interest in masculinity is traced and it is situated in relation to developments in theories of gender. It is shown that, as the emphasis on the inequality and hierarchy of the gender relation increases, so does the necessity of examining the dominant and subordinate terms of the relation and the maintenance and reproduction of both terms. Thus it is necessary to study masculinity as well as femininity, but also the relation between them.

The second set of feminist ideas on masculinity examined here are those produced by grass-roots feminists involved in the struggle against male violence. At first they concentrated their efforts on helping women victims of male violence, as well as attempting to raise public consciousness and campaigning for legislative reform. However, as they slowly made progress in these areas, they also began to extend their interests in the direction of violent men and the construction of masculine identity around violence. Ideas about the reasons for male violence developed, and with them, a growing interest in the examination of masculinity. Changes in feminist understanding of this violence and their strategies for fighting against it are traced, revealing a growing tendency to consider the causes of male violence and the links between violence and masculine identity. This illustrates the changing priorities in this area of feminist activism, both in its practice and the ideas which have emerged out of this practice.

The selection of one example of theories produced almost entirely by academic feminists having little contact with the women's movement and another example from feminist activists whose theories are directly linked to their action, enables us to identify where their ideas meet and where they part and to try to explain why they should be similar or different by looking at the conditions of their production. Observing these two areas of development reveals continuities in the ideas that are being produced in both areas, but also a major debilitating split between theorists and activists and a lack of contact and exchange which might be acting as an obstacle to further developments.



It enables the discussion of whether this split is inevitable; whether a change in the present situation is possible and desirable; and, if so, under what conditions it might take place.

Having examined theories of gender and the problem of male violence separately, the research then considers the work which is taking place on the borderline between the two. This enables a discussion not only of what it contributes to an understanding of masculinity, but also what it can tell us about changes in feminist action and theory in France; about continuities and discontinuities between studies of masculinity in Britain and the United States; and about the possibilities for future developments, both theoretical and practical, including more work with men, greater contact between the movement and research, and greater exchange between Anglo-American and French thought. For example, it is argued that there is currently little exchange between Anglo-American and French feminist theory on this subject. It is suggested that some of the reasons for this might be the Anglo-American portrayal of French feminism as exotic and therefore their refusal to acknowledge the similarities between them; and the insistence amongst certain French feminists that the Anglo-American concept of gender is incapable of expressing the meaning of '*rapports sociaux de sexe*', despite striking similarities in their uses.

Although this is not, and was never intended to be, a comparative study, one of the motivations for doing it was to discover whether feminists in France shared an interest in masculinity, and if so, whether their analyses differed from their Anglo-American counterparts. As the research progressed, it became increasingly clear that a comparative study, in the sense of a balanced or parallel consideration of theories from France, the United States and Britain, would be beyond the scope of this thesis. The main reasons for this are, firstly, that the subject has been given far more specific attention in Britain and the United States than in France, producing a situation where the sheer amount and detail of the literature available is not comparable, and where any attempt at comparison would entail repetition of well-documented areas. Secondly, the way in which feminist thought on masculinity developed in these countries differs to such an extent that it was felt that too much space would be devoted to the differences to do justice to the French theories themselves. Therefore, this study concentrates on French thought, and only the most striking similarities and differences between it and Anglo-American thought will be pointed out.

The split between the movement and research and the relatively undeveloped state of the masculinity debate make it impossible to offer a coherent and satisfying conclusion to the arguments presented here. However, certain elements of a conclusion can be drawn



about the links and continuities between the different aspects of the debate, and suggestions can be made as to whether the debate might become more coherent in the future and under what circumstances this might occur, for example, stronger theories and better links between activists and theorists.

## Sources

Given the theoretical nature of much of the material discussed in this research, the most important source was publications by French feminists. These can be split into movement and research publications, although some fall on the dividing line between these two categories.

### MOVEMENT PUBLICATIONS

The literature from the women's movement was essential to this research, most importantly in the construction of a history of the elements of French feminism which are of most relevance to the study of the development of theories of masculinity. It was also vital to the investigation of the specific issue of feminist action around male violence. It includes journals, reviews, newsletters, pamphlets, conference papers and interviews.

Of the movement publications consulted, some are still produced today, but most of the numerous feminist reviews and journals which were around in the 1970s have now disappeared, including, for example, La revue d'en face: revue de politique féministe du mouvement de libération des femmes (1977-84) and Pénélope, a feminist history journal which disappeared in 1986. Most of those that are left are theoretical rather than movement journals, although some try to span the gap between theory and practice. One of the most practical publications as far as feminist activism is concerned is Paris féministe published by the Maison des Femmes.<sup>29</sup> It functions as a newsletter where events in Paris, in the rest of France, and to a lesser extent internationally, are listed. It also contains short articles about topical items. The other long-running review which has existed since 1977 is Les cahiers du féminisme<sup>30</sup>, published by the trotskyist Ligue communiste révolutionnaire.

In addition to the reviews, the most important sources for information on feminist action around male violence are annual reports of the information gained from helplines, for example, those of the Collectif féministe contre le viol<sup>31</sup>; pamphlets and articles by feminists who work in refuges for women victims of male violence, for

<sup>29</sup>Maison des femmes de Paris, 8 cité Prost, 75011 Paris

<sup>30</sup>Cahiers du féminisme, 2 rue Richard-Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil

<sup>31</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, 4 Square Saint Irénée, 75011 Paris



example Geneviève Devèze; and newsletters from small feminist organisations, such as the Maison des femmes at Cergy-St. Christophe.<sup>32</sup>

#### THEORETICAL PUBLICATIONS

More theoretical feminist publications were also a major resource. An important source for early contributions to theories of gender relations is Questions féministes. QF (with its successor Nouvelles questions féministes, NQF) is the longest-running feminist journal in France.<sup>33</sup> It is the only French feminist theory journal<sup>34</sup> and the only one to attempt to act as a bridge between the movement and theory, with the intention of establishing an exchange between the two.<sup>35</sup> It first appeared in November 1977, describing itself as 'a theoretical radical feminist journal.'<sup>36</sup> In 1980, having published eight issues, the collective split around the question of political lesbianism, and the journal disappeared.<sup>37</sup> Simone de Beauvoir and Christine Delphy, the original founders of QF, then created NQF, of which the first issue appeared in March 1981. Financial problems plagued it throughout most of its existence, particularly in the late 1980s, and its publication had to stop for four years between 1986 and 1991 due to lack of money. In 1991, a triple issue (16, 17, 18) appeared, and, despite continuing lack of funding, four numbers were published in 1992 and 1993.

Journals published by academic feminist research groups were also used, including BIEF (Bulletin d'information des études féminines), a thematically organised publication which has existed since 1979 (with a gap between 1986-9) and which was launched with the self-professed aim of providing a link between universities and women's experiences.

Publications by the 'Association européenne contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail' (AVFT) are an important source of theoretical feminist articles on male violence as well as accounts of specific cases and campaigns. They published Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus from 1985 until 1992, when it became Projets féministes. The journal began as a newsletter, then became a thematic review on sexual harassment.

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<sup>32</sup>Maison des femmes, 31, rue du chemin de fer, 95800 Cergy-St. Christophe

<sup>33</sup>The review published by the trotskyist Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, Les cahiers du féminisme, has also been appearing regularly since 1977. Despite the split in the Questions féministes collective which led to the creation of Nouvelles questions féministes, I am treating them as a theoretical continuum, since the editor (Christine Delphy) and the position of the journal as it was intended by Delphy and Simone de Beauvoir from the outset, remained unchanged.

<sup>34</sup>La revue d'en face could have been described as such during its existence between 1977 & 1984

<sup>35</sup>See the editorial of Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 1, mars 1981, pp. 3-14

<sup>36</sup>Questions féministes, 'Variations sur des thèmes communs: une revue théorique féministe radicale', no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 3-19 (p. 5)

<sup>37</sup>See Beauvoir, Simone de, 'Témoignage', Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 3, printemps 1982, pp. 110-12



It gradually extended its interest to cover all sorts of violence towards women, and Projets féministes has an even broader aim of linking all these types of violence in theories of social relations of sex ('rapports sociaux de sexe').

Academic feminist theories of gender relations were obtained from the feminist journals mentioned above; conference proceedings, for example, the 1982 Toulouse conference on 'femmes, féminisme et recherches'; the publications of research papers by APRE; and non-feminist journals, for example Les temps modernes and L'homme.

Due to the relatively undeveloped state of feminist publishing in France compared with Britain and the United States, there are few feminist books on this subject.<sup>38</sup> The exceptions include histories of the movement, for example, Françoise Picq's Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement<sup>39</sup>, and a series of collections of theoretical articles by individual authors, currently being published by the new feminist publishing house, Côté-femmes.<sup>40</sup>

#### NON-FEMINIST SOURCES

In order to establish the contours of a broader non-feminist debate on masculinity and to assess the rôle that a certain portrayal of feminism plays in the construction of these ideas on masculinity, the following were examined: men's groups' publications, both books, for example Guido de Ridder's Du côté des hommes: à la recherche de nouveaux rapports avec les femmes<sup>41</sup>, and reviews, for example, Types: paroles d'hommes; articles from news magazines, for example Le nouvel observateur and L'évènement du jeudi; and bestselling books on masculinity, for example, Evelyne Sullerot's Quels pères? Quels fils?<sup>42</sup> and Elisabeth Badinter's XY: de l'identité masculine.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of secondary sources were available in Britain, and most of the background reading was done here. However, this did present certain problems, as was mentioned earlier. The pronounced bias in the literature towards theorists such as Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva meant that it took longer than would perhaps be expected

<sup>38</sup>The only major feminist publishing house in France is des femmes, owned by Antoinette Fouque of Psych et Po. See chapter 2.

<sup>39</sup>Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993

<sup>40</sup>For example, Mathieu, Nicole Claude, L'anatomie politique: catégorisations et idéologies du sexe, Paris: Côté-femmes, 1991 & Guillaumin, Colette, Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir, Paris: Côté-Femmes, 1992

<sup>41</sup>Ridder, Guido de, Du côté des hommes: à la recherche de nouveaux rapports avec les femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982

<sup>42</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992

<sup>43</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992



to uncover the particular area of French feminist thought which was relevant to the aims of this research. Although Claire Duchon, in particular, and Toril Moi and Jane Jenson had already written about theorists such as Christine Delphy and Colette Guillaumin, and in the case of the first two, had published extracts from their work<sup>44</sup>, it was not easy to find out more. Very little information on feminist action against male violence towards women was available in the secondary sources, and even less on theories of gender produced in the 1980s and '90s.

The primary sources were all consulted in Paris. The majority of the books and journals were available in the feminist library, the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand and the Bibliothèque nationale. Other materials were obtained from feminist organisations in Paris, including the Collectif féministe contre le viol, the Association contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail, the Ligue du droit des femmes. These were supplemented with interviews and correspondence with activists and theorists.

### **Problems Defining 'Feminism' and 'French Feminism'**

'Feminism' and 'feminist thought' are terms which are already difficult to define; 'French feminism' is even more so. In Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression, Caroline Ramazanoglu explains that attempts to define feminism have been confused by the diversity of women's struggles. The definition of feminism also depends largely on who is defining it, she argues. For example, while liberal feminists and some male commentators who see feminism as a social movement describe it as either American 1970s radical feminism or 19th century bourgeois feminism, many feminist writers employ a broad definition which attempts to encompass all types of feminism. Ramazanoglu argues that both these approaches have their disadvantages. The former narrow definition excludes many political practices and schools of thought which are widely regarded as feminist, the latter fails to convey the contradictions in feminist thought. As a solution, therefore, some feminists have used the term 'feminism' loosely to refer to different conceptions of the relations between women and men and how they might be improved. Ramazanoglu's book is an attempt to explain some of the problems involved in defining feminism and its visions of the future, but in order to begin this task she too needs at least a working definition. The one she adopts is relatively general and includes a list of characteristics which the different varieties of feminism share. She claims that for all versions of feminism, the existing relations between the sexes in which women are subordinated to men are unsatisfactory and

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<sup>44</sup>In Moi, Toril, French Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987; Duchon, Claire, French Connections: Voices From the Women's Movement in France, London: Hutchinson, 1987. A collection of Christine Delphy's articles was also translated and edited by Diana Leonard and published as Delphy, Christine, Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression, London: Hutchinson, 1984



should be changed; that feminism questions much that is considered natural or desirable in society; that feminism challenges the whole of human history and the course it will take in the future; that since feminism's aim is to change the relations between women and men, it has a political practice as well as a set of ideas; that feminist political practice is varied, provocative and always encounters resistance; and that feminism raises questions about knowledge and science, because all feminist thought depends on a subjective engagement, a belief that the relations between women and men are unjust and should be changed.<sup>45</sup>

While some of these points are less pertinent than others for this particular study, and while this list of characteristics would not be accepted by all feminists, Ramazanoglu's guidelines seem a useful starting point for a definition of feminism. It is unnecessary to offer a more precise set of criteria here. In fact, to try to do so could present further problems, since the more exacting the definition, the easier it becomes to exclude types of feminism which do not meet the criteria, thus creating 'right' and 'wrong' feminisms. In this thesis, I use the term 'feminism' to refer to any theory or political practice which is based on the belief that women are subordinated by men and that these unequal relations between the sexes should be changed, in favour of women.

The difficulty of defining what is meant by 'French feminism' has already been raised, but some further points need to be added. Firstly, to talk of national feminisms in this way runs the risk of implying that they are homogenous. In an attempt to minimise this risk, chapter 2 will introduce the variety of French feminisms and some of the conflicts and debates which have split the movement throughout its history. The decision to concentrate only on French feminist theories also enables their diversity to be emphasised, whereas, as Alice Jardine argues in *Gynesis*, an attempt to undertake a more direct comparison between French and, for example, British theories could introduce more of a tendency to reduce each set to its lowest common denominator, thus concealing important differences.<sup>46</sup>

There is the further complication that, whilst it is vital to situate these theories within their originating context, as well as to remain aware of the fact that they are being observed from within another cultural context, it is clear that it is impossible to be certain of the dividing line between the two. Although there are (even taking into account the dangers of cultural stereotypes) identifiable differences between Anglo-

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<sup>45</sup>Ramazanoglu, Caroline, *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression*, London & New York: Routledge, 1989, pp. 6-8

<sup>46</sup>Jardine, Alice, *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 15



American and French theory, there are also continuities, and there has inevitably been an exchange between the two. The cross-fertilisation between national feminisms operates to varying extents and is dependent on a number of factors. As was mentioned above and will be examined in more detail in chapter 2, the selection of French texts imported and translated into English has been unrepresentative. Moreover, there is nothing to suggest that the English-language feminist texts which are translated into French are representative of the variety of publications available in Britain and the United States.<sup>47</sup> Theoretical exchange does not occur only because of translated texts, however, and there are clear differences between the publications of French feminist theorists who read and refer to English-language publications, for example, Christine Delphy or Marie-Victoire Louis, and those who do not, for example, the Atelier production/reproduction, which has developed theories of gender as a social relation in almost total isolation from everything that has been published in English.

### Structure

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part presents the contexts in which feminist theories of masculinity need to be situated. These are, firstly, French feminism as a whole, in order to demonstrate in which areas of feminist theory and practice an interest in masculinity has developed and how it relates to the rest of the women's movement and feminist research. The second context which is presented in Part 1 is the debate on masculinity which is taking place in men's groups, popular books, newspapers and magazines. The aim is to demonstrate how the feminist involvement in the debate relates to these other aspects of it.

Part 2 consists of a detailed examination of feminist theories of masculinity and is focused on two specific areas of feminist interest in which they have developed. The first is theories of gender which have been elaborated by feminist intellectuals. The second is feminist action around the problem of male violence towards women, which has been undertaken by grass-roots activists. Part 2 ends with a consideration of the point at which these two areas of French feminism meet, and the implications of work taking place on this borderline for future developments in the understanding of men, male violence and masculinity.

The arguments and evidence are organised into the five substantive chapters which follow.

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<sup>47</sup>One significant example is that Andrea Dworkin, one of the best-known and widely-read American feminist writers, had never been published in France until 1993, when one of her articles appeared in *Nouvelles questions féministes*: Dworkin, Andrea, 'Israël: franchement, à qui appartient ce pays?' in *Nouvelles questions féministes*, 'Andrea Dworkin parle d'Israël', vol. 14, no. 2, 1993, pp. 7-35



Chapter 2 introduces French feminism as one of the contexts in which the French feminist theories of masculinity examined in part 2 of the thesis have developed. The aim is to explain which French feminists are interested in masculinity, why they are interested, and where masculinity fits into their broader concerns. It discusses the early movement, changes in feminism and the division between the movement and research, concentrating on the factors which might have influenced the developments in the exploration of masculinity, for example, the relationship between theory and practice.

One of the important functions of chapter 2 is to establish what is understood by the term 'French feminism' in this research. It discusses how the term is used by Anglo-American feminist academics, by French journalists and by French feminists. So, for example, American academics might consider French feminism to be the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva; French journalists might represent feminism as an excess of the past or as something which was necessary but has now achieved its aims and consequently disappeared; and French feminists might think of it as a heterogenous mix of activism, research, political pressure, a diffusion of ideas and involvement in academic and political institutions.

Chapter 2 shows that, not only are there numerous varieties of French feminism, but that it is also seen in a variety of ways according to the perspective of the observer, and that this has implications for the way in which issues related to feminism are presented, including masculinity and male violence.

This is further complicated by the fact that feminism in France has undergone many changes since 1970, related to the social and political climate of the time, broader reactions to feminism, and the extent to which feminist ideas have been incorporated into institutions, political party programmes and legislative reforms.

It also identifies the specific aspects of French feminism which are examined more closely in the research. These are shown to have their roots mainly in radical feminism. Radical feminists produced the feminist journal *QE*; in which much of the early development of feminist theories of gender appeared. Radical feminists were involved in the various campaigns against male violence towards women, and organisations continuing this work, such as the Ligue du droit des femmes and the AVFT, come from the radical feminist tradition. Chapter 2 explains the relation between this feminist tendency, and its offspring, and the rest of the women's movement.



However, the work of feminist theorists, who may not have any contact with the movement, are also examined in Part 2. It is therefore necessary in chapter 2 to consider the relationship between activists and theorists. The split between movement and research is demonstrated and it is suggested that it has its roots in the suspicions of grass-roots activists towards feminists who entered the institutions, whether these were academic or political, a situation which was aggravated by the arrival of the Socialist government in 1981, forcing feminists to adopt new strategies in response to a certain number of reforms. The split is maintained and even widened by an increasing reluctance on the part of feminist academics to exhibit their feminism.

The implications of the gap between activism and research become more evident in chapters 4, 5 and 6, when the contrast between practice and theory in relation to male violence towards women is revealed, and the minimal amount of work which attempts to draw together the two areas is discussed. A major argument which emerges from this is that this split between movement and theory limits the insights into male violence and masculine identity, and that each area would benefit from exchange with the other.

The examination in chapter 3 of a variety of perspectives on masculinity which have developed since the eruption of the second wave of feminism is revealing in several respects. It is argued that the assessment of the impact of feminism varies according to the standpoint of the observer, and that this has implications for the way in which the debate around masculinity has developed. For example, men's groups formed as a reaction to feminism, and the way in which they perceived feminism and its impact on society affected their attitude towards the study of masculinity. Some men's groups aimed to prevent the changes brought about by feminism having harmful effects on them, such as the reduction of their power or the limitation of their rights as fathers or husbands. Others wanted to join feminists in their attempts to bring about change. Whereas the former tended to ignore the study of masculinity or to consider only its disadvantages for men, the latter were more likely to consider masculinity in the context of gender relations.

The media portrayal of feminism has affected the popular interpretation of masculinity. Journalists portrayed feminism as excessively radical and therefore to be ridiculed and marginalised or as having achieved its aims and therefore having lost its relevance. In this context, masculinity was said to have been seriously damaged by feminism, and men were portrayed as having suffered considerably and made an effort to respond. The construction of post-feminism means that men are represented either as victims of excessive feminist demands or as having lost a considerable amount of power as a result of the changes brought about by a successful feminism. They are forced to



change and search for a new identity. This interpretation ignores feminist issues and obscures the questioning of men's continuing domination of women.

In a consideration of the relation between feminist and non-feminist analyses of masculinity, it is argued that, for several reasons, feminists were late to enter the debate, but that they *did* enter it. The reasons why they entered it late are firstly, that they had other priorities. For example, in the case of feminists involved in action around the problem of male violence, the initial priority was the provision of refuges for the women victims, and they only began a critical analysis of violent men much later. Secondly, many feminists wanted men to deal with their own problems and felt that women should devote their time and energy to themselves and other women. Thirdly, there was a certain uneasiness around the question of men in a movement split around the question of sexuality. However, feminists later began to show more of an interest in masculinity, partly as a reaction to men's groups, but also because some of feminism's own concerns had reached a point at which the question of men and masculinity needed to be raised. And it is the developments in certain feminist debates which facilitated or necessitated an increase in interest in men and masculinity which will be discussed in detail in Part 2.

Part 2 examines two complementary examples of areas of growing feminist interest in the study of men and masculinity. The first, the development of theories of gender which led to the construction of men and masculinity as explicit objects of research, concentrates on the production of academic feminist theory. The second, the emergence of theories of masculinity out of movement activities against male violence towards women, illustrates how practical feminist action led to the production of certain ideas about men and masculinity. The contrast between the two enables questions to be asked about the production and exchange of feminist theory, and the lack of contact between theorists and activists, which, it will be argued, is one of the salient characteristics of feminism in France.

Chapter 4 considers the development of theories of gender and social relations of sex from articles which appeared in the theoretical radical feminist journal Questions féministes in the late 1970s to the current research of the Atelier production/reproduction (APRE) at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). It asks how the development of theories of gender contributes to a growing interest in masculinity, and looks at a number of examples of theorists working in this area who insist that the theorisation of masculinity as well as femininity is necessary in order to explain the power relations between them.



Chapter 4 traces the development from sex rôles to gender theory and the examination of the relation between masculinity and femininity. It argues that this encouraged the study of both the relation between them and of masculinity itself. It also considers the links between the QF theorists who produced much of the early writing on gender and the APRE theorists who have continued to develop feminist thinking in this area.

The main findings of QF's analyses of the social construction of gender were, firstly, that difference, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed. Secondly, they attempted to show that the social construction of difference, masculinity and femininity is responsible for women's oppression and male power. Finally, they argued that this social construction was historically and culturally variable and could therefore be changed.

The first two of these findings have contributed greatly to the way in which ideas about gender and masculinity have continued to develop. The third has been more recently brought into question by some feminists in France, as in Britain and the United States. The idea that something which has been shown to be socially constructed rather than natural can be changed is politically important. It functions as a theoretical support for action to bring about this change. However, as the revolutionary fervour and political optimism of the 1970s MLF turned into the more downbeat and disparate pockets of feminist activity in the 1980s, this idea began to be questioned. The debate around whether masculinity is natural or socially constructed has been cut through by attempts by feminist biologists to demonstrate that biology is itself socially constructed. Their claims that there is little scientific proof of a natural division of humanity into two clear-cut sex categories have implications for the theorisation of male violence, since they contribute to the arguments refuting the notion that aggression occurs naturally in men and has biological and sex-specific causes.

Chapter 4 raises from another angle the question which will be addressed in chapter 6: how male violence can be explained in a way that goes beyond the essentialist view that men are naturally more aggressive than women. Underlying this belief, which is still held by many people, are certain assumptions about what is natural. It is these assumptions that have been challenged by feminists, including those involved in the production of theories of gender. This chapter, then, also needs to demonstrate how feminist arguments against naturalism produced theories of the social construction of gender and of sexual difference, and later of gender as a power relation, which, they argue, can be expressed in the form of male violence.



In the light of the theoretical developments described in this chapter, two observations can be made. Firstly, the QF generation of theorists developed theories of gender as a relation and began to examine the construction of femininity, and to a lesser extent, masculinity. Secondly, it can be seen that it was the development of theories of gender which highlighted the importance of constructing masculinity as a gendered research object and no longer viewing it as a gender-neutral norm. Thus, research into the behaviour of men was presented as just that, and no longer as representative of 'human' behaviour.

Chapter 5 introduces the attention which has been paid by the French women's movement to male violence towards women. It shows how it was a major concern for feminists from the early 1970s, when they first began to expose the seriousness of the problem and its massive occurrence, and how the initial concerns were raising public consciousness, campaigning for legislative reform and providing aid for the women victims. It then argues that the theories that have developed out of this action over the last two decades have changed considerably, and there has been a development from an almost exclusive concern with women victims of male violence to a growing interest in its perpetrators. Since the main reason for feminist interest in violence against women is that they want to put an end to it, the emphasis on prevention has grown. Some French feminists have recently begun to argue that the way to prevent male violence is to concentrate on the men who do it. This chapter then looks at how feminist action (public consciousness-raising, refuges, campaigns) led to feminist ideas about male violence; how what they really wanted to know was why men are violent towards women and how it can be stopped; how these ideas changed until some (although few) feminists began to consider the importance of thinking about men; and the analyses that this has produced.

Chapter 5 shows that grass-roots feminists have been actively engaging with the problem of male violence towards women since the early 1970s, and that there has been a growth in interest in explaining why certain men are violent and how it can be prevented. It tries to identify the links between the practical work done in refuges and on helplines, and the ideas which have developed out of this experience. It discovers that this link is difficult to pin down, that ideas sometimes emerge directly out of the practice, but that they also sometimes precede it, contradict it, and develop far more slowly, or independently of feminist activism.

It identifies an increase in attempts to explain the reasons why men are violent towards women, rather than why women are the victims of male violence. It finds that this interest began with the realisation that violent men are ordinary, 'normal' men, and that



assailants are not always strangers; and the links between male violence and problems associated with masculinity such as frustration, unfulfilled sexual needs, inability to control sexual urges in the face of provocation, were attacked on the grounds that they were socially constructed by a patriarchal society, and not natural.

The aim of examining the changes and developments in the way that feminists approached the problem of male violence, the priorities they drew up, the campaigns they organised, the action they took, and the ideas they wrote about, was to see if any trends could be identified. It was discovered that feminists gradually identified different kinds of violence, made connections between them, and began to theorise them as part of a whole. It was also found that there was an increasing concern with violent men, associated with an increasing concern with prevention rather than dealing with the effects.

The aim of chapters 4 and 5 is to demonstrate firstly that the development of theories of gender has contributed to a growing interest in masculinity, and secondly, that feminist work on male violence has begun to examine the perpetrators in an attempt to explain and prevent violence towards women. These chapters argue that both of these developments have contributed to the establishment of masculinity as a legitimate object of study. However, it is at the point where these two areas of feminist theory and practice meet that some of the most interesting questions about masculinity - and about French feminism - can be posed. For example, how male identity is constructed around violence, how male violence functions within a system of male dominance, and how individual acts of male violence fit into this broader system.

Chapter 6 looks at the small amount of work which is situated at this point of convergence. It examines attempts to explain male violence within the framework of gender or social relations of sex. It considers what this tells us about masculinity and power and about how an end could be brought to the connections between masculinity and violence. It also looks at what this tells us about French feminism. The work on male violence has taken place almost exclusively within the movement, whilst theories of gender or social relations of sex have been elaborated mostly by CNRS researchers and feminist theorists, who have little contact with the movement. This split between theory and practice highlights the gulf between the two, even though both of them are providing crucial insights into masculinity and male power.

Finally, the conclusion considers how feminist ideas about masculinity relate to the more general debate which is taking place on it, and asks what is at stake in the conflict between them. It also reviews what has emerged in the course of this thesis about

French feminism. For example, that there is an enormous split between movement and theory; that the representation of French feminism from the outside could be read as post- or anti-feminist; that some French feminists are involved in debate about masculinity and male violence, but for institutional reasons (divorce from the movement, lack of organisational interest, the way that feminist studies have been established and funded) are a long way behind Britain and the United States in terms of interest and production. One of the major differences between French and Anglo-American feminism is raised in this chapter: the fact that, whilst in Britain and the United States challenges to the concept of sisterhood by black, lesbian and working class women led to a broadening of the difference debate to incorporate differences between women,<sup>48</sup> in France, sexual difference remains at the centre of the debate. This is not to deny that there have been criticisms of the movement by black and lesbian feminists, and that the issue of class has always been a major division amongst French feminists, but the effect on the terms of the difference debate has been less clear. Finally, the conclusion summarises the major points that French feminists working in this area have made about masculinity: that it is socially constructed; that it is historically and culturally specific, and therefore open to change; that it is constructed around and closely related to violence; and that its links with violence can be broken.

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<sup>48</sup>See, for example, Ramazanoglu, Caroline, Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression, London & New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 3 & Anthias, Floya & Yuval-Davis, Nira, 'Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions', in Lovell, Terry, British Feminist Thought, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, pp. 103-18.



## **PART 1: CONTEXTS**

The rôle of this part of the thesis is to establish the contexts in which the theories of masculinity discussed later emerged. The first context which will be described is that of French feminism. The aim is to situate the numerous aspects of French feminism in relation to each other and to certain historical, political and social contexts, for example, the rôle of the events of May '68 in the launch of the second wave of feminism; the consequences for the women's movement of the arrival in power of a Socialist government in 1981; and cultural representations in the media of 'post-feminism'. This will enable the specific type of French feminism which is examined in the rest of the thesis to be identified and contextualised.

The second context which is described is the broader debate on masculinity which has taken place in France. Analyses of masculinity which have been produced by members of men's groups, by journalists and authors of popular books are examined. This enables the specifically feminist theories of masculinity to be situated in relation to non-feminist and anti-feminist attempts to address the issue.

## CHAPTER 2: FRENCH FEMINISM: MOVEMENT AND THEORY

The aim of this chapter is to introduce French feminism as the background against which the theories discussed in the rest of this thesis developed. In order for the description of French feminism presented here to function as a context for the theories of masculinity produced by feminists, non-feminists and anti-feminists, which are examined later, it needs to consider three specific aspects. These are the relation between the women's movement and feminist theory; the impact of feminism and reactions to it; and how the feminists whose theories and practice are examined in the rest of the thesis fit into the broader picture of French feminism, as it is represented inside and outside France.

The first aspect of French feminism which this chapter focuses on is the gap between the grass-roots movement and feminist theory. It shows how movement activists in France, as in Britain, have been suspicious of institutionalised feminism of any kind, whether it is feminist research or the Ministère des droits de la femme (Ministry of Women's Rights). Feminist researchers, for their part, have seemed reluctant to advertise their feminism or pursue obviously feminist research. Contact between activists and theorists has been very limited. It is important to consider the continuities and discontinuities between activists and theorists, and the sites of tension and conflict, in order to contextualise the rest of the thesis, which examines the movement's activities around male violence towards women, activities which have produced certain ideas about masculinity, as well as more abstract feminist theorising about gender, which is distanced from grass-roots activism. Although the main focus of this thesis is French feminist *ideas*, they did not and could not have developed without the movement; feminist studies and publications would not exist (even in their present diminished state) without it, and it is for this reason that the relation between the two needs to be examined.

The second aspect of French feminism which needs to be considered is its impact on French society and reactions to it, since this has had an influence on the production of theories of men and masculinity. Some of the theories of masculinity examined in this thesis have been produced by men's groups or by non- or anti-feminist intellectuals or journalists. Feminism has had an influence on this theoretical production, if only by virtue of its existence. Changing attitudes to feminism therefore need to be discussed.

Finally, having mapped out the varieties of French feminism and illustrated their relation to each other, this chapter will explain which types of feminism are going to be discussed in the rest of the thesis. One of the main characteristics of the feminist



theories which have been included in this research are that they are all based on the belief that differences between women and men are socially constructed, rather than biologically given. The implications of this basis for a further development of theories of masculinity is that these feminists believe that masculinity, if it is socially constructed, can be changed.

The selection of social constructionist theories of masculinity obviously excludes those which are based on the belief that the differences between the sexes are natural. These are often referred to as theories of 'difference' and are opposed to theories of 'sameness' or 'identity'. The selection of a certain type of feminist production of theories of masculinity has also excluded theorists who are now often represented in Britain and the United States as (the) 'French feminists'. Here I will demonstrate how the American construction of 'French feminism' occurred, and how it excludes many individuals and groups who are active in France.

This chapter concentrates on those aspects of the development of the women's movement, feminist publications and feminist studies which have had most impact on the way in which feminist theory has been produced, and in particular the academic feminist theory which forms the basis of the discussion in later parts of this thesis. It also considers the more general effects of feminism in France, and especially the way in which it has provoked the exploration of the question of masculinity by non-feminists and anti-feminists. The final section of this chapter aims to clarify what is meant by French feminism in this thesis and the confusion which might surround the term, given the way it has been used by many Anglo-American critics.

A view which represents the movement in terms only of sites of theoretical production is, however, necessarily distorted. This chapter does not aim to be a comprehensive or representative account of the history of the French women's movement, a history which has been told in various ways elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it focuses on some groups and developments more than others, pays more attention to written texts than events and discussions, and smoothes over many of the inconsistencies and contradictions of

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<sup>1</sup>Tristan (Zelensky), Anne & de Pisan (Sugier), Annie, Histoires du MLF, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977; Delphy, Christine, 'Nouvelles du MLF: Libération des femmes an dix', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 3-13; Picq, Françoise, 'Sauve qui peut, le MLF', La revue d'en face, no. 11, 4e trimestre, 1981, pp. 11-24; Duchen, Claire, Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand, London & New York: Routledge, 1986; Jenson, Jane, 'Ce n'est pas un hasard: the varieties of French Feminism', in Howorth, Jolyon, & Ross, George (eds.), Contemporary France: A Review of Interdisciplinary Studies, London: Pinter, 1989, pp. 114-43; Jenson, Jane, 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', in New Left Review, no. 180, 1990, pp.127-60; Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: l'Harmattan, 1990; Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993



practical feminist politics. It concentrates, for example, more on the debates within the movement about the rôle of the institutions in feminism; whether feminists can work in academia and, if they do, what relationship exists between their research and activism; the 'institutionalisation' of feminism and the division between movement and theory, than on other questions central to the women's movement such as the relative importance of struggles against patriarchy and capitalism; political lesbianism and the rôle of separatism.

Similarly, the account of the emergence of 'feminist studies', in one form or another, is also concerned more with examining the relationship between feminist studies and the movement, the origins of the theory produced by feminist intellectuals and the way that it was viewed by women in the movement, than with a chronological and exact history of each step in the development of the field.

### **Le Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (MLF)**

Although I am concentrating here on the women's movement since 1968, it must not be forgotten that this was not the birth of feminism in France. Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe's history of French feminism, published in 1977, devotes only one of its twenty-five chapters to the post-68 period, the rest of the book covering feminism in the Middle Ages, during the Revolution, and numerous examples of individual feminists and feminist movements in the last two hundred years.<sup>2</sup> And when Simone de Beauvoir wrote the introductory sentences to The Second Sex in 1949, she felt that:

For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on women. The subject ... is not new. Enough ink has been spilt in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it.<sup>3</sup>

However, to the women involved in the emergence of the movement in the 1970s, it seemed that they were beginning something new. This was because of the ignorance surrounding the struggles of the past. Women's history was yet to be written. In fact, this became one of the projects of the second wave. In addition, the events of May '68 were to have a profound effect on the evolution of the women's movement, and played a vital rôle in the creation of the 'new feminism'. The emerging women's movement was closely linked with other new political movements of the time, and it shared with them an opposition to hierarchy, to the authoritarianism of de Gaulle's France, and to party politics. The new, exciting ideas of this period stimulated women into action, but at the same time, they began to realise their lack of status in the events, and it was the

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<sup>2</sup>Albistur, Maité & Armogathe, Daniel, Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours, Paris: des femmes, 1978

<sup>3</sup>Beauvoir, Simone de, The Second Sex, (1949) (tr. H.M. Parshley), London: Penguin, 1972, p. 13



anger at their treatment by male activists which led to the creation of an autonomous women's movement. Many of them broke away from mixed organisations and organised separately around issues which had not previously been discussed.

During the 1970s, many women's groups were created, and feminist publications began to appear. Most of this activity went unnoticed by the general public and the media, but what they did notice was a series of highly visible actions. For example, a group of women laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in memory of one more unknown than him: his wife. In 1971, the 'Manifeste des 343' was published in the centre-left intellectual weekly, Le nouvel observateur. This was a statement signed by 343 women, many of them public figures, to say that they had had illegal abortions. Reporting these events, the press, borrowing from the American, coined the phrase 'mouvement de libération de la femme' (the women's liberation movement).<sup>4</sup> The press also began to describe the movement as divided into currents or 'tendencies' and these divisions are usually used in analyses of the movement, especially as it was in the 1970s.

However, even amongst activists involved from the very beginning, opinions vary on the extent to which a description of the movement in terms of tendencies is an accurate representation of it. For example, Françoise Picq, in an account of how she experienced the early women's movement in Paris, argues that, although they did disagree and formed separate groups depending on their interests and priorities, between 1970 and 1972 the women's movement could not be described as being divided into currents.<sup>5</sup> According to Picq, women drifted in and out of groups at different times, or were involved in activities organised by different groups, and the notion of sisterhood was still strong enough to give them a sense of identity as 'feminists'.

Christine Delphy, on the other hand, sees this fluidity and exchange as existing only within the confines of a 'central' feminism, which was unaware of other feminist activity and therefore of divisions which might be visible from another standpoint. For example, the split between 'revolutionary' and 'class struggle' feminists was highly visible to Delphy as early as 1970 because she was directly involved. However, at the same time, Delphy admits that there were local trotskyist-controlled groups active in

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<sup>4</sup>Feminists objected to the term 'de la femme' and insisted on the use of the plural 'des femmes'. See Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993, p. 17

<sup>5</sup>Picq, Françoise, 'Sauve qui peut, le MLF', La revue d'en face, no. 11, 4e trimestre, 1981, pp. 11-24



1971 which she knew nothing about until they formed a national federation in 1972-73, which soon became a significant mobilising force.<sup>6</sup>

To write of tendencies or currents, then, should not imply that these divisions were well-defined and fixed, or that all feminists and feminist groups could be categorised in this way.<sup>7</sup> However, there were splits within the movement which should not be underestimated, and conflict between certain groups existed from as early as 1970. The categories most often used in analyses of the movement are the 'tendance lutte de classes', Revolutionary Feminists, and *Psychanalyse et politique*.<sup>8</sup>

#### 'TENDANCE LUTTE DE CLASSES'

One of the major divisions within the movement was the relative importance accorded to the struggle against capitalism and against patriarchy. For the 'class struggle current', the destruction of capitalism was the priority. Many women in the MLF had come from the extreme Left, and brought with them its theoretical frameworks and its conflicts. The 'class struggle current' was heavily influenced by the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), the French section of the Fourth International, and the *Organisation communiste des travailleurs* (OCT). Under these influences it attempted to 'redéfinir le MLF comme une force organisée, hiérarchisée et partie prenante dans la vie politique et sociale française.' ('to redefine the MLF as an organised and hierarchical force, actively involved in French political and social life').<sup>9</sup> Heated arguments took place between the class struggle and revolutionary feminists, and the conflict between them only began to die down in about 1980, when the ideological divisions between them were weakened as a result of increasing feminist involvement in mainstream politics.

Conflicts between class struggle and revolutionary feminists also concerned the organisation of the movement. Whereas the former demanded a structured organisation, the latter were opposed to vertical power structures and traditional forms of political organisation. They were proud of the movement's informal and flexible structure and

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<sup>6</sup>Delphy, Christine, personal correspondence

<sup>7</sup>According to Anne Zelensky, although labels are often given to feminists ('tendance lutte de classes', 'féministes révolutionnaires', etc.), many activists do not recognise themselves in these categories. Zelensky, Anne, interview with author, Paris: 26.3.93

<sup>8</sup>See for example Jenson, Jane, 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', in *New Left Review*, no. 180, 1990, pp.127-60; Duchon, Claire, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand*, London & New York: Routledge, 1986; Remy, Monique, *De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990; and Françoise Picq's reluctant use of the same divisions in Picq, Françoise, *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement*, Paris: Seuil, 1993

<sup>9</sup>Remy, Monique, *De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990, p. 51



objected to any attempts to make it more rigid. But there were also problems on an individual level. The women who entered the MLF from the extreme Left often experienced intense conflict between their activities within the movement and those within their political organisations, a conflict which, for many women, became debilitating. Neither trusted nor fully recognised by either, they were fighting a difficult battle. By 1976, the pull of these divided loyalties had forced many of them to make a decision to go one way or the other, and the current as such disappeared.<sup>10</sup> However, the review Les cahiers du féminisme published by the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire has appeared regularly without a break since 1977 and the feminists who are still in the LCR are probably the most active today.

#### FÉMINISTES RÉVOLUTIONNAIRES

Revolutionary feminists constituted the most active tendency of the MLF in the early 1970s, and were responsible for the highly visible actions which brought feminism into the public eye. However, they are also the most difficult to define. Françoise Picq writes, 'Il n'y a pas à proprement parler une 'tendance' féministe révolutionnaire. Pas même un groupe régulier. Plutôt un courant de pensée, aux limites imprécises et variables.' ('Strictly speaking, there is no revolutionary feminist 'tendency'. There is not even a group which meets regularly. It is rather a collection of ideas, whose limits are variable and difficult to define.'<sup>11</sup>) The first revolutionary feminist group formed in November 1970, but only lasted three months. After that, groups formed, split and re-formed with some of the same women and some new ones, especially during important campaigns, such as the one against rape, when it appeared necessary to present a radical feminist position represented by a specific group.<sup>12</sup> In a note in French Connections, Claire Duchen writes:

The term 'revolutionary feminists' is different in meaning in France and in Britain. This group in France consisted of women who would probably call themselves radical feminists today, with many differing ideas about women's oppression and how to fight it. The group splintered into many small collectives, grouped around specific projects and joining together on an *ad hoc* basis to organise larger events and conferences.<sup>13</sup>

Revolutionary feminism was influenced by American radical feminism, and had much in common with it. It saw gender as the primary dividing factor in society; women were seen to constitute a sex class; patriarchy, not capitalism, was the main enemy; and

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<sup>10</sup>Duchen, Claire, Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand, London & New York: Routledge, 1986, pp. 28-30

<sup>11</sup>Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993, p. 198

<sup>12</sup>Delphy, Christine, personal correspondence

<sup>13</sup>Duchen, Claire, French Connections: Voices From the Women's Movement in France, London: Hutchinson, 1987, p. 22n



separatism was seen as the only effective political strategy.<sup>14</sup> The revolutionary feminists were in constant conflict with the class struggle tendency. The first revolutionary feminist group, 'les petites marguerites', formed in 1970 as a means of escaping the 'incessant quarrels' with the women who held the 'capitalism first' position, who were, at the time, grouped around Antoinette Fouque (see below).<sup>15</sup> However, they were divided on many questions, including the issue of sexual difference: whereas some revolutionary feminists wanted sexual difference eliminated, others wanted to accentuate it. They were also divided on the question of sexuality, with lesbian feminists accusing heterosexual feminists of collaborating with the enemy.<sup>16</sup>

Revolutionary feminists produced many publications, reflecting the plurality of the tendency. Questions féministes (1977-80), which, with its successor, Nouvelles questions féministes (1981-), will be examined in detail in a later chapter, was amongst these. In contrast to British radical feminists, French 'féministes révolutionnaires' have been good at theorising, although relatively incapable of organising and sustaining campaigns. However, there are exceptions, and a variety of groups and projects have emerged from this tendency. These include the Ligue du droit des femmes, which, amongst other activities, formed women's aid collectives, including SOS femmes-alternatives (offering support to battered women) and SOS femmes violées.<sup>17</sup> The Association contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail (AVFT) is in the same radical feminist tradition, as are the women who are currently organising the campaign for parity between men and women in political institutions.<sup>18</sup>

#### PSYCHANALYSE ET POLITIQUE

Psychanalyse et politique (also known as Psych et po) was one of the first groups to form in Paris, and maintained a high profile throughout the 1970s. Part of its influence was due to the fact that it was never short of money, and was therefore able to create a publishing house, magazine and bookshops (all called 'des femmes'). Another reason for its influence was its charismatic founder and leader, psychoanalyst Antoinette Fouque. Psych et po became involved in the debate around structuralism and poststructuralism, and was intellectually influential in the mid-1970s. Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, for example, all passed through the group (although

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<sup>14</sup>Jenson, Jane, 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', in New Left Review, no. 180, 1990, pp.127-60 (p. 131)

<sup>15</sup>Delphy, Christine, personal correspondence

<sup>16</sup>As for example in the split of the Questions Féministes collective in 1980.

<sup>17</sup>Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990, pp. 43-4

<sup>18</sup>Delphy, Christine, personal correspondence



Cixous was the only one to maintain any long-term relations with them, publishing all her work with 'des femmes' between 1976 and 1982).<sup>19</sup>

Psych et po was, however, attacked by other feminists for being politically divisive. They criticised the way in which the group used inaccessible, incomprehensible language which excluded the majority of women, and accused them of elitism. Other feminists also objected to Psych et po's claims to be representative of the MLF. There was an understanding amongst all the women in the various parts of the movement that no individual or group would speak or write in the name of all feminists. However, Antoinette Fouque had begun sending articles and letters to the press signed 'MLF' by 1974. In 1979, Psych et po registered the name 'Mouvement de libération des femmes' and the initials 'MLF' as company trademarks, thus preventing anyone else from using them. Naturally this enraged the women in the movement.<sup>20</sup> They all joined together to denounce this behaviour, writing to the press, titling all their reviews 'du mouvement de libération des femmes', thus challenging Fouque to take them all to court.<sup>21</sup> Their anger was aggravated by the fact that at the same time as writing in the name of the MLF, Psych et po considered themselves 'anti-feminist', and their review Des femmes en mouvements - hebdo (FMH) constantly attacked the rest of the movement.<sup>22</sup> A couple of years later, the media were talking of the 'MLF-déposé' and the 'MLF-non-déposé', and the issue died down for a while.<sup>23</sup> But in 1989, Fouque created the Alliance des femmes pour la démocratie, which, she wrote 's'est donné pour but de contribuer à faire reconnaître la pleine citoyenneté des femmes en même temps que leur identité spécifique.' ('aims to contribute to the struggle to ensure that women's full citizenship is recognised at the same time as their specific identity.')<sup>24</sup> The emphasis placed by Psych et po on women's specificity has been another source of conflict with other feminists, particularly those associated with Questions féministes, who, from the very first editorial, have criticised the idea that women are essentially different<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Moi, Toril, French Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, p. 4

<sup>20</sup>For a history of Psych et Po's appropriation of the movement's name, see Chroniques d'une imposture. Du mouvement de libération des femmes à une marque commerciale, Paris: Tierce, 1981

<sup>21</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Les origines du mouvement de libération des femmes en France', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 137-48 (p. 145)

<sup>22</sup>See for example Liliane Kandel's Post-scriptum: "une presse anti-féministe" aujourd'hui: "des femmes en mouvements", Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 37-44

<sup>23</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Les origines du mouvement de libération des femmes en France', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 137-48 (p. 145)

<sup>24</sup>Fouque, Antoinette, Etats généraux des femmes: 8 mars 1989, Paris: des femmes, 1990, p. 269

<sup>25</sup>Questions féministes, 'Variations sur des thèmes communs: une revue théorique féministe radicale', no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 3-19



Fouque's ability to use the media to her advantage, coupled with the reluctance of the rest of the movement to do this, have meant that Psych et Po have exerted almost total control over the publicity of feminist actions in France. For example, they distribute pamphlets at demonstrations in which they pretend that they organised the whole thing, and that any other group present is a sub-group of theirs.<sup>26</sup> Both important feminist actions which are taking place at the moment - the movement for parity and the expression of solidarity with the women of the former Yugoslavia - have been 'hijacked' by Psych et Po.<sup>27</sup>

#### ISSUE SPECIFIC FEMINISTS

In addition to the three 'currents' described above, many feminists were active in trade unions and political parties and involved in campaigns which did not fit into these categories. They campaigned on specific issues for specific groups of women, for example women workers or mothers. This type of feminism increased towards the end of the 1970s.

#### 1978-81: A Period of Change

The period around 1978-81 was one of change, uncertainty and reflection for the women's movement in France. The Left was on the decline and had suffered defeat in the legislative elections in March 1978; the effects of the economic crisis were worsening and this brought a move from collective struggle to individualism, a search for security and a rising anti-feminism. Although many women remained active within the parties and the unions, many feminist groups disappeared, and there was a move from radical activism to feminist research.<sup>28</sup> In 1979, Psych et po appropriated the name of the movement and with the name, its actions and visibility. In 1980, there were a number of articles reflecting on the ten years of feminism which had passed.<sup>29</sup> One of these was Christine Delphy's 'Libération des femmes an dix'.<sup>30</sup> In this article, Delphy points out two ways in which the history of the movement can be distorted. The first is the way in which the media present feminist achievements as being the result of a natural progression of society as though 'society' were capable of changing by itself, and the second is the deliberate falsification of the history of the MLF by Psych et po,

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<sup>26</sup>Delphy, Christine, interview with author, Paris: 8.4.93

<sup>27</sup>See for example, Visser, Willemien, 'Viols contre les femmes de l'"ex"-Yougoslavie', Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 14, no. 1, 1993, pp. 43-76

<sup>28</sup>Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990, pp. 103-4

<sup>29</sup>For example, Delphy, Christine, 'Nouvelles du MLF: Libération des femmes an dix', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 3-13; Picq, Françoise, 'Sauve qui peut, le MLF', La revue d'en face, no. 11, 4e trimestre, 1981, pp. 11-24

<sup>30</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nouvelles du MLF: Libération des femmes an dix', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 3-13



which is all the more dangerous for representing itself as being within the movement, at the same time as it seeks to undermine its every action. The arrival in power of the Left in 1981 posed further problems for the women's movement, with regards to its relationship to institutions and strategies for achieving short-term reforms.<sup>31</sup> The women who had been involved in the movement from the beginning also began to worry about the new generation of young women who, they felt, were taking the gains of ten years of hard struggle for granted.<sup>32</sup>

If feminists were denying that feminism was dead, this did not mean that they were not aware of the changes taking place in the movement. A frequent declaration by feminists was that feminism had been 'institutionalised'. For many, the most potent symbol of this institutionalisation was the creation of the Ministère des droits de la femme when the Socialists came to power in 1981. Françoise Picq goes so far as to write that the 'Ministère des droits de la femme s'est substitué au mouvement des femmes.' ('the Ministry for Women's Rights has replaced the women's movement.') During its short period of existence (1981-86), the Ministry achieved a number of reforms. Abortions were reimbursed by Social Security; women's centres were established with ministry funding; projects were set up; and feminist research was introduced into the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique). However, it is clear that these would not have happened had it not been for the preceding decade of feminist struggle, and feminist criticisms of the ministry continued.

The existence of the ministry, the (very limited) insertion of women's studies into universities, the success of certain reforms and the ways in which political parties and trade unions took on a certain number of feminist ideas all contributed to the changes that took place in the movement. Feminists remained active, but the revolutionary fervour of the 1970s was replaced by longer-term projects, such as setting up refuges for women and children and doing feminist research. As these long-term, low profile projects began to replace the highly visible actions of the early years, media attention waned.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Nouvelles questions féministes, Editorial: 'Féminisme: quelles politiques?', no. 2, octobre 1981, pp. 3-8 (p. 5)

<sup>32</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nouvelles du MLF: Libération des femmes an dix', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 3-13; Picq, Françoise, 'Sauve qui peut, le MLF', La revue d'en face, no. 11, 4e trimestre, 1981, pp. 11-24

<sup>33</sup>Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993, p. 332

<sup>34</sup>Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990, p. 117



The term 'post-feminism' was increasingly used by the media to refer to the social climate in which these changes took place. The meaning of 'post-feminism' varies according to the author and the context. Two of the most common meanings are that feminism has achieved its aims and is no longer necessary, or that it has given up and is no longer relevant. Although feminism in France had been accompanied almost from the beginning by media suggestions that it was already over, this opinion was reinforced in 1978 when Maria Antoinetta Macciochi, an Italian politician and writer who lived and taught in Paris, published a book entitled Les femmes et leurs maîtres, in which she declared that feminism was dead. This was echoed by the media over the next few years.<sup>35</sup> An example of the cultural expression of the notion of 'post-feminism' was the launch of F Magazine, a women's magazine appearing for the first time in January 1978. It was aimed at the 'New Woman', the intelligent, successful career woman, who can juggle the demands of home and the office, while still maintaining a smart professional, yet unerringly sexy appearance. For the women who read it, writes Monique Remy:

[ce mensuel] nourrit leur optimisme, constate des changements dans le monde des hommes, salue les nouveaux pères, dilue, élargit et neutralise les préoccupations féministes.

[this monthly magazine] feeds their optimism, points to changes in the world of men, greets the appearance of new fathers, dilutes, broadens and neutralises feminist concerns.<sup>36</sup>

### Feminist Research

One of the major changes which took place in French feminism in the 1980s was its introduction into academic institutions. A certain amount of feminist research had existed in the 1970s. For example, in 1975, there was a conference in Aix-en-Provence on 'Les femmes et les sciences humaines', organised by the CEFUP (Centre d'études féminines de l'Université de Provence); new research groups were created in universities; a certain number of women's studies courses began to be offered in departments of literature, law and history.<sup>37</sup> However, the form of this research changed considerably with the official recognition by academic institutions, following the first national conference on feminist research in 1982. This conference, 'Femmes,

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<sup>35</sup>Duchen, Claire, French Connections: Voices From the Women's Movement in France, London: Hutchinson, 1987, p. 44n. See for example the article by Françoise Giroud, 'Les voiles flasques du féminisme', Le monde, 8 avril 1979 and the response to it - 'Des féministes hystériques aux féministes historiques ou de la caricature à l'enterrement' - signed by numerous groups from the MLF which Le monde failed to publish, and which appeared in Questions féministes no. 6, septembre 1979, pp. 102-4

<sup>36</sup>Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990, p. 111

<sup>37</sup>Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS, 1989, pp. 1-2



féminisme et recherche', was held in Toulouse, and was supported by the Ministère de la recherche, the Ministère des droits de la femme and the CNRS.<sup>38</sup> Following the conference, the CNRS launched a research programme that financed seventy 'Actions thématiques programmées' (ATPs) called 'Recherches féministes et recherches sur les femmes'. However, this programme only lasted four years, and was not replaced with any new initiatives at the end of this period. Three posts were created in universities for academics specialising in women's studies, and feminist academics began to form associations, for example, the Association des études féministes (ANEF), created in 1989.<sup>39</sup>

These developments were not popular with all feminists, however, and a certain amount of conflict arose between feminists in the institutions and those outside. The conference at Toulouse was criticised on the grounds that it marked the institutionalisation of French feminism, which had, at least in its early days, prided itself on its opposition to and independence from the institutions. The fact that it was funded by the Ministère de la recherche and the Ministère des droits de la femme explained why so many of the feminists who spoke came from within the institutions, whether the universities or the CNRS.<sup>40</sup> A controversial criticism of the direction which was being taken by feminist studies in France was offered by Rose-Marie Lagrave in an article entitled 'Recherches féministes ou recherches sur les femmes?'. Lagrave argues that the advent of women's studies marked the death of the movement:

Le colloque de Toulouse ... constitue l'acte de naissance quasi ritualisé du champ des recherches sur les femmes tout en accomplissant le travail de deuil du mouvement féministe. La duplicité institutionnelle, sociale et politique qui présidait à ce colloque a servi à masquer sa fonction fondamentale, celle d'être un filtre entre mouvement social et recherche, malgré des discours officiels légitimant la liaison entre les deux.

The conference at Toulouse ... marked the almost ritualised birth of the field of women's studies, whilst at the same time marking the death of the feminist movement. The institutional, social and political duplicity which presided over this conference served to conceal its primary function, which was to act as a filter between the social movement and research, despite the official discourse justifying the links between the two.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS, 1989, p. 2

<sup>39</sup>Picq, Françoise, 'Feminist Studies in France', in European Network for Women's Studies, Seminar Report: Women's Studies and the Social Position of Women in Eastern and Western Europe, European Cultural Foundation, 1990, pp. 45-6

<sup>40</sup>Basch, Françoise, 'Nouvelles... de France et des colonies' Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 5, printemps 1983, pp. 87-92

<sup>41</sup>Lagrave, Rose-Marie, 'Recherches féministes ou recherches sur les femmes?' in Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, no. 83 'masculin/féminin-1', juin 1990, pp. 27-39 (p. 31)



Although one of the questions which was addressed at Toulouse was how to increase contact between the movement and the institutions<sup>42</sup>, some commentators have expressed a certain amount of scepticism about the sincerity of this concern. For example, criticisms of the split between theory and practice at Toulouse were voiced by the group *Ruptures... et féminisme en devenir*:

A Toulouse ... nous avons constaté que la 'théorie' devenait de plus en plus l'apanage de quelques femmes et nous avons déploré l'absence des autres ou leur quasi-impossibilité de se faire entendre. Ceci nous confirme dans la crainte que nous avons de voir s'accroître la division théorie/pratique, avec ce qu'elle contient de risque mortel pour le Mouvement. Nos craintes sont d'autant plus fondées, qu'à travers les attaques portées par certains mouvements d'hommes contre le féminisme, les violentes réactions au projet de loi antisexiste, l'"indifférence" des médias, voire leur complicité, nous avons pu vérifier la capacité du patriarcat à se restructurer à partir de nos luttes et de nos acquis, et à renforcer sa violence.

We noticed at Toulouse that 'theory' was increasingly becoming the prerogative of a small number of women, and we were troubled by the fact that other women were either absent or found it almost impossible to make themselves heard. This reinforced our fear that the split between theory and practice might be widened, a process which could have fatal implications for the movement. Our fears are all the more legitimate in view of the fact that, through the attacks on feminism by certain men's groups, the violent reactions to the anti-sexism bill, the media's 'indifference' or even complicity, we have seen patriarchy's ability to take into account our struggles and victories, to restructure itself accordingly, and to reinforce its violence.<sup>43</sup>

During the early days of feminist research, the universities allowed the introduction of certain courses, but they were marginalised, both in terms of the programmes in which they appeared, and the buildings in which they took place. At the same time, feminists had to adopt a certain number of institutionally acceptable practices, and conform to the rules of academic writing.<sup>44</sup> A constant cause for complaint from feminists involved in women's studies was the extent to which the exchange between feminism and traditional institutional knowledge has been one-way. Whereas some academic feminists had to abandon certain values in favour of those of academic research (replacing anonymous and collective projects with individually authored books and articles, for example), other disciplines did not take any notice of contributions by feminist theorists, marginalising women's studies, and perceiving it as 'unscientific',

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<sup>42</sup>See for example Picq, Françoise, 'Quelques réflexions à propos des études féministes' in *Femmes, féminisme et recherches*, AFFER, Toulouse, 1984, pp. 914-9 & Zelensky, Anne, 'Projet de recherche sur femme-publicité-sexisme, proposé par une femme de la Ligue du droit des femmes au Ministère des droits de la femme et subventionné par celui-ci', in *Femmes, féminisme et recherches*, AFFER, Toulouse, 1984, pp. 595-9

<sup>43</sup>Brun, Odette et al. *Ruptures et féminismes en devenir*, Paris: Voix Off, Imprimerie de Femmes, 1984

<sup>44</sup>Lagrange, Rose-Marie, 'Recherches féministes ou recherches sur les femmes?' in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 83 'masculin/féminin-1', juin 1990, pp. 27-39 (p. 30)



'subjective' and 'politically biased'. Feminists were in conflict about the extent to which male academic values and conventions should be accepted, especially amongst feminists who were involved in the teaching of women's studies, 'thereby attempting to reconcile activism and research, or to continue their activism through their research.'<sup>45</sup> For feminists in the movement, this represented a betrayal. As Françoise Picq wrote:

Le mouvement des femmes dénonçait la promotion individuelle et l'intégration et culpabilisait celles qui auraient été tentées de monter dans cette institution masculine.

The women's movement denounced individual promotion and integration and instilled a feeling of guilt in those who might have been tempted to make a career in the male institutions.<sup>46</sup>

The 'Action thématique programmée' was confronted with the same problems. Lagrave divides the people responsible for selecting the research projects which would take part into:

les 'légitimistes' (qui) veulent assurer aux études sur les femmes la respectabilité académique et sont partisans d'appliquer les critères de sélection du CNRS; (et) les défenseurs de la liaison entre mouvement social et recherche (qui) prônent, au contraire, l'application de critères dérogatoires.

the 'legitimists' who want to bring academic respectability to research on women and who are in favour of applying CNRS selection criteria; and the defenders of the link between the social movement and research who advocate the application of less restrictive criteria.<sup>47</sup>

Lagrave claims, however, that the values of the CNRS won: those chosen were mostly in institutions, were highly qualified academically, and knew how to conform to academic conventions; those who were not and did not were excluded. The ATP selection committee, on the other hand, stated:

Pour effectuer la *sélection* parmi ces projets, le Comité d'ATP a croisé divers critères tels le caractère novateur du projet, une solide connaissance du champ, une problématique féministe, des outils méthodologiques adéquats, une faisabilité et une programmation raisonnable, etc. Il a eu cependant aussi le souci de ne pas écarter des projets qui, tout en ne répondant pas forcément aux exigences traditionnelles, lui ont paru intéressants par leur problématique.

In choosing which projects to fund, the ATP committee employed various criteria, including the originality of the project, a solid knowledge of the field, a feminist problematic, adequate methodological frameworks, feasibility, and a reasonable timetable, etc. However, there was also concern not to exclude

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<sup>45</sup>Lagrave, Rose-Marie, 'Recherches féministes ou recherches sur les femmes?' in Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, no. 83 'masculin/féminin-1', juin 1990, pp. 27-39 (p. 28)

<sup>46</sup>Picq, Françoise, 'Quelques réflexions à propos des études féministes' in Femmes, féminisme et recherches, AFFER, Toulouse, 1984, pp. 914-9 (p. 916)

<sup>47</sup>Lagrave, Rose-Marie, 'Recherches féministes ou recherches sur les femmes?' in Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, no. 83 'masculin/féminin-1', juin 1990, pp. 27-39 (p. 32)



projects which, whilst not meeting the traditional requirements, appeared to have an interesting hypothesis.<sup>48</sup>

According to the ATP, the links between research within the institutions, research outside the institutions, and the women's movement were strong and lively, for example:

Ce développement de la recherche 'dans l'institution' était lié à son essor 'hors institution', comme on disait alors et comme en témoigne notamment le séminaire Limites-frontières qui fonctionne à Paris depuis 1980. Entre les deux, bien des communications, des ouvertures, ne serait-ce que par les personnes. L'une et l'autre cherchaient à répondre au mouvement des femmes en son sens le plus large, à toutes les questions et remises en question qu'il suscitait.

This development of research 'within the institution' was linked to its rapid expansion 'outside the institution', as we used to say in those days, and to which the 'Limites-frontières' (Limits and Boundaries) seminar programme, which has been held in Paris since 1980, bears witness. Between the two, there are numerous connections and openings, even if this is only on an individual level. Both types of research have sought to respond to the women's movement in the largest sense, to all the questions and issues that it has raised.<sup>49</sup>

The debate over the rôle of the institutions in feminism has lost some of its impetus now that feminism has once again almost completely disappeared from academic circles. There are no feminist studies in the sense of fixed courses and syllabuses that remain after the original holder of the post has left; it is just up to individuals to teach as much feminism as they can within the context of their discipline. Not only that, but so as not to jeopardise their careers, many of these individuals refuse to call their work 'feminist'.<sup>50</sup> Toulouse stands out now as an exception rather than the precedent which it was thought to be at the time. In 1991, in an editorial to Nouvelles questions féministes, Christine Delphy argued that feminist studies had been opposed as a legitimate area of research by the hierarchy of academia in a way which is unique to France. The sociology section of the CNRS, for example, accepts as 'scientific' traditional work on women in the family which denies their subordination, opposing it to feminist research which draws attention to women's subordination, and is therefore labelled as 'political' and consequently 'unscientific'.<sup>51</sup> Research on women is now passing as feminist research, she claims, which is praised for having become 'more scientific'. However, Delphy rejects this appraisal,

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<sup>48</sup>Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS 1989, p. 5

<sup>49</sup>Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS 1989, p. 2

<sup>50</sup>Delphy, Christine, interview with author, Paris: 8.4.93

<sup>51</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Editorial', Nouvelles Questions Féministes, nos. 16-17-18, 1991, pp. 1-12 (p. 4)



car si le féminisme a apporté quelque chose à la science, c'est une critique épistémologique et méthodologique mettant en évidence les présupposés non-scientifiques et non-examinés de la plupart des démarches classiques.

for if feminism has made one contribution to science, it is an epistemological and methodological critique which brings to the fore the unscientific and unquestioned pre-suppositions of most classical approaches.<sup>52</sup>

Delphy contrasts this situation to Britain where, she argues, many male academics, especially sociologists, have taken on board certain feminist critiques and adjusted their methods accordingly.

### The Death of Feminism?

According to the weekly news magazine, L'évènement du jeudi, feminism is over.

'Terminée la révolte féministe qui avait bouleversé les années 70. La guerre des sexes est finie,' it announces. ('The feminist revolt which shook the '70s is over. The war of the sexes is finished.'<sup>53</sup>) The same declaration is found in L'express, another weekly news magazine.<sup>54</sup> Both talk of feminism only in the past tense. Women who are challenging gender relations today are referred to as 'post-feminists'. There is no definition of either term and no attempt to justify the distinction between the two. The assumption is that feminism is generally accepted as over and that we are now in a post-feminist era.

Many feminists argue that part of the reason why feminism is now seen as out-moded is its relative success on a social and cultural level.<sup>55</sup> This does not mean that feminism has achieved all of its aims; feminists are perfectly aware that even the legislative changes that they have forced could be retracted at any time. For example, despite the fact that the right to free contraception is now taken for granted by many French women, 13 of the 27 types of contraceptive pill currently available in France are not reimbursed by Social Security, and others are under threat.<sup>56</sup> Violent attacks on abortion clinics are increasing.<sup>57</sup> As Françoise Thébaud wrote in the introduction to L'histoire des femmes en occident: le XXe siècle:

<sup>52</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Editorial', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 1-12 (p. 4)

<sup>53</sup>Domenach, Nicholas (ed.) 'Le mâle français', in L'évènement du jeudi, 13-19 août 1992, pp. 52-89 (p. 52)

<sup>54</sup>Remy, Jacqueline et al., 'Qu'est-ce qu'un homme aujourd'hui?', in L'express, no. 2196, 12 août 1993, pp. 26-39 (p. 29)

<sup>55</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nouvelles du MLF: Libération des femmes an dix', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 3-13; Collin, Françoise, 'Théories et praxis de la différence des sexes', in M, nos. 53-4, avril/mai 1992, pp. 5-9; Lesselier, Claudie, 'Quelles perspectives pour le mouvement féministe?' in M, nos. 53-54, avril/mai 1992, pp. 10-13

<sup>56</sup>Halimi, Gisèle, La cause des femmes, Nouvelle Edition, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p. XLII

<sup>57</sup>See Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 4, which is devoted to abortion.



Mais qu'est-ce qu'un 'acquis', produit d'une construction sociale qu'il importe justement de déconstruire? Il faut s'interroger sur sa nature, sur la façon dont il advient, sur ses adversaires et ses promoteurs, sur ses effets et ses enjeux, réels et symboliques. Et concevoir - le poids actuel du militantisme anti-avortement ou le développement du SIDA sont là pour le rappeler - que rien peut-être n'est jamais acquis.

But what is a 'political victory', the product of a social construction which it is important to deconstruct? We must consider its nature, the way in which it comes about, its opponents and supporters, its effects and the issues it raises, whether real or symbolic. And we must accept - the current fervour of anti-abortion activism and the progression of AIDS are there to remind us - that perhaps no victories are ever permanently won.<sup>58</sup>

But feminism has had an effect. By 1979, when they were already having to respond to claims that they no longer existed, feminists were offering explanations such as the following for the decreased visibility of the movement:

Le Mouvement se répand et se diffuse jusque dans les comportements les plus quotidiens - comme c'était son but - si bien qu'on peut feindre de ne plus le voir. Des courants féministes apparus à l'intérieur des partis ... et la propagation par les media des thèmes féministes sont les signes de la force de ce mouvement. ... La 'récupération' des idées féministes (par exemple la création d'un Secrétariat à la condition féminine) sert encore de prétexte pour parler d'échec et nous en imputer la responsabilité. Or la récupération est un indice historique, lui, de la vitalité d'un mouvement: les institutions reconnaissent par là son existence tout en essayant de le neutraliser.

The movement is spreading and affecting even the most every-day behaviour, as was its aim. This is happening to such an extent that it can pass unnoticed. The feminist currents which have appeared within the parties ... and the diffusion by the media of feminist ideas demonstrate the strength of the movement.... The 'co-option' of feminist ideas (for example, the creation of the Secretariat for Women's Affairs) still serves as a pretext for talking of feminism's failure, for which we are held responsible. Historically, however, co-option is in fact indicative of the vitality of the movement: by trying to co-opt feminism, the establishment is in fact recognising its existence, even as it tries to neutralise it.<sup>59</sup>

It was not just from outside the movement that accusations of 'reformism' were heard. Within the movement itself there was also a debate about the 'watering down' of feminist ideas and their co-option by, for example, political parties. Monique Remy's main thesis in her history of the movement, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, is that feminism in France has lost its strength due to the move from 'revolution to reform'.<sup>60</sup> However, Françoise Picq states succinctly that,

<sup>58</sup>Thébaud, Françoise, 'Introduction', Duby, Georges & Perrot, Michelle (eds.), Histoire des femmes en occident 5: le XXe siècle (sous la direction de Françoise Thébaud), Paris: Plon, 1992, pp. 13-23 (p. 14)

<sup>59</sup>Des féministes de 'Collectif féministe contre le viol', 'Elles voyent rouge' et al, 'Des féministes hystériques aux féministes historiques ou de la caricature à l'enterrement', Questions féministes no. 6, septembre 1979, pp. 102-4 (p. 103)

<sup>60</sup>Remy, Monique, De l'utopie à l'intégration: histoire des mouvements de femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990



'La réforme n'est pas simplement l'antithèse de la révolution comme on le croyait dans le feu de l'action. Elle est tout autant sa résultante'. ('Reform is not simply the antithesis of revolution, as we believed in the heat of the struggle; it is just as much its consequence'.)<sup>61</sup> And in an article published in 1980, Christine Delphy suggests that 'reformism' should not necessarily be seen as negative. She writes:

Si nous nous réjouissons quand une soeur, une mère, une amie, commencent à être touchées par le féminisme, paradoxalement nous condamnons l'expression collective de ce moment de la prise de conscience. Combien de fois entend-on utiliser les mots d'affadissement, sinon de trahison ou même de récupération de 'nos' idées pour caractériser des positions féministes timides. C'est exprimer là non seulement une incompréhension du processus de prise de conscience, que nous avons pourtant bien vécu, nous, toutes autant que nous sommes, mais aussi du processus de diffusion et de surcroît un désir à la fois irréaliste et politiquement suspect de garder le contrôle des idées que nous lançons.

Whilst we rejoice when a sister, a mother or a friend begins to respond to feminism, we paradoxically condemn the collective expression of this nascent consciousness. How often do we describe the first, timid adoption of feminist positions as the 'watering-down', the 'betrayal', or even the 'co-option' of 'our' ideas? This is to misunderstand not only the way in which we achieve a greater consciousness, a process we have nevertheless all been through, and ought therefore to know about, but also of the way in which ideas are spread; it also suggests a desire, which is both unrealistic and politically suspect, to keep control of the ideas which we produce.<sup>62</sup>

### French Feminism Today

It is difficult to establish what exactly French feminism is today. Many feminists will admit the existence of feminist groups involved in specific projects, but not of a Movement as such.<sup>63</sup> In a special number of BIEF (Bulletin d'information des études féminines) on the death of feminism, Françoise Collin claims that if French feminism is currently suffering a lack of visibility, this is not to say that it is dead. A latent period in which the 1970s type of feminism disappeared is being followed by a redefinition: feminism no longer consists of spectacular struggles, but of a gradual spread of ideas:

Il est frappant de voir combien s'est développée parmi les jeunes femmes une conscience et une pratique existentielle, féministe qui ne se revendique pas toujours de ce terme et qui ne se cristallise pas en groupes militants, lesquels se sont peu à peu dissous.

It is striking to consider the extent to which a consciousness and practice has developed amongst young women which is feminist, but is not always

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<sup>61</sup>Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993, p. 349

<sup>62</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nouvelles du MLF: Libération des femmes au dix', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 3-13 (pp. 5-6)

<sup>63</sup>For example, Jeanine Sert in 'Un homme sur deux est une femme' in Chroniques syndicales, Femmes libres (Radio Libertaire) et le groupe Pierre-Besnard de la Fédération anarchiste, Mai '68 par eux-mêmes, Paris: Editions du monde libertaire, 1989, p. 141



recognised as such and which does not lead to the creation of active groups, which have gradually disappeared.<sup>64</sup>

Françoise Picq concluded the 1988 conference 'Crises de la société: féminisme et changement' with the words, 'Le féminisme n'est pas mort: il se perpétue sous des formes historiques variées. Celles qu'il a prises dans les années soixante-dix appartiennent à cette époque-là.' ('Feminism is not dead. It carries on in different, historically specific forms. The forms it took in the 1970s belong to that age.')<sup>65</sup>

And similarly, Françoise Thébaud writes in the introduction to L'histoire des femmes en occident: le vingtième siècle:

Il y a dans l'apparent déclin du féminisme - certains parlent de postféminisme - autant de transformation que de disparition, et l'histoire continue, recomposition incessante, à la fois imprévisible et tout entière contenue dans le passé.

What may appear to be the decline of feminism - some talk of post-feminism - is as much a transformation as a disappearance. Its history continues as a non-stop process of change which is unpredictable, but at the same time contained in the past.<sup>66</sup>

A quick survey of feminist activity in France today would reveal small groups of project-orientated feminists working in specific areas, whether this is solidarity with the women of the former Yugoslavia<sup>67</sup>, the campaign for parity<sup>68</sup>, or women and Aids.<sup>69</sup> Other issue-specific feminist groups are active around male violence towards women (Association contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail, Collectif féministe contre le viol); the defence of the right to abortion and contraception (Mouvement français pour le planning familial); the problems faced by immigrant women (Collectif des femmes immigrées).

Feminist research also continues to take place in universities and in the CNRS, although the funding and institutional recognition it receives is minimal. One of the most striking characteristics of feminist activity in France today is the enormous gap

<sup>64</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Ringard ou ringuèle? La question des stratégies', in BIEF Bulletin d'information des études féminines, nos. 20-1 'Le féminisme ...RINGARD?', décembre 1989, pp. 163-7 (p. 165)

<sup>65</sup>Picq, Françoise, 'Si c'était à refaire...' in Groupe d'études féministes de l'Université Paris VII (G.E.F.), Crises de la société: féminisme et changement, Paris: Revue d'en face/Éditions Tierce, 1991, pp. 257-65 (p. 265)

<sup>66</sup>Thébaud, Françoise, 'Introduction', Duby, Georges & Perrot, Michelle (eds.), Histoire des femmes en occident 5: le XXe siècle (sous la direction de Françoise Thébaud), Paris: Plon, 1992, pp. 13-23 (p. 21)

<sup>67</sup>See any number of Paris féministe during 1992/3; for an account of the actions against and analyses of the rapes committed against these women, see Visser, Willemien, 'Viols contre les femmes de l'"ex"-Yougoslavie', Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 14, no. 1, 1993, pp. 43-76

<sup>68</sup>See Gaspard, Françoise; Servan-Schreiber, Claude & Le Gall, Anne, Au pouvoir citoyennes! Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992

<sup>69</sup>See the special number on Aids of Les cahiers du féminisme, no. 65, été 1993



between the movement and research. Contact between activists and theorists seems to be very limited. For example, talking about feminist work on male violence towards women, Marie-Victoire Louis of the Association contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail (AVFT) commented that 'il y a eu tout ce travail militant mais qui tout de même a été très, très coupé du travail de réflexion des intellectuelles'. ('There is all this work by activists, but it has nevertheless been completely divorced from the theoretical work of intellectuals'.)<sup>70</sup> On the question of violence, there are, she adds, better relations between activists and feminist lawyers, than between activists and researchers.<sup>71</sup> Françoise Collin also describes feminism as split in two:

Le féminisme français semble s'être aujourd'hui replié sur deux de ses bords: d'une part les 'recherches féministes' dont le colloque de Toulouse a consacré le principe, d'autre part le service social auquel j'assimilerais les groupes d'aide aux femmes battues ou aux immigrées. Entre les deux, malgré certaines initiatives, un grand vide de pensée et d'actions politiques, qui n'est d'ailleurs pas pire que celui dont est affectée la scène politique traditionnelle - celle des partis ... Le féminisme n'est plus ou n'est pas devenu ce terrain commun aux intellectuelles et aux non-intellectuelles, à la réflexion et à l'action, qu'il avait rêvé d'être. Le vide que j'évoquais n'est guère interrogé par les chercheuses, soit qu'elles aient renoncé à changer le monde, soit qu'elles considèrent implicitement qu'une modification profonde du savoir, à laquelle elles travaillent, entraînera par elle-même le changement du monde.

French feminism today seems to have fallen back onto just two of its many areas of activity: on the one hand, 'feminist research', which was established at the Toulouse conference, and on the other hand, social services, in which I would include help-groups for battered women or women immigrants. Between the two, despite certain initiatives, there is an absence of thought and political action, which is nevertheless no worse than that which affects the traditional political scene of the parties.... Feminism is no longer, or has not become, the common ground of intellectuals and non-intellectuals, of theory and practice, which it dreamt of becoming. The absence I am describing is hardly ever analysed by researchers, either because they have abandoned their hopes of changing the world or because they believe that the fundamental change in knowledge, which they are attempting to bring about, will of itself change the world.<sup>72</sup>

### French Feminism or 'French Feminism'

A variety of aspects of French feminist activism and research have been described in order that the more specific discussions which follow can be situated in this broader context. This thesis concentrates on particular kinds of feminist action and theory, which can be situated in relation to the tendencies described above and to the debate around sexual difference. Briefly, it concentrates on 'féminisme révolutionnaire' and on those feminists who believe that the differences between women and men are socially

<sup>70</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93

<sup>71</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93

<sup>72</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Ringard ou ringuèle? La question des stratégies', in BIEF Bulletin d'information des études féminines, nos. 20-1 'Le féminisme...RINGARD?', décembre 1989, pp. 163-7 (pp. 163-4)



constructed and not innate. These points are discussed in the first part of this section. Then, the construction of 'French feminism' as an object of research by American feminist academics is described. It is suggested that because of the way in which 'French feminism' is represented outside France, the absence from this thesis of a consideration of the work of certain French women theorists might strike non-French readers as a short-coming. It is argued that this is not the case, and that the exclusion of many types of French feminism from Anglo-American writing on the subject impoverishes our understanding of the movement and certain areas of theory.

#### DIFFERENCE AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

In common with feminism in other western countries, feminism in France has been split around the question of sexual difference, although this split has perhaps been even more pronounced in France than elsewhere.<sup>73</sup> At its simplest, the 'difference debate', as it is known, hinges on whether men and women are essentially the same or different. Feminists who argue that men and women are essentially the same, claim that differences between them are socially constructed in and by a society which oppresses women. Feminists who argue that men and women are essentially different claim that femininity has been undervalued by a society which values only the masculine, and that women's difference needs to be asserted and celebrated. The most ardent advocates of the 'sameness' position have been the editorial collectives of Questions féministes and Nouvelles questions féministes, whereas the best-known 'difference' feminist in France is Luce Irigaray.

This research concentrates on theories which are based on the initial premises of the 'sameness' arguments. This means that they work from the belief that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, and that there is no essential difference between women and men.

The reason for this decision is that it would be impossible within the limits of a doctoral thesis to examine theories of masculinity emanating from both the 'difference' and the 'sameness' position, and still do justice to the political and philosophical contexts in which the arguments have been produced and to the implications of these theoretical developments.

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<sup>73</sup>For an introduction to the difference debates, see, for example, Eisenstein, Hester & Jardine, Alice (eds.), The Future of Difference, New Brunswick & New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1985 & Lovenduski, Joni & Randall, Vicky, Contemporary Feminist Politics, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, chapter 3, pp. 57-92



The implications of this decision are that the thesis inevitably concentrates on 'féministes révolutionnaires'. This is because, in contrast to Britain, it was the radical feminists in France who were the most interested in producing theory. Also, it was in the radical feminist journals, Questions féministes and Nouvelles questions féministes that the social constructionist theories of gender were published, and these were the basis for the construction of later theories of gender and masculinity by research groups such as the Atelier production/reproduction.

#### AMERICAN CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'FRENCH FEMINISM'

French feminism as it is understood by feminists in France is very different to 'French feminism' as it is perceived in Britain and the United States. This difference has important implications for the choice of materials covered in this thesis and needs careful explanation. This section aims to clarify what is labelled 'French feminist' in France and outside; to explain the absence from this thesis of three theorists who are often taken to represent French feminism outside France; and to correct the view that Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva play a central rôle in feminism in France.

American feminists and Women's Studies departments have been particularly keen to import 'French feminism', but the texts they have chosen for translation, critique and popularisation have often been severely limited to a narrow band of French women theorists, which is sometimes reduced to only three: Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva. Literary critic Toril Moi points out, for example, that the texts which are considered particularly 'French', are those which have more of an 'exotic flavour', rather than the materialist-feminist texts, which in fact have much in common with British socialist feminism.<sup>74</sup>

Julia Kristeva, a linguist and psychoanalyst, is unknown in the French women's movement: 'Elle n'est ni une féministe ni à la limite une antiféministe.... Pour nous, ce qu'elle écrit est en dehors du champ du féminisme.' ('She is neither a feminist, nor, I suppose, an anti-feminist.... For us, what she writes is outside feminism.'<sup>75</sup>) Hélène Cixous, a novelist, playwright and professor of literature at Paris VIII, was involved in the feminist movement in the 1970s, but she has not written anything on the subject for the past fifteen years, and her work receives far less attention from feminists in France than in the United States.

<sup>74</sup>Moi, Toril, French Feminist Thought: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987, p. 6

<sup>75</sup>Delphy, Christine, interview with author, Paris: 8.4.93



In contrast to Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, who are labelled 'feminist' only outside France, philosopher and psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray, is different in that she has a following in the movement and is the most prominent 'difference' feminist in France. However, despite having some support amongst activists, she is isolated amongst French feminist intellectuals. Most of these treat her work with little respect and some are overtly hostile to it, particularly those associated with QF and NQF. Irigaray has been repeatedly criticised for, amongst other things, never having engaged in feminist debate, but instead writing essays which contain no references to the work of other feminists and which ignore the developments in feminist theory taking place around her. Maryse Guerlais writes in NQF for example, 'Je m'appuie sur ce que je connais des avancées de la théorie et des travaux féministes produits depuis le renouveau des luttes féministes; avancées et travaux que L.I. ne discute pas; elle les ignore.' ('I draw on what I know of the advances in feminist theory and in feminist work produced since the revival of feminist struggles; advances and work which Luce Irigaray does not discuss; she does not know about them.'<sup>76</sup>) In a recent publication entitled Féminismes au présent, Christine Planté wonders at the success of Irigaray's books, 'en dépit de l'hostilité, de l'ignorance ou du dédain dont font ouvertement preuve à leur égard la très grande majorité des chercheurs/euses travaillant sur la différence des sexes....' ('despite the hostility, lack of interest and contempt which the majority of researchers working on sexual difference exhibit towards them....'<sup>77</sup>)

'French feminism' could be read as a series of ironies. The first is that the three best-known 'French feminists' would not refer to themselves as feminists, and even express differing degrees of hostility towards feminism. Alice Jardine, for example, writes:

Other women theorists whose work has had or is beginning to have a major impact on theories of reading, and who at one level or another are writing about women, at the very least do not qualify themselves either privately or in their writing as feminists and, at the most, identify themselves and their work as hostile to, or 'beyond' feminism as a concept. Hélène Cixous, Sarah Kofman, Julia Kristeva, Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, for instance, belong to this group....<sup>78</sup>

The second irony is that French feminists (without inverted commas) do not read or discuss at least two of these theorists and might even express amazement or incredulity

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<sup>76</sup>Guerlais, Maryse, 'Vers une nouvelle idéologie du droit statutaire: *Le temps de la différence* de Luce Irigaray', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 63-92 (p. 64)

<sup>77</sup>Planté, Christine, 'Questions de différences', in Riot-Sarcey, Michèle; Planté, Christine; Varikas, Eleni et al. Féminismes au présent, L'Harmattan 1993 (supplément à Futur/Antérieur), pp. 111-31 (p. 114)

<sup>78</sup>Jardine, Alice, 'Gynesis', Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism, no. 12, Summer 1982, pp. 54-65 (p. 55)



at the thought that otherwise critical British and American feminists call this work feminist. Christine Delphy writes:

Aux Etats-Unis aussi, Cixous, Kristeva et Irigaray, entre autres, sont étudiées et qui plus est en tant que féministes, ce qui est pour le moins choquant concernant les deux premières qui proclament leur éloignement du féminisme *urbi et orbi*.

In the United States, Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray, among others, are studied, and what is more, they are studied as feminists. This is, to say the least, shocking with regard to the first two, who proclaim their distance from feminism *urbi et orbi*.<sup>79</sup>

The third irony is that the inverted commas which almost always accompany the British and American 'French feminism' seem to imply that the authors using the term do so with some hesitation, detachment, or recognition that it does not really mean what it says: French feminism. A multitude of footnotes attest to this knowledge. For example, in 1992, the American, Nancy Fraser, wrote that 'New French Feminisms ... was the book that first constructed "French feminism" as a distinctive cultural object for English-speaking readers.'<sup>80</sup> She adds in a footnote:

We could doubtless learn much about the workings of our culture and its institutions if we could reconstruct the precise process of this synecdochic reduction. It is all the more striking in that it occurred despite the strenuous protests of Monique Wittig, Simone de Beauvoir, and the editors of the journal Questions Féministes.<sup>81</sup>

And yet the rest of the book consists almost entirely of articles by and about Irigaray, Kristeva and Sarah Kofman, as well as by American academics writing in the 'French' tradition.

A fourth irony is that there are now French feminists who may not refer to themselves as such outside France in case it should mislead English-speaking readers. Christine Delphy referred to herself and the other feminists present at a conference in Paris in 1989 on 'Sexe et genre' as French feminists in an article for Women's Studies International Forum, and was asked by the editor to change the term, since it would be unclear in English. But if Delphy is not a French feminist, then what is she?<sup>82</sup> At the same time, some authors have argued that certain American feminists are in fact (in their

<sup>79</sup>Delphy, Christine, Book Review: 'La passion selon Wittig', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 11-12, hiver 1985, pp. 151-6 (p. 151)

<sup>80</sup>Fraser, Nancy, 'Introduction: Revaluing French Feminism', in Fraser, Nancy & Bartky, Sandra Lee (eds.), Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 1

<sup>81</sup>Fraser, Nancy, 'Introduction: Revaluing French Feminism', in Fraser, Nancy & Bartky, Sandra Lee (eds.), Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency and Culture, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 1

<sup>82</sup>Delphy, Christine, interview with author, Paris: 8.4.93



style and use of theory) 'French'. Toril Moi, for example, writes in the introduction to Sexual/Textual Politics:

A final point: the terms 'Anglo-American' and 'French' must not be taken to represent purely national demarcations: they do not signal the critics' birthplace but the intellectual tradition within which they work. Thus I do not consider the many British and American women deeply influenced by French thought to be 'Anglo-American' critics.<sup>83</sup>

What is at issue here is not whether certain theorists are or are not worthy of the title 'feminist', but rather the way in which work purporting to be in one way or another about French feminism (and whether written by French or non-French authors) is criticised for not being about the 'right' French feminists.

The construction of 'French feminism' in such a narrow sense obscures others, in this case, the ones with the most support. Marie-Victoire Louis claims for example that:

Le féminisme, ce n'est pas trois femmes. Le féminisme, c'est un mouvement social, ce sont des courants, c'est des contradictions, et s'il y avait un féminisme français important, ça serait chez les historiennes et les sociologues.

Feminism is not three women. Feminism is a social movement, it is currents and contradictions, and if there was an important aspect of French feminism, it would be found in the work of historians and sociologists.<sup>84</sup>

Eleni Varikas writes in an article entitled 'Féminisme, modernité, postmodernisme: pour un dialogue des deux côtés de l'océan':

Le qualificatif 'national' contribue ainsi à effacer ou trivialisier toute autre position féministe; il laisse entendre que toute référence en dehors de celles sélectionnées et définies comme French theory ou French feminism, *n'est pas théorique* (ou *n'est pas féministe*) et donc qu'on peut s'abstenir d'en débattre. Or, réduire le féminisme 'français' à certaines positions théoriques ce n'est pas seulement occulter le fait que la majeure partie des luttes féministes ont été menées en dehors et parfois contre ces positions; ce n'est pas seulement occulter les positions théoriques les plus influentes dans la réflexion féministes en France [Colette Guillaumin, Christine Delphy, Michèle Le Doeuff, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, pour ne citer que quelques-unes]; c'est par là même s'empêcher de réfléchir sur les conditions dans lesquelles ces positions multiples ont émergé, sur leur rapport avec une pratique politique des femmes, sur ce qui fait leur acceptabilité ou inacceptabilité sociale et académique, sur leur dynamique subversive.

The 'national' modifier thus effaces or trivialises any other feminist positions; it implies that any reference which falls outside those selected and defined as French theory or French feminism, *is not theoretical* (or *is not feminist*) and that it therefore does not need to be discussed. However, reducing 'French' feminism to certain theoretical positions not only obscures the fact that the majority of feminist struggles have been led outside and sometimes against

<sup>83</sup>Moi, Toril, Sexual/Textual Politics, London & New York: Routledge, 1985, p. xiv

<sup>84</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93



these positions; not only does it obscure the most influential theoretical positions in feminist thought in France [Colette Guillaumin, Christine Delphy, Michèle Le Doeuff, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, to cite just a few]; it prevents the analysis of the conditions in which these numerous positions emerged, of their relation to the political practice of women, of what makes them socially and academically acceptable or unacceptable, and of their subversive dynamic.<sup>85</sup>

Another implication, although one which is less important here, is that the habitual grouping together of these three theorists obscures the (enormous) differences between them.

This thesis, then, examines one specific current of theory about masculinity and male violence which has emerged in one specific current of French feminism. Even if this current cannot be defined any more exactly than this, given the complications and contradictions inherent in speaking of feminism and of national feminisms, it can at least be labelled as 'anti-difference', that is, opposed to those feminist ideas of a feminine specificity, of an essential difference between the sexes. Criticisms of the absence of certain theorists who are, in a reductionist manner, referred to by some Anglo-Americans as 'French feminists' as though French feminism, or indeed any feminism, could be spoken of as an homogenous entity, would therefore be misdirected. The richness and diversity of French feminist thought will only be visible once its almost systematic reduction to the work of three intellectuals comes to an end. This is not to say that feminists should not engage critically with these theorists, but that they should recognise their limited importance in feminism in France.

The most important outcome of this chapter is that it has enabled us to establish how the specific type of feminism which is at the centre of this research relates to the broader meaning of the term. This means that it has been identified as emerging largely from the relatively theoretical radical feminist tradition of the current 'féministes révolutionnaires', which has been situated in relation to the other main currents of the MLF, the 'class struggle' tendency and *Psych et po*, as well as issue-specific feminist groups. The French feminism examined in this thesis has also been identified as incorporating theory and practice, but as experiencing an important divide between the movement and research which has implications for the way in which theories of masculinity are produced and for the way in which practical action, such as that undertaken around the problem of male violence, is organised and interpreted. Finally, the French feminism discussed here has been situated in relation to an Anglo-American

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<sup>85</sup>Varikas, Eleni, 'Féminisme, modernité, postmodernisme: pour un dialogue des deux côtés de l'océan', in Riot-Sarcey, Michèle; Planté, Christine; Varikas, Eleni et al. *Féminismes au présent*, L'Harmattan 1993 (supplément à *Futur/Antérieur*), pp. 59-84 (p. 63)



representation of French feminism, which concentrates on very specific areas of theory produced by a small number of women intellectuals in France.



### CHAPTER 3: FRENCH THEORIES OF MASCULINITY

This chapter presents an overview of the growing literature on men and masculinity which exists in France. In order to do this, three categories of texts have been selected, each of which is used to illustrate certain aspects of a debate on masculinity which is broader than the specifically feminist theories considered in the following three chapters.

The first category contains early texts on men and masculinity, many, although not all of which, were produced by men involved in men's groups. The term 'men's groups' in this context refers to groups which began to form in the 1970s as a response to feminism and with the aim of discussing some aspect of gender relations. They varied considerably in terms of their attitudes towards women and feminism and in terms of their ideals for future relations between the sexes. For example, some aimed to protect the rights of fathers in the face of women's increasing control over reproduction, while others met to discuss ways of freeing themselves and their partners from what they saw as the harmful constraints of masculinity.

The early texts on men and masculinity are far from homogenous. They include writing by heterosexuals and homosexuals, by pro-feminist and anti-feminist men, and by men who remain ambivalent to feminism. These texts are examined here with the specific aim of demonstrating the relation between them and early feminist writings on masculinity. It will be argued that it was men's groups' interest in masculinity which provoked a feminist response and led to the creation of a dialogue on the subject between feminists and men's groups in reviews and journals. While the first analyses of masculinity were emerging from men's groups, feminist priorities lay elsewhere. Feminists joined the debate as a response to these early men's groups' explorations of the subject, although many feminists considered that it was a problem which should be dealt with by men. Even whilst launching frequent and severe attacks at much that emerged from men's groups, many feminists continued to call for men to examine the problems of masculinity themselves and to consider ways to change it. This contradiction is visible throughout the debate between feminists and men's groups, although there is now some evidence of a greater willingness on the part of feminists to work together with men. For example, a collection of articles published in 1992 as Des hommes et du masculin was published jointly by the Centre d'études féminines de l'Université de Provence (CEFUP) and the Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques.<sup>1</sup> The involvement of CEFUP is an indication not only of feminist recognition of this area of research, but of their willingness to publish a collection of

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<sup>1</sup>Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992



articles by men and to invite a man, Daniel Welzer-Lang, to edit it. As Marie-France Pichevin and Daniel Welzer-Lang write in the introduction:

Il (le CEFUP) manifeste le soutien théorique que des féministes apportent à des travaux et à des réflexions menées par des hommes dont l'objectif est de comprendre la construction sociale du masculin.

Ce recueil n'aurait probablement pas été possible il y a quelques années, par manque d'auteurs. Ce qui est nouveau ici, c'est la volonté conjointe, dans le champ scientifique, de femmes féministes et d'hommes ... de réfléchir ensemble aux effets sur les hommes de la domination du genre masculin sur le genre féminin.

It (CEFUP) is demonstrating the theoretical support that feminists are giving to the work carried out by men whose aim is to understand the social construction of masculinity. This collection would probably not have been possible a few years ago, for want of authors. What is new here is the joint willingness, in the scientific field, of men and feminist women ... to consider together the effects on men of the domination of the masculine gender over the feminine gender.<sup>2</sup>

The second category of texts is represented by the treatment of masculinity by the popular press. As an example of one of the ways in which the idea of changing masculinities has been interpreted in the weekly press in France, a special issue of Le nouvel observateur from 1991 will be examined. In particular, the relation between these interpretations and a certain representation of feminism and 'post-feminism' will be discussed.

The third category is the most recent to appear and its relation to feminism is more ambiguous. It is comprised of a number of books which have been written on men and masculinity, and which are on the borderline between academic studies and essays aimed at a wider audience. These are Christine Castelain-Meunier's Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité<sup>3</sup>; Evelyne Sullerot's Quels pères? Quels fils?<sup>4</sup>; and Elisabeth Badinter's XY: de l'identité masculine.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this critique of their work is to consider their relation to feminism and 'post-feminism'.

This survey of literature on masculinity aims, firstly, to illustrate certain trends, especially an increasing interest in masculinity on the part of feminists; and secondly, to introduce another context in which we can situate the more detailed analyses of feminist interest in masculinity which follow. It also raises questions about feminism, anti-

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<sup>2</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel & Pichevin, Marie-France, 'Préambule', Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 7-11 (p. 8)

<sup>3</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988

<sup>4</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992

<sup>5</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992



feminism and post-feminism in contemporary France; about what has provoked an interest in masculinity; and about different analyses of (changing) masculinities.

### **Early Critiques of Men and Masculinity**

It was critiques of masculinity which emerged from the early men's groups which established a debate around men and masculinity. Feminists did not join in this debate until later, although it must not be forgotten that there were other ways in which their theories were very much concerned with masculinity, as will be explained below. Much of the early questioning of masculinity was carried out by men as a response to feminism. The form this response took varied considerably. One indication that men were responding to feminism was the creation of a number of men's groups, beginning in 1972. The number increased, gradually at first, but then more rapidly from 1977. Men's groups differed greatly both in theory and in practice. Some were sympathetic to feminism, some were indifferent to it, and some were ardently anti-feminist.

A characteristic shared by much of the early writing on masculinity by men in France and in Britain is that it concentrated almost entirely on the authors themselves and on other men, without examining the connections between masculinity and femininity. Masculinity was portrayed as an unfortunate burden, causing men pain and anguish. This writing tended towards the confessional and was often autobiographical. Although credited with exposing much more of their subjectivity as an author than was traditionally acceptable in male academic work, these authors were criticised by feminists and pro-feminist men for not progressing beyond this step, and for failing to provide any further analysis of masculinity, ignoring, for example, the social structures which reproduce not only this painful suffering, but also the social effects of masculinity and the power relations surrounding it. This approach, which sought individual solutions to the problems of masculinity, and failed to advance beyond coming to terms with this 'affliction' on a personal level, has, according to Daniel Welzer-Lang, been superseded in France by a second phase in the theorisation of masculinity. He writes:

*Après la déconstruction empirique de la différence des sexes, où chaque genre a privilégié l'étude de son groupe de sexe et les espaces de domination ou d'aliénation, se transversalisent des études inter-genre. Ainsi l'émergence du masculin dans les études en sciences sociales sur l'espace domestique est concomitante de l'apparition de revues ou numéros féministes traitant du masculin et de son analyse....*

After the empirical deconstruction of sexual difference, in which researchers concentrated on their own sex and the questions of domination or alienation, inter-gender studies are now expanding. Thus the appearance of masculinity in social science studies of the domestic sphere is concomitant with the appearance



of feminist reviews or single issues dealing with masculinity and its analysis....<sup>6</sup>

Two of the earliest critiques of masculinity to be published in France and which are frequently cited in more recent analyses are Georges Falconnet and Nadine Lefaucheur's La fabrication des mâles, published in 1975<sup>7</sup> and Gisèle Fournier and Emmanuel Reynaud's 'La sainte virilité', which appeared in Questions féministes in 1978.<sup>8</sup>

In La fabrication des mâles, Georges Falconnet and Nadine Lefaucheur argue that both masculinity and femininity need to be challenged and that new ways of relating to each other need to be established. The book draws on the personal experiences of the thirty-two men that they interviewed, discussing the unease felt by many men in the face of feminist demands, how they acquire their masculine identities, what masculinity means to them, and how they perceive women. It explores the contradictory and heterogeneous nature of constructs of masculinity, as well as discussing future alternatives to the models of masculinity the interviewees feel are available to them. It also examines representations of men and masculinity in adverts, schoolbooks, songs, etc., discussing the relationship between representations of masculinity and consumption, colonialism and imperialism.

The article entitled 'La sainte virilité' was written by Emmanuel Reynaud and Gisèle Fournier and appeared in 1978. 'La sainte virilité' is a harsh critique of masculinity and of the ways in which it oppresses men as well as women. It begins:

Il est rarement venu à l'idée de l'homme de critiquer la virilité. Elle est son domaine, il s'y définit. En son nom, il subit toutes les souffrances et commet toutes les inhumanités, mais il ne la conteste pas. Il conçoit la virilité comme une loi de la nature. Il s'y sent à l'aise: elle est l'affirmation de son pouvoir, il n'imagine pas qu'elle puisse être sa prison.

It has rarely occurred to men to criticise masculinity. It is their territory, they identify themselves by it. In its name they undergo all kinds of suffering and commit all kinds of atrocities, but they do not question it. They see masculinity as a law of nature. It makes them feel at ease; it is the proof of their power. They do not imagine that it could be their prison.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Les études ou écrits sur les hommes et le masculin en France', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 13-23 (p. 23)

<sup>7</sup>Falconnet, Georges & Lefaucheur, Nadine, La fabrication des mâles, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975

<sup>8</sup>Fournier, Gisèle & Reynaud, Emmanuel, 'La sainte virilité', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 30-62 (Emmanuel Reynaud expanded on the ideas in this article in his book (also called La Sainte Virilité), published by Syros in 1981.)

<sup>9</sup>Fournier, Gisèle & Reynaud, Emmanuel, 'La sainte virilité', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 30-62 (p. 31)



Fournier and Reynaud discuss men's relationships to their bodies; the importance placed upon the penis; competition between men; male violence towards women; and homophobia as a means of maintaining dominant models of masculinity. Arguing that the pressures men are under to conform to a certain model of behaviour are oppressive, they conclude that men need to free themselves of masculinity in order to discover a new identity:

La virilité et la féminité n'ont aucune raison d'être. Elles sont la base sur laquelle s'est construit tout un monde. Les mettre en question le fait vaciller, s'en débarrasser pourrait être le prélude à la libération.

There is no reason why masculinity and femininity should exist. They are the foundations on which a whole world is built. Questioning them shakes these foundations; destroying them could be the prelude to liberation.<sup>10</sup>

Several other articles and special issues of reviews were devoted to the question of men and masculinity in 1978. Most of them were written by men involved in one way or another with the various men's groups, some of which also produced their own publications. One of the most anti-feminist men's groups was the Mouvement pour la condition masculine et le soutien de l'enfance (MCM), an organisation consisting mostly of divorced fathers. Its general secretary, André Perrot, wrote in the editorial of its journal Condition masculine:

l'essentiel, pour commencer, est de prendre conscience de la dégradation de la condition masculine dans son ensemble, qu'il s'agisse du divorce, de la paternité, de la situation conjugale, ou du rôle social, de ses conséquences néfastes sur la société.

the most important thing, to start with, is to realise to what extent the masculine condition as a whole has deteriorated, whether we look at divorce, fatherhood, marriage or social rôles, bringing with it disastrous consequences for society.<sup>11</sup>

Like similar groups in Britain and the United States, reactionary men's groups such as the MCM organised around the issues of fatherhood and 'men's rights' and therefore produced less in the way of deconstructions of masculinity than did the more pro-feminist groups.

Whereas the special number of Groupe familial<sup>12</sup> which also appeared in 1978 contained articles written by men belonging to reactionary organisations such as the MCM, in the same year an issue of Recherches<sup>13</sup> on masculinities expressed ideas

<sup>10</sup>Fournier, Gisèle & Reynaud, Emmanuel, 'La sainte virilité', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 30-62 (p. 61)

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Ridder, Guido de, Du côté des hommes: à la recherche de nouveaux rapports avec les femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982, p. 50

<sup>12</sup>Groupe familial: L'homme au masculin, no. 78, 1978

<sup>13</sup>Recherches: masculinité, no. 35, novembre 1978



close to those of men's groups which explicitly distanced themselves from this position. 1978 also saw the appearance of the first men's group review, Pas rôles d'hommes, which ran for four numbers. Following a split in the group, it was replaced by Contraception masculine - paternité, the review of the Association pour la recherche et le développement de la contraception masculine (ARDECOM) which published two issues in 1980 and Types - paroles d'hommes which appeared between 1981-84.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the former was concerned with male contraception and men's experiences of paternity, the latter was a broader attempt to explore and challenge the construct of masculinity.

Autrement, in 1984, devoted an issue to 'Père et fils, masculinités aujourd'hui'.<sup>15</sup> Written mostly by men and in the first person, this is a collection of articles concerning men's individual experiences as sons and as fathers. It explores questions such as the removal of the power of men as fathers, which is challenged by, for example, artificial insemination and the legal change from paternal to parental authority<sup>16</sup>; and the rôle of their relationship with their father in the construction of the son's masculine identity.

One of the contributions is an interview with Geneviève Delaisi de Parseval, a psychoanalyst who has written several books about parenting and fatherhood.<sup>17</sup> She argues that fatherhood has acquired a certain status, and, rather than reflecting a fundamental redefinition of masculinity, the representation of the New Father has more to do with fashion: 'having to' leave work early to look after your son is, she claims, a luxury available only to certain men.<sup>18</sup>

In 1982, Guido de Ridder published Du côté des hommes: à la recherche de nouveaux rapports avec les femmes.<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to give a voice to a minority of men who are challenging existing models of masculinity and looking for ways to change relations between men and women, de Ridder draws on a series of interviews with men involved in the same men's group as himself. He examines the emergence of men's groups, the

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<sup>14</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Les études ou écrits sur les hommes et le masculin en France', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 13-23 (p. 16)

<sup>15</sup>Autrement: Père et fils, masculinités aujourd'hui, no. 61, juin 1984

<sup>16</sup>This occurred in 1970.

<sup>17</sup>Delaisi de Parseval, Geneviève, 'De l'identique à l'identité', in Autrement: pères et fils, masculinités aujourd'hui, no. 61, juin 1984, pp. 197-200. Her publications include L'art d'accueillir les bébés, Paris: Le Seuil, 1980; La part du père, Paris: Le Seuil, 1981; and L'enfant à tout prix, Paris: Le Seuil, 1983

<sup>18</sup>Delaisi de Parseval, Geneviève, 'De l'identique à l'identité', in Autrement: pères et fils, masculinités aujourd'hui, no. 61, juin 1984, pp. 197-200 (p. 198)

<sup>19</sup>Ridder, Guido de, Du côté des hommes: à la recherche de nouveaux rapports avec les femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982



reaction of those involved to feminism, their reasons for wanting an alternative to 'traditional' masculinity, and the difficulties that confront them in their attempts to change. In an optimistic conclusion, he writes that, 'tout laisse à penser que l'actuelle modification des rapports hommes-femmes n'est que le balbutiement d'une mutation plus profonde de l'avenir.' ('everything seems to indicate that the current changes in relations between men and women are just the beginnings of a far bigger change to come').<sup>20</sup>

Critiques of masculinity also emerged from the gay movement. For example, Guy Hocquenghem, in 'Subversion et décadence du mâle d'après mai '68', considers changes in masculine identity since 1968.<sup>21</sup> The decline of the revolutionary ideas which were so bound up with representations of working-class masculinity has produced, he argues, a fragility in masculine identity. Many men are now searching vainly for a new gender identity at a time when they also feel threatened by feminism. The model of the virile working-class man has, he claims, been replaced by American-inspired models. The fact that so many men have been affected by this change, he adds in parenthesis, can only demonstrate just how fragile their identities are. He argues that May '68 marked the end of a certain type of heroic masculinity, a masculinity which enabled men to position themselves at the forefront of the revolution, whilst 'their' women made the coffee and gay men were kept at a distance. The gay movement and the feminist movement emerged out of this, bringing their oppression from the private into the public domain. Hocquenghem asserts that there has been a shift in power. The disappearance of 'hard' masculinity has left a space for new ways of behaving. Feminist and gay challenges, along with the crisis of masculinity, have enabled the creation of new power relations. But, he adds, not until gay men cease to be seen as a threat to heterosexual men, desperately trying to repress their homosexuality, will the tension be broken.<sup>22</sup>

In October 1984, a conference on 'Les hommes contre le sexisme' was held at St. Cloud. It was organised by the review Types/parole d'hommes and the organisation ADAM (Association pour la disparition des archétypes masculins). Opinions differ on whether the conference was pro-feminist or not. At the time, feminists were wary, as will be seen below. Daniel Welzer-Lang, from RIME in Lyon, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of this conference, since, he claims, it was the first time

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<sup>20</sup>Ridder, Guido de, Du côté des hommes: à la recherche de nouveaux rapports avec les femmes, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982, p. 184

<sup>21</sup>Hocquenghem, Guy, 'Subversion et décadence du mâle d'après mai 68' in Autrement, no. 12, février 1978, pp. 158-63

<sup>22</sup>Hocquenghem, Guy, 'Subversion et décadence du mâle d'après mai 68' in Autrement, no. 12, février 1978, pp. 158-63



feminists and 'pro-feminist' men had met and discussed the subject in public. A selection of papers from the conference was published in Les temps modernes in 1985.<sup>23</sup> The interpretations offered in these papers vary, but one aspect receives particular criticism from feminists. This is the view that men are as oppressed by sexism as women, a view which is expressed in the introduction<sup>24</sup> and echoed in some of the papers, for example, Jean-Louis Viovy's critique of the media's invention of the 'New Man', in which he discusses how much more difficult it is for men than for women to acquire their gender identity.<sup>25</sup>

Similar analyses were being produced by British and American men's groups and in men's studies departments, which had recently appeared in American universities. They were also the subject of feminist criticism, which has been echoed more recently in writing by pro-feminist men. Joseph Bristow writes:

It is hard not to notice the reactionary dimensions to this emergent politics of masculinity. Apparently transformed by feminism, some of these men seem caught up in a desire to have their own version of it.<sup>26</sup>

Collections of articles representing a variety of positions in relation to feminism appeared as special issues of certain journals. For example, a 1984 special issue of Le genre humain included an article by Colette Guillaumin, a member of the editorial collective of Questions féministes and currently on the editorial board of Nouvelles questions féministes<sup>27</sup>, as well as an article by philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, which reads as a nostalgic lament for the passing of the rites of passage which, he argues, used to play an important part in the construction of masculine identity.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, some authors on the subject have tried to place themselves 'outside' feminism, for example, those involved in the publication of a special number of Dialogue on 'le malaise masculin'.<sup>29</sup> Taking as its starting point the assertion that there was a certain 'malaise masculin', visible in contemporary films, in articles and papers, and in the

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<sup>23</sup>Les temps modernes, no. 462, janvier 1985

<sup>24</sup>Introduction, Les temps modernes, no. 462, janvier 1985, pp. 1303-4

<sup>25</sup>Viovy, Jean-Louis, 'Nouvel homme et vieux sexisme', in Les temps modernes, no. 462, janvier 1985, pp. 1330-45

<sup>26</sup>Bristow, Joseph, Review Article in History Workshop Journal, no. 29, Spring 1990, pp. 191-3 (p. 191)

<sup>27</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Masculin banal/masculin général' in Le genre humain, no. 10, 1984: 'le masculin', pp. 65-74

<sup>28</sup>Finkielkraut, Alain, 'La nostalgie de l'épreuve', in Le genre humain, no. 10, 1984: 'Le masculin', pp. 57-64 (The popularity in France of Robert Bly's Iron John, published in translation in 1992, suggests that this is not an uncommon view (Bly, Robert, L'homme sauvage et l'enfant: l'avenir du genre masculin, transl. by Christian Cler & Maxime Loiseau, Paris: Seuil, 1992 ))

<sup>29</sup>Dialogue: Revue trimestrielle éditée par l'association française des centres de consultation conjugale, no. 69: le malaise masculin, 3e trimestre 1980



emergence of men's groups, it argues that men are suffering from the effects of feminism, and that their suffering needs to be examined within the context of the heterosexual couple and the family. Its position is made clear in the very first pages, when Marie-Rose Roussier states:

'Aurions-nous, en choisissant un tel sujet, cédé à un discours féministe?' Tel n'est pas le projet de notre association, et nous n'avons pas ici à tenir de discours féministe, pas plus d'ailleurs qu'aucun autre discours.

'Have we, in choosing such a subject, given in to feminist ideology?' This was not the intention of our association and we do not intend now to employ feminist ideology any more than any other kind of ideology.<sup>30</sup>

Early critiques of masculinity, then, represented a variety of positions in relation to feminism, ranging from the extreme anti-feminism of the MCM to the pro-feminism of Types - paroles d'hommes, and not forgetting the attempt in Dialogue to adopt a position 'outside' feminism. The analyses of masculinity they produced varied widely. While some were attempts to reclaim for men the power which women were claimed to have removed from them, others sought to explain the harmful effects of masculinity for men as well as women. As the number of conferences, special issues and men's group publications increased, feminists began to respond.

### **Feminist Responses to Men's Groups' Critiques**

It must be stressed that feminists in France as elsewhere have always been indirectly concerned with masculinity. For example, early theories of patriarchy or sex class systems attempted to explain how men as a group held power over women as a group; and, as will be discussed in chapter 5, feminist attempts in the early 1970s to explain rape raised questions about the nature or the construction of masculinity. However, the explicit treatment of masculinity by feminists began with their reactions to men's groups' analyses.

An examination of these early feminist reactions reveals a number of contradictions. On the one hand, many feminists had been insisting for years that men should reflect on masculinity and try to solve some of the problems it caused. On the other hand, they were critical of some men's attempts to do just this. Some feminists accused men of ignoring their masculine identity, while others criticised their self-indulgence in 'crises of masculinity'. For example, Annelise Mauge wrote L'identité masculine en crise au

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<sup>30</sup>Roussier, Marie-Rose, 'Malaise masculin face à l'évolution de la femme?' in Dialogue: Revue trimestrielle éditée par l'association française des centres de consultation conjugale, no. 69: le malaise masculin, 3e trimestre 1980, pp. 7-18 (p. 7)



tournant du siècle<sup>31</sup> as an attempt to break the silence surrounding masculinity which, she claims, has always hidden behind the mask of the universal and the norm:

L'homme, quant à lui, ne semble guère ressentir le besoin de se situer, pour ce qui touche à la masculinité ..., solidement établi dans le rôle du sujet, il regarde l'autre, l'étudie et le juge.

Men, for their part, hardly seem to feel the need to situate themselves, as far as masculinity is concerned.... Firmly placed in the rôle of subject, they watch, study and judge the other.<sup>32</sup>

Maugue argues that even after twenty years of feminist pressure, men are only slowly beginning to respond and to search for alternative models of masculinity.

Simone Iff echoes Maugue's call for men to examine their own masculinity, but she is critical of men's groups, which, she claims, make the protection of men's own interests a priority:

Ce que les femmes attendent des hommes est tout autre, c'est qu'ils se remettent en cause, eux; qu'ils recherchent qui ils sont vraiment... qu'ils comprennent *leur* propre conditionnement culturel et travaillent à sa remise en cause.

What women want of men is something else entirely. They want men to look at themselves critically; to find out who they really are... to understand their *own* cultural conditioning and work on its critique.<sup>33</sup>

Many feminists were critical of men's groups. For example, a report in Paris féministe on the 1984 St. Cloud conference on 'Les hommes contre le sexisme' began: "Les hommes contre le sexisme". Ce fût une intention louable, mais cela devient en fait: "Les hommes *et* le sexisme." ("Men Against Sexism." The intention was honorable, but it became in fact: "Men *And* Sexism"...)<sup>34</sup> The authors of this report argued that, although most of the contributors were trying to demonstrate the ubiquity of sexism, the organisers, and some of the male contributors, insisted that the main problem was sexism in the private sphere, and that men should therefore fight sexism at home, but not extend their critique to the public domain or to models of masculinity. Paris féministe states:

A l'évidence, le propos des hommes présents consistait surtout à (se) donner une image plus valorisante d'eux-mêmes que celle que véhiculent en moyenne les hommes, et donc à s'aménager une place plus confortable dans le système sexiste, mais il ne s'agissait manifestement pas de l'abattre!

<sup>31</sup>Maugue, Annelise, L'identité masculine en crise au tournant du siècle, Paris: Rivages, 1987

<sup>32</sup>Maugue, Annelise, L'identité masculine en crise au tournant du siècle, Paris: Rivages, 1987, p. 7

<sup>33</sup>Iff, Simone, 'Notre corps nous appartient' in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 218-42 (p. 242)

<sup>34</sup>Eliane D.; Monique D.; Odette B. & Paula B., 'Les hommes contre le sexisme', in Paris féministe, 1-15 décembre 1984, pp. 26-7 (p. 26)



Quite obviously, the aims of the men present were primarily to give (themselves) a more positive self-image than that conveyed by most men, and therefore to create for themselves more comfortable positions in the sexist system. But they were evidently not concerned with destroying this system!<sup>35</sup>

This view is not uncommon in Anglo-American criticisms of certain types of men's groups' critiques. British historian, Michael Roper, for example, discusses the competitive element in men's attempts to 'demonstrate moral rectitude'<sup>36</sup>, and Lois Banner suggests in a review article which appeared in Signs in 1989, that men involved in men's studies have constructed the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' in order to demonstrate how it is a minority of men (to which the authors do not belong) whose masculinity is of the dominant type.<sup>37</sup>

The French feminist reaction to men's groups was part of the reason for the growing evidence of interest in masculinity to be found in feminist publications during the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, as will be argued in chapters 4 and 5, it was also partly due to the development of theories of male dominance and of action against male violence towards women. Before about 1978, feminists did not write explicitly about masculinity, and there was more interest in the more immediate question of whether or not men had a rôle in feminism. At the time, one of the most important feminist issues was whether the movement should be for women only, and what rôle, if any, men could play in feminism. For example, Christine Delphy's article, 'Nos amis et nous', which appeared in Questions féministes in 1977, was a criticism of what she saw as men's attempts to co-opt the movement and to dictate the priorities of the feminist struggle.<sup>38</sup> In 1981, a number of articles published in a special issue of La revue d'en face on men addressed similar questions.<sup>39</sup> For example, Catherine Lapierre argued that men's groups were just an expression of men's desire to have an equivalent oppression to women. Most of them ignore feminist work, she continued, leading a 'struggle' against masculinity which has nothing to do with what feminists want. Moreover, men involved in these groups often see themselves as no longer 'afflicted' by masculinity, thus placing themselves outside the problem.<sup>40</sup> In the same issue, Irène

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<sup>35</sup>Eliane D.; Monique D.; Odette B. & Paula B., 'Les hommes contre le sexisme', in Paris féministe, 1-15 décembre 1984, pp. 26-7 (p. 27)

<sup>36</sup>Roper, Michael, 'Introduction: Recent Books on Masculinity', in History Workshop Journal, no. 29, Spring 1990, pp. 184-7 (p. 185)

<sup>37</sup>Banner, Lois, Review article in Signs, Spring 1989, p.703-8

<sup>38</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nos amis et nous: les fondements cachés de quelques discours pseudo-féministes', Questions féministes, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 21-49

<sup>39</sup>La revue d'en face, nos. 9-10, 1981, Spécial 'hommes'. For a recent historical review of this debate see Baudoux, Claudine & Zaidman, Claude (eds.), Egalité entre les sexes; mixité et démocratie, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992

<sup>40</sup>Lapierre, Catherine, 'A propos des groupes d'hommes', La revue d'en face, nos. 9-10, 1981, Spécial 'hommes', pp. 27-33



Théry discussed the legitimacy of men's groups<sup>41</sup> and Françoise Gilles expressed doubts about the motives of men involved in experimental trials of male contraceptives.<sup>42</sup>

### Masculinity in the Press

As was mentioned in chapter 2, the media began to proclaim the death of feminism and the advent of a post-feminist era as early as 1978, and their representation of a post-feminist climate has played an important part in the growing interest in men and masculinity. Françoise Picq writes:

Alors le discours féministe, inouï en 1970, est devenu inaudible dans les années quatre-vingt. Un nouveau consensus s'est établi, qui proclame la fin du combat. Le féminisme serait mort parce que sa tâche serait achevée. Le patriarcat aurait disparu. Le problème désormais est celui des hommes, déstabilisés par la perte de leur pouvoir, qui doivent trouver une nouvelle identité.

So feminist discourse, unprecedented in 1970, became inaudible in the 1980s. A new consensus was established, which proclaimed the end of the battle. Feminism was said to be dead because its aims were achieved. Patriarchy was said to have disappeared. The problem henceforth was that of men, thrown by their loss of power and searching for a new identity.<sup>43</sup>

An increasing number of articles about the 'New Man' and 'New Fathers' began to appear in the press in the 1980s. For example, in September 1980, three pages of Le monde-dimanche were devoted to a survey on 'Malaise chez les nouveaux hommes.'<sup>44</sup> Interest has not waned: collections of articles on men and masculinity appeared in Le nouvel observateur in 1991<sup>45</sup> and in L'évènement du jeudi in 1992.<sup>46</sup> In addition to these, the 1980s saw the appearance of magazines created specifically for the 'New Man' market (Vogue hommes, Il, Cosmo hommes, Nouvel homme, etc.).

If we examine a selection of interpretations of masculinity which have appeared in the press, we can discern certain attitudes towards feminism as well as towards masculinities, which most suggest are changing or in crisis. The changing representations in the weekly press of sexual identity, men, masculinity, feminism, etc. are of interest, despite the predictable recurrence every summer of articles in one way or another concerned with sexuality. The attention that is currently being paid to

<sup>41</sup>Théry, Irène, 'Le mâle de vivre', La revue d'en face, nos. 9-10, 1981, Spécial 'hommes', pp. 43-7

<sup>42</sup>Gilles, Françoise, 'D'étranges frères étrangers (à propos de la contraception masculine)', La revue d'en face, nos. 9-10, 1981, Spécial 'hommes', pp. 35-42

<sup>43</sup>Picq, Françoise, Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement, Paris: Seuil, 1993

<sup>44</sup>Mamou, Yves, 'Malaise chez les nouveaux hommes' in Le monde dimanche, 14 septembre 1980

<sup>45</sup>Cited by Alia, Josette, Bruckner, Pascal et al., 'Ça va, les hommes?', Le nouvel observateur, no.1338, 13-19 juin, 1991, pp. 4-23

<sup>46</sup>Domenach, Nicholas (ed.) 'Le mâle français', in L'évènement du jeudi, 13-19 août 1992, pp. 52-89



masculinity in articles such as these is related to the publication of new books on the subject<sup>47</sup>, and their popularity makes them worthy of consideration.

One example chosen from a large number of magazine articles, special numbers, surveys and studies, all in one way or another concerned with changing masculinities, is a collection of articles in an issue of the centre-left intellectual weekly, Le nouvel observateur, which appeared in 1991, called 'Ça va les hommes?'.<sup>48</sup>

Like many others, this can be seen as an attempt to identify the 'New Man' and the reasons for his emergence. The articles are written by regular Nouvel observateur journalists, and include a commentary by Josette Alia on what she claims to be the first ever survey about men, carried out among men; interviews; and articles on advertising's portrayal of contemporary masculinity, and changing attitudes to male homosexuality.

Despite Josette Alia's interpretation of the survey as revealing a hazy picture of today's man, full of contradictions and uncertainties, her conclusion is firmly situated in the 'post-feminist' discourse which structures this collection of articles. Here, feminism is portrayed as a passing phase, which is no longer relevant to the way we live. Alia identifies what she portrays as a comforting return to traditional gender rôles after the upheavals brought about by feminism, and an emphasis amongst young people on the importance of maintaining differences between the sexes. While claiming to illustrate the plurality of masculinities in contemporary French society, these articles mock variants which threaten to blur the division of the sexes. By situating the discussion within a context of 'post-feminism', where there are no significant differences between the sexes, the question of power relations is ignored, and men can be represented as the victims of feminism.

The feminism that is supposed to have led to men's loss of power and to crises in masculine identity is presented by these authors as a coherent, unified movement, whose ideals have reached every section of society, and whose effects have been tremendous. Feminism, claim the authors, has produced a fragile male identity. Men, uncertain of their own masculinity, are struggling to define themselves in the face of

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<sup>47</sup>For example, the publication of Evelyne Sullerot's Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992 was followed by a collection of articles in L'évènement du jeudi on 'Le mâle français', 13-19 août 1992, pp. 52-89; Elisabeth Badinter's XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992 was followed by a collection of articles entitled 'Qu'est-ce qu'un homme, aujourd'hui?' in Le nouvel observateur, août 1992, pp. 4-13, which featured an interview with Badinter. Both books became best-sellers.

<sup>48</sup>Ça va, les hommes?: un sondage exclusif Sofrès - Le nouvel observateur, in Le nouvel observateur, no. 1388, 13-19 juin 1991, pp. 4-24



feminist demands. It is feminism which has produced reactions in men which range from taking refuge in a defensive, macho masculinity, to various efforts to reform. The articles imply that men are to be pitied for their suffering and admired for their attempts to change. The authors concentrate, on the one hand, on the ways in which men feel feminism has caused them to lose power that was theirs by right, and on the other hand, on the power that women are said to exert in the home.

These articles undermine any calls for change in gender relations in their espousal of discourses of post-feminism and equality. Feminism is perceived as complete and no longer relevant now that total equality has supposedly been achieved. Feminism's only relevance in the view of these authors is a consequence it has had, namely that men have had to adjust themselves to it. Despite claiming to be concerned with how men and masculinities are changing, these articles in fact do little to encourage change. Instead, they favour an end to what they portray as the petty fighting between the sexes and a return to what they imply is the comforting stability of traditional gendered behaviour.

As a cultural phenomenon, these texts can tell us something about the ways in which feminism and feminist thought is currently presented in France, and the ways in which the debate on masculinity is being popularised. It seems that feminism is derided, caricaturised and marginalized by authors who claim to be writing within the context of a widely accepted 'post-feminism'. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, while the tone of these texts does not seem to differ much from many British and American 'post-feminist' representations of feminism, they see themselves as being involved in a debate which is noticeably different to the equivalent Anglo-American debate. The former French Prime Minister, Edith Cresson, for example, can argue that, whereas in the United States public men cannot have affairs without it causing a scandal, in France it is not important. Or indeed, it is seen as being to the credit of the man concerned. 'I think we order things better here', she says.<sup>49</sup>

### Books on Men and Masculinity

A more difficult category of publications includes Christine Castelain-Meunier's, Les hommes aujourd'hui<sup>50</sup>; Elisabeth Badinter's XY: de l'identité masculine<sup>51</sup>; and Evelyne Sullerot's Quels pères? Quels fils?<sup>52</sup>. These are worthy of particular attention here because of the position that they occupy in the masculinity debate. They have all

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<sup>49</sup>Attallah, Naim, 'France's Femme Fatale', Interview with Edith Cresson in The Observer, 16 June 1991, p. 41

<sup>50</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988

<sup>51</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992

<sup>52</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels Pères? Quels Fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992



reached a wide audience. Sullerot's and Badinter's books reached the top of the bestseller list within weeks of publication. All three of these authors are, or have been, represented as feminists, but these books can all be read as firmly situated within 'post-feminism', presenting a defence of men's interests rather than a critique of masculinity.

LES HOMMES AUJOURD'HUI: VIRILITÉ ET IDENTITÉ

Christine Castelain-Meunier's book, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité is concerned with the changes that men have had to make in order to adjust to the demands of feminism. It is, according to the introduction, an attempt to 'comprendre [les hommes], avec leurs efforts, leurs échecs, leurs blessures, leurs satisfactions, leurs aspirations nouvelles'<sup>53</sup> ('understand [men]: their efforts; their failures; their wounds; their satisfactions; their new aspirations'). The book is divided into three parts, the first of which is an uncritical, narrative account of a universal history of civilisation, which does not seem to differ much from the myths that feminists have been trying to deconstruct for the past two decades. The major argument is that, now that physical strength is no longer necessary for men's work (having been replaced by intellectual ability in a society based on communication, services and images), men's dominance over women, which the difference in physical strength legitimated, can no longer be taken for granted. It remains to be seen, she says, who (men or women) will come out on top in the new society; it all depends who is the most competent at acquiring the skills required for modern jobs.

The first part of the book also examines the impact of feminism and men's reactions to it. 'Feminism' is portrayed as a single, coherent movement, with no mention of the many conflicts and divisions that have dominated much of its history. Along with an atmosphere of crisis (economic and cultural), feminism is supposed to have produced a fragile male identity. Men, she claims, uncertain of their own masculinity, are struggling to define themselves in the face of feminist demands. Their reactions, which are examined in detail later in the book, are here outlined as being either a defensive, macho masculinity, or various attempts to change. And it is clear that some men have made an effort to change, in a direct response to feminism, even where this has meant confronting certain difficulties.

The visible gains of feminism, especially increased access to contraception and abortion, as well as the gradual influence of certain feminist values on at least some sections of society, have indeed challenged traditional masculinity, and Castelain-Meunier tries to unravel the contradictions and complexities both of women's gains and

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<sup>53</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988, p. 11



men's responses. However, having devoted only half a paragraph of the introduction to an explanation of how her study was carried out, including the vital information that it was amongst an unrepresentative male population from the new middle classes, Castelain-Meunier makes no further mention of considerations of class. Her selectivity is justified on the grounds that it is in this section of society that the values of the future can be identified: 'leur questionnement était bien un indice d'un mouvement culturel de fond'. ('their questioning of the situation was clearly an indication of a profound cultural evolution.')54 However, the specificity of the groups of men that she interviewed is soon lost in generalising statements about 'men' and 'women', and it becomes noticeable that considerations both of variations in models of masculinity according to class and of the extent to which positive effects of feminism have been felt amongst women from different classes are, therefore, almost completely absent from the book.

The second part of the book concentrates on new models of masculinity which have appeared in the past two decades. The types of masculinity that Castelain-Meunier identifies in this section are the following: defensive masculinity, which is a regression to traditional values, often accompanied by violence; homosexual masculinity, which is a paradoxical combination of marginalisation and the feeling of community; the 'new hedonists', whose identity is constructed around fashion, conspicuous consumption, and expensive leisure activities; yuppies, whose focus on professional success is seen as a retrograde move towards emphasis on the public sphere in the face of feminist demands that the private gain greater importance; feminised men, who, as a product of 1968, are already on the decline; and 'l'homme en changement', who is making every effort to reform, and is presented here as being the ideal 'New Man'.

The third section looks at the changes apparent in the 1970s and the 1980s. The 1970s are presented as the decade in which women profited from sexual liberation, and rejected male power and traditional models of the family and marriage. They also learnt to make sexual advances, and challenged their position as objects. Castelain-Meunier claims that during the 1970s:

On est passé d'une génération où c'était l'homme qui était dominateur, qui empêchait l'épanouissement sexuel, social de la femme à une génération où ce sont les femmes qui empêchent l'épanouissement sexuel et social de l'homme.

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<sup>54</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988, p. 12



We have moved from a generation in which men were dominant and prevented women from achieving sexual and social fulfilment, to one in which women prevent men from achieving sexual and social fulfilment.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, the 1980s are portrayed as the decade in which men reacted to the new behaviour of women, searching for ways out of crises in relationships, refusing to be seen as objects, and rejecting power relations in the couple. For men and women, it was a time of choice and plurality, the variety of living arrangements available to them including single-parent families, living alone, homosexual relationships, etc. Men were fighting to solve their identity crisis, their feelings of disorientation, which had been provoked by feminism.

The question of fatherhood is at the centre of the fourth part of the book, with considerations of male contraception and the changing significance of fatherhood for men, since:

La paternité est un des grands axes autour desquels s'articule l'*identité masculine* contemporaine et si la progéniture d'un homme n'indique plus qu'il est viril, *sa manière d'être père* le situe par rapport aux modèles masculins.

Fatherhood is one of the main axes on which today's *masculine identity* is situated and if a man's children no longer prove that he is virile, *the way in which he behaves as a father* situates him in relation to models of masculinity.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, Castelain-Meunier emphasises the plurality of 'new men' in contemporary French society, who do not conform to a single model, yet all fulfill at least three conditions. Firstly, they are characterised by a refusal of the limitations of traditional models of masculinity, a refusal to fit into a single category which can be opposed to women, whilst at the same time coping with the insecurities caused by the loss of traditional masculinity. This implies not falling into the traps of androgyny, feminisation, or inverted sexism. Secondly, the 'New Man' believes in egalitarianism in all domains. And thirdly, Castelain-Meunier's 'New Man' is not stupid: he believes in equality only as an ideal:

Ceux qui l'appliquent 'jusqu'au bout' en saisissent les écueils et perçoivent les impasses sur lesquelles elle peut parfois déboucher.... Par la trop grande transparence des relations, par l'obligation perpétuelle de négocier, l'égalité peut tuer le mystère de la différence ou devenir castratrice.

Those who take the principles of equality all the way discover its dangers and the impasses to which it can sometimes lead.... By creating a situation in which

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<sup>55</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988, p. 152

<sup>56</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988, p. 196



relationships are too transparent and negotiations are always necessary, equality can kill the mystery of difference or become castrating.<sup>57</sup>

#### QUELS PÈRES? QUELS FILS?

Evelyne Sullerot's aim is to break the silence surrounding the question of fathers and the changes that have affected them in the last twenty years. The first part of the book is concerned with the discovery of paternity; the construction of patriarchy; the representation of fathers in mythology and religion; and a history of the power exerted in the family by the father in France since the Revolution. This is followed by an examination of the changes that have affected fathers since 1965: the increase in the number of single-parent families, divorces and unmarried couples with children; legislative changes; and the availability of contraception and abortion, allowing women more control over their fertility. Claiming that fathers are disadvantaged by all these changes, Sullerot investigates the demands of associations for divorced fathers, and the hostility towards them. The last chapter is based on a survey carried out amongst an unrepresentative population of 15-18 year-olds 'tous issus de milieux aisés et de familles de bon niveau culturel' ('all from well-off backgrounds and cultured families') which is supposed to illustrate the attitudes of the fathers of the future.

Sullerot describes men forced to pay maintenance to the mothers of children they never wanted, nor even knew about; men whose wives initiate a divorce and receive custody of the children; and men deceived by women who now have all the power to decide when, whether and how to have children. She claims that men are now powerless in relationships, and it is for this reason that she advocates certain changes in men's favour. For example, she suggests that men should have the right to prevent women having an abortion if they are the biological father; and she supports the availability to individuals of genetic paternity tests, which would, she claims, bring an end to women's 'deceit', 'l'évidence scientifique confondant les mystifications féminines.' ('scientific evidence revealing feminine mystifications.')<sup>58</sup>

Sullerot argues that only children and their biological parents can be called 'families', and expresses scorn for any alternative arrangement for bringing up children. She denies the possibility of anyone who is not the biological father being able to replace him, and states that children conceived by artificial insemination should be given the details of the sperm donor, who is, she claims, their only 'real' father:

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<sup>57</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité, Paris: Acropole, 1988, p. 242

<sup>58</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 24



N'importe quel adulte peut aimer un enfant qui n'est pas de lui, ... mais, *indépendamment* d'amour, il existe toujours autre chose, quand les liens de parenté sont certains, quelque chose de plus fort et de moins sentimental qu'on ne peut qualifier. C'est un lien, c'est une attache, un attachement inexplicable. On a quelque chose en commun, à un niveau physique profond et archaïque, même si on ne s'entend pas du tout.

Any adult can love a child who is not his, ... but, when the parental links are certain, there is something more than love, something stronger and less sentimental which cannot be described. It is a link, a bond, an inexplicable tie. There is something shared, at a deep and primitive physical level, even if the parent and child do not get on at all.<sup>59</sup>

For Sullerot it seems that 'ownership' of a child is more important than any love or understanding. Men are the victims of feminism:

Certains n'ont eu aucun tort particulier, n'ont commis aucune faute comme pères, mais ils sont battus, parce que hommes, dans une guerre qu'ils n'ont pas voulue.

Some of them have done nothing wrong at all and have made no mistakes as fathers. But they are beaten, because they are men, in a war which they never wanted.<sup>60</sup>

In common with many feminists, Sullerot criticises the unfairness of the system that awards custody almost invariably to the mother after divorce, despite the fact that the magistrate has to take nothing other than the child's best interests into account.

However, she interprets this and other differences in society's attitudes to mothers and fathers as being wholly in women's interests, a contention that feminists would not accept.

Sullerot's assumptions that the present situation, in which women are more likely than men to have custody of the children after the break-up of a relationship, is uncomplicatedly advantageous for women is contradicted by Irène Théry's argument in *La revue d'en face*.<sup>61</sup> Firstly, states Théry, there is the problem of the non-payment of maintenance which is almost always awarded in favour of the mother. But even when the payments are made, Théry argues that awarding custody and maintenance payments to the mother means that she remains in the same rôle after divorce as she was before: financially dependent on a man and responsible for childcare:

Même 'confortable', la dépendance financière n'est jamais qu'un mal nécessaire, sûrement pas un moyen de régler le problème du travail gratuit des femmes. Mieux vaudrait insister sur les moyens d'accéder prioritairement à une

<sup>59</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, *Quels pères? Quels fils?*, Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 24

<sup>60</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, *Quels pères? Quels fils?*, Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 111

<sup>61</sup>Théry, Irène, 'Divorce: les femmes et les enfants d'abord', *La revue d'en face*, no. 8, premier trimestre 1980, pp. 64-7



formation et un travail salarié (sans en faire une panacée), mieux vaudrait insister sur les implications affectives et sociales d'un rapport d'argent que les passer sous silence sous prétexte de dédramatiser celui-ci.

Even if it provides a 'comfortable' standard of living, financial dependence is never more than a necessary evil, and is certainly not a means of solving the problems of women's free labour. It would be better to concentrate on the search for ways of giving them priority in finding training and a paid job (without implying that this would solve everything), it would be better to concentrate on the emotional and social implications of a financial relation than to ignore them on the pretext of making it seem less dramatic.<sup>62</sup>

Neither would feminists accept Sullerot's differing expectations of parenting depending on the gender of the parent:

Ce n'est pas en temps de présence que se mesure la fonction paternelle bénéfique, mais en attention à la demande d'amour de l'enfant. Aussi, la fonction paternelle peut fort bien être rempli par un père très occupé et peu présent si, quand il est là, il accepte d'être le père dans le regard de son enfant, s'il accepte de l'initier au sport, à la lecture, à la nature, à un quelconque bricolage, s'il est ferme et juste.

It is not the time spent with the child which can indicate the benefits of the father's rôle, but rather the attention he pays to the child's demands for love. The paternal rôle can be played by a father who is very busy and rarely there if, when he is there, he agrees to be a father in the eyes of his child; if he agrees to introduce the child to sport, reading, nature, making things, and if he is firm and fair.<sup>63</sup>

#### XY: DE L'IDENTITÉ MASCULINE

Whereas Sullerot limits herself to pleading the cause of fathers, Badinter's contention is that men are disadvantaged from the moment of conception. Not only do men have to struggle from the embryonic stage to differentiate themselves from the original female state, but they then have the misfortune to be born to someone of the opposite sex. The construction of a masculine identity is therefore one long hard struggle against a 'désavantage naturel', and because it is a natural disadvantage, there is absolutely nothing they can do about it. (Women, on the other hand, can at least struggle against *social* disadvantages).

The first part of the book is devoted to the construction of masculine identity from the embryonic stage, through separation from the mother, to a long and detailed chapter on initiation rites. It ends with a chapter on the relationship between masculinity and homophobia.

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<sup>62</sup>Théry, Irène, 'Divorce: les femmes et les enfants d'abord', La revue d'en face, no. 8, premier trimestre 1980, pp. 64-7 (p. 66)

<sup>63</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 226



The second part is concerned with what can go wrong during the difficult construction of masculine identity, thus producing two types of 'homme mutilé': 'l'homme dur' and 'l'homme mou'. 'L'homme dur', she argues, was replaced during the 1970s by 'l'homme mou', 'mutilé' because he is not 'masculine enough', and detested by other men, 'las d'avoir à faire la vaisselle et le ménage pour avoir le droit de coucher avec leur femme'. ('tired of having to do the washing-up and housework in order to have the right to sleep with their wife'.)<sup>64</sup> A third section of the chapter entitled 'l'homme mutilé' considers whether or not gay men fall into this category. The last chapter of the book describes Badinter's future ideal, 'l'homme réconcilié', and the 'révolution paternelle' that will be necessary in order to create him.

Although this revolution in fatherhood entails structural and organisational changes facilitating equal parenting (giving women recognition and power in other domains and reorganising men's work in order to enable them to participate fully), Badinter does not expect fathers to be anything less than 'real men'. Although a new father may, for the first year, behave as a 'père/mère', he must then assert his virility and become 'père/mentor'. If he fails to do this, he will be unable to transmit a model of masculinity to his sons, who will consequently suffer from identity crises (although even in Badinter's own lengthy account of numerous studies on this subject, it is difficult to find much evidence that this is the case).

Badinter's models of masculinity do not expose any conflict and contradictions between them nor examine their co-existence. There is no consideration of how masculinities vary according to class, age and ethnicity, beyond one passing comment, and, throughout the book, there is a constant refusal to examine the problems associated with masculinity in France. All negative aspects of masculinity are presented as being a problem only in Britain and the United States. It has been harshly criticised by feminists for its methodology, analysis and lack of logical argument.<sup>65</sup>

Badinter, Sullerot and Castelain-Meunier very rarely quote, refer to, or even name feminists. Sullerot talks of 'some feminists' or 'feminists in the 1970s' and 'quotations' are unattributed. She sometimes writes 'we' when referring to feminists, and sometimes 'they', associating and dissociating herself from certain feminist positions by adopting or rejecting 'feminism' according to her arguments. Badinter on

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<sup>64</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, *XY: de l'identité masculine*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992, p. 230

<sup>65</sup>See, for example, the review by Josette Trat in *Cahiers du féminisme*, nos. 63/4, hiver 1992/printemps 1993, pp. 52-3 and Le Doeuff, Michelle, 'Le chromosome du crime, à propos de XY' in Riot-Sarcey, Michèle; Planté, Christine; Varikas, Eleni et al. *Féminismes au présent*, L'Harmattan 1993 (supplément à *Futur/Antérieur*), pp. 173-83.



the other hand always refers to feminists as 'they', and it is 'they' who are responsible for the problems which men are currently experiencing:

La critique féministe de l'homme patriarcal rend la scission de soi insupportable. A l'interdiction traditionnelle de montrer sa féminité s'ajoute celle d'exprimer une virilité contestée. La nouvelle équation mâle=mal a engendré une perte d'identité pour toute une génération d'hommes.

The feminist critique of patriarchal men has led to an unbearable identity crisis. The traditional pressure on men to hide their femininity has been joined by pressure to hide their masculinity. The new equation 'mâle=mal' (male=bad) has led to a loss of identity for a whole generation of men.<sup>66</sup>

In common with Castelain-Meunier and Badinter, Sullerot sees feminism as having had a significant impact. For example, she claims that: 'Bien sûr, il faudrait aller plus loin. Mais on ne le pourra que si toute l'opinion sort de son conformisme féministe non-réfléchi.' ('Of course, we would need to go further. But we can only do this if public opinion abandons its blind conformism to feminism.'<sup>67</sup>) Badinter writes:

En mettant fin à la distinction des rôles, et en prenant pied systématiquement dans tous les domaines jadis réservés aux hommes, les femmes ont fait s'évanouir l'universelle caractéristique masculine: la supériorité de l'homme sur la femme.

By bringing an end to the distinction between the rôles, and by entering all the areas previously reserved for men, women have made the universal male characteristic disappear: the superiority of men over women.<sup>68</sup>

It is not impossible to find examples of very similar books in Britain. For instance, in The Rites of Man: Love, Sex and Death in the Making of the Male, Rosalind Miles also adopts a post-feminist stance, and portrays men as feminism's victims.<sup>69</sup> The Rites of Man has many similarities with XY. Both contain detailed descriptions of particularly horrific male violence. The explanation for this violence is claimed to lie in the social construct of masculinity, which is instilled through certain rites of passage. Both books examine the ways in which men acquire masculinity, and the effects that it has on them and on other men. Finally Miles, like Badinter, holds women responsible for men's behaviour, and blames mothers for much that goes wrong with masculinity; feminism is presented as a further pressure on men to assert their masculinity in response to more independent women. However, as was mentioned above, what is interesting about the French articles and books discussed here is that the authors portray the French situation as completely different from the Anglo-American.

<sup>66</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992, p. 190

<sup>67</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, Quels pères? Quels fils?, Paris: Fayard, 1992, p. 289

<sup>68</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, XY: de l'identité masculine, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1992, p. 17

<sup>69</sup>Miles, Rosalind, The Rites of Man: Love, Sex and Death in the Making of the Male, London: Grafton, 1991



### **The Rôle of Feminism in the Broader Debate on Masculinity**

While this chapter provides the context in which the feminist theories of masculinity discussed later are situated, by describing the way in which feminists joined a debate begun by men involved in men's groups, by examining the terms of this debate to which feminists responded, and by describing those aspects of the debate which have been picked up by the media, it also demonstrates the central rôle played by feminism in men's group, journalistic, and intellectual approaches to masculinity. 'Feminism' is interpreted in many different ways in these various analyses, and it is the *representation* of feminism which has an important influence on their development. Thus, Guy Hocquenheim's belief that the gay movement and feminism together can challenge the construction of masculinity contrasts sharply with the MCM's aggressive anti-feminist stance; and Daniel Welzer-Lang's attempts to work together with feminists in a search for an understanding of masculinity within the context of gendered power relations contrasts sharply with Castelain-Meunier and Sullerot's assertions that these power relations no longer exist. But where do feminists' own analyses fit in? This will be addressed in the next chapters.



## PART 2: FRENCH FEMINISM AND MASCULINITY

Part 1 examined the contexts in which the French feminist interest in the question of masculinity is situated. It explained the relationship between the different aspects of French feminism and introduced the broader debate on masculinity which has been taking place in France in recent years.

Part 2 focuses on two areas of French feminism in which the question of men and masculinity is currently being addressed. These are feminist action against male violence towards women, and the development of theories of gender or social relations of sex.

The decision to concentrate on theories of gender and feminist action around male violence towards women has many advantages. Firstly, it enables us to consider the relations between the movement and feminist research, between practice and theory. By examining one aspect of feminist theory produced by researchers in academic institutions, and then one example of feminist activism at the grass-roots level, we can consider whether or not there is any exchange between them, and if not, what implications this has for both types of feminist work. We can also consider how ideas are produced by academic feminists, divorced from the movement, and by grass-roots activists, whose hands-on experience plays a large part in their subsequent analyses.

More specifically, though, there are reasons why gender and male violence are areas of feminist interest out of which theories of masculinity have emerged, in France as well as in Britain and the United States. Feminist theories of gender relations and the 'difference debate' out of which they developed, have always been concerned with masculinity, even if this concern has only recently become explicit. By addressing such questions as whether differences between the sexes are innate or acquired, whether this was within a framework of sociological theories of sex rôles or psychoanalytic theories of gender acquisition, feminists considered masculinity as well as femininity. However, recent theories of gender relations which place emphasis on the *relation* between women and men and the unequal nature of this relation, have dealt more explicitly with masculinity.

In the case of male violence towards women, a development in the way in which feminists have approached this issue (a development which can be traced in France as in Britain), has meant that masculinity has been examined more closely, as studies have turned from the victim to the perpetrator. This development will be examined in chapter 5.



## CHAPTER 4. THEORIES OF GENDER AND SOCIAL RELATIONS OF SEX

This chapter discusses at some length the concepts 'rapports sociaux de sexe' and 'genre' as they have been used in French feminist theory. These will be translated as 'social relations of sex' and 'gender' respectively. The importance of making this distinction will become evident as the debate around the appropriateness of each of the terms is discussed. However, in order to avoid weighing down the text unnecessarily, the term 'gender' will be used on its own at some general points in the chapter.

The following account of the development of theories of gender and social relations of sex aims to demonstrate how an interest in masculinity has emerged as a result of this development. It concentrates on three things. Firstly, it analyses the major stages in the development of these theories, in order to demonstrate how the importance of both terms of the social relation of sex and of the relation itself has increased. It will be argued that this has both facilitated and necessitated the construction of men and masculinity as objects of research. Secondly, it considers how masculinity was interpreted by the various theorists involved in the production of these theories. Thirdly, it examines some examples of attempts to produce theories of masculinity within a framework of gender or social relations of sex.

The theories discussed here were produced by social constructionist, or 'anti-difference' feminists, who, as was explained in chapter 2, argue that the differences between the sexes are socially constructed, and not biologically inherent. Many of the early social constructionist theorists in France were involved in Questions féministes (QF), and their work will be examined in the first part of the chapter. More recent theories of gender produced by, for example, APRE (Atelier production/reproduction) drew on this early work and developed some of its ideas. They are examined in the second part of the chapter.

Two points need to be made before this account can begin, however. Firstly there is the problem of the order of narrative, since feminist theories of gender did not develop in a strictly linear fashion, but rather in what CNRS researcher, Michèle Ferrand, describes as:

un processus chaotique et non linéaire, allant de la prise en compte de la condition féminine à des approches proposant la construction des rapports sociaux de sexe, désignation récente d'une démarche déjà à l'œuvre dans les théorisations féministes des années 70.

a process which is chaotic and non-linear, from the initial consideration of the feminine condition to analytical approaches proposing the construction of social



relations of sex, a recent name for a concept which was already being explored by feminist theorists in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, although this section is arranged in a mainly chronological fashion, the continuity of theoretical trends takes precedence over chronological exactitude. The stress will be placed on the themes and major theoretical developments, rather than on the exact order in which these ideas appeared in print.

Finally, in terms of the theoretical preoccupations of social constructionist feminists, the theories discussed here are unrepresentative; it should not be inferred from this chapter that masculinity is the main theoretical focal point of this type of French feminist theory. However, there has been an interest, and it is the theories of masculinity which *have* emerged in this area which are important to this chapter.

### 1970s: From Sexual Difference to Gender

The most notable common feature of the theories discussed here is that they take as a basic premise the idea that gender or sexual difference is socially constructed. This argument has its roots in sex rôle theory, which became very popular with sociologists during the 1950s and 1960s and was used by early feminists, who, in their search for an explanation of the differences between men and women, and later amongst women themselves, developed various ideas about how gender was constructed and why masculinity and femininity were so different.

Christine Delphy briefly traces the development of sex rôle theories in an article published in Women's Studies International Forum in 1993.<sup>2</sup> The origins of sex rôle theory are, she writes, usually attributed to Margaret Mead. Mead claimed that most societies divide human characteristics into two, half of which are attributed to women and half to men. This division, she argued, is arbitrary. Mead also saw the division of labour as natural and did not address the social hierarchy between men and women. The division of labour between women and men, continues Delphy, is often explained by anthropologists and also by some feminists as due to differences in reproductive rôles and in physical strength. The idea of sex rôles, writes Delphy, was developed by sociologists from the 1940s to '60s. 'Rôle' was seen as the active aspect of 'status'. Status was the relative level of prestige in society and each status had rôles which the individuals who held that status had to fulfill. Rôles were therefore related more to the

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<sup>1</sup>Ferrand, Michèle, 'Rapports sociaux de sexe: effets et questions épistémologiques', in Groupe d'études féministes de l'Université Paris VII (G.E.F.), Crises de la société: féminisme et changement, Paris: Revue d'en face/Editions Tierce, 1991, pp. 223-36 (p. 224)

<sup>2</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender', in Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1-9



structure of society than to the nature of the individuals. The arbitrariness of the division of characteristics between the sexes was therefore emphasised, continues Delphy, and social rôles were seen as related to positions in the division of labour and not to individual temperaments. These authors also stressed that as the position of women was socially, not naturally, determined, it was changeable. The term 'sex rôles' was used until the appearance of 'gender' in the 1970s.

Gender emerged as a concept which, like sex rôles, could demonstrate that not all the differences between the sexes were natural. There were disagreements about which differences were natural or social and to what extent, but many feminists agreed that some differences at least were socially constructed. So gender started out as referring to those characteristics, values, etc. which were not biological, but which were different for women and men. The way in which boys and girls acquired their gender identity was explained first in terms of sex rôles and later with the help of psychoanalysis. But the asymmetry and hierarchy between the two terms was ignored, despite the fact that it had been present in some of the earlier sex rôle work.<sup>3</sup> Later, it was the relation between the genders, the division of humanity into two sexes and two genders, that became the object of feminist interest. And it was this understanding of gender as a power relation that led to feminist interest in men and masculinity. For some, this was seen as a need to theorise both sides of the relation between masculinity and femininity (eg. Anne-Marie Devreux); for others, it was the relation itself which needed to be theorised (eg. Atelier production/reproduction); or the relation between gender and sex (eg. Christine Delphy).

The development of theories of gender and social relations of sex began with feminist attacks on naturalism and their arguments in support of social constructionism. The term 'naturalism' refers to ideologies which attempt to justify women's social situation with arguments resting on so-called natural features. An example of naturalist ideology is the argument that the sexual division of labour is natural, since it follows on from the different rôles that men and women play in reproduction.<sup>4</sup> Naturalist ideologies assume that what is natural precedes what is social, and therefore that society is organised according to the dictates of nature. The importance for feminism of challenging naturalism is that it attacks one of the ideological bases which justify the relations of

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<sup>3</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender', in Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1-9

<sup>4</sup>Combes, Danièle, Devreux, Anne-Marie & Ferrand, Michèle, 'Le corps support des rapports sociaux de sexe: nouvelles données, nouvelles lectures du biologique et construction des catégories de sexe', in Cahiers de l'APRE: Les rapports sociaux de sexe: problématiques, méthodologies, champs d'analyses, Actes de la table ronde internationale des 24-5 et 26 novembre 1987, Paris: CNRS, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 158-74 (p. 172)



oppression between the sexes. Social constructionist feminists denounce the social use which is made of anatomical differences between the sexes, reject a hierarchy which is based on an immutable nature and look more carefully at what exactly constitutes the differences between women and men. Feminist critiques of naturalism have included the claim made by feminist biologists that there is nothing simple or natural about sex categorisation, that sexes are situated on a continuum, and that only socially can we divide humanity into two groups.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most consistent and ardent opposers of naturalism in feminist and anti-feminist thought is Christine Delphy, co-founder and editor of QF and NOF. Naturalism, argues Delphy, is the ideology which is now used to justify the oppression of women, but scarcely a century ago, it was used to justify the oppression of the proletariat. Delphy insists that she is not denying that women and men are anatomically different and play different parts in reproduction. But, she argues, why should that be used to explain the oppression of one by the other? Delphy contests that, since biological explanations of the oppression of the working class or non-whites have lost all scientific credibility, this should have brought into question the use of such an explanation of the oppression of women. She asks, 'why should we, in trying to explain the division of society into hierarchical groups, attach ourselves to the bodily type of the individuals who compose, or are thought to compose, these groups?'<sup>6</sup>

Many of the early feminist critiques of naturalist arguments took place in QF, which played a vital rôle in the elaboration of social constructionist theories. QF's 'anti-difference' position was established in the editorial of the first number, in which the editors attacked arguments, particularly from *Psych et po*, according to which women's 'natural' difference made them superior to men. This current, which they called 'néo-féminité', was criticised for being ahistorical and for ignoring social factors in its search for the essential Woman. Concentrating on the body and on the physical difference between women and men is, they argued, exactly what patriarchy does in order to justify women's oppression. If women, too, begin to assert their difference, then this can only serve patriarchal interests: 'C'est le système patriarcal qui nous pose "différentes" pour justifier notre exploitation, la masquer. C'est lui qui nous impose l'idée d'une "nature", d'une "essence" féminine.' ('It is the patriarchal system which posits us as "different" in order to justify our exploitation, to mask it. It is the

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<sup>5</sup>Ferrand, Michèle & Langevin, Annette, 'De l'origine de l'oppression des femmes aux fondements des rapports sociaux de sexe', in Battagliola, Françoise; Combes, Danièle; Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie; Devreux, Anne-Marie; Ferrand, Michèle; Langevin, Annette, A propos des rapports sociaux de sexe, parcours épistémologiques, Paris: CNRS, 1986, Part 1 (pp. 4-9)

<sup>6</sup>Delphy, Christine, Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression, translated & edited by Diana Leonard, London: Hutchinson, 1984, p. 23



patriarchal system which forces the idea of a feminine "nature" or "essence" on us.<sup>7)</sup> They stressed that: '*L'existence sociale des hommes et des femmes ne dépend nullement de leur nature de mâle et de femelle, de la forme de leur sexe anatomique.*' (*The social existence of men and women is not at all dependent on their being male or female, on their anatomical sex.*)<sup>8</sup>

The editors of QF, then, asserted their opposition to any defence of feminine difference, whether this was biologically or socially justified. QF remained consistently opposed to biological explanations of sexual difference (for example, those presented in Evelyne Sullerot's Le fait féminin, which was criticised harshly in the journal<sup>9</sup>); 'néo-féminité' and the search for a feminine identity (for example, Luce Irigaray, whose work has been exposed to a vigorous critique in QF and NQF<sup>10</sup>); and to demands for 'equality in difference', which various authors in QF argued was meaningless.<sup>11</sup>

The editorial collective of QF argued that it is not women's biological sex which places them in a single social class, but their position in the power relations which exist between the sexes, namely as the oppressed. The priority must therefore be to 'analyser et détruire les mécanismes de l'oppression' ('analyse and destroy the mechanisms of oppression'), masculine behaviour, discourse and violence.<sup>12</sup>

In the belief that concentrating on the theorisation of femininity and the glorification of women's corporeal or psychological differences was politically regressive, in that it facilitated the continuing domination of women by men on the grounds that this was natural, since they were different, QF attempted to answer some of the following questions: Why are men dominant? Is it because of their biological/genetic differences? Is it because they have been socially conditioned to dominate women? Is it inevitable and immutable?

QF's major concern was the way in which an end could be brought to the oppression of women by men. Therefore, they searched for an explanation of this oppression and the ways in which male power was maintained. Part of this theoretical project was an

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<sup>7</sup>Questions féministes, 'Variations sur des thèmes communs: une revue théorique féministe radicale', no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 3-19 (p. 5)

<sup>8</sup>Questions féministes, 'Variations sur des thèmes communs: une revue théorique féministe radicale', no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 3-19 (p. 5) Emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup>Lesseps, Emmanuèle de, 'Le fait féminin et moi?', Questions féministes, no. 5, février 1979, pp. 3-28

<sup>10</sup>Plaza, Monique, 'Pouvoir "phallomorphique" et psychologie de "la Femme"', in Questions féministes, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 91-119

<sup>11</sup>For example, see Guillaumin, Colette, 'Question de différence', Questions féministes, no. 6, septembre 1979, pp. 3-21

<sup>12</sup>Questions féministes, 'Variations sur des thèmes communs: une revue théorique féministe radicale', no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 3-19 (pp. 13-14)



attempt to understand masculinity: how it is constructed and reproduced and how it functions as a support for male power. A fundamental point in QF's position was that masculinity was a social construct and not a biological given, and was therefore not immutable. The aim was the destruction of the political class of men, not of men themselves. As Monique Wittig wrote in 'On ne naît pas femme':

C'est à nous historiquement donc à définir en termes matérialistes ce que nous appelons l'oppression, à analyser les femmes en tant que classe, ce qui revient à dire que la catégorie 'femme', aussi bien que la catégorie 'homme' sont des catégories politiques et que par conséquent elles ne sont pas éternelles. Notre combat vise à supprimer les hommes en tant que classe, au cours d'une lutte de classe politique - non au génocide.

It is therefore up to us, historically, to define in materialist terms what we mean by oppression, and to analyse women as a class. This amounts to saying that the category 'woman', as well as the category 'man' are political categories and are therefore not eternal. Our struggle aims to wipe out men as a class, as part of a political class struggle - its aim is not genocide.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, three of the most important questions addressed in QF can be represented at their simplest as 'What is difference (and masculinity)?'; 'Why are men dominant?'; and 'Can men change?'. The answers to these questions, as will be demonstrated below, can be summarised as follows: firstly, that difference (and therefore masculinity and femininity) are social constructs; secondly, that the social construct of difference/masculinity/femininity is responsible for women's oppression and male power; and thirdly, that it is historically variable and can therefore be changed.

The publications of three members of the QF editorial collective illustrate this point. They are Christine Delphy, Nicole-Claude Mathieu and Colette Guillaumin, and aspects of their work particularly relevant to this question are examined here. The early work of these theorists set the terms of the debate on gender which has developed amongst French academic feminists and was responsible for the direction this debate took. Their stress on the social construction of difference has continued to play a central rôle in discussions of gender and is now one of the basic premises on which these discussions depend. Academic feminists who explicitly used the early work of Guillaumin, Mathieu and Delphy as a basis for their continuing development of theories of gender and social relations of sex acknowledge their theoretical debt to them, whilst at the same time producing critiques of certain aspects of their work. This 'second generation' of gender theorists, and in particular the group Atelier production/reproduction are discussed in the second part of this chapter.

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<sup>13</sup>Wittig, Monique, 'On ne naît pas femme', Questions féministes, no. 8, mai 1980, pp. 75-84 (p. 80)



CHRISTINE DELPHY

One of the most important social constructionists in French feminist theory is Christine Delphy. Since 1970 she has argued against naturalist explanations of women's oppression. In 'L'ennemi principal', which was published in a special issue of *Partisans* in 1970, 'Libération des femmes', Delphy began her analysis of the oppression of women by men.<sup>14</sup> As in Britain and the United States, feminists in France in the early 1970s stressed the systemic nature of men's dominance of women. 'L'ennemi principal' was an early attempt to theorise the sex system, and in it, Delphy developed two theoretical concepts: the domestic mode of production and patriarchy. Her aims were to find the structural reasons why the abolition of capitalist relations of production would not by itself liberate women and to develop a materialist analysis of women's oppression. Delphy argued that the domestic mode of production was the site of the economic exploitation of women by individual men, to whom they gave their labour free of charge. In this system, men and women are divided into antagonistic classes. Women constitute a class, she argued, since most women marry, but patriarchy hides the fact that women constitute a separate class by pretending that they belong in the same one as their husbands.

Delphy claimed in this article that the exploitation of women by the patriarchy is common to all women, specific to women, and their main oppression.<sup>15</sup> Patriarchal oppression is common to all women, she argued, because 80% of women are married at any one time; it is specific to women because only women have to provide domestic labour free of charge; and it is their main oppression because even when women work outside the home, they are exploited as women. Therefore, since all women are oppressed by patriarchy, they all need to join together to overthrow this system.

Delphy has always placed an emphasis on the relation between women and men, which she argues is a power relation. For example, in 1981 she wrote:

Ce point de départ nous a amenées à mettre l'accent sur le *rapport* qui constitue femmes et hommes en deux groupes non seulement différents mais surtout et d'abord hiérarchisés, c'est-à-dire à adopter une problématique de classes. Dans cette problématique, ce n'est pas le contenu de chaque rôle qui est essentiel mais le rapport entre les rôles, entre les deux groupes. Or ce rapport est caractérisé par la hiérarchie et c'est donc elle qui explique le contenu de chaque rôle et non l'inverse. Dans cette problématique donc, on le voit, le concept-clé est celui d'*oppression* qui est ou devrait être le concept-clé de toute problématique de classes.

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<sup>14</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'L'ennemi principal', in *Partisans*, no. 54-5, juillet-octobre 1970, numéro spécial: Libération des femmes, pp. 157-72

<sup>15</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'L'ennemi principal', in *Partisans*, no. 54-5, juillet-octobre 1970, numéro spécial: Libération des femmes, pp. 157-72 (p. 170)



This starting-point has led us to stress the *relation* which positions women and men in two groups, which are not only different, but first and foremost hierarchical. In other words, we have to analyse it within a framework of class. In this analytical framework, what is important is not the contents of each rôle, but the relation between them, between the two groups. The defining characteristic of this relation is hierarchy, and it is this which explains the contents of each rôle, and not the other way round. In this framework, it is clear that the key concept is *oppression*, which is, or should be, the key concept of any class analysis.<sup>16</sup>

Delphy's use of the term 'sex class' also stresses this relation, as she explains in Close to Home, a collection of her articles which was published in English with an additional introduction:

The concept of class ... implies that each group cannot be considered separately from the other, because they are bound together by a relationship of domination; nor can they even be considered together but independently of this relationship.... The concept of class starts from the idea of social construction and specifies the implications of it. Groups are no longer *sui generis* constructed before coming into relation with one another. On the contrary, it is their relationship which constitutes them as such.<sup>17</sup>

'Nos amis et nous', an article published in 1977 in Questions féministes, takes issue with 'male feminists' and argues that they do not help the feminist cause so much as attempt to dominate the women's movement and define its aims and strategies.<sup>18</sup> It discusses the position of the oppressor in liberation movements and argues the case for a non-mixed feminist movement. It also undertakes a careful examination of men's domination of women, and it is this analysis which is of most interest here. Delphy stresses the institutional structure of patriarchy, criticising those who see women's oppression as existing only in sexism, which she perceives as the 'expression idéologique de l'oppression institutionnelle, partie émergée du patriarcat.' ('the ideological expression of institutional oppression, the visible part of patriarchy.')<sup>19</sup> The article contains an analysis of the consciousness of the oppressor in which Delphy states that:

L'autoritarisme n'est pas un trait psychologique dont il suffit de prendre conscience pour être à même de s'en débarrasser. D'abord, en tant que trait psychologique concret, il ne peut être 'aboli' par un acte de volition pure.... Ensuite, même si cela était possible, c'est-à-dire, si ce trait pouvait, par d'autres moyens évidemment que la simple volition, être supprimé, sa suppression n'abolirait pas *ce qui l'a causé à l'origine* et le renforce continuellement, ce qui

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<sup>16</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Le patriarcat, le féminisme et leurs intellectuelles', Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 2, octobre 1981, pp. 59-74 (p. 66)

<sup>17</sup>Delphy, Christine, Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression, translated & edited by Diana Leonard, London: Hutchinson, 1984

<sup>18</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nos amis et nous: les fondements cachés de quelques discours pseudo-féministes', Questions féministes, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 21-49

<sup>19</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nos amis et nous: les fondements cachés de quelques discours pseudo-féministes', Questions féministes, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 21-49 (p. 31)



est *réellement* en cause, ce dont l'existence permet de douter qu'il existe des moyens de le supprimer: *l'autorité réelle*, c'est-à-dire institutionnelle et matériellement assise, *que les hommes possèdent en fait* sans avoir besoin de la vouloir, et qu'ils soient 'autoritaristes' ou non.

Cette base matérielle sur laquelle croît, qui renforce et que renforce la 'constitution psychologique' des individus, nous ramène à la structure sociale contraignante pour tout le monde, à la fois extérieure aux relations interpersonnelles et *cadre* de celles-ci.

Authoritarianism is not a psychological trait that one can get rid of as soon as one becomes aware of it. Firstly, as a concrete psychological trait, it cannot be 'abolished' by a simple act of volition... Secondly, even if that were possible, that is, if this trait could be done away with, obviously by means other than volition, its removal would not get rid of *what had caused it in the first place*, and what reinforces it continually, what is *really* at issue, the existence of which raises doubts about whether it can be got rid of: the *real authority*, that is, institutional, materially grounded authority *that men hold as a matter of fact*, without ever having to want it, and whether they are 'authoritarian' or not.

This material base, on which the 'psychological make-up' of individuals develops, which reinforces and is reinforced by this psychological make-up, brings us back to the social structure which constrains everybody, which is both outside inter-personal relations, yet at the same time acts as a *framework* for them.<sup>20</sup>

Delphy argues, therefore, that no man can escape his dominant position, because, no matter how egalitarian his relation with his partner, he owes his material situation to the discrimination faced by women as a class (a class to which his own partner belongs) on the labour market. Delphy insists that none of this is due to the man's *desire* or *intent* to dominate a particular woman or women in general, but:

Un individu homme n'a pas à bouger le petit doigt pour être avantagé par rapport aux femmes sur le marché du travail; mais il ne peut *non plus* empêcher qu'il soit avantagé, ni renoncer à son avantage. De la même façon, il n'est pas nécessaire qu'il prenne activement avantage de ses privilèges institutionnels dans le mariage.

An individual man does not have to lift a finger to be at an advantage in relation to women on the labour market. But on the other hand, he cannot prevent himself from being at an advantage, nor can he refuse this advantage. Similarly, he does not need actively to take advantage of his institutional privileges in marriage.<sup>21</sup>

According to Delphy, there are structural reasons why men cannot change on an individual level. The general oppression of women by men pre-dates any interpersonal relations between individual women and men and determines their nature. Therefore, nothing can be done to change this situation on an individual level. It is this aspect of Delphy's early work which seems to express too much intransigence for current gender

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<sup>20</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nos amis et nous: les fondements cachés de quelques discours pseudo-féministes', *Questions féministes*, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 21-49 (p. 31)

<sup>21</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Nos amis et nous: les fondements cachés de quelques discours pseudo-féministes', *Questions féministes*, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 21-49 (p. 32)



theorists, such as APRE, who are keen to explore the ways in which individual men *can* escape from the inevitability of male dominance.

Delphy was an early advocate of the use of the term 'gender' ('genre') and has continued to use it, despite the opposition to the term by other French feminist theorists, such as Colette Guillaumin, Nicole-Claude Mathieu and Monique Wittig.<sup>22</sup> In 'Le patriarcat, le féminisme et leurs intellectuelles', Delphy claimed that for most people, including many feminists, sexual difference is perceived as leading to at least a minimal division of labour, which is called gender. This division of labour, she states, is used as an explanation of the domination of one group over the other. Delphy, however, suggests that the opposite is true: that gender is created by oppression; that the hierarchical division of labour comes before the technical division of labour, which it creates, along with sex rôles or gender; and that gender, in turn, creates anatomical sex in the sense that the hierarchical division of humanity into two transforms an anatomical difference, which in itself is devoid of any meaning, into an important distinction.<sup>23</sup>

For Delphy, gender is an important term, in that it stresses the social aspect of the division between women and men. Nevertheless, in the introduction to Close to Home, she elaborates on some of the problems with the term, the most important being that it is too often used in conjunction with 'sex', and that it therefore loses some of its potential meaning. Delphy argues that too many feminists readily accept the social division of women and men, questioning the variations in the form it takes, but not necessarily the division itself.<sup>24</sup> Delphy continues this line of argument in the paper she presented at the 1989 CNRS conference on Sexe et genre. De la hiérarchie entre les sexes.<sup>25</sup> She criticises the way in which gender is seen as a social dichotomy which is determined by a natural dichotomy: sex. Delphy claims that gender is seen to vary, but sex is supposed to be fixed. No-one asks *why* sex should give rise to any form of social categorisation, just *which* form it gives rise to. For Delphy, it is not sexual *difference* which matters, but the social division and the hierarchy between the genders.

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<sup>22</sup>cf. Delphy, Christine, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender', in Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1-9 (p. 5). Their opposition to the term does not imply that they do not employ the concept of a 'social sex' ('sexe social') which differs from a 'biological sex'.

<sup>23</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Le patriarcat, le féminisme et leurs intellectuelles', Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 2, octobre 1981, pp. 59-74 (p. 65)

<sup>24</sup>Delphy, Christine, Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression, translated & edited by Diana Leonard, London: Hutchinson, 1984, pp. 24-5

<sup>25</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Penser le genre: quels problèmes?' in Hurtig, Marie-Claude; Kail, Michèle & Rouch, Hélène (eds.), Sexe et genre. De la hiérarchie entre les sexes, Editions du CNRS, 1991, pp. 89-101. A revised version of this paper was published in English as 'Rethinking Sex and Gender', in Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1-9



NICOLE-CLAUDE MATHIEU

Nicole-Claude Mathieu, who was a member of the editorial collective of *QF*, was arguably the first feminist in France to begin an analysis of masculinity. This was in an article published in 1973 in the anthropological journal *L'homme*, entitled 'Homme-culture et femme-nature?'.<sup>26</sup> Mathieu also made a vital contribution to the development in France of the concepts of biological sex and social gender, and to theories of gender as a relation. An examination of Mathieu's publications during the 1970s illustrates the development of the thesis that difference/masculinity/femininity are social constructs; that it is these constructs which are responsible for maintaining women's oppression; and that, as social constructs, they are *not* fixed immutable states.

In 'Homme-culture et femme-nature?', Mathieu argues that the language of our society is masculine, as is the language of anthropology and sociology. Through this masculine discourse, society is both interpreted and constructed as divided into two categories of sex, and the difference between them is used to justify and maintain the power exerted by one category over the other. However, argues Mathieu, this division into two biological categories can mask similarities amongst sub-categories as far as their position in certain power relations is concerned. For example, neither women *nor* young boys hold power. So power is not derived from biological sex, but rather from a social relation. The relation between women and men therefore needs to be examined not within a fixed biological dichotomy, but within a dialectical relation.

In a later article, 'Masculinité/féminité', published in *QF* in 1977, Mathieu examines the connections between biological and social sex.<sup>27</sup> She begins by showing that genders in language are applied arbitrarily to objects, as can be seen in the example of a table which is feminine in French (*la table*) and masculine in German (*der Tisch*). When applied to people, however, genders are more consistent with the biological sex of the subject. Mathieu asks:

En est-on pour autant autorisé à penser qu'il y a un rapport d'*essence* entre ce que qualifie le terme 'masculin' et la réalité biologique 'homme' d'une part, et ce que qualifie le terme 'féminin' et la réalité biologique 'femme' d'autre part? Autrement dit, a-t-on le droit de penser que tel comportement ou telle capacité que l'on estime couramment 'masculins' ou au contraire 'féminins' ont quelque rapport que ce soit avec le *sexe biologique* de l'individu?

Does that however give us the right to think that there is an *essential* relation between what is qualified by the term 'masculine' and the biological reality of 'man' on the one hand, and that which is qualified by the term 'feminine' and the biological reality of 'woman' on the other hand? In other words, do we have

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<sup>26</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Homme-culture et femme-nature?', *L'Homme*, no. 13, 1973, pp. 101-13

<sup>27</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Masculinité/féminité', *Questions féministes*, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 51-67



the right to think that behaviour or abilities which are currently thought of as being 'masculine' or 'feminine' have any relation whatsoever with the *biological sex* of the individual?<sup>28</sup>

The social hierarchy which exists between women and men cannot, Mathieu continues, be explained with biological arguments. For example, she asks whether any physiological changes took place amongst the women who in 1945 were not allowed to vote, purely on the grounds that they were *women*, and the same women who could vote in 1946. In other words, the gains that women have made have not affected biological sexes, but rather socially constructed genders.<sup>29</sup>

From the earliest age, states Mathieu, girls and boys, women and men are forced to behave in a way fitting to their biological sex. But at the same time, masculinity is valued above femininity. Therefore, women are forced to behave in a way that women, as well as men, see as inferior. What needs to be done, Mathieu claims, is for masculinity and femininity to be exposed as social constructs rather than fixed destinies, so that they can then be destroyed. Masculinity and femininity, she stresses, *can* be changed:

Car la féminité et la masculinité n'ont pas de sexe, ou plutôt elles n'ont qu'un rapport statistique avec le sexe biologique, et de plus ce rapport est arbitraire, comme nous l'avons dit, et donc provisoire dans une société historique.

For femininity and masculinity have no sex. Or rather, they only have a statistical relation to biological sex and, moreover, this relation is arbitrary, as has been shown above, and therefore temporary in a historical society.<sup>30</sup>

#### COLETTE GUILLAUMIN

Colette Guillaumin's articles in *QF* have also opposed naturalist arguments, which she sees as attempts to justify the appropriation by men of women's time, labour and energy. Guillaumin compares the category of 'sex' with that of 'race', since in both cases, the differences between those who dominate and those who are dominated are defined as natural. She argues that according to this ideology, these natural differences are the cause of women's oppression, and, since they are natural and exist outside history and all social relations, they are immutable. The ideology of nature is expressed in a variety of ways, she claims, and, until it is destroyed, it will continue to be used to justify an appropriation of certain categories of people which ranges from an exploitation of their labour to the physical abuse of their bodies. The argument that

<sup>28</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Masculinité/féminité', *Questions féministes*, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 51-67 (p. 52)

<sup>29</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Masculinité/féminité', *Questions féministes*, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 51-67 (p. 59)

<sup>30</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Masculinité/féminité', *Questions féministes*, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 51-67 (p. 59)



women are different by nature, she states, is used to justify all sorts of material disadvantages, including physical violence.<sup>31</sup>

Guillaumin's article 'Pratique du pouvoir et idée de nature'<sup>32</sup> also discusses the structural reasons for the power relation between the sex classes of men and women. According to Guillaumin, the appropriation of women is more than the appropriation of their labour, and she refers to it as a system of 'sexage' (by analogy to 'esclavage' - slavery and 'servage' - serfdom). There are two levels to this appropriation. The first is the appropriation of all women by all men; the second is the particular form of appropriation which takes place in marriage. So marriage is 'l'expression individualisée ..., la surface institutionnelle (contractuelle) d'un rapport généralisé: l'appropriation d'une classe de sexe par l'autre, le sexage.' ('the individualised expression ... the institutional (contractual) aspect of a general relation: the appropriation of one sex by the other, 'sexage').<sup>33</sup>

The way in which the 'ideology of difference' is used to maintain women's oppression is at the centre of Guillaumin's article 'Question de différence' which appeared in QF in 1979.<sup>34</sup> The sexual differences which are defined by this ideology include physical characteristics, emotional, psychological and experiential characteristics, but also a multitude of other differences between women and men, for example, how much space they occupy, how much they earn, the clothes they wear, their rights, etc. Guillaumin points out that this difference is asymmetrical, since it is only women who are defined as different, while men constitute the norm or the referent to which they are compared.

Guillaumin presents detailed arguments in support of her claim that masculinity and femininity are not natural biological givens, but rather social constructs. For example, in an article which appeared in Le genre humain after the QF split, she expresses astonishment at the number of measures introduced by men in order to protect their masculinity, which, according to their own arguments, is natural and inherent to males.<sup>35</sup> If this is the case, she argues, then why do they feel the need to defend it?

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<sup>31</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Pratique du pouvoir et idée de nature (2) Le discours de la nature', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 5-28

<sup>32</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Pratique du pouvoir et idée de nature (1) l'appropriation des femmes', in Questions féministes, no. 2, février 1978, pp. 5-30 & Guillaumin, Colette, 'Pratique du pouvoir et idée de nature (2) Le discours de la nature', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 5-28

<sup>33</sup>Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie & Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'La reproduction des rapports sociaux de sexe', in Battagliola, Françoise; Combes, Danièle; Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie; Devreux, Anne-Marie; Ferrand, Michèle; Langevin, Annette, A propos des rapports sociaux de sexe, parcours épistémologiques, Paris: CNRS, 1986, Part 3, p. 27

<sup>34</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Question de différence', Questions féministes, no. 6, septembre 1979, pp. 3-21

<sup>35</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Masculin banal/masculin général' in Le genre humain, no. 10, 1984: 'le masculin', pp. 65-74



And why do they feel so threatened by anything which brings into question the clear distinction between the sexes, for example, 'effeminate' or homosexual men?

Si la nature instinctuelle des traits de sexe est ce que prétendent ses tenants alors pourquoi éprouvent-ils une crainte aussi visible, pourquoi alors pratiquent-ils un contrôle si pointilleux pour éviter que ne disparaissent ce qui par définition ne peut pas disparaître?

If the instinctual nature of sexual characteristics is what its advocates claim it to be, then why do they exhibit such a great fear, why do they enforce such rigorous controls in order to prevent the disappearance of something which by definition cannot disappear?<sup>36</sup>

Guillaumin's attempt to expose the ideology according to which sexual difference is natural consists of demonstrating that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and also that they exist only in relation to each other. If this is the case, if masculinity and femininity have no essential existence outside of their relation to each other, then, she argues, they are historical constructs which can therefore be changed.

#### THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE QF THEORISTS

These theorists made an important contribution to the debate on sex and gender by developing theories which stressed that these were inseparable, and that the latter, which was a construct which maintained women's oppression, could be changed. The influence of their work is visible in later theories of gender which have been produced by French feminists.

However, their theories have not been accepted uncritically. The systemic nature of the oppression of women as a sex class by men as a sex class, as portrayed by Delphy in 'L'ennemi principal' and 'Nos amis et nous', leaves no room for change in the relations between them without overthrowing the whole system. While in the 1970s, the importance of such arguments was that they joined women together in the notion of sisterhood, there was an increasing sense during the 1980s that this did not reflect the reality of many women's experiences. It could not account for heterosexual relationships which *were* experienced as egalitarian; it could not account for differences between individual men or between individual women. Certainly in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Britain, the notion of sisterhood was challenged by black and lesbian women who objected to a feminism which they saw as white, heterosexual and middle-class, and which they felt excluded them. They stressed the differences between women, whether these were differences of race, class, colour, sexuality or physical ability, and this was to have a significant effect on the theoretical developments around

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<sup>36</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Masculin banal/masculin général' in Le genre humain, no. 10, 1984: 'le masculin', pp. 65-74 (p. 68)



the question of difference.<sup>37</sup> During the 1980s, differences between women became more central to Anglo-American feminist debate than differences between women and men. Feminists began to take into account the identities that women experience other than gender. For example, women may think of themselves as being black, heterosexual, young, old, lesbian, working-class, as well as being women. Third world women also criticised western feminism for its cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism. They demonstrated how western feminists ignored the many different needs, experiences and priorities of third world feminists. For example, if free and legal contraception and abortion was a major demand for western feminists, it did not have the same meaning for women who were sterilised by force, or who had their pregnancies terminated against their will.

In France, this kind of discussion has not taken place to anywhere near the same extent. It is very difficult to find any references to the specific oppression of North African women in France, for instance, and the difference debate continues to centre on the question of whether or not women and men are essentially the same or different.

The emphasis on the historical nature of masculinity and femininity played a central part in the analyses of difference which appeared in *QF*. Nicole-Claude Mathieu, writing within an anthropological context, also drew attention to their variability from society to society, providing another set of arguments against the biological explanations of 'natural' difference. Other feminists who argued that there was an essential difference between the sexes were criticised for contributing to the belief that the situation could not be changed. For example, Monique Wittig wrote in 1980:

... en admettant qu'il y a une division 'naturelle' entre les femmes et les hommes, nous naturalisons l'histoire, nous faisons comme si les hommes et les femmes avaient toujours existé et existeront pour toujours. Et non seulement nous naturalisons l'histoire, mais aussi par conséquent nous naturalisons les phénomènes sociaux qui manifestent notre oppression, ce qui revient à rendre tout changement impossible.

... if we accept that there is a 'natural' division between women and men, we naturalise history. We pretend that men and women have always existed and always will do. And not only do we naturalise history, but we also as a consequence naturalise the social phenomena which are the manifestation of our oppression. This amounts to making any change impossible.<sup>38</sup>

The idea that the social construction of difference, masculinity and femininity are historically variable and can therefore be changed has been challenged, however.

<sup>37</sup>See, for example, Anthias, Floya & Yuval-Davis, Nira, 'Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions', in Lovell, Terry, *British Feminist Thought*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, pp. 103-18; and hooks, bell, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, London: Pluto, 1987

<sup>38</sup>Wittig, Monique, 'On ne naît pas femme', *Questions féministes*, no. 8, mai 1980, pp. 75-84 (p. 77)



Feminists have begun to argue that, given the biological technology available today, it could in fact prove easier to change something 'biological' than 'socially constructed'.<sup>39</sup> Chemical hormones can be administered easily, whereas re-learning our socially acquired behaviour and attitudes can be a much larger and more difficult process, argues Cynthia Cockburn.<sup>40</sup> Developments which have contributed to this line of argument include the work of feminist biologists who have questioned the notion that what is biological is necessarily immutable. In France, feminist biologists have offered many examples in support of their claim that biology is itself a social construct and is therefore no less immutable than society. These will be discussed below. In Britain, some feminists have argued that biological and social factors interact throughout an individual's life, to the extent that it is impossible to separate the two. Alison Jaggar, for example, claims that human biology is not just a pre-social given, but is the result as well as the cause of our system of social organisation: 'Sex differences are in part socially determined both on the level of the individual and on the level of the species.'<sup>41</sup> She continues: 'We cannot say that "biology determines society", because we cannot identify a clear non-social sense of "biology", nor a clear, non-biological sense of "society". The thesis of biological determinism cannot be stated coherently.'<sup>42</sup>

Whilst it is important to recognise the limitations of the early theories of gender which appeared in *QF*, they did make a considerable contribution to the development of subsequent ideas about sex, gender and masculinity. The roots of theories of gender and social relations of sex can be easily identified in their analyses. Nicole-Claude Mathieu, for example, argued that it is the social hierarchy between the genders which is more important than sexual difference<sup>43</sup>; Colette Guillaumin, that difference only exists in the relation between masculinity and femininity, and that neither of these terms has any meaning outside of this relation<sup>44</sup>; Christine Delphy, that gender constructs sexual difference, in that the physical differences between the sexes acquire meaning in

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<sup>39</sup>Crowley, Helen & Himmelweit, Susan (eds.), Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with The Open University, 1992, p. 62

<sup>40</sup>Cockburn, Cynthia, In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1991

<sup>41</sup>Jaggar, Alison M., 'Human Biology in Feminist Theory: Sexual Equality Reconsidered', in Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with The Open University, 1992, pp. 78-89 (p. 84)

<sup>42</sup>Jaggar, Alison M., 'Human Biology in Feminist Theory: Sexual Equality Reconsidered', in Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with The Open University, 1992, pp. 78-89 (p. 86)

<sup>43</sup>For example, Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Masculinité/féminité', Questions féministes, no. 1, novembre 1977, pp. 51-67

<sup>44</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Question de différence', Questions féministes, no. 6, septembre 1979, pp. 3-21



excess of their actual importance because of the social hierarchy of gender.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Colette Guillaumin argued that the belief that social inequalities are the result and not the cause of sexual difference is untenable. That the male anatomy is invested with such symbolic meaning is not due to its inherent qualities, but to the social power enjoyed by men.<sup>46</sup>

As the stress laid by feminists on the unequal and hierarchical relation between women and men grew, feminists broke free of the sociological and anthropological tradition of considering the sexes as natural and therefore separable. Instead, they argued that they could only be considered in relation to each other, and that it was also important to study men as gendered individuals.<sup>47</sup>

### Gender in the 1980s

During the 1980s, theories of gender were developed by theorists who drew on the work of Mathieu, Guillaumin and Delphy and continued the debate in the terms in which they had constructed it. Thus, many of them took as a basic premise the belief that difference, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed. The major themes discussed in the continuing debate were the social construction of what is often portrayed as immutable biological fact; the terms 'genre' and 'rapports sociaux de sexe'; and attempts to account for variations in the relations between individuals and the structure of male dominance, which early 'structuralist' theories of patriarchy and sex class (such as Delphy's) were unable to account for.

There were many similarities between the concerns of French feminists and British and American ones, including, for example, the growing interest in the re-incorporation of biology and attempts to explain why gender relations are experienced differently by different individuals. However, the similarities between the range of meanings which are attributed by English-speaking feminists to the term 'gender' and by French feminists to the terms 'genre' and 'rapports sociaux de sexe' have been obscured by what would seem to be a misleading debate about the superiority of one term over the others. As will be argued below, this debate seems to rely on a limited representation of the wealth of meanings of one term, in order to portray another as more useful. It also

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<sup>45</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Le patriarcat, le féminisme et leurs intellectuelles', Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 2, octobre 1981, pp. 59-74

<sup>46</sup>Guillaumin, Colette, 'Masculin banal/masculin général' in Le genre humain, no. 10, 1984: 'le masculin', pp. 65-74

<sup>47</sup>Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie & Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'La reproduction des rapports sociaux de sexe', in Battagliola, Françoise; Combes, Danièle; Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie; Devreux, Anne-Marie; Ferrand, Michèle; Langevin, Annette, A propos des rapports sociaux de sexe. parcours épistémologiques, Paris: CNRS, 1986, Part 3 (p. 22)



often depends on an opposition between French and Anglo-American gender theories, which is based on a simplistic representation of the use of the term 'gender' in Britain and the United States. Before discussing this debate, however, let us first consider the ways in which the concept of the social construction of sex was being developed during the early 1980s.

#### 'BIOLOGICAL' SEX AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The conference on 'Femmes, féminisme et recherches', held at Toulouse in 1982, was intended to demonstrate the huge diversity of feminist research and research on women, and inevitably included a section on sexual difference. Two of the contributions are particularly pertinent to this examination of the development of theories of sex and gender. These are Marie-Jo Dhavernas and Liliane Kandel's 'Quelques réflexions autour du notion de "sexisme"', and Evelyne Peyre and Joelle Wiels' 'Différences biologiques des sexes et identité'. Marie-Jo Dhavernas and Liliane Kandel argued that each of the sexes is dependent on the other for its identity, with the consequence that femininity and masculinity do not exist outside of the relation between them. The aim of feminism for them was the breaking down of the binary division of genders and its replacement with multiplicity.<sup>48</sup>

For Dhavernas and Kandel, as for other participants at the conference, it was not just gender which should not be divided into two, but also sex. These participants criticised the biological foundations of arguments for sexual difference, which are based on the different positions occupied by women and men in reproduction. Dhavernas and Kandel argued that only in reproduction can we talk of the complementarity of the sexes, and even then, it is not clear that they can be divided neatly into two. They cited Marie-Claude Hurtig and Marie-France Pichevin who wrote in 'La psychologie et les femmes, petite endoscopie d'une discipline' that sex is a complex and heterogenous reality and that there is no single indicator which can be used to define it.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, the research of biologists Evelyne Peyre and Joelle Wiels, who presented a paper entitled 'Différences biologiques des sexes et identité' aims to demonstrate the complexity of the biological determination of the sexes and to show how the criteria used are not always appropriate. They conclude:

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<sup>48</sup>Dhavernas, Marie-Jo & Kandel, Liliane, 'Quelques réflexions autour de la notion de "sexisme"', in *Femmes, féminisme et recherches*, AFFER, Toulouse, 1984, pp. 750-4

<sup>49</sup>Hurtig, Marie-Claude & Pichevin, Marie-France, "La psychologie et les femmes, petite endoscopie d'une discipline", *Nouvelles questions féministes*, no. 4, automne 1982, quoted by Dhavernas, Marie-Jo & Kandel, Liliane, 'Le sexisme comme réalité et comme représentation', in *Les temps modernes*, no. 444, juillet 1983, pp. 3-27 (p. 1)



Nous voudrions souligner en conclusion - et en bonnes généticiennes - que notre propos n'est pas destiné à nier les différences biologiques entre les individus; il voudrait au contraire mettre en évidence la réduction et la contrainte opérées par la classification en deux sexes. De même que l'on ne peut réduire la diversité humaine à quelques 'races', il nous importe de montrer qu'on ne peut pas non plus la réduire à deux sexes.

We would like to stress in conclusion - and as good geneticists - that it was not our intention to deny the existence of biological differences between individuals. Instead we wanted to demonstrate the reduction and the constraint imposed by their classification into just two sexes. Just as human diversity cannot be reduced to a few 'races', we feel that it is important to show that neither can it be reduced to two sexes.<sup>50</sup>

#### 'GENRE' OR 'RAPPORTS SOCIAUX DE SEXE'?

Since Toulouse, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to the development of theories of gender and social relations of sex, and, especially in the last few years, a number of attempts have been made to clarify the various meanings that these terms have acquired in France. One of the first groups to undertake this task was the Atelier production/reproduction. In a collection of papers published by this group in 1985, Danièle Combes and Dominique Fougeyrollas offered some definitions of 'social relations of sex', highlighting the difficulty of trying to unravel the diverse meanings which it has had in different contexts, and concentrating on those which refer more explicitly to a relation between two terms.<sup>51</sup>

In 1989, a conference was organised by the CNRS, the proceedings of which were published in 1991 as Sexe et genre: de la hiérarchie entre les sexes.<sup>52</sup> Amongst the aims of this conference were to analyse the concepts of sex and gender and the relations between them; to examine their construction and function in society and in the various disciplines in which they are used; and to discuss the social division of the sexes into two categories as the basis of the power relations between women and men. The contributors also aimed to deconstruct these categories, redefine them and use them in new ways.<sup>53</sup>

With the increasing use of theories of social relations of sex, especially within feminist sociology in France, came a growing critique of the limitations of the Anglo-American

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<sup>50</sup>Peyre, Evelyne & Wiels, Joelle, 'Différences biologiques des sexes et identité' in Femmes, féminisme et recherches, AFFER, Toulouse, 1984, pp. 818-24 (p. 823)

<sup>51</sup>Combes, Danièle & Fougeyrollas, Dominique, 'Cadres théoriques d'analyse des rapports sociaux de sexe' in Atelier production/reproduction, Production/reproduction et rapports sociaux de sexe, Cahiers no. 3, Paris: CNRS, septembre 1985, pp. 101-23 (p. 103)

<sup>52</sup>Hurtig, Marie-Claude; Kaïl, Michèle & Rouch, Hélène (eds.), Sexe et genre. De la hiérarchie entre les sexes, Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991

<sup>53</sup>Scott, Joan, 'Genre: une catégorie utile d'analyse historique', Cahiers du GRIF, Editions Tierce, no. 37/38, printemps 1988, pp. 125-54 (p. 15)



concept of gender as they understood it. In an article in a 1991 issue of Les cahiers d'encrage on the state and social relations of sex, CNRS researcher, H  l  ne le Doar  , highlights some of the advantages of a framework of social relations of sex over one of gender. If 'gender' was being used by French feminists by the late 1980s, she argues, this was often as much for stylistic reasons as to add nuances to the analysis, and it was accompanied by a loss of meaning. According to Le Doar  , the concept of 'social relations of sex' is more useful for two reasons. Firstly, it draws attention to the fact that social categories of sex are constructed on biological sex, and secondly, it stresses the fact that these categories are in an antagonistic relation.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, an article by Dani  le Kergoat published in M in 1992 defends the concept of social relations of sex over that of gender.<sup>55</sup> The concept of social relations of sex is a gendered (sexu  ) way of looking at the organisation of society, which is itself materially anchored in the sexual division of labour. It is therefore a way of looking at the whole of society (since the social relations of sex exist throughout society) from a feminist standpoint, she argues.

Kergoat's definition of the social relations of sex rests on a total rejection of biological explanations of the differences between the social practices of men and women; a claim that these differences are socially constructed, and that this construction has a material as well as an ideological base, and can therefore be understood historically; and a claim that these social relations rest first and foremost on a hierarchical relation between the sexes, and that this is a power relation.<sup>56</sup>

Kergoat's position is that, instead of concentrating solely on the social relations of sex, all social relations should be theorised simultaneously. Each individual is involved not only in social relations of sex, but in a whole network of social relations. For example, individuals may think of themselves as workers, unemployed, young, black, etc. Within each social relation they may be either dominant or dominated. And the combination of these axes of power and their position on them constitutes their identity, accounts for their social practices, and determines which, if any, groups they are going to feel part of.

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<sup>54</sup>Doar  , H  l  ne le, 'Note sur une notion: le rapport social de sexe', Cahiers d'encrage, num  ro hors s  rie, premier trimestre, 1991, pp. 8-10 (p. 9)

<sup>55</sup>Kergoat, Dani  le, 'A propos des rapports sociaux de sexe' in M, nos. 53-54, avril/mai 1992, pp. 16-19

<sup>56</sup>Kergoat, Dani  le, 'A propos des rapports sociaux de sexe' in M, nos. 53-54, avril/mai 1992, pp. 16-19 (pp. 16-17)



Kergoat argues, therefore, that although all social relations are gendered (*sexué*), social relations of sex are cut through by other social relations (for example, class). This approach allows for the co-existence of conflicting identities. It also enables a consideration of the interaction between individuals and social relations. Not only are individuals affected by social relations, but they also have an effect on them in the way in which they construct their life through their social practices. Finally, social relations are seen as historically specific, and therefore not immutable.

Kergoat then introduces a debate around the terms 'genre', 'rapports de genre' (which, she explains, is the equivalent of the term 'gender' in English) and 'rapports sociaux de sexe'. It is interesting that she does not mention 'rapports de genre' again, and does not discuss its advantages or disadvantages in relation to 'rapports sociaux de sexe'. Instead, she polarises the debate around a simple choice between 'genre' and 'rapports sociaux de sexe'. Despite explaining that these terms cannot be opposed, since they are both used in a wide variety of ways, and since the meanings attributed to them often overlap, she then presents a list of reasons why 'rapports sociaux de sexe' is the more useful term. These reasons include the fact that it stresses the *relation* between the two sexes and therefore less easily becomes a synonym for 'women'. However, the 'debate' which Kergoat presents does not have the appearance of a balanced and informed comparison of the relative advantages of the three analytical terms. In order to highlight the advantages of 'rapports sociaux de sexe', she interprets very narrowly the uses made by other French theorists of the term 'genre' and conveniently ignores the sophistication of the Anglo-American debate around the term 'gender'. Perhaps, as Kergoat mentions briefly in this article, it is more a question of personal preference for one term rather than the other, than of a significant difference in meaning. Interestingly, in an article published a year later in *Politis*, Kergoat decides to use the term 'genre' 'par commodité d'écriture'.<sup>57</sup>

#### THEORIES OF GENDER AND SOCIAL RELATIONS OF SEX

Since the aim here is to demonstrate how the development of theories of gender and social relations of sex enabled feminists to begin studying men and masculinity within this framework, it is unnecessary to review all the aspects of the more recent developments of these theories. However, a brief overview of the major themes that recur in this work will help to contextualise the specific examples which follow of the ways in which these theories have been used to think about masculinity. A major insistence in much of this work is on the asymmetry and hierarchy which these theorists argue are inherent to social relations of sex. From this basis, Christine

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<sup>57</sup>Hirata, Helena & Kergoat, Danièle, 'La classe ouvrière a deux sexes' in *Politis: la revue*, no. 4, juillet-août-septembre 1993, pp. 55-8 (p. 55)



Delphy, for example, argues that gender only exists because of these power relations. It is the relation which determines gender, which creates the differences between women and men. If this power relation were removed, the differences between the sexes would be reduced to anatomical differences devoid of any social significance.<sup>58</sup>

Other major themes include the reproduction of gender relations, which highlights both their fixed and changing nature; the relations between individuals and structures; the way in which gender relations cut through society and interact with other social relations in the construction of an individual's identity; the contradictions in the social relations of sex; the historical specificity and hence changeability of social relations of sex; the relation between material realities and representation of gender; and why and how the binary division of the sexes has been maintained.

The Atelier production/reproduction (APRE) has paid particular attention to the reproduction of the relations between women and men and of dominant masculine identities. It is argued that, not only are the differences between the sexes socially constructed, but on a systemic, if not on an individual level, they act in the interests of the dominant group, men, and that the members of this group therefore attempt to maintain them. This is why the reproduction of social relations of sex is of interest to feminists. When talking of the reproduction of gender relations, these theorists do not mean the replication of an unchanged and unchanging relation, but rather a constant process of change. They recognise the importance for feminism of having exposed the structural functioning of gender relations, but argue that it is important now to look at how they change. They state that social relations of sex occur everywhere, in every sphere, but that they change according to historical situation. Considering the rôle of the individual in the reproduction of social relations of sex, Anne-Maire Daune-Richard and Anne-Marie Devreux write:

Notons que si l'on n'est pas dans une problématique en termes de rapport social, alors la reproduction des rapports hommes-femmes est analysée en termes d'adaptation des individus aux changements de la structure qui leur reste extérieure, ou en termes de conciliation entre les données nouvelles et anciennes de cette structure.

We should note that if we are not in a problematic in terms of social relations, then the reproduction of relations between men and women is analysed in terms of the adaptation of individuals to changes in a structure which is external to them, or in terms of a conciliation between the new and the old elements of this structure.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Le patriarcat, le féminisme et leurs intellectuelles', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, no. 2, octobre 1981, pp. 59-74

<sup>59</sup>Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie & Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'La reproduction des rapports sociaux de sexe', in Battagliola, Françoise; Combes, Danièle; Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie; Devreux, Anne-Marie;



Finally, changing attitudes to biology have affected theories of gender and social relations of sex, and have necessitated a reconsideration not only of the relations between the sexes, but also between sex and gender. In particular, the work of Christine Delphy and Nicole-Claude Mathieu rejects the belief that sex and gender can be easily separated, and assert that the boundaries between them need to be examined. For sex is not simply an unchanging natural base upon which gender can be constructed; rather it is constructed through the hierarchical relations of gender itself.<sup>60</sup> Mathieu uses examples from non-western societies as well as phenomena marginalised in our own society to argue that neither the definitions of sex, nor the boundaries between sex and gender are that clear.

In common with feminists in Britain and the United States, some French feminists are also beginning to reintroduce the question of biology and the body into their considerations of gender. This does not mean that they are claiming that gender derives from biological sex, but rather that the body cannot be ignored out of fear of accusations of essentialism. As Danièle Combes, Anne-Marie Devreux and Michèle Ferrand stated in a summary of the papers in the strand on biology presented at a round table discussion organised by APRE:

La construction sociologique des rapports hommes/femmes, des rapports entre les sexes, est passée et passe encore par une rupture radicale avec la définition naturalisante-biologisante des sexes. Or, cette rupture a justement pour effet de rendre plus difficile l'intégration de la dimension corporelle dans l'analyse des rapports sociaux de sexe. A y regarder de plus près, ce qui fait problème, c'est probablement la confusion sans cesse entretenue entre le corporel et le sexué.... Tenter de réintégrer du corporel, du biologique dans les rapports de sexe, peut-être, comme le suggèrent certaines, en les rebiologisant après les avoir dénaturalisés...

The sociological construction of relations between men and women, of relations between the sexes, has taken place through a fundamental break with a 'naturalist' or 'biologicistic' definition of the sexes. A consequence of this is that it is more difficult to integrate a consideration of the body into the analysis of social relations of sex. On closer inspection, the problem is probably the endless confusion between the body and sex.... One way in which the body and biology could be re-integrated into relations between the sexes is possibly, as is being suggested by some researchers, by re-introducing the biological, after having de-naturalised relations of sex....<sup>61</sup>

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Ferrand, Michèle; Langevin, Annette, A propos des rapports sociaux de sexe, parcours épistémologiques, Paris: CNRS, 1986, Part 3 (p. 204)

<sup>60</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Rethinking Sex and Gender', in Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1-9 & Mathieu, Nicole Claude, 'Identité sexuelle/sexuée/de sexe?: Trois modes de conceptualisation du rapport entre sexe et genre', in L'anatomie politique: catégorisations et idéologies du sexe, Paris: Côté-femmes, 1991, pp. 227-66

<sup>61</sup>Combes, Danièle, Devreux, Anne-Marie & Ferrand, Michèle, 'Le corps support des rapports sociaux de sexe: nouvelles données, nouvelles lectures du biologique et construction des catégories de sexe', in Cahiers de l'APRE: Les rapports sociaux de sexe: problématiques, méthodologies, champs d'analyses,



## NATURALISM AND MALE VIOLENCE

It has been clear to feminists since the 1970s that one of the implications of challenging naturalism was that it would bring into question accepted ideas about male violence. As Monique Plaza wrote in *QF* in 1978:

Jusqu'à présent, l'idéologie régissant l'approche du problème viol posait l'homme comme une espèce de bouc en rut dont la fougue ne supporte aucune entrave, comme un être bestial sans retenue. Il s'agissait d'un discours naturaliste, qui définissait l'homme avec une violence et une horreur sans égales, et qui permettait de ne pas poser l'injustice des rapports sociaux actuels. L'homme violeur devait relever d'une nature, nullement d'une société oppressive. Il était préférable de lui proposer une lobotomie pour amoindrir son 'instinct de viol' plutôt que de lui faire reconnaître l'oppression des femmes à laquelle en tant qu'homme (social) il participe.

Until now, the ideology which determined the way the problem of rape was approached positioned men as a kind of rutting stag, whose ardour could not be contained, as a wild beast with no self-control. It was a naturalist discourse, which defined men as capable of violence and horror beyond belief. This meant that the injustice of current social relations did not have to be mentioned. Rapists were a product of nature, not of an oppressive society. It was considered preferable to offer a rapist a lobotomy, in order to reduce his 'rape instinct', than to make him recognise the oppression of women to which he, as a (social) man, contributed.<sup>62</sup>

However, as will be shown in the next chapter, arguments such as these in defence of male violence towards women have certainly not disappeared. It is clear to feminists even in the 1990s that, although there are other necessary things to do, the constant battle against naturalist ideology must continue, and it is undertaken by feminist psychologists, such as Marie-Claude Hurtig and Marie-France Pichevin, and biologists such as Evelyne Peyre, Joelle Wiels and Michèle Fonton, amongst others. In a paper published in 1991, for example, Peyre, Wiels and Fonton aim to demonstrate that there is no biological basis for the division of humans into two categories of sex. They argue that the sex of individuals is distributed along a continuum from male to female and that there are huge variations from population to population and within any one population over time. They challenge the belief that sex can be determined without complications on the basis of the rôle of the individual in reproduction, arguing that given the number of heterosexual couples who are, for one reason or another, incapable of producing children, this definition is not very precise. The target of their criticisms is the belief that sex is naturally and clearly divided into two categories:

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Actes de la table ronde internationale des 24-5 et 26 novembre 1987, Paris: CNRS, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 158-74 (pp. 173-4)

<sup>62</sup>Plaza, Monique, 'Nos dommages et leurs intérêts', *Questions féministes*, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 93-103 (p. 102)



On peut évidemment considérer, comme le fait généralement la communauté scientifique, ces 'variantes' comme des situations pathologiques. On peut aussi continuer de penser, comme la société dans son ensemble, que la stérilité est une maladie. Mais ne vaudrait-il pas mieux admettre, étant donné le nombre de gens en réalité non-malades que cela représente, que ce ne sont pas ces individus qui sont 'anormaux' mais bien le cadre conceptuel de la bicatégorisation dans lequel on veut les faire entrer.

Of course, we can consider these 'variants' as pathological, in the same way as the scientific community generally does. We can also carry on thinking that sterility is an illness, in the same way that the whole of society does. But would it not be better to admit, given the number of people concerned who are in fact not ill, that it is not these individuals who are abnormal, but the conceptual framework of bicategorisation, into which they are being forced?<sup>63</sup>

They conclude that:

L'adéquation existant dans les sociétés actuelles occidentales entre sexe social et sexe biologique semble donc fondée principalement sur une division sociale des rôles visant à justifier, en l'ancrant dans l'ordre de la Nature, l'oppression des femmes.

The link between social sex and biological sex which exists in contemporary western societies seems to be based principally on a social division of rôles which seeks to justify the oppression of women by anchoring it in the Natural Order.<sup>64</sup>

### Gender/Social Relations of Sex and Masculinity

The final part of this chapter examines the uses that theories of gender or social relations of sex could have for the study of men and masculinity. The account of the development of theories of gender and social relations of sex in France has shown that some feminist theorists have argued as a result of this development that it is necessary to theorise men and masculinity, in order to understand how these relations work. These theories have therefore provoked attempts to construct men as objects of study who are not only gendered, but whose gendered identity only exists within the power relation between the sexes. One of the few feminists to have published work in this area is Anne-Marie Devreux, the only woman to contribute an article to a recent book attempting to illustrate the variety of theories of masculinity in France, Des hommes et du masculin.<sup>65</sup> Commenting on the scarcity of feminist theories of masculinity within the context of gender relations, Devreux claims that feminists, whilst having developed the necessary theoretical frameworks, have on the whole left this particular line of

<sup>63</sup>Peyre, Evelyne; Wiels, Joelle, & Fonton, Michèle, 'Sexe biologique et sexe social', in Hurtig, Marie-Claude; Kail, Michèle & Rouch, Hélène (eds.), Sexe et genre. De la hiérarchie entre les sexes, Editions du CNRS, 1991, pp. 27-50 (pp. 33-4)

<sup>64</sup>Peyre, Evelyne; Wiels, Joelle, & Fonton, Michèle, 'Sexe biologique et sexe social', in Hurtig, Marie-Claude; Kail, Michèle & Rouch, Hélène (eds.), Sexe et genre. De la hiérarchie entre les sexes, Editions du CNRS, 1991, pp. 27-50 (p. 48)

<sup>65</sup>Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992



analysis to men. She argues that it is now time for feminists to develop their own theories in this direction. Men should be taken as objects of analysis and as gendered social actors. They should be theorised within the context of the social relations of sex in which they dominate women, she writes. By doing this, feminist sociologists would reinforce their critique of universal claims and neuter referents and would at the same time move beyond a gynocentrism which hides the power relations between men and women.<sup>66</sup>

Some examples of the questions examined by feminists involved in the aspects of theories of social relations of sex which are particularly useful to a consideration of masculinity are presented here. These are firstly, the problem of the relation between the individual and the structure of social relations of sex; secondly, the tension and conflicts between the reality and the representation of gender and masculinity; and thirdly, the reproduction of the power relations between the sexes and of dominant masculine identities.

#### THE RELATION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STRUCTURE OF GENDER RELATIONS

This question has been addressed in a search for solutions to the problems of how the differences both in the material existence of and representations of gender relations and masculinity can be accounted for. It is discussed by Devreux in her article in Des hommes et du masculin, 'Etre du bon côté'. In this article, she argues that, although men as a group are dominant in the power relations between the sexes and as a group maintain the conditions necessary to reproduce these relations, individual men occupy different positions in these relations at different times in their personal history. This is because of the interaction between social relations of sex and other social relations and also because of the environment in which these relations exist. Therefore, each individual man can be positioned in these social relations in a way which makes them feel more or less marginal or central to his sex category.<sup>67</sup>

In 'Les rapports de sexe constituent un rapport social', Devreux argues that social actors can in fact move about in social relations, since their actions can set them up in conflict with social structures and because their practices might contradict current norms. For example, if a man's career slows down because he shares parenting with his partner, he could be seen to be experiencing social disadvantages normally reserved

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<sup>66</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Etre du bon côté', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 147-64 (p. 149)

<sup>67</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Etre du bon côté', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 147-64 (pp. 150-1)



for women. In this respect, he is marginalised in his sex category in relation to men who do nothing at home and succeed at work. Instead of concentrating on these marginal positions, however, Devreux focuses on the centre of the sex category of men, and in doing this she identifies several problems. The first is that it is difficult on an intellectual level to imagine men losing their power over women, and it is therefore difficult to see the importance of focusing on the way in which this power is reproduced and maintained. The second is that it is difficult to do this within male-dominated institutions, since it is a subject which is threatening to the men in power in these institutions and also since they cannot see the legitimacy of studying men in sociology, since men as such do not appear to represent a social problem in the way that women do. The third problem is identifying where to look for examples of the reproduction of male dominance. Should it be in single-sex or mixed arenas, for example? The fourth problem is methodological, since the material might only exist in its absence, in what is not said. For example, a sociological study of fathering might consist in the analysis of the effects on many people of the *absence* of their father during their childhood.<sup>68</sup>

However, there seems to be no reason why these problems should be insurmountable. It is true, as Devreux says, that few French researchers have yet begun to place a gendered masculine subject at the centre of their research, but I would suggest that, in the case of feminists, this is not for the first reason she gives, that is, because they find it difficult to imagine men losing power and therefore do not focus on the reproduction of this power. The second problem does cause difficulties, although it applies to most examples of feminist research projects in France, and not exclusively those concerned with men and masculinity. The third and fourth problems do not hinder the research, so much as affect decisions about the way in which it is done.

Moving away from structuralist explanations of male power, Devreux examines the complex interactions between individual men and the structure of gender relations. This has the advantage of enabling the consideration of differences in the way individual men experience the power held by their sex group over women's sex group. By examining the different positions of individual men on this axis, it can also explain cases where individual women exert power and/or violence over individual men. Some feminists would however criticise the way in which it can exempt individual men from responsibility for the oppression of women.

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<sup>68</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Les rapports de sexe constituent un rapport social et les hommes en sont l'un des termes: conséquences sur la construction des objets d'analyse', in Cahiers de l'APRE: Les rapports sociaux de sexe: problématiques, méthodologies, champs d'analyses, Actes de la table ronde internationale des 24-5 et 26 novembre 1987, Paris: CNRS, 1988, pp. 150-7



The relation between individual men and the structure of male dominance is an area which has been examined more thoroughly in Britain and the United States than in France. This seems to be related to the greater emphasis placed in Anglo-American theory on the interaction of many different social relations in the construction of an individual's identity. Although this has been mentioned by French theorists, it has not led to the type of research carried out by their British and American counterparts.

The differences between the French and Anglo-American versions of the 'difference debate' have already been described. Whereas in France, the debate continues to be polarised around sexual difference or identity, in Britain and the United States, it has been cut through by the issues of ethnicity, sexuality and physical ability.<sup>69</sup> This has influenced the approach taken in the study of masculinity, since Anglo-American writers quickly began to examine the differences between men and the power relations which exist within, and not just between, the sex categories.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, feminists and pro-feminist men in France have paid little attention to these questions. Although papers published by APRE repeatedly state that the intersection of gender and other social relations needs to be examined, there is little evidence in their work of serious attempts to develop this.<sup>71</sup>

Anglo-American writers on this subject have explored the power relations between men far more thoroughly, and this has provided a useful perspective for the analysis of relations between the sexes. For example, in 'Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee argue that although men in general are advantaged through the subordination of women, this is complicated by the fact that, at a local level, there are many instances where individual women hold power over individual men. The generalisation is thus modified by the intersections of the various axes of power on which social relations are situated at any one time, for example age, race, class, etc. These contradictions between local situations and the global relationships are a vital site of conflict and hope for future

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<sup>69</sup>See, for example, Lorde, Audre, 'Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Women', in Crowley, Helen & Himmelweit, Susan (eds.), Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge, Cambridge: Polity Press in association with The Open University, 1992, pp. 47-54

<sup>70</sup>See, for example, Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990; Connell, R.W., Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics, Cambridge, Polity, 1987; Chapman, Rowena & Rutherford, Jonathan, Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988

<sup>71</sup>With the possible exception of Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Etre du bon côté', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 147-64



change.<sup>72</sup> Lynne Segal states that: 'it is an understanding of the differences between men which is central to the struggle for change'.<sup>73</sup>

Carrigan, Connell and Lee argue that it is impossible to explore gender relations unless power is examined within as well as between the sex categories. If men are presented as a homogenous entity, all equally responsible for male domination of women, then all it can produce is a paralyzing sense of guilt, they argue. Instead, it is necessary to examine the relations between heterosexual and homosexual masculinities, to establish which types of masculinity are hegemonic.<sup>74</sup> They explain what they mean by hegemonic masculinity as follows:

The ability to impose a particular definition on other kinds of masculinity is part of what we mean by 'hegemony'. Hegemonic masculinity ... is a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance.<sup>75</sup>

They argue that hegemonic masculinity actually corresponds to the reality of the lives of very few real men. However, many men are responsible for sustaining the hegemonic model:

There are various reasons: gratification through fantasy, compensation through displaced aggression (eg. gay bashing by police and working class youths), etc. But the overwhelmingly important reason is that most men benefit from the subordination of women, and hegemonic masculinity is centrally connected with the institutionalisation of men's dominance over women. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic insofar as it embodies a successful strategy in relation to women.<sup>76</sup>

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not accepted uncritically, however. Michael Roper writes:

As early as 1977, Tolson argued that masculinity was a social construction which varied according to historical periodisation, class and race. While this notion soon became orthodoxy, even recent studies tend to treat masculinity in phenomenological terms. At best, variations occur on a sliding scale of images

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<sup>72</sup>Carrigan, Tim; Connell, Bob & Lee, John, 'Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity' in Kaufman, Michael (ed.) Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change, Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 139-92

<sup>73</sup>Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities. Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990, p. x

<sup>74</sup>Carrigan, Tim; Connell, Bob & Lee, John, 'Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity' in Kaufman, Michael (ed.) Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change, Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 139-92 (p. 140)

<sup>75</sup>Carrigan, Tim; Connell, Bob & Lee, John, 'Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity' in Kaufman, Michael (ed.) Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change, Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 139-92 (p. 179)

<sup>76</sup>Carrigan, Tim; Connell, Bob & Lee, John, 'Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity' in Kaufman, Michael (ed.) Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change, Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 139-92 (p. 180)



running between the wimp and 'hyper-masculine'. Diversity is at last replacing monolithic masculinity. But even the concept of hegemonic masculinity, with its appealing distinction between dominant and subordinate forms of manliness, ultimately misses the point. Masculinity is just one component of wider social processes, not an explanatory category in itself.<sup>77</sup>

Some feminists also argue that there is a certain danger attached to the acceptance of multiple masculinities, and in particular the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Lois Banner, for example, argues that in this way, men could argue that they are not responsible for male dominance, since their masculinity is not hegemonic. The consequence of this concept is, she argues, that it obscures the systemic nature of male dominance.<sup>78</sup>

#### TENSION AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN REALITY AND REPRESENTATION

The second area of this work which is particularly useful to a study of masculinity is the examination of the tension and conflicts between the reality and representation of gender relations and masculinity. An example of an attempt to tackle these problems is Michèle Le Doeuff's 'Gens de science: essai sur le déni de mixité' which appeared in NQF in 1992, and in which she examines the reality and representation of parity in the CNRS. Le Doeuff concludes that, despite the actual numerical parity in the organisation, the image presented to outsiders is one of 'the masculinity of research'.<sup>79</sup> Another example is Mariette Sineau's article 'Pouvoir, modernité et monopole masculin de la politique: le cas français', which appeared in the same issue.<sup>80</sup> In this, Sineau deals with the way in which women are excluded from politics, which remains the ultimate site of male power: '... le pouvoir politique est bien encore aujourd'hui considéré par la plupart des hommes comme le pouvoir viril par excellence.' ('...political power is still today considered by most men as masculine power *par excellence*,') she writes.<sup>81</sup> Sineau explores the links between political power and representations of masculinity, which play a large part in the exclusion of women from political institutions. To illustrate her argument, she examines the ways in which French presidents Charles de Gaulle and François Mitterrand have been represented as fathers of the nation, arguing that France is 'un patriarcat (ou une "machocratie") qui laisse peu de place à la véritable démocratie dans laquelle se situent nécessairement les

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<sup>77</sup>Roper, Michael, 'Introduction: Recent Books on Masculinity', in History Workshop Journal, no. 29, Spring 1990, pp. 184-7 (p. 185)

<sup>78</sup>Banner, Lois, Review article in Signs, Spring 1989, p.703-8

<sup>79</sup>Le Doeuff, Michelle, 'Gens de science: essai sur le déni de mixité', in Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 5-37

<sup>80</sup>Sineau, Mariette, 'Pouvoir, modernité et monopole masculin de la politique: le cas français', in Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 39-61

<sup>81</sup>Sineau, Mariette, 'Pouvoir, modernité et monopole masculin de la politique: le cas français', in Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 39-61 (p. 43)



aspirations légitimes des femmes à exercer le pouvoir.' ('a patriarchy (or a "machocracy") which leaves little room for a true democracy and the legitimate aspirations of women ... to hold power.')<sup>82</sup> The idea of mixed political institutions is still not widely accepted, she argues, and the political arena is still presented as being masculine.

The representation of institutions or sites of power as masculine has implications for the reproduction of power relations between women and men, and contributes to the continued exclusion of women from scientific knowledge, in Michelle Le Doeuff's example, and from political power, as described by Mariette Sineau. Revealing the ways in which this image is maintained, whether or not it matches reality, Le Doeuff and Sineau reject the gender-neutral status of masculinity, and instead examine it as gendered. Once politics is seen as masculine rather than gender-neutral, it is easier to identify the mechanisms by which it continues to exclude women.

In Britain, Cynthia Cockburn demonstrates a similar process in the printworking industry. She argues that printworking acquired a masculine identity which outlived any reasons associated with the size and the weight of the machinery, for example. Despite the arrival of new technology which removed any need for physical strength, a strongly masculine identity was retained in an attempt to exclude women and therefore prevent the fall in wages which accompanies the feminisation of any industry.<sup>83</sup>

#### THE REPRODUCTION OF POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SEXES

The third area is the consideration of the reproduction of power relations between the sexes and of dominant masculine identities. According to Devreux and the previous work of the APRE research teams, social relations of sex are reproduced as a structure by individuals. Their reproduction can mean both the maintenance of the structure as it is or its change: 'ce sont bien les acteurs sociaux pris dans ces rapports (et simultanément dans d'autres) qui par leurs actes et leurs pensées recréent indéfiniment ces conditions d'existence du rapport'. ('it is indeed the social actors involved in these relations (and at the same time in other relations) who, through their thoughts and actions, re-create indefinitely the conditions necessary to the existence of these relations'.)<sup>84</sup> Social relations of sex are seen as a system, and the question of their

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<sup>82</sup>Sineau, Mariette, 'Pouvoir, modernité et monopole masculin de la politique: le cas français', in Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 39-61 (p. 41)

<sup>83</sup>Cockburn, Cynthia, Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change, London: Pluto, 1983

<sup>84</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Les rapports de sexe constituent un rapport social et les hommes en sont l'un des termes: conséquences sur la construction des objets d'analyse', in Cahiers de l'APRE: Les rapports sociaux de sexe: problématiques, méthodologies, champs d'analyses, Actes de la table ronde internationale des 24-5 et 26 novembre 1987, Paris: CNRS, 1988, pp. 150-7 (p. 151)



reproduction is thus a question of the reproduction of the bases of this system and of its structural components. Thus, the reproduction of social relations of sex implies the maintenance for the dominants or the change for the dominated of family structures, the labour market, the production of children, etc., or more probably, the maintenance or development of all of these together. Devreux's hypothesis is that:

si le rapport entre les deux termes s'est modifié dans un sens ou dans l'autre, c'est bien que le statut relatif de chaque catégorie sociale par rapport à l'autre a changé mais c'est aussi que les individus (cette fois biologiquement hommes ou femmes) ont pu connaître un déplacement dans le rapport, soit au sein de leur catégorie, soit même d'une catégorie à l'autre.

if the relation between the two terms has changed in one way or the other, it is indeed because the relative status of each social category in relation to the other has changed. But it is also because the individuals (this time biological men and women) have moved within the relation, either within their own category or even from one category to the other.<sup>85</sup>

Devreux claims that, in order to consider both the structure and the individual actors, it is necessary to examine both terms of the relation, since the reproduction of social relations of sex requires both the reproduction of men as dominant and the reproduction of women as dominated.

This is the central aspect of another area of Devreux's research which she presents in 'Etre du bon côté'.<sup>86</sup> This article looks at masculinity in the army amongst national service recruits, concentrating on how masculinity is reproduced, and on the interaction between the family and the army in the socialisation of these men. Devreux examines in particular the way in which domestic chores are represented in this all-male environment. They are seen as boring, repetitive, and representing servitude and femininity. They are therefore seen as a punishment and are used in order to emphasise power and hierarchy in the context of what they see as 'women's work'. So at a time when young men are preparing to leave home, the army teaches them to associate washing and housework with inferiority. At the same time it shows them how to escape from these tasks and the inferior status associated with them. So when they leave the army and begin living in a couple, these young men are intent on regaining the masculinity which was temporarily removed from them in the army when they had to

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<sup>85</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Les rapports de sexe constituent un rapport social et les hommes en sont l'un des termes: conséquences sur la construction des objets d'analyse', in Cahiers de l'APRE: Les rapports sociaux de sexe: problématiques, méthodologies, champs d'analyses, Actes de la table ronde internationale des 24-5 et 26 novembre 1987, Paris: CNRS, 1988, pp. 150-7 (p. 152)

<sup>86</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Etre du bon côté', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 147-64



do domestic chores, and this they do by refusing to do anything associated in their minds with femininity and inferiority, in particular washing and housework.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, although the army may appear to be a masculine institution, it is nonetheless a site of gender relations and of gendered socialisation. The army teaches men the hierarchy between what is feminine and what is masculine, and also teaches strategies for maintaining a dominant position in the sexual division of labour. In this non-mixed social space, explanations of the sexual division of labour cannot be based on arguments of natural biological difference. The hierarchy is only defined in terms of social relations of power.<sup>88</sup>

The reproduction of male dominance and a dominant masculine identity is of particular interest to feminists. It is clear that men have an interest in maintaining the situation as it is, although to do this it can be necessary to incorporate a certain amount of flexibility. British feminists have not only demonstrated an interest in the way that power is retained and reproduced<sup>89</sup>, but also the adaptations men have made as a response to feminism, which they interpret as ploys, rather than evidence of fundamental changes.<sup>90</sup>

#### FRENCH AND ANGLO-AMERICAN THEORIES OF GENDER

With the exception of the way in which power relations between men have been central to the Anglo-American, and yet marginal to the French debate, the similarities between the ways in which masculinity has been examined are more striking than the differences. The development from sex rôle to gender theory, for example, took a similar course in France, Britain and the United States. Early structuralist theories of patriarchy and sex class were replaced by more adaptable theories of gender allowing for individual variations on models. Patriarchy, sisterhood and the systemic nature of men's domination of women have been modified to take into account variations in the nature of this domination. In order to do this, some theorists have rejected the term

<sup>87</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Etre du bon côté', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, *BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin*, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 147-64 (p. 164)

<sup>88</sup>Devreux, Anne-Marie, 'Etre du bon côté', in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, *BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin*, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 147-64 (p. 164)

<sup>89</sup>See, for example, Cockburn, Cynthia, *In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations*, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1991

<sup>90</sup>See, for example, Segal, Lynne, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London: Virago, 1990 & Chapman, Rowena, 'The Great Pretender: Variations on the New Man Theme' in Chapman, Rowena & Rutherford, Jonathan (eds.), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988, pp. 225-48



'patriarchy' which they feel is too inflexible, while others have adapted its meaning to incorporate elements of flexibility.<sup>91</sup>

There has also been a common trend from the optimistic belief that masculinity, since it was socially constructed, could be changed, to a re-examination of the mechanisms of social change or reproduction of existing relations. Thus, Lynne Segal examines men's resistance to changes in the sex system, which she describes as understandable, given the threat they could represent for men's dominance<sup>92</sup>, while Rowena Chapman claims that one of the elements of the successful reproduction of male dominance is men's shrewd adaptations to current demands. She argues, for example, that:

... the new man represents not so much a rebellion but an adaptation in masculinity. Men change, but only in order to hold on to power, not to relinquish it. The combination of feminism and social change may have produced a fragmentation in male identity by questioning its assumptions, but the effect of the emergence of the new man has been to reinforce the existing power structure, by producing a hybrid masculinity which is better able and more suited to retain control.<sup>93</sup>

It has become evident in this chapter that, whilst the differences between the French and Anglo-American developments of gender theories have had a significant influence on the way in which the theorisation of masculinity has taken place, the similarities between them have also been responsible for many shared areas of interest. Whilst it is clear that the Questions féministes theorists examined in the first part of the chapter were greatly influenced by contemporary Anglo-American theories of sexual difference, it is perhaps unfortunate that since the early 1980s, there has been little exchange between French and Anglo-American theorists in this area of feminism.

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<sup>91</sup>For examples of both of these positions, see Waters, Malcolm, 'Patriarchy and Viriarchy: An Exploration and Reconstruction of Concepts of Masculine Domination', Sociology, no. 23, May 1989, pp. 193-211 & Walby, Sylvia, Theorising Patriarchy, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990

<sup>92</sup>Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990

<sup>93</sup>Chapman, Rowena, 'The Great Pretender: Variations on the New Man Theme' in Chapman, Rowena & Rutherford, Jonathan (eds.), Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988, pp. 225-48, p. 235



## CHAPTER 5: THE 'MOUVEMENT DE LIBÉRATION DES FEMMES' AND MALE VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN

This chapter examines the attention paid by the French women's movement to the question of male violence towards women. Its aim is to identify certain trends in the way in which the problem has been approached and the ideas which have been produced in attempts to explain it. The main argument is that feminists in France concerned with male violence towards women have shown a growing interest in the perpetrators, and this has produced certain ideas about violent men and the construction of masculine identity. The chapter discusses firstly, how this interest developed and secondly, what ideas have emerged.<sup>1</sup>

The first trend which will be identified is in feminist action around the problem. It will be argued that from an exclusive interest in the victim of male violence, some feminists have now begun to pay more attention to the perpetrator. So, whereas in the 1970s and early 1980s, the immediate priority was to open refuges for the women victims, by the late 1980s, some feminists were advocating the creation of centres for violent men.

The second trend concerns the changing ideas about male violence, where questions such as why particular women are the victims of certain kinds of violence are increasingly giving way to questions such as why certain men become violent.

A third and closely related trend can also be identified. This is the shift in practical feminist priorities from dealing with the effects of male violence (for example, helping the victims to speak out or campaigning for the proper trial and punishment of the perpetrators), to searching for ways to prevent it, through therapy for violent men or campaigns for better sex education in schools.

The increasing interest in prevention necessitated a better understanding of *why* some men are violent towards women. The analyses of the reasons behind male violence, which were produced in an attempt to find ways to reduce the problem, will be examined in the final part of this chapter. The way in which these analyses began to look at the problem of male violence as an expression of the power relations between the sexes will be examined in chapter 6.

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<sup>1</sup>In my search for the beginnings of an interest in men and masculinity, I do not intend to minimise the importance of all the feminist work on women as victims of male violence, which not only had to precede any feminist analysis of men and masculinity, as will be shown below, but also still continues today.



A problem with the organisation of the narrative is, however, that the development of feminist action and ideas did not always occur at the same rate. Although they sometimes developed in parallel, the theory emerging directly out of the practice and changing with it, there were also times when they were not so closely linked. This chapter, then, will attempt to demonstrate the development firstly in feminist practice, then in feminist ideas resulting from this practice, and to explain both the connections and the discontinuities between the two.

A final point which needs to be clarified before this account can begin is the definition of male violence towards women. The fact that I have concentrated almost exclusively on this form of violence does not mean that it is the most prevalent; victims of male violence are far more often men than women. Neither does it mean that this type of violence is sexual (in the sense of genital), whereas male violence towards men is not; men (and especially boys) are also raped by other men. Finally, it should not obscure the fact that some women are also violent, beating and raping men, children or other women. The specificity of male violence towards women is, as far as feminists are concerned, that it is an expression of a much broader system of domination of women by men, and it is within this context that the following account of French feminist considerations of this violence is situated.

Feminist interest in male violence towards women at the beginning of the 1970s concentrated initially on rape, but other forms followed one after another, from domestic violence, incest, female excision, marital rape and pornography to sexual harassment. While this progression will be pointed out during the following account, not all of the debates can be examined in detail. In the early sections of this chapter, which deal with feminist events and theories in the 1970s, I have chosen to concentrate mainly on rape and domestic violence, since these were the major feminist interests at the time. However, during the 1980s, many more feminists began to connect different types of male violence and to talk of 'violences' in the plural, which were then theorised as different expressions of male power. For example, much of the theorisation of sexual harassment which has taken place in the last few years, particularly by Marie-Victoire Louis and other members of the Association contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail (AVFT), sees sexual harassment as just one type of male violence towards women, all of which, they argue, are situated on a continuum. So, whereas in the early parts of this chapter, there are sections entitled 'rape' and 'domestic violence', later (and especially in chapter 6) the different forms of violence are examined together as aspects of a more coherent whole, thus reflecting the changes that have taken place in the way that these different aspects of male violence towards women are seen by feminists.



## Feminist Action around Male Violence during the 1970s

In France, as in Britain, violence against women has been a major concern for feminists since the early 1970s, when they first began to expose the seriousness of the problem and its massive occurrence. Initially the priorities were raising public consciousness, campaigning for legislative reform and providing aid for the women victims. This feminist action will be examined here, and then the ideas which emerged from it will be discussed.

The problem of violence against women mobilised feminists in France as early as 1972, when the first demonstration against crimes against women took place in Paris.<sup>2</sup> Until the 'Loi Veil' was passed on 29 November 1974, legalising abortion under certain circumstances, abortion remained the major issue for feminist campaigns. However, although it was only a partial victory for feminism, given the initial temporary status of the law and its limitations, it seemed to many feminists in 1974 as though the abortion issue was now over. Consequently, during the second half of the 1970s, violence replaced abortion as the main focal point of feminist interest, as can be seen from the contents page of any feminist journal from this period.<sup>3</sup> The initial priorities were to raise public awareness of the extent of the problem and to provide aid for the victims.

### AID FOR THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

One of the first feminist organisations formed specifically to provide aid for women victims of violence was SOS femmes et alternative, which was created in 1975 by two of the groups within the Ligue du droit des femmes: the legal group and the group which produced their journal Les nouvelles féministes. In October 1975, they set up a telephone helpline. Within the first month they had answered 200 calls from all over France.<sup>4</sup>

Helplines enabled women to talk about the violence they had experienced (and for many, this was the first time they had done that); to discover that they were not alone as victims of violence; and to discuss the possibilities of escaping from it and/or beginning

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<sup>2</sup>Casalis, Marie-France, 'Viol' in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 259-66 (p. 262)

<sup>3</sup>For a selection of early examples of the growing interest in violence towards women, see Peron, Martine le, 'Priorité aux violées', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 83-92; Des féministes révolutionnaires, 'Justice patriarcale et peine de viol', Alternatives, no. 1, Paris: Editions Alternatives et Parallèles, juin 1977, pp. 15-17; Collin, Françoise, 'Entre le chien et le loup', Cahiers du GRIF, nos. 14-15, 'Violence', décembre 1976, pp. 3-9; and for a first-hand account of the period, see Halimi, Gisèle, La cause des femmes, Nouvelle Edition, Paris: Gallimard, 1992

<sup>4</sup>Les Nouvelles Féministes, no. 10 'SOS Femmes-Alternatives' in Agence femmes information, Dossier femmes battues, Paris: Agence femmes information, 1980



legal proceedings. However, a growing understanding of the tremendous problems confronting victims of domestic violence when they finally decide to try to leave home provoked an awareness of the need for women's refuges, and the long struggle began which culminated in the opening of the first: the Refuge Flora Tristan at Clichy in 1978.<sup>5</sup> The idea was to provide a place where women - and their children - could stay, where they would be safe from violence and where they would receive the help they needed to begin a new life. This included finding a job and somewhere to live, perhaps moving the children to a new school, beginning divorce proceedings, as well as regaining the self-esteem and independence which had been crushed by years of abuse and humiliation. The provision of the material and psychological support required by women in this situation was the main priority for feminists. Feminist publications from the 1970s suggest that their main interest was in the victim, and there is little evidence of the explicit consideration of men and masculinity and its relation to male violence towards women.

#### PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

In France, as elsewhere, the main aims of the feminist campaigns around rape during the 1970s were to break the silence, to explain to women that they should not be ashamed of having been raped, and to encourage them to press charges. In 1974, several hundred women joined in a night-time demonstration organised by the *Féministes révolutionnaires* and the *Pétroleuses* to protest against the fact that women were unable to go out safely at night. In 1976, feminists published a 'Manifeste contre le viol' in *Libération*<sup>6</sup>. On the 26th June 1976, the signatories organised a demonstration against rape, in which around 4000 women took part.<sup>7</sup>

Their aim was to raise public awareness of the extent and seriousness of male violence towards women, and to destroy the myths surrounding it. The importance of the 'demystification' of rape was that it aimed to lay the responsibility for this crime fully on men, instead of blaming women for 'getting themselves raped', or worse, 'asking for it'. For instance, feminists insisted that rapists are not a species apart, but ordinary men, often married and from all social classes. They challenged the belief that women enjoy being raped, and that they *unconsciously* 'ask for it'. By stating that this desire is unconscious, the insistence of the victim that it was the last thing she wanted is

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<sup>5</sup>Press reports concerning this opening are collected in Agence femmes information, *Dossier femmes battues*, Paris: Agence femmes information, 1980

<sup>6</sup>'Manifeste contre le viol', in *Libération*, le 16 juin 1976, quoted in Casalis, Marie-France, 'Viol' in Centre fédéral FEN, *Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent*, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 259-66 (p. 262)

<sup>7</sup>Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, *Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-1990)*, Paris: Editions Payot, 1991 (p. 195)



undermined; even if she did not recognise it, the desire was present in her subconscious, and this led her to behave in a provocative manner. This, feminists insisted, is a male fantasy, which they attacked with the slogan 'Quand une femme dit non, c'est non!' ('When a woman says no, she means no!').<sup>8</sup> They argued that women are not responsible for male violence; they do not 'ask to be raped', nor can they be said to provoke some kind of uncontrollable sexual desire in men. This idea of men's sexuality as uncontrollable was also attacked. Feminist lawyer, Martine Le Péron, for example, wrote the following in Questions féministes:

...nous remettons en cause la notion de 'sexualité irrépressible' de l'homme. Cette 'thèse' apparaît généralement dans les procès pour viol, lorsque l'avocat général ... essaie de trouver ce qui dans le comportement de la victime a pu aiguïser le désir du violeur, lui faire perdre son contrôle. Ce qui est sous-jacent à cette recherche, c'est d'abord l'idée que l'homme - du fait de sa nature - pourrait perdre tous les attributs ordinairement dévolus à l'être humain (raison, intelligence...), pour s'égarer en un ailleurs où ses pulsions les plus primaires le domineraient.

...we dispute the notion of men's 'uncontrollable sexuality'. This 'theory' is generally put forward during rape trials when the assistant public prosecutor ... attempts to find something in the victim's behaviour which could have stimulated the rapist's sexual desires and caused him to lose control. Implicit in this approach is the idea that men - because of their nature - can suddenly lose all the characteristics normally attributed to human beings (reason, intelligence, etc.) and can be taken over by their most basic drives.<sup>9</sup>

That the myths surrounding rape played a prominent part in the proceedings of rape trials, and that this also served to perpetuate and reinforce these myths, was becoming a common feminist accusation. Martine Le Péron cited, for example, the defence of one woman's rapists:

Mais, qu'est-ce qu'elle a eu de la chance d'être violée par de beaux gars comme ça. Certes, c'est une femme mignonne, mais regardez les violeurs et vous vous appercevrez qu'elle n'a pu y prendre que du plaisir; dès lors peut-on parler de viol?

But isn't she lucky to have been raped by good-looking lads like these. Of course, she is an attractive woman, but just take a look at these rapists and you will realise that she cannot have experienced anything other than pleasure. In which case, can we continue to speak of rape?<sup>10</sup>

The way that rape trials are conducted and the attitudes of the courts towards the victims are still criticised today, as will be seen at later points in this chapter. However, during the 1970s, feminists were involved in another struggle, this time for a new law against rape.

<sup>8</sup>Granger, Anne-Marie, 'Viol: solidarité', Cahiers du féminisme, no. 43, hiver 1987, pp. 9-10 (p. 9)

<sup>9</sup>Péron, Martine le, 'Priorité aux violées', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 83-92 (p. 87)

<sup>10</sup>Péron, Martine le, 'Priorité aux violées', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 83-92 (p. 88)



## THE FIGHT FOR LEGAL REFORM

As far as feminists were concerned, there were two major problems with the legal situation as it stood. These were firstly, that during rape trials all sorts of myths and prejudices were expressed which operated in the favour of the rapist(s), and secondly that the existing laws against rape were inadequate. As will be shown in this section, the main problem was that there was no legal definition of rape, leaving it to the judges and magistrates, operating within the context of the very myths feminists were denouncing, to decide whether or not the act committed constituted 'rape'. Feminist criticisms of the judges' practical understanding of rape will be discussed, along with other criticisms of the law and the proceedings of rape trials. This will be followed by a consideration of the law passed in 1980, and the effects of this change.

Before 1980, the law against rape was found in Article 332 of the Penal Code, which had been passed on 28 April 1832. According to this, the crime of rape was punishable with a prison sentence of ten to twenty years. Article 333, instituted by a law passed on 13 May 1863, allowed for the harsher sentence of life imprisonment under particular circumstances, and especially in the case of group rapes. Other indecent acts with violence were considered to be 'attentats à la pudeur', attacks on public decency, and were punishable with a sentence of five to ten years imprisonment, ten to twenty years if the victim was under fifteen.<sup>11</sup>

Laws existed, therefore, according to which rape was a crime punishable with relatively severe prison sentences. However, the major problem in translating this law into the practical conviction of rapists was that there was no legal definition of rape. In Britain, rape is defined by the Sexual Offences Act 1956, although the restrictive nature of this definition, which concentrates only on sexual intercourse without the woman's consent has also posed problems.<sup>12</sup> In France, rape was not legally defined and gradually acquired an accepted meaning as a result of the decisions made by magistrates. A verdict reached by the Cour de cassation, the court of appeal, on 25 June 1857 stated that:

Il appartient au juge de rechercher et de constater les éléments constitutifs de ce crime d'après son caractère spécial et la gravité des conséquences qu'il peut avoir pour les victimes et pour l'honneur des familles; que ce crime consiste dans le fait d'abuser d'une personne, contre sa volonté, soit qu'il résulte de tout

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<sup>11</sup>Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-1990), Paris: Editions Payot, 1991 (pp. 194-5)

<sup>12</sup>See Lees, Sue, 'Judicial Rape', Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 11-36



autre moyen de contrainte ou de surprise pour atteindre, en dehors de la volonté de la victime, le but que se propose l'auteur de l'action.

It is up to the judge to ascertain and to record the constitutive elements of this crime, according to its own particular characteristics and the seriousness of the consequences which it might have for the victims and for the honour of the family involved; whether this crime consists in the abuse of a person against their will, or whether it is the result of any other method of constraint or surprise which enables the perpetrator to achieve their aim against the will of the victim.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the law against rape, the absence of a legal definition meant that in practice, rape was very narrowly interpreted. For feminists there were three major problems. Firstly, they argued, the assessment made by judges of the seriousness of the consequences often concentrated more on whether or not the honour of the victim's family was harmed, than on the consequences for the woman herself. In other words, the decision about whether an attack could be defined as rape in practice often depended on whether or not it could lead to the birth of an illegitimate child. Based on this view, it was clear that a rape, in order to be recognised as such, must include penetration, and did not include, for example, sodomy nor penetration with an object, nor could it be committed on a man. Secondly, it could only be committed by a man on a woman who was not his wife; marital rape did not exist because it contradicted the notion of 'marital duties', and because a child who was born as the result of such a rape would not be illegitimate. Thirdly, there was the question of consent, which became the lynchpin of rape trials. This meant that many defence lawyers based their defence on the argument that the victim did in fact consent, or that her behaviour had led the accused to believe that she did. The possibility that this could be used as a defence and that the trial could in fact turn out to be the trial of the woman's responsibility in provoking the rape, her behaviour, her habits, etc., discouraged many rape victims from reporting the crime.<sup>14</sup> The question of consent has held a similar central position in rape trials in Britain, with the same consequences for the victims. This has led to feminist action aiming to achieve legal reform, although it has not yet been successful.<sup>15</sup>

In France, one of the consequences of the absence of a legal definition and the narrow interpretation of the term by the courts, was that many rape cases which were brought before the magistrates' courts were subsequently downgraded, and the rapists were tried instead for assault and grievous bodily harm or indecent acts. In the French

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<sup>13</sup>quoted by Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-1990), Paris: Editions Payot, 1991 (p. 190)

<sup>14</sup>Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-1990), Paris: Editions Payot, 1991 (p. 191)

<sup>15</sup>See for example the account of the experiences of women victims in a sample of rape trials attended by Sue Lees in 'Judicial Rape', Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 11-36



judicial system, assault and grievous bodily harm and indecent acts constitute criminal offences (*délits*), whereas rape constitutes a crime (*crime*), which is more serious. This means that, whereas rape is judged by the Cour d'assises, assault and grievous bodily harm and indecent acts are judged by *tribunaux correctionnels*, which award less severe sentences than the 10-20 years imprisonment which could be imposed by the Cour d'assises until the introduction of the new law in December 1980. French feminists therefore saw the struggle to have cases defined as rape, and therefore as a crime, as important.

As will be shown below, it was not the imprisonment of individual rapists for long periods of time which was at issue for many feminists. In fact, a vicious debate surrounded the question of imprisonment both between feminists and the Left, and amongst feminists themselves. What feminists did want was the recognition that rape was serious, and one way to reinforce this point was through the conviction of rapists.<sup>16</sup> A feminist strategy which was employed in order to draw attention to the seriousness of rape and the need for its condemnation was to focus public attention on individual trials. Several feminist lawyers were involved in this strategy, including Gisèle Halimi, who had pleaded for the defence in the Bobigny abortion trial in 1972, which had been a watershed in the progression to the legalisation of abortion. It was Halimi again who defended Anne Tonglet and Aracelli Castellano in the trial which was to play a central part in the subsequent feminist campaigns for the introduction of a new law against rape.<sup>17</sup>

It concerned the rape in 1974 of two young Belgian women, Anne Tonglet and Aracelli Castellano, who were camping close to Marseilles. The three men who raped them had been charged with the lesser offence of assault and grievous bodily harm, because, according to the magistrate, the women had not struggled hard enough to demonstrate a lack of consent. About forty feminists were present at the first hearing on the 17 September 1975, during which the women's lawyers pleaded incompetence of the court on the grounds that the men were not being charged for rape. The court and the court of appeal both judged that the case should be defined as a crime and that it should therefore go before the Cour d'assises in Aix-en-Provence. The court found the rapists guilty, sentencing one to six years imprisonment and the other two to four years. This case convinced feminists that rape should move to the top of the agenda. During the 1970s, feminist lawyers demanded more and more often that rape cases which had been

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<sup>16</sup>Péron, Martine le, 'Priorité aux violées', *Questions féministes*, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 83-92

<sup>17</sup>See the account of the trial in Halimi, Gisèle, *Viol: le procès d'Aix-en-Provence*, Paris: Gallimard, 1978



'disqualified' into assault and grievous bodily harm or indecent acts, should go before the Cour d'assises.<sup>18</sup>

Following this trial, the definition of rape as a crime and the recognition of this by the courts became a feminist priority. A long battle began to achieve this aim, a battle which was not helped by accusations by men on the Left that, by insisting on the conviction of rapists for their crime, feminists were supporting the bourgeois legal system.<sup>19</sup> In response to this, feminists argued that if rapists were not brought before the courts, as other criminals were, this did not bring into question the current form of punishment (many feminists were equally opposed to imprisonment), it simply demonstrated that rape was not considered a crime.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1975 and 1978, most feminists were in favour of using the legal system in the fight against rape; only a small minority advocated other means of punishing rapists, such as publicising their crime in the vicinity of their home or workplace. However, the debate around imprisonment came to split feminists too, and the divide was aggravated by a series of heavy sentences passed in 1978. The main split was between, on the one hand, Choisir, led by Gisèle Halimi, and La ligue du droit des femmes, who supported the incarceration of rapists in the same way as other criminals, and, on the other hand, Colette Auger, Monique Antoine and Josyane Moutet of the Collectif juridique de défense des femmes, who supported suspended sentences for rapists along with the payment of damages to the victim.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not they agreed on the type of punishment, all feminists saw the recognition of rape as a crime as a vital step, and the need for a change in the law became more and more evident. In 1978, a series of bills was brought before the Assemblée nationale and the Senate<sup>22</sup>, and two years later the new law was passed.<sup>23</sup> Feminist pressure played

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<sup>18</sup>Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-1990), Paris: Editions Payot, 1991 (p. 195)

<sup>19</sup>For further details of this debate, see Péron, Martine le, 'Priorité aux violées', Questions féministes, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 83-92

<sup>20</sup>Des féministes révolutionnaires, 'Justice patriarcale et peine de viol', Alternatives, no. 1, Paris: Editions Alternatives et Parallèles, juin 1977, pp. 15-17 (p. 15)

<sup>21</sup>Auger, Colette, 'Le viol en justice': Entretien, Cahiers du féminisme, no. 33, automne 1985, pp. 11-13 (p. 11)

<sup>22</sup>The first was by Brigitte Gros and other senators: Proposition de loi no. 324, Sénat, annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 20 avril 1978; the two other bills presented to the senate were by Robert Schwint and the members of the socialist group (Proposition no. 324, Sénat, annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 1er juin 1978) and Hélène Luc and the members of the communist group (Proposition no. 445, Sénat, annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 15 juin 1978). The first bill presented to the Assemblée nationale was by Florence d'Harcourt and thirty-one other deputies (Proposition no. 271, enregistrée à la présidence de l'Assemblée nationale le 17 mai 1978). The other two were presented by François Mitterrand and the members of the socialist group, and Gisèle Moreau and the communist group. These were both identical to the bills presented to the Senate by their respective groups. All



an important rôle in the parliamentary debates, and some of their concerns were reflected in the law. For example, the definition of rape was broadened to include 'tout acte de pénétration sexuelle, de quelque nature que ce soit, commis sur la personne d'autrui, par violence, contrainte ou surprise'. ('any act of penetration, of any nature, committed on another person with the use of violence, constraint or surprise') (article 332 of the penal code).<sup>24</sup>

In theory, then, rape now included forced sex between spouses, penetration with any object, and fellatio. However, throughout the 1980s, feminists argued that the changes in the law had failed to be translated into practice. For instance, they argued that the courts still seemed to have difficulty admitting that fellatio or penetration with objects constituted rape.<sup>25</sup>

Rape trials continued to hinge on the question of consent, and feminist attacks on the way in which the trials were conducted did not change much as a result of the new legislation. According to 'féministes révolutionnaires', writing in 1977, the crucial question for the courts was not whether or not a rape had taken place, but whether or not it was 'justified'.<sup>26</sup> They claimed that it was so difficult for women to prove that they were neither consenting nor responsible for their rape that:

seule une femme mariée, enfermée chez elle, en compagnie, habillée jusqu'au cou, peut être reconnue comme victime: c'est-à-dire quand le viol était non seulement matériellement impossible, mais surtout *socialement injustifié*, du point de vue du patriarcat.

only a woman who is married, at home with the door locked and in company, and clothed from head to toe can be recognised as a victim. That is, when the rape was not only physically impossible, but most of all *socially unjustified* from the point of view of the patriarchal system.<sup>27</sup>

Feminists protested that the conduct of the rape trial turns the victim into the defendant, in that she has to undergo various tests and investigations into her personal life. This, they argued, positions rape as different to all other crimes, in that it is potentially the

cited by Mossuz-Lavau, Janine, Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France (1950-1990), Paris: Editions Payot, 1991 (pp. 217-19)

<sup>23</sup>Law no. 80-1041 of the 23 December 1980, which appeared in the Journal officiel on the 24 December 1980

<sup>24</sup>Rameau, Jean-Luc, 'Evolution juridique', in Homophonies, Mensuel homosexuel et lesbien du comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle, no. 54, avril 1985, special number on 'Viol et violences sexuelles', pp. 30-1 (p. 30)

<sup>25</sup>Granger, Anne-Marie, 'Viol: solidarité', Cahiers du féminisme, no. 43, hiver 1987, pp. 9-10 (p. 10)

<sup>26</sup>Des féministes révolutionnaires, 'Justice patriarcale et peine de viol', Alternatives, no. 1, Paris: Editions Alternatives et Parallèles, juin 1977, pp. 15-17

<sup>27</sup>Des féministes révolutionnaires, 'Justice patriarcale et peine de viol', Alternatives, no. 1, Paris: Editions Alternatives et Parallèles, juin 1977, pp. 15-17 (p. 16)



victim who is guilty (of provocation). As Gisèle Halimi argued in her bill proposing the end to 'enquêtes de moralité' for rape victims in 1984:

L'enquête de police effectuée sur la victime s'inscrit en fait dans une pratique judiciaire où la présomption d'innocence joue pleinement en faveur de l'inculpé, la victime étant au contraire présumée coupable, ou pour le moins suspecte. D'une femme violée, on attend qu'elle prouve sa propre résistance à l'agresseur et son défaut de consentement. De plaignante, elle devient accusée, soumise aux allégations sarcastiques de policiers, de juges ou d'avocats.

The police enquiry which is carried out on the victim in fact forms part of a judicial practice in which the presumption of innocence operates in favour of the accused. The victim, on the other hand, is presumed guilty, or at least suspect. A woman who has been raped is expected to prove her own resistance towards her attacker and her lack of consent. The plaintiff becomes the accused, and is subjected to the sarcastic allegations of police officers, judges and lawyers.<sup>28</sup>

As will be seen later in this chapter, feminists continued to criticise those investigations into the victim's personal history throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

### **Feminist Theories Concerning Male Violence during the 1970s**

On a theoretical level, feminists during the 1970s were developing critiques of violence as a form of social control. Violence, they argued, is fundamental to the functioning of patriarchy, and rape, or the threat of rape, operates as a means of limiting women's freedom. For example, in an article published in *Alternatives* in 1977, 'des féministes révolutionnaires' argued that women were unable to do certain things unaccompanied by a man, such as going out after dark, hitch-hiking or camping. The 'féministes révolutionnaires' claimed that, although this behaviour would not necessarily result in their being raped, if they were, they would be expected to explain why they had been there without a man, and to provide a good defence against accusations that through this behaviour they had provoked the attack. Women are therefore controlled by a socially constructed risk of rape which keeps women in their place in the patriarchal order, they concluded.<sup>29</sup> Feminist lawyer, Martine Le Péron, argued in 1978 that the rapist maintains the patriarchal order in that women, through fear of rape, restrict their own movements. She stated that the judicial system sees no reason why it should suppress rape, since it is part of the patriarchal structure whose interests the rapist serves.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Halimi, Gisèle, *La cause des femmes*, Nouvelle Edition, Paris: Gallimard, 1992 (p. 286)

<sup>29</sup>Des féministes révolutionnaires, 'Justice patriarcale et peine de viol', *Alternatives*, no. 1, Paris: Editions Alternatives et Parallèles, juin 1977, pp. 15-17 (p. 16)

<sup>30</sup>Péron, Martine le, 'Priorité aux Violées', *Questions Féministes*, no. 3, mai 1978, pp. 83-92 (pp. 89-90)



Part of the construction of a theory of violence as a form of social control was the deconstruction of biological explanations. Feminists argued that male violence was not the result of men's 'natural aggression' or 'uncontrollable sexuality', but rather an expression of the power relations between men and women. To support this argument, Françoise Collin argued, for example, that in positions of institutional power, women have shown themselves to be just as violent as men, as was discovered to be the case in Nazi concentration camps.<sup>31</sup> This was not to deny, however, that the problem of violence was largely one of *male* violence; women are usually the victims, and men are usually the perpetrators. She writes that, '*il existe une forme de violence qui est exercée par les hommes contre les femmes en tant que femmes, une violence sexuée et qui n'est pas réciproque*'. (*there is a form of violence which is committed by men against women as women; a gendered violence which is not reciprocal.*)<sup>32</sup>

During the 1970s, then, the relationship between violence and power was explored, and the links between the two have been at the centre of much of the theoretical production around the subject since then. All feminists emphasised that rape is a crime, and that this must be recognised. Reflecting the practical concerns of feminists at the time - to provide aid for victims and to fight for legal reform - interest in the rapist himself was limited. If some theorists took the time to argue against biological explanations of why men rape, they did not go any further in an exploration of the links between masculinity and violence. It was patriarchy as a system which was responsible, and all men, as the beneficiaries of this system, were potential rapists. However, this gradually began to change during the 1980s, as more attention began to be paid to the perpetrators of male violence in a search for an explanation of their actions.

### **Feminist Thought and Action against Rape in the 1980s**

As was explained above, the introduction on 23 December 1980, of a new law on rape did not bring an end to feminist criticisms of the way in which the law was applied. The main objection, made by feminist lawyers in particular, was to the numerous experts' assessments which the victim has to undergo, even though they are no more compulsory in trials for rape than for any other crime.<sup>33</sup> Feminist lawyers object to the fact that, although it is not a legal requirement, the rape victim usually has to have a psychiatric test in order to establish her 'credibility', a notion which, they argue, has no

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<sup>31</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Entre le chien et le loup', Cahiers du GRIF, nos. 14-15, 'Violence', décembre 1976, pp. 3-9 (p. 3)

<sup>32</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Entre le chien et le loup', Cahiers du GRIF, nos. 14-15, 'Violence', décembre 1976, pp. 3-9 (p. 5) Emphasis in original.

<sup>33</sup>Auger, Colette, 'Voleurs acquittés: viol légalisé' Nouvelles questions féministes, no. 4, automne 1982, pp. 97-100 (p. 97)



scientific basis and rests on a subjective evaluation by the 'expert' involved. The victim has to have a medical examination to establish whether there is any physical damage and a gynaecological examination to establish the presence of any sexually transmitted diseases. An investigation of her past life and personality is also conducted. Feminist lawyers argue that these expert assessments add little to the evidence of the incident in question. In the case of rape by a stranger or strangers, at least, any knowledge about the victim's previous life or personality obtained during the police investigation could have no bearing on the rape, since the rapist(s) would not have known any of it. Neither could any knowledge about the victim's personality or past history help establish whether or not she had consented to sex with that particular person on that particular occasion. The object of these experts' assessments is, they argue, to establish whether the victim's behaviour could in any way have 'provoked' the rapist, and to establish the likelihood of her having consented. Feminists claim that the notion of 'likelihood' or 'probability' which is employed in order to assess whether or not there was consent appears particularly spurious when the knowledge that the victim is a lesbian can be used to demonstrate that her consent was more probable than if she had been heterosexual, as was the case with Marie-Andrée Marion, whose attackers were acquitted in September 1982. Feminist lawyer Colette Auger argued after this acquittal that the only contribution these experts' assessments could make to a rape trial was to establish whether or not the victim's personality and past history meant that she *deserved* to be raped, as a punishment for parting from society's norms.<sup>34</sup>

For many feminists, the three rapes which took place in broad daylight in Paris in 1985 without a single witness intervening or coming forward afterwards to testify could only be seen as a sign that nothing had improved since the introduction of the new legislation. Despite the fact that there was still much to be done on the legal front, the most important thing for many feminists was to provide support and help for the victims. The series of public rapes led to the creation in June 1985 of the Collectif féministe contre le viol, by the Mouvement français pour le planning familial, Mouvement jeunes femmes, Maison des femmes, and Halte aide aux femmes battues.<sup>35</sup> In 1986, they established a telephone helpline, Viol-femmes-informations.<sup>36</sup> Other feminist groups concentrated their efforts on the provision of information, legal aid and support for the victims of rape. During the 1980s, this type of feminist action increased, in contrast to the 1970s which was dominated by efforts to raise public

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<sup>34</sup>Auger, Colette, 'Voleurs acquittés: viol légalisé', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, no. 4, automne 1982, pp. 97-100 (p. 98)

<sup>35</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le collectif féministe contre le viol: un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 217)

<sup>36</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, in *Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus*, no. 5, juin 1987, pp. 25-9 (p. 25)



awareness, for example, by focusing attention on certain trials and by publicising the details of the rape in the area where the rapist lived and worked.<sup>37</sup>

Although the emphasis was still on women as victims of violence, the 1980s also saw a growing (if still limited) interest in men and masculinity. Feminists had begun to consider the violent man and not just the victim. Attention was drawn to the ordinariness of rapists and men who are violent in the home, and the notion that there is something different about them was slowly being worn away:

Le frappeur, comme le violeur, est apparemment un homme comme les autres.... Il ne s'agit pas, comme on l'entend trop souvent, d'alcooliques notoires ou de brutes sauvages. Il existe des frappeurs dans toutes les classes sociales.

It seems that men who beat their partners, like rapists, are men just like any others.... They are not, as is too often said, notorious alcoholics or savage brutes. There are violent men in all classes of society.<sup>38</sup>

The idea that women are raped by strangers in dark and lonely alleys was also challenged. The Collectif féministe contre le viol, for example, basing their statistics on the calls received by Viol-femmes-informations, stated that 40% of rapes occur in places where women thought they were safe (31.2% at home, 7.5% in the workplace, in sports clubs, etc.) and were committed by men they knew.<sup>39</sup>

Rape continued to be theorised as a means of the social control of women, and feminists argued forcefully against any claims that it was caused by provocation, frustration, or sexual or emotional problems. These excuses, argued Marie-France Casalis of the Mouvement français pour le planning familial, exist only to absolve men of all responsibility and to shift it onto women.<sup>40</sup>

### Domestic Violence

Rape was not the only type of male violence experienced by women, and feminists also began to expose the enormity of the problem of domestic violence. They aimed to bring domestic violence out of the private domain, where men were able to do what they wanted without interference, and to make it a subject for public debate. As Geneviève Devèze wrote in an article entitled 'Femmes battues: brisons le mur du silence':

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<sup>37</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le collectif féministe contre le viol: un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 217)

<sup>38</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Femmes battues: brisons le mur du silence 1', in Paris féministe, juin-juillet 1984, pp. 19-24 (p. 21)

<sup>39</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, in Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, no. 5, juin 1987, pp. 25-9 (p. 25)

<sup>40</sup>Casalis, Marie-France, 'Viol' in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 259-66 (p. 259)



Nous constatons, en effet, que si un homme agresse une femme dans la rue, la police intervient. Alors que si ce même homme agresse quotidiennement sa femme ou son amie à l'intérieur de la sacro-sainte sphère familiale, aucun représentant de ce qu'on appelle 'les forces de l'ordre' ne viendra mettre un terme à des violences qu'il peut exercer en toute quiétude.

Indeed, it is clear to us all that, if a man attacks a woman in the street, the police intervene. But if that same man attacks his wife or his girlfriend every day inside the sacrosanct family home, the police do nothing to stop these violent acts, which he can continue to commit undisturbed.<sup>41</sup>

As with rape, domestic violence was surrounded not only by silence, but also by a number of myths which needed to be destroyed. One of these was that domestic violence is a problem concerning a small minority of individuals from certain classes of society. The experience and knowledge acquired from feminist contact with victims in refuges and on helplines demonstrated that such violence was, in fact, widespread and occurred in all social classes. Another widely held belief was that women are responsible for the violence that they suffer in the home: that they enjoy it, that they 'ask for it', and that if they did not like it, then they would not stay with a violent partner. Feminists argued that there were many reasons why women did not, or could not, leave a violent partner. These included the most basic economic reason that most women were financially dependent on their partners, and that the violence that they had experienced over the years had diminished their capacity and their will to assert their independence and overcome these material difficulties. In addition, there is the fear of their partner's reaction and increased violence if they tried to leave, as well as the shame experienced by women victims of domestic violence, the feeling that they have somehow failed.<sup>42</sup>

In 1987, the national federation Solidarité femmes was set up with the aim of destroying these myths, breaking the silence surrounding domestic violence and allowing women to talk about their experiences. The federation is made up of about forty associations all over France, which are contacted each year by about 100 000 women. The associations provide support for women trying to escape from domestic violence, from the provision of information to refuges. They also try to educate the various public services who come into contact with this problem.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Femmes battues: brisons le mur du silence 1', in *Paris féministe*, juin-juillet 1984, pp. 19-24 (p. 20)

<sup>42</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Femmes battues: brisons le mur du silence 1', in *Paris féministe*, juin-juillet 1984, pp. 19-24 (p. 22)

<sup>43</sup>Fédération nationale 'solidarité femmes', 'Il vous bat. Battez-vous!' (Pamphlet)



In 1989, a national public information campaign on domestic violence was organised by the Secrétariat d'état chargé des droits des femmes. The Collectif féministe contre le viol, the Mouvement français pour le planning familial, the Fédération nationale solidarité femmes, and the association SOS-hommes et violence en privé all agreed to participate, answering phone-calls twenty-four hours a day.<sup>44</sup> However, despite recognising the progress represented by the fact that this campaign had at least taken place<sup>45</sup>, feminists were critical of the extent to which it could have any effect, especially given that no extra provisions were made for coping with the response that it would provoke, with the result that all the existing resources were completely overstretched within a couple of days. Isabelle Forest, who was one of the feminists who volunteered to answer phone-calls during the campaign, wrote:

La violence conjugale, quand elle se révèle, met en lumière les différents aspects de l'oppression des femmes: elles ne sont pas seulement battues. Elles sont souvent dépendantes économiquement, étant moins payées en moyenne que les hommes, ou plus souvent au chômage, alors que leurs qualifications éventuelles sont moins bien reconnues sur le marché du travail. Simultanément, elles assument en général la responsabilité des enfants et la charge matérielle qui en résulte, notamment le travail domestique.

Domestic violence, as soon as it is revealed, highlights the different aspects of women's oppression. They are not only beaten; they are often financially dependent, since they are, on average, worse paid than men. They are more often unemployed, and any qualifications they may have are not as well recognised on the labour market. At the same time, they generally take responsibility for the children and for the work that this involves, in particular the housework.<sup>46</sup>

Isabelle Forest claimed that what these women need is more than an information campaign. Their most urgent requirement is the material aid necessary for them to leave their violent partner, and to find somewhere new to live.

Equally critical of the provisions made for the duration of the campaign, Marie-Victoire Louis states in an article which appeared in Les temps modernes in 1990, that the helpline was not free and that, despite the fact that the number of calls it received did not decrease, it was intended only for the length of the campaign, and withdrawn in January 1990.<sup>47</sup> As a result of the campaign, the existing refuges for women victims of

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<sup>44</sup>Forest, Isabelle, 'Violences conjugales: Il ne suffit pas d'en parler', in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 52, printemps 1990, pp. 7-9 (p. 7)

<sup>45</sup>Marie-Victoire Louis, for instance, wrote, 'On ne peut que se réjouir de cette campagne officielle. Elle a eu le grand mérite de poser ce difficile problème.' ('Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 141))

<sup>46</sup>Forest, Isabelle, 'Violences conjugales: Il ne suffit pas d'en parler', in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 52, printemps 1990, pp. 7-9 (p. 9)

<sup>47</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences Conjugales', in Les Temps Modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 142)



male violence received twice as many appeals for help, but no extra resources. Louis writes that the commitment of the Secrétariat d'état chargé des droits des femmes in this campaign was minimal, quoting the Secretary of State, Michèle André:

la campagne a pour but de mieux faire connaître la législation et non que les femmes quittent leur mari, leur domicile conjugal avec leurs enfants pour se retrouver en foyer d'accueil.

the aim of the campaign was to improve knowledge of the law, not for women to leave their husbands and the marital home with their children and go instead to a refuge.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, questions about violent men were being raised. For instance, Geneviève Devèze, despite her primary concerns with the victims, recognised that research needed to be done on why men are violent:

Cette recherche est nécessaire et nous la menons dans un autre cadre, car au sein du foyer Louise-Labé, l'important est avant tout d'offrir aux femmes, quelle que soit leur histoire, un lieu sécurisant en complète rupture avec leur passé de violence et de peur, afin de leur permettre de retrouver leur personnalité et envisager avec calme une véritable réinsertion dans la vie sociale.

This research is necessary, and we are doing it, but in another context, because the main priority in the Louise-Labé refuge is to offer women, whatever their personal history, a safe haven, completely separate from their violent past and free of fear, in order to allow them to rediscover their personality and quietly plan their full re-integration into society.<sup>49</sup>

### Incest and Marital Rape

The more feminists investigated male violence towards women, the greater the number of forms of violence they 'discovered'. As their awareness and knowledge increased and as more and more women gained the confidence and support necessary to speak out against the violence they had experienced, the massive exposure of women to male violence in every area of society became evident. Also, the links between the different types of male violence became clearer, and feminists began to integrate them into a larger picture of male power. By the mid-1980s, then, feminist discussions of male violence incorporated pornography, incest, sexual harassment in the workplace, female genital mutilations and marital rape. Since, during the 1980s, the similarities between the forms of male violence were increasingly stressed and the differences between them simultaneously minimised, it is unnecessary to discuss each manifestation of violence as though they were separate entities. The exposure of incest and marital violence are examined here as examples of the way in which feminist thought and practice around

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<sup>48</sup>André, Michèle, *La liberté du morbihan*, 15 novembre 1989, quoted by Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in *Les temps modernes*, avril 1990, pp. 132-68, pp. 132-68 (p. 143)

<sup>49</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Violences conjugales. Des femmes ne s'avouent pas battues', *Cahiers du féminisme*, no. 33, automne 1985, pp. 18-20 (p. 20)



male violence developed, and in particular the way in which different forms of violence were 'discovered'.

#### INCEST

Until 1985, incest in France was a problem completely surrounded by silence. The first publication to break this silence was a book by Viviane Clarac and Nicole Bonnin, De la honte à la colère, which the authors published at their own expense, such was the lack of interest at the time. In September 1986, the French television channel, Antenne 2, showed a series of 'Dossiers de l'écran' about incest.<sup>50</sup> The next day, the Collectif féministe contre le viol, which had managed to publicise its telephone number during the programme, was inundated with calls from incest survivors, many of whom were talking about their experiences for the first time.<sup>51</sup> Information from the helpline Viol-femmes-informations demonstrated the previously unimaginable extent of incest. In an article published in 1987 in Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, the Collectif féministe contre le viol stated that out of 264 calls received by their helpline, 134 concerned rape, and 130 concerned incest (90 by fathers on daughters, and 40 by brothers on sisters).<sup>52</sup> The main problem with incest, they claimed, is silence: on the one hand the silence resulting from the hypocrisy surrounding all violence in the family, and on the other hand, the silence of the victims. Not only does the victims' silence contribute to the invisibility of incest, but it is also often interpreted as a form of consent. The real reasons for it are, they claimed, that incest victims are unable to talk: because of the threats made by the abuser, because of their feelings of guilt and responsibility, because of the fear of breaking up the family, sending their father to prison, or losing their mother. In addition to the great difficulty of telling someone, those who do manage to talk are silenced or disbelieved, especially if their abuser is someone who is seen as socially 'respectable'.<sup>53</sup> In order to encourage incest victims to talk about their suffering, the Paris group of the collective produced a video in 1988 entitled 'L'inceste, la conspiration des oreilles bouchées'.<sup>54</sup>

The difficulty of incest victims being unable to make themselves heard was one which was identified by a CNRS research project on rape and incest:

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<sup>50</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le collectif féministe contre le viol: un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 219)

<sup>51</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le Collectif féministe contre le viol: Un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', Nouvelles Questions Féministes, nos. 16-17-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 219)

<sup>52</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, in Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, no. 5, juin 1987, pp. 25-9 (p. 26)

<sup>53</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, in Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, no. 5, juin 1987, pp. 25-9 (p. 28)

<sup>54</sup>Granger, Anne-Marie & Trat, Josette, 'Violences contre les femmes. Une lutte de longue haleine', in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 55, hiver 1990, pp. 8-9 (p. 8)



A cet enchaînement logique des faits d'inceste répondent des qualifications juridiques floues: la qualification de viol bute non pas sur la matérialité des faits qui souvent n'est pas contestée mais sur le consentement de la victime. Problème clé du viol, le non-consentement est ici encore plus difficile à prouver de la part de la jeune victime sur qui le soupçon de non-crédibilité pèse fortement.

The logical progression of the facts of incest is met only with vague legal definitions: the definition of the crime as rape does not depend on the reality of the facts, which are rarely disputed, but on the consent of the victim. Proving that the victim did not consent is the main problem with rape, but in the case of a young victim weighed down by the suspicion of non-credibility, the absence of consent is even harder to prove.<sup>55</sup>

In 1989 public attention was brought to the problem of incest by the case of Claudine J., who during a television programme entitled 'Les abus sexuels sur les enfants: briser le silence' had described the abuse inflicted on her during her childhood by her father. Despite the fact that he could not be recognised from her testimony, since she gave neither his name nor the region where he lived, and since he lived in a place where no-one had ever met Claudine, he pressed charges for slander. The trial became an important focus for feminist action, because it was seen as a struggle to prevent the silencing of incest victims at a time when they had only just begun to speak out.

At the time of the trial, the code of criminal law procedure stated that crimes could only be tried within ten years of their occurrence. This meant that fathers guilty of incest were protected from the possibility that their children would bring charges against them when they became adults, since the ten-year time limit began at the time of the abuse. Therefore, any adult saying something along the lines of 'my father raped me' could be taken to court for slander, even if they could prove their case. Claudine J.'s trial, therefore, could not consider whether or not she had suffered incest as a child. She was found guilty of slander and had to pay the symbolic one franc compensation.<sup>56</sup> The day after the verdict had been given, a law was passed stating that in the case of crimes committed against children by a parent or anyone with authority over them, the ten-year limit would now begin when the victim reached the age of eighteen.<sup>57</sup>

The television programme and the media attention which accompanied the ensuing court cases helped to raise public awareness of the problem of incest. However, it was still

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<sup>55</sup>Bordeaux, Michèle et al. 'Viol et violences contre les femmes', in Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS 1989, pp. 69-76 (p. 73)

<sup>56</sup>Le Doeuff, Michelle, 'Un père incestueux attaque sa fille en diffamation', Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, no. 9, octobre 1989, pp. 6-9

<sup>57</sup>Art. 16 of the Loi sur la protection de l'enfance, passed on 14 July 1989



too often ignored. For example, the 1989 public information campaign about violence barely mentioned incest, and when it did, it was presented as a 'family problem'.

Amongst the criticisms expressed by feminists were the following, which appeared in Les cahiers du féminisme :

Le type de 'solutions' préconçus peut aussi nous inquiéter: on met en avant la thérapie familiale comme s'il s'agissait d'un dysfonctionnement de la famille à traiter dans sa globalité, alors qu'il est essentiel et indispensable de faire retomber la responsabilité de ces crimes sur une seule personne: l'agresseur. Bien sûr, si on qualifie la famille de pathogène, on incrimine non seulement la victime elle-même, mais aussi sa mère, responsable de tous les maux: insatisfaction sexuelle de l'agresseur, absences trop fréquentes, mauvaise éducation de l'enfant etc.

The type of 'solution' envisaged is also a cause for concern: family therapy is proposed as though the problem were a malfunction of the family which needed to be treated as a whole, whereas in fact it is imperative to stress that only one person is responsible for this crime: the abuser. Of course, if the family is labelled pathogenic, then it is not only the victim who is incriminated, but also their mother, who is held responsible for everything: the sexual dissatisfaction of the abuser, not being there enough, bringing up the children badly, etc.<sup>58</sup>

The phrase 'incestuous families' also appeared in the CNRS research project entitled 'Viol et violences contre les femmes'.<sup>59</sup> Other feminists have criticised the use of this term, arguing that it is misleading, since it obscures the fact that incest is a crime committed by one person, and that they *alone* are responsible. By referring to incest as an expression of the malfunction of the family, they claim that it holds other members of the family responsible for the criminal actions of one of them. In addition, the CNRS report could be seen as inculcating the rest of the family more directly, stating that it would be impossible to understand how the abuse could continue for so long if it were not for the silence and a sort of 'complicity by abstention' on the part of the other members of the family.<sup>60</sup> Again, this could be interpreted as shifting the blame onto the rest of family, despite the fact that the researchers also draw attention to the care which the abuser takes in order to ensure that the abuse remains a secret. As Marie-France Casalis from the Mouvement français pour le planning familial writes:

Responsables et coupables toujours nous, les femmes.  
Si victimes, nous nous taisons, ce silence nous est reproché, c'était à nous de dénoncer l'agresseur, pourquoi ne l'avons-nous pas fait? Pourquoi mères

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<sup>58</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le collectif féministe contre le viol: un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 220)

<sup>59</sup>Bordeaux, Michèle et al. 'Viol et violences contre les femmes', in Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS 1989, pp. 69-76 (p. 73)

<sup>60</sup>Bordeaux, Michèle et al. 'Viol et violences contre les femmes', in Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Recherches sur les femmes et recherches féministes: présentation des travaux 1984-7, Nantes: CNRS 1989, pp. 69-76 (p. 73)



n'avons-nous pas vu, entendu, compris que c'étaient des viols commis sur elles par leurs pères, que nos filles souffraient?

Désespoir, détresse, mutisme, anorexie, fugue, drogue, dépression, qui de nous penserait à en chercher la cause dans l'exploitation sexuelle de cet enfant par son père?

Responsible and guilty as always, we women.

If we are the victims and we say nothing, our silence is held against us. It was up to us to denounce our attacker; why did we not do so?

Why, as mothers, did we not see or hear or understand that it was because they had been raped by their fathers that our daughters were suffering?

Despair, distress, silence, anorexia, running away, drugs, depression, which one of us would have thought to look for the cause in the sexual abuse of the child by her father?<sup>61</sup>

Despite the legal provisions for the sentencing to between five and ten years for indecent acts and between ten and twenty years for rape, when they were committed by a parent on a child under fifteen, there were still very few convictions for the crime of incest during the 1980s. This was despite the fact that the Collectif féministe contre le viol received 800 calls from women incest victims between March 1986 and the beginning of 1990. Only 30% of these women had taken any legal measures, and of those which had led to a court case, not one had resulted in a sentence of ten or more years, the sentence which was then applicable to rape.<sup>62</sup>

The importance of incest for feminists attempting to analyse it as an expression of male power is that it demonstrates the same problems involved in breaking the silence around any kind of male violence towards women, but in an accentuated fashion. For not only does it occur within the sanctity of the family, where no-one is supposed to interfere, but it also raises the problem of the silencing and the powerlessness of the victims, who are doubly silenced for being (usually) girls, and for being children; doubly oppressed by a man who also holds extra power over them, as their father (in the majority of cases). Incest, therefore, is about power and powerlessness on an individual level, but also on a societal level in the taboos which surround it, the refusal to recognise its existence, and the refusal to hold the attacker responsible for his actions and condemn them. As the Collectif féministe contre le viol wrote in their 1991 report:

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<sup>61</sup>Casalis, Marie-France, 'L'inceste', in Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with Hommes et libertés), p. 12

<sup>62</sup>Casalis, Marie-France, 'L'inceste', in Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with Hommes et libertés), p. 12. Although incest is not mentioned as such in the new penal code which was passed in July 1992 and came into force in March 1993, aggravating factors which apply to rape include the victim being under 15 years old and the rapist being in a position of authority over the victim. (Code Pénal, Journal Officiel, 23 juillet 1992, Section 3, article 222-24) Thus, incestuous rape is now punishable by a sentence of twenty years' imprisonment.



Tout adulte qui agresse sexuellement un enfant commet un abus de pouvoir et un abus de confiance. Toute grande personne est aux yeux de l'enfant une personne ayant autorité. La contrainte n'a pas besoin d'être démontrée, ni exercée avec des violences: il existe toujours au moins une contrainte morale et souvent un chantage affectif, et au pire une véritable exploitation sexuelle de l'enfant. Même un adolescent qui viole un enfant abuse de son pouvoir d'aîné. Le nouveau Code Pénal, en choisissant sans le définir le terme 'agression sexuelle' pour remplacer 'attentat à la pudeur', désigne assez mal les agressions sexuelles envers les enfants qui sont avant tout des abus de pouvoir et des abus de confiance. Et il faut entendre 'agression' dans son sens le plus large d'atteinte à la personne de l'enfant.

Every adult who sexually abuses a child, abuses their power and the child's trust in them. In the eyes of children, all grown-ups have authority. Constraint neither has to be proven, nor exercised with violence: there is always at least moral constraint, often emotional blackmail, and at worst, the real sexual exploitation of the child. Even an adolescent who rapes a child is abusing the power they derive from their age. The new penal code, by choosing to replace the term 'indecent acts' with the term 'sexual attacks', which is not defined, designates badly sexual attacks on children which are above all an abuse of power and trust. And the term 'attack' must be interpreted in the widest sense as meaning an attack on the person of the child.<sup>63</sup>

#### MARITAL RAPE

By the time feminist attention turned to marital rape at the end of the 1980s, the discussion was based within a context of violence as an expression of male power and dominance, and the links between different types of male violence towards women were becoming more important than the differences between them. Feminists argued that, contrary to the opinion often expressed by magistrates, judges and the police, the effects for the woman victim were no less traumatic if the rapist was her partner than if he was a stranger. The legal situation, however, was ambiguous.

Geneviève Devèze, in Nouvelles questions féministes in 1991, draws attention to the ambiguities in the law with respect to marital rape.<sup>64</sup> In theory, the legal definition of rape which has been in force since 1980 should allow women who have been raped by their husband to press charges, since it defines rape as: 'any act of penetration, of any nature, committed on another person with the use of violence, constraint or surprise' (article 332 of the penal code). However, in practice, very few men have been taken to court, charged with the rape of their wife.

The French Civil Code also contains several ambiguities. Article 242 on divorce states that one partner can ask for a divorce if the actions of the other partner constitute a serious or repeated violation of marital duties and render their life together

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<sup>63</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1991, p. 19

<sup>64</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal: Comme tous les viols, un crime', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 214-16



unbearable.<sup>65</sup> Amongst the acts which fall into this category are 'abstention' and 'non-consecration of the marriage after eleven months'. The fulfilment of marital duties is not explicitly mentioned as an essential part of marriage by law, but it has an important place in attitudes and traditions, as well as being explicitly required by canon law. It is difficult, therefore, for a woman to press rape charges against her husband if he has been forcing her to have what is seen as 'normal' sexual relations every day throughout their marriage. In the case of 'abnormal' sexual practices, he might be tried for indecent acts or violence, but it is unlikely that he would be found guilty of rape.<sup>66</sup>

In theory, then, it has been possible since 1980 for a man to be charged and found guilty of having raped his wife, but in practice very few cases have been taken to court. On 13 February 1981, a man was found guilty by the Cour d'Assises at Grenoble of raping his wife, and was sentenced to eight years imprisonment. However, the circumstances of this case were exceptional. As the victim walked home, the man followed her in his car. He stopped next to a public park, took his wife into it, and cut her repeatedly with a razor-blade while his friend held her down. He then forced her to have intercourse. The husband was charged with raping his wife and with premeditated assault and grievous bodily harm. The rapist's lawyer pleaded that the fact that he was married to the victim meant that the charge of rape was not applicable. However, the chambre d'accusation (the court of criminal appeal) ruled that:

La jurisprudence traditionnelle considère certes que le viol entre époux n'est pas punissable. Toutefois une telle conception ne saurait couvrir des agissements entièrement détachables de toute notion de mariage et de toute idée de ce que peuvent être des rapports intimes entre époux.

It is true that according to traditional jurisprudence rape between husband and wife is not punishable. However, such a conception could not refer to despicable actions far removed from any notion of marriage and intimate relations between husband and wife.<sup>67</sup>

However, as Devèze points out, in this case the rape was accompanied by violence, and it is impossible to say what the verdict would have been had this not been the case.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>'le divorce peut être demandé par un époux pour des faits imputables à l'autre lorsque ces faits constituent une violation grave ou renouvelée des devoirs et obligations du mariage et rendent intolérable le maintien de la vie commune', quoted in Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal: Comme tous les viols, un crime', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 214-16 (p. 215)

<sup>66</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal: Comme tous les viols, un crime', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 214-16 (p. 215)

<sup>67</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'La violence conjugale', in Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with Hommes et libertés), pp. 6-8 (p. 6)

<sup>68</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'La violence conjugale', in Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with Hommes et libertés), pp. 6-8 (p. 6)



Moreover, during the same year, a man who had raped and tortured his wife by inserting burning objects into her vagina was found guilty of 'outrage à la pudeur' (indecent behaviour) and 'actes de barbarité' (acts of barbarity). The charge of rape was dropped by the Court, which did not consider that it was applicable within marriage.<sup>69</sup>

During the late 1980s, feminists began a difficult struggle to alert public awareness to marital rape. One of the difficulties was that even the women who experience marital rape rarely recognise it as such. According to Geneviève Devèze, men experience marital rape as the exercise of their right to sexual satisfaction, whereas women experience it as an abuse of power, sometimes as sexual abuse, but very rarely as rape, believing that rape is something that happens between strangers. This means that men know that if their wives do not recognise it as rape, then they can continue without fear of the consequences.<sup>70</sup>

Following the campaign for the recognition of rape by a stranger as a crime, feminists began to insist that marital rape must also be defined in the law and named as a crime, and that men must be taken to court for it, but this is still being campaigned for. In 1991, Devèze wrote:

Pourtant, il s'agit bien du viol et lorsque les femmes en prennent conscience et se décident à en parler, elles s'entendent répondre qu'il est sans doute moins traumatisant d'avoir des rapports sexuels même forcés avec quelqu'un qui auparavant a entretenu avec vous des relations sexuelles librement consenties que d'être violée par un inconnu. De tels arguments permettent surtout d'éviter d'aborder le vrai problème du viol en privé.

And yet, it certainly is rape, and when women realise this and decide to talk about it, they are told that it is without doubt less traumatic to have sexual intercourse, even if it is under force, with someone with whom they have previously had freely consenting sex, than to be raped by a stranger. Such arguments enable the real problem of marital rape to be avoided.<sup>71</sup>

The differences between domestic violence, rape and marital rape were therefore becoming more and more indistinct for feminists by the end of the 1980s, and they were all linked by the question of power. As Devèze writes:

A l'évidence, le viol conjugal, comme tous les viols, est un crime caractérisé par un abus de pouvoir du mari sur sa femme. Il n'est pas l'expression agressive de

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<sup>69</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal: Comme tous les viols, un crime', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 214-16 (p. 215)

<sup>70</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal' in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 267-73 (pp. 271-2)

<sup>71</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal: Comme tous les viols, un crime', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 214-16 (p. 216)



la sexualité masculine mais l'expression sexuelle de l'agressivité de certains hommes.

Quite clearly, marital rape, like any rape, is a crime characterised by an abuse of power by the husband against his wife. It is not the violent expression of male sexuality but the sexual expression of the violence of certain men.<sup>72</sup>

### Feminist Analyses of Male Violence in the 1990s

It was stated at the beginning of this chapter that three trends would be identified in the way in which French feminists have organised around the problem of male violence: grass-roots feminists are now more concerned with violent men than in the 1970s; feminists are increasingly asking why some men are violent, rather than why some women are victims; and the prevention of violence towards women has become a growing priority. What evidence of these trends can be found in the current activity of feminists in France?

#### INTEREST IN VIOLENT MEN AND THE CAUSES OF MALE VIOLENCE

The growing feminist interest in searching for explanations of why men are violent, rather than why women become the victims of violence, is based on the increased stress on the sex of the perpetrator. Françoise Collin, for example, suggested as early as 1976 that, since this is the only constant factor in male violence, it should perhaps therefore be the focus of feminist interest.<sup>73</sup> Marie-Victoire Louis wrote more recently:

Les violences conjugales, les viols, les viols conjugaux, les viols par inceste, le harcèlement sexuel: à quelques rares exceptions près, dans tous les cas de figure, y compris lorsque la violence est de type homosexuelle, les agresseurs sont des hommes. Comment une réalité aussi massive et d'une telle évidence n'a-t-elle pas été encore prise en compte, en France? Comment la mise en relation du sexe de l'agresseur et de celui de l'agressée n'est pas apparue aux criminalistes, aux sociologues du droit, aux policiers, aux chercheur-euses comme une problématique essentielle?

Domestic violence, rape, marital rape, child abuse, sexual harassment: with only a very few exceptions, in all these cases, including when the violence is homosexual, the attackers are men. Why has such an enormous and so obvious a reality not yet been taken into account in France? Why has the relation between the sex of the attacker and that of the victim not been identified by criminologists, legal sociologists, the police, and researchers as the central question?<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal: Comme tous les viols, un crime', Nouvelles questions féministes, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 214-16 (p. 216)

<sup>73</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Entre le chien et le loup', Cahiers du GRIF, nos. 14-15, 'Violence', décembre 1976, pp. 3-9. See also Collin, Françoise, 'Le désir engage non un objet mais un autre désir', in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 55, hiver 1990, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (pp. 149-50)



The importance of the shift in emphasis from victim to perpetrator, and its implications for future feminist theory and practice, have been addressed by Anne Zelensky, who describes it as a 'third stage of feminism'.<sup>75</sup> In a first stage, she states, feminists concentrated on consciousness-raising and the sharing of experiences between women, especially in women's refuges. The second stage was the feminist fight to change various aspects of the law between 1975 and 1985. And now:

Un troisième temps s'ébauche: après avoir concerné d'abord les victimes, majoritairement des femmes, le mouvement d'interpellation de la violence en privé va s'attacher à concerner aussi les acteurs de violences qui sont principalement des hommes.

A third phase is taking shape: having first considered the victims, principally women, the process of questioning domestic violence is beginning to concern the perpetrators of violence as well, who are mostly men.<sup>76</sup>

Now that it has become evident that legislative changes, although important, have been unable to change attitudes (for example, many convicted rapists still fail to understand the gravity of their crime), Zelensky claims that feminists need to focus their attention on 'the other side of domestic violence, the man'.<sup>77</sup> Having sought in the 1970s to destroy popular myths which obscured the causes of male violence towards women, many feminists are now working towards an explanation of these causes.

On a practical level, too, there seems to be a gradual growth in interest in working with violent men. This is not to say that feminist work with victims has ceased. On the contrary, groups continue to struggle for victims of domestic violence to have the right to stay in their home if they wish, while the violent man is forced to leave; feminist lawyers such as Odile Dhavernas denounce the 'experts' assessments' of rape victims; women's refuge workers struggle to provide enough places to meet demand. However, a number of steps have been taken by feminists and pro-feminist men to provide centres for violent men, eg. RIME in Lyon and SOS-hommes et violences en privé in Paris, in the belief that this will help to reduce the incidence of this violence.

The willingness of certain feminists to work together with men on the question of male violence is increasing. Marie-Victoire Louis, for instance, strongly advocates the acceptance of men in feminist struggles to change the power relations between the sexes. She writes:

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<sup>75</sup>Zelensky, Anne & Gausson, Mireille, Le harcèlement sexuel. Scandales et réalités, Paris: Editions Garancières, 1986 (p. 171)

<sup>76</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86 (p. 276)

<sup>77</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86 (p. 285)



Comment en outre croire à une possible modification des rapports de force entre les sexes si nous ne cherchons pas à impliquer, à responsabiliser, à interpeller les hommes? Comment croire que le féminisme est un humanisme si nous excluons a priori les hommes de toute capacité d'évoluer, si nous les enfermons dans une identité d'opresseur?

Moreover, how can we believe in the possibility of a change in the power relations between the sexes if we do not try to involve men, to make them accept responsibility, to make them face up to the situation? How can we believe in feminism as a kind of humanism if we reject the possibility that men can change, if we enclose them in the identity of the oppressor?<sup>78</sup>

Louis claims that men need to be made to take on responsibility for sexual harassment and for the power relations between men and women, but not to be made to feel guilty for them. She stresses that whilst it is important to recognise the function for patriarchy of this violence, it is wrong to say that all men are (potentially) violent or benefit from it. Louis states that whilst on the one hand it is obvious that the patriarchal system functions because rape carried out by some men controls women's movements, on the other hand, it is wrong to say that all men benefit from this situation. She argues that many men suffer when their wife, partner, sister or mother is attacked and that an increasing number of men are expressing solidarity with women around the problem. For Louis, it is important to recognise these contradictions and to work together with supportive men, because this demonstrates that there are men who find this type of violence unacceptable and because it shows other men that this is possible masculine behaviour. It also disproves theories which state that men are naturally violent and cannot help it.<sup>79</sup>

Anne Zelensky is another feminist who agrees that men must be included in feminism. A feminist activist who has been consistently active and innovative, despite accusations of 'reformism' from other feminists, Zelensky was one of, if not the first, French feminist to begin working together with men on the question of male violence. This resulted in the creation in 1988 of the only centre for violent men in Paris, 'SOS-hommes et violences en privé'.<sup>80</sup> Zelensky says, 'je pense que le féminisme concerne aussi bien les femmes que les hommes et que si on ne continue qu'à concerner les femmes, le fossé va se creuser de plus en plus'. ('I think that feminism concerns both women and men, and if we carry on including only women, the gap between the two is

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<sup>78</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Le harcèlement sexuel: quels enjeux pour les féministes?', in *Chronique féministe*, no. 44, juin-juillet 1992, pp. 34-6 (p. 36)

<sup>79</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93

<sup>80</sup>There are currently two other centres open in France, one run by RIME in Lyon and one by Vivre sans violence in Marseille (cf. Dhoquois, Régine, 'Entretien avec Marie-France Casalis', in *Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique*, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: *Les violences faites aux femmes* (produced in conjunction with *Hommes et libertés*), pp. 10-13 (p. 12))



going to continue to widen.')<sup>81</sup> Men's reactions to feminism have, she states, sometimes resulted in a violent antifeminism. Therefore, it is better to involve them in it and encourage them to accept certain responsibilities than to make them feel guilty and wait for a reaction. However, this willingness to work with men must not be seen as a universally accepted trend amongst feminists. Zelensky has received very little support from other feminist activists, who are still reluctant to devote any time or energy to what they see as problems which men should be confronting themselves:

Non seulement elles n'y travaillent pas, mais la plupart sont hostiles. Les féministes militantes, les féministes de terrain et en particulier les féministes qui s'occupent des femmes battues, sont très hostiles ... ou bien hostiles ou bien elles ne veulent pas entendre parler de ça.

Not only do they not work on it, but the majority of them are against it. Feminist activists, grass-roots feminists, and particularly the feminists who look after battered women, are very hostile ... Either they are hostile or they don't want to hear anything about it.<sup>82</sup>

#### PREVENTION

One of the most important incentives for feminists to conduct research on violent men is the hope of finding ways to prevent it. Whereas the first priority for feminists involved with male violence towards women was to deal with its effects, there is now a growing interest in prevention. It is true that criticisms of the way in which the aftermath of male violence is dealt with continue. The main targets of these criticisms are the police and the courts. For example, in an article on domestic violence published in Les temps modernes in 1990, Marie-Victoire Louis criticises the attitude of the police towards victims of male violence. In an analysis of the letters received by the Secrétariat d'état chargé des droits des femmes during the public campaign in 1989 against domestic violence, Louis refers to cases in which police officers refused to intervene, held the woman responsible, tried to intimidate the woman into withdrawing her complaint, and refused to register complaints for various reasons.<sup>83</sup> However, despite her criticisms of the police, Louis holds the legal system even more responsible for the failure to respond appropriately in the face of this violence. From her analysis of the letters sent to the secretariat, Louis finds cases closed despite medical evidence of serious injury, enquiries which never happened, the failure to take into consideration rape and sexual violence, the failure to take into account the emotional effects of death threats, the

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<sup>81</sup>Zelensky, Anne, Interview with author, Paris: 26.3.93

<sup>82</sup>Zelensky, Anne, Interview with author, Paris: 26.3.93

<sup>83</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (pp. 151-2)



tendency to ignore premeditation and verdicts which laid the blame on both partners or solely on the woman.<sup>84</sup>

However, despite the continuing criticism, improvements have been made in the way victims are treated. In an article published in 1990, feminist lawyer, Odile Dhavernas argues that feminist campaigns around rape have changed both public opinion and the attitudes of the courts and the media; women are now speaking out against the violence they experience; training is provided for medical and police personnel involved in rape cases; victims are properly treated in police stations and in the courts.<sup>85</sup> What is less clear is whether there has been any progress in a move towards the prevention of male violence, and it is on prevention that many feminists are now focusing their attention. Odile Dhavernas states that despite the changes in the way the victim is treated, it is difficult to say whether there are actually any fewer rapes. Rape has been professionalised, she argues; the victims are passed from one expert to the next in order to establish the 'facts' of the case. In addition to the medical, gynaecological and psychiatric examination, the latest innovation is genetic testing (which, although useful on occasions, can only prove the identity of the accused, a question which, she insists, is rarely posed). Dhavernas argues that the solution to the problem of rape is now seen as nothing more than the 'management of suffering'. The only progress that has been made is that the consequences of violence are better treated, whereas the real problem remains unchanged. But, she asks, what can be done to prevent rape? Here she returns to the debate about punishment, arguing that, although the imprisonment of rapists can be important, if only to demonstrate that society does condemn attacks on women, it has failed in almost every one of its purported aims, whether these are to prevent rape, to set an example, or to reform convicted rapists. However, she continues, the State is refusing to invest any money in an alternative means of prevention, leaving us in the paradoxical situation in which the State control of 'victim support' is accompanied by its almost total failure to confront the causes of male violence.<sup>86</sup>

The search for appropriate preventative measures necessitates research into the causes and functions of male violence. The Collectif féministe contre le viol, which publishes

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<sup>84</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (pp. 152-3)

<sup>85</sup>Dhavernas, Odile, 'La dénonciation, et au-delà', in Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with Hommes et libertés), pp. 44-6 (p. 44)

<sup>86</sup>Dhavernas, Odile, 'La dénonciation, et au-delà', in Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with Hommes et libertés), pp. 44-6 (p. 45)



reports based on the information obtained from its helpline for rape victims, wrote in the introduction to its 1991 report:

Si notre travail consiste surtout à aider les victimes dans leur reconstruction, au delà de cette aide, une réflexion sur les violeurs nous semble être indispensable à une politique de lutte contre le viol et de prévention. Aider les femmes, oui! Mais surtout faire diminuer, disparaître le viol: utopie peut-être? Vaste interrogation: peut-on prévenir le viol, sa récurrence à court et long terme? Donc il faut essayer de comprendre... mais comprendre ne veut pas dire excuser!

It is true that our work consists above all of helping victims to rebuild their lives. However, beyond this aid, we feel that studying the rapist is an indispensable part of a policy of fighting against rape and seeking to prevent it. Yes, of course we need to help women. But above all, we want to make the incidence of rape decrease and disappear. Is this utopian? An important question is whether rapists and re-offenders can be stopped in the short- and long-term. So we need to try to understand them. But this does not mean that we will excuse them!<sup>87</sup>

Once the sex of the perpetrator has been identified as the most significant characteristic of male violence, explanations of the causes focus on the connections between violence and masculine identity, as the Collectif féministe contre le viol demonstrate:

Nous parlons de violences sexuelles car nous pensons - l'écoute des femmes le confirme - que lorsqu'il y a viol ou violences conjugales, il s'agit d'un rapport de domination d'un sexe sur l'autre, même si des hommes violent des hommes, même si les abus sexuels concernent aussi des petits garçons. Les modèles culturels masculins confèrent à l'homme le pouvoir et la force, or bien souvent ils ne peuvent exercer ni l'un ni l'autre; le viol ou les coups sont les moyens par lesquels ils pensent pouvoir retrouver leur identité de mâle, en réduisant en objet à leur merci une femme, un enfant ou un autre homme.

We talk of sexual violence because we think - and listening to women confirms this - that rape or domestic violence is related to a power relation between one sex and the other, even if men rape other men, and even if sexual abuse is also a problem for little boys.

Cultural models of masculinity attribute power and strength to men. Often, however, they cannot exert either. Rape or beatings are the ways in which they think they will be able to rediscover their masculine identity, by reducing a woman, a child or another man to objects at their mercy.<sup>88</sup>

For feminists, the main question about male violence is, ultimately, how to envisage bringing an end to it, and it is this question which structures feminist involvement both theoretically and practically. The search for a solution depends on the continuing theorisation of *why* men are violent, accompanied by suggestions of more immediately practicable measures that would reduce the amount of violence in society. Some feminists claim that although refuges for victims of male violence have been a tremendous help for many women, they can only deal with the consequences of the

<sup>87</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1991, pp. 2-3

<sup>88</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1989, p. 6



problem, not its causes. The measures that need to be taken now, they argue, are largely preventative, focusing on the many different causes of male violence. Suggestions for appropriate preventative measures include self-defence training for women; changing cultural representations of women; offering sex education classes in schools which stress the importance of consent and respect for the autonomy of both partners in a relationship; and therapeutic treatment for violent men.<sup>89</sup> The Collectif féministe contre le viol suggests better sex education, which should stress the importance of consent in sexual relations, since:

On constate par leur questionnement que beaucoup d'adolescents, garçons ou filles, hésitent et souvent ne savent pas la différence entre une relation sexuelle consentie et celle imposée par la domination physique ou morale. Le viol se définit par le non-consentement. Mais, prisonnier des mentalités de tous et de chacun, imprégné depuis longtemps par la domination sexuelle de l'homme sur la femme, du fort sur le faible, le jugement de tous est faussé et la vérité difficile à établir.

We can see, by questioning them, that many teenagers, boys and girls, hesitate and often do not know the difference between sexual relations with consent and those imposed by physical or moral domination. Rape is defined by non-consent. But, trapped in the attitudes of anybody and everybody, imbued for centuries by the sexual domination of women by men, of the weak by the strong, everybody's judgement is distorted, and the truth is difficult to establish.<sup>90</sup>

Anne Zelensky argues that children should be brought up in such a way that boys learn to respect girls from an early age and that girls and boys get to know each other, thus destroying the fear they currently have for the other sex. This fear is one of the causes of aggression, she states, since sexual violence results partly from the attacker's inability to recognise the existence of the other person. Zelensky also advocates therapeutic treatment rather than punishment for violent men, suggesting that there should be groups where they could learn to understand and respect women.<sup>91</sup>

Feminists also stress that male violence needs to be seen as a problem belonging to men, not women. Men need to take responsibility for it and stop blaming the victims:

Tant que l'on fera passer 'l'intérêt de la famille' avant le respect du droit individuel, tant que le sexe de l'agresseur ne sera pas pris en compte comme un éventuel, mais probable principe d'explication de cette violence - qui est souvent l'expression banale de *la loi que l'homme veut imposer à sa femme* - nous resterons dans une problématique faisant de la violence le 'problème des femmes'. Et dès lors, en toute logique, les hommes continueront à en être déresponsabilisés.

<sup>89</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86(p. 284)

<sup>90</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1991, p. 25

<sup>91</sup>Zelensky, Anne & Gaussoit, Mireille, Le harcèlement sexuel. Scandales et réalités, Paris: Editions Garancières, 1986 (p. 171)



Pourquoi les femmes devraient-elles supporter des coups voire perdre leur vie pour que leur mari n'aille pas en prison?

As long as the 'interests of the family' come before the respect of the rights of the individual, as long as the sex of the attacker is ignored as a potential, but probable, explanatory factor in this violence - which is often a simple expression of *the law which men want to impose on their wives* - we remain within a problematic which posits violence as a 'woman's problem'. And from this moment, it is logical that men will not be held responsible.

Why should women have to put up with being beaten or even lose their lives, just so that their husbands should not end up in prison?<sup>92</sup>

Marie-Victoire Louis argues that until gender relations are put at the centre of the debate, there is no hope of any decrease in the amount of male violence towards women. Although some men are discovering the constraints imposed on them by masculinity as it is culturally constructed and are trying to escape from it, they cannot do this unless it is within the context of a broader debate on the power relations between the sexes.<sup>93</sup>

### Trends and Limitations

These trends obviously interconnect: if the main aim of feminists is prevention, one of the ways to suggest preventative measures is the analysis of violent men. However, the three trends identified above are not the only ones to have emerged from this study, which has revealed a more complex picture than that indicated by the 'trend' framework. For example, there has been an increasing tendency for feminists to connect different forms of male violence towards women. They talk of 'violences' in the plural, and join all the different forms together on a continuum as expressions of male power, rather than seeing them as discrete phenomena with independent causes and explanations.

There has also been a broadening of themes to include international and historical perspectives, as continuities are explored between innumerable expressions of male power in the form of violence towards women. Thus, the first issue of Projets féministes included articles on incest in the United States in the nineteenth century; infanticide in France in the nineteenth century; murder in Bihar; organised genocide in Tibet; and the rape of children in Kuwait. Paris féministe and Les cahiers du féminisme in 1992 and 1993 published numerous articles on rape in the former Yugoslavia, accompanying the feminist action in solidarity with the women victims. A closer look at

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<sup>92</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 163)

<sup>93</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Postface' in Association européenne contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail (AVFT), De l'abus de pouvoir sexuel. Le harcèlement sexuel au travail, Paris: La Découverte, 1990, pp. 231-51



one example of these articles illustrates the type of questions which are being raised. Willemien Visser's 'Viols contre les femmes de l'"ex"-Yougoslavie' has been chosen, because its discussion is based on a broad review of the literature on this subject.<sup>94</sup>

In this wide-ranging article, Visser examines media reports of the rapes which have been taking place in the former Yugoslavia; the figures used by the media and the caution expressed by organisations such as Amnesty International and the Red Cross with regard to their accuracy; international attempts to provide protection for the victims and organise the trial of the rapists; and action which has been taken by pressure groups and organisations. The last section of the article concentrates on feminist analyses of the rapes, including the debate around whether rape should be seen as a crime against humanity, a war crime or a crime against women, and feminist claims that the suffering of the rape victims is being used to political ends. The conclusion of Visser's article stresses feminist analyses of the continuity between rape in times of war and in times of peace. Visser provides examples of feminists in France, the United States and the former Yugoslavia who argue that it is time to reconsider rape and the struggle against it, and to examine the links between the rapes which are taking place in the extreme conditions of the war in the former Yugoslavia and rapes which take place in 'normal' conditions. Visser then examines the position of Danielle Charest of the collective 'Amazones d'hier, lesbiennes d'aujourd'hui'. Charest argues that the fact that some of the women in the former Yugoslavia are raped by men who were their friends, colleagues or neighbours before the war has much in common with rape in 'normal' times. Visser quotes Charest's conclusion as follows:

... le viol est un crime qui se pratique contre les femmes parce qu'elles sont femmes.... Il est impossible de comparer les viols commis contre les femmes à ceux commis contre les hommes et les garçons qui font partie des oppresseurs et à qui on n'applique pas une politique systématique et globale d'oppression [car] ce n'est pas la guerre en soi qui rend les femmes objets et cibles des hommes, mais les conditions préalables d'oppression et d'appropriation exercées contre les femmes, en tout temps, par la classe des hommes.

... rape is a crime which is committed against women because they are women.... It is impossible to compare rapes committed against women with those committed against men and boys who are themselves oppressors and who are not subjected to a systematic and global oppression [for] it is not the war itself which makes women the objects and targets of men, but the oppression and appropriation of women which has always been carried out by men as a class.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Visser, Willemien, 'Viols contre les femmes de l'"ex"-Yougoslavie', Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 14, no. 1, 1993, pp. 43-76

<sup>95</sup>quoted by Visser, Willemien, 'Viols contre les femmes de l'"ex"-Yougoslavie', Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 14, no. 1, 1993, pp. 43-76 (p. 71)



Feminist interest in the need to remove the causes of male violence towards women raises questions about masculinity and the relation between men and women. The silence has been broken, and it would be wrong to deny the effects of twenty years of feminist campaigns against male violence. It is undeniable that feminist pressure has affected public opinion and forced institutional and legal changes, but while the successes must be recognised, the feminist struggle against male violence is not over. Anne-Marie Granger, for example, argues that these changes are not enough, and it is only by making more fundamental changes that the problem of male violence will be solved:

Malheureusement, il ne suffit pas d'ouvrir quelques centres d'accueil ni d'apporter quelques modifications au Code pénal ou au Code du travail pour remettre en cause fondamentalement cette violence exercée par les hommes à l'encontre des femmes et des enfants. Celle-ci est profondément ancrée dans les rapports d'exploitation et d'humiliation au travail ainsi que dans les rapports de domination hommes/femmes qui structurent toute la société... En conséquence, l'objectif ne peut être seulement de neutraliser la violence physique; il s'agit aussi de mettre en cause les mécanismes, conscients et inconscients, qui préparent les hommes à affirmer leur autorité sur les femmes, par les pressions morales, le chantage affectif, la force, etc., et préparent les femmes à subir cette sujétion par l'esprit de sacrifice et de dévouement qu'on leur inculque dès l'enfance. Ceci implique, dans l'immédiat, une politique de l'emploi et du logement qui respecte le droit à l'autonomie des femmes, à l'évidence en contradiction avec la précarisation actuelle de l'emploi, la spéculation immobilière et l'exclusion raciste. Au-delà, cela suppose un bouleversement radical des rapports sociaux, inconcevable sans l'action consciente d'un mouvement féministe.

Unfortunately, it is not enough to open a few refuges or to make a few changes to the Penal Code or employment legislation in order to challenge this violence committed by men against women and children. This violence is deeply rooted in the relations of exploitation and humiliation at work, as well as the power relations between men and women which structure the whole of society.... Consequently, our aim cannot be simply to neutralise physical violence; we must also question the ways in which men are consciously and unconsciously brought up to assert their authority over women, through moral pressure, emotional blackmail, force, etc., and the ways in which women are brought up to put up with their subjection, through the sacrifice and devotion which are instilled in them from an early age. This implies, for the immediate future, the introduction of employment and housing policies which respect women's right to their autonomy (quite obviously in contradiction with the present precariousness of employment, property speculation and racist exclusion). In addition, it assumes a radical change in gender relations, inconceivable without the conscious efforts of a feminist movement.<sup>96</sup>

One of the problems with this, however, is the current weakness of the movement. For example, Suzy Rojzman from the Collectif féministe contre le viol wrote in 1991:

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<sup>96</sup>Granger, Anne-Marie & Trat, Josette, 'Violences contre les femmes. Une lutte de longue haleine', in *Cahiers du féminisme*, no. 55, hiver 1990, pp. 8-9 (p. 9)



A l'heure actuelle, le Collectif féministe contre le viol est somme toute isolé au sein de ce qui reste du Mouvement. Il gagnerait beaucoup (et la réciproque est vraie...) à rencontrer d'autres structures ou individus du Mouvement, notamment les chercheuses, pour pouvoir développer sa réflexion et sa pratique.

At the moment the Collectif féministe contre le viol is completely isolated in what remains of the movement. It would gain a lot (and the gain would be reciprocal) from meeting other groups or individuals in the movement, especially researchers, in order to develop its theory and its practice.<sup>97</sup>

This lack of contact between activists and researchers seems to be a major obstacle to the development of feminist opposition to male violence, as can be seen from the evidence presented in chapters 4 and 5. The work on male violence has taken place almost exclusively within the movement, whilst theories of gender and social relations of sex have been elaborated mostly by CNRS researchers or feminist theorists, who have little contact with the movement. This split between theory and practice highlights the gulf between the two, even though both of them are providing crucial insights into masculinity and male power.

Chapters 4 and 5 show us, firstly, that out of the difference debate have developed theories of gender as a relation, and secondly, that feminist work on male violence has begun to examine the perpetrators in an attempt to explain and prevent violence towards women. Both of these developments have contributed to the establishment of masculinity as a legitimate object of study. However, it is at the point where these two areas of feminist theory and practice meet that some of the most interesting questions about masculinity - and about French feminism - can be posed. For example, how male identity is constructed around violence, how male violence functions within a system of male dominance, and how individual acts of male violence fit into this broader system. It is therefore necessary to examine the small amount of work which is situated at this point of convergence, that is, attempts to explain male violence within the framework of gender/social relations of sex.

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<sup>97</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le collectif féministe contre le viol: un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 223)



## CHAPTER 6: MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE

As was demonstrated in chapter 5, feminism has played an important part firstly in exposing the extent of male violence towards women, secondly in forcing changes in the laws relating to it, and now in theorising its causes and its relationship to masculinity. Chapter 5 also showed the development in the way in which the problem of male violence has been approached by French feminists. In its most schematic form, this progression has led from a concentration on the victims of male violence (listening to their experiences and attempting to deal with the consequences of the violence they have suffered), to a growing interest in the perpetrators.

This chapter concentrates, firstly, on what feminists have said about violent men and the connections between violence and masculinity, and secondly on the attempts that some feminists have made to explain male violence in the context of power relations between the sexes. It focuses particularly on feminist theorists who emphasise the need to shift the responsibility for male violence from women onto violent men and who claim that the solution to male violence lies in changing men and in changing representations and constructions of masculinity.

As was explained in the previous chapter, French feminists increasingly regard the various forms of violence towards women as situated on a continuum, the form the violence takes being less important than the fact that it is committed by a man. A similar development in Britain has been charted by Anne Edwards in a paper entitled 'Male Violence in Feminist Theory: An Analysis of the Changing Conceptions of Sex/Gender Violence and Male Dominance'.<sup>1</sup> In view of this tendency to pay less attention to the type of violence and more to the fact that it is committed by a man, this chapter will follow the logic of the theories discussed, rather than impose divisions according to the form the violence takes.

Feminist attempts to explain male violence fall into two main categories which will be discussed here in turn. These are, firstly, those which concentrate on the character and behaviour of individual violent men, and secondly, those which have introduced wider social factors. This chapter shows how feminists active around the question of male violence towards women first tried to identify certain characteristics which they believed were common to violent men. However, although this is still undertaken by some feminists and non-feminists (for example the non-feminist psychologist, Claude

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<sup>1</sup>Edwards, Anne, 'Male Violence in Feminist Theory: An Analysis of the Changing Conceptions of Sex/Gender Violence and Male Dominance' in Hanmer, Jalna & Maynard, Mary, Women, Violence and Social Control, London: Macmillan, 1987, pp. 13-29



Mastre, who runs the centre for violent men in Paris, SOS hommes et violence en privé, concentrates on aspects of the individual violent man's character<sup>2</sup> and Sylvie Kaczmarek's book examined below concentrates on individual violent men<sup>3</sup>), explanations which take into account social factors are favoured by feminists such as Anne Zelensky and Marie-Victoire Louis. These 'social' explanations are examined after the 'individual' ones.

### Individual Explanations

The first sign of a consideration of the links between violence and masculinity was the attempt by certain feminists to identify the characteristics of violent men. This was partly in an attempt to expose what feminists saw as the myths surrounding male violence, and partly as a result of the growing mass of information acquired by feminists working in refuges and on helplines, which they realised could enable them to attempt to describe attackers' behaviour, personalities and methods. As the Collectif féministe contre le viol wrote in 1991:

Dans ce bilan 1991, nous avons choisi de chercher à cerner, à travers les mots et les situations décrites par les femmes agressées, les comportements des agresseurs. A travers les paroles des victimes, nous avons constaté que nous avons beaucoup d'éléments d'information sur les violeurs: leurs comportements, leurs personnalités diverses, les circonstances, les lieux, mais aussi l'élaboration des pièges pour mettre les femmes en confiance. Viols occasionnels, viols prémédités, récidives: viols répétés sur le même enfant dans les viols intra-familiaux, mais aussi violeurs ayant agressé plusieurs enfants ou plusieurs femmes.

In this 1991 report, we have tried to describe the attackers' behaviour, through the words and experiences of the women victims. We realised that the victims' accounts provided us with a large amount of information on the rapists: their behaviour, their diverse personalities, the circumstances and the site of the attacks, and also the ways in which they trap women by drawing them into their confidence. We have information about both planned and unplanned rapes and also about rapists who re-offend, whether in the form of repeated rapes of the same child within the family or of attacks on more than one child or woman.<sup>4</sup>

Three of the most commonly held beliefs which feminists reject are that rape is due to men's sudden and uncontrollable sexual urges; that rape is always committed by strangers; and that rapists are 'mad' or in some way marginal to 'normal' society. The Collectif féministe contre le viol use analyses of the calls they receive on their telephone helpline to support their arguments against these beliefs, which they claim are myths. For instance, they argue that the circumstances in which rapes take place show that the majority are premeditated and sometimes involve intricate plans. In the case of child

<sup>2</sup>Anne Zelensky, interview with author, Paris, 26.03.93

<sup>3</sup>Kaczmarek, Sylvie, *La violence au foyer: itinéraires de femmes battues*, Paris: Imago, 1990

<sup>4</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, *Viols, femmes, informations*, Paris: 1991, pp. 2-3



abuse, the lengths that the rapist goes to to ensure that nobody discovers it can be tremendous, and are well-documented. In the case of rape by someone outside the family - whether known to the victim or not - the rapist's strategy often consists of luring the victim to a predetermined place, whether this is the victim's home (for example, by pretending to be the plumber), the rapist's home, or a deserted public place. Sometimes the rapes are planned by watching the victim and noting her habits; sometimes the rapist offers to help her start her car, for example. Other rapes occur at job interviews or house-viewing appointments. This premeditation, they write, proves that rape cannot be explained by sudden uncontrollable urges which force the rapist to act 'against his will'. The collective write:

Toute cette préméditation prouve que le violeur n'est pas un irresponsable, mais jouit de toutes ses facultés qu'il met au service de son crime. Elle prouve aussi qu'il connaît la loi, qu'il craint la police et peut se contrôler.

Comment peut-on encore laisser dire que 'les hommes ont des pulsions irrépressibles' ou que 'le viol, ce n'est qu'un acte sexuel un peu violent' et que 'les femmes, il faut toujours les forcer un peu'?

All this premeditation proves that the rapist is responsible for his actions, that he is in possession of all his mental faculties, which he puts to good use in the preparation of his crime. It also proves that he is familiar with the law, is scared of the police, and can control himself.

How can we then put up with claims that 'men have uncontrollable urges' or that 'rape is just a sexual act, a bit more violent than usual' and that 'women always have to be forced a bit'?<sup>5</sup>

The collective's figures also negate the belief that rape is committed by a stranger.

Around half of all rapes, they show, are committed by someone known to the victim.

In 1991 the collective received 926 calls about rape on their telephone helpline: 524

(56.5%) of these were committed by men outside the victim's family, 358 (38.7%) by

members of their family, and 44 (4.8%) by their husbands. Of the rapists who were not

members of her own family, 45% were known to the victim.<sup>6</sup> In another part of the

report, the collective write: 'Près de 50% des violeurs sont connus de leur victime.

Quand il s'agit d'adolescents la proportion dépasse les 50% et va jusqu'à 95% pour les

jeunes enfants.' ('About 50% of rapists are known to their victims. In the case of

teenagers, it is more than 50%, and for young children, it is 95%.')<sup>7</sup>

From the information they have obtained from the helpline, and in agreement with what

many feminists have been saying since the 1970s, the Collectif féministe contre le viol

feel able to state that: 'contrairement à une idée reçue, ces violeurs ne sont pas des

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<sup>5</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1991, p. 10

<sup>6</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1991, p. 9

<sup>7</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, Viols, femmes, informations, Paris: 1991, p. 15



marginaux, des maniaques, ou des alcooliques' ('contrary to accepted beliefs, rapists are not drop-outs, psychopaths or alcoholics').<sup>8</sup>

Information collected and analysed by feminists who work in refuges for women victims of male violence supports these claims. Clinical psychologist, Geneviève Devèze's articles draw on her work as director of the Foyer Louise-Labé, a women's refuge in Paris. Devèze does not claim that there is a certain type of man who is violent, any more than there is a certain type of woman who becomes the victim of that violence, stating that the well-known case of the loving father playing happily with his children in the park, having only a few hours previously viciously beaten his wife, is evidence enough that it is impossible to provide a description of the 'typical violent man'.<sup>9</sup> However, this does not prevent her from trying to identify certain characteristics which they have in common, and certain patterns of behaviour which seem to recur. For example, Devèze claims that violent men tend to have a fragile masculine identity. The insecurity that they feel in their own identity, she argues, leads them to fear that their partner cannot possibly be satisfied with them, and this produces an almost paranoid belief that she must be having an affair. Since these women are usually exceptionally faithful, they cannot understand their partner's accusations. The more they try to explain to their partners that they are making a mistake, the more insecure they become, and so it continues. So violent men are often possessive, jealous, and paranoid about losing their partner, according to Devèze. At the same time, they are also often very successful outside the couple, particularly at work. Devèze also mentions immaturity, a tendency to alcoholism and difficulties in their relationship with their mother as typical characteristics.<sup>10</sup>

Devèze's analysis does not stop at individual explanations for the behaviour of violent men, however. In an article on marital rape, she emphasises the way that social factors interact with the individual's masculine identity and provoke his violent attacks on his partner:

Ces hommes ne peuvent réorganiser un système de défense face à la violence de leurs émotions et se laissent entraîner dans un processus de domination-destruction pour qui partage leur vie. Il s'agit de l'affirmation de soi par la négation de l'autre. Ce problème est bien plus vaste que celui concernant les rapports entre deux individus, c'est en fait un véritable problème social.

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<sup>8</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, *Viols, femmes, informations*, Paris: 1991, p. 15

<sup>9</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'La violence conjugale', in *Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique*, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with *Hommes et libertés*), pp. 6-8 (p. 7)

<sup>10</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Foyer Louise Labbé. Halte aide aux femmes battues. Entretien avec Geneviève Devèze et Claude-Marie Le Breton-Viala', in *Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus*, septembre 1988, pp. 25-9



Unable to deal with the violence of their emotions, these men allow themselves to be dragged into a process of domination and destruction of their partner, affirming their own identity through the negation of the other. This problem is much larger than the one concerning the relations between two individuals; it is, in fact, a real social problem.<sup>11</sup>

This is in contrast to Sylvie Kaczmarek, whose book La violence au foyer: itinéraires de femmes battues<sup>12</sup> offers a more individualised account of the causes of male violence. As the title suggests, this book is concerned primarily with women's experiences of male domestic violence, and particularly with the ways in which they escape from it and begin a new life. However, Kaczmarek devotes one chapter to attempting to identify certain characteristics found in violent men, using as her sources interviews with violent men, with women victims of male violence and with refuge workers. She describes certain aspects of their past history such as unsuccessful relationships with their mothers, having been the victims of violence during their childhood, or having been brought up by a single parent. Kaczmarek states that some men are violent because they have difficulty expressing themselves any other way and are incapable of communicating verbally with their partners. Whilst maintaining perfectly normal relations with all their other contacts, particularly at work, they are only able to deal with their problems through hate for the person closest to them, hence their aggression and violence in the home. Many of them have traditional views of the wife/the mother/women who work, and their personalities consist almost entirely of their domination of their partner. In fact, the main characteristic which violent men seem to share is, according to Kaczmarek, a certain weakness, and violence is their only means of hiding it. Kaczmarek suggests that men are culturally pressured to be strong and powerful; that is how men are supposed to demonstrate their masculinity, to be a man. Weak men therefore tend to overcompensate in private for their public weakness. She concludes that the accounts she presents demonstrate that, despite their culpability, men suffer too, and male violence needs to be examined from both sides in order for its causes to be understood.

While Kaczmarek's conclusion might be criticised by feminists for encouraging pity for violent men, who are, she claims, oppressed by the constraints of masculinity, it nevertheless implicitly recognises that it is the root of the problem which needs to be attacked, namely the power relations between men and women and the social construction of masculinity.

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<sup>11</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'Viol conjugal' in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 267-73 (pp. 272-3)

<sup>12</sup>Kaczmarek, Sylvie, La violence au foyer: itinéraires de femmes battues, Paris: Imago, 1990 (p. 75-6)



## CRITICISMS OF INDIVIDUAL EXPLANATIONS

Frédérique Vinteuil's article, 'Ordre et violences', which appeared in 1985 in a special number of Les cahiers du féminisme devoted to violence, is a critique of explanations of the relationship between violence and masculine identity which concentrate on the characteristics of individual violent men.<sup>13</sup> She concedes that they doubtless share the ability to transform personal frustrations from many sources into an active hate for women, and that violence is the act of men who have no other way of proving their masculinity:

De manière assez logique, les violences s'accroissent quand les frustrations des individus augmentent. Le chômeur ou le préretraité qui frappe sa femme semble le faire d'autant plus fréquemment que l'épouse a gardé un travail; la violence devient alors la seule façon de maintenir le rôle traditionnel de dominance masculine. Les loubards qui violent en groupe dans les caves ou les trains affirment hautement qu'il y a plus 'raté' qu'eux: une femme.

In a logical fashion, the instances of violence increase as the degree of frustration experienced by the individual rises. A man who is unemployed or has taken early retirement who beats his wife seems to do it all the more often if she has carried on working. His violence therefore becomes his only means of continuing to fulfill the traditional rôle of male dominance. The yobs who gang-rape in basements and trains are making the statement that there is someone who is even more of a failure than them: a woman.<sup>14</sup>

However, Vinteuil goes on to argue that this explanation is too simplistic, that it is contradicted by the fact that there are violent men in all classes of society, and that there are too many sources of frustration for this to be a sufficient explanation. Furthermore, the constant recurrence of violent acts against women, and the leniency with which they are viewed by society, suggest that, rather than resulting from the pathology of certain individuals, they are in fact the result of the way in which society has been organised.<sup>15</sup>

This view is shared by Marie-Victoire Louis, who states that there are no satisfactory individual explanations of male violence. She claims that domestic violence, for example, is not an embarrassing exception to the rule, but rather the logical consequence of the historical development of French society.<sup>16</sup> The only characteristic shared by men who are violent towards their partner, states Louis, is that they are all trying to obtain recognition of their right to exert power in the home. This violence can

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<sup>13</sup>Vinteuil, Frédérique, 'Ordre et violences', Cahiers du féminisme, no. 83, automne 1985, pp. 8-10

<sup>14</sup>Vinteuil, Frédérique, 'Ordre et violences', Cahiers du féminisme, no. 83, automne 1985, pp. 8-10 (p. 10)

<sup>15</sup>Vinteuil, Frédérique, 'Ordre et violences', Cahiers du féminisme, no. 83, automne 1985, pp. 8-10 (p. 10)

<sup>16</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'A propos des violences conjugales...', in Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, juin 1990, pp. 5-14



take an infinite variety of forms and there is an infinite variety of men who resort to it. Louis also stresses that there is no single type of woman who becomes the victim of this violence, despite the popularity of explanations which are based on the character of the victim and the sexual pleasure she is supposed to derive from pain.<sup>17</sup> Louis argues that it is important to analyse the various ways in which men justify and excuse their violence towards women whilst at the same time failing to analyse the society which produces it.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Anne Zelensky states that male violence has acquired an invisibility in our society, which, coupled with 'explanations' such as the social background of the abuser, alcoholism, or the responsibility of the woman, acts as an obstacle to serious reflection on the problem.<sup>19</sup>

### Social Explanations

For many feminists, then, male violence cannot be explained simply in terms of individual characteristics, and they argue that the tendency to do so avoids any challenge to the system which enables this violence to persist. Françoise Collin, for example, writes:

Assez paradoxalement, la reconnaissance de ces cas comme isolés permet d'éviter l'affrontement de la structure dans laquelle ils s'inscrivent. Toute mise en question de celle-ci est perçue comme une atteinte à la 'liberté sexuelle', liberté qui est en fait domination d'une catégorie sexuée sur l'autre.

Paradoxical as it may seem, when these cases of violence are labelled as exceptions, then any challenge to the system in which they occur can be avoided. Any challenge to this system is seen as an attack on 'sexual liberty', a liberty which is, in fact, the domination of one sex over the other.<sup>20</sup>

A question which many feminists are attempting to answer, then, is why society accepts so much violence towards women. Answers to this question include accounts of the historical development of social attitudes to the violence exerted against women by men; the 'complicity' between men accused of violence and the male-dominated legal system; and the social construction of male sexuality around violence.

#### SOCIETY'S TOLERANCE OF MALE VIOLENCE

Many French feminists have argued that today's masculinities have been constructed in and by a society that permits or even encourages male violence, and that it is therefore important to look both at the way in which that social acceptance has developed and the

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<sup>17</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'A propos des violences conjugales...', in Cette violence dont nous ne voulons plus, juin 1990, pp. 5-14 (p. 6)

<sup>18</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93

<sup>19</sup>Zelensky, Anne & Gaussot, Mireille, Le harcèlement sexuel. Scandales et réalités, Paris: Editions Garancières, 1986 (p. 171)

<sup>20</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Le désir engage non un objet mais un autre désir', in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 55, hiver 1990, p. 10



way in which violence has become a significant part of masculine identity. Frédérique Vinteuil's 'Ordre et violences' and Anne Zelensky's 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets'<sup>21</sup> both describe the development of certain social norms which permit violence, beginning with the husband's 'droit de correction'. This dates from Roman law and was one of the prerogatives of the pater familias, who enjoyed total authority in the family. This tradition was supported by religious teachings in all European countries throughout the Middle Ages, and was present in the Penal Code of 1810, which considered the murder of a woman by her husband 'excusable' in the case of adultery, if she was caught in the act in the marital home.<sup>22</sup>

Zelensky and Vinteuil argue that, although this has now changed, history has left its mark in the practice and the attitudes of many people, and the authority of the father as 'head of household' has only recently been eroded. It was not until 1938 that the civil incapacity of women was abolished and that article 213 of the Civil Code, which stipulated the wife's obedience, disappeared. In 1954, the first reforms of marriage settlements took place; in 1970, paternal authority was replaced by parental authority. However, it was only in 1985 that equality was instituted between spouses in the marriage settlement.<sup>23</sup>

Zelensky states that women are beginning to challenge male violence, but it is still the woman who has to leave the family home and it is still the woman who has to prove that she is the victim, against the belief that she was an accomplice. No-one admits the responsibility of the man, and he is rarely punished for his actions. According to Zelensky, there have been some changes since the days of the 'droit de correction' and she claims that it is now more embarrassing to be a violent husband than it was then. However, she adds that there are other ways in which men are still encouraged to be violent: as little boys, they are encouraged to 'look after themselves', to fight back, whereas little girls are not; violent sports and war provide every opportunity to encourage the development of violence in men. Zelensky states that individual personalities limit the extent to which men use this permission to behave violently, but even if many of them do not choose to behave in violent ways themselves, they tolerate violent behaviour in other men.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86

<sup>22</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86 (p. 278)

<sup>23</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86 (pp. 275-6)

<sup>24</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86 (pp. 280-1)



Geneviève Devèze, in an article published in 1990, emphasises that violence as a response to stress or frustration can only be a possibility for an individual who has learnt that this is a socially acceptable way to behave, since women are only attacked in a society which values violence:

L'homme bat sa femme notamment parce qu'il peut le faire. Et il peut parce qu'il a traditionnellement détenu le pouvoir économique, qu'il a eu un meilleur accès à l'information et que sa puissance physique le lui permet. D'un autre côté la société, basée principalement sur des concepts machistes, réagit, lorsqu'elle est confrontée aux mauvais traitements aux femmes, avec des arguments qui mènent, aussi bien les hommes que les femmes, à s'identifier plus facilement avec l'agresseur qu'avec la victime. L'homme violent est ainsi vu comme un être malheureux, qui a eu une enfance sans amour, alcoolique et/ou au chômage, incompris, en un mot, immature. 'Cet homme est digne de pitié, le punir ne conduit à rien, mieux vaut essayer de lui donner l'amour qui lui a manqué'. C'est le genre de raisonnement qui conduit la femme malmenée à retourner vers l'agresseur. Ce n'est donc pas une décision absurde, mais la réponse que la société met dans les mains de la victime et, naturellement, de l'agresseur.

Men beat their wives mainly because they can. And they can because they have traditionally held economic power, had better access to information and had the physical strength to do it. Society, for its part, based as it is on macho ideas, responds to violence towards women with arguments which lead men and even women to identify more easily with the attacker than with the victim. Thus violent men are seen as unhappy beings, deprived of love throughout their childhood, alcoholic and/or unemployed, misunderstood or, in a word, immature. 'These men deserve pity. Punishing them is pointless; instead they should be given the love they have been deprived of.' This is the type of reasoning which encourages abused women to return to their attacker. It is not a stupid decision, but the one which society presents to the victim, and of course, to the attacker.<sup>25</sup>

Addressing the same question of the reasons for society's tolerance of male violence towards women, Marie-Victoire Louis contrasts it with attitudes to racial violence, contending that it is impossible to imagine two million whites being allowed to beat up blacks in France, but when two million French women are victims of domestic violence, nothing is done.<sup>26</sup> She argues that it is no accident that these links have been obscured for so long:

Refuser toute analyse 'systémique'; occulter les rapports de force mis en œuvre, s'interroger en premier lieu sur la responsabilité des victimes sont encore les méthodes les plus efficaces pour masquer cette évidence.

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<sup>25</sup>Devèze, Geneviève, 'La violence conjugale', in *Actes. Les cahiers d'action juridique*, no. 70, printemps 1990, Special number: Les violences faites aux femmes (produced in conjunction with *Hommes et libertés*), pp. 6-8 (p. 7)

<sup>26</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93



Rejecting any 'systemic' analysis; obscuring the power relations at work; focusing on the responsibility of the victims all constitute the most effective means of hiding this obvious fact.<sup>27</sup>

Louis claims that even when the evidence of male violence is irrefutable, it is still possible to label the perpetrators ill, perverted, or in some way marginal to society, and by turning them into scapegoats, the societal origins of male violence are ignored; by referring to them as exceptions, the norm can be perpetuated.

Arguments that society is organised in such a way that male violence is an acceptable and integral part of its functioning are contested. It is a widely-held belief that inequalities between women and men have disappeared from French society, for example, in terms of power in the home, or the control of reproduction and parenting. For example, Elisabeth Badinter's *L'un est l'autre*, argues that differences between men and women no longer exist and that, in contrast to the United States, French society has no problems with male violence<sup>28</sup>; Evelyne Sullerot's *Quels pères? Quels fils?* argues that mothers now have far more power than fathers<sup>29</sup>; and Christine Castelain-Meunier's *Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité* argues that, since physical strength is no longer a factor in post-industrial society, there are no remaining salient differences between men and women.<sup>30</sup> Feminists, however, reject these dismissals of inequalities which, in their view, contribute greatly to a very real and very high level of violence in French society.

#### MALE COMPLICITY?

Another question feminists ask is why the police and judiciary do not make more of an effort to stop the violence men exert towards women. In response to this, Marie-Victoire Louis argues that men protect each other by means of a widely accepted refusal to act. For example, Louis refers in an article published in 1990 to a letter written to the Secrétariat d'état chargé des droits des femmes by the wife of a headmaster in Bayeux, whose file had been 'lost':

On veillait à ne pas ternir l'image d'une personne qui occupe un poste de responsabilité auprès des enfants. N'y-a-t-il pas, dans ce cas précis, carence, pour ne pas dire complicité de la justice par esprit de solidarité entre personnes disposant d'intérêts communs, plus préoccupées de se protéger les unes les autres que de remplir vraiment une fonction? ... En outre, comment justifier le pouvoir discrétionnaire des juges, par lequel précisément justice ne sera jamais

<sup>27</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Postface' in Association européenne contre les violences faites aux femmes au travail (AVFT), *De l'abus de pouvoir sexuel. Le harcèlement sexuel au travail*, Paris: La Découverte, 1990, pp. 231-51 (p. 239)

<sup>28</sup>Badinter, Elisabeth, *L'un est l'autre*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1986

<sup>29</sup>Sullerot, Evelyne, *Quels pères? Quels fils?*, Paris: Fayard, 1992

<sup>30</sup>Castelain-Meunier, Christine, *Les hommes aujourd'hui: virilité et identité*, Paris: Acropole, 1988



rendue? A quoi bon parler, se mobiliser, se plaindre, agir quand la justice elle-même ne veut pas nous entendre?

Care was taken not to tarnish the reputation of someone who holds a position of responsibility with children. But does this not represent, in this particular case, a failing or even the complicity of the judiciary because of a feeling of solidarity with people who share common interests, and who are more concerned with protecting each other than with doing their job? ... Moreover, how can the discretionary power of judges, which actually prevents justice from being done, be justified? What is the point of talking, taking action or complaining, when the judiciary itself refuses to listen to us?<sup>31</sup>

Louis claims that this solidarity which exists between men and which operates in their interests increases the impunity enjoyed by violent men. It also raises questions about the responsibilities of the State and the way in which it has, over the centuries, sanctioned male power in the family by positioning them as 'heads of household' who must be obeyed by their wives.<sup>32</sup>

Feminists have been painstakingly arguing for years that middle-class men are no less often perpetrators of violence towards women than working-class men. However, they have also demonstrated that it can be much harder for the wives or partners of middle-class men to have their accusations listened to. In other words, the police, the judiciary and public opinion seem much readier to believe that a working-class man has abused his partner than if the accused is someone 'respectable'. Marie-Victoire Louis, for instance, writes:

... l'épouse d'un fils d'une famille connue de Bayonne a perdu son procès en divorce malgré plusieurs certificats médicaux, une autorisation écrite de la police pour se réfugier chez ses parents, et une déposition faisant état de violences. Le dossier, recherché pour l'appel, *'a disparu'*. *'Si la première pièce a été (péniblement) retrouvée, la seconde demeure introuvable... En vous disant que nous sommes une famille d'honnêtes et d'intègres ouvriers et que mon ex-gendre sort d'une famille de commerçants en vue, je vous aurai tout dit'*, écrit la mère de la jeune femme.

... the wife of the son of a well-known Bayonne family lost her divorce case, despite a number of medical certificates, a written authorisation from the police allowing her to take refuge at her parents' home, and a statement listing acts of violence. When it was needed for the appeal, the file *'had disappeared'*. *'The first set of documents was found again (eventually), but the second is still lost... If I tell you that we are an upright and honest working-class family, and that my ex-son-in-law comes from a prominent business family, then you will know everything you need to'*, the woman's mother wrote.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in *Les temps modernes*, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 154)

<sup>32</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in *Les temps modernes*, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 163)

<sup>33</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in *Les temps modernes*, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 155)



## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MALE SEXUALITY AROUND VIOLENCE

The Collectif féministe contre le viol offers evidence of the link between violence and male sexuality from analyses of calls they have received from teenagers. They claim that 'le risque est que des jeunes adolescents confondent violences sexuelles et comportement viril'. ('the risk is that teenage boys confuse sexual violence and masculine behaviour.')<sup>34</sup> The collective claim that the calls they receive from teenage girls raped by their boyfriends show that the attitudes held by boys and girls at this age differ considerably. Many teenage boys, for example, think that it is normal to have to 'force' a girl, or that if he buys her a drink or pays for her cinema entrance, then she has already consented to sex. On the other hand, many teenage girls experience their 'first time' as rape. The calls they receive from teenage boys lead the collective to state that the difference for them between 'fuck' and 'rape' is far from clear and that the notion of consent is never discussed in sex education classes.<sup>35</sup>

Anne Zelensky argues that violence is often linked with sexuality in representations of women, whether it is in material commonly recognised as pornographic, or in adverts and films. Even if there is no conclusive proof of the links between the images of sexuality and violence which surround us permanently, Zelensky argues, the accounts given by women in refuges who were forced by their partners to act out scenes from pornographic films and magazines provide some indication of their influence.<sup>36</sup>

These examples would seem to support the idea that male violence and sexuality are closely connected. Françoise Collin has begun to address the question of the origins of this connection. She argues that masculine identity is constructed on the oppression of women and their negation as subjects with autonomous desires:

...toute la culture fait en sorte que les hommes entretiennent avec leur sexualité un rapport différent de celui des femmes: pour eux, en effet, leur sexualité est d'emblée proposée et perçue comme un droit, unilatéral, droit qui repose souvent sur l'assimilation du désir au besoin, analogue à la faim ou à la soif, oubliant au passage un 'détail', à savoir que le désir engage non un objet, mais un autre désir, un autre être humain. Dans cette optique, le désir de l'autre est soit entièrement occulté - l'autre étant réduit à un objet - soit supposé nécessairement en accord. Et une longue histoire de sujétion ou de soumission féminine peut venir conforter cette assurance.

...our entire culture gives men a different relationship to their sexuality than women. For men, in fact, their sexuality is from the outset presented and perceived as a unilateral right, a right which is often based on the equation of desire and need, as with hunger and thirst. On the way, however, one slight

<sup>34</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, *Viols, femmes, informations*, Paris: 1991, p. 25

<sup>35</sup>Collectif féministe contre le viol, *Viols, femmes, informations*, Paris: 1991, p. 26

<sup>36</sup>Zelensky, Anne, 'Crie plus fort, les voisins sont sourd-muets', in Centre fédéral FEN, *Le féminisme et ses enjeux: vingt-sept femmes parlent*, Paris: Edilig, 1988, pp. 274-86 (pp. 280-1)



'detail' is forgotten, namely that this desire does not engage with an object, but with another desire, another human being. In this view, the desire of the other is either completely obscured, the other being reduced to an object, or assumed to be consenting. And this view is reinforced by a long history of the subjection or the submission of women.<sup>37</sup>

Although feminists have begun to address the question of the part that violence plays in the construction of masculine identity and male sexuality, there are, as yet, no satisfactory conclusions which can be drawn in this relatively undeveloped area.

### **Male Violence and the Oppression of Women**

Feminist concern with male violence has been shown to have evolved from the initial realisation that, since almost all the perpetrators are men, research has to focus on this. The first development was the attempt to identify the individual characteristics of violent men. This was followed by attempts to explain how society constructs masculinity in a way which incorporates certain attitudes towards violence. Zelensky and Vinteuil situate the social construction of masculinity within a society with long traditions of male dominance and violence, and an acceptance by the rest of society that this is a normal or natural part of being a man. Devèze, Vinteuil and Zelensky argue that men can only exercise this kind of violence in a society which tolerates it. This tolerance includes the perpetuation of myths which detract from the fact that the most constant factor in the various types of violence is the sex of the perpetrator. It also includes the class solidarity which, feminists argue, men express in order to protect their dominant position. Marie-Victoire Louis has attempted to show how the police and judiciary thus often show signs of bias towards the defendant. Zelensky and Louis both argue that the links between masculine identity, male dominance, male sexuality and violence need to be broken in order for the problem of male violence to be tackled. However, more research will have to be done before the nature of these links can be explained adequately.

A further development can be found, however, in attempts by some feminists to explain the links between violence and male power. Feminists have considered the ways in which violence reinforces the system of male dominance; the ways in which this system uses the notion of women's consent and 'natural' subordination to justify acts of violence; and the way in which male violence can be interpreted as an expression of the power relation between the sexes.

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<sup>37</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Le désir engage non un objet mais un autre désir', in *Cahiers du féminisme*, no. 55, hiver 1990, p. 10



## VIOLENCE AS A SUPPORT FOR THE SYSTEM OF MALE DOMINATION

For many feminists, male violence is seen as a support for the system of oppression of women. An important point in this argument is that male violence is committed by men against women *as women*, and is a political act, not an incident between individuals. Emmanuèle de Lesseps argued in 1980, for example, that the fact that violence was committed by men against women was inextricably linked to the social construction of women as 'other'. In order to demonstrate the political status of violence against women, de Lesseps pointed out the similarities between sexist and racist acts of violence. She argues that there is a certain type of violence which is committed by men against women, just as there is a certain type of violence committed by the dominant ethnic group against subordinate groups. However, whereas in the latter case, the political implications of this violence are recognised, in the case of violence against women, it is seen to stem only from the 'desire-hate' of the male attacker - his desire to consume his victim by objectifying her through the destruction of her body. De Lesseps argues that this 'desire-hate' is also present in racist attacks, but that racist attacks are never reduced only to this aspect; the fact that by attacking a Black/Jew/Arab, the attacker is attacking all Blacks/Jews/Arabs is clearly recognised. But it is not recognised that women are attacked *as women*, as members of an undifferentiated group. Violence against women depends on their existence as 'other', on their difference and thus their objectification. These attacks are a fundamental part of the system of oppression, a way of maintaining the representation of subordinate groups as 'other', and therefore to be oppressed.<sup>38</sup>

Male violence has continued to be theorised as a means of the social control of women, and the attacker as an agent of the patriarchal system. Marie-Victoire Louis, for example, argues that rape serves to maintain the status quo, to control women's activities and to support the system of male dominance:

Le violeur qui interdit les sorties tardives, la fréquentation des cafés, la promenade solitaire, qui fait vivre dans la peur, fait plus pour l'ordre moral que le pape, et plus pour la domination des femmes que tous les textes des socio-biologistes sur leur infériorité naturelle. Les auteurs de violences sont des minables; ce sont aussi des soldats de première ligne sur le front des conflits de sexe que la société patriarcale sacrifie parfois mais soutient le plus souvent.

The rapist who prevents women from going out late, from going to cafés, from going for a walk on their own, who makes them live in constant fear, does more for the moral order than the Pope and more for the domination of women than all the socio-biology texts on women's natural inferiority put together. Perpetrators of violence are pathetic individuals; they are also the front-line

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<sup>38</sup>Lesseps, Emmanuèle de, 'Sexisme et racisme', *Questions féministes*, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 95-102



troops in the battle of the sexes that the patriarchal society occasionally sacrifices, but usually supports.<sup>39</sup>

#### WOMEN'S CONSENT TO VIOLENCE

The notion of women's consent, whether it is to sex, violence, or subordination, runs as a theme throughout the debates around male violence towards women. The early feminist campaigns against rape stressed that when a woman says no, she means no; feminist lawyers have criticised both the way in which rape trials hinge on the question of consent and the judges' interpretations of the 'proof' of consent; feminists active around domestic violence have emphasised that if women victims of domestic violence stay with a violent partner, this is more likely to be due to their financial dependence than to an acceptance of the violence; and feminist theorists have questioned much of the thought surrounding the notion of consent.

Feminist anthropologist Nicole-Claude Mathieu's attempt to explain male violence towards women in an article entitled 'Quand céder n'est pas consentir: de la conscience dominée' concentrates on the way in which women are said to consent to their own oppression.<sup>40</sup> Mathieu claims that the argument that women consent to their oppression is flawed, taking as her example the work of ethnologist Maurice Godelier. Mathieu argues that for women to consent to their oppression, they would have to be conscious of it. Instead, she argues, oppressed groups have a fragmented and contradictory picture of their oppression, which differs to that of the dominant group. In support of this argument, she draws on Gramsci's comparison between 'culture' which is the dominant class's conception of the world and 'folklore' which is the dominated class's conception of it. Gramsci opposes the systematic, unitary, centralised aspects of the former to the unsystematic, fragmentary and multiple aspects of the latter. Mathieu argues, then, that women's experiences of their oppression are full of contradictions. She offers as an example the experience shared by many young women of 'giving in' to a man's 'advances', only later to be called a 'slut'.

Mathieu argues that the idea that those who are dominated in a power relation consent to their domination or share the dominant ideology is based on a particular understanding of the subjectivity or the consciousness of the dominated subject. But, she asks, what is this? Before jumping to conclusions about consent, it is necessary to take into consideration the constraints on women's consciousness in any particular society.

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<sup>39</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in *Les temps modernes*, avril 1990, pp. 132-68

<sup>40</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Quand céder n'est pas consentir: des déterminants matériels et psychiques de la conscience dominée des femmes, et de quelques-unes de leurs interprétations en ethnologie' in Mathieu, Nicole-Claude (ed.), *L'arraisonnement des femmes: essais en anthropologie des sexes*, Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1985, pp. 169-245



These include both the physical constraints in the organisation of relations with men and the limited knowledge about society to which the oppressed have access. Mathieu argues that it is not surprising that women behave differently from men, given the physical and mental constraints imposed on them by their responsibility for their children, given their state of almost permanent near-exhaustion, and the extra undervalued work they have to do. Constant childcare, she argues, also limits women's ability to think and to analyse. Men, claims Mathieu, are perfectly aware that women are constrained both physically and mentally by childcare responsibilities, but they invert cause and effect, thereby implying that women's limitations are the reason for their lack of power, and not its consequence.

Mathieu also criticises Godelier's definitions of violence, which, she claims, refer only to violence between dominants, in this case between men. Violence towards women is different, she states:

Or la violence contre le dominé ne s'exerce pas seulement dès que 'le consentement faiblit', elle est *avant*, et partout, et quotidienne, dès que *dans l'esprit du dominant* le dominé, même sans en avoir conscience, même sans l'avoir 'voulu', n'est plus à sa place. Or le dominé n'est jamais à sa place, elle doit lui être rappelée en permanence: c'est le contrôle social.

Violence against the oppressed does not only occur when their 'consent weakens', it exists *before*, and all around, and all the time, as soon as, *in the mind of the oppressor*, the oppressed, even without knowing it, even without 'wanting' it, is no longer in their place. But the oppressed is never in their place. They have to be reminded of it constantly: and this is social control.<sup>41</sup>

Physical violence, the material and mental constraints which constantly control women's behaviour, are etched in women's consciousness, states Mathieu. If beatings and rapes are no longer necessary all the time, this is not because women consent. Women do *not* consent to their domination, Mathieu argues. They have various ways of dealing with it, at most they could be said to 'tolerate' it, but feminists would rarely use the term 'consent'.

Mathieu argues that the oppression of women by men is not maintained by women's recognition of the legitimacy of men's power, nor by their gratitude for the services men offer them. Rather it is the limited and controlled consciousness of the oppressed and the position of ignorance in which they are maintained which constitute, along with the material constraints, *violence*, the controlling force of domination.

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<sup>41</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Quand céder n'est pas consentir: des déterminants matériels et psychiques de la conscience dominée des femmes, et de quelques-unes de leurs interprétations en ethnologie' in Mathieu, Nicole-Claude (ed.), *L'arrondissement des femmes: essais en anthropologie des sexes*, Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1985, pp. 169-245 (p. 225)



The debate continues in Marie-Victoire Louis' insistence that there is still much work to be done on the question of women's consent and why it is that so many women seem to accept their subordination and physical abuse. There are currently very few answers available to this question beyond the rejection of theories of women's masochism and the demonstration by refuge workers that one of the most common reasons why women remain in violent relationships is because they do not have the economic independence necessary to leave.

This question is one which has been raised by feminists outside France. Cynthia Cockburn also discusses the way in which Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to explain how it was that the ruling class could produce a social and cultural environment in which capitalist relations of exploitation appeared quite normal and acceptable to ordinary people. Cockburn argues that patriarchal ideology successfully sustains hegemonic control of our culture. Even women believe that women and men are biologically destined for social inequality.<sup>42</sup>

### Violence and Power

It is Louis' work on sexual harassment which has centred the most on the question of the relationship between violence and power. She writes:

Le harcèlement sexuel est l'expression d'un rapport de pouvoir qui s'exerce dans l'immense majorité des cas à l'encontre des femmes et à l'initiative d'hommes du fait de leur statut hiérarchique et du fait de leur sexe.

Sexual harassment is the expression of a power relation which in the vast majority of cases operates against women and in favour of men, due to their status in the hierarchy and to their sex.<sup>43</sup>

It is usually men who harass women, because of the power they derive both from their status, since men usually occupy more senior posts, and from their gender, since that too is a hierarchy. If the harasser does not occupy a senior position, the purpose of the harassment is to demonstrate that the gender hierarchy must be maintained, regardless of status. It is because the vital factor in sexual harassment is the power relation between the harasser and the harassed that Louis criticises the analogy between the harassment of women by men and of men by women. She points out firstly, that very few women are in a position to harass men; secondly that a woman harasser is less socially accepted than a man who does the same thing; and thirdly that a harassed man is more likely to take action and to receive support from his friends and colleagues.

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<sup>42</sup>Cockburn, Cynthia, In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1991, p. 169

<sup>43</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Le harcèlement sexuel: quels enjeux pour les féministes?', in Chronique féministe, no. 44, juin-juillet 1992, pp. 34-6



Finally, Louis adds that when a man is sexually harassed at work it is more often by one or more other men than by a woman.<sup>44</sup>

For Louis, the most hopeful way to reduce the problem of sexual harassment is through an analysis centred on the links between the abuse of power, violence and sexuality. She adds that a feminist analysis is essential, since all state, religious, educational and professional hierarchies are founded on a gendered division of power.<sup>45</sup>

Louis' idea of a feminist engagement in the fight against sexual harassment is one which condemns all abuses of power and violence, including those of lesbians towards other women and of women towards their children or their partners. The failure to condemn women's violence as well as men's is, she argues, based on a confusion between the defence of women as a sex and the political struggle to transform power relations between the sexes. Feminists should not refuse solidarity with male victims of violence, whether the attack was committed by a man or a woman. Louis states that, instead of claiming either that the recognition of sexual harassment or sexual violence towards men cancels out harassment or violence towards women or that it is not of concern for feminists, we should recognise that these cases mean that it is all the more necessary to struggle against all kinds of violence.<sup>46</sup>

#### THE FUNCTION OF MALE VIOLENCE

Daniel Welzer-Lang works at RIME in Lyon and is the author of Les hommes violents<sup>47</sup> and numerous articles on the subject of male violence. Influenced by work that has already been carried out in Quebec, where this approach has acquired a certain amount of popularity, Welzer-Lang's analysis stresses, above all, the *function* of male violence.<sup>48</sup> He argues that for the men involved in domestic violence, the attacks have a clear aim, whether this is to produce a certain type of behaviour in their partner, provoke a certain reaction, or just 'teach her a lesson' Domestic violence is interpreted differently by the man who commits it and the woman who is its victim, he claims. Violent men define their violence in a much broader way than women, seeing it as a continuum of physical, psychological, verbal and sexual violence, all of which are

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<sup>44</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Le harcèlement sexuel: quels enjeux pour les féministes?', in Chronique féministe, no. 44, juin-juillet 1992, pp. 34-6 (p. 35)

<sup>45</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Le harcèlement sexuel: quels enjeux pour les féministes?', in Chronique féministe, no. 44, juin-juillet 1992, pp. 34-6 (p. 35)

<sup>46</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Le harcèlement sexuel: quels enjeux pour les féministes?', in Chronique féministe, no. 44, juin-juillet 1992, pp. 34-6 (p. 36)

<sup>47</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, Les hommes violents, Paris: Lierre et Coudrier Editeur, 1991

<sup>48</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Le double standard asymétrique' in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 127-46 (p. 138)



committed with an objective in mind. Their partners, however, define the violence they are subjected to much more narrowly, reducing it simply to hitting or perhaps kicking, and they see no connection between different violent acts. Moreover, they identify only one reason for the violence: he wanted to hurt her. Whereas the woman remembers the physical pain of the attack, the man remembers what he wanted it to achieve, having very little conception of the impact of the pain on his partner.<sup>49</sup> This, he argues, demonstrates that domestic violence has nothing to do with the common excuses of 'losing one's temper', being 'out of control'. In fact, this violence is a means of exercising control, of asserting authority over a partner. Therefore, the work that needs to be done with violent men, and the approach that is taken at RIME, is, first of all, to make the man accept full responsibility for his violence:

Rejetant les notions de pertes de contrôle, de causalités liées à l'alcool, la colère, la frustration, l'enfance traumatisante, la violence pratiquée est d'abord analysée comme un contrôle que réalise l'homme sur sa partenaire. Le fait que les hommes choisissent exactement comment et qui ils frappent, démontre qu'il s'agit de comportements intentionnels et conditionnés.

We reject all notions of loss of control, of causal explanations based on alcohol, anger, frustration, or traumatic childhood experiences. Instead, we analyse violence as a form of control exercised by the man over his partner. The fact that men choose exactly when and whom they hit demonstrates that their behaviour is both intentional and conditioned.<sup>50</sup>

Violent men, argues Welzer-Lang, need to admit *why* this violence occurs and work towards no longer wanting to dominate their partner, rather than just learning how to 'control their temper' and stop hitting her. Welzer-Lang sees domestic violence within the context of gender relations, refusing to accept that it is a problem of certain individuals, marginal to society.<sup>51</sup> He stresses the 'ordinariness' of the violent men who go to the centre, and attacks the assumptions that they are necessarily alcoholics, working-class, etc.<sup>52</sup> If it is the inequality of gender relations which is at the root of male violence, then it is this that needs to be changed; it is the cause of the problem that must be attacked, not just one of its symptoms.<sup>53</sup> As another demonstration of the way in which male violence operates as an expression of the power relations between the sexes, and not just as an attack by men on women, Welzer-Lang examines the case of male rape. From interviews with male rape victims, he shows that male rape is just as

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<sup>49</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Le double standard asymétrique' in Centre d'études féminines de l'université de Provence & Centre de recherches et d'études anthropologiques, BIEF: Des hommes et du masculin, Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1992, pp. 127-46 (pp. 141-2)

<sup>50</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, Les hommes violents, Paris: Lierre et Coudrier Editeur, 1991 (pp. 55-6)

<sup>51</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, Les hommes violents, Paris: Lierre et Coudrier Editeur, 1991 (p. 302)

<sup>52</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Un centre d'accueil pour hommes violents', interview by Josette Trat in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 55, hiver 1990, pp. 22-5 (p. 22)

<sup>53</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Un centre d'accueil pour hommes violents', interview by Josette Trat in Cahiers du féminisme, no. 55, hiver 1990, pp. 22-5 (p. 24)



much an expression of power as the rape of a woman. The male rape victims in this study all felt that they had been 'treated like a woman'. Welzer-Lang explains that the disgust which some of the victims felt towards their experience was more a result of the fact that they had played the 'passive' or 'woman's' rôle, than of the fact that they had had a homosexual encounter.<sup>54</sup> He also claims that the power relations between men that occur in much homosexual behaviour are similar to those that exist between men and women. For example, much gay male pornography does not differ from heterosexual pornography, except in that men replace women in the rôle of the dominated. The effect of representing male rape victims as 'women', he argues, is to legitimate the oppression of women by men at the same time as it denies the power relations which exist *between* men.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to Britain and the United States, these power relations between men have received little critical attention from pro-feminist men in France. However, this is an area in which developments can be expected to take place in the near future.

### Further Research

As is evident from this chapter, the theories being developed by French feminists around the connections between male violence, masculinity and gender relations are still in their early stages. Although groups and individuals are active in this area, the limited contact between them, especially when this involves crossing the boundary between the movement and research, means that there is little cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Marie-Victoire Louis claims that the only specificity of French work on male violence is that it is so far behind that which has been produced in Britain, the United States and Canada,<sup>56</sup> and this is true in terms of the amount of literature. However, it seems that the questions which are being posed by feminists in all of these countries are not dissimilar, with one exception. This is that, in France, only white masculinities have been examined, and the question of racism in this context remains untouched. This is despite the fact that male violence does raise specific problems for black and Arab women, not least when they try to engage with the state in an attempt to escape from a violent partner. For instance, Marie-Victoire Louis mentions in passing the case of a young Moroccan woman who, in a letter to the Secrétariat d'état chargé des droits des femmes during the 1989 campaign against domestic violence, wrote:

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<sup>54</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Mythe du viol et viol d'hommes', *Cahiers gai-kitsch-camp, Actes du colloque international. Série imaginaires et représentations*, Sorbonne 1er et 2 décembre 1989, pp. 38-44

<sup>55</sup>Welzer-Lang, Daniel, 'Mythe du viol et viol d'hommes', *Cahiers gai-kitsch-camp, Actes du colloque international. Série imaginaires et représentations*, Sorbonne 1er et 2 décembre 1989, pp. 38-44 (p. 42)

<sup>56</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, interview with author, Paris: 22.3.93



Je ne comprends plus rien; c'est mon mari qui me frappe, et c'est moi qui dois me justifier, comme si c'était ma faute; il me met à la porte et c'est moi la coupable. Dois-je attendre que mon mari me jette par la fenêtre, ce qu'il avait l'intention de faire la dernière fois?

I do not understand what's happening. My husband hits me, and I have to justify myself, as though it were my fault. He throws me out, and I am guilty. Do I have to wait until he throws me out of the window, as he meant to last time?<sup>57</sup>

Louis adds, 'Elle est en outre menacée d'expulsion'. ('On top of all this, she is under threat of deportation.')<sup>58</sup> There is clearly scope for feminist research in this area, as has already become evident in Britain and the United States.<sup>59</sup> However, it is surrounded by problems, the most important being the interaction for black women between racism and sexism. Exposing the violence experienced by black women at the hands of the men of their own community runs the risk of provoking racist attacks from the outside, and black women have found themselves faced with a dilemma. It remains to be seen whether feminists in France will find a way to overcome the problems inherent in this type of research.

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<sup>57</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 152)

<sup>58</sup>Louis, Marie-Victoire, 'Violences conjugales', in Les temps modernes, avril 1990, pp. 132-68 (p. 152)

<sup>59</sup>See, for example, Mercer, Kobena & Julien, Isaac, 'Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier', in Chapman, Rowena & Rutherford, Jonathan, Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, London: Laurence & Wieshart, 1988, pp. 97-164 & Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities. Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990, pp. 241-7



## CONCLUSION: FRENCH FEMINISM AND THEORIES OF MASCULINITY

This research set out to discover whether there was a feminist debate on masculinity in France. It found that there was an important difference in the way in which French feminism was defined in and outside France. It also found a feminism split between movement and theory, both of which have developed an interest in masculinity, but in different ways. Taking one example of feminist practice, and one of feminist theory, it discovered an almost unbridged gap between them. It also found that perceptions of feminism vary greatly, and that some of them play an important rôle in popular interpretations of masculinity. The examination of theories of masculinity which have emerged out of the women's movement, men's groups and the media allowed a certain number of conclusions to be drawn about French feminism and French feminist theories of masculinity.

### French Feminism

The most important characteristic of French feminism to recur here is the split between the movement and research. Feminist theory would never have developed without the women's movement, but the evidence presented here supports the argument that the gap between them is currently weakening them both. Feminist activists and theorists are working separately, and there is little evidence of exchange between them. Grass-roots feminists are suspicious of academic institutions, and researchers are often reluctant to advertise their feminism. Gender theories, in particular, have developed in almost total isolation from the movement, which perhaps explains why the issue which is currently mobilising Parisian feminists, the campaign for numerical parity between women and men in politics, has not been accompanied by a theoretical examination of the concept of parity, or of its implications for continuing developments in theories of gender. Whereas Cynthia Cockburn has extended the meaning of this term to cover 'equivalence', thus adding another aspect to the debate on sexual difference, in France parity refers only to equality of numbers.<sup>1</sup>

It was shown that a small number of feminist activists regret the fact that there is so little contact between activists and researchers. For example, Suzy Rojtman from the Collectif féministe contre le viol states that they have much to offer each other and appeals for closer links.<sup>2</sup> This is happening, slowly, as the combination of practice and

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<sup>1</sup>Cockburn, Cynthia, *In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations*, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1991. On the parity campaign in France, see Gaspard, Françoise; Servan-Schreiber, Claude & Le Gall, Anne, *Au pouvoir citoyennes!* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992 and most issues of *Paris féministe* since 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Rojtman, Suzy, 'Le collectif féministe contre le viol: un lieu d'information, de solidarité et de lutte', *Nouvelles questions féministes*, nos. 16-18, 1991, pp. 217-23 (p. 223)



theory evident in the work of Daniel Welzer-Lang at RIME and Marie-Victoire Louis at the AVFT demonstrates, but it is limited.

It became apparent in the course of this research that there were significant variations in the representation of feminism and its impact, between, for instance, feminists and the authors of popular accounts of changes in masculinity. One of the most striking features of descriptions of the impact of feminism in France is that its assessment depends very much on the position of the observer. A feminist assessment of the impact of feminism might include the considerable gains which have resulted from feminist struggles, for example, the legalisation of abortion and contraception; changes in the rape laws; sexual harassment legislation; and increased public awareness of male violence. However, it would also consider the fact that the victories have not been total and that there have been negative reactions, for example, the re-introduction of charges for certain contraceptive pills and the rise in the numbers and the increase in the violence of anti-abortionists. It would perhaps mention that violence towards women has not decreased, that there are fewer women in parliament than in 1947 and that feminist research is underfunded and receives little institutional support. On the other hand, authors such as Elisabeth Badinter, Evelyne Sullerot and Christine Castelain-Meunier claim that feminism has been enormously influential throughout society, while divorced men's groups such as the MCM portray it as strong and harmful. Reactions to feminism have influenced the ways in which masculinity has been interpreted in magazines such as *L'évènement du jeudi* and *Le nouvel observateur* and in popular books including Elisabeth Badinter's and Evelyne Sullerot's bestsellers.

The way feminism and its impact are portrayed by the media in the context of the masculinity debate contrasts sharply with the way feminists themselves perceive them, as can be seen from chapters 2 and 3. Two of the most important aspects of the media's portrayal of feminism are, firstly, that it is said to have had an enormous impact on French society during the 1970s, causing a total upheaval in gender relations. This is portrayed as having had devastating effects on men, and in particular on their masculine identity, which was consequently thrown into crisis. The 'New Man', in his various guises, is portrayed as one of the consequences of this change in masculinity. As a background to a discussion of masculinity, this has important implications. It positions men as the victims of feminism and every effort they make to recover from their complete loss of power and to adapt to feminism's demands is therefore portrayed as laudable. Consequently, Elisabeth Badinter and Evelyne Sullerot can express sympathy with men, commend them for their efforts, and position feminism, not unequal gender relations, as the root of the problem.



Secondly, the media have declared that feminism is now over, since it has achieved its aim and, moreover, become aware of its excesses. The concept of 'post-feminism' presented by the magazines and popular books examined in chapter 3 often contains an element of comparison with a 'feminist' United States. Thus American sexual harassment legislation was seen as too much of a threat to the focus on seduction which was claimed to underpin the French way of conducting gender relations. This has a silencing effect on what remains of feminism in France. The fact that the media have refused to recognise that feminism has had to change, by reducing its high profile, revolutionary actions of the 1970s and increasing its low profile, long-term projects, such as establishing women's refuges in the 1980s, means that the assertion that it is dead is widely accepted. It is the changing definition of feminism and its aims, continually re-examined by feminists, which enables feminism to adapt and evolve and retain its relevance. Thus, young feminist groups, such as the Marie pas claire, find it necessary to consider the continuities and discontinuities between what feminism meant to the previous generation of feminists and what it means to them.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to consider the links between French popular interpretations of masculinity and nationalism. The arguments found in these interpretations include the assertion that French men are better than British and American men. Masculinity is presented as unproblematic in France; the French are said to organise their gender relations better; and French women are fortunately not as radically feminist as their American counterparts. In fact, they are *post-feminist*. There is a denial of the existence of male violence in France; it is portrayed as a typically American problem. In this way, then, the existence of French feminism is denied, as is the existence of male violence in France and, consequently, the experiences of the many French women who are the victims of male violence. Although masculinity is becoming a popular subject for magazine articles and popular books, it is displaced from France, so French people can read about the problems of American masculinity and male violence, but little about their own.

#### EXCHANGE BETWEEN FRENCH AND ANGLO-AMERICAN THEORIES OF MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE AND GENDER

This research has shown that exchange between Anglo-American and French feminist theories on the question of masculinity and male violence has been limited. Although there are some exceptions (for example, Christine Delphy has always had contact with British feminists and her work is published in Britain, and Marie-Victoire Louis draws on Anglo-American publications), this is rare. Amongst French feminist and pro-

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<sup>3</sup>See for example, Trat, Josette & Vigan, Marie-Annick, 'Marie pas claire: jeunes et féministes' in *Cahiers du féminisme*, no. 65, été 1993, pp. 26-30



feminist men attempting to theorise male violence, there is more evidence of the influence of Quebec theories than British or American. Marie-Victoire Louis, for example, draws heavily on Quebec developments and publishes articles by Canadian feminists in *Projets féministes*. Daniel Welzer-Lang has close contact with pro-feminist men in Canada and based RIME on Canadian experiences. I have argued that, despite this lack of exchange, there are many similarities between them, and that an increase in exchange could be of benefit to all parties. So what is preventing this?

There are several main obstacles to an exchange between Anglo-American and French attempts to theorise masculinity. The tendency for French feminism to be reduced to the work of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva means that little attention is paid to other feminists, including those whose theories are based on social constructionist premises. The representation of French feminism as exotically different to its Anglo-American counterpart obscures the similarities between them.

Another obstacle is the fact that French gender theories, although similar to their Anglo-American equivalents, often incorporate a false opposition to Anglo-American gender theories. For example, the insistence on the part of some French feminists that the meaning of 'rapports sociaux de sexe' is very different to that of the Anglo-American meaning of the term 'gender' masks the similarities between the two. Practical factors which also hinder exchange include the problems of language and translation, and also the lack of interest in feminism on the part of French universities, research institutes and publishers.

### **French Feminist Theories of Masculinity**

The evidence presented in this thesis enables us to suggest explanations of why French feminists became interested in masculinity. Early feminist interest in masculinity as a subject of inquiry in its own right probably emerged as a response to writing by members of men's groups. This happened slowly, since many feminists believed that it was men who should be investigating masculinity. However, feminist suspicion towards men's groups and a growing critique of the analyses they produced fuelled a debate between the two, and feminist criticism of men's groups' analyses developed into the beginnings of feminist theories of masculinity. At the same time, feminist concerns in other areas, including theories of gender and the struggle against male violence towards women, were developing in such a way that masculinity was becoming an essential object of research. I have shown how feminist interest in masculinity grew in the two areas examined; what the feminists involved have contributed to an understanding of masculinity; and what links there are between the two.



## THEORIES OF GENDER AND MASCULINITY

The development in theories of gender traced in this thesis demonstrates that, as a growing emphasis was placed on the unequal and hierarchical relation between women and men, feminists argued that it was important to study both sides of the relation. Some feminists began to study men as gendered individuals, emphasising that, although men had been the subject of much research in the past, it was usually as a gender-neutral norm to which women were compared.

The rejection of naturalism played an important part in this process. Feminists sought to demonstrate the social reasons for men's domination of women, arguing that anatomical differences offered insufficient explanation. In France, as in Britain and the United States, one of the earliest feminist contributions to the masculinity debate was the insistence that masculinity, like femininity, is a social construct, historically variable and that it can therefore be changed. This was important, since it challenged widely accepted notions of what is natural and therefore fixed. Thus rape, for instance, could no longer be seen as the inevitable expression of natural male aggression. Theorists such as Colette Guillaumin, Nicole-Claude Mathieu and Christine Delphy developed complex oppositions to naturalist ideology. They argue that naturalist ideology is used to justify the oppression of certain groups. Women and black people are defined as naturally or biologically different and this is why they perform different social rôles, hold less power and earn less.

Delphy argues that masculinity and femininity are determined by and exist only because of power relations between women and men. Like social classes, which only exist because of the relation between them, gender only exists because of the power relation between the sexes. The power relation comes first, she argues, followed by the technical division of labour, and finally anatomical sex, or, at least, the belief that anatomical differences matter. Mathieu, too, writes in an early article, 'Homme-culture et femme-nature?', that society is constructed through masculine discourse as divided into two categories of sex. The difference between them is used to justify and maintain the power exerted by one category over the other.<sup>4</sup> According to Colette Guillaumin, sexual difference is a naturalist ideology used by men to justify their appropriation of women's time, labour and energy. Guillaumin exposes what she claims are inconsistencies in naturalist ideology. For example, she states that, if sexual difference were natural, men would not need to go to such great lengths to protect their difference

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<sup>4</sup>Mathieu, Nicole-Claude, 'Homme-culture et femme-nature?', *L'Homme*, no. 13, 1973, pp. 101-13



or masculinity, for example, their disapproval of, or fear of, homosexuality and transvestism and the imposition of dress codes on women at work.

The development of theories of gender relations has been traced from QF to APRE. QF set the terms of the debate and the basic premises on which it took place. Their stress on the social construction of difference has continued to play a central rôle in feminist theories of masculinity. Their work is recognised by French feminists currently developing theories in this area as having made a significant contribution, although aspects of it are now questioned. A major continuity between QF and APRE are that they both take as a basic premise that differences between masculinity and femininity, portrayed as biological facts, are socially constructed and historically variable. For example, Danièle Kergoat's work on social relations of sex has much in common with the main arguments of the QF theorists, including the complete rejection of biological explanations of differences between the social practices of men and women; the claim that these differences are socially constructed; that this construction is historical and therefore not immutable; and that the social relations of sex rest on a hierarchical relation between the sexes, which is a power relation.

There are, however, certain discontinuities between them. APRE has attempted to account for variations in relations between the structure of male dominance and individual men, which early structuralist theories were unable to do. From the rigid structuralism of the 1970s, for example, according to which all men dominate all women as a sex class and individuals cannot step outside the structure of gender relations, feminists have moved to a more flexible combination of various axes of power and to considering the relation between the structure of gender relations and individuals.

The similarities between Anglo-American and French feminist theories of gender are often ignored, but there are many. There are similarities in the trends from sex rôle theory to theories of gender; from structuralism to more flexible systems (whether accompanied by a rejection or adaptation of the concept of patriarchy); and from the optimistic belief that the social construction of masculinity could be changed to a re-examination of the mechanisms of social change and of the reproduction of existing relations. In both, there has been a growing interest in the re-introduction of biology into theories of gender. The maintenance of the binary division of the sexes is challenged by the work of biologists in France, as in Britain and the United States, who claim that biological sex is less rigidly divided into two categories than had previously been thought. Feminist biologists argue that the differences are much more indistinct, that difference is socially constructed and exaggerated into an opposition, but that



individuals do not fit easily into this opposition, and are instead situated on a continuum. They attempt to demonstrate that, since there is no scientific basis for the binary division of the sexes, it is based on a social decision, which is responsible for the perpetuation of this division. Christine Delphy and Nicole-Claude Mathieu argue that sex and gender cannot be easily separated. Sex is defined through the framework of gendered power relations. Anglo-American feminists are similarly interested in this artificial division, and have challenged the opposition between natural fixed biology and socially constructed gender.

Evidence that gender is historically variable has been used to demonstrate that it is socially constructed. The historical specificity of social relations of sex have been examined in France by, for example, Annelise Mauge, who demonstrates in L'identité masculine en crise au tournant du siècle how masculine identity has changed, and therefore can change.<sup>5</sup> Nicole-Claude Mathieu's anthropological comparisons across societies and cultures reach similar conclusions.<sup>6</sup> In the introduction to Histoire des femmes en occident 5: le XXe siècle, Françoise Thébaud stresses that what is important when writing a history of women is to concentrate on changing gender relations.<sup>7</sup>

In Britain, Jeffrey Weeks' history of homosexuality shows how it developed from a practice to an identity.<sup>8</sup> John Tosh and Michael Roper's Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800 and Catherine Hall's White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations of Feminism and History construct a history of gender relations, showing once again how much they have changed in the past and can therefore change in the future.<sup>9</sup>

One of the implications of the deconstruction of naturalist ideology is that it means that male violence cannot be explained with natural facts about men. Social constructionist feminists argue that male violence is caused by factors linked to men's power over women, and that these need to be explored. However, this research has shown that the understanding of male violence towards women is limited by the underdevelopment of the links between male violence and gender relations. Increased contact between

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<sup>5</sup>Mauge, Annelise, L'identité masculine en crise au tournant du siècle, Paris: Rivages, 1987

<sup>6</sup>Mathieu, Nicole Claude, L'anatomie politique: catégorisations et idéologies du sexe, Paris: Côté-femmes, 1991

<sup>7</sup>Thébaud, Françoise, 'Introduction', Duby, Georges & Perrot, Michelle (eds.), Histoire des femmes en occident 5: le XXe siècle (sous la direction de Françoise Thébaud), Paris: Plon, 1992, pp. 13-23

<sup>8</sup>Weeks, Jeffrey, Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the 19th Century to the Present, London: Quartet, 1977

<sup>9</sup>Roper, Michael, & Tosh, John (eds.), Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800, London: Routledge, 1991; Hall, Catherine, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations of Feminism and History, London: Polity, 1992



theorists and practitioners could lead to fruitful exchange and added insight for both parties.

The relation between material realities and representations of gender has been examined in France and in Britain. For example, Mariette Sineau examines it in the context of French politics, considering the way in which the representation of politics as masculine perpetuates the exclusion of women.<sup>10</sup> Michèle Le Doeuff demonstrates how science is represented as masculine even when it is done by women, thus excluding women from legitimate possession of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Similarly Cynthia Cockburn argues that the representation of technology as masculine is maintained in order to keep women out of men's industries, where they would undercut men's wages and therefore threaten their employment. She takes as an example printworking, which developed as a masculine cartel, and demonstrates how decisions about the size and weight of the machinery, for example, helped to emphasise that this was men's work. When new technology arrived, which depended less on physical strength, men found other ways of reinforcing the industry's masculine identity and perpetuating the exclusion of women.<sup>12</sup>

French interest in the reproduction of gender relations, highlighting both their fixed and changing nature finds an equivalent in Cynthia Cockburn's examination of the reproduction of gender relations in organisations. Male power, she argues, is systemic, but how is this system reproduced? It is also included in the continuing debate around patriarchy, for example, the work of Sylvia Walby and Malcolm Walters.<sup>13</sup> Lynne Segal and Rowena Chapman show that it is in men's interest to reproduce the system of male dominance.<sup>14</sup> Further developments in Anglo-American theories include the differences between men in their relation to the structure of male dominance (hegemonic masculinity and various subordinated masculinities, for example gay and black masculinities). The implications of these developments are that individual variations in relation to the systemic dominance of women by men can be examined.

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<sup>10</sup>Sineau, Mariette, 'Pouvoir, modernité et monopole masculin de la politique: le cas français', in Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 39-61

<sup>11</sup>Le Doeuff, Michelle, 'Gens de science: essai sur le déni de mixité', in Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 5-37

<sup>12</sup>Cockburn, Cynthia, Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change, London: Pluto, 1983

<sup>13</sup>Walby, Sylvia, Theorising Patriarchy, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990 & Waters, Malcolm, 'Patriarchy and Viriarchy: An Exploration and Reconstruction of Concepts of Masculine Domination', Sociology, no. 23, May 1989, pp. 193-211

<sup>14</sup>Chapman, Rowena, 'The Great Pretender: Variations on the New Man Theme' in Chapman, Rowena & Rutherford, Jonathan (eds.), Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity, London: Laurence & Wieshart, 1988, pp. 225-48 & Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities. Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990



The examination of the way gender relations cut through society and interact with other social relations in the construction of an individual's identity has started in France, but has not been fully explored. It is better developed in Britain and the United States, where the interaction between various axes of power has been explored by many authors.<sup>15</sup> In France, there has been less exploration of the interaction of various social relations, although there has been an acknowledgement of the importance of doing this by Anne-Marie Devreux and Danièle Kergoat. Kergoat states that it is necessary to examine all social relations which together contribute to the individual's identity. Looking at the way social relations of sex are cut through by other social relations helps us to explain conflicting identities, and the interaction between individuals and social relations.

#### MALE VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITY

Feminists active around the problem of male violence have shown a growing interest in its perpetrators. This has led to the production of certain ideas about violent men and the construction of masculine identity. There is also an increasing willingness on the part of some feminists to work together with men in a search for ways to solve the problem of male violence.

When the priorities for feminists were to raise public consciousness, to fight for legal reform and to provide aid for the women victims of male violence, the main interest was the victims. However, although aid and legal reform were very important, they did not bring about a reduction in the amount of male violence towards women, and it became clear that there needed to be a better understanding of the causes of this violence, and a search for ways to prevent it. This was accompanied by a growing interest in the perpetrator and in the gendered nature of male violence.

As feminists exposed form after form of male violence towards women, they began to make connections between them, and now the different forms are seen by some feminists as situated on a continuum. This has enabled the continuities between the different types of violence to be identified and has encouraged the gendered nature of the violence, and in particular the sex of the perpetrator, to be stressed.

Feminists realised that there was a growing amount of information about violent men emerging from conversations with women victims in refuges and on helplines, so they began to try to identify certain patterns and characteristics which violent men shared.

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<sup>15</sup>Cocks, Joan, The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique, and Political Theory, London & New York: Routledge, 1989 & Connell, R.W., Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics, Cambridge, Polity, 1987



They used evidence gathered in this way to support their rejection of the myths according to which male violence is caused by uncontrollable sexual urges; rape is always committed by a stranger; and rapists are mad or marginal to society. Feminists provided evidence of premeditation in most rape cases and exposed the extent of incest and rape by partners and acquaintances. If rapists were ordinary, normal men, the causes, they argued, must lie elsewhere than in individual pathology, that is, in the power relations between the sexes. Therefore, feminists realised the need to look at violent men within a framework of gender relations.

Some feminists have explored the social acceptance of male violence. They state that male violence is socially tolerated; that it may be encouraged through videos, sports etc.; and that social and cultural representations link masculinity and violence. They argue that men's socially constructed masculine identity is built around violence or hierarchical gender divisions; and that it is necessary to challenge representations of masculinity; to change gender relations and to remove the power relation which is expressed as violence.

French feminists may not have solved the problem of male violence towards women, but they have established certain bases for continuing research, for example, the necessity of stressing that this is *gendered* violence, an expression of male power and the desire to perpetuate male dominance. In this respect, feminists in France are at a similar stage to their British and American counterparts.

#### LINKING THEORIES OF GENDER, MALE VIOLENCE AND MASCULINITY

At the point where theories of gender and male violence meet, certain insights about men and masculinity are emerging. However, as yet, very little has been produced in this area. Marie-Victoire Louis and Daniel Welzer-Lang are perhaps exceptional in this respect. The implications for the understanding of masculinity of work which is situated on the border between gender theory and male violence are that it can contribute to an understanding of how male identity is constructed around violence; how male violence functions within a system of male dominance; and how individual acts of male violence fit into this broader system.

Explanations of the ways in which masculine identity is constructed around male violence vary. Anne Zelensky argues that cultural representations of the links between masculinity and violence play a part in the construction of masculine identity. In war, sport and films, violence is portrayed as part of 'being a man', and it strengthens masculine identity. Male sexuality in such representations is dominant, forceful and often violent. For example, rape scenes are not uncommon in films, and are more often



than not portrayed in a way which emphasises the masculinity of the rapist positively. Pornographic films provide the clearest examples of the links between violence, sexuality and male dominance. Women in refuges have described how they were forced to act out scenes from pornographic films.

Zelensky also argues that violence has been a significant part of masculine identity since the 'droit de correction' allowed men to 'punish' their wives. Nowadays, boys are encouraged to fight in order to solve disputes and to 'stick up for themselves'. Whether men are violent or not themselves, they have a high tolerance of violence in other men. Male violence is often portrayed to men as socially legitimate and it becomes an important part of the construction of masculine identity. Marie-Victoire Louis' studies of male violence are based on similar beliefs about the links between violence and masculinity. She exposes the leniency with which the male-dominated judicial system treats men who have been violent towards women. She claims that there is a tendency for judges and magistrates to blame women for provoking the attack, for nagging, behaving irrationally, or going out on their own at night. She also claims that there is a certain complicity between men, which means that male judges or police officers protect men of their own social class, thus making it difficult to press charges against a middle-class, or in some way influential, man.

According to Zelensky, violence is culturally represented as linked to masculinity, and it is a part of masculine identity constructed in and by a society which has a relatively high tolerance of it. According to Marie-Victoire Louis, it can also be a way in which many men express their frustration when they fail to live up to the social and cultural ideal of masculinity. British and American feminists have dealt with similar questions. Myriam Miedzian tries to explain how masculine identity is constructed around male violence in Boys Will Be Boys<sup>16</sup>; Lynne Segal tackles similar questions in Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men<sup>17</sup>; and Sue Lees examines the way male judges perceive rape in 'Judicial Rape'.<sup>18</sup>

What have French feminists said about the function of male violence in a system of male dominance? They have claimed that violence controls women's movements: the threat of rape stops them going out at night; sexual harassment interferes with their work and refusal to put up with it can prevent them being promoted, or even employed.

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<sup>16</sup>Miedzian, Myriam, Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence, London: Virago, 1992

<sup>17</sup>Segal, Lynne, Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men, London: Virago, 1990

<sup>18</sup>Lees, Sue, 'Judicial Rape', Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 11-36



On a societal level, male violence reinforces men's power over women. For individual men it is a means of reinforcing this power, especially when they feel it is threatened.

Feminists have claimed that seeing male violence as a support for male dominance means seeing it as a political act and not an isolated incident. This was stressed by Emmanuèle de Lesseps, who claimed that, in common with racist attacks, which are political, not individual, since the victims are attacked *only* because of their colour, sexist attacks take place *only* because of the sex of the victim.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore significant that feminists have stressed the links between different forms of male violence. The gendered nature of the violence is seen as more important than the particular form it takes. As mentioned in chapter 5, Willemien Visser states that rape is a crime which is committed against women *because* they are women, and the rape of men and boys cannot be compared to the rape of women and girls, because they are not subjected to a systematic and global oppression during times of war and peace.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, what have French feminists said about how individual acts of violence fit into a broader system of male dominance? Individual acts of violence reinforce and perpetuate this system. They are accommodated by it through tolerance and acceptance or through labelling the perpetrators as exceptions or marginal, and therefore not as a threat to the continuation of the system itself.

A system of male dominance is more stable and effective if there is a widely accepted belief that women consent to their subordination. The notion of women's consent has been challenged in academic debate by Nicole-Claude Mathieu; and in refuge and helpline reports insisting that women do not consent to domestic violence, that financial dependence on a violent partner plays a much greater part in their inability to leave, along with a feeling of shame and the effects of long-term humiliation. Feminists also argue that the notion of consent cannot be applied in cases of child sexual abuse, because of the authority of the abuser; and that consent is defined in ludicrous ways in court, where, for example, the homosexuality of a rape victim can be presented as evidence of her likelihood to have consented to sex with a man.

### **Towards a Greater Exchange of Ideas**

After the hostility of many feminists towards men during the 1970s rape campaigns, when radical feminists declared that all men were rapists, and towards men's groups in the early 1980s, when the St. Cloud conference on men against sexism received much

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<sup>19</sup>Lesseps, Emmanuèle de, 'Sexisme et racisme', Questions féministes, no. 7, février 1980, pp. 95-102

<sup>20</sup>Visser, Willemien, 'Viols contre les femmes de l'"ex"-Yougoslavie', Nouvelles questions féministes, vol. 14, no. 1, 1993, pp. 43-76



feminist criticism, there has been a certain rapprochement between some feminists and pro-feminist men around the study of masculinity and male violence. Evidence of this change can be found in joint publications, such as Des hommes et du masculin and joint projects, such as the centre for violent men in Paris, 'SOS hommes'.

This willingness to include men is not shared by all feminists, but those who have begun to work more closely with pro-feminist men consider it important to the project of changing masculinity and reducing male violence towards women. If men are involved in feminism, argue for example Marie-Victoire Louis and Anne Zelensky, then it demonstrates to other men that there is an alternative masculine identity, which does not have to be constructed around violence and the oppression of women.

Changes in men's studies of masculinity have contributed to this rapprochement. Early writing on masculinity by men was frequently criticised for concentrating only on men's experiences of masculinity and especially on how they were constrained or oppressed by it. It ignored the effects of masculinity on women, and its aim seemed to be to achieve 'men's liberation', rather than a fundamental change in the power relations between the sexes. However, this has changed in recent years, as can be seen by such publications as Des hommes et du masculin. Daniel Welzer-Lang describes this new approach as the second stage in studies of masculinity, and it could have important implications for future research.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that the study of men and masculinity has aroused a certain amount of interest amongst feminists in France. A growing interest has been demonstrated amongst feminists who produce theories of gender and amongst those active around the problem of male violence. However, the insular conditions in which much of the work examined in this research is undertaken may be limiting its development. Certainly, some of the most productive and interesting ideas about masculinity are emerging from groups and individuals who are involved in the cross-fertilisation of ideas, whether this is between the movement and research; men's groups and feminists; or Anglo-American and French theories. Although in most cases this is only just beginning to happen, a growing number of feminists and pro-feminist men are stressing its

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<sup>21</sup>For many British feminists, there are still problems with this. The hostility and suspicion feminists have traditionally demonstrated towards men's studies have not yet disappeared. In fact, as the fight for funding of particular courses in British universities becomes more competitive, men's studies is seen to be threatening women's studies in terms of resources. However, there seem to be some advantages in a greater contact between them, although not at the risk of men's studies subsuming women's studies, which were, for important reasons, established separately. For example, Jonathan Dollimore from the University of Sussex, writes that the cross-fertilisation between the two areas has aided research: 'some of the most exciting work in the area of sexuality is being done by people who are crossing boundaries rather than people trying to erect them and stay inside them.' (Griffiths, Sian, 'A Knock at the Men's Room Door', The Times Higher Educational Supplement, 4 September 1992, p. 36)



importance, and, if the trend continues, important contributions to the masculinity debate can be expected to result.

The current popularity of the masculinity debate in many areas of society and culture in France, as in other western countries, means that it is more necessary than ever for feminists to participate in it. Australian sociologist, Bob Connell, points out that, despite talk of changing masculinities, there is little evidence that gender relations have changed.<sup>22</sup> Connell stresses that the masculinity debate represents an opportunity for a real challenge to be made to the existing system of gender relations, but unless care is taken, this opportunity could be missed. While this danger exists, feminists and pro-feminist men need to ensure that the terms on which the debate is taking place are not redefined.

The fact that feminists have entered the masculinity debate is indicative of an awareness of this danger, and also of a certain evolution in feminism. For various reasons, feminism has broadened its horizons since the early 1970s. There has been a reduction in separatist policies, favouring the inclusion of men in pro-feminist theory and practice. Feminists now place less emphasis on the women centred studies which were important in the 1970s, and recognise that men must be included in their analyses. Changes in the political climate have also had an influence. A dissatisfaction with the Socialist government encouraged alliances between some feminists and other disillusioned groups on the Left. Feminist groups and individuals became involved in mainstream organisations, and this has led to some important gains. However, it has also created tensions between institutionalised feminism and grass-roots activism. If, as Connell states, the future of the masculinity debate depends on feminists and pro-feminist men, then feminists need to reassess the rôle that they can play. Despite media assertions that feminism is over, it is clearly untrue that its *raison d'être* has disappeared. Certainly it seems that women can no longer afford to take for granted the apparent success of feminism. This is particularly important at a time when women are increasingly employed in part-time jobs with little security, when abortion is once again threatened, when racism and immigration are at the top of the agenda for a right-wing government experiencing the pressures of a recession, of high unemployment and of the presence of an extreme right-wing party, the Front national.

The women's movement, like all the new social movements which appeared or reappeared in the 1960s and 1970s, is currently experiencing a crisis of identity and a

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<sup>22</sup>Connell, R.W., 'The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History', in Connell, R.W. (ed.), *Theory and Society: Renewal and Critique in Social Theory*, special issue on masculinities, vol. 22/5, Oct. 1993, pp. 597-623 (pp. 612-13)



lack of political power, even if individuals and groups are politically active.<sup>23</sup> Although external factors have played an important part in the decline of feminism, it is also the result of certain problems which the movement has not been able to resolve. However, before discussing these problems, it is useful here to consider the gains of the French women's movement.

### Gains

Feminism has achieved much in a short period of time. Feminists stress that the changes that have come about have not been the result of an inevitable social evolution, as is often suggested, but are the result of determined action by feminists. The biggest change has been in social attitudes. Attitudes towards sex and the family have changed considerably, and the separation between the public and the private domains have been challenged. The traditional division of these spheres into masculine and feminine and the rôles and identities constructed around this division have been called into question, not only in theory, but also in practice. Issues of sexuality, the family, violence and domestic labour are now firmly on the political agenda, and certain legislative gains have been made at a national and international level.

Women have made great advances in material, legal, personal and sexual terms. In the case of the middle classes, many women now expect to combine a career and motherhood, and no longer attach as much importance to the institution of marriage. More couples cohabit and there are more single-parent families, mostly headed by women.<sup>24</sup>

Feminism has also had an impact on social and political theory. It has questioned the concept of 'nature', and analysed the social construction of gender and sexuality. In the social sciences, feminism has challenged traditional epistemology and developed the idea of a 'feminist standpoint'. It has made important contributions in sociology, anthropology and history.<sup>25</sup>

The current diversity of feminist ideas and projects and the lack of unifying goals and beliefs, as well as the questioning of a feminist identity could be seen as weaknesses and as contributory factors in feminism's decline and lack of power. However, whilst this is true in certain respects (the lack of dialogue between individuals and groups, and

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<sup>23</sup>Lesselier, Claudie, 'Quelles perspectives pour le mouvement féministe?' in *M*, nos. 53-54, avril/mai 1992, pp. 10-13 (p. 10)

<sup>24</sup>Picq, Françoise, *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement*, Paris: Seuil, 1993, p. 340

<sup>25</sup>Lesselier, Claudie, 'Quelles perspectives pour le mouvement féministe?' in *M*, nos. 53-54, avril/mai 1992, pp. 10-13 (p. 10)



between researchers and activists, means that feminism's theory and practice are fragmented), it is also indicative of theoretical developments which have become more coherent. For example, there have been attempts to introduce gender into debates which had previously ignored it and to explore the interaction of gender and class. The diversity of the movement is therefore not just a weakness. As Françoise Collin states, it demonstrates a richness of ideas and a healthy rejection of doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

### Problems and Limitations

Alongside its gains, however, feminism has had to recognise a number of defeats. Single-parent families, which are usually headed by women, have become poorer; working conditions for women employees have worsened; women continue to earn less than men; sexual harassment and discrimination are still a problem for many working women<sup>27</sup>; and, despite the media representations of the 'New Man', there is no evidence that men do any extra work in the home.<sup>28</sup>

Feminism in the 1990s finds itself facing problems defining its identity and aims. It has had to face the necessity of adapting to political and social changes. These include the paradoxical situation in which there has been a public acceptance of some feminist ideas, at the same time as a refusal to accept feminism as such. It has to face the problem of the arrival of a new generation of women for whom feminism does not have the same meaning as for the 1970s activists. Many young women take the results of the early second wave feminists' struggles for granted. Many are unaware of the part played by the MLF in achieving these gains for women. So what is feminism now? And what could it become?

Feminism still has little power and a major limitation has been its marginalisation from politics, for which it is, claims Lesselier, partly responsible. Contrary to its aim, feminism ended up being a movement concerned with the specific condition of women, instead of providing analyses and projects which concerned all issues.<sup>29</sup> Christine Delphy asserts that the women's movement was caught in the same trap as the ecology movement: either they could concentrate their efforts on specific issues (associated with women/the environment) and run the risk of not being considered truly political, because they had no policies on the issues considered by those with most power as 'political', or they could try to take a feminist/ecologist standpoint on all issues, and run

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<sup>26</sup>Collin, Françoise, 'Théories et praxis de la différence des sexes', in *M*, nos. 53-4, avril/mai 1992, pp. 5-9 (p. 6)

<sup>27</sup>Picq, Françoise, *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement*, Paris: Seuil, 1993, pp. 341-2

<sup>28</sup>Kaufman, Jean-Claude, *La trame conjugale: analyse du couple par son linge*, Paris: Nathan, 1992

<sup>29</sup>Lesselier, Claudie, 'Quelles perspectives pour le mouvement féministe?' in *M*, nos. 53-54, avril/mai 1992, pp. 10-13 (p. 12)



the risk of never addressing the specific issues they organised to solve, because they are low on the list of 'political' priorities.<sup>30</sup> The women's movement chose the former, and this can be seen as both a strength and a weakness. One result of it was that men could continue to hold power and make decisions, while token women were invited to speak about 'women's issues', as though they were necessarily specific, and the few women who were in the parties were pushed into departments of health and the family.

As this research has shown, feminism is not dead. But it has changed and there are certain problems, which may or may not be inherent to feminism and may or may not be resolved. The type of reflection which some feminists have begun to undertake is important to its future. Why is the movement so weak and invisible? Is it inevitable? Could this type of movement only exist for a certain period? It is by addressing the questions of its changing identity and aims that feminism in France will be able to confront the problems facing women in the 1990s.

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<sup>30</sup>Delphy, Christine, 'Féminisme et recomposition à gauche', in Le nouveau politis: la revue, no. 1, hiver 1992, pp. 27-34



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## Interviews

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