

The International (Lesbian and) Gay Association and the question of pedophilia: Tracking the demise of gay liberation ideals

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Abstract

In 1993–1994, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) lost its observer status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) because US conservative groups publicised the membership of two pedophile groups. This article examines debates on pedophilia within ILGA before this event, and documents the slow decline of pro-pedophilia stances. It relates them to wider debates on gay liberation, and argues that pro-pedophilia arguments lost most of their appeal when new ways of imagining homosexual emancipation and new political goals emerged. Beyond the issue of intergenerational sex, it shows these debates were also about the kind of movement activists wanted to build together.

Keywords

Activism, children, gay liberation, ILGA, pedophilia

In 2011, David Norris was forced to withdraw from the campaign for the Irish presidency before coming back into the race a few months later. An Irish journalist had accused him of condoning pedophilia because of remarks on ‘Greek pedophilia’ and earlier declarations about his attraction towards mature men when he was younger (McDonald, 2011a). It was later revealed that Norris had also appealed for clemency over the conviction of his former lover who had had sex with a 15-year-old boy (McDonald, 2011b). The news came as a shock, for David Norris was a respectable member of the Irish senate, a Joyce scholar from Trinity

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College and one of Ireland's most prominent gay liberationists, who has taken his country's policy on same-sex intercourses to the European Court of Human Rights and won.

Most people had overlooked that, although gay activists had tried to dissociate themselves from pedophilia in many parts of the world, the issue had not always been a taboo in the gay movement. Although controversial, it was long debated and these discussions were part of the legacy of gay liberation. Besides, despite often difficult relations, pedophile and homosexual groups, which could overlap, have sometimes fought together, and pedophilia was explicitly backed by some gay liberationists.¹

This article deals with debates about pedophilia² within the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). David Norris is one of its founding members, and ILGA debates about pedophilia were part of the Irish controversy (Swords, 2011). It documents the slow decline of pro-pedophile stances from 1978, when ILGA was established, until the mid 1990s, and relates it to wider debates on gay liberation. Indeed, defenders of pedophilia were using this rhetoric to advocate their rights while their opponents were articulating more pragmatic ways of imagining gay and lesbian struggles. Beyond the issue of intergenerational sex, these debates were also about the kind of movement activists wanted to build together.

Although they highlight some long-term effects of these mobilisations,³ accounts of gay liberation movements tend to depict them as short-lived. For instance, in her book on the history of the homosexual movement in San Francisco, Elizabeth A Armstrong writes: 'gay liberation was born out of the encounter between an established homophile movement and the New Left... by the end of 1971 radical gay liberation would be in decline, along with the rest of the New Left' (Armstrong, 2002: 80). Similarly, Jeffrey Weeks, who participated in the London Gay Liberation Front, remembers:

The early 1970s mark the turning-point in the evolution of a homosexual consciousness... Of this new movement, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which sprang up in London in autumn of 1970, was the most typical and dynamic representative. By the middle of the decade, though the name lingered on, the GLF had become a nostalgic memory for most of its participants, and a bogeyman for its opponents. (Weeks, 1990: 185. See also Plummer, 1999: 133).

This article contests this analysis. As claimed by Armstrong and Weeks, it is obvious that few liberationist groups survived in the late 1970s or in the 1980s. However, some of the ideas and the rhetoric they conveyed were still alive after this period, at least in some contexts and on specific issues. Indeed, although the 'pro-pedophile' discourse⁴ became less resonant over time, this study shows the influence of gay liberation arguments long after the end of the 1970s.

If the choice of ILGA may surprise, it makes sense given the history of the organisation. One of the main transnational LGBT groups and the oldest one

still in existence (Churchill, 2009; Rupp, 2011), it was founded in 1978, that is at the very end of the gay liberation period. Although it cannot be described as a gay liberation organisation, it was still influenced by some (of the) liberationist ideals. In addition, pedophilia had been at the centre of fierce debates since 1978. It led to a scandal, which burst out in 1993 and cost ILGA its recently obtained observer status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Because ILGA is a transnational gay umbrella organisation, its study also allows one to grasp the distinctive national approaches as well as dissent among member organisations. The transnational structure of ILGA also permits us to question the standard periodisation of gay liberation. Indeed, the history of lesbian and gay movements is still poorly known, and accounts are built on a limited set of national experiences. Nonetheless, evidence shows that gay liberation reached some countries later and/or has lasted longer, such as in France (Jackson, 2009) or in Spain (Calvo, 2005). In others like Belgium, it seems to have barely influenced homosexual activism (Paternotte, 2011).

This article is organised in four sections. After a brief exploration of the status of pedophilia within gay liberation thought and activism, debates within ILGA will be examined. Three elements, which have structured this 16-year debate, will be scrutinised: the status given to gay identity and its relation to the need for a wider solidarity with other sexual minorities, the increasing dissociation between the issues of pedophilia and age of consent laws, and the priority given to pragmatic and moderate aims and strategies over utopian or revolutionary politics. These axes are studied historically, before showing how they were combined during the UN crisis of 1993–1994.

Given the limited length of this article, it focuses on ILGA as an organisation, and does not investigate at depth the socio-historical context, which allowed pedophilia to become one of the main contemporary sexual taboos. In addition, although highly needed, the scope of such an enterprise as well as the lack of serious research on this topic in a wide range of countries would easily lead to amalgamating distinctive national situations, which went through different social processes and/or changed at a different pace. This research is mostly based on ILGA's archives in Brussels, Amsterdam and London, and is part of a broader research project on ILGA and ILGA-Europe, its European branch founded in 1996.

Pedophilia, children's sexuality and gay liberation

Most scholars would probably not consider pedophilia when looking at the historic development of gay liberation ideas, or they would mention it very briefly. This topic has indeed always been highly controversial, and it has probably become the main contemporary sexual taboo. However, as will be briefly explored, the issues of children's and young people's sexuality and of pedophilia were often discussed by liberationist thinkers and activists, and sometimes belonged to their political agenda. This is a significant difference with the contemporary situation, which is

characterised by a stark condemnation of pedophilia and an overwhelming silence about children's sexualities. Interestingly, the same could be said about the academy, as shown by Kenneth Plummer's (1981a) or Theo Sandfort's (1987a) early research.

Additionally, although pedophilia and intergenerational relations were already discussed in earlier forms of homosexual mobilisation, scholars working on the homophile movement have emphasised that it got a specific flavour during that period. In his study about the French group Arcadie (2009), Julian Jackson has for instance shown that it is only under the influence of gay liberation groups that this organisation, which was strongly influenced by authors such as Roger Peyrefitte and André Gide and often portrayed young men in its magazine, moved from aesthetic and cultural to political concerns about pedophilia (see also Rupp, 2012).

Further investigation confirms this connection. The main thinkers of sexual liberation had indeed already showed interest in the issues of children's sexuality and/or pedophilia. Although he advocated a rather conventional model of 'natural' or 'authentic' sexuality relying on heterosexual complementarity, Wilhelm Reich decisively contributed to the study of children's sexuality in his book *The Sexual Revolution* (1971). More interestingly, Herbert Marcuse conferred a specific role to 'perversions' in the path leading from capitalist-inspired sexual repression to the achievement of polymorphous sexuality (1955). As pinpointed by Jeffrey Weeks, 'perverse sexualities (even paedophilia) were a revolt against the procreative norm, pointing to a fuller meaning of Eros, where the drive towards life represented the realisation of the full possibilities of the body' (1985: 167).

Similarly, key gay liberation activists also discussed the issue. Although he did not mention pedophilia and very briefly noted that sexual liberation implies the encouragement of 'sexual activity among children' (1972: 87), Dennis Altman drew heavily on Marcuse and decisively contributed to the links between gay and sexual liberation, insisting on the free expression of identity as well as on its inclusion within a broader liberation of sexuality. This implied a return to the polymorphous sexuality of the origins, as well as forms of solidarity with other sexual minorities.

Guy Hocquenghem, who was actively involved in the French Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) and was heavily influenced by the philosopher René Schérer (Idier, 2013), depicted more explicitly (the) youth as a particularly oppressed sexual group in *The Homosexual Desire* (2000), and contested the idea that intergenerational sex necessarily implies a form of sexual abuse (2000: 166–167). Pedophilia was central to his early work. Mario Mieli, one of the founders of the Italian FUORI!, also confers a specific role to perversions (among them pedophilia) in his quest towards 'the complete desinhibition and a liberation of the profound hermaphrodite nature of desire' (2008: 353).

Finally, as reminded by Matthew Waites, one must be cautious about current interpretations of the past, for the issues of young people's right to sexual autonomy and intergenerational sex were initially often intertwined, for instance through criticisms against age of consent laws (2005: 122–131). It must also be said that these issues were already contentious, notably – but not only – among

feminist circles. Both Nancy Whittier (2009) and Laurie Bousquet (2008) have highlighted the critical role of feminist groups in their studies about the emergence of the notion of sexual abuse and its association with intergenerational sex in countries as varied as the USA, the UK, France and Belgium.

I(L)GA and gay liberation

The International Lesbian and Gay Association was founded in 1978 in Coventry (UK) during a fringe meeting of the annual conference of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE). Organisations from Australia, Britain, Denmark, France, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Scotland and the USA were represented. Other groups rapidly joined the organisation, such as the Catalan Front d'Alliberament Gai de Catalunya (FAGC), the Flemish Federatie Werkgroepen Homofilie (FWH), the Swedish Riksförbundet för sexuellt likaberättigande (RFSL), the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition (CLGRC), and the North American Men Boy Love Association (NAMBLA). Although North and South American as well as Australian and New Zealand organisations were early members, ILGA long remained a mostly European organisation. It was also a predominantly male group, with no women attending the first meeting in Coventry. Although a women's caucus was set up in 1979, IGA only changed its name to ILGA to give lesbians more visibility in 1986.

Since its inception, the organisation has articulated a clear reformist agenda, trying to enter into dialogue with political institutions to gain rights and seeking incremental change instead of revolution. Its discourse was moderate, and references to human rights manifold. As mentioned in 1978 by Ian Dunn (Scottish Human Rights Group), who co-organised the Edinburgh International Gay Rights Congress in 1974, 'We are a representative group attempting to win beneficial changes for the gay community within the social system, and are not attempting to 'overthrow' that system' (Dunn, 1978: 10). Interestingly, ILGA was already targeting the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, and European institutions (both the European Economic Community and the Council of Europe), including litigation at the European Court of Human Rights.

Nonetheless, a more radical language was still talked within IGA and its discourse was partly moulded according to the gay liberation rhetoric. The latter was a fairly recent event in most countries, and it had had a strong impact on several member groups. If some like the English Campaign for Homosexual Equality were initially rather opposed to some of the aims of gay liberation and saw themselves as an alternative to the Gay Liberation Front (Robinson, 2007: 78–79), others had been gay liberation groups before moderating their discourse, like the Italian FUORI! (Prearo, 2013). Former homophile groups had also slowly integrated bits of the liberationist logic, such as the Dutch Cultuur- en Ontspannings Centrum (COC – Tielman, 1987). Therefore, while being undoubtedly reformist and pragmatic, IGA's founding documents were still displaying concepts and ideas reminiscent of gay liberation. For instance, the goals of the organisation included

efforts towards ‘the liberation of gay people’,⁵ and this document, which mentioned notions such as pride and oppression, stressed the importance of coming out.

The discourse of some member organisations was also reminiscent of the gay liberation rhetoric. In the first *IGA Bulletin*, Page Grubb from the Dutch COC suggested a connection between the foundation of IGA and the idea of gays being subversive transnational sexual outlaws:

Gays have always defied categorization . . . Categorization-by-passport is one of the many such labels we’ve managed to shake off, setting up through the years an international network that defies the attempt to order a most delightful chaos. We’re everywhere, we’re our own inns our own immigration procedures, our own transportation systems. We fly millions of miles around the world to make love. We’re global bhikku’s. (Grubb, 1978: 9)

This discourse was confirmed a few years later when COC members wrote in a document highlighting the need of an international tribunal on homosexuality:

WE DON’T WANT THE CAKE . . . WE WANT THE BAKERY . . . We don’t want a place under the sun to ourselves; we want no ghetto, we want a society that is free from all structural barriers that prevent humanity to liberate itself from oppressive norms and morals, from superstition and prejudice, from aggression and stupidity. (IGA Action secretariat, 1983: 2)

Early debates on pedophilia

Despite the disappearance of gay liberation groups in many countries, the rhetoric and some core ideas of gay liberation were still present within IGA, at least on certain issues. Pedophilia was one of them. Indeed, ILGA’s discourse on pedophilia was long influenced by a liberationist rhetoric, which was aimed at the overthrow of sexual repression and located the end of gay oppression within a broader liberation of sexuality. Therefore, the organisation insisted on the need for solidarity with other sexual minorities, including pedophiles and young people. Some activists also identified common roots of oppression, linked to patriarchy or capitalism. However, this position was contested from the start, and ideological and political tensions between liberationist and more pragmatic approaches, as well as hesitations, can be noticed. Furthermore, the long dominant liberationist approach gradually shifted towards the adoption of an official policy against pedophilia in 1993.

As regularly pinpointed by advocates of pedophilia, a geographical and cultural divide was clearly emerging, as voices opposed to pedophilia predominantly came from Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries. In those countries, this issue had already been discussed, often under fierce attacks from gay rights opponents, and gay and lesbian activists had decided to focus on homosexual issues. Both in the USA and in the UK, 1977 appears as the start of virulent anti-pedophile campaigns, with

Anita Bryant's mobilisation, which used pedophilia to attack gay groups (Thorstad, 1991) and actions against the Paedophile Information Exchange – PIE – (O' Carroll, 1980; Plummer, 1981b; Robinson, 2007: 133–137). As famously argued, these campaigns would have contributed to the moral panic (Weeks, 2012: 20), which emerged in the 1980s and would have been accompanied by the development of a 'punitive state' in those countries (Lancaster, 2011). As shown by the Danish case, the disjunction between pedophilia and homosexuality was even older in Scandinavia, taking roots in the persecution of men sleeping with boys and the willingness of the police to dissociate them from 'good homosexuals' in the 1950s and 1960s (Edelberg, 2011).

Pedophiles had been able to organise more freely in countries such as the Netherlands, which were rapidly seen as one of the main centres of the pedophile movement. A federation of working groups on pedophilia was established within the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Seksuele Hervorming (NVSH) in 1971 and the powerful COC itself became more tolerant from 1975 as a result of a change among the leaders of the organisation and of a greater pervasiveness of gay liberation ideas (Sandfort, 1987b; Schuijjer, 1991). Similarly, in 1977, while pedophiles were under attack in the US or the UK, leading French intellectuals such as René Schérer, Guy Hocquenghem and Gabriel Matzneff, launched several political campaigns in favour of both a full decriminalisation of homosexuality and the lowering of age of consent. They were supported by key figures such as Foucault, Sartre, Beauvoir, Deleuze, Derrida or Guattari (Idier, 2013). It is not surprising that the groups supporting a letter action to the PIE in 1981 were mostly French (Communauté du Christ Libérateur, CUAHR, Gai Pied, Masques, GLH Marseille).

According to IGA's archives, the organisation first dealt with pedophilia in 1979, at the Bergen (the Netherlands) conference. Member organisations knew they had to adopt an official position, but they could not agree on the one they wanted to promote. Therefore, they arranged to hold a specific panel on this topic. Because of the diversity of opinions, however, the decision was postponed, and it was agreed to carry on with this debate at the next two conferences, in Brighton in December 1979 and in a village close to Barcelona in 1980. Some members were already aware of the explosive nature of this debate, as shown by discussions about potential damage to the organisation's image and to gay and lesbian struggles. The same cautiousness was displayed in the PIE case.⁶

The documents of the 1980 Barcelona conference, where pedophilia was thoroughly discussed in two workshops (the women's caucus and a specific one on the topic), reveal that, despite the cautiousness and the already emerging dissent, positions were primarily liberationist. The defence of pedophilia was presented as an issue of solidarity between oppressed sexual minorities and an endorsement of young people's right to sexual autonomy. If the women's caucus raised the issues of power imbalance in sexual relationships, of patriarchy and of institutional violence against women and children, it refused a systematic association between pedophilia and gender violence, stating that 'mutual relationships are possible between adults and children'. Besides, female activists emphasised the existence

of 'a link between the repression of (paedo)sexuality and the appearance of repressive sexuality (rape and sexual assaults)'. At the same time, they were claiming that, as 'children have limited power at present to determine the course of their own lives; a liberation movement should aim to change the relations between adults and children to provide children with more ability to control the course of their own lives'.⁷ They raised the issue of age of consent laws, but a consensus could not be reached concerning their overall abolition.

The pedophilia workshop, which included representatives of some pedophile groups (the German DSAP, the British Fallen Angels and the French Groupe de Recherche pour une Enfance Différente), proposed another resolution suggesting to continue the debate, both within national organisations and at ILGA.⁸ Although this document acknowledged tensions and debates within IGA, its preamble was clearly inspired by a liberationist agenda. It claimed that arguments about this topic were often used against 'homosexual liberation', emphasised 'the place liberation of paedosexuality takes in the whole of sexual liberation', and stressed 'our distinctive ability, derived from our own experience of oppression as gay men and lesbian women, to contribute to the discussion of the liberation of paedosexuality'.⁹ Age of consent laws were condemned, and activists claimed the right to sexual self-determination irrespective of age.

A discussion paper prepared by the COC on request of the 1980 Barcelona conference and discussed at the 1981 Torre Pelice conference, which relied on an earlier decision by the COC annual congress (Sandfort, 1987b), confirmed this stance. It urged homosexuals to show their solidarity with pedophiles, particularly because both groups suffer from normative compulsory heterosexuality, and maintains that 'a successful homo-emancipation should include pedo-emancipation'. It also calls for the abolition of age of consent laws, claiming that 'children often have the same capacity for sexual response as adults'.¹⁰

Pedophiles vs. young people

The debate was however far from settled. A 1984 open letter from the Flemish FWH to the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM) reveals that IGRM had suspended its membership because of disagreements on the way pedophilia had been handled at the 1983 Vienna conference. In this open letter, the FWH emphasised that the call for 'international solidarity in the face of universal oppression' in IGA's foundational document actually included pedophiles and other oppressed sexual minorities, and that, if pedophiles are not necessarily gay, pedophilia was definitely a gay issue (Elsen, 1984: 14–15). The existence of a fierce debate was further confirmed by the launch of a new study group at the 1986 Isterød (Copenhagen) conference.

A major discursive and conceptual turn occurred in the mid 1980s, when issues of pedophile rights and young people's sexual autonomy were dissociated. This change was the result of three phenomena, and is also related to the lowering and the equalising of age of consent laws in several European countries. First, young

people formed their own groups and workshops both inside and outside ILGA. At the beginning, they were defending positions close to the ones of pro-pedophilia activists. But, while they were keeping the liberationist tone and calling for the abolition of age of consent laws, they were simultaneously emphasising the specificity of their claims.¹¹

This discourse changed dramatically a few years later, and by 1986–1987 young activists were defending lower age of consent laws instead of no limitation at all, arguing that young people need sexual protection from adults.¹² Therefore, while ages of consent were lowered in several European countries, issues of pedophile rights and age of consent laws were dissociated, and an increasing interest on power imbalances in sexual relationships arose in lesbian and gay groups.

Secondly, the content of discussions within the ILGA women's group altered. According to the minutes of the 1987 conference, female activists, who were increasingly regarding pedophilia as a male issue, were now urging ILGA 'to strongly object to adult plenary sexual activity (that is, the manipulation of sexual parts of the body) with persons who have not yet reached their psycho-social, biological and emotional adolescence', and recommending 'all resolutions made at previous ILGA conferences supporting adult sexual activity (as defined above) with persons who have not yet reached their psycho-social, emotional and biological adolescence be rejected'.¹³ This was a major change compared to the positions held in 1979, and, while female activists were articulating a rather constructivist approach to sexuality in the past, they were now referring themselves to the psychological and biological development of the child.

Thirdly, initiatives concerning children's rights began to emerge, for instance through the organisation of thematic workshops at annual conferences. These initiatives, encouraged by the other two developments outlined before, caused major tensions. Two Norwegian groups, Fellesraadet for Homofile Organisasjoner I Norge (FHO) and Det Norske Forbundet/48 (DNF/48), prepared a recommendation proposal for the children's rights workshop at the 1989 Vienna Conference, attempting to strengthen the decisions taken the year before. For them,

ILGA should remain an organization for lesbian and gay rights...ILGA should continue working with: questions concerning equality of age of consent between homo- and heterosexuals; questions concerning sexually mature young people's right to sexuality. Sexual relations between sexually immature children and adults may often constitute an abuse of the child. ILGA should work against such abuse on a global basis.¹⁴

Clearly dismissing ILGA's efforts to support pedophiles, this recommendation, although ultimately unsuccessful, gave rise to a huge controversy.

At the following European conference in Athens, in November 1989, DNF/48 and FHO submitted a new text entitled 'Sexual Abuse of Children'. This document introduced a new argument, which became central in the 1990s, according to which ILGA could not support pedophile claims for strategic reasons.¹⁵ In response,

the minutes of the pedophilia workshop indicate that participants were feeling increasingly threatened within ILGA and were 'suspicious about a possible hidden agenda'.¹⁶

As a result of these three dynamics, the issues of pedophile rights and young people's sexual autonomy became progressively dissociated. This is further confirmed by the proceedings of the workshop on sexual abuse of children held at the Athens conference in 1989, which mention that 'several people felt that it is important to keep the two matters clearly separate and that much confusion has arisen in the past from mixing the two subjects and from the choice of terms (i.e. abuse)'.¹⁷

These positions were reinforced during the 1990 Stockholm conference,¹⁸ when ILGA clearly endorsed the rights of the child. The following resolution was almost unanimously passed:

1. ILGA supports the right of every individual, regardless of age, to explore and develop her or his sexuality;
2. Major power imbalances create the potential for child abuse. ILGA condemns the exploitative use of power differences to coerce others into sexual relationships;
3. Every child has the right to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography;
4. We share the anger of all those damaged by such exploitation and offer our support;
5. ILGA should strive to eliminate the conditions that make coercion and exploitation possible.¹⁹

The balance between pro- and anti-pedophilia advocates and their respective influence on ILGA's official position was shifting and the gap between them had dramatically widened. If ILGA had not yet condemned pedophilia and was still promoting a strategy based on dialogue and mutual understanding, pro-pedophilia activists were feeling less comfortable than a few years before and struggled to convince their fellow activists to support their claims. Their discourse was still making reference to gay liberation, but it had become less audible.²⁰

The United Nations crisis

In July 1993, after more than 15 years of lobbying, ILGA gained a roster consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC (Sanders, 1996). However, this new status was quickly put at risk by the American conservative Right. In September 1993, the *Lambda report*, a US newsletter specialising in tracking and denouncing the lesbian and gay movement worldwide (Herman, 1997: 78–79), publicised that a pedophile group, NAMBLA, was a member of ILGA. It had faxed the ILGA secretariat in Brussels in August 1993 to get the list of the US members and screened them. This attack was part of wider conservative strategies to obstruct the progress of sexual and reproductive rights at the UN, in which the American Christian Right played a key part (Buss and Herman, 2003: Chapter 6).

In October 1993, ILGA answered in a press release that

debate about paedophilia, as well as about other complex issues regarding sexuality, has been ongoing for a long time, both within and outside the ILGA. The ILGA has therefore called upon its members to treat all sexual minorities with respect and to enter into a dialogue with them. Neither in the ILGA or in scientific circles has a consensus about the issue, which has caused and still causes considerable controversy, been reached. It is therefore important that discussion can continue in an open and respectful manner, which takes into account the feelings of all parties involved.²¹

Very quickly, however, the government of the USA stated publicly that it could not support ILGA's consultative status as long as pro-pedophilia organisations remained members. These statements, along with pressures from (mostly) American members, urged ILGA to change its response. In November 1993, after a meeting of the secretariat's committee in New York attended by two representatives of NAMBLA, ILGA requested NAMBLA and two other groups (Martijn and Project Truth/Free) to resign. Negotiations to convince them to leave the organisation began to take place, but remained unfruitful. During the 1994 annual conference, held in New York to commemorate the Stonewall riots, pedophilia was clearly condemned, and these groups were expelled by a motion approved by more than 80% of the members (214 in favour, 30 against).

At the end of the meeting, ILGA claimed it had 'confirmed [its] determination to fight for children's right to be protected from sexual abuse. The question of pedophile membership is now closed. . . ILGA can now return to the real goals of all our members: the protection of and fight for the basic human rights of lesbians and gay men in the world'.²² Nonetheless, long-standing member organisations and prominent voices within the organisation contested this decision. The Catalan FAGC denounced external pressures from the USA, Institut Lambda soon left ILGA, and Maria Pronk, a key COC member involved in contacts with United Nations, rejected the ostensible association between pedophilia and sexual abuse. She suggested pedophile groups be given observer status while backing the motion for pragmatic reasons.

These decisions did not suffice to convince the US conservative Right. In January 1994, the American Senate adopted a motion drafted by Senator Jesse Helms asking the USA to withhold all funds given to the UN if the President could not certify to the Congress by the end of September 1994 that no UN agency was granting a status to an organisation promoting pedophilia. A new scandal occurred in September 1994 as a result of further screening by US officials, who discovered that the Munich-based group Verein für sexuelle Gleichberechtigung (VSG) had a pedophile sub-group holding meetings in its premises. ILGA's consultative status was consequently suspended by the ECOSOC in accordance with a motion of the USA, and ILGA's members were again screened to decide whether to restore or definitively cancel ILGA's membership.

*After unfruitful talks, VSG membership was suspended until the following annual conference, which was to take place in Rio de Janeiro. During this meeting, ILGA strengthened its rejection of pedophilia and its support for children's sexual autonomy and protection. Official goals were expanded to include the promotion of universal respect for and observance of 'human rights and fundamental freedoms', including the rights of the child. A specific resolution on accreditation at the UN further confirmed the fact that ILGA neither promoted pedophilia, nor sought its legalisation, although it was defending 'the right of every individual, regardless of age, to explore and develop her own sexuality'. Finally, all organisations were summoned to send a document supporting the new goals of the organisation in order not to lose their membership.

If this crisis was the external element necessary to expel pedophile groups from ILGA after long and fierce internal debates, it had been prepared by the previous discursive and conceptual changes outlined earlier. Indeed, the discursive context and the power relationships within ILGA had dramatically changed when the UN crisis finally broke out. Therefore, former arguments relating the issue of solidarity with other sexual minorities and to the dissociation between paedophilia and young people's sexuality were still present. However, a more recent argument became central and was combined with the two former ones: political pragmatism and strategy. The UN status, which had been pursued since 1978, was central to ILGA's aims and strategies, and could not be jeopardised because of this scandal. Internal debates, including numerous letters sent by member organisations to ILGA's secretariat, also confirmed the geographical and cultural divide. The most hostile organisations came from the USA, Australia, Sweden or the UK. Reversely, although they may have voted for the expulsion of pedophiles for pragmatic reasons, groups from Brazil, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium or the Netherlands proved to be more sympathetic, or at least expressed doubts about the way the whole issue was handled.

The most ancient axis of the debate, opposing the need of solidarity with other sexual minorities to an exclusive focus on gay and lesbian issues, was still present. According to the secretariat's committee:

Some pointed out that it clearly must be the prerogative of the ILGA membership to define what kind of work we want and need an international umbrella like ILGA for.

Their answer was that this be limited to the liberation of lesbian and gay people, that it would only blur our focus and hinder our progress if we took on other issues.²³

Reversely, pro-pedophilia activists kept insisting on the need of solidarity. VSG argued that 'as a gay and lesbian organization, the ILGA must not behave towards a minority among us as hostilely as the anti-homosexual majority behaves towards ourselves. Otherwise ILGA will lose its credibility and its right to exist'.²⁴

During the 1993–1994 debates, it was also often recalled that the defence of pedophilia could not be equated with the advocacy of young people's sexual autonomy, and the notion of sexual abuse became central in ILGA's discourse.

For instance, the Swedish RFSL maintained that ‘a sexual relationship between a child and an adult by definition implies sexual abuse, since it cannot be determined whether the relationship is voluntary or not’.²⁵ Conversely, pro-pedophilia activists kept repeating that intergenerational sex could be consented, and that they were condemning any form of sexual abuse while emphasising that young people’s sexual self-determination implies the right to engage in sexual intercourse with adults.

Finally, the argument of political efficiency and the need for a strategic approach proved to be decisive. For British activist Peter Ashman, one of the founders of ILGA who initiated its human rights strategy, defending pedophile groups was:

likely to hamper ILGA’s ability at an international institutional level. It may also jeopardise ILGA’s relations with specialist UN agencies like [the] WHO [World Health Organisation] with whom ILGA works on issues related to HIV and AIDS, and damage ILGA’s credibility with member states of the UN. There is also the possibility that ILGA’s members will leave the organisation to set up a new one which would be able to seek consultative status and do such work.²⁶

Opponents emphasised the external nature of the debate, presented as imposed from outside by American conservative groups. As asked by the VSG, ‘will the ILGA follow its present Secretariat’s Committee into a “future development” which will force the ILGA to sacrifice all these ideals for an uncertain UN status and to expel more and more of its members at Jesse Helms’ behest?’²⁷

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the transformation of the relationship to pedophilia in the International Lesbian and Gay Association. If the scandal which broke out in 1993 at the UN is widely known, this issue was far from being new and had been discussed at almost every annual conference since the foundation of the organisation in 1978. A careful analysis of the debates unveils a profound transformation of the position of this organisation, which moved from a dialogue with pro-pedophilia groups and an endorsement of some of their claims to a clear condemnation and a few expulsions between 1993 and 1995.

The study of this debate also offers a way to examine the persistence of a gay liberation rhetoric after the demise of gay liberation groups. Indeed, defenders of pedophilia within ILGA often made reference to the broader aim of sexual liberation and to some of its key principles. The most common discourse located gay liberation within the broader frame of a liberation of all oppressed sexual minorities, and called upon ILGA’s members to show their solidarity with pedophiles, portrayed as the victims of a ‘repressive’ sexual order. But pro-pedophilia activists also maintained a ‘maximalist’ definition of young people’s sexual autonomy and of their ability to consent to sexual relationships, denouncing the notion of abuse and combating age of consent laws. They were ultimately promoting a more

utopian form of activism, opposed to pragmatic and institutional strategies. Their vision of sexual diversity was reminiscent of some experiments of the 1960s and early 1970s, and relied on the free expression of a broader scope of 'sexual perversions'.

The progressive isolation of these activists within ILGA suggests that their discourse became less resonant over time. Obviously, this change is linked to a dramatic transformation of social attitudes and moral judgements over pedophilia, which has been one of the most striking changes in sexual regulation over the last decades (Hekma, 2008). However, the decline of this discourse is also related to the confrontation between alternative ways of understanding and imagining gay and lesbian struggles. At the end of the 1970s, pro-pedophilia activists could find some sympathetic voices because of the proximity to the gay liberation period, to which they made references that were still meaningful for other activists. As time went by, their appeal faded, and a new way of conceiving homosexual emancipation emerged, along with new political goals.

Finally, if these discursive transformations show the slow demise of pro-pedophilia arguments through time within ILGA, they also indicate that some discourses reminiscent of gay liberation survived gay liberation groups, including in a reformist organisation such as ILGA. These transformations are undoubtedly similar to those that happened within national organisations. However, working on a transnational organisation reveals different temporalities according to the national context and enriches our understanding of the history of gay liberation. The latter did not reach all countries at the same time, and its influence varied widely across time and space. Hence, more comparative research is needed and other cases than the USA, France or the UK should be explored.

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Notes

1. This article mostly investigates male activism, reflecting the gender unbalance within ILGA and most homosexual organisations at the time. The specific contribution of lesbians within ILGA and their discrepancies are however discussed at length.
2. Vocabulary is always a sensitive issue, particularly on controversial topics. I use the terms 'pedophilia' and 'pedophile', reflecting the language in most documents I have consulted. However, other notions were also used, as shown by a footnote in a 1987 report from NAMBLA to ILGA. This indicates: 'For the purposes of this report, "gay pedophilia" will refer to sexual relationships between men and boys who have not reached adolescence. "Pederasty" will refer to relationships between men and adolescent boys. "Man/boy love" and "intergenerational sex" will encompass both categories' (NAMBLA, 1988: 24). See also Sandfort, Brongersma and van Naerssen (1991).
3. With two radically distinct perspectives, see D'Emilio (1983) and Epstein (1999).

4. It must be said that, as will appear in the article, stances were often more complex, and some activists could for instance defend liberal attitudes towards intergenerational sex although they had a difficult relation with pedophile activists. The 'pro' and 'anti' labels are therefore used for the clarity of the argument.
5. IGA, *Foundation document (as approved by the members of the Association on Sunday 15th April, 1979)*, s.l., 1979.
6. Fallen Angels, [*Letter to International Gay Association & Member Organizations*], London, 1980–1981.
7. IGA, 'Workshops. A. Women's Caucus', *IGA Newsletter* 80(1), Reports of the 2nd Annual Conference, 1980, p. 5.
8. It was passed by a large majority of votes, but CHE voted against.
9. 'Pedophilia', *IGA Newsletter* 80(1), Reports of the 2nd Annual Conference, 1980, p. 7.
10. COC, 'Discussion paper to Torino', in IGA, *Conference papers*, 1981, p. 11.
11. See 'Statement and resolutions of 2nd international gay youth congress', *IGA Bulletin*, 1985 (4) p. 6–7.
12. ILGA, *Conference report of the 1987 Cologne conference*, 1987, p. 24.
13. ILGA, *Conference report of the 1987 Cologne conference*, 1987, p. 22.
14. ILGA, *Conference report of the 1987 Cologne conference*, 1987, p. 29.
15. DNF-48 and FHO, 'Sexual abuse of children', ILGA, *Pre-conference papers*, 1989.
16. ILGA, *Report of the 1989 Vienna Conference*, 1989, p. 41.
17. ILGA, *Conference papers for the ILGA European regional conference*, 1989, p. 13.
18. ILGA, 'Minutes of the children's Rights Workshop', in ILGA, *Conference papers*, 1990, pp. 38–40.
19. ILGA, *Brief explanatory note on secretariats' committee positions regarding the debate on pedophilia in ILGA and the VSG suspension*, n.d., p. 1.
20. See for instance: Martin Burgess, 'Pedophilia as the cutting Edge of gay Liberation?' in ILGA, *Pre-conference papers Stockholm 1990*, 1990, p. 16. NAMBLA, *Nambla responds to the advocacy of children's rights by the FHO and DNF-48*, 10 April 1990, p. 4.
21. ILGA, *Statement*, Brussels, 14 October 1993.
22. ILGA, *Conference report*, 1994, p. 9.
23. ILGA, *Brief explanatory note on secretariats' committee positions regarding the debate on pedophilia in ILGA and the VSG suspension*, n.d., p. 2. (See also Deschamps and Limelette, 1994: 6).
24. VSG, *Report: ILGA caught between conformity and gay solidarity: UN status versus pedophilia*, Munich, 1995, p. 7. See also NAMBLA, *NAMBLA Affirms Membership in ILGA*, New York, 27 December 1993, p. 3.
25. ILGA, *ILGA Bulletin*, 2/94, p. 16. See also Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International, [*Letter to Rebecca Sevilla and Hans Hjerpekjon*], Washington, 24 November 1993.
26. Peter Ashman, *ILGA and Paedophilia – the NAMBLA debate*, March 1994.
27. VSG, *Report: ILGA caught between conformity and gay solidarity: UN status versus pedophilia*, Munich, 1995, p. 7. See also John Prinser, [*Letter to the members of ILGA' secretariat committee*], Amsterdam, December 1993.

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