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(RE)MAKING "TRANSGENDER" IDENTITIES IN GLOBAL MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

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For at least as much of human history as we have written records, individuals whose gender identities differ from those expected of them at birth have existed across diverse cultures. In Western society, the (primarily psychomedical) term "transgender" is used to describe individuals with such gender-variant identities. In other cultures, understandings of gender variance have produced native identity categories, such as *hijra* in the Indian subcontinent, *muxe* in Oaxaca, *waria* in Indonesia, and two-spirit people in some Native American and First Nations cultures. Yet as the forces of globalization transform the cultures (and media industries) of nations across the world, the great diversity of gender variance is increasingly homogenized, recast as "transgender" identities. Considering the relatively low prevalence of individuals with nonnormative gender identities in the general population, mediated representations are crucial to (re)shaping cultural norms and attitudes toward gender minorities and advancing their political standing. As such, the globalization of media is of immense consequence to gender variant people worldwide.

This chapter explores representations of gender variant identities in global media, analyzing the ambivalent tension between the "Westernization" of native identity categories and the development of cross-national/-cultural modes of identification. While the remaking of native gender identities in a Euroamerican model involves familiar dynamics of cultural imperialism, it simultaneously makes nonnormative gender identities legible in a global context and enables a transnational movement for recognition and acceptance. Further complicating this dynamic, both transnational media companies (often based in Europe or North America) *and* local national media participate in this remaking of "transgender" identities, raising important questions about the role of global media elites in this process of westernization.

Our argument centers this ambivalence, presenting three different cases representing three different sets of relations between global media and local identities: (1) *hijra* in India, who are represented in global media as locked in battles for "transgender rights"; (2) two-spirit communities in North America, who employ digital media to resist the white-washing of their identities as instances of a prehistoric "transgender" identity and, consequently, circumvent the hegemonic power of global mass media over their representation; and (3) transgender rights activists in Namibia, who capitalize on the power of global media to build cross-national solidarity and, in doing so, leverage international political pressure as a means of affecting local change.

(De)colonial Tensions in the Articulation and Experience of Gender

Gender exists as one of the central organizing features of social existence. Across cultures, gender categories – often built around the outward appearance of a child's genitalia at birth – dictate how an individual should understand and conduct themselves, as well as how they should be understood and regarded by others (Martin 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender also defines, in many ways, the structure and nature of familial relations and kinship networks, as well as the division of labor within a society (Rubin 1975; Laslett and Brenner 1989). While the gendered organization of society has been common across cultures historically, the exact definitional boundaries between genders and their associated roles have varied.

As the continents of North and South America, Australia, Africa, and Asia were colonized by European imperial states, the peoples native to those lands were subjected to political domination and economic exploitation. Existing governance structures were replaced with imperial administration and capitalist trade economies based on resource extraction were established (Kohn and Reddy 2017). Reaching beyond the political and economic domains, however, colonization forcibly restructured social organization (e.g., Sen 2002). This significantly included translating political and economic dominance into the supposed (and "scientifically" defended) supremacy of the "white" race over non-white peoples (e.g., Harrison 2005; McCarthy 2009) and the imposition of European hierarchies of dominance on colonized cultures' gender categories (Lugones 2007; McClintock 1995; Oyewumi 1997). The latter specifically entailed the enforcement of an immutable male/female binary with clear (and presumed "natural") roles assigned to each and with patriarchal power at its core (Lugones 2007; Oyewumi 1997).

As a consequence of the imperial imposition of binary gender in colonized societies, all gender identities that did not comport with the "new" binary were suppressed and often criminalized, resulting in their near erasure (e.g., Arondekar 2009; A. Wilson 2015). While not all colonized cultures recognized non- or cross-binary identities, many did, often identifying gender-variance with creation narratives and important religio-social roles (Chatterjee 2018; Epple 1998; Goulet 1996; Hossain 2018; Hossain and Nanda in this volume; Pyle 2018; Ung Loh 2014). These included the *muxe* people in Oaxaca, *hijra* in the Indian subcontinent, *waria* in Indonesia, and the two-

spirit people of some Native American and First Nation cultures (e.g., *nádleeh* in Navajo culture and *winkte* in Lakota culture). With the imperial importation of Christianity, imposition of European educational systems, and introduction of new criminal codes, these identities were punished and those who held them habituated to the imperial order (e.g., M'Baye 2013; Miranda 2010; Palmer 2014; Pyle 2018; A. Wilson 2015).

Beginning in the 1940s, Asian and African societies under imperial rule began to achieve first steps toward independence, ultimately forcing the withdrawal of colonial forces and the constitution of new sovereign states. The establishment of these new states, which largely did not represent pre-colonial territorial divisions, required the dismantling of colonial political structures, a process often referred to as decolonization (Jansen and Osterhammel 2019). However, political decolonization did not necessarily result in the dismantling of colonial powers' de facto economic or social control. Thus, since achieving political independence, many formerly colonized states have sought cultural decolonization through movements to remove social and cultural norms imposed by colonists and to revitalize customs suppressed or lost during the colonial era (Chen 1997).

Importantly, cultural decolonization in North America, South America, and Australia has been different, as these regions have not followed the same progression from political independence to new sovereign states to cultural revolution more uniformly found in Africa and Asia. Rather, many Central and South American cultures have sought cultural decolonization over a century after achieving political independence from colonizers, but in the face of neocolonialization by the United States (e.g., Go 2011). Similarly, Native North American and indigenous Australian cultures have sought cultural decolonization while facing continued political colonization and physical occupation.

Common across these cases, however, is that cultural decolonization seeks the reclamation and reconstruction of pre-colonial cultural norms and values. This has included attempts to deconstruct colonial norms and regulations regarding gender and sexuality, ranging from the deinstitutionalization of women's subjugation to the decriminalization of homosexuality and gender-variance (e.g., Currier 2012; M'Baye 2013). Moreover, there have been robust movements to "rediscover" and reconstruct pre-colonial gender identities (where they existed) or else construct new vocabularies to articulate gender-variance in the face of colonially inherited gender- and sexuality-based prejudices (e.g., Epple 1998; Ung Loh 2014; A. Wilson 2015).

Yet while political and cultural decolonization progresses in many formerly colonized states, economic colonization has become further entrenched through globalization and the spread of free-market capitalism (Banerjee and Linstead 2001). Globalization maintains the supremacy of former colonizers over the formerly colonized by recreating the imperial conditions of resource and labor extraction under the guise of economic development (Hoogvelt 2001). In practice, globalization thus subjects postcolonial states to (re)new(ed) imperialism by European and North American corporate powers. Moreover, economic globalization, in reifying

European and North American hegemony, consolidates political and cultural power over so-called "developing" nations. The attendant omnipresence of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations further subjugates postcolonial cultures to forms of governance by their former colonizers (e.g., Gürcan 2015; Langan 2018). As such, globalization has often retrograde effects on postcolonial cultures, undoing or at least impeding the processes of decolonization.

The effects of globalization on culture constitute *cultural imperialism*, in that they reaffirm the cultural values of neocolonial powers over those of postcolonial states, albeit through economic domination rather than direct colonization (Petras 1993). In the domain of gender and sexuality, cultural imperialism has resulted in the (re) construction of sexual behavior and non-European gender identities in vocabularies legible to neocolonial powers (Cabral in Boellstorff et al. 2014; Chiang 2014; Chiang, Henry, and Leung 2018). That is, non-heterosexual identities have been (re)constructed as "gay," while gender-variant identities have been (re)constructed as "transgender." Yet, to articulate *muxe, hijra, waria*, or two-spirit identities as "transgender" does not accurately reflect the identities as they have been historically – or are necessarily currently – understood and experienced within the cultures that originated them. And in cultures that did not have pre-colonial categories for gender-variance, to articulate experiences of gender-variance as "transgender" makes those experiences legible at the expense of constructing them as a consequence of colonization. Thus, the articulation of gender-variant identities in contemporary global society is shaped by competing decolonial and neocolonial tensions that manifest in often ambivalent and contradictory ways.

Cultural Imperialism and the Globalization of Media Industries

Media are a major force in the construction of social reality and media industries are increasingly global. Media's global influence, achieved by the internationalization of media distribution, is rooted in globalization's focus on economies of scale (Chan-Olmsted and Chang 2003; McChesney 2001). That is, globalization operates on the foundational premise that if a greater quantity of a good is produced, then the per-unit cost of production decreases, increasing profit margins. So too do media industries, as the marginal cost to make of each copy of a media product once it has been produced is negligible. For example, if a media firm produces a film for $100 million, the first copy of that film – the master copy – costs $100 million to make, but each subsequent copy costs only the price of a blank DVD. Thus, the more copies of the film sold, the lower the per-unit cost of production, and the firm's profit margin can grow indefinitely so long as more almost-free-to-produce copies are sold. As such, media industries are incentivized to distribute globally because doing so immeasurably increases their potential purchasing audience and, consequently, profit margins (Chan-Olmsted and Chang 2003; McChesney 2001).

Yet, media content production is incredibly resource intensive. Therefore, media companies capable of fronting the high costs to produce content are better positioned to distribute their content globally and for a higher profit (Chan-Olmsted

and Chang 2003; McChesney 2001). Media companies in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and continental Europe benefit from government subsidies for the arts and entertainment, which lower the costs of content production, enabling them to more easily produce content than companies in other nations (e.g., Crane 2014; Jackel 2004). Many of these countries also operate public broadcasting services that produce and distribute media content both nationally and internationally. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a public service broadcaster subsidized by the British government, is the single largest broadcaster in the world. They produce news from all over the world, which is distributed across dozens of countries in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. While the United States lacks a robust public broadcasting service and provides fewer government subsidies for entertainment (McChesney 2008), the major Hollywood studios possess vast quantities of capital accumulated since its genesis as the world's oldest film industry, which enables them to invest heavily in production and global distribution (Crane 2014).

Of course, media production and distribution is not the purview of North American and European nations. Nearly every country has a national media industry that produces and distributes vernacular news and entertainment media (Chadha and Kavoori 2000; Crane 2014; Neyazi 2010). However, few countries distribute media content to global audiences outside of their diaspora or other countries that share a mother tongue (e.g., Crane 2014; Dwyer 2013; Smets et al. 2013). However, each of these media industries, despite being highly profitable and broad in their geographic spread, do not have social and economic power to match those of North America and Europe, or to wholly resist the forces of cultural imperialism. Furthermore, they generally lack a reciprocal influence on North American and European cultures, compared to the influence North American and European cultures have on them.

The end result of the globalization of media industries is the homogenization of media content, which occurs in two ways. First, content is homogenized to the extent that, in a very literal sense, the same content is being distributed globally. For example, a Lady Gaga album will (with perhaps a track or two difference) be exactly the same in every country it is distributed in. So too will an *Avengers* film from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, though individual scenes may be subject to censorship, particularly if they include depictions deemed too sexually provocative, political subversive, or otherwise immoral in some states (e.g., Gao 2009; Zhou 2015). In either case, these media are distributed (and consumed) widely and in high volume across the globe. China has fought the homogenizing influence of North American and European media content, to some extent, by placing quotas on the number of foreign films that can be distributed within the country (Gao 2009), but such restrictions are rare and their efficacy at counteracting cultural imperialism is up for debate (e.g., Zhou 2015).

Second, content is homogenized to the extent that North American and European media are considered the professional standard and set (cross-)cultural expectations for what forms media content should take (e.g., Boyd–Barrett and Xie 2008; Kuipers

2011). That is, global standards for whose stories deserve to be represented in media (in what ways and with what overarching messages), what genre conventions media should meet, and what production values media should have are unfailingly Euroamericentric. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the near ubiquity of English as the language of globally distributed media, regardless of its nation of origin. It is also evident in media industries such as that of Korean pop music (K-pop), which synthesizes European dance-pop and African-American hip hop musical conventions in English-infused Korean-language popular music (Anderson 2016). While K-pop's global popularity has meant a large cultural and economic influence for South Korea, it still ultimately contributes to the homogenization of media content caused by the globalization of media industries.

In sum, the globalization of media industries, in large part via the homogenization of media content, reifies the cultural supremacy of European and North American nations (Gross and Costanza-Chock 2004). Moreover, the global distribution of media content serves as a simultaneous boon to North American and European economic *and* cultural power, furthering the inequities between North America and Europe and Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. Consequently, media serve as a primary vector of cultural imperialism, transmitting neocolonial (re)constructions of the social world to postcolonial audiences.

Beyond "Transgender": Gender Variance in Global Perspective

Transgender identities and the issues faced by transgender people are emerging in their salience, as well as in their perceived legitimacy, in both European and North American societies (see, for example, Åkerlund in press; Billard 2016, 2019a, 2019b). In particular, transgender issues and identities have become frequent subjects of both political and media attention, serving in many ways as the flashpoint *du jour* of the so-called "culture wars." This is partially attributable to the fact transness challenges, to a certain extent, historical Euroamerican understandings of an immutable gender binary ordained by God and biologically determined in utero. While there is increasing understanding and acceptance of non-binary gender identities – and an estimated one-third of transgender people in the United States identify as non-binary (James et al. 2016) – in large part transgender identity is understood as being psychomedical in nature (Balzer/Lagata 2014). That is, prevailing media narratives (and much academic research) in Europe and North America generally maintain transgender identities result from the psychological condition of "gender dysphoria," the treatment for which is medical intervention (usually in the form of hormone replacement therapy and any number of reconstructive surgeries) to make the transgender person's body conform with expectations associated with their (binary) gender identity.

Disregarding momentarily the restrictions these narratives place on the potential identifications of European and (non-Native) North American people, the dominance of this understanding of transness in Euroamerican media has resulted in *global media* interpreting instances of gender variance cross-nationally/cross-culturally as being

further instances of "transgender" identity (e.g., Hegarty 2017; Chiang 2014). The consequences of global media's reconstructions of gender variance within a Euroamericentric model are numerous and fraught with cultural imperialist tensions. However, before we can address these tensions, there must be a basic understanding of what gender identities exist cross-culturally and what knowledge about their representation in media has been produced.

An exhaustive survey of global gender variance is impossible, but it is necessary to convey the diversity and geographic distribution of such identities, as well as how they differ from Euroamerican "transgender" identities. Generally speaking, we can conceive of three categories of gender variant identities vis-à-vis Euroamerican "transgender" identities: (1) precolonial gender identities, including both those that have survived through colonization and those that have been "recovered" through decolonial movements; (2) gender identities that did not exist before colonization, but that developed or have been constructed outside the psychomedical model of transgender identity; and (3) "hybridized" gender identities that appropriate, adapt, and/or resignify "transgender" identity with non-Euroamerican understandings of gender.

First, many cultures had extant categories or conceptions of gender that fall outside Euroamerican understandings of a strict binary gender system prior to colonization. These identities largely described people who were assigned male at birth but who took on feminine or female social roles. Examples include *māhū* in Hawai'i and Tahiti; *fa'afafine* in Samoa; *meti* in Nepal; *katoey* in Thailand; *nádleeh* among the Navajo; *âyahkwêw* among the Plains Cree; *waria* in Indonesia; *sarimbavy* in Madagascar; *hijra*, *jogta* or *jogappa*, *aravani* or *thirunangi*, *shiv-shakthi*, *kothis*, *khwaja sira*, *khunsa*, *zennana*, *kinnar*, and others in the Indian subcontinent.[1] Importantly, many of these identity categories do not make clear distinctions between "gender" and "sexuality," and as such the lines between what a Euroamerican observer might categorize as a feminine gay man versus a transgender woman are not so much blurred as they are nonexistent (e.g., Durban-Albrecht 2017; Dutta and Roy 2014; Epple 1998; Khan 2016). Similarly, many of these identity categories have a strained relationship to bodily modification relative to Euroamerican expectations of "transition," with some identities (selectively) engaging in castration and others refraining from any permanent modifications (see, for example, Dutta and Roy 2014).

At the core, these differences in identity concepts come down to cultural variations in worldview (e.g., Epple 1998; Goulet 1996). For example, Carolyn Epple (1998, 267) discusses how many Navajos do not view "male" and "female" as oppositional categories belong to biological division, but rather "view male and female as situational values." Of course, the precolonial identity categories presented here are not necessarily referred to by transhistorical terms inherited from the precolonial past; some were created, developed, or reconstructed to recover lost identities (Pyle 2018). Regardless, these identities represent modes of gendered existence of philosophies of gender difference erased or marginalized under colonization, and now facing displacement by "transgender" identities of Euroamerican origin.

Second, some cultures have developed gender variant identities that do not predate colonization or else arose in cultures that were never colonized (e.g., Japan), but that nonetheless developed outside of the Euroamerican psychomedical model of "transgender" identity. These identities are particularly notable in Latin America, where categories like *vestidas, pintadas*, and *travesti* predominate, alongside other categories like *mujercitos* (Cervantes 2014). In Japan, numerous categories exist that "refer to a gender that is neither male nor female, or, depending on the definition, both" (Dale 2012, 1). These include the relatively recent term of *x-jendā* (Dale 2012), as well as the more commonly encountered *ryōsei, chūsei*, and *musei* (Robertson 1998). In both Latin America and Japan, these identity categories exist alongside transgender identities; that is, psychomedical constructions of transgender identity are often found in both Latin America and Japan, but these non-psychomedical identities persist or else emerged since the import of "transgender" as a label for gender variance. Like many precolonial gender variant identities, these identities also have an often-ambiguous relationship to what we might call "sexuality," existing at the intersections between "homosexual" and "transgender" identity as understood in Europe and North America (see especially Cervantes 2014).

Third, some cultures have "hybridized" gender identities that either synthesize existing identities with transgender ones or resignify transgender identity with non-Euroamerican understandings of gender. For example, Dutta and Roy (2014) discuss how *hijra* groups in India hybridize trans and *hijra* identities to produce a constructive category of political signification and self-determination (cf. Chatterjee 2018). In Latin America, there are similar tensions between *travesti* and *transgenero y transexual*, whereby *travesti* activists have simultaneously used "transgender" as a category of legal action *and* resisted the medical gatekeeping of "transgender" legal classification (e.g., Jarrín 2016; Silva and Ornat 2016). In Haiti, by contrast *trani* individuals came to appropriate "trans" and "transgender" as translations of their own identity category, rather than as a total replacement of it, even as US-based LGBTQ organizations introduced "trans" and "transgender" as "correctives" for *trani* (Durban-Albrecht 2017, 201).

Indeed, across all cultures with gender variant identities, globalization has wrought a pronounced "Westernization" of these identities in both academic and popular discourse.[2] As micha cárdenas (in Boellstorff et al. 2014, 434) argues, "The transnational circulation of the idea of transgender is a colonial operation, spreading Western ontologies and logics such as Western medicine; the idea of the individual, unchanging self; and the binary gender system." As a consequence, "transgender" is reified as a "culturally nonspecific umbrella term" that renders endogenous identity categories "doubly local, localized in their own culture and in relation to the international scope of transgender" (Cabral in Boellstorff et al. 2014, 436; see also Dutta and Roy 2014). Moreover, recasting all such identities as "transgender" elides significant differences in "geographically specific subcultures" (Chatterjee 2018, 313) of gender variance within societies.

The role of global media in this is clear. As Susan Stryker (2006, 14) compellingly argues, "transgender" is, "without a doubt, a category of First World origin that is currently being exported for Third World consumption," and that exportation occurs both through the nongovernmental "development" sector (e.g., Durban-Albrecht 2017; Dutta and Roy 2014) and through the global media and cultural industries (e.g., Chiang 2014; Hegarty 2017; Leung 2016). That said, little about the relationship between global media and the diffusion of transgender identity has been written. Two exceptions stand out: Benjamin Hegarty's (2017) "The Value of Transgender: *Waria* Affective Labor for Transnational Media Markets in Indonesia" and Howard Chiang's (2014) "Sinophone" keyword entry in the first issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*. Hegarty's (2017, 78) article makes a compelling case that the term "transgender" has "come to be understood by most *waria* and used by some," in large part because of its use by media makers, such a filmmakers, journalists, and documentarians, who *waria* see as sources of income amidst economic precarity. Ultimately, however, "the global category transgender is transforming the meanings of the Indonesian category *waria*" (Hegarty 2017, 80), all because of the production and circulation of transnational media by industries based in Europe, North America, and Australia. Chiang (2014) identifies a similar, but distinct dynamic in 1950s Taiwan, where intersex soldier Xie Jianshun was "dubbed the 'Chinese Christine'" – referring to the first highly publicized trans woman in American media, Christine Jorgensen. As Chiang (2014, 185) argues, Xie was transformed by media "into a transsexual cultural icon whose status would put Taiwan on a par with the United States on the global stage as a modern and technologically sophisticated nation," simultaneously popularizing *bianxingren* (transsexual) as a category of identity. Beyond these studies, several studies of national media representation of transgender identities have been published spanning Australia (e.g., Kerry 2018), China (e.g., Zhang 2014), Japan (Mackie 2008), Norway (Roen, Blakar, and Nafstad 2011), Sweden (Åkerlund in press), the United States (e.g., Billard 2016, 2019a, 2019b; MacKenzie and Marcel 2009), and the United Kingdom (e.g., Gupta 2019; Humphrey 2016). Missing, however, are truly *global* perspectives (as opposed to series of national perspectives), and particular national perspectives are un(der)represented (specifically, from nations in Latin America, South Asia, Africa).

Our argument serves as a partial corrective to what is missing, offering a distinctly global account of media and gender variance. Following Stryker (2012, 287), among others, we recognize that "Western discourses informed by sexological science have a way of travelling transnationally, as part of broader patterns of Eurocentric imperialism and colonization and as part of the global accumulation and transfer of capital." Global media acts as a vector for this discourse, remaking gender variant identities in Euroamerican models in a culturally imperialist manner. At the same time, we acknowledge the active participation of local communities and local media in (admittedly power-imbalanced) relationships with global media producers (e.g., Hegarty 2017), as well as acknowledging the agency of local communities to resist cultural imperialism by a variety of means, including hybridization (Dutta and Roy 2014), even if such resistance is incomplete (Chatterjee

2018). As such there is an ambivalent tension between the power of global media to (re)colonize gender variance worldwide, on the one hand, and transnational modes of identification and organization, on the other.

"Transgender Rights in India": Global Media and (Mis) representations of *Hijra* [3]

Of the three cases we take up, *hijra* are perhaps the clearest example of the hegemonic and culturally imperialist power of global media to recast endogenous gender identity categories in a Euroamerican mold. In particular, the international political press has variously represented *hijra* as "India's third gender" (e.g., Al Jazeera 2013; Gettleman 2018) and "the oldest transgender community" in the world (e.g., Francis et al. 2015). Yet even where the label of "third gender" is applied to *hijra*, they are still described as a subset of "transgender" people, as though to be *hijra* is to be a square and to be "transgender" is to be a rectangle; all *hijra* are transgender, but not all transgender people are *hijra* (see, for example, Gettleman 2018). As a consequence, the precarious social, political, and economic positions of *hijra* in postcolonial India are discussed in the international press as issues of "transgender rights in India" (e.g., New York Times Editorial Board 2014).

   Hijra as a category of identity representing gender variance across the Indian subcontinent has its own issues, as well. The specific category of *hijra* originates in the Sanskrit epic Ramayana as a "psychological sex" (Michelraj 2015, 17; see also Hossain and Nanda in this volume) that is neither male nor female. According to the epic, Lord Rama turned to his followers while leaving the Kosala kingdom in exile, commanding that all "men and women" turn back and return to the city. A small number of followers stayed outside the city through his 14-year exile in the Dandaka forest. These followers – *hijra*, who were neither men nor women – were honored for their devotion with the power to "confer blessings on people on auspicious occasions" (Michelraj 2015, 17). But *hijra* are not the only gender variant identity within the Indian subcontinent, nor are they the only one associated with spiritual rites or religious texts. For example, the *aravani* of Tamil Nadu originate from the Mahabarata story of Aravan in which the god Krisha assumes the form of a human woman to marry Aravan before he is sacrificed, while *jogta* and *jogappas* originate from worship of the goddess Renukha Devi (Chatterjee 2018, 314–15). In Pakistan, Bangladesh, and various regions on India, still other understandings of both *hijra* and non-*hijra* gender variance exist (e.g., Hossain 2018; Hossain and Nanda in this volume; Khan 2016). As Shraddha Chatterjee (2018, 314) argues, to collapse these all "under the rubric of transgender is to forget the most interlinked biological, cultural, religious, and geographic specificities of each community." Moreover, the emphasis on *hijra* almost entirely precludes discussion of what we might consider "transmasculine" gender variance in the region (Khubchandani 2014).

As such there is a dual erasure of South Asian gender variance in the international political press, as all gender variance is collapsed into the singular category of *hijra*, which is then in turn subsumed under the banner of "transgender." This shift from *hijra* to "transgender" seems traceable to the late 2000s with the rise of NGOs and community-based organizations supported by increased transnational funding (Chatterjee 2018) and increased international media attention as India came to be seen as a burgeoning economic power (Rao and Mudgal 2015). These increases, wrought by globalization, produced a new "taxonomy of terms" for "queer" identity, ultimately leading to "transgender" becoming "an umbrella term that came to represent many forms and subcultures of gender nonconformity in India" (Chatterjee 2018, 312).

As one example, Femi Oke, anchor of the social media-forward Al Jazeera program *The Stream*, introduced an hour-long segment of "India's 'third gender'" in 2013 by referring to "India's transgender, or *hijra*, community," offering *hijra* as a linguistic translation for the English word "transgender." The numerous guests – a diverse cast of transfeminine South Asian scholars and activists ranging in their self-identifications from *hijra* to transsexual – presented nuanced discussion of the various social, cultural, and historical forces affecting gender variant people in India. Over their speaking images, however, sat a chyron reading, "Follow the story: #India #LGBT," collapsing the various concerns being discussed back into a universalized "LGBT" identity. Throughout the broadcast, *hijra* and "transgender" were used interchangeably, the differences being explicated by the guest elided by the anchors at every turn.

In a more recent example, *NBC News* published a story by Priti Salian (2018) on The Aravani Art Project, which they described as "a public art venture started in Bangalore" as a means of mitigating the economic hardships faced by "trans women" by employing them to "paint murals across India." The irony is clear to anyone familiar with gender variance in India: the program is called "The Aravani Art Project," referring specifically to the identity category of *aravani* – those whom it aims to help – and yet is consistently (and exclusively) described in the story as helping transgender women. Similarly, a recent video by BBC News (2018) focusing on the economic disenfranchisement of "transgender women in India" opened with video of several *hijra* dancing. They were clad in brightly colored saris, clapping and singing as one of them gently cradles a newborn. The words on the screen read: "These transgender women in Kolkata are celebrating the birth of a child. They sing and dance, praying for the baby's healthy life." If the relationship between them being transgender and praying for a baby's health seem unclear, that's because it *is* unclear. It is, however, a sanctioned social role of *hijra* to confer blessings on newborns through song and dance, a cultural particularity of the (neither male nor female) identities of the people depicted erased in recasting them as "transgender women."

In a recent article in the *New York Times*, Jeffrey Gettleman (2018) kept more consistently with the language of *hijra*, as opposed to "transgender" – though slipped between the two occasionally, especially in his anecdote about Puja, a 28-year-old *hijra* who "lives with three other transgender women." But even though he more

consistently used the term *hijra* to describe his subjects, the descriptions themselves were unambiguously characterizations of them as trans women. More specifically, Gettleman peddled in stereotypic portrayals of transgender women in Western media that scrutinize (and often implicitly mock) their appearances and that focus on their genitals and histories of medical intervention (Billard 2016, 2019a). For example, he opened his story with a vignette of *hijra* "[d]ressed in glittering saris, their faces heavily coated in cheap makeup… sashay[ing] through crowded intersections"; their gender is spectacle and artifice – a performance of womanhood – just like trans women in the West. Elsewhere, he discussed Chandini, a *hijra* elder, and the barriers she faced to getting a "sex change" relative to the ease of access to medical care younger *hijra* have. Though they are called *hijra* and not trans women, the validity of their gender identity hinges on "getting a sex change."

    The consequences of this media discourse are profound and clearly visible: the local Indian press discusses *hijra* and other gender variant people as "transgender" also, and the legal battle for the rights of *hijra* and others is waged as a fight for "transgender rights." In fact, the primary focus of political attention on the rights of hijra, both locally and internationally, is the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, which passed the lower house of the Indian parliament in December 2018. A 2015 story by *The Guardian* (Francis et al. 2015) profiled *hijra* actress and activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi. Like many of the other stories in the international political press, it elided differences between *hijra* and "transgender," using the terms interchangeably. Toward the end of the video, Laxmi met with two cisgender white men from the UK at a local UN office, discussing the need for these two men to support the fight for the proposed transgender rights bill. They clearly had a longstanding working relationship, and were committing to keeping their relationship going as they worked toward civil rights protections. But the intersections of international pressures here are clear: the international political press recasts the rights of gender variant people as "transgender rights," international civil society intervenes in the push to protect these rights under the banner of a "transgender bill," and a bill is passed in the parliament protecting "transgender people."

    These dynamics are further evident in local Indian press coverage. For example, *The Hindu*, one of the largest English-language newspapers in India, published an editorial on the Transgender Persons Bill once it was passed, reflecting on the tensions between the "transgender" community and parliament around what the bill does and does not do (The Hindu 2018). As they wrote, the bill "covers any person whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth, as well as transmen, transwomen, those with intersex variations, the gender-queer, and those who designate themselves based on socio-cultural identities such as *hijra, aravani, kinner* and *jogta*." This characterization is somewhat odd for an Indian newspaper, describing *hijra* and other such identities as "socio-cultural" ones, in contrast to "transmen, transwomen, those with intersex variations, the gender-queer," which are presented as natural, self-evident, "neutral" categories. In another story on the bill in the *Times of India* (2018), *hijra* Mahumita was quoted on why many were upset with the bill intended to protect transgender people, saying "the bill would

stifle the 'hijra' culture." Yet, in reporting her quote, Madhumita was described as "a transwoman," and the concerns expressed by activists were described as "the concerns raised by transgenders." It is of course important to note, as Dutta and Roy (2014, 323) do, that "[l]ike other seemingly foreign terms such as lesbian or gay, transgender has been found by many to be a suitable word for expressing who they are." Nonetheless, these (re)framings of *hijra* identities and of concerns over the rights of *hijra* as "transgender rights" represents a clear orientation of the local Indian press toward Western legibility, and it is further reflected in the focus on "transgender rights" in civil society and in policy.

To summarize, while discussions of *hijra* (and the other gender variant identities subsumed under it) as the "Indian version of trans identity" in the international political press makes the struggle for *hijra* rights legible in a global context, it is not without local consequences. There is, to quote Chatterjee (2018, 316) an attendant "imposition of hierarchies that privilege first-world knowledges as global frameworks and subsume third-world knowledges as indigenous cultures specific to a time and place." That is, the fight for *local* civil rights gets recast as merely a local manifestation of an *international* fight for civil rights being waged in Euroamerican terms. The globalized media system, for its part, participates in a necessary overwriting of the cultural legacy and particularities of *hijra* (and other) identities to enable this globalizing of perspective.

Circumventing Global Media: Digital Media and Two-spirit Self-communication

Whereas global media exert clear hegemonic power in both international and local press coverage of *hijra* identities, the power of global media is less total in the case of two-spirit identities. In some respects this is attributable to the relative absence of two-spirit representation in mass media (among other types of Native American representation; Merskin 1998). Yet, while this absence might once have constituted "symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner and Gross 1976, 182), the contemporary media environment affords opportunities for mass visibility outside of the mass media. Accordingly, two-spirit individuals, like many others, are capable of producing their own symbolic representation via networked communication technologies. Indeed, two-spirit individuals in North America use social media, among other communicative resources, to engage in what Manuel Castells (2009) refers to as "mass self-communication," thereby circumventing hegemonic media power in constructing their own identities for mass digital audiences.

First, however, the identity label "two-spirit" deserves some explication. The term "two-spirit," by all accounts, does not predate the colonization of North America. Rather, "two-spirit" identity was formed as a pan–Indian reclamation of precolonial gender variant identities erased through colonization; among different tribes and peoples, more specific identity labels are often found (e.g., *âyahkwêw, nádleeh, winkte*, etc.). Métis/Nishnaabe scholar Kai Pyle (2018, 577) provides a wonderful potted history of the term "two-spirit," writing that the term was

officially adopted in 1990 at the Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Conference in Winnipeg, Canada. Though opinions as to the origins of the term differ, "today the term is dear to many Indigenous people (Pyle 2018, 577). Importantly, "two-spirit" is a term that, in the words of Scott Morgensen (2016, 194), "resists translation into Western sexuality or gender categories." That is, "two-spirit" refers to a broad range of identifications that, through a Euroamerican lens, might be read as sexualities *or* as gender identities, but that can be neither reduced to nor separated from one another.

Indigenous peoples across the globe have long histories of independent media-making, often developed as means of countering colonial mass media's mis-representations (or non-representation) of their histories, cultures, and identities. In producing their own media, Indigenous peoples reclaim what feminist anthropologist Laura Graham (2016) refers to as "representational sovereignty," breaking free of the colonial gaze. Historically, Indigenous media production and media activism have focused largely on film and television (Brady and Kelly 2017; P. Wilson 2015). However, Indigenous communities have been early and highly adept adopters of networked communication technologies (e.g., Carlson and Frazer 2016). Much research on Indigenous media production and distribution via digital technology has focused on Australia, where Indigenous activists have capitalized on the communicative affordances of digital media both to build solidarity among themselves and to reach non-Indigenous publics (Carlson and Frazer 2016; Dreher, McCallum, and Waller 2016; Duarte 2017; Sweet, Pearson, and Dudgeon 2013). For instance, Dreher, McCallum, and Waller (2016) discuss the savvy use of digital media by the *Recognise* and #sosblakaustralia campaigns to disseminate diverse Indigenous voices on under-reported social and policy issues, both directly through social media and indir-ectly through amplification via mass media reporting on the campaigns. While atten-tion to these voices was "uneven and uncertain" (Dreher, McCallum, and Waller 2016, 36), digital technologies nonetheless afforded Indigenous activists access to broad publics and visibility to policy-makers. Similarly, Sweet, Pearson, and Dudgeon (2013) argue that the @IndigenousX Twitter account, control of which rotates weekly to a different Indigenous Australian, amplifies the concerns and perspectives of Indigenous peoples and bridges Indigenous and non-Indigenous publics.

In the US context, most attention to Indigenous digital media use has focused on the #NoDAPL campaign protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline being built through Standing Rock Sioux and Lakota lands. As Hinzo and Clark (2019) note, mass media attention to the controversy over the pipeline was negligible and so social media became a crucial means of increasing public awareness of the issue, swaying public opinion, and pressuring the US government to reverse course. Moreover, they argue, the forms of visibility sought (and achieved) by the Native American people fighting against the pipeline did not conform to the colonial epistemologies that drive global mass media, but rather represented Indigenous epistemologies and storytelling traditions (Clark and Hinzo 2019; Hinzo and Clark 2019). Though these forms of communicative action could/would not be carried over colonial mass media, they flourished over social media (Clark and Hinzo 2019; Hinzo and Clark 2019).

Much the same is true of two-spirit communications. Mass media narratives of two-spirit identity, where they exist, hold up two-spirit people as an artifact of history that evidences the transhistorical "normalcy" of contemporary transgender identity. And this is a narrative often actively advanced my non-Native transgender people, as well, as a means of justifying their place in society (Pyle 2018; Towle and Morgan 2002). As a consequence, two-spirit identity is collapsed into yet another historical manifestation of "transgender" identity under the supposition that it simply didn't have a name before the term "transgender" came around. Two-spirit self-communicative work via digital media challenges these and other hegemonic narratives, reasserting precolonial identities outside of colonial epistemologies. They reclaim community-specific, as well as pan-Indian, under-standings of self and of their role in society independent of Euroamerican transness, and indeed outside the very concept of transness.

Take for instance a YouTube video by Vision Maker Media (2013), a nonprofit media organization that produces video content to share Native stories and culture. The video presents animations of five two-spirit storytellers from different tribes and nations, each of whom explains via voice over their understandings of and experiences identifying as two-spirit. The first speaker, Mica Valdez, a Mexica two-spirit, began the video by rejecting the Euroamerican categories of "LGBT," defining her two-spirit identity in opposition to these labels. In her words:

> Gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender—it feels like they're all boxes and categories that you have to fit into and they can't change. When I learned about being two-spirit, it felt more natural to me. It felt like it acknowledged more than the surface of somebody's identity. I feel like it encompasses also a way of carrying yourself in the world.

The fourth speaker, Charlie Ballard, an Anishinaabe and Sac and Fox two-spirit, similarly expressed a disidentification with LGBT identity, saying it was not until he went to a Native boarding school and saw other two-spirit people that he found an understanding of his own identity. Elsewhere in the video, Navajo/Diné two-spirits Nazbah Tom and Arlando Teller specifically cited colonization and forced christianization as forces that marginalized two-spirit identities, recentering the sacred value of being two-spirit. Through traditional storytelling practices distributed over digital media by Native media producers, these two-spirit people communicated their personal subjectivities and cultural identities to mass audiences (almost 200,000 people at the time of writing) without confining themselves to colonial epistemologies or the norms of global media production.

Of course, two-spirit activists and educators also engage in mass self-communication through digital media they do not produce themselves. For example, David Herrera, director of the Montana Two Spirit Society, was featured as a guest on *Sexplanations* (2017), a YouTube-based sexuality "edutainment" program hosted by Dr. Lindsey Doe, a clinical sexologist. Through the program's open interview format, Herrera was afforded at least 10 of the 11-minute video to speak, discussing both the history of

two-spirit identities and the role of two-spirit identity in contemporary Native American cultures. Both in terms of form and content, this interview would not have happened in corporate broadcast media, but the divergent forms and content norms of digital media enabled the production of the interview. Moreover, because the program was not produced directly by or for Native American audiences, Herrera was able to reach audiences that would not otherwise be attentive to two-spirit issues. This is to say nothing of corporate digital media that hybridize the logics of "traditional" mass media and social media, which occasionally distribute content to their digital audiences featuring two-spirit communicators (e.g., FUSION 2017; them 2018).

In summary, by using digital media to engage in mass self-communication, two-spirit individuals in North America continue a tradition of Indigenous mediamaking that reclaims representational sovereignty from hegemonic mass media. They are, in doing so, able to construct their identities in their own terms, outside the colonizing influence of global media that insist on recasting their identities as instances of a prehistoric "transgender" identity. As such, the power of cultural imperialism is stymied, albeit not entirely overcome.

Wings to Transcend: Global Media, Transgender Identity, and Transnational Coalition-Building in Namibia[4]

In contrast to both global media's (re)construction of *hijra* identity as "transgender" and two-spirit individuals' self-communications outside the Euroamerican concept of gender identity, transgender rights activists in Namibia utilize the power of the global media system to make their struggles for safety and equality legible to international audiences and, in the process, build cross-national solidarity and increase external political pressure on the Namibian government. Also in contrast to the Indian subcontinent and North America, Namibia lacks any known precolonial gender variant identity categories. Accordingly, "transgender" has been a useful import to name a previously unacknowledged experience of gender in Namibia.

A key tension at play in the politics of many sub-Saharan African nations is that between what Ashley Currier (2012) refers to as "homophobic nationalism" and what we might consider a "progressive globalism." Whereas homophobic nationalism positions queerness (and, by extension, transness) as a consequence of Western moral corruption, progressive globalism positions African culture as "backward" or "behind" in its social, cultural, and political acceptance of LGBTQ people. As Babacar M'Baye (2013) argues in the case of Senegal, queerness and transness are constructed by political and cultural leaders as "un-African," and these claims arise as a response to neo-colonialism and (primarily European and American-led) interventions in African society and politics by international NGOs. Currier suggests much the same in the case of Namibia, writing that the (re)construction of a strict anti-queer patriarchy was advanced by nationalists as a means of decolonizing Namibia after European and South African domination. Thus, for transgender rights advocates in Namibia, progressive globalism offers a recourse to homophobic nationalism in the absence of a precolonial category of gender variance to reclaim.

Integral to this progressive globalism are global media. Global media serves, in many ways, as the bridge between local activists and transnational publics, linking their specific struggle into a global struggle for transgender rights and drawing international attention to the issues they face. This is evident in the communicative practices of Wings to Transcend (WTT), Namibia's premiere transgender rights organization. WTT (n.d.) was founded in Windhoek in 2015 and, per their mission statement, works to lobby "local government, civil society and policy makers in national and international spheres about the needs of the transgender community in Namibia." While much of this work occurs through direct lobbying, community organizing, and coalitional partnerships, media are central to how WTT positions themselves specifically and transgender Namibians generally. Even a cursory glance at WTT's social media feeds reveals deep engagement with global media. On Facebook, WTT shares international news alongside updates on their policy work, amplifying stories on trans beauty queens in Mongolia (WTT 2018b), transgender rights legislation in Uruguay (WTT 2018c), legal third gender identity options in Germany (WTT 2019b), a trans male candidate for judiciary office in Pennsylvania (WTT 2019c), a transgender parliamentarian in Thailand (WTT 2019d), a public school for transgender people in Pakistan (WTT 2019e), and discrimination against trans women in Japan (WTT 2019f). In doing so, WTT uses global media coverage (in the absence of local media coverage) as communicative resources to construct universal transgender experiences both of identity and of marginalization.

Additionally, WTT engages with global media to construct a pan-African struggle for transgender rights. For example, in January 2019 WTT shared a news story about the Angolan parliament's decision to repeal the colonial era penal code that criminalized sodomy and adopt nondiscrimination protections on the basis of sexual orientation (WTT 2019a), drawing an implicit link between Angola's progressive move and activists' own struggle to achieve the same in Namibia. These kinds of engagements with global media fit alongside WTT's policy work building transnational coalitions – which are also often shared on their social media accounts. For instance, WTT (2018a) shared images of its founder and executive director, Jholerina Timbo, attending the Southern Africa Trans Forum strategic planning workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa in October 2018. As reported in an Arcus Foundation (2018) article on Timbo and her work with WTT, partnerships with organizations in countries like South Africa and Botswana help activists pressure their own nations to adopt similar policies. And beyond internal pressure, transnational coalitions help WTT leverage international pressure, often from intergovernmental organizations, to achieve policy change within Namibia. For example, WTT joined with The Advocates for Human Rights, as US-based NGO, to submit testimony to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' Committee Against Torture detailing the Namibian government's failures to comply with the United Nations Convention Against Torture in its laws and policies regarding LGBTQ citizens (The Advocates for Human Rights et al. 2016).

All of this would be impossible, however, without WTT's strategic engagement with global media to link the concerns of transgender Namibians with an imagined global community of transgender individuals, all of whom share an identity category and attendant experiences. That is, WTT takes advantage of neocolonial infrastructures, both in the global media system and in governance, to advance meaningful social change in their home country. Thus, the Namibian case stands in stark contrast to the Indian subcontinent and North America because in this case the neocolonial power of global media is actively sought after for its political potential, rather than resented or resisted for its cultural imperialism.

Conclusion: Ambivalent Tensions in the (Re)making of "Transgender" Identities

It has been our contention throughout this chapter that the globalization of the mass media industry has profound neocolonial implications for the (re)construction of gender variance across cultures. While, in certain cases, the reconstruction of global gender variance as "transgender" clearly operates under a model of cultural imperialism, in others the relationship is more fraught. There is, we contend, an ambivalent tension between the supplantation of native gender categories with "Western" psychomedical categories and the development of cross-national and cross-cultural modes of identification that enable transnational movements for rights and acceptance. It is not a question of which is happening; both are happening at the same time. The question then becomes when, where, and why does each happen?

We maintain that the global media system serves as a vector of cultural power where it concerns the communication of "transgender" identities. In certain cases, such as in the Indian subcontinent, global media elites wield this power in ways that diminish the cultural and spiritual diversity of native gender variance for the sole benefit of legibility to a global audience. In other cases, such as in Namibia, local activists wield this power to leverage the influence of international political elites over their oppressive government. In still other cases, such as with two-spirit mediamakers in North America, local activists employ digital media to circumvent the power of global media. Across each case, however, the (re)constructions of "transgender" identity in global media have profound social, political, and economic consequences that affect the everyday experiences of gender variant people worldwide.

Notes

1 For an introduction to several of these identity categories and their cultural politics, see Boellstorff et al. (2014), Chatterjee (2018), Dutta and Roy (2014), Epple (1998), Hegarty (2017), Khan (2016), Palmer (2014), and Pyle (2018), among others.
2 Our review of critiques of globalization, (neo)colonialism, and the "Westernization" of gender variant identities is necessarily too brief. For a robust set of discussions on these critiques, see Boellstorff et al. (2014), Chatterjee (2018), Chiang (2014), Chiang, Henry, and Leung (2018), Dutta and Roy (2014), Epple (1998), Hegarty (2017), Silva and Ornat (2016), Stryker (2006, 2012), and Towle and Morgan (2002).

3 See Adnan Hossain and Serena Nanda's chapter in this volume for a more thorough discussion of *hijra* identity in South Asia to complement our discussion of the role of global media.

4 In the course of the first author's ethnographic fieldwork at the National Center for Transgender Equality in 2018, Wings to Transcend's founder and executive director, Jholerina Timbo, took a month-long residence at the organization as a Mandela Washington Fellow. The first author is grateful to Madame Timbo for their education on the history and the current status of transgender rights activism in Namibia.

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