

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Previously Published Works

Title

Groupe du 6 Novembre: lesbiennes Issues du Colonialisme, de l'Esclavage et de l'Immigration

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0b37g48z>

ISBN

9780684325538

Author

Bacchetta, Paola

Publication Date

2019-01-18

Peer reviewed

as 2017 in Kailua, Hawaii, the artist Jess X Snow created an outdoor graffiti installation with the text “Today I Touched My Queer Body until It Became Cathedral.” The piece celebrates masturbation as a form of self-love for queer bodies of color that are perpetually marginalized in society. Within two days the word *queer* was blacked out and a large penis was drawn between the hands. In an interview after the defacement, the artist attributed this vandalism to patriarchy and homophobia.

Increase in and Recognition of Queer Graffiti

Today, queer themes appear with increasing regularity in street art. In San Francisco and elsewhere, Jeremy Novy creates gay imagery, such as stencils of leathermen. Rommy Sobrado-Torrico and Crystal are contemporary street artists making queer-themed work in San Francisco. In New Orleans, graffiti artist Hugo Gyrl creates brightly colored images of disembodied hands and noses that are monstrous, playful, and decidedly queer in their flamboyant and fierce aesthetic. In the 2010s there has been a shift toward institutional recognition, with the first exhibition exclusively devoted to LGBT and LGBT-friendly street artists, *A History of Queer Street Art*, opening in 2011 at SOMArts in San Francisco, organized by Novy.

However, queer themes remain lacking in literature on graffiti. Dominant accounts of graffiti tend to focus on its heteromasculine originators, and the contributions of LGBT people have been less acknowledged, until recently. Graffiti writing has been a male-dominated and heterosexual-dominated field, but LGBT people have been involved in it since its first decades. Fundamentally, graffiti is an art form that seeks to communicate. One scholar has identified its power as a medium to give voice to those marginalized in mainstream society. Graffiti can be a powerful statement of personal identity, as well as an outlet for public affirmations of collective identity, particularly in the wake of gay liberation in the late 1960s and 1970s, the HIV/AIDS crisis since the 1980s, and our contemporary moment. Social media now also enables the promotion of illicit queer graffiti worldwide. The Tumblr site “Queer Graffiti” regularly posts images of graffiti of same-sex kissing, gender bending, and other queer imagery from over 140 countries.

SEE ALSO *ACT UP; Boys Love (Yaoi) Manga; Cruising and Cruising Grounds; Daughters of Bilitis; Pink Triangle*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Avramidis, Konstantinos, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi, eds. *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing, and Representing the City*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Bonnin, Debby, Roger Deacon, Robert Morrell, and Jenny Robinson. “Identity and Changing Politics of Gender in South

Africa.” In *South Africa in Transition: New Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by David R. Howarth and Aletta J. Norval, 111–131. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998.

- Crimp, Douglas, and Adam Rolston. *AIDS Demo Graphics*. Seattle, WA: Seattle Bay Press, 1990.
- Deitch, Jeffrey, Suzanne Geiss, and Julia Gruen. *Keith Haring*. New York: Rizzoli, 2014.
- Ensminger, David A. *Visual Vitriol: The Street Art and Subcultures of the Punk and Hardcore Generation*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
- Goldin, Nan, et al. *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing, November 16, 1989–January 6, 1990*. New York: Artist’s Space, 1989.
- Jacobs, Karrie, and Steven Heller. *Angry Graphics: Protest Posters of the Reagan-Bush Era*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith, 1992.
- Lord, Catherine, and Richard Meyer. *Art and Queer Culture*. London: Phaidon, 2013.
- McQuiston, Liz. *Graphic Agitation: Social and Political Graphics since the Sixties*. London: Phaidon, 2006.
- Rechy, John. *City of Night*. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Taylor, Claire, and Thea Pitman. *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Trahan, Adam. “Research and Theory on Latrinalia.” In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross, 92–102. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Waclawek, Anna. “Pop Culture and Politics: Graffiti and Street Art in Montréal.” In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross, 247–257. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Wojnarowicz, David, Dan Cameron, et al. *Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz*. Edited by Amy Scholder. New York: Rizzoli, 1999.

FILMOGRAPHY

- von Praunheim, Rosa, dir. *Silence = Death*. Rosa Von Praunheim Filmproduktion, 1990. Documentary.

Groupe du 6 Novembre: lesbiennes Issues du Colonialisme, de l'Esclavage et de l'Immigration

PAOLA BACCHETTA

Professor, Department of Gender and Women’s Studies
University of California, Berkeley

The first heterogeneous autonomous self-declared lesbian of color group in contemporary France, founded in 1999.

The Groupe du 6 novembre: lesbiennes issues du colonialisme, de l’esclavage et de l’immigration (6 November Group: Lesbians Begotten of/Out of Colonialism,

Slavery, and Immigration) was the first heterogeneous autonomous self-declared lesbian of color group in contemporary France. It was founded in 1999 in Paris and remained primarily based there. It also operated more broadly in France—in the Parisian *banlieues* (suburban racialized working-class neighborhoods) and in other cities and *banlieues*. It formed links of solidarity with lesbians in France's present and former colonies and with lesbians of color groups elsewhere in Europe and globally.

Unlike prior autonomous women of color groups in France, the members of the Groupe du 6 novembre did not come from one national, regional, or community background. Instead, they came together from many: Maghrebian, sub-Saharan African, Afro-Caribbean, Latin American, and racially mixed. The group was founded during a tumultuous political period for people of color in France. The founders converged at a national lesbian gathering in 1999, where it became apparent that lesbians of color, and questions of coloniality and racism, were not being taken seriously by most white lesbians. They created an autonomous space at the gathering and thereafter opened it to create the broader group (Bacchetta 2009).

The name Groupe du 6 novembre: lesbiennes issues du colonialisme, de l'esclavage et de l'immigration reveals quite a bit about the group's political mandate. The first part refers to its founding date. It is not uncommon in France to use a specific date in names to mark the inauguration of a new politics that is present and simultaneously is yet to come. The group's subtitle (Lesbians Begotten of/Out of Colonialism, Slavery, and Immigration) references a critical relationship to histories, bodies, and political geographies of the postcolonial world. The notion of "begotten of" evokes not only respect for ancestral lands but also the necessity and desire to "re-compose our own herstory" (Nedjmam 2001; translation by Paola Bacchetta).

Historical Emergence

Like many other postcolonial lesbian groups elsewhere, the genealogy of the Groupe du 6 novembre most accurately begins by recognizing that lesbians were among the many other activists in anticolonial movements (Bacchetta 2002). More recently, as France's colonies began to win political independence, lesbians made their way to France as immigrants. The earliest postcolonial immigrants to France were men who entered the labor market at its lowest rungs, in factories. By the 1970s, the French state's patriarchal and heterosexist "family regrouping" laws allowed women to enter in substantial numbers, but also made them legally dependent on male counterparts, thereby imposing conditions of sexism and lesbophobia (Bacchetta 2016).

The first lesbians who organized politically in autonomous women's groups had previous experience in

their national liberation movements or, in the case of Latin Americans, had fought against dictatorships organized and bolstered by US imperialism. An exception to this was the Coordination des Femmes Noires (Black Women's Network), which organized by regional origin. Given this history and France's policy of bilateral migration treaties with individual nations, it is not surprising that from the 1970s onward immigrant women first organized autonomously along country lines. Lesbians were among them.

During the 1980s, lesbians of color were active in the anti-racism, *Beur* (a term that signifies "Arab" in *verlan*, the language developed by youth of Arab origin in the working-class racialized suburbs of French cities, and which is extended to signify people of color), and pro-immigration movements of the day. They did not yet organize autonomously as lesbians but instead tried to impose an intersectional perspective that would include all their struggles. For example, lesbians of color—of Maghrebian and racially mixed backgrounds, primarily—were among the cofounders of Collectif féministe contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme (Feminist Collective against Racism and Anti-Semitism), a coalitional collective created in 1984 at the Maison des Femmes de Paris (Paris Women's Center). Some of the same lesbians, along with at least one in exile from Latin America, co-established the Lesbiennes contre le racisme, l'anti-sémitisme et le fascisme (Lesbian Collective against Racism, Anti-Semitism and Fascism) in 1985 at the Archives Lesbiennes (Lesbian Archives) in Paris. Just slightly prior to the creation of the Groupe du 6 novembre, a short-lived group called Les Nègresses Sapphiques (Saffique Black Women) was formed. Then, in 1999, shortly after the Groupe du 6 novembre's founding, another lesbian of color group, Madivine (a term for "lesbian" in Haitian Creole), was created mainly by Caribbean lesbians (Madivine 2000; Lesbiennes of Color 2016). Also in 2001, a group of Arab lesbians living in their countries or in exile in France created the N'DéeSses. In sum, this was a first crucial period for autonomous lesbian of color organizing.

Outside of the groups, during the 1980s and early 1990s, politicized lesbians of color met informally to discuss their intersectional oppression and their relations with other movements. Some published essays and poetry on lesbianism and racism. Some of these ended up in a book created by the Groupe du 6 novembre, and some are collected, along with the texts produced by the autonomous groups, in the first anthology of writings from lesbian of color activism and creative practices in France.

Activities

The Groupe du 6 novembre held regular meetings, wrote collective and individual texts, organized cultural and

political events, participated in conferences, and spoke on immigrant and alternative radio (Doumia 2001). It published on the following topics: how colonialism, slavery, racism, heterosexism, and lesbophobia operate together; survival; relations to dominant French lesbian, feminist, and anti-racist movements; links with lesbians across the globe; and transnational politics. It created a website to open the conversation among lesbians of color more broadly.

In 2000 the group worked to publish a special issue of a French Canadian lesbian journal. When its work was met with excessive editorial intervention, the group created its own publishing company: Nomades'Langues (Nomadic Languages and Languages Nomads). In 2001 Nomades'Langues published *Warriors/Guerrières*, a bilingual book of theoretical essays, personal narratives, poetry, and art by members and comrades. Arab lesbians in the group produced a special issue (no. 7) of the lesbian Arabic journal *Bint el nas*. Other group members organized a major exhibit in Paris by the black lesbian Italian artist Veruska. In 2001 the Groupe du 6 novembre showed up at the (white) lesbian conference on Monique Wittig in Paris, protesting that they had not been invited to speak. Members spoke out on immigrant and other alternative radio. In 2001 they went to the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, where they expanded their transnational connections with lesbians of color globally. After these years of intensive activities, the group met less often. However, members remained in touch and also stayed in the broader movements in which they had all been involved.

SEE ALSO *Anti-racist Activism in Europe; Comité d'Urgence Anti-répression Homosexuelle (CUARH); Grupo de Trabalho Homossexual and LES; Strange Fruit*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bacchetta, Paola. "Rescaling Transnational 'Queerdom': Lesbian and 'Lesbian' Identitary Positionalities in Delhi in the 1980s." In "Queer Patriarchies, Queer Racisms, International," edited by Heidi J. Nast. Special issue, *Antipode* 34, no. 5 (2002): 947–973.
- Bacchetta, Paola. "Co-formations: Des spatialités de résistance décoloniales chez les lesbiennes 'of color' en France" [Co-formations: On decolonial spatialities of resistance by lesbians "of color" in France]. *Genre, sexualité et société*, no. 1 (2009). doi:10.4000/gss.810.
- Bacchetta, Paola. "QTPOC Critiques of 'Post-Raciality,' Segregationality, Coloniality, and Capitalism in France." In *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions*, edited by Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj, and Silvia Posocco, 264–281. Oxford: Counterpress, 2016.
- Bêtes Noires. "Des lesbiennes blanches rêvent notre silence" [White lesbians dream our silence]. In *Warriors / Guerrières*, edited by Groupe du 6 novembre, 25–30. Paris: Nomades'Langues Editions, 2001.

- Doumia, Nadia. "Le Groupe du 6 novembre: Notre Standing Up!" In *Warriors / Guerrières*, edited by Groupe du 6 novembre, 10–18. Paris: Nomades'Langues Editions, 2001.
- Kaddour, Hanan. 2001. "La continuité de la vision coloniale dans la pensée et analyse de lesbiennes françaises" [The continuity of the colonial vision in the thought and analysis of French lesbians]. In *Warriors / Guerrières*, edited by Groupe du 6 novembre, 33–36. Paris: Nomades'Langues Editions, 2001.
- Lesbiennes of Color (Sabreen, Moruni, and Aria). "Decolonial Activism in White French Feminist Land." In *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives, Critical Interventions*, edited by Sandeep Bakshi, Suhraiya Jivraj, and Silvia Posocco, 141–153. Oxford: Counterpress, 2016.
- Madivine. *Racisme. Sexisme. Homophobie*. Lyon, France: Author, 2000.
- Nedjmam, N. "Terres natales, terres d'exil: À la recherche de nos territoires" [Native land, land of exile: Looking for our territory]. *Bint el nas*, no. 7 (2001). <http://www.bintelnas.org/07nativexile/introf.html>

Grupo de Trabalho Homossexual and LES

ANTÓNIO FERNANDO CASCAIS

Assistant Professor, School of Social and Human Sciences,
Department of Communication Sciences
New University of Lisbon, Portugal

Two prominent LGBTQ advocacy organizations in Portugal.

The Grupo de Trabalho Homossexual (GTH; Homosexual Working Group) and LES—Grupo de Discussão sobre Questões Lésbicas (LES—Discussion Group on Lesbian Issues) were two associations that, in spite of a considerable time gap between their beginnings—1991 and 2008, respectively—were both intended to fill voids in the LGBTQ movement in Portugal. The former was created to address the pure and simple nonexistence of a LGBTQ movement in Portugal, while the latter intended to fill the absence of a proper discussion of lesbian matters in the already existent organizations, as well as in the public sphere at large. Although working separately, the two groups each sought to respond to the ongoing presence of homophobia in Portugal.

Homosexual Working Group

The GTH was created in May 1991 as a section of the Partido Socialista Revolucionário (PSR; Socialist Revolutionary Party), a small, Far Left Trotskyist organization