

Frontiers of Feminist Resistance: Radical African Lesbian Feminist Organising in Africa

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Civil society spaces are full of conversations. Central to these spaces is the need to share thoughts and ideas around the work we do and how to ease the growing backlash that activists experience when pushing back against oppressive spaces and powers. Despite the many strides that African women have made in various spaces, it remains imperative, in fact urgent, that spaces for African women only are created where we can speak with ease about our setbacks and successes. At the Sixth Changing Faces Changing Space (CFCSVI) Conference, such a space was created for the first time.

The Coalition of African Lesbians (CAL) was invited to create such a space for sharing, learning, political planning and fun. Integrating Open Space Technology and conversational sharing, CAL hosted a one day pre-conference at CFCSVI titled *Frontiers of Feminist Resistance: Radical African Lesbian Feminist Organising in Africa*. The space was a vibrant engagement of all senses, with a wellbeing space as well as a place for artistic expression and exploration.

During the course of the day, African lesbian and bisexual women were provoked to engage with the systemic and structural issues that inform and influence the work that is done to counter oppressive power structures in their communities and countries. Beyond naming the problem, the activists were encouraged to use art, our bodies and new approaches to explore root causes of these oppressions that are experienced by African women. It was important to be able to speak as African women, and to collect and share ideas that are often extracted by non-African institutions and entities. The power of speaking to our own problems, naming our issues and coming up with our own ideas became evident as the participants contributed passionately to the conversations and activities of the day.

Notably present in the space were lesbian and bisexual women from Francophone Africa, who spoke with a particular nuance and politic to their work. Often, when spaces for feminist sharing are created in Sub-Saharan Africa, French speaking activists and feminists are forgotten in the room. But this space had a passionate sharing of experiences and stories between women from North, West, Southern and East Africa. Missing in the space were women with disabilities, which remains an opportunity for intersectionality for feminist organising in Africa.

The CFCSVI Frontiers of Feminist Organising place was also an opportunity for these African women and activists to shape demands, dismantle language that we use often but without meaning, as well as, and most importantly, name their dreams for a feminist future. For hours, using crafts and art, women put together their dreams for a future free of violence, silencing and intimidation.

Speakers and participants reminded each other that we too, our well-being and wellness are as important as the social justice issues that we fight. We were reminded that we operate within and around the various layers and manifestations of patriarchy and that oftentimes we



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too become a source of silencing and oppression for other women and activists. It was an important moment for women to affirm each other as well as call each other to take responsibility and stay aware of the various kinds of oppressions that we both experience and participate in creating.

The participants of the Frontiers of Feminist Organising move on to the main CFCSVI Conference space with a greater awareness of what African women demand from the space, as well as with a sense of collective organising and sisterhood in the space and beyond.



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