



Dossiers D&J n°4 - Summary

The international scene

Being a religious believer and
Lesbian, Gay, Bi or Trans around the
world

Content of the full dossier

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Editorial – So far, so close...

Elisabeth Saint-Guily et Nicolas Neiertz, co-presidents and co-spokepersons



Our association, David & Jonathan, has been working for the defence of LGBT people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) in the world for a long time. It is a founding member of ILGA-Europe (International Lesbian and Gay Association – Europe) and of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. Its International Commission allows those of its members who wish to do so, to take part in action on this international level.

With our allies, we are committed to the struggle against homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the world. In particular, in our public speech and in the media we insist on the fact: LGBT-phobia exists throughout the world, with sometimes unfortunately the support of religious authorities. This dossier makes clear the special role that these authorities play in many countries where our LGBT sisters and brothers are persecuted. As a Christian homosexual movement open to all, D&J tirelessly calls on religious leaders, whoever they are, to condemn all violence directed against LGBT people and reminds them of the dignity of each person, whatever his/her gender identity or his/her sexual or affective orientation.

Each of us here in France has been able to feel the harm that homophobic words or acts can do, in our families and in our churches. LGBT people are also physically aggressed. We feel close to those people who have accepted to testify in this special issue of our magazine *Dossiers D&J*, especially when the homophobia that they undergo uses religious arguments.

Together with our allies, we denounce the religious or political authorities who encourage these LGBT-phobic persecutions in a certain number of countries, especially in Africa, in Eastern Europe and in the Near East.

It is important to bring people together and create ties of friendship, in France as elsewhere. This is why D&J in 2015 organised in the North of France an international meeting with the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups combined with the annual assembly of David & Jonathan.

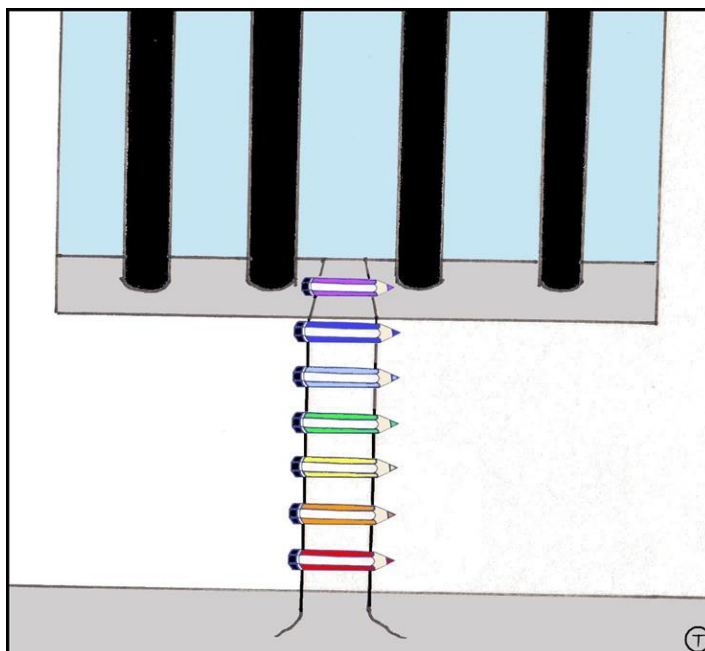
More than 250 LGBT's, Christians, Jews and Muslims from 27 countries were thus able to get to know each other and to share in a brotherly way a time of conviviality, of life attestation, of workshops and religious celebrations that overwhelmed us all. Names of countries and cities became incarnate in voices and faces and tears and smiles. This gave us the idea of creating this exceptionally rich issue, which will become a precious tool, for our own movement and for our allies and friends around the world and for any person of good will who aims at better understanding of discriminations throughout the world. We express our warm thanks to all those who have helped us to put it together!



May this work and these encounters give us the energy to act in the future against LGBT-phobia in the world! These subjects that touch on the intimate and the family are sensitive ones in every culture. Our solidarity must become manifest in our support for religious LGBT militants and their allies. Together we must act in a specific way for each person, and listen to them, so as to understand the path to emancipation that is their own. For the liberation of oppressed persons cannot be done against them. We are delighted with the ties thus created that cross religious or political boundaries and we see in them a message of hope, in faithfulness to the spirit of the Gospel.

"I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven", declared Desmond Tutu, the Anglican archbishop from South Africa, whose daughter, Mpho Tutu, an Anglican minister, has just married her female partner.

May D&J, along with many others, continue to support the emancipation of LGBT people throughout the world! We have our part to play in building a world of justice and peace, with the best of humanity. ■



Summary

The lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people (LGBT) who bear witness in this issue of "Dossiers-D&J" live in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle-East, the Far-East, or elsewhere. They have different religions (they are Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Muslims) and come from different cultures, from different countries where their rights vary a great deal. They may be exposed to violent homophobia, sometimes in connection with the religious background, that threaten them physically, to the point some have to flee and look for asylum so they can start a new life. Others choose to stay and fight for their dignity, some of them in the very name of their faith. Their words and their courage teach us about living.



The notion of family is very important, even essential.

➔ Different situations but common experiences

° The context varies according to the people interviewed

The part played by the family is a major one. For Denise (Ivory Coast), "the notion of family is very important, even essential", and Kalhil (Ivory Coast) confirms that "in Africa, without your family's support, you just can't go anywhere".

Machismo remains deeply rooted in the culture of many countries. Denise highlights "the social order in which men dominate society and women". Davis (Nigeria) notes that there is a high degree of inequality between men and women in Nigeria, as in most African countries.

Many men view women as their possession. Some think women must not be educated. In most cases, women have no voice to express their opinion, neither in Church nor society". Misha (Russia) clearly states that "Church and Government both promote a very traditional pattern in which men work and earn money, and women look after the home and children". Wang (China) makes the following analysis:

"the root of the problem lies in traditional Chinese marriage. Parents tell their children: do whatever you like, but give us grand-children".

Economic poverty and insecurity constitute aggravating factors, notably in the areas with a high population growth: "For the average Nigerian, the problem is how to manage one daily meal" (Cynthia).

Paul points out the existence of child-soldiers in East Congo. According to Unicef, the African population which currently amounts to 1.2 billion inhabitants, will have doubled by 2050 and is one of the poorest in the world according to the Observatory of Inequalities.

In some countries, the legal system is overtly biased against LGBT people: according to *ILGA*, in 2015, 76 countries criminalise homosexual relations between

two consenting adults, death penalty being the sentence in 5 of them (Mauritania, Sudan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen). Subhi (Syria) points out that in the Islamic State [Daesh], gays are tracked and killed all the time". *UN, Amnesty International* and *ILGA* all insist on the infringements on Human Rights regarding LGBT people in numerous countries.

° A homophobia with common causes

The testimonials we have collected all reveal the common forces behind homophobia. It is founded on a mixture of social and religious traditionalism,

together with anti-Western and anti-colonialist feelings. Religious institutions play an important part. In Africa for example, Davis (Nigeria) notes "human sexuality has become a political tool in my Church. [...]"



Based on a photo from Julien Hameis

The media and the Churches deal with homosexuality as an evil. Homosexuality has become a major taboo". Franck (Ivory Coast) explains: "Among Christians, Evangelical Churches are crusading against homosexuality. We are targeted in every single sermon as hellhounds. Among the Catholics, remarks are less frequent and less aggressive".

Orthodox belief has been used against us as a weapon and has had a negative and long lasting influence on the frame of mind that prevails in our society against LGBT people.

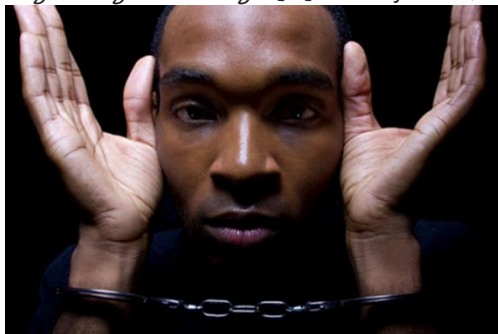
Paul (Democratic Republic of the Congo) points out that "If lobbies exist today against homosexuals in the Congo, they definitely are religious institutions. They actually have overwhelming influence on moral standards and social values". Jules (Cameroon) is a witness of "sermons delivered by clergymen of various religious denominations, constant appeals from the media recommending to members of society to wipe out the curse imported into our country by the Western world".

According to Mgr Sarah, an African cardinal, acceptance of homosexuality, and so of same-sex couples, is a change that the Western world, including the Church, wants to impose on Africa. This is in contradiction with a considerable number of studies in the field of social sciences that have clearly demonstrated the presence of homosexuality in sub-Saharan Africa for centuries, as Samuel reminds us...

The same can be said of Eastern Europe. For Florin (Rumania), "orthodox belief has been used against us as a weapon and has had a negative and long lasting influence on the frame of mind that prevails in our society against LGBT people". Misha (Russia) adds "Orthodox Churches only put forward the points that make people fall back in line. [...] They have arbitrarily made up a definition of what tradition was and use it as a means of control and prohibition".

°A homophobia with devastating consequences

In Ivory Coast, according to Denise, "people are officially neither for nor against homosexuality, but unnamed homophobia prevails daily, with violent acts, threats and bad words". Monica (trans) observes: "Transphobia is manifest every day [...]. Which means you have to be on the lookout to be safe". Khalil adds: "For us, Muslims, death is the most frightening of all things. [...] When you die, nobody will bury you.



Your body will just be left stranded". Rose reminds us that in Kenya, "when the wrong sexual orientation begins to show, the child is expelled from school". Jules

(Cameroon) observes: "homosexuals have to go through swindling, extortions, blackmail, eviction from their home and work-place, family rejection, arrests, arbitrary custodies, murders and attempted murders". He adds: "During the year, I had to face three physical aggressions, one of them in the airport on my return from a trip, by a policeman who also tried to extort 200 euros from me". Aristide (Cameroon) is very distressed when "some choose, rather than being faced with permanent threat, to commit suicide".

When he was 13, Tomas (Angola) was raped twice by his uncle who thought he was too effeminate. In the following years, his own father even had him jailed twice for several months "in order to make him loose his bad habits". Later, when after being denounced his homosexuality was exposed, Tomas was confined, deprived of water, tortured and raped every day by a group of ten servicemen. His



persecutors enjoyed telling him again and again: 'now you can watch your own slow death'. Tomas was helped by an accomplice and finally managed to flee from his jail to a foreign country.

Lesbians meet with specific difficulties. For Denise (Ivory Coast), "they often have a lesser degree of education than other women. Boggled down by their identity problems, they tend to give up studying earlier. As a consequence, they have more precarious lives and are exposed to the calamity of addiction to drugs.

For Pierre (RDC) "homosexuality in Africa is really... it shuts all doors to the future".

In Russia also, homophobia is overwhelming. Misha mentions that "the situation is very bad in Russia, hatred is stirred up and violence is always lurking". Marc adds "the Russian gays I have met live a withdrawn life, many are single, they do not look after themselves, drink heavily and do not protect themselves when having sex. Aids is viewed as a Western issue". According to a poll by the Levada Center, more than half Russian citizens think homosexuals should be isolated from society (37%) or even "got rid off" (27%).

In Iran, Arman explains “my parents would rather have me be a criminal: that would have caused less shame than a homosexual son”. The risk was getting too high: “Arrests were taking place at parties, I was scared for myself, for my reputation and for my family”. Arman had to escape to Europe.

In South Africa, Sarah explains that “whereas LGBT rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, a lot of violence is generally going on against LGBT people [...]. Another severe problem is that rape is used 'to correct' lesbians”.

In Vietnam, Huy underlines that “it is fairly frequent to undergo violence from family members if they find out you belong to the LGBT community”.

When it comes to transgender persons, Sharon, co-president of the European Forum of LGBT Christian groups, observes that “most people expect everyone to be clearly identifiable as 'man' or 'woman'. As a result, when a person does not entirely fit one of the categories, she or he is likely to suffer acute discrimination and experience frequent violence”.

My parents would rather have me be a criminal: that would have caused less shame than a homosexual son.

➔ Different strategies to adapt

To cope with violent homophobia, LGBT's develop different strategies.

° Try to hide who you are



Some LGBT's get married: Aristide (Cameroon) says “homophobia took my life. [...] To be a pastor in Cameroon, or at least in many protestant and evangelical churches, you must be married. I had to bring myself to do it, to be a pastor”.

Some movements are also trying to “cure” LGBT's. Misha (Russia) was part of “a group of Christians who were trying to fight against their own homosexuality.” After struggling for years, he “realised that homosexuality could be a decent way of life.” Paul (DRC) mentions “how many times have I had under my eyes on social networks some individuals posing as former homosexuals, miraculously freed from

their ‘satanic addiction’ and urging others to convert and to join alleged exorcism prayer circles?”

An American association, *Exodus* tried for 40 years to “cure” homosexuals, as Alexandra recounts. Its former president now



recognises that the pseudo-therapies of “conversion” do not work. Similarly, a former leader of the American organisation *Love in Action* has said: “Changing sexual orientation is impossible”.

° Keep silent

Most LGBT's are forced to keep silent. Kalhil (Ivory Coast) said: “It is a disgrace for Muslim families. If this gets out, you will be automatically rejected. This is why we live hidden”. Aristide (Cameroon) adds “Talking about LGBTI's at home is already an act of courage, it is such a taboo. As for assuming being gay ... better forget about it”.

° Leave and try to live

Many LGBT must flee their countries due to the risk to their safety or their lives. They must start life over again from the beginning. This exile is very painful. Arman (Iran) said “On the plane, I looked at my friend's empty seat. It was painful. He had let me down”.

The journey is sometimes risky, and Pierre (DRC) testifies: “You cross borders on foot, you sleep out-of-doors, you go through the great forests, it was very hard. [...] When you're there in the middle of the forest at night in the cold, you think you're going to die”.

The host countries create an ambivalent feeling: Arman (Iran) remembers: “I was breathing in every moment of my freedom, as a man, a human, not as a gay. Just to be free”. He notes: “During the first evening at the JAR [the annual gathering of David & Jonathan] I saw men dancing together and women dancing with women: it was amazing! They were not flirting, just being happy and dancing”. At the same time “I had imagined Paris with the Eiffel Tower and the Champs Elysees, and then I found myself in this slum that looked like anything but Paris”.

Davis (Nigeria) explains: “It is very difficult to be cut off from your people and your culture. I had to sacrifice all that was important to me. In Europe, integration is

The situation is very bad in Russia, hatred is stirred up and violence is always lurking.

very difficult, for example at first you do not even know how to get a passport, get a job, use public transport”. Tomas (Angola) also

notes that "migrant life in France is not easy! With only 11 euros a day for meals and for living expenses, and not being allowed to work, it is hard to live. And there is a common racism, you are considered as a dirty homosexual Negro".

The procedure for obtaining asylum often takes a long time. Arman (Iran) has been through a "big depression". But in the end, he was able to start a new life and Arman married his companion in France. Today he says: "I miss my family. Especially now that my mother knows me and my husband".

Some associations help LGBT asylum-seekers. Frédéric (ARDHIS - France) describes these people "as totally lost, disoriented, particularly because of the language barrier, but also because of the complexity of our administration and its procedures." A key challenge for justifying the asylum case is to explain the motivation of the request. [...] Most often the claimant is not used to telling his/her story, to talking about intimate and often painful topics." Moreover "in addition to the pain of exile, LGBT asylum seekers often suffer from internalised LGBT-phobias because of their education and their culture".

Arman (Iran) concludes: "To someone who risks his life in his own country because he is gay, I want to say that at a certain level of risk you have to make a choice, to stay or to leave: leave everything behind and search for freedom, but be prepared for the worst. I do not know if leaving is an act of courage, perhaps staying requires more courage. I am currently wondering about it. [...] For freedom there is a price to pay.

To someone who risks his life in his own country because he is gay, I want to say that at a certain level of risk you have to make a choice, to stay or to leave.

For me, it meant leaving all the people I loved, to become a stranger not always welcome in my new country, to lose my identity, to stay without work and without papers, to be dependent".

° Stay and come to terms

Many LGBT's also live positive experiences by coming to terms. Jules (Cameroon) says: "Today I am a man at peace,

convinced of God's love for me". In a touching letter written after his coming-out, Paul (DRC) wrote to his parents: "According to your judgement, the problem of sexuality arises for any individual under one or the other forms of sexuality: bisexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality or transsexuality. Ultimately, in all of its forms, it is the same reality: human sexuality. I did not expect such subtlety from you".

Leave and try to live.

➔ Religions and social implications

° Church tensions over LGBT emancipation.

At the present time the theme of homosexuality is taking up a lot of space in Christian Churches. Some religious leaders have spoken out



vocally on the subject. One of them is Cardinal Sarah, a Guinean member of the Roman Curia, who said: "There is confusion between good and evil... God was quite clear on homosexuality". Fabio (Italy)

explains: "A fundamentalist minority in the Catholic Church insists on what they call 'Gender ideology'... although the majority has kept clear of this campaign". Wang (China) "Christian churches are on the rise in China, especially

Evangelical Churches which are very unwelcoming to LGBTs". And yet Denise (Ivory Coast) notes that "the Pope has opened up many people's minds. He has raised doubts among people with deeply entrenched certainties, that are now being slowly eroded".

° Tensions relayed by the world of politics and the media.

Leah (Moldavia) mentions that in her country "there is no clear divide between Church and State". For Anastasia (Russia), Russian authoritarianism finds its basis in "a new ideology of otherness built on 'traditional' values represented by the Orthodox faith, the patriarchy and its implications". She denounces the "law against homosexual propaganda, which most of the time condemns the mere fact of mentioning homosexuality in public". Misha (Russia) adds "if you speak out on homosexuality or on transsexuality, you are in trouble because it is thought that under-age children might have access to this information".

Florin (Romania) notices that "the Orthodox Church imposes its moral and traditional values as the unique basis for human rights, distorting our system of human rights and its understanding completely". Misha (Russia) adds: "The concept of human rights is understood as a foreign idea", the Russian government is trying to introduce "a resolution at the Human Rights Council of the United Nations so that human rights would not only be individual rights but also the rights of a group or perhaps a nation".

° The necessary re-interpretation of religious texts

Misha (Russia) thinks that “we need to use the language of theology to show that what they are doing is evil”. Three biblical passages are repeatedly quoted as religious arguments against homosexuality: the story of Sodom in the book of Genesis, two legal precepts in the book of Leviticus, a passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans. “Most serious biblical interpreters, if not all, currently consider that these three texts do not refer to homosexuality as it is lived today”, says Michael. Thus, the EPUdF (French united protestant church) has just allowed religious blessing for same-sex couples following a civil marriage.

Resorting to biblical texts is also ambivalent in Judaism. Renée (Israel) says that “in the media, we never hear of a rabbi condemning homosexuality as an ‘abomination’ and quoting Leviticus, for example”. Some rabbis in France, as elsewhere, suggest reading the Bible with a view to reconciling homosexuality and Jewish religious



practices, according to Tenou’a magazine.

Nassr Eddine (Morocco, Muslim LGBT activist living in France) describes how he relates with the Koran: for him “‘Queer’ is a more pervasive notion in the Koran than homosexuality that does not exist anywhere. Neither homosexual love nor homosexual relations are ever mentioned. Homosexuality was created out of the blue by political and religious jurisprudence to obey to the demand of a hetero-dogmatic theology and successive political powers. He sees in the Koran “a liberation theology” for LGBTs. “The prophet (peace on him and his saintly family) said: ‘the one who condones injustice without opposing it is not one of us’ “. For him “God granted us the right to live, to love, to have a home, to get married, to have children, to practice one’s religion and to reconcile it with one’s own homosexuality”. All the same, he recognises that “in Morocco, it is impossible to use religion to further LGBT rights”.

God did not curse anyone when he created a bisexual, a heterosexual, a homosexual or a transsexual; he created us different to show his creative diversity in this specific aspect we call sexuality.

° Reconciling faith and homosexuality

For Aristide (a minister in Cameroon) reconciling one’s faith and one’s homosexuality “is the easiest thing to do: God is love, and God loves me. This is the message I deliver every day to those who are on the brink of suicide, who have lost their interest in life”. For Paul (Congo-Kinshasa) “God did not curse anyone when he created a bisexual, a heterosexual, a homosexual or a transsexual; he created us different to show his creative diversity in this specific aspect we call sexuality”.

Denise (Ivory Coast) adds: “whether you are gay or lesbian, you are in the image of God”. Nora (Tonga), who is trans, says as a joke: “God created men, then God created women, but he was still dissatisfied. Finally he created me and then he was satisfied!”.

➔ Emancipation movements versus conservative movements

° Factors speeding up the advent of emancipation movements.

The internet and social networks have drastically changed LGBT people’s lifestyles in the last few years. Franck (Ivory Coast) and Jules (Cameroon) say: “Social networks create an unexpected space where LGBTIs can socialise, get organised and meet”. It gives hope. For Franck and Jules, “Africa is the world’s future, since most of the world’s change and growth will take place there in the coming fifty years”. So they decided to bring together all the French-speaking LGBT Christians in Africa in an LGBTI Christian Forum of French-speaking Africa. This organisation already unites activists from five different countries: Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Congo and Ivory Coast. Training activists is the main priority: “We need to know how to counteract religious leaders who summon up Bible verses against us every day”.

Leah (Moldavia) mentions the existence of “spiritually secure spaces for LGBT people and their families”. Such is the case of the European Forum for LGBT Christian Groups. “It was the first time I met people who celebrated both their sexuality and spirituality”.

° A positive evolution

The UN notes decisive progress in various legislations: “Since 2011

This is a real challenge for international LGBT movements. They must show more solidarity to emerging movements in the South which necessitate all sorts of help.

fourteen states have passed laws against LGBT discriminations and hate crimes, strengthening the current arsenal and

increasing people’s protection in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity... Three states have decriminalised homosexuality”.

Huy (Vietnam) says that in her country “the law on marriage has repealed the ban on same-sex marriages”. Leah (Moldavia) adds that

“women’s rights and anti-discrimination policies are only beginning, for the anti-discrimination law has only been passed recently”. Misha finds in Poland “a very different, much easier situation (compared with Russia)”.

Renée (Israel) says “On LGBT issues Israeli society has changed for the better in the last 20 years”. Franck Jaoui (Jewish LGBT world congress) says: “Diversity and inclusiveness are values shared by numerous Jewish or LGBT groups in different countries”.

For Amnesty international, many African organisations helping LGBTs continue, against great odds, to fight for greater acceptance and a better protection of fundamental rights.

° How can international LGBT movements support local initiatives?

Jules (Cameroon) thinks that “this is a real challenge for international LGBT movements. They must show more solidarity to emerging



movements in the South that need all sorts of help”. Davis (Nigeria) adds: “If you want to help people, you need to listen to those people, listen to their own

stories and understand African culture (...) Besides, France has fought so many battles. You can explain what process you used in winning gay rights”. Leah (Moldavia) insists: “For this support to be effective you need a local go-between. Someone who has access to outside experience and knowledge and can apply it to the needs of a specific country”.

It goes hand in hand with the awareness of international issues. Marianne (David & Jonathan, France), who was deeply involved in the gathering of the European Forum of LGBT Christian groups in France in 2015, thinks that “the participants really experienced the international dimension of our movement. It is no longer an idea... They are faces and names from other countries. They will stay with us and embody this international dimension (...) Our movement took an active part in creating the *Global network of Rainbow Catholics*, gathering 25 nationalities, to encourage the Catholic Church to welcome LGBT people and their families”.

➔ Conclusion

Sharon, female co-president of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups, thinks that “Education is very important to change people’s hearts, and that’s what we need. We also need more people, either LGBTs or allies, willing to take responsibilities and be visible. They must speak out and work, day in day out, in favour of LGBT people. I don’t think we need to have a different approach in the case of different churches. I think we need to identify the origin of LGBT-phobia and respond to it appropriately”.

Jules (Cameroon) concludes: “Where is love in all that? We need to work with religious leaders of all persuasions to come back to the true values of religion. Instead of advocating exclusion they should remind all believers of the love of God for everybody, so that each person might do the same thing with his or her neighbour”.

Samuel, Fabrice, Michael, Marianne, Alexandra, Anthony, Nicolas.

Translation Michael, Martine, Yves and Fabrice ■

[Read the full dossier \(French 82 pages\) ➔ Link](#)



Some testimonies

Other interviews and articles are part of the full dossier (French 82 pages) → [Link](#)



Davis Mac-Iyalla– Nigéria

Interviewed by Fabrice



Davis: I was born in Rivers State, southern Nigeria in 1972. All my Family is Anglo-Catholic. I grew up being part of the Church. I had a very active role in the Church. I come from a happy good family, so I lived a normal life as every human being. When I came out of school, I had a job and had a successful career.

But also I discovered that I was more attracted sexually to men and it's obvious that I was gay. I lived my sexuality in a "don't ask, don't tell" society, because the way you live your sexuality is not commonly disclosed in the culture I come from.

My Church was against homosexuality, but there was no serious desire at that time to discriminate or persecute anybody. I lived my life well.

The reason why I left West Africa for England was because as the Church started to discuss human sexuality, it became unsafe for anyone to challenge the Church and government. Human sexuality became a political tool in my Church. The priests said that there were no homosexuals in their Church. Even though I was indirectly out before that, people knew my sexuality.

My publicly coming out was when I came out to challenge the authority of the Nigerian Church for denying the existence of gay and lesbian people. That challenge exposed me to brawl. People began to look at my life, to attack me. I was attacked, beaten and jailed by the

Nigerian police. Even when I was in Togo I was also physically attacked. When I came to England, on a visit, somebody from Nigeria sent an email to threaten me.

I could have been killed in Nigeria. Nigeria has a mob culture and you can be violently attacked or killed, and nobody will take the responsibility. Besides, homosexuality is still criminalised in Nigeria. I was lucky to leave Nigeria alive.

D&J: Why is homosexuality such an evil in Nigerian culture?

Davis: The media and the Churches treat homosexuality as evil. Homosexuality has become a strong taboo. Even if people are not against homosexuality and don't worry, the media and the religious people control the masses.

In Nigeria there are secret cults and secret societies. Most of those cult members are alleged to be homosexuals whereby they are seen as taboo or outcast. Religious people blame all kinds of mishaps on homosexuals and influence the government to pass stronger laws to punish homosexuals.

The media and the churches treat homosexuality as evil.

D&J: Are these people influenced by foreign organisations?

Davis: In Western countries (Europe, America), there are very strong extremists who want to influence Africa.

D&J: What is condition of women in Nigeria?

Davis: There is a high level of inequality between men and women in Nigeria as in most of Africa. A lot of men think women are their possession. Some men think women must not have education. In most cases, women do not have a voice to express their opinion on the Church or in society.

D&J: Is there any LGBT association in Nigeria? Is it a secret life?

Davis: LGBT people are normal people such as in Europe or in America. However there are no gay pubs or clubs. There are some gay friendly places. They must be discreet and cannot say that they are gay. Internet is very useful to create different groups and to connect. So there is a lot of supporting for LGBT groups in Nigeria, but most of them cannot be public.



D&J: Are foreign groups any help to LGBT people of Nigeria?

Davis: In 2005, I founded *Changing Attitude Nigeria* ([link](#)). It helps LGBT people within the Church and outside the Church. We began like a support group. We come together and pray. There are also a lot of secular resource groups.



D&J: You have emigrated to Europe. Was it difficult?

Davis: It was very difficult, even if I am a well known human rights activist. It is very difficult to cut off from your people and from your culture. I had to sacrifice everything that was important for me. In Europe, integration is very difficult, for instance at the beginning you don't even know how to get a passport, to get a job, to use public transport. You need to struggle in several areas. Even getting a job is not an easy task: you are discriminated because of your accent, because of who you are.

D&J: How did you survive?

Davis: I have never received any support from the Nigerian community, because even in the UK most of these people are homophobic. I have good friends, Christian LGBTs, for instance in France at David and Jonathan. Different groups helped me to deal

It is very difficult to cut off from your people and from your culture. I had to sacrifice everything that was important for me.

with my status of refugee.

D&J: What was the process to become a refugee in the UK?

Davis: To be eligible to the status of refugee you need to go through a long procedure, learn the language. The procedure for asylum can take up to 6 months or 3 to 5 years. Even if you are well known it is a very difficult journey.

Once you are successful with your asylum, you are expected to look for a job, and this is what I did. I started working in a restaurant, while re-training for a new profession. Europe was not easy for me and I continue to work hard to survive.

D&J: How does your association help LGBT refugees in the UK?

Davis: We are a group that support LGBT refugees. We help them to have the right witness statement.

D&J: What about lesbians in Nigeria?

Davis: There are also lesbians. Some of them get married for social acceptability; others are not married.

Most of them keep their life private. There is also a strong Lesbian movement in Nigeria part of the LGBT movement.

D&J: What about transgender people?

Davis: Transgender people live very discreetly in Nigeria. I do not know any transgender movement. I knew of a few Trans people in Nigeria.

D&J: Are you still in contact with Nigeria?

Davis: Even if I am in the UK, I am still supporting LGBTs in Nigeria.

D&J: Do the changes for LGBTs in Europe or America influence the LGBTs' condition in Africa?

Davis: Africa is changing. We are starting to discuss issues such as same-sex marriage in private and sometimes in the media. Some LGBTs can now dare to be out and proud, even if the atmosphere is very difficult, and that is a deep progress.

D&J: How can a movement such as David and Jonathan help Nigerian LGBTs?

Davis: There are many ways to help and to give assistance. Many LGBTs in West Africa need education to learn that religion approves their homosexuality. Many LGBT people still think that may-be something is wrong with them. So there is a lot of education that

people in the West can do to support LGBT people in Africa.

Besides, France has fought so many battles. You can explain what process you used in winning gays rights. You can give back knowledge about how to achieve these rights.

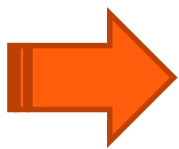
Another thing that could help is when an LGBT person in Nigeria comes out, they lose their job and get disowned by their family. You can help by explaining how to build a business, how to be autonomous.

If you want to help people, you need to start by listening to these people, listen to their own stories, and understand their culture from Africa.

You can also influence French foreign policy to fight for equality within Nigeria or within Africa.

So there are many ways in France, in Europe or in America you can support LGBT people in Africa to get their human rights. ■





Florin Buhuceanu - Romania

Interviewed by Fabrice

Florin Buhuceanu, a Romanian human rights activist, is coordinating advocacy programs for the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. He is also the founder and executive president of ECPI-Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives, a human rights foundation defending and promoting sexual and reproductive rights in Romania.

Trained as a theologian, Florin Buhuceanu's formal or informal leadership ensured the success of many of civil society's legal advocacy projects in Romania, from the adoption and implementation of the anti-discrimination legislation, hate-crimes legislation, to the blockage of discriminatory and harmful provisions against women in the field of sexual and reproductive rights. Mr. Buhuceanu, former Executive Director of ACCEPT and President of the Centre for Legal Resources, is the author of the 2014 Report "Traditional values, Religion & LGBT rights in Eastern Europe" ([link](#)).

D&J: Where do you come from?

Florin: I am living in Bucharest, Romania. For many years, I have led the national LGBT organisation called ACCEPT association whose priority was for years to decriminalise homosexuality in Romania. Romania had an active anti-gay legislation till 2001. For many years, our public expression and identity were not tolerated. A number of us were sent to prison even after the collapse of communism, till 1998-1999.

That's the context I grew up in, and this is why I became a human rights activist, to change this repressive legislation which actually made us outcasts in Romanian society. Religion had a huge influence in keeping this anti-gay legislation alive, unfortunately.

The Romanian parliament took pretext of the inquisitorial position of the Orthodox Church. They said: "Look, this is a strong position of the Church that is largely embraced by the general population. We are living in an Orthodox country, so we cannot get rid of this legislation." The Orthodox religion was used as a weapon against us and has negatively and persistently influenced the general mentality in our society.

Religion was an important part of my life, and part of my work. I studied theology. I was dismissed from school in third year after they



publicly heard my position on this issue, in the nineties. It was a time when you couldn't hear simple words like "I am gay". For many years, I was one of the very few out LGBTs with a voice and a face. Even now, it is still difficult to find out LGBTs who are spreading a message in media, for example, or in relation to public institutions. Several countries in Eastern Europe are still dealing with this lack of visibility despite all our efforts (LGBT prides, public events about sexual orientation and gender identity issues, publications). People are still reluctant to come out.

D&J: Are families very influenced by traditional values?

Florin: The values in this society are religiously based. Of course, there is a social pressure upon each of us to conform to these values (e.g. marriage). You are supposed to be heterosexual.

My compatriots have difficulty in understanding that some people are different. They think that homosexuals have chosen to be

LGBT, that sexual orientation is an option in our case. Mysteriously, we choose to be who we are. Invisibility reinforces these stereotypes, unfortunately.

If there is a consistent lack of public personalities who are out as gays, this situation is even worst in terms of lesbian coverage. There is no public lesbian, known as such in this society even in 2015. Lesbians can be out in a small circle but not in public. There is a clear lack of visibility in the educational sphere, no curriculum exists to giving space for these identity and diversity issues. Sex education

The Orthodox religion was used as a weapon against us and it has negatively and persistently influenced the general mentality in our society.

at school is also absent, and this is the case for many countries in the region.

Even today, there are not so many books about homosexuality, not to mention bisexuality or transsexuality.

In a large city such as Bucharest, Cluj or Timisoara there are some LGBT establishments, but they are opened mostly during the weekend. Imagine the rest of the country: what is your chance of meeting a partner when you live in some small town?

Homosexuality is still considered as abnormal by half of the population.

D&J: What about Christian LGBT association in Romania?

Florin: Since 2001 we have a group related to the LGBT Church, the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). We are currently connected to MCC and the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups. We have published a number of resources on internet and participated in public events, being associated with a human rights foundation, the Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives that is based in Bucharest.

Homosexuality is still considered as abnormal by half of the population.

A large number of our fellow Romanians are still living with the dilemma "God versus LGBT". We have

internalised this bullshit. Because of this induced trauma, several LGBTs have become anti-religious, considering religion as a threat to their personal identity. That's why it is essential to create visibility around sexual orientation and religion, and to invest in the visibility of Christian LGBT issues in Romania and in the region.

D&J: What about the relationship with the Churches?

Florin: I would say that the Orthodox Church is in many areas more conservative than the Roman Catholic Church, generally speaking.

The Orthodox Church feels modernity as a kind of aggression on traditional values. It portrays the LGBT as a kind of postmodern actor that aggresses the traditional societal model. Their ecclesiastical representatives treat us as a turbulent and dangerous community simply because we challenge the so call traditional values and the way they are used in society. There is a conceptual fusion in which



the traditional values are equated to family values, and all of them are considered to be religious values – and this is dangerous! They



have transformed these values into identity icons which cannot be even touched, discussed or negotiated. In their eyes, heterosexuality is the way it is meant to be and everything outside the procreative heterosexual solution is considered to be against nature, against God and against society.

Homosexuality is for them a kind of quintessence of social evil. We are considered to be the most serious opponents to these traditional values. These proclaimed traditional values are actually American concepts, developed by American fundamentalists and exported to Eastern Europe and to Africa with the support of various churches from the region. What is new is that more recently, European states and state leaders are supporting this kind of ideology, and it is not only the Orthodox Church anymore.

Russia has decided to fully accept and promote internationally this ideology. The Russian state and the Orthodox churches are becoming the representatives of traditional family values

Homosexuality is for them a kind of quintessence of the social evil.

in coordination with other Churches such as some Catholic Church leaders and some protestant and evangelical Churches. The Russian Federation and the Orthodox Church pretend to be the defenders of the nation, of family, of Christianity and the whole of Europe against the moral decadence symbolised by the West. LGBTs are considering to be against their national traditional values, traitors and foreign agents infiltrated by the West... As a direct effect, we are treated as artificial, ideological agents of the West, able and eager to 'homosexualise' Eastern Europe. It is totally ridiculous.

D&J: Romania is a part of Europe and has a strong relationship with other EC countries. Does that influence society?

Florin: Society is definitely changing. However the Orthodox Church after the 1990s became much more present in public life and in politics. None of our political parties dares to compete with the



authority of the Orthodox Church. This is common for Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Moldova, Russia, Macedonia and even Greece.

The Orthodox Church is imposing moral and traditional values as the only basis for human rights, twisting completely our human rights system and its interpretation and practice. Human rights cannot be operational in the absence of these patriarchal values: in a potential competition between these two, the moral and traditional values must prevail. For example, in the case of abortion, they managed to redefine themselves as human rights actors protecting “the rights of the unborn child” who should have the same citizen rights as any of us. In a medical situation in which the mother’s life is endangered by her pregnancy, what is the doctor to do? He cannot make any decision. The mother is no longer important in this vision, her life is becoming of secondary importance.

In this battle of rights, the majority has the right to impose its views and to suspend the rights of minorities which are not conforming (women, LGBT, religious minorities, etc.).

Politicians have a mental blockage. In the case of legally recognising families outside marriage, their entire focus is homosexuality related, so they cannot see that there are also several forms of heterosexual families. Civil unions are considered to be against Family and Orthodox values, so they cannot be legally recognised regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

D&J: Do young couples get married?

Florin: More and more young straight couples do not get married, especially in the church. This is a social reality that a politician cannot ignore anymore, but they keep on ignoring it deliberately.

However, we are facing a significant decline in population. For them, supporting civil partnership legislation, means that our natality would go down, and it is a problem of national security. It is an interesting and cynical way to rewrite history.

D&J: In such a context, how can Western LGBT Christian groups support your fight?

Florin: One of the most important needs is to identify and support those alternative religious voices supporting equality and non-

discrimination as social justice issues. For instance, it will be good to get more connected with those French actors that took serious initiatives, the capacity of Opposition to attract and mobilise public support against *Mariage pour tous*. There is another area where French Christian LGBT groups can play a role. Eastern countries have a generation of activists who are very young, and they need constant and structured support. It is very difficult for a Christian LGBT group, in some countries such as Romania, Serbia, Russia or Moldova, to survive. There is very little support for these groups outside of the support offered in the last 2-3 years by the European Forum of the LGBT Groups subsidised by the Dutch Government and the Arcus Foundation in the United States.

It is important indeed to create more theological links between East and West, for Eastern and Western Christian Churches to discuss in depth topics such as religion and sexual and reproductive rights in a safe space. In the absence of such a format, how can you treat ‘the other’ with respect, how can you create a genuine dialogue? There is no safe space right now in any of our Eastern European countries. The Western Christian LGBT groups and the Western Churches can

play a very active role supporting the creation of such dialogue on the level of the World Council of Churches or the Conference of the European Churches.

In this battle of rights, the majority has the right to impose its views and to suspend the right of minorities which are not conforming (women, LGBT, religious minorities, etc.).

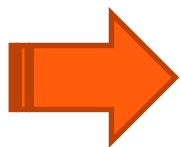
D&J: What about the influence of fundamentalist Western groups?

Florin: If you look at the number of actors against LGBTs, you can easily find Western and French persons with important influence such as Gregor Puppink from the European Center for Law and Justice who is one of the persons behind the ‘Manif pour tous’. He makes the link between the conservative French bishops, Le Front National, the Russian Orthodox Church and the American fundamentalists.

These organisations are working with important numbers of lawyers. They were present in the Romanian parliament during the recent debate on the civil union, to oppose it, to give an example. They also support the ‘gay propaganda’ legislation in Russia. They are smart



enough to create diverse and close relationships between Eastern and Western conservatives. They operate in Eastern Europe, in Africa, and also in Western Europe on the level of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. They pretend to represent the Christian voice. We should dismantle this monopoly they are claiming and raise our voice in support of a society free of discrimination and bigotry. ■



Anastasia – Russia

Interviewed by Marianne

D&J: Can you briefly describe the general context of your country?

Anastasia: Russia seems to be passing through a period of authoritarianism, although tolerated by the majority of the population. In the last few years, the government has taken some voluntarist decisions, which put the population at risk, both political and economic. This risk is justified by a new Ideology of otherness, based on the so-called “traditional” values, which is the Orthodox

In the last few years, the government has taken some willful decisions, which put the population at risk, both politically and economically. This risk is justified by a new Ideology of otherness, based on the so-called “traditional” values, which is the Orthodox faith, patriarchy and its implications.

faith, patriarchy and its implications.

D&J: What is your own life path?

Anastasia: I felt in love with a girl at the age of 13; she was my classmate. It seemed very natural for me – to fall in love with a girl. It was true love, and I didn't even have a thought that something could be wrong about it. I didn't even realise that the person I loved was of the same sex. I didn't think of myself as a “lesbian”, until somebody told me that probably I was. I felt that this wasn't the right word for me, but I didn't understand why. The relationship lasted for about 15 years. And it took even more before I realised: I am not a woman. Since, I am not a lesbian. Now I perceive myself as an agender.

I am somehow lucky to have grown up in the late 90s. This was quite a different time. And I feel sorry for present day queer Russian teens who are under the pressure of state and society.

D&J: How do LGBT people live in your country?

Anastasia: In Russia, LGBT people are now experiencing hard times. It is against the law to “propagandise” homosexuality, that is, in many cases, just to talk publicly about it. One recent legislative

initiative is a fine just for a coming-out... We are wondering what will be next.

Several LGBT activists had to ask for asylum abroad because of persecutions.

There are also several movements, whose rhetoric is anti-gay – most of them are nationalistic and pro-Orthodox.

The society is hostile towards LGBTs. The media often report acts of violence throughout the country.

D&J: What about LGBT movements?

Anastasia: LGBT movements are a result of the courage of their founders and activists. Interested people can find their web pages, which are public, and get some information about their profiles, activities and stuff. But there are different “security checks” for those who wish to go further, to join the group in the social media, to get involved and participate in the activities.

I don't know anything about direct influence of international LGBT movements, but I guess that at least some indirect influence exists. Many activists travel abroad and have a chance to know more about international LGBT experiences and to take it into account in their own work.

D&J: Spirituality: how do LGBT people live their faith?

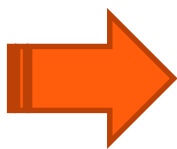
Anastasia: As far as I know, two LGBT Christian groups exist in Russia – one is in Moscow and another one is in Saint Petersburg. This is vanishingly little for such a huge country, but of course it is better than nothing.

The Moscow LGBT Christian community, The Light of the World, of which I am a member, meets several times a month - to pray, to discuss different subjects

and to support each other.

We all belong to different churches, mostly lesbo-, homo- and transphobic. Many of us have difficulties trying to reconcile our sexual orientation or gender identity and faith. ■





Misha - Russia

Interviewed by Fabrice

D&J: Where do you come from?

Misha: I am 31 years old. I was born in Moscow, in Russia. When I was 26, I moved to Poland.

I grew up in an Orthodox Christian family. My parents converted to Christianity before my birth. They were members of Father Alexander Men community. It is the name of a priest who was killed in the

I came out in the Emmanuel community and they said that even if they can stay friends with me, I cannot stay in the community.

1990's for his active church ministry. My parents have taken huge responsibilities in this Church. I grew up as a Christian believer. In the 90's, my parents were

very connected with the Emmanuel community. Through these communities they understood they wanted to build a community in Russia. I was strongly involved in Church life in my childhood.

In my youth, I realised that I had "gay feelings". I was very much afraid of that and have struggled with that since I was thirteen. I prayed.

My parents were aware of my problem and sent me to a therapist and to priests. I was part of a group called "overcoming X"; it was a group of Christians trying to fight their homosexuality.

Because of this group and of the therapy, I decided to go with a girl. My first girl became my wife. We started dating, and after one year and a half we got married. Before she became my wife, I told her my story. Our daughter was born. We were very hopeful. The problem was I tried to change, but the more I tried, the worse my state was and I failed on many occasions.

We struggled like that for almost six years after our marriage, then we decided that it was too painful and meaningless. She decided to live separately and to divorce. My daughter staid with her.

When I left my wife, for one year and a half, I experienced the lowest point in my life. I had to reconsider everything. I had the luck to have some friends, especially some priests who were asking me relevant questions. I decide that I could be gay but celibate. I was thinking about a monastic life or a consecrated life. It became clear that I was not made to be celibate but to be in relation of love. I realised that being gay could be a decent life.

D&J: Then, you met a boyfriend?

Misha: I met a guy from Poland online. We started chatting, but soon, we fell in love. We were visiting each other in Poland and in Russia. Less than half a year later, I decided to live in Poland. It was a decision based on my love for him, but also because I had too much pressure.

I was too connected with my previous life in all domains, including my professional life. I already knew Poland, because in my previous life I was connected with the Emmanuel community in Poland and I was part of this community.

The relationship with my boyfriend in Poland failed after two years. Then I met my wonderful lover, and we have been together for one year and a half.

I came out in the Emmanuel community and they said that even if they could stay friends with me, I could not stay in the community. Then I looked for other communities in Poland and I met a Christian LGBT group called "Rainbow Catholics". I came to the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups and also Christian LGBTs of Eastern Europe where I have taken on some responsibilities.

Professionally speaking, I am an interpreter, and I am also a musician. Every month I go to Moscow to see my daughter.

D&J: Does your family know your situation?

Misha: They know but they have not accepted my situation. However they met my partner.

My ex-wife knows that I am gay, by she is in a "don't ask, don't tell" attitude. My daughter doesn't know my situation because she is ten years old and, in Russia, talking to her is not the safest thing to do. She would not be able to protect herself, so I try to wait until she is more mature.

D&J: It seems impossible to be gay in the Emmanuel community.

Misha: I came out and I had to quit the community, but my case was the first coming out in this community. Right now a ministry is starting for homosexuals who accept to stay celibate. You cannot be a practising gay and to be publicly out. Some people are saying that they can accept you as a friend, but as the community is so huge, they cannot change it. The Emmanuel Community is very conservative.



Photo: Keete 37

D&J: What is the difference in LGBT status between Russia and Poland?

Misha: The situation is very different. The situation is much easier in Poland. Poland is a democracy, a part of the European Union. Even if the population is strongly Catholic, there is a strong left-wing

In Russia, the situation of LGBT people is a disaster.

movement. Even if the parliament rejects same-sex unions, or if the president refuses changes for transgenders, I am living in Warsaw where I can live freely with my partner. We have attended a TV show as musicians. The producer wanted me to tell my story. We did it with my partner, and we were not afraid to be persecuted. The reputation issue is more complex, but there is no physical risk and I can be protected by the police if needed.

In Russia, the situation of LGBT people is a disaster. You cannot discuss publicly any issues about LGBTs, because there are now very strict laws against anti-Russian, anti-traditional, anti-Christian discourse coming from the West. Also, there are anti propaganda laws. That means that if you say anything public about homosexuality or transsexuality, you are in danger, because one can consider that minors may have access to this information online. If you do not protect yourself by showing that minors cannot have access, you will have serious difficulties because of propaganda laws.

In the 90s (before anti-propaganda laws), LGBT life developed. There were organisations, clubs and artists. Everything now must be hidden. Some people who have been out in recent years have lost their job and position. There is a strong level of violence, especially outside of the capital. In smaller cities, the understanding of homosexuality is much lower. There is a movement in social networks, a kind of criminal organisation, organising themselves into teams wishing to "punish pedophilia". They call it an "anti-pedophile movement", but in fact what they do is to provoke and lure gays. They invite them online for a date, and then a team of gangsters hit the poor gay person. There are numbers of cases against gays and

They have fixed tradition artificially, and they use tradition as a way to control and to prohibit.

lesbians, and transgenders as well.

For LGBT Christians, the situation is also much better in Poland than in Russia, even if Catholics bishops are in majority not yet publicly

supporting LGBTs. However, our group in Poland has several priests as members (most unofficially). We also have some friends in liberal Catholic circles, who write books or articles, or sometimes work as a mediator. For example, last year when pope Francis sent out his document for the Catholic Church in Poland [in order to prepare the Catholic Synod on the family], these Catholic officials collected the answers from ground level, and

they collected the answer from our group.

Our answer was composed by almost one hundred stories from most parts of Poland with various experiences within the Catholic Church. Some of them were positive, but not so many; most of the experiences were negative such as hate speeches, hate homilies. Most of these people were part of Catholic movements and left after their coming out.

We presented the report and our group to higher levels of the Catholic Church, and one by one met some Catholic officials, to make them understand that we are not out of the Church and that we are numerous.

The parents of LGBT people form a very serious potential group in Poland, and we have a lot of parents coming to us. They are asking questions and asking

for support, because they are Catholics and they have to reconcile their faith and the lives of their children.

Meanwhile in Russia, there is absolutely no space for discussion with the mainstream church. The Church is too much affiliated with the authorities, with Putin's regime, with its imperialistic ideas and values. The Churches only value things that can help them to bring people into line. This line consists of imposing their traditional values and family values. These values are not in reality about families, but about conformity of people against diversity, openness. They have fixed tradition artificially and they use tradition as a way to control and to prohibit. So there is no chance now for any discussion within the Church about homosexuality. Besides, a lot of priests are gay themselves but would never admit it in public. That's why they hate



Photo: Keete 37 - 2013

any public discussion because they are ashamed of themselves and they want to stay hidden.

Even some Anglican or Protestant Churches, who have taken positions in support of homosexuals abroad, are not ready in Russia to discuss and be open to homosexuals and transgenders because they are afraid of anti-homosexual propaganda laws.



"Love Against Homosexuality / L'amour contre l'homosexualité"

There are some small groups of Christian LGBTs in Russia (e.g. members of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups) but they do not belong to mainstream Churches or in most cases, to any Churches. These groups are not public and not out. The only place where they can express their sexual identity or gender is within these small groups.

For LGBT people, things are not 100% easy in Poland, but much simpler than in Russia.

D&J: In Russia, is there any police surveillance of LGBT groups?

Misha: The state authorities and the police, are observing closely the LGBT organisations. As for LGBT Christian groups, I don't think that these groups are out enough or public enough to be of much interest to the police. I think they are below the radar.

Some organisations are more at risk. One activist of a friendly organisation called Samantha, (Samantha hosted the European Forum in 2014), had to leave the country a couple of months ago because there was a high danger for his life in prison. There was a criminal case against him on some pretexts which are absolutely absurd.

So the authorities are against activist people and the Church supports that.

D&J: How can you create an LGBT group in Russia under such pressure?

Misha: First, most of the LGBT groups were created in the previous era. Ten or twenty years ago, the restrictions were not so important. There are some new initiatives, for instance one called "Children 404" (error 404 on the web means the page is not found or prohibited). This group has started online in a Russian social network. LGBT activist journalists started offering help with teenagers who feel LGBT. They start to collect and publish their stories: several of them were rejected by their family... This shows that the anti-propaganda law which pretends to protect minors, left out of the picture those minors who are homosexual. It is not propaganda to speak about people who are already gay.

There was big trouble, and the social network tried to close the group.

The liberal parties, the anti-Putin groups, know this issue

About three years ago, after the election but when the anti-propaganda law was not yet passed, there was a short period where the opposition came into the street and there was an involvement of LGBT groups. It is now impossible.

The new initiatives use networks. They are not public, they support gays but do not perform advocacy, because advocacy is striving for

The Church and the government promote a very traditional model where men are working and earning money and women are taking care of the home and the kids.

social changes, and social changes about LGBT issues is nowhere near being seen.

D&J: What about the condition of women in Russia?

Misha: We can do a parallel between the LGBT condition and women's condition. The role of women in public life, or in politics, is very small even if there are some women in politics. Even if you put the gender-equality question on the table, it is also considered in Russia to come from Western and alien culture.

The Church and the government promote a very traditional model where men are working and earning money, and women are taking care of the home and the kids. Of course there is more chance for feminists to discuss publicly, and they support the LGBT movement, but I think all the changes can come only from a change in politics, society and culture. If Russia wakes up from the imperialist dream of Putin's empire, and if Russia stops its wars and crimes (Ukraine ...), then people will be able to talk about the condition of women, LGBTs or whatever. Without this political and social change, the LGBT agenda is in the second row for Russia.

D&J: How can we help?

Misha: Just saying that Putin is homophobic will not work, because Russia has learned, and Churches as well, to laugh a bit at the concept of human rights. You cannot change Russia just by saying: "You are violating human rights". You cannot tell the Churches they have to



accept gays because of dignity or human rights. The concept of human rights is understood as a foreign concept.



Russia is actively advocating around the world its traditional model. They have introduced a resolution in United Nations Human Rights

Council claiming that human rights are not just the rights of individuals but also the rights of a group and possibly of a nation. Russia is probably stating that the rights of nations are superior to the rights of persons.

The Russia is hurt by economic sanctions. Sanctions are somehow a good way to push Russia further. Only economic reasons can potentially wake people up and people to understand that propaganda is lying by saying that life in Russia is good and that Putin is taking care of Russian people. I would say, the sanctions are good, but the problem with the sanctions is that they are only half way, because in each county, even in Europe, there are some politicians that sabotage these sanctions. So sanctions are not working as they should.

As Christians, we could obviously pray, but we could also deconstruct traditional models, especially in religion. For instance in the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups, some theologians try to deconstruct from inside Christianity, using the language, using the notions that are inherent in these cultures and in these Churches. This could work. We need to use the language of theology to show that what they are doing is actually wrong.

Another way is to support liberal Christian thinking in Russia on other issues. I could say that if you support my liberal friends in Russia, they will be more supportive of nonviolence and LGBT causes.

Only saying that Putin is homophobic will not work, because Russia has learned, and Churches as well, to laugh bit at the concept of human rights.

Other pressures from the outside could only strengthen the

government's claim that they are persecuted by the rest of the world.

D&J: Do you think the situation would change if the government changed?

Misha: Putin is the climate of the system, but also its expression. He has strong support from the people. People share his values because they have some revenge to take and dreams of restoring the Soviet Union. They feel humiliated by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin has tricked every one by using that feeling: he uses the anti-Western sentiment in Russia and he uses the homophobia present in Russia.

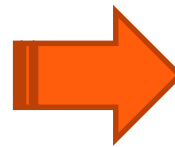
So change is necessary from the top and from below as well. We can only hope.

D&J: Can we help LGBT movements?

Misha: It is important that LGBT movements feel they are not alone and abandoned, because isolation will crush them. You need to listen and to share their stories, to be in contact, and just to be there for them. In a practical way, there can be some programs for exchange to help Russians just to get away some times and see what others do. Besides, you need to ask these organisations what they need.

D&J: How to conclude?

Misha: To conclude, even if there is no death penalty for homosexuality, the situation is very serious in Russia, hate is burning, and violence is still on the table. So I think the stories of Russians LGBTs should be better known to the world. ■



Lương Thế Huy - ISEE – Vietnam

Interviewed by Nicolas



D&J: Could you introduce yourself to our readers in France?

Lương: My name is Lương Thế Huy and I am LGBT Rights Program Manager at the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy, and Environment (ISEE) in Hanoi. My work focus at ISEE is advocacy work and carrying out studies on LGBT issues.

D&J: Could you explain what ISEE Organisation ([link](#)) is?

Lương: ISEE is an NGO, non-profit organisation established in 2007. Its three main focuses are ethnic minorities, LGBT issues and civil society.

D&J: Could you explain how ISEE deals with LGBT people in Vietnam?

Lương: ISEE is working with the LGBT community. We are working on human rights efforts and we try to empower LGBT people to stand up and speak out about their rights.

Before 2007, the LGBT community in Vietnam was developing very strongly in online forums.

ISEE called on all forum leaders to establish its LGBT Rights Program. Then



“Information, Connection and Sharing” (ICS) was founded in 2008, and is the first organisation to work exclusively to promote the rights of LGBT people in Vietnam. We have the plan to develop and to become the main independent organisation of LGBT people.

Until now ISEE and ICS are two of very few organisations that work on LGBT issues in Vietnam. There is a board of independent organisations for LGBT people. But we are two amongst the few in Vietnam. We do rare work with the law makers, media, public education and the private sector.

D&J: How would you say LGBT people are accepted by their families in Vietnam?

Lương: It is not usual to get attacked by strangers or when you are walking in the street. But it is quite common to have violence from members of the family if they find out that you are LGBT. A lot of people face struggles and discrimination from members of their own family.

The situation is changing now because the social attitude is becoming more and more accepting. Parents now accept more and more their LGBT children.

We now have “Parents for Lesbians and Gays” (PFLAG), which is the organisation for LGBT people's parents. They give support for their children. PFLAG in Vietnam is very strongly supported by ISEE and ICS. We think their work contributes to acceptance by families.

D&J: How would you say LGBT people are protected by the law in Vietnam?

Lương: Luckily LGBT people have never been criminalised by Vietnamese law. But however, they have no explicit protection for their LGBT sexual orientation.

In 2013, we started to do advocacy work and a lot of things have been changing until now. A lot of people are well aware of LGBT people's situation nowadays. In 2014 for instance, Marriage Family

Law removed a same-sex marriage ban. There is still no protection for same-sex cohabitation, but law makers are better aware of same-sex marriages as a first step. On 24th November 2015, new civil court officials recognised transgender rights. They had previously banned transgender rights, so Trans people had to travel to Thailand. Now they have the right to change gender on legal documents, through hospital surgery. Their legal identification was not accepted, so these people undergo surgery. On this thing, we will try to advocate in the future.

D&J: Are there religious obstacles against LGBT people in Vietnam to your mind?

Lương: The religious, especially Christian churches don't place official obstacles against LGBT people. They don't have as much power as in Western countries. It is not good for religious rights, but it is however good for the LGBT movement!

Buddhists show sympathy for same-sex marriage and transgender people.

D&J: Are there Vietnamese Organisations that help LGBT people in Vietnam to your knowledge?

Lương: ICS and ISEE organisations work exclusively on human rights and LGBT rights. Some other organisations work on violence against LGBT people and try to help.

10 years ago, as a student, I could not imagine that there could be so many changes and discussions on LGBT issues, so active and exciting, as today.

D&J: Are there International Organisations that help LGBT people in Vietnam to your knowledge?

International NGOs in Vietnam, like the United Nations, are very strong partners, but they do not do so much work in Vietnam for LGBT people.

D&J: How is the situation of LGBT people changing nowadays in Vietnam to your mind?

Lương: A lot! 10 years ago as a student, I could not imagine that there could be so many changes and discussions on LGBT issues, so active and exciting, as today.

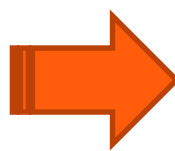
Lương: A lot! 10 years ago as a student, I could not imagine that there could be so many changes and discussions on LGBT issues, so active and exciting, as today.



Visibility of LGBT items is possible through their being so proud to contribute to the situation of the LGBT rights.

D&J: How could a French LGBT organisation like ours help LGBT people in Vietnam to your mind?

Luong: I myself care about what is happening in the world. We have historical links with countries like France or the US. What happens there has a very special impact in Vietnam. Every situation has very special effects or impact in Vietnam: the way authorities legalise same-sex marriage for example. We share the way French people have overcome the opposition to same-sex marriage, and how we as law-makers can influence official rights. It gives us hope to find the right thing to do, legislative legal things and advocacy. ■



What do Christian Churches say about homosexuality?

By Michael

In the following text, I give my own point of view as an amateur theologian, passionately interested in theology and Bible study. Please forgive its limitations and approximations: they are inevitable in such a short text on such a complex subject.

Up until around 1960 all Christian churches took negative attitudes on the subject of homosexual acts and considered them as sins, i.e. acts that rejected God, and a freely chosen vice. But for what reasons? There are differences of nuance between their positions and these differences have their origin in the different ways of conceiving authority within each Church.

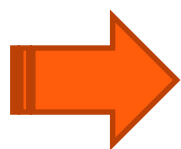
The Bible

All these Churches have a point in common: the authority that they give to the Bible, a set of diverse texts in which God reveals himself to us.

Most Churches now accept that the Biblical texts were written by human authors, but these authors were inspired by an experience of God that they had lived themselves together with their community. So the text was not dictated word-for-word by God, but reflects an experience of God situated in a given era and in a given context. This is called the historico-critical approach to the Bible.

Now there are three main passages in the Bible that are regularly quoted as indicating the sinful nature of the homosexual act: the story of Sodom in the book of Genesis (Gen 19:1-28), two legal precepts in the book of Leviticus (Lev 18:22 and 20:13), and a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 1:24-28). Almost all serious Biblical exegetes now consider that these three texts say nothing about homosexuality as it is lived today.

In the first passage, Lot is living as an immigrant in the city of Sodom when he receives a visit from two young men (in fact angels) and the men of the city, in a reaction of hatred, threaten these visitors with sexual violence. As a result of this, God ends up destroying the city in a rain of fire and brimstone. According to an interpretation that goes back to the hellenised Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, it was because of the homosexual nature of the intended act that God reacted as he did. So just the threat of a homosexual act was enough to justify the destruction of the city and its inhabitants. This interpretation was taken up by the first Christian



Annual Meeting and European Forum of Christian LGBT groups in 2015

During five days at Pentecost 2015, 260 LGBT people from twenty-



six countries in Europe, from Spain to Russia and Kyrgyzstan, but also from Africa, America and Asia met in the North of France.

The David & Jonathan Association and the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups had jointly organised the meeting. This event was marked by a strong spiritual diversity: Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, as well as Jews, Muslims and non-believers. Workshops and conferences addressed very diverse topics: the fight against discrimination, male/female relationships, the place of youth, ecumenism, relationships with the Churches, sexuality...

The central theme was "Babel or Pentecost? intercultural encounters." Babel in the Old Testament symbolises the impossibility of understanding each other. Pentecost in the New Testament testifies to the possibility of reconciliation.

A very pleasant gathering of people from multiple cultures, sometimes living situations of violent homophobia in their own countries, and sharing the same human and Christian fraternity.

Learn more -> [Link](#) ■

thinkers, the Fathers of the Church, and ended by being generally accepted. Nevertheless no such interpretation exists elsewhere in the Bible: Sodom is often reproached a number of evils, but never homosexuality. In fact the real fault of Sodom seems to be the refusal



of hospitality (an essential virtue in the Near East) and Jesus himself talks about Sodom only in a context where he is criticising a lack of welcome

(Lk 10:10-12). It is worth noting that Jesus never mentions homosexuality.

The second passage consists of two parallel verses in the legislation of the book of Leviticus. The Hebrew text is obscure, but it seems to mean that if a man allows himself to be penetrated by another man, then this constitutes a serious crime that causes ritual impurity (*abomination*) and warrants the death penalty. It should be noted that this text applies only to men, free Israelite citizens, and is not applicable to women, to slaves, or to prisoners of war. The crime in this patriarchal society would be that a man of consequence should allow himself to be debased to the level of a woman and so lose his status of masculine superiority. These texts (like many other texts in Leviticus that no-one nowadays would dream of applying) are obviously conditioned by a social context and a scale of values that in a modern Christian perspective are outdated.

The third passage is from the New Testament. Here in a context of tension between Christians of pagan origin and Christians of Jewish origin, Paul wants to show that both the pagans and the Jews are equally bogged down in sin and in need of God's mercy. His argument is long and complex and his primary aim is not to give moral rules: so nothing justifies the fact of extracting two verses from it and using them to prove that homosexual acts are reprehensible. It seems obvious that Paul does not approve of the acts that he speaks about, but he sees these acts in a given context. Either he refers to acts of a pagan cult (for he speaks of idolatry) or to acts of plain debauchery (common among gays of the first century), but he certainly is not talking about the expression of love between two persons of the same sex.

There are three main passages in the Bible that are regularly quoted as indicating the sinful nature of the homosexual act: the story of Sodom in the book of Genesis (Gen 19:1-28), two legal precepts in the book of Leviticus (Lev 18:22 and 20:13), and a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom 1:24-28). Almost all serious Biblical exegetes now consider that these three texts say nothing about homosexuality as it is lived today.

In any case, it is clear that the Bible never speaks about homosexuality as it can be lived today (love between two free and equal persons of the same sex) as that was just unthinkable in that period.

Protestant Churches

The simplest case of authority is that found in Protestant Churches. They apply the principle of *Sola Scriptura*: only Scripture has authority. All moral rules must then be deduced from Biblical texts. But even Protestants read the Bible in an institutional setting that tends to favour conservatism.

However, in the historical Protestant churches, despite the

reluctance of conservatives, there is a recent evolution towards an acceptance of homosexuality, thanks to the adoption of a modern, more rational, reading of the Bible. Thus the United Protestant Church of France (EPUdF) has just ruled to allow the blessing of same-sex couples after a civil marriage (so long as the minister and the parish are in agreement). In Evangelical churches, however,

a more emotional approach to religion is favoured, with a tendency to reject the historico-critical approach to the Bible, seen as too intellectual. This implies a literal fundamentalist reading, in which old interpretations, like that of Philo, are not criticised but are taken for granted. This is why the Evangelical churches are generally hostile to equal rights for LGBT's and favour so-called "conversion therapies".

This freedom of conscience is a principle that is present throughout the New Testament and the Churches can hardly call it into question.

The Catholic Church

In the Catholic Church, the situation is more complicated: along with the authority of the Bible, there is also the authority of the Magisterium (the Pope and the bishops).

The moral decisions of the Magisterium are not based only on the Bible



(or the Gospels) but often refer to philosophical considerations, as in the case of "Natural Law". Such a "law" would have the advantage of being universal, since it would be founded on reason, and could even

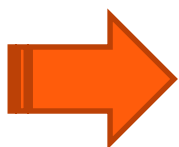
be recognised by non-believers. According to this approach, acts that are moral are those that are in keeping with human nature. Unfortunately the nature referred to here is a vague concept and it is difficult to say what is really part of human nature. Thus according to present-day views, homosexuality would not be in keeping with human nature, but up until about 1880, slavery was justified as being a part of this same human nature. This "Natural Law" is also used to justify the ban on contraception or the ordination of women.

Orthodox Churches

In the Orthodox Churches, the Bible still has authority, but the historico-critical approach is treated with suspicion. For the Orthodox, there is no single Magisterium, but rather a form of traditional jurisprudence, with an attitude that is more mystical than legalistic. Furthermore, the Fathers of the Church have retained considerable prestige and it is very difficult to go against their judgements. These Churches give great value to a rigid "Eternal Truth" and they accuse the Western Churches (Catholic and Protestant) of being capricious. Orthodox Churches are hostile to rights for LGBT's, because this hostility is part of what is seen as "Holy Tradition".

Conscience

A final point is often overlooked: all the moral rules that the Christian Churches prescribe are only guides, "objective" recommendations. In all cases, it is the individual conscience that judges what is moral in the life of each person. This freedom of conscience is a principle that is present throughout the New Testament and the Churches can hardly call it into question. The rules imposed by Churches can nevertheless create complications in the life of an LGBT person, as all Churches require people to be in line with their laws if they are to participate fully in the life of the Church. ■



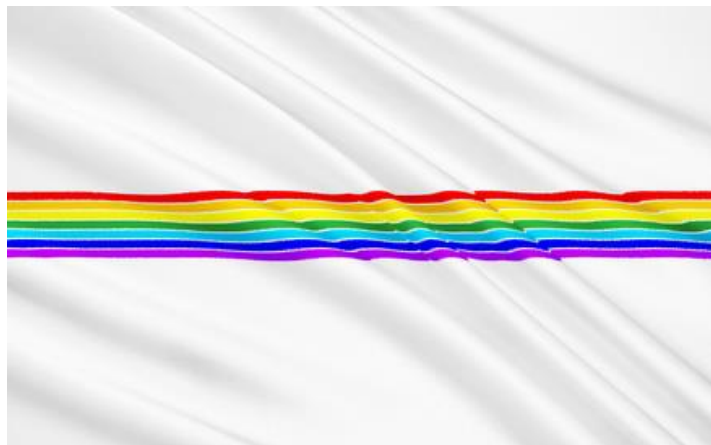
Judaism: the World Congress of GLBT Jews – Franck

Dear Friends from D&J,

I am contacting you as the new president of the World Congress of GLBT Jews, an organisation founded in 1975 (almost the same age as D&J) to promote inclusiveness of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities within the Jewish community.

The "World Congress" (our shorter nickname) has become famous over the years in organizing more than 20 international conferences in major cities including New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Mexico, London, Munich, Amsterdam and, of course, Paris.

Today diversity and inclusiveness are values shared by many Jewish or LGBT bodies in different countries but we remain the only truly global Jewish and LGBT organisation with active members in 15 countries on 5 continents. We reach out to remote/smaller local



communities, leverage the communication of larger ones, and connect between our members and with LGBT organisations around the World.

The World Congress welcomes individual members of all faith, sexual orientations or gender identities. However we are still primarily an umbrella organisation for 40 local or national groups, such as Beit Haverim in France who hosted our annual Board meeting in 2011. Few years ago we developed LGBT training materials in Spanish to promote inclusiveness in our Latin American communities. In January 2016, we organised an art auction sale in Hollywood (CA) to fund an educational program with the Jerusalem Open House who had 5 allies wounded and 1 killed after a violent attack during the Parade they

It might seem idealistic considering the current situation of international affairs, but we, at the World Congress, ambition to be - among others like David & Jonathan - at the forefront of interfaith dialogue and respect of each others in order to promote peace.

organised last July.

I believe that LGBT people are uniquely positioned to understand the terrible consequences of discrimination. It might seem idealistic considering the current situation of international affairs, but we, at the World Congress, ambition to be - among others like D&J - at the forefront of interfaith dialogue and respect of each others in order to promote peace. That is the core of my personal motivation while engaging in such a challenging volunteer adventure.

I would be delighted if we could catch up whenever you have the chance to come over to New York. I look forward to hearing or reading from you.

Sincerely

Franck GIAOUI

Contact information: president@glbtjews.org ■

Conclusion by Sharon Ferguson, co leader of European Forum of Christian LGBT groups

D&J: What is the European Forum? What is its history?

Sharon: The Forum is an organisation made up from groups that have lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christian members. It started in 1982 in Paris and D&J were part of its creation. We now have member groups all over Europe and the Balkans. We aim to support groups in their work by bringing together resources and providing opportunities for networking and sharing.

D&J: What are the specific issues of Christian LGBTs in Europe?



Sharon: Whilst in many countries across Europe there are laws to protect LGBT people from violence and discrimination for many LGBT Christians this is still something they experience.

The media constantly report how the 'church' is homophobic, biphobic and transphobic. This makes it very hard for LGBT Christians to be 'out' in their faith community. It also makes the wider LGBT community view religion with suspicion and consequently LGBT Christians have problems being 'out' about their faith. This makes it very difficult to build community and can be isolating.

D&J: What are the main situations encountered by Christian LGBTs in the different areas of Europe?

Sharon: Many western and southern European countries have recently had some very positive changes to their laws which give more equal rights to LGBT people, however, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans there has been a rise in draconian laws criminalising homosexuality. These laws are often instigated and supported by the national church and people with more fundamentalist Christian beliefs. This means that whereas the church should be, and is usually a place of support, for LGBT Christians they are denied this and are put under the stress of having to hide or deny their sexuality and/or gender identity.

D&J: Are there specific issues for lesbians and transgenders?

Sharon: Lesbians often have to deal with issues relating to their gender as well as their sexual orientation and so face discrimination on both accounts. This is very much the case when it comes to leadership.

Transgender people experience discrimination in many different ways - some transgender people are also lesbian, gay or bisexual. Most people expect others to present as clearly 'male' or 'female' and if a person doesn't 'pass' adequately they can become victims of severe discrimination and often violence. Both lay and ordained people are often removed from ministry when they transition which can include losing their homes as well as their livelihood.



D&J: How are these situations of Christian LGBTs changing (e.g.: movement against LGBT? LGBT acceptance? Churches leaders' behaviour regarding LGBT? ...)?

Sharon: Education is very important to bring about the change of heart that is needed. We also need more people who are in prominent positions who are either LGBT themselves or allies to speak out more often.

D&J: Should we, and can we, have a specific approach for each Church (Sharon: for the different kinds of Christian, Protestant, Orthodox movements)?

I'm not sure that a different approach is needed for each church but we do need to be aware of the underlying reasons behind the homophobic, transphobic and biphobic beliefs and address them accordingly. Different churches have different doctrines and structures which must be understood in order to offer the right resources.

D&J: How can the European Forum, and its members, help LGBT groups of Eastern or Southern Europe (theology, relationships with Churches, testimony, activism, networking, support ...)?

Sharon: The Forum offers an annual conference where there are opportunities for networking, learning and listening people as well as Facebook groups and websites to remain connected virtually. We have also produced books, reports and leaflets dealing with common topics of concern and sharing personal stories. ■

