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Feminism: Between a rewritten past and an uncertain future

Françoise Picq

In order to imagine the necessarily uncertain "political future of feminism in France," it is useful to reposition it within its long history. We need to reconnect with an unknown past that has been lost between first-wave feminism (to which we owe the momentous achievement of equal rights for men and women) and the movement that declared 1970 to be the year zero of women's liberation.[1]

Feminism in France has often shone in terms of its intellectual expression. Its political history has been punctuated by the country's tumultuous history, which has informed its demands, and by its complex relations with social movements. Although always in the minority, at particular moments French feminists have been able to crystallize collective revolt around pertinent issues. "Pertinent issues" are not necessarily easy to resolve, however, and a great deal of idealism was required for women to venture beyond their assigned roles. It was not until later that French feminism became reformist and a driver of social "change" (sometimes too late for history to acknowledge the debt). The forms it has taken, its issues of interest, and its modes of expression have been highly diverse, and it is therefore difficult to reduce to a single definition. But in each of its phases it has expressed the same protest, founded on the awareness of a particular form of oppression and building solidarity among "the women" in whose name it has fought to change an unjust situation that is neither natural nor unalterable.

1. "Libération des femmes, année zéro," *Partisans* (July-October 1970); Françoise Basch, Louise Bruit, Monique Dental, Françoise Picq, Pauline Schmitt Pantel, and Claude Zaidman, eds., *Vingt-cinq ans d'études féministes: L'expérience Jussieu*, (Paris: CEDREF, 2001).

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Envisaging the future from a feminist perspective requires us to accept innovation, and the unexpected. It requires us to differentiate between the short-term characteristics of a particular movement, even if it is these features that provide historical context, and those characteristics forming part of a cumulative history whose achievements must be preserved. We must accept that each generation defines its own issues of interest and does not see itself in the battles that previous generations considered to be crucial and unresolved. But to identify the patterns taking shape over time, we must not lose sight of the progress or danger that these issues represent for the position of women in the long-term.

FEMINISM: BETWEEN TWO WAVES

After a spectacular breakthrough during the 1970s, particularly in France, the feminist movement went into a long decline in the 1980s. It was assimilated by the "patriarchal" society, which re-established an equilibrium that incorporated hard-won gains, and sought to mitigate them or reduce their impact. A "postfeminist" ideology prevailed, proclaiming the end of the patriarchy and the obsolescence of rebellion. Feminism was useful, it acknowledged: it had advanced the place of women and modernized society, but its legitimate goal had been achieved, and any further demands would be unnecessary and dangerous.

Feminist activists, increasingly isolated, were reduced to defending their gains and their image, to maintaining threadbare organizations, deserted women's centers, and rehashing sterile debates. The movement dispersed into the society that it had helped create, and split off into different organizations, each focused on a particular objective.[2] For female academics, increasingly removed from feminist activism, the time had come to take stock. The "women's movement" of the 1970s became a research object. Its role in social change was assessed, and the future was discussed in terms of renewal.[3]

2. MLF, "Mouvement de libération des femmes: le Mouvement," see Françoise Picq, *Les années-mouvement* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 363.

3. CLEF (Centre lyonnais d'études féministes), *Chronique d'une passion* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989); Françoise Picq, "Si c'était à refaire…," in GEF (Groupe d'études féministes de l'Université Paris VII), *Crises de la société, féminisme et changement* (Paris: Éditions Tierce, 1991), 257-263.

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Feminist studies, which combined a critical approach with methodological rigor, explored in greater depth the questions and issues that had been raised by the movement. They sought—with much greater difficulty in France than elsewhere—to gain institutional legitimacy and to pass on their knowledge and methods of analysis within the confines of a rigid university system.

For several years, new forms of mobilization involving women were observed: mobilizations that were viewed with interest—such as the awaited renewal—but also with some caution. There was a desire to pass on the legacy of experience and to warn against backsliding, but this required the former to be accepted and the latter to be identified. Communication is not a one-way street, and older feminists had to allow their legacy to be remodeled, reinterpreted, and transformed, in unpredictable ways.[4]

Not to accept innovation in feminism as we had known it would undoubtedly have meant missing out on its future, just like the last of the first-wave feminists who, believing they were keeping the flame alive, had "missed" *The Second Sex* and then the fight for access to birth control.

The key demands of French feminism had been obtained at Liberation, with the order of April 21, 1944 giving women the right to vote and stand for election, and equal rights "in all spheres" guaranteed by the law and enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution of 1946. Squeezed between the two dominant social movements of the period (Communism and Catholicism), only a handful of feminists pursued an independent struggle, insisting that the right to vote was not the pinnacle of achievement but a means that French women must use to influence political decisions and achieve the necessary reforms: to combat restrictions on married women and unequal parental rights, and achieve access to careers and equal pay. Having been shaped by equality feminism, they did not recognize the new phase in their struggle announced by *The Second Sex*, which also betrayed Simone de Beauvoir's total lack of awareness of their activities. Accustomed to basing their demands on the "social function of maternity," they also underestimated the danger of the prevailing traditional family ideology, and of social policies that treated women as mothers and housewives,

4. Michèle Ferrand, "Le féminisme, nos filles et nous," in BIEF (Bulletin d'information des études féminines), *Le féminisme… ringard?* (Aix-en-Provence: Centre d'études féminines de l'Université de Provence, 1989).

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confining them to this status and tolerating their exclusion from social life. With a continued decline in women's activity (encouraged by the single-wage allowance, the *allocation de salaire unique*) and the reinforcement of gender roles within the family, women exchanged "the right to vote for the obligation to return to the home."[5] This was the domestic stranglehold that would be tackled by the next generation. Older feminists displayed incomprehension rather than sympathy, and unease rather than enthusiasm, in relation to the birth control movement. This began in 1956 with *La Maternité Heureuse* (Happy Maternity), which became the *Mouvement français pour le planning familial* (French Family Planning Movement) in 1960, and encountered hostility from both the Catholics and the Communists.[6]

Simone de Beauvoir, on the other hand, did not hesitate to support the movement of the 1970s, despite the fact that it pursued an agitating collective struggle far removed from the rigorous perspective of individual liberation outlined in her philosophical essay.

First-wave feminism had worn itself out achieving equal rights, and clung to a definition of feminism that no longer reflected the issues at stake. Although founded upon it, the second wave scorned such "formal equality." It adopted an exaggerated view of the feminism of the past, rejecting the caution and reasonable behavior with which older feminists hoped to convince "those who make the laws" as, in the wake of May '68, it portrayed feminism in terms of liberation and revolutionary celebration.

This, perhaps, is the aspect that we need to let go, for being open to the renewal of feminism does not mean waiting for a movement resembling the wave that we may have experienced as its ultimate form, but was in fact merely the particular shape taken by feminism in the political context post-May '68. In a political climate open to change, the enormous hope of suddenly bringing an end to oppression, and abolishing the patriarchy within a generation, was highly effective in condemning compromise, destabilizing old relationships between the sexes, and forging new visions.[7]

But such a radical movement is unlikely to develop in a France that has become reasonably reformist, that has lost the taste for disruption and

5. Sabine Bosio-Valici and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Femmes et fières de l'être: Un siècle d'émancipation féminine* (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 55.

6. Sylvie Chaperon, *Les années Beauvoir* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

7. Picq, *Les années-mouvement*.

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confrontation, and no longer believes in the great ideological frameworks of liberation. We must however preserve the fundamental achievement of the 1970s: freedom over one's body.

This wave of feminism was accompanied by a shift in female identity. With control over their own fertility and the achievement of professional autonomy, women gained greater freedom to determine their own destiny, to be something other than mothers, and to negotiate new relations with men. There was a shift away from the glorification of maternity, that "kindly form of patriarchy,"[8] to a freedom that might be termed *habeas corpus*.[9]

During the twentieth century, women won equal rights and personal autonomy. But as the demonstration on November 25, 1995 proclaimed: "Women's gains are never truly secure."

THE TURNING POINT OF 1995 AND NEW FORMS OF MOBILIZATION

It was around 1995 that the decline of feminism began to reverse. Groups that had never given up on the struggle saw their persistence rewarded, and young people who saw themselves as feminists despite the climate of the era found themselves able to declare this openly. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, considered international issues through the lens of "women," and highlighted the feminization of poverty, violence against women, their economic exploitation, and the slow nature of progress since the first conference in 1975. This spotlight was not only important for women in the Global South but also for European women, and in particular women in France. French shortcomings in regard to female participation in decision-making were revealed, with France finding itself ranked 31st in the world for the UNDP's (United Nations Development Programme) "women's participation in decision-making" indicator.

In France, 1995 also marked the return of the right to power, and the sense that women's rights were under threat was stoked by the government's tolerance toward anti-abortion "commandos," the battle over the amnesty

8. Françoise Héritier, "Privilège de la féminité et domination masculine," *Esprit* (March-April 2001): 77-95.

9. Geneviève Fraisse, "Entre égalité et liberté," in *Éphésia: La place des femmes* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995).

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law, revelations about the political influence of Opus Dei, traditional family lobbying, the non-application of the professional equality law, a decline in jobs and salaries, under-representation in public and political life, and the rise of the far right. The threat to abortion rights was enough to trigger mobilization. The "core activists" rebuilt their networks and called on feminist organizations to pool their resources, and on progressive political organizations to support women's rights, which were held up as symbols of the rights of the individual against the government and the moral order. The secularism camp reformed.

CADAC (*Coordination des associations pour le droit à l'avortement et à la contraception*, the Co-ordinating Group for Abortion and Birth Control Rights Organizations) seized the initiative to call for a united women's rights demonstration, and November 25, 1995 marked a new beginning, with over 100 organizations, political parties, unions, and various associations coming together in response.[10] Some 40,000 people of all ages marched for "abortion and birth control rights," against the "moral backlash," and for "true equality between men and women." Women were symbolically at the head of the march and in the clear majority, but many men also took part. The demonstration indicated a willingness by otherwise very divided organizations to combine forces in agreement on an issue outside their core interests. This allowed them to delegate their activists and demonstrate their willingness to unite at little individual cost. But the co-ordinated action gave feminism political legitimacy by showing it could combine different political forces, and the movement would notably come to be seen as paving the way for the general strikes of November-December 1995.

Following the demonstration of November 25, 1995, a new body was created: the *Collectif des droits des femmes* (Women's Rights Collective), which acted as an umbrella organization for the united groups and sought to build on their agreement and pursue new initiatives. The Collectif did not reflect a change in generation: it remained led by feminists from the "class struggle" wing of the 1970s movement, or by union and political activists shaped by the same period, and bore the scars of old wounds. Yet its strategic choices revealed a political project that broke with the past,

10. Created in 1990 at the instigation of *Planning familial* and *Elles sont pour*, CADAC mobilized against the anti-abortion "commandos," blocking their activities with counter-demonstrations, and obtaining a vote on a law to introduce the "offence of obstructing abortion" (Neiertz law, December 23, 1992).

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seeking not the political autonomy of feminism, but rather support for women's rights from all organizations involved in the social movement. And such organizations, eager to retrospectively rectify their misjudgments, demonstrated a clear desire to do so. Hence for example the new openness to both feminism and humanism from the PCF (*Parti communiste français*, the French Communist Party), which lent its support to the women's cause without seeking to advance class struggle or take control.

United action was made possible by the shared organization of the *Assises nationales des droits des femmes* (National Women's Rights Conventions), which ran over a sixteen-month period and provided the opportunity to compare different analyses and points of view: drawing up "an inventory of women's rights," developing the conditions necessary for their advance, and launching debate on current issues (political parity, the place of immigrant and undocumented women, and of lesbians). The commissions worked, prepared papers, and developed recommendations to submit to the assemblies; regional groups were created, liaised with one another, and brought together the same political groups locally. The women's rights collectives offered a very open framework for meeting and mobilization, with female academics, activists, and trade unionists comparing information and analyses. Young people came together, and passed on their awareness.[11]

The Assises also generated frustrations that developed into new forms of mobilization. Lesbians felt their voices were not being sufficiently heard, so they started their own activities. Young people did not feel their ideas were adequately reflected, so they founded their own groups. Accompanied by a series of sometimes violent crises, setbacks, and with renewed energy, the *Collectif des droits des femmes* got itself up and running, forged new ties, circulated information, and launched campaigns and slogans. It was the natural hub for mobilizations and meetings; an organization with the capacity to react to political and social current affairs, to defend and advance women's rights, and to support major international action. The 2000 World March of Women, instigated by the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* (Quebec Women's Federation), provided a way to weave a web

11. *Études féministes, militantisme et mouvement des femmes*, supplement to *Bulletin de l'ANEF* no. 23 (Spring 1997); Les Assises nationales pour les droits des femmes, *En avant toutes!* (Paris: Le Temps des Cerises, 1998).

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of demonstrations across a huge number of countries in the age of the internet and opposition to rampant globalization.

A new generation of feminists emerged in the 1990s, from a range of political party and union youth organizations, student associations, and "anti-sexism" commissions. The *Marie pas claire* were the first of these, in 1992: activists from far-left organizations who formed a women-only group to discuss issues they were unable to tackle within their organizations, and who naturally revived the ideas and modes of expression of the post-1968 *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*, the Women's Liberation Movement (MLF).[12] Mafalda began in Toulouse in 1993, and CARES (*Collectif d'Action et de Réflexion pour l'Égalité entre les Sexes*, the Collective for Action and Reflection for Sexual Equality) in Lyon. The student organization "Les Sciences potiches se rebellent" (the "Window Dressing Scientists Rebel") was officially recognized within Sciences Po. Each group had its own story, pace, and issues of interest. Experience was passed on from the feminists of the 1970s to the new generation, sometimes directly from mother to daughter, and sometimes through feminist teaching, conferences, readings, and meetings. Undertaking master's level studies or research degrees in history, sociology, or political science was also a way of bringing current debates to bear on the movement of the past. Whether they called themselves feminists or preferred other terms, whether they claimed continuity or kept their distance from the past, these groups were set up on new terms. With the exception of the *Marie pas claire* they chose to be mixed-sex groups, rejecting all segregation from their natural environment.

Mix-cité was perhaps the most emblematic group of this new generation, as its difference from earlier forms of feminism was not only declared in its name (a homonym for the French term for mixed-sex), but also institutionalized in its working methods. The organization was founded following the 1997 *Assises des droits des femmes*, and loudly proclaimed both its mixed-sex policy and its feminism, which were carefully defined in its statutes. It neither rejected, nor was held in thrall to its feminist predecessors. It did however make choices in direct contradiction to those that had created the magic of the MLF before leading to its demise. Wary of spontaneity, *Mix-cité* had a clear organizational plan, with specific

12. Marcelle Marini, ed., "Continuités et discontinuités du féminisme," *Cahiers du CEDREF* 4-5 (1995).

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statutes that were re-debated and updated as issues arose. Spokespersons were appointed and the respective roles of each sex in the management of the organization was considered. Meetings began with a presentation, debates were held on joint positions, and annual reports were produced and discussed. A distinction was made between the "personal" and the "political," and safeguards were put in place, suggesting that lessons had been learned from past experience.

Other groups developed in which feminism was not a central issue, but simply part of a set of activist objectives. *Pro-choix* (Pro-choice), for example, defended abortion rights in the name of freedom of choice, just as it called for individuals to be able to choose their sexuality, and the right to decide one's life and death. Homosexuality was often the common factor that brought men and women together in a united call for equal rights between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

The women-only policy that had been central to the MLF therefore no longer made sense for a younger generation who—unlike in 1970—sought to fight together against imposed roles and to transform male-female relations.

Another significant change took place in regard to institutional relations. This was a change on both sides, for if there was no longer a role for radical protest, it was because the authorities willingly organized an apparent dialogue, inviting feminist organizations to provide their opinions and sometimes making concessions to the most effective pressure groups. From 1997 onward, a number of issues raised by feminism were taken into consideration and sometimes enshrined in law (or the constitution). A willingness was expressed to create equality on the ground, to give women greater access to positions of responsibility (through the feminization of political life and community life, and through "the equal access of men and women to senior jobs in the public sector"), to guarantee professional equality and freedom of choice, to combat violence against women, sexism in advertising, and stereotypes, and to make everyday life easier by improving childcare provision. Agreements, charters, equality plans, access programs, seminars, steering committees, and working groups brought together senior figures from organizations and feminist academics to discuss and develop programs.

The advancement of women, a symbol of modernity, became one of the key battlegrounds and areas of competition in the political sphere. But

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there was a significant danger in relying on the good will of the government (and the European government, with "equality of opportunity" one of the "pillars" in the Treaty of Amsterdam). Feminist activism remained even more necessary because the declared intentions of governments might remain purely symbolic or cede to political imperatives or pressure groups with a different kind of influence.

Experience clearly shows that progress is never made without persistence from the key individuals affected, and that institutions only shift under pressure from the groups concerned. Furthermore, the pace of politics, the electoral cycle, and media pressure often focus public action on the short-term, ignoring dissenting opinions that might slow down decision-making. Perhaps this is what led the government to the highly paradoxical decision to introduce both political parity and the Pacs (the *pacte civil de solidarité*, a civil union for couples). This introduced gender difference into the sphere of citizenship, where it had no place, and denied it in the very context where it should have been considered.[13]

UNIVERSALISM AND GENDER DIFFERENCE: A FEMINIST POINT OF VIEW

The law on political parity promised undeniable progress, but it posed a problem from a feminist point of view. The reform was pushed through against the misgivings of numerous feminists, including upholders of democratic universalism. It divided citizenship into two gender categories that were institutionalized in the political sphere, and was based on a traditional, pre-feminist idea of a quasi-ontological difference between men and women—on the common understanding that feminism had deconstructed.[14]

Conversely, those in favor of and "beyond the Pacs" tended, in the name of universalism and equality between sexes and sexualities, to oppose any value in "gender difference," including in relation to parenthood and

13. Nathalie Heinich, "Les contradictions actuelles du féminisme," *Esprit* 273, no. 3/4 (March-April 2001): 203-219.

14. Rose-Marie Lagrave, "Une étrange défaite: la loi constitutionnelle sur la parité," *Politix* 51 (2000): 113-141; Françoise Picq, "Parité, la nouvelle 'exception française'," *Modern and Contemporary France* 10, no. 1 (2002): 13-23; Liliane Kandel, "Sur la différence des sexes, et celles des féminismes," *Les Temps modernes* no. 609 (June-July-August 2000): 283-306.

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having children. The law that brought in the Pacs was debated in response to a demand for institutional recognition from some gay organizations. Such demand demonstrated that the center of gravity in the gay movement had shifted from calling for individual freedom to proclaiming equality between homosexual and heterosexual couples.[15] The reform, which resulted from a compromise, did not fully satisfy those calling for it, as it did not provide them with a status equivalent to marriage and did not allow them to adopt or use assisted reproduction. In the words of Daniel Borrillo, it was inspired by a "heterosexist ideology," as it did not question the image of the family, which remained founded on gender difference and, as such, excluded gays and lesbians from the right to start a family.[16] From a feminist point of view, it is difficult to understand this demand for family normality, led by a gay movement dominated by men, which stood in such opposition to the feminist struggle and views of the 1968 generation. Forgetting the feminist critique of marriage, the Pacs aligned the couple (heterosexual or homosexual) with the institution's most problematic residual features (shared taxation and derivative rights), while dismissing its guarantees (unilateral separation requiring only a letter with acknowledgement of receipt). Another route to improve the situation of couples (both homosexual and heterosexual, without returning to the problematic family model) appeared preferable: legal recognition of the free union, its inclusion in the Civil Code including same-sex couples, and extended rights for all cohabitees.[17]

But as the developing debate has made clear, the core of the contradiction concerns motherhood and "gender difference."[18] On the whole, the

15. Marianne Schulz, "Reconnaissance juridique de l'homosexualité: quels enjeux pour les femmes?," in *Lien sexuel, lien social: sexualités et reconnaissance juridique* (Journée de l'ANEF, June 13, 1998), supplement to *Bulletin de l'ANEF* 29 (1999): 9-26.

16. Daniel Borrillo, "La protection juridique des nouvelles formes familiales," *Mouvements* 8 (March-April 2000): 59.

17. Irène Théry, "Le contrat d'union sociale en question," *Esprit* 10 (October 1997): 159-211; "La question du genre dans les débats actuels sur le couple," in *Lien sexuel, lien social: sexualités et reconnaissance juridique* (Journée de l'ANEF, June 13, 1998), supplement to *Bulletin de l'ANEF* 29 (1999): 22-31; "Manifeste pour la reconnaissance légale de l'union libre," in *Lien sexuel, lien social: sexualités et reconnaissance juridique* (Journée de l'ANEF, June 13, 1998), supplement to *Bulletin de l'ANEF* 29 (1999): 79.

18. See in particular Daniel Borrillo and Éric Fassin, eds., *Au-delà du Pacs: L'expertise familiale à l'épreuve de l'homosexualité* (Paris: PUF, 1999); "Le meccano familial" special report, *Mouvements* 8 (March-April 2000); "L'un et l'autre sexe," *Esprit* (March-April 2001); Yvonne Knibielher, ed.,

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feminism of the 1970s followed Simone de Beauvoir in considering sexual identity to be a social construct, stating the necessity of separating female identity from maternity, and imagining the utopia of the end of sexual bipolarization. This deconstruction/reconstruction approach has been taken up by the gay and lesbian movements, with queer activists going further by blurring categories of sex and male and female identification. However, feminists oppose a form of questioning that appears to surpass their intentions. As Marcela Iacub has explained, they are not as "anti-differentialist" as they claim to be, and do not seek "the disappearance of women as a historical subject, their business capital."[19]

Feminists in fact continue to see gender categorization as playing a major role in self-definition. The outlines might be hazy and there are blurred areas, as Nathalie Heinich has explained, but this takes nothing away from the reality of gender difference, nor from its necessity.[20] And even if we refuse to reduce the identity of women to their status as mothers, even if maternity lies at the heart of the oppression of women, this potential is part of female identity. Feminists are wary of the ideal of a genderless society in which reproduction is debiologized, as they fear this masks an undermining of their achievements.[21] The "power of mothers" can easily be presented as abusive, not only in regard to keeping custody of children after divorce (about which much could be said), but also in regard to freedom of reproduction. For Marcela Iacub, the right to abortion, "combined with women's new powers, has become a source of inequality between the sexes." It calls the sexual freedom of men into question, as they cannot "substitute themselves for the mother's all-powerful will to have an abortion or bring a child into the world."[22]

This position clearly demonstrates where the denial of biological difference can ultimately lead, and allows us to understand the caution of feminists. Under cover of equality between sexes and sexualities, the specific nature of maternity is undermined and, with it, accompanying

Maternité: Affaire privée, affaire publique (Paris: Bayard, 2001); Forum des états généraux de l'écologie politique, *Sexualités et genres: permanences et évolutions*.

19. Iacub, "Le meccano familial," 77.

20. Heinich, "Les contradictions actuelles."

21. Bertrand Guillarme, "La justice démocratique et l'effacement du genre," *Cités* 1, no. 5 (2001): 49-54.

22. Marcela Iacub, "Reproduction et division juridique des sexes," *Les Temps modernes* 609 (June-July-August 2000): 242-262.

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rights, including those over one's body. This is a true challenge to the gains of feminism, which women cannot under any circumstances allow to be called into question. Motherhood, which was seen as a destiny, has become the inalienable right of women. True, this may result in an inequality between the sexes, but such is the price of women's freedom. If women have been subjugated because of their reproductive capacity, with men needing them as a "resource" to reproduce, it is only by taking back this power over themselves that they become individuals. This "great revolution of our time" is, according to Françoise Héritier, a sufficiently powerful lever to escape the "differential valence of the sexes."[23]

The possibility that pregnancy could become "something that can be negotiated, artificial, and substituted," and "the right to bypass one's body to procreate," which Marcela Iacub has made a new slogan, is another way of responding to men's old complaint that they cannot have children without women.[24] Marriage and the presumption of paternity, those foundations of the patriarchy that feminists have fought against, with significant but never definitive success, were established in order to appropriate maternal power, and this new dogma of equality between the sexes and between sexualities, which condemns the abuse of power by mothers, could well be a means of re-establishing male domination, mirroring the post-war family ideology that dealt with women who were now equal in law by sending them back into the home.

The "We are the universalists" manifesto seeks to marry the claims of feminism with those of the gay movement. I believe that feminists must support the rights of gay couples to start a family. They must contribute to combating discrimination against gay couples of both sexes, particularly in regard to adoption and custody of children following divorce. But such support must not be based on an ideology that denies the specific nature of maternity, and contests the primacy of women over their own pregnancy. As Marie-Josèphe Dhavernas explains: "In denying the biological, we deprive ourselves of the means to analyze its effects and thus combat them when they occur." On the contrary, biological asymmetry must be acknowledged in order to achieve social equality.[25] On this basis, the

23. Héritier, "Privilège de la féminité."

24. Iacub, "Reproduction et division," 262.

25. Marie-Josèphe Dhavernas, "Biomédecine: la nouvelle donne," in *Maternité, affaire privée, affaire publique*, ed. Yvonne Knibiehler (Paris: Bayard, 2001), 93-108 (101-103).

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feminist and gay communities can unite their efforts against stereotypical labels and sexual roles and move toward greater fluidity and individual choice. Men and women can jointly develop new ways of sharing parental tasks and responsibilities.

The future of feminism is uncertain. As is the history to come. Considering it within the context of an unduly ignored past allows us to shed light on the horizon from a cumulative perspective. Once they are established, rights gained are too easily trivialized, and risk being insidiously undermined. Knowledge of past struggles helps us to see their importance as well as their limitations. Equal rights, won after a century of struggle, were not sufficient to secure the emancipation of women. The following—essential—stage was for women to gain control over their fertility. Women are no longer consigned to maternity, but they remain trapped by it, tasked with the responsibility of children and resolving this as a female, individual, and private issue. They are required to "juggle" maternity with their social and professional lives, as if they alone were responsible for paying the price for human reproduction. The world of work continues to follow the old model, assuming that generational renewal, the home, children, old people, and the sick can only be cared for if half the human race agree to give up on a full and complete individual existence. This results not only in inequalities between men and women in professional competition and access to senior positions, but also between women themselves.[26] A total rethink of the intersection of the social spheres, the place of maternity and paternity in sharing family tasks, and social and professional life could be the next issue for feminism. The involvement of fathers in the domestic sphere, no longer in the role of the symbolic father, but through actual concrete actions, would greatly contribute to doing away with gender, and would allow women to play a full part in social life. This requires us to draw up a new social contract between the sexes, and for the whole of society to assume the responsibility of generational renewal. Feminism still has an immense task before it, and it is one in which men have a role to play.

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26. Irène Théry, "Mixité et maternité," in *Maternité, affaire privée, affaire publique*, ed. Yvonne Knibiehler (Paris: Bayard, 2001), 251-270 (262).

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international networks, and organizations. Her main publications are focused on the history of feminism and the specific features of the women's movement in France, as well as on the issue of political parity, and include *Libération des femmes: Les années-mouvement*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1993), "The History of Feminist Movements in France" in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (London: Zed Books, 2002), and "Parité, la nouvelle 'exception française'," *Modern and Contemporary France* 10, no. 1 (2002): 13-23.

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