

INTRODUCTION

The problem is not so much homosexual desire as the fear of homosexuality: why does the mere mention of the word trigger off reactions of hate? We must therefore question how the heterosexual world conceives and fantasizes about “homosexuality.”

—Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 1972

According to widespread opinion, homosexuality is more liberated today than it has ever been: it is present and visible everywhere, in the streets, in the newspapers, on televisions, in the movies. It is even completely accepted, as witnessed by recent legislative advances in North America and Europe regarding the recognition of same-sex couples (Vermont, Quebec, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, France, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Switzerland, England, etc.). Certainly, further adjustments remain necessary in order to eradicate sexuality-based discrimination, once and for all, but it would be nothing more than a simple question of time: time to bring to its conclusion a grassroots movement launched many decades ago.

But then again, perhaps not. Truth be told, the twentieth century was, without a doubt, the most violently homophobic period in history: deportations to concentration camps under the Nazi regime, gulags in the Soviet Union, and blackmail and persecution in the United States during the Joseph McCarthy anti-communist era. For some, particularly in the western world, much of this seems very much part of the past. But quite often, living conditions for gays, lesbians, and transgenders in today’s world remain very difficult. Homosexuality seems to be discriminated against everywhere: in at least seventy nations, homosexual acts are still illegal (e.g., Algeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Senegal) and in a good many of these, punishment can last more than ten years (India, Jamaica, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Syria). Sometimes the law dictates life imprisonment (Guyana and Uganda), and, in a dozen or so nations, the death penalty may be applied (Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan). In Africa, many nations’ leaders have brutally reaffirmed their will to personally fight against the “scourge,” which is, according to them, “anti-African.” Even in countries where homosexuality is not illegal, or explicitly named in the penal code, persecution is on the rise. In Brazil, for example, death squads and skin-heads spread terror: 1,900 homophobic murders have

been officially reported during the last twenty years, without having prompted any real action from either police or legal authorities. In such conditions, it is difficult to imagine that the world’s “tolerance” of gays, lesbians, and transgenders has gained much ground, if at all. On the contrary, in the majority of these nations, homophobia appears to be more violent than ever.

This brief overview of the situation seems even more sinister as it belies the naïve impression of those who would believe that the overall acceptance of gays and lesbians in society is growing. But in reality, pessimism and blind optimism constitute two symmetric pitfalls for both thought and action, inasmuch as both of these attitudes rest upon completely illusory presuppositions: one, that homophobia has and always will exist, and is a constant in human society; the other, that homophobia is generally a thing of the past. In reality, homophobia as it exists today is neither a transhistorical inevitability, impossible to fight, nor an historical residue destined to disappear by itself over time. It constitutes a problem of humanity, serious and complex and with many ramifications.

But what exactly is homophobia? Apparently, the term was first used in the 1960s, but it is credited to Kenneth Smith, author of a 1971 article entitled “Homophobia: A Tentative Personality Profile.” Although the word appeared later in other languages—particularly in French through the writing of Claude Courouve in the 1970s—it did not appear in dictionaries until 1994. It is, therefore, a recent term with a relatively rich history.

Over time, the word’s semantic spectrum has consistently broadened. In 1972, psychotherapist George Weinberg defined homophobia as “the fear of being in a closed space with a homosexual.” This very narrow definition quickly overflowed into common usage, as witnessed by the standard definition found in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*: “An extreme and irrational aversion to homosexuality and homosexuals.” Didier Eribon proposed to extend the notion by introducing the idea of a homophobic continuum “which goes from those words shouted on the street, which every gay or lesbian has heard, ‘fuckin’ fag’ or ‘fuckin’ dyke,’ to those words that are implicitly written on the archway of the city hall wedding hall: *Homosexuals Not Admitted*.” From this perspective, the notion fully integrated into everyday homophobia the theoretic dialogue of judicial, psychoanalytical, or anthropological allegiance, thereby seeking to confirm or justify the

established inequality between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Pushing the limits of analysis, Daniel Welzer-Lang suggested a new definition. For him, homophobia “is, in a greater sense, the disparagement of those said feminine qualities in men and, to a certain extent, those said masculine qualities in women.” As such, he sought to link “specific homophobia, which is practiced against gays and lesbians, and generalized homophobia, which takes root in the construction of the hierarchical organization of gender.” The phenomenon can affect any individual, which explains why the insult “fag” can be applied to those who are clearly heterosexual, in the sense that, beyond sexual orientation, it condemns a deficiency in the “perfect” virility that society expects and demands in men.

Evidently, the notion of homophobia has progressively broadened as research has allowed us to understand that acts, words, and attitudes that are clearly perceived as homophobic are nothing more than the by-product of a more general cultural construction representative of violence throughout society as a whole. As a result, the semantic extension of the word has obeyed a metonymic logic that has permitted the linking of the act of homophobia to its ideological and institutional foundations, which are also denounced under this term.

However, parallel to this semantic broadening, there has been an inverse movement of lexical differentiation operating at the heart of the concept of homophobia. Because of the specificity of attitudes towards lesbianism, the term “lesbophobia” has been introduced into theoretic discourses, a term which brings to light particular mechanisms that the generic concept of homophobia tends to overshadow. With one stroke, this distinction justifies the term “gayphobia,” since much homophobic discourse, in reality, pertains only to male homosexuality. Similarly, the concept of “biphobia” has also been proposed in order to highlight the singular situation of bisexuals, often stigmatized by both heterosexual and homosexual communities. Moreover, we need to take into consideration the very different issues linked to transsexual, transvestite, and transgendered persons, which brings to mind the notion of “transphobia.”

Another distinction has been proposed in order to clarify the political uses of the notion of homophobia. According to sociologist Eric Fassin,

The actual use hesitates between two very different definitions. The first emphasizes the phobia in homophobia: it is the rejection of homosexuals and of homosexuality. We are at the level of an individual psychology. The second sees a certain heterosexism in homophobia. It is the inequality between sexualities. The hierarchy between heterosexuality and homosexuality returns us to the collective level of ideology.

To this, he adds, “perhaps in this case, using the distinction between misogyny and sexism as an example, it would be clearer to distinguish between ‘homophobia’ and ‘heterosexism’ in order to avoid the confusion between the psychological and ideological meanings. That, for my part, is what I propose and practice.” In these terms, regarding subjects such as same-sex marriage or adoption rights, those who do not believe themselves to be the slightest bit homophobic, while refusing equal rights to others in the name of some religious, moral, anthropological, or psychoanalytical privilege reserved for heterosexuals, will have to at least recognize that this is, technically speaking, a heterosexist attitude; such a recognition could constitute a first step.

That being the case, these semantic evolutions, extensions, or distinctions enrich, albeit considerably complicate, the debate. And the political stakes are quite real, since more and more citizens, associations, and politicians have become conscious, notably in France during the battle for PaCS (Pacte civil de solidarité; Civil solidarity pact), of the necessity to resist and even penalize homophobia in the same manner as racism or anti-Semitism. In effect, after the passing of homosexuality from the criminal law code to the civil law code, homophobia could, contrarily, pass from civil society, where it still remains, to criminal law, where it is not yet contained. Shifting the focus from homosexuality to homophobia constitutes, as correctly noted by Daniel Borrillo, “a change that is not only epistemological, but political as well.” But for the time being, in the fight against homophobia much remains to be done.

In order to fight homophobia, it is necessary to determine its real causes. Homophobia’s deep origin is, without a doubt, to be found in heterosexism, that compulsory rule of heterosexuality that feminist writer and poet Adrienne Rich criticized. This regime tends to construe heterosexuality as the only legitimate

sexual experience possible, or even thinkable, which explains why so many people go through life without ever having considered the homosexual reality. Better than a norm—which would require explication—heterosexuality becomes, for those it has conditioned, the *non thought* of their particular psychic makeup and the apriorism of all human sexuality in general. Far from being self-evident, this transparency of self, which is a forced exclusion of the other, constitutes one of the fundamentals of social learning. In its rigidity, it ends up as, and not only for heterosexuals, a model by which to perceive the world, individuals, and gender. In these conditions, it becomes difficult to imagine not only homosexuality, whose simple existence risks shaking the foundations of universal beliefs, and consequently values, but also heterosexuality, which, being the usual point of view on the world, is nonetheless that point of view's blind spot.

In fact, by not evaluating all the horror that homosexuality can represent, we expose ourselves to not understanding homophobia—as much as we *can* understand it—in its more radical form. The general and convulsive feeling of hatred that Copernicus aroused when he dared knock the Earth off its epistemological pedestal might give us an approximate idea. The concept of heterocentrism, fashioned after geocentrism, may be described as a world view circling a self-proclaimed center of reference, in this case heterosexuality. From this perspective, other sexualities may not be anything other than strange galaxies, obscure nebulae, or, at the very least, extraterrestrial life forms. Whether the earth was, or was not, at the center of the universe changed very little in everyday life; however, the necessity to objectively rethink God's order, which was in fact Man's order, aroused a veritable subjective fury whose reasoning went beyond strict religious belief, which was fundamentally never put into question by the theories of either Copernicus or Galileo.

Thus, for those individuals who are strongly conditioned by heterosexism, the simple existence of homosexuals—who, objectively speaking, pose no threat—subjectively constitutes a threat against a valued psychological construct built on exclusion. This allows us to understand how fear—and even more the resulting hate—can lead to the most brutal violence. Clearly, this fear could never constitute mitigating circumstances, even less justification, for homophobic murders. And when claims are made in American courts, sometimes successfully, by individuals who go to cruising areas,

baseball bats in hand to “bash some queers,” the notion of *sex panic* appears to be the height of dishonesty and cynical cruelty. Nonetheless, it is the deep origin of extreme reactions, linked to heterosexist conditioning, that dictates the male identity as based on the more or less “gentle” control of women and the more or less harsh repression of homosexuality.

For theories—be they theological, moral, legal, medical, biological, psychoanalytical, anthropological, et cetera—are never more than concocted reasons to justify, after the fact, obviously unjustifiable personal convictions aligned with the status quo. Thus, during the fight for PaCS, arguments based on theology and religious morality were not well received, so the Catholic Church did not hesitate to resort to more fashionable psychoanalysis, whose theories the Church had not so long ago condemned as being obscene and permissive. Similarly, it is generally useless to explain to those who see homosexuality as a type of defect or pathology that their beliefs have long been invalidated by medical science itself. Far from being the cause of their homophobia, the obsolete medical argument is nothing more than the occasional manifestation of homophobia and, at most, its confirmation. Thus, belief can both precede and obstinately survive the theories upon which it is seemingly based, theories that were, in fact, nothing more than a contextual formulation and justification.

Truth be told, the theories themselves matter very little; they are often interchangeable. The divine, natural, moral, public, symbolic, or anthropological orders are nothing but the decline of the one and the same concept, though diversely constructed, invoked to legitimize a condition that is profoundly inegalitarian. We must use all means necessary to change this. From all evidence, the theories or arguments set forth are nothing more than a conjectural means set in motion by generic homophobia, whose conscious origin must be sought deep within this thought, or rather this heterosexist non thought, which contains the stigmatization of all homosexuals. However, this respectable heterosexism does not always lead, thankfully, to murderous violence. Therefore, it remains to be understood why homophobia arises or resurfaces more violently during certain periods, areas, and conditions.

Beyond everyday manifestations, it seems that large waves of homophobia generally obey opportunist motivations and history is rife with lessons. In the first years of the communist revolution, homosexuality

was relatively “tolerated.” In the Soviet Union, after the abolition of the penal code of 1832, the crime of sodomy was not reintroduced in the codes of 1922 or 1926. And in its first edition in 1930, the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* asserted quite clearly that homosexuality was neither a crime nor a sickness. Likewise, in Cuba, at the beginning of the New Revolution, homosexuals enjoyed a short-lived yet real liberty, as witnessed by writer Reinaldo Arenas, however, the instant political difficulties appeared, they were systematically hunted and locked away in camps. Similarly in the USSR, the difficulties in the regime and the ascension of Stalin contributed to a hardening of living conditions. Homosexuality was once again penalized in 1933, soon became a crime against the state, a sign of bourgeois decadence, and, even worse, a fascist perversion to be harshly condemned. But, as Daniel Borrillo notes, “by a sad irony of history, at the same time, Nazi Germany put into place a plan to persecute and exterminate homosexuals by putting them in the same category as communists.”

These examples clearly show that heterosexism’s latent and inherent homophobia can suddenly be reawakened by a serious crisis that justifies the search for a scapegoat. Accused of all evils, homosexuality can become sufficient reason for purges perceived as necessary. That is why, depending on the historical moment considered, it is adjusted to each particular situation and projected upon an adversary who is to be stigmatized or eliminated. Thus, likened to Bulgarian heresy during the Middle Ages, sodomy was regularly used as the main charge in the fight against religious “deviancy,” such as the charge against the Knights Templar. Similarly, during the French Religious Wars, homosexuality became a Catholic vice according to the Huguenots, and a Huguenot vice according to the Catholics. During the same period, it was ascribed to Italian morals, in the sense that the French Court seemed to be submerged by Italian culture; then to English morals, when the British Empire was at its pinnacle; to German morals, at the time when the Franco-German rivalry was at its peak; to Jewish cosmopolitanism, whose alleged aims were so worrisome to the nation; to American communitarianism, whose principles threatened, we are told, the French Republic. While a bourgeois vice to the proletariat of the nineteenth century, it was considered by the bourgeois to be a phenomenon of the immoral working classes, or of the necessarily decadent aristocracy. In

the Near East, India, China, or Japan, it is perceived as a Western practice; in Black Africa, it is, of course, a white phenomenon.

In short, homosexuality constitutes a symbolic protean component, typically characteristic of an adversary or enemy, be it a rival nation, a particular social group, or an individual on the street. It is the simplest and most certain means to disqualify another, and it is why it finds such a favorable ground in areas where social, religious, racist, xenophobic, or anti-Semitic hate is already deeply rooted. It is the strange common denominator of various resentments that rally around the same cause. That is, in a heterosexist culture, crises and difficult circumstances favor the formation of homophobic sentiments and practices, which offer an opportunity for any “charismatic” leader in search of popular support. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that homosexuality is so often the designated target for regimes who, at least in appearance, are not only dissimilar, but in polar opposition. As soon as any cloud darkens the sky, the mobilization of homophobic discourse is a useful method to divert attention from real problems, while guaranteeing support of the moralists. And often, that which was nothing more than an opportunistic pretext becomes an end in itself, justified by sentiments most acceptable to the public. It is the end making a virtue out of necessity.

However, it remains necessary to examine the numerous methods used by homophobia. It is not so much a question of putting together a *catalogue raisonné*—a grim and fastidious task—as it is of analyzing its complex workings. Methods are often ambiguous and it is difficult to classify these diverse forms of violence, be they formal, i.e. practiced under government authority (death penalty, forced labor, whipping, chemical or physical castration, clitoridectomy, incarceration, internment), or informal (terrorism, assassination, punitive rape, beating, physical or verbal assault, harassment). Moreover, this distinction itself is subject to caution in the sense that, in certain countries, informal violence benefits largely from the approval—if not the outright complicity—of authorities who are supposed to condemn it. And even where homosexual practices are not penalized, legal detours may be used in order to incriminate these practices with other charges, as fantastic as they may appear to be: unlawful meeting, conspiracy, blasphemy, mutual assault and battery, even if it occurs in a private home. Since the roles played by authorities are rather ambiguous, the line between formal

and informal violence is often difficult to trace.

Beyond this more or less state-sanctioned homophobia, the more widespread social homophobia is practiced everywhere: in families, school, army, workplace, politics, media, sport, prison, et cetera. These types of physical violence or moral coercion are often less understood, and those who suffer from them—sometimes simultaneously—often refuse to denounce them. The fear of having their homosexuality revealed and the fear of reprisals—especially when these acts are committed within a group setting, barracks, or team—compels to silence those victims who are the most vulnerable.

But it is in the symbolic order that everyday homophobia is best practiced. Beyond even the acts, attitudes, and discourses that are clearly homophobic, society's framework constitutes a structure in which daily violence is, doubtless, difficult to imagine for those whose experience is organized in accordance with that framework. As Eribon notes, no matter how racist the area in which he is born, a black child has every chance to grow up in a family that will allow him to construct his identity with a sense of relative legitimacy. However, in heterosexual families in which the majority of gay youth grow up, the developing consciousness of their desire constitutes, generally, a trial that is even more difficult in the fact that it must remain secret. The shame, the solitude, the despair of never being loved, the pure panic of one day being discovered locks away the spirit in a sort of interior prison that pushes the individual to sometimes overestimate the negative attitudes expressed by his or her social circle. Thus, we see tearful parents who are incapable of comprehending their gay child's suicide; of course they would have accepted his or her difference; moreover, they had never said anything against homosexuality. The problem is that they had never said anything in its favor, either. They cannot understand, but the general silence surrounding this taboo subject, the absence of images and dialogue were, for their son, for their daughter, the strongest condemnation.

It is in these extreme cases, more numerous than we would want to believe, that homophobia's symbolic violence is best measured; it does not need to be expressed to be committed. Silence is its home. Cursing and condemnations are often useless. Parents, friends, neighbors, television shows, films, children's books, and magazines, all repeatedly celebrate the heterosexual couple. As they grow up all children understand, said or unsaid, consciously or unconsciously, that the

alternative is impossible—homosexuality is outside of language, if it isn't against the law. It remains only in the basest of insults, "fag," "cocksucker," and other charming words, whose homophobic charge isn't even understood by those who use them, thereby relegating male homosexuality to the level of ignominy and female homosexuality to being beyond thought.

Consequently, even in silence, this symbolic violence imposes itself upon the minds of its victims. Far from arousing their revolt, it often succeeds in ensuring their collaboration in exchange for some eventual tolerance. As Erving Goffman so rightly explained, "We ask, therefore, the stigmatized to show some manners and not take too much advantage of their luck. It is unacceptable for them to test the limits of the acceptance they've been given, nor that they take advantage of it for new demands. Tolerance is almost always part of the bargain." Thus, the more a homosexual gives proof of proper conduct, the more a homosexual believes that he or she will receive acceptance by others. This type of condescending homophobia with its liberal, tolerant façade encourages gays and lesbians to multiply the pretences and honorable lies that, even when they deceive no one, appear to be the prerequisites for an always precarious recognition, whose limitations always surprise those who so naively believed in a definitive "integration."

This logic of social acceptance at any cost drives those who submit to it to adopt, in their position of being dominated, the dominant point of view, which is a source of immeasurable heartbreak and psychological disorder. It creates within them a sense of internalized homophobia, a veritable self-loathing, which may be the cause of the greatest violence. The necessity to prove their perfect "normalcy" pushes certain individuals to assault or persecute those whom they perceive as homosexuals. Of this, contemporary history has offered a blatant example. It is unknown to many that the American "witch hunts" were largely aimed at homosexuals. But it is also believed that one of the primary players, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, was gay or bisexual and the purpose of his homophobic, patriotic, and strong-armed internal policies was to prove, especially to himself, his infallible virility. This mental disposition—a profound split between a desire for the other and the denial of self—may also lead to rape. Frequently in non-mixed environments, such as prisons, barracks, or boarding schools, where masculinity is exacerbated, the practice of rape—to the degree

that it teaches a lesson to a victim who is perceived as less “virile”—offers a double advantage of satisfying a secretly homosexual libido while proving to others an incontestable sexual power that is, in this paradoxical logic, completely heterosexual.

Nonetheless, this internalized homophobia, whose violence is vented against other homosexuals or, more often, against the subject himself, is without a doubt one of the most appalling aspects of the symbolic order, since it acts without having been seen to do so. The shame that it arouses and fuels exempts it from visibility—so much so that many reasonable people do not believe that homophobia actually exists and suspect, rather, that those who complain about it suffer from some form of paranoia. By refusing to see precisely this characteristic of symbolic violence—that it can be committed without any apparent constraints—they become the allies of a system which they refuse to recognize. In this way, the relentless machine that is homophobia of the symbolic order, anonymous and collective, seems particularly formidable: those who submit to it, by internalizing its principles, contribute implicitly to its legitimization; those who denounce it, by questioning its violence, discredit themselves, especially since they appear, like Don Quixote, to be tilting at windmills.

That being the case, the fight against homophobia, whose causes are profound and whose methods so effective, appears to be a difficult venture. Inasmuch as laws that condemn or discriminate against homosexuality are the effect rather than the cause of rampant homophobia, the simple act of abolishing them appears to be a necessary, if not sufficient, measure. It would be necessary to go further in order to create the conditions that would permit a true evolution of thought. However, minds cannot be so easily changed, and the necessary work requires time, energy, and clear-headedness.

To contribute to this long-term project, it is useful to compile a summary as overview of the problematics associated with homophobia. In order to do that, it seems appropriate to revive the tradition of critical dictionaries of the Age of Enlightenment: long ago, philosophers Bayle, Diderot, d’Alembert, and Voltaire resorted to this format in order to fight prejudice and other forms of intolerance.

The dictionary format offers entries on every aspect of the subject matter. They are independent, detachable, reusable elements able to feed new development.

Clearly displaying both a scientific and political vocation, this dictionary of homophobia is, as a result, a work of knowledge and of battle.

The articles here, presented in the alphabetical order expected of any dictionary, can nonetheless be divided into five categories whose titles made up the generative principles for the definition of the various entries. Firstly, consideration was given to the theories that may have been used to justify homophobic acts, attitudes, or discourses—from theology to psychoanalysis by way of medicine, biology, or anthropology. Historical agents of homophobia, such as Joseph McCarthy and Anita Bryant, for example, were also included, as were the historical victims of homophobia, such as Radclyffe Hall or Oscar Wilde. Next, many articles focus on different countries (France, Germany, India, China, etc.) or regions (Maghreb or Central and Eastern Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Latin America, etc.) creating a panorama which, without being exhaustive, allows us to think about homophobia geographically and historically. Another group of articles concerns environments and institutions, such as family, school, the armed forces, or workplace, where social homophobia engenders very specific practices and thought that are of interest to study. And finally, the everyday themes of homophobic rhetoric—such as debauchery, sterility, proselytism, and AIDS—have also justified a group of articles.

In total, more than seventy people from over fifteen countries have worked on this book. It has many voices, not only for the sake of plurality, but also, and fundamentally, because homophobia is a collective violence. When it targets one individual, it always targets him as a supposed element of a group that it seeks to stigmatize. Consequently, faced with this collective violence, it is necessary to respond collectively. For all that, gathering these articles in one book does not suppose a unified thought; but if there is a lesson to be had, it can be none other than the need to fight against homophobia is essential.

Beyond this, the subject’s complexity and diversity do not permit us to draw any general conclusions. Furthermore, homophobia does not always present the same face. Indeed, it may seem problematic to use the term for cultures in which the concept of homosexuality does not exist *per se*. But in truth, it is not necessary to conceive of the existence of a social and sexual system, such as ours, in order to use the notion of homophobia. Whether homosexuality exists or not

as a category in different societies, homophobia may be thought of as a tool for analysis and can be defined as the totality of physical, mental, or symbolic violence targeting sexual relations between persons of the same gender, regardless of the significance given to these relations. Each entry is composed by authors who, conscious of the term's limits, attempt to highlight different details, while avoiding the dangers of anachronism or ethnocentrism.

However, though the authors worked alone, it is clear that the various articles blend with, complete, and respond to one other, inviting the reader to explore according to his or her whim. And in order to simplify the book's use, keywords have been listed at the end of each article. Furthermore, the bolded words indicate words that have their own specific entry. These comments are sufficient operating instructions for any book whose goal is to clarify, in the general sense, an issue whose topicality reveals its crucial importance. Also, this dictionary should be considered a synthesis rather than a whole. It will seem incomplete to those who wish to go further into one aspect or another. For them, the bibliographical entries will suggest some additional avenues to explore. For all others, it will without a doubt constitute a true basis of reflection and, possibly, action.

—Louis-Georges Tin
2003

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