

## 8. The Opposing desires within Korean anti-LGBT activism

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### 8.1 Opposing desires I: framing contests around human rights

The dynamic yet continuous aspects of anti-LGBT collective action in Korea become apparent also in framing contests that the movement is involved in. These contested processes reveal how opposing desires are at work in the framing activities and relations of the anti-LGBT movement. Such opposing or contradictory desires loom, for example, in the movement's counterframing efforts. Benford (1987, 75) defines *counterframing* as attempts "to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework". Anti-LGBT activists fight against frames that pro-LGBT actors use while at the same time redeploying these exact frames, but in a way that serves the anti-LGBT camp's purposes. Contested framing processes, however, do not only emerge between a movement and its opponents. They can also take place internally when movement actors disagree over the best approaches and practices. Such intra-movement conflicts over the elaboration of frames have been termed *frame disputes* (Benford & Snow 2000, 626f.). In the context of framing, the opposing desires refer to the disagreements within the anti-LGBT movement over the ways to address certain issues. As I will demonstrate, parts of the so-called 'ex-gay movement' feature framings that diverge from that of the mainstream anti-LGBT movement. Both the adoption and transformation of originally oppositional frames as well as internal frame disputes are risky for a movement since they have the potential to jeopardize socio-political alliances and the overall consistency of arguments. Anti-LGBT activists frequently call upon church unity for the fight against LGBT rights – an appeal that may be necessary given the obvious divisions within the Protestant Right (cf. also chapter 12). Such pleas lay bare cracks and inconsistencies, which might eventually do more harm than good to the actions and reputation of the Korean anti-LGBT movement.

This study has already pointed out types of counterframing that include the adoption of originally oppositional frame elements. The self-victimization of the Protestant Right is one example. The anti-LGBT movement recasts the image of vulnerability, weakness, and victimhood that LGBT people actually have in a way to deny LGBT people the

recognition of their anguish and, rather, ascribe this underdog position to themselves. Another example is the movement's framing around the concept of love. Siwoo (2018, 191–199) describes how anti-LGBT activists try to redeploy this term for their own purposes, claiming, for instance, that homosexuality is not real love, which they assert is only possible between a man and a woman. The Protestant Right also uses love-related frames to counteract the accusation of being 'hate forces' (*hyōmo seryōk*), a reproach commonly made by pro-LGBT activists. In a noteworthy twist, anti-LGBT activists claim in speeches and on protest posters that they oppose homosexuals exactly because they 'love' them (cf. also Interview 20). Siwoo argues that this is a mere marketing strategy geared to creating a better image for the anti-LGBT movement. In fact, the anti-LGBT camp continues categorizing people into groups worth of receiving love, and others that are not. This corresponds to the Christian expression 'love the sinner, hate the sin' (cf. also Moon 2014), which suggests that those who overcome their 'sinful' behavior can be met with affection and acceptance. This is why anti-LGBT activists keep claiming that LGBT individuals can change and that 'conversion therapy' is possible. Eventually, such a reframing of love – besides the intended effect of positively rebranding churches – contains an insidious core. Rather than granting actual love, understanding and recognition, queer people are put at risk through the propagation of measures that are scientifically proven to be harmful (Briken et al. 2019).

This chapter focuses on an aspect of framing contests that has not been covered by previous research, that is, counterframing and frame disputes in the realm of human rights. Rights discourses around LGBT communities have been studied for the US case (Herman 1996) as well as elsewhere, for example in Korea and Israel (Kim, Jongwoo 2019; Dudai 2017).<sup>1</sup> Yet, the specific approach and lineup of the Korean anti-LGBT movement in this respect – or, as I will demonstrate, its opposing desires – have remained indistinct so far. Other forms of 'opposing desires' are also present in the framing of the movement: radicalized narratives versus alleged moderation, and religious versus secular framings. These two themes will be covered after the now following section.

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<sup>1</sup> A special political and academic debate in this context is the one on so-called 'Asian values'. In the 1990s in particular, this concept has been promoted by politicians in Southeast and East Asia, claiming that Asian cultures and countries feature values different from the 'Western' concept of universal human rights, e.g., the preference for acting in and for the collective, and loyalty towards authorities – often citing the Confucian tradition as foundation. Early on, critics have put into question the distinctness from general human rights, as well as the idea that human rights politics are a form of 'cultural imperialism' in Asia. Furthermore, Asian values have been accused of being a means for authoritarian political leaders to justify their repressive and undemocratic political approaches (Freeman 1996). However, the concept of Asian values lingers on in academic discourses, also in relation to debates about LGBT rights, which are said to be unfit for Asia due to their alleged infringement of filial piety and of the familial loyalties based in Confucianism. Such a perspective has been rejected by scholars who call for queering Asian values (Hou 2020) and for reconstructing the universality of human rights for LGBT people in Asia as well (Lee, Po-han 2016). The Korean anti-LGBT movement does not explicitly refer to 'Asian values' in their activities. But they do, as I have shown in previous sections, denounce homosexuality as 'un-Korean' and as 'western imports'.

## Relativizing the human rights of LGBT people and one's own hostility towards them

A common frame used by anti-LGBT forces is to pretend that they respect the human rights of queer people. These statements are, however, immediately followed by relativizations of this alleged respect, effectively contradicting the declaration of tolerance made only seconds before as the subsequent examples show. "We should protect the legitimate human rights of homosexuals, but we should not include sex acts between men who spread AIDS in human rights. Protecting the distorted sexual behavior of homosexuals will seriously harm the public health and family system of Korean society" (Kil Wönp'yöng, cited in Paek, Sang-hyön 2015, December 13). "The human rights and diversity of all people should be respected, but if it makes the community sick and is contrary to common sense and truth, it must be firmly corrected" (Kim Yong-jin, cited in Yu, Yong-dae 2010, October 29). "The human rights of homosexual soldiers are important, but the human rights of parents who have sent their children to the military are also important" (Yi, Wön-dük, cited in Paek, Sang-hyön 2015, May 31).

The beginnings of these statements make the speakers seem more moderate than they actually are. While pretending to care for the human rights of LGBT people, the latter part of their statements reveals that, in fact, they have the exact opposite in mind. The activists here wish to deprive homosexual people infected with HIV from their right to participate in society without discrimination, as well as limit the freedom rights of homosexual soldiers. At the same time, they compare the rights of LGBT people to those of other groups, suggesting that, ultimately, the rights of the majority outweigh those of the minority (cf. chapter 7.3). Such an argumentation strategy is commonly referred to as 'whataboutism'.<sup>2</sup> In order to belittle the concerns of, or divert attention away from an actually disadvantaged group, other collectives are put into position, suggesting that the latter are more important or that the granting of rights to LGBT people would infringe upon the latter's rights. This kind of whataboutism can also be observed in the way anti-LGBT activists allude to North Korea when attempting to present LGBTs as individuals undeserving of rights. While doing this, they commonly attack leftist political forces and state institutions, which they accuse of supporting LGBT rights. At a protest event aiming at dissipating the reproach of producing 'fake news' launched against the Protestant Right by the progressive newspaper *Hankyoreh* (Pak Chun-yong 2018, September 27), a pastor called An Yong-un spoke in the following manner: "Left-leaning figures anxious to enact a student human rights ordinance and anti-discrimination law insist on protecting homosexuals' human rights, but they are silent about North Korea, which is

2 Whataboutism is not commonly used as an analytical concept in social sciences. There are some studies that investigate the characteristics of whataboutism, for example its function in discussions (Barceló Aspeitia 2020) and its concrete usage in US media and politics (Dykstra 2020). According to Dykstra (2020, 4f.), media and public interest in whataboutism has significantly increased since 2017 when Donald Trump became president of the United States. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines whataboutism as follows: "The practice of responding to an accusation or difficult question by making a counter-accusation or raising a different issue. Also in later use: the practice of raising a supposedly analogous issue in response to a perceived hypocrisy or inconsistency" (cited in Dykstra 2020, 2). I argue that whataboutism has analytical value as a concept that describes quite well the discursive strategy used by Korean anti-LGBT activists.

committing the worst human rights abuses" (cited in Paek, Sang-hyōn 2018, November 2). Besides left-wing forces, another common target of criticism is the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK), as the following quote shows.

The biggest contradiction of the National Human Rights Commission is that it is silent about the severely violated human rights of North Koreans while emphasizing the human rights of homosexuals, of people engaging in polyamory, and prostitutes. [...] The National Human Rights Commission of Korea, which is mired in biased gender ideology and demands the legalization of homosexuality, polyamory, and prostitution, must be judged by the people. (Choe Po-gil, cited in Paek, Sang-hyōn 2019, March 20).

A common demand of anti-LGBT activists, also in the context of accusing the NHRCK of disregarding the human rights of North Koreans, is to abolish the NHRCK as a whole. Dismantling the NHRCK, however, would aggravate the human rights situation of LGBT people in Korea only further, demonstrating that, after all, the anti-LGBT movement's asserted respect for LGBT human rights is not honest. What the Protestant Right really cares about is their own vested interests and rights such as religious freedom and freedom of speech, which they see at risk owing to pro-LGBT bills like the anti-discrimination law. Their concept of human rights negates the universality of human rights. According to the anti-LGBT movement, some groups – like the purported majority of Koreans and, of course, Christians – are more deserving of rights than others. A press statement issued by several groups that organized a counter-rally against the 2015 Seoul Queer Culture Festival exemplifies this fact. "How can perverted sexual acts be human rights when at the same time criminally punishing those who do not acknowledge them? Is this human rights? [...] This is a policy to exterminate Christian churches, hidden behind the law banning discrimination against homosexuals" (cited in Yu, Yōng-dae 2015, June 10).

The actual lack of respect for LGBT human rights becomes apparent in another counterframing strategy, which is in partial conflict with the framing approach just presented. Rather than feigning tolerance, some anti-LGBT activists argue that the whole idea of LGBT human rights is wrong or 'fake'. Paek Sang-hyōn, a Kukmin Daily journalist, has been particularly active in promoting the frame of "fake human rights". In 2017, he published a book entitled *Fake Human Rights, Fake Hatred, Fake Minority – Telling the Truth about the Homosexual Dictatorship Frame*. In this book, he uses the trope of something being fake to disparage LGBT groups and their strategies, as well as propagating the view that the latter and left-wing political forces strive to establish a "homosexual dictatorship" in South Korea. This sensational writing about alleged dangers of homosexuality fits into the conspiracy narratives analyzed in chapter 7. The adoption of the 'fake' frame can certainly be credited to the Trump Administration's and its allies' use of the very term (cf. Polletta & Callahan 2019). I argue that it is also a counterframing strategy in face of the accusations of deliberately spreading wrong information about homosexuality and related topics. In the case of Paek Sang-hyōn's 2017 book, it could even be called a preemptive type of counterframing, since the reproach that Protestant groups engage in disinformation really gained traction only after the Hankyoreh investigation of 2018. Stigmatizing LGBT groups and their supporters of being 'fake'

in manifold respects is a precautionary measure to fend off charges of a similar kind directed at the anti-LGBT movement.

Alongside Paek Sang-hyön's journalistic framing of LGBT human rights as 'fake' or 'false', other parts of the anti-LGBT movement also question whether demands for equal treatment of LGBT people have anything to do with 'true' human rights. At a protest at the private Protestant Handong University, for instance, participants also utilized the term "fake human rights". They alleged that the university and society at large are in danger of falling for 'bad' LGBT influence under the guise of human rights protection (cited in Paek, Sang-hyön 2019, January 23). The Christian Council of Korea (CCK) features a similar line of argument when attributing moves for legalizing same-sex marriage to the detrimental effects of the human rights discourse (cited in Ko, Se-uk 2014, December 5). Another activist attempts to delegitimize the demand for LGBT rights by bringing up a far-fetched comparison associating homosexuals with health issues: "Homosexuality breaks down social norms by shortening human life and allowing indiscriminate sexual freedom through AIDS infection. Homosexuality is not a true human right, just as happiness through drug inhalation is not a true human right" (Yun Sön-gyo, cited in Paek, Sang-hyön 2016, June 23). Activists also argue from a Christian perspective that the concept of human rights does not extend to sexual minorities. In one press release, the KACC quotes the US Declaration of Independence of 1776, focusing on the definition of the concept of human rights outlined there. "In this concept, human rights are the rights granted by the Creator, meaning that nobody can infringe on them, and that rights not granted by the Creator cannot be included in the category of human rights" (KACC 2015, June 24).

### Raising and externalizing 'ex-gay' human rights

The framing activities of the Korean anti-LGBT movement in the area of human rights is mostly of a deprecating kind. Human rights, if granted to LGBT people, lose their essence, the argument goes. But the overall image the movement strives to create is more extensive. In fact, the whole discourse on human rights for disadvantaged and excluded groups is a thorn in the side of the Protestant Right. According to conservative Protestant activists, refugees, Muslims, and feminists should not be able to enjoy basic human rights either (Kim, Nami 2016). The Protestant Right is right when concluding that human rights have become increasingly relevant in international and domestic politics over the past decades – both in terms of LGBT rights (Kollman & Waites 2009) and other rights-related topics in world politics at large (cf. e.g., Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999). However, for the most part, the Korean anti-LGBT movement does not engage in human rights framing in the sense that they actively, frequently and systematically claim human rights *for themselves*. If at all, activists denounce alleged violations of their rights, yet, without going much into detail and without using the term 'human rights' in this context.

In contrast to this, one sub-group of the Korean anti-LGBT movement does proactively claim human rights for themselves: the 'ex-gay' organizations around Pastor Lee Jonah (Yi Yo-na), which claim that 'escaping' one's homosexuality is possible and which

'help' people to do so through the power of faith.<sup>3</sup> This they have in common with the rest of the anti-LGBT movement: advocating the 'healing' of LGBT people and alleging that it is 'true' human rights to help people overcome their homosexuality – or 'come back' to heterosexuality, a frame that has already been treated before (cf. chapter 7.2). As for the specifics of human rights, however, the framing strategy of this part of the Korean ex-gay movement diverges from the mainstream anti-LGBT movement's impulses to discard the concept of human rights altogether. The *Holy Life* ex-gay group around Pastor Lee Jonah engages in a different kind of counterframing, thus essentially creating a frame dispute within the larger movement. As I will demonstrate now, this dispute does not only manifest itself in different framing strategies. Rather, there is a distinct split within the anti-LGBT movement, which even leads them to hold separate events in opposition to the Seoul Queer Culture Festival all at one time.

Lee Jonah, senior pastor at the Calvary Chapel in Seoul, has been active in the Korean anti-LGBT movement from the beginning. Over the years, many subsidies of his original ex-gay group *Holy Life* were founded, such as the *Ex-Gay Human Rights Christian Association* (*t'al tongsōngae in'gwōn kidokkyo hyōbūihoe*), the *Ex-Gay International Alliance* (*t'al tongsōngae kukche yōnmaeng*), the *Ex-Gay Human Rights Professors' Forum* (*t'al tongsōngae in'gwōn kyosu p'orōm*), and the *Ex-Gay Movement Mothers' Meeting* (*t'al tongsōngae undong ōmōni moim*). The substance of at least some of these additional organizations is questionable, though. When searching the ex-gay mother's meeting on Google, for example, there is only one result. As for the other ex-gay groups, the acting personnel are often the same. Lee Jonah is virtually always involved when these groups meet or when they appear in news reports. Be that as it may, the ex-gay movement around the Calvary Chapel pastor can be described as very industrious in that it establishes diverse sub-groups and strives to expand its activism and network transnationally.

At some point, however, the mainstream anti-LGBT movement and the ex-gay groups that were created around *Holy Life* started drifting apart. In his study *Queer Apocalypse*, Siwoo argues that the mainstream movement wants to prevent homosexuality from spreading because they think it is a sin and dangerous, whereas ex-gay groups act out of the wish to 'help' homosexuals (Siwoo 2018, 72). Even though these two camps cooperate with each other, Siwoo sees competition between them. Anti-LGBT groups criticize the ex-gays around Lee Jonah for thinning out the issue, while the latter accuse the mainstream movement of exploiting anti-LGBT sentiments merely to increase their political power (Siwoo 2018, 77f.). These internal animosities between the ex-gay and mainstream anti-LGBT movements have been confirmed by both pro-LGBT (Interviews 8; 18; 35) and anti-LGBT actors interviewed for this study (Interviews 17; 22). A result of this rift was the establishment of yet another ex-gay group in December 2018. The counselling service *I Ministry* (*ai minisüt'uri*) is led by the self-proclaimed ex-gay mission-

<sup>3</sup> The term 'ex-gay' is commonly used in English to denote people that claim having abandoned their 'former' sexual or gender identity, or organizations that encourage people to 'overcome' their non-heterosexual sexual orientation or non-cis gender identity, for example through the means of so-called 'conversion therapy'. Although the word 'gay' figures prominently in the term 'ex-gay', it encompasses more sexual identities than just male homosexuality.

ary Pak Chin-gwön and is actively supported by several mainstream anti-LGBT social movement organizations (Paek Sang-hyön 2018, December 9).

The internal discord also becomes apparent in the way ex-gay activists around Lee Jonah frame human rights. Like the mainstream anti-LGBT movement, they connect human rights to the 'need' to 'heal' queer people. Kim Kyu-ho, an ally activist of Lee Jonah's, puts it like this at the second *Ex-Gay Human Rights Forum* in March 2015: "It is true human rights to help homosexuals escape from the pain of homosexuality" (cited in Yu, Yōng-dae 2015, March 22). Pro-LGBT activists worldwide, however, repudiate such statements, citing scientific research which proves the harmfulness 'conversion therapies' and similar practices. In recent years, an increasing number of states like Canada, Ecuador, France, and Germany acknowledged this danger posed to LGBT individuals and consequently prohibited 'conversion therapies' within their jurisdictions.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps also against this development of mounting pressure through criminalization of 'conversion therapy' in many states that ex-gay activists turned to human rights narratives to defend their practices. In Korea, ex-gay activists hold their own 'human rights forums' with 'expert' lectures and self-declared ex-gays (and ex-lesbians and ex-transgender people) who testify their experiences. The term 'human rights' figures prominently already in the name of these events, which also stretch transnationally. Ex-gay activists from outside Korea are commonly invited to such forums.

A frequently used frame in the context of demanding human rights of ex-gays is that, as a minority themselves, they deserve non-discriminatory treatment. At an event against the Seoul Human Rights Charter in 2014, the participating ex-gay and anti-LGBT groups published a press statement which reads like this: "Seoul City must first and foremost protect the human rights of ex-gays who are more of a minority than homosexuals" (cited in Yu, Yōng-dae 2014, November 28). By claiming the minority status for themselves, ex-gay activists thus contradict the mainstream movement's strategy of emphasizing the rights and opinions of the majority. Besides this frame dispute, ex-gay activists also engage in counterframing, claiming that they themselves are victims of hate, especially emanating from pro-LGBT rights groups, and that they, therefore, need to fight for their very own human rights as ex-gay individuals (Yu, Yōng-dae 2015, March 24). In this context, they also directly attack pro-LGBT activists like in the following press statement.

If the organizers of the homosexual queer festival [sic!] are truly in favor of the human rights for homosexuals, they should not turn a blind eye to the cry of ex-gays. They should immediately stop anti-social acts that wrap up their sexual depravity as human rights and that lead young people in our society to such sexual depravity. (Cited in Yu, Yōng-dae 2016, April 21)

Part of the fight for ex-gay human rights is to also promote legal changes. At the first installment of the 'Ex-Gay Human Rights Forum' in 2014, Lee Jonah stated that is a pity

4 Germany, for example, introduced a nationwide ban on 'conversion therapy' in 2020, however, only for minors until the age of 18, but including a prohibition of advertising for such practices. The bill also forbids 'conversion therapy' for adults in case they did not freely decide to undergo such a 'treatment' (Deutscher Bundestag 2020).

that Korean churches only dealt with homosexuality in terms of condemnation rather than concentrating on ex-gay pastoral. Therefore, he and his allies formed the *Ex-Gay Human Rights Christian Association*, an organization that has the goal of fighting for ex-gay human rights and preparing an “ex-gay human rights law” (cited in Yu, Yong-dae 2014, November 20). Such a law, however, has failed to materialize in Korean politics so far.

It is perhaps also owing to the absence of political success in Korea that the ex-gay movement turned from the domestic turf towards the transnational and international arenas. In June 2015, Korean ex-gay groups held a meeting together with ex-gay activists from ten other countries to prepare the foundation of the *Ex-Gay International Alliance*. In their foundation statement, these actors again emphasize the minority status of ex-gays and argue that “their human rights are not properly protected by the United Nations and other countries and societies, and are being violated under the pretext of protecting the human rights of sexual minorities” (cited in Yu, Yong-dae 2015, June 29). Essentially, ex-gay groups accuse the UN of hypocrisy and double standards when espousing the human rights of one group, but ignoring or even dismissing the rights of others. In 2016, Korean ex-gay groups traveled to Europe to advocate for ex-gay human rights at the European Union in Brussels and at the United Nations in Geneva. According to the Kukmin Daily reports, they held small protests in front of EU and UN buildings, praying and holding a banner that reads “The United Nations! Protect the Ex-Homosexual Human Rights!”. They did not speak with officials from these organizations, but presented a declaration for the protection of ex-gay rights, which they also distributed to international media (Yu, Yong-dae 2016, October 26; Yu, Yong-dae 2016, October 27). A Google search, however, reveals that the trip to Europe of these Korean ex-gay groups did not get wide media attention except for the reports in Kukmin Daily. In 2018, Korean ex-gay activists again went to Switzerland, submitting the “Forth Declaration for Ex-Gay Human Rights” to the *United Nations Commission on Human Rights*. In the declaration, ex-gays are presented as victims in need of protection, emulating frames that are normally used by pro-LGBT groups, to which they negatively refer:

[..] homosexuals who have disconnected from their homosexuality suffer from all sorts of verbal abuse, accusations, and even death threats by pro-homosexual actors. Also, in some countries, laws are being implemented that require people to pay high fines or go to jail if they claim to be ex-gay or support ex-gays. The human rights of ex-homosexuals are being ignored all over the world today. As a result, ex-gays and their families suffer greatly and their hearts get injured. We hereby declare that we will take the lead in the protection of the human rights of ex-gays and of those who are struggling to escape homosexuality. (Yu, Yong-dae 2018, November 10)

Aside from using self-victimization frames – arguably more credibly than the mainstream anti-LGBT movement because such criminalizing laws do in fact exist in some countries and regional entities – ex-gay activists from Korea here demonstrate that they go to great lengths in the fight for the protection of ex-gay human rights – while at the same time withholding information on the harmful effects conversion treatments can involve. Their commitment reaches to international and transnational arenas. Within the whole spectrum of anti-LGBT activism in Korea, the ex-gay groups around Lee Jonah can

be called the most active ones in transnationalizing the movement. What we can observe in this concrete case of claiming ex-gay human rights with international organizations is the mechanism of *externalization* (della Porta & Tarrow 2005; Keck & Sikkink 1998). Korean ex-gay groups encourage external actors to get involved in domestic conflicts. However, they have not been able to attain concrete success with this strategy – at least when the resonance from the international organizations addressed is concerned. Rather to the contrary, UN bodies tend to condemn practices such as ‘conversion therapy’. In 2020, the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* issued a report written by an independent expert who called for a global ban for such practices. The Office’s accompanying press release summarizes the reasons for demanding such a ban, quoting the expert Victor Madrigal-Borloz: “conversion therapy’ practices have been consistently debunked by the scientific community and have been repeatedly linked to long-term harm to the physical and mental health of LGBT persons” (OHCHR 2020).

Be that as it may, I argue that these transnationalizing efforts of the ex-gay groups are not futile. The ex-gay groups have not been able to score concrete returns in their attempts at receiving support from international organizations. Yet, it is quite possible that this was not their goal or expectation in the first place. Rather, the fact that Korean ex-gay activists travel all the way to Europe and try to build transnational networks testifies their volition to fight for ex-gay human rights – giving the whole narrative on ‘ex-gay human rights’ more credibility. These actions legitimize the framing of ex-gays as subjects in need of human rights, human rights being a topic that has become increasingly important in international politics. In addition, building alliances with foreign ex-gay activists fulfills the function of creating the image of a global problem that is not limited to Korea. The target audience, however, remains Korean. The images created and the statements given in international contexts serve the purpose of convincing people in Korea to join the fight for ex-gay human rights. It is questionable, though, whether Korean audiences outside the established church base let themselves be won over that easily. The inconsistencies and animosities that emerge in the framing contests analyzed in this section may cast doubt among the publics addressed.

### Emerging animosities and inconsistencies

The framing contests demonstrated above reveal three main cleavages. The obvious one exists between the pro and anti-LGBT movement’s dealings with human rights. The anti-LGBT movement adopts human rights frames from pro-LGBT actors, but changes their content according to their interest, mostly by engaging in a kind of counterframing that devalues the whole concept of human rights. The second rift is between pro-LGBT actors and the ex-gay movement, with the latter arguing they want to ‘help’ queer people whereas the former focus attention on the harmful effects of practices like ‘conversion therapy’. The third, and most surprising example of opposing desires can be found in the diverging ways ex-gay groups frame human rights. Unlike their mainstream anti-LGBT fellows, they do not discard the concept of human rights as wrong or ‘fake’, but rather actively deploy it for themselves. By claiming minority status and reframing ex-gays as individuals who lack human rights protection, they almost create a one-on-one reproduction or ‘mimicry’ (cf. Dudai 2017) of arguments put forward by pro-LGBT human rights

activists. At the same time, they – unwillingly? – fabricate a frame dispute within the entire anti-LGBT movement. Inconsistencies as well as slight animosities come to the fore.

Borrowing and transforming frames from rival groups holds the potential of perturbing the opponent's arguments, especially when it comes to a general framing strategy as successful as the one around human rights. At the same time, however, counter-framing has the risk of revealing discord and disunity within a movement. Decrying the concept of human rights, but claiming them for oneself all at once does not make sense. The ex-gay groups around Lee Jonah appear to be willing to bear the consequences of their partly diverging forms of activism. For years now, they have been staging a counter-event against the Seoul Queer Culture Festival. This *Holy Festival* has taken place at the same time and in the immediate vicinity of the mainstream anti-LGBT movement's counter-rally. Apparently, ex-gay groups do not disagree with other anti-LGBT actors only over the way human rights should be framed. As the separate *Holy Festival* shows, the rift goes deeper. It remains to be seen whether these opposing desires and inconsistencies have negative implications for the Korean anti-LGBT movement. In any case, it is to be expected that these internal rifts make it easier for pro-LGBT actors to tackle their anti-LGBT opponents by exposing these contradictions. I shall now proceed from framing contests to a different kind of opposing desires within the anti-LGBT movement: radicalized narratives versus alleged moderation.

## 8.2 Opposing desires II: radicalized narratives versus alleged moderation

When the counter-protests against the 2014 Seoul Queer Culture Festival (SQCF) escalated into violence, leaving ten people injured and four anti-LGBT protesters arrested (Kwön & Yi 2014, June 9; Yu, Yōng-dae 2014, June 8), the reactions and media coverage beyond conservative Christian newspapers was rather negative for the anti-LGBT movement. Pro-LGBT activists and other human rights groups harshly criticized the violence emanating from anti-LGBT protesters, as well as the hindrance to exercise their freedom of assembly. Critique also came from within the anti-LGBT movement. Leading organizations of the Protestant Right such as the CCK, CCIK, and the KACC published a press statement ahead of the following year's Seoul Queer Culture Festival, in which they demanded counter-protesters to refrain from violence and overt expressions of hatred. They feared that this could, again, lead to negative news reports and argued that, ultimately, such harsh behavior would only benefit the pro-LGBT movement (cited in Yu, Yōng-dae 2015, June 4). The sustainability of this advice from the anti-LGBT movement leadership turned out to be not that great since violence reappeared in the counter-protests against the *Inch'ōn Queer Culture Festival* in 2018 (Yi, Yu-jin 2018, September 11).

Be that as it may, the movement leadership seems to be very intent on avoiding the image of malign, hateful, and violent anti-LGBT protests. On some level, they wish to appear moderate, as representatives of common sense, of majoritarian attitudes as against allegedly 'extreme' demands and displays by pro-LGBT groups. Several aspects that I have illustrated in previous parts of this study contribute to this intended favorable impression. The hollow assertion of being in favor of human rights for LGBT people is one ex-

ample. Another is the emphasis on 'love' in many instances, for example, when anti-LGBT protestors claim that they oppose homosexuality out of love for homosexuals. The 2019 counter-rally against the SQCF was entitled 'Love is Plus Festival'. Judging only from the sophisticated design of the main stage which featured the same love-related motto, one could not tell that this 'festival' was actually directed against LGBT rights. The event even exhibited a professionally produced protest song with the title 'Love is plus'. The concept of 'love' expressed at the counter-rally, however, was of course a restrictive and heteronormative one. The stage design highlighted the love between one man and one woman, as well as the love parents have for their children.

It becomes apparent that the anti-LGBT movement makes a lot of efforts to pretend to be more benevolent and moderate than they actually are. The impression they want to construct is one of anti-LGBT groups as caring and thoughtful actors who have in mind the best interest of church members, of Koreans in general, even including LGBT individuals. This is also why there are some church groups that seem to be unwelcome at the large counter-rally with its festival-like character. Many church groups and explicit anti-LGBT organizations have booths on the area of the counter-event, which is situated just across the street from the SQCF. The SQCF has been taking place on Seoul Plaza, a central square in front of Seoul city hall, since 2015. Other church groups, however, have their smaller stages elsewhere around Seoul Plaza, disseminating more explicit and radical anti-LGBT messages. At my participant observation of the protests against the SQCF on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019, I was able to capture several such examples. One stage came up with young children wearing military uniforms and boasting posters akin to the 'love' frame: "I was born because mom and dad love each other." Other posters featured far more radical messages, though. "Exterminate homosexuality! Eradicate homosexuality! For a clean Korea. Hallelujah." Or: "Homosexuality is the worst. God's judgment!" Interestingly, messages of an explicitly religious nature were to be seen and heard more outside the main counter-rally's area. People on another smaller stage on the opposite side of Seoul Plaza held up posters reading "Homosexuality is sin! Return to Jesus!" Posters, flags, sashes, and banners that people flaunted at the main rally had more 'neutral' contents such as "Against homosexuality" (*tongsōngae pandae*), "Marriage is between one man and one woman" or "Prevent the bad influence of homosexuality!" These materials were all preproduced, had a common design, and were distributed to the participants in the course of the counter-rally. While the vast majority of participants at the main rally can be expected to be Christians,<sup>5</sup> this avoidance of religious framing seems odd at first glance. However, the preparatory committee of this counter-rally consciously decided to organize it "without a Christian undertone" as a Kukmin Daily report reveals (Paek, Sang-hyōn 2019, April 26). I argue that the leadership of the anti-LGBT movement chose to go for less radical and less 'Christian' imagery at this event in order to be compatible and resonate with the general public beyond their traditionally strong Protestant support base.

5 I conducted a small survey of the participants at the counter-rally (cf. chapter 9), which also has an item on religious affiliation. All of the 26 randomly chosen interviewees stated that they belonged to a Christian church. Out of these 26, 17 claimed to attend religious services more than once a week. Two interviewees said they attended church service every day. These results suggest that the majority of participants were of Christian faith, and at that, very active members of their churches.

Of all anti-LGBT events over the years, the counter-rallies against the SQCF can be assumed to get the most attention. Against this background, too radical or extreme positions would rather deter potential future adherents and supporters. The context of every protest event, as well as the public addressed, therefore do matter greatly in the way a movement presents itself and frames its issues.

While the leadership of the mainstream anti-LGBT movement is mostly concerned with its public image, others prefer to remain true to themselves and even pride themselves in boasting extreme and fundamentalist messages. This does not mean that the leadership holds different, actually moderate positions. Rather to the contrary, I argue that they in fact fully agree with such radical positions. The only real difference is that they care more about the ‘marketability’ of the movement. This is, however, again a blatant inconsistency within the anti-LGBT movement – just like the discord with the ex-gay groups around Pastor Lee Jonah analyzed above. The inconsistencies become even greater when taking a look at the overall tendency of increasingly using radical rhetoric. The intended appearance of moderation and temperance clash with framings that invoke alleged ruin, decay, and oppression.

I have already demonstrated large parts of this symbolic framing of the anti-LGBT movement in other parts of this study. A short recapitulation: activists deliberately create the threat of churches, families, and the whole nation being destroyed by leftist LGBT ideology and pro-LGBT legislation. To symbolically substantiate these claims, they use strong vocabulary such as “destruction”, “collapse”, “harm”, “corruption”, “decadence”, and “running out of control”. They invoke “chaos”, “distortion”, “confusion”, “crisis”, and attribute manifold negative adjectives to anything queer, like “evil”, “toxic”, “obscene”, “perverse”, “dirty”, “impure”, and describe homosexuality as “social cancer”, as a “poisonous mushroom”, and a “ruse by Satan”. Queer Culture Festivals are depicted as “panties festival”, “naked body parade”, and “gay porn festival”.<sup>6</sup> Many of these symbolic frames are among the frames most used by the anti-LGBT movement (cf. Table 7). The function of using such extreme rhetoric is, as I have analyzed before, to instill people with indignation and outrage, to create fear and anxieties, and to vilify LGBT individuals as dangerous ‘others’ unworthy of equal treatment.

It is not surprising that anti-LGBT activists use such drastic frames. The point I want to make here is, rather, that it is hard to harmonize the juxtaposition of purported moderation of rhetoric and action forms on the one hand, and their radicalization on the other. One would expect that these opposing desires within the movement should be negotiated and resolved internally to guarantee external consistency. But this does not seem to materialize, at least not successfully. I argue, however, that these diverging strategies do not necessarily entail negative effects. Rather, the anti-LGBT movement displays adaptability, a capacity of dynamically accommodating different desires. The differing degrees of radicalness do not only show up between the above-mentioned groups. From event to event, from speaker to speaker, the ways anti-LGBT issues are framed vary significantly, supposedly according to the public addressed. Longstanding

6 For the sake of clarity, I refrain from providing sources for each of these quotes, also because most of the terms used appear several times. The PEA dataset offers more information and the corresponding protest events.

supporters of the movement as well as members of churches that are part of the Protestant Right can be expected to be more open to radical and explicitly religious framings. The general public, in contrast, has to be approached differently. If such a custom-made framing strategy proves successful must be doubted, though. As I have already mentioned above, the attendees of the counter-rally were for the most part, if not entirely Christians. The effects on people who only read reports about the counter-rally remain of course unclear. It is therefore to be expected that the anti-LGBT movement principally reaches and finds resonance with its traditional, conservative Protestant adherents – despite the efforts to create a more ‘neutral’ image at some protest events.<sup>7</sup>

### **Framing anti-LGBT collective action as a war against ‘homosexual dictatorship’**

It is perhaps also due to the absent success with people outside the traditional support base that anti-LGBT activists increasingly turn to extreme accusations and aggressive rhetoric, hoping to win over new supporters this way. Let me present two examples to illustrate this: the usage of war-related terms, and the reproach of ‘dictatorial’ and ‘totalitarian’ tendencies charged against pro-LGBT actors. The usage of warfare metaphors is not specific to the Korean anti-LGBT movement or the Protestant Right. In fact, war-related vocabulary is ubiquitous in diverse areas of public discourse, be it the ‘war on terror’, ‘battles with cancer’, or ‘wars against poverty’ to name a few examples. Flusberg et al. (2018, 1) argue that they are commonly used because they refer to widely shared knowledge and “they reliably express an urgent, negatively valenced emotional tone that captures attention and motivates action.” Particularly in South Korea – a country that is still officially at war with its Northern neighbor – war metaphors can be expected to be both generally intelligible and to instill people with fear.

Anti-LGBT activists present LGBT people and their allies as opponents in a war such as in the following statement: “The homosexual war is covering the political, educational, cultural and medical sectors, and has already become a global issue, so we need to be alert” (cited in Paek, Sang-hyon 2015, October 8). This ‘war’ does not just emanate from the pro-LGBT camp. Korean churches are also depicted as being involved, or motivated to actively take part in battles that are commonly framed as ‘spiritual’. A speaker at an event on the role of churches in the fight against homosexuality, for example, said that “[t]he Korean church must come to its senses in the spiritual battle” (cited in Kim, Na-rae 2018, June 4). For him, this spiritual battle is related to fighting against gender mainstreaming as well as “the Marxist communist ideology behind homosexuality”. The symbolic ‘war’ frames are closely related to the fight against Cultural Marxism. This ‘cultural war’ has been omnipresent in recent years, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters. The ‘cultural war’ is both seen as a battle against foreign influences and interferences (i.e., from foreign cultures), and as a fight against what is framed as harmful Marxist and LGBT cultures. A 2016 press statement issued by the KACC exemplifies this view: “The fact that many US and European ambassadors participated in Korea’s queer festival and exercised

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 8.3 will present similar results in relation to the seemingly opposing framing strategies of using religious frames on the one hand, but also ‘secular’ frames, e.g., relating alleged scientific facts on the other hand.

national pressure shows that Korea is becoming a battleground of the global cultural war" (KACC 2016, October 14). This cultural war takes place on the level of ideology, values, and beliefs – or, as Gramsci would call it, using a war metaphor himself: a 'war of position' to change common sense and, ultimately, achieve cultural hegemony.

On the part of the anti-LGBT movement, this cultural war includes associating pro-LGBT politics with far-reaching accusations. Activists frequently frame activism in favor of LGBT rights as threatening freedom rights and even democracy as a whole. They assert, as I have already shown in previous parts of this study, that religious freedom and freedom of speech are at risk should LGBT rights be introduced. They go even farther in their fearmongering, claiming that Korea is in danger of falling back into "dictatorship", "totalitarianism", and "tyranny" owing to 'LGBT ideology'. In a statement directed against the introduction of human rights ordinances, the Protestant associations of all 17 Korean provinces and cities explicate this strong reproach.

As the attitude of the law, which had a balance between conflicting values, turns to protecting one-sided values, it results in the unjust suppression of the freedom of the other side. Demanding that one must not criticize or oppose homosexuality is equivalent to past Nazi, fascist, and proletarian dictatorship laws that have abused freedom by suppressing all opposition expressions in the name of the law. The attempt to enact enforcement rules [for human rights ordinances] should be withdrawn and scrapped immediately. (Yu, Yong-dae 2017, March 7)

Anti-LGBT actors started using such far-fetched accusations in 2012. The usage increased in 2018–2019, especially in contexts in which they feared (or rather: created the fear) that freedom rights would be restricted. The KACC has been particularly keen on drawing connections between pro-LGBT bills and alleged dictatorship-like side effects. In 2012, the KACC issued a press statement lambasting the *Student Human Rights Ordinance* planned by the Seoul city government. "The Student Human Rights Ordinance should neither be a goal for political gain nor be considered a panacea for education. Moreover, it is the product of dictatorship for 'human rights advocates' to monitor schools and teachers" (KACC 2012, May 11). The subtext of this statement is the critique that left-leaning political elites try to impose their ideology upon people 'under the guise' of human rights, and that such ideology would now also find its way into the educational system. Be it teachers, Protestant pastors, or conservative-minded people, the 'dictatorial scare' that anti-LGBT activists strive to create is always about the fear that people get punished when stating 'sound' criticism against homosexuality and related topics.

Invectives of a similar kind have been launched against several law proposals, ordinances, and guidelines in favor of LGBT rights. But also state institutions and private organizations come under fire for supporting LGBT rights. The NHRCK is, as so often, a target in this context, with anti-LGBT activists arguing that the human rights watchdog is paving the way for dictatorship. At a rally against the NHRCK, a host addressed the 150 participants like this: "The National Human Rights Commission of Korea is muzzling those who oppose homosexuality in the name of hate and discrimination. [...] This is a dictatorship to block criticism of homosexuality" (cited in Im, Po-hyök 2019, April 24).

Similar criticism was launched against *Newsnjoy*, a rather progressive Christian online newspaper. Like the daily newspaper *Hankyoreh*, *Newsnjoy* had been reproaching anti-LGBT activists of producing fake news. The anti-LGBT movement, in turn, accuses *Newsnjoy* of using the “fake news frame” because of ideological dissent. One activist said the following at a press conference that also demanded to defund *Newsnjoy*. “If our society stigmatized others for having different opinions like *Newsnjoy* is doing, we will eventually end up in a totalitarian society” (cited in Paek, Sang-hyon 2018, December 27). It is telling that anti-LGBT activists often retaliate ‘fake news’ accusations by either reproaching the opponents of producing wrong information themselves, or by resorting to harsh defamations. It seems that, in most cases, they indeed cannot prove the verisimilitude of their own claims. What is more, the freedom of speech argument gets strained significantly here. It is questionable whether you can call something an opinion when this ‘opinion’ has the potential of debasing and harming people. This notwithstanding, the anti-LGBT movement extends this argument also to the academic sphere, where they see scientific freedom in jeopardy. For example, the KACC criticized Seoul National University, Korea’s most prestigious university, for planning to introduce a human rights guideline, suggesting that the fact that sexual minorities are also mentioned would thwart any expressions of disapproval against homosexuality. In this context, the KACC proposes the following analysis.

This is essentially the same as the laws of Nazi fascism or proletarian dictatorship, where any voice of opposition was suppressed and freedom violated in the name of the law. In other words, it can be said that the university’s human rights guidelines contain the essence of ‘homosexual fascism’ and ‘homosexual dictatorship’. (KACC 2016, October 6)

Likening certain good practices of human rights protection to activities of political regimes that afflicted millions of people with suffering and death is a daring framing strategy. Admittedly, the anti-LGBT movement derives its accusations mainly from the correct historical observation that the German Nazi regime, as well as fascist and communist governments worldwide have heavily limited people’s freedom rights in the past. However, when considering all implications of such far-fetched comparisons several contradictions leap to the eye. On the one hand, the attempt to transform the meaning of terms describing abhorrent political regimes so that they also serve to vilify LGBT individuals and their allies may have certain benefits. The abominations committed by these regimes are known to an extent that they can be expected to provoke immediate rejection with large parts of the audience. The aim is to depict homosexuality and transsexuality more shockingly than already done before to create a sense of urgency. Furthermore, older South Koreans have experienced authoritarian military regimes themselves so that they might react sensitively whenever such threats are raised. The historical horrors of communist regimes are well known anyways (cf. chapter 7.4). Therefore, anti-LGBT activists may expect that this framing resonates well with the general public.

However, this counterframing strategy could also backfire, again, owing to inconsistencies and the sheer overstatement. It is absurd when anti-LGBT groups like *People’s Solidarity for a Healthy Society* (2017) refer to homosexuals as “Nazis” and use invented

terms such as “gaystapo” (*keisut’ap'o*; the ‘Gestapo’ was the secret police of Nazi Germany), since homosexuals themselves have fallen victim to Nazism and fascism (Schwartz 2014). What the Korean anti-LGBT movement is doing here is a deliberate inversion of victims and perpetrators. They completely disregard other aspects of these authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, such as the systematic discrimination against, the persecution, and killing of certain groups of people because of their ethnic origin, religious affiliation, political attitudes, sexual orientation, or gender identity. And it is the anti-LGBT movement which indirectly succeeds such horrendous and tragic wrongdoings – on a different level, of course, but certainly also very damaging. The activists may get away with the lack of historical consistency, for many Koreans might not be familiar with the historical details. But still, bystanders can be expected to be deterred rather than convinced by such exaggerated allegations. People may come to think that such unsettling accusations are in fact proof of a self-radicalizing movement and turn their backs on them. Pro-LGBT activists, in turn, can also use such examples as evidence for the nonsensical and extreme positions held by actors from the Protestant Right and disclose blatant contradictions. One such contradiction is the relationship between the Protestant Right and past political regimes in Korea. As I have elaborated before, it is actually them who have the legacy of cooperation with ideologically rightist authoritarian governments in the past.

This study does not have the means to analyze the actual individual-level effects of this two-pronged framing strategy, which oscillates between alleged moderation and radicalized rhetoric. It is certainly a continuous balancing act for anti-LGBT activists in general, and for the movement leadership in particular. The opposing desires within the framing strategy of the anti-LGBT movement do not stop here, though. The next and final part of this chapter will deal with the way the movement juggles with religious and secular framings.

### 8.3 Opposing desires III: religious versus secular framing strategies

Religion plays an important role as the social movement basis of the Korean anti-LGBT movement. Christian faith and the Protestant Right as a loose organizational structure serve as resources for identity formation, mobilization, and as a ‘toolkit’ for constructing frames. As I have established in chapter 7.3, the anti-LGBT movement uses different framing strategies depending on which kind of public it wishes to persuade and win over. In this process of identity formation, one can expect that explicitly religious frames are suitable for conservative Christian audiences, whereas non-Christian publics need to be convinced by proffering another kind of framing. Displaying overly religious arguments and action forms may even deter and discourage potential adherents from considering the movement’s messages and joining their ranks. While religious and ‘secular’ (such as scientific) arguments do not necessarily contradict each other, there is still the risk of eventually only reaching one’s traditional support base. The previous subchapters have already touched upon similar intricacies and resulting opposing desires within the movement. This section briefly recapitulates religious and secular framing strategies and concludes that the Korean anti-LGBT movement does not succeed in concealing its Christian foundation – a strategy that the movement leadership has been pursuing

as demonstrated before. I argue, however, that the movement does not require such a concealment. They may not succeed in mobilizing many people outside the confines of Christianity, but it is exactly this Christianity, its organizational, human, and relational resources that have laid the fundament for the ‘accomplishments’ of the anti-LGBT movement so far. Even if assuming that both religious and secular frames mostly served to consolidate the conservative Protestant constituency and to re-create and reinvigorate their self-conception in the direction of henceforth harboring anti-LGBT attitudes, this development of a loyal following is crucial for movement success.

### ‘Christian’ frames against homosexuality

When it comes to framing strategies, Christian faith can serve as a symbolic resource (cf. Kniss & Burns 2004, 701). Gramsci claims that religious worldviews have the potential of being a significant hegemonic power, along with the structures that religious organizations provide (Gramsci 1971, 382; cf. also Forlenza 2019, 4). This potential is primarily situated on the ideological level. Christian doctrines, values, and beliefs provide orientation, first and foremost, in the area of ethics and morality. Morals play an important role in the religious framing of the anti-LGBT movement. Activists refer to homosexual acts as sinful behavior, a claim they base on fundamentalist, that is, literal interpretations of the Bible. A common religious argument is that homosexuality and same-sex marriage are against God’s creation order, which is interpreted as including only two distinct sexes – male and female – that are destined for each other. Sexual acts are only seen as legitimate when performed in heterosexual marriage. Homosexuality is presented as something acquired by sinful people, an immoral behavior that one has to overcome. To undergird these views, anti-LGBT actors frequently quote or allude to Biblical texts that, according to literal or conservative interpretations, condemn same-sex acts. The Presbyterian *Tonghap* denomination, for example, issued a general statement against homosexuality in April 2014, listing several Bible passages that they regard as supporting evidence for their rejection of homosexuality.

We believe that the Bible teaches that homosexuality is one of the sinful phenomena of fallen humans, contrary to the will of the holy God, and that is the result of unclean motives and learning (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Timothy 1:9–10). (Cited in Kim Tong-yöp 2014, April 9)

Such lists frequently appear in statements issued by anti-LGBT actors. Interestingly, it seems to suffice to just mention these Bible passages without providing further theological insight or exegesis. One could say that the sinfulness of homosexuality is so obvious from a conservative Christian point of view that it does not need further explanation. Some activists do include more concrete references in their statements, such as on the notorious Sodom and Gomorrah story. However, both the actors just alluding to Bible passages as well as those going a bit more into detail follow strictly literal interpretations of the scripture. They withhold the fact that other interpretations exist, for instance from

a historical-critical perspective, and explicitly position themselves in opposition to liberal theological approaches, which they often denounce as heretical (cf. chapter 12).<sup>8</sup>

Framings in the hermeneutical tradition of literalism claim that interpretations and doctrines condemning homosexuality are the only true and legitimate way of theologically and pastorally dealing with homosexuality. They have a clear orientation towards the internal workings of churches. Yet they also point towards the effects that sinful behavior can allegedly have on societal areas outside the Christian realm. Early on, in 2001, another Presbyterian denomination in Korea, *Hapdong*, interpreted the acceptance of, and socio-political support for homosexuality as signs of an increasingly unbelieving society losing its ethical foundation. The *Hapdong* leadership demanded that churches fight against such developments (cited in Ko Se-uk 2001, October 9). In a similar way, Protestant church leaders create the threat that homosexuality is not only a violation of Biblical 'truths', but that it also entails dangers for the rest of society. "The Korean church can never tolerate homosexuality, which destroys God's creation order and drives the world into conflict and chaos" (cited in Kim, Mu-jöng 2015, November 2). "Conflict and chaos" that is allegedly caused by LGBT issues are thus not only regarded as problematic for churches internally, but for society as a whole. It is in this manner that Protestant anti-LGBT activists vindicate their activism against the rights of homosexual people. On top of this, they even attempt to justify outright discrimination by referring to the Bible as in the following statement made at a conference on the problems of homosexuality.

It is not Biblical to compare homosexuals to slaves and blacks. [...] It is because homosexuality, unlike slavery, as well as discrimination against blacks, women, and people of other races, regional backgrounds, and cultures, is not based on the creation order, but on human sin. The rights of people should be asserted according to God's law. (Cited in Kim, A-yöng 2015, November 30)

Basically, homosexuals are presented as people without rights due to their sinfulness. Even their mere existence is questioned, for it is claimed that they are not part of the creation order. Besides essentially excluding and outlawing homosexual people, another noteworthy aspect becomes manifest in this quote. That is, the view that religious laws

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8 The historical-critical method of Bible exegesis transcends merely literal interpretations by also including into the analysis perspectives on the temporal and local circumstances at which Biblical texts were written, and critically considering ways of translation and usages of terminology, as well as questioning common, allegedly obvious interpretations of Christian scriptures. In the course of such historical-critical endeavors, many theology scholars have come to interpret the Bible as a work that is, after all, not so clear in its condemnation of homosexuality or homosexual sexual acts. To give one example, liberal theologians interpret the well-known Bible passage on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–28) as a story showing God's strong disapproval of inhospitable behavior and sexual violence, rather than being a condemnation of same-sex acts between men. Recent theological schools of thought such as *Queer Theology* have substantiated such claims and started interpreting Bible passages using the method of 'queer reading', going also beyond the Biblical texts commonly cited as allegedly treating same-sex behavior (cf. e.g., *The Queer Bible Commentary*, edited by Mona West and Robert E. Shore-Goss 2022; for liberal Bible hermeneutics on homosexuality, see e.g., Badini Confalonieri et al. 2021; Gagnon 2001).

should be superior to secular legislation. In the fight against LGBT rights, a larger religio-political and religio-juridical agenda of the Protestant Right comes to the fore.

As demonstrated in the previous section, however, the anti-LGBT movement is intent on not showing too much hostility, since this would, in the long run, delegitimize their actions. Especially from a Christian point of view, one would expect compassion and forbearance from activists with a Protestant background. In fact, anti-LGBT activists do not only use 'Christian' frames to criticize allegedly immoral behavior or existences. As explicated in the previous section, they also show a certain degree of tainted benevolence towards LGBT people. The opposing desires of on the one hand strictly rejecting 'sinfulness' but on the other hand also showing mercy, can be expected to be particularly pervasive in Christian communities. Dawne Moon (2014) has shown in her study that the strategy of 'hating the sin, but loving the sinner' is a common approach of conservative, yet moderate Christians. As I have demonstrated before, however, it is questionable whether the mainstream anti-LGBT movement actually abides by its claims of 'loving homosexuals'. The majority of its activism is, rather, characterized by more or less overt hostilities directed towards LGBT people and their supporters. Be that as it may, activists frequently use this kind of framing – also combined with an explicitly 'Christian' focus. At an event kickstarting a campaign to evangelize gays and lesbians supported by Lee Jonah's 'ex-gay' groups (cf. chapter 8.1), for example, the chairman of the *Busan Holy City Movement* made the following statement: "Homosexuality should be hated, but homosexuals should be loved. Saving homosexuals through the gospel is the most active way for the Korean church to deal with homosexuality" (cited in Yu, yōng-dae 2017, October 20). The Korean Methodist Church issued a similar statement when it established a 'Homosexuality Task Force' in 2017: "The purpose of the committee is not to hate and condemn homosexuals, but to serve them with the love of the Lord so that they can live a Biblically and socially healthy life through enlightenment and repentance" (cited in Sin, Sang-mok 2017, May 29). Denominational leaders and anti-LGBT activists lead themselves and other Christians to believe that they have power over people, that they can 'save' homosexuals through conducting them towards atonement through faith. However, they deliberately disregard the damage potentially inflicted upon LGBT people, their families and friends by such allegedly well-intentioned offers or actions.

The religious framing against LGBT people is mostly of a moralizing kind. Homosexuality is depicted as a sinful practice that people can decide to engage in or not. The scientific fact of homosexuality as a given identity trait of people that cannot be changed through external efforts (Briken et al. 2019) is largely ignored. In general, anti-LGBT activists mostly do not differentiate between homosexual acts and homosexuality as an identity. Anything related to homosexuality is presented as sinful according to an allegedly God-given and Biblically verifiable 'natural order'. This moral framing is exclusionary in essence. The very action of Christian anti-LGBT activists detecting homosexuals as objects to care for, objects to be healed and led towards penance, effectively results in denouncing homosexuals as strange, adverse, and harmful 'others'. Superficial benevolence just serves to disguise the continuing exclusion and defamation of LGBT people and their allies. Moralizing homosexuality – especially when done predominantly from a 'Christian' perspective – can be expected to be less effective with non-Christian publics. In Korea, outside the confines of Christianity, it is the area of heteronormative family

values that could be expected to be most likely amenable to moralizing frames. In fact, anti-LGBT activists frequently create the image of homosexuality threatening families. Korean familism, however, particularly relies on a sense of duty to successfully continue the family lineage rather than being rooted in morality in the strict sense (Chang 2010).<sup>9</sup>

### **Secular frames directed against homosexuality: 'scientific knowledge'**

The anti-LGBT movement is aware of the varying potentials of different framing strategies. In the research interviews conducted for this study, anti-LGBT activists revealed that their framing approaches vary depending on the public targeted (interview 16). One activist, for example, related that the most convincing frames were health issues and accounts that include statistical data, for they are also convincing for non-Christians (interview 7). This study has already treated many of such 'secular' framings like national security, health issues, and the social costs for treating HIV/AIDS patients. I will now concentrate on two aspects of secular argumentation that the anti-LGBT movement uses in addition, and also in contrast to religious framings: alleged scientific 'truths' and legal arguments beyond human rights.

Anti-LGBT activists often refer to scientific research in the context of claims that homosexuality is innate – the 'born this way' argument often used by pro-LGBT activists. In contrast to this, the anti-LGBT movement questions the substance of this claim by mentioning studies that allegedly prove that homosexuality is not hereditary but rather something acquired. Activists also criticize studies of having a pro-LGBT bias like in the following statement:

There is no scientific basis for the claim that homosexuality is an innate sexual orientation, and scientific research supporting this claim has already proven to be the result of unfair sampling and manipulation of figures. Homosexuality is not innate, it is abnormal and immoral, it should be described truthfully that homosexuals get infected with diseases and lead unhappy lives. (Cited in Yu, Yong-dae 2013, July 3)

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9 Wondong Lee's (2021) recent study on "The Shifting Moral Authority of the Conservative Evangelicals' Anti-LGBT Movement in South Korea" focuses on moral justifications that anti-LGBT activists use to oppose LGBT rights. He also cites the Bible and family values as sources for such moral justifications, but also the constitution, scientific research, and national security. I disagree with Lee concerning these three latter categories, which I argue are precisely not used as 'moral' arguments, but rather as secular additions to the framing repertoire in order to also appeal to non-Christians. In political science, there is a growing field of policy studies which focus on 'morality politics' or 'morality policies', i.e., a category of public policies where "at least one advocacy coalition involved has portrayed the issue as one of morality or sin and used moral arguments in its policy advocacy" (Haider-Markel & Meier 1996, 333; cf. also Doan 2014; Mooney 2001). This research approach also commonly deals with the fact that political processes around LGBT rights, sexuality in general, and reproductive rights are particularly frequent targets of moralization (cf. e.g., Knill & Preidel 2015; Doan 2007). This study does not build upon, nor contributes directly to this field, since its focus does not lie on policies (for this aspect, cf. Kim Ol Teun 2021) nor on aspects of morality only. This study is situated in movement studies and aims at providing a broad overview of the framing strategies of the Korean anti-LGBT movement, including, but not exclusively treating aspects of moralization.

Scientific 'knowledge' is, however, only used to the extent that it serves the purpose of the anti-LGBT movement. Certain details and explanations are left out from the explanations as in the above quote. First, the selection of research results presented by anti-LGBT activists can be biased itself. Second, while it is true that in many countries, gay men are more likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), anti-LGBT activists present STDs as a problem of homosexual men only. They withhold the fact that everybody can get infected, for example, with HIV, and by doing so contribute to unscientific disinformation which might put the health of the general public at risk (cf. also chapter 7.2 on alleged health threats). Third, while there is evidence that homosexuals are more often afflicted with mental health problems, anti-LGBT commonly conceal the reasons for this. In many cases, mental health problems of LGBT people are caused by unaccepting or even hostile social environments. One can say that, ultimately, it is the anti-LGBT movement that centrally contributes to "unhappy lives" of LGBT people. Finally, anti-LGBT activists deliberately hide the fact that the 'scientific' research results they refer to represent easily falsifiable minority opinions within the academic community. Similarly questionable arguments in the area of biology, medicine, and psychology are also made with regard to transgender people. It is claimed that trans people 'choose' their sex and that trans – and also intersex people – do not exist since there are only two distinct, genetically determined (cis-gendered) sexes: women and men (cf. e.g., KACC 2012, October 12).

The – factually unscientific – claim that homosexuality is something acquired is often accompanied by allegedly scientific assertions that homosexuals can become heterosexual 'again'. Min Söng-gil, a former psychiatry professor at the prestigious Yonsei University, is a frequent speaker at anti-LGBT events sharing his 'expert' knowledge. At a forum on the problems of homosexuality, he stated that

[...] advocates of homosexuality claim that homosexuality is inherited and that one should overcome prejudice, but this has proven to be scientifically wrong. Some homosexuals naturally change into non-homosexuals as they get older, and some have changed to heterosexuals by Christian faith. (Cited in Paek, Sang-hyön 2015, October 8)

'Experts' such as Min Söng-gil commonly participate in anti-LGBT events with the goal of bestowing scientific legitimacy on the anti-LGBT movement and its claims. Other activists also exploit their alleged 'expert' positions, such as the medical doctor Yöm An-söp and the pharmacist Kim Chi-yön, two very active movement figures. In order to provide these 'experts' with even more credibility, they are often introduced by stating the university they studied at, especially in cases of degrees from renowned universities like Seoul National University or Yonsei University. The anti-LGBT movement also creates organizations that are, *prima facie*, civil and scientific, but that actually still have a religious agenda that they strive to 'rationalize' by superficially disseminating 'scientific facts' on homosexuality. The prime example for this is the *Korean Sexology Research Association* (*Han'guk sōnggwahak yǒn'gu hyōphoe*) (cf. Baek, Jo-yeon 2018).

## Secular frames directed against homosexuality: legal approaches

Along with 'scientific' arguments, another secular area of framing is using legal arguments, which has also been analyzed in two other studies on the Korean anti-LGBT movement (Lee, Won-dong 2021, 100f.; Baek, Jo-yeon 2018, 99–109). I have discerned seven types of frames pertaining to legal reasoning. Five frames claim the illegality or legal incompatibility of proposed bills in the strict sense, claiming that (1) same-sex marriage and other pro-LGBT laws, if introduced, would be unconstitutional, (2) such laws would lead to 'reverse discrimination', (3) ordinances require as a basis a higher law on the national level, (4) previous court decisions are anti-LGBT precedents, and (5) pro-LGBT events are in violation of certain laws. Two further types of frames are situated on the counterfactual and symbolic levels, asserting that (6) a 'legalization' of homosexuality in Korea is still pending although it had never been criminalized on the national level and (7) that the NHRCK Act is the root cause of all 'problems' related to homosexuality.

At the beginning of anti-LGBT activities in the legal arena, however, the Protestant Right still used religious arguments. When, for example, the Supreme Court ruled in 2006 that trans people have the right to change their legal gender in official documents after having undergone sex confirmation surgery, churches reacted by claiming that this court decision would break down God's creation order and that homosexuality was sinful – apparently confusing the latter sexual orientation with transsexuality (cited in Paek, Chae-ch'an & Chi, Ho-il 2006, June 23). Later in the development of anti-LGBT collective action in Korea, activists seem to have realized that religious arguments are not convincing in the areas of law-making and judiciary. Previous research on Christian-based anti-LGBT lobbying also showed that religious actors came to the conclusion that they need to turn to explicitly legal arguments if they want to be taken seriously in the democratic processes of a secular state, for instance, in the case of Catholic efforts against the introduction of civil partnership and same-sex marriage in Germany (Johannemann 2017).

A frequently used legal argument against pro-LGBT legislation is that it would violate the South Korean constitution. Anti-LGBT activists claim that same-sex marriage, for example, must be rejected since it would go against article 36(1) of the constitution: "Marriage and family life shall be entered into and sustained on the basis of individual dignity and equality of the sexes, and the State shall do everything in its power to achieve that goal." The term for 'equality of sexes' is "*yangsōng-üi p'yöngdung*" in the Korean original. The '*yang*' in '*yangsōng*' means 'both' or 'two'. A literal translation would thus be 'both sexes' or 'two sexes', which is why anti-LGBT activists argue that the Korean constitution only allows heterosexual marriage between a woman and a man. It is also for this reason that the anti-LGBT movement opposed a constitutional amendment proposed by the Moon Jae-in government, which wanted to change the term '*yangsōng*' to just '*sōng*' (i.e., 'sexes'), because they feared that this would lead to the recognition of sexual identities beyond the binary heterosexual model and ultimately facilitate the introduction of same-sex marriage.

The proposals for an anti-discrimination law also came under fire from a legal perspective. Activists commonly list several alleged breaches of law, however, often without explaining the exact nature of the violations claimed, as in the following statement by the head of *The Korea Institute of Church Law* (*han'guk kyohoe p'op yönguso*).

The bill in question violates the constitutional principles of liberal democracy and rule of law, and it violates the fundamental rights of physical integrity, freedom of religion, independence of education and the right to health, the marriage and family systems, and the independence of jurisdiction. (Cited in Yu, Yǒng-dae 2013, October 2)

Alternatively, anti-LGBT activists claim that LGBT people are already protected under the anti-discrimination provisions of the constitution or that there is actually no discrimination against LGBT people on the legal level like in other countries where homosexuality is or was criminalized, arguing that therefore, no separate law is necessary (Interview 35).<sup>10</sup> Another common frame in this context is to suggest that if a pro-LGBT law gets introduced, this could result in a 'ripple effect' (cf. Table 7). Activists go as far to claim in a fearmongering way that if pro-LGBT laws get passed, the legalization of incest, sex with animals, and polygamy could ensue. Another fear they create is that of 'reverse discrimination', which has already been analyzed in previous parts of this study. The anti-LGBT movement claims that laws such as the anti-discrimination bill would, in turn, lead to rights violations for Christians, for instance, in terms of their alleged religious freedom to oppose homosexuality.

Referring to the formal level of the Korean legal system, anti-LGBT activists claim that ordinances or charters on the regional or local levels are illegal since they lack a basis in form of a nationwide higher law. Targets of such a criticism have been, for example, (student) human rights ordinances in many provinces and cities, and the Seoul Human Rights Charter. In the absence of a 'mother law', the argument goes, such legal texts are in fact void. An anti-discrimination law on the national level could provide such a basis. This is where we can observe how this particular legal frame interlocks smoothly with the movement's indefatigable activism against this very law. Interestingly, anti-LGBT activists themselves provide arguments that contradict the 'mother law' narrative. *The National Human Rights Commission Act*, which was enacted in 2001, can be described as such a higher law. It is perhaps because of this that this bill has become contentious in recent years, mainly due to the inclusion of the category 'sexual orientation' in its anti-discrimination provisions. Anti-LGBT activists have described the NHRCK Act as the root cause for any 'problems' that have occurred in relation to LGBT rights in Korea: "If you look at the root of the anti-discrimination bill, which is feared to undermine freedom of faith, conscience and expression, there is the National Human Rights Commission of Korea" (Kim Chi-yǒn, cited in Paek, Sang-hyǒn 2017, January 4). After repeated demands by anti-LGBT activists to delete the clause on sexual orientation from the NHRCK Act, 40 members of parliament introduced such a bill into the law-making process in late 2019 (Paek, Sang-hyǒn 2019, November 14), however without yielding legislative success so far.

Another common legal argument is that past court decisions have denied the extension of rights to LGBT persons. Important rulings in this context are those of the Korean Supreme and Constitutional Courts, which repeatedly upheld the criminalization

<sup>10</sup> As I have elaborated before, contrary to this latter claim, concrete discrimination, or to be precise, criminalization of homosexuality does exist in Korean law, namely article 96(2) of the *Military Criminal Code*. For more details, cf. footnotes 12 and 13 in chapter 5.2.

of same-sex acts between soldiers in the Korea military as stipulated in Military Criminal Law article 92(6). Anti-LGBT activists often cite a 2008 Supreme Court ruling in this context, which describes homosexual acts as acts that “objectively cause aversion in the general public and go against the good sense of sexual morality” and “violate the healthy life and discipline of the military community” (Supreme Court of Korea 2008, ruling 2222). This passage is used to lend legal credence to their fight against LGBT rights. Despite this discouraging legal precedents, pro-LGBT activists continue their legal battles against this overt discrimination of gay soldiers in Korea. In fact, a recent ruling of the Supreme Court in April 2022 hints at a slightly changing legal assessment in this respect. The judges declared the conviction of two gay soldiers void, explaining that consensual same-sex acts outside the barracks were not to be persecuted by the provisions of the Military Criminal Law (Choe, Sang-Hun 2022, April 21).

The usage of the term ‘legalization’ (*happōphwa* or *pōpchehwā*) is another legal, yet peculiar framing. Anti-LGBT activists often describe the passing of pro-LGBT bills as a “legalization of homosexuality”. I argue that they do this deliberately to construct the reverse – and incorrect – image that homosexuality is not a legal conduct in South Korea. Presently, only the Military Criminal Law forbids same-sex acts, but there has never been a similar criminalization law at the national level. Alternatively, it may be that activists wish to problematize the actual act of creating a law with pro-LGBT content. This, however, has already taken place with the passing of the NHRCK Act in 2001, and several human rights ordinances in the following years. Therefore, it is more probable that this framing strategy aims at misleading the public (cf. also Interview 35).

The final type of legal framing of the anti-LGBT movement is arguing that the activities of pro-LGBT actors or of whole pro-LGBT events are in violation of existing laws. The Seoul Queer Culture Festival is faced with such accusations ever since it has taken place on Seoul Plaza, a central square in the center of the capital city. Anti-LGBT activists employ the *Seoul Plaza Ordinance* to argue against the queer event. The ordinance stipulates that the space can only be used for “citizens’ healthy leisure usage and cultural activities”, which the anti-LGBT movement claims is not the case for the SQCF (cited in Yu, Yong-dae 2015, April 6). The opponents of the SQCF denounce “obscene” displays of nudity in a public place, which they judge unfit and ‘unhealthy’ for families and children. They decried that participants of the SQCF drank alcohol and that some booths sold food in violation of the ordinance. The anti-LGBT movement also supported filing a lawsuit against the allegedly unlawful usage of Seoul Plaza by the LGBT community (Yu, Yong-dae 2016, June 5) – however, to no avail.

I argue that by framing issues through the lens of legality – as well as through taking a ‘scientific’ perspective – the anti-LGBT movement intends to address people that are difficult to reach with religiously inspired frames. One anti-LGBT interviewee confirmed this analysis, mentioning that a long-term goal and strategy of the movement was to have Christian lawyers fight in the area of law (Interview 23). At the same time, this framing strategy serves to present the movement as a serious and firm defender of the rule of law and of the constitution as against pro-LGBT activists who they depict as obscene lawbreakers disloyal to the legal foundations of Korea. The subtext of the movement’s legal framing is yet another kind of othering, of allegedly protecting law-abidance and order versus alleged attempts at creating disorder. This disorder is, purportedly, cre-

ated by people that the anti-LGBT movement effectively declares outlaws, for example when asserting the illegality of homosexuality. This framing strategy may act as a counterbalance to human rights claims by pro-LGBT activists. Human rights for LGBT people are described as incompatible with the Korean legal system. More importantly, however, anti-LGBT activists pit LGBT rights against rights of the majority, creating the fear of 'reverse discrimination' and 'ripple effects', which are claimed would eventually undermine freedom rights and contribute to an ever greater legal and social disarray. In this way, the Protestant Right presents its anti-LGBT activism in a proper light, a light that is also designed to increase the resonance of its overall framing beyond the presumably limited effectiveness of religious arguments.

