

1970-2000

“My body, my choice!”: Major battles

It is indeed an effervescent period that emerges in the 1970s. These years give form to a new golden age of feminisms, intertwined with battles for equality: struggles against imperialism and racism, fights against discrimination, support for revolutions. Women take to the streets to snatch new rights, in particular the right to own their body and to claim it loud and clear: “My body, my choice!” The wave is huge thanks to international solidarities and connections, now bearing a new name: sisterhood. Contraception and abortion are at the core of the risky demonstrations in which subversion takes place. The Women’s Liberation Movement initiates unprecedented actions, some of which are purposefully reserved to women only. The topics are serious: violence against women, exploitative working conditions and wage inequalities. But this still leaves room for casual laughs and bursts of happiness. Such a taste for partying sets patriarchy’s teeth on edge. It is time for the rising of demands, sometimes provocative, always with original actions and ideas. Taking to the streets and public spaces induces independence of action, between hope and rage: “Don’t free us, we’ll free ourselves!”. These commitments pay off and sometimes result in laws, such as the crucial Veil Act, which recognises the progress of rights.

For abortion rights and contraception

In secret, clandestine abortions are performed, with tact and sorority, now thanks to the “*Mouvement pour la liberté de l’avortement et de la contraception (MLAC)*”: Movement for abortion and contraception rights. In the streets, women demand for abortion to be legalised. On the banners, their words call for free and reimbursed birth control as well as abortion, including for minors and immigrants. The activists claim it at the top of their lungs in demonstrations: abortion is not a crime, it is a right. Hence: “One doesn’t beg for a fair right, one fights for it.”

Stagings, humour and parties

Feminists organise parties, set unique initiatives up, display humour and happiness: they are ready. Ready to break the stranglehold, to mock, to provoke, to break with convention, to smash the ready-to-wear norms, to unleash and unchain novelty, to take to and occupy the streets. Ready to innovate as well, by sometimes choosing a “women-only” approach: in order to experience the joy of being together and gathering, the enthusiasm of different times when fighting is important and so is singing, hugging and running in the freed streets.

International solidarity

Internationalism is the long-standing matrix of feminisms, reinforced by mutual assistance. In the 1970s, this internationalist outlook is, more than ever, a guiding principle. Feminist solidarity comes forward during dictatorships such as Salazarism and Francoism. It supports the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, mothers who desperately want to know what their missing sons have become. It also supports the women in Chile after the coup d'état of 1973.

The Rouen trial

On 6 October 1979, thousands of women demonstrate in Paris for the right of abortion.

Among them, over 300 are from Rouen.

But they are not satisfied with the report published in *L'Humanité*, and ask to meet its director, Roland Leroy. However, they are met by a heavy-handed security force. They are insulted and one of them is left injured.

This leads to a trial that also reflects the tensions between feminist movements and part of the left. Communist activists testify alongside the plaintiff, expressing all at once solidarity and sisterhood.