

Being a Lesbian in Costa Rica at the End of the Last Century

By Alda Facio

When IGLHRC asked me to write the introduction to this book, I responded that, although I would love to, I didn't have the time. But then, after reading the chapters that follow, I realized that none of them included the historic context of the lives of lesbians in Costa Rica today. It appeared to me that, in order for readers to be able to truly understand the current situation of lesbians in this country, a little bit about the past was indispensable. However, even more importantly, in order to transform the lesbophobic and misogynist society that it has been our lot to live in, it is imperative that we ourselves know about our history. Only by building upon our predecessors' successes will we be able to enjoy and exercise our human rights as fully-realized people. Only by understanding our lives, strategies, successes and failures will we be able to succeed.

And while we women have been overlooked as builders of the history of humanity, which in its official version, when we appear at all, presents us as the objects of the affection, fears, hatreds or needs of men, this is even more so in the case of lesbians, whose existence is not mentioned in any history of Costa Rica, whether official or not.

This is why I felt that it was necessary to begin this book on lesbians and Costa Rica with a more or less historical chapter. The problem was that I still didn't have enough time to write it. It was then that I proposed to write a sort of subjective history on the basis of my experience as a lesbian feminist of nearly 55 years of age, who took part in the creation of the first lesbian-feminist group in Costa Rica, Las Entendidas. From the standpoint of my personal experience, I felt that I could sketch a picture of both this group and of the lesbians who preceded us in the struggle for a life out of the closet. This introductory chapter in no way claims to be the official history of lesbians in Costa Rica, but rather a sampling of the memories of an activist for the human rights of all women, lesbians included.

Although Las Entendidas were the first openly lesbian feminist group in Costa Rica, it was not the first group of brave and rebellious lesbians. Before us there were others, and even others before them. Each generation has blazed trails for the next generation, and will continue to do so until it is no longer necessary, until the day when being a lesbian does not involve any discrimination, let alone any danger. Naturally, as a feminist, I think that such a day will not arrive until *all* women can live free from discrimination and violence. This entails overthrowing the patriarchy, and therefore presupposes a strong feminist movement, comprising women in all their diversity, and capable of eliminating not only the patriarchal structures that keep all women oppressed, but also capable of breaking with sexual stereotypes and lesbophobic attitudes. It was precisely with these objectives that Las Entendidas was founded.

However, before discussing Las Entendidas, I would like to mention the lesbians who preceded us by one or two decades. These are women who today are mostly between the ages of 60 and 70. I have met some of them in bars, others at women's parties, and others while I was directing a master's thesis some time ago, written by Ester Serrano. All of the women in this age group that were interviewed by her, and with whom I have spoken personally over the course of many years, generally have some knowledge of the existence of lesbians who preceded them, and recognize them as people who in some way were able to improve the lives of subsequent generations of lesbians. Although not all of them recognize these successes as the result of political work, they all acknowledge that the way in which their predecessors led their lives was a form of resistance against one of the strongest institutions of the patriarchy: obligatory heterosexuality. Of course, those who are not feminists do not use such terms, but in my view, this is what they are saying in other words.

For example, a friend of mine, who is over 70, told me a few years ago that when she was an adolescent, she didn't even know about the existence of lesbianism or homosexuality, and therefore wasn't even aware that it was "sinful" or "degenerate" to have the feelings that she did towards women. Notwithstanding, when she told her mother about her feelings, they sent her to a psychiatric clinic in France to "cure" her. Although she was not "cured," she did learn how to lie about her <affections> and sexuality. She was married, had children, and also led a clandestine life for more than 30 years. Determined that other women not have to go through what she did, she urged her younger lovers to come out of the closet and not to accept pretending to be heterosexual.

In Ester's thesis, the women over the age of 50 that she interviewed recognized that lesbians older than themselves had to cope in an historical context of violent behavior towards them. Some of them noted that this forced them to confront this environment with strategies that currently are not understood as such.

Three of the women interviewed by Ester had the following to say about lesbians who today are between the ages of 60 and 70:

"Many of them married men but continued being lesbians, they had to do so and live that double life, but despite everything, they pulled it off: they did everything they felt like doing." (Luz)

"Despite the fact that they married, many figured out how to have their lovers, and they had the strength to do so despite everything that could happen to them. The strength to fight for everything we love—that's what the generations older than my own passed on to us." (Agnes)

"In fact, they had the same problems we do, as my generation. They weren't accepted either. People would say: Ugh! Don't hang out with that one,

'cause she likes women, creepy, she's a dyke. It was hardly any different from our time.' (Luz)

"Many of them—my friends—lived their lives and tried to enjoy them, but they never managed to overcome that sense of guilt. And when their partnership was over, they never went looking for another companion. I think the system swallowed them up. But they were brave women who fought hard, even at the expense of their well-being or their health." (Agnes)

"Many of them were never seen, they didn't let themselves be seen, it's as if they were invisible." (Isabel)¹

The latter quote reflects the perception that many Costa Rican lesbians have of their sisters over the age of 70. And, although Ester's thesis does not contain interviews with women in said age group, in some cases because none could be located, and in other cases because they did not wish to participate, Ester presumes that, in effect, the historical context in which they lived undermined their ability to recognize themselves as a group. In any case, what is certain is that there were no public places where lesbians could meet among themselves.

Nonetheless—according to Ester's thesis—despite the silence that surrounded said generation, and which made them invisible to the younger generations, there were small cracks through which filtered parts of their lives, their loves, and the sorrows arising from their sexual preference, as well as their resistance against the violence and discrimination they suffered. However, because these women are not directly included in Ester's thesis, the story of their lives, along with further analysis of their 'coping strategies, will need to be the subject of future research.

The contributions of said generation, together with their joys and loves, and the shunning, discrimination and violence they suffered, have not been documented. It is therefore imperative that those among us who are now between the ages of 40 and 60, who knew and loved these invisible predecessors, give testimony of their lives for the younger generations. It behooves us to recognize that they had an impact upon our lives, and improved conditions for us in many ways.

A lesbian whose current age is 55, and who was the lover of a woman who is now 71, recalls how this woman, who was never able to come out of the closet, helped her to recognize and respect herself as a lesbian:

¹ *Quotations taken from the draft thesis by Ester Serrano for a Master's Degree in Women's Studies at the Universidad de Costa Rica, entitled De la Memoria Individual a la Historia Social, Grupos de Encuentro de las Mujeres Lesbianas (From Individual Memory to Social History, Lesbian Women's <Encounter Groups>), 2002, photocopied, p. 154.*

“Gloria was one of my mother’s friends. Once a month, she would come to my house to play cards. I always liked her style and her sense of humor. Once, when I was about 17, I waited for her at the door and gave her a kiss. She wasn’t surprised, nor did she say anything to me, but many years later, we realized that when there aren’t any places to meet women like us, one develops a sort of radar, an antenna that tells you who is and who isn’t a lesbian. You can imagine what came after that kiss. A few days later, we were lovers. It wasn’t hard to be together, because, like I said, she was a friend of the family. I even went on vacations with her with my parents’ blessing! What can I say? She taught me to be self-reliant. She made me understand that the double life she led wasn’t for me, and she helped me to be who I am. She was adamant that I study and be financially independent. Of course, by then, things had changed: there were bars where I could meet others like myself, and there were The Buffalos.”

“The Buffalos” (“Los Búfalos”) were a group of women who are now between the ages of 50 and 60. Ester was in fact able to interview them for her thesis. The following quotation from Ester’s thesis is from Isabel, a woman who was very close with this group of lesbians who called themselves “The Buffalos”:

“They were very special women. Some had enough money, though that wasn’t what made them stand out. They had cars, which gave them more power. Some had college degrees. They were professionals, or owned property or a bar, and they had a bunch of girlfriends, too. Everyone wanted to be their girlfriend. Being a Buffalo, was, as they would say nowadays, ‘cool.’ They had the most feminine little friends at their table; the most divine women in the world were with the Buffalos. They wore leather jackets, plaid shirts and jeans. They would sit and cross their legs with their boots up, and they drank hooch straight up. Their girlfriends were were totally feminine ‘ladies’ who you had to get chairs with no nails for because they might rip the silk dresses they were wearing—long dresses with super-feminine finery. They set the fashion for hairdos, make-up and jewelry. That contrast was marvelous: one group looked like grizzlies, butch and strong, and the other group was super-feminine. The Buffalos were like that.”(Isabel)²

The following quotation from Ester Serrano’s thesis is an excellent example of what the lives of these women meant for the generations that followed:

“The fact that I can write a poem that says how much I love a woman. To be able to say so without fear, I’m not scared anymore, nothing worries me—I owe that to them. Thanks to them, women today have nothing to fear. Today, we must venerate that struggle and make lesbianism better. They were intelligent, brave women, but most of all, they had Buffalo hearts, they had big Buffalo hearts” (Isabel).³

² Serrano, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Other quotations in Ester's thesis, from women who were Buffalos or close to them, give us an even better idea of what their unconventional lives meant for lesbianism in Costa Rica:

"The hand we were dealt was to blaze a trail in this world. My generation started to break many taboos and we were the ones who managed to set up some places that became bars. That's why I think my generation passed on to the following ones courage, strength, but also the fact that we paved the way so that they can talk with their families more freely, something that many of us weren't able to do." (Agnes)⁴

"Losing the fear of saying it, of accepting it, of telling your parents, of having them accept and respect you being a lesbian. Because you are a human being—you just have different tastes. It's like you liking blue and me liking black. The rest is the same—a person has the same worth as such, the same feelings, that which hurts one hurts the other. A couple's break-up is like breaking up a marriage: it hurts us as much as it hurts them." (Luz)⁵

"People trusted us; if we were there, nothing bad would happen to them. They felt a sort of protection and strength that emanated from us. And that's why they dubbed us the Buffalos. I think it was on account of the strength not to be afraid, to be willing to confront anybody, including men." (Luz)⁶

"We, or at least I, felt that I had to defend those who didn't defend themselves. And I would step in, wherever I saw trouble, that's where I'd go. 'What's going on? Why are you treating her like that?' That's how I got my nose broken, by defending a partner of mine that the police were mistreating. I jumped them, just like that, without hesitation. The cop pulled out his club and whap! I figure my nose and mouth bled for who knows how many hours. But that <tough stuff?> was necessary to set a precedent. To tell the police and everybody else: 'You can't mistreat me, because I know how to defend myself.'" (Luz)⁷

"But they could also take a 'lady' by the hand and take her to the dance floor. They would put their arms around her waist and she would put her arms around her partner's neck, as if defining the female figure. Then the Buffalo would take her to the table and pull out her chair and sit her down first. And if a 'lady' had to go the bathroom, for example, all the Buffalos at her table would stand up, and the Buffalo who was with her would go with her and wait for her at the bathroom door, and then would bring her back on

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<her> arm, pull out her chair and sit her down. And the Buffalos wouldn't sit down until the 'lady' had." (Isabel)⁸

Although later, in the 1980s, <lesbian feminists> criticized the dichotomy of the role-playing between the "buffalos" and the "ladies," there is no doubt that they blazed trails in Costa Rican society. I also believe that things couldn't have happened differently because, due to isolation, there were no other models, and no space in which to reflect upon them. Fortunately, even though the history of the Buffalos is not recorded in the history of their country, there is at least the thesis of Ester Serrano, which also includes younger lesbians' recollections of these women:

"They passed on a lot of fortitude to us, to face 'our problem,' as people call it. They paved the way for us, and even though at that time it was much harder to maintain that stance, they maintained it." (Sofia)

"How can I put it... they were very strong women, who went out to the bars, who clashed with the police, who did things that no one had done before. For example, opening bars just for gays and lesbians. They were, or rather, they are very strong women; above all, they were women who were not afraid." (Marlen)

"There is something I believe is very valuable: they passed their life-experience down to me, their courage to continue ever forward and the courage to pave the way for us. They passed on to me the possibility of not having to live through the attacks that they had to put up with, because they confronted them for us... They passed history on to me, which is essential for living." (Camila)⁹

This last quotation highlights the importance of recording history before it is lost, especially that of groups which have been discriminated against and marginalized. Having a history is indispensable in order to feel entitled to human rights, and to be a full-fledged citizen.

This is why I believe it is so important for us to remember how the 70s and 80s were for lesbians in Costa Rica. They were better times than those that preceded them in that there were public spaces where one could go to meet others like oneself. Still, going to a bar meant encountering the police, which in turn meant that the clandestine lives led by the majority of lesbians could be publicly exposed. In other words, women who went to bars were not only in fear of being assaulted by the¹⁰e police, which happened quite frequently, but also of losing their job or, even worse, of being rejected by their family.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

I personally have met a number of lesbians who have lost their job because it was discovered that they had been in a gay bar. And even though the law did not include having a sexual preference other than heterosexuality among the grounds for dismissal, it did not occur to anyone to question such dismissals because the scandal would be even greater. One friend of mine nearly lost custody of her children, and another was nearly expelled from law school. So many others lost their family, their friends, and even themselves. A very close friend of mine decided to no longer speak to me so that she wouldn't have to face up to the fact that once she had been with me to a bar.

When I was in my third year of law school, two Costa Rican women were publicly married by the minister of a gay church who was passing through the area. At my law school, there was a whole movement to strip these women of their Costa Rican citizenship and expel them from the country. When I defended them, some classmates started to say that I should also be stripped of my citizenship, and that maybe I, too, was a dyke. The only comical moment of this otherwise unamusing episode was when one of my classmates, who wished to defend me, did so by exclaiming that he could vouch for my normal sexuality, and would go so far as to bet his right arm on it! And even though at the time I was not aware that I was a lesbian myself, you can imagine the fear felt by all of my gay and lesbian classmates.

Although there were bars in Costa Rica in the 70s and 80s where gays and lesbians could meet, going to them was dangerous. Notwithstanding, in some of these bars, various strategies had been devised for when the police arrived. I remember that in a bar called La Avispa, they would turn on the light on the dance floor. This meant you were either going to sit down or switch partners with a couple of gay men. This way, when the police came in, what they found were couples consisting of a man and a woman instead of same-sex couples. Even so, the police would haul off a few people who were at the bar, and if they resisted, they would club them. But despite all the danger that going to a bar entailed, many of us kept on going because it felt so nice being in a space where heterosexuality was not the norm, where people enjoyed themselves, where you could meet attractive people, and, moreover, where we felt that we had a right to do so.

However, by the end of 1986, by which time I was already a lesbian, we were tired of the fact that the only spaces where we could be out lesbians and meet other lesbians were the bars. As much as we enjoyed them, the bars had a negative and violent side to them, and they did not foster political activism. Because of this, a few of us lesbians, who belonged to a feminist group called Ventana, started to think about the idea of forming a lesbian feminists' group. We wanted a space where we could work on the topics that were not relevant to our heterosexual members, or that were not perceived by them as being of interest for the group as a whole. These included topics such as internalized lesbophobia, obligatory heterosexuality, motherhood issues faced by lesbians, sexuality, etc. Still, despite the fact that we wanted a separate group, we recognized that being in a feminist support group had raised our awareness of the discrimination that all women

suffer from, and the importance of overthrowing the patriarchy. We wanted to remain within Ventana, however we also wanted a space of our own.

With the idea of forming this new group, a few of us spoke with lesbians who were not feminists, or who were not in any feminist groups that were already considering the same possibility. It was difficult, because those who were not feminists did not want a lesbian feminists' group. They said they wanted a lesbian group, period. Others of us did not want to be in a lesbian group without a feminist ideology. For the lesbian feminists among us, it didn't make sense to create a lesbian group that was not part of the feminist movement, because we understood that, as women, we suffered from discrimination not only as lesbians, but above all on account of being females. Moreover, we understood that the discrimination against us as lesbians owed its existence to the patriarchal institution of obligatory heterosexuality, and that said institution could only be adequately understood by way of feminist theory.

Without having completely resolved the dilemma over whether to create a lesbian group or a feminist lesbian group, at the beginning of 1987 the first lesbian feminists' group in Costa Rica, called "Las Entendidas^{*}," was founded. We spent a large part of that year discussing whether the group should be feminist or not. However, following the 1st Feminist Lesbian Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Mexico just prior to the 4th Feminist Meeting in October 1987, things changed. The members of Las Entendidas who attended, and who were not yet convinced of the importance of lesbians' accepting themselves as feminists, were transformed into radical feminists. From then on, there was no longer any debate about whether we were a feminist group in addition to being a lesbian group: all of us were convinced that radical lesbian feminism was our ideology.

However, prior to this conversion, we had already decided that Las Entendidas would be a support group through which our political and erotic relationships with other women could be discussed and even promoted. But by the end of 1987, we realized that we also wanted to strengthen ourselves so as to be able to bring the message of lesbian feminism to other lesbians, as well as to heterosexual feminists. I remember that I wrote my first article on radical lesbian feminism in the form of a letter for Las Entendidas. Later, I wrote a series of such letters, which are part of my thoughts as a feminist. In said first letter, I explained what radical lesbian feminism was, as I understood it at that time:

"Both lesbianism and feminism revolve around love and support among women. Both have to do with gaining awareness, with the creation/discovery of women's being/actions and the struggle against the patriarchal institutions that underpin and maintain the supremacy of men. Understanding the relationship that exists between lesbianism and feminism is vital in order to build on experiences that will end the oppression of all women, and of many

* Which roughly translates as "Those (Women) In The Know."

men. The experience that combines the life experiences/awareness of these two forms of women's being/actions is called radical lesbian feminism."¹¹

We, Las Entendidas, declared ourselves to be radical feminist lesbians. We would meet once per week at the home of one of our members. Specifically, we would meet at the homes of those members who could have 10 or 15 lesbians in the living room talking about their lives, which was not the case of everyone. At these meetings, we realized what a great need we had to talk, as well as to provide one another affection, sisterhood and support in times of crisis. Little by little we came to discover our style: we would read articles that we brought, or the letters that I would write to the group; we would talk about our private lives and our various doubts; we would laugh a lot.

But it was not all fun and laughter. As Paquita Cruz explains, in an article she wrote on Las Entendidas, "The group soon discovered that the first battle we had to wage was within our own group, and that we had to fight it on three fronts: against our low self-esteem, which we had acquired from a society that rejected us; against our own homophobia—disrespect towards our way of being, which we had internalized throughout our entire lives; and against our passivity, which made us tolerate the discrimination that we suffered in every area."¹²

In addition, we soon discovered that many of us had been sexually abused as children. We decided to form a support group, facilitated by one of our members who is a doctor, and who specialized in this area. This group remained a part of Las Entendidas, but we also met separately on a different day so we could talk amongst our ourselves.

We also realized that many of our members did not have much knowledge of feminist theory, and we therefore decided to start another group, open to any woman who wished to attend, in order to read and discuss articles on feminism, especially radical lesbian feminism. This group was different from Las Entendidas in that it was open to non-members, whereas "Las Enten" (as we affectionately dubbed ourselves) was members-only. Although some people criticized us for being members-only, I still believe that it was necessary for it to be so, because otherwise we would not have been able to talk so openly about our doubts and fears. As it happened, several women who came to the reading group asked us, the recognized members of Las Entendidas, to allow them to join us. Several of our members joined in this way, particularly the youngest members, who did not have access to the bars.

On the topic of bars, one of the strategies we implemented to reach out to more lesbians and raise our lesbian self-esteem was to have women's-only nights at a gay bar owned by one of our members. We decided to do this within a short

¹¹ Alda Facio, "*Queridas Entendidas*" (*Dear Entendidas*), *Letter No. 1*, unpublished, 1987.

¹² Paquita Cruz, "*The Lesbian Feminist Group Las Entendidas*," in *The Costa Rican Women's Movement*, edited by Ilse Leitingner, University of Pittsburg Press, 1997, p. 148.

while of when we began to meet as a closed group. By dint of talking so much among ourselves, we realized that we could not be solely a support group, and that we needed a form of outreach to the lesbian community.

So it was that La Avispa, which at that time was a tiny bar for gays and lesbians, began to hold a lesbian feminist night once per month. During these women-only nights, we would give talks on radical lesbian feminism, but we would also perform funny little sketches, hold lesbian poetry recitals, or make up lesbian songs, which we would sing on the La Avispa dance floor.

I remember that I was the first to give a talk at these women's nights. La Avispa was packed, and I thought I was going to die of nervousness. I had never spoken before in public about lesbianism, let alone as a lesbian in front of so many lesbians! I started to talk and nobody listened to me. These women had not come to a bar to learn about obligatory heterosexuality. I kept on talking and talking, and little by little they began to quiet down and listen to me. Not all of them, of course, but many of them did start to pay attention. When I finished, I felt like the biggest and bravest person in the world, my small size notwithstanding. What was my surprise when a truly big woman, dressed "Buffalo"-style, hoisted me up by the collar to hit me, apparently because she didn't enjoy my talk. She was furious, and kept repeating that I had ruined her evening. Luckily, a bunch of other women came to my aid, and in this way I met a few lesbians who otherwise would have never been a part of my life.

After these initial talks, during which few women paid attention to us, the women's nights became quite a draw. Not only did women come to be among other lesbians and meet new people, dance and be happy, but also to hear Las Entendidas and participate in our soirées. And, of course, we stopped using the light to signal the arrival of the police, because we decided we would keep on dancing, even with the police watching us. As it turned out, the police couldn't do anything, because it wasn't against the law for same-sex couples to dance together.

I believe that the generosity of Ana, the owner of La Avispa, was invaluable in strengthening Las Entendidas. Without her, I am convinced that the group would not have had the reach that it did. I feel it is important to emphasize this, because I think that life has rewarded her for her solidarity. Today La Avispa is perhaps the largest and most important gay and lesbian bar in Costa Rica, and perhaps in all of Central America. I believe that Ana deserves a monument, or at least recognition for everything she has done for Costa Rican lesbians. And not only for lesbians, since she has also supported many feminist projects, including the 9th Feminist Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean held here in Costa Rica in December 2002.

But to return to the topic of Las Entendidas, in 1989 we decided to publish a quarterly bulletin, also called "Las Entendidas." In this bulletin we published information on the feminist movement in Costa Rica and abroad, we reproduced

lesbian texts, and we offered a forum for Costa Rican lesbians to express their opinions. There were also lesbian crossword puzzles and a lesbian dictionary, as well as other games. The bulletin continued coming out on a quarterly basis until the group dissolved in 1991.

More or less around 1989, another group of feminist lesbians, called “Las Humanas” (“The Humans”) was founded. On average they were younger than most of us, and very creative. They soon began to lend us their support at the women’s nights at La Avispa. And, shortly thereafter, many people started referring to them as the daughters of Las Entendidas, because they were also feminists. I remember that they were very playful, and I loved to go to their meetings, to which I was invited on a few occasions in order to speak to them about gender theory and the human rights of women.

On one or two occasions, we organized a meeting between Las Entendidas and Las Humanas at a villa outside of San José. We had a marvelous time talking, practicing yoga, swimming, playing and telling stories. And, more than anything else, laughing our heads off. These girls, who are now women in their forties, had a real gift for anything playful, and have a really great sense of humor. I greatly enjoyed those moments spent with them. However, this group did not stay together very long, and I believe it didn’t last any longer than two years. According to a few of its members, the breakup occurred because they couldn’t agree on what their main objective should be. Some of them wanted only to be a support group, while others wanted to do outreach. It really is a shame that they weren’t able to stay together as a support group since, despite the bad reputation that such groups have nowadays, I feel that they are very important and that they do have a political impact—perhaps not directly, but by strengthening their members.

In the case of Las Entendidas, we were fortunate in that we *were* able to agree on being both a support group and a group that did outreach to the lesbian community. However, in 1990, we made the mistake of organizing the 2nd Feminist Lesbian Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean. And I use the term “mistake” in the sense that, not only was the meeting difficult for the group to organize, since many of our members did not agree that we should do it at all, but then on top of everything else there was the government, the Church, and society in general.

Ester Serrano, in her article, “A History of Lesbian Organizations in Costa Rica,” describes the climate running up to said Meeting:

The attack campaign began well before the women met: the newspapers started alerting people about the lesbian meeting. The Catholic Church proclaimed that it was against the Meeting, and Archbishop Román Arrieta declared that "Costa Rica has always been characterized by its

human and spiritual values, and a meeting of this kind is a stain on the country's honor."¹³

For its part, the Costa Rican government, by way of the Minister of Government, Antonio Alvarez Desanti, stated that he would endeavor to ban the meeting, arguing that it "goes against the natural and healthy customs that prevail in Costa Rica... we cannot agree to this if the participants engage in conduct that offends the upbringing and religious principles that we have fought for, and that we want to pass on to our children."¹⁴

The arguments against the meeting were based on patriarchal religious morals and the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and healthy behavior for all men and women. The written press systematically used a strategy whereby they compared lesbians to drug addicts, racketeers and drug dealers, to wit: "Costa Rica cannot become a host to these types of visits, which can only harm our youth and provide them a bad example. We cannot turn our country into a **garbage dump**, where **racketeers, drug addicts and dealers**, and now **lesbians** wish turn this land [sic] into their perfect refuge."¹⁵

Although these attacks were not able to prevent the Meeting from being held, it did give rise to a polemic among the members of the group that organized it. Some of them decided not to attend the meeting, although they did take part in some activities 'from the outside'.

The follow-up meeting proved to be fatal for the group. Due to attacks perpetrated during the meeting by a large group of men, who somehow discovered where the exact location of the meeting was, the group was never able to completely recover. For a year following said meeting, we made efforts to restore confidence in the group, but fear had dug its claws deep into every one of our hearts.

The day that we decided to break up Las Entendidas was very painful to me, since I had learned and grown so much with this group. But there was no way to go on—perhaps because the group had already accomplished its mission. In any case, after Las Entendidas, I distanced myself from lesbian feminist activism in Costa Rica. Since then, I have been absorbed in my work on behalf of the international movement for the human rights of women. Now I practice lesbian activism in a different way: namely, by being openly lesbian, and by not allowing

¹³Las Entendidas, *Memoria de un Encuentro Inolvidable (<Memory of? Report on?> an Unforgettable Meeting)*, <2nd Lesbian Feminist Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean>, April 1990. San José, Costa Rica, p. 7.

¹⁴ "**Procuran impedir reunión de lesbianas**" (*Attempts made to prevent lesbian meeting*), *La Nación*, April 11, 1990, p. 7A.

¹⁵ "**¡Exijimos respeto para la mujer!**" (*We demand respect for women!*), *Movimiento Costa Rica Libre (Free Costa Rica Movement)* *La Nación*, April 11, 1990.

all the discrimination and hatred that still exists against us to hinder my growth as a human being.

There are many ways to fight for human rights. I have chosen to do so through the feminist movement, with socialist feminist theory. I know that there are now other groups that fight against discrimination and the negative stereotypes of people who do not accept heterosexuality as the <imposed> norm. I believe that these groups are necessary, because I know that much still remains to be done for the lesbians of Costa Rica. This book is a testimony to that fact.