The Feminist Discourse on Violence against Women
and the Question of Prostitution

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Introduction

My MA-Thesis I am currently working on is about the politicisation of violence on women. I’m interested in how Feminists of the Second Wave Women’s Movement in Geneva raised the question of violence against women, trying to bring it to public attention and to impose it as a political issue. The Second Wave Feminist Movement put forward a very large conception of what had to be considered as “violence”. They distinguished between ”direct” violence (rape, drague, and other kinds of ”aggression”) and “indirect” or “structural” violence which included practically any kind of oppression or constraint on women in the patriarchal society.

In this contribution to the workshop, I propose to analyse the problematisation of violence against women by the Second Wave Feminist Movement in Geneva by focusing more closely on the issues of prostitution and trafficking of women. The questions I will be concerned with are the following: To what extent have the specific experiences of prostitutes been taken into account in the politicisation of violence on women by the New Women’s Movement? Is there any mention of the issue of women trafficking? In what sense are prostitution or women trafficking seen as “violence”?

To analyse the conceptualisation of violence on women by the New Women’s Movement, I propose to draw on a discourse analytical perspective, which, I think, furnishes very useful instruments for an in-depth analysis of the ideological dimension of the movement. Underlying to this perspective is a non-metaphysical conception of the world, meaning that reality is not given out there, but that it is constantly constructed through language. In this sense I am also interested in observing how the issue of violence against women is constructed politically, and how it becomes relevant both for politics and political science. Moreover, as I pose my object of research in terms of ”politicalisation”, I will be led to reflect on what is generally considered as political or non-political and on the question of the passage from one to the other.

I propose to start my contribution with these more general considerations about what is “political”.

I) Theoretical Section:

1. The political, the non-political and politicisation

If you are a man, and if you went down the streets of Geneva in the late 1970s, you could have been handed the following card, on which you read:

“Vous avez insulté une femme
   cette carte a été traitée
   chimiquement, votre queue
   tombera dans les 3 jours”

(You have insulted a women, this card has been treated chemically, your dick will fall off within 3 days)

Can this be seen as a “political” act?

For the women handing out this card, along with a number of other cards of this type, there was certainly no doubt about it. But it is also certain that a lot of political scientists would be extremely hesitant to qualify such an act as “political”.

However, it is a fact that derision has been a very privileged means of action on the part of these second wave feminists. The handing out of this card was part of a whole campaign to denounce “aggressors” and to draw public attention on what they considered to be “violence”. To call it “violence” was a way to stress the unacceptable character they wanted to give it and

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1 I wish to thank Robert Ayrton and Sonja Wälti for helpful advice and for linguistic improvements, and Véronique Mottier for her encouragements.

2 This term is the noun for something like “to make a pass at somebody”. As we did not find a very satisfying term to translate drague we will use the French expression in this text.
to present it as a social problem which needed urgent remedy. For this purpose they elaborated different means of retaliation and defence, including “direct action” (graffities, threat, physical revenge ("passage à tabac") realising in this way a “female justice”), self-defence, the setting up of shelters and hot-lines for battered women, all of which finally led to the demand for recognising violence against women as a criminal offence.

In this work, I wish to focus on the following questions: How does a political issue get progressively built in civil society? How is it that a certain topic succeeds in finding its way into the headlines of newspapers, to become a “hot” topic, forcing the political authorities to address it? This question of politicisation leads to another: if we think of “politicisation” as a kind of passage to the political, how do we then conceptualise the “political”? Where are the frontiers between the political and the non-political? From what moment on can we pretend that a problem has been politicised? Does this implicate that the administrative or political authorities will address it? Or would it be better to set up other criteria to define this frontier? Finally, is this question not purely rhetorical and too vain to be asked?

One may seem to be splitting hairs, but this issue is full of important implications indeed: On the level of society, being able to impose a certain issue as “political” means bringing it to public attention, to generate a public debate around it and possibly to enhance substantially the possibility of change. On the level of political science a topic that is not "political" needs to be given legitimacy as a politically relevant issue in order to be accepted as a valid object of research. Nevertheless, it seems that the reflection on what is to be considered as “political” has often not gone very far. This despite the fact that the purpose of this discipline is to study “political” processes, and thereby distinguishing it from sociology or history. To illustrate this by an example from the Swiss context, Voutat, Schorderet and Gottraux have shown how the debate within the Swiss Association of Political Science on the object of this new scientific discipline has continuously been adjourned (Voutat, et al. 1997: 15 - 45), illustrating a certain uneasiness within the Association vis-à-vis that question. The discipline continued, however, to grow and to develop. But the failure to raise seriously the question of the “political” has probably contributed to spread a too restricted, and at the same time lay, understanding of the political. This certainly contributes to discredit the study on certain topics (such as prostitution and trafficking of women for example) that do not immediately appear as "political", such as elections, political parties or even policies.

We have not yet gone into the details of the question of how political science comprehends “the political”. We think it would be interesting here to go back to attempts to define fixed frontiers between the political and the non-political, and then present the feminist criticism of this dichotomy (Pateman 1989), (Pateman 1979) (Okin 1998). But the question here is if the public-private distinction can be seen as the same as that of the political and the non-political.

Moreover, it would then be interesting to consider more closely political science literature on the question of “politicisation”, and to see which conception of “the political” they contain. System analysis of political process (Easton 1974) for example, which replaced its focus from the political system to its relations with the environment. “The political” is here not seen as an autonomous domain of reality. But the focus within this approach on the system’s equilibrium, reduces “the political” to a sort of global regulation of conflicts, in which the political system has the role of a central mediator that arbitrates conflicts in society in the name of global values (Lecomte and Denni 1990), (Cot and Mounier 1974).

One can also add the process of “politicisation” conceptualised in terms of agenda-setting (Kingdon 1995). The problem is here posed in terms of “policy formation”. This means that the analysis of the politicisation of a subject is made by finding ex-post the factors that have contributed to the elaboration of a public policy. In this way any construction of a political issue that does not aim towards State-intervention as a possible solution for their problem is immediately removed from the analysis. Moreover, this approach also fails to take into account issues that did not succeed in being set on political agenda. “The political” is reduced here to what has to do with the State. This is a too narrow conception: Indeed, what regards the phase of the New Women’s Movement of setting up self-help associations (as for example the shelters for battered women, or hot-lines) that progressively asked financial support from the State, would be seen, according to the agenda-setting approach, as a phase of
politicisation. For the New Women’s Movement, on the other hand, this phase is seen as a phase of de-politicisation (!) since the focus is put now at the individual help for victims of violence. This is seen as a sort of emergency troubles shooting of male violence, which gives up the more subversive perspective of the questioning of the relations of domination between men and women.

For the reasons mentioned above, we would much more claim for a constructivist conception of the “political”. It could be seen as something like the conflict of competing collective Weltanschauungen over specific issues. In this sense, there are no political objects per se, there are only political objects insofar as they are constructed as politically relevant. What is considered as “political” or not “political” is the result of a struggle between conflicting worldviews to impose certain issues as political whilst disqualifying others as “private” for example, banishing them from the field of public debate or decision. This open conception of the “political” does not only widen up the scope of issues that can be studied by political scientists, it is also firmly interdisciplinary in considering that academic boundaries are only social constructs.

The discourse analytical perspective

I propose to study the politicisation of violence against women in a discourse analytical perspective. Originally, Discourse Theory came from linguistics where it has been focused on the structure and meaning of sentences and words. From there it kept the insight that the meaning of words and sentences is not given, but relational, depending on the context in which they are inserted. Discourse Theory has then been widened up and used to study more generally the process of construction of meaning in society.

During the last decades Discourse Analysis has become a very large movement (Jaworski and Coupland 1999). It developed a wide range of various traditions focusing on different aspects of Discourse and involving many different scientific fields. What theses different discourse theory approaches share in common, despite this diversification, is the insight that language plays a crucial role in society. It appears in fact as a neutral medium through which we speak of the world we live in. But Discourse Theory draws our attention to the fact that the words and categorisations we use are not natural and reflecting directly the things we talk about. They are arbitrary and contribute to constitute the world as it is. Discourse Theory is critical about the possibility to describe the world in “true” and “objective” terms and stresses the fact that language always carries symbolic constructions who are vehicles of value-systems and certain visions of the world. This function of language as mean to make sense of the world is of course full of social and political implications.

As some of the core characteristics of Discourse Theory we can thus cite the fact that it is based on a non-metaphysical conception of the world, on a constitutive conception of language (as constituting itself reality) and focuses on the construction of social and political meaning within a determined context.

The kind of Discourse Analysis I am more precisely referring to is what has been called by Jaworski and Coupland (Jaworski and Coupland 1999) “Critical Discourse Analysis”. Critical because it analyses in a critical way the role and impact of language in society, more precisely it observes the way how language mediates social practices. The concept of Discourse is therefore used not to refer to communicative interaction at the micro-level, but refers to social and political processes mediated through language. Discourse is conceived in the larger sense of “system of meaning”. I am adopting here the definition of discourse of Ernesto Laclau as “a differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated” (quoted in: (Torfing 1992: 84 - 100) The term “signifying sequences” stresses here the fact that meaning is constructed through discourse and discourse-analysis then observes how this function of Discourse structures social and political practices (Howarth 1995: 115). By making sense of the world Discourse can sustain or transforms power relations and social discriminations. That is why Critical Discourse Theory is particularly interested in the construction of ideology through discourse. In other words the concept of discourse replaces the older and problematic concept of ideology (Mottier 1994).
Norman Fairclough gives the following account of critical discourse analysis as ideological analysis:

*I view social institutions as containing divers “ideological discursive formations” associated with different groups within the institution. There is usually one IDF which is clearly dominant (...) A characteristic of dominant IDF is the capacity to “naturalise” ideologies, i.e. to win acceptance for them as non-ideological “common sense”. It is argued that the orderliness of interactions depends in part upon such naturalised ideologies. To “denaturalise” them is the objective of a discourse analysis which adopts “critical” goals. I suggest that denaturalisation involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures” (Fairclough 1995: 27)

The important point here is that “naturalisation” is a dynamic processes. It implies a continuing struggle over social arrangements. In fact the critical perspective is oriented to social change, it sets out to understand social changes in the ideological use of language (Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 34).

We are interested in this paper in the formation of the political discourse or ideology of the New Women’s Movement on the topic of violence against women. So what we want to analyse is how this discourse has been constructed and articulated and which are the social and political implications of it.

Several authors put forward that Discourse Theory is not a research method in a conventional sense (Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 135). It does not provide research instruments that are immediately “ready for use”. It rather puts forward suggestions of under which angle certain issues could be tackled. Certain theorisations are very interesting but highly abstract and seem difficult to bring down to concrete analysis of empirical data. Jaworski and Coupland make this remark in particular about “Critical Discourse Theory”.

“Our thinking is that critical theory, while exerting considerable influence on discourse analysis, remains “theory”. It is a diverse set of abstract and philosophical writing (for example by Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Emile Benveniste, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco and Jacques Lacan) which does not impinge directly on the analysis of discourse, but is definitely part of the same intellectual climate.” (Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 33)

Most probably Jaworski and Coupland include here as well Discourse Theory as put forward by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe3. My work is highly inspired by their work, but what regards the application of Discourse Theory I will follow the suggest of Jacob Torfing in his book New Theories of Discourse, Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek:

For, whereas there is a great need to develop our critical reflections on how to apply discourse theory in concrete studies, we should not aim to solve the methodological question once and for all. Discourse theorists must remain methodological bricoleurs and refrain from developing an all-purpose technique for discourse analysis. The methodology to be applied will vary from study to study, and the development of a totalizing master methodology would serve only to repress new and alternative forms of analysis (Torfing 1992: 292)

In this sense, I propose to make a pragmatic use of different contributions of Discourse Theory.

As I said above we conceptualise Discourse at a macro-level as “a differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated”. But how then grasp Discourse at the macro-level through concrete empirical data? I here adopt the standpoint of Véronique Mottier, who conceives narratives as a component of Discourse, but underlines that narratives are not exhausting Discourse (Mottier 1999: 4). Discourses are, according to her, reproduced as well as transformed by individual and collective narratives. Contrary to some authors who suggest that there is no difference between narrative and discourse, she conceives narratives in the limited sense of “stories “ or “story-telling”. Narratives are in this sense

3 As they are not mentioned in the book The Discourse Reader, bringing together a big number of important contributions on Discourse, we can not be sure about that.
possible forms of discourse. For our work, this concretely means that we are analysing the Discourse of the New Women’s Movement on the level of empirical texts as “stories”.

Narratives can be of different types or “genre”: Texts or caricatures are different narrative forms. One of the characteristics of the Feminist Discourse of the Seventies is that it used wide range of different forms of communication (slogans, images, pamphlets, metaphors, songs …) refusing to a certain extent the very analytical and intellectual style of expression of the traditional Left. The Feminist Discourse of the Second Wave Movement constitutes in this sense a very rich and inspiring source for discourse analysis.

On what regards the empirical data used, I propose to focus in this paper on the Discourse on violence against women of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF) of Geneva. I will especially consider the 1978 edition of one of their journal called L’Insoumise (the un-submissive) that has been especially dedicated to the topic of violence against women. This empirical data base can seem very narrow. But the firmly qualitative orientation of discourse analysis to social understanding is an in-depth analysis that is very sensitive to the context relatedness of its interpretations. The objective is much more than generalisation to reach a greater clarity of vision, specifically of how language permeates human affairs. “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the discourse perspective requires us to scale back our ambition, again particularly in relation to generalising” (Jaworski and Coupland 1999: 37).

When analysing the “stories” (articles and illustrations) of the journal L’Insoumise we are not so much interested in their formal structure, but on their social and political role and how they make sense of the world (Plummer 1995: 19). What we will do, is analysing what we could call the story-telling event (Jaworski and Coupland 1999): who speaks? In the name of who? What is chosen to narrate? What is said and what is left out? We will also observe how the story is constructed? Here the concept of articulation is very important, it refers to a practice of bringing together different element to construct new meaning (Howarth 1995: 119-120). Here the concept of story-line is useful. A story-line is a “generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena”(Hajer 1995: 56). We will use this concept to redraw the argumentation of feminists in problematising the question of violence against women.

Narratives are not objective or impartial ways of representing events, they contain implicit values and norms. We would like to stress here the performative character of narratives to use a concept of J. L. Austin (Austin 1962). Austin stresses the fact that narratives often work as “speech acts”, in this paper we will for example observe what feminists of the MLF consider as being “violence” against women, and how they bring into being this new conception of “violence”. “Violence” is here not seen as given or natural but as a concept that is a social construction. To use the terminology of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe we consider it as an empty signifier which specific content is defined by the merely play and redefinition of other related free-floating signifiers. The building of ideology is very largely a process of defining conceptual classes, and of labeling those classes and the relationships between them.

Another performative aspect of discourse is that it constitutes identities. Discourse Theory examines the logic’s and structures of discursive articulations, and the way in which they make possible the formation of identities. Discourse Theory teaches us that identity is always constituted relationally, that is through demarcation with what it is not. It constitutes in this way commonalities and differences between self and others and draw therefore boundaries between “us” and “them”, that is between the victims and perpetrators of violence in our case. These narratives perform in this way group-identity through explicit or implicit in- and exclusion. This constructing of specific groups of people as other, as fundamentally “different”, or as the “same” are politically important. In this paper we will particularly pay attention to the in- or exclusion of prostitutes from the feminist discourse on violence against women.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe stress the fact that the mechanism of classification, inclusion and exclusion that construct identity can never fully eliminate ambivalence, that is they are never definitely fixed, and constitute thus sources of further conflict that is political processes, understood as struggles between antagonistic forces over the structuring of social meaning.
II) Empirical Section:

Context: The Second Wave Feminist Movement

The historical context of the appearance of what is called the “New Women’s Movement” in the late Sixties is a period of economic growth, accompanied by material wellbeing, consumerism and important cultural and social transformations. As particularly relevant for the emergence of the New Women’s Movement one could name the growing number of women in paid work, but also the diffusion of means of contraception, especially the entry on the market of the anti-baby-pill in 1960 in the US, that permitted women to control their fertility. This was accompanied by a certain liberation of the sexual habits and customs, that is generally referred to as the “sexual revolution”, a new search of happiness and pleasure in a sexuality in full bloom. The student’s protest movement of 1968 constituted both the favourable political climate and an important ground for the diffusion of the New Feminist Movement.

As opposed to the “Old Women’s Movement” of the beginning of the century, the “New Women’s movement” stressed the importance of equality in all areas of ordinary life, rather than to focus on legislative equality (right to vote and so on). The objective was in this way the real liberation of women (by analogy to the liberation from colonial oppression) that gives back to women the responsibility of their own destiny. An important characteristic of the New Women’s Movement is its will to bring up new political issues and demands, which were considered as “personal” before. In fact, one of the most important claims of the movement of that time is that “the personal is political”. In this way they put forward a number of issues that had hitherto been pushed back and excluded from the political arenas. The questioning on the private-public distinction led to reflections on politics. By practices as the famous “consciousness raising groups” they draw on their own personal experiences to make up political strategies to fight against the discrimination to which they were subjected.

As regards the style of expression of this movement is concerned, its members liked to use irony, sarcasm, humour, derision and provocation to make their claims visible. This certainly provided the movement with a certain capital of sympathy, but on the other hand this style full of provocation and transgression put a certain number of potential participants off. According to Fougeyrollas-Schwebel (Fougeyrollas-Schwebel 1997 : 729) the emergence of the New Women’s Movement in the late Sixties constituted a real “shock-wave”. It started in the US and gained rapidly Europe. The brightness of the American Women’s movement gave inspiration and force to the movements in European countries.

A particularity of the Swiss context, is that the “first” and “second wave” of the Women’s Movement overlap. In fact, Swiss women got the right to vote only in February 1971 (!). Whereas the New Women’s Movement in Switzerland made its first appearance within the students protest in Zurich in 1968 (Joris and Witzig 1986). It quickly took its distances from the student’s movement and organised itself in a autonomous way. From the American Women’s Lib it took the name Frauenbefreiungsbewegung (FBB). The FBB was founded in Zurich in the end of 1969 and has since developed in the majority of big cities of Switzerland (Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Lugano...) In the French speaking part of Switzerland it took the name Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF) and got a lot of inspiration from the MLF in other French speaking countries as France and Quebec.

As regards the MLF in Geneva it started gently in October 1970 within a small circle of feminist women and friends. (Joly 1998: 23) More precisely, two women from Geneva met at the University of Montreal (Budry and Ollagnier 1999: 178) and initiated feminist reflections and movement back in Geneva. On the very night when Swiss men granted in a popular vote the right to vote to Swiss women, they put up little pamphlets on the walls of the city declaring that the right to vote for women would not improve in any way their discrimination in ordinary life. The first public appearance under the name of MLF took place on May 15th, 1971, when they disrupted public festivities to distribute a pamphlet “against repression, for free abortion, equal pay for equal work, and the right to sexual pleasure”. The topic of abortion was a very important claim and a lot of activities have been organised around it. In

4 Cf. “Historique du MLF” 1973, Archives Espace Femmes Internationale
parallel to that, there was the ongoing process of emancipation from the classical left, that gave rise to a number of conflicts and debates. Later on (in 1972) the MLF functioned in plenary assemblies and in specific groups on particular subjects (as abortion, maternity, the body (becoming later on dispensaire des femmes\textsuperscript{5}), lesbianism, mothers, emigrated women, groupe pour le salaire ménager … ) There was no specific group on the subject of violence, but since several feminists from Geneva participated on the 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} of May 1972 to the “Journées de dénonciation des crimes contre les femmes” at the Mutualité in Paris (see Le torchon brûle n° 4). The topic of violence was raised in different groups: for instance in the group dispensaire from a medical angle with advice on how to behave after rape or other violences (medical report or assessment or acknowledgement). The common journal of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the French speaking part of Switzerland, La Fronde, dedicated several articles to the topic. Moreover the groupe pour le salaire ménager started publishing in 1975 the journal L’Insoumise (the un-submissive) from which the group took up the name later on. Between 1975 and 1978 ten issues were published. The December edition of 1978 was dedicated to the topic of violence.

Another group called “Terre des femmes” was created in 1978; it did not really belong to the MLF, but was rather based on a personal initiative of Genèvieve Piret. But there were frequent contacts between the groups. Terre des femmes became later on Solidarité Femmes en détresse which managed a refuge for battered women. Later on another group Viol Secours was constituted, and offered a hot-line to battered women. The topic became very hot, when there was a law suit concerning a collective rape of two women which gave it a big audience.

For this paper I will take into account only the Feminist Discourse of the MLF on Violence against women and try to indicate some interesting issues concerning violence related to prostitution and trafficking of women.

**Discourse analysis: Naming Violence**

What strikes at first sight when considering the feminist discourse on violence against women is the very large conception of what has been seen as “violence” against women. This becomes already evident in the title of the December edition of the Insoumise in 1978: “Viol, drague, violences”.\textsuperscript{6} The journal raises questions about very different forms of violence: most contributions are on rape and how to avoid it. A surprisingly big number is also on drague and different kinds of aggressions (we would say “harassment” today) on the streets. It is interesting to note that the distinction between these three is only a question of degree:

> Pour nous tous les hommes sont des dragueurs et trop souvent ils sont aussi des violeurs.\textsuperscript{7}

Flirt and rape are seen in a direct line of growing seriousness of “violence” against women, where rape is just the most awful and extreme expression of what flirt is already in a more diluted form. This conception is illustrated by a lot of quotes where drague, aggression and rape are mentioned in one line:

> Nous nous faisons toujours draguer, agresser, violer, nous n’osons toujours pas sortir la nuit \textsuperscript{8}

> Encore que nous faisons des différences entre la drague anodine et la drague plus “grave”, où tu te fais brusquer, toucher, même sans te faire pénétrer.\textsuperscript{9}

This quote suggests that to be brusquée or touched is already a kind of pre-stadium of rape, which shows the mention “even without being penetrated”.\textsuperscript{7} In a similar way this is also mentioned through the structure of the article on page 8 with the title “The little girls”. The three sections that the article contains have the following titles: …Regardées, maquillées, violées\textsuperscript{10} As if one necessarily leads to the other.

\textsuperscript{5} sort of Health-centre from women for women

\textsuperscript{6} Rape, flirt and violence (in plural form)

\textsuperscript{7} Insoumise, n° “Viol, drague, violences”, 1978, p. 2

\textsuperscript{8} Insoumise, n° “Viol, drague, violences”, 1978, p. 1

\textsuperscript{9} Insoumise, n° “Viol, drague, violences”, 1978, p. 2

\textsuperscript{10} … looked at, … maquillée, raped p. 8
There are also several articles on what we would call today harassment on the streets. On page 9 a woman tells her story of being harassed several times by the same man on the same street in Geneva. She says that everything started with the feeling of being followed and then being “attacked” by his sending her kisses from where he was:

Il me sourit radieux, il me lance des baisers envoûtés, un vrai tir de mitraillette, un après l’autre. Mitrailée, paralysée je m’arrête une seconde.

The military vocabulary used stresses clearly that these kisses are seen as aggression. The woman then tells her reaction when this happened another time:

Cette fois j’ai réagi. Je lui ai dégueulé tout ce que je pouvais, que je n’étais pas un chien, que les femmes ne sont pas en vente…

So this clearly shows that these different kinds of aggressions are seen as a same kind of contempt for women. As a non-respect of them as subjects with own will and individuality.

These kinds of violence are seen as “direct” or “personal” violence of men against women. But the Feminists of Geneva have taken up the conception of “structural violence” put forward by the International Tribunal of crime against women held in March 1976 in Brussels¹¹. This term aimed to catch and to scandalise not only the immediately visible form of direct violence, but also the more subtle and more hidden forms that are embodied in the structure of patriarchal society and get manifest through an unequal distribution of power and possession. In this sense every kind of obstacle for women to their liberation are seen as “violence”:

Toutes les structures, toutes les institutions de la société patriarcale sont en ce sens autant de formes différentes de viol, qui visent toutes à nier l’intégrité et l’identité propre de la femme.¹²

To quote the resolution of the International Tribunal (quoted in(Schäfer 1979: 177):

Zwischen den extremen Formen der physischen Gewalt und den subtileren psychischen und sozialen besteht ein enger Zusammenhang. Sie sind eine Form der Missachtung der Frau, die zu einem solchen Masse gesellschaftlich akzeptiert ist, dass sie von Männern überhaupt nicht wahrgenommen und von Frauen als notwendiges Uebel ihres Frauseins oder als biologisch berechtigte From der sexuellen Beziehung zwischen Mann und Frau hingenommen wird.

This large conception of violence is adopted by the Feminists of Geneva, the whole society is experienced by women as oppressive and “violent”. Every kind of attack to their physical or psychological integrity, any form of restriction to their liberty and liberation are seen as a forms of violence. This appears in many quotes of the journal l’Insoumise¹³:

Les sévices physiques en sont l’expression la plus pure. Mais il y a tout le reste, insidieux: l’ensemble des contraintes qui pèse sur chacun, qu’on accepte comme “naturelles”.¹³

It is the annihilation of women as subject by men. A society that supports status of women as commodities.

Il serait plus intéressant de faire le procès de la société machiste, de la publicité, du cinéma qui incitent les hommes au viol.

To sum up the point here, we can say that the New Feminist Movement tended to stress anything that women lived as oppression, physical or moral, direct or internalised, which condemns women to live in the world like in a prison. The following poem sums up very well what the discourse on violence against women aimed at.

It is not necessary that every man rapes women, but the fear of being raped places women in a position of vulnerability and need of protection. This is an important restriction to their liberty and makes it difficult for them to exist independently from men.

¹¹ see article in La Fronde. Journal romand des mouvements de libération des femmes, mai 1976, p. 20
¹² La Fronde, mai 1976, p. 20
Je n’ai pas été violée

Je n’ai pas été violée physiquement
Ni par mon père, ni par mon patron
Ni par une conducteur de poids lourds
Ni par un ami de la famille
Ni par un inconnu

J’ai été trop bien élevée
Dans la crainte de mon corps et de celui des autres
Dans la méfiance de mon corps et de celui des autres
Dans le mépris de mon corps et de celui des autres

J’ai été, je suis
Prudent, soumise, craintive, inquiète, peureuse, méfiante…

J’ai fait taire tous mes désirs de peur d’éveiller ceux des autres

Pas violée, non, mais amputée, mutilée, réduite à protéger mon corps
qui n’est pas mon corps, réduit à vivre comme en prison.

Feminists fight against their being turned into “women-object”.

a-t il pire pouvoir, pire exploitation, que celle qui fait de nous des objets sexuels, une marchandise violable et draguable à merci”?

So we can note that there is a double transition in how violence against women is brought up. On the one hand, there is a very large conception of “violence”: it includes more subtle forms of violence inherent to the patriarchal structure of society. And, on the other hand, there is a concentration of activism against rape as the most extreme and paradigmatic form of violence against women. There would be a lot more to say about these different kinds of violence, but what is to retain is the distinction feminists made between “direct” and “structural” violence.

It’s important to note that there is no article in the journal L'Insoumise on the issue of prostitution: in any case not specifically or in detail. There is an article on page 10 of the 1978 issue written by feminists of the German-speaking part of Switzerland giving an account of their action against members of the Swiss Automobile Club going to a sex-show after their Annual Assembly as is the tradition. It is thus not a problematisation of prostitution but an account of an action made against people going to consume a sex-show, nevertheless it can also reveal some aspects of how prostitution has been seen by feminists. The account has the title “les cochons riches”

The feminists say that they wanted to go to the sex-show to frighten the members of the Swiss Automobile Club, but that they were not numerous enough to do so. Therefore they filled up eggs with stinking liquid and with paint and they threw these eggs into the crowded bus of members of the Swiss Automobile Club, which was evacuated immediately. They conclude the article by saying that they were satisfied by their action, because they succeeded to spoil their trip, and that the following year they wanted do even better.

What we can note is that they are fighting more against men going to see a sex-show than for prostitutes and call-girls.

Drawing boundaries: Victims and Perpetrators of Violence and what about Prostitutes?

It is an inherent property of discourse to proceed to categorisations, because of it being the only way to talk about the world which is infinitely complex. Categorisation aims to represent the complex world in a more comprehensive way. This characteristic of discourse is particularly relevant in political discourse which aims to mobilise. It defines in fact – among other types of categorisations – who belongs to the group the movement represents and who is

\[\text{L'Insoumise, n° "Viol, drague, violences", 1978, p. 35}\]
\[\text{the rich pigs}\]
part of the “others”. It gives identity to the group and consistency to what means “we” in defining who are the “enemies” to fight.

So let us turn to consider what is meant by “we” in the feminist discourse on violence against women as represented by the discourse of the MLF in Geneva.

At first sight it appears that the battle against violence is fought in the name of women as a whole, that is for “women” seen as a homogenous group. There is generally no reference to specific groups of women suffering of specific violence. The only exception are lesbians. There is one article in the Insoumise where lesbians are drawing attention to the fact that they are suffering from a double oppression: as women and as lesbians. 16 A girl tells about her experience of having kissed another girl on the street and of having been observed and then followed by four men, maintaining:

C’est la première fois que je vivais l’oppression des lesbiennes.

Otherwise, women are considered in the discourse of the MLF on violence as being all the same and being affected in a same way by the problem of violence.

Nevertheless, when looking more closely at the kind of violence that is most considered (drague, rape) we can see that the movement is above all talking in the name of young, unmarried women, without children, and generally from the political Left (as the numerous references to political groups of the left shows). In fact, there are no concerns on domestic violence between husband, wife and children, nor on women from other nationalities or cultures, nor from prostitutes... Theses categories on women are implicitly but de facto excluded from the political discourse on violence against women by the MLF.

Considering more precisely the case of prostitution. We are particularly interested in, we can note that in the only (!) article treating indirectly the subject of prostitution in the journal L’Insoumise, the problem seen from the point of view of prostitutes is completely absent. It is the article on the action of feminists in the German-speaking part of Switzerland mentioned earlier. The prostitutes are absent of the account, feminists are more fighting against men going to a sex-shop, than for women working as prostitutes.

Where the other side of “othering”, i.e. how feminists delineate their enemy to fight, we can note that in a similar way, every man is seen as a potential perpetrator of violence against women. Feminists say, that even if not all men exercise violence against a women, they nevertheless benefit all together from it. Here they draw on an analysis that Susan Brownmiller already presented in her influential book Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape, which has been translated into French in 1975

Vergewaltigende Männer sind nicht Aussenseiter der Gesellschaft (...) sondern vielmehr männliche Stosstrupps, terroristische Guerillas, im längsten Krieg den die Welt jemals gesehen hat (172 German Edition)

Feminists contest very strongly the idea that violent men are seen as an exception, as deviant behaviour:

L’agression sexuelle contre les femmes n’est pas le fait du pervers, du marginal, de l’asocial, elle est le fait de tous: père de famille, jeune mâle bourgeois ou prolétaire. 17

Feminists maintain, on the contrary, that attention should be brought on any kind of man, including the “comrades” of the political left, which are accused of not questioning enough their own role in perpetuating male dominance.

Comment, enfin, croire à la “bonne volonté ” que manifestent certains hommes tant qu’ils ne lutteront pas activement contre le rôle que la société leur impose à eux?
Cf. aussi lettre "Salut les mecs!"

16 Insoumise, n° "Viol, drague, violences", 1978, p. 11
17 Insoumise, n° "Viol, drague, violences", 1978, p.4
The fact that some men are women rapists, is sufficient to keep women in a state of constant fear. In this context, “kind” men are presented to women as potential protectors. But this view is criticised very strongly by feminists, especially by lesbian feminists:

*Cet homme est un violeur - Cet homme est un homme - l'homme protecteur est une illusion.*

Lesbian feminists reject all men as oppressors and present heterosexual feminists as "collaborators". Lesbianism is for them the only logical and really "revolutionary" imposture in the face of masculine domination.

This is contrary to how the feminist discourse on violence against women constructs the category of "women" where differences between women are played down and women are seen as homogenous group. Regarding the category of the "enemy" men, feminists recognise differences among them, but reject explicitly the argument that they are not all in a same way responsible of male violence on women.

What does all this mean? How can we interpret the fact that the MLF fights in the name of "women", but represents *de facto* only young unmarried Swiss women, without children and with rather high educational background?

To speak in the name of "women" is certainly necessary in the political rhetoric of a movement that wants to mobilise. That they represent in fact their own situation is of course related to the fact that the elaboration of their political discourse follows the maxim of *partir de soi* and the politicisation of one's own experience. Most of the members of the MLF were students (Budry and Ollagnier 1999: 231) and came from the new intellectual middle class (Fougeyrollas-Schwebel 1997: 759), (Joris and Witzig 1986: 474).

We will now turn back to the distinction the MLF made between “direct” and “structural” violence, considering more closely certain kinds of the latter and their conceptualisation which hopefully will tell us something more about how the New Women's Movement framed the question of prostitution and trafficking of women.

**Criticism of the "Sexual Revolution" and the question of Prostitution**

The Anti-baby-pill, that was first sold on the market in the USA in the year 1960, constituted the first relatively easy way to control contraception and brought with it for the first time the divide between sexuality and procreation. This changed radically the nature of sexuality. In fact we can note that there was, during the 60s and the 70s, a radical transformation of intimacy characterised by the fall of many taboos and a larger permissivity in sexual concerns. That is what is generally referred to as the “sexual revolution”. Some authors are talking of a “Sex Wave” (Joris and Witzig 1986: 298). Sexuality became an object of consumption and films, pornography, articles and love stories etc. got produces with a whole market developing around it. Desire and Love was to be from now on consumed without fear and limit, in sum – sexuality became available for the free market.

At the same time movements as those of the hippies made of sexuality a central issue and put forward (by proclaiming "make love not war") a completely "free" sexuality, drawing on statements as those of Wilhelm Reich, who saw the dominant moral norms and the constraint to fidelity as a premeditated mechanism of control and oppression of the individual. He claimed that the fight against alienation and oppression has to go hand in hand with the fight for sexual liberation and that only a sexually free man is really a free man. "Free love" was the new maxim and this sexuality free of repression was lived through new forms of unions such as those which were experience in communities. (“Wer zweimal mit der selben pennt, gehört bereits zum Establishment”).

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18 pamphlet of “ Vanille –Fraise. Groupe de Lesbiennes Politique ”. 8 mars 1983
Feminists – especially those from the "Second Wave" – took up the topic of sexuality. If they admitted that the sexual revolution had brought with it some improvements concerning the public debate on contraception and abortion, they stressed that the term of "sexual revolution" was misleading: the new permissivity for "free love" does neither overthrow the power balance in sexual relations between women and men nor question the dominant sexual practices which where in their eyes male-defined, that is, serving only male needs for satisfaction. That is why dominant sexual practices were seen as submission of women and therefore as "violence".

La sexualité dominante, celle qu'on impose à tout le monde, femmes et hommes est en soi violence pour les femmes.  

They maintained that in reality the development of the Anti-baby-pill led to the constraint for women to be "modern" and "liberated", which meant permanent availability for sexual relations. The following caricature illustrate this and shows also the complete disinvolve of the woman in a sexual practice that is entirely oriented to male needs, she being the passive object while the man is the subject controlling everything.

Feminists strongly criticised the dominant practices of sexuality. Numerous critical books have been written on this issue and got translated in several languages. There is especially the feminist critique of the Freudian vision of female libido as “homme manqué” which Kate Millet, in her book Sexual Politics, denounced as one of the elements of the “phallocratic” society. Or there is Anne Koedt's famous work The myth of vaginal orgasm published in 1968 and translated in French in 1970 in the Revue “Partisanes”. This point of view has also been taken up by Alice Schwarzer in her book Der kleine Unterschied und seine grossen Folgen published in French in by the Editions des femmes in 1975, especially in the chapter on the role of sexuality in the oppression of women, in which she stresses how few women get satisfaction in the actual sexual relations, and that it is therefore cynical to talk about “sexual revolution”. A woman is now even brought to simulate desire, because her own desires are unknown and repressed.

On en a marre des plaisirs violents !

Les femme ont été conditionnées à se laisser séduire par la violence. Qu’avaient-elles comme alternative ? Connaissions – nous déjà une sexualité autre que celle du viol ?

A whole discussion has then gone on in the women's movement on how to redefine and reinvent a sexuality that is more appropriate to feminine needs. The practice of the "small groups" based on personal testimony leads rapidly to the insight that women need to get a better knowledge of their own body and their own needs. They claimed the right to pleasure

21 La Fronde, Journal Romand des mouvements de libération des femmes, juin 1977
22 référence...
24 The reports on female and male sexuality written by the American journalist Hite were also written in this perspective, however we did not find any direct reference to theses books in our empirical documents.
in sexual relationship, especially in stressing the clitoral orgasm. The New Women's Movement stressed in their message the refusal of penetration and the reinvention of another type of sexuality more sensual and better adapted to female needs.

As we noted before the “sexual revolution” also gave rise to the development of a large industry of sex, where sex became an article of consumption in the form of films, pornography, articles or love stories. Feminists criticised especially pornography, which they compared to racist or anti-Semitic propaganda. Pornography was for them "anti-women propaganda" because it reduced women to their body and portrayed them as objects of desire to take and to consume. Moreover, pornography carried the assumption that male sexuality is an uncontrollable biological drive that has to be satisfied. For these reasons, pornography was seen as "structural violence" against all women.

les femmes dans la pornographie sont comme les hommes aimerait qu’elles soient – nous ne sommes pas ça - nous détestons la pornographie parce qu’elle dégrade, bêtifie, aliène, manipule, nie, viole, le corps des femmes.25

Concerning the topic of pornography, feminist are again accusing men of their ambiguous attitude as the following illustration shows:

The following poem brings together and articulates several of the main feminist criticism on sexuality, as well as on women seen as “objects” and on pornography:

Nous ne sommes pas celles que vous fantasmez
Nous ne désirons pas ce que vous désirez
Nous je jouissons pas de vous voir jouer
Nous ne sommes pas un trou
Nous ne sommes pas en adoration devant vos érections
Nous ne sommes pas des machines à pipes
Nous ne désirons pas être prises-frappées, baisées-violées
Nous ne jouissons pas de votre sadisme
Nous ne sommes pas toujours prêtes
Nous refusons de baiser et d’être baisées comme ça, même au cinéma.
La pornographie est un commerce fait par les hommes, pour les hommes
Nous ne nous faisons aucun problème à vouloir le détruire27

As for the problem of prostitution, as mentioned above, there is no article in our (quite narrow, I admit) empirical base underlying this paper focusing exclusively and in detail on that question. But there is an article in which the authors speak of an incident and discussion at the États généraux de la prostitution which took place in Lyon (France) in 1975. A feminist accuses prostitutes in the following terms:

25 L’Insoumise, n° "Viol, drague, violences", 1978, p. 23
26 L’Insoumise, n° "Viol, drague, violences", 1978, p. 22
27 L’Insoumise, n° "Viol, drague, violences", 1978, p. 23
Comment pouvez-vous vous considérer partie intégrante du mouvement de libération des femmes, alors que vous perpétuez votre (et notre) statut d'objets sexuels en monnayant vos services à travers le fric, et à n'importe quel acheteur?  

The relation between feminists and prostitutes is characterised by a high degree of tension and conflict. The criticism on prostitution is in fact similar to the one on pornography: Prostitutes are accused of perpetuating the status of all women as sexual objects, by letting men who pay experience a sexuality which is exclusively oriented to their own needs, without any concern for the needs of the women.

A prostitute at the *Etat généraux de la prostitution* in Lyon retacts to the feminist accusation by returning to them the following argument:

Mais pour les hommes on est toutes des objets sexuels! Ca nous colle à la peau dès qu'on n'est pas mère et intouchable. (….) Peut-être que la division serait un peu moins marquée entre nous, peut-être que beaucoup de femmes reconnaîtraient finalement qu'on les taxe un peu trop souvent de "putains" et sans les payer en plus.

This interpretation, stressing the fact that for men every woman is a sexual object, is taken up by the feminists of the *Journal L'Insoumise*; they express this interpretation in the following illustration with the title “the myth of love”:

The caricature shows a possible (and supposed current) misunderstanding between women and men. Whereas the woman is speaking about love, represented in the caricature with a heart meaning the emotional involvement with another person; the man with whom she is communicating talks about sex. He reduces in this way the women to an object to have sex with: a prostitute. When the woman in the caricature realises what’s going on, she asks for money. The authors of this caricature point out that one must not hand out too many gifts! They suggest that so long as society poses women as sexual objects, women should at least be paid for their "sexual service".

Pourquoi ne pas demander du fric à nos copains, maris ou amants lorsqu'ils nous utilisent comme objets, lorsque nous n’arrivons pas (et des fois nous en avons marre) à les changer?

They maintain that this will remain as such as long as men impose on women a sexuality without sensuality, which does not take into account female desires and continue to evaluate, compare and treat women as merchandise, with women not succeeding in putting themselves out of this “trade”:

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Pourquoi ne pas nous détacher entièrement de ce qui nous est imposé d'étranger à nous-mêmes? Pourquoi ne pas le décoller définitivement de notre peau en faisant du travail, et du travail qu'on déteste (au lieu de continuer à croire qu'il s'agit d'amour)?

Feminists incite women to recognise this and consider "sexual service" as “work” that has to be paid. Even if they admit that it is not a very rewarding job…

Et si on le déteste vraiment, ce travail, pourquoi continuer à l'offrir gracieusement gratuitement… même à ceux qu'on aime!... au lieu d'imposer (au moins!) qu'il soit reconnu comme tel, et donc payé.

This vision inserts itself very well in a more global analysis of society. In fact, the group L'Insoumise carried in the beginning the name : groupe pour le salaire ménager (group for domestic wage). But house work was seen in a very large sense, which included, according to the traditional feminine role, to love, to console, to care, being a sexual object etc. (Joly 1998: 48). In the 1977 edition of the Insoumise with the title Le foyer de l'insurrection, the objective of the struggle is formulated in these terms:

Ne plus fonctionner comme on l'attend de nous. Fondamentalement c'est ne plus faire gratuitement le travail qui nous est assigné, le seul travail pour lequel la société ne peut pas se passer des femmes: le travail ménager, le travail d'être mère, le travail d'être femme

quoted in: (Joly 1998 : 49)

The idea is thus not to do free of charge anymore the “work” which is assigned to women by the partriarchal society. Hélène Joly shows very convincingly in De "Sappho s'en fout" à "Vanille Fraise" (1972 - 1986): Histoire du mouvement lesbien genevois how lesbian feminists conceived their engagement in this battle. She quotes a speech of Ruth Hall presented in London in 1975 during the campaign for domestic work, with the title “lesbianism and power”.

La sexualité est une des relations productives qui fait partie du cycle productif du capitalisme (p. 114) … bien que nos relations sexuelles soient également du travail, elles sont moins productives pour le capital dans la mesure où elles ne reproduisent pas comme le font les femmes hétéros les relations sociales que représente le pouvoir des hommes sur les femmes (116). L'organisation des lesbiennes en tant que lesbiennes pour le salaire pour le travail ménager attaque la division entre les femmes et le travail qui nous a divisées. Elle donne à toutes le pouvoir dont nous avons besoin pour lutter (117).

As Hélène Joly appropriately notes: the notion of the sexual division of work is taken up and pushed forward to a paroxysm. The social role of women, and not only their function of reproduction, becomes in itself a production of services that need to be paid for.
Conclusion: the New Women’s Movement and the Question of Prostitution

What has become very evident throughout these pages is that women prostitutes are absent of the feminist discourse on violence against women. Feminists of the MLF from Geneva largely failed to make out the particular situation of women-prostitutes. By speaking in the name of “women” in general, they de facto defended a very particular group of women, that is: young, unmarried women, without children, with high educational background and generally from the political left.

In the feminist discourse on what they called “direct violence” (that is violence exercised directly on a person) there is no concern in how far prostitutes could be more exposed to violent behaviour than other women. Very probably there have not been any contacts between feminists of the MLF and prostitutes in Geneva, otherwise feminists would no doubt have raised this topic. Even in the article on the action of feminists aimed at men of the Swiss Automobile Club going to a sex-shop, the authors are not reporting the point of view of the prostitutes and call-girls. To what extent prostitutes in particular are victims of direct violence is totally absent form the feminist politicisation of violence against women.

On the other hand, prostitution is conceptualised as a kind of “structural” violence. It is seen as perpetuating both the vision of women as sexual objects to possess and to consume and the dominant vision of sexuality, and is in this sense seen as “structural” violence against all women. Prostitutes are accused of reinforcing the negation of female sexuality and female needs for sexual satisfaction by offering sex for money in a sexual relation where the woman is completely passive while the man has the control and active role, orienting everything to his own desires. In this sense, feminists fight against prostitution with the same idea as they fight against pornography or (at a less serious level) against the image of women in publicity. Prostitution is from this angle seen as the paradigmatic case of male domination over women. This vision contributes to reinforce the marginalisation of prostitutes from society but also from the “women’s” movement, accentuating the division between women prostitutes and other women. Moreover, they obviously contribute to their stigmatisation, by presenting prostitution as the worst case of male dominance over women.

Aside from this, the discourse-analysis adopted in this essay has also shown some elements of the change of meaning given by feminist to the phenomenon of prostitution. There are signs of a more positive reconsideration of prostitution, which not only aims to overcome the division between women who are prostitutes and those who are not, it also claims that “normal” women should follow the example of prostitutes! Whereas prostitutes have been seen before as the most exploited type of women, they now appear as the only ones that have not been deceived by men! The argument is, that women are in any case used by men as sexual objects, but that the institution of marriage and the representation of love dissimulate this fact (see “the myth of love”). The claim is that women should stop doing things for free, for which prostitutes get at least financial compensation.

Focusing on the question of prostitution and women-trafficking within the feminist discourse on violence helped to sharpen our outlook on ambiguities, internal contradictions and omissions within this discourse. That’s what discourse analysis is all about. It suggests to pay attention to these things, arguing that they are socially and politically relevant. In fact it is necessary for a discourse which endeavours to mobilise to speak in the name of a certain group, as feminists do in the name of “women”. But this is never really possible: Even if Feminism is based on a presumed common identity in a common experience of oppression, it requires (abusive) homogenisation of the group and plays down differences. This was one of the sources of difficulties and conflicts with which the New Women’s Movement was faced and explains to a certain extend its fragmentation. The question is, if this has to be considered as something positive or negative....
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