

04

COMING OUT! GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

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[ECVC](#) is a European grassroots organization that currently gathers 31 farmers', farm workers' and rural organizations based in 21 European countries. It is the regional member of La Vía Campesina, the largest international grassroots peasant movement.

“[E]nding discrimination based on gender and sexuality is not any less important than the struggle for fair prices for agriculture products or for land. Instead, the rights of LGBTTIQ persons are also part of the struggle for justice and dignity.”

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¹ For more information on how women are at the forefront of resistance against authoritarianism, please see article “Women’s Resistance against Authoritarianism in Brazil, the Philippines, and Rojava (Northern Syria)” in this issue of the *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch*.

² Misogyny is the dislike of, contempt for, or deep-seated prejudice against women.

³ International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). *State-Sponsored Homophobia 2019*, edited by Lucas Ramon Mendos. Geneva, March 2019: 24. Available at: [ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2019_light.pdf](https://www.ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2019_light.pdf).

In the current global context, discrimination is used as a tool to preserve and support authoritarian and far-right political movements. Immigrants and refugees are denied their legal right to asylum, human rights defenders are murdered, and civil society is criminalized with complete impunity. The increased corporate capture of public policy spaces, and the unfettered destruction and grabbing of natural resources – land, water, and seeds – indicates the devastating influence of an economic elite, leading to global inequalities. In this context, the body, and sexual and gender identities are targeted. The right wing and conservative forces which shape these realities are often the same ones that deny human rights, especially the rights of women,¹ and non-heteronormative people, perpetuating misogynist,² homophobic, and transphobic discourses, which are allied to “extreme nationalism and xenophobia, cultural and race supremacy”.³

UN agencies are increasingly becoming active global players on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics issues.⁴ In recent years, at country level, laws have been reformed in favor of gender non-conforming people.⁵ However, LGBTTIQ⁶ individuals remain marginalized, and are denied their human rights overall. Indeed, as structural discrimination leads many of them to suffer from social exclusion, their rights to food, housing and life are not guaranteed.

Today, authorities at different levels still promote an anti-LGBTTIQ national heteronormative identity. In this context, LGBTTIQ communities and sexual rights activists who defend their many rights are targeted for violations. And yet they too, amongst other movements, discriminate against and judge others,⁷ thus replicat-

ing existing tensions in society around race, gender, class, and North-South dynamics. As this article demonstrates, even whilst defending a feminist agenda amongst small-scale food producers, the rights-based food sovereignty movement is not spared from the reproduction of sexist patterns. Moreover, the naturalization of gender roles in agriculture, and the non-mention in key declarations of persons who do not fit into heteronormative patterns, not only make them invisible, but also makes “an intersectional⁸ perspective that would allow the analysis of multiple discrimination more difficult.”⁹

This article analyzes how the struggle for the rights of LGBTTIQ persons is largely silenced in the broader human rights movement, and in the struggle for food sovereignty and the human right to adequate food and nutrition. It argues that leaving out these persons is a denial of the multiple forms of discrimination they face. It aims to foster a dialogue between the feminist, queer-feminist and food sovereignty movements, thereby strengthening the potential for understanding and collaboration. Finally, it calls for all these movements to join forces and embrace convergence in the collective struggle for human dignity and human rights.

THE SELF-PERPETUATING CYCLE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND FOOD INSECURITY

In urban areas of the USA, gender non-conforming people know what multiple discrimination means. Specifically, poor LGBTTIQ ethnic minorities are targeted for violations. Different organizations have reported that Afro-descendant trans women suffer high levels of violence and discrimination by society and the police.¹⁰ Harassment or mistreatment at work related to their gender identity is also a common reality.¹¹ With increased workplace harassment and lack of job retention, these people have fewer means to ensure access to basic needs,¹² affecting their ability to feed themselves and to access housing. In order to survive, many of them turn to prostitution. Against the backdrop of a failing systemic structure where transphobia and misogyny intersect, trans feminine sex workers of color are also victims of discrimination, not only by individuals, but by the very social programs that are put in place to help them.¹³ For example, they face discrimination in accessing emergency facilities, which provide shelter and food. Considering that the majority of homeless shelters in the United States are organized by sex, incorrect assumptions about gender identity result in failure to access services. Discriminatory behavior is also encountered in public servants, their affiliated organizations, and business-like charities that engage in ‘philanthrocapitalism’.¹⁴ In this context, the criminalization of black and brown people, the criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers, the marginalization of trans-identifying individuals in emergency housing services, and more specifically their intersectionality, leads to systematic human rights violations, including the access to adequate food and nutrition.¹⁵

Indigenous LGBTTIQ¹⁶ individuals in the Americas also have to deal with discrimination within and outside their communities. European colonization left a legacy of prejudice that to this day negatively impacts the ancestral sexualities and spiritualities of indigenous peoples.¹⁷ Different mechanisms were used to colonize indigenous sexuality, imposing European social and religious conceptions of same-gender relationships and *trans*-identities. However, there is ample documentation that prior to colonization there were other conceptions to express gender and sexual diversity among several indigenous communities, such as the *muxe* sexuality in the Zapotec cultures in southern Mexico, or the ‘two-spirit’ sexuality among Native Americans.¹⁸ The ‘two-spirits’ traditionally played a sacred role in community rituals and ceremonies, as they were able to access male and female qualities.¹⁹

4 In 2016, the UN Human Rights Council took a major step forward by appointing an independent expert on the protection from violence and discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans people. This expert was mandated to assess the implementation of existing international human rights instruments related to overcoming violence and discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and to identify and address the root causes of violence and discrimination. For more information, please see www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SexualOrientationGender/Pages/Index.aspx.

5 For more information, please see: OHCHR. *Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity*. A/HRC/29/23. May 4, 2015. Available at: www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/29/23&referer=/english/&Lang=E; and ILGA. *Supra* note 3.

6 The acronym LGBTTIQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender people, transvestites, cross dressers, intersex and gender queer people, but does not always adequately refer to gender non-conforming people in all contexts. In this article the term LGBTTIQ is used with some variations, in order to reflect the specific contexts, and in some cases, to respect the original in references.

7 ILGA. *Supra* note 3: 25.

8 Intersectionality is a concept used to describe how persons, or groups of people, are disadvantaged by multiple sources of prejudice and discrimination, due to their overlapping identities and experiences, e.g. race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.

9 Gioia, Paula and Sophie von Redecker. “Queerfeldein. Queer-feministische Perspektiven auf die Bewegung für Ernährungssouveränität”. *Class & Care*, June 2018. Available in German at: www.zeitschrift-luxemburg.de/queerfeldein/.

10 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). *Violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Persons in the Americas*. Organization of American States, 2015: 194-195. Available at: www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/ViolenceLGBTIPersons.pdf.

- 11 For more information, please see: Sears, Brad and Christy Mal-lory. *Documented evidence of employment discrimination its effects of LGBT people*. The Williams Institute, July 2011. Available at: williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Sears-Mal-lory-Discrimination-July-2011.pdf.
- 12 Fry, B. *Body Politics: Transisogyny and the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition for Trans Sex Workers of Color*. (2019): 7. Unpublished manuscript.
- 13 *Ibid*: 6
- 14 The term “philanthrocapitalism” was coined to describe charitable organizations that harness the power of the market by investing in social programs, which yield return on investment in the long term.
- 15 *Supra* note 12.
- 16 The author notes that non-heteronormative indigenous people might not necessarily identify with the concept of LGBTTIQ.
- 17 IACHR. *Supra* note 10: 152.
- 18 *Ibid*: 26.
- 19 *Ibid*; and Fernandes, Estevão Rafael. “Being native and being gay: weaving a thesis on indigenous homosexuality in Brazil”. In *Etnográfica. Revista do Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia*. Vol. 21 (3), 2017. Available in Portuguese at: journals.openedition.org/etnografica/5090.
- 20 Fernandes. *Supra* note 19.
- 21 For more information, please see: IACHR. *Supra* note 10: 151-152.
- 22 Fernandes. *Supra* note 19.
- 23 Gamboa, Fatima. “¿Dónde estamos las mujeres indígenas lesbianas?”. *Pikara online Magazine*, October 2017. Available in Spanish at: www.pikaramagazine.com/2017/10/donde-estamos-las-mujeres-indigenas-lesbianas/.
- 24 For more information, please see: www.univision.com/noticias/america-latina/wera-pa-mujer-falsa-asi-viven-las-indigenas-transgenero-en-colombia.
- 25 IACHR. *Supra* note 10: 153.
- 26 Amaral, Sofia. “Jovens indígenas debatem tema LGBT e querem ‘abrir mente’ dos mais velhos...”. January 30, 2018. Available in Portuguese at: noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2018/01/30/jovens-indigenas-debatem-tema-lgbt-e-querem-abrir-mente-dos-mais-velhos.htm.

Through policies of inter-ethnic marriage, schooling, dress codes, naming, or cutting the hair of indigenous people,²⁰ colonization caused immense cultural losses, with worrying consequences among native communities.²¹ Indigenous homosexuality, if viewed from this angle, “is not a sign of ‘cultural loss’, but rather its invisibility and subordination are the result of colonial dynamics that are still in progress.”²²

Throughout the Americas, young LGBTTIQ indigenous people face enormous challenges: non-acceptance, the risk of being expelled from the community, a life of sexual clandestinity, covert harassment and violations, and migration to urban areas.²³ Many of them are still teenagers when they abandon the community,²⁴ and most likely end up doing sex work in order to survive. They too face intersectional discrimination. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), indigenous communities see “themselves as a collective unit in which each individual views their independent spiritual and cultural survival as dependent on their continued connection with the collective identity of the community and its ancestral lands.”²⁵ It is from their community land that they traditionally get food and other natural resources for subsistence. Therefore, LGBTTIQ individuals who are rejected by the community, or who take the initiative to abandon the ancestral land, often face a deep loss of identity. Challenging this reality, some young LGBT(-TIQ) indigenous people are working to re-open the mind of their elders.²⁶ In doing so, indigenous LGBT(TIQ) subvert twice: ethnically and sexually.

BREAKING THE CYCLE: COLORFUL FOOD PRODUCTION

In rural areas, especially in agriculture, gender discrimination is an undeniable reality. Food production is interlinked with ‘nature’ and what are perceived to be ‘natural conditions’. In this sense, a dichotomous division of society based on a binary gender model (woman and man) is regularly reproduced, thereby pre-defining – according to one’s biological body constitution – the tasks and roles that each individual is supposed to carry out and fulfill. Even progressive feminist discourses coming from the food sovereignty movement tend to essentialize gender roles in agriculture, often reproducing an understanding of gender along binary lines. Additionally, the movement has so far been working with a concept of ‘nature’ that is constructed to support a heteronormative and patriarchal narrative and social order.

From a queer point of view, this is an instrumentalization of ‘nature’,²⁷ to make ‘nature’ fit into the hegemonic gender binary. It is high time to deepen the critical agenda of the food sovereignty movement by adding a queer-feminist perspective²⁸. The following cases show how LGBTTIQ rural actors in three different continents are actively developing strategies to open up this binary vision, and to fight the patriarchal heterosexual norm within agricultural realities.

The Land Dyke Feminist Family Farm²⁹ is a community farm in Taiwan, which stands for a new understanding of the concept of family. While promoting biodiversity through agroecology, they bring gender awareness into farming practices. They produce rice and vegetables, and at the same time pursue “equal cooperation between people and the earth, workers and farmers, migrants and locals, cities and villages”.³⁰ In doing so, they “create a family that is based in the collective strength that propels society toward change, not established through private inheritance, blood ties, and gender stereotypes.”³¹ The Land Dyke is not the only example; similar initiatives can be found worldwide. In the launching year of the UN Decade on Family Farming (2019),³² these experiences can inspire us to rethink the way agri-

culture and farms are structured, and to redefine the concept of family, since the 'family farm' does not necessarily need to be associated to a monolithic heteronormative and paternalistic model. Instead it can also be seen plurally, considering not only LGBTTIQ families, but also members of any family or kinship structure that fall outside the traditional model of 'the family'.³³

The European Coordination Vía Campesina (ECVC) is also engaged in changing patriarchal social patterns in the European agricultural sector and within its own membership. In 2018 ECVC organized its first LGTBIQ Forum,³⁴ highlighting that ending discrimination based on gender and sexuality is not any less important than the struggle for fair prices for agriculture products or for land. Instead, the rights of LGBTTIQ persons are also part of the struggle for justice and dignity. Sexuality, affection, and emotionality are fundamental characteristics of strong individuals, who strive to carry the common struggle towards a just society with food sovereignty as a lived reality. In a context where the peasant system and economy have been decimated by machines, agro-chemicals and agribusiness, it is fundamental to embrace new entrants, who are willing to rebuild a human- and nature-based agriculture system, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identities.

At the national level, Brazil is an example of further resistance. The recently elected right wing government continues to openly attack existing policies directed at supporting gender and ethno-racial minorities, and to incite social hatred against LGBTTIQ persons. Brazil has one of the highest rates of homo/lesbo/transphobia-motivated murders in the world.³⁵ In 2017 there were 445 such killings, and another 420 in 2018.³⁶ Nevertheless, rural LGBTTIQ-communities continue to struggle for recognition, and to defend their achieved rights. The Landless Movement (MST) is one of the organizations actively working on that agenda, since rural patriarchy normalizes the heterosexual pattern.³⁷ Through political trainings, dialogue with urban LGBTTIQ movements, and cultural and political interventions, the organization's continuous commitment to this cause has contributed not only to self-empowerment of landless LGBT individuals, but also to strengthening both struggles: for agrarian reform and for LGBTTIQ rights.

UNITE: JOIN FORCES – ACHIEVE CHANGE!

For all the reasons described in this article, sexual identity can neither be seen in isolation, nor as merely a private issue of LGBTTIQ individuals themselves. Sexuality plays a key role in the physical and mental development of human beings, and influences their relation to others, to the environment and to their socio-economic contexts. As explained above, the political, economic and social discriminations LGBTTIQ people face in different contexts have considerable impacts on their ability to access adequate (culturally acceptable) and nutritious food.³⁸ This is a result of the systemic heteronormative and patriarchal order we are all embedded in.

Whilst the situation of vulnerability described further above elucidates how gender-based discrimination, aggravated by intersectionality, can lead to food insecurity, other cases show that resistance exists and that LGBTTIQ actors are organizing to seek visibility, recognition and equality not only in their communities and movements, but in society as a whole. What's more, just like their heteronormative colleagues, LGBTTIQ actors in agriculture also contribute to local food production, and several of them are highly committed to the food sovereignty agenda. The struggle for their visibility, acceptance and guaranteed human rights needs to go beyond the private sphere. It needs to become a collective struggle for dignity and

27 Gioia and von Redecker. *Supra* note 6, referring to: Bagemihl, Bruce. *Biological exuberance. Animal homosexuality and natural diversity*. New York, 1999; and to Barad, Karen. "Nature's queer performativity". In "Kvinder, Kon og forskning/ Women, Gender and Research". *Feminist Materialisms* 1-2 (2012): 25-53.

28 The queer-feminist perspective provides a new direction to the feminist project, in order to overcome the gender binaries embedded within it. Nevertheless, the queer-feminist perspective is deeply connected to the feminist project, as it also addresses patriarchal power relations, and the empowerment of women.

29 For more information, please see: www.facebook.com/landdykeca.

30 Land Dyke Feminist Family Farm. "Land Dyke Manifesto". Unpublished manifesto.

31 *Ibid.*

32 For more information, please see: www.fao.org/family-farming/decade/en/.

33 ILGA. *Supra* note 3: 29.

34 For more information, please visit: www.eurovia.org/ecvc-1st-lgt-biq-meeting-building-spaces-for-sexual-and-gender-diversity-in-european-agricultural-trade-unionism/; Fouce – Periódico labrego de información técnica e sindical. Number 323, November-December 2018: 18-19. Available in Galician at: www.sindicatolabrego.com/index.php?s=18.

35 ILGA. *Supra* note 3: 106.

36 Grupo Gay da Bahia. *Relatório 2017: Pessoas LGBT mortas no Brasil*. Available in Portuguese at: pt.calameo.com/read/004650218f3258a331907; and homofobiamata.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/mortes-po-anos.jpg.

37 CartaCapital. "A vida dos LGBTs na zona rural". Available in Portuguese at: www.cartacapital.com.br/diversidade/a-vida-dos-lgbts-na-zona-rural.

38 FIAN. "LGBTIQA community – The Right to Feed Off Inclusion". In *Series Struggle for the Right to Food and Nutrition*, Issue 8, February 2017. Available at: www.fian.org/en/publication/article/the-right-to-feed-off-equality-1941.

solidarity, specially considering that this is also a struggle for the promotion of the right to food and nutrition of all human beings who depend on the food produced by their hands and hearts.

Neo-fascist trends across the globe are currently a growing threat to democracies, to minorities and to human rights at the global level. But a united struggle that challenges gender norms, seeks bodily autonomy, and brings down patriarchal (and related racist and colonial) structures, can become a counter-threat to conservative elites. In this regard, progressive sectors need to unite and develop collective strategies towards gender and ethnic equality, land rights, housing and food sovereignty, always bearing in mind the implementation of Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:³⁹ “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This is not the time to divide, but to unite: Social justice advocates and human rights defenders, LGBTTIQ or heterosexuals, we must stand together and work in partnership, we must be in solidarity with each other, and we must be bold.

³⁹ Available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.



IN BRIEF

This article analyzes how the rights of LGBTTIQ persons are largely silenced in the broader human rights movement, in the struggle for food sovereignty and for the realization of the right to adequate food and nutrition. It demonstrates that, even whilst defending a feminist agenda within the food system, the rights-based food sovereignty movement is not spared from the reproduction of sexist patterns – reinforcing patriarchy. The author argues that marginalizing LGBTTIQ persons in those struggles reflects the multiple forms of discrimination they face, stemming from their overlapping identities and experiences (race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation).

This piece aims to foster a dialogue between the feminist, queer-feminist and food sovereignty movements, thereby strengthening the potential for understanding and collaboration. Finally, the author calls for all these movements to join forces and embrace convergence in the collective struggle for human dignity and human rights within the different sectors of the food system.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Worldwide, LGBTTIQ individuals are marginalized and denied their human rights, leading many of them to suffer from social exclusion. Their rights to food, housing and life are not guaranteed.
- Even whilst defending a feminist agenda, the food sovereignty movement replicates sexist patterns and social tensions around race, gender, class, and North-South dynamics.
- The struggle for the rights of LGBTTIQ persons is largely silenced in the broader human rights movement, and in the struggle for food sovereignty and the human right to adequate food and nutrition.
- In agriculture, gender discrimination is a reality and food production is often interlinked with a binary understanding of 'nature'. However, this is a concept of 'nature' that is constructed to support a heteronormative and patriarchal narrative and social order.
- Discrimination faced by LGBTTIQ individuals must not be considered a private issue. The political, economic and social discrimination they face has considerable impact on their ability to access adequate, culturally acceptable, and nutritious food.
- Progressive sectors need to jointly challenge gender norms, seek bodily autonomy, and bring down patriarchal structures, whilst developing collective strategies towards gender and ethnic equality, land rights, housing and food sovereignty.



KEY WORDS

- LGBTTIQ
- Food Sovereignty
- Food Systems
- Gender and Women's Rights
- Social Protection
- Gender Diversity
- Indigenous Peoples
- Urban Food Insecure