

**Gay and Lesbian Activism in France
Between Integration and Community-Oriented Movements**

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I. Introduction

Over the past decades we have witnessed the emergence of many 'identity-based movements' in Western Europe and the United States. Having confronted the world with their slogan *Black is beautiful*, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States inspired numerous other oppressed groups to creep out of their shells. These groups no longer asked for sympathy, but proudly and vehemently demanded equal treatment and/or recognition of their 'right to be different'. The feminist movement was of course among the front runners, sparking a process of cultural change that has reverberated through to the present day. But there were others minorities such as the disabled, immigrants, gay men and lesbians, who also started to take action.

This wave of emerging identity movements has repeatedly been interpreted in terms of the concept of 'new social movements'. So much so in fact, that a New Social Movements paradigm has even developed (Offe 1985, Melucci 1990, Pizzorno 1978, Touraine 1978), which contends that the prime objective of these movements is to bring about cultural, rather than political change (Melucci, 1980:220). These NSMs are cast as the champions of a new, post-materialist world. This concept has, however, endured a torrent of criticism (Cohen 1985, Klandermans 1986, Kuechler & Dalton 1990, Rucht 1991), mainly because many older movements, such as the trade unions with their flourishing workers' culture, were similarly characterized by a profound sense of identity (D'Anieri, Ernst & Kier 1990, Tucker 1991).

However, this objection does not wholly invalidate the NSM theory, but merely implies that these new movements are not 'new' in terms of their compelling sense of collective identity. Instead, their novelty seems to lie in the specific constellation of movements dominated by (parts of) the new middle classes, whose goals are predominantly non-materialistic (Duyvendak, 1995a:19; Kriesi 1989).

A significant characteristic of some of these new movements, such as the peace and environmental movements, is that identity of the members is only of secondary significance (Nelles 1984). Within these instrumental movements, collective identity is little more than a (transient) product of collective action. It is not a fundamental mobilizing factor, and it is certainly not their *raison d'être*. In other new movements, however, the identity of members does play a vital role. These new, 'exclusive' movements (Zald/Ash, 1966:330-331) are characterized by a 'politicization of personal identity'. They include the feminist, gay and many immigrant movements, which all advocate an identity-based political strategy (Duyvendak 1994).

It bears mentioning, however, that social movements based on the collective identity of a specific group, do not have equal opportunities to develop in their respective countries. (Fillieule & Péchu 1993). France is especially interesting in this regard, because the 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 we will discuss how this tradition affected the development of the French gay and lesbian movement.

The gay and lesbian movement is an identity movement that combines elements of 'subculture' and 'movement' in an intriguing manner. The gay and lesbian movement is a subcultural movement *par excellence* (Koopmans 1995). Gays and lesbians develop a positive self-identity through movement participation: the common sexual orientation serves as an incentive for individuals to mobilize and

organize collectively. A subcultural movement that is the exclusive provider of the collective good its members need, does not suffer from free-riders (Duyvendak, 1995b:167). However, the gay and lesbian movement may be confronted with free-riders at a certain moment, especially if its efforts are successful. Although direct participation is an indispensable prerequisite for sharing any collective benefits at the start of the emancipation process, 'parasitic' behaviour may arise as an option later on. As subcultures become increasingly *commercialized*, people can share collective identities outside the movement. Under such circumstances, many gay organizations can only survive by becoming more pleasure-oriented and less political. Gay journals in particular will show a tendency towards commercialization, by publishing more erotic material and less political information. In this article we will assess to which extent the shifting relationship between subculture and movement may be attributed to either endogenous dynamics or exogenous factors, such as the republican tradition.

II. Old and new social movements in France: the status of 'identity'

France is fairly similar to other Western European countries in terms of the quantitative aspects of political protest (i.e. in terms of the sheer number of movements and activists). It does, however, deviate in a qualitative sense. For instance, the dynamics of protest are fundamentally different. In France, demonstrations are not organized by specific groups with numerous members who systematically take to the streets for a specific purpose. Instead, political action is the domain of individual citizens, most of whom are not members of any 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 towards head-on confrontation. (Favre and Fillieule 1993; Fillieule 1997) Furthermore, 'traditional' objectives remain predominant in the protest actions of social movements in France, leaving very little room for new objectives. Ideological permanence may be attributed to both the formal political structure and the informal political culture of the system. All new movements are confronted with this problem, whether they be instrumental-oriented (the environmental, peace and solidarity movements) or identity-oriented (the feminist, squatters, gay and lesbian movements). (Duyvendak 1995a; Fillieule 1998)

Concerning the status of identities, there are lessons to be learnt from the development of the dominant, *old* movements. Firstly, we may conclude that France is not fundamentally opposed to all identity-based politics, because 'identity' has been a key issue of the traditional conflicts. Corsicans and Bretons, farmers, Catholics and workers (Fillieule 1993), all foster a deep-seated sense of collective identity. In fact, many of them even consider acknowledgement of their identity to be the prime objective of their struggle. In light of the aforesaid, it is easy to refute the contention that identity-based politics are primarily the domain of the new movements. It also seems logical - perhaps even more so than elsewhere - that France should be confronted with political strife based on collective identities. A society that swears by egalitarianism, offers disgruntled citizens a powerful discursive weapon allowing them to organize themselves as a group in order to demand equal rights. There is therefore no reason to draw the *a priori* conclusion that identity-based politics will be less common in a universalist political culture than they will be in a particularist culture. After all, any French minority group that feels slighted, has the right to demand equality.

It is also instructive to note that the older movements pursue a specific type of identity-based strategy: movements based on particular collective identities demand *equal*, rather than *special* treatment. They demand the same rights as the majority. The groups in question are engaged in a struggle against disfranchisement; they too wish to become real French citizens.¹ Even those groups that are ‘proud’ of their unique identity, often formulate their pride in general, universal terms. For example, Catholics will state that they are true Frenchmen, and workers will state that they are real republicans. On the one hand, the Jacobin, 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. One may therefore conclude, that 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 therefore limited for two reasons. Firstly, the legitimacy of identity-based political action is always temporary and conditional. This implies that it is tolerated as long as it is directed towards eradicating inequality or towards erasing the societal discrepancies and disadvantages which fuel the group’s discontentment. Secondly, the available space for new movements is limited because the political field is already occupied by the aforementioned traditional identities. In terms of the prevailing political logic, however, these traditional political identities should have been of a temporary nature. Instead, they have become highly stable entities, owing to stagnation of the political system. This constitutes an 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 the new movements to formulate their demands in terms of the republican rhetoric of universalism and egalitarianism, but also dictate that they should forge alliances with the dominant discourse of the older movements. In concrete terms, 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 (Duyvendak, 1995a: 203-209).

This assimilation of new issues by older movements contradicts the concept of a zero-sum relationship between old and new issues. (Brand 1985a, 1985b; Kriesi and Duyvendak 1995) This concept therefore requires qualification. After all, even in France there is scope for new issues, despite the fact that they must be formulated in terms of the traditional antitheses. However, new organizations that did make an all-out solo bid to place their issues on the political agenda, have failed indeed, almost without exception.² To illustrate the assimilation of ‘new’ issues into ‘old’

1. With the exception of a few regionalist groups, whose struggle reached such high levels of radicalization that they wished to dissociate themselves from France.

2. In actual fact, only one organization has been partly successful: the left-wing, Catholic trade union CFDT (Hamon & Rotman 1982). Since 1968, this union has criticized the dominant political culture which makes it so difficult to broach new issues. Even the *Parti Socialiste* was unsuccessful in this regard. Mainly because it strove to compete with the communist party by imitating 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

movements, we will give an empirical account of the factors that forced the French gay and lesbian movement to present itself as a left-wing element.

III. From Revolution to Involution 1970-1981

It is difficult to fix a precise date when the French homosexual movement was born. The period after the Second World War saw in France a tentative start being made with the publication of a journal (*Futur*). But this remained almost unknown to the outside world as all publicity for it was forbidden by the state. Homosexuality had no place in French *political* life, in contrast to cultural life, in which it was, and remains, a source of inspiration³. Contact between the authorities and gays was absolutely one-sided: the former always began any interaction on the basis of repression.

This particularly difficult situation improved to some extent in 1954, when the *Arcadie* journal was established. Some authors consider this as the starting point of the gay movement (Bach 1982, 1988; Cavailles 1984), others (for instance, Girard 1981) consider neither the journal, nor CLESPALA (*club littéraire et scientifique des pays latins*)⁴, the social club that was part of *Arcadie*, to constitute a *movement*. Nevertheless, *Arcadie* is important in that this organization does constitute a reference point for all subsequent organisations. André Baudry, its leader from start to finish, dictated an (a)political line⁵ *Arcadie* was a self-help organization,⁶ which stressed the *equality* of hetero- and homosexuals: *l'homosexuel est aussi un homme social*.⁷ In the contact which developed slowly with the outside world, *Arcadie* followed a so-called key-figure policy. Public activities were absolutely impossible under the repressive conditions of the day, but, even when the political climate became a little less wintry in the years after May 1968, *Arcadie* maintained its strategy whereby for the improvement of the homosexual condition, *homophiles* were advised to behave as *normally* as possible.

trade union, the CGT, by being 'different'. The CFDT broached various non-traditional trade union issues, such as *autogestion* (autonomy), environmental policy, women's rights and the dangers of nuclear energy. The CFDT presented itself as a mouthpiece for the anti-statist *deuxième gauche*, as 'le parti de la société civile' (Esprit 1980).

3. In France, famous authors and other artists have traditionally always been able to deal relatively openly with issues related to homosexuality (Proust, Gide, Jouhandeau, Cocteau, Genet, Foucault, Colette, Fernandez, Tournier and Guibert). However, this openness does not have much bearing on the public's rather hostile attitude towards homosexuality. Researchers who overplay this cultural tradition, neglect the fact that these extraordinary people have rather exceptional points of view which are not generally shared by the broader society. Although their contribution may have been of support to the emancipation movement as a whole, most writers did not become an active part of it. This was so because they had artistic freedom and were not directly confronted with discrimination and related problems in their work (which is why the category of "gay literature" did not develop in France as it did in the USA for instance).

4. [Literary and Scientific Club of the Latin Countries] As in many other countries we see that under repressive circumstances homosexual organizations favour the use of labels with a high protection value, either suggesting at literary groups (in the Netherlands: *Shakespeare Club*), or scientific organisations (*Scientific Humanitarian Committees* in Germany and Holland prior to World War II).

5. "*Arcadie* attempts to be apolitical: it does not believe that improvements in the fate of homosexuals should automatically be linked to the victory of such a party, or of such an economic doctrine" is repeated in every publication of *Arcadie*.

6. "*Arcadie* enables homosexuals to meet each other, to escape from their loneliness (*Arcadie* n●. 273)

7. [The homosexual is also a social man] (*Arcadie* n●. 273)

The highly confrontational style of the *Comité d'Action Pédérastique Révolutionnaire*⁸ at the Sorbonne in May 1968, and, more importantly, of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire⁹ after 1971, was contrary to Arcadie's strategy. "Whereas *Arcadie* rejected the effeminate, the queens, the transvestites and the transsexuals, the FHAR in return gathered together a rich variety of behaviours." (Girard, 1981:91) It strongly opposed the *clandestinité digne et virile*¹⁰ of Arcadie in an attempt to fight the stigmatised identification of homosexuals with a pathological condition. In contrast with *Arcadie*, it considered *la différence* as something positive. "Abnormal" sexuality was no longer something to be hidden, but was instead something to be shown in public. In that respect, the founding event of the FHAR is highly significant: the interruption of a radio broadcast on "*l'homosexualité, ce douloureux problème*"¹¹ on 10th March 1971. "That is not true, we are not suffering at all!", shouted the activists, and their first press communiqué declared that "homosexuals are fed up with being a 'painful problem'."

Because the FHAR was born out of the turmoil of the 1968 movement, it was strongly linked to Marxist ideology: "In a world based on sexual repression and on such foul obscenities as work, all those who are unproductive, those who make love exclusively for pleasure and not for production of an industrial army reserve have no other alternative but to perish or revolt." (pamphlet cited in Hamon/ Rotman, II, 1988, p. 329). The FHAR not only stressed the political character of homosexuality, but also its revolutionary potential. *Notre trou du cul est révolutionnaire*¹², as the FHAR spokesman Hocquenghem put it.¹³

This radical assertion is evidence of the fundamental ambiguity from which the movement could never escape: on the one hand the strategy aimed at constructing a new identity based on overturning the stigmatism associated with being homosexual and asserting gay pride¹⁴; on the other, the movement refused to limit its action to the building of communities, but extended the struggle to highlighting the economic and political exploitation of the capitalist order. Thus for example the hostility of the organisation to the commercial development of gay meeting places (bars, clubs and saunas) that was not in accord with their harsh denunciation of capitalism.¹⁵

This ambiguity shows itself also in the FHAR slogan "*Le droit à la différence*", which 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 normality¹⁶. The FHAR clearly refused to bow to the republican logic, which held that minorities

8. [Committee for Revolutionary Homosexual Action]

9. [Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action]

10. [dignified and virile clandestineness]

11. [The painful problem of homosexuality]

12. [Our assholes are revolutionary]

13. This visible manifestation of homosexuality on the street (the CGT's May Day demonstration was disrupted) meant a split within the movement in France between the radical *pédé's* and the *homophiles* of *Arcadie* whereas, for instance, in the Netherlands the main homosexual organization COC was capable of incorporating these opposition tendencies (Tielman, 1982:165; Warmerdam/ Koenders, 1987:341).

14. "We are more than 343 sluts, we have been fucked by the Arabs. We are proud of it, and would do it all again", "one can never be too gay", are some of the slogans that were published in *Tout* (n●12), quoted in Girard (1981, p. 89).

15. To illustrate that point, suffice it to say that FHAR activists were the first to stigmatise the development of a gay subculture as creating an "homosexual ghetto".

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

should strive to obtain the same rights as the majority. Instead, the FHAR turned this logic upside-down: the minority not only demanded the right to be different, but also argued that the majority should change. This counter-cultural trend, which also emerged in many other Western European countries at that time (Adam 1995, Duyvendak 1991), 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 pluriformity was (and is) not seen as a legitimate political objective in itself. Therefore, in contrast to the gay and lesbian minorities in the Netherlands and (even more so) the United States, which demanded to be recognized as minorities (Meijer et al. 1991, Seidman 1995), the dominant political culture in France forced the gay and lesbian movement to speak the language of egalitarianism. In order to achieve its political goals, the French gay and lesbian movement therefore had to join the majority, instead of turning against the dominant 'normality'. In concrete terms, this meant they 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 their demand for "*le droit à la différence*". This meant that the right to be different should not only be seen to apply to homosexuals (male/female), but to 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 consequently adopted the slogan 'their struggle is our struggle', effectively erasing any possible distinction between their own struggle and those of other groups.

In its ambiguity, the FHAR managed to balance pleasure with policy interest, organizing parties and meetings simultaneously at the same venue; its revues *Le Fléau Social*¹⁷ and *L'Antinorm* were interesting mixtures of anarchistic chaos and Trotskyist consistency.

New organisations became increasingly involved exclusively in political activism, aggravated by the fact that many entertainment institutions (i.e. bars, journals, etc.) were still repressed by the police and politics. The FHAR faded away in 1973, to be replaced by the *Groupe de Libération Homosexuelle*. Within this group a struggle developed between those who favoured a political line in the "anti-normality" tradition of homosexuality *GLH-Groupe de Base* (GB)¹⁸ and those who argued for more pragmatism *GLH-Politique et Quotidien* (PQ)¹⁹. Of all these tendencies, GLH-PQ survived and even succeeded in building a network of local organizations. Besides organizing a great number of activities with other contemporary movements (pro-choice, feminist, anti-militarist, anti-nuclear energy), it also organized the first massive demonstrations in the streets of Paris, as well as putting forward gay candidates to run in local and national elections.

In their political discourse, GLH-PQ expressed strong sentiments against the PCF (i. e. the French Communist party). As a matter of fact, if left-wing groups had, albeit reluctantly, taken on board gay and lesbian demands insofar as they were conceptualised in terms of class, the PCF remained opposed to gay liberation, even "disguised" in anti-capitalist terms²⁰. During the second half of the

17. [The Social Plague]

18. [GLH- Grassroots Group]

19. [GLH- Politics and Daily Life]

20. Juquin, in those days spokesman for the PCF, formulated the party's position in the first half of the 1970s as follows: "I did not know that homosexuality, glorified in the left-wing movement, has an especially radical position.

1970s, the gay movement made inroads into the more moderate parties of the left which "de-radicalised" the discourse of the movement: the total politicisation of homosexuality faded away. Homosexuals moved away from a partly countercultural position toward a more *instrumental* approach.

At the end of the 1970s, an umbrella organization was established, comprising sixteen gay and lesbian organizations, with the exception of *Arcadie*. This so-called *CUARH (Comité d'Urgence Anti-Répression Homosexuelle)*²¹ openly supported the candidature of Mitterrand for the presidential elections in 1981. On the one hand, this showed a certain moderation in the political opinions shared by lesbian and gay activists, and on the other, it clearly indicated that the movement was still highly politicised, which implied, in terms of the French political opportunity structure, that they were highly dependent on the left, and more specifically, the Socialist Party. Whereas in some countries liberal parties also showed some sympathy towards lesbian and gay issues, at least to the extent that they were formulated in terms of equal rights²², in France only the Socialist party opened itself to the gay and lesbian movement at the end of the 1970s. Apart from this umbrella organization, some other new organizations emerged, such as *Gai Pied*, providing structure and publicity for the subculture. Whereas in the CUARH men and women co-operated in promoting their common interests, these new, subcultural organizations were non-mixed.

At the lesbian side, one of these organizations was *Lesbia*, a journal that paid at least as much attention to lifestyle issues as to the world of politics. *Lesbia-Magazine* is until now the most successful lesbian 'organization'. It can be considered as the 'successor' of many attempts to establish an independent journal for lesbians in France; attempts that failed due to the extremely marginal position of lesbians in French social and political life and to the ideological fights between several groups of lesbians over politics, feminism and (non-)cooperation with gay men.

Whereas many lesbian women were strongly involved in the feminist movement during the 1970s, both the 'heterosexualization' of French feminism at the end of the 1970s and the growing political opportunities for gays and lesbians at the start of the 1980s, stimulated, on the one hand, the development of a mixed, interest-oriented movement (CUARH) and, on the other, the growth of radical, countercultural lesbian groups (Lesbian Archives, 'autonomous projects', et cetera). (Gonnard 1997; Mossuz-Lavau 1991) After 1980, lesbians were not very eager anymore to participate in a rather hostile, declining feminist movement (De Beauvoir wrote in 1980: "Lesbians are presenting their specific and limited group interests as the interests of feminists in general"). Their cooperation with gay men was not longlasting either, however. After the successes reached by the CUARH (see below), there did not seem to be a further reason for mixed organizations. Moreover, any political organization seemed to be outdated after the realization of the goals of the movement at the start of the 1980s. Not only radical lesbian organizations disappeared during the 1980s, but the more moderate as well. It was only after the resurgence of the gay movement at the end of this decade (due to AIDS), that lesbians manifested themselves publicly again as well. In

(...) But the cover of homosexuality or drugs never had anything to do with the workers movement. Each of them actually represented the opposite of the workers movement." (cited in Girard, 1981. p. 96-97) By 1977 its position had become somewhat more liberal: "We must revise legislation, not because homosexuality in itself would have either a liberalising or revolutionary value (that would seem absurd to me), but because homosexuals have as much right to live in peace as any other citizens of our country." (Girard, 1981, p.138)

21. [Emergency Committee Against the Repression of Homosexuals]

22. For example in Germany and the Netherlands.

particular the organization of the film festival *Quand les lesbiennes se font du cinéma* at the start of the 1990s, showed the increasing visibility of lesbians and the tendency to organize non-mixed, cultural activities. A *Coordination Nationale des lesbiennes* was established, providing a network for both political and social activities.

The more intense cooperation between lesbians and gays around 1980 can be understood in the perspective of changing political conditions in a climate that was rather repressive until then. Two legal texts demonstrated the discrimination against homosexuals, in comparison to heterosexuals, in France. Article 331, paragraph 3, of the *code pénal* punished by fine and imprisonment any "indecent or unnatural act with an individual of one's own sex, under the age of 21 years" (18 years after the lowering of the age of adulthood), even though heterosexual relations were allowed from the age of 15 years; Article 330 of the same code imposed higher penalties for an act of indecency when it concerned persons of the same sex. At the instigation of H. Cavaillet, the Sénat voted for the abrogation of these two clauses on 28th June 1978 but the bill was not submitted to the National Assembly for another two years. The provision abrogated Article 330 but refused to amend Article 331. On 4th April 1981, the CUARH organized a national demonstration in Paris in favour of the abrogation of the law in question, with tremendous success. 10.000 people, among whom many women, attended the first mass demonstration of gays and lesbians in France. Soon after, Mitterrand adopted a campaign position in favour of abrogating the law, and following his election (10th May 1981) the National Assembly repealed the law on 20th December. (Masques 1981)

The success provided by the PS reinforced the instrumental wing of the gay and lesbian movement. This process was accelerated further by the foundation of homosexual groups either within or closely linked to political parties like *Homosexualité et Socialisme* and *Gais pour la Liberté* (both PS-oriented), as well as *Mouvement des Gais Libéraux* (right-wing). However, the climate of *reform* was not particularly stimulating for mass mobilisation. Whereas at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, French gay and lesbian movement mobilisation was the strongest in Europe, the subsequent decline was indeed even more dramatic.

The rapid successes of the movement after Mitterrand's election, concurrent with both the dominance of the instrumental wing within the CUARH and the flourishing gay commercial subculture, lead to the rapid decline of the fortunes of CUARH. As a matter of fact, this wing had already become isolated, because the gay community generally gave priority to social and cultural activities. This was so because the left-wing government itself looked after homosexual interests and had cleared away all judicial impediments to the development of the gay and lesbian subculture. CUARH's membership declined after 1982 and the regional groups disappeared. Its journal *Homophonies* survived until 1986, but faced strong competition from non-mixed magazines which were better able to balance interests with pleasure.

The good relations that existed between the CUARH and mainstream politics precipitated the disappearance of *Arcadie* in 1982, which by that time found itself hopelessly outdated. *Arcadie's* obsolete character came to the fore in June 1981, one month after Mitterrand was elected, when it protested against the closure of the police department which had specialized in the control of gays. *Arcadie* complained about the loss of the good contacts it had developed with some key figures within this (repressive!) corps: "*Arcadie* had not realized that the gay movement could count on non-discriminatory attitudes from the police, even if this needed time and considerable action on the part of the movement." (Bach, 1982, p.71) At the same time, *Arcadie* ceased to function as a

meeting place because the commercial circuit was booming and people were no longer forced to meet behind closed doors.

It is interesting to note that the commercial circuit was also too competitive for the *lieux associatifs* which had developed in the early 1980s—subsidised by the Ministry of Culture²³—and which faded away during the second half of the decade. In addition, the rather intellectual journal *Masques*, which was neither commercial nor parliamentary-political, disappeared. The success of the CUARH's policy of "equal rights" not only outdated the anti-normality discourse so eloquently formulated by the FHAR and its successors (Duyvendak 1991), but *each* normality and *all* collective sexual identities: "Even more fundamentally, the future of homosexuals rests in the disappearance of the very concept of homosexuality itself, which *ipso facto* implies an end to heterosexuality and, therefore, all sexual normality." (*Masques*, 1986, p.31)

Apart from commercialisation, the essential *subculture* was characterised by territorial concentration, especially in Paris, and a strong emphasis on sex: pleasure became an even greater binding element than it had been before and all kinds of sexual substyles developed after the restrictions had disappeared. Although at the outset this newly acquired sexual freedom was still shown to the outside world, some years later it turned out that the drive to show just how "gay" gay life was, no longer generated sufficient incentive for mobilisation. This can be illustrated by the development of the Gay Pride Parade. The number of participants had declined from 10,000 at the start of the 1980s, to 2 or 3,000 by the second half of that decade. The character of the march underwent both a quantitative and qualitative change: whereas in earlier days political demands were expressed, as time went by the element of fun became more important. In 1985, in a public letter in *Gai Pied*, the most significant gay entrepreneur of the day (David Girard) wrote:

Everyone to the demonstration! What is certain is that we are not going to demonstrate in the same spirit as the people of CUARH. They march in order to denounce anti-homo racism. That is their right. But allow me to say that taking up a banner and marching under it chanting "No to anti-homo racism" will not change a thing, it will not even attract sympathy. It is sad. It is grey. All of us, we come to feast. And what we shall defend is the right to feast. It is surely more communicative (and communicating), more of a tonic for the participants, and consequently more impressive and attractive for onlookers and media. (*Gai Pied*, no. 174, p. 61)

The same development, from an external, rather political orientation toward a subcultural one, can be traced with regard to *Gai Pied* (Duyvendak/Duyves, 1993). In 1979, this magazine was founded by former members of the GLH-PQ who had discovered the impact of media use by the gay movement. From its beginnings, however, tension existed between political purity and sexual pleasure, which resulted in several crises within the editorial board. The booming

23. Whereas the more interest-oriented organizations, which desperately needed support for their survival did not get much money, the entertainment side—which developed pretty well autonomously—was subsidised by the left-wing government. This shows that this government did not realise the value of *intermediary organizations*; only inwardly-oriented organizations, such as the *Fédération des Lieux Associatifs Gais* which were built on participation and not representation, were in fact subsidised.

subculture, and the growing number of people who considered themselves openly as homosexual, nevertheless provided a basis for a commercially-viable project. A "price" had to be paid however: the magazine dealt increasingly with issues related to pleasure as its readers were no longer very interested in politics²⁴.

IV. The AIDS Crisis. From Fear to Self-Help. 1981-1989

At the beginning of the nineteen-eighties then, one can say that, if in part the French homosexual movement failed, as the other left-wing movements born of 1968 had failed, to revolutionise society and overturn the capitalist order, at least all the demands specific to homosexuals themselves were satisfied. Gay people had asserted their right to live as they wished and, in consequence, everyone set about testing this new-found freedom. This was the situation, with a relatively weak (because successful) instrumental movement and an increasingly inward-looking sex-oriented subculture, when HIV started to circulate.

At the moment of the spread of the epidemic, the militant tendency of homosexual associations was limited to *CUARH*, with the monthly *Homophonies* and weekly *Gai Pied Hebdo* (GPH) and the *Association des Médecins Gais (AMG)*, founded on 5th May 1981, five days before the election of François Mitterrand²⁵. Among associations oriented rather more toward subculture, the range is somewhat richer, notably with the launch of the journal *Samouraï* in 1982 and of the revue *GI* which devoted themselves to lifestyles, to cultural matters and to the commercial services offered to homosexuals. Homosexuals also began to appear on the airwaves with the launch in June-September 1981 of a pirate radio station, *Fréquence Gaie*, which obtained an official permit to broadcast from May 1982.²⁶

It is in this context that the first doctors and researchers to tackle AIDS started to group together in an association (*ARSIDA*) and attempted to alert homosexual organisations to the risks being run. These organisations responded to the call in different ways and it was the *subcultural* wing that launched the first initiative with the creation in 1983 of *Vaincre le sida (VLS)*. (Information about the first years of the anti-AIDS movements are mostly driven from De Busscher and Pinell (1996)).

What brought this about? The first explanation that comes to mind is that the militant tendency

24. Data from the annual readers research by *Gai Pied* in cooperation with M. Pollak, showed that in 1983, 25% of readers considered *Gai Pied* too political, 30% would have liked to see more erotic or pornographic pictures, and 36% wanted more "pictures" in general. The results of 1986 indicated that the readers thought that attention given to politics—that had already diminished considerably—was still too much.

25. This association was founded on a militant ticket with, as its primary goal, to encourage positive representation of homosexuality in the medical field, but equally to struggle against venereal diseases. From this point of view, the militancy of the association goes hand in hand with an orientation tending towards a form of communitarian self-help in the same vein as GMHC in the USA.

26. It was with the coming to power of the Left that the airwaves started to be liberalised, and pirate radio stations received broadcasting licences. *Fréquence gaie* was taken over by GPH in 1987 with the idea of turning it into a profitable enterprise. It then became *Futur Génération* until April 1990, when it again changed name to *FG 98.2*. Its commercial success was by this time assured.

was then in such a state of dereliction that it had become quite incapable of taking charge of the problem, while the sub-cultural associations were flourishing. This phenomenon without doubt played a part but equally significant was the fact that the militant arm of the movement was not ideologically ready to recognise the threat of AIDS, precisely in defence of the normalisation of homosexuality only recently obtained.

Also, perhaps, it was less through organisational weakness than by reason of deliberate choice that the *CUARH*, the *AMG* and *GPH* resisted the diffusion of information on AIDS. Up to 1984, the *AMG* and *GPH* were trying in effect to play down, indeed deny, the significance of the illness. Persuaded that AIDS was being used to disturb and to weaken them, they counterattacked by refusing to take seriously what they considered to be "a paranoid panic (...)" which allows homosexuals, by way of their specific illness, to go back on the list of social afflictions that they had begrudgingly left.²⁷ *GPH* popularised then the (foolhardy) slogan: "Fucking is dangerous? Isn't crossing the street?" This position, which was maintained long after medical research had categorically demonstrated that AIDS was indeed a contagious disease touching mainly homosexuals, is explained by the fact that for the most militant of the associations, the fight against discrimination must take precedence over the dangers of the contagion²⁸. This attitude, moreover, was not confined to France. (see the chapter on the USA)

As said, the first reaction related to the epidemic therefore came from the subcultural wing with the creation of *Vaincre Le Sida (VLS)* in 1983. The association focused on the provision of services and information to the gay community by setting up a telephone hotline. The most striking feature of this first initiative, which was going to characterise all associations involved in the fight against AIDS up until 1989, was the, often obsessional, will to put forward demands which were completely devoid of all reference to homosexuality, even though many members of these organisations, and the first people affected by the disease, were principally homosexuals. Once again, as with the more militant associations, fear of stigmatisation and of a rising homophobia were at the root of the attempts to give the cause a broader base.²⁹

27. (*GPH*, n°39 juin 82: "Gais toubibs en colloque") In March 1982 Dr. Lejeune wrote that "since the beginning of the year, barely a week has passed in which the press has not blasted out headlines on a disease which is now afflicting us, we poor gays. Worse than the plague and gangrene combined. (...) One thing is certain, homosexuality is good for business. We have become a consumer product. A French dermatologist announces four cases of Kaposi sarcoma. The plague? No, these cases have been diagnosed and treated over several years." (*GPH*, 37, mars 82)

28. This attitude which might seem surprising in retrospect can be fairly well explained in the context of the day: in part, knowledge about AIDS was still vague and, traditionally, homosexual militants have been suspicious of moralising talk, and reference to normalisation in medical science; in part also, the manner in which the press represented AIDS in the early years of the epidemic tended toward a cautious attitude: one hears talk of the "gay cancer" and it was principally in the "traumatising" practices of homosexuals that the cause of the disease was assigned (poppers, sodomy, etc.). (See on the media coverage of AIDS in France: C. Herlich and J. Pierret (1988), "Une maladie dans l'espace public. Le sida dans six quotidiens français", *Annales ESC*, sept-oct, n°5, p. 1109-1134 and A. Mercier (1992), "Les médias comme espace scénique. Information sur le sida et émergence dans le champ politique", in P. Favre (1993).

29. "It will be the pioneers of '68 who will be the first to mobilize, perhaps because they are also the first to be affected. These people undoubtedly have not need to assert their homosexuality high and wide. Confronted with AIDS, it is only natural for them to turn outwards, to put the experience of exclusion to good use to avoid others also becoming victims of it; not to shut themselves away once again avoiding latent pressure from those who are already pointing the finger at them and suggesting that they shut themselves back up in the closet. They are simply demanding that the law be

From 1985, the anti-AIDS campaign, still mainly sustained by homosexual sub-cultural organisations, saw a major change of direction with the creation of *AIDES*, an association destined to have a meteoric success, taking the lead, at least until 1989, among the associations involved in the campaign.³⁰ From its foundation, and without any real deviation thereafter, *AIDES* adopted a hostile attitude to any identification of the association as a homosexual movement, despite the fact that amongst its founders could be found the chief contributors to publications such as *Masques* and *GPH*.³¹

For the militant homosexual organisations, their involvement in the campaign only came later, once the media, from the summer of 1985 onwards, following the lead of the public authorities, began to recognise that AIDS in fact affected everyone, not just homosexuals.³² The belated realisation that gay participation in the campaign was imperative is explained in part by this increasingly universal appeal of the AIDS campaign, which posed less of a threat to the emancipation of homosexuality. At the same time internal rivalry between the multitude of organisations forming the gay movement had hindered collective action. Strong competition within the specialised gay press of which *GPH* and *Samourai* were part, meant that *GPH*, and consequently *AMG*, found it difficult to establish links with *VLS*, supported from the beginning by *Samourai*. (Pinell & De Buscher, 1996) Nevertheless, by 1985 *Homophonies* and *GPH* had started to give out information on AIDS without trying to play down its importance, and in the same year *GPH* published the first booklet from *AIDES* with advice on AIDS prevention. It was also *GPH* that welcomed the enquiry launched by the *CNRS* into the sexual behaviour of homosexuals (by Pollak and Laurindo). (De Busscher and Pinell, 1996)

respected, that discrimination should not be added to the worry of being ill. Departing from the principle that he no longer has any taste for the subtleties of his own homosexual identity, but wishes above all else to be considered as a "normal" ill person, with nothing - in the end - to distinguish him from others."", Ph. E., in *Sida 89*, n°6, juillet-août 1989, p. 14.

30. If associations came to be formed after this date, it is undoubtedly due to the discovery, on the one hand, of HIV itself (1984) and, on the other, the development of a test for HIV (1985). These events made tens of thousands of people aware for the first time of the deadly threat surrounding them. Previously, the only people really interested in the discovery of an effective treatment were those positively diagnosed as having AIDS and many of these could not positively engage in the campaign because of the state of their health. Those diagnosed HIV-positive, but not yet showing symptoms of full-blown AIDS, were obviously more strongly motivated to campaign.

31. "Daniel Defert, sociologist and companion of Michel Foucault was the founder of the association. The hallmark of Foucauldian thought partly explains the refusal to homosexualise the cause - but without invalidating the hypothesis set out above with regard to *VLS*. *AIDES* relies in particular on the idea that the anti-AIDS movement must rely on AIDS-sufferers themselves, those at attest in the flesh to the disease, and not on those who are most susceptible to become victims (homosexuals). Questioning the position of AIDS-sufferers with regard to medicine and medical knowledge counts more than the question of a homosexual identity in Michel Foucault's philosophy." (see De Busscher and Pinell, 1996, p. 21-25)

32. If since 1983, in the French press, one hears mention of the 4 Hs (homosexuals, Haitians, hæmophiliacs and heroin-addicts), no article is dedicated to the last two categories. It is not until August 1985 that *Libération* dedicates its first article to drug-addicts, followed by *Le Monde* in February 1986. And it is only very belatedly, in 1987, after the Minister of Health (Michèle Barzach) made AIDS a "great national cause" and announced at a press conference that "amongst AIDS patients, in 32% of cases, the persons affected are heterosexual", that the mainstream press starts to examine the case of heterosexual AIDS-sufferers (February 1987 for *Libération*, March 1987 for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Le Point*, etc.).

From 1987/1988, the range of anti-AIDS associations blossomed, with the creation of many new associations, notably after a schism within *AIDES* in March 1987. The common characteristic of these new groups was that they remained fundamentally faithful to the line adopted by *AIDES* in relation to the question of the *homosexualisation* of AIDS, always excepting Santé et Plaisir Gay (*SPG*) which, born of an initiative of militants within *AIDES*, introduced into France *les Jack-off parties* and tried to raise again the question of homosexuality in the debate.

In summary, it can be seen that during the years 1981-1988 homosexual associations got involved belatedly, and often in a relatively hidden way in the fight against the AIDS epidemic. If all the campaign associations were created and sustained, at arms-length, by homosexuals, they persisted in regarding their action as removed from any element of gay activism, and, in good republican tradition, without any reference to a so-called homosexual identity. It is only after 1989, with the arrival of a new generation, that the anti-AIDS movement begins to come up against a new dynamism from homosexual activism.

V. AIDS and the Attempt to Found a Gay Community. 1989-1996

At the end of the 1980s, anti-AIDS associations underwent a dual process of differentiation and of institutionalisation with on one side the multiplication of associations orientated towards specific groups of people (hæmophiliacs, blood-transfusion patients, drug-addicts and children) and on the other a new-found professionalisation of which *AIDES* was undoubtedly the most striking example. This professionalisation explains why these associations were not founded as a counter-force nor even as a pressure group. The push of the administration was constantly driven towards the obtaining of subsidies and integration with government bodies for managing the epidemic such as the *Agence Nationale de la Recherche sur le Sida (ANRS)* and the *Association Française de Lutte contre le Sida (AFLS)*. This desire to integrate into the decision-making structures of the State and the diversification of the groups of people under its charge had several effects. Firstly, homosexual groups, within and outside these associations, started to feel a sense of dispossession, as much from the growing de-homosexualisation within the associations as from the fact that AIDS-sufferers had been deprived of a direct voice in deference to professionals speaking on their behalf (one starts of speaks of an "AIDS establishment" and of the "AIDS business"). Secondly, the methods of managing the AIDS problem through associations goes hand in hand with a political neutrality which prevented the adoption of any critical stance vis-à-vis the numerous and obvious deficiencies of governmental politics, especially in terms of prevention.

For these two reasons new associations were born in 1989, with the objective of giving the sick back their voice, of clearly establishing a link between homosexuality and AIDS and of refusing to cooperate with the political authorities of which it was clear that they were not doing everything they could to fight against the epidemic. This regeneration of the associational set-up thus had the effect of reactivating the old cleavages in the homosexual movement, opposing once again sub-cultural and political orientation, searching for recognition and political opposition. To these old divisions - which had led to the rupture at the beginning of the 1970s caused by the creation of the FARH- were also substituted a new opposition between a "general" model and a

model based on identity and community which, in the wake of movements on the other side of the Atlantic, defended the idea of the politics of minorities based on the claim to a specifically HIV-positive and/or homosexual identity. It was in this context that the associations *Solidarité Plus*, *Positif* and *Act Up-Paris* were founded.

Created in May 1989, *Positif* saw itself as a "association of self-help and of solidarity, conceived for HIV-positive people, run by HIV-positive people", with the goal of defending "all HIV-positive people who suffer discrimination and to organise the defence of the HIV-positive consumer". The aim of the association was to think about the development of a new identity and to assert the association's own demands, demands neglected by medical specialists and the existing associations. The same is true of *Solidarité Plus* which took from American parlance the notion of Persons with AIDS (PWA).³³

Behind the problematic claim to an "*identité séropositive*", in fact lies the claim to a *singularisation* of the AIDS cause which is advanced, in the name of a strong link with homosexuality.³⁴ From this point of view, the formation of *Act Up-Paris* positively overturned the associational landscape, putting the homosexual movement as such back on the map.

The structure, the organisation and the strategy of *Act Up-Paris* are based on the model put forward by the association created in New York in 1987. Defining itself above all as an association of people affected by AIDS, the group sought by intense lobbying and direct action (demonstrations, *zaps*, *die-ins* etc.) to put pressure on the public authorities and the sectors charged to varying degrees with dealing with the illness³⁵ for a more effective and less discriminatory campaign against AIDS. More precisely, the activity of denunciation of *Act Up-Paris* articulates at once the search for greater *visibility* for AIDS and a fight against the *stigmatisation* of affected people (principally homosexuals)³⁶. These two aspects are intimately tied to the struggle for a monopoly in scientific expertise, which combines at the same time with a claim by AIDS-sufferers to take charge of AIDS themselves (what Michael Pollak calls "the transformation of the socio-medical assistance into a self-help movement"³⁷) and a challenge to

33. It was during the same period that the project of the *Etat-Général du sida* was launched allowing HIV-positive people to speak out and escape from the technocratic discourse of the associations. "There are some things that cannot be delegated, to understand how we stand on the things we are living through. One cannot ask people who, for a whole heap of reasons, remained detached from the illness, to speak for us", declared Alain Vertadier, one of those running the committee. This demonstration took place on the 17th and 18th March 1990 in Paris.

34. "Today, whilst AIDS finds other footholds in society and hits the heterosexual population, homosexuals have little by little and almost unconsciously, integrated the illness into their condition. Strangely, even he who vehemently denounces the slightest linking of AIDS with homosexuality today manifest a fairly paradoxical desire to appropriate it for themselves, as if it represented a coveted heritage, now that they have in some way domesticated it. Many speak of a new homosexual consciousness, a new identity; of an enrichment, indeed of the chance to set about organising a new "militancy". (...) One moreover speaks of "profiting" from AIDS to make homosexuality something banal, to constrain the heterosexual authorities to take into account the homosexual reality, and to recognise it", Ph. E., in *Sida 89*, n°6, July-August- 1989, p. 14.

35. That is to say firstly government agencies, the hospital sector, the pharmaceutical sector, medical laboratories, associations of doctors and chemists and insurance companies.

36. An exposé setting out the political manifesto of *Act Up* can be found in *Act Up-Paris, Le sida : combien de divisions?*, Dagorno, Paris, 1994.

37. Michael Pollak, "Constitution, diversification et échec de la généralisation d'une grande cause. Le cas de la lutte contre le sida", *Politix*, n°16, p. 80-90.

the medicalisation of homosexuality.

In the same vein as *Act Up* in the USA, the group aims to construct a homosexual identity and community. The justification for this path is simple: AIDS does not affect everyone in the same way and it is the most oppressed minorities that were its first victims. This phenomenon calls for a political analysis, AIDS revealing the multiple exclusions of our world :

In industrialised countries, AIDS did not affect in the first place just any man or woman, but socially definite categories: homosexuals, drug-addicts, ethnic minorities, prison inmates, now women, forgotten by medical research; the list is not exhaustive. In this sense, AIDS is not only a human or collective drama; today it is still a drama aimed at precise social categories, defined by their practices and their differences with relation to a dominant model: practices related to socially-determined and politically-significant human groups. To this extent, what one says, AIDS has nothing to do with the mythology of previous epidemics: "all equal before death". (...) AIDS spreads by conduits not by simple contact. So it attacks at root the very way we live our lives, and not simply our geographical situation. (...) In this way, to fight against AIDS is necessarily to call into question the founding model of our society, and to stand as a common front of minorities against the shortsightedness and cynicism of the dogooders.³⁸

However, further to an attempt to widen the discourse on minorities to all minorities placed in the first line of the epidemic, it is the homosexual community which is central, to the extent that the association seems, in the public eye, to be an association in defence of homosexuals rather than against AIDS:

Act-Up is often reproached for the way in which we constantly affirm our link with the gay community. Under the pretext that AIDS today concerns everyone, it would be better that we hide the fact that all anti-AIDS associations were born of the gay community and that Act-Up has been the most assertive amongst them. (...) But the fundamental position of Act-Up has been that the point of view of minorities can only be asserted from within strong communities. We cannot today start relying, in the struggle against AIDS, on those that have played in to its hands for years by waiting until the epidemic explicitly affected everyone before realising its importance. (...) To fight for the gay community, which remains closest to us, is to fight as much against those who reckon that the homosexual question is solved now and that their battle is a rear-guard action (they confuse their own privileges with the state of the world) as against those who bolt the door, taking exception for example to the idea of a mixed homosexual community. (Ibid, p. 18-19.)

From this point of view, the rhetoric employed by *Act Up-Paris* is very near to that of the left-wing movements of the 1960s (in its denunciation of sexual repression) but at the same time radically distinguishes itself by its call for the foundation of a homosexual *community*, something no other movement up to then had sought to defend:

38. *Act Up-Paris*, op. cit., p. 11-12.

To set about a struggle against AIDS which aims at denouncing politically the abandonment of People With AIDS by the public authorities and by civil society, it is necessary that the queer community makes of the gay movement a movement for the fight against AIDS and of the anti-AIDS movement a gay movement. To fight against AIDS, one must therefore fight also for the thousands of shameful fools who live their sexuality badly. (...) From the point of view of the gay community to survive it is imperative to get out of the closet, to go out into the street asserting oneself as gay to fight against AIDS, not only because the virus is decimating its members, but because AIDS threatens gay sexuality. (...) Right off AIDS has been set as the unescapable corollary to all sexuality which is not geared towards the family and reproduction, as the price to pay for pleasure: AIDS serves to orchestrate a great, repressive offensive not only against homosexuality, but against sexuality pure and simple. (Ibid, p. 209-210.)

From 1989, then, one can see that the anti-AIDS movement gave birth to a militant homosexual movement, of which *Act Up* is at the vanguard. The most notable feature is that this homosexual identity does not show itself solely in the discourse held by the association but also in its sociological composition. A study by questionnaire undertaken with regard to militants in the organisation, the results of which can be compared with those from one conducted by *AIDES* in its own grassroots support, provides unambiguous verification of this point.³⁹

39. This survey by questionnaire was undertaken by Olivier Fillieule in the framework of a working group on activism in France at the IEP de Paris. All results are analysed in Olivier Fillieule (ed), *Activisme et guerre contre le sida. Regards sur les Act-Up d'Europe et des USA*, Paris, L'Harmattan, (forthcoming). The Act Up questionnaire was distributed in 1994. 221 questionnaires were received or collected. By reason of the varying degrees of militant involvement, we have distinguished three categories amongst those responding : activists, who participate regularly in action and/or in commissions (33% of the total being 73 people), occasional activists who only participate in large-scale demonstrations and at the RH (35%, being 71 individuals), and finally sympathisers, who participate but rarely but subscribe to *Action* (32%, being 71 persons). Only 42% of sympathisers live in the région parisienne, as opposed to 94% of activists and 80% of occasional activists. All respondents form the mobilisable potential of *Act Up*.

Table 1 : Comparison between militants in AIDES and in Act Up-Paris

| | Act-Up | | | | AIDES |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Activists | Occasionals | Sympathisers | Total | Total |
| Men | 76% | 70% | 62% | 70% | 57% |
| Homosexuals | 68% | 62% | 57% | 62% | 44% |
| Heterosexuals | 21% | 25% | 34% | 27% | 45% |
| Never intro-venous drug users | 94% | 96% | 96% | 96% | 72%* |
| HIV-negative | 65% | 68% | 71% | 68% | 72% |
| HIV-positive or AIDS patients | 26% | 27% | 26% | 26% | 13% |

* NB : in the AIDES questionnaire, there was no distinction between hard and soft drugs.

In 1994, according to Table 1, almost a third of activists declared themselves directly effected by the disease. If one compares this percentage with the proportion of affected activists in AIDES (13%), one can deduce that *Act-Up* is the anti-AIDS association with a membership made up in greatest part of AIDS-sufferers, even though the association does not provide them with direct support. However, intravenous drugs-users, as well as blood transfusion patients and hæmophiliacs, are almost totally absent from *Act Up*.⁴⁰ Moreover, the fact that two thirds of militants declare themselves HIV-negative does not serve to place them into the classic form of *solidarity activism* stemming from some notion of altruism. When members were asked what made them join *Act Up*, the primary reason put forward was closeness to the illness and to the suffering of others (32%, in spontaneous statements). It is therefore this true, as Michael Pollak highlighted, that "the veritable network which feeds [the associations] (...) was created by the virus itself, through people affected physically and/or psychologically"⁴¹.

40. One should mention on this matter the chronic difficulties faced by the drug-addiction commission, particularly in being heard by the rest of the movement. From this point of view, the explanation of the quasi absence of drug-addicts from *Act-Up* without doubt does not stem solely from any disinterest in taking action which is generally and unfairly assigned to them (for an example, see Pollak, op. cit. p.83).

41. Pollak, op. cit. p.83.

But above all, Table 1 indicates that those actively involved are essentially gays, and this rather than the degree of engagement reinforces it. The comparison with the results of the *AIDES* survey suggests however that this situation cannot be explained in the same way at the end of the 1980s, when homosexuals were indeed the sole supporters of the associations⁴². If before 1987, 90% of volunteers in *AIDES* were male, the situation then started to change and, in 1993, only 57% of activists were men. The rise in the number of women in *AIDES* translates logically into the proportionately weaker proportion of homosexual men and women than in *Act Up* (44% against 62%). These are in effect 85% heterosexual, against only 15% men. This "heterosexualisation de la cause" is explained at once by an altruistic commitment to *AIDES* and by a sizeable arrival of volunteers from the health and social services, a strongly feminine sector directly involved with sick people.

Rather than a sign, as a few years ago for *AIDES*, of a manifest failure of an attempt at *de-singularisation* of the cause, preponderance of gay members of *Act Up* highlights then above all the highly visible homosexual identity of the association, the importance of which has already been stressed.⁴³

The dual concerns adopted by *Act Up-Paris*, politicisation of AIDS and identity-building, did not fit in well with the associational and political establishment and after 1991 *Act Up* started to become the object of fairly virulent attacks in both these areas in which one might say they highlighted the difficulty, in France, in building up a homosexual movement on a truly communitarian basis.

In part, *Act Up* is accused of seeking to politicise a problem which should not be political, nobody can be held responsible for an epidemic. This accusation rests at root on a debate about homophobia. Frédéric Edelmann, in the *Journal du sida*, engaged in a polemic with the association on the basis of a refusal to admit that homophobic sentiments existed in France implying its vague responsibility in the selective spread of the disease. For example, he wrote in December 1993 with regard to a film on the plague as a metaphor for fascism:

This film incites, constrains even, one to ask questions about the basis on a discourse which tends, today, to confer on AIDS the status of a political debate, by distinguishing the epidemic as revelatory of the sickness within the social fabric (...). Without mentioning a much more radical discourse which has been raised and received a fairly large following, instituting the campaign against AIDS as being essentially a political struggle.⁴⁴

In the same way, an interview appeared in the *Journal du sida* with Alain Finkielkraut, taking up this denunciation of the politicisation of AIDS in the name of the myth of homophobia:

42. See on this Michael Pollak et Marie-Ange Schiltz, *Les homo- et bisexuels masculins face au sida. Six années d'enquête*, Paris, GSPM, 1991.

43. The communitarian tendency of Act-Up is also demonstrated in the editorial line of the monthly *Têtu*, clearly inspired by the American model, launched in July 1995 by Didier Lestrade, a founding father of the movement.

44. *Le Journal du sida*, December 1993, p. 3. and the fairly violent reply of Act Up in *Action*, the journal of the association, no. 21, January 1994, p. 9.)

AIDS is a catastrophe. It is not, as certain slogans from *ACT UP*, or as Tom Hanks, the hero of the film *Philadelphia*, say, a holocaust. This analogy contains a desire to negate fatality in the name of "everything is political", which I find dangerous. (...) We are waiting for the enemy that will allow us to exist. Here we must invoke once again Michel Foucault: homosexuals do not need homophobia in order to live. Some may need it to support the unsupportable and to give but a little sense to the absurdity of fate. Here again, I understand the movement but we cannot make out that AIDS is a homophobic conspiracy. The concept of homophobia has appeared in the West at the time when homophobic attitudes are in decline.⁴⁵

In a similar vein, the desire by People with AIDS for a confrontation with the public authorities is analysed in psychological terms as derived from fear of dying:

As for the militants, would we still dare today (...) to suggest that the appearance of AIDS was for some almost a stroke of luck, smited as they were, perhaps, that the practice of homosexuality would at last obtain (...) a (relative) right to exist. (*Le Journal du sida*, December 1993)

Even to the extent that it designates objectives or those responsible, the politicisation of the illness allows a release of anxiety and permits to escape the inevitable by action. If I were myself infected with AIDS, I would perhaps succumb to this paranoia. I believe however that it is demagogical to flatter it. (*Le Journal du sida*, April 1995, n°72)

This violent stigmatisation in fact finds its explanation in the very negative reaction of the major part of French associations to *Act Up*'s attempt to found a homosexual movement on the basis of the American identity/community model. The attachment of the French left to the classic republican model, in which "minority politics" is not tolerated, is here contested in its own terms⁴⁶. An analogy to this struggle can be found in the development, at the start of the 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) Furthermore, it is because he had already taken a stance numerous times on the question of the right to be different that Alain Finkielkraut found himself once more solicited by the *Journal du sida* in 1995 to denounce the "identity trap" in which *Act Up* would like to draw gay associations and the anti-AIDS campaign:

45. *Le Journal du sida*, April 1995, n°72 and *Act Up*'s response in the words of Agnès de Luna in the n°73, May 1995, p.42 edition of the same journal.

46. See also the editorial of Gérard Dupuy in *Libération*, 24 June 1995 ("Visibles"), an article of Pascal Bruckner in *Le Monde* of 23 June 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* 15 April 1996: "Les homosexuels se divisent sur la question du communautarisme"; *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 April 1996, etc.). For an analysis of the reasons why France is fundamentally reticent about the communitarian model, in the tradition of the principles of the République, see also the sophisticated analysis of Ernst (1995).

Gays today form (...) a community of destiny. (...) To this extent, I do not believe that it is necessary to encourage, as in the USA, a “gay culture”. Let us remember the warning of Michel Foucault against the identity trap. It serves to fix into identities sexual behaviour, whatever it is. (...) Discretion, ambiguity, indeterminacy, decency are not, as one often believes them to be, the remnants of a repressive order or signs of inhibition, but indispensable of the art of living. (...) What seems to me to be incontestable is the manifest desire of some in this movement to constitute what Paul Ricoeur calls a “narrative identity” in explicit reference to the Jewish model of identity. (*Le Journal du sida*, April 1995, n●72.)

VI. Conclusion

French political tradition has clearly had a far-reaching effect on the development of the gay and lesbian movement, especially in terms of the (limited) political opportunities for gays and lesbians to manifest themselves as a collective political identity. Because this new identity was granted only limited access to politics, many homosexuals took an apolitical view of their sexual orientation. French gays and lesbians therefore found it difficult to develop a collective political identity and seldom took collective political action, because the political establishment refused to hear - let alone support - their appeal, in particular as long as other, traditional *cleavages* remained predominant. This has resulted in a weak movement on the one hand, and an almost invisible, apolitical subculture on the other; a logical consequence of the immense divide between the state and the street in France.

The far-reaching effect of the universalist, republican tradition on the gay and lesbian movement was proved once more when AIDS raised its ugly head (Favre 1992). Whereas most other Western countries soon realized the need to combat AIDS in a specific, focussed manner, the French government refused to develop prevention campaigns directed solely at male homosexuals (Altman 1988, Duyvendak & Koopmans 1991, Duyvendak 1995e). The development of a target-group policy proved to be well nigh 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 the patients were homosexual, especially at the start of the epidemic (Hirsch 1991, Pollak & 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 recognize 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).

However, even under these extremely difficult circumstances, since the beginning of the 1990s, a

series of indicators would seem to herald a renaissance in the homosexual movement in France, centred on the identity/community model proposed by *Act Up-Paris*. A Gay and Lesbian Center has opened in Paris, a successful Gay and Lesbian Film Festival has been organised since 1995, demonstrations commemorating the deportation of homosexuals during the Second World War, the spectacular success of the Gay Pride of June 1995, the broadcast of a Gay Night on the television channel Canal Plus, all these elements indicate very well the community slant of what can well be called a "gay and lesbian movement". Moreover, the efforts to have a law on "gay marriage" (*Contrat d'Union Sociale et Civile*) passed by the new left government. A first bill was promoted by a fraction of the Socialist Party in 1990. After hesitations and changing majorities, the new left government (elected in 1997) had decided to enact the law before the end of the year 1997.

It is not sure however that a movement founded on the notion of community and of minority interests can maintain itself in France, as the failure of the FHAR in the 1970s and the 'differentialist' anti-racism movement in the 1980s demonstrated. The risk of failure are as great whether it be for the anti-AIDS movement that gave way to a resurgence of a homosexual movement (and not the other way around), or for an association like *Act Up* which must manage at the same time a permanent tension between its homosexual identity and its principal aim which is the fight against AIDS. From this point of view, the homosexualisation of AIDS as much as the "AIDS-ification" of homosexuality present a problematic challenge to these movements today. The future fortunes of the gay and lesbian movement in France in the coming years, depends on the political opportunities to manifest oneself as being 'different'.

In contrast to the United States, which provides a rich substrate for group differentiation, and in contrast to the Dutch state, which recognizes specific groups as political actors, the French state often approaches specific groups with a view to privatizing them, repressing them, dispersing them, or subjecting them to centralized, hierarchical control. France may be a nation of individuals, but all these individuals are Frenchmen first and foremost; only in second instance are they men or women, bourgeois or working class, gay or heterosexual, Catholic or Muslim (Seidman 1995:72).

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