

9. Discussion: does the anti-LGBT movement mobilize effectively in its 'cultural war'?

The 'cultural war' waged by the Korean anti-LGBT movement takes, as the previous chapters have shown, manifold shapes. Activists use diverse framing approaches to fight against LGBT issues. However, the question remains whether these struggles have been successful at all. In the political and judicial arenas, the movement was able to chalk up several victories, such as preventing the Anti-Discrimination Law and the Seoul Human Rights Charter, abolishing the Human Rights Ordinance of South Ch'ungch'ŏng Province, and thwarting the deletion of the anti-gay provision in the Military Criminal Code. Yet, the anti-LGBT movement also suffered various failures in the course of its activism during the past 20 years. The Seoul Student Human Rights Ordinance was passed despite their ferocious resistance, they were not able to delete the category of 'sexual orientation' from the NHRCK Act, and the success in South Ch'ungch'ŏng Province was only ephemeral, since the regional Human Rights Ordinance was reintroduced as soon as the majority situation in the regional parliament changed. The record of the movement in terms of political achievements can therefore be called ambivalent.

Another indicator of success – especially when considering that the movement is waging a Gramscian 'war of position' on the level of culture, ideas, and ideology as presented in the previous chapters – is the degree to which activists are able to change the 'common sense' (*senso comune*) in a way that serves their socio-political endeavors. A convenient measure in this context are opinion polls. As I have illustrated before, however, public opinion on homosexuality has been getting increasingly benevolent in South Korea over the past 20 years. According to the Pew Research Center (2019) the acceptance of homosexuality rose from 25 percent in the year 2000 to 44 percent in 2019 (cf. also Table 8). While the majority of the surveyed Koreans were still against homosexuality in 2019, the positive trend cannot be denied and is also confirmed by other opinion surveys. When considering additional demographical data, it is mostly people leaning to the political right and religious survey participants who consistently show less support for homosexuality, with Protestants scoring particularly low in this respect (Rich et al. 2012; Rich 2017). Two conclusions can be drawn from this survey data. First, while direct causalities cannot be ascertained, the opinion polls seem to support the assumption

that the anti-LGBT movement has not been successful in convincing the general public of their positions. Rather to the contrary, the overall public opinion has been developing in the exact opposite direction of what anti-LGBT activists wish for. Especially younger Koreans feature predominantly positive attitudes towards LGBT people these days. Secondly, one can assume that anti-LGBT collective action has been more successful in the traditional strongholds of the Protestant Right, that is, politically and religiously conservative members of Protestant churches. Their rejection of homosexuality has remained steady over time.

Against this background, one can expect that the movement mostly mobilizes conservative Protestant Christians for its diverse actions. Mobilization has increased over the years in terms of participation at protest events and in signature campaigns, as well as concerning the increasing number of participating group actors (cf. chapter 6.3). The following chapter will elaborate more on the background of social movement organizations and the movement leadership of anti-LGBT collective action in Korea. Now, I bring into focus the individual participants at anti-LGBT protest events to answer the question whether the movement is able to mobilize effectively – also beyond looking at the mere numbers of protest participation. Put differently, one can ask whether the anti-LGBT has achieved a change of the common sense of individual protesters towards greater or consolidated hostility against LGBT people?

For the purpose of giving an approximate and preliminary answer to these questions, I use survey data that I myself have collected among participants of the counter-rally against the Seoul Queer Culture Festival on 1st June 2019. Before looking into the dataset, however, let me first say that this data has to be analyzed with caution. I was only able to interview 26 out of several thousands of participants, using a largely standardized questionnaire. Despite attempting to pick interviewees randomly, I can thus not claim representativity of the results collected. The reliability and validity of this small survey cannot be guaranteed either, since I was not able to conduct a pre-test.¹ These flaws notwithstanding, I argue that the survey data can nevertheless give some indication of who participated in this particular event, and for what reasons they did so.

1 Methodical intricacies include the fact that this event only takes place once a year only. I could have conducted a pre-test or further rounds of questions at other protest events. I refrained from doing this, however, because other events generally have a far smaller number of participants, making it even more difficult to guarantee representativity. Moreover, I also abstained from doing so for reasons of personal safety. It is easier to avoid attention in bigger crowds, while a survey at smaller events could have raised suspicion with the organizers and, consequently, could have complicated further research, e.g., qualitative research interviews during field work. The questionnaire used for this small survey can be found in the appendix (A.3).

Table 9: Survey of 26 participants of the counter-rally against the SQCF 2019

ITEMS	ANSWERS AND NUMBER OR RESPONDENTS				
Origin	Seoul	Inch'ön/ Kyönggi Prov.	Ch'ungch'öng Prov./Taejön/ Sejong	-	n/a
	13	5	5		1
Age	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60 and above
	4	3	7	3	9
Gender	Male	Female	-	-	-
	12	14			
Party prefer- ence	Liberty Korea Party	-	-	-	n/a
	12				14
Religious affiliation	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Catholic	Other Chris- tian
	15	3	3	1	4
Religious service at- tendance	Every day	More than once a week	Once a week	-	-
	2	17	7		
Participation at anti-LGBT events	First time	2–3 times	More than 10 times	'Uncount- able'	n/a
	10	11	2	2	1
How have you known of this event? (free an- swer)^a	Internet/ print news, social media	Heard in church about it	From Esther Prayer Move- ment	Activist her- self/ himself	Participation by chance
	7	10	2	2	2
Member of anti-LGBT or- ganization?	Yes	No	-	-	n/a
	6	18			2
Most import. socio-politi- cal issues in Korea? (mul- tiple & free answers)^a	Economy	Homosexual- ity	North Korea	Ideology/ socialism/ communism	Security
	10	8	7	6	5
	Political conflict	Anti-US attitudes	Youth unem- ployment	Endangered democracy	Gender (ide- ology)
	5	2	2	2	2
ITEMS	ANSWERS AND NUMBER OR RESPONDENTS				
Motivation for participa- tion (multiple & free answers)	Religious reasons (against creation order, sinful, unbiblical) (10), 'I am against ho- mosexuality' (6), Danger of AIDS (4), homosexuality must not be instigated in youth (3), gender ideology (2), homosexuality destroys family (now 1 each), destroys so- ciety, human values collapse, against abortion, only homosexual's voices are being heard, homosexuality is un-Korean, bad things happen in the name of human rights, resistance against untruth, to inform public and government about anti-LGBT move- ment, to rebuild church, against queer festival, no special reason (2)				

^a Only the answers with the highest frequencies are shown here.

Table 9 demonstrates the results of the survey. The demographic data show a fairly evenly distribution of gender and age cohorts. One can expect that people of all ages were able to attend since the event took place on the weekend. My impression from participant observations at other anti-LGBT protest events was that the participation rate of elderly people and women was higher than at this event, especially when the events happened during the week (i.e., Monday–Friday). The place of origin of most participants interviewed was in Seoul or in the adjacent Kyōnggi Province or Inch'ōn city. However, there were also five participants who came from a bit farther away, from Ch'ungch'ōng Province. In order to get a general idea about the political leaning of the participants, I included an item on party preference into the questionnaire.² Twelve interviewees indicated the *Liberty Korea Party*, the largest conservative political party in Korea which in the meantime changed its name to *People Power Party*, as the party they supported. The rest did not have a preferred party or refrained from answering this question. What is noteworthy is that nobody chose the *Christian Liberal Party* (*kidok chayū tang*), a minor party that is strongly intertwined with the anti-LGBT movement and the Protestant Right at large (cf. chapter 10.5). The Christian Liberal Party was the only political party being present with a booth at the counter-rally.

The general political attitudes were also part of the item asking about the three most important socio-political issues in Korea. I had asked this question before delving deeper into motivations of participating in this anti-LGBT event in order to guarantee unbiased answers. Interestingly, only 8 interviewees mentioned homosexuality here and nobody indicated it first, that is, other aspects came to their minds before the issue of homosexuality. Many interviewees were concerned about the economy (10 mentions), as well as about North Korea (7), the political ideologies of socialism and communism (6), security, and political conflict in different shapes (5 each). Apart from the economic situation in the strict sense, the protest participants display similar concerns as the anti-LGBT movement at large, as expressed in framings that combine these socio-political topics with LGBT issues. The answers given to the question of why the interviewees participated in this particular event also reflected the topics covered in the movement's framing. 'Christian' arguments are the most frequent reason (10), followed by the danger of AIDS (4), the demand that homosexuality must not be promoted with young people (3), and gender ideology (2). Multiple other reasons were indicated as well, yet only appearing one time each, such as regarding homosexuality as un-Korean, claiming that it destroys families and society, and that this event helps rebuilding the church. Two interviewees said they participated having no special motivation. One remarkable aspect was that six participants stated they took part in the counter-rally just because they opposed homosexuality, without indicating further, more specific reasons.

This begs the question whether these latter interviewees actually have further reasons and knowledge about the issue at all, or whether they may have participated for other

2 In hindsight, it would perhaps have been better to instead, or additionally include an item asking the interviewees where they put themselves on right-left spectrum, since not all interviewees indicated a party preference. But owing to the limited space available on the questionnaire sheet, I opted for the more straightforward question about concrete political parties.

reasons, for example, because they were asked by their congregation's pastor to join. Alternatively, it is possible that homosexuality in itself elicits such negative feelings that it appears 'natural' to the participants to just state this as a motivation for participating. This conundrum prompts the question as to how the interviewees ended up with their convictions. One possibility is that, after more than a decade of anti-LGBT activism, they have internalized the basic frames put forward by anti-LGBT activists to the extent that they became part of their common sense and mobilize them to participate in concrete anti-LGBT events. On the other hand, it may also be the case that the interviewees have had such socio-political attitudes irrespective of the anti-LGBT movement's workings, and that, conversely, anti-LGBT activists built their frames exactly on these commonly held attitudes. While this study cannot provide conclusive answers regarding this analytical problem of causalities, I argue that both possibilities have most probably operated side by side. The politically conservative attitudes of the traditional support basis of the Protestant Right may have led anti-LGBT activists to merge issues like security and anti-communism with anti-LGBT impulses. In reverse, the protesters in fact appear to have adopted common anti-LGBT frames – also beyond the 'obvious' religious arguments.

It is the category of religion, however, which offers the clearest insights to be drawn from the small survey. All 26 interviewees belonged to Christian churches, with a large majority of members of Protestant and evangelical churches (25). And all 26 people interviewed seem to be devout and faithful members of their churches, as indicated by the frequency of participating in church services. Of the interviewees, 17 said they attended church service more than once a week, 7 did so once a week, and 2 participants even claimed they went to church on a daily basis. Consequently, 10 people stated they received the information about this event at church, while 7 heard of this event through diverse media channels. This data suggests that the participants of the counter-rally against the Seoul Queer Culture Festival have a strong affiliation with Protestant Christianity. And not only that, 6 interviewees indicated that they were members of anti-LGBT groups. The survey data is also indicative of a certain commitment and allegiance to the anti-LGBT movement in particular. 15 interviewees answered that they have already participated several times in anti-LGBT events. 10 participants said they took part in such an event for the first time.

Considering the general opinion polls and the survey data just presented, I argue that the 'cultural war' of the Protestant Right in the area of LGBT issues was mainly successful with politically and religiously conservative Protestants. They seem to have internalized hostility against homosexuality and related topics, and they can be effectively mobilized for anti-LGBT protest events. The causal mechanism behind this mobilization, however, remains uncertain. It is unclear whether people participate out of homophobia or due to their allegiance to conservative churches, which call for broad participation in such events. More definite conclusions can be drawn concerning what the anti-LGBT was *not* able to achieve. The movement seems to have problems mobilizing people beyond conservative Christian confines. This could mean that the efforts to also appeal to non-Christian crowds, for example, through using secular frames, have been largely ineffective. The 'war of position' waged by anti-LGBT actors seems to have had an impact mainly on people that had been close to the movement anyways due to their affiliation to conservative Protestantism. In the general public, however, such an identity shift and change

of common sense in the direction of increased hostility towards LGBT people and LGBT issues has not materialized. While such an ample ideological shift would be necessary to sustainably grasp power eventually – at least when following a Gramscian line of argument – the partial power of the anti-LGBT movement cannot be denied. The movement has demonstrated considerable political clout in their fights against pro-LGBT laws. The potential to mobilize conservative Protestant church members is an important asset in this context, presumably capable of making significant impressions on lawmakers. As chapter 10.5 shall demonstrate, the anti-LGBT movement in fact maintains close relations with politicians from diverse backgrounds.

9.1 Conclusion: a partly successful anti-LGBT ‘cultural war’ rife with productive inconsistencies

Section 2 of this study started off by demonstrating the scant interest of the conservative Christian newspaper Kukmin Daily in homosexuality in the 1990s, to then proceed to the early, rather sporadic collective actions of Protestant actors against several pieces of pro-LGBT legislation. By and by, the movement consolidated itself and really took off from 2013/2014 onwards, with a steep rise in protest events, topics covered, actors involved, and opponents targeted. The Protest Event Analysis data revealed that large parts of anti-LGBT activism in Korea are situated in the area of communication, issuing press statements, hosting ‘educational’ events, and using media channels (online or traditional) to disseminate anti-LGBT narratives. Considering these particular action forms, I argue that the anti-LGBT movement centrally engages in a Gramsci-inspired ‘war of position’ to change people’s common sense in a direction of actively opposing LGBT issues, with the ultimate goal of increasing the political influence of the Protestant Right. It turned out that, indeed, most protest events revolved around political topics – rather than fighting against the LGBT movement in the strict sense. Consequently, the majority of targets of anti-LGBT protests consists of organizational and individual opponents belonging to the governmental and political spheres. One can therefore call the Korean anti-LGBT movement an *opposing movement* in that it struggles against a concrete topic (cf. Dugan 2004), rather than a direct countermovement of the pro-LGBT movement.

An important part of the movement’s struggles for cultural hegemony is its claims-making. Anti-LGBT activists employ diverse framing strategies that this study analyzes through the lenses of *dynamic continuity* and *opposing desires*. The opposing desires within the framing approaches include different kinds of framing contests, with seemingly contradictory tendencies. Activists adopt frames from opponents and use them in a counter-framing manner, but frame disputes within the anti-LGBT movement also exist. Among these are, for example, presenting oneself as ‘normal’ and as representing ‘the’ majority versus a potentially threatening ‘other’, while at the same time claiming a certain victimhood status for themselves. Moreover, the concept of human rights gets reshaped in a way to present LGBT people as undeserving of rights. Radical rhetoric and hyperbolic accusations are paralleled by claims of moderation and attempts at concealing factual hostility and violence. Reproaches of disinformation are accompanied by disseminating ‘fakes’ or inaccurate information themselves. Activists depict LGBT issues as a dangerous

'ideology' from abroad while hiding the fact that important parts of their own ideological, conspiracy-like narratives have a foreign origin. And finally, religious frames are used alongside secular ones.

Dynamic yet continuous elements are present in many of these seemingly inconsistent ways of framing 'realities'. On the ideologically congruent and temporal levels, the anti-LGBT movement combines the established, historically 'proven' framing around anti-communism with LGBT issues. An 'old' master frame is complemented and augmented with a new element, that is, anti-LGBT hostility. One could even argue that 'homosexuality' itself has become a new master frame for the movement, since it combines flexibly with other vilification strategies, for example, when homosexuality gets conflated with dictatorship, security threats, alleged pro-North Korea attitudes, and current political elites. We can also assume that 'homosexuality' developed into a master frame for the Protestant Right since activists, while covering a great many topics, often describe the actual 'threat' or 'danger' of LGBT issues in abstract terms only, hinting at the fact that they take for granted hostility against these topics among the general public. Further dynamic continuities are situated on the ideologically congruent and relational levels. This becomes apparent among ideologically 'compatible' actors, for example, through the adoption of the 'cultural Marxism' narrative from right-wing actors in the US and in Europe. In this context, the ideological transnational ties are the 'continuous' part, while the active adaptation of the adopted frames according to domestic needs and specific interests bring in the dynamism. Finally, on the ideologically adversarial and relational levels, the anti-LGBT movement also makes use of strategies and framings originally developed and used by the direct opponent. Examples for this are the Gramscian 'war of position' strategy as well as counterframings employed by the movement. Here, the dynamic element is the adoption of action repertoires from antagonistic forces, whereas the continuous aspect is that these frames or strategies had already been created and proven effective before, allowing the movement to piggyback on such established elements in a modular fashion.

At first sight, these framing strategies may appear contradictory and inconsistent. It is true that engaging in such opposing framings is an intricate matter, especially when they uncover cracks within the anti-LGBT movement. Altogether, however, I argue that activists chose such action repertoires consciously and intentionally. A main goal of their activism is to convince the general public of their socio-political positions. The general public, however, is not homogeneous. While explicitly religious frames may work well with Christians, they will not have a similar effect on non-Christian parts of society. Therefore, tailor-made secular frames are being used as well, which can be expected to find resonance with both Christians and non-Christians. Yet, as the analyzed data suggests, the anti-LGBT movement seems to have failed to persuade and mobilize people beyond its traditional support base. The intended identity shift and change of common sense in the direction of making hostility towards LGBT issues an active part of people's self-conception seems to have mostly worked with conservative Protestant church members.

This does certainly not mean that the situation for LGBT people in Korea is all rosy by now – quite to the contrary. The anti-LGBT movement did achieve at least one important thing. It centrally contributed to rendering LGBT issues highly contentious in Korea at

large, and particularly in Korean politics. This shows that the anti-LGBT movement, and by extension, the Protestant Right as a whole remains a political force to reckon with, especially because of their very assiduous and rigorous activists. They are almost always present when anything pro-LGBT emerges in society and, particularly, politics. I argue that the enduring political influence of the anti-LGBT movement is precisely due to its considerable capacity to mobilize the faithful. As Antonio Gramsci rightly claimed, religion is a forceful hegemonic power, both as a symbolic resource for collective identity and framings, and a potent resource for mobilization. Aware of their assets, anti-LGBT activists actively promote an image of Korean Protestant churches as being an important socio-political player, purporting that it is only them who keep a clear view, who have critical thinking, and who can ultimately protect Korea. This sense of 'election' or 'chosenness' created by activists of the Protestant Right may also fuel the increasingly proactive willingness among conservative church members to get active in the fight against LGBT rights.

In order to better understand such internal workings of Korean Protestantism in general, and of the anti-LGBT movement in particular, the next chapters will delve into specific topics that this first analytical section could only touch upon cursorily. The now following chapter 10 focuses on the structural and relational aspects of the anti-LGBT movement, investigating the networks among social movement organizations of the anti-LGBT movement, and the important role of movement leaders in appropriating established church structures for the fight against LGBT rights, as well as in establishing new organizations themselves. This chapter will also cover the explicitly 'political' relations of the movement, as well as its own political endeavors. Some topics that this section has briefly broached will be detailed in the then following chapters. Chapter 11 treats the shifting ways in which the movement approaches the crucial task of communicating its contents to the greater public, above all in the areas of traditional media, social media, and education. The final analytical chapter 12 is devoted to the internal animosities within Korean Protestantism on the question as to how to best deal with LGBT issues. It zooms in on the way anti-LGBT activists and movement leaders busy themselves with safeguarding church unity and covering up internal conflicts.