Engaging with tradition: mechanisms, strategies and tactics.

The relationships between tradition and social justice are complex and contingent, conditioned by many factors including social context, individual attachments and mechanisms of transmission and re-enactment. These relationships may be positive, negative or neutral from the perspective of LGBT concerns, and they may be approached in a variety of different ways according to the goals and circumstances at hand. The Engaging Tradition Project aims to explore these patterns in order to establish when and why tradition forms a barrier to the achievement of gender and sexual justice, and to identify how tradition can be deployed in positive ways by activists and social movements in their efforts to overturn or circumvent these barriers.

This working paper lays out a simple conceptual framework to guide the analysis of these questions, applies this framework to a selection of concrete cases, and presents an initial set of hypotheses to be tested and refined through further empirical research. The goal of this research is to produce a set of practical and theoretical tools for use in the continued exploration of the role of tradition, and in strengthening efforts to address and utilize tradition in movements for LGBT equality and broader social change. The paper was written by Michael Edwards, with extensive input from Urvashi Vaid and valuable help from the rest of the Engaging Tradition Project team.[1] All comments and suggestions are welcome.

1. Tradition and social justice: a simple conceptual framework.

Under what conditions is tradition likely to form a barrier to the achievement of social justice, and under what circumstances can it be used as a resource for social transformation? These are more complex questions than they may appear, and they are especially difficult to answer in general terms across many different settings. In exploring these questions, the Project starts from one, central hypothesis: that the impact of tradition derives from the interaction of three sets of factors.

- *The social, cultural, political and economic context in which tradition takes its shape*
- *The content of tradition, defined as a composite of substance, norms and attachment or affect; and*
- *The strategies and tactics used by different groups to confront, defend or utilize tradition in their work*

Regardless of the setting, the interplay between context, content and strategy will determine the overall impact of tradition in relation to the achievement of social justice.

1.1 Context

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The first of these influences consists of external or structural factors, including the material conditions that set the stage for the appeal or disappearance of particular traditions, the nature of the political regime in place, the patterns of authority that support and govern traditions and tradition-making, and the cultural and historical context in which traditions emerge and survive. Traditions are constantly mutating in response to changes in economic and political opportunity structures, environmental and technological conditions, and the shifting influence of different agents of social construction such as government, law, education, business, civil society and the media. These structural realities give enormous power to certain traditions and erode the influence of others.

It is no accident, for example, that the US South, where opposition to LGBT rights is reflected in the lack of civil rights protections and a hostile climate, has had a more conservative political history and has higher levels of religiosity among its population than other regions. The importance of these contextual factors was apparent in May 2012 when a majority of voters supported a ban on same-sex marriage in North Carolina. Equally important was the fact that material conditions also favored the ban, with highly-organized forces raising twice-as-much money for advertising and campaigning as gay marriage supporters (Robertson, 2012).

Tradition is often used as a universalizing frame of reference to oppose gender and sexual justice, yet every country simultaneously invokes its own traditions in order to justify cultural norms and practices, and to regulate family forms. History, culture or merely the prevalence of certain social norms and practices are all deployed to buttress compliance with particular traditions. Yet the seemingly un-breachable walls that are erected through these processes can be overcome by remembering that all traditions emerge from specific contexts and conditions, and can therefore be contested by different communities. For example, Saba Mahmood (2004: 2) uses the case of the Women's Mosque Movement in Egypt to explore varying constructions of feminism and their connections to different kinds of tradition in Islam. The results are complex, with the empowerment that comes from subverting the tradition of male control over religious teaching taking place "within a discourse tradition that regards subordination to a transcendental will (and thus, in many instances, to male authority) as its coveted goal."

Or take the example of the family. As economic conditions have changed over the last sixty years, the form and structure of families has shifted too. The idea of a 'traditional' family in the 1940s and 1950s differs from the notion of a 'traditional' family today. New traditions of divorced, blended and step-families have emerged in societies with high divorce rates; the traditions that surround families in France differ from those in Russia, for example; and traditions like dating before marriage may be neutral in one context (like the USA), but are seen as harmful and to be punished in another (such as Mali). Recognizing the ways in which traditions are rooted in particular contexts can provide important entry points into the process of transforming them.

1.2 Content

The importance of tradition is often couched purely in terms of what is said, written or taught, but the content of a tradition is a more complex composite of factors that often reinforce one-another, especially:

- The *substance* of a tradition, as in 'It's a tradition at the Augusta National Golf Club where the Masters is played to allow only male members.'
- The *norms* or *values* enshrined in a tradition, as in 'love the sinner/hate the sin' or in ideas about how people should behave that are enforced by various forms of internal and external discipline and policing in family, church, and state.
- And the *level of affect or attachment* to a tradition, including how traditions are transmitted and/or committed to in the present i.e. whether they are open to negotiation or re-interpretation, and if so, how and under what terms and conditions.

The *substance* of a tradition is rarely fixed. It mutates with its re-enactment during different times, and is often changed by law, policy, lived experience or evolving norms. So a practice like the henna designs carved into an Indian bride's hands and arms, for example, may continue across decades, but the actual designs that are used evolve over time – with some being very old and others being new. Or take the tradition of children inheriting property from their parents, which continues as a general rule but no longer in ways that privilege male children.

The *values* contained within traditions are harder to transform, in large part because they often originate from, and are reinforced by, disciplinary institutions like religion, the state and the family. For example, the tradition of abstaining from sex before marriage is a practice that many families, religions and governments have taught and enforced over many generations, so the evolution of some societies away from positions that condemn pre-marital sex is remarkable in this light because it shows how lived experience can challenge the dogma even of powerful institutions.

'*Affect*' is a complex term, encompassing both the emotional reaction to stimuli as well as the consciousness of the experience of the feeling itself. Understanding the affective dimension of tradition is central to the task of disengaging various publics from these attachments, which may be very strong. To remain in force, traditions must be transmitted, re-enacted and engaged-with in the present, and these transmission mechanisms such as education, religion, culture, law and the media are animated by the actions of individuals even though they are conditioned by the structures that surround them. So the strength of individual attachments and the affective experiences produced by these encounters are crucial factors in shaping transmission and re-enactment, helping to determine the influence and durability of traditions over time and the kinds of strategies which may be effective in addressing them.

1.3 Strategies and tactics

Following from these first two sets of factors, those who want to utilize, deflect or influence tradition can direct their energies to external factors such as political opportunity structures, internal factors like the practices and re-enactments that transmit traditions from one generation to another, or some combination of both context and content. But the choice of strategy is also an active variable in our model, since different strategies may be more or less

effective in addressing different elements of content in different contexts. For example, education, evidence and rational argument may do little to weaken tradition where levels of affect and attachment are very high, as in some catholic and evangelical religious communities in the USA today. Identifying the optimum mix in each scenario - by matching strategies to contexts, content and objectives - is an important task for the Project on Engaging Tradition.

In this task, it may be useful to think of these strategies along a spectrum, from outright resistance at one end, through various forms of constructive engagement in the middle, to the outright celebration of tradition at the other. Since traditions constitute both resources to be utilized and barriers to be overcome, most strategies are likely to fall somewhere in this middle ground, where there are many overlaps and interactions.

1.3.1 Resistance and refusal

At one end of the spectrum, and perhaps most common in highly-restrictive contexts, traditions that are highly damaging to sexual and gender justice can be openly exposed and challenged, often using tactics that intend to shock their audiences and disrupt existing public norms. Egyptian college student, blogger and activist Aliaa Maghda El-Mahdy did this when she decided to display nude photos of herself on her website in 2011, setting off a firestorm of reaction from both conservative and liberal constituencies. By challenging both Muslim and Arab traditions about the public representation of the female body in the supposedly-revolutionary context of opposition to authoritarian rule, El-Mahdy created space for new conversations to take place about gender, power and activism in the so-called 'Arab Spring.' Another example comes from the community of Catholic nuns in the USA, whose response to papal rebukes about their "non-traditional" activities in support of same-sex marriage and abortion rights in 2012 was to go even further on the offensive by planning a bus trip across nine states, stopping at health care facilities along the way to highlight their determination to continue their campaigns in full public view (Goodstein, 2012).

1.3.2 Legal advocacy, legislation and policy change

Where sufficient openness exists in the legal and public policy environment, opposing harmful traditions, or embedding support for positive ones through advocacy, policy reform and legal activism can be very effective. Indeed, this has been the most popular approach in the LGBT community over the past thirty years, at least in the USA. Law and policy work are often the most effective tools in tackling the substantive content of traditions. Legal advocacy is important precisely because its results are 'hard' i.e. they become embedded in the formal rules that govern decision-making and the allocation of resources, but while success in the LGBT movement's engagement with these strategies is evident over the past forty years, the deeper impact of law on the transformation of tradition remains open to debate. The evidence cuts both ways. Law changes behavior on the part of the state, economic actors, civil society and individuals; and these behavioral changes generate new norms over time, a fact illustrated, for example, in dramatically-improving attitudes among younger people towards LGBT rights and equality. The percentage of Americans supporting gay marriage increased from 27 per cent in 1996 to 53 per cent in 2011 and was even higher among those in their twenties and thirties (Rosensaft, 2012). On the other hand, attachment to tradition and the validity of norms of gender and sexuality are not dislodged by legal reform. A court case or a legislative enactment provides

a particular remedy for a particular harm, but it does not necessarily overturn the traditional order on which sexual prejudice, misogyny and inequality have been erected.

1.3.3 Public education and rational argument

In order to pursue the deeper objective of shifting the 'traditional order', public norms and political constituencies must be changed in ways that eventually feed through into regimes and institutions. These strategies are 'softer' than legal reform in the sense that they engage with the ideas and attitudes that underpin the distribution of formal authority in society. They include many different ways of intervening in the public sphere, including the use of empirical evidence to flesh out the costs and benefits of traditions such as parenting in same-sex and opposite-sex marriages. For example, attempts by the Christian Right to use social science to prove that child welfare and development fare best in heterosexual couples (or to equate homosexuality with pedophilia) quickly collapse when faced by evidence which shows that gay couples are loving and effective parents, a conclusion that has been confirmed by professional bodies representing social workers, child development specialists and others (Polikoff 2000). Careful exposure to evidence like this can be a powerful educational tool among opponents of gay rights who are open to rational debate such as David Blankenhorn, President of the Institute of American Values, whose surprise u-turn on same-sex marriage in June 2012 was rooted in his belief that gay couples can strengthen the institution of marriage against a background of high rates of divorce among heterosexual couples (Harris, 2012). "*Familia es Familia*," a public education campaign launched by a coalition of Latino organizations in 2012 to build support in the Hispanic community for acceptance of LGBT family members, provides another example of these strategies at work (de Leon 2012).

1.3.4 Intervening in mechanisms of transmission and re-enactment

More broadly still, traditions are reproduced and re-enacted at the deepest level through everyday institutions like schools, churches, businesses and the media, so these are all potential sites for interventions that aim to halt the reproduction of damaging traditions or accelerate the popularity of those that are seen as positive over the longer term. Examples from popular culture include the reintroduction of the super-hero Green Lantern as a gay character by DC Comics in 2012 after 72 years 'in the closet,' and the gentle challenge posed to traditional views of the family by TV shows featuring gay parents like Modern Family on ABC (Flood 2012). The exposure of millions of viewers to openly-LGBT people has changed their views about their families, workplaces and societies. Thus, cultural tools like film, video, writing, theater, music, art and engagement with religious doctrine may prove to be effective strategies in changing the values that are enshrined in traditions. Face-to-face encounters may be even more powerful because they strip away the stereotypes that often accumulate around 'distant strangers,' or the ever-threatening 'other.' Maryland lawmaker Wade Kach, for example, was a staunch opponent of same-sex marriage until he attended a legislative hearing on the subject in February of 2012, where he sat right next to the witness table. "I'm sitting there watching the one with cancer (sic) rub the back of the one who's testifying", he told a reporter, "and I just saw the love and devotion that they had to one another" (Cooper and Peters, 2012). Since the transmission of tradition relies on continuing affect and attachment, encouraging people to be conscious that tradition is in force and has been internalized is extremely important. The same is true for pro-social justice traditions like marriage as an accepted norm for the LGBT movement, as opposed to the deeper tradition of securing protection for all families regardless of marital status.

1.3.5 Re-framing and re-interpretation

Where context and content permit, traditions may allow more 'room-to-maneuver' in challenging norms and substance, not by abandoning the tradition itself but by re-framing it in different ways – a way of preserving affect but loosening attachment to a singular interpretation. Sunder (2003: 446-8), for example, explores how Muslim women have used textualism and translation to identify "good texts" and transmit them through indigenous forms that can be heard by those directly involved, creating a manual on human rights in Muslim communities in the process. Strategies in this category can also expose the spurious historicity of traditions that have invented fairly recently like 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality,' and to challenge disputed terms such as 'sodomy' which has multiple meanings in the bible (Tuck 2012). As Newheiser (op.cit:22) puts it, "although many assume that the condemnation of homosexuality has an ancient lineage, it has existed for barely a century," and pre-existing traditions may carry a very different set of values. Kaoma (2012) makes just this point about official condemnation of homosexuality by many African governments and church leaders, which is rooted in Christian and colonial thinking rather than in the indigenous traditions that pre-date both. Such strategies derive their influence from the simultaneous honoring and deconstruction of traditions, which allows those who value them to evolve in their thinking over time without abandoning their core commitments.

1.3.6 Co-opting or finding countervailing traditions

In this sense, the power of tradition can be used almost against itself, even more so when counter-traditions from the same teachings can be found, or when appeals are made to higher traditions that outweigh lower-level ones like the Golden Rule which is central all religions - "treat others the way you would want to be treated" as President Barack Obama defined it when he used just this tactic to come out in support of gay marriage in May of 2012 (Calmes and Baker 2012). Religious-based challenges to the denial of LGBT rights and family creation, though still resisted by some fundamentalist faiths, have increased the acceptance of LGBT people as part of both "God's" plan and the human family in dramatic fashion over the last four decades. Examples of these strategies are especially common in efforts by liberal and radical Christians to emphasize traditions of love and compassion in the early church, and to highlight the Gospels' over-riding commitment to equality, a message that is also being pushed today in some conservative evangelical universities by reformers in an effort to open up the discussion around gay rights. Conservative traditions can also be co-opted for progressive ends (or vice-versa), as in the use of Christ-like imagery to define rebels and radicals throughout history from Che Guevara's iconic poster to IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands to Bobby Rainey today, whose photo after being pepper-sprayed in an Occupy demonstration in New York City in 2010 carried the same kind of symbolic power and authority.

1.3.7 Inventing, building on and celebrating positive traditions

At the opposite end of the spectrum, traditions that are seen as helpful or hopeful to LGBT concerns can be actively embraced, strengthened and celebrated, leading, perhaps, to a rediscovery of the power of tradition for liberating ends. Women Living Under Muslim Laws, for example, has worked to re-construct the history of support for women's rights within Islam from the eighth to the twentieth century as a way of building support and recognition for their contemporary expression (Sunder op.cit: 449-453). Or take the case of 'pre-figurative politics' –

the tradition of integrating personal and social transformation into one, reflexive process that runs from the early American Romantics like Thoreau, through Mahatma Gandhi's "Satyagraha" movement for Indian Independence, to the struggle for civil and women's rights in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, to parts of the LGBT community today. Mark Jiminez and Beau Chandler, who refused to leave the Dallas County Clerk's office after their application for a marriage license was rejected in July 2012, stand in a long and proud tradition of this kind of principled civil disobedience (Butigan 2012). It is these 'transformative traditions' that often go unrecognized as traditions, yet they carry enormous power to root radical action in a deeper sense of affect and attachment.

Of course, in reality all these strategies intersect and overlap with each-other, and they may need to be used in combination to achieve the desired results. For example, transforming attachments to harmful traditions requires a complex interplay of hard-core legal changes designed to induce behavioral shifts, with persuasion in the court of public opinion. Condemning violence as a response to gender non-conformity provides a good example of this process.

2. From theory to practice: two examples

The interplay of context, content and strategy creates a bewildering array of possible interactions, so it may help to concretize this conceptual framework through some real-life examples, one that has clear negative outcomes for sexual and gender justice and one which is clearly more supportive.

2.1 A 'perfect storm'

Whether grounded in secular or religious thinking, the relationship between tradition and social justice for the LGBT community has often been extremely damaging. Few contexts have been supportive of major advances in equality, still less social transformation. The substance of traditions condemning homosexuality has been aggressively disparaging of LGBT people, and targeted at preserving inequality and exclusion. The norms or values they promote have claimed that heterosexual ways of being are endangered by the full acceptance of gender and sexual variance, and have been successful in relegating gays, lesbians and queers to the status of second-class, deviant citizens. The procedures for re-negotiating these traditions have been tightly controlled and/or masked by appeals to divine authority and inspiration, and the prohibitions they contain have been especially powerful because they are so strongly affective, forming the emotional core of straight and gay people's senses of what is normal, right and properly-ordered. Finally, the strategies that LGBT groups have used to address these traditions have been successful only in limited terms, restricted to certain contexts and constrained within liberal interpretations of rights and equality.

Therefore, from an LGBT perspective it is no surprise that tradition is seen as inherently unjust, reactionary and unhelpful. Most traditions of family and citizenship exclude people because of their non-conforming sexual orientation and gender identities. Notions of the traditional family, traditional culture and traditional values often embody prescriptive norms about the proper role of women and men, the form and structure of the family, responsibilities for child-rearing and child-bearing, and how authority should be exercised in the family and in society at large. These norms are themselves rooted in justifications about the naturalness and inevitability of male dominance, binarism, and heterosexual forms of intimacy. Movements for

gender and sexual justice are challenged by their conflicting need to expose these traditions as collections of power-distributing assumptions that need to be shaken up and replaced, and their desire to gain access to the forms, norms and institutions that once excluded them.

The role played by certain, conservative religious traditions in this picture is well-known, and is being continuously challenged by feminist and LGBT advocates (Vaid 1995; Clendinnen and Nagourney 1999; Pelligrini and Jakobsen 2004; Tuck 2012). Religion has often been the source of what one might call 'permissible prejudice,' even where traditions governing other forms of prejudice based on race and gender have been overturned – the "key to preserving homophobia in the USA" as Engel (2001:150) puts it. Among Christians who support progressive action on poverty, immigration reform and the environment, LGBT concerns lag far behind, and where they do register there seems little commitment to translate these concerns into advocacy and other forms of action (Kinnaman and Lyons 2007). As Sandel (op.cit:253) concludes, while "liberal public reason" *has* to approve of same-sex marriage because there are simply no grounds for denying this right, "religious reason," even *among* some liberals "looks at the purpose of marriage and the moral status of homosexuality and disapproves." Tradition is rarely more dangerous than when cloaked in religious garb that cannot adequately be challenged by rationalist arguments for social justice because it claims sanction from other-worldly authority.

"Sacred scripture condemns homosexual acts as a serious depravity" as the Vatican put it in 2003 (cited by Newheiser, op.cit:20), a position re-stated in 2012 when the same authority described homosexual acts as "intrinsically disordered and contrary to natural law" (Goodstein and Donadio, 2012). Such statements continually reaffirm the position of mainstream Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions on homosexuality and same-sex marriage as they have been interpreted over the last one hundred years, and they have been regularly used by secular authorities to justify discrimination, including in the landmark Supreme Court judgment in Bowers v. Hardwick in 1986 which cited "millennia of moral teaching against sodomy" (Vaid op.cit:14). More often than not, however, such judgments are rooted as much in the contemporary context as in historical precedent, as in the case of Bowers v. Hardwick which came against the background of rising pressure from the religious right during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Clendinen and Nagourney op.cit). It is the confluence of the two – "tradition *plus* power" as the Project Background Paper puts it - that is potentially so influential (Edwards 2012).

As another illustration of this point, consider the debate on whether so-called 'traditional values' must be included in understandings of human rights. In 2009, a resolution calling for the study of traditional values as a source for human rights was initiated by the Russian Federation and supported by various conservative states and by the Organization of Islamic Countries. A report on "traditional values" was duly submitted to the UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee in February 2012, and it generated widespread controversy. Echoing previous attempts to formalize tradition into an international precedent, the report asserts that all traditional values are positive and that they reinforce conventional notions of the family which privilege certain groups at the expense of others, a convenient conflation for authoritarian political interests in Russia and other countries who were instrumental in drafting the report's conclusions (United Nations 2012). The report was contested by LGBT, feminist and human

rights advocates who argued that tradition cannot be a smokescreen that legitimizes inequality, though it can certainly be harmonized with social justice goals.

In the face of these attempts to deploy tradition against social justice goals, the primary strategy deployed by LGBT activists has been the law. There have been some important victories in this respect, especially around economic and social rights, but legal strategies have obvious limitations. This is partly because lawmakers repeatedly defer to some traditions even as they ignore others they disagree with or invent new rules that are themselves carried forward as traditions. More recently, in response to a concerted effort by religious institutions to undermine the law, courts and legislatures have given more deference to religion to operate outside of the parameters of human rights and civil rights legislation. Characterized by one scholar as a "new sovereignty" bestowed on religious institutions, the exemptions that have been carved out for religions in the implementation of constitutional or human rights statutes have inhibited progress for women's rights and LGBT rights. As Madhavi Sunder (2003: 402) writes, "premised on a centuries old, Enlightenment compromise that justified reason in the public sphere by allowing deference to religious despotism in the private, human rights law continues to define religion in the 21st century as a sovereign, extralegal jurisdiction in which inequality is not only accepted but expected."

Such traditions are not, however, solely the province of religion, since the institutions of governance, capitalism, the family, the state and civil society also produce and enforce norms of racialized heteropatriarchy. Traditional (hetero-normative) family structures and gender roles have been defended by secular civic and political interests nationally and internationally, as, for example, in recent attempts by conservatives to brand the admittance of transgender children to Girl Scout troops as contrary to the "traditions of scouting" in America (Praetorius 2011). Civil society is a rich terrain of contestation about tradition in the arena of gender and sexuality, yet it is also embedded with unquestioned norms and assumptions about whose voices predominate, whose expertise counts, and how those with wealth control civil society strategies and goals.

2.2 The 'ideal social movement'

These examples illustrate the damaging interplay that unfolds around tradition when unfavorable cultural and political contexts encounter deeply-conservative content, high levels of attachment and affect, and a restrictive set of strategies that fail to get to the root of the problem. The result is a 'perfect storm' against LGBT rights, and even more so, against broader social transformation. However, this dynamic can and has sometimes been reversed, as during those periods in history when cultural attitudes have been fractured, political structures have been opened up, and new economic actors have emerged. In contexts like these such as 1960s America or the 'Arab Spring' today, traditions can be challenged, loosened and shaken up, and new traditions are brought back into play, re-framed or re-invented. Old strategies may become more effective and new strategies are developed, though for feminists and LGBT activists a positive engagement with tradition is rarer and more complicated, for at least three reasons. First, because tradition has been such a negative force in reproducing gender and sexual injustice in so many circumstances; second, because these episodes have generated advances on some issues for some groups but not necessarily for the LGBT community; and third, because positive traditions are often not recognized as such, so they remain un- or under-utilized in the struggle for human rights. Therefore, the reverse of the 'perfect storm', in which effective strategies could foster the

evolution of transformative traditions with high levels of attachment in a favorable context, has not occurred.

Nevertheless, pro-social justice traditions have an important history that can be built on. For example, traditions of non-conformism, radical dissent and non-violent civil disobedience have been a cornerstone of social reform and social movements for at least 150 years, more than long enough to satisfy Edward Shil's (1981) requirement that ideas must cohere through at least "three generations" in order to qualify as traditions. In terms of their content, these traditions also encompass the theory and practice of pre-figurative politics; a commitment to internal democracy, accountability and radical equality inside social movements; and the norms of solidarity and sacrifice that have cemented common bonds between activists across issue silos and national borders. These progressive traditions have often involved a revolt against authority structures and ideas about authority, and the practice (or at least the advocacy) of more democratic alternatives, which makes the processes of tradition-making more fluid and opens the way for traditions that may themselves become transformative.

Internationalization has been a common feature of these traditions for at least a century, with LGBT activists like Bayard Rustin, for example, acting as key interlocutors in exchanges between activists inside and outside the USA during the 1950s and 1960s that fed into the strategies deployed by the civil rights movement. In turn, they inspired successive generations of progressives in movements for women's liberation, gay and lesbian rights, the environment, and the peaceful overthrow of authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, right up to the 'Arab Spring' of today. It might even be said that human rights and social justice themselves have become traditions as a result of a century of these experiences, along with the tradition of separating church and state which provides the bedrock for challenging the influence of other (religious) traditions in democratic societies. Clearly, context played a major part in many of these episodes, both in the form of a sudden collapse of authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and elsewhere and in the more gradual opening-up of closed social and political structures that took place in the USA and Western Europe after World War Two, and especially during the 1960s.

Many of these social movements found inspiration in their own interpretations of religious traditions, though they reached very different conclusions to their conservative counterparts. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders were brought up in the tradition of the 'social gospel' which was especially strong among Black churches, though it has surfaced in many other incarnations from Christian Socialism to the Theology of Liberation. Importantly, little of this commitment to social justice was specifically applied to the situation of gays and lesbians, and both the civil rights and many later movements have been criticized for widespread homophobia and sexism. As is well-known, increased support for certain aspects of LGBT equality does not necessarily prefigure progress on the deeper elements of social transformation, where different traditions may need to be invoked and different strategies may be required. As Section Three makes clear, recognizing and rebuilding these 'transformational' traditions may be one of the keys to success in the future.

Today, there are signs that social activists are reclaiming religious traditions in service to LGBT rights and justice, or "re-occupying" it as Heather White (2012) puts it, citing the fact that Jesus (and most other religious leaders) never spoke about same-sex relationships at all, even though the Romans who lived in New Testament times openly practiced and celebrated

homosexuality (Lux 2012). The key is to recognize that religious traditions are far from monolithic, containing many elements that can be used to support the case for equality, either because they are grounded in traditions like love for one-another that arguably out-rank more conservative, lower-order teachings, or because they disavow conservative interpretations of specific teachings on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Even some evangelical Christians (the so-called "New Evangelicals") are beginning to depart from mainstream conservative positions on these issues by appealing to their own traditions of moral responsibility and populism that are deeply-rooted in older struggles against slavery and robber-baron capitalism (Pally 2011).

More generally, the strongest and most transformative social movements have always been those that combine elements of the 'old' and the 'new' into a creative synergy that produces breakthrough moments – not those that shelter in the past *or* those that adopt new innovations uncritically. This was true of the civil rights movement, which blended radical new tactics of direct confrontation onto older traditions of non-violence and church-based activism, and it may well be true today for successful movements like *Avaaz* for example, which tries to combine the best of new information and communications technologies with pre-existing traditions of street protest. The various manifestations of Occupy provide another example of this process, aiming as they do to integrate cutting-edge experiments in social media with time-tested lessons from community organizing such as the need for maximum internal democracy and consensus-building through face-to-face encounters. At a time when 'virtual' engagement, network-based advocacy, social enterprise and other new ideas are so popular, these lessons are well-worth remembering

3. Hypotheses for research

What can be learned from these cases, and what hypotheses and research questions do they generate? Most situations are unlikely to fall so easily into either of the above categories - the 'perfect storm' or the 'ideal social movement.' Rather, the three elements of our conceptual model - context, content and strategy - are likely to move in different directions, or in the same direction at different levels of intensity, a situation which creates invaluable room-to-maneuver for those who seek to address the consequences of tradition in different ways. An innovative strategy, for example, might achieve results even in a context that is unfavorable, while a weaker set of tactics might produce results where levels of attachment to a damaging tradition are declining. To explore these relationships, the Engaging Tradition Project has drawn up an initial set of hypotheses for research.

3.1 *In general terms*, the Project has two key hypotheses, namely that:

- Tradition plays a significant role in perpetuating injustice *and* in furthering LGBT equality, rights, and broader social transformation; and that
- The impact of tradition in both these directions derives from the interaction of context, content and strategy.

The first goal of the project is to understand the patterns that are generated by these hypotheses and codify the mechanisms which produce them.

3.2 Moving *from the general to the strategic*, the Project then focuses on a set of second-order questions concerning whether and how traditions can be used to positive effect in the struggle for social justice. It is likely that different strategies are more, or less, effective in different contexts and/or with different types of content. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

- A mix of strategies is more effective than reliance on one strategy alone, whether it is 'for' or 'against' tradition, but certain mixes may work against each-other while others are mutually-reinforcing; and that

- When traditions are clearly injurious to LGBT rights and equality and impermeable to re-negotiation, oppositional tactics of various kinds are most effective; conversely, where more room-to-maneuver exists, constructive strategies will bear more fruit

By testing these hypotheses in practice it should be possible to develop a typology of tactics arranged by context, content and strategy mix.

3.3 Moving *from the strategic to the organizational* level, the Project also aims to explore whether traditions of different kinds can be used to strengthen groups and movements for sexual and gender justice, and whether by doing so they become more effective in their work. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

- Shared opposition to damaging traditions strengthens civic action across the lines of identity, economic status, nationality and religion

- The use of democratic and egalitarian traditions helps groups and movements to strengthen their internal capacities and accountabilities, and their external impact

- Recovering the deeper traditions of pre-figurative politics and social movement-building helps LGBT activists to move their work from 'virtual equality' to 'social transformation;' and that

- In all these ways, groups that understand and utilize tradition explicitly in their work achieve greater influence over their goals and objectives.

The next phase of the Engaging Tradition Project's work will test these hypotheses through empirical research with a range of LBGT and feminist groups, initially in the US South. Over time, it is hoped that similar research will be undertaken in other contexts so that a comparative framework of results and analysis can be developed.

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