



BOOK REVIEW

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Tremblay, M., Paternotte, D., and Johnson, C. (Eds.) (2011). The lesbian and gay movement and the state: Comparative insights into a transformed relationship. London: Ashgate. ISBN 978-1-4094-1066-9.

This book examines how lesbian and gay movements impact and are impacted by the historical, political, legal, social and cultural scenario prevailing in fifteen countries around the world. The book is a must read for people working in the social sciences, politics, law, and NGOs, as well as people interested in the gay and lesbian rights movement. The chapters are written by political scientists or sociologists investigating this area, and all provide answers to two basic questions, namely how has the state influenced the gay and lesbian movement and how has the movement impacted the state. The chapters are well organised, each beginning with a positive tone highlighting the success of the movement in that country. To quote from the chapter based in Argentina, for example:

On December 28, 2009, Freyre and di Bello finally wedded in Ushuaia city becoming the first same sex couple in Latin America to have contracted marriage. These dramatic events represented the beginning of important victories in the struggle waged by Argentina's LG movement to challenge the traditional definition of marriage, a struggle that culminated with the reforms of the civil code approved by the Argentina congress in 2010 that allowed for gay marriage nationally.

Such an introduction generates curiosity in the reader's mind as to what must have led to the beginning, struggle, and success of the movement, all of which is explained in the later part of the chapter.

The historical background or the beginning of the lesbian and gay movement within the respective countries covered in the book, when viewed as a whole by the reader, provides clear insights into the diversity existing among the various countries. For example, in Belgium the lesbian and gay movement began when the country merged with the European Union, thereby exposing it to the status of the movement within Europe. In India it was a legal protest against Section 377, whilst in the Netherlands it emerged because of religious and class liberalisation. These examples emphasise the cross-cultural perspective of the study of lesbian and gay movements.

The book also deals with the question of how the state impacts on the lesbian and gay movement, which makes for an interesting read for both students of politics and law, as the chapters beautifully bring out the interplay between the law of the land and the quality of government in power, both of which effect lesbian and gay movements. For example, in both Argentina and Belgium, important alliances have been formed between state actors and activists of the movement, transforming the relationship from a conflictive one to a cooperative one. In Brazil, though laws in favour of lesbian and gay movements have been passed, the government shies away from implementing them, whilst in Netherlands the state has been very accepting and liberal, yet society still puts restrictions on lesbian and gay people, as the authors suggest:

Although the Dutch claim that they accept gays and lesbians, this acceptance remains problematic. While 95 percent may say that they have no problems with homosexuality, 45 percent said they dislike seeing two men kissing in public, insults like 'queer', 'gay',

'homo' and 'sissy' are still prevalent in school yards.

Each chapter is followed by a conclusion which clearly sums up the main issues discussed within it. On the whole the chapters are well researched, and wherever there is a lacuna it is clearly outlined so that future researchers can work on these areas. The language used is lucid and connects the paragraphs in a clear flow, thereby not disrupting the chain of thoughts of the reader. The length of the chapters is appropriate, extra jargon is avoided, and the placement of examples and research studies is appropriate. Each chapter opens a new vista for the reader, bringing out the unique political, legal and social diversity of various countries around the world in terms of lesbian and gay movements. I strongly recommend this book to any reader interested in the various aspects of lesbian and gay movements, as instead of being based on hypotheses or possible theories about lesbians or gay men, the book talks about the practical aspects of lesbian and gay movements, and thus provides a fresh perspective and perhaps new ideas for further research in this field, which is the need of the hour.

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