

# Threads of History: Beyond the Common Ideas of the Feminist and LGBTQ+ Movement

From Emotions to Feminism: History and Inspiration

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**Threads of History: Beyond the Common Ideas of the Feminist and LGBTIQ+ Movement**

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I am for equality.

**Nora**



# Introduction

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This booklet discusses the major historical milestones of the feminist movement, LGBTQI+<sup>1</sup> history, and the development of gender and queer studies. The main aim is to bring these evolutions to the readers in an easy-to-read way. The booklet is primarily targeted at primary and secondary school teachers, but can of course serve the public and all persons hungry for knowledge.

The booklet is based partly on a book written by the British historian Lucy Delap, who in her book *Feminisms: A Global History* focuses on the various feminist movements around the world that have been central to shaping societies as we know them today. As you will see from the text below, feminism has never been (and probably never will be) a unified movement. Nor has the LGBTQI+ movement, which is the subject of the second half of the booklet. This part of the text also describes the development of gender, queer and men's studies in academic settings.

<sup>1</sup> This acronym is an umbrella term for people of non-mainstream sexual orientation or gender identity. Specifically, it refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons. The + sign then represents other gender identities and sexual orientations not explicitly mentioned in the acronym.

# From Emotions to Feminism: History and Inspiration

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## Norms of expressing emotions over time

- 
- |                                       |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Late 18<sup>th</sup> century</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Both women and men were allowed to express a range of emotions in public life.</b></li> </ul>                               |
| <hr/>                                 |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>In the 19<sup>th</sup> century</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Both women and men were allowed to express only a limited range of emotions in public life.</b></li> </ul>                  |
| <hr/>                                 |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Late 19<sup>th</sup> century</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Efforts to broaden the limited range of emotions that women were allowed to express.</b></li> </ul>                         |
| <hr/>                                 |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>In the 20<sup>th</sup></b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The demand for happiness and fulfilled life for women has become the basis of emancipation around the world.</b></li> </ul> |
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## Feminist “nerve-wracking”

In Henrik Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* (1879), the main character Nora describes her home as a place where she is supposed to be mainly a “cheerful” wife and mother; in this environment and in this era, her real feelings were irrelevant. The important thing was to portray an impression of cheerfulness. This pretence and failure to acknowledge the women’s real emotions led, understandably, to their frustration and other negative – formerly suppressed – emotions. As women started to explore their emotions and take them seriously, they began to allow themselves to feel angry and to express this feeling. Eventually, the heroine Nora ran out of her patience and she stood up against this convention and ultimately became a global symbol of women’s emancipation.<sup>1</sup> This “feminist snap”<sup>2</sup> thus laid the foundation for feminist action.<sup>3</sup>

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## Verbal Expression of Pain

For a long time, women have been socialised not to express their anger therefore some found it difficult to use it as a tool. It was this attempt to normalise anger that led to the formation of The Furies,<sup>4</sup> a group named after the Roman goddesses of vengeance, in Washington, D.C. in 1971.<sup>5</sup>

Chinese and Vietnamese women have also been an inspiration for many parts of the world<sup>6</sup> in advocating for the right to express their emotions. They lived in a culture in which women’s status and importance were reflected in Mao Zedong’s<sup>7</sup> well-known statement: “*women hold up half the sky*”.<sup>8</sup> This fact combined with the cultural practice of relieving pain through its utterance became a good basis for feminist activities.<sup>9</sup>

## Experience transformed into a Slogan

By combining the above-mentioned Maoist cultural practice of relieving pain on the one hand with the habit of the movement Black Power of “telling it like it is” on the other hand, an extraordinary synergy was sparked. Thanks to this connection, the well-known feminist slogan “the personal is political” came to light.<sup>10</sup> Behind this slogan is the idea that issues such as women’s relationships, their roles in marriage and their feelings about motherhood,

<sup>1</sup> Since the heroine Nora symbolised courage in the fight against conventions that restrict women, we decided in 2004 to name our organisation ‘Gender Information Center NORA o. p. s.’ as a tribute to this global symbol of women’s emancipation, which inspires us to strengthen equality and change gender stereotypes.

<sup>2</sup> This expression originated from british-australian writer and researcher, Sarah Ahmed.

<sup>3</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>4</sup> The Furies: A Lesbian-Feminist Political Group

<sup>5</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>6</sup> They were inspired by Australian, Cuban, French and West German feminists in the years 1960-1980.

<sup>7</sup> Mao Zedong was a Chinese communist revolutionary.

<sup>8</sup> Lovell, Julia. 2019. *Maoism: A Global History*. London: The Bodley Head. ISBN: 978-1847922502.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to Communist China and Vietnam, the inspiration also came from the above discussed Norwegian play “*A Doll’s House*”, as well as from the Italian and American movements.

<sup>10</sup> These two ideas were brought into connection by Carol Hanisch in 1970.

need to be discussed as politics of emotions that are somehow guided, are heading somewhere and need to be changed.<sup>11</sup>

## Truths spoken from the Vagina

Women in Japan were positioned in subordinate roles as daughters, wives and concubines, and Toshiko Kishida<sup>12</sup> was critical of this fact in her public lectures. This was during a period when the government was beginning to move away from rigid social hierarchies (1868–1912). Kishida advocated for women's rights and in her speeches she expressed the anger stemming from the restrictions placed on women, which took the form of demands for absolute obedience to parents and seclusion in the home. Despite the initial hopes for change, the government cracked down on her and other critics and excluded women from any political participation by banning them till the year 1922 and even after that public appearances by women were accompanied by violent acts of government disapproval. However, Mitsu Tanaka<sup>13</sup> carried on Kishida's ideas and used specific rhetoric to express her anger. **As women were seen as objects of men's desire, they were more than anything else like vessels for satisfying their needs and therefore could be compared to toilet bowls.** She formulated this idea into a manifesto named *Liberation from the Toilet* (Benjo Kara no Kaiho) and presented it at the Conference of *Asian Women Fighting against Discrimination* (1970). **Tanaka purposely used this peculiar rhetoric to ensure that acts such as sexual abuse were not described in peaceful terms,** and therefore described these crimes in terms such as "I mark my revenge with the blood of my own child". As she herself claimed, these are 'the truths spoken from the vagina'.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1970s, the radical feminist Barbara Mehrhof<sup>15</sup> believed that raising awareness about emotional issues in connection to emancipation wouldn't change patriarchal practices in any way. She was calling for women's tactics of terror that would effectively combat rape culture.<sup>16</sup> **A similar approach and combative rhetoric brought to feminism an important question of whether the use of violence is an acceptable means of combating oppression or not.**<sup>17</sup>

## Love and Solidarity

Feminism, which fought for women's right to emotions and their expression, used anger as a reasonable form of expression. But alongside anger, feminism also promoted love and solidarity. This love was understood by some in as-

<sup>11</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>12</sup> Toshiko Kishida was a writer and political activist for women's rights, who is known as Japan's first woman orator.

<sup>13</sup> Mitsu Tanaka was a Japanese feminist and writer, who became well known as a radical activist during the early 1970s.

<sup>14</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Mehrhof is an American writer. In 1976, together with Florence Rush, a social worker and feminist who pioneered research on sexual violence against children, published under the title *Sexual Abuse of Children: A Feminist Perspective*.

<sup>16</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

sociation with motherhood as a specifically female experience and by others as warmth, friendship, trust and solidarity between women. This emotion of love and care thus acted as a unifying element for a wide range of women.<sup>18</sup>

## Seeking and liberating women's space

### Personal space

Mary Wollstonecraft was a British writer, philosopher, and one of the most famous advocates of women's rights. Wollstonecraft is best known for her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear to be only because they lack education.<sup>19</sup> She suggests that both men and women should be treated as rational beings and imagines a social order founded on reason. Today Wollstonecraft is regarded as one of the founding feminist philosophers, and feminists often cite both her life and her works as important influences.<sup>20</sup>

The sad truth is, until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wollstonecraft's life, which encompassed several unconventional personal relationships at the time, received more attention than her writing. What was so shocking about her life? It has a connection only to her personal space. During her marriage, even though she was pregnant, it was really important to her to have her own place to stay. **"Marriage under two roofs", which was an everyday reality for Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband William Godwin, was really controversial for the society of that time.** However, for Wollstonecraft, the negative interest of their acquaintances was much less important than one of her biggest priorities in life: the possibility of receiving political and intellectual guests in her own apartment.<sup>21</sup>

French-Peruvian socialist writer and activist Flora Tristan had this unique demand for being independent in her own place. She also wanted to own her own apartment where she could meet her guests and develop her ideas and thoughts. She made important contributions to early feminist theory and argued that the progress of women's rights was directly related to the progress of the working class. However, unlike Wollstonecraft, Tristan had much bigger problems with owning her own apartment than the misunderstanding of society. Her husband, André Chazal, pursued her constantly. **Tristan had to rent the tiny apartment under an assumed name. However, her husband still tracked her down and shot her in her own apartment in 1838.**<sup>22</sup>

Both of these stories remind us that for feminist thinkers, establishing their own spaces was crucial, but very difficult. Different people approached the creation of their own space for the realisation of feminist activism in their own way. For example, the tactic was to occupy male-dom-

<sup>18</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>19</sup> Defense of women's rights (K. Hilská, Trans.). In L. Oates-Indruchová (Ed.), *The Girl's War with Ideology: Classic Texts of Anglo-American Feminist Thought* (Dívčí válka s ideologií: klasické texty angloamerického feministického myšlení). pp. 19–26. Prague: Sociology Press. ISBN: 80-8580-67-2.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft. *Brooklyn Museum*. Available from: [www.brooklynmuseum.org/easca/dinner\\_party/place\\_settings/mary\\_wollstonecraft](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/easca/dinner_party/place_settings/mary_wollstonecraft)

<sup>21</sup> Abrams, Lynn. *The making of modern woman: Europe 1789–1918*. Longman history of European women. London: Longman, an imprint of Pearson Education, 2002. ISBN: 0582414105.

<sup>22</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

inated places (e.g. political gatherings) and draw attention to the absence of women<sup>23</sup> or to politicise their homes while husbands left to work in the public sphere.<sup>24</sup>

For example, teahouses, where women could meet and debate with impunity, became a key part of feminist campaigns. However, the biggest obstacle has always been the lack of funds. For feminists, space has always been influenced by ethnicity, religion or class. These intersections have determined what spaces can be used by whom and how.<sup>25</sup>

## Safe Space

In the 1970s and 1980s, a large number of feminist shelters, refuges and safe places were established. Most of them centred around the problem that was increasingly called “domestic violence” (until then “wife beating”) and also around rape and sexual assault. The use of the new terminology was intended to emphasise the seriousness of the violence, which did not only take place within the married couple but also against children and other relatives. At this time, the transformation of the perception of domestic violence is absolutely essential. Indeed, the feminist approach ceased to view violence as an individual experience with domestic partners (where women were the victims of the one accused of causing the violence) but began to view violence as a structural feature of patriarchy that helped maintain the structural status quo. The goal of the asylums that began to emerge at that time was to offer women a safe environment where they could re-evaluate their own lives and find out what it’s like to be in control of the circumstances of their lives. Initially, these shelters were improvised (e.g. squats or private apartments of feminist activists), and volunteers and clients themselves took part in their operation. Nevertheless, it represented a key service at a time when the police and social services were indifferent to women experiencing domestic violence. Such shelters first received government support in Australia and have been receiving government money since 1975 – the problem, however, was that if the government was not receptive to the idea, access to the money would again be denied to the shelter operators.<sup>26</sup>

However, it is a sad truth that asylums and shelters were only partially accessible to women who lacked class or racial privileges. Refuges led by white feminists have sometimes lacked the willingness to define themselves against racist assumptions. For example, among Australian feminists, “white” or “Anglo” values prevailed: ethnicity was automatically considered the cause of violence and not the more general structural factors of isolation and poverty that some groups faced and were therefore more likely to suffer violence and less able to cope with it. The result was the establishment of specialised shelters for immigrant or indigenous women. However, these

shelters drew much less money from the state budget than those for white women.<sup>27</sup>

## Space for work

The opening of paid work in the public space to women is also a big topic connected to the area of “women’s space”. By this, we do not only mean working-class professions which were often the only livelihood for working-class women. We mean a profession of intellectual activity that would be open to educated women. One of the first institutions that called for the advancement of women in the field of paid employment was the editorial office of the London magazine *The English Women’s Journal*. In 1859, its editors founded the Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women (SPEW). This company offered employment agency services and SPEW made it acceptable for women to be typists, hairdressers, printers, and bookkeepers. The Society also lends money to women for professional training.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, in the years that followed, this labour agency proved controversial and divisive. Women, who had long worked in poorly paid and demanding industries such as agriculture or domestic service, wanted better pay and more recognition. Sex workers wanted the police to stop harassing them. However, SPEW ignored all these problems and focused mostly on the workload. The working-class British women were strongly frustrated by the naivety of the demand for free entry into the labour market, as poor workers lacked employment rights and often worked in extremely dangerous conditions. Therefore, they demanded protection from the state to ensure improved problematic working conditions.<sup>29</sup>

However, the British women’s movement was deeply divided by the workplace debate: There were both opponents and supporters of the protection of women in the public workplace. For example, the feminist Jessie Boucherett said that if women workers are protected by the state and cannot work at night, for example, she fears that this protective legislation will only lead to pushing women out of the labour market again. Similar disputes also occurred in the USA in the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, which was promoted by the National Organization for Women. This act of enacting equality dominated feminist activism after suffrage and became its symbol in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

Unions and strike sites became key feminist spaces. For example, activists Maida Springer Kemp, Pauline Newman or feminist trade unionist Frieda Miller became activists for the organisation of activism among textile workers working in New York in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historian Dorothy Cobble refers (not only) to these women as “feminists of social justice”.<sup>31</sup> Trade union activism gradually began to focus on areas such as

23 Suffragette Susan B. Anthony was arrested when, along with 16 other women, she infiltrated the US presidential election and attempted to vote.

24 Abrams, Lynn. 2002. *The making of modern woman: Europe 1789–1918*. Longman history of European women. London: Longman, an imprint of Pearson Education. ISBN: 0582414105.

25 Strickland, Cara. “The Top-Secret Feminist History of Tea Rooms”. *Daily.jstor.or* [online]. Available on: [daily.jstor.org/the-top-secret-feminist-history-of-tea-rooms](http://daily.jstor.org/the-top-secret-feminist-history-of-tea-rooms)

26 Our History. *Shelterwa* [online]. Available on: [www.shelterwa.org.au/about-us/our-history](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/about-us/our-history)

27 Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

28 Colville, Deborah. Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (SPEW). UCL BLOOMSBURY PROJECT. 2012. Available from: [www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/institutions/society\\_promoting\\_employment\\_women.htm](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/institutions/society_promoting_employment_women.htm)

29 Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

30 Ibid.

31 Cobble, Dorothy Sue. 2014. “More than Sex Equality: Feminism After Suffrage”. In: Cobble, D. S., L. Gordon, A. Henry. *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women’s Movements*. New York, London: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

administration, light industry, teaching, retail, etc. The aforementioned Maida Springer Kemp headed the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Among other things, this organisation demanded that the needs of mothers and children should be part of the employer's responsibilities, which was an important requirement during the period of increased birth rates in the 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, their approach did not challenge the overall gender order, which the activists from the women's liberation movement did not agree with. However, in addition to the issue of equal pay, various feminist associations have also raised issues of further marginalization of women in the workplace, such as sexual harassment in the workplace or insecurity during maternity.<sup>32</sup>

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# Tactics of Revolutionary Feminism

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Despite the fact that feminism is different all over the world, we can see networks of common inspiration and borrowing and sharing of techniques. All of this manifests itself in the ways that feminists fight exclusion, appropriate spaces and seek to make their voices heard.

In the context of the most significant acts in connection with feminist social development, we can talk in particular about acts of violence to gain the right to vote, strikes and demonstrations, or the subtle use of women's breasts.

**“To improve the conditions of the nation, it is absolutely necessary to improve the conditions of women.” Oásim Amín<sup>1</sup>**

## Radically Raised Objections

Feminist acts were essential to change the order of society. It was not enough to “passively wait” and think about change, but it was necessary to address the strategies of those who wanted to put feminist politics into practice.

Some of the most significant feminist acts took place during the campaigns for women's suffrage. Members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU, founded 1903) or the Irish Women's Franchise League chose as their strategy to draw attention to the absence of women's suffrage, for example, disrupting meetings, destroying art, placing acid in letterboxes or smashing shop windows or government building's windows with stones. Although these methods may seem quite radical, according to WSPU founder Emmeline Pankhurst “breaking windows was the only means they believed the disenfranchised can use to cause a political situation, which can only be solved by giving women the right to vote”. Such direct actions involved women of different classes, specifically from the working and middle class. But the working classes sought more than gender equality in these protests. They were concerned with the right to vote for all adults, regardless of wealth – indeed, the rule in Britain at the time, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, excluded those without certain assets from voting. Since the activists were being punished for destroying buildings, they adopted a new tactic, which was, for example, to chain themselves to the fence of the Prime Minister's building, where they were given space to make speeches while the police tried to drag them away. Unfortunately, the campaign also included sporadic arson, destruction of art and bombings in churches and ministerial residences. Some of the practices of the British activists have also spread to the United States and, to some extent, to some Asian countries. In China, the rhetoric of women's suffrage also used the idea of the “learned wife” (who could significantly support her husband in business and politics) based on Confucianism.<sup>2</sup>

However, Chinese activists also adopted the strategy of attending National Assembly sessions, disregarding the session order, and sitting among the members. During speeches, they would audaciously interject, disrupting the smooth progress of the sessions. They also relied on signing petitions. Both the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China theoretically supported women's equality, but rivalry between these parties

<sup>1</sup> Qasim Amin was an Egyptian jurist, philosopher, reformer, judge and one of the founders of the Egyptian national movement and Cairo University. Qasim Amin has been historically viewed as one of the Arab world's “first feminists”.

<sup>2</sup> Mann, Susan. 1997. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. ISBN: 9780804727440.

prevented them from granting women the right to vote until the national constitution of 1936.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, feminists or women's groups from other countries around the world (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, or Germany) often distanced themselves from the above violent tactics.<sup>4</sup>

## The Outcry of the Equality Protests

The poor working conditions that working-class women were forced to suffer were the most common cause of strikes. Working-class women often joined together to form unions. However the women of YH Trading in South Korea, for example, did not only protest against their own working conditions, their struggle led to the political revolution of 1979, in which the autocratic government of President Park Chonghi fell.<sup>5</sup> Strikes, including direct actions such as boycotts or sit-ins, were a powerful weapon for women workers. They often collaborated with other labour movements that included men. For example, there was a strike in support of Mexican-American miners, who were forbidden to strike in the workplace on pain of punishment – but this prohibition did not apply to their wives, who began to occupy the mines and to strike for greater social justice. In France, for example, thanks to the strikes, women won the right to contraception in 1967.<sup>6</sup>

Icelandic feminists took the strikes to a national and public level when they declared 24 October 1975 a national ‘day off’ for women, who deserved it for their hard work in the home and workplace and for their low pay compared to men. An estimated 90% of women joined the strike at the time, causing a near-total shutdown of Iceland's schools, industrial plants and shops. A year later, equality legislation was passed in the Icelandic parliament.<sup>7</sup>

But women were not only humiliated in the workplace. As a result, the strikes spread to other institutions in the form of demonstrations. For example, in Ireland in 1971, women protested outside the parliament building for a law on women's access to contraception. This protest was subsequently taken up by the Irish Women's Liberation Movement. Women in Japan and Korea then used demonstrations to protest against the commercial (‘tourist’) sex industry. These protests took place mainly outside airports or inside arrival and departure halls.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1977, protests under the slogan “Reclaim the Night” have also been held against male violence against women (from the pornography industry to street harassment, rape, gender-based murder). The march spread from Brussels to London, Rome, Berlin and West Germany. Protesters carried

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, Louise. 2000. “Women's Suffrage in China: Challenging Scholarly Conventions”. *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 69, no. 4, pp. 617–38. Available on: doi.org/10.2307/3641227.

<sup>4</sup> Delap, Lucy. *Feminisms: A Global History*. 2022. ISBN: 978-0226754093

<sup>5</sup> Molony, Barbara. 2016. *Gender in Modern East Asia: An Integrated History*. Boulder: Westview Press. ISBN: 9780813348759.

<sup>6</sup> Watson, Cicely. 1952. “Birth Control and Abortion in France since 1939”. *Population Studies* 5, no. 3: 261–86. Available on: doi.org/10.2307/2172430

<sup>7</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093

<sup>8</sup> Guichard-Anguis, Sylvie, Moon, Okpyo (eds.). 2011. *Japanese Tourism and Travel Culture*. London, New York: Routledge. Available on: www.academia.edu/70084752/Japanese\_Tourism\_and\_Travel\_Culture



flaming torches and beat improvised drums – invading hostile spaces with sound and light. “Reclaim the Night” marches are still held today.<sup>9</sup>

## Breasts of power: The Voice of the Body in Protest

The feminist movement is also often associated with women’s breasts, in a variety of contexts. **The most famous example is “bra-burning”, which has almost become synonymous with feminism, even though it is only a historical myth.** But the truth is that feminists encouraged other women to not wear bras in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

In 2008, a group of Ukrainian feminists known as FEMEN attracted worldwide publicity and thus attention to address serious social problems by stripping halfway down and writing slogans on their bare breasts. On the other hand, these feminists only used young and slender bodies that conformed to patriarchal standards of beauty, not, for example, fat, old or atypical bodies. Which undermined their efforts to highlight the exploitation of women’s bodies by men.<sup>11</sup>

Protests involving nudity have always taken place in environments in which the meaning of women’s bodies was influenced by race, faith, and class. African and African American women, for example, also frequently exposed their bodies in protest, as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States, these protests using naked female body parts have been particularly challenging, due to the historical setting. Through slavery, Black women (and men, also) have historically been viewed as animalistic in nature, specifically regarding their sexuality. Black women were associated with uncontrollable sexual desires. Slavery itself functioned as a sex economy, where Black women were sexually abused at the hands of white men. Black women were raped continuously, and viewed at a higher value if they were younger and not pregnant because of their sexual availability. Black women’s bodies have been commodified and monetized for the male gaze, and this view of ‘lustful’ behavior has led to the justification of rape and sexual assault of Black women in the United States. The sexual depictions of Black women in slavery informed the treatment and commodification of their bodies in modern society: The ideology that Black women are ‘easy’ and overtly sexual places them at a lower sexual value as compared to white women still exist (for example, Black strippers and porn actors are paid less and treated worse than their white counterparts, as they are viewed to have a lower erotic capital, and want to be consumed by white audiences).<sup>12</sup>

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# Conflicts Within the Feminist Movement

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<sup>9</sup> Reclaim the Night 2022. *Reclaim the Night* [online]. Available on: [www.reclaimthenight.co.uk/index.html](http://www.reclaimthenight.co.uk/index.html)

<sup>10</sup> 100 Women: The truth behind the ‘bra-burning’ feminists. 2018. BBC [online]. Available on: [www.bbc.com/news/world-45303069](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-45303069)

<sup>11</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>12</sup> Heller, Nicole E. 2020. “Black Female Artists Reclaiming Their Sexual Power”. *The Cupola*. Available on: [cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/850](http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/850)

18	<b>Racism in the Feminist Movement</b>
18	<b>Veiling in the Feminist Movement</b>
19	<b>Class Differences in the Feminist Movement</b>
21	<b>Homophobia in the Feminist Movement</b>
21	<b>Transphobia in the Feminist Movement</b>

## Racism in the Feminist Movement

Black women as well as Asian or Latin American women often encountered the arrogance of white feminists who articulated women's needs according to their own needs, yet they referred to all women in general. Because women of the Global South had different problems than white women, they also focused their feminist anger elsewhere, but these issues were downplayed and ignored by the white feminists.<sup>1</sup> Feminism in Latin America has placed a strong emphasis on child care and motherhood since the beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, instead of the right to abortion that feminists in developed countries sought, **the Latin American feminists wanted protection from the doctors and social workers who forcibly performed abortions and sterilisations on them and who also took away their children.**<sup>2</sup>

However, racism in feminism also manifested itself within individual countries of the Global South. This was evident at the 1974 congress where Peruvian feminists met and divided themselves into a group of Hispanic white women, who were often educated, and a group of indigenous Peruvians, who tended to be poor. For them, this racial conflict was more fundamental than addressing other forms of oppression. The aforementioned contradiction involved, for example, indigenous women's rejection of contraception in order to support population growth and thus fight against corporations and "first world" domination. It was also obvious that postcolonial nationalism was projected here.<sup>3</sup>

## Veiling in the Feminist Movement

Veiling of women is a practice that is historically well-established in different cultures and societies. Nevertheless, the veiling of specifically Muslim women is very controversial for many different social groups, especially in those feminist ones. There is a long-standing criticism of the veiling of Muslim women as well as criticising Islam as a religion that oppresses women and the veil as a tool of the patriarchy.<sup>4</sup>

But according to historian Lucy Delap, the veiling bans that are becoming part of political debates in Western countries are presented as an effort to "liberate women", but instead of real liberation, she says, they are primarily an effort to provoke Islamophobic reactions. Behind this is the discourse of the West, which since the 1970s has increasingly portrayed Islam as inherently fundamentalist, anti-feminist<sup>5</sup> and something dangerous, threatening Western society.<sup>6</sup>

This is misleading because there are various reasons behind veiling as well as rejection of the veil by Muslim women, especially those feminist ones. That means that some groups of Muslim feminist women argue that their veiling doesn't enable "transforming women into sex objects that occurs when women are constantly judged on their appearance, but instead, it allows them and those around them, to concentrate on what is inside her

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Reina, Mills, Sara. 2003. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bečka, Jiří, Mendel, Miloš. 1998. *Islám a České země*. Olomouc, Publishing house: Votobia. p. 176.

head, her mind rather than what is on her head—her hair—and, by extension, her physical attractiveness".<sup>7</sup> **For some muslim women veiling is a cultural as well as religious practice that can be connected to public activism and in some cases it is the only tool that allows them to be publicly active in this way.**<sup>8</sup> Many Muslim women base their feminist view of the world and their role in society from their interpretation of the Quran and from the social reforms established by the founder of Islam the Prophet Muhammed.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the ban on the veiling of Muslim women is interpreted by Muslim feminists as an attempt to control women's bodies and women's ability to make decisions about their bodies.

Historically veiling was also a tool of politicians in muslim as well as non-Muslim states. In 1956 president of Egypt Gamal Abd an-Násir gave women the right to vote, guaranteed them equal rights, and saw paid employment of women as something essential for building the state. Establishing "a state of feminism" was linked to the upliftment and modernisation of Egypt.<sup>10</sup> But in the 70s and 80s "the Islamic iconoclastic movement started to promote 'authentic Islam' as opposition to the 'western Islam' and a great number of young Muslim women at universities started to wear hijab".<sup>11</sup> Veiling of Muslim women was often linked to politics in a way of showing with whom they sympathise. That was apparent not only in Egypt, but also in the Iran Republic 1979, unfortunately, the chain of events led to the segregation of women from the public space.<sup>12</sup> The same conditions became true for women in Pakistan. Pakistani women fought against this regime by creating feminist groups that promoted women's rights and to show their disapproval of the "hostile legal and cultural environment for women", they burned their veils.

The practice of burning the veil can be seen even today in Iran where Muslim women are fighting against the oppressive state regime and actions of the so-called "morality police". **Veiling as well as not-veiling can be then feminist as well as activist way of expressing yourself in society.** Muslim women in post-9/11 America, who often face discrimination and prejudice, are striving to redefine the meaning of veiling as "a call for equality".<sup>13</sup> Veiling as well as non-veiling can then be interpreted in every situation differently, and as such it should not be deemed only as non-feminist.

## Class Differences in the Feminist Movement

The class nature of clothing has always been a source of tension and a reflection of power in the women's movement. Since fashionable clothing was demanded at the protests, working-class women were excluded from them,

<sup>7</sup> Muslim Sexual Ethics: Veiling and the Hijab. *Brandeis University* [online]. Available on: [www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/muslim/veil.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/muslim/veil.html)

<sup>8</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. p. 203. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>9</sup> As he improved the position of women and gave them many rights that they did not have at that time. Women also played an important role in the establishment of islam and its expansion.

<sup>10</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. p. 203. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed's analysis of increased 'veiling' wins religion prize. *Grawemeyer Awards* [online]. Available on: [grawemeyer.org/ahmeds-analysis-of-increased-veiling-wins-religion-prize](http://grawemeyer.org/ahmeds-analysis-of-increased-veiling-wins-religion-prize)

leading to the fact that many of the most prominent actions of the *Women's Social and Political Union*<sup>14</sup> were led by middle- and upper-class women.<sup>15</sup>

Feminist protests for women's liberation usually disregarded race and class. This can be shown through an example of the struggle against events that were focused on the objectification of the female body and that were designed to please the male gaze. One of these actions took place in the British black community, which had a long tradition of beauty pageants. **Although feminist activists in their advocacy focused on a necessary and beneficial goal (to criticise the objectification of women's bodies), they failed to consider that for many models who came from working-class backgrounds, success in beauty pageants was a means of gaining better social status and prize money.** These protests, which treated the needs of working-class women very insensitively, thereby reinforced the reputation of feminists as exaggerated critics and rigid moralists. Moreover, they gave credibility to the idea that feminists opposed heterosexual eroticism and pleasure. This ultimately affected the perception of feminism and it also weakened its ability to appeal to mainstream society.<sup>16</sup> Feminists could not agree whether fashion was a harmful invention of patriarchy or the means to express their personality and enjoyment.

In the 1980s, the fashion rules changed, and feminists of higher status began to wear pantsuits and jackets with shoulder pads. Jackets were often red and also heels made a comeback, this combination expressed a mixture of power and sexuality.<sup>17</sup>

*New Zealand Rational Dress Association*, requested that women would be allowed to stop wearing corsets that restricted their movement and breathing. Some saw this as purely a health reform, others as a right of women to freedom of movement in public places, freedom to ride bicycles and to play sports. **Clothing reform for rational dress.** These advocates of clothing reform, women in trousers were often portrayed as lacking fashion sense. **For many feminists, the new clothing options seemed like a powerful means of expressing resistance in everyday life.** Women have described how satisfying it was for them to be able to dress for themselves and for other women without the need to follow conventional or male-defined fashion.<sup>18</sup>

In this period when feminists were defying fashion conventions, disposing of their bras and refusing to shave their body hair, however, women closer to power had to decide strategically how to deal with this new feminist tendency in politics. For example, the British politician Valerie Wise, who gave large financial donations to women's organisations, dressed conventionally (for example, she usually wore dresses and jackets). She believed that if she were to wear controversial trousers, people would not listen to what she was saying, but instead judge her clothing.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> WSPU was a British suffragette organisation that fought for women's right to vote. The organisation was founded in 1903 and dissolved in 1917. In 1918, women over the age of 30 were given the vote; and in 1928, under a Conservative government, they finally won it on equal terms with men.

<sup>15</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. p. 203. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## Homophobia in the Feminist Movement

American feminists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century soon realised the homophobic nature of the feminist movement. **Lesbians faced marginalisation and the downplaying of their opinions and issues.**<sup>20</sup> This contradiction needed to be resolved, and for this reason, the Congress to Unite Women was organised in 1969.<sup>21</sup> However, this objective failed to be fulfilled and Betty Friedan<sup>22</sup> and her followers continued to display strong homophobia. **They identified lesbians as threats to the unity of feminism and its acceptance by the public.** Betty Friedan and her followers continued to accentuate their stereotypical view of homosexual orientation, calling it a source of extremism, which in their opinion, seeks to marginalise men and reject pregnancy and motherhood. This only led to a stronger wave of anger towards this homophobia, resulting in counter-campaigns aimed at feminist activism, with the goal of calling on heterosexual feminists to unite the feminist movement.<sup>23</sup>

*Radical lesbians*<sup>24</sup> created a manifest called *The Woman – Identified Woman*, describing a lesbian as “a woman who often, from an extremely early age, acts according to her inner compulsion to be a more complete and independent human being than society wishes to allow. These needs and actions lead her into painful conflicts with people, situations, acceptable ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving over the years”.<sup>25</sup>

However, the issue of feminism marginalising lesbians had little resonance outside of Europe and North America. **The issue of sexuality was not even considered a priority by many participants from the Global South at the World Conference on Women**<sup>26</sup> which took place in Mexico in 1975. **Within the Global South, for example, in India, the issue was seen as a western import, prompting Indian women's disaffection and refusal to address it.**<sup>27</sup>

## Transfobia in the Feminist Movement

One of the conflicts that resonates in contemporary feminism involves so-called radical feminists<sup>28</sup> and their exclusion of trans women<sup>29</sup> from the places and communities designated for women and lesbians. The opposing side pejoratively refers to them as: ‘trans-exclusionary radical feminist’ or simply ‘TERFs’. On the other side stand trans women whose biological sex at birth was not female, but who nevertheless feel they are women, label

<sup>20</sup> Looks, Black. 1984. “Feminist theory: From margin to centre”. Boston: South End P.

<sup>21</sup> Delap, Lucy. 2022. *Feminisms: A Global History*. p. 203. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>22</sup> Founder of the National Organisation for Women, an American feminist organisation.

<sup>23</sup> Delap, Lucy. *Feminisms: A Global History*. 2022. ISBN: 978-0226754093.

<sup>24</sup> *Radical lesbians* is a lesbian movement that arose in part because mainstream feminism did not actively include or fight for lesbian rights. The movement was started in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>25</sup> *The Woman – Identified Woman*. 1970. [online]. Available from: repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlms01011

<sup>26</sup> It was the first international conference held by the United Nations to focus solely on women's issues and marked a turning point in policy directives. After this meeting, women were viewed as part of the process to develop and implement policy, rather than recipients of assistance.

<sup>27</sup> Naisargi, D. N. 2012. *Queer activism in India: A story in the anthropology of ethics*. Duke University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Trans-exclusionary radical feminist.

<sup>29</sup> Trans woman is a woman who was identified as male at birth as a result of being born with traditionally male genitalia.

themselves as such, and want to participate in events for women as well, or at least have the opportunity to do so.<sup>30</sup>

Radical feminists argue that gender identity<sup>31</sup> is an “ideology” that damages women’s rights. In their opinion, feminism should only include women who were identified as women at birth, i.e. cisgender women.<sup>32</sup> Transgender women, on the other hand, claim that their exclusion from events for women, feminist organisations, and from feminism in general, as well as the failure to respect their desires to identify themselves as women, are acts of transphobia.<sup>33</sup>

One of the early moments that could be described as transphobia from lesbians was during the first National Lesbian Conference at University of California, Los Angeles, in 1973. This was the venue where transgender folk singer Beth Elliot performed and was booed off the stage to shouts of “He’s a goddamn man!”<sup>34</sup>

However, the most famous dispute between “radical feminists” and transgender women revolved around the Michigan Women’s Music Festival. This was an annual women-only event that was popular among lesbians. In 1991, the organisers of the festival asked a transgender woman to leave this festival. The organisers of the Michigan Women’s Music Festival never issued an official policy against transgender women attending the festival, according to American historian Lillian Faderman, but they openly stated that it was a “woman-born woman only” space.<sup>35</sup>

This festival became a symbol of the exclusion of many trans women who experienced exclusion from women-only and lesbian-only spaces. According to Faderman, many festival attendees and other people advocating for transgender people did not share the festival’s position.<sup>36</sup>

This ongoing concern about the trans-exclusive stance taken by some feminists or organisations gave rise to the “Not In Our Name” statement in 2018.<sup>37</sup> This is a statement on trans inclusion from eight of the most prominent lesbian publishers in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK, which declares that neither trans-inclusion, trans women nor gender identity are a threat to lesbian women and women’s rights. By publicly condemning this idea, they send a message of solidarity to the trans community with this statement: “*We are really concerned about the message these so-called lesbian publicists are sending to trans women and young lesbians – including trans lesbians – and we want to make it clear that this is not on our behalf.*”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Compton, Julie. 2019. ‘Pro-lesbian’ or ‘trans-exclusionary’? Old animosities boil into public view. NBC News [online]. Available on: [www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosities-boil-public-view-n958456](http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosities-boil-public-view-n958456)

<sup>31</sup> I.e. the ability to label oneself and self-identify as masculine, feminine, or various combinations of both genders, or as neither.

<sup>32</sup> Cisgender is the label given to people whose gender identity matches the sex they were designated at birth.

<sup>33</sup> Compton, Julie. 2019. ‘Pro-lesbian’ or ‘trans-exclusionary’? Old animosities boil into public view. NBC News [online]. Available on: [www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosities-boil-public-view-n958456](http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosities-boil-public-view-n958456)

<sup>34</sup> Faderman, Lillian. 2015. *The gay revolution: The story of the struggle*. Simon and Schuster.

<sup>35</sup> Compton, Julie. 2019. ‘Pro-lesbian’ or ‘trans-exclusionary’? Old animosities boil into public view. NBC News [online]. Available on: [www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosities-boil-public-view-n958456](http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosities-boil-public-view-n958456)

<sup>36</sup> Faderman, Lillian. 2015. *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. Simon and Schuster.

<sup>37</sup> Not in our name. *Diva* [online]. Available on: [diva-magazine.com/2018/12/19/not-in-our-name](http://diva-magazine.com/2018/12/19/not-in-our-name)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

# Conflicts Outside the Feminist Movement

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Anti-gender movement

## Anti-gender movement

The anti-gender movement began in the 1990s. Scholars studying this movement link its beginning to the Catholic response to the UN International Conferences on Population and Development and the World Conference on Women, after which the UN began to recognize sexual and reproductive rights. The Holy See feared that this recognition would lead to abortion as a human right, the delegitimization of motherhood, and the normalisation of homosexuality.<sup>1</sup>

Reproductive rights, the right to marriage for all, the right of men to show empathy, or the fight against domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are the themes that have become the central concept of what the Anti-Gender Movement is fighting against and what they call gender ideology.<sup>2</sup> The promotion of the aforementioned rights or education in human rights issues is what is being attacked by conservative political parties or groups in society and satellite organisations of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

# Gender studies and men's studies

<sup>1</sup> Kuhar, R., D. Paternotte (eds.). 2017. *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>2</sup> As well as gender theory or genderism. However, a uniform definition of the term is lacking.

<sup>3</sup> Kováts, E. 2017. The Emergence of Powerful Anti-Gender Movements in Europe and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy. *Gender and far right politics in Europe*. pp. 175–189.

During the 1970s, gender studies and feminist anthropology developed, critically responding to anthropological texts that dealt with women only as passive figures who were observed but did not speak, despite the fact that demographically they represented half of the studied population.<sup>1</sup> **At this time, the distinction between sex as a biologically given attribute and of gender as culturally, socially and temporally conditioned attribute was established. But the meaning of both of these categories were still assigned to biologically determined differences between women and men.**<sup>2</sup>

Since then, social anthropologists have insisted on the social and cultural creation of the category of gender, because this fact is evidenced by the existence of different forms of gender roles in societies in different parts of the world<sup>3</sup> or by examples of “third genders”.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1980s, the field of gender anthropology was firmly established, based on the assumption that it is necessary to study not only men or only women, but to focus on “gender relations as the structuring principle of all human societies and on the study of the interrelationships between men and women”.<sup>5</sup>

At this time, Men's Studies<sup>6</sup> and, subsequently, Masculinity Studies emerged. This was the logical outcome of the recognition that masculinity, like femininity, is a product of gender relations and, as such, it is also a construct dependent on social and historical factors.<sup>7</sup>

A further development in this field have taken place since the 1990s, especially under the influence of Bourdieu's Theory of Action, according to which gender roles and categories are not rigid and must be constantly constructed and performed in practice<sup>8,9</sup>.

- 1 Ardener, E. 1975. Belief and the Problem of Women. In S. Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women*. London, Toronto, Melbourne. pp. 1–17.
- 2 Oakley, A. 1985. *Sex, gender and society*. Ashgate Publishing. ISBN: 9781857421712.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Whitehead, H. 1981. The bow and the burden strap: a new look at institutionalized homosexuality in native North America. In S. B. Ortner – H. Whitehead (eds.), *Sexual Meanings. The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. Cambridge. pp. 80–111.
- 5 Moore, H. 2001 [1999]. Whatever happened to women and men? (Co se stalo se ženami a muži?). *Cargo* 3/4, pp. 174–197; p. 175. In: Budilová, Lenka. *A socio-anthropological study of kinship and gender with special attention to the Czech context* (Sociálně–antropologické studium příbuzenství a genderu se zvláštním zřetelem k českému kontextu). *Historická demografie* 39/2015: 271–291. p. 288.
- 6 Differentiation between men's studies (= studies concerning men) and masculinity studies (= set of social constructs carried by men) was substantial.
- 7 Filipowicz, M. 2010. *Opportunities for using masculinity studies for research into 19th century Czech literature* (Možnosti využití maskulinních studií pro výzkum české literatury 19. století). Available on: [service.ucl.cas.cz/edicee/images/data/sborniky/kongres/%C4%8Cesk%C3%A1%20literatura%20v%20perspektiv%C3%A1ch%20genderu/005\\_marcin\\_filipowicz.pdf](http://service.ucl.cas.cz/edicee/images/data/sborniky/kongres/%C4%8Cesk%C3%A1%20literatura%20v%20perspektiv%C3%A1ch%20genderu/005_marcin_filipowicz.pdf)
- 8 The performative understanding of masculinity and femininity is the acting out gender in accordance with different social situations. This is based on an understanding of gender as a fluid category.
- 9 Budilová, Lenka. 2015. *A socio-anthropological study of kinship and gender with special attention to the Czech context* (Sociálně–antropologické studium příbuzenství a genderu se zvláštním zřetelem k českému kontextu). *Historická demografie* 39: 271–291.

26

# Queer studies

- 31 Differences and similarities between lesbian and gay studies, gender studies and queer theory
- 33 Theories of sexuality
- 35 Heterosexuality as an erotic regime
- 37 Lesbian existence ≠ male homosexuality existence
- 37 Emancipation of homosexuality
- 39 Critique of Queer Theory

Queer theory was born in the domain of gay, lesbian and gender studies in response to the growing unease caused by the way gay and lesbian identities are represented, both by political activism and by the American academic world during the eighties and the dawn of the nineties. Fundamentally, this movement aimed to provide a stronger voice and self-representation for those individuals whose experiences and interests were not adequately reflected within the existing gay identity. **These individuals pointed out the shortcomings of the ethnic framework employed by the homosexual liberation movement and its failure to recognize its inherent biases favouring whiteness and the middle class.**<sup>1</sup>

The term 'queer' was initially an example of hate speech that derogatorily encompasses individuals "without distinguishing between gays, lesbians, and any other sexual subjects perceived as perverse (...) that does not obey the heterosexual/homosexual binarism".<sup>2</sup> Later, however, the label *queer* began to be reclaimed from its pejorative use as a neutral or positive self-identifier by LGBTQI+ people.<sup>3</sup> This linguistic choice also signifies one of the core actions of queer, which is a desire for subversive appropriation, in this case, of the word. By "repeating, rearticulating, and re-operating it, queer opens up contests the not yet legitimised and funds new and unexpected forms of expression".<sup>4</sup>

The core of queer studies thus interprets cultural productions and representations of sexuality and identity; that's why this approach claims a shared ground between *queer* studies, gay and lesbian tradition, and feminism. However, *queer* theory<sup>5</sup> has inserted, more or less consciously, into the context of the new claims the concept of identity/sexuality citizenship advanced mainly by black homosexuals<sup>6</sup> and the so-called *sexual rebels*<sup>7</sup> (which is evident in both non-fiction literature and active political advocacy). It means that they consciously began to work with sexual identity, as well as with racial, ethnic, and other identities. They examined how individuals with various identities are perceived, how they are regulated, and how this reflects on their status in civil society.<sup>8</sup>

**These shifts emphasise the importance of factors like race and class, which are no longer seen as mere supplementary features of homosexual identity. Instead, they are recognized as interconnected aspects that challenge the exclusivity of a white, middle-class homosexual identity.**<sup>9</sup>

Another significant theme has been the exploration of paths that affirm the existence of models and forms of sexuality that cannot be reduced

1 Seidman, S. 2007. Identity and Politics in a "Postmodern" Gay Culture. In Michael Warner (ed.). *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, pp. 105-142.

2 Pustianaz M. 2004. Queer Studies. In Michele Cometa (ed). *Dictionary of salso culturali*, Roma, Meltemi, pp. 441-42.

3 Ibid.

4 Carotenuto S. 2000. "A sui generis philosophy, the philosophy of Judith Butler". In: A. Bellagamba, P. Di Cori, M. Pustianaz. *Genres of traverse*. Vercelli: Mercurio. pp. 228-46: 238-29.

5 De Lauretis, T. 1999. "Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction". *Differences* 3.2. pp: iii-xviii.

6 Some of the earliest anthologies of black homosexual voices are J. Beam (ed.), *In the Life*, Boston, Alyson, 1986 and E. Hemphill (eds.), *Brother to Brother*, Boston Alyson, 1991. One of the first interventions related to bisexuality or sexuality not with Vocational is L. Hutchins, L. Kaahumaru (eds.), *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, Boston, Alyson, 1991.

7 This meant anyone who set themselves apart from normative or mainstream views of sex or relationships, so it could often include feminists.

8 De Lauretis, T. 1999. "Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction." *Differences* 3.2. pp: iii-xviii.

9 Ibid.

to the binary and dominant model of heterosexuality/homosexuality, which categorises individuals solely based on the gender of their sexual partner, neatly organising identities into one of the two binary representations.<sup>10</sup>

To summarise, it means that the dominant essentialist identity adopted by American homosexual movements faced a dual challenge. On one hand, criticism was initiated by Black homosexual culture and the sexual rebels. On the other hand, this established identity was challenged by the perspective that "emphasised the immense socio-historical diversity of meanings and structures of homosexual desire".<sup>11</sup> With the formation of a request for recognition<sup>12</sup> of lesbian women and gay men who are poorly represented, marginalised and not the subject of discourse within the homosexual hegemonic culture, the new *queer* approach to sexuality has not forgotten the number of:<sup>13</sup>

#### Achievements of the gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 70s

- |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1970 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Organisations CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution) was founded in Australia.</b></li> <li>• <b>The first LGBT Pride Parade was held in New York.</b></li> <li>• <b>Carl Wittman wrote A Gay Manifesto.</b></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1971 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Homosexuality was decriminalised in Austria, Costa Rica and Finland.</b></li> <li>• <b>The first same-gender marriage ever was recorded in the public files of any civil government in the United States.</b></li> <li>• <b>The University of Michigan established the first collegiate LGBT programs office, then known as the "Gay Advocate's Office".</b></li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| 1972 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sweden becomes the first country in the world to allow transgender people to legally change their sex, and provides free hormone therapy.</b></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 1973 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Homosexuality no longer an illness: In Australia and New Zealand, Federal Council declared homosexuality not an illness. In the United States, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.</b></li> <li>• <b>Lavender Country, an American country music band, released a self-titled album which is the first known gay-themed album in country music history.</b></li> </ul> |

10 De Lauretis, T. 1999. "Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction." *Differences* 3.2. pp: iii-xviii.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 1970s in LGBT rights. *Wikipedia.com* [online]. Available on: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970s\\_in\\_LGBT\\_rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970s_in_LGBT_rights)

- 1974**
- **Chile allowed a trans person to legally change her name and gender on the birth certificate after undergoing sex reassignment surgery, becoming the second country in the world to do so.**
  - **The world's first gay softball league was formed in San Francisco as the Community Softball League, which eventually included both women's and men's teams.**
- 
- 1975**
- **UK journal *Gay Left* begins publication.**
  - **Gay American Indians, the first gay American Indian liberation organisation was founded.**
- 
- 1976**
- **The American Episcopal Church passes a resolution affirming homosexuals as children of God "who have a full and equal claim upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church."**
- 
- 1977**
- **San Francisco hosted the world's first gay film festival.**
- 
- 1978**
- **The eight-colour rainbow flag was used as a symbol of homosexual pride for the first time.**
- 
- 1979**
- **The White Night riots occurred. Thousands of people took to the streets to protest the lenient sentence received by Dan White for the murders of local politician and gay rights activist Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone.**



This new queer approach seeks to move away from rigid heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine binaries. Instead, it emphasises the idea of human sexuality being essentially polymorphous and bisexual. Furthermore, it aims to clarify why sexual repression has manifested in society<sup>14</sup> and strives to transform the fight for sexual liberation into a broader gender revolution, thereby emphasising the connection between gender and sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, some of the more astute queer theorists, recognizing the current limitations in dismantling the constructs of gender and sexuality, despite their prior deconstruction in theoretical discourse,<sup>16</sup> have strived to make the goal of political liberation seem less idealistic. They have emphasised the absence in previous traditions of a "credible strategy

<sup>14</sup> Altman, D. 1971. *Homosexual repression and liberation*. New York: NYU Press, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Seidman, S. 2007. Identity and Politics in a "Postmodern" Gay Culture. In Michael Warner (ed.). *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, pp. 105–142.

<sup>16</sup> Pustianaz, M. 2004. Queer Studies. In Michele Cometa (ed), *Dictionary of salso culturali*, Roma, Meltemi, pp. 441–42.

to transform and socially anchored gay/heterosexual identity regime in a liberated, post-identity order".<sup>17</sup>

## Differences and similarities between lesbian and gay studies, gender studies and queer theory

Queer theory has faced several challenges in its efforts to effectively integrate into the political discourse of various gay and lesbian activist movements and also in identifying its fundamental theoretical principles.<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler (recognized as one of the most influential queer theorists thanks mainly to her book *Gender Trouble*) did not hide her personal disdain for being identified as part of so-called *queer* theory at a time when the theoretical debate had already been largely initiated thanks to her own work.<sup>19</sup> She stressed the fact that "it had never crossed her mind to be part of queer theory".<sup>20</sup> Through a series of negations, a precise date emerges for queer theory, namely 1990, coinciding with the date of publication of the article, in which Teresa de Laurentis launched an effective challenge to reflect the certainties acquired on the subject of the theme of gay and lesbian identity.<sup>21</sup>

Further problems, however, arose from the words of the same scholar precisely about the proliferation, starting from *Differences*, of acts of appropriation of the term *queer* in contexts and for purposes originally not foreseen. Having given rise to a theoretical rethinking to "problematise that naturalisation of homosexuality that took place in gay and lesbian studies."<sup>22</sup> After a few years T. de Laurentis will write:

"If at this point you are wondering, readers, what is the difference between lesbian and gay studies, gender studies and queer theory, I can only answer that I do not know. All these expressions are used both in universities and in publishing with weak and imprecise references, mostly for propaganda purposes, to attract students or increase book sales."<sup>23</sup>

Defining in the same context the motivations that originally led it, first, to the subversive use of the term *queer*:

"I wanted to open a dispute and discuss, first, the idea that male and female homosexuality were, regardless of gender, the same form of sexuality and, secondly, that this was identifiable only by contrast with heterosexuality (...). Consequently, to courageously address the problem of inequality between lesbian women and gay men (...), exploring both the common ground

<sup>17</sup> Carotenuto S. 2000. "A sui generis philosophy, the philosophy of Judith Butler". In: A. Bellagamba, P. Di Cori, M. Pustianaz. *Genres of traverse*. Vercelli: Mercurio. pp. 228–46: 238–29.

<sup>18</sup> Seidman, S. 2007. Identity and Politics in a "Postmodern" Gay Culture. In Michael Warner (ed.). *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press. 2007, pp. 105–142: 128.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge New York & London.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> De Laurentis, T. 1999. "Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction". *Differences* 3.2. pp:iii–xviii.

<sup>22</sup> Manieri F., Fiorilli O. 2011. Queer: a look through, in L. Borghi, F. Manieri, A. Pirri (eds.), *The Five Lesbian Days in Theory*. Roma Ediesse. pp. 107–35.

<sup>23</sup> De Laurentis, T. 1999. *Eccentric Subjects*. Milano: Feltrinelli. pp. 104–105.



and the specific ground to their respective practices (...) and self-representations of homosexuality, bearing in mind the different instances of gender, class, racial affiliations (...). In this way, we would have measured the limits and possibilities of an effective alliance despite our differences, instead of adapting to an uncomfortable cohabitation under the same label. (...) This was the blueprint for queer theory as I imagined it. Now I can only record the dissemination of that term and the uses and abuses that have been made of it.”<sup>24</sup>

Teresa de Lauretis recognized that a “common front or political alliance between gay men and lesbians (...) was made possible and necessary (...) by the national emergency of AIDS and the pervasive and institutional repression against *queers* of all sexes”.<sup>25</sup> One of these necessary alliances between gay men and lesbian women was in the early 1980s during a growing pandemic of HIV (especially in the United States). A group of lesbians who called themselves the Blood Sisters organised themselves into groups to do blood drives for gay men with AIDS – men who were desperate and in need of blood transfusion. Many lesbians offered to give their blood after gay men were banned from donating as authorities tried to stop the spread of HIV. These lesbians were also primary caretakers to people when nurses would not enter into the room of a gay AIDS patient and also doctors would speak to patients only from the door.<sup>26</sup>

T. de Lauretis used the term *queer* to resolve the discontent caused by the partiality of mutual representations in gay and lesbian culture.<sup>27</sup> The intention was “to problematize some of the discursive construction in the field of gay and lesbian studies”.<sup>28</sup> She refers to the fact that there isn’t only the gender difference, but also the racial or class differences advanced by numerous activists, theorists and writers already during the 80s.<sup>29</sup> Requesting the use of the term *queer* signifies the acknowledgement of the deep divisions between lesbian and gay male groups in the United States. Lesbian groups were allied with the women’s movement but faced opposition from certain feminist groups due to their homophobic beliefs. Meanwhile, gay male groups were already split between those who believed in essentialist self-representation and those who favoured constructivist views. The queer theory was therefore born in its first phase already along the path traced by gay and lesbian studies and did not oppose to this precise tradition a new and rational interpretation of sexuality. However, many non-fiction writings labelled as queer have not focused to a large extent their attention on the past discomforts characterising the relationship between the gay component and the lesbian and, on the contrary, have often silenced the filiation of *queer* theory. To date, the two disciplinary areas remain quite clearly separated. Hence the possibility of talking about the presence of “significant differences

<sup>24</sup> De Lauretis, T. 1999. *Eccentric Subjects*. Milano: Feltrinelli. pp. 104–105.

<sup>25</sup> De Lauretis, T. 1999. “Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction.” *Differences* 3.2. pp: iii–xviii.

<sup>26</sup> Wilde, J. 2021. Lesbian ‘Blood Sisters’ were a crucial part of the battle against AIDS in the 1980’s. *Ggn.ie* [online]. Available on: [gcn.ie/lesbian-blood-sisters-crucial-1980s-aids/](http://gcn.ie/lesbian-blood-sisters-crucial-1980s-aids/) and Markides, John-Paul. 2021. They gave us their blood to keep us alive. *The Diocese of Huron* [online]. Available on: [dihuron.org/news/they-gave-us-their-blood-to-keep-us-alive](http://dihuron.org/news/they-gave-us-their-blood-to-keep-us-alive)

<sup>27</sup> De Lauretis, T. 1999. “Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction.” *Differences* 3.2. pp: iii–xviii.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

in the propositions of LGBT and *Queer* theory (...) some of which included, respectively, disciplinary distinctions (social sciences and humanities), different models of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, and doubts about the stability and fluidity of sexual and gender identities”.<sup>30</sup>

Queer theory, according to this perspective, with its “destabilising and deconstructing the notion of fixed sexual and gender identities”,<sup>31</sup> has become one of the main enemies of the gay and lesbian canon – which emphasises “the stability of homosexual identities”<sup>32</sup> – thus relaunching an internal dialectic based on the need for both LGBT and *queer* studies “to coexist in a progressive and productive tension in which neither holds nor seeks hegemony of thought”.<sup>33</sup> The desire for a peaceful resolution of the challenges within gay and lesbian studies has not materialised. Instead, an arbitrary appropriation of de Lauretis’s idea by numerous scholars, who have independently developed new *queer* instances, has become established.<sup>34</sup> Numerous models for homosexuality were developed, often in stark contrast to each other, or different strategies for the emancipation of neglected sexualities. The qualitative weight and the number of such activities has now allowed the sedimentation of the new queer culture, both because “what is now placed in the field of gay and lesbian studies and studies on sexuality (...) It must necessarily take into account a theoretical capital now settled”, both because such activities have produced tangible effects in the culture of activism, suggesting “a different idea of the alliance between different sexual subjectivities (...), greater attention to cultural, racial, religious, class differences within the forcibly homogeneous gay community or mythical lesbian community”.<sup>35</sup>

## Theories of sexuality

Gayle Rubin, an American cultural anthropologist and theorist, explored the societal constructs of sexuality in her essay *Thinking Sex* from the year 1984. She examined the value systems assigned to various sexual behaviours by different social groups, whether feminist or patriarchal. These value systems categorise some behaviours as morally acceptable and natural, while labelling others, such as homosexuality or BDSM, as deviant and unnatural.<sup>36</sup>

Gayle Rubin’s essay *Thinking Sex* is one of the most authoritative requests for citizenship made by marginalised and neglected communities for citizenship. It means that she explored how individuals with different identities are perceived and how this influences their position in civil society. Gayle Rubin, making explicit that “the kingdom of sexuality also has its own personal and internal politics, its inequalities and its models of

<sup>30</sup> De Lauretis, T. 1999. “Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction.” *Differences* 3.2. pp: iii–xviii.

<sup>31</sup> Lovaas, K. E., Elia J. P., Yep G. A. 2006. *LGBT studies and queer theory. New conflicts, collaborations and contested terrain*. New York: Harrington Press. pp. 6–7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Arfini, E.A.G., C. L. Iacono (eds.). 2012. *Reverse Canon*. Pisa: ETS. p. 35–36.

<sup>36</sup> Rubin, G. S. 1993. *Thinking Sex, Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, in H. Ablove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge. pp. 3–4.

oppression”,<sup>37</sup> makes a call for emancipation, referring above all to Michel Foucault’s thinking on sexuality. The scholar, according to Rubin, was among the first to cite the *History of Sexuality*, recognizing this writing as “the (...) more influential and emblematic of the new doctrine on sex”<sup>38</sup> because it was able to “critique the traditional understanding of sexuality as a natural impulse, eager to free itself from social control” while giving “a history to sex” and creating “a constructivist alternative to sexual essentialism (...)”.<sup>39</sup> Gayle Rubin emphasises the oppressive character of the “... modern sexual system [which] contains classes of sexual populations, stratified by the operations of a social hierarchy”,<sup>40</sup> since “most people mistake their sexual preferences for a universal system that works or should work for each”.<sup>41</sup> From a scholarly perspective, an examination of the sexual culture in the 1980s evokes strong parallels with the climate of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. This earlier period was marked by heightened concerns centred on the perception of the “homosexual threat” and the ambiguous notion of the “sexual harasser”.<sup>42</sup> This call is not only justified by a renewed repressive activity, particularly in response to the escalating AIDS panic.

It’s also driven by the fact that this historical-social moment has set the course into more systematic movements for the liberation of homosexuals, following the inspiration of the “Stonewall” riots,<sup>43</sup> which played a pivotal role during the development of ‘*Thinking Sex*’.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, this call extends to the “other dissident groups of sexuality”<sup>45</sup> who have started to come together and aim to replicate the successes of the homosexual community. This includes individuals who identify as “bisexuals, sadomasochists, individuals who prefer trans-generational relationships, transsexuals, transvestites (...)”.<sup>46</sup> All of this is happening during a period marked by the formation of a sense of community and the acquisition of identity.<sup>47</sup>

The analysis of Rubin, strives to find a critical language able to suppress the barbarity of sexual persecution.<sup>48</sup> Looking at neighbouring US feminism, a particular discomfort emerges because a real activity demonising sexuality is recognized in certain feminist culture. **In particular, following the interpretation of sexual liberation as a simple extension of male privilege, the American anti-pornographic feminist culture became widespread in the early eighties.** Gayle Rubin assumed that it was one of the hardest and most

37 Rubin, G. S. 1993. *Thinking Sex, Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, in H. Abelove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge. pp. 3–4.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Stonewall were a series of protests by members of the gay community in response to a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighbourhood of Lower Manhattan in New York City. Patrons of the Stonewall, other Village lesbian and gay bars, and neighbourhood street people fought back when the police became violent. The riots are widely considered the watershed event that transformed the gay liberation movement and the twentieth-century fight for LGBT rights in the United States.

44 Rubin, G. S. 1993. *Thinking Sex, Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, in H. Abelove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge. pp. 3–4.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

restorative stumbling blocks to the already marginal sexiness.<sup>49</sup> Not only because of this current’s portrayal of “most sexual behaviour in the worst possible light (...), always using among the worst available examples as if they were representative”, but also because “this anti-pornographic movement and its representatives have claimed to speak for all feminism”. Thus recreating an extremely conservative idea of morality and sexual regime.<sup>50</sup> The desire for a clear emancipation from the not-always-hospitable feminist thought associates Gayle Rubin with lesbians and heterosexual women who considered themselves misrepresented by anti-pornographic discourse. The solutions and further suggestions elaborated by Gayle Rubin, however, are clearer the possibility of interpreting *Thinking Sex* as a precursor appeal of *queer* and, in a broad sense, the possibility of reading it as a request for an innovative and autonomous culture of sex. For example, she suggests rejecting anti-pornography.<sup>51</sup> She also emphasises that “feminism is the theory of gender oppression”<sup>52</sup> and underscores that “to automatically understand that makes the theory of sexual oppression fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other”.<sup>53</sup>

## Heterosexuality as an erotic regime

The difficult positioning of bodies and the non-problematization of the dominant space are advanced by Adrienne Rich in her *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* from the year 1980, whose main role has been to suggest an analysis of heterosexuality in a new light, which reveals it as a mandatory regime. The author’s analysis takes a uniquely feminine perspective by stating that “heterosexuality has been both forcefully and subliminally imposed on women”<sup>54</sup> by men who inscribe on their bodies the sign of the inevitability of heterosexual intercourse, through a “pervasive set of forces, ranging from physical brutality to the control of consciousness”.<sup>55</sup> However, the intensity and compulsive quality of such acts suggests to Adrienne Rich “the fact that a huge and potential counterforce currently needs to be controlled”.<sup>56</sup> The author’s language not only evokes but also directly touches upon issues related to pornography and sadomasochism. These issues have now become central points of discussion in the discourse on female sexuality, regardless of how specific branches of feminism choose to define or assess them. Implicitly positioning herself within the anti-pornographic discourses Adrienne Rich manages to clarify the real problematic crux of the story arguing that “the most harmful message transmitted from pornography is the fact that women are natural sexual prey for men and that

49 First works on the canon anti-pornographic are *Take Back the Night* curato da Laura Lederer (New York, William Morrow, 1980). The most authoritative voices for anti-pornography will become already by mid-years Eighty of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine McKinnon.

50 Rubin, G. S. 1993. *Thinking Sex, Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, in H. Abelove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge. pp. 3–4.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Rich, A. 1993. *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. In: H. Abelove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

they themselves love this; the fact that sexuality and violence coincide; the fact that for women sex is essentially masochistic, pleasantly humiliating, physical abuse". However, the author's interest is not to discuss issues within sexuality from the perspective of the most recent US feminist debates, but on the contrary to emphasise the presence of unease with sexuality in the broad sense within feminism.<sup>57</sup> The author does not work to reject possible heterosexual romantic and erotic relationships, since "in the absence of choice, women will remain subject to the possibility or fortune of particular relationships and will not have a collective power to define the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives".<sup>58</sup> This perspective encourages heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which weakens women, so that women can be changed or even just so that feminists themselves can henceforth "find as little as possible to read, write or teach from an unproblematized heterocentric perspective".<sup>59</sup> The appeal repeats the fact that "feminist theory can no longer afford simply to express tolerance for 'lesbianism' as an 'alternative way of life' or to make a formal allusion to lesbians' by not examining its own heterosexual pity more closely".<sup>60</sup> The appeal of Adrienne Rich does not revolve around the acceptance or integration of lesbians as an autonomous minority. Instead, it seeks to establish a new space by repositioning the heterosexual regime, problematizing it, and politicising it.<sup>61</sup>

### Lesbian existence ≠ male homosexuality existence

There is a pressing need to separate lesbianism from male homosexuality and remove romantic feelings (eros) from it. This desire stems from the wish to create a new space for women to explore sexuality in innovative ways. This space should be distinct from the established practices of both heterosexuality and homosexuality, allowing women to approach their sexuality from a fresh perspective.<sup>62</sup>

"Lesbians have been historically deprived of a political existence through inclusion as female versions of male homosexuality. Equating lesbian existence with male homosexuality because both are stigmatised means eliminating female reality, once again. Part of the history of lesbian existence is, of course, to be found in places where lesbians, lacking a coherent female community, have shared a common social life and cause with homosexual men. But there are differences: women's lack of economic and cultural privilege over men; qualitative differences in male and female relationships – for example, the manner of anonymous sex between homosexual men and the blatant discrimination of older people not deemed sexually attractive, by gay standards. I understand the lesbian experience as a pro-

<sup>57</sup> Rich, A. 1993. *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. In: H. Abelove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

foundly feminine experience, like motherhood, with particular oppressions, meanings and potentialities that we cannot accept as long as we simplistically group it together with other sexually stigmatised existences."<sup>63</sup>

Legitimized and nurtured lesbian desire, in its broadest sense, should enable the exploration of new spaces for women. These spaces can offer a more critical perspective on the imposed regime of sexuality and make alternative models of existence viable, free from heterosexual compulsion. Finding new spaces and perspectives will be for women who define themselves as lesbians and for those who define themselves as heterosexual.<sup>64</sup>

### Emancipation of homosexuality

The pair of terms heterosexuality/homosexuality proves to be a production of homophobia and the mechanism that regulates the relationship between the two poles. This mechanism is established so that the first (heterosexuality) is the bearer of qualitative and normative meaning and is not so problematised while, on the contrary, the second pole (homosexuality) becomes marked as problematic. So both poles (heterosexuality/homosexuality) do not allow to clearly name a portion of reality, rather they work so that the second (homosexuality) allows the first unmarked (heterosexuality), to delimit itself through negation and opposition. The problem is that the queer perspective, focusing exclusively on the homosexual sphere, identifies it not as an autonomous term, but as a supplement to the definition of "heterosexual". It is therefore also a tool that stabilises through the difference the very definition of the notion of heterosexuality.<sup>65</sup>

A good summary offered by David Halperin's positioned rereading of the Foucault's publication *History of Sexuality*:

"Queer does not indicate a natural species or does not refer to a particular object; It gets its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. (...) There is nothing particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality face to face with the norm, a positionality that is not relatable to lesbians and gays, but is on the contrary available to all those who are or feel marginalized because of their sexual practices. (...) It is from the eccentric position occupied by the queer subject that it can become possible to imagine a variety of possibilities for reordering relations relating to sexual behaviour, erotic identities, gender constructions, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, ways of constructing the self, and community practices."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Rich, A. 1993. *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. In: H. Abelove, M. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York, Routledge.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Halperin, D. M. 1995. *Saint = Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography*, New York, Oxford University Press. pp. 63–64.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

As we can see, on the one hand *queer* confirms the heterosexual pole with its opposition, but on the other hand it uses a strategy, which already works with a chain of randomness and effects, is already a first attempt to de-legitimize the heterosexual pole.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, this strategy can also motivate the development of new mechanisms of struggle for specifically homosexual liberation. This new path of emancipation starts from the request to observe the forms of gay politics as a truly creative and dynamic discourse.<sup>68</sup>

## Critique of Queer Theory

The new position taken by queer theory is therefore generated by a choice to transform the strategy to observe sexuality. This new awareness allows understanding of the themes connected to the erotic linked to social reality, from a more external and potentially more complex point of view. This new discursive place became necessary because it accompanied a genuine desire for repositioning advanced by some subjects and a partial evolution of theory on the erotic.

However, as has been said before, queer has posed a set of risks and generated inconveniences that still make its status partly uncertain. Some of these can be really problematic because they affect the usual strategies with which we talk about the subjects and name them. *Queer* has the ability to deconstruct categories of identity or community. The key issue is that if we eliminate categories that label a specific group of people, we may lose the advantage of mutual support within the group. The term queer has also become synonymous with the generational conflict between lesbians and gay men, as the word has often been associated with contexts inexplicably labelled in this way.<sup>69</sup>

A further complication is that its vague nature has turned “queer” into a broad term that encompasses various forms of rejection or disavowal in matters of identity and erotic politics. The first consequence of this usage was the hope that inclusivity could bridge gaps between lesbians and gay men and resolve conflicts. However, it also led to “queer” being used as a synonym for the original homosexual essentialism,<sup>70</sup> making it applicable to those who may not even experience the social stigma associated with sexuality.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Halperin, D. M. 1995. *Saint = Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography*, New York, Oxford University Press. pp. 63–64.

<sup>68</sup> Foucault, M. 1990. *History of Sexuality*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. ISBN: 0679724699.

<sup>69</sup> Kirsch, M. H. 2000. *Queer theory and social change*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>70</sup> Homosexual essentialism conceives of homosexuality as innate.

<sup>71</sup> Halperin, D. M. 1995. *Saint = Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography*, New York, Oxford University Press. pp. 63–64.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, the feminist and LGBTQI+ movement has enabled us to make significant progress in achieving equality. However, even in 2023, we still face various challenges, threats, suffering and persecution around the world. This is illustrated by recent newspaper headlines published just before the completion of this booklet.

### **“Famed Iranian Rights Lawyer Reportedly Jailed and Beaten”**

October 30, 2023, The New York Times

### **“UN experts call on the Taliban to free 2 women rights defenders from custody in Afghanistan”**

October 31, 2023, ABC News

### **“African, Asian Parliamentarians Debate How People-Centered Policies Aid Development of Women, Youth”**

October 31, 2023, Global issues

### **“Hidden women: Madrid show puts forgotten artists in the picture”**

October 31, 2023, The Guardian

### **“The state prosecutor has proposed a prison sentence of around three years for former Member of Parliament Dominik Feri, who is accused of two counts of rape and attempted rape”**

October 31, 2023, ČT24

### **“The violent conflict in Sudan has impacted nearly every aspect of women’s lives.”**

October 30, 2023, Global issues

### **“The number of Ukrainian female soldiers is increasing, but they still face discrimination: ‘A woman cannot make mistakes’”**

August 11, 2023, Woxpot

### **“Husband of Makayla Meave-Byers accused of shooting her, wrapping body in carpet so he could date other women”**

October 30, 2023, New York Post

**“Jasmin Bhasin’s Confession About Rape Threats Post ‘Bigg Boss’ Shows The Dark Side Of Fandom”**

September 05, 2023, IDIVA

**“Women recruitment in govt jobs doubled since 2014 according to Union Minister Jitendra Singh”**

January 11, 2023, East Asian Forum

**“Pakistan’s former PM Nawaz Sharif under fire for using sexist remarks against PTI women supporters”**

October 27, 2023, The times of INDIA

**“Empowering women’s rights in Indonesia”**

January 11, 2023, East Asian Forum

**“‘Tampon tax’: Italy to raise VAT on sanitary and baby products”**

October 25, 2023, The Local IT

**“Johannesburg Pride marches for LGBTQ+ Ugandans after anti-gay law passed”**

October 28, 2023, News24

**“Malaysian LGBTQ community slam Matty Healy for concert kiss”**

July 27, 2023, Euronews

**“Trans soldier’s attack highlights challenges faced by LGBT Ukrainians”**

August 18, 2023, Euronews

**“Elon Musk Mocked for Calling Cisgender a ‘Heterosexual Slur’”**

October 31, 2023, Advocate

**“Pope Francis hints at acceptance to blessings of same-sex couples”**

October 3, 2023, Global news



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**Threads of History: Beyond the Common Ideas of the Feminist and LGBTQI+ Movement**

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