

## Silenced voices: the impact of dictatorships in Asia on the LGBT+ community

### ARTICLE

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### Resumo

A construção dos direitos da comunidade LGBT+ enfrenta obstáculos complexos que refletem um processo contínuo de invisibilidade imposta sobre seus membros. Em meio a fraturas sociais e jurídicas, os indivíduos LGBT+ se encontram em desvantagem diante do padrão heteronormativo imposto pela sociedade. Este artigo se propõe a investigar de maneira abrangente como regimes autoritários influenciaram e suprimiram as vozes da comunidade LGBT+, gerando consequências profundas e de longo alcance. Adotando uma análise detalhada de contextos históricos específicos em diversos países asiáticos, o estudo evidencia de maneira inequívoca como tais regimes silenciaram e reprimiram as vozes LGBT+, resultando em repercussões significativas e duradouras. São exploradas amplamente as políticas discriminatórias implementadas por essas ditaduras, ressaltando as múltiplas violações dos direitos humanos e as restrições severas à liberdade de expressão e identidade. O artigo destaca também a resiliência da comunidade LGBT+ e seus esforços de resistência contra os desafios enfrentados, visando o reconhecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunidade LGBT+. Ditaduras Asiáticas. Direitos humanos.

### Vozes silenciadas: impacto das ditaduras no continente asiático sobre a comunidade LGBT+

### Abstract

The construction of LGBT+ rights faces complex obstacles reflecting a continuous process of imposed invisibility on its members. In the midst of social and legal fractures, LGBT+ individuals are at a disadvantage in the face of the heteronormative standard imposed by society. This article aims to comprehensively investigate how authoritarian regimes influenced and suppressed the voices of the LGBT+ community, resulting in profound and far-reaching consequences. By adopting a detailed analysis of specific historical contexts in various Asian countries, the study unequivocally demonstrates how such regimes silenced and suppressed LGBT+ voices, leading to significant and enduring repercussions. The discriminatory policies implemented by these dictatorships are extensively explored, highlighting multiple violations of human rights and severe restrictions on freedom of expression and identity. Additionally, the article highlights the resilience of the LGBT+ community and its efforts to resist the challenges faced, aiming for recognition.

**Keywords:** LGBT+ Community. Asian Dictatorships. Human Rights.

## 1 Introduction

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In the intricate weave of the history of the Asian continent, between the authoritarian fabrics of dictatorial regimes, emerges a chapter often forgotten and relegated to silence: the impact of these dark periods on the LGBT+ community. This article aims to explore a narrative that often escapes historical and social attention, focusing on a less discussed dimension of Asian dictatorial periods. Over the decades, authoritarian regimes have imposed their will over vast regions of Asia, imposing restrictions, repressions and silencing diverse dissenting voices. However, the central focus is on a particularly neglected aspect: the treatment of the LGBT+ community during these periods of dictatorship.

Within the context of authoritarian regimes, the LGBT+ community has often found itself marginalized and invisibilized. The strict social norms and traditional values exacerbated by dictatorships often resulted in a systematic suppression of diversity of sexual expression and gender identity. This suppression in authoritarian regimes not only relegated the LGBT+ community to the social margins, but also had profound ramifications for the development of a collective identity (Barbosa; Costa, 2021, p. 7-8).

The imposition of strict norms and traditional values contributed to the creation of a hostile environment which, in turn, triggered a search for validation and belonging. In this context, many LGBT+ individuals faced the challenge of reconciling their identity with the expectations imposed by the authoritarian regime.

The following analysis aims to shed light on the experiences of LGBT+ individuals in Asian dictatorial contexts, exploring the intricate intersections between authoritarianism and sexual identity. As we delve into the pages of this study, we will delve into the strategies of resistance adopted by the LGBT+ community, the challenges faced in the face of state oppression and the enduring legacies that shape the current dynamics in the region. Understanding these silenced stories not only contributes to a more complete picture of political oppression, but also sheds light on extraordinary resilience and the relentless pursuit of freedom and equality amid adversity.

In the vast history of the Asian continent, there are a number of chapters obscured by authoritarian shadows, many of which continue to be relegated to a disturbing silence. Among these oppressive periods, an often overlooked narrative emerges: the impact of dictatorships on the LGBT+ community. For Zion (2020), over the decades, authoritarian regimes have extended their control over vast swathes of the Asian continent, imposing not only political restrictions, but also restricting and repressing diverse dissenting voices. However, the specific perspective of the LGBT+ community, often submerged in historical narratives, deserves unique attention. This study aims to shed light on the unique experiences faced by LGBT+ individuals during these tumultuous periods, highlighting the complex interactions between authoritarianism and sexual identity (Silva; Alves, 2021, p. 11-12).

The first point of reflection is the often oppressive nature of Asian dictatorial regimes in the 20th century, which imposed ideological rigidity and strict control over society. These regimes, characterized by autocratic governments and a lack of respect for individual rights, often adopted repressive policies against minority groups, including the LGBT+ community. State control over morality and individual expression often resulted in persecution, discrimination and even criminalization of homosexuality, perpetuating the silencing of the voices of this community (Miguel, 2023, p. 12-13).

Secondly, it is crucial to analyze the specific experiences of Asian countries that have experienced dictatorial regimes, such as Afghanistan, China, North Korea and Indonesia, among others. Each of these contexts presents distinct nuances in the way they have dealt with sexual and gender diversity. Understanding the specific policies and practices adopted by these regimes allows for a more in-depth analysis of the implications for the LGBT+ community, highlighting the various forms of oppression and resistance that have emerged.

The third point to be addressed is the role of culture and tradition in perpetuating the marginalization of the LGBT+ community during Asian dictatorships. Pre-existing cultural norms were often instrumentalized by authoritarian regimes to justify persecution and discrimination. By examining how cultural notions were manipulated to serve the

political agenda, we can better understand the mechanisms by which the LGBT+ community was silenced and marginalized.

In Asia, dictatorships have often used culture and tradition as tools to justify and perpetuate the marginalization of the LGBT+ community. In many cases, pre-existing cultural norms were cleverly manipulated by authoritarian regimes to legitimize their discriminatory actions. For example, entrenched concepts of morality, such as the preservation of family lineage and conformity to traditional gender roles, were distorted to frame non-normative gender identity and sexual orientation as deviant or antithetical to "traditional" cultural values.

The instrumentalization of cultural norms was particularly effective due to the reverence and respect generally accorded to these values in Asian society. Dictatorships took advantage of this to impose an ideology of cultural homogeneity, marginalizing any group that was perceived as divergent. For example, during the imperial period, the idea of the "traditional family" was widely promoted as a pillar of nationalist morality, excluding and stigmatizing any form of gender identity or sexual orientation that did not fit this mould (Moreira, 2023, p. 56).

Furthermore, cultural diversity among Asian nations adds complexity to the role of culture in marginalizing the LGBT+ community. While some cultures have traditions that are more tolerant of gender and sexual diversity, others are more conservative and restrictive. This cultural diversity has often been exploited by authoritarian regimes to justify the repression of minorities, including the LGBT+ community. For example, in Afghanistan, where the culture is strongly influenced by Islam and tribal traditions, homosexuality is considered taboo and an offense against Islamic morality. As a result, the LGBT+ community faces discrimination and violence, often based on strict interpretations of Islamic Sharia law (Malerba, 2017, p. 7-8).

China has a complex history in relation to sexuality, with many ancient traditions recognizing the existence of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. However, the Chinese government has adopted an ambivalent stance towards the LGBT+

community. Although homosexuality is no longer criminalized, state censorship and social pressures still create significant challenges for LGBT+ individuals (Ting, 2012, p. 6).

In North Korea, cultural norms are tightly controlled by the authoritarian government. Homosexuality is officially considered an aberration and a threat to social cohesion. Dissent from state-imposed cultural norms is severely punished, making it extremely difficult for LGBT+ individuals to express their identity (Albert, 2023, p. 5).

Indonesia is a country with a diverse mix of cultures, religions and traditions. While in some parts of the country, such as Bali, there is relatively greater tolerance towards sexual and gender diversity, in other areas, especially those with a strong Islamic influence, homosexuality is stigmatized and faces legal and social persecution (Torres, 2010, p. 6).

These examples highlight how cultural norms and traditions vary significantly between Asian nations and how these differences influence the experience of the LGBT+ community in each context.

Furthermore, it is essential to analyze the legacy of these dictatorships and their lasting impact on LGBT+ communities today. Although many of these regimes have been replaced by more open systems, the marks of repression persist, influencing social, political and legal attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity. Reflecting on how these experiences have shaped present attitudes allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play (Oliveira; Silva; Sarroeira, 2022, p. 14-15).

In the tumultuous context of Asian dictatorships, the voices of the LGBT+ community are among the most silenced and marginalized. Under authoritarian regimes, the expression of sexual and gender identity becomes dangerous, subject to repression and severe punishment. The research problem of this study lies in gaining an in-depth understanding of the consequences of this systematic silencing and the oppression exercised by dictatorships on the LGBT+ community on the Asian continent. Given this context, the main objectives of this study are twofold: firstly, to identify the patterns of oppression, discrimination and human rights violations perpetrated by dictatorial regimes against the LGBT+ community; secondly, to examine the forms of resistance, mobilization and quest for recognition and equality that have emerged in response to these adverse

conditions. By outlining the research problem and objectives of this study, it is possible to situate oneself within the historical and political backdrop of Asian dictatorships, shedding light on the magnitude of the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community and outlining the importance of addressing these issues in a critical and sensitive manner.

This article, therefore, seeks to illuminate the silenced voices of the LGBT+ community amidst the shadows of Asian dictatorships, exploring the social, political and cultural ramifications of this silencing. By unveiling these often forgotten stories, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the experience of the LGBT+ community in authoritarian contexts on the Asian continent.

## 2 Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study consists of a bibliographical survey, which provides a solid basis for in-depth exploration of the topics already investigated. This approach allows the researcher to gather relevant theoretical knowledge about the problem in question, seeking valuable answers and insights (Lima; Mito, 2007, p. 5-6).

For Soares and Picolli (2018), as for Pizzani *et al.* (2012), bibliographic research is a crucial phase in the academic research process, consisting of the search, selection and critical analysis of a wide range of bibliographic sources related to the subject of study. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to understand and contextualize the subject in question, exploring existing knowledge, theories, debates and discoveries already made by other scholars.

Essentially, in this article, bibliographical research will involve the analysis, especially of journal articles, in digital format. The aim is to gather a solid base of information that enables the researcher to understand the historical, theoretical and methodological context of the topic under analysis.

In this stage, a comprehensive review of the existing literature will be carried out, seeking to understand the discriminatory policies and practices adopted by Asian dictatorships towards the LGBT+ community. Studies will be explored that address both



the legal and social aspects of policies of repression and discrimination, as well as the consequences of these policies for the LGBT+ community.

In addition, gaps in the existing literature will be identified, highlighting areas that require further research and analysis. These gaps will be useful in guiding the research, directing the focus towards underexplored aspects of the topic.

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Bibliographic research will also be essential to support the theoretical discussion of the research, allowing the results found to be contextualized within a solid conceptual framework. Theories related to identity, resistance, human rights and public policy will be explored to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of Asian dictatorships on the LGBT+ community.

In short, bibliographic research plays a crucial role in providing a comprehensive and grounded overview of the impact of dictatorships on the Asian continent on the LGBT+ community. It not only informs the methodological approach of the research, but also contextualizes the study within the existing body of knowledge, highlighting the importance of amplifying "silenced voices" and promoting inclusion and human rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

### 3 Silenced by Dictatorship: LGBT+ in Asia

The experience of the LGBT+ community under the rule of Asian dictatorships represents a narrative that is often forgotten and hidden in the historical record. This section sets out to explore the complex dynamics of survival that LGBT+ individuals faced during authoritarian periods in various Asian nations. By delving into the devastating effects of these regimes, it is possible to glimpse how gender identity and sexual orientation became frequent targets of state repression, relegating the LGBT+ community to a forced silence. In light of this, Maurício (2018) comments that:

[...] the LGBT community is a minority, and a sexual minority can be defined as a group whose sexual identity and orientation differs from that of the majority of society. Included in this group are also transsexual and intersex individuals. Sexual

minorities are despised and attacked by the rest of society because of their sexuality alone and because they disrespect the gender roles historically ingrained in most societies today. Like the victims of racism, sexism and religious persecution, these minorities have been labeled by dominant social groups as less than human and, as such, have no legitimacy to hold the same rights as so-called "normal" people (Maurício, 2018, p. 16).

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The institutionalized oppression of Asian dictatorships imposed an additional burden on the LGBT+ community, which was forced to face double marginalization. By exploring personal accounts and stories of resistance, this section aims to highlight the intrinsic resilience of the LGBT+ community in the face of a hostile context. Throughout these turbulent times, members of the LGBT+ community found creative and courageous ways to resist, often building underground support networks to preserve their identity and dignity (Moreira, 2023, p. 5-6).

In addition to direct persecution, Asian dictatorships imposed a lasting legacy of stigmatization and discrimination, perpetuating harmful stereotypes that still echo in contemporary society. This section looks at how discriminatory laws and social repression have shaped cultural perceptions of gender diversity and sexual orientation, influencing attitudes to this day. The critical analysis of these legacies seeks not only to document the past, but also to shed light on the persistent challenges faced by the LGBT+ community in its struggle for acceptance and equality. In this logic, Cabral (2017) states that:

With the relative relaxation of censorship and the expansion of a less clandestine field of political action, marked by the flourishing of increasingly powerful oppositions, the new LGBT groups began to demand an agenda of recognition and public policies. This shift in focus demanded a stance of dialog and demands rather than open and uncompromising combat from the state. In this way, the focus of the demands became the abolition of discriminatory legislation, the inclusion of legal protection in the legal system, the abandonment of a medical-legal discourse of stigmatization by health class entities, shelter for victims of violence and investigation of those responsible, as well as an open dispute in the press against the broadcasting of sensationalist and prejudiced news (Quinalha, 2017, p. 74).

We agree with Silva (2016) when he highlights the resistance strategies adopted by LGBT+ individuals during the Asian dictatorships, highlighting the initiatives that allowed identities to be preserved and a sense of clandestine community to be built. This section



therefore seeks to provide an in-depth overview of the resistance strategies that enabled the LGBT+ community to survive the silence imposed by the dictatorships, highlighting stories of courage and solidarity that transcend the barriers of time.

Dissecting the experiences of the LGBT+ community under Asian dictatorships reveals not only the suffering inflicted, but also the tenacity and resilience that define the legacy of these dark periods. When considering the legacy of Asian dictatorships on the LGBT+ community, it is essential to draw connections with current realities and examine how past experiences continue to shape the lives of these individuals (Nogueira, 2023, p. 26-27).

According to Maurício (2018):

The proliferation of new identities to rival traditional identities demonstrates the difference between the fixed and stable concepts of a gay identity and the greater fluidity of the sexuality of many men and women. For example, in the MSM community - Men Who Have Sex With Men - sexual identity is determined by sex roles and not by the gender of the sexual partner. This results in three types of homosexual men, and the term "gay" is insufficient to designate any of them: firstly, given existing cultural norms in South Asia, the man who takes the active role in the sexual act does not adopt a homosexual or gay identity (a designation that is considered pejorative), but is labeled, within the MSM community itself, as "giriya" or "panthi". This label translates the idea of a real man who identifies as heterosexual. In second place are men who take on the passive role and exhibit characteristics of both genders. And in third place are transsexuals, or hijras. This model seems to ignore the existence of individuals who take on the passive role of the sexual act, but who do not display variable characteristics of the two genders (Maurício, 2018, p. 49).

For Baptista and Boita (2017), the experience of the LGBT+ community under the rule of Asian dictatorships reveals an intricate web of challenges and resilience that often remains on the margins of historical narratives. During these authoritarian periods, gender identities and sexual orientation became targets of systematic repression, forcing the LGBT+ community to face not only state oppression, but also the silence imposed by society. The depth of this marginalization is evident in the stories of resistance, where LGBT+ individuals have found courageous ways to preserve their identities, often building secret support networks to mitigate the impact of social and legal stigma.

For the LGBT+ community in Asian dictatorships, survival often meant inhabiting the shadows of society, resisting in subtle and creative ways. The imposition of discriminatory laws and strict social norms led to the need for underground resistance strategies. These strategies not only ensured the preservation of individual identity, but also built a basis for solidarity among members of the LGBT+ community, forming a web of support that transcended the barriers of imposed silence (Carvalho, 2023, p. 33-34).

Asian dictatorships not only restricted the expression of sexuality and gender identity, but also left a lasting legacy of stigmatization that permeates contemporary society. Harmful stereotypes created during these authoritarian periods persist, impacting the lives of LGBT+ individuals to this day. A critical analysis of this legacy seeks to illuminate not only the historical adversities, but also the persistent challenges faced by the LGBT+ community in its quest for acceptance and equality (França, 2023, p. 41-42).

When exploring the legacy of Asian dictatorships on the LGBT+ community, it is essential to understand not only the suffering inflicted, but also the resilience that defines the legacy of these dark periods. Rescuing these untold stories seeks to contribute to a more complete understanding of Asian history, recognizing the significant role of the LGBT+ community in building more inclusive and authentic narratives about the impacts of dictatorships in the region. This legacy, despite the imposed silence, resonates as a call for reflection on the importance of preserving diversity, resistance and the search for a fairer society.

Cabral (2018) comments that:

From the issue of injury, which is ever-present in the lives of LGBT+ people, it is possible to reconstruct the way in which they are subjected to the cisheterosexual order and its practically inescapable binarism. However, it is also possible to reconstruct how they resist domination by producing new ways of life, creating spaces of freedom and a certain particular world as a possibility of (re)existence. Hence the importance of talking about the processes of subjectivation that recreate personal identity from the identity attributed, re-signifying not only one's own subjectivity, the making of oneself, but engendering new ways of relating to others (Cabral, 2017, p. 13).

In addition to direct persecution, the imposition of stigmas and discrimination by Asian dictatorships has left a persistent legacy that permeates contemporary societies. Harmful stereotypes, ingrained during these dark periods, continue to affect cultural perceptions of gender diversity and sexual orientation. The silencing imposed by authoritarian oppression still reverberates today in the LGBT+ community's ongoing struggle for acceptance and equality, fueling the need for recognition and understanding of this complex heritage.

The resistance strategies adopted by the LGBT+ community under the Asian dictatorships tell stories of courage and solidarity. In a hostile environment, clandestine networks and safe spaces emerged, where authentic expression of identity was possible, albeit in secret. These survival strategies not only allowed identities to be preserved, but also contributed to building a collective resilience that transcends the limitations imposed by dictatorships, revealing the inner strength of the LGBT+ community.

For Fernandes, Santos and Rodrigues (2023), as for Sardinha (2024), drawing connections between the past experiences of the LGBT+ community and current realities is essential to understanding the extent of the legacy of Asian dictatorships. The critical analysis of this legacy not only documents historical suffering, but also highlights the importance of addressing the lasting after-effects of these authoritarian periods. This study is not just a dive into the past, but a deep reflection on how the experiences of the LGBT+ community under dictatorships continue to shape the narratives and challenges faced by these individuals, paving the way for a more inclusive and just society.

During Asian dictatorships, gender identities and sexual orientations outside the established norms were often targets of discrimination and persecution. Systemic marginalization imposed additional pressure on the LGBT+ community, leading many individuals to hide their true identity to avoid reprisals. This imposed silencing, whether out of fear of persecution or in response to restrictive social norms, had profound implications for the identity formation of the LGBT+ community in these historical contexts (Dias *et al.*, 2023, p. 7-8).

At the same time, the LGBT+ community developed creative survival strategies to resist oppression. Secret support networks, symbolic codes and artistic manifestations often became clandestine means of expression and connection, allowing the community to remain resilient in the face of the silence imposed by dictatorships. These strategies of resistance not only preserved identities, but also paved the way for a history of resilience and solidarity that transcends temporal boundaries.

The legacy of Asian dictatorships on the LGBT+ community is evident not only in the historical scars, but also in current social and political dynamics. The persistence of harmful stereotypes, the lack of legal recognition and barriers to acceptance continue to shape the experiences of the LGBT+ community in the region. This theme therefore seeks to explore how historical events have influenced the formation of contemporary Asian LGBT+ identity, underlining the importance of recognizing and overcoming the legacy of silence imposed by dictatorships (Neves, 2021, p. 7-8).

Ultimately, the narrative of the LGBT+ community under Asian dictatorships is a story of resilience, resistance and perseverance. By uncovering these often forgotten experiences, this issue seeks to give voice to the silenced stories, shedding light on the complexities of LGBT+ life under authoritarian regimes and encouraging critical reflection on how society can move forward towards a more inclusive and respectful future.

## 4 LGBT+ Resistance: Activism in the Shadows

In many parts of Asia, the LGBT+ community faces a reality marked by systemic persecution and institutionalized discrimination. In the midst of these challenges, courageous acts of resistance and struggle emerge, characterizing an activism that often takes place in the shadows, away from the public eye and under the constant threat of repression. This resistance manifests itself in a variety of ways, from the formation of clandestine support networks to the creation of safe digital platforms for the expression of identities and experiences. According to Maurício (2018),

In most Asian countries, Asian values, which derive from Confucianism, come up whenever human rights are discussed. Some say that Asian values such as loyalty to the state, social discipline and collectivism can be used to justify ignorance of the universal value of human rights, and it is true that they have served to justify more authoritarian regimes. In fact, in the 1980s and 1990s, Asian values emerged as a way of emphasizing national identity and defending Western influence (Maurício, 2018, p. 120).

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For Kobayashi *et al.* (2021), LGBT+ activists in Asia, often forced to operate in the shadows of society, silently challenge imposed norms, promoting visibility and the quest for fundamental rights. This form of resistance, although often invisible, is a testament to the resilience and determination of this community to seek a more inclusive and equal society. The history of these struggles in the shadows not only highlights the urgent need for recognition and protection of LGBT+ rights, but also inspires reflections on the transformative power of resistance in challenging contexts.

In a context where the visibility and rights of the LGBT+ community are often challenged, activism in the shadows emerges as a resilient form of resistance in Asia. This vast continent witnesses persistent persecution against individuals who challenge established gender and sexuality norms. Despite adversity, the LGBT+ community has found creative and strategic ways to engage in discreet forms of activism, often operating on the margins of public visibility.

Resistance in Asia manifests itself through secret networks, clandestine meetings and anonymous online platforms. Activist groups operate in the shadows to protect the identity of their members, recognizing the risks associated with openly expressing their gender identities and sexual orientations. This form of activism, although less visible, plays a crucial role in promoting awareness, education and emotional support within the LGBT+ community (Vasconcelos, 2023, p. 7-8).

It's interesting to see how, even under repression, silenced voices find ways to make themselves heard. Whether through online campaigns, underground educational initiatives or discreet cultural events, activism in the shadows demonstrates remarkable resilience. This resistance not only challenges social norms, but also contributes to a

broader dialog about diversity, inclusion and equality, even in contexts where such conversations are often restricted. Therefore,

The stigmatization of LGBT behaviours, identities, relationships and communities is done through the institutionalization of negative attitudes and beliefs about LGBT people, and is done through what is known as heterosexism (a cultural ideology that reproduces heterosexual norms and statuses in the most varied aspects of life in society). It is through cultural heterosexism that ideologies are propagated that LGBT people are inferior and less deserving of social recognition than heterosexual people; it can be both physical and psychological, and ranges from prejudice and prejudicial attitudes towards LGBT people, to extreme violence and murder (Petit, 2021, p. 21).

However, it is essential to recognize that activism in the shadows is not without its challenges. The constant threat of exposure, persecution and discrimination creates an atmosphere of persistent fear. In addition, the lack of public visibility can limit the impact of these actions and raise awareness of the issues faced by the LGBT+ community. In this complex context, there is a need to understand the nuances of this activism and explore strategies to increase its effectiveness, thus promoting the construction of a more inclusive and respectful society in Asia.

The activism subtly rooted in the LGBT+ community in Afghanistan is an eloquent testimony of courage and resilience in the face of a formidably adverse context. In a country where laws and social norms are often oppressive and discriminatory towards the LGBT+ community, courageous individuals find discreet ways to express their identity and seek support.

Due to the restrictions imposed by Afghan society and government, open and outspoken activism for LGBT+ rights is practically impossible. However, this does not prevent members of the LGBT+ community and their allies from acting discreetly and strategically to promote acceptance and ensure safe spaces for the expression of their sexual orientation (Santos, 2022, p. 6-7).

These activities often take place in the shadows, through clandestine networks, encrypted communications and secret meetings. Activists and defenders of LGBT+ rights



in Afghanistan face constant threats and the risk of violence, which makes their work all the more admirable.

As well as providing emotional and practical support for members of the LGBT+ community, shadow activism also plays a crucial role in raising awareness and education, challenging harmful social norms and promoting a culture of inclusion and respect.

Although an arduous and often dangerous task, shadow activism in Afghanistan's LGBT+ community is a testament to human resilience and the determination to fight for basic rights and dignity, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity. These efforts deserve to be recognized and supported by the international community as we continue to work towards a more just and equal world for all (Santos, 2022, p. 9-10).

In the bowels of Chinese society, where oppressive policies stifle the expression and rights of sexual and gender minorities, a resilient and courageous movement is emerging. In a country where the LGBT+ community faces systematic persecution and discrimination, individuals and groups find refuge in the shadows of the underground, promoting equality and visibility in a discreet but powerful way (Yan, 2024, p. 33-34).

Away from the watchful eyes of the authorities and public opinion, networks of support and solidarity emerge, providing an oasis of acceptance and emotional support. In secret rooms and secure online forums, these activists share their stories, exchange resources and plan strategies to tackle the challenges they face on a daily basis. These spaces become vital refuges where the community can find comfort and strength in the midst of adversity (Yan, 2024, p. 36).

Despite threats of repression and punishment, activism in the shadows persists, fueled by the conviction that change is possible even in the darkest corners of society. Through discreet actions, such as small-scale awareness campaigns and clandestine artistic interventions, these activists quietly challenge established norms and claim their space in the struggle for equal rights.

However, the cost of activism in the shadows is high. Those who dare to challenge the *status quo* face the constant risk of reprisals, from persecution and imprisonment to

social and family ostracism. Even so, the fire of resistance continues to burn, fueled by the hope of a future where diversity is celebrated and all voices are heard.

In North Korea, the government exercises strict control over all aspects of daily life, which includes severe repression against any form of dissent or individual expression that challenges the official ideology. In this context of oppression, the LGBT+ community faces even more significant challenges.

The North Korean regime does not recognize the existence of LGBT+ identity and therefore any form of expression or organization that aims to promote the rights of this community is ruthlessly suppressed. Simply being LGBT+ in North Korea can result in persecution, arbitrary detention and even summary execution (Albert, 2023, p. 6-7).

Faced with this hostile environment, LGBT+ activism takes on secretive and subversive forms. Individuals who identify as LGBT+ often resort to clandestine methods to connect with other members of the community and create support networks. This can involve the use of clandestine technology, encrypted communication and discreet meetings.

For Nagamine (2019), the fight for visibility and recognition of the LGBT+ community in North Korea is an extremely difficult and dangerous battle. However, despite the risks, many individuals continue to defy the oppressive regime in search of dignity and equality. Resistance persists, albeit in the shadows, as a manifestation of the LGBT+ community's determination to claim their space and fundamental rights.

It is important to recognize that reports on the situation of the LGBT+ community in North Korea are scarce and often difficult to verify due to the strict control of information by the government. However, accounts from defectors and some international organizations offer insights into the extreme adversity faced by LGBT+ individuals under the North Korean regime (Cunha, 2020, p. 7-8).

In Indonesia, a vast and diverse nation, there is a marginalized community that faces a silent battle for its very existence. While the world's spotlight often shies away from this reality, there is a web of vibrant yet cautious activism unfolding in the shadows.

On Jakarta's busy streets and in isolated rural villages, members of the LGBT+ community find subtle ways to express their identity and resist social pressures. Clandestine support groups offer a safe haven where stories are shared and bonds are formed in secret. With the spread of information through social media and encrypted messaging apps, a web of solidarity is woven, providing resources and guidance for those living under the specter of discrimination and persecution (Rodrigues; Hernandez, 2020, p. 6-7).

Persecution is a palpable reality for many members of the LGBT+ community in Indonesia. Reports of physical aggression, intimidation and harassment are frequent, while social and legal structures perpetuate a climate of fear and oppression. In addition, public exposure of LGBT+ identity can lead to social exclusion, loss of employment and even expulsion from their own families (Torres, 2010, p. 6).

These imminent dangers force many members of the LGBT+ community to take refuge in the shadows, where they can discreetly seek solidarity and support. However, even in these clandestine networks, the threat of being discovered persists, requiring constant vigilance and extreme precautions.

Laws criminalizing the expression of gender identity and sexual orientation are still in force, creating a climate of fear and repression. Shadow activism is a response to this hostile environment, where direct visibility can result in devastating consequences (Torres, 2010, p. 8).

Despite the challenges, the resilience of the LGBT+ community in Indonesia is evident. From secret demonstrations to small acts of resistance in everyday life, these individuals find ways to affirm their existence and claim their right to equality. As the world continues to turn, it is essential not to lose sight of the courageous and persistent struggle taking place in the shadows of Indonesia.

In all these contexts, activism in the shadows represents a brave response to persecution, allowing the LGBT+ community to continue to fight for their rights, even in hostile environments. The resilience demonstrated highlights the importance of recognizing

and supporting these efforts, promoting inclusion and acceptance across the diversity of human experience. In light of this, Mazzeto (2020) comments that:

Various discussions around discrimination within the social movement itself, and the implications throughout history, ended up outlining the LGBT terminology, first giving visibility to Lesbian women and later to Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals and Transvestites. It is noteworthy that the last National LGBT Conference, held in 2015, decided to continue with the LGBT terminology in the field of public policy formulation, however, there are indications from social movements that the terminology to be used more appropriately is LGBTQI+, in order to represent the widest range of sexual and gender diversity (Mazzeto, 2020, p. 28).

As for future changes, shadow activism also points to the hope of significant transformations. As the globalized world continues to evolve and awareness of human rights expands, it is possible to anticipate gradual changes in social attitudes and, eventually, government policies. Shadow activism can become a catalyst for greater acceptance and respect for sexual and gender diversity, as Asian societies continue to confront and challenge the discriminatory norms of the past.

However, even in the midst of oppression, a narrative of resistance is emerging: "Shadow Activism". The Asian LGBT+ community, facing persecution, finds ingenious ways to speak out and fight for their rights. This resistance in the shadows represents a courageous, often anonymous, but incredibly impactful form of activism. Underground organizations, support networks and individual activists emerge as a collective force, challenging the official narrative and claiming space for diversity and inclusion.

These stories of resistance illustrate how, even under authoritarian regimes, the flame of equality and freedom continues to burn. The struggle of the LGBT+ community on the Asian continent transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, connecting people through a shared determination to defy adversity. While the "Silenced Voices" echo sadly, "Shadow Activism" persists as a beacon of hope, showing that even in the midst of persecution, the quest for human rights and equality can never be extinguished.

## 5 Conclusions

In the final considerations of this study, the significant impact of dictatorships on the Asian continent on the LGBT+ community becomes clear. A comprehensive analysis of the different experiences lived by individuals from this community in authoritarian contexts reveals not only the extent of the repression, but also the resilience shown by many.

The repression imposed by dictatorships resulted in long-lasting consequences for the LGBT+ community. Marginalization, discrimination and persecution had profound effects, leaving marks that persist to this day. Forced silencing perpetuated harmful stigmas and limited the LGBT+ community's ability to contribute fully to society.

Understanding the legacy of these dictatorships is essential to guide efforts towards a more just and inclusive society in Asia. Recognizing the negative impact of discriminatory policies is the first step towards promoting meaningful change. The struggle for equality and human rights must be continuous, aiming not only to repair the injustices of the past, but also to guarantee a future where diversity is valued and respected.

It is imperative that society, human rights organizations and local governments unite in promoting a culture of acceptance and inclusion. Awareness of the challenges faced by the LGBT+ community in Asia must be raised, and concrete measures implemented to create safe and equal environments.

In concluding this analysis, the importance of breaking with discriminatory and repressive patterns of the past is emphasized. The quest for justice, equality and respect for human rights must be relentless, so that the silenced voices of the LGBT+ community can finally be heard and valued in all their diversity.

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