

Bridging Gaps, Marking a Struggle: The History of the Filipina Lesbian Struggle in the Philippines*

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The author attempts to recover the lost history of the two-decade-old lesbian struggle in the Philippines, to mark it in the larger historical map, and to explain its location within the various socio-political arenas. The problem is lesbian invisibility. Enforced heterosexuality, an institution imposed by the patriarchy, and violence committed against lesbians have forced them to keep their struggle invisible. Even with lesbian voices in the women's movement and the national democratic movement, the lesbian issue is not widely discussed. Women's issues are discussed along the lines of heterosexual concerns in relation to socio-economic conditions, with lesbian concerns only peripheral. While feminism poses itself as a women-oriented cause, it imposes certain heterosexual patterns that relegate lesbians to a dark corner. Lesbians also find themselves the humorless counterparts of the usually flamboyant male homosexual. In 1992, the movement achieved a breakthrough with the formation of the The Lesbian Collective (TLC) in Manila and its participation in the Women's March. Breakthroughs followed in Baguio and Davao, and the idea that lesbians can band together to form a comprehensive collective nationwide slowly took shape. In 1996, the First National Lesbian Rights Conference (FNLR) was held. Now less invisible, the lesbian movement appears to be moving at a slow pace because the more active and outspoken bourgeois leadership has very little or no inclination for grassroots organizing. Until it creates a mass base, the lesbian struggle will not transform into a movement.

The Beginnings of a Journey: Remembering a Lost Past

They published your diary, that's how I got to know you
key to the rooms of your own and a mind without end
here's a young girl, in a kind of a telephone line through time
and the voice at the other end comes like a long lost friend...¹

- from the song "Virginia Woolf" by Indigo Girls

Just like a "telephone line through time and the voice at the other end comes like a long lost friend." These words play in my head over and over like an auto-reverse tape on deck. Ultimately, it was the drive to bridge gaps that brought me to this study. It was the desire to unravel that compelled me to write this. It was the desire and the last attempt to wait out and reclaim a past that was so violently taken from our hands.

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Somewhere along the way we allowed this past to slip away from us, so that, now, today, when we look in the mirror, we recall nothing that brought us here. Now, here, in front of the mirror, we could not re-trace the steps that we took that made us this way. All we are left with is this presence that we try so hard to crush away from our skin because we don't recall any of this before. And we are left to think that we are alone in this process. That we have no past, that we have no memory, that we have no history.²

I am very young in this community, the lesbian community, and I admit that there were things I was not able to experience, especially in the beginnings of our struggle in this country. Somehow, this aspect of lesbian activism was taken for granted along the way. Somehow, it was no longer important for some lesbian feminists today to look back at the things that our foremothers accomplished, or even the reasons why we are here in the first place. I feel that there is a great need to write our past, and this is why almost all my life as a lesbian activist, I have been looking for that chance to trace the history of lesbian struggle in the country. To take an initiative to know and learn about the things that I had no chance to experience when I entered the community. I feel that it is time that I pick up the phone and dial the numbers that would give me a chance to take a look at things that happened in and with our community in the past. And maybe, just maybe, I could even write in here a fragment of that long lost past. There is a lot of catching up to do... and so, I write this.

The Filipino lesbian struggle and community have been in existence for almost a decade now, and yet, there is not enough comprehensive written history on where, when and how we started as an activist community. For us younger feminist and lesbian advocates, there has always been a feeling of dislocation from our origins. I have heard declarations and statements that the lesbian struggle came from the women's movement in the country, but there is still a great lack of understanding of what the relationship between the lesbian and women's struggle is all about. There is rapture somewhere between the birth and the present state of the struggle, and I think this rapture remains to be one of the reasons why our progress is still moving at a very slow pace today. This miscommunication or should I say, dislocation from our origins remains one of the major reasons why the lesbian struggle at present is still a struggle and not a movement. It is one of the reasons why the struggle is disorganized in many ways: I am projecting this paper

to be the primary answer to, (1) The problem of lesbian invisibility in Philippine History, and (2) The problem of the present lesbian struggle's dislocation from its roots.

For this paper, it is my intention to (1) trace the history of the Filipino lesbian struggle and try to re-tell its story, (2) lay bare the reasons for this seeming dislocation from our origins that most young, lesbian-feminists experience at present, (3) bridge this gap that occurs between the present lesbian struggle and its origins from the women's and people's struggle back in the 1980s, and, (4) locate lesbian art history within the history of the lesbian struggle and community in the country.

Scope, Methodology and Limitations.

Before this study, fragments and bits, and pieces of events and people mark the lesbian struggle in our country. There was no attempt to write a comprehensive story of our origins and our struggles as a community. Even in many scholarly papers, the emphasis or the information told about the history of Filipino lesbianism is written in very vague phrases, or if not, a declaration that there was no origin of lesbianism in the country, for example:

Walang nakitang dokumentong nakasulat kung kailan nag-umpisang pumasok ang lesbianismo sa Pilipinas. May umiral na same-sex behavior sa lipunan ngunit walang nakatala kung sino ang kauna-unahang Filipinoang tomboy. Kinokonsidera sa papel na ito ang taong 1993 bilang umpisa ng pahirat kang lesbiana dahil sa taong ito unang nailimbag ang isang koleksiyon ng mga kuwentong lesbiana ng isang manunulat na lesbianang Filipino.⁸

(There was no written document of how and when lesbianism started in the Philippines. There were various same-sex behavior and practices however, but there was no record of whoever was the first Filipina lesbian. For this paper, it is considered that 1993 marked the beginning of lesbian literature because it was during this year when the first collection of lesbian writings by self-identified Filipina lesbians was published.)

Up to the present, such vagueness about the history of the Filipina lesbian struggle, including advocacy through literature still characterizes

lesbian scholarly writings. This study is an attempt to put an end to this vagueness, and retell our story in a more comprehensive manner. However, I do not particularly declare this study to be the most complete written history of our sector because of the following limitations:

1. I am limited to confine my study within the periphery of the visible. This is to say that the lesbian struggle that I am talking about here does not include the struggles of Filipina (lesbians) who consciously defied heterosexual norms in the Philippine society (although that would be another point of study). For this particular study I will only examine and write the history of lesbian activism covering the period when feminism already came to us, when the modern concept of lesbianism and homosexuality already came to us, and when, consciousness about lesbian identity was already being discussed.

2. There were very few articles written about the development of the lesbian struggle in the country. Because of this, it became very hard for me to even start the research, as I was faced with an overwhelming uncertainty on where and when I would begin looking for our roots as a community. I had to rely on interviews with the people who were there from the start of the struggle, and the people who are most active at present. But even this posed a problem for me because the people operating in our community work in such secrecy, lesbian ethics as we call it, that most information were given in very vague terms, causing nuances in accounts from each of my sources.

3. The information given by my sources were not all complete because of the secrecy that I mentioned above. This secrecy, or lesbian ethics, is an unwritten agreement in the community that we protect each other's welfare through careful respect for the privacy of each and every one of us. Thus, preventing the disclosure of certain names, places, and time frames in the course of my research. "Outing"⁴ is a very delicate process for lesbians because of the possible sanctions awaiting us if we identify ourselves as lesbians in the society. For example, in the course of my conversations with my sources, it was very rare that I heard names and places dropped. This is because some of the lesbians that we talked about were women in the so-called high society, and revealing them as lesbians would jeopardize their political and economic power in the society. We have to understand that the issue of lesbianism is a very delicate matter, and we as lesbians are faced with real dangers of

harassment, social castration, even to the point of physical violence, just because of being lesbians, and so, "outing" is such a dangerous act.

4. To re-create the story of a sector that has been deemed invisible almost all its time of existence, and to re-tell a whole decade of lesbian struggle in the country is task too great, it cannot be completed within a few months of research.

Nevertheless, I will try to be as thorough as possible with this study. But given the major limitations that I mentioned above, I feel it is just right to admit the reality that this study has a lot of loopholes especially in terms of writing the history of the Filipino lesbian struggle in the country. For example, one of the limitations of this study is that, the events and the people accounted are only those which are visible and out as "lesbian" events and personalities. This is a limitation because, I know for a fact that there are still undocumented, unseen and unvoiced languages, events, people and happenings that all contributed to the formation of what we now call, the Filipino Lesbian Struggle. I know for a fact that more than half of our stories lie within the bounds of the closet or the invisible. This, however, does not change the fact, that I still project this paper as a primary and exploratory answer to the problem of lesbian invisibility in history. I say primary because to my knowledge, this maybe is the first comprehensive paper on this subject, and exploratory, because there are still a lot of things to be done for our struggle and community's history to be retold and re-traced.

"Marking a struggle" is another driving force that compelled me to write this paper. Again, I will delve into the problem of lesbian invisibility, and for a sector and a struggle that has been initially marked as,

(A) ghost, whose sexual activities cannot be defined, and yet she repeatedly reappears, haunting the heterosexual imaginary. This ghosting of lesbian desire has made possible a denial of its reality for too long. Readers can learn from Castle that the 'apparitional lesbian' is not absent from history, but is to be found Everywhere.¹⁵

The push that our sector is and has always been a part of history is a crucial step in order to address our initial problem of lesbian invisibility. To come up with evidences that, yes, we have a history as a movement is an important part of advocacy. The idea that we are a sector marked

In history is a significant ingredient in the foundation of any political movement. Thus, I am not only retelling a long lost history of lesbian struggle in the country; I am also marking it in the larger historical map of the Philippines, ultimately examining its location within the various political arenas in the country.

This paper is divided into three major parts exclusive of this introduction. These parts are. (1) The discussion of the problem of lesbian invisibility and how the lesbian has been invisible in many ways, specifically, in history as both a practice and a struggle, in the feminist movement and the gay movement. (2) The origins of our struggles from the late 1980s up to the present. (3) The location of lesbian art in the larger lesbian struggle. (4) The conclusion, which I will formulate with the assumption that every struggle's dream and ultimate goal is to become a movement, and in which I will incorporate some prescriptions and methods, which we can use in order to achieve this goal.

Sin of Omission and the Problem of Lesbian Invisibility

I've seen that life touches us with pain
and we change, becoming strangers to ourselves,
tell me what happened along the way
how did I lose me along the way?"

- from "Wall of Silence" by October Project

I recognize that I cannot begin to wail about invisibility without even explaining how we became invisible in the first place. For people who are not aware of the existence of lesbians, for people who trivialize our existence and continue to relegate our issues in the dark corners of history and politics as mere sentiments, I know it may be hard to comprehend that our struggles and resistance throughout history are very real and very radical. It was the responsibility to uncover this lost history that brought me to this. But again, how can I even begin to write about a lost history, when we don't have any recollection of when, where and how our history was taken away from us? And so, I decided to begin this paper of recollection by discussing the problem of lesbian invisibility, and how we were invisibilized in the course of history, and in the long run, how we accepted the comforts of our dark corners.

Sinead O' Connor, walls this misfortune in her song "Famine" by saying that, "if there's going to be healing, there has to be remembering and then grieving, so that then, there can be forgiving, there has to be knowledge and understanding."⁷ I think we, as lesbians, are in the state of grieving for our faceless presence. I think that we are starting to remember what happened to us along the way, no matter how much it hurts to re-trace our steps, in order to re-claim this past that we were deprived of, that we are entitled to, and that we are uncovering now.

"Lesbian history has always been characterized by a "not knowing" what could be its defining core."⁸ This statement by Martha Vicinus largely describes the state of lesbians in history. Almost all my entire life as a lesbian, when I ask about lesbianism and our roots, it has always been that lesbians are, "entities lying neither in or out the locus," "something that's undefined," "neither heterosexual nor homosexual," and "outside any periphery." I think this high degree of uncertainty of our roots and our subjectivities are not only dependent on the resistance to define lesbian identity to give way to lesbian diversity. I think this uncertainty lies within the fact that we are almost always invisible in history and under the banner of other gender-oriented movements, like feminism and male homosexuality.

For this paper, I will discuss three levels of invisibility from which the "lesbian" suffered and is still suffering from, (1) history, (2) the feminist movement, and, (3) the queer⁹ movement. These three aspects contribute largely to the continuing invisibility of lesbians because these three aspects are the locations from which lesbians could be located as a legitimate entity in the society.

Lesbian Invisibility in History as Both Subject and Practitioner

In this section, I will examine how the lesbian existence was not only discouraged in previous societies, but practices of which, involved certain sanctions in the society. This violent erasure of our existence does not only erase lesbian existence in history but it also relegates us under other subjectivities that were seen as outcasts in society like witches, spinsters, and prostitutes.

In Laura Weigert's study of images of witches and prostitutes in 16th century in Western prints and paintings, she concluded that sexual practices of women that exclude men, mainly through self-genital stimulation and genital stimulation with each other (lesbian sexual practice), are discouraged and sanctioned as a deviant behavior.¹⁰ Not only were they called witches and prostitutes, but they were also legally punished and executed in the name of pagan and unchaste practices against Catholicism. In the final analysis, these sexual practices of women with the absence of men were deemed by the Catholic-patriarchal society of Europe as a threat to male dominance. Thus, women with these practices were either burned at the stakes, or forever branded as freaks of society. Adrienne Rich also took into account similar instances specifically in the 15th and 16th century Europe when many lesbians were tried and executed because of practices, sexual or not, that excluded men, for example, the refusal to marry.¹¹ Punishment, she said, did not only promote compulsory heterosexuality in the society but also relegated lesbian practices and subjectivities into the darkest corner until they became invisible.

The whole point is that lesbian existence and practices were not only discouraged but also punished. With this violence committed against lesbians, it is logical that, lesbianism would be relegated into the invisible. Eventually, women and lesbians alike allowed this in the hope of a better life, out of danger and out of economic impoverishment. In the Philippines, it is expected that this kind of invisibility would also be felt because of certain economic and cultural conservatism that is expected of and imposed on women (lesbians) by the hetero-patriarchal society.

Despite this situation, some women chose not to give in to this oppression. They expressed their resistance through women bonding, or being solitary women. The cases of Paz Paterno and Adelaida Paterno who both died unmarried,¹² and the many cases of witches, widows, unmarried women, and spinsters in 15th and 16th century Europe, evidenced the resistance.¹³ Thus, lesbianism and other women-oriented practices which can also be read as "lesbian," using Rich's concept of lesbian continuum,¹⁴ were seen and should be seen as a resistance to patriarchal oppression. However, this is another misconception of lesbianism that we should be wary about, as Adrienne Rich says, that lesbianism is an expression of women who hates men, or, "simply, an acting out of bitterness toward men."¹⁵

Feminism and Compulsory Heterosexuality

In the process of lesbian invisibility through violence and state sanctions, it came to a point when even women no longer questioned or put into account that heterosexuality is an Institution also imposed by patriarchy. In Adrienne Rich's article, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence," she took into account with great detail the numerous assumptions of feminists in different fields and various levels about the innate heterosexuality of women. She also added the neglect of contemporary feminism with regard to the various histories of women who resisted institutionalized patriarchal modes and systems such as marriage despite societal castration. According to one assumption, "biologically men have only one innate orientation – a sexual one that draws them to women – while women have two innate orientations, sexual toward men and reproductive towards their young."¹⁶

To assume that women are innately sexually drawn towards men is to assume and promote heterosexuality as a whole and that women are only naturally attracted sexually to the opposite sex. This assumption of feminists is very much felt in various fields of study. In psychoanalysis for example, examination of motherhood by theorists like Nancy Chodorow, assumes that men and women are collaborators in upholding patriarchal ideologies. In these statements, Chodorow implicitly assumes that a society is produced through the union and collaboration of men and women (heterosexual communion), thus, the only way to dislodge patriarchy is by equal caring emotionally, physically and mentally, by both men and women in the name of parenthood.¹⁷

In the Philippines, this saddening but otherwise very real tendency is also felt. In the Women's Movement, for example, it was only in the early 1990s that the lesbian issue was explored. Before this time, issues that women discussed were always along the lines of heterosexual concerns in relation to socio-economic conditions.

In my own experience in asserting lesbian space in Philippine art, I have encountered much discrimination from both feminists and lesbians alike. In an art criticism workshop for example that was held in 1998 by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, when I was presenting an argument for a possible lesbian oriented framework of criticism I was

repeatedly asked why there is a need for such assertion. Precisely because it was never discussed at any place, at any corner, even the dark corners, of art history and criticism, I think there is not only a need but a great need to assert the lesbian position as a legitimate critical framework. In another international conference catering to Southeast Asian Women, I was surprised to find that there was no lesbian representation in the arguments presented in the panel. Luckily, I was there and the coordinator was open enough to let me read a lesbian art manifesto at the concluding part of the conference. The point is, that there is still a great need for lesbians to be "out" as art practitioners in order for this space to be re-claimed. This is a need because even such spaces that claim to be women-oriented spaces, surprisingly leaves out the lesbians, and are even filled with lesbophobia and aversions toward lesbians to a certain extent.

Thus, on the one hand, feminism poses itself as a women-oriented cause and yet imposes certain heterosexist patterns that relegate lesbians into the dark corner even more. On the other, feminism's assuming position as a mother loving a daughter (lesbian) can also be equally dangerous because of its desexualized notion of women relationships to one another. Cheshire Calhoun in her study on why the lesbian disappears under the sign "women" tells us that:

When feminist woman loving replaces lesbian genital sexuality, lesbian identity disappears into feminist identity, and the sexual difference between heterosexual women and lesbians cannot be effectively represented. Moreover, when lesbian cross-dressing and role-playing is denied, a distinctively lesbian relation to (and I will argue, outside of) gender disappears into a feminist relation to gender. The women-identified-woman is incapable of either the femme's redeployment of femininity or butch's gender crossing. As a result, the gender difference between heterosexual women and lesbians cannot be effectively represented, indeed is repressed, under her image.²⁸

It is an ambivalent feeling actually, that on the one hand, we need to connect and affirm sameness with our sisters in the feminist movement. Most of the time, this sameness means to change the language of our identities and conform to the conventional identity of women, such as essentially veering away from the idea of the mannish lesbian and promote feminine lesbianism as an empowering image of

lesbianism. Moreover, hovering under the umbrella of women poses dangerous tendencies of denying lesbian sexuality, meaning, the body attraction, pleasure of the lesbian gaze, the breasts, the buttocks, etc. Lesbians are encouraged to be asexual under the feminist banner because feminism promotes the veering away from the conventional "male gaze." The male gaze, which compartmentalize women's bodies as a site of pleasure, despite the fact that lesbians, or most lesbians do take pleasure with the site of women's bodies. On the other hand, we need to affirm our own sexualities as lesbians, which made us different from heterosexual women in order to preserve and reclaim our subjectivity, existence and lost history. However, as I have been saying, affirmation of our identities does not mean segregation. It should not be viewed as a move that as lesbians we are ultimately separating ourselves from the rest of the feminist community by affirming our differences. As Ani Difranco would say,

The worldsong is a colorless dirge without the differences which distinguish us, and it is that difference which should be celebrated not condemned.¹⁹

We can, by means of sisterhood solidarity still affirm our differences, and work as one to emancipate women and lesbians from patriarchy, and empower our ranks.

Gay Movement and Male Homosexuality

When queer theory and the gay movement flourished in the early part of the 1990s in the West, lesbians were once again, subsumed under the banner of another gender-oriented cause. Adrienne Rich said,

Lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through "inclusion" as female versions of male homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to deny and erase female reality once again. To separate those women stigmatized as "homosexual" or "gay" from the complex continuum of female resistance to enslavement, and attach them to a male pattern, is to falsify our history. Part of lesbian existence is, obviously, to be found where lesbians, lacking a coherent female community, have shared a kind of social life and common cause with homosexual men.²⁰

In the Philippines, it was very recent that the lesbian struggle came to work in collaboration with the male gays. Historically, we (lesbians) owe the birth of our struggle to the women's movement, but we have come to affirm that we also have certain commonalities with our gay brothers. But as it happened, lesbians were once again relegated to the silent corners in this collaboration because gay males are more flamboyant and we are reduced to being their female counterparts. Once again, the only solution to this relegation is to assert and affirm our lesbian identity, so that even if we are working in coalition and collaboration with other gender-oriented causes, we would not be invisible.

All the three aspects that I discussed above contribute to the continuing invisibility of lesbians in any society, and in the Philippines in particular. This discussion of lesbian invisibility will help explain the importance of marking the lesbian in history, whether in Philippine history or in the more specific context of Philippine art history, for lesbian art. I also hope that this section explains where I am coming from in this study. That, I am coming from a marginalized sector in search of a root that has been scrubbed away from our hands, our faces, our beings.

Bridging Gaps: The History of Lesbian Struggle in the Philippines

I call it "bridging gaps," because along the way, we as young lesbian feminists were somehow snatched from our roots in this struggle. Without a mother or at least, a sense of that mother to guide us through this struggle, but only with sisters to hold our hands, we search desperately for symptoms of our beginnings. We work in darkness. We work disjointed from a starting point, from a beginning that we can call our own. We were gapped. We were broken loose from that beginning, but now is the time to reconnect. Now is the time to bridge or tie the knots once more with that process, with that beginning... and this is an attempt to re-trace that alignment.

Aida Santos was one, or probably the only one who came out as a lesbian in the mid-1980s. Back then, she was one of the most active players in the underground national democratic movement, battling with issues of dictatorship, foreign imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism, which will eventually emancipate our countrymen from poverty toward national economic and democratic progress. She was also one of the pioneers of the women's movement in the Philippines.

It was the Women's Movement in the 1980s that conceived and reared the lesbian struggle even within the secret tresses of the national democratic movement.²¹ This concern for the lesbian issue within the national democratic movement came into serious discussions within the ranks of feminists, when murmurings within the movement that there are discriminatory practices against the lesbians and lesbophobia started to accumulate. These murmurings and secret discussions went on for years until a position paper by the MAKIBAKA underground women's organization in the national democratic movement marked the formal inclusion of the issue of sexual orientation within the movement.²² However, even if there was an incorporation of sexuality issues, it was very clear at that time that all issues were in line and should be analyzed within the socio-economic discourse.

During the 1990s the issue of dictatorship began to decline as a new brand Catholic-bourgeois ideology took over, the issues on gender and sexuality also took on a different facade. Led by a few strong members of the Women's Movement, which came from the national democratic movement along with younger feminist lesbians, discussions about gender and sexuality became a major concern of the Women's Movement. Despite this seeming popularity of sexuality issues, the lesbian issue remained untouched. It remained peripheral and not part of the central issues of the Women's Movement. Despite this continuous marginalization, lesbians started to form clusters that started out as *barkada* within various women's organizations, since most of these lesbians are part of these organizations anyway. In 1992, the first formal lesbian organization was formed and centralized in urban Manila and was called The Lesbian Collective (TLC).

With the growing awareness towards sex and sexuality, the Women's Movement, piece by piece, slowly open its system to other women's concerns and issues like prostitution and violence against women which were all analyzed in relation to socio-economic discourse. In the Women's March in March 1993, the Women's Movement carried the theme "Violence-Against-Women."²³ This was the first time that the women's movement, carried an issue that was closer to women's rights, which was slightly apart from its former issues of anti-dictatorship and socio-economy. It was during this time that the newly formed TLC had the initiative to read a statement by lesbians to discuss issues of violence.

against lesbians. Lesbians after all are women, thus, the issue of violence against women also affects lesbians.

It was a breakthrough both personally and politically for the members of TLC to join the Women's March under the banner of lesbians, and to actually read a statement as lesbians in the program. Within the Women's Movement, the lesbians had to struggle for space.²⁴ To read the lesbian statement, members of TLC had to struggle for their place in the program when they were told they would be cut off from the program because of time constraints. They were even requested to just read the statement while marching to Mendiola, which was the final destination of the march. One marcher, JJ Josef recalls:

Tapos nang hanggang nagma-martsa na, ipinarating sa amin na hindi raw puwedeng basahin yung statement namin, kasi daw walang time. So, kung gusto pa rin daw namin habang naglalakad mula Welcome Rotonda papuntang Mendiola, basahin habang naglalakad.²⁵

(When we were already marching, they told (program committee) us that we could not read our statement because there was no time. So, if we still want to read the statement, we will have to read it while walking from Welcome Rotonda to Mendiola.)

Finally, some of the older feminists voiced out their support for the younger lesbians who were finally allowed to read the statement in public as part of the program. And so, the then appointed TLC speaker Giney Villar publicly read the first lesbian statement at Mendiola.²⁶ It was a very heartwarming experience for everybody in TLC because it was the first time for most of them to march under the banner of lesbianism. It was the first time that something about lesbians was publicly read, listened to and applauded. Most of all, it was the fruit of a collective effort of lesbians who formed clusters and *barkadas* within the women's movement. From then on small lesbian formations started blossoming in and around urban Manila.

Outside Metro Manila, a number of small lesbian groups were also being formed. In Baguio, a number of professionals and young feminist activists formed Lesbians in Baguio for Nationalism and Democracy (LESBOND), which advocates the welfare of lesbian mining workers and lesbians working in the Baguio Export Processing Zone.²⁷ In Davao, a

small socio-civic lesbian group headed by Andi Consunji called The Group was gaining recognition by participating in raising funds for schools, environmental activities, and other socio-civic concerns. Although these groups were not clear about the political lines of women's welfare and the particularity of the issue of lesbianism in the country, they had proven that lesbians can bond together to form a comprehensive collective nationwide.

In 1993 the controversial (but according to Aida Santos, very pre-meditated) interview article by Pennie Azarcon in the Valentine's issue of the Sunday Inquirer Magazine called, "When Aida Met Giney," was published. It was in this article that for the first time, lesbian love, lesbian sex, and the idea that lesbians are essentially ordinary people was discussed in a public venue, the media. A very important detail in the article was also given to the public, the contact number of Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization (WEDPRO) where Santos was a board member. This brought about an overwhelming response from lesbian readers from all walks of life who started calling WEDPRO for inquiries and counseling. To accommodate all the calls, it came to a point when the staff needed to spend half of their time at the office counseling over the phone.

The board of WEDPRO then formed a small cluster within the organization to provide, train and monitor lesbian counseling and the Womyn Supporting Womyn Committee (WSWC) was born. The committee served as a special committee directly under the executive board of WEDPRO. The organization managed to acquire funds for its phone-counseling project and started training lesbian counselors to answer the callers. Fortunately, a substantial number of WEDPRO employees were also lesbians so the incorporation of the lesbian issue within the mandate of WEDPRO was an inevitable occurrence even without formalization. Most of all, it was in the project called the "Lesbian Hotline" managed by WSWC, that lesbian work was deemed as a profession, paid, monitored and assessed as part of the work load done in WEDPRO. For the first time, the lesbian clusters that do work voluntarily and out of the spirit of camaraderie are compensated for professional work.

Meanwhile, in the field of literature and publications, a joint project of Santos and Villar, in cooperation with Karina Bolasco of ANVII, was being negotiated. The lesbian anthology was projected to be the first Filipina lesbian literary anthology, way before "Ladlad" and "Tibok: The

Heartbeat of Filipino Lesbian" was published. However, because of time constraints, the lack of sources of lesbian literary production and the dominance of closet lesbian writers in the anthology, it was postponed indefinitely. In lieu of this, Santos with the co-authorship of Villar, funded and published the first lesbian anthology in 1994 called, "Woman-to-Woman: Prose and Essay" to serve as a testing ground in identifying the market for lesbian oriented books. But a serious problem surfaced as the publisher suddenly disappeared and took with him thousands of copies of the book which were sold to various bookstores. It was a heartbreaking experience for the authors because even they do not have copies of their own book.

During this year TLC slowly faded from lesbian organizing and the former members started forming their own groups. What was a formalized "barkada" started to part ways because of conflicts in political beliefs. Since most of the members of TLC were also members of various feminist organizations with active roles in the larger national democratic movement, it was inevitable for the conflict within the national democratic movement to affect its followers and members in the women's organization. It is to be noted that during this time a faction within the national democratic movement, which actually started even in early 1992, emerged. A separation between what we call as "re-affirmists/RA"²⁴ and "rejectionists/RJ"²⁹ characterized one of the low points in the leftist movement. These political conflicts also brought about a division within the TLC as some members sided with the reaffirmist group and the others with the rejectionist group. It is believed that lesbian organizations, even up to now, are loose with regard to the imposition of political beliefs aside from lesbian politics. According to JJ Josef, one of the lesbian theorists in the country, this may also be one of the major reasons why most lesbian groups break up. She said,

Sa umpisa, galing din yan sa iba-ibang political groupings, parang nag-agree kami noon na it did not matter kung RA ka, kung RJ ka, kasi madugong-madugo ang issue at that time. May effect rin yun sa organization. So ang naging agreement namin, ero yung issue natin lesbianism, women's issues pero andiyan din, hindi naman natin kinakalimutan yung political at class issues. Pero yung pagiging RA, RJ, third force, o kung ano mang klaseng may the force be with you ka, huwag mong dalhin yung agenda mong iyon sa grupo. Tingnan natin kung anong basis of unity natin yun ang I-push natin. Pero eventually

siguro? Kasi nga ayaw naming mag-impose sa isa't isa. So parang hindi rin ganoon kahigpit yung pagkapit sa membership. Kasi yun din yung reason, kasi kumbaga yun yung nag-attract sa amin to form the group, dahil may freedom ka to express yourself, kahit anong political leanings mo puwede, and yet, yun din siguro naging rason kung bakit eventually nawala yung grupo.³⁰

(In the beginning, we agreed that it did not matter if you're RA or RJ, or whatever your political grouping is, because it (the break up of the National Democratic Movement) was really an issue during that time. We agreed that we should only concentrate on the issue of lesbianism and other women's issues, and although we always make it a point to include other political and class issues in the struggle, the individuals' political leaning was not important, or rather, we agreed that we won't bring that into the lesbian organization. Eventually, it may be precisely because of this political slackness, we weren't able to hold on to the members. The reason why we were attracted to the group in the first place, that space for political freedom, is maybe the same reason that the group eventually faded away.)

After TLC's break up, there was a sudden yearning to continue what the organization started. There was still a struggle to insert the lesbian agenda within the women's agenda especially after the historic reading of the lesbian statement in the Women's March. The emotions were too overwhelming to be dismissed simply because TLC broke up. Because of this yearning to put the lesbian into the fore of political discussion and the sincere effort of the public to receive their agenda, members of TLC began forming various lesbian organizations with various lesbian agendas, issues, focus and methodologies in terms of breaking the problem of lesbian invisibility. Some of the members formalized the then WEDPRO sub-committee, WSWC, and formed the Womyn Supporting Womyn Center to continue the objectives of the committee. Other members formed the media advocacy oriented group, Can't Live in the Closet (CLC).

In the United States, it was during this time that the historic Stonewall Commemoration³¹ took place. Gay and lesbian groups from different states marched in colorful outfits to celebrate this new gender freedom. This was the beginning of the traditional Gay and Lesbian Pride March, which is held every June of each year. In this march in the US, the first

Filipino New York-based lesbian organization, "Kilawin Kolektibo" took part in the march.

In the Philippines, it was not until 1996 that the Gay and Lesbian Pride March, which became the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride March, was adopted and celebrated.³² But it was in 1994 when news about the growing population of "out" gays and lesbians in the North America and the growing awareness of queer theory, transgenderism and the gay movement, that lesbians and gays in the Philippines started crossing boundaries.

In a small forum called "When Lesbians Meet Gays," the lesbians who were moving only within the periphery of the Women's Movement, started seeing possibilities of collaboration and coalition with our gay brothers.³³ The forum, small as it was, was an eye-opener for both the lesbian and gay sectors because they were finally communicating and getting to know each other. Josef quotes Michael Tan of the Remedios Aids Foundation,

Tapos I think si Mike Tan ang nagsabi noon na wala tayong choice. Kailangan at darating at darating ang panahon na kailangan nating mag-work together. Ngayon ia-avoid ba natin yon o kailangan nating paghandaan?³⁴

(I think it was Mike Tan who said that we have no choice because the time will eventually come that we will find it necessary to work together. The question is, are we going to avoid it or be prepared for it?)

This was the start of the lesbian collaboration with the local gay or *bakla* movement. It was in June 1996 that the preliminary discussions and collaborations among the gays and lesbians culminated in the First Filipino Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride March which was held in Remedios Circle, Malate.

The year 1996 was also very important for lesbian organizing because of the First National Lesbian Rights Conference (FNLRC), the first nationwide network conference of lesbians in the Philippines was held. The idea for the First National Lesbian Conference or FNLRC was initiated by accident by two members of WEDPRO who attended the 3rd Asian Lesbian Network (ALN) Meeting in Taiwan in 1994.³⁵ The Filipino

representatives in the said Asian wide networks meeting volunteered the Philippines as the site of the 4th Asian Lesbian Network (ALN) meeting in 1998. The WSWC managed the conference with the help of other organizations like LESBOND, The Group in Davao, and CLIC in preparation for the 4th ALN. The vision of internal lesbian networking was to tap various regional and multi-sectoral lesbians in the country, ranging from peasant lesbians, butch,³⁶ femme,³⁷ factory workers, etc. The initial step for the group was to hold regional consultations in the provinces and sectoral consultations in the urban centers.

The conference was well attended by representatives of various sectors. Unfortunately, and as expected, the direction and discussion about lesbian issue were dominated by the more articulate and more feminist educated lesbians from the middle class and the urban Manila sectors. This marked the beginnings of a transition period in the language and concern of the lesbian struggle in the Philippines.

The FNLRC played a crucial role in introducing and making visible the lesbian in Philippine society. It was the first time a press conference about lesbianism was held in Blue Café in Malate, a small café owned by John Glenn, one of the pioneer bar owners in area and a gay icon. During the press conference, lesbian stereotyping was the foremost issue that was discussed. According to Josef, it was a conscious effort for the group to present a variety of lesbian looks to the public, from the butch type lesbians or tomboy to the feminine looking ones, to debunk the stereotype that all lesbians are masculine, "women wanting to be men," or tomboy-looking.

The press conference was covered by both tabloid and broad sheet newspapers. With the variety of the media coverage, a variety of issues and questions were also raised in the conference, from trivial questions on lesbian sex, relationships and lifestyle, to more political questions like lesbian rights, agenda and identity. The discussion of these issues may have been limited by time and the public nature of a press conference, but the gains that this conference achieved were very crucial to the development of the Filipina lesbian struggle, even if it drew some scandalous tabloid headlines like "Mga tomboy, Nag-Aisa!" As Josef puts it, the radical-ness of the idea that for the first time, lesbians were being heard and written about in a political manner can never be erased. It was also during this conference that it was concluded that December 8 would

be the official National Lesbian Day in accordance with the celebration of the Human Rights Day on December 10. It is at this point that we can say that we have marked a struggle.

Marking a Struggle

I came into the lesbian struggle in 1997 when I attended the First Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference in December of the same year. During this late part of the millenium there were changes that occurred in the direction and language of lesbian organizing in the country. I have observed four of these tendencies.

First, the premonitions of meetings and getting-to-know-you activities in 1994, then the beginnings of a collaboration and reaching out to our gay brothers in 1996 and finally the formal beginning of gay and lesbian collaboration in the "First Gay and Lesbian Leaders Conference" in 1997, a number of gay and lesbian organizations and alliances started initiating various activities especially in the urban Manila. More often than not the gay and lesbian issues were discussed at the same level as the encompassing issue of homosexuality.³⁸ The Task Force Pride March for example, is growing every year in terms of participation by gays and lesbians not only in the march itself, but also in the conceptualization of the whole activity.

Second, lesbian and gay organizing became more geared towards cultural venues and issues such as art and media, and as a result have produced more artistic, media and literary productions that discuss, cater to and produced by gays and lesbians. This change was brought about by the continuing popularity of Western Queer Theory that emphasizes reading popular iconography and culture to root out lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender symptoms and language. Moreover, with the growing popularity of lesbian and gay visibility in the country, lesbian and gay theorists started to tap every possible niche they could find to assert queer issues and agendas. Culture and arts were recognized as relatively liberal venues and potentially queer-friendly and so, a number of gay and lesbian academics, theorists and cultural workers started focusing on these venues for asserting the homosexual agenda.

It was in 1996 when lesbian art was first exhibited when Maita Beltran and Irma Lacorte mounted their paintings as part of the cultural

aspect of the FNLRC. The formation of the lesbian art community however was only formalized and truly felt when "The Purple Palette" art exhibition was held in UP Diliman in 1998 and "Lesbianarama" was concluded this year. In literature, "Tibok: The Heartbeat of the Filipina Lesbian" was published in 1998.³⁹

Third, methodology has also shifted from small formations in various sectors to coalitions and alliances. For example, in 1998 LAGABLAB or Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network was formed as an alliance that focuses on the lobbying and critiquing legislative bills and laws that pertain to gays and lesbians.

Fourth, in terms of the theme of advocacy, issues about lesbianism have shifted from the more socio-economic political concerns to that of the Post-structuralist idea of diversity and identity politics.

Lesbian Organizing

At present, the trend of lesbian advocacy and activism is still very much the same as in the late part of the 1990s. Pride March is on-going, art exhibits are still being mounted and written about, media appearances are still being done, and lesbian literature both in the academic and creative aspects are still being negotiated. Finally, the marking of our struggle as a legitimate part of this political battlefield has been partially fulfilled as our issue is now being discussed, and to a certain extent, heard in various aspects of the society. More and more lesbian organizations, whether or not they have a conscious political or feminist inclination, are being formed in and out the urban centers of the country. Some of these organizations are: WSWC, CLIC, LESBOND, KAMPI, The Group, LINK (Davao), Lucky Guys of La Union (La Union), Bambang True Friends Association (Nueva Vizcaya), Lesbian Advocates of the Philippines (LEAP), UP Sappho Society, SOUL or Society of United Lesbians (Manila), Dykes of Manila (DYMLAS), Filipino Lesbians On-Line (FLO), INDIGO, and LESBIND (Zamboanga). These organizations have contributed to the growing visibility of lesbians in various society, whether it be in grassroots organizing, socio-civic efforts, sports, arts, or in the youth sector.

In the regions, one of the strongest lesbian organizations since the formation of TLC in 1992 is LESBOND. This group was a well-known radical, left-leaning group working and organizing lesbians in the Export

Processing Zone and various mining companies in the Mountain Province to protect their rights as lesbian workers and as members of the proletariat sector. Through the years, LESBOND experienced turmoil in politics, ideology and status of members, but somehow persevered. LESBOND's primary work is within this periphery of grassroots organizing. THE GROUP in Davao on the other hand, organizes various fund raising and socio-civic activities like workshops and health oriented projects within Davao City to help the community and to debunk the stereotype that lesbians are liabilities to the society. Other groups like KAMPI, Bambang True Friends Association, and Lucky Guys of La Union hold yearly basketball tournaments for the locals in their respective communities.

In Manila, organizations like WSWC struggle to promote and propagate discussions on lesbian politics, identity, organizing and agenda while other organizations like CLIC and LEAP concentrate on media advocacy. The younger groups like UP Sappho Society, DYMLAS and SOUL, concentrate on gathering and organizing the lesbian youth sector, particularly the middle class students, and in the case of the Filipina Lesbians On-Line and DYMLAS, an internet-based network for young lesbians.

The fact that we are already out there and being talked about is already a big step towards legitimizing our position in this society. The fact that we are already out there and participating actively in the progression of the society whether in grassroots organizing, art, culture gathering, peer counseling, socio-civic activities and politics, it proves that lesbians are legitimate members of the society, worthy of recognition and respect. As Santos put it:

Hindi naman na tayo kabataan; hindi rin naman tayo katandaan, pero tingin ko kumbaga dalaginding na tayo. Tapos na tayo doon sa pagpapang. Naniniwala ako na nakalabas na tayo. Nakalabas na tayo.⁴⁰

(We are not so amateur anymore in this struggle, we may not be as mature though, but we are definitely not amateurs anymore. I believe that the hard ascend to start a movement is over.)

Breaking Silence: The History (So Far) of Lesbian Art in the Philippines

It was in 1996 when the first symptoms of lesbian art came into view. Almost simultaneously and in separate venues, Irma Lacorte and Maita Beltran, two of the most prominent lesbian artists in the country decided to become fulltime artists. Without even being conscious about creating a category for lesbian art in the country, their works truly reflected bits and pieces of their sexuality. In almost parallel occasions, these two artists slowly entered the Philippine art world through the margins. Although Maita Beltran's exhibitions are widely written about in broad sheet papers and various art magazines, her shows were mostly held in cafés and restaurants only. She has not exhibited in an art gallery or museum. One show that Maita had already mounted is "Out of the Closet, Into the Canvas," which was a coming out exhibition both of her sexuality and her artistry. While Lacorte has been working her way into lesbian advocacy as a member of WSWC through her art works because whenever there are cultural nights that cater to gay and lesbian causes, her paintings have always been mounted. Some of the individual shows that Lacorte mounted during this time was the "Pagmumuni-muni ng Isang Lesbiana" series which was exhibited at the Blue Café during the FNLRC cultural night.

When I came into the community in 1997, I envision to introduce art as a legitimate venue for lesbian advocacy. My vision is to create lesbian space within the art community and vice versa, to carve a space for art in the lesbian community. It was not easy. Given this invisible existence of lesbian artists in the country and the hetero-centric trend of women in the arts; to "break the silence" means to break the thick screen that hides lesbian artists and reveal their flesh, minds, and unheard voices. Breaking silence means to be recognized and say that, "yes, there is lesbian art in the Philippines."²²

The first challenge is to search for "out" lesbian artists who are ready to face the discriminating eyes of the public, but there are very few of them. Luckily, I have discovered both in my lesbian and art journals three brave women who were in the movement even before I accepted my own sexuality — Beltran, Lacorte and Tata Lim. These three women paved the way for lesbian art through their numerous engagements in the art field, either by exhibitions or joining art discussions. In 1997, I tried to initiate discussion on the possibility of putting the lesbian as a legitimate

category of visual arts when I curated and organized a joint gay and lesbian art and literary exhibition participated by friends like Lacorte, Joaquin Hernandez and Eugene Evasco called *Intimations of Desire* at Cafe Coribana in Malate.

The second challenge is to battle the discouragement that my lesbian cohorts and art practitioner colleagues gave me whenever I talked about the possibility of marking the lesbian as a category of Philippine art. As I wrote in one of my articles entitled, "Visualizing Lesbian: Lesbian Art as a Category of Philippine Art:"

When I started this project in 1997, I had only drew grins, negative questions and arched brows as a sign of doubt or even adversity for what I was doing. Surprisingly, even from my lesbian cohorts. More often than not, there is a lack of support from the community because 'there are more things to be prioritized than art' by people who are involved in the struggle... and one of these priorities is the basic need to sustain day-to-day existence."²

The third challenge is to find financial support from agencies and institutions that are willing to shell out money for these kinds of themes and projects. Fortunately, in 1998 I found the opportunity to formally launch "lesbian art" in the Philippines when I was appointed as the Cultural Committee Head of the 4th Asian Lesbian Network Conference held in the Philippines. It was this opportunity that paved the way for the possibility of launching the vision that I have been working on for some time. It was in this conference when the Steering Committee gave me funds and resources to come up with various cultural presentations in the course of the five-day conference. I used the funds to gather works by various lesbian artists in the country and organized the first lesbian group exhibition entitled, "The Purple Palette." It was originally envisioned to be a group exhibition of various Asian lesbian artists, but because of time and financial constraints the participation was reduced to the Philippine delegation only. "The Purple Palette" featured works by Lacorte, Beltran, Ramilo and Lim. It was also the first collaborative work from various lesbian art practitioners in the country. Curator Eloisa Hernandez volunteered to help me with the mounting of the show. It was also in this show that the academe started showing interest in lesbian art. Art critic Claudette May Datuin voiced out her solidarity message for the rising lesbian artists from the point of view of feminist/women's art. Most of all,

this was the first occasion when the phrase "lesbian art" was mouthed and used, both in the statements of the organizers and the critics, in the Philippines.

"The Purple Palette" was a turning point in the history of Lesbian Art in the country for it formally launched lesbians making art and art produced by lesbians as a category of Philippine Art. The events after this were overwhelming in terms of response and stimulated fervor from various art practitioners in the country. Other art practitioners and enthusiasts started organizing lesbian art exhibitions of their own. The most recent of these exhibitions are JJ Josef's "Kasali Kaming Kasari Niyo" at the University Center for Women's Studies, featuring art works by Chigo, Briggy, Lacorte, Beltran, Bing Concepcion and Lorna Ysrael. The others are Hernandez's "Lesbianarama" at Surrounded by Waters and works by Maita Beltran, Bing Concepcion, Lacorte, Ramilo and Eloisa Hernandez exhibited at Jorge Vargas Museum. "Kasali Kaming Kasari Niyo" marked a very important factor in the development of lesbian art in the Philippines because it introduced several new names in the roster of lesbian artists, that is mostly dominated by Lacorte and Beltran. New names in art like Ysrael, Chigo and Briggy prove that there is a growing interest in this field. "Lesbianarama" is also noted for its initiative to enter "lesbian art" in art institutions such as the museum. It was also the first one to initiate formal engagement with the academe as the last day of the exhibition was devoted to a forum between the artists and academics. This was arranged and co-sponsored by the Department of Art Studies in the University of the Philippines, Diliman.

Other venues such as the internet is presently being explored by lesbian art practitioners. In 1998, an e-mail based Filipina lesbian artist network was established by Ramilo, a painter from New York, and myself. We called it "Pinay Dikya Art Link." We had 30 members from the Philippines and the North America for the initial construction of our web site. Unfortunately the link was discarded because of maintenance problems. In the World Wide Web however, a web magazine called Nativeswish has been a regular venue for articles on art and lesbianism. One of the producers, Libay Cantor,⁴² is both an artist and editor of said site.

In the academe, aside from "Tibok: The heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian" which was published by Anna Leah Sarabia in 1998 and

"Woman-to-Woman: Prose and Essay" which was published by Santos and Villar in 1994, there are a number of published papers on the subject of lesbianism and art. Some of these papers are my own studies on the various aspects of art and lesbianism such as, "Breaking Silence" in *Djiliman Review*, "Out of the Closet, Into the Dance" in *Philippine Humanities Review* and "The Nativity of the Dyke" in the *Art Association of the Philippines Ginto Compendium*. "Tabi-tabi sa Pagsasantabi: Mga Kritikal na Tala ng mga Lesbiana at Bakla sa Sining, Kultura at Wika" is an anthology of critical papers which is in the process of publication to be edited by Rommel Rodriguez, Eugene Evasco and myself. Other academics who are starting to write on this subject is Flaudette May Datuin, and in literature, the pioneering undergraduate theses of Sharon Pangilinan and Minerva Lopez are very critical and well-written studies on lesbian literature in the Philippines.

Marking a Category

The lesbian intervention in Philippine art history should be recognized long before the formalization of "lesbian art" in the country. In a research which I recently conducted regarding "proto-lesbian"⁴⁴ in various paintings and prints in the late 18th to the early 20th century Philippine art, I have discovered that lesbian undertones are evident in works as early as this period. Some lesbian tendencies that I discovered in my findings are homoerotic tension in women's friendships, homoerotic tension in women's group activities such as bathing, homoerotic tension in women images as an allegory, cross-dressing, and autoeroticism.⁴⁵

However, "lesbian art" as a category, is fairly young in both the art and lesbian community, and it is true that even up to now this subject still draws negative grins and pessimistic laughter. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that our voice as lesbian art practitioners are slowly being heard and being taken seriously and that we have something to say on this matter. It is only very recently that supporters and enthusiasts, both in and outside the lesbian community started to assert the voice of the most active lesbian art practitioners in the community. Such recognition is important, especially in a context which is bound by cultural conservatism, economic encumbrance and lesbian invisibility and voicelessness. Art, and "lesbian art" in particular is no doubt one of the venues and fields where discussion and assertion of the "different" is welcomed, allowed and sometimes celebrated. Despite the danger of essentialism and tokenism, we need

to assert our identification as lesbians regardless of subject, medium and language, and despite the risks of appending the word "lesbian" to their art, we need to gather lesbian art practitioners and a body of work that will allow us to establish our own category of art as lesbians.

All these efforts indicate that, while we are at a young and amateurish stage, we as lesbian art practitioners are ready to go out, be visible, assert and create our space in this field called art. I just hope people are ready for us.⁴⁹

Bridging Gaps, Marking a Struggle: The Lesbian Struggle and the Formation of a Movement

The lesbian struggle has existed for almost a decade now. It was in 1992 when we formally launched the struggle through the first reading of a lesbian statement on violence against lesbians in the Women's March. In 2002 we will mark our first decade of lesbian advocacy. However, the struggle seems to be moving at a very slow pace and lesbian organizing seems to have stagnated at the small formations that have been there years ago. This is not to say that there were no changes at all in the struggle. In fact, there is a 100 percent growth of the number of lesbians who are out and into advocacy now since its beginnings in the 1980s. Moreover, there are some new groups also that were formed over the last year, like the UP Sappho Society in Dillman, which is the first lesbian organization catering to the youth lesbian sector, and LEAP which included former members of CLIC. However, this does not change the fact that organizing remains to be at a slow pace and centered on middle class and urban lesbian concerns.

This language of transition in the lesbian struggle happened and was marked in the late 1990s, so as the direction of the lesbian struggle became more inclined towards urban gay and lesbian concerns. The bourgeois, who has very little, if not no inclination, for grass roots organizing, also dominated the leadership and activism during this time. During this shift in language and concern, the lesbian struggle seems to have created fissures and gaps between its present status and its origins in the women's movement and the national democratic struggle.

In order for any ideological movement to have a "movement" it is necessary to create a mass base. To create a mass base, one must

recognize the mass of people and the concern of that mass in a given society. In the Philippines where poverty is an overwhelming phenomenon it is inevitable to go back to the issue of socio-economic politics in order to emancipate other discriminations and oppressions. In this country where the majority lives below the poverty line, the lesbian mass must also be living in poverty. Because of these recognitions, the present lesbian struggle must re-think the course that it has been taking for some time now, which is basically urban-centric and bourgeois in nature. How can you organize a mass base when you do not even recognize your constituents? In order for the present lesbian struggle to do this there should be a looking back and a bridging of the gap with the origins of the struggle. It is to look back and recognize the ideology of the Women's Movement and the national democratic movement, which were the foremothers of the lesbian struggle. It is only through this bridging that we will be able to understand the need to look into the lesbian masses in the country, and to eventually come up with mechanisms to organize these lesbians. Only through the organizing of the lesbian mass can we create a mass base that is not only limited to the issue of sexuality and gender, but cuts across very specific post-colonial subjectivity of class, and race. Eventually, this mass base will be the key to the movement that we have been dreaming of.

This "looking back" is not to deem the current lesbian struggle invalid. It is also important to recognize the power of the media, culture and cross-sexual identity coalitions for the expansion of our ranks. However, there is a great need to recognize the original vision of our struggle. This vision is based on socio-economic conditions because our country is still largely arrested in this overwhelming poverty. We can only emancipate our sexual identities in accordance to the emancipation of our socio-economic condition into a level that would give us the luxury of time, space and means to freely think about our diverse sexual identities.

It was Santos who pointed out that the key term here is "rights," and people's rights are always "lesbian rights." Until we are able to address the needs and discrimination against the lesbians who are deprived of their right to work freely, without the threat of being fired or being assaulted because of being lesbians, the dream of victory will remain far at reach. Until we learn to engage the mass of the lesbians who are the ones who do not have the choice and luxury of time and money, unlike the relatively privileged middle class and upper class lesbians, the dream

of creating a lesbian mass base will remain unrealized. Until we are able to reach out recognize who we should be tapping to improve and strengthen our ranks, the dream of a lesbian movement will remain to be a dream. Until that time, we will dream and hopefully, reorganize. ♀

Endnotes

- 1 Indigo Girls, "Virginia Woolf," from the album *Rites of Passage*. (New York: Epic Records, 1992).
- 2 Excerpts from this paragraph were directly taken from my #96 Journal entry written in August of this year.
- 3 Minerva Lopez, "Si Nena, si Neheng at si Erlinda," from *Tabi-tabi sa Pagsasantabi: Mga Kritikal na Tala ng Lesbiana at Bakla sa Shing, Kultura at Lipunan*. Edited by Eugene Evasco, Rosette Pineda and Rommel Rodriguez. (UP Diliman: Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Development, publication in progress), p. 9.
- 4 Being "out" means to admit one's lesbian sexual identity. "Outing" can be experienced in different levels and in different occasions. For example, a lesbian can be "out" with her friends but not with her family, or there are some circumstances that a lesbian would deny sexual identity for protection from homophobia, or from further harassment.
- 5 Martha Vicinus, "Introduction," in *Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) p. 9.
- 6 October Project, "Walls of Silence," from the album *October Project*. (New York: Epic Records, 1993).
- 7 Sinead O'Connor, "Famine," from the album *Universal Mother*. (Canada: EMI Records, 1994).
- 8 Martha Vicinus, p. 2.
- 9 "Queer" is a Western term for various sexual identities and other "different" (not necessarily deviant) social practices such as lesbians, gays, transgenders, transvestites, and transsexuals.
- 10 Laura Wegert, "Autonomy as Deviance: Sixteenth Century Images of Witches and Prostitutes," from *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary and Artistic Discourses of Auto-eroticism*, edited by Paula Bennet and Vernon Rósario II (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 21.
- 11 Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence," from *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), p. 180.
- 12 Balssa Claire Rivera, "Women Artists and Gender Issues in 19th Century Philippines," from *Woman, Take Back History and... Review of Women's Studies*. Vol. VIII, No. 2, (UP Diliman: University Center for Women's Studies, July-December 1998), p. 93.
- 13 Rich, p. 180.
- 14 Adrienne Rich's concept of lesbian continuum says that all women are potentially lesbians because of the primary bonds of women to each other, which started as far back as mother to daughter relationship, *Ibid*, p. 192.
- 15 *Ibid*, p. 178.
- 16 Adrienne Rich quoting Alice Rossie in the article "Children and Work in the Lives of Women," which is a paper delivered in the University of Arizona, Tucson, February 1976. *Ibid*, p. 177.

- 17 Ibid, p.181.
- 18 Cheshire Calhoun, "The Gender Closet: Lesbian Disappearance Under the Sign 'Women'," from *Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader*, edited by Martha Vicinus, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 212.
- 19 Ani Difranco; from her first album released in 1992 called "Ani Difranco."
- 20 Adrienne Rich, p. 193.
- 21 Aida Santos, Interview, Pag-asa Village, Quezon City, September 8, 2000.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Interview with JJ Josef, August 25, 2000.
- 24 This is yet another evidence of lesbian invisibility within the Feminist/Women's Movement that I discussed in the second part of the paper.
- 25 JJ Josef, August 2000.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 JJ Josef, *Sexual Identities and Self-images of Woman-Loving-Woman: An Exploratory Study on the Realities of Woman-Loving-Women in the Philippine Context*, Masters' thesis. (UP Diliman: College of Social Science and Philosophy, October 1997), p. 11.
- 28 What we call RA or re-affirmists today in the Leftist Movement, re-affirms the Maoist-Leninist model of Philippine Revolution concocted by Jose Ma. Sison, in which, the peasants are seen as the revolutionary leaders in alliance with proletarian forces in various urban centers. This methodology was designed because of the recognition that the Philippines is still largely an agricultural and feudal society.
- 29 RI's or rejectionists on the other hand, reject this Maoist-Leninist framework of analysis by Joma Sison. With the leadership of the late Ka Popoy Lagman, RI's took the revolution to the urban centers with the belief that the Philippines is now a socialist country because of the rapid growth of factories, urban centers and other urban infrastructures. The proletariat forces became the crucial sector to push this kind of revolution towards victory.
- 30 JJ Josef, Interview, UP Diliman, August 25 2000.
- 31 Mary Ann Ubaldo, written interview, June 2000.
- 32 JJ Josef, Interview, UP Diliman, August 25 2000.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Aida Santos, Interview, September 8, 2000.
- 36 Butch lesbians are masculine looking lesbians.
- 37 Femme lesbians are feminine looking.
- 38 Another evidence that lesbians were invisible under the banner of gay male, as a female counterpart of homosexuality.
- 39 Anna Leah Sarabia (ed.), *Tibok: The Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian*, (Manila: Anvil Publishing Co., 1998).
- 40 Aida Santos, Interview, Pag-asa Village, Quezon City, September 8, 2000.
- 41 Eloisa Hernandez: curator of "The Purple Palette"
- 42 Roselle Pineda, "Visualizing Lesbian: Lesbian Art as a Category of Philippine Art", (Nativeswish Web Magazine, September 2000).
- 43 Ubay Unangan Dactor, is a Filipino lesbian Palanca awardee writer and editor, film maker and photographer, who co-produces and co-edits a Web Magazine entitled, Nativeswish.
- 44 Proto-lesbian images are images of lesbians before the modern concept of lesbianism came to the Philippines. The term is adapted from Minerva Lopez's conception in her

article, "Si Nena, si Neneng at si Erlinda: Ang Sex Variant sa Panlikang Pilipino", but the concept was reshaped and revised into my own idea of "lesbian sexuality as lesbian textuality." In this light, proto-lesbian images are considered to be lesbian texts produced in the eyes of the Lesbian Subject.

45. Rosete Pineda, "Eloquent Crochets: Investigating Proto-lesbian Images in Prints and Paintings in the Late 18th to the Early 20th Century Philippine Art," (unpublished paper, September 2000), p. 32
46. The last sentences are taken from my article entitled, "Visualizing Lesbians: Lesbian Art as a Category of Philippine Art" (Nativeswish Web Magazine, September 2000)

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