

# **Visualizing LGBT Inbetween Spaces: Emancipatory Power and Challenges in the Global South<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This paper offers a critical perspective on emerging and alternative spaces for emancipation within LGBT communities across various regions of the Global South. Taking into account contemporary queer literature against the backdrop of postcolonial legacies, it employs Kurze and Lamont's concept of inbetween spaces to argue that barriers to moving our understanding of queer studies in the context of the Global South forward are conceptual and methodological in nature. Conceptual obstacles appear through narrow demands for rights and justice both driven by a global and transnational narrative and dominant agenda of international LGBT advocacy. To illustrate this trend, this study homes in on impediments to empowering local communities and networks beyond national boundaries, providing an in-depth comparative analysis on a series of regional case studies. Methodologically, I draw on a mixed method approach, employing qualitative analysis and digital visualization tools to help understand the interactions between different stakeholders across time and space. I conclude by suggesting relevant tools to capture the evolution of cross-regional dynamics and gauge emancipatory power of growing online communities and the challenges they are facing.

## **Keywords**

LGBT, Global South, emancipation, space, justice, cartography, digital visualization

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## Introduction

Whether in Asia, such as the *Sayan* network, short for South Asian Young queer Activist Network<sup>2</sup>, or in Latin America, with the project *Adelante*<sup>3</sup>, which loosely translates to “moving forward”, Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) activism has seen a larger participation and collaboration of transnational actors across different countries and regions. While some of these initiatives receive funding from Global North partners, such as the European Union (EU) funding for activities including workshops, advocacy, and campaigns to create greater visibility and acceptance of sexual minorities, recent work by LGBT communities across the Global South have fueled collaborative practices that are sui generis to the local contexts and their stakeholders, thus questioning the “gay international”<sup>4</sup> -- a Global North driven LGBT discourse -- and contributing to a rich and nuanced landscape of synergies between various groups in different parts of the world and across regions.

Drawing on a critical perspective of emerging and alternative spaces for emancipation within LGBT communities across various regions of the Global South, this paper is an initial effort to further explore and map these increasing practices and trends. To better understand *who* is involved across *which* areas and in *what* type of activities stakeholders engage in, I scrutinize some of the contemporary queer literature against the backdrop of postcolonial legacies. I then employ spatial theory<sup>5</sup> showing that barriers to advancing our knowledge of queer studies in the context of the Global South are primarily conceptual and methodological in nature. As for conceptual obstacles, they generally surface through oftentimes exclusive demands for rights and justice both driven by a global and transnational narrative and dominant agenda of international LGBT advocacy. To underscore this growing phenomenon, I take a close look at impediments to empowering local communities and networks beyond national boundaries, providing an initial cross-cutting visualization on a series of regional case studies.

Based on data collected across various online sources, including organizational and institutional webpages, news sources, and social media platform posts, I compile a preliminary dataset of LGBT community practices that illustrate synergies among community members across borders of the Global South. Preliminary, as the empirical cases only constitute an initial survey of practices among LGBT stakeholders. My mixed method approach relies on qualitative analysis and digital visualization, especially drawing on digital mapping tools to help understand the interactions between different stakeholders across time and space. In this context, I point to the challenges associated with cartographic research more generally as well as in terms of this

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<sup>2</sup> See their official Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/South-Asian-Young-queer-Activist-Network-338061486849872/about>, accessed September 1, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> See official project website at <https://adelanteconladiversidad.com/>, accessed September 1, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.

<sup>5</sup> For some recent work addressing space and LGBT issues, see for instance Voiculescu and Groza, “Legislating Political Space for LGBT Families: The 2018 Referendum on the Definition of Family in Romania”; Mutua-Mambo, “Living in a Liminal Space: Feminist and LGBT Alliances in Kenya”; Hartal, “The Politics of Holding: Home and LGBT Visibility in Contested Jerusalem”; Bilić, *LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space*.

research. I finish with a proposed roadmap and tools to further capture the evolution of cross-regional dynamics and gauge emancipatory power of growing online communities and the challenges they are facing.

## **Queer Theory, the Global South and Spatiality**

LGBT issues have garnered attention across the Global South for some time now, including advocacy driven analysis as well as academic inquiries from a variety of disciplines.<sup>6</sup> Against the backdrop of contemporary queer literature and postcolonial legacies in countries often loosely labelled as part of the Global South<sup>7</sup> this section highlights the importance of scrutinizing developments within sexual minority communities by borrowing from space-oriented studies. To begin, however, it is helpful to situate some of the more recent debates to better understand current issues.

### ***Striving to Contextualize the (In)Visible***

Queer studies has made tremendous strides in recent years to disclose thematic areas that have for a long time been overlooked or merely been treated on the sidelines. While many of these areas are expanding, they are in need of continued dedicated research that often requires engaging directly with the LGBT community. One of these issues relates to the “medicalisation of sexualities” as a consequence of colonial practices, particularly in the Global South.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, mass surveillance of women’s bodies, HIV and sexual deviance have received scholarly attention. Yet particularly with regards to disabilities within the LGBT community these issues constitute terra incognita in terms of a developed research terrain.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, transnational LGBT activism has flourished and issues pertaining directly to queer migration and questions of state protection and safe spaces for sexual minorities is developing across case studies and regions.<sup>10</sup> We will develop the question of citizenship further below.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the questions surrounding the power of language and discourse, notably in view of promoting queer thinking has gained increased scholarly traction recently.<sup>12</sup> And consequently, the role of academic discourse and literary forms of expression addressing LGBT issues across the Global South have become more visible. Nevertheless, conservative forces have

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance Roth, “LGBT: Moving towards Equality”; Wieringa and Sívori, *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*; Kollman and Waites, “The Global Politics of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights: An Introduction”; Moreau, “Political Science and the Study of LGBT Social Movements in the Global South.”

<sup>7</sup> For a historical contextualization, see for instance Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*.

<sup>8</sup> Chappell, “Situating Disabled Sexual Voices in the Global South,” 7.

<sup>9</sup> Chappell, “Situating Disabled Sexual Voices in the Global South.”

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Valiquette, Cowper-Smith, and Su, “Casa Miga: A Case of LGBT-Led, Transnational Activism in Latin America.”

<sup>11</sup> For a study on global workplace developments and the LGBT community see for instance Ghosh, “The Global LGBT Workplace Equality Movement.”

<sup>12</sup> Singh, “Language, Gender and Sexuality in 2020: Forward Global South.”

also harnessed the power of discourse against the backdrop of pushing an evangelical Christian discourse, such as, for instance, in South Korea.<sup>13</sup> In light of this dichotomous trend, the significance of online spaces for LGBT communities, including its empowering potential as well as challenges and how to best study these phenomena have been at the forefront of scholarly inquiry.<sup>14</sup> Online ethnographies and artificial intelligence as a tool to promote less visible communities instead of policing behavioral patterns online are just some of the trends captured here.

Increased visibility of LGBT research in the Global South has taken on various shapes and forms in recent years, including scholarship promotion via non-mainstream avenues, linking advocacy and psychological trends and LGBT discourse, and fueling an action research agenda and community alliance formation in different regions from Latin America all the way to Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, scrutinizing LGBT issues across the Global South and against the backdrop of postcolonial legacies and power imbalances some recent work has emphasized the importance of “strategic universalism.”<sup>16</sup> First coined by Paul Gilroy<sup>17</sup> with respect to race, in the context of Dominican LGBT activism, the concept demonstrates the grassroots power of minority organizing and community-building to oppose the grip of the Catholic Church, the corrupt state and anti-LGBT values. “It also reveals how the struggles of Dominican LGBT subjects takes place through global governance and in response to global Catholic fundamentalist authorities.”<sup>18</sup> The Dominican case illustrates the importance of intersectional issues that pertain not only to gender or race, but also includes health and socioeconomic factors.<sup>19</sup>

Economic disparities are closely linked to broader development questions associated with development issues. As Julie Moreau and Ashley Currier have pointed out, development assistance programs from the Global North pose a “queer dilemma” especially for African LGBT activists. The latter cannot refuse funding from organizations, yet the ties exposes the vulnerabilities of LGBT advocates groups “to both heteronormative and homonormative pressures that buttress neocolonial power relations.”<sup>20</sup> Reminiscent to the work mentioned on disabilities above, research that links development studies and queer theory is crucial to further illuminate power imbalances and struggles in these contexts. The questioning of the current

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<sup>13</sup> Yi, Jung, and Phillips, “Evangelical Christian Discourse in South Korea on the LGBT: The Politics of Cross-Border Learning.”

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Yue and Lim, “Digital Sexual Citizenship and LGBT Young People’s Platform Use.”

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Cornejo Salinas, Martínez, and Vidal-Ortiz, “LGBT Studies Without LGBT Studies: Mapping Alternative Pathways in Perú and Colombia”; Manalastas and Torre, “LGBT Psychology in the Philippines”; Tellis and Bala, *The Global Trajectories of Queerness: Re-Thinking Same-Sex Politics in the Global South*; Nicol, Gates-Gasse, and Mule, “Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights: Strategic Alliances to Advance Knowledge and Social Change.”

<sup>16</sup> Lara, “Strategic Universalisms and Dominican LGBT Activist Struggles for Civil and Human Rights.”

<sup>17</sup> Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*.

<sup>18</sup> Lara, “Strategic Universalisms and Dominican LGBT Activist Struggles for Civil and Human Rights,” 112.

<sup>19</sup> For a study on the intersectional advances of LGBT issues at the global level, see Aylward, “Intergovernmental Organizations and Nongovernmental Organizations: The Development of an International Approach to LGBT Issues.”

<sup>20</sup> “Queer Dilemmas: LGBT Activism and International Funding,” 223.

North-centric development discourse has led to increased awareness of heteronormative practices, including NGOs such as the *Human Dignity Trust*.<sup>21</sup> It also sparked discussions on how to best integrate religion into the equation.

Development issues are also closely linked to questions of identity politics and citizenship at the nation-state level. In terms of queer identities in the Global South this becomes visible Euro- or US-centric sexual citizenship. Homonationalism, as some argue, have led to further undermine the heterogeneity in sexual identities and queerness. This poses a particular problem in terms of societies in the Global South, as it reintroduces orientalist practices and a colonized otherness.<sup>22</sup> As a result, “sexual democracy has become an instrument for governments to implement other discriminations based on cultural, religious or racial differences.”<sup>23</sup>

Democratizing practices, however, do not necessarily lead to negative consequences. On the contrary, increasing the rule of law may have a positive effect on society where politics and law intersect. Jurisprudential gains have been made in Latin America over the past decade and advocacy educational campaigns in Chile, for instance, have led to broader LGBT acceptance and even promotion of LGBT rights.<sup>24</sup> Given the post-colonial struggle of many nations across the Global South, for some, legal gains are embedded in transformative constitutions that rose after the suffering of the oppressed, such as in South Africa. The South African constitution, as a case in point, “expressly recognized sexual orientation as a prohibited basis of discrimination in the new South African state.”<sup>25</sup> And in India, long known for legal practices based on a colonial penal code of 1860 criminalizing sodomy, the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage in a 2018 ruling.<sup>26</sup> The above examples raise the question of cultural factors fueling transformative change at an institutional and structural level, which we address next.

### ***Postcolonial Legacies***

Closely examining social transformation of societies in view of promoting LGBT rights proves helpful to further understand collaborative trends and exchanges of LGBT communities across the Global South. While Latin America has witnessed LGBT rights advances over the last few decades -- underlined by a wave of judicial assertiveness -- high profile cases of personalities that are out, especially in politics, remain rare.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the region is also witnessing a

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<sup>21</sup> Stella et al., “The New Trans-National Politics of LGBT Human Rights in the Commonwealth: What Can UK NGOs Learn from the Global South?”

<sup>22</sup> Sabsay, “The Emergence of the Other Sexual Citizen: Orientalism and the Modernisation of Sexuality”; See also Stella, Taylor, and Reynolds, *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging: Trans-National and Intersectional Perspectives*.

<sup>23</sup> Sabsay, “The Emergence of the Other Sexual Citizen: Orientalism and the Modernisation of Sexuality,” 613.

<sup>24</sup> Miles and Zelada, “Introduction to: LGBTQIA + Rights Claiming in Latin America: Some Lessons from the Global South.”

<sup>25</sup> Narrain, “Brazil, India, South Africa: Transformative Constitutions and Their Role in LGBT Struggles.”

<sup>26</sup> BBC News, “India Court Legalises Gay Sex in Landmark Ruling.”

<sup>27</sup> Corrales, “LGBT Rights and Representation in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Influence of Structure, Movements, Institutions, and Culture.”

backlash with religious groups, particularly the evangelical church, drawing on liberal democratic institutions to hamper progress made by LGBT advocates.<sup>28</sup>

Yet growing awareness of power imbalances rooted in postcolonial legacies has resulted in strategies and research to support LGBT communities through alternative funding opportunities connecting local NGOs in the Global South with donors around the world.<sup>29</sup> An online portal, *Funders for LGBTQ Issues*, a US-based network demonstrates the challenges when grappling with funding. It stated in their 2017-18 report that only 31% of the donations went to countries of the Global South with the majority of the money being distributed to countries in the Global North.<sup>30</sup> Other cases illustrate that LGBT funding now goes beyond the initial HIV donor support, such as in Southeast Asia, but grants also remain modest in Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>31</sup> The latter is an excellent illustration of how the rights of the LGBT community “ebb and flow with the political and economic conditions of the nation” where homosexuality is still criminalized.<sup>32</sup> Economic security is valued more than political freedom.

The dark shadow of lingering colonial practices remains visible in countries of the North notably when scrutinizing asylum cases of LGBT refugees. For example, “interconnected structures of colonial discourse and regulation come into force through the Canadian asylum and resettlement process.”<sup>33</sup> Here it is important to ask not only the question of where asylum seekers come from but where they are going to. In other words, Canada’s silence on and the neglect of indigenous issues especially in terms of migration studies is telling in this context.<sup>34</sup> It is thus important to create greater visibility for those who have been marginalized. This also holds true for specific minority groups of the LGBT community, such as trans and gender diverse.<sup>35</sup> Growing levels of consciousness in this regard has driven Northern donor countries to questionable awareness raising practices, showcasing LGBT advances in the Global South in a Northern context.<sup>36</sup>

The aforementioned illustrations trigger two essential observations. On the one hand, LGBT activists worldwide despite uncountable struggles and challenges have fueled a global mobilization of LGBT rights and created a connection between a broader set of civil and individual rights and a human rights agenda.<sup>37</sup> While synergies emerged between the North and South, countless tensions rose along the way. For advocacy to be successful, it was also

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<sup>28</sup> Corrales, “The Expansion of LGBT Rights in Latin America and the Backlash.”

<sup>29</sup> Becker et al., “LGBT Impact Travel Models for Connecting Potential Donors to LGBT Communities in the Global South.”

<sup>30</sup> For more details see organizational website at

<https://lgbtfunders.org/research-item/2017-2018-global-resources-report/>, accessed September 1, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Ng, “LGBT Advocacy and Transnational Funding in Singapore and Malaysia.”

<sup>32</sup> Ciochini and Radics, *Criminal Legacies in the Global South: Cultural Dynamics, Political Tensions, and Institutional Practices*.

<sup>33</sup> Fobear, “Queer Settlers: Questioning Settler Colonialism in LGBT Asylum Processes in Canada.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See for instance Essack, Van Pol, and Ndelu, “Putting the T in LGBT: Trans and Gender-Diverse (in) Visibility and Activism in South Africa.”

<sup>36</sup> See for instance, Humanity in Action, at

<https://humanityinaction.org/denmark-activities/gender-identity-in-the-global-south/>, accessed September 1, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Thoreson, “An International LGBT Movement.”

necessary to explore different avenues, such as an educational route in Chile or Argentina, when non-binary students were ejected from school.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, it required creative searches for suitable coalition partners, some more evident and reliable than others, including advocates of the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the universality discourse about human rights has also proven to be counterproductive in different cultural or regional contexts, especially when promoting LGBT rights. Brokers therefore have to walk a fine line between specificity and universal claims.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, being sensitive to the effects of power differentials, institutional and structural impediments as well as diverse contexts and backgrounds of stakeholders engaged in these processes is a fundamental premise for understanding shifting trends across the Global South and beyond. The notion of space is especially useful to draw from here and which we explore below.

### *Inbetween Spaces*

As seen earlier, the notion of space does not only refer to physical and tangible spaces, but also virtual ones, such as the internet. Interactions between these two spheres are common, such as an organization's or social movement's presence on a social media platform like Facebook or Instagram and its engagement with the community, including events, educational programs or protest marches. Urban spaces in the Global South are an example of intertwined web of spaces and actors. LGBT advocacy, if illegal, often requires strategic alliances with supportive partners, such as women's organizations.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence, international organizations, such as the United Nations, have taken note of the importance of gender in urban planning strategies across the Global South and with regards to sustainable development goals. The combination of promoting gender inclusiveness in urban spaces proves therefore also beneficial for LGBT communities to form and grow networks for advocacy purposes.<sup>42</sup> Yet, as some have noted, the appropriation of space, notably in urban areas, such as major cities, is not a linear process and comes with territorial challenges, including contestations by heteronormative forces when LGBT communities find themselves in conservative and hostile enclaves, geographically and socially speaking.<sup>43</sup>

This phenomenon is further compounded the notion of "gay menace" put forward by many repressive states across the Global South to ostracize sexual minority groups. Forms of state homophobia are insofar problematic as they decontextualizes sexual minority politics, thus limiting a rights-based discourse to achieve security for sexual and gender minorities under

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<sup>38</sup> Thoreson, *Transnational LGBT Activism: Working for Sexual Rights Worldwide*, 186.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>41</sup> For an excellent overview of these trends in urban spaces see for instance Tucker and Hassan, "Situating Sexuality: An Interconnecting Research Agenda in the Urban Global South."

<sup>42</sup> Chant and McIlwaine, *Cities, Slums and Gender in the Global South: Towards a Feminised Urban Future*, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Costa and Amorim, "Queering the City. Spatiality and Territoriality of LGBT Lives in the Cities of Southern Europe and the Global South," 4.

threat.<sup>44</sup> Closely linked to this is the issue of sexual citizenship or the question of space with regards to sexualities and citizens, which requires a certain level of privacy. Autocratic regimes, however, often devoid citizens of these private spaces, aiming for societal conformity and homogeneity. In addition, social, economic and other realities affect the practice of such citizenship forms, further marginalizing LGBT communities.<sup>45</sup> The poisonous relationship between sexuality and citizenship in illiberal states further plays out in the politics of space and the promotion of the nation-state. As an example, LGBT mainstreaming against the backdrop of homonationalism and homonormativity although inclusive at first sight, creates exclusionary effects -- especially for LGBT subgroups -- and has been appropriated by state authorities for other ends, such as in Israel, the “gay heaven” of the Middle East.<sup>46</sup>

Despite state-centric challenges and repressive practices, LGBT stakeholders have continued to engage in grassroots transnational queer engagement and solidarity. A powerful illustration thereof is the “Queer University Video Capacity Building Training Program”, a three-year initiative between Chinese and African queer filmmakers and activists in recent years, offering a participatory video production program.<sup>47</sup> Held mainly in Zimbabwe and Ghana, it highlights the importance of LGBT issues in development practices against the backdrop of Chinese government ambition on the African continent. Furthermore, it underscores the underlying potential harnessed by civil society to create a space and push the boundaries of (in)visibility of sexual minorities through art.

As indicated above, digital technologies have played an important role generating greater visibility for LGBT activism, particularly in sociopolitical contexts that are repressive and in which autocratic regimes target sexual minorities and marginalized groups. It must be noted, however, that under precarious conditions and at the risk of harassment, persecution, imprisonment, and violence, increased visibility might also require greater discretion and/or protective measures to ensure the safety of LGBT community members. Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey all illustrate this phenomenon, when activists developed strategies to resist repression and to exist drawing from different social movement repertoires.<sup>48</sup> As an example, Turkish students were able to connect across campuses, through networks and associations, including *Legato* and *Pembe Hayat*.<sup>49</sup> The use of social media under these attenuating circumstances is also crucial for some communities as it allows for the creation of alternative spaces to foster a collective identity in otherwise conservative surroundings.<sup>50</sup>

The existence of safe spaces, physical and virtual, is vital to LGBT communities and has created opportunities for members to explore various forms of encounters, exchanges and shared

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<sup>44</sup> Bosia, “Global Sexual Diversity Politics and the Trouble with LGBT Rights.”

<sup>45</sup> Richardson, “Rethinking Sexual Citizenship.”

<sup>46</sup> Hartal and Sasson-Levy, “Being [in] the Center: Sexual Citizenship and Homonationalism at Tel Aviv’s Gay-Center,” 741.

<sup>47</sup> Bao, “The Queer Global South: Transnational Video Activism between China and Africa.”

<sup>48</sup> Acconcia, Perego, and Perini, “LGBTQ Activism in Repressive Contexts: The Struggle for (in)visibility in Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>50</sup> Mokhtar and Sukeri, “Social Media Roles in Spreading LGBT Movements in Malaysia.”



experiences. The fluid nature of these spaces, also referred to as Foucauldian *heterotopias* or spaces of otherness<sup>51</sup> serves as an excellent framework for this study to further explore the engagements and synergies between various stakeholders across the Global South. As interactions between members of different LGBT communities vary it is crucial to also have a closer look at *where* exactly they connect, for *what* purpose, and *who* is getting together. The example of Turkish LGBT students organizing on, across, and beyond their campuses showcases how stakeholders operate in hybrid spaces or “inbetween spaces.”<sup>52</sup> Getting to the bottom of these (in)visible sites and loci and framing an initial topographical map against the backdrop of the above conceptual foundations is next, starting with some methodological reflections.

### **Mapping Inbetween Spaces of LGBT Communities in the Global South<sup>53</sup>**

Above I explored the concept of inbetween spaces, underlining justice-driven challenges repressive contexts, with the goal, among others, to shed light on alternative ways to create spaces for more equality or representation when seeking to address injustice and wrongdoings. Here, the focus turns to initial efforts of capturing and mapping these trends and practices by relying on techniques and tools based on the craft of cartography. Drawing and creating maps today differs substantially from earlier craftsmanship thanks to technological advances. Current geospatial data analysis software integrates a multitude of datasets, creating various data layers on a digital map. As a result, it is able to visualize data that is not only geocoded but it also provides complementary details on the context, conditions, and the area in question, including demographic information for the analyzed locations. In the context of LGBT struggles evoked, multi-layered mapmaking represents a valuable resource to capture the synergies between LGBT communities in the Global South and increase the visibility of these trends.

Digital methods, including geomapping, have allowed us to visualize evolving behavioral patterns over time and space.<sup>54</sup> In the following, I present a study of a map using data visualization to capture alternative spaces based on LGBT stakeholder practices. I compare this data across time and space to organizations and practices, examples of which have been discussed in the literature earlier. Below, I engage in a brief but critical discussion on mapmaking, lay out the design and methodology, and provide reflections on limitations and challenges.

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<sup>51</sup> Kurze, “Seeking New Metaphors: Gender Identities in Tunisia and Lebanon.”

<sup>52</sup> Kurze and Lamont, “Breaking the Transitional Justice Machine: Exploring Spatiality, Space Travel, and Inbetween Spaces in Research Practice.”

<sup>53</sup> This section draws from original ideas first published in Balasco et al., “Introducing Justicecraft: Political Change Across Space and Time.”

<sup>54</sup> For research relying on geo mapping to examine a variety of social issues, see for instance Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-Coded World*; Bagheri, “Mapping Women in Tehran’s Public Spaces: A Geo-Visualization Perspective”; Kristensen, “Revisiting the ‘American Social Science’—Mapping the Geography of International Relations”; Caragea et al., “Mapping Moods: Geo-Mapped Sentiment Analysis during Hurricane Sandy”; Torres and Costa, “Digital Narratives: Mapping Contemporary Use of Urban Open Spaces through Geo-Social Data.”

## *Virtual Mapmaking and (In)Visibility*

One of the basic tenets of quantitative research is the ability to aggregate data in view of generalizability.<sup>55</sup> However, generalizable trends do not necessarily promote a deeper and more accurate understanding of complex social justice processes. On the contrary, the invaluable insights of rich case studies in combination with comparative case analysis—to assess lessons learned and to scrutinize variation across cases—has led to rich and multilayered analyses. Thanks to innovative data visualization technology and geo-mapping tools in humanistic social sciences, researchers are able to unearth dynamic interactions between actors, across contexts, and varying conditions while still maintaining detailed local case study data. Past research emphasizes the importance of work on alternative justice mechanisms to complement and contextualize insights from existing traditional literature.<sup>56</sup> As a result, this project introduces a large *n* case study to capture and map LGBT collaboration across the Global South during the post-Arab Spring era and across various world regions.

In spite of our ability to capture less visible phenomena thanks to the above technological advances, I am conscious of limitations associated with mapmaking. Engaging in the art of cartography requires being aware of underlying power relations when drawing maps.<sup>57</sup> Cartography cannot merely be seen as a technical field. It also calls for a critical discussion on explicit and implicit power dynamics inherent to mapmaking. While critical cartography rose to prominence in the 1990s, criticizing power imbalances native to the craft, recent debates have questioned the potential of emancipatory power in the field.<sup>58</sup> According to Annette Kim, the immediate subjects of a mapping project should ideally be integrated in the process.<sup>59</sup> Efforts to capture truth-seeking initiatives across the United States in recent years are an excellent example of this goal and illustrate the challenges associated with grounding work in knowledge, experience and representation.<sup>60</sup> The pilot project for this article embraces a holistic perspective that “sets out a roadmap for the readers, drawing attention to the landmarks” and that helps readers to situate the work into a broader scholarly context.<sup>61</sup> By focusing on marginalized actors and disclosing less visible themes we also shed light on “new contestations, tensions and constellations of power,” which help us reframe the politics of justice.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Haig, *The Philosophy of Quantitative Methods*.

<sup>56</sup> For prior research see for instance, Kurze, “#WarCrimes #PostConflictJustice #Balkans: Youth, Performance Activism and the Politics of Memory”; Kurze, “Youth Activism, Art, and Transitional Justice”; Kurze, “Seeking New Metaphors: Gender Identities in Tunisia and Lebanon”; Belhadj and Kurze, “Whose Justice? Youth, Reconciliation and the State in Post-Ben Ali Tunisia.”

<sup>57</sup> Crampton and Krygier, “An Introduction to Critical Cartography.”

<sup>58</sup> Kim, “Critical Cartography 2.0: From ‘participatory Mapping’ to Authored Visualizations of Power and People,” 216.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> See for instance the interactive map by the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation at George Mason University, <https://www.mapcustomizer.com/map/US%20Truth%20and%20Reconciliation%20Initiatives%202020>, accessed June 25, 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd, “Women, Peace and Security: A Critical Cartography,” 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

### ***Map Design and Data Limitations***

This mapping project captures some of the struggles mentioned earlier in this article, concentrating on LGBT community practices to fuel cross-national and cross-regional collaborations.. While the conceptual exploration of different spaces illustrated the breadth of LGBT engagements, this pilot-sized cartographic analysis homes in on a handful of specific categories of mechanisms. It compares various forms of justice-oriented engagements to establish a voice or greater visibility, including activism, lobbying, advocacy and art-related activities. The data for this analysis was retrieved from publicly available sources online, such as institutional websites and news reports, as well as social media platforms and cases from around the world since the post-Arab Spring era until present. Date and location for each collected incident were recorded for visualization purposes. Multiple locations per incident were possible to indicate the collaboration between multiple actors across multiple sites. In other words, if an LGBT group collaborated on an event with another transnational partner and the collaborative engagement occurred over a longer period of time with, e.g. events, such as workshops in different locations, then these locations were recorded if they occurred outside the original country. The current data selection includes 38 data entries across Latin America, Africa and the MENA region and Asia.

Some of the initial limitations in creating the research design and protocols for this project include issues inherent to source materials, data selection, and visualization tools. The data sources were not homogenous and required manual coding for event type and actor type. Furthermore, the initial dataset is only part of a pilot project that will be expanded to provide more homogenous data point comparisons and to create a larger, uniform database structure. Some of the collaborations include indirect or direct involvement of Global North partners. Due to the ownership of local partners they were included in the current dataset. The data source carries other limitations. First, data sources only include publicly available information, thus overlooking a large number of localized practices by grassroots organizations and individual LGBT community members. Often, only newsworthy stories appear on institutional websites and blogs, rendering less newsworthy activities invisible. Such intermediary activities might nonetheless be important building blocks for creating partnerships and collaborative practices. Some of these issues will be remedied during the next phase of the project, which will integrate interview data from participants across the Global South. Last, although the selected data visualization software offers a variety of functions I performed only a very limited mapping in this initial phase of the project. Additional coding with more nuanced categories of practices, actors, locations and time periods offer room for future interpretation and complementary data analysis of the original study design.

### ***The Mapmaking, Challenges and Takeaways***

The initial cartography was performed with ArcGIS Online and uploaded on a publicly accessible server.<sup>63</sup> ArcGIS Online is a server-based software for geo-mapping and data-driven visualization of multiple layers in a single map. The current maps provide viewers with a topography of various stakeholders engaged in these processes as well as an initial sketch of the different types of activities they are engaged in. The maps contain data from the post-Arab Spring until the present. The current visualization includes pop-ups for each incident, allowing viewers to click on locations on the map and learn more about the actors and type of event and the time of occurrence. The objective of this initial interactive map is to provide an overview of LGBT practices from a comparative perspective notably, but not exclusively across the Global South. The present maps aggregate incidents and visualize event frequency across different engagement categories, including activism, lobbying, advocacy, litigation and art-related activities.

As we can see in Figure 1 below, visualizing synergies and collaboration between LGBT communities on a map highlights geographical variation of different stakeholders across regions. The current data points on the existing map also serve as an important reminder to further inquire about the relationship between activities that directly engage with LGBT issues versus activism and work that for different reasons does not immediately address the needs of sexual minorities, tackling related matters instead. Furthermore, linkages between art and LGBT issues in our sources represent an opportunity to inquire about these appearances in terms of cross-boundary synergies. Who frames it? How are these discourses promoted? And what are the consequences? These questions thus call for a further examination of struggles for changes in related contexts that might not have been recorded under a common LGBT issues label.

Consequently, the map complements existing studies that aim at capturing Global South LGBT trends. While the current project version of the map contains only limited data points, the flexible database structure and geo mapping tool allow for further exploration and integration of additional variables in subsequent versions of the map.

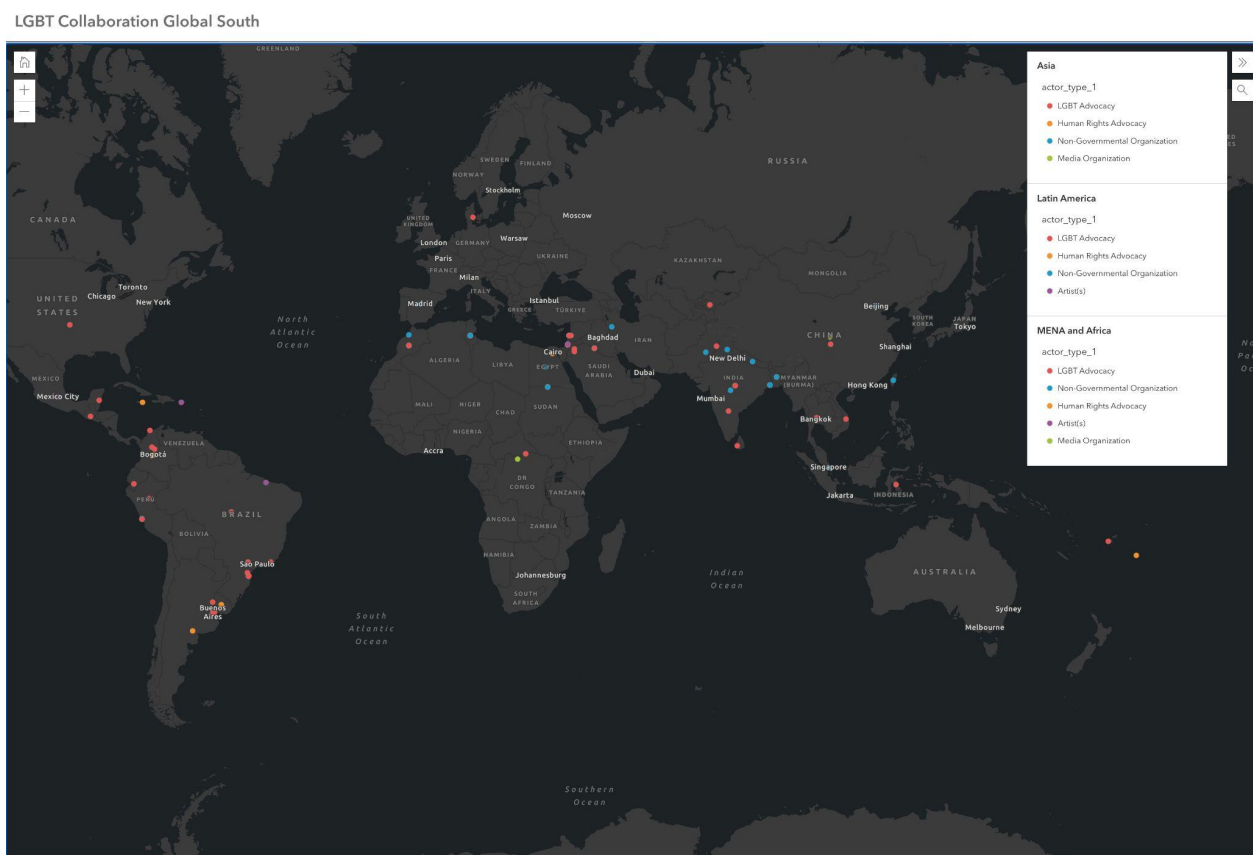
### **Initial Topography of Stakeholders and Activities**

An exploratory compilation and codification of data shows a large variety of stakeholders within the LGBT communities across different world regions. For our first map, we color coordinated different types of actors within several world regions, including Latin America, Africa and the MENA region, and Asia. The map shows that the range of actors engaging in LGBT issues does

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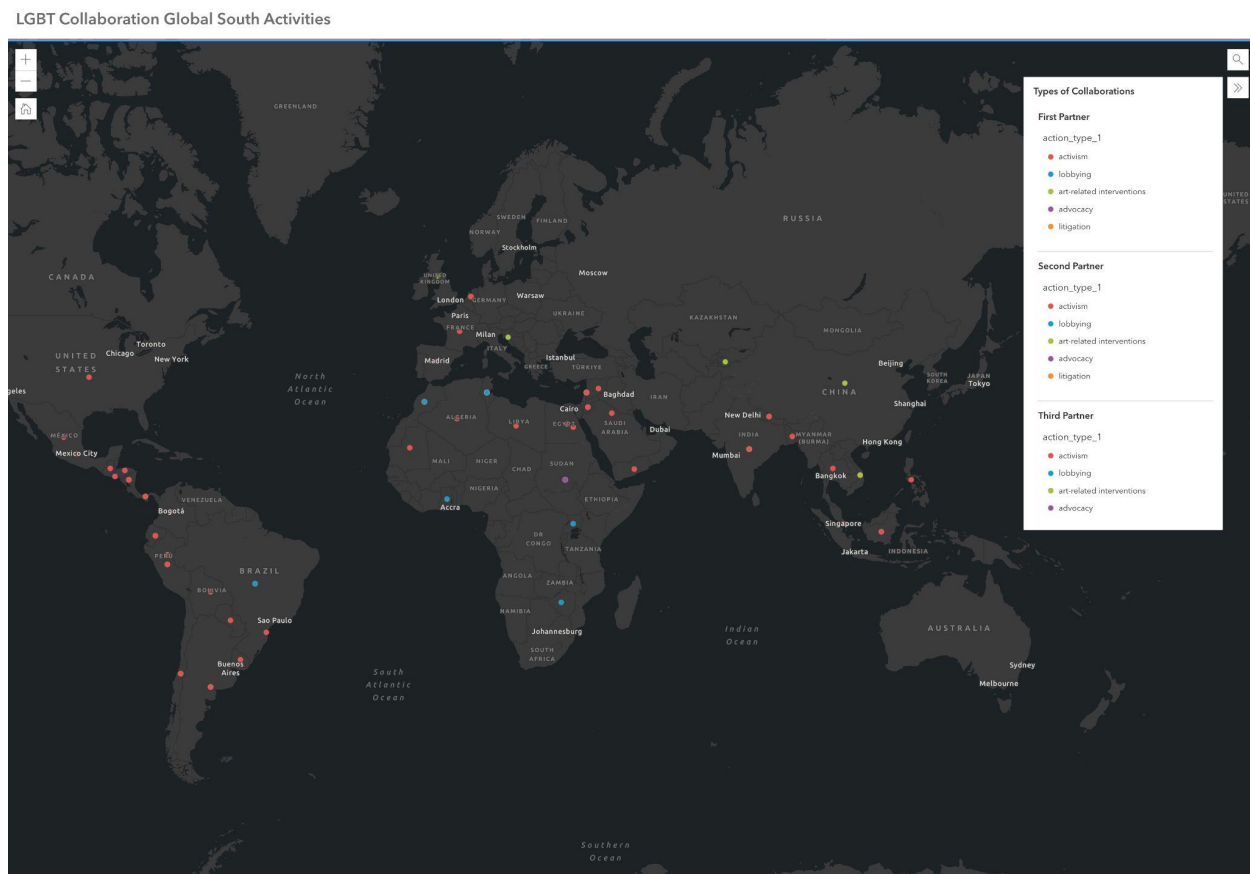
<sup>63</sup> The interactive maps are available online. A map capturing the different types of organizations is available here <https://montclair.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=6e6429e5de504914a9f4ffc8123fe4f2>. A map categorizing the different types of activities can be seen here, <https://montclair.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=f385b97dbcaa4f508e9b53de1b8bcace>, accessed September 5, 2022.

not solely include stakeholders explicitly advocating for causes directly relating to sexual minorities (labelled under LGBT advocacy in Figure 1). In fact, often the sociopolitical context does not allow for actors to directly engage with these topics, sometimes because of the prohibition of homosexuality, at times because of the cultural and normative environment, or both. Interestingly, nongovernmental organizations that work in the medical field, public health and well-being, and gender inclusion, all feature among LGBT community allies depending on the country-specific context. Artists and media organizations also are among important actors in certain cases. More often than not different actor constellations coalesce and collaborate across a variety of topics and issues. In subsequent visualizations one of the goals lies in further teasing out the intertwined nature of some of these collaborations and highlighting it in an interactive map feature online. The initial mapping efforts, however, underscores more direct LGBT activities across Latin America and slightly more NGO-related work in areas of the MENA region and parts of Asia. Additional analysis, such as frequency and time series may provide compelling insights on these trends within a region as well as across-regions and remain to be performed in the next phase of the project.



**Figure 1** Map visualization of different LGBT communities collaborating across the Global South.

This map is only a first attempt to capture and visualize LGBT collaborations across the Global South and thus contains a number of limitations for broader public use and with regards to generalizability. First, the dataset is limited to a total of 38 cases across three regions, including some overlapping cases based on different partnerships of LGBT communities. Consequently, the current map is a call to further explore and capture the emergence and existence of LGBT collaborations across the Global South across geographic locations and across time. More refined searches and the inclusion of other data sources, such as archival material, interview data and additional social media elements will help further understand the nuances between a variety of engagements in different contexts and time periods. In sum, however, these preliminary results—particularly with regards to capturing the existence of art-inspired collaborations—have illustrated the extent to which different stakeholders have engaged publicly in light of different events.



**Figure 2** Map visualization of different types of LGBT collaborations across the Global South.

For our second map, we color coordinated different types of activities within the different regional areas. The activity categories were defined as follows. First, LGBT advocacy, which directly involves references to sexual minorities and their needs. Second, human rights activism,

which presents LGBT causes less explicitly, emphasizing the general rights and norms culture around human rights (for various reasons). While the lobbying category mainly represents legal reform efforts led by LGBT activists and allies, the advocacy label on the map refers to activities that go beyond policy-related agenda setting, including workshops and normative changes at the societal level through awareness campaigns and other activities. Litigation directly uses the judicial system and existing laws to promote LGBT issues. Art-inspired practices have become a staple choice of action in certain contexts and often occur at the intersection of issues, including queerness, gender and race.

## **Conclusion**

This paper aimed at introducing a critical perspective on alternative spaces for emancipation within LGBT communities across various regions of the Global South. The term critical applies here in two ways. First, from a theoretical perspective by introducing spatial studies to LGBT issues within the context of the Global South. Second, in terms of applied mixed methods to process empirical data on the issue. In fact, the digital visualization of synergies and collaborative efforts among different stakeholders using ArcGIS constitutes an initial effort to visually and tangibly illustrate alliances and transnational and cross-regional work of LGBT advocacy groups and LGBT allies. Certes, this preliminary work will benefit from further expanding the number of cases and additional data that includes a larger number of countries, regions and collaborative activities. In addition, it would also benefit from crowdsourcing. In other words, create an open source platform that allows for researchers, stakeholders and interested individuals or groups to add data, all of which is currently being evaluated and examined. Interview data will be integrated in the next phase of the mapping project, which consists of narrative-style visualizations. Some limitations apply here.

Moreover, against the backdrop of recent queer theory literature and postcolonial legacies, I used spatial concepts, particularly the idea of inbetween spaces, to highlight the varying trends of LGBT stakeholders in different contexts and areas to promote justice and create greater visibility for marginalized and repressed communities. Empowering local communities, however, is associated with intricate challenges and the exploratory maps provide an excellent opportunity to showcase some of these activities in a concise and more tangible way.

To continue to complete the existing data, this project will also seek to integrate interview data from community members across different regions, creating narrative-style storytelling that is embedded in the virtual, online maps. As such, the goal is to create a living online document that is publicly available, which continues to tell the story of important strides to tackle injustice and marginalization of lesser visible groups and individuals from a transnational and cross regional perspective. Despite remaining challenges and obstacles, including notably the safety and well being of LGBT community members, current and past engagements and activities have proven that the time is in favor of transformative change, including research, the harnessing of online spaces and the continued collaboration of stakeholders across professions and disciplines.

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