



ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

# Global Resistance to Anti-gender Opposition

LGBTQI+ Activism in Colombia, India,  
Kenya, Peru, and Serbia

September 2023



# Purpose and Gratitude

In May 2022, we, two researchers with long histories of activism, Alejandra Sardá- Chandiramani and Hakima Abbas, were hired by the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice to look into the impact of the anti-gender movement on LGBTQI+ activism globally with a special focus on five countries: Colombia, India, Kenya, Peru, and Serbia.

We started by looking at the existing literature and noted that there is a wealth of knowledge that has been built on the states, people, and organizations working to roll back the rights of LGBTQI+ people and criminalize or further criminalize LGBTQI+ people and communities. We have included a brief bibliography with a selection of literature from the last three years for further exploration.

The existing literature lacks the perceptions of LGBTQI+ communities and peoples about the impact and the stories or lessons from their struggles to resist cisgender heterosexual patriarchy and build queer futures. Yet, those most impacted by oppression hold the deepest knowledge of the manifestations, impact, and solutions of that oppression. For this reason, we asked LGBTQI+ activists around the world to share their experiences, knowledge, and insights through a survey, focus groups, and interviews. The process of knowledge curation was iterative. Each conversation led us to answers and more questions. We want to thank the hundreds of activists and researchers who added to the collective pot of knowledge and built this work with us.

We also worked with research associates in each of the five countries of focus. They researched and wrote the case studies that share context specific insights for universal learning, as well as contributed their knowledge, networks, and expertise to the research. For us, it was a privilege and an honor to work with our colleagues, Muthoni Ngige, Marija Radoman, Marija Jakovljević, Morgan Londoño Marín, Yinna Ortiz, Claudia Jimena Plasencia Custodio, and the Indian researchers whose names are kept confidential for safety reasons.

This report is our attempt to share what we learned through this process, draw threads from the similarities, and add analysis to strengthening

LGBTQI+ movement action. In chapter one, we discuss the definitions and terms used to describe the opposition. In chapter two, we reveal the impact of the opposition on LGBTQI+ lives, communities, activists, and movements. In chapter three we celebrate LGBTQI+ resistance and world building. In chapter four we capture the complexities of alliance building and solidarity.

We would like to thank Luam Kidane, Radhika Chandiramani, Marta Musić, and Lucía Fernanda Bonilla, who read and significantly improved our drafts with their feedback. The Astraea Foundation was very generous with their knowledge and contacts, making our work easier and more fun. In particular, we would like to thank Gathoni Blessol, Lame Olebile, Lariza Fonseca, Mariam Gagoshashvili, Meenu Pandey, Sanjar Kurmanov, Senda Ben Jebara, Simone Williams, and Xena Scullard. Lastly, we would like to thank the group of translators and interpreters without whom curating the global knowledge of LGBTQI+ activists would not have been possible, including Gloria Delgadillo, Sacha Monfort, Usha Ravikumar, Nidhi Agarwal, María Angélica Ramírez, and José Eduardo Sánchez.

A note on language: throughout this report we use the language of LGBTQI+ people, activists, communities, and movements. We are however aware of the limitations of this nomenclature for the rich tapestry of people, communities, and organizing that we are referring to. For this reason, we have included terms like “sexual and gender dissident” and “hijra” when writers or activists used these terms to speak about themselves, their communities, or movements.

A note on quotes: This report is a collective endeavor. Throughout the text we have quoted the activists who helped give it shape through the survey, focus groups, and interviews. For safety reasons, they are not named. Whenever possible, we mention their organizations and the countries where they live and work. Some quotes are integrated into our own text, marked by the use of italics and quotation marks, and sometimes preceded by a brief introduction. Others are presented on their own. There is no hierarchy among the quotes. Simply, some blended into the text more easily than others.

This report is a collection of knowledges from around the world by various people and authors. Chapters have been written by various authors, and many people and activists are quoted. The report presents various voices as authentically as is possible, while providing coherence through the chapters and expanding or explaining concepts or terms that may not be easily understood universally. We have minimally edited the contributions so as to remain faithful to the intention of each speaker and author. Our intention is to stay true to the specific context, language, knowledge, and experience of each contribution and to celebrate the plurality of LGBTQI+ lives, resistance, and alternatives. We hope that you, the reader, will enjoy and join this celebration.

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# Chapter 1: A Beast With Many Heads

# A Beast With Many Heads

Depending on where and who you are, you may be impacted by policies, laws, and socialization that attempt to silence, disappear, criminalize, and repress not only dissent and dissidents but even the very existence of your identity. You may experience religious and cultural institutions that use their reach and power to create an absolutist view in which there is no place for multiple ways of being and understanding the world. You may have to struggle daily to assert existence, claim rights, seek justice, and defend lands and territory. You are not alone. All around the world, the majority is experiencing the impacts of fundamentalist, conservative, fascist, nationalist, white supremacist, far-right, anti-gender, and anti-rights forces.

Academic and movement literature provide precise and important definitions of the forces that make up this opposition to rights and justice and uphold a culture of domination. You will find definitions of them in the glossary and literature about them in the bibliography.

Our research reveals that there is no single language that is used by LGBTQI+ activists to describe the opposition that they face. In fact, the language to describe these forces varies across contexts and even within the same context. There are four categories used to describe the opposition faced by LGBTQI+ activists around the world. These are

in relation to affiliation to and use of institutionalized religion, with terms like fundamentalists, religious extremists, and religious fundamentalists;

in relation to political ideologies, with terms like ultra-conservatives, right wing, nationalists, ultra right wing, conservatives, and fascist;

newer terms that describe the oppositions' relation to concepts such as anti-rights and anti-gender;

terms that describe the oppositions' targeting of specific communities, such as trans-exclusionary radical feminists and white supremacist.

The most common term used by our survey respondents to describe the opposition was

fundamentalist.<sup>1</sup> Many of the respondents selected as their top term one that links the opposition to institutionalized religion, suggesting that the opposition is primarily using religion as the basis for targeting LGBTQI+ activists.<sup>2</sup> We also asked respondents what other terms were used in their context. A majority of these terms were political, including terms such as conservative, ultraconservative, right wing, ultra right wing, and fascist. 46% of the sample indicated that at least one of these terms refer to the political ideologies of their opposition. It is worth noting that the most mentioned term in the fundamentalist category was one with a long history and whose meaning may be more accessible than others: conservatives.

There is a clear awareness among LGBTQI+ activists about the dual religious-political nature of the opposition. These actors are often indistinguishable from each other and even more often religious actors disguise themselves as political or secular ones to advance their agendas “beyond the faithful.”<sup>3</sup> 33% of survey respondents selected a political term as their top one, showing the growing strength of this trend among opposition actors. This is probably because it has been successful and has broadened the appeal of these forces in specific contexts. The Association of Women in Development (AWID) describes the relationship between the opposition and nationalism in the following way:

***“Anti-rights actors make strong parallels between the nation and the family as patriarchal and heteronormative institutions. Both are constructed in exclusionary ways that reinforce social hierarchies and norms of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and often***

- 1 A total of 33% of respondents mentioned “fundamentalists” (24%) or “religious fundamentalists” (9%) as the top word that best describes opposition actors in their context
- 2 42% of respondents chose a term to describe the opposition that included reference to their religious affiliation
- 3 Políticas antigénero en América Latina en el contexto pandémico [livro eletrônico] / ditado por Sonia Corrêa ; revisão técnica Magaly Pazello. — Rio de Janeiro : Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinas de Aids - ABIA, 2022. PDF. Vários autores. ISBN 978-65-87854-12-0

***class. In this ideology, a deviation from the norms of the patriarchal and heteronormative family is perceived as a form of national threat or betrayal. Once the nation is imagined as a single homogenous social unit of kinship, particularly when grounded in racial ideologies of shared origin and supremacy, the nation and the family become almost interchangeable.”<sup>4</sup>***

While our methodology did not deeply explore the economic ideologies of opposition actors, respondents did point to capitalism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism as having an important impact on the lives of LGBTQI+ people and communities. Similarly, the literature acknowledges that while the opposition appears to mobilize predominantly around religious or political frames, they seek the privatization of social assets and a “free economy,” despite paradoxically leveraging social resentment about neoliberalism.<sup>5</sup>

Among the newer terms used in the literature to describe the opposition, “anti-rights” seems to have the most resonance among LGBTQI+ activists. 11% of survey respondents mentioned it as its top choice against 6% for “anti-gender”). It was also the second most mentioned term across all five countries in our group. It is worth noting that no respondent from Kenya or Serbia mentioned this term and that the term has more traction in Latin America. Our literature review reveals that in the context of progressive philanthropy, there is a growing interest in, and a potentially narrow focus on, anti-gender, and to some extent anti-rights, mobilization, primarily by funders in the global north, perhaps because of the increased visibility and impact of these forces in the U.S. and Europe. As discussed in chapter three, the narrow focus by donors who support LGBTQI+ activists with a single manifestation of the opposition may limit the creativity and multi-pronged approach needed for effective resistance.

Fewer respondents to our survey selected terms that describe the opposition in relation to their targeting of specific oppressed communities, such as trans-exclusionary radical feminist, TERF, or white supremacist. This may be because the question asked for the word that “best describes” the opposition to LGBTQI+ rights, which may require a broader

definition. However, 8% of the respondents were deeply concerned about anti-trans attacks and chose “TERFs” as their top term. The targeting of trans and intersex communities is multifold, with TERFs being only one subset of this opposition. The visibility and wide platform that TERFs are given appears to be bolstered by the opposition who capitalize on “the opposition within,” and some TERFs themselves appear to be so invested in the oppression of trans people that they embrace alliances with forces in the opposition that would appear to be counter to even the most conservative form of feminism.<sup>6</sup> TERFs and other opposition forces use language such as “anti-gender ideology” to oppose all forms of gender affirming care and promote genital mutilations and harmful medical interventions on intersex minors. They often also seek to criminalize sex workers and people who use drugs.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, the words and definitions to describe the opposition resonate differently for different LGBTQI+ movements based on context. For example, according to the activists we talked with in India, anti-gender really does not resonate as a phenomenon, whereas in North America, Latin America, and Western Europe, anti-gender is widely understood as a construct created to undermine transgender, intersex, and cisgender women’s rights, autonomy, and self-determination. Religion is used as a pretext to undermine rights in Colombia, Peru, and Kenya, so in those contexts religious fundamentalist terminology resonates most, but less so in Serbia where nationalism and fascism are the ways in which opposition forces manifest more clearly, even though there are embedded religious underpinnings. Similarly, the positionality of the activists themselves has an impact on the terminology they use for the opposition. For example, those who organize primarily through a trans and intersex rights and justice lens tend to focus on anti-gender actors, those who organize primarily through a leftist lens may focus on right and far-right actors, and those who organize primarily through a racial lens may focus on imperialist and white supremacist actors.

LGBTQI+ people living in situations of conflict or war also are faced with militarism and militarized

4 Rights at Risk: Time for Action, AWID, 2021

5 Countering anti-gender actors and narratives, ILGA, TGEU and GATE (2022)

6 Trans-Exclusionary Feminisms and the Global New Right. An issue of: TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly, Volume 9, Number 3, Published: August 2022

7 Countering anti-gender actors and narratives, ILGA, TGEU and GATE (2022)



opposition. In our interviews and focus groups, armed groups were mentioned in the Colombian context where they control territories and violently impose a gender and sexuality order. When the state forms part of the opposition, LGBTIQ+ communities are subjected to the often arbitrary and legitimized violence of militarized police or other so-called security personnel, even in times of ostensible peace. The agents of state-sanctioned violence are often framed as the enforcers of a moral order and target LGBTIQ+ people, whose multiple identities further criminalize them on the bases of race, class, work, or drug use.

LGBTIQ+ activists that we talked with in our research also mentioned the opposition from within, which is discussed further in chapter two. There are LGBTIQ+ people who join conservative or right-wing political parties often with discourses that demonize other groups such as immigrants and impoverished people and/or promote religious, racial or caste superiority. While they may not purport to blanketly oppose LGBTIQ+ people's rights, they align themselves with oppressive views and practices, positioning themselves as respectable within the dominant construct at the expense of other oppressed people. The degree of adherence to these harmful notions of moral order can vary within this internal opposition, ranging from LGBTIQ+ people who want to fit in, to those who take active part in the oppression of other people on the basis of race, caste, religion, class and other factors. In chapter four, we discuss the complex relationship between solidarity and alliance among LGBTIQ+ activists and feminist, progressive, left, Black, and Indigenous movements and the failures of purported left states to advance rights and justice for LGBTIQ+ people.

Despite the differences and nuances in nomenclature, it is clear that these opposition forces are gaining power and influence, have multiple manifestations and strategies, are building alliances across their differences, and targeting women, LGBTIQ+, and other oppressed peoples in an attempt to gain power and control. Tracing these opposition forces across time is useful in locating their ideologies and practices, as well as demystifying their impact and countering the myth of their invulnerability and sudden rise. Plainly, for as long as cisgender heterosexual patriarchy has existed, so has (and will!) queer resistance and alternatives.

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## Going Back to Fundamentals: A Queer Feminist Decolonial Framing

The opposition forces that LGBTIQ+ activists face in these times of complex dynamics and multiple intersecting crises are manifestations of cisgender patriarchy that intersect with imperialism, colonialism, neoliberalism, ecocide, and other forms of domination and oppression.

***“Our bodies are the first line of defense against this colonial assault. We are territories worth defending” - Blessol Gathoni, Kenya***

While cisgender heterosexual patriarchal opposition is not new, the persistence of these forces is neither natural nor inevitable. Neither has there been a documented time in history in which their absolutist vision of the world was realized, despite their narrative harkening back to mythical times. The current wave of global cisgender heterosexual patriarchy has many manifestations and forces behind it. While holding disparate ideologies, the opposition to LGBTIQ+ rights is united in their vision of a world of domination, control, and homogeneity. Many of these forces, organized in groups, religious institutions, and political parties among others, have created networks and spaces of global connection as a way to strengthen their agendas. Resources, including money, flow across and between these networks and connections.<sup>8</sup> With limited exceptions, the forces that oppose LGBTIQ+ rights and justice also target other oppressed groups like cisgender heterosexual women and impoverished, Black, Indigenous, and Dalit people. They use many different tactics and narratives that are context specific and are tested and amplified to resonate with the most people.

As we discuss in chapter four, there are attempts to mask the fundamental tenet of the opposition and coopt some cisgender heterosexual women and LGBTIQ+ and oppressed peoples into these agendas. Sticking to well-known terms that can be easily and broadly understood and can help identify the opposition clearly, like fundamentalist or conservative, may be an effective way to engage more of the general public and community-based activists in resistance.

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8 Tip of the Iceberg: Religious extremist - Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality & Reproductive Health in Europe (2021)

# Kenyan Queer Folk Constructing Spaces of Subversion and Resistance

By **Muthoni Ngige**

Popular anti-gay narratives cite homosexuality as exogenous to Africa and use cultural values, nationalism, tradition, and religion to uphold unjust social structures that drive homophobia and transphobia in Kenya and in the African continent. This portrayal of LGBTQI+ embodiment and culture as incompatible not only presents a crisis of representation and belonging, but links anti-gay organizing in Kenya to the broader anti-gender movements that similarly utilize these concepts to frame moral anxieties that legitimize stigmatizing practices.

Without denying cultural relativism's role in stigmatizing, discriminating, and excluding same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming people, I present an alternative narrative foregrounding the ways in which LGBTQI+ folk in Kenya participate in molding cultural forms that disrupt dominant representation, politics of sexuality, citizenship, and practices of space and place. I assert that these practices of alternative world-making unite their experiences of body-mind and spirit, where the systematic and institutionalized violence hurts in visible and invisible ways and presents a discursive point from which to negotiate for space that reinserts these narratives into public transcripts.

Here, I showcase the Nairobi underground ballroom scene to show the agency and inventiveness of Kenyan LGBTQI+ in embodying a manifestation of queer space-making that challenges local norms and cultural conventions. Memory, observation, personal experience navigating the Nairobi queer scene, and five interviews inform the process of writing this case study.

***“These spaces we created for ourselves: From Kwa Mathe-Tacos-2go-Grindr-TikTok-Twitter”***

10 years ago I was kicked out of a Nairobi club on Kimathi Street called Tribeka. The bouncer told me that people like me were not allowed to be there. At the time I was unaware that my self-expression and unconventional style read as queer. This experience maintained a grip on my imagination, but it gave me the courage to believe in the mechanism of change in favor of spaces that did not discriminate based on class/socio-economic status, gender, or sexual orientation. It helped me to see that LGBTQI+ exclusion is deliberate and so should be efforts for inclusion. Queer aesthetics signaling was my first introduction to space-making at Nairobi's Tacos club on Kimathi street and Florida 2001, clubs notable as some of the initial LGBTQI+ inclusive clubs. These clubs did not open up for queer people but “were taken up.”

I draw on the concept of taking up space and insistence on embracing



the empowering experiences of joy and pleasure as an element of agency that affords us insight into how Kenyan queer folk rely on their imaginations, creativity, and hope to collectively construct identities and spaces for themselves. From the downtown Nairobi bars Kwa Mathe and Tacos to the apps 2go, TikTok, and Twitter, queer space-making, online and offline, has provided queer folk an opportunity to make themselves visible in order to challenge popular cultural, religious, and political narratives, examine their pleasures, desires, form queer survivorhood, and improve their well-being, thereby creating an alternative reality through a collective reimagining of space and place.

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## Hidden resistance on the runway

***“Those pleasures may be fleeting and accessible only to the few. But they should not be dismissed, nor should we underestimate the role that pleasures of any variety play in enabling those who are otherwise distressed to reclaim some sense of their humanity” - Moradewun Adejunmobi***

### Structure

The Nairobi Underground allroom Scene was founded by drag performer in 2018 to use drag art and performance as an advocacy tool to shift perspectives and change the negative narratives and stereotypes often imposed on sexual and gender minorities. They have Kenyanized the ballroom experience that is associated more straightforwardly with global Black queer resistance, especially the one represented by American shows like Pose.

It functions as a loosely structured collective, made up of young peer educators, trans and non-binary folk, and young gay men accessing HIV/AIDS programming at ISHTARMSM, a gay men’s health center.

They host ballrooms at the GALCK+ Community Centre Nairobi, an LGBTQI+ affirming church, and Cosmopolitan Affirming Community premises and run paid shows at LGBTQI+ events and conferences. The performances range from strutting, lip-syncing, voguing, dancing, face posing, runway catwalk, and songs inspired by queer culture.

In 2023, the violence meted out on queer people has undeniably formed a sinister shadow on Kenya’s timeline, with different spheres of society joining forces to preach hate. The consequence is that queer folk are not safe anywhere; there is no room left for them. The Nairobi underground ballroom scene presents a creative and courageous counter-narrative in which performers continue to organize ball events and make visible the spaces of possibility that are closed off by homophobic hatred to create spaces that affirm their bodies, well-being, and lives.

By the end of 2022, the number of performers in the group had stabilized at around 20. Demographically the performers’ age group ranges from 18 to 30 years of age and is made up of mainly gay men, non-binary folk, and trans women from different Kenyan ethnic communities. There is a considerable turnover in attendees for the curated ballroom events, ranging from 50 to 70 people. Most of the performers are high school leavers and do not have any post-high school professional training; they live in the slums of Nairobi and make money through the informal sector. Some engage in sex work and transactional sex as a way to meet basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Only two of the 20 performers have studied for a professional degree.

Given the diverse differences, how does this group share an understanding of space?

### Repairing Kin

The founder of the Nairobi underground ballroom acts as the mother to most of the performers. She/they gives personal guidance to the performers and provides a secure space for them to air out any interpersonal issues. They encompass friendship and mutual obligation by maintaining frequent communication through WhatsApp where they make life bearable by supporting each other through personal and relationship troubles and contributing monetarily towards emergency events that would be too heavy for an individual to bear alone (e.g. relocation in case of being ousted from families or eviction by landlords). As such the ballroom space begins to repair the harm of othering caused mostly by biological families, sustaining relations of belonging and supportive networks and reclaiming the notion of family. It embodies alternative queer community-making expressed in terms of kinship-friendship-

relationship-siblinghood by providing a possibility where their future can be imagined outside marriage or reproduction, with friends and lovers as chosen family made on the basis of a similar experience of marginalization of sexual orientation and gender identity, sharing affection, and their space-making work.

### **Feeling Free as a Provocation, Making Space for Defiant Joy**

On stage and in dancing training, the performers let down the trappings of conformity, creating a queer sanctuary that focuses inwardly on identity, self-exploration, and self-expression. This realization is done through the use of creative expression and building character, clothing, and costume that disrupt gender and sex binaries. The space offers an opportunity to safely perform gender fluidity and explore ambiguous dressing and experiment with makeup. The attendees and performers charge into a space where they can comfortably display same-sex affection and seek out intimate sexual encounters. This joyous space temporarily mediates the confinement of the legal and cultural violence that queer folks are subjected to in their daily lives, especially in opposition to the institutions of heterosexuality where they are distanced from the ways in which they are embodied. This possibility provides a blueprint for the future promised by queerness; a shared world of pleasure and is further explored by the idea expressed by Jose Esteban Muñoz that art manifests itself in such a way that the political imagination can spark new ways of perceiving and acting on the reality that is itself potentially changeable.

### **You Belong Here**

Posters adorn the ballroom walls perhaps because the ballroom transforms the community center office into a fun place and therefore a symbolic space outside all categories of Kenyan spatial location; school, work, club, and church that are checked for demonstrations of same-sex intimacy. This configures gayness itself and disrupts alienation and rejection of sexual and gender minorities, establishing the ballroom as a space to secure potentially affirming and nourishing communities.

Homophobia and transphobia disrupt the experience of belonging and the idea of home for most LGBTQI+ folk, the ballroom scene provides a space to build community with others over a shared experience of marginalization where there is no endpoint to experiences of home. The impulse is to create an alternative space for performers to express themselves without being judged for their sexual orientation and gender identity.

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## **Conclusion**

The resistance of affirming space-making through ballroom in Kenya is mostly undocumented, hidden, and under-resourced. It is often seen as not real action, work, or art, yet hope forms the nuts and bolts necessary for mobilizing and organizing a grassroots base that is actively working to change its situation and is not only a victim of homophobia. Perhaps this invisibility is telling of the rubric of Kenyan gay culture and LGBTQI+ experience, one that is marred with demonization, denials of existence, stigma, and discrimination.

Embodied disruption as in the Nairobi underground ballroom reinvigorates hope and reimagines space and place in which queer people can live their lives to the fullest. Where they create their own self-transforming reality in spite of the distress associated with the psychological terror of despair brought about by patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia. They provide a joyful space to imagine our freedom and dreams and to dream us queer people out of the bleak and suffocating place of fear and despair.

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# Chapter 2: The Opposition and Its Impact

# The Opposition and Its Impact

There is a rich body of literature on what we call the opposition to queer rights and lives. The opposition are actors who deny that all or some queer people are entitled to human rights and fundamental freedoms, which includes living their lives with dignity and joy. In this chapter we will try our best to not repeat what has already been said, but rather to connect and re-read the information that is already out there, with the participants' voices and experiences shaping our interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

Classic opposition actors are those that have always been there, like religious groups, specifically Catholic, evangelical, Orthodox, Muslim, and Hindu for the focus countries for this study. This group not only includes the "fundamentalists" or "religious extremists" named by the activists with whom we interacted, but also the politicians who genuinely believe or instrumentalize a religious or "family values" agenda for their own benefit, along with the institutions dominated by them that enforce their mandates (academia, medical establishment, families, etc.). Some of those politicians are religious actors engaged in a second career as "citizens" and have positioned themselves strategically to influence public policies. However, in recent years this opposition has broadened its boundaries to also welcome or to make visible an internal opposition made of actors from queer movements themselves or from movements that historically have been adjacent to or overlap with queer movements, like the feminist movement. A third group is what we call opposition actors in disguise, those who appear to be allies but are in fact allied only to their own vested interests.

In this section we will discuss what the opposition looks like with regard to the geopolitical spaces where queer activists live and work and the impact it has on them.

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9 For further discussion about specific opposition actors and context, please refer to the annotated bibliography.

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## Who is the Opposition?

Beyond the specific actors that can be named, one of the main opposition actors LGBTQI+ communities face today is not an actor itself but a perspective that is common to all opposition actors. This opposition is an emerging "common sense" rooted in a colonial models of thought that is continuously being actualized through various institutions, such as the state, schools, families, the media, and the church. This common sense endows bodies with meanings and determines how to relate to them. Thus, and with variations across contexts, expressions of hate against marginalized groups are considered an attribute of the winner, an expression of freedom, an act of love to protect the 'right' members of society and/or the only tool for the survival of a particular community, race, or nation in its current privileged status. By the same token, equality and diversity are seen as pretexts, weapons of the weak to obtain undeserved advantages, and totalitarian impositions. This common sense is fabricated, promoted, and disseminated by all opposition actors that LGBTQI+ and other historically oppressed communities face today – both classic and internal ones. One of our reviewers from India reflected further on this:

"This 'common sense' is a manufactured kind of 'coolness,' a social behavior that privileges the uncaring, the adjusting, the chill and content ... This is building a world where LGBTQIA+, Queer, Trans, muslim, Hijra activists are called 'snowflakes,' and seen as those using 'victimhood' to claim rights."<sup>10</sup>

We argue that this way of endowing human experience with meaning is colonial because it sustains the binary logic imposed by the West and is extended through structural violence. The colonial reasoning differentiates between those who are recognized as human and those who are not continues to work in the present. Yet it is also true that this common sense has morphed in response to community contestations and ongoing changes in the economic, political, cultural

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10 Reviewer activist from India (validation survey respondent)

and social spheres. Another reflection from an Indian activist:

***“Language is being weaponized. When feminists oppose queers they speak from a language of equality: ‘trans people are disrespecting our historical inequality and our vulnerability.’”<sup>11</sup>***

During our exchanges with activists, we perceived that a crucial factor in the spread of this common sense is global communication technologies. We live in a world connected 24/7 by an overwhelming web of entertainment and distraction, in other words, social media, which produces enormous profits for a few and has an unprecedented capacity to manufacture and ossify global consensus. This is also a contested space, as we see attempts being made by social movements to re-appropriate the media to erode such common sense and its colonial traces. Social media is explored further in chapter three. In response to our survey, a lesbian activist from Peru shared a good illustration of this:

***“In early 2022 we organized a demonstration in the form of the National Civil Registry to uphold the rights of lesbian mothers. There were people waiting in line to go into the Registry and suddenly they started to scream at us, telling us to leave and that we deserved to be raped for being who we are. We had not seen something like that happen for years and we realized that post-pandemic we lesbian movements have lost the street.”<sup>12</sup>***

That emerging common sense works to safeguard the colonial order, perpetuating the unequal distribution of power and restricting fundamental human rights to a few. Thus, this model provides a sense of security and direction to those who hold power and erects the illusion that it is possible to achieve those rights if one meets, or can pretend to meet, the standards of sexuality, sex, gender, race, class, ability, and species that the system rewards. This happens at a time when our planet is being destroyed by greed and historic efforts to guarantee dignified lives for all are collapsing, including public health and education, labor protections, democracy and its institutions, a less unequal distribution of wealth, among others.

11 Reviewer activist from India (focus group participant)

12 Survey respondent, Peru

For the majority of those on the planet who live in locations where those efforts were never made, there is a growing realization that it may never happen. In a context like this, the call for individualism, to be on the right side of the equation at all costs, to be part of those who will decide who gets on the lifeboat and who does not, becomes enormously attractive.

Some of those trying to climb into the boat come from the LGBTQI+ communities themselves – the internal opposition. They tend to be individuals with some degree of privilege, cisgender, white, middle or upper class and/or otherwise belonging to the dominant religious, ethnic or cultural group in their context. The internal opposition who join the emerging common sense violently target less privileged members of their own communities, like trans persons, particularly in Latin America, North America, parts of Africa, and Europe, or Muslims and individuals from non-dominant castes in India. While there have always been a variety of ideological positions within LGBTQI+ movements and confrontations about privilege have been strong, the current context encourages this in unprecedented ways. In most of the world, our movements are fragmented or even broken from within at a critical time when we need numbers and solidarity more than ever. From what we heard in the course of our research, the damage caused by these confrontations is as serious as, and in some cases even stronger than, that caused by the classic opposition actors like churches and states which are fueling and using this to their advantage.

The opposition actors in disguise are those who have the power to create enabling conditions for classic and internal opposition actors to deny and damage LGBTQI+ rights and lives. They do so by action or inaction, because it serves their interest of holding on to power. Some of them may even appear as allies and may support – in the letter and to the extent it comes at no risk or cost – those very same rights they are actually eroding. Most of them will be seriously offended if they see themselves in this category. Who are they? The neoliberal capitalist governments and private corporations, which often overlapping in their members/staff, that are responsible for the destruction of our planet and of the more humane alternatives of sharing our common goods described above. This group is actively contributing to reinforce the prevailing common sense that glorifies individual success, wealth, and greed over solidarity and the preservation of our planet and lives.



Unlike the classic opposition, the opposition in disguise is more ambiguous. Presenting themselves as progressive allies, they promote the fundamental rights of minorities as long as those do not contradict the economic interests of the elites they represent. Thus, we encounter states that, on the one hand, legislate in favor of queer people, celebrate multiculturalism, and promote discourses of equality, yet on the other hand, they militarize Indigenous territories, promote gentrification and housing insecurity, displace communities that oppose extractive corporations, and endanger informal work from which the majority of LGBTQI+ people and historically oppressed groups sustain themselves. Thereby, alliances between the states and the corporations they represent instrumentalize human rights to legitimize the expropriation and dispossession of nature and the disproportionate enrichment of a few. This is only possible because of the colonial common sense that allows voracious capitalism to be read as progressive. Moreover, these state-corporate actors often designate the authorized voices of the queer and feminist movements and by doing so they deepen the inequalities reproduced within our movements.

***“We have seen that the Left can be as authoritative and anti-rights as the right. Even if our current State government has great policies on LGBT issues, they also walk hand-in-hand with their cronies to implement projects that devastate the environment and ruin the livelihoods of millions.”***

— Focus group participant from India

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## What is the Impact of Opposition Actors?

The impact of these different actors on LGBTQI+ communities, movements, and individuals is widely and well-discussed in the literature on this topic. In this section we will highlight a few common threads from activists in our survey and focus groups. In the *Annex on Data and Stories from the Survey* we go into detail about the different kinds of impact, with a variety of examples from different contexts to illustrate them.

## Classic Opposition

### **Physical Violence**

However well-known this may be, we must say it again. Activists who become visible and demand better lives for queer communities are still being murdered, imprisoned, beaten, and raped every day in different corners around the world by state and non-state actors, particularly if they are not from privileged sectors in their context. A Colombian trans and sex worker activist whom we interviewed said, “All the girls who have spoken up and confront police brutality have been threatened and raped by officers.”<sup>13</sup> Another interviewee, a Black trans woman activist also from Colombia, reflected how the lack of recognition of violence against queer communities makes its impact even greater, as it often results in the lack of specific measures for prevention and redress to its victims.<sup>14</sup>

### **Control Over the Media and Control by the Media**

In our opinion, there is no such thing as free media in the present world. What is said, how, and to whom is always controlled by somebody. The question is who exercises that control, what checks and balances exist, and how broad is the scope for alternative communication by those not in control, especially LGBTQI+ communities and movements. In some cases, this control is exerted directly by the state when it owns media outlets and/or enforces regulations that silence LGBTQI+ voices in the name of protecting “the family” or “national identity.” More often than not, the controlling entities are not as visible because they are private corporations that may have links to classic opposition actors. Those who control the media may also be part of the opposition in disguise and contribute by circulating or refusing to regulate extremely damaging content in the name of freedom. “Freedom of profit” might be more appropriate.

“We find other ways to connect with each other,” said a participant in a focus group who lives in a context where the media is controlled by the state.<sup>15</sup> “Social media has been taken over by the extreme right, progressives try to use it but the Right has an army of people paid to do the job,” added another, sharing a

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13 Interview, trans woman activist in Colombia

14 Interview, Black trans woman activist in Colombia

15 Focus group participant, Serbia

experience that is common to other contexts across the world.<sup>16</sup>

Queer people are not immune to the appeal of social media or a culture in which to exist is to be seen as often as possible and always looking your very best and successful. “Platforms like Snapchat or TikTok have normalized queerness or transness but there is also a worry that it is very easy for things to go viral. It calls for a bit of wisdom in how you interact. When people become visible in this way, attacks have happened and people are not always cognizant of the risk,” reflected a Kenyan activist.<sup>17</sup>

### **Shame, Guilt, and the Appeal of the Immoral Majority**

The negative views about being queer still live inside many, if not all of us, to different extents. For those living in contexts where LGBTQI+ people are oppressed because of their religion or ethnicity, those negative perceptions are very strong. A Muslim queer activist from India explained, “The moment something goes wrong i.e. a heartbreak or a fight with someone from the community some people regress into the most conservative ideas. ‘God is punishing me’, they say, and some even marry and have babies.”<sup>18</sup> In a world of uncertainty and justifiable lack of trust in democratic progress, fuelling anxieties and pushing people to trade affirming their identities for safety is not difficult. Another Indian activist, this time a Hindu queer person, said “In police stations, lesbians or trans people fleeing home are being told, ‘We don’t deny your identity but you know laws may change over time while your family is your single constant source of support.’”<sup>19</sup>

## **Internal Opposition**

### **Strengthening the Impact of Classic Opposition Actors**

Probably one of the most painful experiences for LGBTQI+ activists in recent years has been to witness how feminists who were once their friends, allies and/or mentors have in fact allied – and/or aligned –

themselves with ‘classic’ opposition actors to restrict their rights and lives. We heard the following example from a member of trans organization Talas in Serbia:

***“This year for the very first time we have definitions of who is a trans, homosexual or intersex person included in a Biology textbook for 8th year students. A newspaper interviewed parents and teachers who voiced negative opinions about it. And then some TERFs issued a Manifesto also condemning them. When the school year started, the main right wing group in the country started talking about the books again and forced the government to create a body to examine them. Members of that body were recommended by the right wing group and were trans/homophobic. Their recommendation was to wipe out all the definitions and not introduce a sociological concept like ‘gender’ in a scientific textbook. We confronted the TERFs and asked them how it feels to have the same opinion as the right but they claim ‘it is their (the right’s) problem and not ours.’”<sup>20</sup>***

### **Closing Spaces and Failing to Provide Solidarity**

When a space or a struggle is dominated by exclusionary activists, they decide who can and who cannot participate. This was the case of the struggle for decriminalizing abortion in Colombia from which trans men and non-binary people were excluded by cisgender feminists at the start.<sup>21</sup>

In all the contexts we studied, activists point to particularly older or classic feminist movements as having a narrow and binary understanding of gender that stands in the way of alliances and even provision of services, as in areas like gender-based violence or sexual and reproductive health, particularly for trans and non-binary folks, but also to those embodying non-respectable expressions of queerness. These groups may not be vocally anti-trans and easily labeled as TERF, but they practice a more subtle form of discrimination that still has devastating effects on queer people, particularly as these groups tend to

<sup>16</sup> Focus group participant, India

<sup>17</sup> Focus group participant, Kenya

<sup>18</sup> Interview, queer Muslim activist, India

<sup>19</sup> Interview, activist collective, India

<sup>20</sup> Interview, trans activist, Serbia

<sup>21</sup> However, trans movements were able to change this. More on this success story below, in the section on alliances. - Focus group participant, Colombia

have much larger resources to provide life-saving, affirming services.<sup>22</sup>

### **Restricting Funding, Access, and Representation**

In every context there are established queer organizations that tend to be well-known, consulted by international allies, including the opposition in disguise, and attract more funds than others. When those organizations are part of the internal opposition, the damage to those who embody oppressed identities (trans, Muslim, non-privileged caste, ethnic, racial or cultural groups) can be significant in terms of access to funding and representation in international spaces and institutions, including LGBTQI+ networks. When those privileged groups have ties to their governments because they share the same supremacist outlook, as is the case in India, their negative impact is even greater. For the excluded activists, it is not always easy to bring this issue to the attention of funders and international institutions, as there is a tendency to avoid fragmentation and/or to go for the easiest interlocutor, the one with the most access and the best systems to facilitate the work.

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## **The Combined Impact of the Opposition on Emotional and Economic Well-being**

***“We have no access to good jobs, and activism does not pay.” - survey response from Kenyan lesbian activist<sup>23</sup>***

We claim that emotional wellbeing is inseparable from the material conditions of subsistence. Moreover, the gaps in mental health care access are traversed by economic inequality. LGBTQI+ peoples and activists, especially those who are also Indigenous, Black, impoverished and/or living with disabilities, face significant challenges in finding well-paid jobs to meet their basic needs. It is also common for the work carried out in defense of human rights, feminism, or queer rights to be unpaid, poorly paid, or without health coverage and paid leave. Thus, queer activists facing the opposition spread themselves thin

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22 Activists reviewers from Kenya and India (survey respondents)

23 Survey respondent, Kenya

between poorly paid jobs, activism, and care work their biological and chosen families. Caring for their own health and wellbeing, not to mention leisure time, an often forgotten human right consecrated in article 24 of the Universal Declaration, and pleasure come very low in the list of priorities. This is exacerbated in contexts where public services are deeply discriminatory against LGBTQI+ persons. A lesbian activist in Serbia describes the situation she sees in her context:

***“The biggest problem is that this is a profit-driven country, everything is around making profit and demolishing of human and social rights. This is worse than the nationalism we witnessed earlier and has a huge impact in society. Among the activists, whoever could leave, already did. It is impossible to sustainably stay in the country: so you left, you are planning to leave, or you have to use all your energy to think of how to survive each day. As a hobby you can join a movement. Only a small group of people with jobs at NGOs can be part of the strategic resistance.”***

The impact of the opposition on mental health was strongly present throughout our conversations with activists across all contexts. This impact is not only felt at an individual level, but also affects how movements are built or broken, as a Colombian trans activist from the organization Femidiversas shows:

***“There was a coalition for sex workers’ rights that broke as some cis women came out as TERFs. A member of our (trans) group is a University student. Some of those TERFs went to her school and wrote horrible graffiti against her. We are also attacked online, all the time. Then our feminist allies came to ask her and me if we could participate in a dialogue with those TERFs to see if the coalition could be brought together again. We thought about it and declined, because there has been no acknowledgement on their part of the damage caused, no offer for reparation. Two of us talking to 20 of them will only affect our mental health.”<sup>24</sup>***

However, the good news is that activists resist and persist. We will address both in greater detail in

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24 Interview, trans woman activist in Colombia

chapter four. We would like to end this chapter with a little bit of hope. When asked what helps them to go on, some of the activists we talked to mentioned

- their successes and the alliances that sustained them,
- the positive changes they see happening over time in spite of everything,
- the spaces they create for themselves and their communities where they can be themselves together – on and offline.



# Positioning and Re-positioning – Divergent Reconfigurations of LGBTQI+ Movements in Serbia

By **Marija Jakovljević**

Contrary to many Western chauvinistic beliefs, most of the human rights in Serbia were established during socialist Yugoslavia. Instead of further democratizing it, including dealing with homophobia, the country was violently dismantled. The so-called new democratic society did not prove safe for the queer community.<sup>25</sup> Paradoxically, more pride parades happened during the autocratic regime of the Progressive Party.<sup>26</sup> One might think that having a lesbian prime minister should have improved the level of rights for queer people and oppressed social groups. Alas, shared identity does

not necessarily lead to a shared struggle for justice. On top of controlling the government, many agree that president Vučić holds power over far-right hooligan groups who attack or refrain from attacking the queer people and events, using them as bait or a diversion from an ongoing political inconvenience.

While the government essentially does not care for queer people and human rights, the right-wing opposition, conservative academia, and Orthodox Church actively undermine gender-related rights. It takes the form of spreading unscientific claims<sup>27</sup>, sabotage of education about sexual violence<sup>28</sup>

25 While Western diplomacy, development, and philanthropy sectors showed up as allies, they in parallel reinforced neoliberal transformation and consequent reduction of social and economic rights.

26 What is also interesting is the high level of women's participation in parliament and government. Yet, this is an illustrative example that quotas mean nothing if they support harmful politics. Among women in power, we often hear refusal to use gender-sensitive language, including for naming their positions, claiming it is an "artificial modification" in language, even though Serbian language has suffixes that enable having gender-sensitive nouns. In such neoliberal conservative context, the systematic dismantling of human rights is masked with the adoption of some gender-positive and anti-discriminatory measures. Serbia for example has a Law on Gender Equality and a Law on the prohibition of discrimination, but not on a same-sex partnership.

27 As highlighted by social scientists from the queer movement, "pseudo-science has become one more weapon that the opposition groups use not only to take over the streets and the collective imagination but also to build false 'theories' that they oppose to gender, feminist and queer theory in the struggle for controlling the field."

Conservative professors use their position to produce unscientific narratives and interpret information in a skewed way, intentionally twisting or neglecting findings from the field or not even being familiar with current developments of theory and research. They shape conferences, produce books and articles, appear in the media and present themselves as experts on the topic, instilling all sorts of phobias and wrong conclusions in the broader public that easily get spined further. They build on patriarchal "common sense" often rooted in religious values and present their point as "worried citizens and scientist."

28 Serbian feminist Adriana Zaharijević wrote about the case here: <https://bit.ly/3YPjIGY>

or gender<sup>29</sup>, backed up by anti-NGO propaganda and indirect incitement of violence against queer community and activists.

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## Perpetuation of Non-recognition

The queer community has been active in many struggles against other groups with different, even completely conflicting, values.<sup>30</sup> Activists agree that these joint pushes are necessary as a matter of survival.<sup>31</sup> Many hope that protesting together “shows that we all suffer from the same oppressor(s) [and] gives us human traits that are so easily taken from us.” Yet, we keep seeing homophobic social media posts from some eco-activists and social distance persists, noted a queer activist from a disability movement. The question has been raised, “Could some flirting with Serbian nationalism payout to get a seat at the table for the community or is it just another form of individual profiteering on the oppressed community?”<sup>32</sup> Speaking of the stratification within the movement, one of the burning questions is the political cooptation and commercialization of the pride parade. Dissatisfaction with the “pride for diplomats and politicians” that has been going on for years.<sup>33</sup>

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29 In 2022, an all-male-non-of-them-biologist panel (see more here: <https://bit.ly/3WMnGlZ>) pushed for the revision of biology textbook for the 8th grade, that in their opinion was an attack on *national and religious Serbian being*. The book had one chapter that was explaining the difference between sex and gender.

30 For many, the queer movement in Serbia is closely intertwined with the feminist and anti-war movements. Members of the first formal organization of the LGBT community, Arkadija, established during the nineties, were also active in the anti-war movement during the dismantlement of what used to be Socialist Yugoslavia. Over the years, queer movement intersected with other movements, like students, workers, environmental, etc. There has been a range of attempts to break the barriers and build solidarity (e.g. with miners, workers of privatized factories, refugees and IDP, people from rural areas, people with or at risk of HIV, and so on). Yet, visibility and acknowledgment of queer people’s work remain limited.

31 As in the protests against the Milošević regime in 2000, the recent fight against Rio Tinto trying to exploit lithium in Serbia and destroy the environment brought everyone who does not support the ruling party to the streets. See for example <https://bit.ly/3k1xMaX>

32 See for example <https://bit.ly/3VAmffy>

33 Yet, some would say that there is a power struggle among dominant organizations, while more leftist and

One must put on not just an intersectional lens, but also headphones to hear people with multiple oppressed identities and positions in society. Queer people with disabilities or queer Roma people are often at the margins of the movement, even though they’ve been active in diverse activist and professional initiatives. Acknowledging our blind spots and stopping excuses for why some people are excluded is obviously far from being resolved.

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## Consequences of a Narrow Approach to Gender-based Violence

When there are constant spiraling or mutating crises in society, it is extremely difficult to reflect on the possible unintended consequences of certain approaches in the long run. This is what happened in the feminist movement in Serbia, which has severely affected the queer community. Years of wars and the lack of any long-term structure to work with those who were in the wars play out as violence against anyone with less power. Naming the perpetrators, pointing to the scale of violence and its embeddedness in everyday reality was a priority. This has been the feminist movement’s focus on male violence against women, and not enough attention has been paid to other forms of gender-based violence.

For a while, the focus of some feminist organizations on male violence coexisted with the work of queer organizations, and they even fought together in many overarching struggles for human rights and social and environmental justice.

However, reducing the optics of violence against women to male violence has intersected with infused anti-gender propaganda, creating a new generation of feminists with essentialist and trans-exclusionary

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grassroots groups remain marginalized. During the years there was a lot of discussion among LGBTQI+, feminist, and leftist groups about whether to boycott pride or to attend and call for solidarity across oppressed social groups.

views.<sup>34</sup> Local divides have echoed across the region and created further polarization.<sup>35</sup>

One can note the similarities between right-wing politicians, conservative academia, and trans-exclusionary anti-gender feminists. The former have discussed the supposed “anti-Serbian engagement” of feminist and LGBTQI+ community, while the latter focus on what they call the “anti-people” standpoint of the queer-inclusive LGBTQI+ community.<sup>36</sup> In bizarre opposition to “gender ideology,” members of some trans-exclusionary groups have shown explicit support for the modern fascist party Dveri, which calls itself “patriotic,” in the recent attack on the content in school books mentioned above.<sup>37</sup> Both targeters give themselves the right to define possible categories for people, dehumanize those who do not fit into their forcefully tailored categories, and strip them of their human rights.

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34 Young bold feminists who managed to build on the work of generations of activists before them, and massively mobilize the public against violence against women, are at the same time very vocal against and harmful to trans and queer people, as well as to the feminists who oppose such approach. Some of the new collectives that emerged like Women’s Solidarity (Ženska solidarnost) that subsumes transphobia under the fight against violence against women, while the Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Network (Lezbejska i gej solidarna mreža) claims to fight for workers and feminist rights, freedom of speech, protection of children, and against queer, gender and trans culture. See their website: <https://lgsolidarnamreza.org/>. Their whole understanding of human rights is wrong and retrogressive – based on a belief that the rights of one group come at cost of the other social (or they would say biological) group. Elaboration of their argumentation, if read without knowing who made it, could be easily confused with far-right groups speaking about (homo)sexuality and women. What is ironic is that more than a decade ago we were wondering what was “gendered feminism”, for which right-wingers were accusing feminists, and could there be feminism without a gender (see here: <https://bit.ly/3Z4mkLR>).

35 Some of the oldest and most influential organizations of the feminist and anti-war movement are staying silent, turning a blind eye, or even providing space or explicit support to trans-exclusionary anti-gender activists. For example, Declaration on Women’s Sex-Based Rights was translated and circulated on the mailing list of the Network of women against violence. In 2020 many members or even the whole organizations signed support to the transphobic director of the Center for Women’s Studies in Zagreb, Croatia (see here <https://bit.ly/3PRae4k>).

36 See for example <https://bit.ly/3HXCKcl>

37 <https://bit.ly/3BZcl0j>

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## What We Have (Not) Learned

Fragmentation and gaps within movements are not surprising, as movements are not homogenous voices speaking in unison, nor should they be. There have to be self-reflection, healing, space made for diverse bodies, un/re-learning, sharing of power and resources, and expansion of spaces for autonomy and solidarity. Otherwise individual and collective traumas, isolation, frustrations, misplaced anger, and harmful learnings accumulated over the years, lead to impatience and unconstructive conflicts that weaken movements.

Even when connections are reestablished or people gather to face a common enemy, without proper healing and a developed capacity for collaboration, all those structures and alliances are temporary and fragile. We should have learned so far that none of us is immune to internalizing oppressive views and practices and perpetuating them while believing in “doing the right thing.” Forms of social oppression and segmentation usually translate into movements. Understanding this is important for stepping out of bubbles, expanding the horizon of discussion and experience, and reframing anti-humanist positions.

Outside allies, like philanthropic groups, should support movements in developing skills and knowledge on self-reflection, dealing with unrecognized violence within the movements, paying attention to mental health, the practice feminist leadership and power-sharing, conflict transformation, and collective care.<sup>38</sup> Better quality resources are needed for political self-education, preservation of the movement’s knowledge, purchase of autonomous safe spaces, and building safety nets for activists. All that should contribute to minimizing power struggles and movement towards constructive conflict, constant self-reflection, and “learning how to practice self/criticism instead of annulling others,” as noted by one of the activists who reviewed this report.

Anti-rights and anti-gender attacks are global, well-funded, and well-coordinated. Our movements have the complex task to fight them, find time to heal, and be self-reflective and constructively self-critical. No struggle is linear, and no fight is won forever. We from

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38 As elaborated by Srilatha Batliwala: <https://bit.ly/3YX-10HP>

former Yugoslavia saw that in every aspect of human rights.

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## Coloring a Bleak Landscape

Historically, in Serbia we have witnessed some very progressive and emancipatory initiatives. We must break the circle of violence and create a world where people thrive and enjoy love, rights, and freedom, regardless of gender or any other characteristic.

It is encouraging to see some organizations engaged in mediation to deal with transphobia among their members. Hearing shouts of "No!" to anti-gender politics in the March 8 protest was also long overdue. Addressing harmful collaborations with anti-gender groups and blocking their events in public spaces have unpacked hidden layers of misuse of feminism and freedom of speech and showed to many that we have serious problems within our circles. People are finally figuring out how harmful, vicious, and vile anti-gender narratives are.

At this moment, Serbia is going through massive protests against violence that may open space for recognizing and addressing the plethora of violence, not only the shooting that triggered the protests.<sup>39</sup> Conservative forces, particularly the Orthodox Church and the government cross the red line for many ordinary people, leaving space for the progressive narrative to shift the perception. It is too soon to tell whether we will move from the current turbulence into something new or claw back into regressive historical sediments. Many look for the so-called old days and traditional values to steer them out of current anomie. We need to figure out how to spark imaginations for a new, vibrant, and just society for those who refuse to let go of harmful values. My hopes lie with the younger generations unburdened with preexisting relations within and across the movements, who embrace diversity, love, and joy and engage in a proactive and creative manner.

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39 <https://tinyurl.com/nh5h3r4b>



# Fundamentalism and Strategies of Dissent in Rural Colombia

By **Yinna Ortiz**

Although the exclusion of women and sexual and gender non-conforming, also known as sexual and gender dissident, groups in Colombia has marked its history in different public spheres and moments, this exclusion manifested in new ways only about a decade ago. An openly anti-rights fundamentalist discourse began to emerge in a structured way through the agendas of conservative religious and political groups across the country.<sup>40</sup> This does not mean there was no anti-rights discourse before. These lines of discourse have only recently been consolidated into a series of narratives and strategies that make up a more defined ultraconservative project that is not only present in Colombia but also other Latin American countries. This project attempts to undermine the rights achieved by the LGBTQI+, sexual and gender dissident, feminist and women's movements and has met with the resistance from those same movements in public spaces.

The advancement of ultraconservative agendas has manifested in several campaigns against so-called "gender ideology" that sought to halt achievements won for LGBTQI+ people's rights. These campaigns became evident and in other ways solidified, through indications put forth by conservative religious and political sectors in regards to the Constitutional

Court's Ruling T-478 of 2015. This ruling ordered the Ministry of National Education to review school code of conduct manuals to ensure respect for diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The opposition claimed these kinds of initiatives imposed an ideology that indoctrinates children and young people.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of this campaign, which included the dissemination of distorted ideas of the ruling and materials promoted by the Ministry and their approach to gender in the media, a series of mobilizations and sit-ins were organized in 2016 at the national level. Organizations such as *Con mis hijos no te metas* (Don't Mess With My Kids), along with Christian and conservative Catholic groups, rallied in the streets of cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, Bucaramanga, Santa Marta, Valledupar, Riohacha, and Popayán. The rallies and public discourse, which equated "gender ideology" with a strategy to destroy the "traditional family," permeated Colombian society to the point that it was used as one of the banners raised by ultraconservative political and religious groups to question the referendum that ratified peace agreements between the government and the FARC-EP (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army), resulting in 50.2% nay votes.

40 Until 1980 homosexuality was criminalized in Colombia's Penal Code. In daily life, same-sex couples were also condemned: brochures were circulated across Colombia, in urban and rural areas and signed by different actors, threatening "social cleansing," that is, attack against *travestis*, *maricas*, sex workers, and anyone seen as upsetting the conservative social order.

41 Between 2014 and 2016 Gina Parody was the head of Ministry of National Education. As an openly out lesbian woman, Parody was the target of media persecution when she was accused of promoting homosexuality and transsexuality due to the development and dissemination of a series of guidebooks that were distorted by the opposition as materials that promoted pornographic images in educational institutions.

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## Opposition Strategies in Rural Colombia

While anti-rights strategies and their actors are clearly apparent in urban areas of Colombia, the realities of rural Colombia present multiple nuances. On the one hand, the strategies used by the opposition in these areas do not take the same form as they do in the cities. There is no clear and visible presence of groups such as *Con mis hijos no te metas*, *40 días por la vida* (40 Days for Life), or *Salvemos las dos vidas* (Save Two Lives) that have rallied against bodily autonomy, abortion, and LGBTQI+ people's rights on educational inclusion, adoption, other issues. Instead, what has been progressively happening in rural areas is the arrival and expansion of Christianity<sup>42</sup>, even in areas hard to control and difficult to access by the state.

These groups promote conservative ideas about the meaning of family, the role of men and women, and sexual diversity, which in turn has generated a transformation in the dynamics of the community and a reconception of gender relations in rural areas.

In places such as Cauca in southwest Colombia, as well as in other departments that constitute important niches of social Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and farmer organizations, Christian churches have infiltrated community political dynamics, generating a process of syncretism, in which recently and in ways that are more and more concealed, leaders from ethnic territorial organizations are orienting their actions and militant work from a Christian fundamentalist worldview. Here it is important to acknowledge that not all those defending territories and holding religious beliefs are conservative, and that not all religious practices attack women's and sexual and gender dissidents' rights. On the contrary, churches occupy a nuanced position among Indigenous and other ethnically oppressed peoples in

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42 Even though evangelical Christian churches account for the majority of the expansion and they have transformed local dynamics, there are cases in which representatives of Catholic churches have introduced positions that openly exclude the LGBTQI+ population. For example, in Mercaderes, south of Cauca, the town's church priest, encouraged — in the middle of the eucharist — churchgoers to mobilize and react to one of the first beauty pageants organized by sexual/gender dissident (non-conforming) people, declaring that such an event could not be allowed in the town. And in 2016 at the national level, the Episcopal Conference showed its support to the sit-ins and mobilizations organized "in defense of the family" that were previously mentioned.

Colombia, and in some cases they provide space for developing critical thinking.<sup>43</sup>

An example of the importance of these spaces for Christian sectors, particularly for evangelicals, lies in their search to be included in the agenda for the fundamental conference that happens every four years within the Colombian Indigenous movement, the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC in Spanish).<sup>44</sup> Thus, the opposition in rural areas does not constitute strictly defined groups, but rather it happens at the intersection of struggles, which complicates their sedimentation or identification as fundamentalist groups, since on the one hand they reproduce normative views of women, sexuality, sexual orientations, and gender identities, while also defending some human rights and territorial rights.

This reality is compounded by other contextual factors facing rural areas, such as the presence of different armed groups, given that even after the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, there has been a reconfiguration of actors and war dynamics in the country that directly involve rural areas of Colombia. While the signing of the agreements did bring a period of cessation of hostilities in these places — in which diverse initiatives of gender and sexual non-conforming people blossomed — through the arrival and restructuring of different armed actors in search of territorial control, moral orders were implemented that control gender expressions and punish those who break from the cisgender heterosexual norm. Although these groups do not strictly correspond to the characteristics of fundamentalist urban groups, their dynamics of control support conservative and binary views of sexuality, gender, and social roles that mark the experiences of women and LGBTQI+ people in rural Colombia.

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43 An important presence here is that of Father Alvaro Ulcúe Chocue, first Indigenous Catholic priest from the Nasa people, who promoted critical thinking about inequality in land ownership and Nasa identity but also spoke up about family violence and how it affects women and children. His legacy has been key for the Nasa people's history.

44 During the 16th Conference, held in 2021, the evangelical Christian churches requested to be part of the political agenda. Their goal was to address elements that had already been raised in the previous conference, such as religious freedom and the quest to strengthen an Indigenous Christian Cosmovision (known as a biblical interpretation from an indigenous perspective).

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## Diverse Strategies of Resistance

Faced with these situations, feminist and sexual and gender non-conforming organizations have crafted varied responses to develop their political militancy amid perpetual war, in many cases differing from one rural area to another, taking into account each region's contextual and sociopolitical conditions. In the search for transformative realities and the creation of fair living conditions, recently there has been a development of articulations with different social sectors. These kinds of expressions allow for a projection of the struggles beyond the exclusive demand for rights as diverse people, which outline a broader interpretation of the realities experienced in a country like Colombia. These articulations allow us to see the intersections and generate alliances from overlapping perspectives of class, ethnicity, race, age, and other intersections.

In places of disputes between armed groups for territorial control, one way these organizations have responded is by thinking strategically about the ways to make rights claims. For example, being openly queer, arepera<sup>45</sup>, lesbian, gay, and trans puts one's life at risk. For this reason, many people have decided to advocate from other places of identity, ranging from community leadership, radio, and audiovisuals. Even though they do not directly call themselves LGBTQI+, they do include demands for sexual and gender non-conforming rights.

In other rural areas where the presence of paramilitary actors has not been so noticeable, and on the contrary, the local control is exercised by gangs or other armed actors, the strategies have focused on taking over public spaces, like main town squares, for events and actions, as a way to support the visibility and political positioning of their experiences and the creation of non-conforming socialization spaces, such as parties for the internal recognition of the LGBTQI+ community.<sup>46</sup> In places like Puerto Tejada and Villa Rica, in the north of Cauca, it has been possible to negotiate spaces for the existence and public visibility of sexual and gender non-conforming collectives with

*pandillas* (gangs) building on family, friendship, and community ties that had a greater weight.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of sexual and gender non-conforming experiences within organizations, some of them tied to ethnic identities, two strategies have gained momentum. On the one hand, there has recently been a big focus on, particularly in the case of young people who are part of the indigenous movement of Cauca, the quest to reinterpret the foundational Nasa<sup>48</sup> myths from a disruptive and critical perspective, naming their diverse identities from their own experiences, and moving away from some conservative sectors' attempts to single out sexual and gender non-conforming life experiences as foreign or not in accordance with the Indigenous world.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, there has been an increase of sexual and gender non-conforming people occupying representative positions, both at the community and political-electoral levels. This has made it possible to challenge some of the stereotypes that have been constructed about sexual and gender non-conformity in rural areas and, through organizational and political experience, bring LGBTQI+ sexual and gender non-conformity closer to the community in general and to the territorial processes from within. This in turn has made it possible to obtain resources and develop initiatives

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45 Local term to name women in erotic-loving relationships with other women. It was used as an insult but it has been appropriated by the *areperas* to name themselves.

46 In the northern part of the department of Cauca, in places such as Villa Rica and Puerto Tejada, these spaces for socialization are known as *maricotecas* (queer disco).

47 On the experience of sexual and gender dissidents in the armed conflict, see the report "Aniquilar la diferencia. Lesbianas, gays, bisexuales y transgeneristas en el marco del conflicto armado colombiano", Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH): <https://www.centrode-memoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2015/aniquilar-la-diferencia/aniquilar-la-diferencia.pdf>; Comisión Para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad llamado "MI CUERPO ES LA VERDAD. Experiencias de mujeres y personas LGBTQI+ en el conflicto armado" <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/mi-cuerpo-es-la-verdad>; Corporación Caribe Afirmativo, "Entre silencios y palabras": <https://caribeafirmativo.lgbt/publicaciones/investigaciones/>.

48 In reference to one of indigenous communities that is part of CRIC (Indigenous Regional Council for the Cauca Region)

49 This search is quite recent but further information can be found in texts like "Volver así: de wera fa a traviesas. Alegorías trans sobre mujeres indígenas Embera en Santuario (Risaralda)": <https://pdfcoffee.com/volver-asi-de-wera-fa-a-traviesas-alegorias-trans-sobre-mujeres-embera-en-santuario-risaralda-pdf-free.html>; and the article Untak Kuan Mu Merik Keik (Loving without Despising) published by Revista Unidad Álvaro Ulcué, CRIC <https://revistaunidad.cric-colombia.org/untak-kuan-mu-merik-keik-amar-sin-despreciar/>; and in the movie Aipa'a Yem, a love story between two women from the Misak and Wayuu peoples.

that strengthen trainings and the advancement recognizing rights.

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## Some Reflections

In rural Colombia, ultraconservative discourse jeopardizes advances in the rights of sexual and gender non-conforming persons, manifesting in links to partisan and community politics. Fundamentalists or ultraconservative religious groups are not a single category as it may be the case in urban areas, but a far more complex, diverse, and heterogeneous set of actors.

More than a strategy deployed to stop the progress of rights, what we see is the reproduction of a binary and conservative worldview that penetrates all levels of community life. This means that rather than portraying the different actors involved, such as armed, religious ultraconservatives, among others, as agents external to the community that impose foreign ways of understanding the world with an aim to stop progress in terms of rights, we need to see this process as one in which meanings are produced jointly by all involved. Community socio-cultural logics are blended with fundamentalist readings about gender and sexual non-conformity and identities that break cisgender heterosexual norms.

For example, during the armed conflict, the moral orders enforced by armed actors did not express a new way of seeing the world. Rather, they reproduced the cultural legacy of society where certain sexual practices are desirable, certain gender expressions are the norm, and certain ways of love as the right one are deeply entrenched.

Although these strategies are gaining strength and have begun to have an impact in rural areas, it is essential to identify more clearly new tools to confront essentialist or fundamentalist discourse in spaces that are not defined, as in communities and political organizational spaces where different agendas and multiple systems of oppression intersect. Going deeper in our understanding of how discourse is shaped at local level and in rural contexts is key to consolidating stronger strategies to resist and continuing the struggle for moving rights forward and never backward.

# Chapter 3: Fighting Back and Building Movements

# Fighting Back and Building Movements

With the pervasive and multitiered nature of the opposition to rights and justice for LGBTQI+ people, as well as the pluricrisis facing the world, it is a marvel that LGBTQI+ people and communities continue to not only fight back but find hope and build movements. In this chapter we look at the sites of struggle from which the resistance takes place and the needs of the movement. Sustained, long term, well-resourced tactics and strategies that are distinct and context-specific are needed to disrupt the variety of opposition to LGBTQI+ rights and justice. While LGBTQI+ movements fight on multiple fronts with bold and brave visions for the world, they experience barriers to resources to sustain their work. We asked LGBTQI+ activists what tactics and sites of struggle would be most effective in their context and what they needed to win.

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## Tactics and Sites of Struggle

***“We cannot do things the same way, because, these people have multi pronged strategies to reach the masses.”<sup>50</sup>***

***“Perseverance is my greatest tactic.”<sup>51</sup>***

***“Every day I walk this path, I am winning.”<sup>52</sup>***

LGBTQI+ activists perceive social media as a site of struggle with significant positive impact according to analysis of our survey results. Despite the literature on the ways in which the opposition has used social media to spread hatred and lies, the online space is clearly a strongly contested one.<sup>53</sup> However, this is also not the

case across the board. While social media plays a big part in resistance globally, none of the respondents from Kenya and India felt that this was an effective site of struggle, whereas globally and in Serbia, Colombia and Peru, social media was considered an effective space of resistance.

LGBTQI+ activists have been able to shift public opinion through media, campaigns, and protests to some extent globally. This global trend is mirrored in Colombia and Peru, but to a very little extent in India, Kenya, and Serbia. Concomitantly, according to the literature, there appears to be a narrow overemphasis among funders on narrative change as the primary tactic of effective resistance for LGBTQI+ movements, which is not mirrored by the wealth of tactics and the need for multipronged transnational strategies as experienced and expressed by activists.

The courts seem, to a lesser extent, an effective place to disrupt the impact of the opposition globally. In our countries of focus, Kenya is leading the charge, followed by India. In Kenya, a February 2023 Supreme Court decision ruled in favor of LGBTQI+ organizations' right to register with the NGO board, ending a ten year court battle. The court ruling stated, “Human rights are inherent and held simply because of being a human. All human beings, including LGBTQI+ persons, are entitled to the full enjoyment of all the rights under chapter four of the constitution, not by reason of their sexual preferences as LGBTQI+ but as human beings. Just as the rights enjoyed by heterosexuals are not based on their sexual orientation but by virtue of common humanity.”

This is not the first time that the Kenyan courts have ruled in favor of the rights to assembly and privacy of LGBTQI+ people and communities. However, in May 2019, Kenya's courts upheld British colonial-era laws criminalizing consensual adult same-sex relations, in violation of the constitution

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50 Participant of focus group discussion from Kenya

51 Participant of focus group discussion from Serbia

52 Participant of Astraera Foundation Africa grantee convening, November 2022

53 Conversion Therapy Online: The Ecosystem by the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism <https://globalextrremism.org/reports/conversion-therapy-online-the-ecosystem/> Accessed March 28, 2023 and Conversion Therapy Online: The Players by the

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Global Project Against Hate and Extremism <https://globalextrremism.org/reports/conversion-therapy-online-the-players/> Accessed March 28, 2023

that guarantees equality and dignity for all citizens. Importantly, following the rights-based court ruling in February 2023, the opposition has tactically used the ruling to whip up public moral panic and, mostly under the guises of Christianity and Islam, tradition, and culture, effectively used media and social media to spread oppressive messages. The hashtag “#SayNoToLGBTQinKENYA” trended for days following the ruling. While courageous, visible, and strategic resistance continues, the increasingly violent public discourse has put LGBTQI+ people and communities at further risk in a period when several gender non-conforming, gay, and queer Kenyans have been murdered and attacked. The immediate and seemingly well-prepared backlash by the opposition in Kenya speaks to the importance of a strong LGBTQI+ movement that is able to advance a rights and justice agenda across multiple sites of struggle, use many tactics, and keep the most oppressed, including working class and rural LGBTQI+ communities, safe.

The British colonial laws criminalizing consensual adult same-sex relations in Kenya are similar to those that existed in India and many other former British colonies. In 2018, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the application of Section 377 to consensual same-sex relations between adults was unconstitutional, “irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary.” The Supreme Court ruling opened the terrain for several other court rulings across the country that codify the rights of LGBTQI+ people. Yet the criminalization of queer people is still in force, as we explore in country focus on India, “Queer Women, Love and Law in India.”

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## What We Need to Win

When asked what the one thing that would make resisting the opposition in their context much easier and likely successful, the responses from LGBTQI+ activists can be grouped into four categories:

Financial resources

An enabling environment

Additional skills, knowledge, and strategies

Strong movements and inter-movement solidarity

## Financial Resources

***“Our movement, and especially initiatives led by those further marginalized, is directly lacking financial resources - primarily access to core and flexible grants.”<sup>54</sup>***

Access to financial resources is consistently lacking for LGBTQI+ groups and activists, particularly transgender and intersex movements and those working at the intersections of multiple oppressions. Lack of resources not only impacts the ability to be creative, responsive, and strategic, but also sustained resistance to the opposition.

In contrast, the opposition is well funded with diverse sources of funding. In fact, The Institute for Journalism and Social Change reveals that, since 2014, supposedly progressive development partners from the global north have involved anti-LGBTQI+ religious groups in Uganda in dozens of aid-funded projects, with total values over \$75 million, of which at least \$40 million appears to have been directly transferred to these organisations.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the Global Philanthropy Project found that “between 2013-2017, LGBTI movements worldwide received \$1.2 billion, while the anti-gender movement received \$3.7 billion.”<sup>56</sup> The funding landscape gets even bleaker for LGBTQI+ people with multiple identities; for example, the Black Feminist Fund revealed that only 0.48% of human rights funding goes to Black LGBTQI+ people.<sup>57</sup>

LGBTQI+ activists are brave and courageous and want to be able to take calculated risks to challenge and disrupt the chokehold of the opposition. Progressive philanthropy has to ensure that resources allow activists and movements to drive their own agendas, be funded over the long term and experiment with tactics and strategies at scale. Core, flexible, long term

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54 Survey respondent

55 Progressive cash for the anti-LGBTQI backlash? How aid donors and ‘feminist’ governments have funded backers of Uganda’s deadly Anti-Homosexuality Bill [https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Progressive-cash-for-the-anti-LGBTQI-backlash\\_.pdf](https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Progressive-cash-for-the-anti-LGBTQI-backlash_.pdf)

56 Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement <https://global-philanthropyproject.org/2020/11/12/meet-the-moment/>

57 Where is the money for Black feminist movements?, Black Feminist Fund, [www.fundblackfeminists.org](http://www.fundblackfeminists.org)

funding, with grant sizes that are impactful are key. Activists spoke of the asymmetry of funding between themselves and the opposition, but also about the vulnerability and precarity of their lives, communities, and activism, as was discussed in chapter two.

## An Enabling Environment

**“Adequate social security for health, housing, employment, education. Recognition on civil rights of Q&T persons in terms of care mechanisms, property inheritance & property sharing, housing, access to resources”<sup>58</sup>**

**“Absence of the threat of war”<sup>59</sup>**

**“Opportunities to have a role in the process of impacting political decisions or changing political agendas”<sup>60</sup>**

**“Organizational autonomy that will allow us to be able to oppose the system without fear of losing our jobs and jeopardizing our quality of life.”<sup>61</sup>**

**“Political stability”<sup>62</sup>**

**“Ability to take down the media monopolies that skew public opinion towards anti-rights and capitalist myths and hamper solidarity of the people”<sup>63</sup>**

LGBTQI+ activists the world over are experiencing and impacted by deepening multiple crises, cisgender heterosexual patriarchy, conservative and fundamentalist forces, class oppression, and white supremacy, among others. They are fighting for rights and justice and require an enabling environment for their activism. This includes safety and security in its broadest terms: financial, physical, spiritual, and collective wellbeing. An enabling environment is both what LGBTQI+ activists are fighting for and a resource required to advance rights and justice.

LGBTQI+ activists create safe and bold resistance spaces using multiple tactics. They create enabling environments in political reading and study groups, in ballroom and cultural expression, in chosen family and expressions of love, desire and pleasure, in communal prayer and ritual. These spaces are sometimes not acknowledged as resistance spaces by those outside the communities and movements. The very existence of spaces for queer joy within hostile contexts is an act of insurgency. This is the resistance that Muthoni Ngiye describes in chapter two, *Kenyan Queer Folk Constructing Spaces of Subversion and Resistance*, and exists across the world in many different forms.

In a human rights framework, the state has the primary responsibility to ensure an enabling environment for all human rights defenders and to protect defenders from threats and attacks according to international obligations enshrined in treaties and charters. Yet in a global context where the forces of the opposition are mobilized against rights and justice, cisgender heterosexual women, LGBTQI+ people, and environmental defenders face increased attack and threats with little to no support from state actors. In many cases, these attacks are state sponsored.

LGBTQI+ activists are increasingly using the framework of healing justice,<sup>64</sup> which places wellness and collective care as part of the work of “self-preservation”<sup>65</sup> necessary to counter the opposition. Coined by Black feminists, healing justice is a strategy in itself for LGBTQI+ communities and activists to build resilience and create an enabling environment for a world free from precarity, where everyone has access to care, social services, and a life of dignity. Through these practices and framework, activists and movements create space to address the causes of generational trauma and isolation. However, LGBTQI+ activists, particularly those in the global south, report that funders and other allies take a narrow view of healing and wellness, reducing the concept of healing justice to one-off retreats with culturally appropriative practices. Healing justice, wellness, and collective care require opportunities to access livable wages and decent work, child care, context-appropriate ritual and practices, and connections to the earth.

58 Survey respondent

59 Survey respondent

60 Survey respondent

61 Survey respondent

62 Survey respondent

63 Survey respondent

64 Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety by Cara Page and Erica Woodland

65 “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” Audre Lorde



Geopolitical, military, economic, environmental, political, social, and cultural changes impact the enabling environment in which LGBTQI+ people, activists, and movements live and work. This may seem self-evident; however narratives and actions on the part of some well-meaning funders and allies often deny this context. For example, there is a narrow focus on rights agendas related to gender and sexuality that assume a broad environment of individual financial stability. Broadening the focus may shape priorities to be outside the accepted scope of LGBTQI+ activism. Indeed, issues of trade, aid, working conditions, militarism, democracy, and climate change are all urgent LGBTQI+ issues and have a deep impact on LGBTQI+ people's lives. LGBTQI+ activists assert that their fight is a broad base agenda for rights, justice, self-determination, and autonomy, essentially, a queering of the left.

### **Additional Skills, Knowledge, and Strategies**

***“A website documenting the agenda and narratives that anti-trans proclaimed feminists and proclaimed LGB rights groups use to stir transphobia and anti trans beliefs among people.”<sup>66</sup>***

LGBTQI+ activists want deeper knowledge of opposition forces and feel that they can be more strategic if, in their specific contexts, they are able to trace the opposition's funding, effectively disrupt their narratives, and understand their tactics. LGBTQI+ activists also noted that they want to build alternative media, build sustainable organizations, and develop the relevant skills and knowledge.

There is a heavy toll on the physical and mental health of LGBTQI+ activists because of the oppression they experience and attacks they face. Intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience becomes critical to the fight to counter the opposition and build queer futures. In East Africa, for example, there was little capacity or funding to sustain the intensity of work of LGBTQI+ movements after the first wave of anti-homosexuality bills proposed in the early 2010's. Yet, this knowledge and experience has been critical in facing the opposition's offensive in 2022 and 2023

66 Survey respondent

that led to the passing of the anti-homosexuality bill in 2023.<sup>67</sup>

### **Strong Movements and Inter-movement Solidarity**

***“Greater unity among transfeminist movements”***

***“A strong trustworthy intermovement network”***

***“Space for collective analysis to develop joint strategies are limited”***

LGBTQI+ activists recognize the political importance and practical necessity of solidarity across LGBTQI+ identities, communities, and movements, as well as with broader movements. Solidarity is one of the greatest tools within reach of the oppressed. As discussed in chapter four, LGBTQI+ activists consider the feminist movement among their closest allies.<sup>68</sup> This is not only because LGBTQI+ activists perceive solidarity and joint action between feminist and LGBTQI+ movements to have increased significantly in the last five years, but also because most of our respondents themselves identify as feminists. We can extrapolate therefore that feminist ideology is understood and practiced by LGBTQI+ people as coherent with their identities and freedom dreams. Conversely, we may deduce that patriarchy is widely recognized among LGBTQI+ activists globally as a system that is central to their own oppression.

***“Feminism is part of my identity and should not be taken away from us”<sup>69</sup>***

Nevertheless, LGBTQI+ activists and movements acknowledge that cisgender heterosexual patriarchy

67 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/uganda-anti-homosexuality-act-2023-petition-constitutional-court/>

68 Respondents were asked to evaluate cross-movement solidarity and joint action using a scale in which 1 meant “not at all” and 5, “very much”. Respondents felt that Solidarity and joint action increased in the last 5 years among feminist and LGBTQI+ activists by an average of 4.13.

69 Participant of Astraea Foundation Africa grantee convening, November 2022

present in feminist movements causes pain, as we explored in chapter two.

***“Feminism is a tool for me, not an identity. A tool for fighting and dismantling oppression. So feminism as a movement, for me as a queer, my first betrayal came from the feminist movement. They said we don’t want people like you here. So feminists should be, could be, but are not our greatest allies.”***<sup>70</sup>

***“Feminism is not just a movement, but rather an aspiration to the kind of world we want to see. Now as a queer, I can take back feminism from them. It belongs to me and you - I am taking it as something which I own.”***<sup>71</sup>

According to the survey, solidarity and joint action between progressive movements and LGBTQI+ activists globally has also increased significantly in the last five years, although in most places to a lesser extent than with feminist movements. LGBTQI+ activists also feel that they have had success in disrupting and challenging the opposition discourse among progressive movements, although this is not the case in Peru and is only the case to a small extent in Kenya. In Colombia, Kenya, and India, progressive movements’ solidarity and joint action with LGBTQI+ movements is perceived to have increased to the same extent as with feminist movements. In Colombia the solidarity and joint action with feminist and progressive movements was higher than the global average and had increased to the same extent. This may point to the historic moment in Colombia where over the last five years, mobilization “from below and to the Left”<sup>72</sup> has brought together progressive, Black, Indigenous, LGBTQI+, and feminist organizations. See the country focus on Colombia for more context. In Kenya and India, perceived solidarity and joint action with progressive movements has increased to a higher extent than the global average, signaling potentially important shifts in the movement landscape. In Peru and Serbia, solidarity and joint action increased more so with progressive movements than with feminist

movements. Although the difference was small, this may correlate with the increase in TERF mobilization in Serbia, which had the highest perception of growing transphobia of all five countries. This correlation does not ring true for Peru, which had the lowest perception of growing transphobia.

It is difficult to draw a conclusion around the dynamics that have strengthened and weakened solidarity and alliances. However, it is clear that there is a significant interplay between these dynamics and that there is no global rule about alliances with particular movements, even if there is strong identification with these movements by LGBTQI+ activists, as we explored in chapter four.

70 Participant of Astraea Foundation Africa grantee convening, November 2022

71 Participant of Astraea Foundation Africa grantee convening, November 2022

72 The Walls Above, The Cracks Below (And To The Left), Zapatistas, February 2017 <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/02/16/the-walls-above-the-cracks-below-and-to-the-left/> Accessed March 27, 2023

# Queer Women, Love, and Law in India



By **Ajita Banerjee**

***“If the women were given the slightest agency, if they were considered autonomous subjects, the families might have stopped looking for them and left them to make their own decisions. But since women are treated as objects, they are merely commodities, property, possessions of their families. Commodities, property, possessions do not have free will. [These women] had the audacity to assign themselves free will, appropriate it, create it where it was withheld: a criminal act that deserved punishment.”***<sup>73</sup>

## Introduction

In India, the use of criminal law to control women’s sexuality is understudied, particularly when they elope from their birth homes to enter into romantic or sexual relationships of choice.<sup>74, 75</sup> When adult women run

away from their birth homes and challenge the moral expectations of society, families may feel entitled to take legal action against them and their partners, even when they leave a note or testify at a police station that they have left of their own volition.<sup>76</sup>

This case study will reflect on the carceral approaches used by the police-parent nexus against adult queer women in India when they enter into relationships of choice.<sup>77</sup> Through an analysis of emerging queer jurisprudence in India, we will explore the ways in which queer women in India are subjected to the full force of the law when they attempt to assert their choice and continue to be treated as criminals, despite decriminalisation of consensual adult same-sex sexual relationships.<sup>78</sup> The lack of visibility of this violence and any meaningful state protection against it, allows the birth families of queer women to harm them with great impunity. Finally, we reflect on the impact of the landmark judgment in *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India* (2018) and seek to understand the ways in which queer women have been able to find autonomy, dignity, and love within the law, despite criminal law’s historical role in the unjust regulation of queer lives.<sup>79, 80</sup>

73 Maya Sharma, *Loving Women: Being Lesbian in Underprivileged India* (Yoda Press 2006) 57.

74 ‘Hadiya to ‘Love Jihad Laws’: Why Do We Keep Infantilising Women?’ (The Quint, 5 December 2020) <<https://www.thequint.com/opinion/love-jihad-and-other-laws-misused>>

75 For those who are not familiar with Indian society, it is worth mentioning that often (or in most cases, according to the context), straight marriages in India are the outcome of negotiations among families, with different degrees of agreement by the partners involved. De-facto straight unions are quite rare. Same-sex marriage is not legal and de-facto same sex unions are also rare, except among economically and socially privileged people (and even in these cases they are seldom ‘out’ as such).

76 Shukla, Surabhi, ‘The L World: Legal Discourses on Queer Women’ (2020) 13 NUJS L. Rev. 1

77 For the purpose of this case study, the category of ‘queer women’ will include cisgender women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer. In some cases, this category may also include trans-masculine persons who may or may not identify as trans men at a later stage in their lives.

78 *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India*, 2018

79 Kerala HC allows lesbian couple Adhila, Fathima to live together’ (The New Indian Express, 1 June 2022) <<https://www.newindianexpress.com/good-news/2022/jun/01/kerala-hc-allows-lesbian-couple-adhilafathima-to-live-together-2460288.html>>

80 Arvind Narrain, *Queer: ‘Despised Sexuality’, Law and Social Change* (Books for Change 2004). See also Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c. 1850–1900* (Cambridge University Press 2019)

## Criminalising Queer Desire

Soon after the discovery of an elopement or relationship, a wide array of criminal complaints are filed by the parents against their daughter to initiate a police enquiry. Further, the birth family often produces forged evidence at the police station or the court to indicate that their daughter is a minor and subsequently file criminal complaints against the partner for abduction, kidnapping, statutory rape, or even human trafficking.<sup>81</sup> This has been a standard legal strategy adopted by birth families in India, in collusion with the police, to orchestrate the return of their daughter who has transgressed the boundaries of caste, religion, or sexuality and eloped to marry or live with her chosen partner.<sup>82</sup> It is evident that while the criminality of queer relationships continues to be maintained through state apathy, the crimes committed by birth families are overlooked.<sup>83</sup>

Once the runaway couple has been traced by the police or the birth family, they are forced to testify at a police station, usually one in their hometown, and any resistance is met with threats of arrest under fabricated criminal charges. At the police station, during an informal and off-the-record interrogation, the police will try to convince the so-called “runaway daughter” to return to her parents. If she stands her ground and refuses to return, she may be produced in front of a magistrate to testify.<sup>84</sup> She now bears the burden of proving to the court that she was not raped, abducted, or kidnapped and that she is a consenting subject in this situation. At this point, the court should ideally allow her, a person who has attained the age of

majority, to live anywhere she chooses to.<sup>85</sup> However, in certain situations, the court tends to act as an extension of the heterosexual patriarchal family.<sup>86</sup> The court might order a medical examination to ascertain if the woman has in fact been raped, a bone density test to determine her age, and/or a psychiatric evaluation to ensure that she is of sound mind.<sup>87</sup> Only if she has clear and incontrovertible proof of her age of majority and of being of sound mind, acceptable by the judge, will the court allow her to exercise her choice.

In some cases, even after a clear declaration of her will, she may not be allowed to return to live with her partner, as that is considered an unnatural choice, and may be sent to a neutral location, such as a government-run women’s shelter home. This is usually done to allow her time to think about her decision, which is seen as an effective strategy to cajole her into returning to her parents.<sup>88</sup> However, these shelter homes are not neutral or safe spaces for queer women and their partners, as they face harassment, surveillance, and absolute restriction of mobility.<sup>89</sup> The capacity to consent to a relationship of choice therefore entails having the strength to survive incarceration and experience harassment and violence in state-run institutions.

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81 Madhya Pradesh: Lesbian Ties Knot with Minor Girlfriend after Eloping; Arrested under POCSO Act' (*Mirror Now*, 28 June 2020). <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/article/madhya-pradesh-lesbian-ties-knot-with-minor-girlfriend-after-eloping-arrested-under-posco-act/613185>;

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Act No. 32 of 2012.

82 Pratiksha Baxi, 'Habeas Corpus in the Realm of Love: Litigating Marriages of Choice in India' (2006) 25(1) *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 59.

83 Pratiksha Baxi, 'Habeas Corpus in the Realm of Love: Litigating Marriages of Choice in India' (2006) 25(1) *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 59.

84 Banerjee, Ajita. (2022). Queer love and litigation in India: Sreeja S. v The Commissioner of Police, Thiruvananthapuram and Others, Writ Petition (Criminal) 372 of 2018, Kerala HC. *Jindal Global Law Review*. 13. 1-11.

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85 Indian Majority Act (1875)

86 Anjali Mody, 'In 21st Century India, the Supreme Court Is Treating an Adult Woman Like She's Her Father's Property' (*Scroll.in*, 29 November 2017) <<https://scroll.in/article/859610/in-21st-century-india-the-supreme-court-is-treating-an-adult-woman-like-shes-her-fathers-property>>

87 Sruthisagar Yamunan, 'Has the Kerala High Court Crossed the Line by Ordering Psychological Test on a Trans Woman?' (*Scroll.in*, 06 June 2018). <<https://scroll.in/article/881558/has-the-kerala-high-court-crossed-the-line-by-ordering-psychoanalysis-on-a-trans-woman>>

88 Pratiksha Baxi, 'Habeas Corpus in the Realm of Love: Litigating Marriages of Choice in India' (2006) 25(1) *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 59.

89 Banerjee, Ajita. (2022). Queer love and litigation in India: Sreeja S. v The Commissioner of Police, Thiruvananthapuram and Others, Writ Petition (Criminal) 372 of 2018, Kerala HC. *Jindal Global Law Review*. 13. 1-11.

## Queer Jurisprudence and the Right to Love

In *K S Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2017), the Supreme Court of India held that the ability to make decisions on matters close to one's life is an inviolable aspect of the human personality:

**“The autonomy of the individual is the ability to make decisions on vital matters of concern to life... The intersection between one's mental integrity and privacy entitles the individual to freedom of thought, the freedom to believe in what is right, and the freedom of self-determination... The family, marriage, procreation and sexual orientation are all integral to the dignity of the individual.”**

To that end, the writ of habeas corpus has often proved to be a powerful tool used by individuals to seek freedom for themselves or their partners from confinement by the birth family or from detention at a state-run institution.<sup>90</sup> In the past five years, there have been several judgments from various high courts across India, often addressing a habeas corpus petition filed by the partner, that have not only provided police protection to queer couples facing threats from their families, but also upheld the right of two adult persons to live together without state interference.<sup>91</sup>

In this light, the Kerala High Court case of *Sreeja S. v The Commissioner of Police, Thiruvananthapuram & Ors* (2018) sets a crucial legal precedent as the first case in India to recognise the right of a queer woman to live freely, without fear of violence from her birth family or the police, with her same-sex partner. This is also the first case to rely on *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India* (2018) to emphasize that the choice of partner rests exclusively with the individuals themselves and neither the state nor society can have a say in the matter. The case marks a significant moment in Indian legal history, as it is the first time that the term lesbian entered judicial records and that the legitimacy of a same-sex live-in relationship

was validated by a constitutional court. Prior to *Navtej*, since no legal language existed to articulate intimacy outside of heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage, there was no choice but to argue the case in a language, as described by queer legal scholars, “most comprehensible to the court.”<sup>92</sup> This essentially entailed referring to a lesbian or queer couple as “close friends” who wish to live together, away from their families. The language around sexuality and desire was carefully removed from the petitions and from courtroom exchanges, as the criminality attached to pre-decriminalisation queer relationships made it difficult to argue for a queer couple's right to love.

Emerging jurisprudence on the right to love in India has shown us that the desire to seek justice within the law is not unwarranted, because the law has proven to be a useful tool in challenging status quo. Yet, the law is seen to exhibit a line-drawing function where recognition of one's rights is often conditional upon whether one has been recognised as a worthy subject, both by the law and the society.<sup>93</sup> In that case, exclusion from the law can and does function as violence, where certain groups of people are excluded from the realm of rights on the basis of their identity. However, the legal respite provided by constitutional courts in India has acted as an antidote to the criminalisation of queer love, as well as love that transgresses boundaries of caste and faith in India.<sup>94</sup>

As observed in *Navtej*, queer people's right to equality reflects, and is part of, a wider struggle for equality across many other marginalized groups and communities. The Court had rightly noted that, “What links LGBT individuals to couples who love across caste and community lines is the fact that both are exercising their right to love at enormous personal risk and in the process disrupting existing lines of social authority.”<sup>95</sup> For instance, in the renowned case of inter-faith love, more popularly known as the Hadiya case<sup>96</sup> in India, the Supreme Court held

90 Ponni Arasu and Priya Thangarajah, 'Queer Women and Habeas Corpus in India: The Love That Blinds the Law' (2012) 19(3) *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 413.

91 Banerjee, Ajita. (2022). Queer love and litigation in India: *Sreeja S. v The Commissioner of Police, Thiruvananthapuram and Others*, Writ Petition (Criminal) 372 of 2018, Kerala HC. *Jindal Global Law Review*. 13. 1-11.

92 Ponni Arasu and Priya Thangarajah, 'Queer Women and Habeas Corpus in India: The Love That Blinds the Law' (2012) 19(3) *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 413.

93 Aishwarya Singh, 'Queer Women and Law: Desire and Betrayal' (1 September 2020) <<https://www.tarshi.net/inplainspeak/queer-women-and-law-desire-and-betrayal/>>

94 *Shafin Jahan v. Ashokan K.M.*, 2018 (Supreme Court of India)

95 *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India*, 2018

96 <https://www.scobserver.in/journal/8-hadiya-mar->

that the consistent effort by the birth family, as well as the Kerala High Court, to deny an adult woman of her choice to live with the man she chose to marry is a “manifestation of the idea of patriarchal autocracy and possibly self-obsession with the feeling that a female is a chattel” and that the courts do not have the jurisdiction to “decide what it considered to be a ‘just’ way of life or ‘correct’ course of living for Hadiya<sup>97</sup>” In a more recent queer elopement case, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court noted, “Our autonomy as persons is founded on the ability to decide: on what to wear and how to dress, on what to eat and on the food that we share, on when to speak and what we speak, on the right to believe or not to believe, on whom to love and whom to partner, and to freely decide on innumerable matters of consequence and detail to our daily lives.”<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

**“The choice of a partner whether within or outside marriage lies within the exclusive domain of each individual.”<sup>99</sup>**

Through this chapter, we have highlighted how law is used as a tool to deny autonomy to queer individuals, especially in terms of choosing a partner. Adult queer women’s agency can easily become a contested category, and law is readily manipulated to maintain control over women’s bodies. We further analysed how cooperation between the family and the police works to silence, punish, and incarcerate queer women.

Further, by drawing parallels with inter-faith love in India, it is clear how citizenship is hierarchically structured around sexuality, just as it is around caste and religion, and legitimised by societal institutions such as marriage. This pushes us to reflect on queer women’s relationship with and within the law, as well as with the larger women’s movement in India. We should continue to search for the possibility of a new politics of desire and pleasure within the law, while remaining conscious and cautious of its repressive effects on queer lives.

For additional information, please consult *Progressive Realisation of Rights: A Co-Traveller’s Reflections on Crisis Intervention*. Authors: Astha Kalarikkal, Deeptha Rao V N & Sathyakala K K. Published by: Raahi: A Journey Towards Dignity (Bangalore) Published: May 2022

[https://www.raahithejourney.org/\\_files/ugd/57ce07\\_e4a70eb9e5c54c09b8da9094bd2030ce.pdf](https://www.raahithejourney.org/_files/ugd/57ce07_e4a70eb9e5c54c09b8da9094bd2030ce.pdf)

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riage-case/

97 Shafin Jahan v. Ashokan K.M, 2018 (Supreme Court of India)

98 Shweta Dogra And Another vs Union Territory Of J&K And Others on 3 February, 2020

99 Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India, 2018

# Chapter 4: Alliances, Co-optation, and Contestation

# Alliances, Co-optation, and Contestation

***“For partnership to be effective they need to be value based, with shared values. Some alliances are very extractive, you have to constantly watch your back even with your own people [LGBTQI+]. These are life and death issues: if I can’t trust you with my life, how are we supposed to go out and talk to people together? An alliance starts with the values and then moves forward”. (Gay activist from Kenya, focus group)<sup>100</sup>***

Through our research, every LGBTQI+ activist shared that building, maintaining and, healing alliances, with and outside the acronym, was a priority to which they devote significant effort on a day-to-day basis.

While this may not be true of all LGBTQI+ activists everywhere, feminist movements have a special status for the activists we consulted. 53% of survey respondents stated that their two main activist affiliations were “feminist and LGBTQI+” or “LGBTQI+ and feminist.” Another 11% defined themselves as “trans” and “feminist” activists. That is, the majority of our participants, 64% in total, is positioned at the intersection of feminist and LGBTQI+ movements. They do not see cisgender feminists as others, but as peers.

It is undeniable that feminists have played a leading role in opening alliances between LGBTQI+ groups and other social movements. However, these alliances are permanently under tension, and fissures have opened up due to racism, transphobia, class bias, and other forms of colonial violence perpetuated within certain expressions of feminism.

When asked if they were also organizing around any other aspect of their identities, 89% of survey respondents mentioned at least one other movement or issue they were affiliated with. Thus, a large majority of the activists we talked to are queer sex workers, queer persons with disability, working class queer people, Black or Indigenous queer people, queer

people positioned within religious minorities, and Dalit queer people. They can only understand their activism as the navigation of and bridging of their whole identities, however difficult it may be.

Beyond their personal identities, all activists we interviewed are individuals for whom social justice and collective well-being matters. They can see the connections between the oppression they experience on a daily basis as queer persons as originating from and upholding the same system that imposes white or caste supremacy, ableism, or a brutally unequal distribution of wealth. They gravitate toward expressing those connections in coordinated action with other social movements and political parties of the left, wherever they exist. They seek to remain genuine even, if they themselves belong to privileged groups in some regard.

Among the 36% of those responding to our survey that do not consider themselves as feminists or LGBTQI+, they recognize different legacies with their own advantages and conflicts. For instance, some activists, particularly gay men and transgender women, are linked to AIDS movements, most of which do not have origins in feminist analysis or practices.<sup>101</sup>

In this section we will discuss alliances with feminist and other movements. In both cases, we will address what has worked for LGBTQI+ movements, where the obstacles lie, and how they have been faced historically.

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## Our Feminist Allies Ourselves

***“Feminists are our main allies. We cooperate in a very horizontal way, their vision is to share knowledge so we can grow together. They are not selfish at all” (Peruvian trans woman activist)***

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100 Focus group participant, Kenya

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101 Reviewer activist from India, survey response



In chapter two we addressed the wounds left by trans-exclusionary feminisms on LGBTQI+ people and the emotional burden that carrying those wounds entails. In this section, we want to delve deeper into the strategies activists utilize to repair alliances that feel permanently broken. We want to further explore alliances as practices toward healing and opening the feminist struggle to a wider range of possibilities. In spite of the fragmentation and the damage caused by white, upper class, and trans exclusionary feminists in recent years, the activists we talked to continue to value and positively assess their alliances with feminist movements. While, as we saw in chapter two, some coalitions and relationships have been broken, the good news is that many have not and new ones have also been forged.

For 59% of survey respondents, feminist movements were their closest allies. This percentage is almost double the figure for the second closest ally identified, human rights movements. When asked to rate on a five point scale how much solidarity and joint-action with feminist movements has increased in the last five years, the global average was 4.13.

In most, if not in all, contexts, feminist movements tend to be older and more established than queer movements, which also means they are likely to have more resources, financial or otherwise. Across our conversations with activists, we heard examples of feminist organizations being instrumental for queer groups' organization efforts. Feminist organizations may support queer groups in obtaining legal registration, open up their facilities to queer groups for meetings, or share organizational learnings and tools.

With their vast experience in addressing patriarchal violence, feminist and women's rights groups are also among the first to respond when crisis strikes. This solidarity sometimes is easily given when the LGBTQI+ group or individual who needs it shares some common features with the feminists involved, such as class, caste, or ethnicity. When commonalities are absent or lacking, solidarity is sometimes denied, as was discussed in chapter two.

In August 2022, when two Peruvian trans activists were arrested in Indonesia, and one of them was tortured and killed by police, feminist groups circulated solidarity statements, contributed to fundraising initiatives, and even liaised with feminist groups in Indonesia to make sure the relatives of the

murdered man had local support.<sup>102</sup> On the other side of the world in India, one of our interviewees who manages many situations of crisis for lesbians, bisexual women, and trans men has a similar experience:

***“From the very beginning we have always been supported by feminist groups in situations of crisis. We have faced no challenges with them, they have always been supportive and fast responders”.***<sup>103, 104</sup>

When discussing how alliances with feminist groups are built and maintained, activists highlighted two main factors:

Time and patience - After all, alliances are relationships and are built patiently, day after day, by being there and getting to know each other. Shared history, memories of victory, and solidarity in defeat are a powerful glue that can help withstand opposition efforts to break alliances.

Mutual learning - As in any genuine relationship, all parties are transformed by the experience and by the others involved. An experienced activist in one of our focus groups shared their experience:

***“Over the years, my feminism – and that of many others in my community – has kept growing as we encountered realities that for us were new both in life and in politics. This happens with issues of sexual and reproductive rights as they apply to queer women, to trans people, even to single women and to those outside the upper urban classes. We learned by listening, by being there as life happened to people around us and something began to change in how we saw those issues, and even in how we saw ourselves...”***<sup>105</sup>

102 Recollection from Alejandra Sardá-Chandiramani - Alchemy Project researcher - who was personally involved in these efforts.

103 Interview, collective, India

104 In the Serbia case study we can read a different view on the issue of responding to gender-based violence; realities are always complex and each voice contributes a different aspect of them.

105 Focus group, activist, India

Openness to transformation, which can feel scary sometimes, particularly when you hold some form of privilege, is a prerequisite for forging genuine alliances.

We discussed the impact of the internal opposition actors in chapter one. It is important to keep in mind that not all feminist groups are, can be, or want to be allies to LGBTQI+ groups. Many of them are what we call the internal opposition. It is worth noting that despite the harm and ruptures they bring, they can also have an unintended positive effect in fostering or urging alliances among feminist and queer groups, just as classic opposition actors do in contexts where they are growing in power, like India or Kenya. A promising experience to illustrate this point is that of the trans inclusive feminist platform that brings together trans and cisgender feminist groups in Montenegro, Serbia, and Croatia. A trans male activist we interviewed described it as follows:

***“The platform is open to everyone who respects feminist values. Many individuals and feminist groups started to react when the TERF issue escalated so we realized it was useful to bring them all together in one place. We also discuss how to approach writers, journalists, people who are very public in their discourse and get them before the TERFs do so we can explain trans issues to them.”***<sup>106</sup>

This kind of public collaboration between transgender and cisgender feminists who do not shy away from confronting trans hatred can be very helpful in repairing and stopping the damage that is being caused. Activists in Colombia have a similar experience, even in the absence of a formal structure, as one of our interviewees said, “There are feminist spaces that are reflecting and speaking of TERFs and transphobia as structures of violence that they have to fight against.”<sup>107</sup>

Feminists are often proud to explore less hierarchical ways of organizing, and that is a significant transformation feminism has made and will continue to have alongside other social movements. However, at the present time of fragmentation, these loose structures can lead to some feminists taking a position of hate on behalf of a network that does not actually share it. Trans activists in Serbia addressed a situation

106 Interview, trans activist, Serbia

107 Interview, trans activist, Colombia

of this kind with determination and patience, leading to a positive outcome:

***“One member of this network we have been collaborating with, a very important women’s network in our context, is a TERF and she signed a petition against trans people. We approached the network’s leader to ask what was happening – she was not aware and said that the doors were open to trans people as always had been. They were organizing a seminar and dedicated one whole day to discuss trans rights. There were many TERFs there on that day and we got 20 minutes to respond to their statements. We were patient and nice, while they were very aggressive. Once it was over, many network members came to us to say they were ashamed of the behavior of their TERF colleagues. We continue to build on that connection.”***

As we discussed in chapter two, it is not always possible for trans activists to respond to hatred directly because it has a cost for them in terms of mental health. Here is where, in our opinion, cisgender feminists, particularly queer ones, have an important role to play in the confrontation of hatred in ways that can also build bridges and strengthen alliances wherever possible. One activist from India who reviewed our report reminded us of this importance:

***“The fact is that the feminist movement at many instances in history has also disenfranchised many people and they, especially Black and trans people, have a complicated relationship to feminism. The work should, therefore, continue to evolve and also take into consideration arguments and beliefs of those who move away from the feminist movement or have never identified with it.”***<sup>108</sup>

In our of our focus groups, a member of the Colombian trans men network *Somos* gave us the gift of the following inspiring story:

***“It was a slow process of many years to get our sexual and reproductive rights as trans men and non-binary persons recognized by feminist movements. They had this bias that we were just like cis men. For years the doors***

108 Activist reviewer from India (survey respondent)

***were closed and there was no understanding of how our agendas are similar if not the same as theirs. At one point we realized that we were too focused on that fight and decided to start doing our own thing, to work by and for our community. We realized we could have our own academic and artistic production, to make our issues visible. And then an understanding slowly began to be built. Three days ago for the first time we were invited to a conversation with the cis feminists who are leading the work around abortion in Colombia. We were heard and welcomed. In the meantime we grew and we can now approach working together from a stronger position”.***

While very prominent in Latin America and Europe, anti-transgender hatred is not the only issue undermining these alliances. The activists we consulted also mentioned intergenerational dynamics across and within movements, as in the following reflection from a Muslim queer activist from India.<sup>109</sup>

***“Any movement that includes very young people tends to become more queer friendly and more aware of intersectionality, and that is happening in feminism too. But older feminists for whom it was enough of a big deal to leave their homes and be able to have careers and who still see women trapped in their houses or beaten up by their husbands have a hard time understanding why queers are – in their view – ‘so hung up on things like pronouns.’”***<sup>110</sup>

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## The Grass Looks Greener On the Other Side (or Not)

In survey responses and conversation, the activists in this study mentioned other social movements with which they are forging alliances. Which movements they prioritized depends highly on the context, which issues are most pressing, and who is better positioned to provide support.

The human rights movement was the second most mentioned “closest ally” to LGBTQI+ movements,

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109 See the Peru case study for more reflection on this

110 Interview, Muslim queer activist, India

totally almost 25% of survey responses. They are important allies for those fighting criminalization, as in the Kenyan context, and in Serbia, where some of the activists we talked with consider the LGBTQI+ movements to be predominantly human rights movements.<sup>111</sup>

There were interesting references to alliances with the left, keeping in mind that in most contexts, like a Serbian lesbian activist said, “The Left is not being allowed to be proactive – they are always in a defensive position.”<sup>112</sup> This changes drastically when the left, in any of its multiple expressions, comes to power, as is the case in Colombia. Sadly, our research took place just as the new government was just coming into office there, so it is still too early to assess how the alliances that exist with many LGBTQI+ groups across the country will evolve. Elsewhere, there are promising initiatives, like the recently created Left Transfeminist Network in the Balkans that brings together feminist and LGBTQI+ groups. These initiatives are worth following and exploring how their learnings can be shared across regions.

Moments of intense mobilization that bring a large and very diverse population into the street to demand radical changes are sometimes opportunities for bringing down barriers, dismantling biases, and building alliances. Sometimes they are not. In some cases, bridges are built across identities, while in others gender and sexual biases prevail, and alliances never take off. In the course of our research, we heard a positive example from Colombia and a negative one from Peru, which is included in the country focus. In Colombia, the trans woman activist from Femidiversas that we interviewed remembers:

***“The Paro allowed many people to meet and acknowledge each other in the streets. We were able to work together with soup kitchens and particularly with one very, very marginalized neighbourhood La Caracola where we are still working. We feel connected to each other because we face the same class oppression. Women from the neighbourhood welcome us, nobody treats us badly. We share similar experiences of inhabiting our bodies and***

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111 Activist reviewer from Serbia, survey response

112 Interview, activist, Serbia

**territories – that is where we find common ground”<sup>113</sup>**

As with feminist movements, time and patience often lead to good results with the left. A participant in one of our focus groups from India shared, “We had been going to protests organized by the Left for three years when the Communist Party asked us for gender and sexuality training.”<sup>114</sup> These alliances also challenge queer movements to articulate their intersectional perspectives more deeply, something that not everybody is willing or equipped to do. A Serbian activist expressed their concern:

**“As queers our task is to provide our own narratives about current issues i.e. air pollution, that [are] huge. The biggest problem is that queer organizations sometimes do not recognize that these are also their issues.”<sup>115</sup>**

This is an area where there is still work to be done and where queer groups can help each other to develop narratives and expand alliances, as groups across the globe have developed or are developing intersectional perspectives on specific issues.

Last but not least, queer groups in different contexts have had different degrees of success in building alliances with the movements of those that are oppressed by their ethnicity, religion, or caste. In all those movements, just like in feminist circles, there are more progressive expressions that are open to these alliances, as well as individual leaders who share both identities and can act as bridges. There are also more conservative expressions that have their doors closed to queer groups and sometimes would even ally with classic or internal opposition actors.

Dalit and Muslim women’s progressive groups were particularly mentioned as successful examples of allies built by activists in India where the awareness about the common enemy is very acute among those who cannot accept a limited recognition of their sexual/gender identities in a context of nationalism, caste, and religious Hindu supremacy.<sup>116</sup> However, some of the activists we interviewed shared that they

were shocked to find that “they are more mainstream than us, they try to keep themselves in the good books of the government as much as possible.”<sup>117</sup>

In India, caste and class often determine the extent of alliances. The class element is found in many other contexts, often intersecting with ethnicity, as in Peru. One of our activist reviewers explains:

“In the India context, I feel three strands make up the LGBTQI+ ‘movement’: (i) organizing led by upper caste/ middle class (predominantly gay) men, (ii) advocacy by members of the thirunangai/ hijra community - strongly influenced by those from the southern part of the country - who are writers and have managed to influence left-progressive writers collectives, and (iii) feminist groups largely composed of queer cis women, non-binary people, and transmasculine individuals. Those in (iii) do work in alliance with other groups addressing gender-based violence, inter-caste and inter-faith issues, etc., but are largely upper caste/ middle class themselves.”<sup>118</sup>

While the caste element is unique to India, class plays a significant role in the alliances that LGBTQI+ activists can forge everywhere.

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## Some reflections

**“Histories are divergent, alliances are contingent, meeting in spite of ourselves, sharing rooms even if we don’t share agendas”  
(Indian activist reviewer, focus group)**

It is worth stating that while other movements were also mentioned by respondents, the two main allies, feminists and human rights movements, account for almost 85% of our responses. In many present contexts, LGBTQI+ movements are predominantly feminist movements and, to a lesser extent, human rights movements. The feminist label is very broad and encompasses the most radical sectors seeking to overthrow patriarchy and build a completely new order to those closest to an equality paradigm that seeks to ensure that women and LBTQI+ people have access to the same opportunities as cisgender men do within our current system. Queer feminist movements

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113 Interview, trans woman activist, Colombia

114 Focus group, trans activist, India

115 Interview, activist, Serbia

116 Focus group, trans activist, India; interview, Muslim queer activist, India; interview, collective, India

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117 Interview, collective, India

118 Activist reviewer from India (survey respondent)

are probably located everywhere along the feminist continuum.

The other important ally, human rights movements, is to some extent a problematic one on many levels. In some contexts, it is as much a target for the classic opposition as queer groups, or even more so.<sup>119</sup> In other cases, it is being eroded by the instrumentalization of Western powers, like the USA or Europe, and by the loss of prestige of international/ regional) human rights mechanisms that increasingly deploy a biased perspective that serves geopolitical rather than justice-oriented purposes. LGBTQI+ and women's rights have an unfortunate place of privilege in that instrumentalization, as they are often deployed as weapons in extremely selective manners (i.e. against Iran or China but not Saudi Arabia or Qatar). As the confrontation between the current and weakening world power of the USA and the emerging one of China continues, the need for the reimagining of human rights to encompass justice at all levels and defy patriarchal paradigms of power will become more pressing. Many within queer and feminist movements have already started this process, but their voices are not yet strong enough to assert the beginning of new patterns of resistance and building other worlds and futures.

The current landscape of fragmentation across social movements – not only within feminist or queer movements – may indicate the need to explore alliances that go beyond identities to prioritize that highly demonized word, ideology. While some feminists and queer activists are finding common ground with expressions of hate and oppression based on gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, or class, others will benefit from much greater support and opportunities to explore the vast territory of commonalities they share with those who also refuse to accept a world order based on domination and exclusion, regardless of who is included or excluded. As one of our activist-reviewers said, “There is a need to articulate and give words to those ‘other’ common grounds/commonalities.”<sup>120</sup>

While we advocate for broadening, deepening, and diversifying alliances, we can not ignore the reality that social activism performed through the NGO model faces today, in our capitalist world, a fierce competition for resources and the resulting turfiness – the need to define and defend a space or identity for one's organization in order to be funded. What we are proposing here may work better for informal collectives and movement-based initiatives that can allow themselves to break the walls of identity, even paying the cost of having less financial resources to do their work. Of course, if the funding ecosystem manages to prioritize work done around issues and not identities, the outcome will be better for everybody.

***“We dream of living in a world with social justice. We reach out to other movements and we see cis-heteropatriarchy replicated there. That is a shock. But it is still good that our horizon is to make that fair world a reality for all.” (Colombian activist, focus group)***

119 For instance, in India, a group may be more successful at getting their legal registration if their name includes the words “lesbian”, “gay” or “trans” than if they mention “human rights” - Focus group, trans activists, India

120 Activist-reviewer from India, focus group participant

# The Role of LGBTQI+ Activists in Social Upheaval in Peru (2022-2023)

By **Claudia Jimena Plasencia Custodio**

To study the role played by sexual and gender dissident activists during the social upheaval in Peru during 2022 and 2023, we will start by describing the battle for sexual and reproductive rights in the country and how the conservative wave consolidated itself during the 2021 General Elections. This landscape has an impact on how the movement itself acts, as organizations and activists have had to continually fight setbacks. Next, we will describe the political-social context in which the upheaval happened, with conservative groups who are strong in Parliament supporting human rights violations and the criminalization of the protesters. In the third section, we analyze how movements have responded to this context, specifically feminist and LGBTQI+ organizations.

## Facing Conservatism in Contemporary Peru: The Struggles of the Feminist and Sexual Dissident Movements

In Peru, policies related to sexual and reproductive rights have been the terrain of strong battles since the transition to democracy. In the early 2000s, the fight was around forced sterilization practices by the Fujimori regime.<sup>121</sup> Another big struggle was around

access to the emergency contraception pill, banned in 2009 and allowed in 2016 by a precautionary measure. The bill for same-sex civil unions did not get enough votes to be passed by Parliament in 2015, but it contributed to the creation of different LGBTQI+ organizations like *Más Igualdad* (More Equality) whose main struggle was for same-sex marriage. Therapeutic abortion is legal in Peru, but its implementation raises serious hostility, particularly among medical professionals. All these struggles have been led by feminist and LGBTQI+ activists.<sup>122</sup>

The inclusion of a gender perspective in the school curricula in 2016 led to conservative evangelical and Catholic leaders creating a local version of *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (Hands Off My Children) that brought together evangelical and Catholic conservative leaders, civil society organizations linked to religious organizations, and right wing Parliament members, particularly Fujimori supporters. They worked in the media, the courts, and other institutions, as well as through public mobilization, to spread fear about so-called “gender ideology.”<sup>123, 124</sup> One of these

121 Coe, A. (2004.) From Anti-natalist to Ultra-conservative: Restricting Reproductive Choice in Peru. *Reproductive Health Matters* 12 (24): 56–69.

122 Rousseau, S. (2020) Antigender activism in Peru and its impact on state policy. *Politics & Gender* 16 (1), 25–32. doi:10.1017/s1743923x20000070

123 Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir. (2018). Actores y estrategias del conservadurismo religioso: Mapeo del terreno. In *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir*. Recuperado de <http://clacaidigital.info/handle/123456789/1168>.

124 Plasencia C. (2020). Activismo religioso conservador en las calles: La estrategia de movilización de las iglesias del Movimiento Misionero Mundial contra la “ideología de género” (2016 -2019). MA in Political Science and Government Thesis, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales (PUCP).

collectives, *Padres en Acción* (Parents in Action) sued the Ministry of Education for implementing the contested curricula, but thanks to the key allies that the feminist and sexual dissidents' movements were able to find within the government, the Ministry stood firm, and in 2019 the Supreme Court approved implementation of a gender perspective in the school curricula.

Despite conservative attempts to roll back the status quo on gender issues in the 2016-2020 period, the movements managed to hold the line, while also making gender-based violence against women visible in the huge *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Woman Less) demonstrations, defending a gender perspective in education, and implementing electoral reform that guaranteed gender parity. However, the political crisis that plagued Peru during the same period, along with the rise of a populist right that embraced an anti-gender discourse to gain allies, consolidated itself in the 2021 General Elections.<sup>125</sup>

Pedro Castillo won the presidency as the candidate of a left party, but in Parliament the right took most seats and immediately challenged the Castillo victory. Despite confrontation from the beginning, populist right parties managed to come to agreements with the ruling *Peru Libre* (Free Peru) party to promote laws against equality and women's rights. These included bill to change the name of the "Ministry of Women" to the "Ministry of the Family," Law 31498 that allowed parents to intervene in the development of school curricula, which opened the door to incorporate religious and moral perspectives in textbooks that went unchallenged by President Castillo, shared custody of children as the de facto option, and a bill that recognizes "the rights of the unborn person" that further restricts access to abortion.<sup>126</sup> All these initiatives were developed in 2021, the first year of the Castillo administration.

Even against a landscape where a conservative Parliament stops any progress in sexual and

reproductive health and rights, organizations fighting for these rights in Peru (which includes both feminist and sexual dissident groups) continued to fight, deploying different strategies, including advocacy in Parliament itself. A representative from the organization Flora Tristán says we are backsliding:

***"We managed to create a group of Parliament members in favor of a gender perspective, led by Parliament women Ruth Luque and Susel Paredes. We think they are about 20 but the total number of Parliament members is 130 and there are 110 against us".<sup>127</sup>***

In this hostile context, the organizations are producing talking notes, technical briefs, and arguments to be shared with our few allies in Parliament, while also working through the media. For instance, to fight Bill 1520<sup>128</sup> by Fujimorist Parliament member Barbarán:

*"We produced talking notes with the arguments we thought could work inside the Parliament. Feminist organizations like Manuela Ramos, Demus, Coordinadora de Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos achieved the inclusion of a line by Barbarán stating that the bill was not aimed against therapeutic abortion. Finally, the bill has not yet been subjected to the vote and we hope it will not be passed because even with that reference it sets a (bad) precedent".<sup>129</sup>*

Thus, feminist and LGBTQI+ activists have kept up a tireless fight in a country where no gain for women's and sexual dissidents can ever be taken for granted, as the conservative right's goal to roll back these rights keeps growing. It is important to keep this context in mind as we move to discuss the social upheaval that started in late 2022.

125 Rousseau, S. (2022). Populismo y política antigénero en Perú: De la sociedad civil al escenario electoral. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 0(113), 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32992/erlacs.10841>

126 D. Olmo (2022, June 15) "*Una ola ultraconservadora*": 3 leyes del Congreso de Perú cuestionadas por el "retroceso" para la mujer y la igualdad. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-62143544>

127 Interview with a representative from feminist organization Flora Tristán (Lima, Feb 22, 2023)

128 Bill 1520 seeks to protect the pregnancy of pregnant mothers, the unborn child, and the family surrounding them. The text (in Spanish) can be found here.

129 Interview with a representative from the sexual and reproductive health and rights organization Promsex (Lima, February 22, 2023)

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## Political and Social Context in Peru - Social Upheaval

The social upheaval in Peru between December 2022 and March 2023 has been a social mobilization process whose nature differs from other historical cycles of protest. After Pedro Castillo, leader of the left-populist government attempted a self-coup, and Vice President Dina Boluarte took over the administration, popular mobilizations began in the south of Peru. Those mobilizing opposed Castillo's arrest by the police and supported closing Parliament. President Boluarte allied herself with the extreme right in Parliament so that she could stay in power until 2026, betraying those who had elected her on the same ticket with Castillo in the 2021 general elections.

Mobilizations were first limited to the south and led by national organizations such as CGTP, CNA, FENATE, CUNARC-P<sup>130</sup>, and *etnocacerismo*<sup>131</sup>, as well as local and rural groups like peasant communities, small rural landowners or *regantes*, and neighborhood associations.<sup>132</sup> As they were met with violent repression, and the government took an authoritarian position, protests erupted across Peru without a body coordinating them. Their demands included Castillo's release and reinstatement to power, a new Constitution drafted by a Constitutional Assembly, Boluarte's removal, and the bringing forward of the election date. Some of the protesters supported all the above, while others only a few.

By late January-early February 2023, protests moved to the capital, Lima, because in Peru validation as a political subject requires visibility in the capital. Other neighborhood collectives, student networks, and feminist and LGBTQI+ activists joined the protests, just as the Indigenous Amazonian movement, religious groups, NGOs, and human rights movements

had already done elsewhere in the country. The newcomers joined to demand Boluarte's resignation, as well as justice for the 46 persons murdered by state repression.<sup>133</sup> This violent response by the state has been a historical reality in how social conflict involving racialized peoples in Peru, particularly Andean and Indigenous citizens, is dealt with.<sup>134</sup>

The current social upheaval involves mainly rural and peasant communities that traditionally make decisions through assemblies and mistrust national social organizations and political parties. It is a sum of fragments, both demands and organizations, that do not come together in a single united front from where leaders can emerge with channels for starting dialogue with the government or forming a coalition that can eventually win a general election and establish a constitutional assembly.<sup>135</sup>

The fact is that this upheaval is marked by social fragmentation, the reaffirmation of the power of the center, at the capital, mistrust among its different actors and the persistence of structural factors like racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples will have an impact on the participating LGBTQI+ and feminist movements, as well as on how involved they are in the upheaval. To this must be added the exhaustion among LGBTQI+ activists caused by the attacks described in the first section.

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## More Than a Movement, Activists: How Has the LGBTQI+ Movement Been Involved in the Demonstrations?

Different positions coexist in LGBTQI+ activism in Peru, along with the absence of a unified platform for political participation. Activists see the upheaval in a myriad of ways depending on their individual socioeconomic, geographical, and racial status.

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130 CGTP: Union Federation of Peru; CNA: Peasant Federation; FENATE: National Federation of Teachers and CUNARC-P: Peasant Self-Defense Union.

131 Mariana Alvarado (2022) in *Populismo radical en el Perú: La Invención del etnocacerismo*. Fondo Editorial PUCP, defines it as "A Peruvian political movement that started during the armed conflict of 1980-2000 [...] It reclaims the cultural legacy of the populations that were victimized, positioning themselves as heirs of an ancient culture to be recovered and not erased".

132 Coronel, O. (2023) Ni revolución ni barbarie. La complejidad del estallido social peruano. *Revista Ideele*. (308), s/p. link.

133 Ojo Público (2023) Un memorial por los adolescentes y jóvenes muertos en las protestas. link

134 Velarde, J(2023, January 14). Todo bajo control: discriminación, racismo y muerte en la crisis. Ideh PUCP. link.

135 Coronel, O. op. cit



LGBTQI+ activists do not have a common position on the social and political crisis. Some are in favor of the protests and their demands, while others are against them. Some liberal LGBTQI+ activists labeled the protests as “anti-democratic” and reproduced the government’s fear-mongering narrative that those protesting are violent and terrorist actors.<sup>136</sup> As an LGBTQI+ representative from Cusco said, it is worth keeping in mind that 50% of LGBTQI+ activists are middle class, urban and not rural, and that they do not identify with social justice struggles while those whose parents are peasants do.<sup>137</sup> This lack of empathy leads to only superficial involvement through social media, reluctance to take any public position, or even opposition to the protests.

In Lima even those who acknowledge that it is important to protest and demand that Boluarte quit do not do it as a unified LGBTQI+ bloc in solidarity with the broader social movement because LGBTQI+ mobilization is very limited. What can be found are individuals joining demonstrations on their own, as citizens. Even though there are more institutionalized LGBTQI+ organizations in Lima, none focus on political mobilization, so their actions have been to issue statements via social media demanding that Boluarte quit or have remained silent about the upheaval.<sup>138</sup>

Even though mobilization of LGBTQI+ activists is more limited when their conservative contexts discourage it, there are differences across Peruvian regions, including inspiring examples. For instance, in Arequipa there is a mobilized LGBTQI+ bloc that has a long tradition of involvement in social protests beyond the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda. By giving their support to other struggles, they forge alliances and understand that it is essential to do so to advance LGBTQI+ rights.

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136 Kessler, Jacob (2023) As Peru descends into chaos, queer people have a bigger priority than LGBTQ+ rights. [Lgbt Nation link](#)

137 Interview with a representative from the Kackaniraqmi collective in Cusco (March 23, 2023)

138 In Peru feminist and LGBTQI+ movements have developed as experts in areas like strategic litigation but the creation of a grassroots movement that supports their agendas is still limited. C. Gianella (2022) When Winning in the Courts is Not Enough: Abortion and the Limits of Legal Mobilization Without Grassroots Involvement in Peru. En Botero, S. Brinks, D. y Gonzales-Ocantos, E. pp. 66. Cambridge University Press.

Even though they have different positions, LGBTQI+ organizations in Arequipa marched together not to see Pedro Castillo reinstated, but to force Boluarte to step down, and then initiate a process leading to justice for the victims.<sup>139</sup> Even though they have not yet joined the organizing committee for the current mobilization and some social actors like the unions are still reluctant to be seen too near the LGBTQI+ bloc during demonstrations, they have still been recognized and invited to join the mobilization.<sup>140</sup> However, this is not common in other regions. Left-leaning LGBTQI+ organizations think that they not only have to confront the machismo of broader social movements, but also the lack of interest in those broader struggles on the part of LGBTQI+ activists.<sup>141</sup>

With regard to alliances among LGBTQI+ groups, there has been an attempt to come together among LGBTQI+ collectives from the southern regions. However, it has not been successful, and, for the time being, no LGBTQI+ platform exists to respond to the political context. Many activists think that when a political initiative does not originate in Lima, it lacks the support of Lima-based organizations and lacks the strength to be implemented. The problem of centralism is common to both LGBTQI+ and other movements, like feminism. LGBTQI+ collectives are close to feminist ones, but there is no coordination among them for joint mobilization.

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## Final Reflections

A lack of interest in the struggles for social, economic, and cultural justice by some LGBTQI+ activists have left them disconnected from social movements in Peru. However, wherever these activists have been involved in other social struggles, they have managed to overcome mistrust and are being recognized as political subjects. This opens the possibility of LGBTQI+ agendas being adopted by broader social movements in the future.

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139 Interview with a representative of the Lesbian organization in Arequipa (March 10, 2023)

140 Interview with a representative of the LGBTQI+ network in Arequipa (February 20, 2023)

141 Interview with a representative of Mas Igualdad organization (February 20, 2023)

Fragmentation, lack of spaces for articulation, and structural barriers like racism and discrimination that are present in Peruvian social movements, are also found in the LGBTQI+ movement. Agendas and initiatives originating in regions outside of Lima are not taken as seriously. This demonstrates the impact of socioeconomic and racial identities even in spaces considered to be more inclusive, like the LGBTQI+ movement.

There is also a lack of democratic practices within Peruvian political spaces that are marked by authoritarian practices, patronage, and lack of dialogue. The same features can be observed sometimes in the LGBTQI+ movement.

Finally, there is a window of opportunity to build a more articulated, representative, and diverse Peruvian LGBTQI+ movement, and the same applies to the Peruvian feminist movement. The visibility of the cracks is an opportunity to find solutions originating from the movement itself. This requires that all actors involved reflect on their own positions and hear the demands of others.

# Conclusion

***“For those that are left on the sidelines, but who are the center of life”***

— Toward Feminist Consciousness Collective<sup>142</sup>

There exists a global LGBTQI+ movement that is countering the cisgender heterosexual patriarchal opposition with multiple tactics and on many fronts, while also building possibilities for queer futures.

LGBTQI+ activists experience the opposition on many fronts and in many guises, the classic opposition, the internal opposition, and the opposition in disguise. There is much research globally on particular forces within the opposition and their transnational networks, although not all of this research is accessible to LGBTQI+ activists or relevant to their context specific. While the opposition is not new, the pluricrisis facing the world are breeding a deepened network of actors with agendas of domination that seek to infringe on the rights of LGBTQI+ people, cisgender heterosexual women, and other oppressed people. Increasingly their narratives have found platforms and resonance in a common sense of domination that has appeal even among oppressed people.

LGBTQI+ activists are deeply impacted by this assault and face increased risk and threat for their work to defend their rights. Nevertheless, LGBTQI+ activists are still able to build allies, forge solidarity, and use multiple tactics that have disrupted the opposition. Today it is a fight between those who seek to reinforce domination and those that chose to build a world that is life-affirming. While resourcing for LGBTQI+ movements still remains scarce, many LGBTQI+ formations are building work that is beyond narrowly defined agendas and are fighting back and building these alternatives. As authors of this work, we salute them.

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142 A Pan-African queer feminist Platform from Western Sahara <https://feministconsciousnessrevolution.wordpress.com/>

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## 2: SURVEY RESULTS

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## 3: Glossary and Methodology

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# Glossary

In this section you will find definitions - by experts and by us - of some of the terms we used in the report. All definitions are provisional and contested, and you may find better ones elsewhere. Also, we may not define below the term that intrigues you... We hope to inspire you to keep looking and learning!

**Adivasi:** Original inhabitants of India, legally known as “scheduled (registered) tribes”. 705 are currently registered but it is estimated that many more exist.<sup>143</sup>

**Anti-gender movements:** (those) “comprised of religious, nationalistic, and conservative actors that oppose so-called “gender ideology”, “gender theory”, or “genderism”. They reject the concept of gender and believe it to be constructed as an attack on nature (religious actors), nation (nationalistic actors), or normality (conservative actors).”<sup>144</sup>

**Anti-rights actors:** those opposing sexual and reproductive rights particularly for women and LGBTIQ persons; the arguments and strategies deployed for that opposition may vary and they are addressed in further detail in the report.

**Cisgender/Cis:** a person whose gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth.<sup>145</sup>

**Cisheteropatriarchy:** A system of power based on the supremacy and dominance of cisgender heterosexual men through the exploitation and oppression of cisgender women and the LGBTIQ+ community.

**Conservative actors:** those that want to prevent or minimize social change, thus upholding privilege and keeping power where it currently resides (with the few and not the many)

**Core and flexible funding:** Core funding is one that can be spent on what an organization or group needs to be able to function, such as salaries for its people,

equipment, rent, etc, and that is not necessarily related to a particular project. Flexible funding is money that an organization or group can use in whichever way it decides to - for core expenses, for a project, a bit of both, etc.

**Dalit:** The term Dalit means ‘oppressed’, ‘broken’ or ‘crushed’ to the extent of losing original identity. However, this name has been adopted by the people otherwise referred to as Harijans, or ‘Untouchables’, and has come to symbolize for them a movement for change and for the eradication of the centuries-old oppression under the caste system. In legal and constitutional terms, Dalits are known in India as scheduled castes. There are currently some 166.6 million Dalits in India.<sup>146</sup>

**Ecocide:** The deliberate and systematic domination and destruction of the Earth by human action particularly related to capitalist accumulation and elite greed.

**Far/extreme-right:** the most extreme actors within conservative, nationalistic and white supremacy movements; prone to resort to physical and symbolic violence and very adept at the use of social media.

**Fascism:** a political movement characterized by authoritarianism and exalting a particular nation or race above and against any other concerns such as individual rights, coexistence with other nations and racial groups, etc.

**Fundamentalist movements:** (those) characterized by their intolerance of diversity and plurality, and by their coercitive nature, which includes the use of violence to enforce norms. All fundamentalisms reinforce patriarchy, gender inequality and heteronormativity<sup>147</sup>.

**Heteronormative:** the assumption that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal

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143 Debates Indígenas <https://www.debatesindigenas.org/notas/144-movimiento-pathalgari-revolucion-indigena-india.html>

144 GATE's Series on Building Resistance N°2

145 TRANSHUB, Health and Gender Affirmation in NSW, Australia. <https://www.transhub.org.au/101/cis>

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146 World Directory of Minority and Indigenous Peoples. <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/dalits/>

147 Religion, Culture and Tradition: Strengthening Efforts to Eradicate Violence against Women, AWID, 2013

sexual behaviour and that male-female differences and gender roles are natural and immutable.

**Hijra:** an officially recognized third gender in the Indian sub-continent. Hijra people often live in a community with each other and may have a guru they follow. Although some hijras refer to themselves as feminine, others identify as belonging to a third gender and are neither men nor women.<sup>148</sup>

**Homonationalism:** a term coined by Jasbir Puar to describe a liberal gay and lesbian rights discourse used to gain access to cultural and legal forms of citizenship by 'good' queers at the expense of excluding the sexual and racial 'others'.<sup>149</sup> This term is used for example in the context of the segments of the Israeli LGBTIQ+ movement that uphold the occupation of Palestine by omission or explicitly.

**Nationalism:** the belief that one's nation is superior to all others and needs to be preserved from corruption by 'foreign' elements (this could be non-nationals, such as migrants, but also nationals who do not fit with the nationalistic idea of the 'nation', such as those of non-dominant religion, ethnic group or sexuality).

**Neocolonialism:** the control of the economic Global South by the economic Global North through indirect means (that is, not armies by foreign debt, to name just one)

**Neoconservative ideology:** the contemporary expression of a perspective about the State and of citizenship structured around the defense of a 'universal' conservative sexual moral.<sup>150</sup>

**Pinkwashing:** the strategy used by corporations and States to benefit from their claimed support for LGBTIQ+ rights, thus portraying themselves as liberal and democratic, as a way of obscuring their role in

violence and oppression perpetrated against the majority of people that includes LGBTIQ+s.

**Pluricrises:** The multiple interlocking crises based in capitalism, racism, anthropocentrism, cis-hetero-patriarchy, ableism and others is neither new nor unprecedented but deeply rooted in the imperialist colonial model and societal project which seeks to maintain a world order in which the majority, who have been living in this state of crisis for centuries, continue to be subjugated.

**Religious fundamentalism:** the "belief that there is only a single set of religious teachings that provides an inerrant set of truths that dictates how people should live their lives and must be defended against any other views that are in opposition to these truths"<sup>151</sup> "Religious fundamentalisms are absolutist, monolithic interpretations of religion. These ideologies exist across all regions and are often used to attain or maintain power—political, economic and/or social. They present the world in terms of "right" and "wrong", and present their subjective moral and social positions as "objective truths" that are religiously sanctioned.<sup>152</sup>

**White supremacy:** a system of exploitation and oppression of Black and Brown continents, nations and peoples by White peoples and nations for the purpose of establishing, maintaining and defending the appropriation of their wealth. The belief that by being white one is superior to all others and entitled to lead and dominate them is deeply entrenched in all societal institutions and manifests itself in a myriad of ways. No white person, however progressive or otherwise oppressed, is 100% from the white supremacy system.

## Methodology

The question we began the work with was: what hasn't been said or researched about the opposition facing LGBTIQ+ activists. As our research progressed, it was revealed by our literature review that what was

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148 Provided by TARSHI - Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues, an organization based in Delhi, India.

149 Shreshtha Das and Aijaz Ahmad Bund, "The Homonationalist Agenda of 'Good' Queers Who Love the Nation-State. Published in *The Wire*, (2020)

150 Vaggione, J. M. (2022). El entramado neoconservador en América Latina. La instrumentalización de la ideología de género en las democracias contemporáneas. Las Torres de Lucca. *Revista internacional de filosofía política*. 11(1), 51-64. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/Itl.79437>.

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151 Mbote, D.K., Mombo, E., Mutongu, Z.B. et al. Religious Fundamentalism and Attitudes towards Sexual and Gender Minorities and Other Marginalized Groups among Religious Leaders in Kenya. *Pastoral Psychol* 70, 167–178 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-021-00942-9>

152 Religion, Culture and Tradition: Strengthening Efforts to Eradicate Violence against Women, AWID, 2013

missing were the voices, arguments, analysis and perspectives of LGBTIQ+ activists from around the world on the impact of the opposition on their work and how they counter the opposition. We began by identifying the key areas/questions:

1. who are the opposition actors and how they are named in each context?;
2. what is their impact on LGBTIQ+ movements and activists?;
3. who are our current allies and how they support our struggles (with a particular emphasis on feminism)?; and
4. how are LGBTIQ+ movements resisting the opposition and what do they need to shore up this resistance?

We created a survey that was circulated in French, English and Spanish and responded by a total of 114 activists from 29 different countries. 62% of them were from Astraea's focus countries (Colombia, India, Kenya, Peru and Serbia). We asked respondents which were the main movements they identified with, 64% positioned themselves at the intersection of feminist and LGBTIQ movements. We also asked our respondents if they organized around other identities. The most mentioned identity (24%) was working class, followed by sex workers, Black, Indigenous and people with disability. 78% of respondents described the geographic scope of their activism as community based. Many respondents were from outside the capital cities or main regions, particularly those in Colombia, Peru and India. 64% work through NGO formations (28% organize in informal collectives, non-registered groups, community-based organizations, independently and in trade unions). The remaining percentage corresponds to independent activists and funders (8%).

Once we processed the survey results, we held 4 focus group discussions (5-6 persons in each) and 15 individual interviews to delve deeper into the themes that emerged. Participants in the groups and those interviewed were a mix of: a) Astraea grantees and others recommended by Astraea staff; b) activists we know and whose expertise we value and c) activists who expressed their interest to further participate in the research while responding to the survey. At this

moment of the research we worked in Tamil, English, and Spanish.

We then organized what we had heard in a draft report (in English and Spanish) that was reviewed by a total of 47 activists, mainly but not exclusively from the focus countries, through a validation survey and 3 Focus Groups discussions. In this final version of the research (available in Spanish and English) we integrated their profound and rich contributions to the best of our ability.

As authors, we can only hope we have done justice to the deep knowledge, insights and experience shared with us by hundreds of activists around the world. - we knew this report did have something new and valuable to add but we started doubting our capacity to do justice even to the small number of activists that we managed to speak to. For the sake of full transparency, that doubt is still with us! We encourage all of you reading this report to look out for the activists and groups we name - and those we can not name - and for others who are not only doing but also thinking and reframing this world we live in on our own terms.



# Data and Stories from the Survey

## Section 1

### Who responded to the survey?

#### Which country are you responding from?

- Armenia 3
- Bolivia 2
- Cameroon 1
- Colombia\* 22
- Côte d'Ivoire 2
- El Salvador 2
- Eswatini 1
- Ghana 1
- Guatemala 2
- Honduras 1
- India\*\* 11
- Kenya 9
- Lebanon 2
- Malaysia 1
- Mexico 1
- Morocco 1
- Nicaragua 1
- Nigeria 2
- Peru 14
- Rwanda 1
- Serbia 15
- South Africa 1
- Sudan 1
- Togo 1
- Tunisia 1
- Uganda 1
- UK 1
- Zambia 1
- Zimbabwe 4
- Regional\*\*\* 8
- **Total 114**

\*Some respondents in Colombia also specified their regions: Cauca (4), Antioquia, Boyaca and Popayan (1 each).

\*\*Two respondents from India specified their regions (Eastern India and Tamil Nadu)

\*\*\*Seven respondents did not indicate a country but the regions in which they work: Southern Africa (2); Totally, Central Africa & West Africa, Europe and Central Asia, South Asia, South Caucasus/Eastern and Central Europe and Western Balkans (1 each)

### What movement would you say you organize in? – Top response

Respondents indicated the movement they primarily identify with

	Feminist	LGBTIQ	Trans	Intersex
Total	46	41	23	1
Peru	7	5	2	
Colombia	5	8	9	
Kenya	4	4		1
India	4	5	2	
Serbia	6	6	3	

\*3 participants left this question blank

### What other/s movement/s would you say you also organize in?

Respondents indicated other movements within which they also organize

	LGBTIQ	Trans	Feminist	Intersex
Total	58	46	43	1
Peru	8	4	4	3
Colombia	11	4	8	6
Kenya	4	3	4	0
India	6	5	6	5

Serbia	8	9	8	11
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Multiple responses accepted **Which other identity does our activism organise around? – Top response**

	Working class	Sex workers	Black	Persons with disability	Religious minorities	Indigenous	Dalit
Total	27	24	24	15	5	4	2
Peru	2	3	5		1	1	
Colombia	4	7	4	3	1		
Kenya		3	4	1		1	
India	5			3	1		2
Serbia	10		3				

\*13 participants left this question blank **Which other identity/ies does/do our activism organise around? – All other mentions**

	Sex workers	Persons with disability	Working class	Black	Religious minorities	Indigenous	Dalit
Total	47	36	29	26	23	22	8
Peru	4	3	1	2	0	8	0
Colombia	5	5	4	6	1	2	0
Kenya	1	0	3	4	2	1	
India	9	5	4	0	5	1	8
Serbia	8	9	2	2	3	4	0

Multiple responses accepted **My activism is...**

	Community-based	National	Regional	Total
Total	89	75	68	21
Peru	9	12	8	1
Colombia	16	9	17	0
Kenya	7	7	2	1
India	11	7	6	1
Serbia	11	8	11	3

Multiple responses accepted **Are you part of...?**

	A registered NGO	An informal collective	A non-registered group	Others
Total	73	16	15	10*
Peru	10	1	3	
Colombia	11	8	1	2
Kenya	6	1	0	2***
India	7	1	2	1**
Serbia	9	4	0	2****

\*Independent activists

\*\* Philanthropy

\*\*\* Registered CBOs

\*\*\*\* One trade union and one independent activist

## Section 2

### Definitions Which word best describes the anti-rights actors in your context?

#### Top response

	Fundamentalists	Anti-Rights	Religious Extremists	Religious Fundamentalists	TERFs	Ultra-conservatives	Right-wing	Nationalists	Ultra right wing	Anti-gender	Conservatives	Fascists
Total	27	12	11	10	9	9	7	7	7	7	5	2
Peru	6	3		1	1	1				1	1	
Colombia	7	4		2	3	3	1		2			
Kenya	1		2	3						2	1	
India	2	1	2			1	2		1	1		1
Serbia			1		1		1	4	4	1	1	1
Other countries	11	5	6	4	4	4	3	3	0	2	2	0

\*No respondent selected White Supremacists as their top response. **All other responses**

	Conservatives	TERFs	Anti-gender	Religious Fundamentalists	Anti-Rights	Ultra Conservatives	Religious Extremists	Right-wing	Nationalists	Fascists	Fundamentalists	Ultra right wing	White Supremacists
Total	71	63	62	61	58	55	55	49	46	45	41	38	23
Peru	8	4	6	8	8	6	6	5	2	4	8	4	2
Colombia	15	11	7	11	11	6	8	8	1	5	3	4	2
Kenya	6	3	7	3	2	3	6	2	2	1	4	1	1
India	5	4	5	7	5	5	5	4	9	6	5	8	1
Serbia	9	10	10	6	7	12	8	12	8	9	6	7	3
Other countries	28	31	27	26	25	23	22	18	24	20	15	14	14

Multiple responses accepted

## Section 3

### Impact

#### Top response

Respondents were asked to rank the impact of anti-rights actors on particular aspects of their work & their context using a scale where 1 meant “not impact at all” and 5 “very much impact”. Average rating for each aspect is provided below.

Type of Impact	Advancing LGBTQI rights & activism became more difficult	Advancing progressive agendas & activism became more difficult	Impacted political discourse to the detriment of queer lives	Advancing SRHR and activism became more difficult	Made activism more risky	Deepened economic inequalities	Created a negative social and cultural shift	Made achieving activist goals more difficult	Made it more difficult for orgs to operate	Growing transphobic agendas in WR/feminist movements
Total	4.53	4.41	4.39	4.35	4.34	4.18	4.12	3.96	3.79	3.54
Peru	4.93	4.86	4.86	4.86	4.36	4.64	4.57	4.21	3.64	3.00
Colombia	4.36	4.18	4.09	4.36	4.23	3.86	3.72	3.54	3.45	3.50
Kenya	4.55	4.44	4.55	4.44	4.66	4.11	4.44	4.11	3.66	3.44
India	4.45	4.81	4.36	4.00	4.45	4.63	4.27	4.36	4.81	3.18
Serbia	4.21	4.00	4.12	3.79	4.07	3.86	4.00	3.64	3.29	3.86

## Examples provided about the impact of fundamentalist/antirights actors

*Note: With minimum edits for clarity, we reproduce below the responses as provided by the activists through the survey form*

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## Legal and policy restrictions and setbacks

### Bolivia

- Ultra-conservative political actors filed an unconstitutionality action against the Gender Identity Law in 2016. As a result of the analysis raised by these deputies' and senators' arguments, the Constitutional Court — also conservative and not very knowledgeable around LGBTI issues — has determined a restriction to marriage, adoption, confidentiality of procedures and political participation of trans people in Bolivia. Which means, trans persons can exercise their right to identity change through the modification of their name and sex, but in doing so they lose civil and political rights.
- Unfortunately, Bolivia's political context has been affected by the coup, which has sought to roll back progress on LGBTI+ people's rights. A clear example of this is that as of yet the State refuses to bring before the legislative bodies 2 bills worked on by the LGBTI+ population, in coordination with the Ministry of Justice, last year. These bills are fundamental to guarantee the right to form a family for GLB people and the other one guarantees trans people their right to exercise their civil and political rights.

### Colombia

- There's been a focus on creating obstacles for legislative achievements and this has been a clear example of anti-rights actions in Colombia against trans people. As it was in the case of the Decree

1227 of 2015, which made it possible to issue a sex correction in identification documentation as well as the implementation of the Ministry of Health regulations in relation to SRHR, especially the right to body construction through hormonal and/or surgical processes.

- The government actions (local, regional and national) slow down processes in order to continue denying rights, such is the case that so far there's no public policy (which has been promised by several governments) that helps alleviate the multiple forms of violence that affect people with life experiences that differ from the normative sex and genders.
- In the context of Popayán, I would say that some of the most representative ways in which these actors affect trans people and activism for this population have to do with religious, biologicistic and conservative ideas that prevent advancements in things like sexual and reproductive health for trans men, trans women and non-binary people. This also includes, the guarantee to exercise sex work, access to health and more specifically access to care related to hormone replacement therapy and sex reassignment. Pathologizing trans lives (treating it as a mental health illness) is also an obstacle, as trans people have basically no access to justice in the face of the violence, seeing as how there is a lack of attention to transfemicides or to any case in which a trans person has been a victim of a crime.

### Côte d'Ivoire

- As a person from the LGBTQI+ community and an activist for the transgender people community, I would say our hope for a betterment of LGBTQI+ people's rights was shattered during the legislative reform when Law 226 relative to punishment of any discriminatory act was revised so that discrimination toward LGBTQI+ people is not taken into account in this law.

### El Salvador

- Abortion in all its forms is still criminalized in El Salvador. This includes cases where the pregnant woman's life is at risk, the pregnancy is the result

of rape and/or the fetus is incompatible with life outside the womb. Marriage equality and people's gender identity is still not a legally recognized concept. All these situations are due to the influence of conservative sectors — although not many — that have a strong influence in the political and economic sphere of the country.

## Guatemala

- During the night of March 8, 2022 the Republic of Guatemala Congress approved Law 5272, "Law for the Protection of Life and Family", this ruling was sent to the Executive branch for its approval, but what is it and what does this controversial law entail? Law 18-2022 seeks to protect three things: life, family and marriage between a man and a woman, as well as establish parents as the only educators in the sex education field. Bill 5940 in the Guatemalan Congress, pathologizes trans populations and denies our childhood and adolescence existences.// In 2017 the initiative 5272 was proposed to protect life and family, it ended up being archived, however it wasn't ruled unconstitutional, it's a looming threat. Additionally, in its second reading initiative 5940 was brought up that seeks to protect children and teens against gender identity disorders.

## Honduras

- Discourse from the executive branch, the refusal of the Gender Identity Law, government hate speech, the lack of recognition of trans women as women by the Secretary of Women's Affairs and institutional death that doesn't guarantee human rights for the LGBTIQ+ community.

## India

- Even though the queer-trans movements on the whole seem to not face a backlash, but a growing moral policing and hatred against the other affects individuals from queer trans communities also in a different way. The presence of non State actors functioning with sanction from the State means that laws can be okay but there is no implementation of the policy. State officials are either actively agreeing with the far-right groups or do not take

constitutional stands under pressure and in fear. This is affecting collectivising as well as individual support and help during a crisis.

- Many examples but these have affected us the most: 1. Discriminatory laws like the transgender person's (protection of rights) Act 2019 & Rules 2020.

## Kenya

- Kenya Criminalizes adult consensual same sex conduct both in private and in public in its penal code with imprisonment terms of up to 14 years. These Laws compounded with the existing socio-cultural norms against us LGBTIQ+ Kenyans and Non Kenyans largely exacerbate human rights violations on account of sexual and gender identities. Consequently, While the constitution states that Kenya is a secular state, the nation is highly Christian. The religious fundamentalists have made major contributions in violating our rights and justifying crude human rights violations on account of SOGIE-SC against us.

## Malaysia

- In Malaysia, the collusion of nationalist and religious fundamentalist politics has intensified, leading to public campaigns and witch hunt against queer people and migrants and refugees. For example, over the past 2 years: some states in Malaysia have amended their laws to increase punishment for same sex acts and for being transgender.

## Nigeria

- One of the major issues we work to address as an organization is advocacy around the criminalization of same sex marriage under same-sex marriage prohibition act (2014) which also criminalized organization and allies programming for LGBTIQ people in Nigeria. This legalized homophobia and crackdowns on LGBT people has sent hundreds of people into hiding and amplified a culture of fear and hate.

## Peru

- We don't have a Gender Identity Law that allows name or sex changes, changes are only allowed in court proceedings that can last up to three years and are costly.
- Peru endorses violence sanctioned initiatives, discrimination through regulations, procedures and laws, which are outlined with the exclusion in the National Registry of Identification and Legal Status (RENIEC) [T.N. exclusion of what is not clear in the original document]. Peru does not recognize the children of same-sex parents and does not have a Gender Identity Law. In terms of the health system (there are no exclusive protocols for LTGBIQ+ persons), there's no children adoption, no marriage equality, no record to distinguish between sexual orientation and gender identity related violence in police stations and the prosecutors' offices.
- During this past year, we've experienced an occupation of conservative groups in positions of power that are taking advantage of the polarized context of our society between the right and the left. This is extremely dangerous because they're trying to remove policies that had been achieved in favor of a gender approach in the country.
- Anti-gender and anti CSE (comprehensive sex education) laws have been passed. Anti-rights groups occupy spaces of power and decision making at the state level.
- National congress has refused to pass the gender identity law, has eliminated comprehensive sex education (CSE) from school's curriculum and is seeking to repeal the law that allows therapeutic abortion.
- Peruvian politics are conservative and led by political extremists. They keep rolling back rights around sexual and reproductive rights, they don't care about the country's progress.

## Serbia

- A part of the Serbian government participating in the last 7 years on "Traditional Families" global anti-gender conferences, the main issue is shrinking spaces for gender equality conversations, the

government being against the introduction of education packages on gendered violence in schools, and normative framework being changed regarding shrinking space for women's rights.

- Serbia floats between two realities - desperate one for citizens, ordinary people, and progressive political reality where we have the Prime Minister gay (as she states) having a child with her partner. On the other side the rhetoric of politicians in front of her are anti-LGBTIQ, she is not pressuring them to lower their rhetoric and to influence their attitudes. The President stated that while he is alive, he will not sign the Law on same sex partnerships, and this puts the end on any kind of public dialogue. Politically in the accession processes we are progressive (according to the EC Progress reports) while in the reality rights are derogating fast and not only rights of LGBTIQ persons, but also minority rights and women's rights.

## Uganda

- With the law and policy reform that is never in our favor laws are being passed that are discriminative and unfair to minority groups

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## Obstacles for organizational functioning

### Colombia

- The Atlantic movement and I need more support in terms resources and dissemination [of information]. Because sometimes it can't be consistent, or it doesn't achieve the impact that a group that has media support and the ability to move with greater force due to their better pool of resources. However, this has never stopped us from giving it our all and be everywhere like ants.

### Côte d'Ivoire

- Regarding the organizations' operations, several of them end up not being registered because registration criteria for NGOs do not recognize

LGBTQI+ organizations. We are often faced with the reformulation of the terms and causes of our struggle to be able to access registration // Regarding the operation of groups, we can say that the registration requirements for organizations penalize LGBTQI+ people. Hence, an increasingly low number of registered organizations, some of them must change their missions and vision statement in order to access a proper registration.

## India

- Funding and resources are threatened in different ways.
- Tightening of foreign contribution and foreign funding

## Kenya

- The anti-rights actors have made it hard to work in Kenya as an LBQ organization and so we are forced to register with a different name so as not to raise suspicion that might lead to our organization closing. Also, when carrying out our activities we always must be very careful of people not to realize that we are queer so as not to put our lives at risk, we always must be on high alert it is like we are living in this country illegally now that Homosexuality is criminalized in Kenya.
- In the same electioneering period, NGO EMAC (Empowering Marginalized Communities) executive Director was subjected to unlawful investigations by the DCI Matungulu Sub County following the politician's rhetoric over allegations of mobilizing and organizing along criminal activities. NGO National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) swiftly responded and represented the Director, and the investigations were dropped. However, the experience still makes the Director live in fear to even visit the area and advance the LGBTQI+ movements Agenda. In 2018, Meru County government declined to sign an MOU with EMAC to implement an HIV grant for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), forcing us to change the geographical target County to Kitui. Although we did advocacy and the county reversed the decision, we still experience opposition in making inroads in Meru County to promote access to quality HIV

health care for LGBTQI+ and Key Populations and efforts to promote human rights and access to justice.

## Nigeria

- Our unjust policies and laws not only restrict the LBQ community identity, choices, and safety at individual levels but also limit the feminist and LBQ collective movements in those communities. These restrictive laws prevent organizations from being able to formally and/or truthfully register and increase the potential for discrimination in the forms of homophobic violence, blackmail, and extortion. The existence of such unwarranted laws also creates insecurity and mistrust within the LBQ/LGBTIQ community itself which prevents collective actions.

## Peru

- These conditions make it difficult and limit our access to funding, whether public or private, for our community-based organizations. This reality affects our ability to define boundaries for creating campaign budgets, whether they're informative, training related, for political advocacy around gender-based violence awareness, around gender identity and hate crimes or prejudice, equal access to health services, and to develop laws, regulations and procedures that include us. Those who generally have access to funding are mixed civil society organizations with many years of experience in project development and management. These organizations prioritize their agendas and use LGBTQI+ organizations as study subjects, legitimizing gatekeeping and creating dependence and don't strengthen the autonomy and freedom of the LGBTQI+ Movement to decide their own destinies and agendas.
- Conservative groups have created groups in government spaces that make it impossible or harder to do activist work and be able to raise awareness and fight for sexual and reproductive rights.



## Rwanda

- Homophobic individuals that work for the government ensure that any LGBTIQ organizations go through hardship in registering the organizations.

## Southern Africa

- Over the past two years, it has become more difficult to pinpoint who the anti-rights groups are. They masquerade as government and or allies of the government. The government passes laws restricting civil society operations and attacking human rights organizations by enacting new laws that seemingly address money laundering and anti-terrorism actions. These laws are put in place to police CSO operations, including where funding to human rights organizations comes from. The SADC member states have started putting in place these laws, and in countries such as Eswatini, activists are arrested under the pretext of terrorism.

## Tunisia

- Since July 25th, 2021, Tunisia is the theater of a major political change following several decisions from the President of the Republic aiming at formally monopolizing power, so we are facing a new dictatorship that is settling in, which further complicates our work as a civil society organization. Plus, it is always harder for LGBTQI+ organizations.

## Uganda:

- Our NGOs are closing down and the government is making sure we don't exist. The homophobia we get from churches and cultural leaders makes our existence worthless because we love differently. The insecurity in Uganda right now for queer people is very worrying because the Minister of Internal Affairs is closing the big entities and we worry how this world affect young queer entities.

## Zimbabwe

- As Mothers Haven working with the rural LBTQ persons who have children we have been deprived

of our digital rights after we installed satellite technology for better, safe and reliable internet connection as the local leaders forcibly asked us to remove it on the basis that we are promoting homosexuality and there is no need for internet connection in the rural areas.

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## Socio-economic inequalities

### Central Asia

- Current times are taking a toll on trans communities' rights and lives. We are moving from one crisis to another. The war in Ukraine has disastrous consequences for communities in Ukraine, in neighboring countries and throughout the region. COVID-19 has exacerbated already-existing deep inequalities and has led to unprecedented health, socioeconomic, and political crises. In such a context, rising anti-LGBTI and anti-gender forces have been thriving and incited governments to use the pandemic as an excuse to further violate trans people's rights and lives. Since the beginning of the outbreak, we have witnessed a series of major setbacks in the recognition and protection of trans people in the European and Central Asian region. In 2020 and 2021, Transgender Europe (TGEU) reported a list of worrying developments. In 2022, the list gets longer. As always, it is those further marginalized who end up at the forefront of violence and other human rights abuses – trans women and femme people, trans Black and people of colour, trans migrants and asylum seekers, trans people with disabilities, trans people living with HIV, and many more.

### Colombia

- It's difficult to move forward and become active because it implies risks to our lives and to our economic security, as we are often stigmatized and thus unable to access employment contracts. And you can't live off activism because it doesn't pay and less so if it deals with progressive issues.

## Côte d'Ivoire

- We also witness discrimination at work and in access to housing, which worsens the economic situation of LGBTQI+ people in our locality. In these conditions, it is necessarily difficult to express oneself freely as an activist. // We can mention here the work-related discrimination and social discrimination around access to housing for transgender people in our context. These people are denied employment that fits their qualifications due to their gender identity and there are also landlords who decide to throw trans people out of their homes because they were informed of their gender identity.

## Kenya

- Anti-rights actors have deepened economic inequalities in my context in the last 5 years. Anti-rights actors have created a negative propaganda to people who choose to believe them that Queer people have no place in Kenya. Queer people are seen as second-class citizens with no rights to education and employment among other rights. Many Queer people drop out of schools because of the hostility in the institutions that create barriers for them to stay in school like other students. Some who endure the system and gets the skills required by employers are denied equal opportunities by employers even when they are better qualified than the rest of the candidates. Others who start businesses only thrive in business until they are outed and nobody wants to associate with or buy from them. This has led to increasing numbers of unemployed Queers who end up poor not because they lack skills but because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

## Peru

- A large percentage of us live in poverty or extreme poverty compared to people who call themselves heterosexuals. In a country in which going to a police station, local government office, or bank can mean experiencing violence, or be called by your name assigned at birth, causes LTGBIQ+ people to drop out of school at a higher rate, have greater difficulties accessing their National Identity Card, which means they remain undocumented.

## South Africa

- The socio-economic context informs to what extent group and civilians enact / advance anti-rights agendas. The deepening inequalities are regarded as major pushes in our context that advance an anti-rights agenda, as evidenced through the ongoing hate crimes against LGBTQs, migrants and refugees, sex-workers.

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## Violence against queer communities, activists and organizations

### Armenia

- Our collective had to forcefully relocate from one place to another twice during the past 5 years. The first time it happened because the neighbors understood that many of our visitors were queer, and they complained to the landlord who ceased the contract with us. We relocated to a new place, more expensive, touristic, right in the center of the city. Some neighbors saw two women kissing each other next to our doorway and called the police. The police came and investigated our place, our books, documents, and papers. Then the founder of our collective was forced to visit the police to provide explanations and further documents. We had to leave our place again. Our collective receives threats and hate messages online quite regularly, but especially during political turmoil. Feminist struggles and LGBTQ rights are being manipulated by political forces about which I wrote an article at [opendemocracy.org](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/in-armenia-gender-is-geopolitical/), you can access it here: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/in-armenia-gender-is-geopolitical/>. There were instances when manipulative and hateful information was published in right-wing and pro-ex regime media channels. These politically driven media publications impact the overall attitudes of the public that becomes more homophobic and more aggressive.

### Cameroon

- In the last five years, our work has been cornered,

following some socio-political events and the COVID-19 pandemic that exposed the LGBTQAI+ community in general; women, including LBQ women/sex workers/drug users/jailed women. In Cameroon specifically, Raoul Bengono's wedding with the Swiss billionaire and their stay in Cameroon triggered a huge media coverage; two trans women, Patricia and Shakiro, were condemned to the maximum sentence (5 years) and maximum fine (1,000,000 CFA francs); famous international football player Gaëlle Enganamouit's sex tape, which led to all masculine women in the country being called "Enganamouit"; the demonstration against the accreditation of the US ambassador in Cameroon, because he is officially married to a man, so openly gay, triggered the creation of an organization fighting against gay rights. These events, and many others, have contributed to weaken our actions and expose the leaders among others, as well as the actions we built over the last years.

## Colombia

- It's important to highlight the consequences of the armed conflict in Colombia as there are many gender-based victims: women and LGBTQ people. Likewise, security in the territories where armed groups persist.
- The problem is that this kind of pressure within these contexts lead to the emergence of violence in communities which are socially endorsed and therefore justified. In which authorities are cooperative with this violence, they let it happen, validate it and even promote motives that make justice and the possibility of reporting it impossible. Ultimately, breaking the status quo ends up becoming deserved violence. It's difficult to move forward and become active because it implies risks to our lives.
- The violence inflicted by the National Police and the impunity and complicity of the institution.
- A most recent event occurred on Wednesday, August 24, we decided to go out and attend a park, there were about 15 trans women. When we're finishing up, we were approached by a guy with a gun and told us that he didn't want to see "weird" people like us near the space, and that next time he wasn't going to talk but act. Anti-rights actors have led us to not being able to be in any space, so currently the only safe space we have is our CASA MUDE [T.N. house] Thank you Astraea for making this possible!
- The growing exposure of activism and the emergence of leaders with agendas in favor of LGBTQ+ people and sexual and gender nonconforming people has showcased struggles that were not previously present in a department such as Cauca (Colombia); which intersects with the social armed conflict (of multiple groups) and where people hold fundamentalist and conservative religious beliefs. This emergence/eruption of nonconforming people who are aware of their role in the creation of a society that is more respectful and guarantees their rights has put them in the spotlight of anti-rights people, making them a target of various attacks and of an obstruction of their agendas, both in the private and governmental spheres. For example, several leaders have been threatened for their role as human rights activists for the nonconforming population, trans women sex workers (whores) lives are attacked in the public spaces they occupy, military forces and some institutions exercise physical and emotional violence especially against those who occupy the streets (such as sex workers and those who participate in social protests).
- Anti-rights actors (especially trans exclusionary feminists) are adopting the same organizational practices as fascist groups by increasing the presence of backlash groups, encouraging bullying and harassment, and reaching out to the youth to accelerate their growth.
- Because of anti-rights actor's bad practices, bigger actions are being blocked today in territories. Likewise, there has been little recognition of the activism there and an increased discrimination and violence.
- As a sexual and gender nonconforming rights advocate, I have experienced bosses that have become obstacles at work and in public service environments. This is due to their ignorance and ideologies they hold. However, we have overcome these obstacles through two tools, the first one: 1. legal arguments, including legislation and rulings, and 2) search for allies to support the processes.

- Our municipality called Guarne, is very conservative, to the point that there are churches with the so-called conversion therapy — an absurd practice. We have not been directly attacked, but it's difficult to act in schools and communities. Religious extremism is deeply rooted.
- I think living and building processes in a territory that intersects with religion and conservative thinking, makes for a desolate landscape, becoming a challenge for us to move forward. However, it teaches us a lot about resisting as we continue to resist the social marginalization, we face for being diverse women but also because we advocate for our rights.
- Visibility for us who engage in activism is a fundamental risk factor. For example, I am a very visible trans person because of my attitude, behavior and my gender expression. Thus, people recognize me easily and that has generated some cases of harassment and threats on social networks. There's also an increase of mental health crises since, local institutions are calling to inform me of or invite me to events, even when they know that meeting causes me mental health because of their bad procedures. However, my recognition makes them call me and continue to harass me, among many other situations.
- Our organization and our members have been a target of accusations, false accusations, disciplinary investigative processes (in the case of a university professor who works in the organization) and harassment in networks, by priests, members of Marian religious groups and regular people. And although this, fortunately, has not escalated to serious cases of violence or damage the reputation of our entity, it has meant an obstacle for the pedagogical work that is carried out in the territory. Our agendas continue to develop normally, but we know that at the same time fundamentalist groups and some representatives of these groups in Municipal Councils have their own agendas that create tension in civil society's opinions of the territories we have presence in.

## Côte d'Ivoire

- Regarding the risk level related to activism in my context, we are facing enormous challenges.

This year, we witnessed the burning down of the apartment 2 trans women shared, as they were interviewed and revealed their gender identity on a podcast our organization realized and shared on social media.

## El Salvador

- In El Salvador, anti-rights groups have made great strides in the partisan political arena supported by churches, and during Nayib Bukele's presidential term, this has been reinforced to the point of institutionalizing the conservative discourse against the SRHR and issues such as a gender identity law for trans people. Additionally, the political party that Nayib represents holds the majority in the Legislative Assembly, making it easier for him to create "legal" mechanisms to control the work of organizations, collectives, and activists. For example, we are facing a new mechanism that controls income flow from donations due to the Anti-Money Laundering Law, this law has empowered the Attorney General's Office to request records, policies, and greater control over receiving and management of funds that organizations get. Additionally, they're being accompanied by fines of up to 10 years in prison. Faced with an institutional framework that has proven to be incapable of respecting due process, this is a risk.

## Eswatini

- Community members asked local Leaders to kick us out of our office spaces and they also attacked one of our Team members. The Government has also denied our existence in the country, we also constantly subjected to severe stigma and discrimination which takes a huge toll on our mental health as LGBTQI identifying community.

## India

- With the re-election of the right-wing government run by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, the country is seeing increasing violence on people from religious and caste minorities, alongside a narrow understanding of women, queer and trans rights.

- India has the strange place of being trans “friendly” on paper but anti rights both economic and socio-cultural around gender at large. It has also a growing disparity and intolerance and hate filled environment. So, it means that trans communities who come mainly from marginalized backgrounds are part of the communities that are facing the repression and the violence. Many human rights defenders have been incarcerated and a lot of the organizations are worried about government repression through active cancellation of sources of funding leading to a chilling effect in which very few mass organizations alone are able to raise their voice against State policies unlike earlier when civil society organizations of all kinds were part of these actions.
- In 2020, when I tried to join the pride organizing for my city, I faced severe backlash for my views. These people collaborated with the right-wing government of my country, to persecute me for my views.
- Arrests and harassments of Activists/ Journalist/ Lawyers and Progressive thinkers.
- As queer and trans social workers we have experienced several challenges in terms of navigating through the social matrix and engaging with the mass. There have been many hopeful legal changes in the last 10 years. Consensual homosexuality is decriminalized, some recognition on trans rights have been achieved through the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 and the subsequent Rules 2020. Despite many positive inputs there have been strong resistances from different spheres of the society. With the pandemic hitting hard there have been a significant escalation in domestic violence. The legal and legislative changes alone will not help in terms of dealing with the quotidian violence and discrimination faced by queer and trans person in our contemporary context. Violence on queer & trans persons continues in different ways. As social workers we have faced several challenges from family and police to reach out to gender sexual minority (GSM) persons in distress. Life threats are quite common occurrences while intervening during a crisis call. As marriage is the singular normative pillar enforced upon persons assigned female at birth soon after reaching puberty, Q&T persons assigned gender female at birth encounter more pressure in terms of getting married from their

natal family. The forms of violence faced by Q&T persons in domestic spaces are multi-dimensional - economic, mental, physical, sexual. Resisting marriages have been hard for social workers who work directly in this context. Queer relationships are still looked down upon as a stigma. Transphobia and homophobia are deeply internalized in our social fabric that manifests through the rising violence on GSM persons. As social workers we have received more death threats from antagonistic parents supported by local political groups while we were on field working hard to arrange for safe spaces for GSM persons in crisis.

## Kenya

- In Machakos County, during the campaign period towards Kenyan General elections, the incumbent Member of Parliament, Matungulu constituency Mr. Stephen Mule politically incited Christians in a church during mass to support his endeavor to evict EMAC “an organization recruiting youth into homosexuality and promotes and conducts gay marriages” as a result, staff can't work from the office and we have to look for support to relocate the office to a different County (Meru) for the safety and security of our staff.
- The Nationalists have made inflammatory remarks against LGBTIQ+ while calling for intolerance, homophobic violence, and exclusion of us. Example the former deputy president has referred to LGBTIQ+ persons as ‘worse than dogs’ these statements have had wide ranging effects on our safety. The Current Cabinet Secretary of Education has called for exclusion of learners perceived to be LGBTIQ+ from learning institutions. These remarks have sparked arbitrary expulsions and suspensions from School on the schoolteacher’s whim around learners perceived sexual orientation and gender identities. Cultural leaders have performed cursing rituals in court for judges who have ruled in favor of LGBTIQ+ persons. The government has sighted religious doctrines as justification of blatant rights violations of LGBTIQ+ Nationals.

## Lebanon

- The illegal and unconstitutional crackdown on LGBTQIA events in Lebanon during international

pride month (June) 2022

## Malaysia

- The Malaysian media and religious department conducted what amounts to a hate campaign against a trans woman, and were actively hunting her down for arrest, she has now gained asylum in Australia. Last month a trans man who was reported to have performed the religious pilgrimage in Mecca was doxed.

## Nicaragua

- In Nicaragua, one of the anti-rights actors is the State, in addition to fundamentalism and religious extremism in the country. Nicaragua is also a post-war society, fueled by a system of precarious rights, which reproduces violent behavior towards women and LGBTIQ+ people. A country where repression and the current socio-political context make dissident bodies invisible. Currently, collectives, artists and activists that work with these populations, experience political persecution based on a list of laws created in the last few years, that places bodies under government control.

## Nigeria

- Criminalization of homosexuality, physical and sexual violence by family and community, forced marriages, lack of autonomy over sexual and reproductive choices, discrimination and mental health issues are just a few of the ongoing challenges endured by LBQ community that we seek to address with our programs.

## Peru

- At the beginning of 2022, we attended a protest at the National Registry of Identification and Legal Status (RENIEC) against the appeal of the court's decision in our favor that recognizes lesbian mothers. During this protest, the public that was waiting to be helped began to angrily shout at us, told us to leave and said that if we continued to protest, we deserved to be raped because of who we are. It had been many years since we

had experienced something like that, and we realized that since the pandemic the trans lesbian movement had lost the streets.

- On various occasions I have been denied a classroom or LGBTI activism on campus has been prohibited by anti-rights actors. Even though they enjoyed privileges such as having an office called "*Oficina Pastoral Universitaria*" (University Pastoral Office) and were allowed to have Bible study groups, which proves the widespread intolerance in private university spaces in Metropolitan Lima. As a student collective, we were never recognized by university authorities, even though the collective worked hand in hand with organizations such as JNE, the UN, the Congress of the Republic, and other collectives in Lima.
- Even though they're not usually violent, there are a few violent anti-rights groups that pose a risk when we show up for rallies and protests. What does spread are insults and hate speech on social media, which is a trend that has been happening throughout the region driven mainly by an "anti-gender" agenda and a group called "*Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas*" (Don't Mess With My Kids).
- We must be careful because the anti-rights groups identify, persecute and threaten us.
- Advancements of anti-rights groups in Peru has had an alarming effect on transgender people's life, physical and digital security. Even amidst covid-19 they continued to violate our rights — a clear example is the "*pico y género*" policy, a gender-based quarantine— there were up to 17 cases of violence against trans people and non-binary gender registered. These included arbitrary holds of National ID cards and physical and psychological abuse and banning of public transit, none of which has been resolved by the State. Victims are still waiting for justice, reparation, and sanctions. Additionally, murders continued to happen during the pandemic. So far between 2020 and 2022 we registered 17 hate crime cases based on gender identity and gender expression. This has us quite concerned because as it was in the cases regarding the gender-based quarantine, so far justice has not been served for any of these incidents. A few weeks ago, a fellow sex worker and trans woman who is part of the organization was shot by a quota collector mafia, fortunately she's alive but

she's in a very unstable condition. Three days ago, Ninoska was murdered, who was an older trans woman who's part of the trans safe house. She was choked and beaten, we had to raise funds to be able to bury her. We will continue to fight to denounce and register the cases. We hope that the anti-rights groups do not attack us this coming October while at the OAS (Organization of American States).

- Catholics for the Right to Decide-Peru was sued by an anti-rights religious group requesting to nullify them of their registration as a legal entity. In this context, those of us who do activist work or work around this issue have been subject to harassment and bullying.

## Togo

- Personally, I was the target of threats as the Executive Director of our organization. Our premises where our offices are were broken into. All of this happened because anti-gender actors who demanded on several radio and TV programs to the Human Rights Ministry to crack down on the LGBTQI issue. This led the population to acts of verbal and physical assault against members of our community on the beach.

## Serbia

- In our reports to Astraea, I and my colleagues have written extensively about the negative impacts and particular dangers of the growth of the anti-rights actors in the Serbian society and how they affect our work, struggle, and everyday lives. We continuously work on combating these tendencies and their activism.
- Banning the Euro Pride will bring more bans in the future: to ban the protests against pollutions, against the Rio Tinto multinational who is killing people by researching on Lithium, Roma rights eventually. NGOs are currently keeping silent or measuring the public appearance and this is not good development either.

## Zimbabwe

- The abductions that have happened in Zimbabwe particularly during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdowns, really made my activism risky because human rights activists were being abducted for speaking out on human rights violations that were happening in the country. So safety and security has been important in my activism as I have to watch what I say, what I do and the spaces that I am engaged in.

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## TERFs and other intra-movement issues

### Colombia:

- Polari Foundation is an organization that is in the coffee region of Colombia, a region that's known to be quite conservative, however, what's surprising is that the strongest attacks in recent years haven't been from conservative or right-wing groups, but by women's groups that call themselves trans-exclusionary radical feminists which have generated a discourse of violence and discrimination against our fellow trans women. These attacks have even led to the halt of government initiatives that seek to protect trans women who engage in sex work, additionally this has caused a breakdown in the sisterhood and relationships of care woven between different feminist organizations. This discourse has increased since 2020 within the context of the pandemic.
- Anti-rights actors (especially trans exclusionary feminists) are adopting the same organizational practices as fascist groups by increasing the presence of backlash groups, encouraging bullying and harassment, and reaching out to the youth to accelerate their growth.
- Popayan is an extremely religious and conservative city; this makes anti-rights actors claim power over bodies through a religious basis. This is violent and delays progress. There's also been evidence of an increase of trans exclusionary feminists, which is quite worrying since their discourse is very violent.

## Côte d'Ivoire

- There are also some feminist groups fighting for women's rights who do not recognize trans women as women because they are not biological women.

## Guatemala

- In the past 5 years in Guatemala trans women have faced trans exclusionary feminists. In fact, we had to make a statement to raise awareness around the inconsistencies around this with feminist principles.

## India

- In our situation, the major anti-rights group are the those working to further the interests of dominant castes. We don't have much issue with radical feminists. There may a few individual trans exclusionary feminists with extreme narratives but overall, if anything, women's groups have started becoming more supportive of LGBTIQ. The major issues continue to be caste, Hindu nationalism, and fundamentalism.
- Right-wing cis-gay activists who are extremely transphobic, sexist, xenophobic and casteist, hold tremendous amount of control and power in my city.

## Kenya

- Mainstream women rights organizations have been hands off regarding human rights violations against trans and LBQ-GNC persons.

## Nigeria

- Another example is the exclusion of LBQT and gender non-conforming persons in the Nigerian Feminist movements. However, we are making a headway into lobbying for inclusion and planting queer people in decision making bodies of the Nigerian Feminist Forum

## Serbia

- TERF and SWEF movement is also on the rise.

- In our reports to Astraea, I and my colleagues have written extensively about the negative impacts and particular dangers of the growth of the anti-rights actors in the Serbian society and how they affect our work, struggle, and everyday lives, as well as the surge in the anti-rights movement and in particular conservative political groups, and especially TERF groups. We continuously work on combating these tendencies and their activism and right now are conducting 2 campaigns: one as a sort of deconstruction of the TERF ideas and activism in Serbia and the region and for TIQ rights, and another for the adoption of Gender identity law and the rights of intersex persons in Serbia.

- Feminism is more and more silent in protecting rights and keeping the safe side: violence against women and girls and gender equality. Even protection of minority women, sex worker and trafficked women is marked as unsafe enough to express it publicly and pressure Government to act against it. **Cultural influence and censorship**

## El Salvador

- One of the most notorious and recent advancements by conservative groups was that they managed to cancel a documentary screening on abortion. The screening was coordinated by a movie chain, Cinemark, but due to the pressure from these religious groups, the company decided to cancel the deal.

## India

- Engagement with young people, especially students, on social media platforms have become more difficult and surveilled. It has become tougher to collectivize in public spaces. Academic disciplines are becoming more conservative.
- There is fear of speaking out and silence is the safe option often. This is quite visible on social media platforms where trolling and repression are both familiar.
- I have the fear to update or forward the messages in the social media regarding my activism. Because of the right-wing govt. purchased social media like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.



## Kenya

- The religious extremists have pushed for the current elect president in my country and things may get more difficult if he is sworn in or ascends to power. Given his comment on LGBTIQ when he was the deputy president <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/counties/article/2000168074/dp-ruto-homosexuals-have-no-place-in-kenya>

## Lebanon

- I'm not sure if the remaining portion of the survey will ask about imperialism and colonialism, because in Lebanon foreign policy of the global north has been detrimental on queers and trans

## Malaysia

- The government and media has intensified narratives that queer people mere existence and right to practice their religious beliefs are an insult to Islam

## Peru

- I believe that anti-rights actors have strengthened the fascist narrative and naturalized hatred against everything that's considered different. On one hand, they have strengthened contradictory discourse to emulate white, urban and consumer culture, along with nationalism, anti-globalism and a reinterpretation of human rights based on individualism.
- The "*Con mis hijos no te metas*" (Don't Mess With My Kids) movement has a very powerful communication strategy and has generated fear and disinformation about the issue of gender.

## Serbia

- LGBTIQ activism in the Balkans has always been risky. Anti-gender politics, which are being promoted by various political actors (right, left, center, if that division still has any sense) are gaining the popularity by taking over the human rights and common-sense discourse, presenting

itself also as anti-neoliberal. At the same time, the reason why they are gaining popularity and impact also lies in the political emptiness of local organizations, focused solely on "advocacy", "lobbying", "human rights" and "political correctness" which actually enables them to contextualize and articulate political values and standing points on the gender and sexuality related issues. Vast responsibility for that lies also in donor driven policies that have been pushing for institutional change and cooperation, and not supporting community building.

**What is the one thing that you (as a person or as a movement) don't have right now that would make resisting anti-rights actors in your context much easier and likely successful? \***

*\*Despite the question asking for "one thing", many respondents mentioned several so the final count of references does not tally.*

## Resources (37 references)

### Financial

- Our movement, and especially initiatives led by those further marginalised, is direly lacking financial resources - primarily access to core and flexible grants.
- Safe and sustained access to enough funds
- More funding opportunities for right based work
- Resources to reach to as many people as possible to change the negative narrative that is out there about LGBTIQ persons
- Core and flexible funding that allows groups and collectives to respond to anti-rights actors and address burn out
- Financial Empowerment because most Anti-rights actors go the extra mile to finance their hate campaign across the media and social spaces.
- Multi-year flexible funding to easily run our organization without the stress of writing over a hundred proposals but focus our energy of social change and fighting injustice.

- We do not have support to expand our work and gain support from all regions in Zimbabwe including rural and peri rural where they could be more support in resistance / In Bolivia we don't have resources to reach isolated areas to promote rights and stop churches that try to recruit queer people and restrict their rights
- The LBTQI community in Zimbabwe is not financially supported which makes it very difficult to organise. The LBQTI community has no resources for documentation or for addressing human rights violations perpetrated on them, hence it becomes difficult to resist anti-rights actions.
- Funding for comms campaigns
- For us as Black LGBTQ population it is important to have a structure or a solid capacity to sustain healing, resistance and ownership of ancestral practices processes over time.
- For us, Fundacion Polari, we need more funding to do more transfeminist projects and counter anti-LGBTIQ discourses as well as to spread knowledge about our Parenting School as a response to fundamentalist attacks centered in families.
- Funding for empowerment and political participation
- Funding for legal support to take cases to national and international Courts

#### **Staff:**

- Finding young people who would be committed to the work. Getting more people and on the team from communities like Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim or other classes and castes would be incredibly helpful in improving the efficiency and rigour of our work and be more inclusive and nuanced
- Enough Staffing at the legal aid center,

#### **Understanding:**

- Since we mainly challenge homophobia and transphobia through legal reactions funding that would be sensitive on slow pace of Serbian criminal-justice system would be very helpful.

#### **Specific assets**

- A community radio station. In my view this is one voice that can amplify community voice and give power back to community. (Southern Africa)
- A physical safe space /Autonomous feminist houses

### **Context (31 references in total)**

#### **Laws, policies & protection**

- Adequate social security for health, housing, employment, education / Recognition on civil rights of Q&T persons in terms of care mechanisms, property inheritance & property sharing, housing, access to resources
- An anti-discrimination law
- Civil rights are practised through the understanding of heteronormative lives. This creates an unequal grounds for Q&T persons in terms of claiming rights.
- Same-sex partnership law
- Adequate implementation of existing laws
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of mobility
- Adequate legal protection. In courts in Serbia even with the existing laws you cannot be sure that you can win the political context.
- a justice system that protects LGBTQI+ people
- Human Rights Defenders status
- Security guarantees

#### **Allies & support**

- Police, political players resisting anti-rights actors, political will, government/ruling political elites, government human rights institutions

### **Substantive inclusion in political processes**

- Opportunities to have a role in the process of impacting political decisions or changing political agendas
- The LBTQI community is excluded in most national process as a group that is against the norms and cultural values of the country. Therefore there is no support for the community to even have spaces for capacity building on how to resist the anti-rights actors, there is no space for strategic litigation and advocacy for equality and non-discrimination.

### **Representation and visibility**

- More positive representation, self-representation and visibility in traditional media (online and printed).
- Ability to take down the media monopolies that skew public opinion towards anti-rights and capitalist myths and hamper solidarity of the people
- More publicity in the mainstream.

### **Organizations**

- It is very difficult to register as a queer feminist movement in my country and therefore we lose our opportunities in receiving funds sometimes which limit our activities and our access to our targeted groups.
- We need to be registered to have a greater operational margin in our work
- Organizational autonomy that will allow us to be able to oppose the system without fear to lose our jobs and jeopardise our quality of life.

### **Specific situations**

- Have a Plan B for safety if the situation in Tunis deteriorates
- Political stability
- Absence of the threat of war

## **Skills, knowledge and strategies (20 references in total)**

### **On communications:**

- Virtual Advocacy/On Line/Social Media Campaigns Content/Arguments Production (4)
- Communication / Stronger and compelling narratives that make our support grow across undecided/conflicted audiences (3)

### **On advocacy:**

- Tools to measure and know is what is being done by certain organisations/individuals is what's working, how do we measure it so that others can try it too.
- A website documenting the agenda and narratives that anti-trans proclaimed feminists and proclaimed LGB rights groups use to stir transphobia and anti-trans beliefs among people.
- Advocacy for LGBTQI+ Rights/Personally I need a deeper knowledge of strategies to advocate with decision-makers. In the movement, those skills will allow me to contribute to develop training and sensitization strategies for religious leaders, feminist movements and anti-gender actors so they can be our allies in advocacy with the government
- Strategies for Resistance

### **Organizational:**

- Organizational Development/ Capacity Building (2)
- Community Building (2)
- Trans Leadership Capacity Building

### **On funding:**

- Crisp and visually digestible data on funding available for anti-rights in my region (how much \$\$ they have and from whom, whose political agendas are they pushing) as opposed to funding available for LGBTQIA/Feminist movements

### **Others:**

- How to strengthening allies' capacities

- Knowledge and terminology in local languages
- Space for collective analysis to develop joint strategies are limited
- As a movement, getting closer to community and conservative people to transform their perspectives and make them stop supporting fundamentalist ideas

### **Inter-movement**

- A strong trustworthy intermovement network
- Intersectional approach to our resistance
- Support from women's organizations
- Wider connection with other organizations

## **Movement related (15 references in total)**

### **Intra-movement Unity:**

- A consistent and joint voice emerging from those who are resisting anti rights actors. the polarisation that exists amongst those who are on the same side is far too great and sometimes one feels that the other sides are far more organised
- Greater unity among transfeminist movements
- Being part of a Latin American network sharing advocacy experiences from a transfeminist perspective **Hierarchies:**
- As of now most representatives of the Indian LGBTQIA+ movement, happen to be from the right-wing conservative faction. This is not understood by people outside India, therefore these anti-rights faction receive funding and other opportunities, which the movement on the ground is deprived of. I wish that there was recognition and support of left and progressive queer movements which would allow us to work with some ease.
- To live in a context like Popayan (Colombia) is very restrictive. We are at the mercy of groups that are leading from Bogota without knowing our territory or our context

### **More bodies**

- More peers
- Enough people willing to be included.
- More empowered LGBT people
- Greater commitment to the struggle on the part of each LGBTI actor

## Section 4

### Resistance and Alliances Joint action

Respondents were asked to evaluate cross-movement solidarity and joint action using a scale in which 1 meant “not at all” and 5, “very much”. Average rates are provided below.

Solidarity and joint action increased in the last 5 years among...	Feminist and LGBTQI movements	Progressive and LGBTQI movements
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>3.62</b>
Peru	3.43	3.57
Colombia	4.36	4.36
Kenya	3.88	3.88
India	3.82	3.82
Serbia	2.78	2.93

Where have your strategies to challenge and disrupt anti-rights agendas being the most successful?

	In social media	Among progressive movements	On public opinion (campaigns, media, protests)	In the Courts
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>
Peru	6	0	6	1
Colombia	5	6	8	3
Kenya	0	2	1	6
India	0	6	1	4
Serbia	6	4	1	2
Other countries	17	15	7	5

\*Note: One respondent from Peru and one from Serbia left this question blank. **In fighting anti-rights actors, I perceive the following as the LGBTQI movements closest allies**

Top response

	Feminist	Human Rights	Women's Rights	Youth	Black	Political figures	CSOs	Progressives in general	Trade Unions	Academy, Indigenous, Progressive faith-based, Artists, Environmental, Dalit, Religious Minorities
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
Peru	7	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colombia	14	4	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
India	6	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kenya	4	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Serbia	8	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other countries	20	14	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	0

\*5 respondents left this question blank **Other responses**

	Artists	Youth	HR	Progr.	WR	Academy	Political	Feminist	CSOs	Relig.	Black	Environment	Indig.	Trade Unions	Rel. Min.	Dal
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>
Peru	7	10	11	5	8	3	5	3	1	4	4	2	3	2		
Colombia	11	14	16	10	10	9	7	6	3	1	8	3	3	2	2	0
India	9	6	2	4	6	7	6	4	2	7	0	4	2	0	1	6
Kenya			3		2	2		2								
Serbia	11	5	7	9	7	5	4	2	7	1	2	5	2	3	1	1
<b>Other countries</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>

*Multiple responses accepted*





## **ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE**

**Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice** is the only philanthropic organization working exclusively to advance LGBTQI human rights around the globe. We support brilliant and brave grantee partners in the U.S and internationally who challenge oppression and seed change. We work for racial, economic, social, and gender justice, because we all deserve to live our lives freely, without fear, and with dignity.

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