LSE Research Online

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Timothy Hildebrandt and Lynette J. Chua

Negotiating in/visibility: the political economy of lesbian activism and rights advocacy

Article (Accepted version) (Refereed)

Original citation:
Hildebrandt, Timothy and Chua, Lynette J. (2017) *Negotiating in/visibility: the political economy of lesbian activism and rights advocacy.* Development and Change, 48 (4). pp. 639-662. ISSN 1467-7660

DOI: 10.1111/dech.12314

© 2017 International Institute of Social Studies

This version available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68569/

Available in LSE Research Online: July 2017

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (http://eprints.lse.ac.uk) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk

Negotiating In/visibility:
The Political Economy of Lesbian Activism and Rights Advocacy

Timothy Hildebrandt and Lynette J. Chua

Abstract: Efforts to address HIV/AIDS have brought new opportunities and resources to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) activism in many parts of the developing world. But increased attention in terms of both political opportunities and economic resources is uneven across the diverse population of LGBT peoples and activists. Lesbian activists have reaped far fewer benefits than their gay men counterparts. Building on existing approaches to movement visibility and invisibility, we posit a 'political economy of in/visibility' to analyse lesbian activism in China and Myanmar, where activists face particularly restrictive political and economic conditions. Rather than focus on visibility as a movement pre-condition, objective, or strategy, we examine the *sources* of in/visibility and their interactions with activists' agency; in/visibility emerges from political and economic conditions, but is continuously reshaped by activists who negotiate them. We demonstrate that, despite challenges, lesbian activists respond in ways that help advance LGBT rights advocacy broadly, sometimes even with tactics that their more visible gay counterparts avoid. These interactions subsequently influence the conditions that shape in/visibility. Investigating the political economy of in/visibility, therefore, has significant implications for understanding not only lesbian activism, but also LGBT advocacy and collective mobilization, especially under politically and economically restrictive conditions.

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to thank Ashley Currier, David Gilbert, Lynn C. Jones, Helen Kinsella, Hakan Seckinelgin, Joe Soss, and the two anonymous reviewers for helpful critiques on earlier drafts; Naw Mar Moora, Khine Khine Zin, U Kyaw Maung, Koh Wei Jie, Maria Acton Thomas, Chris Phua, and Yeo Sam Jay for their research assistance; informants for their participation in the study; and the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant (WBS No. R-241-000-118-646), National University of Singapore.

INTRODUCTION

The globalisation of human rights discourse, coordinated efforts to address HIV/AIDS, and related funding from international non-profit organizations, development agencies and governments have brought new opportunities and resources to LGBT activism (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender)[1] in many parts of the developing world. But the picture of a growing global LGBT activist sector is often painted with too broad a brush; increased attention in terms of both political opportunities and economic resources is uneven across the diverse population of LGBT peoples and activists. Lesbian activists, for example, have reaped far fewer benefits than their gay men counterparts.

In this article, using what we posit as the 'political economy of in/visibility,' we analyse the dynamics of lesbian activism in China and Myanmar—how lesbian activists negotiate political, legal, and economic conditions, which restrict them *both* as sexual minorities and as women. Whereas extant literature focuses on visibility as a movement pre-condition (e.g., Tilly, 1978), objective (e.g., Bernstein, 1997), strategy (e.g., Currier, 2012), or debate its value (e.g., Taylor, 1989; Sawyers and Meyer, 1999), 'political economy of in/visibility' is concerned with the political and economic *sources* of in/visibility and, more importantly, the ways activists exercise agency and strategically respond to them. We examine whether and how activists overcome restrictive political norms to attract supporters and make claims vis-à-vis the state ('political in/visibility') and deal with legal conditions and other requirements to secure international aid and other funds ('economic in/visibility').

[1] We use 'LGBT' to refer to movements that comprise gays, lesbians, and other sexual and gender minorities, and 'gay' to refer to activism that centres on gay men's issues. As is the case elsewhere, the degree of movement participation by transgender people varies according to intra-movement dynamics, local sexual cultures, and the political context (for example, see footnote 20 on Myanmar); it is an issue that lies beyond the scope of this article and is part of a separate ongoing study by the second author.

By focusing on lesbian activism, we shed light on a less studied aspect of social movements – its political economy processes, particularly in developing countries – and highlight the significance of our analytical framework. Gendered by the regulation of sexual and reproductive norms, the socially subordinate role of women, and their exclusion from the political, lesbian activism often lacks access to economic and political resources. In various socio-political contexts, democratic and non-democratic alike, lesbian activists struggle against being overshadowed by gay men or neglected by women's movements (see, e.g., Winnow, 1992; Chua, 2016) and are thus relatively invisible in the political and economic sense that we discuss in this article. We examine the cases of China and Myanmar because these are two countries where such gendered barriers are particularly acute. Moreover, in these contexts political and economic conditions already make political organizing in general difficult. Restrictive rules hinder lesbian activists from exercising their civil-political liberties to form legally recognised organizations and thus acquire legal status to raise their own funds. Meanwhile, the state accepts and partners with gay men-centric organizations to implement HIV/AIDS programs and secure domestic and international funding, thus allowing them to gain limited political and economic visibility; on the other hand, the state does not provide for lesbian activists similar access to HIV/AIDS-related economic resources.

Nevertheless, the state of in/visibility for lesbian activism is fluid and capable of changing. In China, lesbian activists have used their political and economic *invisibility* to engage in rights advocacy that has prepared them well for changing conditions whereas their gay counterparts are losing political and economic opportunities once afforded to them due to the global fight against HIV/AIDS. In Myanmar, lesbian activists gain political and economic *visibility* by mobilizing as part of a young LGBT movement that deploys human rights discourse,

as their country transitions from military dictatorship to democratic governance, and opens the door to international donors.

Hence, the political economy of in/visibility captures the dynamic interactions between structural conditions and activists' agency. It highlights, in our two cases, how lesbian activists negotiate in/visibility in various ways that reflect both the oft-changing sources of in/visibility, influenced by the international and domestic nature of politics, and their strategic decisions, sometimes trying to overcome invisibility and sometimes taking advantage of it. These decisions vary across time and context, as well as activists and organizations within a given context. For example, during heightened surveillance, pushing for visibility may jeopardise activists' safety and their organizations' survival; declining or being unable to take advantage of HIV/AIDS funding may free activists' of donor expectations and state scrutiny that enable them to advance gay rights or employ discourses— such as human rights—avoided by gay male counterparts in their countries. These decisions also influence the choice of allies, be they feminist activists or other gay rights groups, both within their country and around the world.

After examining existing scholarship on the visibility and invisibility of social movements, we draw from research on lesbian activism, and political process and resource mobilization theories to elaborate upon our analytical framework. Next, we discuss our methods and data collection. We then examine the interrelated political and economic in/visibility of lesbian activism in China and Myanmar, and how lesbian activists negotiate it. In the conclusion, we discuss more generally how these insights might help us understand lesbian activism and the advancement of LGBT rights in similar developing countries and non-Western liberal contexts.

VISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Our analytical framework builds on existing approaches toward social movement visibility and invisibility. These approaches can be organized along four themes: visibility as precursor for movement emergence, as movement objective, and as strategy, and invisibility as an equivocal problem. The themes are not mutually exclusive. A movement may relate to visibility and invisibility in multiple ways at any given time, as degrees of visibility and invisibility are not absolute but relative to each other.

First, visibility is regarded as critical to movement emergence. With visibility, social movements can attract recruits, generate media coverage, mobilize support, and effectively 'frame' arguments (McAdam, 1996). Collective mobilization also becomes easier when groups are more identifiable (Oberschall, 1978; Tilly, 1978). Particularly for identity-based movements, visibility helps constituents to identify themselves with the movement, and thus build up movement base (Brighenti, 2007); it can also attract media attention for the movement (Rohlinger, 2006). Collective identity formation is especially central to movements that make claims premised on group identities, such as indigenous peoples, women, and sexual minorities (Swidler, 1995). Being seen as a collective suggests strength in numbers; therefore, scholars argue that visibility bolsters the negotiating power of a social movement (Melucci, 1985), and the potential for policy victories (Constain, 1992; McAdam, 1999). Although visibility often arises in a cumulative manner, with a movement's reputation building over time, it can also come from a singular, seminal event: the large and vocal crowd (e.g., public protests) can be fundamental to recognition (McPhail, 1991).

Second, achieving visibility is a measure of success. Melucci argues that the main purpose of visibility is to 'reveal the stakes' and show society a problem exists and needs to be

addressed (1985: 797). Increasing visibility, thus, becomes a key objective for many social movements. Activists generate controversy in the media (Gamson and Meyer, 1996) or hold mass demonstrations (Oberschall, 1996). For identity-based movements, since collective identity is both a source and product of collective action (Gamson, 1995; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Stoller, 1997; Taylor and Whittier, 1999; Thayer, 1997), being publicly identified with the group in question thus becomes an end in itself (Armstrong, 2002; Chabot and Duyyendak, 2002; Currier, 2012).

Scholars have recently studied visibility in a third way – movement strategy. For LGBT activism, 'coming out' amounts not only to a goal, but also a tactic and means (Ritchie, 2010: 563). To achieve collective identity as a movement goal, LGBT activists urge people to come out as a core movement strategy (Armstrong, 2002; see also Bernstein, 1997). In Namibia and South Africa, LGBT activists deploy and adjust visibility strategies in relation to specific goals (Currier, 2012). By approaching visibility as a strategy that unfolds through activists' interaction with target audiences (Jasper, 1997) and socio-political conditions, we can see how *in*visibility is also intentionally deployed, such as to escape hostility or create safe spaces (Currier, 2012; Gash, 2015).

Discussions of strategic invisibility lead to the fourth theme: debates over the challenges and benefits of invisibility. Movements sometimes involuntarily experience invisibility, because heightened repression might have hampered their ability to mobilize openly (Earl, 2003). Whereas many scholars presume a positive relationship between visibility and movement success (Tarrow and Tilly, 2007)—and worry about the negative impact of unintentional invisibility—others reflect on the possible benefits of lessened visibility. Melucci argues that social movements can benefit from 'latency,' regrouping and strengthening collective identities

during such periods to prepare for visible action (1985). Similarly, Taylor finds that ‘abeyance structures’ helped the American women’s movement self-preserve until they could re-emerge when socio-political conditions turned more conducive (1989). Others are more sceptical. Sawyers and Meyer suggest that while abeyance structures allow groups to maintain their identity and values, they might lose influence in the longer run (Sawyers and Meyer, 1999). In Saunders’ examination of environmental movements in London, activists became more isolated and engaged in infighting over intra-group differences, which recede to the background during times of strategic visibility (Saunders, 2007).

Political economy of in/visibility and lesbian activism

Extant scholarship, however, often does not emphasize how restrictive political and economic conditions affect movement in/visibility. In contrast, a ‘political economy of in/visibility’ underscores the importance of such conditions while accounting for activists’ agency in negotiating them. In/visibility is not a fixed binary, but a dynamic process whereby strategic decisions shift across activists, their organizations, time, and place, depending on the conditions and their changes, and activists’ interpretations and responses to the former.

Our framework draws from two established theoretical perspectives in social movements: political process model, which takes into account the interactions among political conditions, organizational-level factors such as social connections and resources, and the agency of social actors, to analyse movement development (McAdam, 1999); and, resource mobilization, which focuses on the contribution of elite actors, expertise, funds, and other external resources to movement organizing (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Such political conditions and resources are often infused with gendered practices that neglect the needs and interests of lesbians as women and sexual minorities, and shape the ways lesbian activists, as well as their allies and opponents,

respond to them and deal with one another. Together, the two approaches foreground structural conditions as well as the role of social actors in responding to or even changing them. The framework is, thus, also consistent with calls for micro and macro analyses of political economy generally (Beckert, 2013) and invisibility specifically (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010). Additionally, it speaks to a feminist political economy, which shows how 'political economic processes interact with and re-configure the institutional and ideological formations of society where gender identities and relations are shaped' (True 2010: 44).

The political economy of in/visibility consists of two main components. The first concerns *political in/visibility* and how activists engage with its sources of shifting political conditions. Political visibility involves being seen and heard by constituents whom activists represent and by state agents, as well as being known, recognised, tolerated, and engaged by the latter to differing degrees. It can be both beneficial and detrimental for movements, and thus examples include being targeted by law enforcement, inclusion in policy debates, and coverage in state-controlled media.

One key aspect of political in/visibility is state law. It features prominently as an instrument that governments use to oppress sexual minorities, especially criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct. In this sense, gay men have more visibility than lesbians, as lesbian sexual conduct is less often criminalised, and lesbians are less frequent targets of police persecution. However, invisibility does not mean less oppression, but a different *kind* of oppression, one that oppresses lesbians as women (Whittier, 1995). It diminishes the sexual agency of women and subsumes women's sexuality under heteronormativity (Rich, 1980). Criminalisation of sexual relations between men also symbolises the deviancy of homosexuality and thus justifies discrimination against lesbians, as well. Yet, some scholars argue that lesbians gain little

visibility from decriminalisation campaigns that tend to focus on gay men (Ofreneo and de Vala, 2010).

Still, lesbian activists manage to negotiate legal conditions of in/visibility in ways that favour them. For example, lesbian couples and activists play prominent roles in campaigns for equal marriage rights and civil unions in the United States. These public campaigns bring visibility to adoption and other issues that concern lesbians. Mobilization around legal rights in a place like the United States also garners the movement cultural resonance and legitimacy (Scheingold, 2004).

Moreover, state policies matter to political in/visibility and shape activists' diverse forms of negotiations. In the 1980s, when the American government's initial homophobic reaction to HIV/AIDS prompted the LGBT movement to channel attention and resources toward the epidemic, lesbian activism vicariously gained political visibility. Motivated by the crisis, lesbian activists mobilized to assist the larger LGBT community (Epstein, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990; Winnow, 1992). Some gained new legitimacy and ascended the leadership ranks of movement organizations (Armstrong, 2002). At the same time, lesbian activism remained politically invisible, as its visibility was subsumed under and derived from that of HIV/AIDS, which was gay-men centric (Rofel, 1999).

The gendered nature of the political context, even when not manifest in explicit state laws and policies, also influence in/visibility. In countries as diverse as the United States (Wolf, 1979; Esterberg, 1994), Indonesia (Blackwood, 2007), Singapore (Lyons, 2004), India (Dave, 2011), and Mexico (Mogrovejo, 1999), women's groups have sometimes avoided being publicly associated with lesbian politics for fear that they would lose legitimacy in the eyes of the state or

compound their challenges.[2] For lesbian groups who have mobilized within the feminist movement (Bernstein, 2002; Stockdill, 2003), although they remain embedded in a heteronormative political structure, and are often marginalized and 'suspect for being lesbian' (Winnow, 1992: 69), some have created advantageous visibility for themselves (Taylor and Whittier, 1992).

In more politically closed contexts, lesbian activism is politically invisible not simply because of political conditions specifically related to gender or sexuality. Governments in such contexts use law to restrict civil-political liberties and suppress social movements more severely than liberal democracies (Chua, 2014; Currier, 2012; Hildebrandt, 2013; Johnston, 2006). The restrictions obstruct LGBT groups from publicly airing their issues and making claims, thus hindering their recruitment and alliance-building efforts. They also put activists at risk if they engage in human rights or other politically sensitive discourses and prevent their organizations from becoming legally recognised entities, both of which have repercussions for their economic in/visibility (see below).

For LGBT organizations in such non-democratic states as China and Myanmar, one way of getting around the restrictions has been to take on HIV/AIDS work, which is more tolerated by their governments. However, HIV/AIDS work that has the endorsement or tacit approval of the state typically does not identify lesbians as an important constituency. In this respect, lesbian activism is not only politically but also economically gendered; lesbians are seen as a subset of a larger movement (LGBT) whereas gay men are the universal across homosexuality.

[2] The gendered nature of the political context is also inherently intertwined with gendered social norms that regulate women's sexuality and physical mobility, which could also restrict lesbians' ability to mobilize collectively (Chua, 2016).

Political in/visibility and activists' negotiations of it are, therefore, intertwined with the second main component of our analytical framework – economic conditions that activists also experience and engage. *Economic in/visibility* refers to movements' access to funding, whether it comes from state agents, international bodies, domestic funders, or private donors. Economic invisibility includes not only lack of access to funding, but also the inability to meet donor requirements, such as organizational registration status and applications that must be submitted in unfamiliar languages. Since women on average earn only 60-70 percent of men's pay for similar work (Hausmann et al., 2011) and remain overly burdened by unpaid family work, the structural economic inequalities along gender lines make lesbian activism all the more difficult around the world.

Here, we turn to insights from resource mobilization (Tilly, 1978). Although this model focuses more on expertise and elites (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) than economic resources (but see Hildebrandt, 2013), its emphasis on external contributions nevertheless illuminates the significance of funding to movement development. Among LGBT activists, lesbians face more difficulty in attracting funding where international or domestic economic resources are designated for HIV/AIDS-related programs. From the 1980s until the early 1990s in the United States, for instance, the ability for an LGBT movement organization to secure funding became intertwined with its strategic responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Andriote, 1999; Button et al., 1997).

In developing countries, restrictions imposed on the civil-political freedoms of activists, including their ability to make claims using human rights, also limit lesbian activists' access to economic resources (Weiss, 2006). Domestically, LGBT organizations cannot raise funds legally where their governments require non-profit organizations to have formal registered status, which

is denied to them. If they turn to human rights-based strategies, they could attract international funding (Bob, 2005; Sikkink, 1993), but they risk incurring state retaliation, such as in Uganda (Nyanzi, 2013; Tamale, 2013). Moreover, despite flowing from mostly liberal democracies, developmental aid and their implementing agencies often reinforce heteronormative biases rather than challenge them (Cornwall et al., 2008; Lind, 2010).

Some LGBT organizations, including those discussed in our case studies, circumvent restrictions by adopting HIV/AIDS programs that are relatively tolerated by the state compared to human rights advocacy. However, they often end up with gay-men centric agenda, which remain the funding priority of HIV/AIDS donors, thereby exacerbating lesbian activism's political invisibility (Chua and Hildebrandt, 2014). Alternatively, lesbian activist groups may turn to other alliances or discourses, as we learned from studies on Mexico and Chile (Mogrovejo, 2000).

By placing our analytical framework within broad social movement theories, we depart from the majority of studies on lesbian activism. Instead of structural conditions or political opportunities, those studies highlight the cultural work or subjective side of activism, such as community organizing and identity politics (see, e.g., Taylor 1999; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Certainly, the cultural and subjective aspects of social movements are political in that they inherently challenge heterosexism and patriarchy embedded within formal political and economic conditions that affect lesbians as lesbians and as women. They also help to build political consciousness and inspire constituents to take action targeting personal, social and broader political change (Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Nevertheless, in

considering structural conditions, we highlight the agency of lesbian activists.[3] Our analytical framework emphasizes the interactive relationship between social actors and the political and economic conditions (see also Brighenti, 2007) and shows that structural constraints, while influential, are not deterministic. As we will show in our case studies, lesbian activists exercise their agency, depending upon changing conditions, to overcome restrictive conditions of invisibility or work with them, strategic decisions that contribute to the advancement and sustainability of movements.

CASE SELECTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

We take the approach of 'parallel demonstration of theory' (Skocpol and Somers, 1980) and use two independent but complementary case studies on LGBT activism in China and Myanmar to explain the 'political economy of in/visibility' and its account of processes. We do not treat the two cases as comparative studies or seek to provide a definitive history of lesbian activism in those two countries. Rather, we use the experiences of lesbian activism in those two cases to draw out key patterns of our analytical framework and illustrate variety and nuances in activists' exercise of agency, which could help inform or apply to other cases elsewhere.

We examine lesbian activism in China and Myanmar—two countries where we have been long engaged in research projects—because of the political and economic conditions that are stacked against activists, and the gendered nature of lesbian activism that further exacerbates their challenges.[4] The strategic actions of lesbian activists become not only crucial but also particularly pronounced. Therefore, though the two contexts diverge in history, population

[3] Identity could also be a kind of resource that can be mobilized (Tilly, 1978) or reduce the cost of organization (Tarrow, 1994).

[4] Since 2010, Myanmar's political and legal reforms have relaxed controls on assembly, trade unions, speech, and media, but other restrictions on civil-political liberties are still in place, and its human rights record remains problematic (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

demographics, geography, economic development, political access and representation, civil-political liberties, as well as epidemiology of HIV/AIDS, they are excellent case studies for illustrating the interactions between activists and structural forces in the political economy of in/visibility.

The fieldwork for the Chinese study, conducted by the first author, includes 68 hours of semi-structured, in-depth interviews in Mandarin Chinese and English with 30 activists from 25 organizations, including 16 lesbian activists. Interviews were carried out in two phases by the first author from 2007 to 2008 in Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming, and Chengdu, with follow-up interviews in August 2015. This longitudinal data allows us to capture continuity and change in the process of political economy of in/visibility, both in terms of structural conditions and activist responses to them. A nationwide survey of 100 organizations, covering about 15 or 75 percent of lesbian groups was also conducted as part of a larger project (see Hildebrandt, 2013) and some results are presented here.

The Myanmar study was initiated in 2012 by the second author. The fieldwork is ongoing and so far consists of interviews with 112 informants, including 23 lesbian activists, in English or Burmese with the help of an interpreter, and observations of movement meetings and activities. The interviewees and their organizations originate from 16 cities and towns, though lesbian activists are mainly concentrated in Yangon, Mandalay, and bigger towns such as Pyi. The study's period of analysis extends from the emergence of lesbian and gay organizing in the mid-2000s up to contemporary developments, enabling us to discern the dynamics from pre- to post-transition.

Despite the lack of coverage of rural regions, both studies include the respective countries' major sites of organized lesbian activism, which is concentrated in the urban areas.

They also cover the majority of lesbian activists at the two sites. In addition, both studies involve archival research on the respective countries' laws, policies and pronouncements, and content analyses of organizational materials to supplement the interview and observational data.

For this article, we independently analyse the entire data sets of each case study but highlight the data most directly relevant to lesbian activism. We focus on the development of lesbian activism, how lesbian activists or their organizations respond to their political conditions, funding opportunities, and legal obstacles, and the outcomes of those responses and actions. To protect our informants working on sensitive topics in these closed political contexts, to which we gained invaluable access, we do not provide activists' names or identify organizations.[5]

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF IN/VISIBILITY OF LESBIAN ACTIVISM IN CHINA

Like most recent forms of activism in China, lesbian activism took off on the Internet. Broader economic development, urbanisation, and early Internet technology innovations, such as the online bulletin board system (BBS), connected lesbians and led to the birth of the first few formalized lesbian organizations in the late 1990s. The first lesbian-focused website went online in 2000. However, moving from the virtual world to the 'real world' proved more difficult.

Although Communist China has never criminalised same-sex sexual conduct (Ruan, 1991) and 'anti-hooligan' laws, repealed in 1997, were used primarily against gay men, lesbian activists face the same restrictive legal environment as all other activists (Hildebrandt, 2011a; 2011b). The Chinese state imposes such laws as the 1998 Regulations for the Administration and Registration of Social Organizations to stop the formation of groups perceived to aggregate a number of societal interests and challenge, or otherwise undermine, the ruling party. Local

[5] For more details on how we gained access to our respective research sites, please refer to Chua, 2015; Hildebrandt, 2013.

officials, usually Public Security Bureaus, also used proxy laws to ban public gatherings on the basis of lack of proper permits, which are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

Lesbian activists soon learned from experience the political limits to using human rights discourses. In 2001, authorities banned a lesbian cultural festival, claiming that organizers were in violation of fire code regulations. One lesbian activist pointed out the festival had a 'clearly political tone,' as organizers circulated a statement that connected LGBT rights with 'human rights' and contacted domestic and international media.[6] Disheartened, the festival's organizing group shut down soon after the ban. A few years after its emergence in the late 1990s, lesbian organizing suffered setbacks due to heightened (and more sophisticated) Internet censorship, government officials' weariness of all activism, and lack of funding.

Although lesbian activists learned to eschew human rights discourses and distance themselves from those who do so to avoid government interference, they are less able to overcome negative political invisibility than gay men, who encounter the same political conditions and lack of formal recognition. Despite legal controls on collective mobilization and suppression of human rights discourses, the Chinese government does allow non-profit organizations and activists to work in areas that complement government policies and even partners with them as service providers. Since the late 1990s, the toleration and partnership has come in the form of HIV/AIDS for gay groups. The Chinese government was initially reluctant to acknowledge the epidemic and its own inadequacies in handling the problem, but it eventually recognised the importance of tackling the crisis and securing international support. It, therefore, implicitly signalled permission for LGBT organizations to form and mobilize more openly, so long as they focused on HIV/AIDS and performed the role of service provider, reaching out to

[6] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 11 October 2007.

gay men as a high-risk group. Gay activists, indeed, avoided discussion of human rights. This was easily done, however, as they could mobilize around 'public health' that was both more palatable to the state and met one of its pressing needs.[7]

Hence, activists who framed or repurposed their movement organizations to complement the government's HIV/AIDS strategy increased their political visibility. They gained important (if limited) space to operate formal/informal access to stage agents, but consequently created or reinforced gay-men centric agenda. When asked if his group could exist without HIV/AIDS, one gay leader curtly responded, 'not likely,' and suggested considering the relatively few and small lesbian groups to understand why.[8] In fact, before HIV/AIDS funding became available, lesbian and gay groups reported that they worked together. After receiving HIV/AIDS funding, however, gay leaders found their focus too different to collaborate with lesbian counterparts.

Whereas some of these gay groups have managed to register as legal entities with the government, lesbian organizations rarely, if ever, achieve registration. In fact, while 22 percent of gay and lesbian activists in our case study characterize their goals as 'not complementary' to government's policies, the percentage rises to 70 among lesbian respondents. They see the government as largely ambivalent about their activities and, indeed, their existence as both lesbians and activists. As a result, their expectations are appropriately lowered: 'We hope that at least [government officials] do not obstruct us.'[9] As another lesbian activist puts it, being

---

[7] But as the need for civil society groups to address HIV/AIDS diminishes for the Chinese state, the opportunities and protection afforded by such a 'public health' discourse also decreases for gay activists, thus indicative of the changing nature of the political economy of in/visibility as well. One example was the arrest in May 2014 of nine activists before a planned gay rights conference in Beijing (Wong, 2014), an activity that was permitted in past years.
[8] Interview, gay activist, Kunming, 15 August 2007.
[9] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing,11 October 2007.

invisible is ‘better than negative attention’ from the state and society.[10] Indeed, given the recent repression of other activists, the costs of being ‘seen’ by the Chinese state can outweigh the benefits (Cornwall, et al., 2008).

When gay groups question their viability without HIV/AIDS, they are also implicitly speaking of the economic resources tied to political opportunities. The HIV/AIDS-oriented gay groups are able to attract international financial support, a move welcomed by central and local Chinese officials; new unfunded mandates from the central government in the area of public health have made it necessary for local officials to find more alternative means of funding. Groups can also receive some governmental funding. Regardless of the source, funds are channelled through government-controlled mechanisms, what amounts to a ‘filter-model’ of funding (Hildebrandt, 2011a; 2012; 2013). Hence, HIV/AIDS oriented gay groups need political recognition and toleration – if not acceptance – to gain economic visibility.

By comparison, lesbian activists are economically more invisible. As one activist puts it, ‘There are no lesbian groups in this city. How could there be? We cannot get any AIDS money!’[11] Although reliable official statistics do not exist, at their height around 2008, estimates from informants suggest gay male organizations numbered in the low hundreds, while there were only 10-20 known lesbian groups. In terms of organizational size, lesbian groups are also significantly smaller. Our survey results show that each organization has about 1.5 fewer staff members on average. Given that the gender pay gap remains large in China—women make 31 percent less than men for similar work (Hausmann et al., 2011)—opportunities for self-funding are further circumscribed.

[10] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 9 November 2007.
[11] Interview, lesbian activist, Kunming, 23 November 2007.

An obvious way of negotiating the economic invisibility that accompanies political invisibility is to pursue HIV/AIDS funding. One lesbian leader in Yunnan managed to receive some HIV/AIDS-related monies, rationalising the strategy to the first author with the reminder that lesbians are not immune from HIV/AIDS. She is, however, an anomaly. At HIV/AIDS meetings of civil society representatives in which she participated, she was usually the only lesbian representative in a room of nearly 100 attendees. Most lesbian groups report having little to do with HIV/AIDS, either failing to secure or lacking interest in HIV/AIDS-related funds; an activist suggested that gay men are financially 'squeezing out' lesbian women.[12] In addition, due to purposeful distancing from human rights issues, these activists are unable to—at least openly—attract international funding that is earmarked to support these causes in more closed polities like China.

Instead, lesbian activists negotiate political and economic conditions to take *advantage* of their invisibility. As one Beijing-based activist noted, 'we want to be visible to some, but not visible to others!'[13] Contrary to the Kunming interviewee's complaint about the lack of economic resources, most lesbian informants see the inability to attract funding as liberating. Not having to worry about such political norms and funding obligations, lesbian groups in our study focus more easily on topics that concern most of their constituency, such as family, social pressure, and relationships. One of the largest organizations in Beijing holds regular salons in which participants discuss the political, such as the necessity of anti-discrimination policies, and the personal, such as dealing with family pressures to marry and bear children. In contrast, gay groups by gaining political access and economic resources through HIV/AIDS cannot stray too far from HIV/AIDS-related work, lest they jeopardise their funding status and opportunities.

[12] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 20 August 2015.
[13] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 19 August 2015.

Even international donors, such as the Global Fund and the Gates Foundation, are cautious about allowing Chinese grantees to be too advocacy-oriented. They operate in China with the state's complicity and the understanding that their continued existence in the country is dependent upon staying in the government's good graces. Although 'LGBT rights' funds have become more available in recent years, activists recognise that this economic visibility can bring unwanted political visibility as it attaches their work to 'human rights' campaigning towards which the government is hostile.[14]

Without HIV/AIDS funding, lesbian groups rely on member contributions and are, therefore, more grassroots-driven. Many have deployed, what one activist describes, a 'community building approach' that focuses more squarely on a spectrum of lesbians' concerns. Because these financial resources are limited, lesbian groups also more frequently collaborate, leading to stronger ties of solidarity with their cohort than gay men's groups, which experience infighting in their competition for HIV/AIDS funding. Of course, just like gay men's groups, contestations over limited funds do exist within the small urban lesbian activist communities in China,[15] with divergent views on strategic foci and political risks.[16]

Lesbian groups' interactions with the broader feminist movement in China also demonstrate how they have negotiated the conditions of invisibility to their advantage. While there has been more cooperation and convergence of goals between lesbian and feminist groups since the 2000s (He and Jolly, 2002; Jolly, 2000), differences remain. A prominent Shanghai lesbian activist described early lesbian activism as doing 'fun' work like 'community building

[14] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 19 August 2015.
[15] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 20 August 2015.
[16] Interviews, lesbian activists, Beijing, 19 August 2015; Beijing, 20 August 2015; Shanghai, 24 August 2015.

activities' while feminists were interested in 'serious stuff' like rights.[17] Despite not having explicit strategic purposes, such decisions resulted in political invisibility for Chinese lesbian activists, shielding them from the negative visibility to which feminists were exposed (including the major crackdown and arrests in 2015). Feminists have had difficulty organizing in China since the founding of the PRC in 1949 largely because the party-state maintains a monopoly on women's organizing through the mass organization, the All China Women's Federation (Edwards, 2007). Because the party has long espoused to represent the interests of women, women's organizing independently of this body is thus tantamount to criticizing the state, especially when it engages in 'women's rights' or feminist agendas.

Nevertheless, Chinese lesbian activists do engage in projects that align with human rights, without explicitly deploying the discourse. By 2007, some lesbian groups began the call for legal recognition of same-sex marriages. Public activities started with an annual Valentine's Day event where lesbian activists passed out leaflets and roses to passers-by; soon they organized public speeches and even held mock same-sex weddings on pedestrian malls in Beijing with no significant negative (or positive) state response (see also Hildebrandt, 2011b). Since 2014, they have actively promoted the passage of China's first domestic violence law, proposing gender-neutral language in the law while strategically avoiding specific references to LGBT issues or rights.[18]

In sum, lesbian organizations parlay their political and economic invisibility in a strategic process that created 'their own way,' different from gay activists or feminists.[19] Perceiving that they face less government scrutiny than gay men and, increasingly, feminists, lesbian activists

[17] Interview, lesbian activist, Shanghai, 24 August 2015
[18] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 19 August 2015.
[19] Interview, lesbian activist, Beijing, 11 October 2007.

believe that they enjoy more latitude to mobilize as advocacy organizations. Perhaps they are, ironically, at the forefront of LGBT rights advocacy in China, though much of it depends on how they continue to adapt to the country's rapidly changing conditions.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF IN/VISIBILITY OF LESBIAN ACTIVISM IN MYANMAR

Lesbian activists in Myanmar began to coalesce as part of the recent LGBT movement only a few years before the country's political transition from military rule to civilian governance following the 2010 general elections. Until the late 2000s, lesbians had little visibility. No lesbian organization mobilized politically around lesbian issues. At most, small groups of friends maintained informal networks to socialise and help one another.

Lesbians' political invisibility is even more acute when placed alongside the conditions of male sexual minorities.[20] During the military regime, draconian legislation effectively banned formal organizations, except for those conducting only religious or economic activities or possessing governmental or military ties, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in such limited areas as rural development and health. In the early 2000s, INGOs working on HIV/AIDS began to partner with informal community groups by male sexual minorities, providing them with funding, along with technical assistance, to implement their programs at the grassroots. Even though the latter do not have official government permission, they are tolerated presumably because of INGOs' arrangements with the government.[21]

---

[20] In the Burmese context, male sexual minorities include gay men as well as those who are born male-bodied but would be considered transgender in international LGBT parlance; the latter might choose to self-describe as 'gay' or 'transgender' when adopting these English labels for activism and funding purposes. For further discussion on these identities, see (Chua and Gilbert, 2015; 2016).

[21] Under the military regime, a myriad of laws required organizations to be approved by and registered with the state. The Association Registration Law, which came into effect in July 2014, supersedes those old laws and does

Reminiscent of Chinese groups that accepted HIV/AIDS funding, Burmese organizations for and by male sexual minorities gained political and economic visibility by interacting with structural conditions that reacted to HIV/AIDS. In comparison, lesbians – not deemed a high-risk population for HIV/AIDS – were excluded. At the same time, the increase in visibility remained constrained by repressive conditions. Prior to the political transition, both they and their INGO partners avoided going beyond their remit of 'health' to advocate for legal reform, such as the repeal of Section 377 of the Penal Code, which effectively criminalizes homosexual conduct between men as 'unnatural intercourse.' They especially avoided human rights, out of concern that they could provoke government clamp down.

Around 2007, a group of human rights activists among Burmese political exiles and economic migrants in Thailand began to build an LGBT movement with funding from international donors. In the beginning, lesbians were excluded from this new development in political and economic visibility. The Thai-based Burmese group, dominated by male sexual minorities, at first relied on personal connections with the HIV/AIDS INGOs and community groups to identify and bring over grassroots activists to Thailand where they were educated on human rights and trained to carry out human rights-based LGBT activism back in their hometowns. Male sexual minorities, therefore, benefitted from the relatively safe visibility afforded by international and domestic HIV/AIDS organizations operating under the tacit sanction of the military regime.

In contrast, in the early days of their LGBT movement, leaders had difficulty identifying and recruiting lesbian activists, who lacked the existing organizing networks created by HIV/AIDS activism. These pioneers of the LGBT movement add that lesbians are unfamiliar

---

not criminalize non-registration. Burmese lesbian groups and LGBT organizations have not yet opted to register under the new law.

with political organizing, lack the experience and confidence to engage in advocacy work, which further affirm their lowly social status of being women and sexual minorities, and thus usually keep to their social circles.[22] It took the movement pioneers several years to overcome the initial barriers – by expanding their new movement network and leveraging on contacts they had made on the ground in Myanmar to locate potential lesbian leaders. In 2010, they finally recruited enough participants to hold the first lesbian-only workshop.

Gradually, with the recent changes in government, lesbian activists started to challenge their state of invisibility. Shifts in political conditions offered more tolerance for collective organizing and the use of previously suppressed discourses to raise political consciousness.[23] For the LGBT movement and lesbians, it was human rights-based activism. Finding resonance with human rights' ideas of dignity and equality and their applicability to LGBT persons, the first lesbian rights activists adopted and deployed the discourse to expand lesbian activism within the movement. '[Lesbians] don't know much about their rights … When I attended the training of [the human rights group] I found out about more rights, so I started forming a bigger group.'[24] Leaders such as this interviewee talked to other lesbians about what she had learned and tried to cultivate rights consciousness among them. By empowering lesbians that they had inalienable rights and that they could change their circumstances as a collective, they brought together lesbians scattered among social groups in their towns to form lesbian rights groups affiliated with the LGBT movement.

---

[22] Interview, gay activist, Myitkyina, 25 April 2013; Interview, gay activist, Yangon, 18 May 2013.
[23] However, crackdowns and imprisonment of protestors, as well as other human rights violations, still occurred after 2010 (Human Rights Watch, 2014). It remains to be seen how the new government, following the National League for Democracy's victory in November 2015, will respond to activism and collective action over time.
[24] Interview, lesbian activist, Pyi, 28 March 2013.

Since then, lesbian leaders have set up lesbian organizations or co-founded groups focused on human rights for LGBT persons (rather than HIV/AIDS). They collaborate with male sexual minorities to organize International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) events to bring awareness to discrimination against sexual minorities and LGBT rights, and participate in the larger movement's strategic planning activities. After the political transition, lesbian activists joined the LGBT movement's delegation that meets with national politicians, policymakers, foreign diplomats, and international NGOs to discuss human rights violations and reforms. Although the meetings explicitly focused on lobbying for support for repealing Section 377, which does not apply to lesbian sexual conduct, they aired their concerns as part of the larger oppression and stigmatisation of homosexuality.

Furthermore, together with the change to their political invisibility, lesbian activists who aligned with the movement and adopted their human rights strategy made economic gains. Unlike the days of military rule, INGOs and foreign governments are funding human rights activities in Myanmar, and domestic groups advocating for a wide range of issues are adopting human rights discourse more openly. Leaders of the Thai-based human rights group, which has since relocated to Yangon and set up as the LGBT movement's national organization, are attracting international funding with their expansion of human rights-based programs to other parts of the country. As part of their movement, lesbian rights activists receive funding, training, and technical assistance from the national LGBT organization. The organization also sponsors lesbian activists to attend international conventions and take up internships with LGBT rights groups in other countries.

Challenges, of course, remain. Lesbian activists have to ensure that their issues are not overshadowed by the larger movement's push to decriminalise sexual conduct between men, as

they try to ride the wave of legal reforms undertaken by the newly elected government. They continue to struggle with recruitment and retention. Apart from the few leaders, most lesbians 'come and go' from the movement,[25] often citing the need to make a living;[26] while movement work is usually voluntary for lesbians, male activists who are also affiliated with HIV/AIDS organizations are able to incorporate the movement's human rights agenda and their responsibilities into their paid NGO work more conveniently. It also does not help that women, like their Chinese counterparts, earn disproportionately less than men for similar work.[27]

Meanwhile, the women's rights movement, where women do occupy paid NGO positions, gives little attention to lesbians. These activists worry that openly supporting lesbians would taint their credibility when they are already dealing with a patriarchal and conservative Burmese state.[28] Through the LGBT movement, lesbian activists are building alliance with women's rights groups, but they have not yet made substantial inroads. Although they are slowly sensitising women's rights activists to their issues, those who are sympathetic or who are lesbians themselves still rarely speak up for lesbians to avoid conflict or protect themselves.

In short, despite severe conditions of invisibility, Myanmar's lesbian activists have begun to resist those conditions by mobilizing as part of the larger LGBT movement and adopting a human rights framework. Especially since the country's political transition, these strategic moves have been giving them a stronger and more audible political voice. In turn, their strategy has been garnering them economic visibility, connecting them to broader human rights concerns that place Myanmar under international scrutiny during these changing times. As Myanmar's

[25] Interview, lesbian activist, Dawei, 23 February 2013.
[26] Interview, lesbian activist, Yangon, 25 June 2015.
[27] According to Than (2014), there is a lack of comprehensive data on the income disparity between men and women. UN Women (2016) reported in 2016 that women earned only about 60 percent of men's wages for similar work in 2007.
[28] Interview, women's rights activist, Yangon, 23 October 2014.

political and economic conditions morph with recent elections and reconfiguration of political power, it remains to be seen whether such a human rights-based strategy will continue to help lesbian activists navigate their state of in/visiblity, overcome the ongoing challenges, and not conversely trigger government backlash.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article, we problematized invisibility (Brighenti, 2007) by conceptualising the political economy of in/visibility and demonstrating it through case studies on China and Myanmar. We showed the impact of political and economic conditions on lesbian activism and how activists strategize and respond to those conditions over time. While we do not intend to generalize far beyond these two cases, we do conclude the article with several points about the political economy of in/visibility for lesbian activism and the advancement of LGBT politics in similar developing countries and non-Western liberal contexts.

We found common themes in our case studies: Domestic legal conditions constrain civil-political liberties and prevent lesbian and other activists from organizing openly around LGBT issues and deploying human rights or other politically sensitive discourses. Furthermore, compared to the larger LGBT movement and gay activism, lesbians suffer more from political invisibility. Their governments partner with or tolerate HIV/AIDS organizations by gay men or male sexual minorities, enabling those groups to mobilize under "public health" frames to secure funding. Lesbian activists, on the other hand, lack both political sanction to organize more robustly and gain access to HIV/AIDS-related economic resources. Nonetheless, in both countries, lesbian activists manage to navigate political and economic conditions to their advantage; they adopt a variety of responses to in/visibility at the level of domestic and international politics. In addition, they show nuanced adaptations in their alliances with those

inside the LGBT sector, with women's rights, and others. More than maintaining survival, they are able to work on issues that resonate with LGBT rights.

Despite its state of in/visibility, therefore, lesbian activists pursue LGBT politics. As we also noted elsewhere (Chua and Hildebrandt, 2014), taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by HIV/AIDS comes with political and economic obligations that could divert focus away from LGBT issues (see also Baillee Smith and Jenkins, 2012). In rights-adverse states, it often means sacrificing rights-based advocacy. Yet, in China, feeling liberated from the funding expectations of HIV/AIDS work, lesbian activists go beyond providing social service and support to take the lead in advocacy work.[29] They do so by avoiding open engagement with human rights advocacy, and fighting for issues that are not explicitly framed as human rights or LGBT rights but are beneficial to their communities; their recent work on domestic violence is one such example.[30]

Shifts in political conditions can also affect lesbian activists' strategy as well as their economic conditions, helping them pushing the frontiers of LGBT politics, and change their overall state of in/visibility. Unlike the Chinese case, Myanmar's transition to democratic governance increased political opportunities for lesbian activists, as well as the larger LGBT movement, to adopt human rights-based claims openly in their country. The globalised discourse, in turn, brought funding opportunities. Even though lesbians were left out of HIV/AIDS activism, lesbian activism emerged and developed from a nascent LGBT movement that explicitly adopts a human rights-based approach.

---

[29] The recent withdrawal of HIV/AIDS funding from major donors like the Gates and Clinton foundations, and the Global Fund, will mean a change for gay men's activists, as well; they, too, might begin to feel the freedom of doing more gay advocacy like their lesbian counterparts, even though they will have to do so with less funding.

[30] This strategy has some parallel to the U.S. where LGBT activists flew under the radar to achieve adoption rights, and then leveraged on those gains in other more visible sectors (Gash, 2015).

Nevertheless, in spite of their courage and creativity in navigating difficult political and economic conditions, lesbian activists are situated within structural conditions that continue to constrain collective mobilization and consequently affect their in/visibility. Appealing to international human rights could put lesbian activism and the LGBT movement at risk of government backlash (see e.g., Boyd, 2013; Currier, 2012; Lee 2012). Although Myanmar has relaxed its control on human rights discourse, the new government still cracks down on protests and imprisons activists and faces pressure from religious fundamentalists to increase sexual regulation. After the November 2015 elections, the future of democratic reform and the LGBT movement's prospects remain uncertain. In China, although lesbian activists are cautious about being associated with human rights advocacy, they still have to be mindful of tactics considered by the state to be too confrontational and jeopardise the safety of their followers and organizations. Recent crackdowns on labour and feminist activists in China show how quickly structural conditions can change.

It is difficult to predict how the political economy of in/visibility will develop in both countries. What is certain, however, is that in China and Myanmar lesbian activists have navigated the difficult the narrow political opportunities and limited economic ones. They have largely been able to stay within the boundaries of ' activist behaviour acceptable to their governments, while at the same time push those boundaries ever so slightly to effect incremental change (see also Chua 2014). In this respect, while their brand of activism may not resemble that in the developed world, it represents one way forward for LGBT rights advocacy and collective mobilization, especially under politically and economically restrictive conditions.

REFERENCES

Androite, J-M. (1999) *Victory Deferred: How AIDS Changed Gay Life in America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Armstrong, E.A. (2002) *Forging gay identities: Organizing sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Baillie Smith, M. and K. Jenkins (2012) 'Existing at the Interface: Indian NGO Activists as Strategic Cosmopolitans', *Antipode* 44(3): 640-662.

Beckert, J. (2013) 'Capitalism as a System of Expectations: Toward a Sociological Microfoundation of Political Economy', *Politics & Society* 41(2): 323-250.

Bernstein, M. (1997) 'Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement', *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 531-565.

Bernstein, M. (2002) 'Identities and Politics: Toward a Historical Understanding of the Lesbian and Gay Movement', *Social Science History* 26: 531-581.

Biekart, K. and A. Fowler (2013) 'Transforming Activisms 2010+: Exploring Ways and Waves', *Development and Change* 44(3): 527-541.

Blackwood, E. (2007) 'Regulation of Sexuality in Indonesian Discourse: Normative Gender, Criminal Law and Shifting Strategies of Control', *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 9(3): 293-307.

Bob, C. (2005) *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Boyd, L. (2013) 'The Problem with Freedom: Homosexuality and Human Rights in Uganda', *Anthropological Quarterly* 86: 697-724.

Button, J.W., B.A. Rienzo, and K.D. Wald (1997) *Private Lives, Public Conflicts: Battles Over Gay Rights in American Communities.* Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Brighenti, A. (2007) 'Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences', *Current Sociology* 55(3): 323-342.

Chabot, S. and J.W. Duyvendak (2002) 'Globalization and Transnational Diffusion between Social Movements: Reconceptualizing the Dissemination of the Gandhian Repertoire and the "Coming Out" Routine', *Theory and Society* 31: 697–740.

Chua, L.J. (2014) *Mobilizing Gay Singapore: Rights and Resistance in an Authoritarian State*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Chua, L.J. (2015) 'The Vernacular Mobilization of Human Rights in Myanmar's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Movement', *Law & Society Review* 49(2): 299-332.

Chua, L.J. (2016) 'Negotiating Social Norms and Relations in the Micromobilization of Human Rights: The Case of Burmese Lesbian Activism', *Law & Social Inquiry* 41(3): 643-69.

Chua, L.J. and D. Gilbert (2015) 'Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minorities in Transition: LGBT Rights and Activism in Myanmar', *Human Rights Quarterly* 37: 1-28.

Chua, L.J. and D. Gilbert (2016) 'State Violence, Human-rights Violations and the Case of *Apwint* in Myanmar', in A. Barrow and J.L. Chia (eds.) *Gender, Violence and the State in Asia,* pp. 169-85. New York: Routledge.

Chua, L.J. and T. Hildebrandt (2014) 'From Health Crisis to Rights Advocacy? HIV/AIDS and Gay Activism in China and Singapore', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 25(6): 1583-1605.

Cornwall, A., S. Correa, and S. Jolly (eds.) (2008) *Development with a body: sexuality, human rights and development*. London: Zed Books.

Costain, A.N. (1992) *Inviting Women's Rebellion.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Currier, A. (2012) *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Dave, N.N. (2011) 'Indian and Lesbian and What Came Next: Affect, Commensuration, and Queer Emergences', *American Ethnologist* 38 (4): 650-665.

Earl, J. (2003) 'Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression', *Sociological Theory* 21: 44-68.

Edwards, L. (2007) 'Strategizing for politics: Chinese women's participation in the one-party state', *Women's Studies International Forum* 30(5): 380-90.

Epstein, S. (1996) *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Esterberg, K.G. (1994) 'From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement', *Gender and Society* 8(3): 424-443.

Gamson, J. (1995) 'Must Identity Movements Self-destruct? A Queer Dilemma', *Social Problems* 42: 390-407.

Gamson, W. and D.S. Meyer (1996) 'Framing Political Opportunity', in D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy, and M.N. Zald (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, pp. 275-290. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gash, A. (2015) *Below the Radar: How Silence Can Save Civil Rights.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hausmann, R., L.D. Tyson, and S. Zahidi, (2011) *Global Gender Gap Report*, World Economic Forum

He X.P. and S. Jolly (2002) 'Chinese Women *Tongzhi* Organizing in the 1990s', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 3:3, 479-491.

Hildebrandt, T. (2011a) 'The Political Economy of Social Organization Registration in China', *The China Quarterly* 208: 970-989.

Hildebrandt, T. (2011b) 'Same-sex Marriage in China? The Strategic Promulgation of a Progressive Policy and its Impact on LGBT Activism', *Review of International Studies* 37(03): 1313-1333.

Hildebrandt, T. (2012) 'Development and Division: The Effect of Transnational Linkages and Local Politics on LGBT Activism in China', *Journal of Contemporary China* 21(77): 845-862.

Hildebrandt, T. (2013) *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State in China.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Human Rights Watch (2014) *World Report: Burma*. http://www.hrw.org/world-report-%5Bscheduler-publish-yyyy%5D/world-report-2014-burma (accessed 2 April 2014).

International Monetary Fund (2012) *World Economic Outlook (Statistical Appendix).* Washington, D.C.

Jasper, J.M. (1997) *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements. Chicago*: University of Chicago Press.

Johnston, H. (2006) '"Let's Get Small": The Dynamics of (Small) Contention in Repressive States', *Mobilization* 11: 195-212.

Jolly, S. (2000) '"Queering" development: Exploring the links between same-sex sexualities, gender, and development', *Gender & Development*, 8(1), 78-88.

Lee, J.C.H. (2012) 'Sexuality Rights Activism in Malaysia: The Case of Seksualiti Merdeka', In M. Ford (ed.) *Social Activism in Southeast Asia,* pp. 170-186. New York: Routledge.

Lind, A. (ed.) (2010) *Development, sexual rights and global governance*. New York: Routledge.

Lyons, L. (2004) *A State of Ambivalence: The Feminist Movement in Singapore.* Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

McAdam, D. (1996) 'The Framing Function of Movement Tactics: Strategic Dramaturgy in the American Civil Rights Movement', in D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy, and M.N. Zald (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings,* pp. 338-356. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McAdam, D. (1999) *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McCarthy, J.D. and M.N. Zald (1977) 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology* 82: 1212–1241.

McPhail, C. (1991) *The Myth of the Madding Crowd.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Melucci, A. (1985) 'The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements', *Social Research*: 789-816.

Meyer, David S. (2004) 'Protest and Political Opportunities', *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:125–145.

Mogrovejo, N. (1999) 'Sexual preference, the ugly duckling of feminist demands: the lesbian movement in Mexico,' in E. Blackwood (ed.) *Female desires: Same-sex relations and transgender practices across cultures*, pp. 308-335. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mogrovejo, N. (2000) 'Lesbian visibility in Latin America: reclaiming our history' in P. Drucker (Ed.) *Different Rainbows*, pp. 71-89. London: Prowler Press.

Nyanzi, Stella (2013) ‘Dismantling reified African culture through localised homosexualities in Uganda’, *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 15(8): 952-967.

Oberschall, A. (1978) ‘The Decline of the 1960s Social Movements’, *Research In Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 1: 257-289.

Oberschall, A. (1996) ‘Opportunities and Framing in the Eastern European Revolts of 1989’, in D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy, and M.N. Zald (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings,* pp. 93-121. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ofreneo, M.A.P. and T. Casal de Vela (2010) ‘Spheres of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Struggles: A Comparative Feminist Analysis’, *Gender, Technology and Development* 14(2): 197-215.

Polletta, F. and J.M. Jasper (2001) ‘Collective Identity and Social Movements’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283-305.

Rich, A. (1980) ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, *Signs* 5: 631-660.

Ritchie, J. (2010) ‘How Do You Say ‘Come Out of the Closet’ in Arabic? Queer Activism and the Politics of Visibility in Israel-Palestine’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16(4): 557-575.

Rofel, L. (1999) ‘Qualities of Desire: Imagining Gay Identities in China’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5(4): 451-474.

Rohlinger, D.A. (2006) ‘Friends and Foes: Media, Politics, and Tactics in the Abortion War’, *Social Problems* 53(4): 537–61.

Ruan, F.F. (1991) *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture.* New York: Plenum.

Saunders, C. (2007) ‘Comparing Environmental Movement Networks in Periods of Latency and Visibility’, *Graduate Journal of Social Science.* 4(1): 109-139.

Sawyers, T. and D.S. Meyer (1999) ‘Missed Opportunities: Social Movement Abeyance and Public Policy’, *Social Problems*. 46(2): 187-206.

Sedgwick, E.K. (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scheingold, S.A. (2004) *The Politics of Rights: Lawyers, Public Policy, and Political Change.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2010) 'Palestinian Women and the Politics of Invisibility: Towards a Feminist Methodology', *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 3(1): 1-21.

Sikkink, K. (1993) 'Human Rights, Principled Issue-Networks, and Sovereignty in Latin American', *International Organization* 47(3): 411-441.

Skocpol, T. and M. Somers (1980) 'The uses of comparative history in macrosocial inquiry', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22(02): 174-197.

Stockdill, B.C. (2003) *Activism against AIDS: At the Intersections of Sexuality, Race, Gender, and Class.* Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner.

Stoller, N. (1997) 'From Feminism to Polymorphous Activism', in M.P. Levine, P.M. Nardi, and J.H. Gagnon (eds.) *Changing Times: Gay Men and Lesbians Encounter HIV/AIDS,* pp. 171-190. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Swidler, A. (1995) 'Cultural Power and Social Movements', in H. Johnston and B. Klandermans (eds.) *Social Movements and Culture*, pp. 25-40. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tamale, S. (2013) 'Confronting the politics of nonconforming sexualities in Africa', *African Studies Review* 56(2): 31-45.

Tarrow, S. (1994) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, S. and C. Tilly (2007) 'Contentious Politics and Social Movements', *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics,* 435-460.

Taylor, V. (1989) 'Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance', *American Sociological Review* 54(5): 761-775.

Taylor, V., and L.J. Rupp (1993) 'Women's culture and lesbian feminist activism: A reconsideration of cultural feminism', *Signs* 19(1): 32-61.

Taylor, V. and N.E. Whittier (1992) 'Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization', in A.D. Morris and C.M. Mueller (eds.) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, pp.349-365. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Taylor, V. and Nancy E. Whittier (1999) 'Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist', *Waves of protest: Social movements since the sixties* 101: 169.

Than, T. (2014) *Women in Modern Burma.* New York: Routledge.

Thayer, M. (1997) 'Identity, Revolution, and Democracy: Lesbian Movements in Central America', *Social Problems* 44: 386-407.

Tilly, C. (1978) *From Mobilization to Revolution.* Reading: Addison-Wesley.

True, J. (2010) 'The Political Economy of violence against women: a feminist international relations perspective', *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 32(1): 38-59.

UN Women (2016) 'CEDAW and Women's Human Rights: Myanmar', *United Nations,* http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/cedaw-human-rights/myanmar (accessed 1 June 2016).

Weiss, M.L. (2006) 'Rejection as Freedom? HIV/AIDS Organizations and Identity', *Perspectives on Politics* 4(04), 671-678.

Winnow, J. (1992) 'Lesbians Evolving Health Care: Cancer and AIDS', *Feminist Review* 41: 68-76.

Whittier, N. (1995) *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement.* Temple University Press.

Wolf, D.G. (1979) *The Lesbian Community.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wong, C. (2014) 'Beijing police detain gay rights activists before conference', *Global Times*. http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/859069.shtml (accessed 20 May 2014).

Timothy Hildebrandt (corresponding author; email: T.R.Hildebrandt@lse.ac.uk) is Assistant Professor of Social Policy and Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science (Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK). He is the author of *Social Organizations and the Authoritarian State in China* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Lynette Chua is Assistant professor of law at the National University of Singapore. She is writing a book on Myanmar's LGBT rights movement (under contract with Stanford University Press). She is also the author of *Mobilizing Gay Singapore: Rights and Resistance in an Authoritarian State* (Temple University Press, 2014).