

## TWO

### IDENTITY POLITICS IN FRANCE AND THE NETHERLANDS: THE CASE OF GAY AND LESBIAN LIBERATION

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#### Introduction

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS based on the collective identity of a specific group do not have equal opportunities to develop in their respective countries. France is especially interesting in this regard, because its prevailing republican tradition of egalitarianism and universalism conflicts with the pursuit of a specific group identity and the representation of particular desires and interests (Ambler 1971; Hazaseeringh 1994; Hoffmann 1963). In this article, I will discuss how this tradition affected the development of emerging identity-based movements, especially that of the French gay and lesbian movement. My analysis starts with the following question: To what extent and in what way did the broader political context in France affect the manner in which the French gay and lesbian movement voiced its collective interests and desires? In answering this question, the circumstances in the Netherlands will serve as a basis for comparison, wherever relevant. The situation in the Netherlands is of interest in this respect because of the country's longstanding policy on groups: until the late 1970s "pillarization" existed throughout the country. This system provided an organizational framework for politics and social life (parties, school, sports associations, the media, and social interaction) within carefully delineated groups (usually by religious denomination). Although the Netherlands has recently been "de-pillarized," it certainly does more to accommodate group manifestations and policy than does France. I will start with a broad overview of political protest in France and the Netherlands, focusing on the specific nature of the gay and lesbian movements that have emerged in both countries.

#### Political Protest in France and the Netherlands

Most people have come to take vehement social conflict in France for granted.<sup>1</sup> Mass demonstrations and teetering governments seem to be part of

an age-old tradition. Passion has been a characteristic feature of French politics since the Revolution of 1789. Politics in France has therefore always had a dramatic and emotional ring to it, as exemplified by the events of 1830 and 1848, the Commune de Paris of 1871, the Dreyfus Affair, the prewar Popular Front, May 1968. More often than not, heads must roll, either literally or metaphorically, to appease the citizenry.

This representation of French politics as a battlefield, where citizens and their elected representatives are locked into a state of ongoing conflict, is contrasted by another cliché, which holds that the French are politically passive. De Tocqueville was among those who vehemently criticized the lack of political commitment among his compatriots. He urged them to follow the lead of their American counterparts, whose commitment to the civil cause was exemplary. He pointed out that civic commitment was flourishing in the United States, while France was characterized by an almost total lack of civic bodies dedicated to a cause. France lacked intermediary organizations between individuals and the state; in other words, France was missing a civil society (Tocqueville 1968, 1988).

At first glance these views seem contradictory, but closer scrutiny reveals that they are perfectly compatible. Out of fear of near-revolutionary political upheavals, which seem to occur every other decade, citizens are denied access to the political arena. Professional politicians are in control and generally ignore "interference" from lobbies or social movements. Whether originating in the left or right wing, French politicians are inclined to turn a deaf ear to the populace. In contrast to the Netherlands, access to political debate and decision making is very limited.

Although the regular recurrence of political unrest may suggest otherwise, French trade unions and most other organizations are in disarray, particularly compared with other Western European countries. In the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, and Austria, workers benefit from their membership in trade unions, which engage in regular consultation and negotiation with employers—often under the watchful eye of the state. In France, however, it seems pointless to join a trade union, because employers and the state largely ignore such organizations. Therefore, the low levels of organization in France go hand in hand with an increased tendency to strike—certainly in comparison with the previously mentioned countries. If employers refuse to take a seat at the negotiating table, workers must find other ways to vent their dissatisfaction. Other organizations, such as those involved in the environmental movement, face a similar predicament. Unlike those in many other European countries, environmental organizations in France are usually not represented in state advisory bodies. Here, too, the state's reluctance to accord legitimacy to intermediary groups reduces the incentive to become a member. It is hardly surprising that the French state is even less tolerant of radical groups. The sabotage of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* during

Mitterrand's first term as president was certainly no coincidence. It was yet another grim reminder that members of the French political class have maintained their traditional stance and will not tolerate interference from citizens—let alone noncitizens—in matters of the state.

Presented as part of a deliberate strategy to protect democracy, these efforts to exclude movements from politics and small political parties from parliaments actually undermine democracy. In the first place, political stability is repeatedly endangered when the arrogance of the political establishment sparks a spiral of events leading to a head-on confrontation: groups of citizens become frustrated, they organize demonstrations, the state refuses to negotiate with the protestors, the demonstrations grow and become more radical, the political opposition senses an opportunity to bring down the government, police action becomes more and more repressive, and eventually the left- and right-wing blocs engage in open confrontation. At this point, the parties have lost sight of the concrete demands, and only one question remains: will the government and the president survive the conflict? Though France is fairly similar to other Western European countries in terms of the quantitative aspects of political protest (i.e., the sheer number of movements and activists, Duyvendak 1995a; Kriesi et al. 1992, 1995), it differs greatly with respect to the qualitative *dynamics of protest*. In France, demonstrations are not organized by specific large groups that systematically take to the streets for a cause. Instead, political action is the domain of individual citizens, most of whom are not members of an organization. For a brief period they are induced to participate in mass mobilization, formulating ever more general goals as they move through the spiral of protest toward head-on confrontation.

The system's inaccessibility leads not only to the crippling political dynamics sketched above but also to a stagnation of political innovation. In contrast to the Netherlands, where a multitude of new issues (e.g., the environment and liberation for women and homosexuals) have been added to the political agenda over the past decades, contemporary France remains trapped in age-old political *cleavages* (Kriesi and Duyvendak 1995). These include the divide between urban and rural areas, the struggle between centralist Paris and areas striving for autonomy (Corsica, Brittany), the relationship between church and state (the struggle surrounding the Catholic *école privée*), and last but certainly not least, the ongoing class struggle. Whereas 75 percent of all political action in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands is related to new issues (e.g., the environment, the third world, women, and gays), this holds true for only one-third of all popular action in France (Kriesi et al. 1995). The mobilization capacity of so-called new social movements (women's movement, gay and lesbian movement, ecological movement, peace movement) in France is extremely weak. Apart from the demonstrations organized by the antiracism movement (Blatt 1995), nearly

all other major demonstrations held in France during the past twenty-five years have dealt with traditional political issues. For example, Catholics and right-wing parties have demonstrated against the Socialist government, unions and left-wing parties have demonstrated against the right-wing government, and farmers have launched protests against Paris (Duyvendak 1995a).

The political stagnation in France may be attributed to the dominance of the traditional political parties, especially the ones left of the center, which are hardly threatened by political newcomers. No other Western European country had a communist party as powerful as the Parti Communiste Français, which constituted a serious threat to the Socialist Party for many decades. Nor did any other European country have such prominent Trotskyite and Maoist groups. As a result, attracting political attention in France requires that issues are framed in orthodox class terms. Hardly any latitude was granted to the independent, noncommunist peace movement, which dared to criticize the French nuclear arsenal, *la force de frappe*. Similarly, the broader protest movement against nuclear energy was unable to gain momentum because it failed to garner any real support among the traditional parties in Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Only very recently have ecological issues reemerged in the political arena, especially now that the Green Party supplies a minister to the Jospin cabinet.

The gay and lesbian movement in France has also been deeply influenced by these limited opportunities for new social movements. Until the late 1980s many members subscribed to the neo-Marxist line, presumably because the radical leftist parties were the only ones somewhat receptive to the homosexual struggle for emancipation in 1970s. Even they demanded that the effort figure within the class struggle.

In the Netherlands the leftist political parties had a similar impact on the ideology of the gay and lesbian movement during the 1970s. At no point, however, did the movement submit its interests to those of these parties: it managed to establish itself independently, rather than purely as part of a "political family" (Duyvendak 1995a). Moreover, the Dutch movement's emergence proceeded far more smoothly than that of its French counterpart, which became entangled in the ups and downs of the French left because of its dependency. How can we understand these differences? What kind of political culture exists in the Netherlands, providing opportunities to social movements for autonomous development?

In the Netherlands the authorities take political protest seriously and are quick to accommodate demonstrators, even if their demands deviate from the prevailing opinion. Operating within a pluralist democracy, traditionally based on agreements between religious minorities, political authorities cannot afford to disregard "new" minorities such as homosexuals (Schuyf and

Krouwel 1999). When the Netherlands was still "pillarized" (1950–70), this arrangement involved contacts behind the scenes between the heads of the political and religious groups and the leadership of the incipient homosexual emancipation movement (Tielman 1982). In subsequent decades, interaction became far more open between the main organization of Dutch homosexuals (the COC) and numerous political parties, including right-wing and Christian parties. The early interest in homosexual issues in politics resulted from efforts by other emancipation movements that preceded them (especially the women's movement). This cannot explain, however, the willing ear homosexual issues found in Dutch politics, since the women's movement cleared the way for gay and lesbian liberation in many other countries as well. What, then, gave the Dutch gay and lesbian movement its surprising strength and success in politics, at least compared to that in France?

### French and Dutch Political Culture/Political Structure

The rather limited specific opportunities for (new) social movements in France can best be explained in terms of both the informal cultural and the formal structural characteristics of the country's political system. The *political culture* in France is overwhelmingly republican. Since the French Revolution of 1789, intermediary bodies are distrusted as representatives of specific interests, which are believed to harm the common interest. There is a republican distrust of separate identities, which manifests itself not only among politicians but also among the population. This deeply rooted antipathy toward groups and intermediary organizations between the state and the citizenry is both characteristic of French politics and of a selective nature. The republican logic has greatly impeded the rise of the homosexual movement, which through its public manifestation elicited a vehement response not only as a sexual minority but also through its quest for acknowledgment as a minority and its effort to avoid becoming caught up in a universalist discourse.

Here, the central slogan of the French 1970s gay and lesbian movement (the FHAR, or the Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action) merits consideration: *le droit à la différence*. It added an entirely new element to French politics. After all, groups demanding "the right to be different" were something of a novelty within the political culture of egalitarian France, and such demands had certainly never been made in combination with an attack on dominant, heterosexual normality.<sup>3</sup> The FHAR clearly refused to bow to the republican logic, which held that minorities should merely pursue the same rights as the majority. Instead, the FHAR turned this logic upside down: as a minority, it not only demanded the right to be different, but also argued that the majority should change. This countercultural trend, which also emerged

in many other Western European countries during that time (Adam 1995; Duyvendak 1995b), was not likely to last very long in France. In the first place, the political establishment interpreted the emphasis on collective identity as an appeal for equality, because variety or multiformity has never been seen as a legitimate political objective in its own right. Therefore, in contrast to the gay minority in the Netherlands, which demanded to be recognized as a minority (Seidman 1997), the dominant political culture in France forced the gay and lesbian movement to restrict itself to the language of egalitarianism. So, in order to achieve its political goals, the French gay and lesbian movement had to join the majority, instead of turning against the dominant "normality." In the Netherlands, it was, given its political culture, normal to claim a space for being different (on the basis of equal rights), whereas in France no such claim is imaginable: equality is the best you may hope for as gays and lesbians.

In practice, the French gay and lesbian movement therefore had to join the left-wing family. This brings us to the second reason underlying the transience of the French gay and lesbian movement's bid to be "different." The coercive solidarity within the left-wing bloc forced the FHAR to generalize its demand for *le droit à la différence*, thus expanding the bid beyond gays and lesbians to include all minorities. Paradoxically, the generalization of *le droit à la différence* led to uniformity. In terms of the left-wing, *gauchist* ideology, all affiliated groups were different in the same way: they were all victims of capitalism. The FHAR adopted the slogan "their struggle is our struggle," effectively erasing any possible distinction between their own struggle and those of other groups.

In the end, *le droit à la différence* proved to be an inadequate slogan in a political arena where differences between groups were considered undesirable. The ideology of difference was therefore effectively exiled to the (politically) invisible subculture and to the higher spheres of culture and science, which were inhabited by numerous French intellectuals who impressed the world with their views on difference (Masques 1981). This popularity of the ideology of difference among intellectuals is paradoxical in a country that is largely intolerant toward political differences (certainly in comparison to other Western European countries). Whereas after the 1980s French intellectuals like Foucault, Derrida, Irigaray, and Cixous fell into partial oblivion among the French feminist and gay movements, they were wholeheartedly embraced by emancipatory movements in the capital of multiculturalist politics: the United States.

Besides a look at the political culture, an analysis of the political opportunities for social movements also requires a look at the *political structure*. The political structure in France is characterized by a centralized state system that is strikingly impermeable. The central government is still very dominant

(despite decentralization reforms during left-wing cabinets), while the Parliament, based on a majority system, is much less accessible to new and small parties than are systems based on proportional representation. In France, these structural conditions led to a freeze in the relationship between political parties, with a right-wing bloc facing a left-wing bloc. The most radical parties in these blocs (the Gaullists on the right, the Communists on the left) have long held a dominant position, leading to the previously mentioned old cleavages that still influence French politics and leave less room for new political issues than in many other European countries. The French Greens did not achieve their breakthrough until the second half of the 1990s.

It is important to place this political stagnation in the right context. The fact that certain structural and cultural factors lead to conservatism in French politics and a peculiar dynamics of collective action does not imply that French society as a whole has stagnated. The relationship between society and politics is more complex. While the rapid changes throughout the world during the late 1960s did not exclude France, they led to fewer political innovations there because the left was so strongly dominated by communist (i.e., Marxist) organizations. The predominance of traditional issues in French politics might surprise readers who were led to believe that the winds of change had blown through the corridors of power in May 1968, heralding the breakthrough of new political ideas. The fact of the matter is that the events of May 1968 were not prototypical for the new protest movements that emerged in Europe and the United States; they were in fact atypical. The vehemence of protest in France should be attributed primarily to the volatile alliance between students and millions of striking workers, not to the inherent strength of the new movements.

New social movement sympathizers remained relatively marginal in party politics, too. When they eventually joined the Socialist Party, this "second left" (as the nonstatist left was called) (Hamon and Rotman 1982), gave rise to some openness toward social movements such as the antinuclear movement (which emerged in France as early as it did elsewhere). It was unable, however, to shield these movements and many other new political issues (e.g., homosexuality) from being inundated by orthodox leftist class issues, particularly when the Socialist Party started cooperating closely with the Communists for electoral reasons.

The lack of prospects for the new social movements eventually caused the downfall of the "second left" in French society. While elsewhere, such as in the Netherlands, a "green" subculture developed, the left-libertarian sentiments in France evaporated during the 1980s. Many leftist movements split into countless splinter groups. This process resulted in part from the decreasing support for these movements emanating from French society, which, in turn, was caused by the impossibility of political success. We have analyzed this extensively in the case of the antinuclear movement. It turned out that

support for this movement decreased as the political arena—and especially the political parties on the left—distanced itself from it (Koopmans and Duyvendak 1995). The problems faced by new movements, such as the gay and lesbian movement, were attributable to these general characteristics of the French political structure and culture.

In the Netherlands, the traditional political antitheses were pacified a long time ago. As a result, cleavages in state-church and class relations were resolved institutionally (which does not preclude persistent class differences), giving new movements greater access to the political arena (Duyvendak et al. 1992; Kriesi 1993). Furthermore, the legitimacy of identity-based demands in the Netherlands is the product of a completely different tradition: "pillarization," or the organization of society and politics on the basis of sharply defined, separate groups. As a country of minorities—there was no religious denomination to which a majority of the Dutch adhered—the Netherlands generally empathized with specific groups demanding recognition. Such groups could even request state funding to maintain their specificity: these "pillars" had their own schools, broadcasting organizations, and welfare institutions, paid for by the state (Duyvendak 1994; Lijphart 1971, 1974). This pillarization remained intact until the late 1960s. Its gradual erosion ("de-pillarization") led people to question the tradition. It soon became clear that Dutch pillarized society was hierarchical and undemocratic: consultation was the prerogative of the upper echelons. In addition, individuals found it impossible to break out of their respective pillars. Numerous political customs, implemented during pillarization, nevertheless remained intact after the 1970s. In addition to the custom of funding a wide variety of oppositional groups, the custom to invite all the different organizations to participate in the political process, with the aim of reaching a consensual and peaceful solution of conflicts, also persisted. Thus, the scope of Dutch political culture extends to specific groups that take pride in their "difference." Or, more accurately, tolerance for such difference is greater than it is in France, where assimilation seems to be the best a minority can hope to accomplish.<sup>4</sup>

The Dutch homosexual movement COC (which organizes both gays and lesbians) received invitations to serve on official committees as well as an impressive array of subsidies. As stated, this is a familiar pattern in the open Dutch political culture: all kinds of organizations receive government funding, including some with positions that deviate from the "norm" (not only those of radical gay and lesbian activists, but also antinuclear groups and even squatters). New organizations, such as the gay and lesbian one, have benefited from this longstanding tradition.

The relative openness of Dutch politics is reinforced by a few aspects of the political system's *structure*, especially the system of proportional representation. Minority parties, even those obtaining less than 1 percent of the vote,

are entitled to congressional representation. Established political parties therefore need to remain especially alert to new trends. They must accommodate new topics and individuals in the party or risk forfeiting votes and seats.

In the Netherlands more opportunities were available to highlight gay pride. Many gay men and especially lesbian women emphasized their distinctive characteristics ("difference"): the homosexual movement was not looking for a spot in the limelight but wanted its own show: its own lifestyle and space for cultural and political expression. The openness of the Dutch public and political arena, however, also subdued the movement's discourse: the relative ease of attaining equal rights in the Netherlands quickly marginalized the emphasis on the "difference" of homosexuals (Duyvendak 1994). This change reveals an interesting paradox with respect to France in that granting minorities latitude and equal rights has reduced the need for identity politics in the Netherlands. Where minorities are not allowed to manifest themselves, however, their identities become more deeply entrenched (France). As for interpreting this paradox, what is the latitude and need for highlighting new identities in both countries?

#### Old and New Social Movements in France and the Netherlands: The Status of "Identity"

"Traditional" objectives continue to dominate the protest actions of social movements in France, leaving very little room for new objectives. All new movements are confronted with this problem, whether they are predominantly instrumental-oriented (the environmental, peace, and solidarity movements) or identity-oriented (the feminist, squatters, gay and lesbian movements). Identity movements, however, suffer even more from the republican distrust of separate identities. Their sphere of action therefore seems even smaller than that of new, predominantly instrumental movements with less emphasis on identities. But is the prospect for identity movements really that bleak? And, was it always this bleak?

The development of dominant, *old* movements teaches us several lessons. In the first place, we may conclude that the dominant French political discourse is fundamentally opposed to identity-based politics, but that—precisely due to that fact—in political reality identity has been a key issue in traditional conflicts. Corsicans and Bretons, farmers, Catholics, and workers all harbor a deep-seated sense of collective identity. Many even consider acknowledgment of their identity to be the prime objective of their struggle. In light of this, it is easy to refute the contention that identity-based politics are primarily the domain of the new movements. It also seems logical that France—perhaps even more so than elsewhere—should be confronted with political strife based on collective identities. A society that swears by egalitarianism

offers disgruntled citizens a powerful discursive weapon for organizing themselves as a group in order to demand equal rights. After all, any French minority group that feels slighted has the right to demand equal treatment.

The older movements pursue a specific type of identity-based strategy: movements based on particular collective identities demand the same rights as the majority. On the one hand, the republican egalitarian tradition grants groups of citizens the freedom to unite temporarily and demand equal rights. On the other hand, this tradition makes it impossible for such groups to maintain their appeal for support and preservation of their specific group culture or identity. Since separate identities are not recognized, it is (and always has been) impracticable to pursue a multiculturalist policy (Gutmann 1992; Seidman 1993; Taylor 1992) in France.

The degree of freedom granted to new identity-based movements in France is limited for two reasons. First, the legitimacy of identity-based political action is always temporary and conditional. Such action is tolerated as long as it is directed toward eradicating inequality or erasing the societal discrepancies and disadvantages fueling the group's discontentment. Second, the available space for new movements is limited because the political field is already occupied by the aforementioned traditional identities. According to the prevailing political logic, these traditional political identities should have been temporary. Instead, stagnation of the political system has enabled them to become highly stable entities. The situation has resulted in another intriguing paradox: *Although the French political system makes no provision for the permanent accommodation of specific collective identities, these identities have proved extraordinarily persistent, owing to the obstructive dynamics of the political system.*

These circumstances not only force new movements to formulate their demands in terms of the republican rhetoric of universalism and egalitarianism (a rhetoric emphasizing equality, as in many other liberal countries) but also dictate that they should forge alliances with the dominant discourse of the older movements. This prompted many new movements to seek shelter under the wings of traditional leftist parties and movements, where they learned to speak the language of the left-wing political family, which stresses specific "old" identities (Duyvendak 1995a:203–9).

However, even in France there is scope for new issues, despite the fact that they must be formulated in terms of the traditional antitheses. Yet new organizations making an independent bid to place their issues on the political agenda fail, almost without exception.<sup>3</sup>

The situation in the Netherlands is quite different: effective resolution of old issues has cleared a lot of space on the political agenda for new ones. As

argued above, the space for new topics is attributable to old political *traditions*: new groups easily achieve political acknowledgment (financial or institutional), and new issues quickly enter the political arena. The strength of these longstanding traditions is the only possible reason for the predominantly positive reception of homosexual emancipation in the Netherlands, even when the Christian democrats were included in the coalition governments. In contrast to France, there are (and were) no "hard" identities in Dutch politics gays and lesbians had to compete with: since many other groups had been recognized and appeased before the gay and lesbian movement emerged, these "old" identities were not as persistent as the old ones in France. Due to the fact that there are provisions for the permanent accommodation of specific collective identities in the Netherlands, these groups are much more "open" and willing to accept others than are comparable groups in France still desperately seeking recognition.

Finally, I will further illustrate the differences between the two countries by presenting two relevant episodes in the history of the French and Dutch gay and lesbian movements.

### Two Episodes in the History of the French and Dutch Gay and Lesbian Movements: AIDS Politics and the Recognition of Homosexual Relationships

Political tradition has had a profound effect on the development of the gay and lesbian movement in France.<sup>6</sup> It has even dictated the political language the movement uses to formulate its objectives. The far-reaching influence of the universalist republican tradition on the gay and lesbian movement was proved once more when AIDS reared its ugly head (Favre 1992). Whereas many other Western countries soon realized the need to combat AIDS in a differentiated manner, the French government refused to design prevention campaigns directed at male homosexuals (Altman 1988; Duyvendak and Koopmans 1991; Duyvendak 1996). The development of a target-group policy proved to be almost impossible in a republican country (Arnal 1993; Pollak 1988). Even the organizations founded to assist HIV-infected people and AIDS patients tried to avoid being labeled homosexual, despite the fact that almost all of their members and patients were homosexual, especially at the start of the epidemic (Hirsch 1991; Pollak and Rosman 1989). Ernst analyzed the situation as follows: "The enduring influence of the French republican model of citizenship and politics is evident in the gay community's response to AIDS. The reluctance of AIDS organizations to 'own' the disease, and to interpret it as a civil rights issue, and to instead view it as a health problem is testament of the degree to which identity-based politics remain illegitimate in France. While French AIDS organizations certainly rec-

ognize the ways in which the disease poses a threat to civil rights, this threat is viewed as a general one. AIDS poses a threat to the universal human rights of all French citizens, not to the right of French gays" (1995:17). Groups of citizens have neither political nor social opportunities to permanently manifest themselves as being different. They therefore see themselves primarily as individuals, whose only common denominator is that they are French. "Unlike the US which allows, indeed encourages group differences to flourish in civil society, and unlike the Dutch state which recognizes groups as political agents, the French state often approaches groups with an eye to privatizing and suppressing them or subjecting social differences to hierarchical, normalizing control. France may be a nation of individuals, but before such individuals are men or women, bourgeois or proletariat, straight or gay, Catholic or Muslim, they are, or should be, French" (Seidman 1997:252).

The AIDS epidemic made abundantly clear that differentiation among groups (and thinking in terms of groups) is necessary, even in France, not because AIDS strikes only homosexuals, but because certain groups obviously run a greater risk of contracting the disease than others. This awareness sparked a vociferous antirepublican reaction, in particular through ACT-UP Paris, which presented itself as a community organization that wanted to have its "uniqueness" recognized, an unprecedented phenomenon in France. On the one hand, the rhetoric employed by ACT-UP Paris was very similar to that of the left-wing movements of the 1960s and 1970s (in its denunciation of sexual repression) but at the same time radically different by virtue of its call for the foundation of a homosexual *community*, something no other French movement had ever sought to attain.

The two goals adopted by ACT-UP Paris (politicization of AIDS and identity-building) did not suit the associational and political establishment, and after 1991 ACT-UP started to become the object of fairly virulent attacks in both these areas, highlighting the difficulty of establishing a homosexual movement on a communitarian basis in France. Frédéric Martel, for example, as his book *Le Rose et le noir. Les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (1996) shows, felt compelled to defend the republican model against the communitarian tendencies developing in gay AIDS organizations in France. And he was not alone: most French associations reacted negatively to ACT-UP's attempt to found a homosexual movement on the basis of the American identity/community model. These reactions indicated that the goals of ACT-UP directly contested the attachment of the French left to the classic republican model, in which "minority politics" is not tolerated, on its own terms.<sup>7</sup>

An interesting analogy to this struggle can be found in the development in the early 1980s of movements like SOS-Racisme, which asserted (like the FHAR for gays and lesbians in the 1970s) a *droit à la différence* for French people of immigrant parents (Blatt 1995).

The severe resistance ACT-UP has experienced to this day in France attests

to the fact that an action model and discourse that fit a movement in one country—the tremendous impact of ACT-UP in the United States is a good example—may diffuse to other countries but will not necessarily take hold there. Because ACT-UP demanded recognition as a community organization, it was not able to expand its appeal in France. Its antirepublican battle cries made it easier for the French authorities to ignore its demands, even those for equal treatment.

In that sense, one would expect the current struggle to allow partnership registration as an alternative to marriage for couples to have a better chance of succeeding, as it demands the same rights for heterosexual and homosexual couples, irrespective of their differences. This discussion reflects, however, the selective nature of republicanism's universalism. From the reactions to the proposal for this registration option, it is evident that "universal" in France refers to what is commonly accepted as "normal." Thus, only heterosexuals seem to qualify for institutions sanctioned by the state. How ironic to find a heterosexual group "right" in a land so proud of its universalism.

In the Netherlands both AIDS policy and marriage legislation are entirely different. Dutch homosexuals figured prominently in fighting the epidemic (Duyvendak 1996). In fact, they (i.e., the leaders of their organizations) were in a position to select the prevention strategy they expected would yield the best results. This situation reveals the risks of complete "self-administration," since the information message chosen ("stop engaging in anal intercourse") long persisted in that format, even after profound doubts had arisen regarding its resonance and effectiveness. Since this message had been "approved" by homosexuals themselves, however, it did not instigate a reaction among other groups. At any rate, because of the major role of a homosexual "elite" in AIDS policy, the "average" gay man had (or felt) no cause to mobilize, let alone engage in a radical or demonstrative form of action.

In the debate about legislation concerning relationships between homosexuals, the differences between France and the Netherlands took a surprising turn as well. The deep political appreciation of minorities in the Netherlands led to greater willingness to adapt legislation concerning relationships. Registered partnerships were approved in 1998, and same-sex civil marriages are likely in the near future as well. Respect for minorities enables their equality in politics and before the law. In republican France, the persistent prohibition of marriages between homosexuals is a striking contrast to the practice in the Netherlands. In keeping with its tradition, France is the scene of heated debates and demonstrations, this time primarily by those opposing legislation that would allow homosexuals to legalize their relationship. The right wing and the Catholics in France are flooding the streets by the hundreds of thousands: hardened identities are up in arms, and new groups are paying the price.

Comparing the two cases shows that the space for identity politics greatly differs in France and the Netherlands. In France, the dominant republican rhetoric precludes recognition of groups. Even at the height of the AIDS epidemic, the fact that AIDS primarily struck among certain groups was ignored. In response, a "communitarian" ideology evolved among French homosexuals: the negation of their existence led them to emphasize their distinction from other groups in dramatic terms. In contrast, the Dutch strategy for combatting AIDS makes clear that when there is space for a group to exist, that group will not need to stress its particular identity and "differentness" in strong terms. The almost immediate recognition within the political and social arena that HIV primarily struck among homosexuals—and, therefore, that this group should be the prime actor in the fight against AIDS—explains why no radicalization of the gay and lesbian movement and no "queering" of gay and lesbian identities took place in the Netherlands (Duyvendak 1996).

Moreover, the example of homosexual marriage shows that the dominant group actively represses gay and lesbian identities. Ironically, in a republican France proud of its universalist flag, the dominant majority turns out to have a strong identity as well: women, migrants, and homosexuals who want to organize themselves are disqualified as unrepugnant by a dominant group consisting primarily of white, heterosexual men. In France, this dominating group has, at least compared to the Netherlands, a surprisingly conservative face, partly due to the logic of solidified identities described earlier: the majority values class, heredity, region, religion, and political affiliation, because those are the identities that have occupied France during the past century. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, politics is much less defined by "a face": the tradition of tolerance for organizing minorities (stemming from the fact that everyone belongs to a minority) prevents rights that exist for one group from being withheld from another. Paradoxically, it seems that equality prospers through the recognition of difference.

## Notes

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1. The research data presented in this paragraph, dealing with protest in France from 1975 through 1989, are discussed more extensively in Duyvendak 1995a. My study of French social movements formed part of a broader, international comparative study (see Giugni 1992; Koopmans 1995; Kriesi et al. 1992, 1995).

2. Although the Socialist Party initially expressed some support for this movement (implying that it was not completely insensitive to new social movements), it ceased supporting the antinuclear movement as soon as it came to power in 1981. As a

result, France is the only country in Europe that has carried out its original nuclear energy program from start to finish (Koopmans and Duyvendak 1995).

3. The FHAR published the *Rapport contre la normalité* (1971).

4. Contrasting the Netherlands with France shows that there are other ways of dealing with difference than the French way. A comparison with the situation in Canada would have probably resulted in a similar contrast (which is not to say that France is exceptional in its denial of group identities).

5. In fact, only one organization has been partly successful: the left-wing, Catholic Trade Union (CFDT) (Hamon and Rotman 1982). Since 1968, this union has criticized the dominant political culture that makes broaching new issues so difficult. Even the Parti Socialiste (PS) was unsuccessful in this regard, largely because of its effort to compete with the Communist Party by emulating it as much as possible. As a result, the PS was the most dogmatic socialist party in Western Europe until the early 1980s, thus obstructing the emergence of a New Left and granting hardly any latitude to the "new social movements." The CFDT took a different approach. It tackled the dominant position of the Communist Trade Union (CGT), by being "different." The CFDT broached various nontraditional trade-union issues, such as *autogestion* (autonomy), environmental policy, women's rights, and the dangers of nuclear energy. The CFDT presented itself as mouthpiece for the antistatist *deuxième gauche*, as "le parti de la société civile" (Esprit 1980).

6. For a more extensive empirical description of the history of the French gay and lesbian movement, see Duyvendak (1995c) and Fillieule and Duyvendak (1999). For the history of AIDS organizations, see Fillieule (forthcoming) and De Busscher and Pinell (1996).

7. See also the editorial of Gérard Dupuy in *Libération*, June 24, 1995 ("Visibles"), an article of Pascal Bruckner in *Le Monde*, June 23, 1995 ("La Démagogie de la détresse"), and the public debate started by the publication of *Le Rose et le noir. Les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* by Frédéric Martel (*Le Monde*, April 15, 1996: "Les homosexuels se divisent sur la question du communautarisme"; *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 25, 1996, etc.) For an analysis of the reasons why France is fundamentally reticent about the communitarian model, in the tradition of republican principles of the République, see also the sophisticated analysis of Ernst (1995).

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## THREE

LESBIAN-FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND LATIN AMERICAN  
FEMINIST ENCUESTROS

Juanita Díaz-Cotto

SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES of women in Latin America,<sup>1</sup> whether written by lesbians or heterosexual women, have tended to ignore the experiences and contributions of lesbians to their societies. Such exclusion has been the result not only of heterosexism and internalized lesbophobia but also of the repression to which Latin American lesbians have been subjected throughout the centuries by social forces on all sides of the political spectrum.

This article discusses the emergence of a distinctive lesbian-feminist politics in the context of the larger Latin American feminist *encuentros*.<sup>2</sup> The overall issue is the relationship between Latin American feminist political identities and perspectives and lesbian-feminist organizing. Such discussion will take place through an analysis of the role played by lesbians in six of the eight Latin American and Caribbean feminist *encuentros* held between 1980 and 1999. Brief references will be made to three of the five Latin American and Caribbean lesbian-feminist *encuentros* held between 1987 and 1999.

In order to situate lesbian-feminist organizing within a historical context, the article will briefly discuss the emergence of contemporary Latin American feminist movements and explore some of the main themes characterizing the *encuentros*. It will end with a discussion of the emergence of a distinct lesbian-feminist politics within each of the *encuentros* in order to measure the growth of lesbian activism within Latin American feminist movements.

## Contemporary Feminist Movements in Latin America

The second wave of feminist movements in Latin America emerged and thrived during the mid-1970s within national, regional, and international contexts, including growing national debts, austerity measures imposed by international monetary agencies, active anti-imperialist movements, and severe political changes (e.g., military dictatorships, guerrilla movements, leftists revolutions, liberalization, and redemocratization).