LESBIAN MOVEMENTS: RUPTURES & ALLIANCES

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Lesbians have always been present in various civil society movements, with gay men’s organizations, in feminist groups, as well as in the artistic sphere and in the fight for decolonization and independence of their country. In recent decades lesbians have been present in the fight for equal rights for women of colour, aborigen women, and more broadly with feminist movements.

ILGA’s publication on lesbian movements is a collection of experiences from individuals worldwide involved in lesbian movements, civil society and human rights organizations. Credit was given to those lesbians in many parts of the world who have led the way and those who are actively involved in fighting for the wellbeing and recognition of their rights.

Sharing experiences and knowledge is a way to develop skills and being aware of those achievements is the first step towards empowerment and pride. The report has a positive imprint and is aimed at strengthening the future of the lesbian movement rather than lingering on victimization.

Some of the positive examples illustrate that “history can be changed” and that some lesbian groups have managed to mainstream their concerns with those of other movements.

With the World Women’s March taking place from March till October 2010, I have selected an excerpt of an interview of Diane Matte, Canada, where she explains how lesbians has been involved in the development of this international initiative.

“During the first international meeting, that took place in Montreal in 1998 and gathered women from sixty-five countries or territories, lesbian demands caused a heated debate. Some groups felt they would not be able to mobilize partners in their countries if such demands were enshrined in the platform. Others were taken aback when faced with the fact that lesbians were not recognized by women groups in all countries. We, therefore, accepted that lesbian demands should be submitted to a distinct adoption process. We, indeed, deemed it more important to launch the networking exercise and implement the action against poverty and violence against women that were scheduled to take place in 2000. We agreed to educate our members and to set up a working committee that would be in charge of drafting an explanatory document that was then to be sent to all participating groups. Some 3,500 women groups scattered around eighty countries received the document.

In reaching this compromise, we wanted to give the opportunity to countries in which that issue had not been raised before, or seemed very detached from the day-to-day reality, to learn about and be in contact with lesbians. All through the March, that option created some tensions:
some countries refused to deal with the topic at home, while others seized the opportunity to disseminate information about the realities of lesbians and do away with the myth that lesbianism is only a Western phenomenon."

And I would like to continue with an excerpt of Toni Kasim speech, that proves that there are many ways to interpret feminism and lesbianism.

“Our strategy at Sisters of Islam is to take away the power (of the monopoly of interpretation) and of saying 'Islam says'. It is often branded about that 'Islam says this' and 'Islam says that'. Islam does not say anything though. There is human intervention at every point. (…) 

It is important that (interpretation of texts) is divorced neither from the human rights discourse nor from the democratization discourse. It cannot be divorced from the feminist movement, and we noticed it was a very crucial source of strength and power for ourselves. That discourse is not isolated from global politics either.

Besides, we need to look at how we work with cross-movements as well. It is not sufficient to talk about LGBTIQ movements. It is more useful to have a broader platform onto which more people can come. For instance, faith-based groups, secular-based groups, LGBTIQ groups, feminist groups, overall human rights groups interface through this. Of course, grasping the local and cross-border contexts as well and looking at how we can mutually support each other is paramount.”

The above two texts are an indication of the diversity and complexity of lesbians’ movements and being feminist can take different forms according to where you are coming from, your country of origin and your own experience.

For sure “Lesbians are everywhere” and we can be very proud of it.

The publication “Lesbian Movements: Ruptures & Alliances” is available in pdf version and read only version on ILGA’s website.

View the publication