

# SOLIDARITY LOOM

Weaving a Global Network of Engaged Creatives

in a world of rising authoritarianism

virtual series January-June 2026

# GENDER AND AUTHORITARIANISM

April 16



# PRE PORT

April 2026

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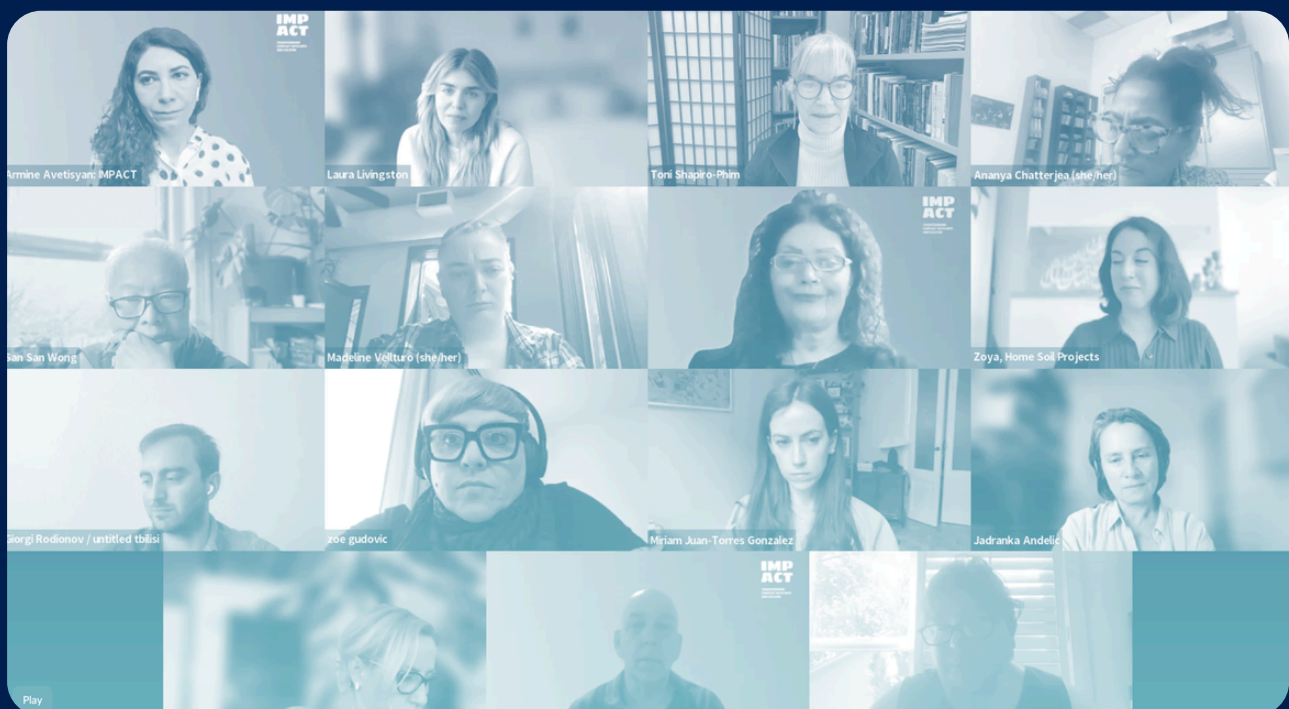
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# INTRODUCTION

The third session of the Solidarity Loom: Weaving a Global Network of Engaged Creatives in a World of Rising Authoritarianism series explored the intersections of gender and authoritarianism. The session opened with a presentation of the Engendering Authoritarianism report by Miriam Juan-Torres Gonzalez (Democracy Forum of Othering and Belonging Institute) and Laura Livingston (Over Zero), examining how attacks on women’s rights, feminism, and LGBTQ communities have become central strategies within contemporary authoritarian movements.

The discussion was enriched by responses from three artists working in different contexts: Ananya Chatterjea, a transnational feminist choreographer based in Minnesota, Zoe Gudović, a Serbian feminist artist and anti-war activist, Giorgi Rodionov, a curator and founder of Untitled Tbilisi in Georgia. The session also incorporated embodied reflection practices facilitated by Zoya Sardashti (Home Soil Project), creating space for participants to ground themselves in the conversation, connect the themes to their own lived experiences, and reflect on how resilience, care, and collective action can be sustained in times of uncertainty and polarization.



# “Gender and Authoritarianism”

## In Numbers

### PRESENTERS



### REGIONS



### PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



### REGISTERED



### COUNTRIES



### NEW TO IMPACT



### PARTICIPATED



# PRESENTATION OF THE (EN)GENDERING AUTHORITARIANISM REPORT

## MIRIAM JUAN-TORRES GONZALEZ (OTHERING AND BELONGING INSTITUTE)

### 1. GENDER AS A STRATEGIC TOOL OF AUTHORITARIANISM

- Attacks on women's rights, feminism, and LGBTQ communities are not incidental culture-war disputes but deliberate strategies used to advance authoritarian politics.
- Gender serves both as a target of repression and as a mechanism for normalizing hierarchy, exclusion, and concentrated power.
- The weaponization of gender helps authoritarian actors build support for broader anti-democratic agendas.

### 2. THE GLOBAL ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT

- Anti-gender politics is a transnational project with roots stretching back decades, involving actors and networks across Europe, the United States, and beyond.
- Narratives such as "gender ideology" have been strategically developed and amplified over time to mobilize opposition to feminist and LGBTQ movements.
- These campaigns are not isolated national phenomena but interconnected global efforts.
- 



***“Attacks on women’s rights, feminism, and LGBTQ rights are not random... they are actually part of the strategy.”***

-- Miriam Juan-Torres  
Gonzalez --

**[VIEW THE REPORT](#)**

# MIRIAM JUAN-TORRES GONZALEZ

## 4. CREATING ENEMIES AND MORAL PANICS

- The concept of “gender ideology” functions as an abstract enemy onto which social anxieties and grievances can be projected.
- By presenting rights-based movements as dangerous ideologies, authoritarian actors justify restrictions on freedoms and protections.
- Gender becomes a powerful tool for constructing threats that can then be used to legitimize crackdowns and exclusion.

## 5. GENDER, RACE, AND NATIONALISM

- Gender-based narratives frequently intersect with anti-migrant, racist, and nationalist politics.
- Conspiracy theories such as the Great Replacement rely on fears about reproduction, demographic change, and women’s bodies.
- Authoritarian movements often co-opt the language of women’s or LGBTQ rights to advance xenophobic and exclusionary agendas.

## 6. CULTURE WARS AS POLITICAL STRATEGY

- What is often described as a “culture war” is not simply a social disagreement but a deliberate political strategy.
- Gender issues are used to deepen polarization, divide opposition movements, and create fertile ground for authoritarian politics.
- These narratives enable coalitions among actors who may otherwise have very different political interests.

**“They are constructing or creating this boogeyman, this very abstract term under which authoritarian leaders lump a lot of discontents.”**

**“Culture war can also be a way of conducting politics.”**

– Miriam Juan-Torres  
Gonzalez –

# LAURA LIVINGSTON (OVER ZERO)

## 1. WHY GENDER MATTERS FOR DEMOCRACY

- Gender and sexuality are deeply connected to contemporary democratic erosion and should be understood as democracy issues, not solely human rights concerns.
- Efforts to restrict gender and sexual freedoms often serve as entry points for broader authoritarian projects.
- Defending democracy therefore requires attention to attacks on gender equality and LGBTQ rights.

## 2. FEAR, NOSTALGIA, AND SOCIAL CONTROL

- scapegoats and promising a return to an idealized past.
- Appeals to “traditional values” and “traditional families” become vehicles for restoring social hierarchies and concentrating power.
- Nostalgia functions as a powerful emotional and political tool.
- 

## 3. VIOLENCE AS AN ENFORCEMENT MECHANISM

- Violence and intimidation are not accidental byproducts but integral mechanisms through which authoritarian systems reinforce hierarchy.
- Harassment, threats, and exclusion push women and marginalized communities out of public and political life.
- This limits participation and strengthens unequal power structures.



***“If you care about democracy, you need to be concerned with efforts to weaponize and to attack gender and sexuality because they are intimately connected.”***

*-- Laura Livingston--*

# LAURA LIVINGSTON

## 4. CULTURE AND THE NORMALIZATION OF HIERARCHY

- Gender roles often serve as a gateway for normalizing broader ideas about dominance, obedience, and social hierarchy.
- Influencer culture, including “tradwife” and related online movements, can package these ideas in attractive and seemingly apolitical ways.
- Cultural spaces play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward authority and equality.

## 5. GENDER AS DISTRACTION

- Gender controversies are frequently used to divert attention from corruption, unpopular policies, or democratic decline.
- Keeping societies focused on divisive gender debates helps authoritarian actors maintain power while avoiding scrutiny elsewhere.

**“Violence... pushes groups out of public life.”**

**“Gender and sexuality are these deeply rooted and intimate aspects of identity.”**

-- Laura Livingston--

**“Ideas around social hierarchy and dominance are first explored through gender and gender roles.”**

-- Laura Livingston--

# KEY INSIGHTS FROM Q&A

## FROM RECOGNITION TO RESISTANCE

- The discussion focused on what comes after identifying authoritarian patterns: how communities sustain resistance, solidarity, and hope.
- Participants emphasized the importance of learning from successful examples of collective action.
- The 2025 Pride mobilization in Hungary was highlighted as an example of reframing LGBTQ rights as a broader defense of democracy and civil liberties.

## GENDER, WAR, AND THE POLITICS OF UNITY

- Participants connected the discussion to the Women, Life, Freedom movement in Iran and other struggles led by women and gender-diverse communities.
- Reflections highlighted how feminist and queer perspectives are often marginalized during moments of crisis in the name of national unity.
- The conversation challenged nostalgic visions of the past that erase marginalized identities and experiences.

## PROTECTION OR CONTROL?

- Authoritarian movements often justify restrictions through promises of security, stability, and protection.
- Participants noted that these narratives frequently conceal exclusion, censorship, and unequal power.
- A recurring theme was the need to distinguish genuine safety from mechanisms of social control.

## ART AS A SPACE FOR FREEDOM AND IMAGINATION

- Art was described as a space for critical thought, ambiguity, memory, and imagination.
- Participants noted that authoritarian movements often target artists and cultural institutions because they recognize the power of culture.
- Artistic practice was reaffirmed as a vital form of resistance, helping communities preserve memory, challenge dominant narratives, and imagine alternative futures.

## THE EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF RESISTANCE

- Participants reflected on the exhaustion of navigating war, propaganda, online hostility, and polarization.
- Sustaining relationships, dialogue, and hope was described as an essential part of resistance.
- The discussion highlighted the importance of approaches that challenge authoritarian narratives without deepening social fragmentation.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Resistance requires both analysis and collective action.
- Gender and sexuality remain central targets of authoritarian politics.
- Narratives of protection can be used to justify exclusion and control.
- Sustaining resistance requires attention to emotional wellbeing and connection.
- Art remains a powerful tool for preserving freedom, memory, and democratic imagination.

# RESPONSES FROM ARTISTS

## ANANYA CHATTERJEA (ANANYA DANCE THEATER )

### 1. RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH FEMINIST RESISTANCE

- Women and femme artists reclaiming public space emerged as a powerful form of resistance to authoritarianism, exclusion, and social control.
- Processions, performances, and public interventions were presented as acts of visibility that challenge erasure and assert collective presence.
- Occupying streets, stages, and public sites becomes a way of disrupting dominant narratives and creating new possibilities for civic engagement.

### 2. ART AS EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL MEMORY

- Choreography and performance can serve as ways of knowing, remembering, and transmitting experiences that are difficult to capture through language alone.
- Movement, metaphor, and embodied storytelling create opportunities to engage audiences emotionally as well as intellectually.
- Artistic experiences can leave lasting impressions that provoke reflection long after a performance ends.

### 3. CONNECTING STRUGGLES ACROSS BORDERS

- Artistic practice can reveal connections between struggles for racial justice, gender equality, caste liberation, migrant rights, environmental protection, and resistance to state violence.
- References to movements such as A Rapist in Your Path, Black Lives Matter, anti-caste organizing, and Indigenous environmental activism highlighted the interconnected nature of struggles for justice across regions.
- Creative work can help audiences recognize shared experiences and solidarities across geopolitical boundaries.



***“I love this idea of women and femme artists taking up space, making all the noise we can, being as rude as we can.”***

***“Carefully crafted stage choreographies allow us to offer provocations that linger in the minds of audiences.”***

*– Ananya Chatterjea -*

# ANANYA CHATTERJEA

## 4. THE COMPLEXITY OF SOLIDARITY

- Solidarity cannot be assumed, even within movements resisting authoritarianism.
- Communities often arrive at collective action from different social, political, and historical positions, bringing with them distinct experiences of oppression and privilege.
- Building meaningful solidarity requires acknowledging internal tensions, exclusions, and power dynamics rather than overlooking them.

## 5. ART AS A PRACTICE OF REMEMBERING

- Artistic work can serve as a vehicle for recovering histories that have been erased, silenced, or marginalized.
- Performance offers opportunities to surface stories of displacement, oppression, and resistance that may otherwise remain absent from public memory.
- Through ritual, embodiment, and storytelling, art can challenge collective amnesia and create spaces for remembrance.

## 6. CENSORSHIP AND THE THREAT OF CRITICAL ART

- Artistic work that addresses difficult histories and contemporary injustices can encounter censorship, institutional resistance, and political pressure.
- Efforts to suppress critical artistic expression demonstrate the perceived power of art to challenge dominant narratives and expose uncomfortable truths.
- Art that makes visible grief, rage, resistance, and alternative futures can become threatening to established systems of power.

**“We make dances that work to refer to multiple stories that resonate across geopolitical landscapes, reminding us that we are connected.”**

**“When we fill the stage with articulations of rage, grief, and make it a platform of spacemaking... we become a threat to the mainstream.”**

— Ananya Chatterjea —



Images from Ananya  
Dante Theater Performances

# ZOE GUDOVIĆ (TRANSDISCIPLINARY ARTIST )

## 1. MISOGYNY AS A FOUNDATION OF AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEMS

- Zoe situated contemporary authoritarianism within lived experiences of war, nationalism, misogyny, economic precarity, and militarization, drawing from feminist and anti-war organizing during and after the breakup of Yugoslavia.
- Misogyny was framed not as a single form of discrimination, but as a foundational logic that underpins broader systems of domination, including militarism, nationalism, colonialism, and economic exploitation.
- Violence against women was described as deeply embedded within social, political, and economic structures rather than existing as an isolated issue.
- Gender-based oppression was positioned as inseparable from wider struggles for justice, dignity, and human rights.

## 2. ART AS INTERVENTION, NOT REPRESENTATION

- Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, feminist artists and activists used public performance to address violence against women in towns and communities across Serbia.
- At a time when feminism and LGBTQ activism were highly stigmatized, the street became a place where difficult conversations could happen outside formal institutions.
- Public performances created opportunities to challenge silence, expose violence, and make visible experiences that were largely confined to private spaces.



**“Misogyny is the base of everything.”**

**“Street is the only institution for me.”**

**“I believe in young generation, that maybe through technology, will do some cracks in any system.”**

– Zoe Gudović –

## 3. MAKING VIOLENCE VISIBLE

- Street interventions revealed how deeply normalized violence against women had become within society.
- During performances, male audience members frequently reacted with hostility, harassment, and aggression, while authorities often failed to intervene.
- These public reactions mirrored the dynamics many women experienced in their homes, making visible the connections between private and public forms of violence.

## 4. ART AS COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

- Artistic practice was described not simply as representation, but as a form of intervention and community organizing.
- Women attending performances often approached organizers seeking support, identifying with the stories being told and recognizing their own experiences within them.
- Artistic projects were intentionally connected to local women's organizations, ensuring that awareness-building was accompanied by practical support and long-term engagement.

## 5. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ARTISTS AND ACTIVISTS

- Artistic engagement was presented as carrying a responsibility that extends beyond creating a performance or raising awareness.
- Questions were raised about what happens after an intervention ends and how artists can remain accountable to the communities affected by the issues they address.
- Sustainable change requires building relationships, networks of support, and connections to local organizations that remain present long after an artistic project concludes.

## 6. CHALLENGING COMFORTABLE NARRATIVES

- Dominant assumptions that gender-based violence is primarily a problem of certain regions or cultures were challenged.
- Experiences from both the Balkans and Western Europe illustrated that patriarchal violence remains widespread across different political and economic contexts.
- Zoe highlighted both the endurance of oppressive systems and the importance of continuing to create spaces for resistance, solidarity, and collective action.
- Despite skepticism about institutional change, hope was placed in future generations and their ability to challenge existing systems and create new possibilities.





**Žene, Život, Sloboda**  
**Woman, Life, Freedom**  
**Jin, Jiyan, Azadî**  
**STOPPT FEMIZID**

Images from Street Performances in Serbia



# GIORGI RODIONOV (UNTITLED TBILISI)

## 1. QUEER COMMUNITIES AT THE CENTER OF AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS

- Giorgi reflected on the rapid authoritarian shift in Georgia and the ways LGBTQ issues have been deliberately weaponized as political tools.
- Anti-LGBTQ legislation became a central feature of political campaigns, with queer communities portrayed as threats to national identity and social stability.
- These policies extended beyond rhetoric to include restrictions on freedom of assembly, artistic expression, and access to healthcare, particularly for transgender people.

## 2. AUTHORITARIANISM, COLONIAL LEGACIES, AND GEOPOLITICS

- The rise of anti-queer politics in Georgia was situated within longer histories of Russian imperial influence and ongoing geopolitical struggles in the region.
- Queer communities often find themselves caught between competing political projects, with their identities used symbolically by different sides while their actual needs and realities remain marginalized.
- The presentation highlighted the importance of understanding anti-gender politics through local historical and political contexts rather than through simplified East-West binaries.

## 3. THE LIMITS OF IMPORTED ACTIVIST MODELS

- A central reflection focused on the challenges of applying advocacy strategies developed in one context to another.
- In Georgia, highly visible actions such as Pride events often became flashpoints that authoritarian actors used to mobilize backlash and justify further restrictions.
- Giorgi called for approaches that are responsive to local realities, histories, and risks rather than relying on universal models of activism.



**“Queer issues became one of the leading ”problems“ for the country.”**

**“The aspect of just copy-pasting the strategies that have worked before in different locations is not always working in the region.”**

– Giorgi Rodionov –

# GIORGI RODIONOV

## 4. COMMUNITY AS A FORM OF SURVIVAL

- As political conditions deteriorated and many artists and activists were forced into exile, community-building became a central form of resistance.
- Cultural gatherings and artistic festivals were described as spaces where displaced artists could reconnect, share experiences, and sustain a sense of belonging.
- Maintaining community was presented not only as a social need but as a political act in the face of isolation and displacement.

## 5. RECLAIMING QUEER HISTORIES AND CULTURAL MEMORY

- Through projects such as Queer Deities in Migration, artistic work explored connections between migration, spirituality, gender fluidity, and pre-Christian traditions across the South Caucasus.

- These projects challenge narratives that portray queer identities as foreign imports by uncovering historical and cultural traditions that embraced fluidity and multiplicity.
- Artistic research became a way of recovering suppressed histories and reconnecting contemporary struggles with deeper cultural roots.

## 6. REIMAGINING TRADITION

- Giorgi challenged dominant assumptions that traditional culture naturally belongs to patriarchal or conservative forces.
- Many cultural practices now associated with rigid gender norms were described as more diverse, fluid, and inclusive before being appropriated by nationalist and religious institutions.
- Artistic practice was presented as a means of reclaiming, reshaping, and revitalizing cultural traditions rather than abandoning them to authoritarian interpretations.

## 7. ART AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE

- Art was framed not only as a form of protest but as a process of rebuilding culture and imagining alternative futures.
- By revisiting traditional music, rituals, stories, and aesthetics through queer and feminist perspectives, artistic practice creates new possibilities for belonging and identity.
- Cultural work was presented as a long-term strategy for challenging authoritarian narratives and expanding collective understandings of heritage and community.

**“Slow change is more important rather than clashing face-to-face with authoritarianism.”**

**“We are using our own culture and rethinking and reshaping it, and giving it new life.”**

-- Giorgi Rodionov -



IN THE MOUNTAINS  
Festival of Queer  
Artists from South  
Caucasus- 2025



# CROSS-CUTTING THEMES ACROSS THE SESSION

## FROM RECOGNITION TO RESISTANCE

- Across the session, gender emerged as a key site through which authoritarian actors consolidate power, reinforce hierarchy, and justify exclusion.
- Attacks on women, LGBTQ communities, and gender equality were repeatedly framed as part of broader anti-democratic projects.

## ART AS RESISTANCE AND REIMAGINATION

- Artists described art as more than a form of expression—it is a channel for resistance, memory, healing, and social transformation.
- Through performance, storytelling, and cultural work, artists challenge dominant narratives and imagine alternative futures.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF SOLIDARITY

- Building solidarity requires acknowledging differences in context, identity, privilege, and experience.
- Participants emphasized that meaningful solidarity is an ongoing practice rather than an automatic outcome.

## CONTEXT MATTERS

- Strategies that work in one setting may not work in another.
- Speakers stressed the importance of locally grounded approaches that respond to specific political, cultural, and historical realities.

## RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE

- From feminist street performances in Serbia to processions in India and queer cultural gatherings in exile, participants highlighted the importance of occupying public space as an act of visibility, solidarity, and resistance.

## MEMORY AGAINST ERASURE

- Several presentations focused on recovering suppressed histories, honoring marginalized experiences, and challenging collective amnesia.
- Art was presented as a powerful way to preserve memory and make hidden stories visible.

## COMMUNITY AS SURVIVAL

- In contexts of repression, war, displacement, and violence, community-building emerged as a vital form of resistance.
- Creating spaces of belonging, care, and mutual support was seen as essential to sustaining long-term movements.

## RECLAIMING CULTURE

- Participants challenged authoritarian claims over tradition, religion, and national identity.
- Artistic and cultural work can reclaim these spaces, revealing more diverse, inclusive, and liberatory histories and futures.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS AND LESSONS

- Gender justice and democracy are deeply interconnected.
- Authoritarianism operates through culture as well as politics.
- Art is a powerful tool for resistance, memory, and social change.
- Public space remains an important site of visibility and collective action.
- Effective resistance must be rooted in local realities and contexts.
- Solidarity requires ongoing relationship-building across differences.
- Community care is essential for sustaining movements under pressure.
- Reclaiming history and culture can challenge authoritarian narratives and expand possibilities for the future.

# ABOUT IMPACT

IMPACT is a diverse global organization, advocating for arts and culture to transform conflict and build more creative and just societies. IMPACT is governed by a diverse and dynamic board comprised of artists, scholars and practitioners in the field of arts, culture and conflict transformation from around the globe, including Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Israel, Kenya, Japan, Serbia, and the Philippines.



## JOIN THE IMPACT COMMUNITY

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