

LesStickers-te

LesStickers-teadores is a creative collective made up of visual artists, designers, and communicators who generate downloadable copyleft graphic content. The collective is focused on making visible the diversity of the big family that is Cuba, and was part of the broad independent activist campaign that arose to challenge the new Code of Families, which was voted on in a referendum in 2022. They were born in a Telegram group of the 11M Platform, a space created by the LGTBQ+ civil society, which organized to defend their rights. The collective chose stickers as a visual resource in response to the campaigns that religious and fundamentalist groups launched on social networks and public spaces across the country against the rights of LGTBQ+ people. In the face of hatred, intolerance, and misinformation, LesStickers-teadores responds with art. A network was then created to design, produce, manage, and distribute free stickers with messages defending rights in those spaces.

The plot

In 2018, a draft of the new constitution was created and submitted for popular consultation in Cuba. The document replaces the prior constitution which was ratified in 1976. Although the draft constitution ushered in changes in all realms of the economic, political, cultural, and social life of the country, citizen and institutional attention was focused on Article 68.

The “68” defined marriage as “union voluntarily entered into between two persons with legal capacity to do so, in order to live together”. This wording updates the previous definition, which was the union between a man and a woman. Thus, it opened the door for the regulation of same-sex marriage. The 68 upset a large part of the evangelical population and sectors of the Catholic Church. Upon the publication of the article, an intense conflict arose with religious officials voicing their disagreement, using the political weight of the Church to push for

the article to be changed. For the first time in decades, an unofficial voice with national reach dissented on a matter of collective interest.

Initially, five evangelical churches issued a joint statement. They insisted that marriage was a divine institution made up exclusively of man and woman and rejected “gender ideology” as something foreign to Cuba and to “communist countries”. Shortly thereafter, a new communiqué was published, this time signed by twenty-one evangelical organizations. There were also ecumenical alliances between different religious camps that affirmed fundamentalist ideas. The result was a far-reaching campaign against marriage equality. One of its centres was the defence of the “original design” of the family.

Under pressure, the governmental Drafting Commission of the Constitution decided to strike Article 68. In the final text, marriage was defined as: “a social and legal institution. It is one of the forms of organization of families. It is based on free consent and on the equality of rights, obligations, and legal capacity of the spouses” (Art. 82).

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Plataforma
11M

With this decision, the battle for a more inclusive society was postponed until the approval of a new Family Code – the only norm that was put to a referendum, despite more than one hundred that were being created or modified. This gesture made clear the growing influence of evangelical leadership and fundamentalism in Cuba. It also demonstrated their organizational capacity to generate high-impact social campaigns.

The #11M

As expected, the concessions of a secular state to churches caused concern within the LGBTIQ+ community. The reform and elimination of Article 68 meant subjecting human rights to the conditionality of another referendum process; rights that, due to their nature, should be guaranteed.

A few months before the approval of the new constitution, on 7 May 2019, the National Center for Sex Education (a government institution tasked with working for LGBTIQ+ rights in the country) decided to suspend a traditional conga that takes place every year along Havana's central Calle 23, as part of the Cuban Day



Against Homophobia. In response, part of the LGBTBIQ+ community organized an independent march on 11 May of that year, along the Paseo del Prado, also in the capital. The action was unprecedented.

This march made visible the demands of the community – among them, the approval of marriage equality, a gender identity law, and non-discrimination in the workplace. The march was interrupted by the authorities near Havana's *Malecón*. However, it demonstrated that the only way to confront religious fundamentalist campaigns is through the organization and promotion of public action, with an emphasis on education and awareness in each community.

A year after the march and as a legacy of all LGBTBIQ+ activism, #11M was created on Telegram. This digital space has become a support network, shortening geographical distances. It has also provided spaces for debate, socializing, the construction of collective knowledge and – most importantly – the dismantling of myths and prejudices.

Evangelicals and protestants have continued their campaigns both in their churches and on social media. The referendum on the new Family Code was the next horizon that mobilized this fundamentalist activism – and the activism in defence of rights.

In this context, members of #11M came up with the idea of handing out a pride flag sticker in the shape of a heart. The objective is to make the love between people of the LGBTBIQ+ community visible and to advance social awareness. The gesture was widely welcomed and quickly replicated.

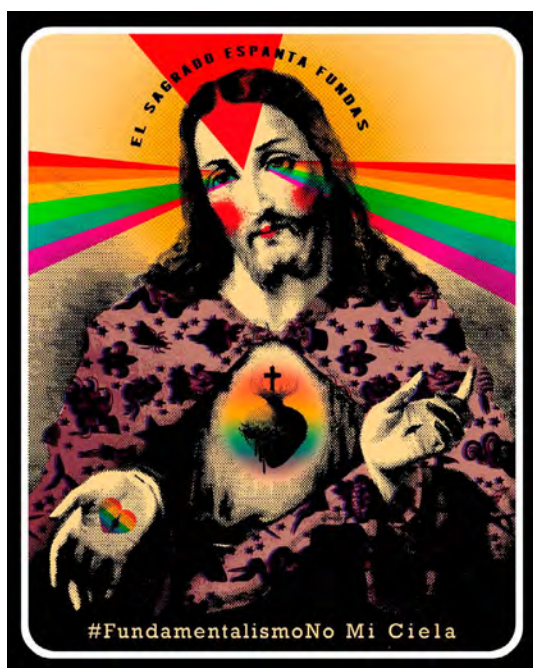


Stickers beyond Havana

The designs of the LesStickers-teadores communicate diversity of families, different forms of love, and the need for a gender identity law in Cuba. LesStickers-teadores propose collective history with their stickers, scaring away the *fundas* (fundamentalists) and their anti-rights discourses. In addition, they place diversity as a crucial issue for the nation and affirm that the same rights have to protect all its people.

In total, three collections of stickers and other graphic material have been created. They have been launched at different times, as the collective gained collaborators and visibility. The messages, both graphic and text, have LGBTBIQ+ activism as their source and many of them have already been positioned on social networks thanks to activists who have promoted them through hashtags such as #ChúFunda #Espantafunda and #UnCódigoInclusivo.

One of the biggest challenges for the collective has been to escape from "Havana-centrism". Many of the actions that have been developed in the struggle for rights originate and are confined to Havana. LesStickers-teadores wanted to do things differently. The message spreads beyond the capital and communicates through collective action, via stickers, with other parts of the country.



For several months and in almost all Cuban provinces, activities were organized to distribute the stickers and raise awareness of the key topic: that all rights should be for all people. To this end, members of LesStickers-teadores created a general collection account to promote actions in areas of the country that are more difficult to access; they identified places where the stickers could be printed; they made group collections and advised activists remotely on how to respond and promote distribution. The stickers were provided free of charge with collaborative donations as a way of sustaining the campaign.

For the collective it is very important to promote horizontality, self-management, and independence in its activities. The production of the stickers is decentralized and encourages each person to coordinate with other subjects, collectives, or institutions to carry out actions of socializing stickers, *stickerteadas*, or fundraising to produce them. In less than a month LesStickers-teadores achieved national coverage, with at least one action per province.

The experiences have generated mobility and feedback with neighbouring communities in all their diversity, and have served as a pretext to accompany other activities



and actions for the defence of rights. The act of sticking makes the recipient an actor-bearer of the message, whether by handing out stickers or sticking them on the door of their house as a declaration of support. This is the kind of response that energizes community environments and contributes to change.

Restrictions on movement, intimidating state-police control of autonomous initiatives, and provocations exercised by Cuban religious fundamentalist figures in virtual and physical spaces did not prevent LesStickers-teadores from multiplying; on the contrary. In addition to the design and distribution of stickers, the group has organized fundraising parties that contribute to the presentation of new collections, bike rallies for the defence of rights, and creative meetings to devise new actions and projects.

In 2022, a much fairer Family Code was approved by a large majority. But even so, religious fundamentalisms will continue to act and expand. The battle for more rights and guarantees has just begun.

Further reading

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