Transgender in Translation: A Transnational Category of Socio-Cultural Analysis

by

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To my mother, Şüheda Açıkgöz, and my sister, Irmak Yağmur Açıkgöz, who are the brightest colors of my rainbow

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the transnational circulation of the category of "transgender" and its multiple variants in the contemporary world. It argues that a critical analysis of the deployment of those categories in the Middle East and the Global South can reveal the ideological convergence between modernization and epistemological colonization. By focusing on Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (1990), Annick Prieur's *Mema's House* (1998), Don Kulick's *Travesti* (1998), Pınar Selek's *Maskeler, Sürvariler, Gacılar* (2001), Tanaz Eshaghian's *Be Like Others* (2008), Gabrielle Le Roux's *Proudly Trans in Turkey* (2012), and Bülent Ersoy, a popular trans public figure from Turkey, this dissertation examines how "transgender" as an umbrella term erases the religious, class-based, ethnic, and racial particularities of the Global South's gender non-conforming communities. It suggests reading the translation of transgender and its variants into these diverse geographies through a decolonial and post-secular lens. It argues that this reading praxis allows us to accomplish three outcomes. First, it exposes the epistemic erasures of the secular Eurocentric knowledge production. Secondly, it challenges the archival politics of the transgender biomedical modernity. Thirdly, it provincializes the Eurocentric intellectual and cultural capital by problematizing the asymmetries that globalized knowledge circulation maintains.

This dissertation emphasizes that in order to comprehend the complex nature of translation and representation, one has to map out their asymmetrical global trajectories. To this end, its chapters bring together various cultural and linguistic traditions–English, Turkish, Persian, Spanish, and Portuguese–to examine discrepant but related dimensions of the politics of

translation and representation. While aimed at unearthing the ideological patterns and mechanisms in common, this dissertation underscores the need to re-contextualize the hegemonically differentiated traditions and to problematize the asymmetrical modalities of their interconnectedness.

Introduction

> "This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you."
>
> Adrienne Rich[1], "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children"
>
> "Essentializing the silent subject or the victim has a tendency to desensitize the situation, thereby negating the real (sentient) individual, whether animal or human. Animals, women, blacks, and Jews become merely ideas and concepts, caught in a rhetoric of similes, analogies, and metaphors."
>
> Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question*

In her introduction to *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005), M. Jacqui Alexander asks "What do lives of privilege look like in the midst of war and the inevitable violence that accompanies the building of empire?" (1-2). I have not been able to stop reflecting on what lives of privilege look like in the process of writing this dissertation in the midst of a global pandemic, police violence, state-sponsored hatred against disenfranchised communities, pervasive racism, and mass protests. Never during this process did I awake to a day when I had to or was forced to work at the tremendous risk of

[1] Although Rich's powerful statement deeply resonates with me, I cannot simply include a quotation from her in a dissertation about trans people without expressing my reservations about her contributions to trans-exclusionary radical feminist discourse, particularly to Janice G. Raymond's notorious *Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1979 and 1994). For a nuanced engagement with/poetic resistance to Rich's and other trans-exclusionary feminists' transphobic legacy, see Trish Salah's *Lyric Sexology Vol. 1* (2014).

contracting COVID-19 and transmitting it to my immunocompromised family members or colleagues. I had the privilege of having the option to stay at home and still get paid. The pandemic sees no color, no class, no geographic location, no gender, no sexuality, no religion, no ability, and no ethnicity; therefore, we are told, we are all in the same boat. We have never been in the same boat though. I did not awake to a day in the USA when I feared that I could be arbitrarily killed by a police officer due to the perceived color of my skin. I had the privilege of passing as white in the racist visual economy of this country. All lives matter, or so we are told. Not all lives have mattered, nor has everyone been historically recognized as human though. I did not awake to a day in Turkey, where I would increasingly have to worry about the consequences of being a part of the trans/queer community in light of the recent state-sponsored dissemination of transphobia and homophobia. In April, Ali Erbaş, the president of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, an official state institution in Turkey, pointed to homosexuality and adultery as the root cause of diseases and moral degeneration, proceeding to condemn them in his *khutbah*, which was later endorsed by the president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other high-profile government officials representing the state. I had the privilege of living in a different geographic space no matter how precarious and temporary this privilege might be. Article 10 of the constitution of the Republic of Turkey states that every citizen is equal in the eyes of the law. Some citizens have been more equal than others though.

I did not start writing this introduction focusing on the question of privilege merely because I wanted to emphasize my relatively privileged positionality or reify a timeless binary of privileged versus unprivileged. Critical and engaged activism/scholarship[2] has shown that when

[2] For instance, I find A. Finn Enke's discussion of the cis/trans binary very helpful, particularly their argument that cis(gender) as a term, even when used by gender studies-savvy individuals, risks encouraging investments in a gender stability. As Enke states, "when we posit cis in binary opposition to

we assume certain positionalities even with a view to acknowledging hegemonic power differentials rampant in society, we risk rendering our positionalities more stable and static than they actually are. It is not my intention at all to foreground my (privileged) positionality as stable, which, in addition to being problematic, would be grossly inaccurate. Rather, I intend to render transparent the temporal, spatial, and epistemic dimensions of my privilege, which, I argue, is tantamount to telling the story of this dissertation. Privilege is maintained not only financially, culturally, politically or institutionally but also through the production of knowledge. It does not escape me that I wrote this dissertation in an academic institution located in the Global North. Even though I greatly appreciate all the epistemological frameworks, theoretical paradigms, and institutional support that I have acquired thanks to my affiliation with this university, I am also cognizant of both the academy's complicity in perpetuating systems of oppression and its staunch resistance to decolonizing knowledge. The cultural and intellectual capital with which the Global North provides one might very well be deployed in the service of transforming the Global South into a reservoir of case studies and empirical data. The epistemic erasure of the Global South through the production of knowledge might, at first, not be as explicit as its destruction through the imperial war machine or so-called benevolent development programs. Mechanisms of colonialism and imperialism are still alive and well, more subtle and perhaps more powerful than ever, and academic institutions have always had an immense potential to be a pivotal part and parcel of those mechanisms. Nevertheless, the institutional acquisition of the Global North's academic capital, a tremendous intellectual privilege in so-called "modern" times, does not always need to result in the perpetuation of the hegemonic

trans, cis and trans both must erase their temporality and location" (73). For more on Enke's analysis of this binary, see "The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies" in *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies* (2012).

knowledge production. This process might indeed open up new sites of possibilities for reading the capital against its own terms and exposing the colonial nature of the stories/histories that it narrates. Yes, this is the oppressor's capital, yet I can use it to start imagining an elsewhere and elsewhen.

My dissertation, "Transgender in Translation: A Transnational Category of Socio-Cultural Analysis" constitutes, I hope, one such attempt. In the following three chapters, I analyze the transnational circulation of the category of "transgender" and its multiple variants in the contemporary world. I argue that a critical analysis of the deployment of those categories in the Middle East and the Global South can reveal the ideological convergence between modernization and epistemological colonization. I draw on medico-legal literature, queer and feminist scholarship, oral histories, testimonies, ethnographies, and ethnographic documentaries from the USA, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, and Mexico to examine how "transgender" as an umbrella term erases the religious, class-based, ethnic, and racial particularities of the Global South's gender non-conforming communities. I suggest reading the translation of transgender and its variants into these diverse geographies through a decolonial and post-secular lens. I argue that this reading praxis allows us to accomplish three outcomes. First, it exposes the epistemic erasures of the secular Eurocentric knowledge production. Secondly, it challenges the archival politics of the transgender biomedical modernity. Thirdly, it provincializes the Eurocentric intellectual and cultural capital by problematizing the asymmetries that globalized knowledge circulation maintains. My dissertation emphasizes that in order to comprehend the complex nature of translation and representation, one has to map out their asymmetrical global trajectories. To this end, my chapters bring together various cultural and linguistic traditions– English, Turkish, Persian, Spanish, and Portuguese–to examine discrepant but related dimensions

of the politics of translation and representation. While aimed at unearthing the ideological patterns and mechanisms in common, my dissertation underscores the need to re-contextualize the hegemonically differentiated traditions and to problematize the asymmetrical modalities of their interconnectedness.

In a sense, my dissertation is in conversation with non-Anglophone trans scholars who have rightly critiqued the dominance of transgender as an example of imperialist discourse that functions metaphorically. Canadian trans scholar Viviane Namaste, for instance, notes transgender's complicity in socio-cultural and economic relations of imperialism[3]. She argues that much Anglophone transgender theory and activism evacuates the possibility of an institutional analysis and has no meaningful contribution to such critical issues as immigration, health care, and legal system (2005: 21-22). My dissertation is also inspired by the pioneering works of queer- and trans-of-color critics such as C. Riley Snorton (2017) who make a distinction between transgender and trans, understanding the former as a biomedical and epistemological category while conceptualizing the latter as ontological. Snorton's analysis shows that "the condensation of transness into the category of transgender is a racial narrative" that obscures the ways in which blackness finds articulation within transness (2017: 8). Although my dissertation shares a similar conceptual framework to theirs, it also slightly departs from them in its geographic, cartographic, and theoretical orientation. Much queer- and trans-of-color scholarship focuses on the repercussions of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, analyzing the resulting imbrication of race and gender through a secular framework. The introduction of my dissertation to a small extent and my future book project, tentatively titled *Coloring Trans:*

[3] For an insightful reading of Namaste's critique of transgender as a form of linguistic imperialism, see Trish Salah's review essay "Undoing Trans Studies" (2007).

Reimagining the Afterlife of the Red Sea Slave Trade, contribute to this burgeoning scholarship by centering instead the afterlife of the Red Sea slave trade and positioning the figure of the black eunuch within the polyvocal and shifting religious discourse of the period. By doing so, I intend to show that a secular, Eurocentric, and biomedical understanding of transness erases the contiguous relationship between gender non-conformity and blackness within the post-imperial modernity of the Middle East, in particular, and the Global South, in general.

Not all the works that I critique in this dissertation use the term "transgender" in their analyses. Global North's terms such as transvestite, transsexual, transgendered, and trans appear alongside more local terminologies such as travesti, *jota, vestida*, and lubunya. However, by listing all these Western variations under the category of transgender, I do not in any way suggest that all these terms have similar genealogies, connotations, significations or political implications even though they are all part and parcel of the Global North's cultural capital. Discussing the global circulation of transgender as a form of epistemological colonization does not mean that certain activists or communities in the Global North/Global South should not or cannot adopt the term to resist, for instance, other terminologies such as transsexual that, to some community members, might signify the medicalization of their identities[4]. Even so, I read transgender[5] as a representative, regardless of its potential disobedience or subversive manifestations, of the Global North's cultural capital that homogenizes as well as frames,

[4] Of course the medical connation is but one of the several differences that exist between transsexual and transgender. The issues of race, age, ethnicity, class etc. might determine the ways in which community members choose a specific term over another to talk about their identities. For a detailed and informative take on contexts, concepts, and terminologies, see Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* (2017).
[5] For an insightful discussion on decolonizing transgender, see Tom Boellstorff's, Mauro Cabral's, Micha Cárdenas', Trystan Cotton's, Eric A. Stanley's, Kalaniopua Young's, and Aren Z. Aizura's roundtable discussion "Decolonizing Transgender: A Roundtable Discussion" (2014).

through a colonial lens, the Global South's gender-variance to tell a very specific (read ideological) story/history.

Understanding the translation of transgender into different geographies requires a critical analysis of the politics of translation. I argue, particularly in chapter one, that translation constitutes an epistemic violence, domesticating the foreignness of the cultural other through the prism of the dominant theoretical/epistemological framework. Cultural turn in translation studies has long discussed translation as a cultural phenomenon (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990; Vermeer 1992; Toury 2004). For instance, in his article "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action" (2004), which details his functionalist approach to translation, Hans Vermeer defines translation as a cultural phenomenon and translators as cultural experts: "Translator is such an expert. It is thus up to him to decide, for instance, what role a source text plays in his translational action. The decisive factor here is the purpose, the skopos, of the communication in a given situation" (222). In other words, as cultural experts, translators are given the authority and freedom to translate their texts/cultures according to their skopos. On the surface, this framework seems to liberate the translator from the historically ideological requirement to be "faithful" to the source text/culture. Translators are empowered and they can choose whether to be faithful or not as long as they fulfill their skopos. On the one hand, such pronounced empowerment of the translator masks the colonial framing of the translator as an expert and translation as a cultural phenomenon. Vermeer's framework overlooks the power asymmetries between cultures (that is, the cultures of the Global North and the Global South) as well as the colonial implications of so-called cultural expertise that translators are assumed to possess. On the other hand, Vermeer does not interrogate what kind of cultural capital structures the skopos of the translators given that all the textual and cultural interventions the translators perform are

determined in accordance with that. It is ironic to bring up the issue of intervention in this case since that term has been used by several feminist translators/scholars to define their feminist "interventionist" translation strategies (Simon 1996; Lotbinière-Harwood 1989; von Flotow 1991). These critical translators intervene in their texts to challenge not only the invisibility of women translators but also the misogynistic and patriarchal language of the authors whom they translate, making language, in Lotbinière-Harwood's words, "speak for women" (1989: 9). Making the intervention politically and textually explicit in feminist terms, however, does not address the coloniality of translation, nor does it challenge the ideological framing of the Global South's lived experience through the Global North's theoretical lens. To cite Boisseron with a difference, what is translated gets "caught in a rhetoric of similes, analogies, and metaphors" (2018: 22) and disappears through epistemic intervention/erasure.

Rethinking the (Hi)stories from the Global South, Rereading the Color of Trans

On September 12, 1980, a fascist military *coup d'état* supported by the United States took place in Turkey. The chief of staff, Kenan Evren, argued that a military intervention was necessary to heal the political divisions and restore peace and order in the country. He banned the political parties and designated himself the new president. Much has been written about the political and social implications of this violent turning point as well as the subsequent advent of neoliberalism within the history of Turkey and the Middle East. Freedom of the press was suppressed, journalists and politicians were incarcerated, political activists were tortured, and an official ideology based on a synthesis of Islam and Turkish nationalism was institutionalized. However, there was one community that was missing from the archival projects published to expose the military regime's politics of marginalization. It was the trans community that was "unofficially"

criminalized, barred from working in the entertainment industry, deterred from being visible in public spaces, and exiled from their neighborhoods and cities. In a sense, trans people were denied the right to life and relegated to social death, which was reinforced through their absence from the official documents.

Speaking of the difficulties that transgender and transsexual people have writing themselves into the archives, L. H. Stallings states:

> If transgender and transsexual history and culture depend on what has been published, visible, legible, and authorized enough to be archived, then we might query what has been omitted as a result of the conditions of illiteracy, criminalization, or poverty. These are the conditions that have made it difficult for some transgender subjects to be the absolute source, represent themselves, and write themselves into being (2015: 224).

Those omissions constitute the limits of the official historiographical projects and reveal the ideological investments of the sanitized archives. The collective oral history project, *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak* (2012, *To Be a Lubunya in the 80s*), addresses those omissions and absences in the national archives. It centers the lived experiences and testimonials of nine trans people. Financed by the Global Dialogue Foundation and published by the Siyah Pembe Üçgen İzmir LGBT Association, the project highlights the importance of understanding the military regime's rampant violence through the perspectives of the disenfranchised trans people.

The testimonials of the trans people interviewed in the project do not merely reveal the multivalent forms of criminalization and systematic maldistribution of life chances. They also render visible a vibrant and resilient community that creates new networks of kinship, support, and cohabitation as well as conditions of possibility for existence and survival. One of the interviewees, Belgin, narrates this resilience and fight for survival in the aftermath of the military coup by stating that trans people were forced to embark on trains, subjected to torture, and exiled

from the cities that they inhabited but that they refused to give up, some of them jumping off the trains and travelling back to the cities to which they could no longer legally belong (81-82-83). Belgin's narrative of trans resilience and survival echoes the experiences of the other interviewees who survived the systematic violence and marginalization both before and after the fascist regime through their trans kinship networks. Ahu, for instance, describes in detail the fundamental role that her "lubunya" friends played in helping her navigate homelessness, hostile public spaces, and discrimination as a minor (27-31). Ahu's narrative points out one significant epistemic tension between the regional and the global that is also evident in the title of the oral history project. Lubunya as a term refers to trans individuals and gender non-conforming gay men in Lubunca language. Lubunca[6] is a jargon, a secret language, used by trans sex workers in Turkey and is one of the few queer jargons still in use in the contemporary world. Its lexicon is derived from a variety of languages such as Romani, Turkish, Greek, Kurdish, Arabic, and Armenian. Furthermore, the language has a complex and underdocumented imperial history. In the Ottoman Empire, Lubunca in its earlier form was used by *köçeks* (who were young male dancers) and was later shaped through social and physical contact with various non-Muslim ethnolinguistic minority groups, turning into its contemporary form that provides varying degrees of discreetness. In that sense, what it means to be a lubunya and speak lubunca has an imperial history that has to do with not only gender and sexuality but also class, race, religion, and ethnicity, which is inevitably erased by the use of transgender as an umbrella category.

Lubunya as a regional term has a peripheral relationship to the biomedical and sexological modernity that the global category of transgender represents. Any discourse that uses

[6] For a more detailed analysis on the historical development of Lubunca, see Nicholas Kontovas' M.A. thesis "Lubunca: The Historical Development of Istanbul's Queer Slang and a Social-Functional Approach to Diachronic Processes in Language" (2012).

Lubunya and transgender analogically erases the specificity of the regional. Such discourse conceals the dominance of the Global North's cultural capital and re-centers the biomedical transgender modernity. This epistemic tension becomes clearly visible when Belgin uses terms such as trans, travesti, and transsexual in place of lubunya throughout her narrative and states:

> Biz TT'ler (travesti-transeksüeller), dünyanın en kalabalık ailesiyiz, dünyada da, Türkiye'de de. Biz translar dünyanın neresinde olursak olalım, dünyanın en büyük ailesiyiz.
>
> We the TT'S (travestis and transsexuals) constitute the most crowded family of Turkey and the world. No matter where we, trans people, are in the world, we are the biggest family (83).

The simultaneous coexistence of the regional and global terms as well as the global's subsequent dominance is mentioned by another interviewee, Demet Demir. Demet explains that it is only in the last 7-8 years that these terms (travestis and transsexuals) started to be commonly used by the community members (133). She also adds that media outlets very often confused homosexuality with transsexuality in the past and still do today to a certain extent (133-134). On the one hand, Demet's and Belgin's narratives challenge the hegemonic narratives of supersession[7]. Such narratives claim that the local or so-called premodern terminologies are completely replaced by their modern and Western counterparts. As the trans women's accounts reveal, regional terms such as lubunya and dönme[8] continued and still continue to coexist with the global and so-called modern terms. On the other hand, their narratives also reveal the universalization of transgender and transsexual as umbrella categories under which premodern or archaic terms could be subsumed. The invocation of these Eurocentric categories as appropriate

[7] For a stimulating critique of the narratives of supersession, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)
[8] I include a brief discussion of this term in chapter one

ways of defining gender non-conformity further coincides with the analytic disarticulation of homosexuality from transsexuality. As David Valentine writes, an understanding of transsexuality or gender non-conformity as categorically distinct from homosexuality might describe certain contemporary identities in the Global North. However, it fails to represent those identities in which such medicalized distinctions were ambiguous or did not exist at all (2004: 217). Indeed, the narratives of the nine trans women interviewed provide many instances that indicate the inability of this medicalized distinction to fully describe their lived experiences. Their lived experiences are inflected by their geographic location, class, and national origin. Nevertheless, the trans women's desire to gradually approve of these Euro-American terms as appropriate ways of describing their identity reveals the burgeoning domination of the Global North's cultural capital during that period. The global circulation of this cultural capital universalizes the biomedical transgender modernity and erases the regionally specific particularities of lubunyas. It is important to note that having access to this cultural capital is not necessarily determined by the class status or the level of education of the transgender women interviewed in this oral history project. What determines the conditions of this access is first their belonging to urban trans kinship networks and second, their encounters with medical authorities.

It should be acknowledged that as a form of trans historiography, *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak* accomplishes three crucial outcomes. First, it sheds light on the ideological omissions in the official archives by centering the experiences of the trans women disenfranchised during the military regime. Second, it challenges the sanitization of the transgender histories that often operates through the erasure of sex work in the constitution of trans identity and community. Third, it ensures that the referential trans subject does not disappear from the accounts provided by the narrators. The diverse testimonials center the trans women as authorial subjects. As

authorial subjects, they expose the scandals of the sanitized archives as well as the asymmetrical emergence of the biomedical transgender modernity[9]. However, despite challenging the archival erasure and transnormativity, the oral history project erases the role of colonial and sexological violence in the constitution of the secular category of transgender. This erasure reinforces and in turn is reinforced by the implicit designation of Turkey as a nation-state in the Middle East. Such designation overlooks the colonial and imperial underpinnings of the country. It obscures the role of the Red Sea slave trade in the production of racialized and gendered human bodies within the region. In other words, the absence of the country's imperial past from the narratives occludes a metonymical understanding of trans as a movement of racialized and gendered bodies across time and space[10].

Reading the color of trans across different times and spaces requires a metonymical thinking of geopolitics, archives, and historical narratives. In that sense, this reading of history draws on that of historians in the tradition of literary criticism. Hayden White (1990), for instance, claims that historical narratives should be read as analogical, metonymical, and metaphorical statements. Since historical narratives can only offer us story elements, they cannot constitute stories on their own. To put it differently, historical narratives need to be assembled into a narrative with a plot in order for history to make sense. This literary construction of history is, as White argues, no different than the plotting of a novel (1990: 83-84). Both offer the readers similarities between the past and the present. But what if historical narratives were read

[9] Textual and visual representations of the marginalized communities from the Global South have a colonial tendency to portray these communities as disempowered victims lacking the privileges enjoyed by their counterparts living in the Global North, which appeals to the Global North's savior complex. For a critical documentary that presents a powerful resistance to such representational demands, see *Vibrancy of Silence: A Discussion with My Sisters* (2017), produced by Frieda Ekotto and directed by Marthe Djilo Kamga.

[10] For a more detailed discussion on trans as a movement of racialized bodies across time and space, see C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017)

metonymically rather than metaphorically? And what if contiguity replaced similarity as the organizing mechanism of historiography, in general, and trans historiography, in particular?

What is at stake in these questions is more than an ethical or proper way of reading and writing histories. Geographic spaces are cartographies constructed through historical narratives and archives. That being the case, plotting stories out of these materials shapes the spatial and temporal arrangements of the global geopolitics. I argue that this way of thinking is particularly useful to rethink the North-South divide and has a pivotal import for trans historiographies from the Global South. If we used, for instance, the archival narratives to read the North and the South metonymically, we would have to radically rethink the geopolitics of this divide. Since if the North-South divide is one of contiguity rather than similarity, then one needs to think about locating the North within the South and the South within the North, which inevitably challenges the hegemonic politics of translation. Metonymy enables one to use a part of something to refer to the whole of something. It is precisely this part, whether it is the North or the South, that we epistemically erase when we refer to the whole metaphorically. This erasure, in turn, reinforces the cartographies of the North-South divide by centering the nation-state.

When the oral history project, *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak*, overlooks the imperial history of the term Lubunya by using it interchangeably with transgender, it unwittingly foregrounds Turkey as a nation state in the Middle East. This geopolitical designation has three important consequences: First, it centers the transgender biomedical modernity by reading trans metaphorically and prioritizing the cultural capital of the Global North. Second, it fails to understand Turkey as a post-imperial state by obscuring its ties to the imperial institutions of slavery. And finally, it conceals the metonymical manifestations of transness, which erases the afterlife of the Red Sea slave trade within the region.

What histories and pasts could we reimagine if we did not take the national as our point of departure? What if we conceptualized trans as movement of bodies across time and space in imperial and post-imperial universes? And what if we understood transness as a focal point whereby the racialized category of human is shown to be inflected by gender, sexuality, class, geography, religion, and ethnicity? Reading the color of trans in archives of the Global South entails a serious geopolitical engagement with the manifestations and omissions of the color line. Such reading praxis does not erase the particularities of the referential trans subjects. Rather, by exposing their contiguity, it reveals the entanglements of the North-South divide and refigures the meaning of trans historiography.

Overview of Chapters: What Does the Global South Want?

> "This seems to me the basic point, that one cannot meaningfully and ethically think about human sexuality without humans at the center of the thinking, and that one cannot imagine or think about transsexuality without transsexual people at the center of the thinking/imagining."
>
> Trish Salah, "What Does Tiresias Want?"
>
> "Yet in all these instances, writing from the vantage point of the racialized Other creates a tendency to become enmeshed in a certain politics of recognition. The racialized Other becomes so bent on inscribing his or her subjectivity onto mainstream white consciousness that he or she becomes in many ways dependent on the penetrating gaze of the European, or white, subject."
>
> Frieda Ekotto, *Race and Sex across the French Atlantic: The Color of Black in Literary, Philosophical, and Theater Discourse*

What does the Global South want? In a sense, the following chapters of this dissertation can be

read as trying to provide a meaningful response to that question. Despite their different geographic loci, each chapter centers on the idea that one cannot, to cite Salah with a difference (2017: 635), ethically and meaningfully theorize, produce knowledge about, conceptualize or imagine the Global South without the subjects of the Global South at the center of such critical endeavors. Moreover, each chapter resists the transformation of the Global South into a productive reservoir of case studies/empirical data/human bodies against the backdrop of which the universality and applicability of the Global North's cultural capital is measured. To put it simply, all the chapters attempt to undo the epistemic erasure of the Global South through the production of knowledge.

Chapter one represents my desire to reckon with queer theory's geographic, linguistic, cultural, and ideological baggage. The rise of queer theory within Anglophone North America in the nineties was accompanied by the accelerated transformation/translation of the Global South into a reservoir of case studies aiming to uncover queer's culturally, religiously, and sexually different "others" for the consumption of the Global North. Chapter one argues for a need to go back to this period and reread queer's secular cultural capital within the juxtaposition of Latin America and the Middle East to rethink not only the spatial and temporal arrangements of the North-South divide but also the epistemic and ontological universe of Anglophone queer theory. By focusing on the production and circulation of the Global North's ethnographic gaze in Turkey, Brazil, and Mexico in the nineties, chapter one intends to show that queer's translation into Global South's religiously and racially different geographic spaces masks the ontological exclusions of this epistemic transplantation. Through a close reading of various ethnographic texts such as Annick Prieur's *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (1998), Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture*

among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes (1998), and Pınar Selek's *Maskeler, Süvariler, Gacılar* (2001), chapter one argues that Anglophone queer cultural critique operates as an alibi for both the universalization of sexological modernity and the domestication of religiously and racially inflected somatic difference. In other words, this close reading exposes how queer theory's professed desire to embrace foreignness and stress cultural difference masks its teleological reordering of the incommensurable. Provincializing queer theory's secular axioms, chapter one concludes by discussing what kind of decolonial hemispheric dialogues one can imagine if such contiguous cartographies of the Global South do not get lost in their metaphorical translation into the language of queer modernity.

Can Islam accommodate trans people? Is the figure of a pious Muslim trans person an oxymoron *par excellence*? Last but not least, what kind of epistemic universe, political positionality, and cultural capital allow for the possibility to pose these questions regarding Islam and pious trans people? Chapter two takes up these questions to interrogate how labels such as "political", "strategic", and "activist" are deployed in ways that reproduce exclusionary transgender archives in the Turkish nation-state. First, chapter two engages the theoretical frameworks of various trans and feminist scholars who have made important contributions to the discussions on agency, embodiment, ethics, and post-secular feminist politics. While acknowledging the significance of their contributions, chapter two argues that the limitations of their frameworks in terms of addressing the archival politics vis-à-vis the pious trans people in the Global South point out the need to formulate a post-secular transfeminist analysis. In light of these discussions, chapter two moves on to the close reading of Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay's article (2008), which analyzes the statements and performances of Bülent Ersoy, who has been a very popular trans public figure in Turkey since the eighties and who has, to the surprise of many,

publicly embraced Islam in the last three decades. This close reading is followed by an analysis of the section on religion and spirituality from the South African Gabrielle Le Roux's activist documentary *Proudly Trans in Turkey* (2012). Chapter two shows that the kind of transgender religiosity espoused by activist projects and queer scholarship risks foreclosing the possibility of engaging and rendering visible the ethical self-formation of pious trans people in the Turkish nation-state.

Drawing on an analogy between ventriloquism and representation, chapter three uses a transnational methodology to analyze two documentaries, Jewish-American Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (1990) and Iranian-American Tanaz Eshaghian's *Be Like Others* (2008). Through its transnational reading of these two works, chapter three argues that Tanaz Eshaghian, in her "benevolent" attempt to critique the discrimination and ostracization faced by so-called homosexual individuals in Iran, re-inscribes transsexuality as pre-modern fundamentalism and silences Iranian transsexual individuals through ventriloquizing and (mis)representation. This silencing deploys the conventions of colonial ethnographic documentary systematically used by Western ethnographers and filmmakers in their projects on indigenous/local gender-variant communities. These projects, in turn, shape and structure the frames of subaltern representations. In this asymmetrical power dyad, the layers and levels of strategic self-effacement and masquerade are curiously conditioned by the national and cultural positionality of the two filmmakers. Whereas the outsider positionality, as in the case of Jennie Livingston, is rendered invisible through a strategic self-effacement that enables the illusion of self-representing cultural others, the semi-insider positionality, as in the case of Eshaghian, "confers" on her the right to not only portray but also "judgingly" evaluate, through a colonial lens, the culture and the marginalized subjects of her work. In other words, while the former effaces the asymmetrical

cultural and economic relationships, the latter leaves unproblematized its unwitting subscription to colonial ideologies and neocolonial modes of representation. Notwithstanding their differences on paper in terms of their approach and hermeneutical stances, a comparative analysis of these different geographic and discursive regimes (USA and Iran) can offer critical insights into the ways in which these colonial forms of representation perpetuate the Global North's voyeuristic gaze as well as the teleological/tropological (mis)representations. Chapter three argues that a critical transnational analysis can reveal the global connections of the epistemic erasure produced by these seemingly national forms of representation and ventriloquizing.

Through these chapters, I hope to make a theoretical intervention that searches for utterance and grammar[11] outside of the Global North's epistemic universe, for a language that does not become complicit in the ideological textualization of the Global South's lived experience. I also hope that in this instance, writing from the vantage point of the intellectual and cultural Other does not get enmeshed in a certain politics of recognition dependent on the Global North's penetrating gaze (Ekotto 2011: 21). In the end, my dissertation imagines the Global South not as a static space but as a dynamic site of critical and anti-hegemonic knowledge production. It is my hope that the following chapters are read in those terms.

[11] In this formulation of my theoretical intervention, I am inspired by Tiffany Lethabo King's own theoretical intervention that "searches for utterance and grammar outside of what Black studies calls the narrativity of the liberal subject or human" (21) in her book *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (2019).

Chapter 1: *Jotas, Vestidas, Travestis,* and *Transsexuals*: Queer Theory and the Metaphorics of the Global South

It was in my senior year in 2010 as an undergraduate student at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul that my burgeoning fascination with gender and queer studies as academic fields of study started. In a stimulating conversation with a fellow student who previously took a "Sociology of Gender" course on campus, I was introduced to a book that I, according to my friend, must absolutely read now that I had started to consider pursuing an academic career in gender and queer studies. The book was none other than Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1998). Having talked about his professor's and the whole class's appreciation of the book, my friend proceeded to mention that Kulick's ethnographic research is indeed a very rich and complex demonstration of the socially and culturally constructed nature of sex, gender, and sexuality. In other words, Kulick, a Swedish queer theorist, provided a perfect transnational and transcultural case study for the performativity of gender, corroborating in the process queer theory's epistemological framework. Thrilled and excited, I ordered a copy of the book the following day, looking forward to reading this seemingly widely-acclaimed and appreciated book. At no time did it occur to me to reflect on the implications of reading that book as one of the core works of queer theory. Why would an ethnographic work conducted by a Swedish queer theorist and published in English by an American academic press be unquestioningly received as an authoritative text in a sociology of gender course in Turkey to understand and theorize so-called "travesti subjectivity" in Brazil?

It was not until 2013 that I found myself meditating on this question again in a different context, this time as a graduate student in Women and Gender Studies at the University of

Toronto. On the second day of the class discussions in our inspiring seminar "Queer Theory", our brilliant professor began the seminar by inviting us to deconstruct the title, "Foundational Texts in Queer Theory", that he chose for that day's readings in the syllabus. After our failure to deconstruct the title and convincingly explain what was wrong with it, he proceeded with a brief but very interesting lecture about how we missed the irony, stating that the title is completely anti-queer and that queer theory, by its nature, can have no foundations. The lecture then turned into a fascinating whole class discussion about how queer theory challenges not only normative conceptualizations of sex, gender, and sexuality, but also conventional notions regarding foundations, disciplines, institutions, and traditions. At no point during those discussions, however, did we consider why specifically those texts were chosen to represent the foundational texts of queer theory, nor did we problematize what it meant and required to be part and parcel of queer theory's canon. The "representative" foundational texts included selections from Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and David Halperin. Was that taken for granted then that language, geography, and Eurocentric cultural capital had already determined the foundations of queer theory's epistemic universe even when queer as a concept and as a methodology was at odds with the very idea of foundations?

This chapter represents my desire to reckon with queer theory's geographic, linguistic, cultural, and ideological baggage. The rise of queer theory within Anglophone North America in the nineties was accompanied by the accelerated transformation/translation of the Global South into a rich reservoir of case studies aiming to uncover queer's culturally, religiously, and sexually different "others" for the consumption of the Global North. In this chapter, I argue for a need to go back to this period and reread queer's secular cultural capital within the juxtaposition of Latin America and the Middle East to rethink not only the spatial and temporal arrangements

of the North-South divide but also the epistemic and ontological universe of Anglophone queer theory. By focusing on the production and circulation of the Global North's ethnographic gaze in Turkey, Brazil, and Mexico in the nineties, I intend to show that queer's translation into Global South's religiously and racially different geographic spaces masks the ontological exclusions of this epistemic transplantation. Through a close reading of various ethnographic texts such as Annick Prieur's *Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos* (1998), Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1998), and Pınar Selek's *Maskeler, Süvariler, Gacılar* (2001), I argue that Anglophone queer cultural critique operates as an alibi for both the universalization of sexological modernity and the domestication of religiously and racially inflected somatic difference. In other words, this close reading exposes how queer theory's professed desire to embrace foreignness and stress cultural difference masks its teleological reordering of the incommensurable. Provincializing queer theory's secular axioms, I conclude this chapter by discussing what kind of decolonial hemispheric dialogues one can imagine if such contiguous cartographies of the Global South do not get lost in their metaphorical translation into the language of queer modernity.

In Mema's House We Speak a Lingua Franca: Southern Lives, Northern Tongues

Annick Prieur's ethnographic work *Mema's House, Mexico City* (1998) is driven by an interest in unraveling, in her own words, "deeply embedded truths about gender" (xiv) by studying so-called feminine homosexual men living in Nezahualcóyotl, Mexico. The case that Prieur, a Norwegian sociologist, encounters and decides to research in Mexico presents, according to her, a unique and exemplary occasion to account for such complex issues as sex, gender constructions, class-based aesthetics, embodied practices, and marginalization (xiv). The Neza

community composed of feminine *homosexuales*, *jotas*, and *vestidas* offers a microcosm of the theoretical repertoire that Prieur acquired "after having studied gender and sex issues for some years" (xiii). In other words, the very community emerges as a material testing ground for the universality of Prieur's epistemic commitments. Prieur does acknowledge the problems she sees in purely theoretical or empirical works by stating her conviction that "it is only through empirical studies that theoretical questions may be addressed meaningfully, and through theory that these studies become interesting" (xiv). However, Prieur's declaration of her conviction masks the ways in which the empirical is already reordered through the theoretical. Ethnographic research in this context functions similarly to a colonial enterprise that utilizes local/native "materials" to resolve pre-determined issues or satisfy urgent curiosities. Like all other colonial enterprises, curiosities and issues are transplanted onto the local setting, transforming it into a raw material to be processed, molded, and rendered intelligible. Knowledge produced through the framing of the raw material in question not only denies the empirical its theoretical power but also naturalizes and universalizes the given "theory's" cultural capital. In an interview with Viviane Namaste, Vek Lewis (2011) emphasizes the unilaterality of Prieur's ethnographic work by reminding the readers of how her work was not "even available in Spanish until a decade after its English publication" (186). If the *homosexuales*, *jotas*, and *vestidas* in the Neza community in particular, and the Mexican public, in general, are not, as it turns out, the audiences for Prieur's ethnographic work, then how is one to make sense of the status of the empirical in the production and dissemination of the theoretical? The question goes far beyond interrogating the transactional nature of Prieur's academic work that overlooks reciprocity as well as the fundamental ethical dimensions of a community-engaged project. What becomes clear is that the empirical becomes subordinated to the theoretical whereby the raw material, now reduced to a

mere tool, is no longer coded as equally constitutive of knowledge. In a sense, one can make the argument that Prieur's textualization of lived experience for "scholarly" knowledge production replicates, on a smaller scale, the macrocosm of the Global North-Global South division.

The theoretical framework on which Prieur bases her understanding of the subjectivity of *homosexuales* and their somatic difference, particularly in comparison with their American, European or even local middle-class counterparts, effaces cultural and epistemic difference even when it seemingly embraces them. Prieur questions *jotas'* assertion that they have not become feminine due to outside pressure (133) by arguing, through Pierre Bourdieu, that "…the adjustment [between the presentation we give of ourselves and the representation others have of our social role] is not a result of intensive reflection, but of a rather intuitive sense of 'social orientation'…that makes us perfectly aware of what is suitable and what not" (134). In other words, *jotas'* somatic differences are shaped and configured in accordance with and as a form of resistance to their specific machista culture's expectations/prescriptions. On the surface, this characterization acknowledges the question of cultural difference as well as the ways in which cultural variance results in multivalent configurations of gender, desire, sexuality, and sex. In her response to Gata's question about how Norwegian homosexuals are, however, Prieur states that "…many things [are] different, and that almost none of them [dress] like women" (133). Implicit in this answer and Prieur's subsequent challenge to Gata's expression of sadness for what she, as a self-described *jota*, perceives as Norwegian homosexuals' lack of freedom to embrace their femininity and live like *jotas* is the universalized narrative of sexual modernity within which those who acquire the Global North's secular cultural and sexological capital learn to disarticulate embodied femininity from homosexuality even in the face of existing cultural differences. In this framework, cultural difference is rendered intelligible only against the

backdrop of sexual modernity's teleology whereby *jotas'*, *vestidas'*, and *homosexuales'* class-based as well as racialized somatic difference and femininity represent an anachronistic tradition.

The transplantation of Global North's cultural and sexological capital to the Neza community in Prieur's analysis manifests itself in two distinct but related ways: diagnosis and acculturation. In her admittedly banal conclusion on where to locate the so-called "homosexually behaving feminine man" and how one becomes a *jota*, Prieur contends that "becoming a *jota* is a complex process where many factors are intertwined–some early occurring feelings, genetically determined or psychologically formed; some childhood experiences; labeling and learning…And neither biology nor culture may be determinant in any absolute sense" (138). Prieur's uncritical import of a never-ending "nature versus nurture"[12] debate to theorize *jota* subjectivation not only exemplifies a familiar colonial gesture but also enacts a medico-cultural reordering of the local through a Eurocentric episteme. In a sense, the diagnosis arrives pre-made when Prieur overlooks the inevitable incommensurability between the socio-cultural climate of the empirical and the sexological capital of the theoretical. In this context, the diagnosis' colonial underpinnings are better understood when the term is used etymologically. To the Greeks, to diagnose meant "to discriminate", "to know apart", and "to discern between two possibilities". In her diagnosis of *jota* subjectivity, Prieur makes it clear which medico-cultural possibility and epistemic universe she deploys.

The questions of acculturation and cultural capital appear under different forms at several points in Prieur's analysis. At one such point, when Prieur cites Mema's interpretation of the *jotas*' femininity that it is both a result of machismo and a resistance to it, Prieur mentions how

[12] For a more detailed discussion on "nature versus nurture" debates, see Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000).

"Mema has not read Foucault, but is familiar with some of his ideas, in this case to his analysis of power and counterpower" (134). In this instance, Prieur seems to make an implicit suggestion that the subjects in her ethnography could have a more complex and nuanced understanding of their subjectivities, embodied praxes, and socio-political environments if they possessed necessary cultural (read Eurocentric) capital and acculturated into the Anglophone/Francophone intellectual universe similarly to some of their local middle-class "counterparts". Nevertheless, Prieur's refusal to both justify the assumed universality of her theoretical attachments and discuss why a certain strand of French theory is supposed to be the most appropriate methodological tool with which to understand *jotas*, *vestidas*, and *homosexuales* in Mexico serve to mask her uncritical attachment to Global North's cultural capital. In other places in her work, Prieur quotes frequently from other prominent Western theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas, and Jean Baudrillard. Bourdieu comes in handy to reflect on many puzzles, as in when Prieur analyzes *vestidas*' "active and conscious fashioning of the body" (160), whereas Baudrillard's[13] insights into signs, symbolic transactions, and transsexuals prove useful (albeit with reservations) for her when she elaborates on *vestidas*' cheating, realness, and passing praxes (158-165). It must be stressed that this critique is not about policing Prieur's citational praxis, nor is it merely driven by a desire to make a statement about her ethnography's larger politics of citation. What needs to be underscored at this juncture instead is that through her positioning of the theoretical and the empirical in her work, Prieur creates a geographic, cultural, and

[13] Annick Prieur is surely not the only scholar using Baudrillard's problematic and ahistorical abstraction of transsexual subjectivity embodied through his "we are all transsexuals" statement. For instance, Pınar Selek, who will be discussed later in this chapter, also uses Baudrillard's insights into transsexuality to analyze travestis and transsexuals in her research in Turkey. For an insightful discussion on Baudrillard's misreading of transsexuality as a postmodern threat, see Rita Felski's "Fin de Siècle, Fin de Sexe: Transsexuality, Postmodernism, and the Death of History" (1996).

theoretical binary. Within that binary, the Global South emerges as a space and an idea, providing a reservoir of case studies to be processed and theorized by the Global North.

Prieur is a sociologist and as a sociologist she states that the objective of her field "still is to uncover social mechanisms, to see patterns in the variety", at which point she articulates some of her reservations about certain postmodernists who do not contribute much to sociological theory (273). Prieur makes her contributions through a "thick ethnographic description" as opposed to a thin one, adding statements about the different agents' interpretations of what happened as well as the researcher's (herself) interpretation of it (40). The patterns that could be seen in the variety or the social mechanisms that could be uncovered through a thick description are already restricted, however, by the classificatory tools or concepts on which such interpretations are predicated. Interpretations are filtered through an epistemic lens whose modus operandi is, much to the denial of the sociologists and anthropologists not invested in decolonizing the field, a priori rather than empirical, arbitrary rather than reasoned. If one rules out sexological violence for instance, what justification can be put forward for the labelling of *vestidas* and *jotas* as transvestic homosexuals? What reasoned argument can be made for the use of transvestite, a term that, as I show in chapter three, does not even have an historical coherency within its own original context let alone a transnational applicability, when Prieur classifies some *vestidas* as "transvestites at a first degree" and the other *vestidas* as those who take the transvestism to the second degree (161)? What grounds does Prieur give for separating homosexuality from transsexuality in a geography that is not specifically marked by the medical history of that disarticulation? What historical, social, political, cultural or medical circumstances have led to the dissemination of diagnostic categories such as homosexual with which certain community members identify and what empirical data exist to showcase this particular history of

sexological imperialism as well as its impact on the Neza community? These interrogations can surely be proliferated, the point of which is not to fault Prieur for using an incorrect terminology. The growing transformation of the Global South into a territory offering raw evidence for the "complex" gender theories coming out of the Global North belongs to a "queer" history and Annick Prieur is part and parcel of it as she also acknowledges it (albeit with reservations) in her introduction. An observation from Prieur in her work perhaps best captures what the Global South signified and still, to a certain extent, continues to signify for the Global North: "The *jotas* are true proletarians: they possess nothing but their bodies" (159). The Global South is a true reservoir: it possesses nothing but case studies.

Does "Queer" Live in Bahia? Local Words, Global Interpretations

Five years after I first heard about and read it, I again had the occasion to read Don Kulick's *Travesti* (1998) in the company of brilliant fellow students as part of an inspiring seminar on "Trans Latino/a American Drag". The experience was awkward on a personal level not least because here was a book by which I had been fascinated merely five years ago but which was now raising some fundamental problems that I did not know how to pinpoint or articulate coherently. What was wrong with or problematic then about Kulick's widely popular ethnography that I had failed to reflect on in my first reading and only started to take into account after my subsequent encounters with the work? In his ethnography on travestis living in Salvador, Bahia, Kulick seeks to show how "travestis elaborate the particular configurations of sexuality, gender, and sex that undergird and give meaning to Brazilian notions of 'man' and 'woman' (9). Kulick lived for eight months with travestis in Salvador as, in his own words, a foreign, noncondemnatory, clearly identified gay researcher" who spoke or understood very little

Portuguese for the first two months of his stay (14-15). Interestingly, at least for the purposes of this chapter, Annick Prieur[14] and Neuza Maria de Oliveira at first express doubts that as a man Kulick "would ever be able to gain access to and acceptance by travestis" (15). However, contrary to what they say, his status as a gay man indeed facilitates, according to Kulick, the sorts of relationships he ends up developing with travestis, which, in turn, allows him to pose and try to answer his ethnography's central question: "what do travesti practices tell us about the ways in which gender is imagined and configured in Brazilian society?" (11). It is this very question and the circumstances enabling Kulick's ethnographic project that then propel me to ask the following question: what do the theoretical framework and epistemic tools deployed in Kulick's research tell us about the ways in which queer theory "frames" the Global South to domesticate cultural, racial, and somatic difference?

Kulick renders transparent the theoretical lens and two types of scholarly work he draws on in his introduction. The first, he states, "is the work of ethnomethodologically grounded scholars who have argued that transgenderism constitutes a privileged vantage point from which it is possible to observe how sex and gender are conceived and enacted in everyday life" (10). This tendency to read transgender/transsexual tropologically and postulate that trans experience and embodiment can be read as a microcosm always encapsulating the conditions, features, structures, and particularities of something larger and bigger such as a state or a political regime is, needless to say, not unique to Kulick as his references also make clear. To read trans, or travesti in this particular case, tropologically not only delineates trans ontology as

[14] Annick Prieur is a frequent interlocutor for Kulick during his research. Moreover, although Prieur had conducted her research in Mexico before Kulick started his own, references to Kulick's ethnography appear in several points in Prieur's published book, *Mema's House, Mexico City* (1998)

symptomatic[15], an epistemic violence[16] *par excellence* (which I discuss in more detail in chapter two) but also makes the subject in question amenable to the ideological moldings of a specific theoretical lens. That lens Kulick does elaborate upon when he states the second body of work that informs his arguments in his ethnography: "…recent feminist and historical writing that argues that the concept of biological sex is itself a gendered notion, dependent on culturally generated notions of difference for its meaning and its ability to seem 'natural'" (10-11). According to Kulick, the significance of this theoretical move, namely queer theory[17] (although Kulick does not use this designation), is that it allows the researcher to analyze the travesti subjectivity without assuming that one already knows the intended referent or end point of the travesti project (11). The conclusion at which Kulick arrives concerning "not assuming" anything about gender or sex while justifying the benefits of using queer theory is ironic, if not misleading, given that the theory's naturalized universality conceals what is already assumed. One can make the argument that the assumption is already made and the subjects in the ethnography are already theoretically framed when Kulick considers travestis as gendered persons. This critique does not, it should be pointed out, claim that the travesti experience has nothing to do with gender or that any attempt to discuss the relevance of gender for travestis would be erroneous. The point is, however, that it is an assumption, albeit an unacknowledged

[15] For an insightful discussion on the problems of reducing trans people to national/cultural allegories or other figurative and performative deployments in Latin America, see Vek Lewis' *Crossing Sex and Gender in Latin America* (2010)

[16] To see in trans existence an embodiment of cultural, technological, and political developments that are taking place nationally and globally is a discursive tactic commonly used by trans-exclusionary radical feminists, the most notorious examples of which are Janice G. Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* (1979 and 1994) and more recently Sheila Jeffrey's *Gender Hurts* (2014). I bring up this issue again in chapter three when I discuss Sandy Stone's response in her article "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto"

[17] In his interview with Viviane Namaste cited earlier in this chapter, Vek Lewis also critiques Don Kulick's "unabashedly queer" agenda in his ethnography.

one, to contend that travestis can tell us something about or, to put it another way, "embody" the performativity of gender. The empirical is provincialized at the same as the theoretical is universalized, a universalization that reinforces itself through a transnational substantiation. Travestis emerge as a testing ground for Kulick, just as *vestidas* and *jotas* did for Prieur, to verify queer's theoretical applicability and prowess. The geographic implications of this transaction are left unproblematized, which preserves the hegemonic status of the Global North's cultural capital. In a sense, one already "knows" the end point of Kulick's travesti project: the subtle translation of cultural, racial, and somatic difference into the universal language of queer theory. Translation in this context means domestication whereby the empirical's interpretation through, and disappearance into, the theoretical masquerades as an ostensible recognition of intercultural difference. The South's "raw material" is interpellated into the North's queer culture, which secures the travestis' a priori emergence as gendered persons confirming queer theory's discourse on gender.

Theorizing the travestis' gender system which, according to him, is predicated on the role of penetration as an engendering act, Kulick states that "…whereas the northern Euro-American gender system is based on anatomical sex, the gender system that structures travestis' perceptions and actions is based on *sexuality*" (227, emphasis in the original). The identified cultural incommensurability between the North and the South serves to underscore the cross-cultural and cross-national pertinence of queer theory whose desired authority and explanatory power in this instance can only be ensured if deployed ahistorically. As M. Jacqui Alexander reminds us in her *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2006), "…an early epistemic marriage between queer theorizing and the dominant methodologies of poststructuralism in the U.S. academy has had the effect of

constructing queer theory in a way that eviscerates histories of colonialism and racial formation…" (70). Kulick depicts the so-called travesti subjectivity in queer's ahistorical terms, perpetuating the inattentiveness of the theory's "foundational" texts to histories of racial formation, power asymmetries, and colonialism. The result is that the travesti becomes all about body, gender, sexuality, desire, and culture. The empirical is processed in such a way that obfuscates the naturalization of the Global North's cultural capital as well as that capital's ideologically eviscerated histories.

The inability of Kulick's theoretical framework to critique structures of colonialism and processes of racial formation due to its reductive focus on the signification of the travesti embodiment also manifests itself in its reading of temporality. In his analysis of two conflicting but coexisting understandings of homosexuality operating in Brazil, namely the one in which only the sexually-penetrated subject is considered homosexual as opposed to the other in which both parties engaging in sexual activity are seen as homosexual, Kulick argues, through George Chauncey, that a temporally-discrepant equivalency can be observed between the contemporary Brazilian culture and the Western urban industrial culture of the early decades of the twentieth-century (212). Strikingly, in this analysis, queer's reading of temporality is not "queer", at best, and colonial, at worst, when one reviews the queer scholarly literature focusing on queer temporalities in racial capitalism or queering societies' conventional conceptions of time and space[18]. For instance, E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen in their edited volume *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (2011) argue that "In Western discourses, queerness has always been marked

[18] For a more detailed discussion on imagining alternative times, worlds, and spaces as well as re-theorizing cultural constructions of futurity see Kara Keeling's *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019), Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), and José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009).

by its untimely relation to socially shared temporal phases, by a lack of proper orientation in terms of time as much as of social norms" (7). The idea of untimeliness, which refers to an inability to keep up with the temporality of the mainstream culture, is associated with queerness and signals a break from and a lack of synchronicity with oppressive heteronormative temporality. Elizabeth Freeman, on the other hand, theorizes the value and meaning of queer time that resists the manipulative mechanisms of what she terms "chrononormativity" (2010: 3). In contrast to these "queer" takes on temporality that aim at challenging the conventional time's hegemonic hold on bodies and cultures in late racial capitalism, Kulick's reading and deployment of temporal similitude serve to constitute the Global South's present cultural difference as the facsimile of the Global North's past condition, naturalizing in the process the linear temporality of sexological modernity. In a sense, the difference of Brazil's present cultural configurations of homosexuality turns out to be nondifference, a mere temporal matter notwithstanding the specified distinctive concept of penetration. The South becomes the body, albeit an anachronistic one, to the North's mind, supplying the raw materials to verify the modernity and universality of the Global North's cultural capital.

In the ethnographies of both Don Kulick and Annick Prieur, one can see conspicuous patterns of the transformation of the Global South into a laboratory within which to investigate the relevance and universality of the theoretical frameworks developed within the academic enclaves of the Global North. In various iterations of this; however, one does not always find Euro-American theorists/researchers fascinated by the complex and foreign empirical "data" offered by the underdocumented territories of the Global South, nor are such "fascinating" territories always necessarily identified as part and parcel of the Global South. These geographic, ethnic or racial variations only attest, one can argue, to the hegemonic power of the Global

North's cultural capital as well as the epistemic violence perpetuated through its transnational circulation. The following section of this chapter will turn to analyze one such ambiguity that points out not only queer theory's ideological currency in the nineties but also the need to rethink the spatial implications of the North-South divide.

Does Sociology Study the Socius? Masks, Cavaliers, and the Global North's Logos

In her *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that "at least for certain ('queer') people, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity" (64). While one can debate the assumed permanence of shame's role in structuring identity in Sedgwick's theorization, her designation of shame as constitutive of the self can be helpful, I argue, to analyze not only those instances in which one experiences shame on a personal level but also those moments in which one's experience of shame is secondary. Growing up as a child in the nineties in a Mediterranean city of Turkey, I encountered people with whom I felt that I shared a common gendered or sexualized identity almost exclusively through television screens or newspapers. Bülent Ersoy[19] was one such figure, for instance, but there were many others whose names or identities went, most of the time, unannounced. Among such representations, there was one group of "gender outcasts "whose frequent appearance on television screens and newspapers in 1996 as dangerous and immoral actors of terror and violence left the biggest imprint on my consciousness and identity. The shame that they experienced at the hands of the media, police, and civilian militants did

[19] Bülent Ersoy is a very popular and hypervisible trans public figure referred to as the diva of the Turkish classical music in Turkey. I discuss her place in the collective consciousness and memory of trans/queer people living in Turkey in more detail in chapter two.

become my shame. The travestis[20] and transsexuals, as they were, and are still, commonly referred to, living on Ülker Street in Istanbul were frequently and aggressively depicted by the visual and print media as posing serious perils to the public order and morality. (Figure 1) They were a danger and nuisance, the public was told. They were me and I was them; therefore, I thought, I was a danger and nuisance. Their suffering, ostracization, and shame became mine although it did not escape me for one moment that none of them, unlike me, did have the immense privilege to experience these processes solely on a cognitive level.



Figure 1: "Dönme trap for high-school students"[21]

[20] I keep the word as it is used in Turkish instead of translating it into "transvestite" because the word travesti in Turkish has several connotations, most prominently class-based, that the word transvestite does not encapsulate in English.

[21] Dönme is a pejorative term used as an insult in Turkish to refer to gender non-conforming individuals. The excerpted piece in Figure 1 is but one of the many examples of scandalized news very common

As Pınar Selek also describes in her introduction to her ethnographic work *Maskeler Süvariler, Gacılar*[22] (2007, *Masks, Cavaliers, and Women*[23]), in the spring of 1996, a social conflict took place on Ülker Street, located in Cihangir Neighborhood of Istanbul. Thanks to the incredibly deceptive and inaccurate media representations, the public learnt that a coalition of different entities such as neighborhood residents, patriotic ultranationalists, police forces, and Beyoğlu and Ayaspaşa Gentrification Association, were cleansing Ülker Street of travesti and transsexual individuals. The war against these marginalized communities was allegedly being waged in the name of reinstating morality, public order, and tradition. Not surprisingly, this cleansing operation also preceded the start of Habitat II, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, which was held in Istanbul in the summer of 1996. As a result of this cleansing operation, it was made clear that Ülker Street would no longer be a hospitable place for travestis and transsexuals who had carved out on this street a "relatively" safe space to live and work. The street was full of police cars, ultranationalist groups, civilian militants, and members of the press. Many travestis and transsexuals left the street and neighborhood. Those that insisted on staying took shelter in their homes. Their homes were repeatedly raided and their windows got broken; therefore, they tightly pulled their curtains to appear as invisible as possible. Many

during this period spreading transphobic disinformation. The news claims that the travestis living on Ülker Street pose a great danger to our youth because they seduce underage high-school students, have sex with them in exchange for money, initiate them into homosexuality, and infect them with many sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS [sic], syphilis, and gonorrhea.

[22] *Maskeler, Süvariler, Gacılar* was first published in 2001. In this chapter, I use the second edition of the book published in 2007.

[23] To translate "Gacılar" as "Women" into English fails to convey the cultural and ethnic repertoire of the word "Gacı" in Turkish. Gacı has distinct connotations that the word "kadın" (woman) in Turkish does not have. Etymologically, gacı comes from the Roma language in which the word is used to refer particularly to women who are not from the Roma community. In slang Turkish, the word is used to refer to passive homosexual men too. Some travestis and transsexuals also use the word to refer to their community members, which is not surprising given how much Lubunca, a queer argot, has been shaped by the Roma language. For a brief discussion on Lubunca and the epistemological implications of its use, see my introduction.

of those who decided to leave either committed suicide or were tragically murdered by "unknown" assailants. On the other hand, a constant fear reigned over the travestis and transsexuals imprisoned in their homes, which reminded them that they no longer belonged in Ülker Street.

Providing a sharp contrast to the deceptive visual and print media representations, Selek's courageous ethnographic work intends to shed light on the real motives behind this cleansing operation. As she powerfully demonstrates through her research, when lands and neighborhoods become profitable and gentrification processes take over, reinstating morality, tradition, and public order turns out to be a great excuse exploited by the state and extra-state forces to drive out the vulnerable, disenfranchised, and marginalized communities. Not only an outsider researcher but also a friend of some of the travestis and transsexuals[24] living on Ülker Street, Selek expresses that at first she felt desperate when her friends asked her about why as a sociologist she would not write or conduct research about them and what was happening on Ülker Street (26). Selek feels desperate and doubts that she could conduct such research not because she fears that the ideological state apparatuses would not allow it but because she thinks that she could risk portraying her friends as innocent victims and ignoring their complicity in her "scientific" research even though she does not believe that the researcher has to be impartial (26-27). In her self-reflexive approach, however, Selek does not consider what would and should constitute the theoretical and conceptual pillars of a scientific research appropriate for her ethnography, nor does she offer a critical discourse on how what one understands as "scientific"

[24] I use the words "travestis and transsexuals" throughout this section not because I think that it is not problematic to refer to those individuals every time with such totalizing signifiers but because I keep Selek's "preferred" way of talking about them. Word choice matters and it can, I argue, give us insights into how certain subjects/communities are positioned in a researcher's theoretical framework.

is already framed through a universalized theoretical lens. Selek's refusal to acknowledge the ways in which her scientific and theoretical points of departure are saturated by the Global North's cultural capital results in the reproduction, through a "local" prism, of the North's colonial gaze as well as its epistemic assumptions in this ethnographic setting. In other words, in her attempt to document this state-sponsored violence against travestis and transsexuals, Selek ends up deploying a colonial discourse that casts Turkey and the Middle East as an anachronistic replica of the Global North while characterizing the travestis and transsexuals as unenlightened, pre-modern, and potentially homosexual subjects of this region. The cultural difference of the region problematized by Selek is shown, through her analysis, then to be a symptom of a nonexistent modernity, which reveals that the foregrounded difference, when translated through queer's modernist theoretical repertoire, is a mere cover for the teleological reordering of the incommensurable.

Selek acknowledges the ethical value of treating the travestis and transsexuals in her ethnography as subjects rather than objects of research while underscoring the significance of the collective learning process in the field (28). Nevertheless, in her introduction, she narrates her disappointment at how her research was not able to succeed in enabling the subjects of her research to rethink what they experienced, collectivizing the search for knowledge or intervening in life's circumstances:

> Gelinen aşamada, bu araştırmanın travesti ve transseksüellerin kendi yaşadıkları üzerine ikinci kez düşünmelerini sağlayabildiğini söyleyemiyorum. Bu hedefle başlattığımız, hatta ilk düşünsel çabalardan sonra çözüm deneyimi olarak düşündüğümüz Sokak Atölyesi çalışmamız, elimizde olmayan nedenlerden dolayı yarıda kesildi…Benim kişisel olarak en büyük işlevim, bu konuda yapılmış olan tartışmaları onlara taşımak olmalıydı. Bunda başarılı olamadım.
>
> At this stage I cannot say that this research has been capable of enabling the

> transsexuals and travestis to reflect again on what they have gone through. Due to reasons beyond our control, we had to discontinue "The Street Artists Workshop", the product of our preliminary intellectual endeavors that we hoped would offer a solution to our challenges…Personally my biggest function should have been to convey to them the academic discussions about this subject [homosexuality]. I could not succeed (28).[25]

Selek's acknowledgement of her failure to transfer the "enlightened" feminist/queer wisdom of the researcher to her subjects brings to the fore her conceptualization of travestis and transsexuals as insufficiently political figures who lack the necessary cultural capital (read Global North's cultural capital). Hence, according to her, they are unable to theorize their lived experiences, nor can they coherently articulate the political situations in which they find themselves. Such characterizations become a recurrent theme throughout the ethnography as the question of class emerges, in Selek's reading, as a colossal wall that keeps travestis and transsexuals from reaching over to the North's theoretical and discursive territories framed as the treasure chest of knowledge and truth. In her critical analysis of Demet Demir's[26] argument that the seventy percent of the travestis in Istanbul are gays who dress up as women to make money and that they thus do not reflect on their temporary identities, Selek reiterates her portrayal of travestis and transsexuals as unenlightened subjects lacking cultural capital:

> Demet Demir'in "düşünmüyor" dediği travestilerle yapılan çeşitli sohbetlerden çıkan sonuç, çok çeşitli "düşünme biçimlerinin" olduğu yönündedir. Bunlar, Foucault'nun Genet'nin, Kaos ve benzeri dergilerin çevresindeki eşcinsellerin kendi cinsel kimliklerine yönelik felsefi yaklaşımlarından habersizlerdir. Çünkü içinden geldikleri sınıfsal, kültürel ve sosyal çevre böylesi bir birikim kazanmalarına müsaade etmemiştir. Bu anlamda, kendi yaşadıklarını, kendi tanıklıklarını ifade edebilecek dilsel araçları zayıftır.

[25] All the translations in this chapter are mine unless stated otherwise.
[26] Demet Demir has been one of the most prominent trans activists from Turkey in the last four decades. She was also one of the participants of the documentary *Proudly Trans in Turkey* (2012), which I analyze in more detail in chapter two.

> The conclusion I have reached based on various conversations I had with the travestis Demet Demir accuses of "not reflecting on" their identities is that there are many different "forms of thinking". They are unaware of the philosophical approaches that Foucault, Genet, and other homosexuals from *Kaos*[27] and similar journals have developed to understand their sexual identities. Their class position as well as the cultural and social environment in which they grow up prevent them from accumulating this cultural capital. They possess weak linguistic tools to articulate what they have gone through and witnessed (256).

Travestis' and transsexuals' interrogations of not only the triad of sex, sexuality, and gender but also the conditions of their subjection are destined to be shallow and limited, according to Selek, given that profundity and complexity of thought, assumed to be the markers of modernity and enlightenment, are associated with those either representative of or familiar with the Western philosophical critiques. In a sense, travestis and transsexuals are foregrounded as the true inhabitants of the Global South, imagined as both an idea and a space, only a bridge away from the telos of homosexuality, a bridge than can only be crossed through the acquisition of the Global North's cultural capital. The conflation of the Global North and homosexuality in Selek's analysis is not totally surprising, particularly when one considers the genealogy of queer theory in tandem with its privileging of sexuality and idealization of transgender at the expense of transsexuals.[28] Selek also refers to this when she discusses the place of travestis and transsexuals within the global homosexual subculture, stating that the emergence of queer theory in the nineties in Euro-American circles enabled travestis and transsexuals to be more accepted by lesbians and gays (89-90),

[27] Kaos GL journal is published by KAOS GL (KAOS Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association), which is one of the oldest LGBTQ rights organizations in Turkey. It was founded in 1994 and became the first LGBT-oriented organization in Turkey to be legally registered as an association in 2005.

[28] I discuss the emergence of transgender as the idealized category of queer theory in Butler's earlier work as well as Jay Prosser's and Viviane Namaste's critiques of this moment in queer theory in more detail in chapter two.

which is a statement that overlooks the earlier epistemic tensions of queer theory through its erasure of transgender's, transsexual's, and travesti's specific histories. The specificity of those histories is not the only subject erased in Selek's account, however, since the materiality of travesti and transsexual bodies also disappears. In this disappearance, queer emerges as a linguistic and discursive project whereby travestis and transsexuals could theoretically "transubstantiate" themselves into homosexuals if only they did not have such weak linguistic tools conditioned by their lack of cultural capital.

The disappearance of travesti and transsexual materiality as well as the designation of homosexuality as modernity's (and Global North's) enlightened identity in Selek's research are further reinforced when she starts to make connections between what she implicitly frames as "premodern transsexuality" and the premodernity of the Ottoman/Turkish culture. In her description of the so-called homosexual subculture that has, according to her, been in existence in Turkey since the Ottoman Empire, Selek argues as follows:

> Ama Ortadoğu'da eşcinsellik, genellikle ataerkilliği besleyen, hatta onun aracılığıyla gelişen altkültürel örgütlenmesi çok zayıf bir toplumsal kesimi ifade eder. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Ortadoğu'nun en güçlü, en geniş ve en merkezi devletiydi. Burada da eşcinsellik Türk erkek egemen kültürünün özgün örüntüleri bir yana tipik olarak Ortadoğu tarzında yaşandı.
>
> But homosexuality in the Middle East generally refers to a social category with a very weak subcultural organization that both maintains patriarchy and even develops through it. The Ottoman Empire was the strongest, largest, and most central state of the Middle East. Besides being endowed with the specific patterns of the Turkish male supremacist culture, homosexuality was practiced in a typically Middle Eastern way in this region (97).

Given that there are many commonalities between the histories of travesti/transsexual and homosexual subcultures in Turkey, one can make a case for the relevance of Selek's unusually

detailed, albeit very problematic, discussion of homosexuality to her ethnography on travestis and transsexuals living on Ülker Street. The historical and contemporary analyses of homosexuality, uncritically assumed to be cross-cultural and universal[29], take up almost half of Selek's book, with occasional theoretical and historical references to the travesti and transsexual subculture. Nonetheless, as one continues to read through Selek's Western-centric analyses of homosexuality, transsexuality, and travestism, it becomes clear that her discussions serve to institute homosexuality as a modern identity category while relegating travestis and transsexuals to fundamentalism and premodernity. In other words, the Global North's cultural capital is embodied through the figure of the homosexual blessed with the Euro-American theoretical and philosophical sophistication. The cultural difference of the region, namely the Middle East, is revealed to be temporal rather than incommensurable, a teleological domestication, *par excellence*, of foreignness. As Selek states:

> Erkekliğin saltanat sürdüğü topraklarda, "edilgen erkekler" nasıl olur da bu edilgenlikleri üzerinden bir yaşam tarzı geliştirebilirler?...Türk erkek egemenliğinin bu tutumu kabul etmesi mümkün değildir. Bu koşullarda, eşcinsel edimin açık edilmesi ancak kadın kimliğiyle ya da onu çağrıştıran bir kimlikle mümkün olur. Lezbiyen ve gey kimlik mücadelesinin gelişimi önündeki "erkeklik" engeli, birçok geyin kadın kimliğinde, yani travesti ve transseksüel olarak kendisini açık etmesine neden olur. "Eğer erkeğin cinsel iktidarını reddediyorsa, erkek değildir, içinde bozukluk vardır, kadındır…" inancı, bu topraklarda travesti ve transseksüelleri lezbiyenlik ve geylikten daha kabul edilebilir kılar.
>
> In lands where masculinity and manhood reign, how could 'passive men' develop a lifestyle based on passivity?...Turkish male supremacy has no place for this [homosexuality]. Under these circumstances, the disclosure of a homosexual act can be possible only through the reclamation of a female identity or another identity that connotes femininity. These issues of manhood and masculinity prevent the advance of lesbian and gay identity movements and lead many gays to declare themselves to be women, to come out as transsexuals and travestis. The belief that "if a man

[29] I come back to the critiques of the international gay agenda, homosexuality's assumed universality, and transsexuality's designation as reactionary and premodern in chapter three.

> denies the sexual power of manhood, one is longer a man, one is corrupted and thus one is a woman…" renders transsexual and travesti identities more acceptable than lesbian and gay identities in this region (109-110).

In Selek's account, victimized and suppressed homosexuals become a real reference point for premodern travestis and transsexuals, many of whom, according to Selek and her suspect statistical data, would not even exist if this sketchily-modernized state were not obsessed with masculinity and manhood. Similarly to Prieur's analysis that theorizes the immense impact of the so-called macho culture in Mexico on the "dramatic" femininity of *jotas*, *vestidas*, and *homosexuales*[30], Selek underscores the assumed imprint of the patriarchal Ottoman/Turkish culture on the culturally forced feminization of travestis and transsexuals who, under "normal" (read modern) circumstances, would come out as homosexuals. The root cause of this problematic theorization is two-fold. First, Selek's uncritical subscription to what one can characterize as a trans-exclusionary feminist standpoint that universalizes a timeless and monolithic understanding of patriarchy leads her to read travestis and transsexuals as inherently reactionary. Since everything is critiqued through the prism of patriarchy in Selek's theoretical framework, travestis and transsexuals are cast as docile subjects that due to their lack of self-reflexivity and cultural capital reproduce the patriarchal discourses on bodies rather than defy them. In a sense, Selek fails to do what David Valentine in his article "Sue E. Generous: Toward a Theory of Non-Transexuality" (2012) asks feminist and queer non-transsexuals to do: "…consider what it means to do the work of *being* non-transexual, because refusing to do so naturalizes the very sexed and gendered bodies and power relations that most queer theorists and feminists are at pains to denaturalize" (187, emphasis in the original). To put it another way, in

[30] I discuss Prieur's theorization, through Pierre Bourdieu, of symbolic violence as well as Vek Lewis' critiques of her model again in chapter two where I analyze the critical reception of Bülent Ersoy's religiosity by queer scholarship in Turkey.

her framing of travestis and transsexuals as subjects not doing the work of resisting patriarchal notions of embodiment, Selek ignores her own complicity in the reproduction as well as naturalization of gendered and sexed ideologies. Second, what becomes reproduced and naturalized in Selek's epistemological skeleton goes far beyond the questions of sex and gender when one considers the ideological juxtaposition of Islam, travestis, transsexuals, premodernity, and tradition. All these signifiers become interchangeable, transforming into the distinctive markers of the Global South, which, in turn, reproduces the discourse of the Global North as being secular, modern, and homosexual. Selek makes this point even clearer when she discusses gays who do not have economic or cultural means to partake in critical conversations about the nature of patriarchy or sexual identity:

> Travestilik veya transseksüellik, bu noktada geyler için bir zorunlu seçim olabilir. Dünyadaki travesti ve transseksüel nüfusun yüzde sekseninin modernleşmenin çarpık geliştiği, geleneksel değerlerin ağırlık kazandığı, özellikle Müslüman ülkelere ait olması dikkat çekicidir. Örneğin, Türkiye'de son dönemlerde, travesti ve transseksüellerin sayısındaki azalmanın gey nüfusun artmasıyla dengeli olarak ilerlemesi, Türkiye'de geçmişe göre geyler açısından daha çok yaşam alanı yaratılmış olmasıyla bağlantılıdır.
>
> At this point travestism or transsexuality might be a compulsory choice for gay men. It is striking that eighty percent of the world's travesti and transsexual population lives in sketchily modernized, heavily traditional, and particularly Muslim countries. For instance, in recent years the decrease in the number of travesti and transsexual individuals is proportional to the increase in gay population in Turkey. This stems from the fact that compared to past, more living spaces have been created for gay individuals in Turkey (122).

In other words, as Turkey becomes more modern and less traditional, this process is followed by an automatic decrease in the number of premodern subjects, i.e. travestis and transsexuals. This binary framework of modernity versus pre-modernity blending with Orientalism in Selek's account perpetuates the colonial logic and reproduces the familiar gaze of the Global North that

reads a homophobic agenda in the assumed relative prevalence of so-called pre-modern travestis and transsexuals in the Middle East. Furthermore, in Selek's epistemic universe, the question of religion only becomes relevant when it is portrayed as a tool of oppression. It is theorized as an undesirable remnant of tradition, representing an anachronistic time, an out-of-placeness in times of modernity. Religion's, in general, and Islam's, in particular, emergence as a marker of false consciousness in Selek's discourse occludes a critical analysis of the ways in which travestis and transsexuals used, and continue to use, religious discourse to open up new sites of possibilities for existence and survival. Such problematic reading of religion's potentially enabling power and signification serves to conceal the hegemonic presence and epistemic violence of the secular, sanitizing the ideological exclusions of the Global North's cultural capital. In other words, to have a cultural capital in this context is linked to being secular, which, in turn, is theorized to be the precondition of being modern. In this paradigm, at the other end of the scale lies the conglomerate of religiosity, transsexuality, travestism, premodernity, and tradition, assumed to be the peculiar attributes of the Global South's cosmology.

Selek's reductive discussion of the Ottoman-Turkish continuum also redirects the focus to the pre-modern/modern binary, overemphasizing, in the process, "tradition" at the expense of the question of "imperial". This results in the characterization of Turkey as a nation-state whose most prominent connection to its Ottoman past is shown to be its unabashed misogyny and patriarchy. If Selek's analysis considered Turkey as a post-imperial state rather than a nation-state, however, it could challenge the common impulse for incommensurability and dissimilarity between the country's imperial past and the post-imperial present. By reading the Turkish present through the Ottoman past outside of a reductive secular critique of patriarchy, such analysis could foreground the metaphorically erased history of gender non-conforming

communities and their multivalent imperial and post-imperial manifestations throughout the centuries. One can make the argument that this non-linear, palimpsestic[31], and metonymical reading of time could have the potential to reveal the continuities and disjunctures of gender and sexual non-conformity across time and space within this region instead of designating travestis and transsexuals as signs of a premodern past. It could also allow one to rethink so-called trans and queer archives in terms that proliferate rather than foreclose meaning and interpretation. In contrast, by designating travestis and transsexuals as sexological phenomena manipulated and rendered docile by the region's pervasive patriarchal structures, Selek's framework erases the complex histories of the post-imperial state's connection to slavery, centers the nation-state, and sanitizes the colonial underpinnings of the categories used in her analysis.

Unlike Annick Prieur, a Norwegian sociologist studying the *jotas, vestidas,* and *homosexuales* in Mexico, or Don Kulick, a Swedish anthropologist researching the travestis living in Bahia, Brazil, Pınar Selek is a local sociologist whose ethnographic work, on the surface, is not marked by the visible entanglements of the North-South division. Selek's positionality as a seeming cultural insider, however, does not, as this close reading shows, signify the absence of the domestication of the foreign, an ideological translation enacted through the hegemonic presence of the Global North's cultural capital in her theoretical framework. Throughout her analysis, Selek argues that travestis' and transsexuals' class status precludes them from critically understanding the conditions of their embodiment or radically subverting the oppressive gender system of patriarchy. Nevertheless, it is indeed Selek's "intellectual" class, within which knowledge is produced and legitimized through the secular

[31] I discuss M. Jacqui Alexander's theorization of palimpsestic time in more detail in chapter three when I critique the contemporary politics of mainstream ethnographic representation that conveniently ignores the transnational circulation of sexological ideologies. For more on Alexander's palimpsestic time, see *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2006).

epistemic prism of the earlier queer and feminist theory, that precludes her from reading the specificities of the local in its own terms and instead leads her to explicate the ontology of the South through the epistemological lens of the North. From Nezahualcóyotl, Mexico to Salvador, Brazil to Istanbul, Turkey, geographies, researchers, subjects, and political/socio-cultural circumstances change; however, as it turns out, theory remains the same, reifying its universality and masking, at the same time, its ideological and colonial investments. But what if the stories and case studies were not looked at, to use the etymological sense of the word "theory", through the metaphorical decoders of the North? What sort of decolonial hemispheric dialogues could appear if contiguous cartographies of the Global South did not disappear, through translation, into the language of the Global North's (queer) modernity?

Conclusion: "Transing" Cartographies, Resisting Translations

> "Western experts in anthropology, linguistics, and history regularly venture into the village. Unlike us, they have the right to observe the different bouis-bouis in the area for their academic research in order to enrich the register of knowledge about other cultures. I find the abuses produced at every level truly troubling. Our countries, our villages continue to venerate the feats and successes of Western cultures. They're allowed to transgress all the codes of our customs, but we cannot. Their excuse is that they're foreigners and researchers."
>
> Frieda Ekotto, *Don't Whisper Too Much*[32]

Throughout this chapter I have critiqued Prieur, Kulick, and Seleck for their hegemonic

[32] Frieda Ekotto's groundbreaking novel *Chuchote pas trop* (2005), translated by Corine Tachtiris as *Don't Whisper Too Much* (2019) is set in a Fulani village in Northern Cameroon and tells the story of three generations of women (mothers and daughters) who defy the prevailing conventional norms and the colonial gaze by intimately loving other women.

translation of Global South's cultural difference by which, I have argued, the foreignness of the local is domesticated in Global North's queer terms. Surely this chapter is far from being the first to link translation to the questions of domestication and foreignization. Borrowing from Friedrich Schleiermacher's earlier distinction, Lawrence Venuti (1995), for instance, underscores the ethnocentrism of domestication as a translation strategy, stating that it is "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values, bringing the author back home" (20). According to Venuti, domestication strategy, as opposed to foreignization which, in his view, presents a more ethical approach, prevents the readers from reckoning with the foreignness of the source text by failing "to register the cultural and linguistic difference of the foreign text" (20). Problematizing domestication through translation in this context does not mean uncritically endorsing foreignization as the ethical strategy with which to theorize gendered cultural difference, however, given that translation[33] as a framework and praxis is inevitably complicit in the reproduction of power asymmetries and hegemonic ideologies. Through its metaphorical and analogical transformation of the foreign, translation reinforces, rather than challenges, the teleological reordering of the incommensurable. The equivalence set up comparatively between the source and target culture masks the unequal ideological traffic between the two. The careful faithfulness displayed towards the source culture when it comes to the translation of the Global North's cultural capital into the Global South's cultural difference is not observed when it is the Global South that emerges as the source culture. In other words, when the Global South's empirical reservoir is translated into the Global North's terms, the source culture disappears into the target language.

[33] For a more detailed discussion on/critique of translation, see my Introduction.

Instead of translation then, one could perhaps take up translanguaging[34] as a mode of analysis, which, in contrast to the colonial underpinnings and ideological biases of translation as both a methodology and praxis, has the potential to reckon with the epistemic implications of geographic and cultural difference. To put it another way, translanguaging can offer new forms of reading not conditioned by the metaphorical and analogical impulses of translation, which, within the context of North-South relations, always signifies the emplotment of the South through the North's idiom. In a sense, offering translanguaging as a reading praxis to challenge queer's comparative reflexes is to expose queer theory as what it was and, to a certain extent, still is: not only an anthropological but also a linguistic project whose epistemic loyalty almost always turns out to be to the Global North's cultural capital. Ironically, queer's investment in performativity as a theoretical lens to understand the hegemonic constructions of sex, gender, sexuality, race, religion, and ethnicity loses its critical edge when it comes to foregrounding its performative constitution of the Global South. The ethnic, religious, sexual, gendered, racial, and somatic differences are performatively constructed as the foreign markers of queer's universality in modern times, a process which, in this case, conveniently lacks a critical analysis of performativity as well its material and discursive repercussions. The X of so-called travestis, transsexuals, *jotas*, *vestidas*, and *homosexuales* occupying the cartographies of the Global South is made to tell us something about the Y in the Global North, which, again and again, reiterates the theoretical applicability of the Y regardless of time and space. Translanguaging then can be deployed, I argue, to stress that there is indeed more than one language and that this language (or

[34] In their book *Translation and Translanguaging* (2019), Mike Baynham and Tong King Lee argues that there is a fundamental difference between translation and translanguaging in that while the former is an institutionalized practice, the latter "is a variable, contingent aspect of language in use", language from below (59). I find their distinction very helpful, particularly their investment in "understanding translanguaging as a theoretical lens with which to interrogate translation as applied practice" (6).

better yet, these languages) cannot be reduced to the language of queer modernity. To group different geographies from the Global South under a single referent as I did in this chapter does not, however, mean homogenizing them, nor does it signify, in any way, that they speak the same language, the language of the oppressed, or that they embody the same forms, which would be tantamount to "translating" them and their difference into one another. Rather, this critical gesture aims at revealing the hegemonic ways in which such contiguous cartographies of the Global South are positioned in academic scholarship vis-à-vis the theoretical production of knowledge, which can open up new sites of hemispheric solidarity to problematize the transnational circulation of the Global North's cultural capital in times of colonial modernity.

Chapter 2: Archiving Religious Piety and Trans Identity: Towards a Post-Secular Transfeminism in the Turkish Nation-State

On a scorching summer day in the Mediterranean city of Mersin, Turkey in the early nineties, I remember going to the biggest mosque of the city with my grandmother for a special occasion whose details I barely recall. I was young enough to be allowed entry into the women's prayer area where I always felt both "ambivalent" and "at home" even though my official gender classification would definitively mark me as an outsider in the years to come. I felt at home since I was among other women, yet I was ambivalent since I felt that I could never fully belong in that religious space. On that day, however, I thought for the first time that I was not the only ambivalent outsider there. There was a woman praying, ignoring the inquisitive and appalled looks of other women. Soon these women's questioning gazes turned into hostile murmurs replete with interrogations as to how this woman who "clearly" looked like a man could dare to enter into a religious space exclusively allocated to women. In what other women saw as a source of anxiety and boundary violation, I found a source of affirmation for belonging. Nonetheless, I could not help thinking about why she felt the need to come to that space. I was there because my grandmother took me there (I doubted that I would go if I had a choice) but who or what took that woman there? Why did I even feel the need to question her existence in that quintessentially Islamic space? These questions haunted me for many years and eventually led to more interrogations: Can Islam accommodate trans people? Is the figure of a pious Muslim trans person an oxymoron *par excellence*? Last but not least, what kind of epistemic universe, political positionality, and cultural capital allow for the possibility to pose these questions regarding Islam and pious trans people?

In this chapter, I take up these questions to interrogate how labels such as "political", "strategic", and "activist" are deployed in ways that reproduce exclusionary transgender archives in the Turkish nation-state. First, I engage the theoretical frameworks of various trans and feminist scholars who have made important contributions to the discussions on agency, embodiment, ethics, and post-secular feminist politics. While acknowledging the significance of their contributions, I argue that the limitations of their frameworks in terms of addressing the archival politics vis-à-vis the pious trans people in the Global South point out the need to formulate a post-secular transfeminist analysis. In light of these discussions, I move on to the close reading of Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay's article (2008), which analyzes the statements and performances of Bülent Ersoy, who has been a very popular trans public figure in Turkey since the eighties and who has, to the surprise of many, publicly embraced Islam in the last three decades. My close reading is followed by my analysis of the section on religion and spirituality from the South African Gabrielle Le Roux's activist documentary *Proudly Trans in Turkey* (2012). I show that the kind of transgender religiosity espoused by activist projects and queer scholarship risks foreclosing the possibility of engaging and rendering visible the ethical self-formation of pious trans people in the Turkish nation-state.

Given the political and cultural stakes of this chapter, I should clarify two points. First, the trans people and their narratives analyzed in this chapter pertain to a specific culture and discursive tradition, namely Turkey, and hence are in no way intended to be representative of all trans communities from other Islamic traditions. What one refers to as Islamic tradition is a vastly heterogeneous signifier that displays dramatically distinct characteristics depending, among others, on geography, ethnicity, culture, language, and nationality. This heterogeneity is unambiguously reflected in the multivalent ways trans people embody or distance themselves

from Islam. Secondly, I do not intend to make the argument that pious trans people who embrace Islam and religious discourse do so necessarily with the aim of formulating a subversive interpretation within Islamic tradition or recovering the emancipatory dimensions of a nonliberal tradition. Rather, I argue that one should resist the temptation to take concepts such as subversive, emancipatory, or complicitous as self-evident, highlighting instead their historically and epistemically situated axioms.

A post-secular transfeminist analysis enables one to avoid, in Max Strassfeld's words, "diminishing the possibilities of how we understand both trans and religion" (Wampler 2017). It also allows one to go beyond what I term "diagnostic reading", which can be described as an implicit replication of the medical discourse through secular cultural critique when the subject matter is trans. As I show in this chapter, even antitransphobic and queer/feminist works risk perpetuating a diagnostic reading. They enact this reading praxis by either using trans people as exceptional tropes with which to analyze cultural, religious, political, and economic transformations that a nation undergoes or interpreting trans people's relationship to various forms of institutions and state apparatuses through a subversive-complicit dyad. I contend that adopting a post-secular transfeminist methodology and going beyond the limitations of a diagnostic reading require one not to read certain trans people's reservations about or distance from Islam as the vindication of incommensurability between Islam and trans ontology. It also entails one to refrain from reading the pious espousal of Islam and religious discourse by trans people in the Turkish nation-state as a mere masquerade driven by circumstantial survival strategies.

Secular Transgender Agency and Its Discontents

While the question of agency has been one of the central points of contention among feminist theorists, it has equally shaped the critical terrain of transgender studies since its earliest days. From the anti-trans radical feminist Janice Raymond, who, in her notorious book *The Transsexual Empire* (1994), blamed society "for producing the conditions that create the transsexual body/spirit" (115) to Sandy Stone, who in her groundbreaking posttranssexual manifesto asked "How, then, can the transsexual speak?" (2006: 230), the issue of transgender agency has defined almost every scholarship published on transgender politics. Arguably, no other scholars have made such controversial contributions to these debates as Judith Butler and Jay Prosser, who have positioned themselves on the opposite sides of the discussion. As Prosser argues (2006), "Without doubt…the single text that yoked transgender most fully to queer sexuality is Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*…" (259). In *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler, not very "intentionally", conceptualized transgender and drag as the privileged subjects of queer theory by virtue of their potential to offer subversive forms of homosexuality that can destabilize the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality. Nonetheless, in the very visibility and privilege accorded to the transgender body in Butler's theorization of gender performativity, some transsexual scholars (Prosser 1998; Namaste 2000) saw the erasure of the embodied transsexual subject whose materiality, they argued, disappears under the discursive referent of "transgender". In response to queer theory's reclamation of the transgender as the poster child, Prosser asked: "what are the points at which the transsexual as transgendered subject is not queer?" (2006: 261). In Prosser's reading, Butler's work appropriates the transsexual subject only to decontextualize its material corporeality and create out of this decontextualization a transgender subject with a potentially subversive politics. In other words, the figure of the transsexual with its materiality

and literality constitutes the limits of queer politics represented through the figure of the discursively constructed and subversive transgender. This precarious position of the transsexual in Butler's theory of performativity not only leads, according to Prosser, to the erasure of the transsexual agency which is now read as potentially reinscriptive and literalizing but also serves to valorize the transgender agency as the potential catalyzer of sexual and gender insubordination. However, if Butler's theoretical framework erases the transsexual agency through abstraction and valorizes the subversive modalities of the transgender agency, I argue that Prosser's critique is equally guilty of erasure, one that operates through the concealment of the secular and Western cultural capital that sustains the autonomous agency of the transsexual subject. In his desire to ensure that the referential transsexual subject does not disappear in queer politics, Prosser universalizes the authorial agency of the transsexual subject by locating the transsexual in the secular and sexological archives of the Global North.

When Prosser reclaims autobiography as an empowering genre central to the subjective constitution of the transsexual people, he challenges the disempowering use of autobiography as the only genre through which transsexual people were allowed to speak and become intelligible to a nontranssexual audience. Prosser states that "whether s/he publishes an autobiography or not, then, every transsexual, as a transsexual, is originally an autobiographer" (1998: 101). He goes on to emphasize the centrality of the autobiographical narrative by arguing that "Narrative is also a kind of second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be 'read'" (101). Prosser's description of the transsexual as an original authorial subject is grounded in the transsexual's discursive and material interaction with the clinician's office since, as he argues, "The autobiographical act for the transsexual begins even before the published autobiography– namely in the clinician's office where, in order to be diagnosed as

transsexual, s/he must recount a transsexual autobiography" (101). I argue that it is precisely this spatial and cultural construction of the transsexual agency that centers the secular trans subject of the Global North. In Prosser's framework, transsexual agency only becomes legible and intelligible when read through Western sexological archives. In that sense, Prosser's valorization of the referential transsexuality in response to the transgender's theoretical popularity in queer politics conceals the role of the Western sexological and cultural capital in the formation of the secular transsexual subject. To the extent that Prosser's account of transsexual agency challenges the universality of agency-as-resistance, it does not interrogate the liberal conception of the transsexual as an autonomous being, nor does it problematize the construction of the transsexual as inherently Western. Despite his nuanced critique of the erasure of the transsexual through figuration and abstraction, Prosser creates a transsexual archive composed of raceless, classless, autonomous, and teleological subjects whose narratives (second skins) are engendered by the Global North's secular cultural capital.

Transgendering the Post-Secular Turn in Feminism

Prosser's erasure of the role of colonial and sexological violence in the constitution of the secular transsexual subject highlights the lack of critical frameworks to engage the epistemological challenges posed by the pious trans subject in the Global South. One very productive analytical framework to start theorizing the embodied post-secular trans subject, however, comes from Sabah Mahmood, who, quite ironically, draws on Judith Butler's non-volitional and discursively constructed model of subjectivity to develop her own critique of humanist conceptions of agency and subject (2005: 20-21). Butler's theory of subjectivity, argues Mahmood, allows a broader understanding of norms as conventions that are not only consolidated and/or subverted but also

performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways (22). In her desire "to expand on Butler's insight that norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority" (23), Mahmood moves away from an agonistic framework, which, she argues, characterizes Butler's framework due to its contextual constraints, and instead invests in "think[ing] about the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated" (23). Mahmood's theoretical trajectory opens up two possibilities to reflect on the ethical self-formation of the pious subject. First, by not necessarily locating agency in the political and moral autonomy of the subject (7), it renders intelligible and legible the ethical practices that the pious subject embodies in their docile self-cultivation. Secondly, by disarticulating oppositional consciousness from the politics of agency, it challenges the misreading of piety and docility as lack of politics and false consciousness.

Mahmood's post-secular conception of agency finds its resonance in Rosi Braidotti's call for a post-secular turn in feminist studies where she stresses the need to challenge European feminism by theorizing subjectivity as "a process ontology of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values, and hence also multiple forms of accountability" (2008: 2). Braidotti also continues the project of dissociating agency and subjectivity from the production of counter-subjectivities by locating them in religious piety and/or various affirmative manifestations of spirituality (19). In that sense, both Braidotti and Mahmood[35] view technologies of self and embodied ethical praxes as alternative forms of becoming that force the secular-liberal political capital to reckon with issues of alterity

[35] Mahmood's post-secular conception of agency is more limited than Braidotti's theoretical framework given that the latter acknowledges the posthumanism's relevance to the post-secular turn to reflect on the intersection between political subjectivity and bio-political issues that are not usually categorized within the purview of the secular tradition in feminism.

and epistemic difference. However, not all feminists who write on the relationship between feminist politics and religious piety feel as enthusiastic as Mahmood and Braidotti about the political implications of post-secular agency defined as the affirmative ethics of self-formation. In "The Politics of Postsecular Feminism" (2016), Rosa Vasilaki questions "whether this particular conceptualization of agency [post-secular agency], in close synergy with religion as a matrix for subject formation, can have genuine subversive, counter-hegemonic, conceptual and political effects" (106). Arguing that the post-secular turn predicated on the teleology of cultural incommensurability engenders "a reasoning which embodies 'the disavowal of history itself'" (115-116), Vasilaki states that the post-secular historical moment "does not suggest a substantial turn towards alternative spiritualities but, on the contrary, towards powerful forms of hegemonic religious conservatism" and reactionary forms of subjectivation (110).

Vasilaki's critique of the post-secular turn in feminism as disarmed vis-à-vis the historical and political ramifications of the separation between autonomy and agency (118-119) is grounded in her Eurocentric epistemic universe that takes concepts such as politics, progressive or reactionary as self-evident. Nevertheless, I argue that her critique can be taken to think about the limitations of post-secular feminist frameworks in terms of addressing the archival politics regarding the pious trans people in the Global South. I make this argument for two reasons. First, by prioritizing the category of cissexual/cisgender womani to theorize the power relationships between secular and pious movements/subjects, post-secular feminism becomes vulnerable to the critiques grounded in historiography that suggests that the historical record of religious subjectivities "tends to weigh more on the side of repression and social control than creativity and openness" (Vasilaki 2016: 110). This secular feminist critique can only be justified to the extent that it ignores the reversal of this historical record for trans politics

within which the Eurocentric cultural capital and the Western medical-industrial complex have overdetermined the transsexual as a secular and modern category to the exclusion of the pious trans subject. Hence, a post-secular transfeminist critique, that is, a post-secular feminism that seriously engages the issues of piety and trans identity particularly in the Global South, can show that the historical record of the pious trans subject situated within the intersections of geopolitical, (trans)national and (neo)colonial discourses weighs more on the side of secular and political erasure than social control.

Secondly, by conceptualizing the feminist/queer constitution of transgender archives as a form of secular epistemic violence, a post-secular transfeminist critique can push post-secular feminist frameworks to go beyond their primary focus on the affirmative and ethical self-formation of subjects. This shift away from the subjectival formation towards the archival formation can enable post-secular feminist methodologies to broaden the scope of their analyses and examine the ways in which the secular Eurocentric cultural capital saturates the language of trans politics, discourse, and activism. As I show in the following sections, labels such as strategic, political, and activist perform the ideological work of centering the secular trans subject in Turkey, an archival erasure that a post-secular transfeminist analysis lays bare.

Bülent Ersoy and Strategic Religiosity

In his informative article "Reconstructing the Transgendered Self as a Muslim, Nationalist, Upper-Class Woman: The Case of Bülent Ersoy" (2008), Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay, following

Simone de Beauvoir, traces how Bülent Ersoy[36], a very popular trans public figure referred to as the diva of the Turkish classical music by the mainstream media, "has become a Muslim, nationalist, and an upper-class woman" (2008: 210-11) in light of the neoliberal, nationalist, and conservative transformations that Turkey has gone through since the fascist military *coup d'état* of 1980. (Figure 2) Performance emerges as the key term in the article as Altınay analyzes the multivalent ways in which Ersoy has strategized and performed various hegemonic identities to carve out spaces of tolerance and acceptance in a society that defines her identity as abject. The



Figure 2: "Ersoy poses for the camera in her youth" (left)
Figure 3: "Ersoy in a bathing suit in her youth" (right)

[36] Bülent Ersoy has an extremely important place in the collective memory of the gender and sexual minorities from Turkey due to both her hypervisibility in Turkish visual/print media and her name's widespread association with anything that connotes gender and sexual non-conformity in the country. Like many queer and trans identified people growing up in Turkey, I used to get called "Bülent Ersoy" very frequently when I was bullied for my perceived femininity. Her name is used, in some cissexist and heterosexist circles of the society, as a form of insult similar to how faggot is used in English.

seemingly descriptive nature of his analytical framework, however, obscures the performative politics of his queer/feminist scholarship, which, informed by the secular Eurocentric cultural capital, determines the boundaries of what counts as acceptable trans religious performance in Turkey. (Figure 3) By characterizing Ersoy's performances as emanating from her interested desire to mirror the increasingly conservative public and political climate, Altınay's secular queer analysis leaves little room for understanding the complexity of Ersoy's subjectivity outside of a subversive-complicit dyad. This becomes particularly problematic when Altınay does not discuss how Ersoy embodies Islam and religion outside of her "interested" desire to be accepted. Instead, Altınay overemphasizes the tactics, performances, and strategies that Ersoy deploys to construct an image of a pious Muslim woman. This theoretical framework not only replicates a long tradition of diagnostic reading performed by critical theorists with its undertones of deceptive, complicit, and/or tropological transsexual[37] but also suggests that the figure of a pious Muslim trans person is at best a tactical masquerade.

Critiquing Ersoy's problematic silence on the atrocities committed by the military regime against trans people and sex workers in the post-coup political atmosphere on the grounds that she "was the only person who had the power to have her voice heard", Altınay states that "…she [Ersoy] was clearly rejecting transgenderism as an opportunity to deny established gender codes. She desired only to be accepted as a woman. She did not have any intention to fight against heterosexism either" (2008: 214). (Figure 4) In another instance, Altınay again critiques Ersoy for not resisting the hegemonic gender norms when he argues that "…Ersoy has internalized the

[37] Julia Serano (2007) elaborates on the trope of the deceptive transsexual in her critique of the dominant cultural and medical representations of trans women. Vek Lewis (2009) also examines how the trope of the deceptive transsexual operates in his analysis of the dating reality show *There's Something about Miriam.*

restrictive discourses on gender and the body rather than resisting them" (222). In Altınay's secular epistemic universe, what seems to characterize a good trans subject is ultimately their desire and radical intentionality to subvert gender norms. A subversive trans subject who resists and exercises their agency to challenge the social norms is privileged while a complicit trans



Figure 4: "Ersoy is detained and incarcerated in an increasingly conservative society"

subject who embodies the norms and traditions either strategizes for personal interests or suffers from false consciousness. This characterization has been pervasive, as Prosser reminds us (1998), not only in transphobic radical feminist and constructionist analyses but also in certain strands of feminist and queer theory. As Prosser points out, whether these analyses celebrate "the transsexual" as deliteralizing and transgressive or they condemn "the transsexual" as literalizing and reinscriptive, "the referential transsexual subject can frighteningly disappear in his/her very invocation" (1998: 14-15). In Altınay's reading, the epistemic erasure of the referential

transsexual is coupled with the secular erasure of the pious trans docility. Ersoy's transness is reduced to a strategic and literalizing theatrical performance on the grounds that she willingly pays lip service to Turkey's heteropatriarchal gender norms. Furthermore, because her performance is characterized by her hypocritical and deceptive discourse, the authenticity and sincerity of her commitments, particularly religious commitments, become debatable.

Altınay discusses Ersoy's performance of strategic religiosity once again with the secular hermeneutics of suspicion when he analyzes her decision to recite the *adhan*, which is called out by a muezzin (who is traditionally a cisgender man) five times a day from a mosque to summon Muslims for prayer (Figure 5). Altınay argues that "By reciting the *adhan* in Arabic, Ersoy asserted her identity as a conservative Muslim…This gave Ersoy the opportunity to reaffirm her faith in Islam and also have others reaffirm her gender identity as a woman" (2008: 217). This



Figure 5: "Ersoy wears a headscarf"

argument implies that Altınay considers Ersoy's pious Islamic identity relevant only insofar as it enables her to gain social acceptance in Turkey's fast-changing neoliberal landscape. Ersoy's decision to recite the *adhan* in Arabic instead of Turkish and to use a vocabulary abundant in Ottoman words is read as an indication of Ersoy's strategic rejection of modernity to perform a conservative and pious Muslim identity (217-18). At this juncture, one wonders why one cannot interpret Ersoy's lexical and linguistic preferences not as performances conditioned by circumstantial necessities but rather as manifestations of her desire to embody the norms of Islam and claim a religious space that has been systematically denied to cis and trans women as well as trans men? Why does Altınay read her religious and conservative performances as ironically strategic rejections of modernity and queer/transgender identity on the grounds that transsexuality and queer theory were made possible through modern epistemologies and medical technologies (218), when one can instead read modernity and Western identity categories as an alibi for the neocolonial universalization of a particular secular Western episteme? Altınay's diagnostic reading diminishes the possibilities of understanding Ersoy's relationality to Islamic space and temporality by reducing her piety and religious praxes to self-interested strategic performances.

The idea that Ersoy's conservative Muslim identity is a contingent phenomenon is further underscored when Altınay contends that "As the importance of nationalism and Islam in Turkish public discourse has increased since 1980s, the significance of these elements in Ersoy's construction of her own identity has increased as well" (2008: 220). This argument shares a similarity with Annick Prieur's explanation of *jotas'* and *vestidas'* femininity in the ethnographic

research that she conducted in Mexico City in the late eighties and early nineties[38]. In that research, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Prieur theorizes the femininity of *jotas* and *vestidas* as emanating from these identities' resistance to symbolic violence (1998: 34, 140-41). However, as Vek Lewis insightfully argues, Prieur's theorization of *jotas'* and *vestidas'* femininity renders *jotas* and *vestidas* "as highly contingent phenomena which in a different set of variables would not and need not exist" (Lewis 2006). Similarly, Altınay's discussion of Ersoy as a tropological trans figure mirroring the transformations that Turkey has gone through implies that in a different cultural context with different political, social, and economic changes, Ersoy would not and need not be pious. In other words, Ersoy's pious religiosity can only be strategic and tactical, a circumstantial necessity that can be "diagnosed" through a secular constructionist queer lens.

Proudly Activist and (Ir)religious in Turkey

Designed by the South African artist Gabrielle Le Roux in collaboration with Amnesty International Turkey and two Turkish trans organizations, Istanbul LGBTT and Pembe Hayat, *Proudly Trans in Turkey* (2012) is an activist art project that includes eighteen videos and seventeen portraits by Le Roux. The videos include interviews with trans activists in Turkey that touch on themes such as religion, hate crimes, activism, family, and work. In this section, I close read a specific portion of these video interviews where the trans activists respond to the open-ended question "What is the role of religion and spirituality in your life?" and discuss its implications within the larger framework of Le Roux's activist art project. As their responses reveal, the trans activists relate to religion, in general, and Islam, in particular, in distinct and

[38] For a more detailed critique of the epistemological framework Annick Prieur uses in her research in Mexico, see chapter 1

dynamic ways. Their relationality is inflected by, among other things, their activism, family, class position, ethnicity, geography, lived experience, and political affiliation. While some respondents state that Islam or other religions are not compatible with their trans existence and *Weltanschauung*, others critique orthodox interpretations of Islam, challenging various forms of violence and marginalization inflicted in the name of religion. On the surface, Le Roux's activist and collective art project represents the rich diversity and multidimensional aspects of trans religiosity and activism in Turkey. However, I argue that her project raises serious issues that need to be analyzed through a post-secular transfeminist lens. First, Le Roux universalizes the secular feminist conceptualization of agency and portrays a diverse group of urban political activists who speak the global and Eurocentric language of queer and feminist politics as the true representatives of trans diversity in Turkey. Secondly, Le Roux's positionality as a white South African artist and human rights activist who created similar engaged multimedia projects before in the Global South enables her to transform the language of resistance into the language of neoliberal consumption by tying the national trans activism to the global and universal language of human rights. Finally, by ignoring the tensions between the rural and the urban as well as the regional and the national/global, Le Roux's archival politics misreads secular cultural capital as diversity and erases the pious trans people whose docility and lack of "subversive" politics are deemed unfit for the transnational and global circulation.

Le Roux's use of strategic diversity and collective project is praised by Cüneyt Çakırlar (2017) in his article on the documentary LGBTQ narratives from Turkey. Çakırlar argues that "The ethic of collaborative ethnography, the primary address aimed at activists, and strategic diversity in Le Roux's activist practice intervene in 'a politics of pity…[that] situates the sufferer as passive and the one who observes the suffering as obliged to act" (2017: 10). While Çakırlar is

right in his argument that the contemporary rights-based ethnographic documentaries produced for the consumption of the Global North base their representational framework on victimhood (11) and that Le Roux's politics of representation is not driven by the savior complex, he does not analyze the ways in which the ethnographic gaze also manifests itself through the secular constitution of agency, language, and cultural capital. The project's strategic diversity operates as an alibi for the simultaneous erasure of pious trans people who are not "political" and who do not have the cultural capital to speak the language of resistance and subversion. In this context, the label "political", as Evren Savcı argues, is structured through the logic and vocabulary of neoliberalism and perpetuates other forms of normativities and exclusions (2016: 373). The urban trans activists display their political agency and oppositional consciousness through their critical conceptualization of Islam. Their critical language, regardless of whether they embrace Islam or not, confers on them an intelligible political positionality. In that sense, diversity, which has been rightly critiqued as a tool of neoliberalism for adopting a flattened version of difference and obscuring the structural workings of racism (Ahmed 2012; Mohanty 2013), renders illegible the lived experiences of pious trans people whose ethical self-formations do not fit the parameters of secular agency and autonomy assumed to be cross-cultural and immanent to the trans subject. In other words, strategic diversity, to slightly misquote Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, preserves the secular trans subject of the Global North or the secular Global North as subject by confirming, through a "diverse" and urban trans representation from Turkey, the universality of trans people's autonomy and sovereign agency.

The responses in the video to the open-ended question "What is the role of religion and spirituality in your life?" indicate the multivalent ways in which the language and cultural capital of the secular Global North is translated into an Islamicate national context by the urban trans

activists. (Figure 6) One of the interviewees, Destina, who identifies as a conservative Muslim, says: "I consider myself religious and conservative although I do not fulfill the religious duties perfectly….Religion and spirituality play a major role in my life because I think that I have overcome many difficulties thanks to my belief"[39] (AI Turkey 2012). Similarly to Destina, Selay



Figure 6: "Destina talks about the role of religion in her life"

also identifies as a believer in Islam. Moreover, she harshly condemns the brutalities and atrocities committed in its name: "I believe in Islam and Allah. I always pray to Allah. I believe in our prophet and other things too but I do not believe in what they call Islam in 2011. If it is Islam, I am not a Muslim" (AI Turkey 2012). (Figure 7) Selay's critique of how certain radical groups abuse Islam in the contemporary world is followed by her discussion of how "her" Islam is based

[39] All the translations in this chapter are mine unless stated otherwise.

on tolerance, compassion, altruism, and nonviolence. One can argue that Selay's and Destina's

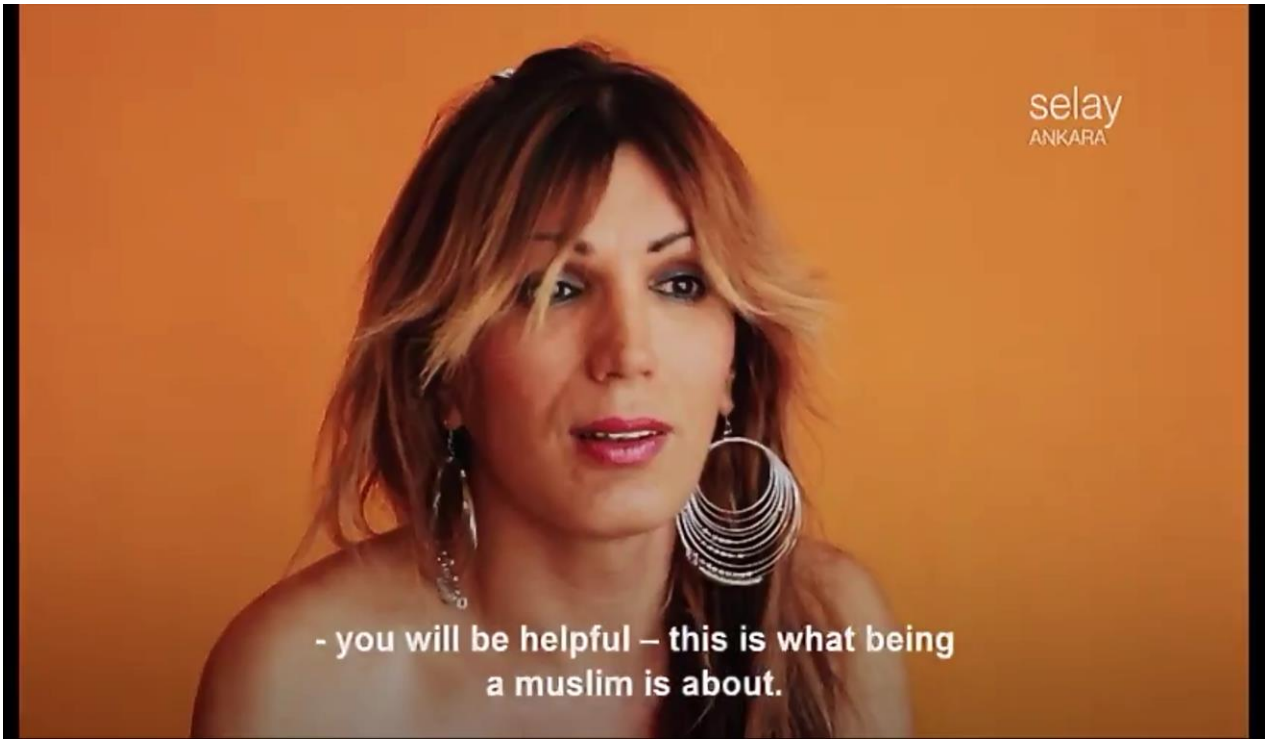


Figure 7: "Selay discusses her understanding of Islam"

discourses about Islam can be read as manifestations of the minoritized subjects' attempts to disidentify with an orthodox and hegemonic religious tradition[40]. Their disidentificatory praxes can be compared to those of secular Muslim feminist writers who reclaim oral tradition to intervene in the supposedly closed debates in Islamic religious literature. Fatima Mernissi, for example, describes the Islam she inherited from her grandmother as "an occasion to journey to strange countries, to spread one's wings, and to discover love and enlightenment there" (1991: 63). Leila Ahmed also elaborates on the notion of Islam as an oral and aural heritage passed down from women to women through generations (1999: 125). In the same vein as secular Muslim feminists,

[40] In his book *Disidentifications: Queers Of Color And The Performance Of Politics* (1999) José Esteban Muñoz discusses in detail the concept of disidentification by which he refers to the survival strategies that minoritized subjects practice in order to negotiate and navigate phobic/punitive majoritarian spheres (4).

Selay and Destina understand Islam in a way that enables them to confront the contemporary radical Muslims' amnesia and recreate a world in which they can spread their wings. Their self-reflexivity in relation to their critical embrace of Islam is informed by their activist language, cultural capital, urban location, and politics of resistance. Their acceptance of Islam does not disarticulate agency from autonomy or oppositional consciousness.

Selay's and Destina's feelings toward Islam and religion seem to be, on the surface, completely different from those of Esmeray, who says: "I do not think that any religion will make me happy. I feel like religion is the opium of the people" (AI Turkey 2012). (Figure 8) Having grown up in a Kurdish family in the city of Kars, a geography influenced, as she claims, by the political climate of the Soviet Union, Esmeray adopts an agnostic approach, claiming that we do not and cannot know whether Allah exists or not: "The only thing we know is that we want to be happy together in this world. That is what I believe in" (AI Turkey 2012). According



Figure 8: "Esmeray talks about her approach to religion"

to Esmeray, Islamic identity, in particular, and religious identity, in general, are not means through which her utopian and revolutionary vision can be realized. In her epistemic universe, religiosity emerges as a deterrent to the realization of that collectivist vision. In other words, for Esmeray, Islam turns out to be a category irreconcilable with her lived experience, activism, trans identity, and political objectives. Esmeray's irreligious positionality in the video complements the religiosity espoused by the other trans interviewees and thus serves to highlight Le Roux's commitment to strategic diversity. However, it is precisely this strategic diversity that erases the difference and re-centers the "same", that is, secular political agency. This erasure is enacted through a misreading of secular cultural capital as (ir)religious diversity, which, in turn, overdetermines the possibilities of inhabiting a religious trans positionality. Basing the strategic diversity on the conflation of the secular Muslim trans activists with the pious trans people, Le Roux's activist project archives urban trans politics, activist language, and secular trans cultural capital at the expense of trans people whose ethical self-constitution dissociates agency from the language of resistance and subversion.

Le Roux's prioritization of urban trans activists in her collaborative project also raises issues as regards the divisions between the rural and the urban as well as the regional and the national. Çakırlar argues that "Rather than attempting to entirely contain the trans identity under the national referent of Turkey, [Le Roux's] project's core aim is to work with activists and address their struggle by creating a horizontal ethnographic setting…" (2017: 8). I give credit to Le Roux for creating a horizontal ethnographic setting within which the trans activists are not used as tools to provide decontextualized and generalized information about what it means to be a trans person in Turkey. The setting enables the trans activists to share their wisdom and diverse forms of activist politics without appealing to the Global North's savior complex. However, the

creation of this horizontal ethnographic space only becomes possible, I argue, through various forms of geopolitical and secular erasures, which challenges the claim that this multimedia project does not entirely contain the trans identity under the national referent of Turkey. First, Le Roux, by emphasizing the urban as the center of trans political life, conceptualizes the urban spaces in Turkey as the teleological and secular sites of modernity that have the potential to enable the political formation of so-called "rural" trans subjects. The presence of a horizontal ethnographic setting conceals the role of the Eurocentric cultural capital and political language in engendering trans people's self-identification as secular national/transnational activists in urban spaces. Secondly, Le Roux's collaborative project couples oppositional political consciousness with urban geopolitics while privileging the secular trans public cultures of Turkey's global cities whose representational powers gain their currency through national and global referents. By reinforcing the link between urban secular political consciousness and national/transnational forms of activism, Le Roux's activist project leaves unquestioned how the absence of the nonmetropolitan and rural pious trans subject is central to the construction and global consumption of this horizontal ethnographic space.

Cultural Imperialism and the (In)visible Humans of Rights Discourse

In *Proudly Trans in Turkey*, the question of erasure is also obscured through the language of activist visibility, global human rights struggles, collaboration, and transnational solidarity. Berfu Şeker, in her interview with Le Roux on this multimedia project, defines Le Roux as a human rights activist whose work transcends boundaries (2013: 252). In the interview, Şeker notes that Le Roux created and designed a similar project with African transgender activists in 2008, titled *Proudly African and Transgender*, and that while she was in Turkey in 2010 to attend an

exhibition on this project, she got an invitation from transgender activists to create an analogous collaborative work (251). To emphasize the collaborative and collective nature of her project, Le Roux stresses that Amnesty International Turkey and two Turkish trans organizations, Istanbul LGBTT and Pembe Hayat, will collectively own the copyrights to display the reproductions of the portraits of the trans activists in future exhibitions (266). Le Roux's ethics of collaboration and collective work underscores her desire to avoid being seen as a white cisgender non-Turkish speaking outsider with a vested interest in looking in and extracting information from her subjects in the Global South (258). Nonetheless, Le Roux's project's implication in the global neoliberal systems of LGBTQ funding and international human rights discourses as well as the transnational implications of her decontextualized and analogic activist praxes raise questions about the ethical foundations of her work and the excluded subjects of her "inclusive" secular politics.

In her critique of moral egalitarianism, Judith Butler argues that it "is restricted and ordered by modern cultural and technological frames that determine in advance who or what can appear as the subject of equality" (2009: xix). What Butler means is that not everybody can be situated within the egalitarian discourse and that certain bodies and subjects are relegated to the status of ungrievability. Hence, the modern Western citizen-subject emerges based on the grievability of their body as opposed to the disappearance of the non-Western subject whose body cannot be publicly mourned and who cannot count as "human". One can contend that this critical interrogation of moral egalitarianism also creates implications for the presupposed applicability of the concept of human rights and its multiple political manifestations. Human rights discourses obscure the exclusionary and imperial undertones of rights discourse while

failing to address the questions of "what counts as human" and "how the category of the human normatively functions".

In her article "'Woman' as Theatre: United Nations Conference on Women, Beijing 1995" (1996), Spivak also underscores the ethical problems of human rights discourse by arguing that United Nations Conferences on women, organized with the aim of promoting women's rights as human rights, can be regarded as a global theatre staged to show participation between the North and the South, the latter constituted by Northern discursive mechanisms and power networks. In other words, the North organizes a South (2). In this hegemonic and manipulative organization, what is left out is "the poorest women of the South as self-conscious critical agents, who might be able to speak through those very non-governmental organizations of the South that are not favored by these object-constitution policies" (2). The UN, according to Spivak, supports the kind of women's development programs that are nurtured by post-fordism (3). "The small is beautiful of post-fordism", which emerges as a result of the silencing of the radical criticism of small-scale conscientized/disempowered women who have the potential of resisting, building and working with the big, creates a post-fordist small that despite giving the impression of being de-centered, helps the centralization of capital (3). Similarly to the designation of the normative category of human, Spivak reveals that these UN conferences define "who qualifies as woman and what that woman must think in order to represent the woman who is to be empowered" (3). Showing that these international women's rights conferences are detached from the specificities and cultural differences of the local, Spivak argues that the debates in these conferences will never have the desired consequences in the lifeworld of oppressed and exploited women. The connection between state- and local-level implementation and the legal force of UN documents is a moot issue and one very possible result

of these conferences is that the Third World women are homogenized, classified, and matronized by white, hegemonic, and diasporic feminists (4).

Echoing Spivak's discussion of the issues and dangers at stake when dealing with women's rights as human rights discourse, Inderpal Grewal points out that policy and action require addressing localized and transnational specificities that created gender inequalities (1999: 337). As she rightly underscores, concepts of economic and social justice rather than rights may provide more productive and egalitarian alternatives in many such contexts (337). These alternatives seem even more urgent and needed when one casts a critical eye on the promotion of women's rights as human rights as an offshoot of human rights regimes because these regimes "refer to the network of power and knowledge that have inserted such discourses into geopolitics" (337). Hence, as Grewal argues, women's rights as human rights as a naturalized regime of knowledge must be critiqued through a critical lens so that one can dismantle "the operations of power in relation to the knowledge formation that are emerging in the contexts of globalization at the turn of the century" (338). She contends that before the popularization of human rights discourse, the idea of development in the Third World used the West as a model or progress and thus "implied a linear, environmentally destructive model of change based on Enlightenment notions", which then led to a decline in the living standards of women in most Third World countries (338). In that sense, human rights discourse can be seen as a replacement for the concept of development "to ensure the continued authority of knowledge production by the 'developed world' of the 'developing world' within the existing capitalist international-national system" (338). In other words, the South becomes the Other. The North is depicted as enjoying human rights while the South still needs to achieve them (338). Questioning whether the legal instruments of human rights can bring about social justice on a worldwide scale, Grewal

argues that the women's rights as human rights discourse serves to universalize the category of women. However, as Grewal underscores, the subjectivity of the individuals categorized under the label of women is not solely constructed by gender (341). Therefore, trying to bring the Third World women under the umbrella of "common tradition" only serves to homogenize and victimize the disempowered Third World women while not only benefiting the Global North's imperial interests but also reinforcing the asymmetries of power that shape global circumstances.

Grewal's article powerfully speaks to Charlotte Bunch's problematic discussion of women's human rights. Referring to the first African Women's Leadership Institute, Bunch states as follows: "the fact that over three hundred women applied to spend three weeks there speaks volumes about both the *growth* of feminism in the region and the seriousness of women's commitments to it" (2001: 129, emphasis mine). What does it mean to talk about "growth" within this context? Does it imply that the Third World women are finally gaining feminist consciousness that has been present in Western feminists for a long time? One can interpret this as a striking example of the epistemic violence that Spivak points out. The Global North always appears as the Subject in human rights discourses shaped by liberal multiculturalism and cultural imperialism. Furthermore, Bunch's argument that "one of the universalities of the feminist struggle is the commonality of our opposition" (130) reduces the oppression of all women to their gendering process. Even though she seems to acknowledge the differences of the local and the specificities of the transnational, this acknowledgement takes place within hegemonic human rights discourse and does not create a productive site where the local can inform the so-called innocent global in non-hegemonic ways. Her hypothesis that the attention to diversity should also provide the basis for creating more inclusive strategies for the future as well as her assertion that diverse, local, and particularized women's movements are the grounds upon which any

global activity must build (132) are characterized by the discourse of liberal multiculturalism, which, as one can argue, never operates independently of the Global North's imperial episteme. Even though she tries to avoid falling into the trap of false universalization through the incorporation of local differences in her approach, she perpetuates the model of multicultural progress that unwittingly relegates certain local contexts to anachronistic time. Basing her assumptions on the possibility of solidarities that can be secured through the encouragement of a global feminism framework integrated into human rights regime, she problematically assumes that "women's human rights is an example of the kind of mobilization that is necessary to translate international human rights standards into local social and political practice" (145). Therefore, in the end, her attempts to examine the pejorative names the Third World feminists get called in their respective countries in her search for finding solidarity and commonality between women remain far from addressing the multivalent forms of epistemic violence rampant in international women's rights as human rights discourses.

One must acknowledge, however, that critiquing human rights discourses whether they are globally mobilized for women's rights or trans rights, as in the case of *Proudly Trans in Turkey*, is far from being easy. As Grewal states, "how can one be against the use of human rights as a tool for women [and LGBTQ individuals] across the world, when it is clear that non-dominant groups are using it as well?" (338, parenthetical additions mine). Human rights discourses have become such widespread conceptual tools that it is hardly possible to reflect on anything but the good that comes with them. Furthermore, such a critique might also risk overlooking the ways in which human rights discourses have opened up new sites of possibilities for certain marginalized and disenfranchised groups in different contexts. However, it would also be naïve, to say the least, to mobilize human rights discourses for anticolonial political agendas

without taking into account the ways in which they not only are implicated in imperial networks of power but also reinforce the hegemony of the Global North's subject positions. As Butler's, Spivak's, and Grewal's discussions reveal, human rights discourses are inevitably exclusionary when framed within a global context shaped by cultural imperialism and asymmetrical power relations. Furthermore, when coupled with neoliberal LGBTQ funding structures, human rights discourses end up sanitizing the paternalistic and imperial history of financial capital as well as its concomitant politics of visibility.

Such neoliberal financialization of activism in the Global South comes to the fore in Şeker's interview when Le Roux states that thanks to the contributions of Amnesty International Turkey, *Proudly Trans in Turkey* has more financial support than her previous project, *Proudly African and Transgender* (2013: 266). This portrayal of Amnesty International Turkey as a benevolent and generous supporter of human rights activists, in general, and trans activists, in particular, sanitizes the operations of AI in the Global South as well as the political implications of this collaboration. Given that Amnesty International is an organization with a history of anti-communism that continues to permeate their work, biased reporting in devastated war regions in the Global South (especially in Syria), and exploitative labor policies that have resulted in strikes in Turkey, one needs to interrogate at what cost, for the benefit of whom, and to the exclusion of whom, AI Turkey funds Le Roux's activist project and politics of visibility. What kind of cultural capital and political language are required to be visible as a trans activist in an AI-funded activist project? What political work does solidarity perform in this context? The invisibility of pious trans people who do not speak the secular language of global human rights constitutes the outer limits of Le Roux's activist archive. In this case, solidarity emerges as a diverse network consolidated through transnational neoliberal capital and predicated on the secular conceptions

of autonomous agency and resistance. In other words, solidarity works as an alibi for the concurrent merging of neoliberal financial capital, liberal cosmopolitanism, and secular cultural capital.

Conclusion

At this point, a few clarifications are in order. First, a post-secular transfeminist critique does not romanticize the peripheral and tangential relationship of the rural and the regional to the nation-state. As Gayatri Gopinath argues, the rural and the regional can be used to decenter and destabilize the dominant nationalist frameworks by "foregrounding 'other' narratives that tell an entirely different story of gender, sexuality, and nationalist subjectivity" (2008: 343). However, as Gopinath also reminds, their minoritized position vis-à-vis the nation-state does not mean that these spaces are "irreducibly particular [or] self-closed" but that "they are produced precisely by the collision of the local, the national, and the transnational" (343). In other words, pious trans people who do not occupy urban spaces or who have a tangential relationship with the ideological nation-state apparatuses cannot be understood as irreducibly particular or untouched by the global/transnational circulation of ideologies. In the same vein as urban trans political activists, rural pious trans people negotiate the local, the national, and the global processes in their ethical self-formation even though this negotiation does not follow the secular and "political" constitution of agency-as-resistance. Secondly, a post-secular transfeminist critique does not necessarily have an epistemic investment in "unearthing" alternative cartographies of gendered or queer resistance to the national and global discursive traditions that the Western secular feminism considers nonliberal. Obviously, the perlocutionary effects of some pious trans people's embodied praxes might be "politically" intelligible to the extent that they fit the

parameters of the trans activist language. However, it may well be that some of them embody and inhabit the politics in terms that are not easily translatable to the language of the secular trans politics. Hence, I argue, the primary epistemic concern of a post-secular transfeminist critique is archival in that rather than prioritizing how the "recovered" post-secular trans subject might offer us a new lens to understand trans religiosity and alternative forms of agency, which, as Rosalind Morris reminds us, would be tantamount to the replication of the masculine-imperialist ideology (2010: 3), it interrogates what work the labels "activist", "strategic", and "political" perform in the vocabulary of the secular trans politics as well as what kind of erasures/exclusions these labels authorize.

By focusing on the ways in which the Eurocentric secular cultural capital is translated into an Islamicate context to determine what counts as politically acceptable trans religious performance, a post-secular transfeminist critique allows us to archive the transnational cartographies of secular erasure as well as the polyvocality of trans (ir)religiosity. As I show in this chapter, trans people's narratives and performances reveal not only the irreducible heterogeneity of how they embody or refuse Islam but also the role of political/activist language in their embodied praxes. Analyzing their positions on the matter of religion outside of the secular prism of diagnostic reading opens up new and productive ways of thinking through this heterogeneity. Such a post-secular transfeminist analysis then ensures that the referential pious trans subject does not "disappear".

Chapter 3: Ethnographic Documentarists into Ventriloquists: Colonial Erasure of Gender-Variant Subjects and Transnational Politics of Representation

> "It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations."
>
> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

"Leave me alone and let me down" says Orson in response to the insisting requests by Dan Horn, one of the most talented and renowned ventriloquists in the world, to come out of his box and become a part of the "show time" in Horn's 1988 stand-up comedy performance[41]. Orson, a witty and flirtatious character created by Horn, needs to do a show and entertain the audience who enthusiastically watches and applauds the dramatic as well as ironic dialogues that take place between Horn and his "buddy" Orson. Orson fights with Horn, sarcastically argues with him, challenges his demands/requests, and tries, often successfully, to outwit his master. "I want you to know that you made my night, *a lot longer*" says Orson satirically to the audience before he is forced by Horn to get back into the box at the end of his eleven-minute performance. The audience applauds this spectacular performance of ventriloquism where Horn demonstrates his amazing ability to "throw" his voice. As a result of Horn's masterful technique of

[41] "The Best Ventriloquist in the World -1988- Dan Horn & Orson", *Youtube*. Retrieved December 12, 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQcwJTn_FHM

ventriloquism, Orson appears as an authentic persona who has his own voice, epistemologically in line with a colonial mode of representation, leaving behind few reasons to doubt his position as a proper speaking subject in the performative space of the stage. Despite the perfect illusion of his illocutionary/perlocutionary authenticity, however, Orson is a product of ventriloquism, his voice coming not from "elsewhere" but from Horn's stomach. Ironically, the more authentic and real Orson's voice sounds, the more this serves as an evidence of Horn's powerful mastery and control, testifying to his admirable ability to utilize his technical and cognitive skills. This ironic dimension of ventriloquism, which only serves to further the agenda of the master, is, strikingly, what secures its uneasy yet robust connection with "representational politics". When ventriloquism is mastered and representation is politically corrected, the agenda of the subject-in-control remains intact if not rendered even more invisible and subtle. Hence, looking at the production of knowledge and performance by masterful acts of ventriloquism and representation, one can see a more subtle and invisible form of erasure, an epistemic one that preserves the master as well as the master's economic, political, and cultural capital as the Subject/norm.

Drawing on this analogy between ventriloquism and representation, this chapter uses a transnational methodology to analyze two documentaries, Jewish-American Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* (1990) and Iranian-American Tanaz Eshaghian's *Be Like Others* (2008). Through its transnational reading of these two works, this chapter argues that Tanaz Eshaghian, in her "benevolent" attempt to critique the discrimination and ostracization faced by so-called homosexual individuals in Iran, re-inscribes transsexuality as pre-modern fundamentalism and silences Iranian transsexual individuals through ventriloquizing and (mis)representation. This silencing deploys the conventions of colonial ethnographic documentary systematically used by Western ethnographers and filmmakers in their projects on indigenous/local gender-variant

communities. These projects, in turn, shape and structure the frames of subaltern representations. In this asymmetrical power dyad, the layers and levels of strategic self-effacement and masquerade are curiously conditioned by the national and cultural positionality of the two filmmakers. Whereas the outsider positionality, as in the case of Jennie Livingston, is rendered invisible through a strategic self-effacement that enables the illusion of self-representing cultural others, the semi-insider positionality, as in the case of Eshaghian, "confers" on her the right to not only portray but also "judgingly" evaluate, through a colonial lens, the culture and the marginalized subjects of her work. In other words, while the former effaces the asymmetrical cultural and economic relationships, the latter leaves unproblematized its unwitting subscription to colonial ideologies and neocolonial modes of representation. Notwithstanding their differences on paper in terms of their approach and hermeneutical stances, a comparative analysis of these different geographic and discursive regimes (USA and Iran) can offer critical insights into the ways in which these colonial forms of representation perpetuate the Global North's voyeuristic gaze as well as the teleological/tropological (mis)representations. This chapter argues that a critical transnational analysis can reveal the global connections of the epistemic erasure produced by these seemingly national forms of representation and ventriloquizing.

Aesthetic versus Political Representation: Rethinking the Discursive Structures of *Paris Is Burning*

Representation as a form of hegemonic ventriloquizing is far from being a new analogy. For the last three decades postcolonial and transnational feminist studies have pointed out the ways in which representational politics as ventriloquizing, even when pursued by radical and progressive

intellectuals, has been implicated in colonial ideologies**.** In her field launching essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak compares the epistemic violence that follows from the representational politics of the radical intellectuals of the Global North, namely Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, to the ramifications of the British colonial discourses on the positionality of Hindu *sati* women. This comparison seems odd if not irrelevant at first sight because on the one side of the juxtaposition are two benevolent radical intellectuals who speak for and represent the interests of the oppressed and colonized Third World communities while on the other side are located the British colonizers with their patronizing and paternalistic civilizing mission that replicates the recurring paradigm of "White men saving brown women from brown men" (1988: 297). However, as Spivak points out, what unites these two seemingly incommensurable discursive frameworks is in fact their rhetorical conflation of aesthetic and political structures of representation. Undoubtedly, political forms of representation are almost always influenced by aesthetic dimensions; politics is after all powerfully driven by structural and historical conditions of real bodies in the social domain, which underscores the inevitability of the cross-pollination between the two. What becomes problematic though is when the aesthetic is filtered through a political lens and presented under the totalizing weight of politico-cultural concerns. In theory, aesthetic and aesthetic representation are assumed to foreground their statuses as "re-presentation of the real, whereas political representation denies this structure of representation" (Morton 2003: 57). In the representational discourses of Foucault and Deleuze, however, re-presentation of the real turns into a political representation. They overlook their implication as intellectuals in the discourse that they are producing and fail to critique their subject positions from which they represent the Third World political agents. In Spivak's terms, they take part in "a masquerade in which the intellectual as an 'absent nonrepresenter […] lets

the oppressed speak for themselves'" (Spivak quoted in Morton: 57). The result of this masquerade is not only the homogenization of the Global South but also the transparent and coherent postulation of a Third World subject that can perform, act, and reclaim their voice in accordance with the structures of political representation. What gets lost in this postulation is the very voice of the represented whose assumed transparency obscures their lack of access to Global North's intellectual discourses.

Furthermore, Spivak contends that "British colonial representation of widow self-immolation overlooks the voice and agency of Hindu women" (Morton: 63). In reality, the practice of widow self-immolation is not imposed or rendered compulsory by Hindu religious codes or conventions; this practice is textually conceptualized as "an exceptional signifier of the woman's conduct as a good wife" (63). Although this practice is not a religious obligation, nor an indispensable imposition of Hindu culture on women, British colonial discourses represent the *sati* women as tragic victims of their cultures by "absolutely identifying, within discursive practice, good-wifehood with self-immolation on the husband's pyre" (63). The "exceptional signifier" gets lost in the colonial translations of this Hindu cultural dimension into the colonizer's target context. The self-proclaimed benevolent colonial power aesthetically (read politically) represents the "tragic" victims of the so-called primitive and patriarchal Hindu culture and sees it as its rightful duty to deploy its civilizing agenda to save these poor brown women. Therefore, the practice of *sati* is outlawed by the British colonial government in 1829 (63). What disappears from the archives and representative discourses is again the voice of the Third World women (Hindu women in this case) who is denied a voice and whose homogenization further obscures the structures of their palimpsestic oppression.

In both the colonial and intellectual representation of the Third World subjects, structures of aesthetic and political representation are hegemonically conflated. Political representation or, in other words, representation by a proxy, determines the conditions of the aesthetic conceptualization of the subaltern. In Spivak's terms, "in the constitution of the disempowered groups as coherent [and transparent] political subjects, the process of (aesthetic) representation is subordinated to the voice of the political proxy who speaks on their behalf" (58). As intellectuals and colonial powers efface their presence as well as their manipulative discursive constructions, their positions as proxies are also effaced, resulting in the replacement of the aesthetic representation of the subaltern by the structures of political representation. What emerges then is a group of coherent political subjects from the Global South that transparently and homogenously pursue their politically represented interests/desires. Since the aesthetic dimension of the political representation is systematically ignored, the voice of the Third World subjects continues to be absent from the archives. Ironically, this conflation of the two meanings of representation does, as Spivak reminds us, have injurious effects on the oppressed groups that these seemingly benevolent intellectual and colonial powers claim to speak for (58).

In another field launching article, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (2006), Sandy Stone brings to light the similar problems that arise from the representation of transsexuality as a diagnostic category. As Stone powerfully articulates, "Concomitant with the dubious achievement of a diagnostic category is the inevitable blurring of boundaries as a vast heteroglossic account of difference, heretofore invisible to the 'legitimate' professions, suddenly achieves canonization and simultaneously becomes homogenized to satisfy the constraints of the category" (2006: 229). "Transsexualism" acquired its status as diagnostic category, a form of "official disorder", in the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and*

Statistical Manual in 1980 (223). The inclusion of the category in the *DSM* did not radically change the previous medico-legal representation of transsexualism by Harry Benjamin as being born in the "wrong body" though (229). Moreover, this diagnostic "victory", while officially acknowledging the phenomenon of transsexuality and therefore somewhat legitimizing it, opened a can of worms for transsexual individuals on epistemic and political grounds. On the one hand, the new medico-legal status of "transsexualism" constituted an epistemic violence by lumping together a myriad of cross- and trans-cultural lived experiences, embodiments, perceptions, and realities under the same diagnostic category. This observation does not mean that all these different forms of identities were able to have equal or sufficient access to the legal and historical discourses before the diagnostic category started to represent them in homogenizing and totalizing ways. However, as Sandy Stone notes, "the *berdache* and the stripper, the tweedy housewife and the *mujerado*, the *mah'u* and the rock star, are [according to this diagnostic category] still the same story after all, if only we try hard enough" (229). Cross-cultural difference is effaced, Global South's discrepant stories are interpreted through a singular signifying economy, and the differential contextual narratives are filtered through the universalizing episteme of the Global North's diagnostic category. The political representation now under the guise of medical diagnosis colonizes and hegemonically re-signifies the aesthetic realities of these identities. Then one cannot help but wonder: whose narratives and lived experiences are told through this diagnostic category, anyway?

On the other hand, another conflation of political and aesthetic representation was at play in some circles of radical feminism. As Stone states, "As with 'genetic' 'women', transsexuals are infantilized, considered too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity, or clinically erased by diagnostic criteria; or else, as constructed by some radical feminist theorists, as robots

of an insidious and menacing patriarchy, an alien army designed and constructed to infiltrate, pervert, and destroy true 'women'" (229-230). In that sense, the transsexual body became the site of palimpsestic oppression; the so-called "monster" created and politically represented through the clinical accounts of the medical industrial complex was now under attack by radical feminist theorists who were uncritically recycling the epistemological framework of the medico-legal discourses. In other words, while they were claiming to re-present the transsexual reality for their ideological agendas, they were conflating the aesthetic and political, adopting the medical establishment's political and diagnostic "representation" of transsexuals. For instance, as Susan Stryker notes in her "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (2006), Mary Daly, understanding transsexuality as a techno-medical monstrosity, characterized transsexuals as the agents of a necrophilic invasion of female space while Janice Raymond, acknowledging Daly as a formative influence, less directly argued that "the problem of transsexuality would be best served by morally mandating it out of existence" (2006: 245). These two trans-exclusionary radical feminists, representative of other similar radical feminist discourses at the time, were conceptualizing transsexuals as monstrous creatures of techno-patriarchal industry, as medical machines brought into existence to reproduce and legitimize the authenticity of patriarchal binary gender norms.

Ironically nowhere in these accounts, radical feminist or medico-legal, are we presented with the aesthetic re-presentation of transsexual lived experiences that can potentially challenge the ready-made, moralizing, and patronizing conclusions of these two ideological accounts. As Stone remarks, "Each of these accounts is culture speaking with the voice of an individual. The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. As with males theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals

as possessing something less than agency" (229). The conflation of aesthetic and political structures of representation not only silences and delegitimizes the voice of transsexual individuals, but also distorts and manipulates the frames of intelligibility when it comes to the reception of transsexual's accounts of themselves. Transsexual narratives become subjected to self-censorship. To become legible and intelligible, transsexual individuals sanitize and modify their autobiographical accounts; nobody mentions, for instance, "wringing the turkey's neck", the ritual of penile masturbation for male-to-female transsexuals just before surgery (228), in order not to challenge the ontological account of irreducible sexual difference consolidated through the rhetoric of "being born in the wrong body". The epistemic violence that comes about as result of the conflation of the aesthetic and political creates a deceptively transparent sexological account of what a transsexual is/does.

In her documentary, *Paris Is Burning* (1990), Jennie Livingston seems to present a structurally more different account of black and Latino gays, transvestites, transsexuals, and drag queens participating in the 1980's New York ball culture and drag scene. Livingston's representation is, on the surface, disinterested and value-free, which effectively serves to conceal the political and economic implications of her project. She is not a proxy; she does not speak on behalf of the marginalized subjects of her documentary. Since she lets her subjects speak and act for themselves, the issue of ventriloquism seems irrelevant. Given that she is a literal absent nonrepresenter in terms of speech, the "aesthetic" representation of the 1980's New York ball culture conveys the message of being "authentic". However, one can make the argument that on account of one's socially, culturally, politically, and historically situated repertoire, being an absent nonrepresenter in terms of speech is not automatically tantamount to being an absent nonrepresenter in terms of "performance". Even if we almost never hear from Livingston

throughout the documentary, not only is her identity as a white cis woman possessing Global North's cultural capital a constant presence in her interactions with this cultural, racial, and economic alterity, but she also has the power to decide which performances, speeches, and lived experiences get to become part of her documentary. In other words, even if Livingston does not speak, she "performs" via her cultural, economic, and identity capital. Her particular representation of this marginalized community must be subjected to further critiques. Although, on the surface, Livingston seems to aesthetically represent the ball culture of these racialized communities, her particular version of aesthetic representation is, to use José Esteban Muñoz's words, highly sensationalized and glamorized (1999: 162). Livingston's representation sacrifices disease and poverty for the sake of spectacle and style (162). This is not to suggest that there are not references in the documentary to how these minoritarian subjects experience poverty and discrimination in their daily lives. Pepper LaBeija, one of the legendary and most important names in Livingston's documentary, explains this situation as follows: "You know, a lot of those kids that are in the balls, they don't have two of nothing. Some of them don't even eat. They come to balls starving…They sleep on the pier, or wherever. They don't have a home to go to. But they'll make, they'll go out, they'll steal something, get dressed up and come to a ball for that one night and live the fantasy". These brief references point out the struggles and discriminations that these minoritarian subjects constantly have to negotiate in their daily lives but these issues of high significance disappear under the sensationalized representations of their performances in the documentary. Since representation turns into an excessive form of spectacularization oriented towards unravelling the riddle of this "spectacular" alterity located in the Global North, the complexity of the axes of marginalization that systematically subject these communities to

economic, racial, gender, and sexual disadvantages is reduced to the issues of style and performance.

The criticism of a multilayered reduction that Livingston enacts through her spectacularized representation based on glamorized style and performance is, in no way, to dismiss the political significance and subversive potential of drag and performances in the ball culture. As Judith Butler argues, "drag is a site of a certain ambivalence" and that "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (1993: 125). Since one of the ways in which heterosexuality is rendered original is through the hegemonic naturalization of this sexual category, drag can be politically subversive through its potential to denaturalize the regimes of intelligibility consolidated by the cultural force of heteronormativity. On the other hand, as Butler also underscores throughout her article, since ambivalence is at the heart of drag, drag performances can also risk becoming a form of hegemonic and complicit appropriation. Butler elaborates more on the implications of this conceptualization in another piece "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1991), where her reclaiming of drag and butch-femme identities/identifications as subversive aims at re-signifying the political dimension of their parodic modalities. Butler argues that lesbian sexuality "reinscribes power domains that it seeks to resist, that it is constituted in part from the very heterosexual matrix that it seeks to displace" (310). According to Butler, the specificity of lesbian experience cannot be positioned in contradiction to the framings of lesbian sexuality as just heterosexuality once removed, or that it is derived, or that it does not exist because the very specificity is "to be established in the very modality and effects of [the] reinscription" that it performs (310). In other words, the political project should not aim at establishing the specificity of lesbian sexuality over and against its

derivativeness but to redeploy its secondary, copy status in a way that disrupts the normative constructions of heterosexuality as original (310). Inverting the original status of heterosexuality and reworking the secondary status of lesbian sexuality so that it no longer signifies that which derives from heterosexuality can be read as a radical futural political project. In this deconstructive maneuver, lesbian sexuality is reformulated and replayed as that without which there can be no heterosexuality. In that sense, butch-femme identities/identifications cannot be considered copies of heterosexual models because they subversively redeploy their secondary, copy status in a way that undermines the normative constructions of heterosexuality as original.

Critiquing the professionalization of identity categories, Butler states that this professionalization "requires a certain performance and production of a 'self' which is the constituted effect of a discourse that nevertheless claims to represent that 'self' as prior truth" (311). However, this self cannot be claimed to play homosexuality as a role because the self cannot take a radical distance from the performance. Also, the fact that the self plays at being a homosexual does not mean that the self is not literally a homosexual but that the very situationality of playing at being a homosexual constitutes the multivalent ways in which being a homosexual gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed (311). Butler argues that if the sexual subjectivity is the effect of a certain repetition, then it means that there is no subjectivity that precedes the gender/sexuality that it is said to perform but that the coherency of the subjectivity is configured and contested by the very repetitions and unfaithful iterabilities themselves (311). Although this assertion emerges as a very radical stance, one also needs to interrogate whether one risks obliterating the homosexual subjectivity altogether by claiming that this subjectivity is an effect of a string of performances. Butler responds to this critique with a similar question in which she asks whether this theory of repetition risks becoming complicitous

with the conservative political forces that seek to obliterate the possibility of sexual/gender identity categories (311). However, Butler argues that it is still crucial to critique the essentializing specificities of identity categories so as to keep the "threats of obliteration from dictating the terms of the political resistance to them" (311).

Butler does not claim that "drag" is an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes that gender is the rightful property of sex but that drag enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed (313). Through a deconstructionist lense, Butler goes on to argue that "drag is a kind of imitation for which there is no original, producing the very notion of original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself" (313). Butler's deconstructionist method echoes Derrida's deconstruction of the statuses of originality and translation. In "Des Tours de Babel", Jacques Derrida argues that "the structure of the original is marked by the requirement to be translated" and that "the original is the first debtor, the first petitioner; it begins by lacking and by pleading for translation" (1985: 184). Derrida's understanding of translation subverts the vision of the original as superior and shows that the concept of original depends on translation. If the original is lacking, then one can no longer argue for the privileged status of the original within the binary opposition. In a similar deconstructionist move to Derrida, Butler contends that the imitative effects of drag expose heterosexuality as an incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization (313). In its endless endeavor to repeat itself and naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality can only produce the effect of its own originality. If there is no originality without assuming a copy, a derivative that retrospectively confirms the original's status as prior (313), then the homosexual as copy precedes the heterosexual as origin, inverting the binary and hegemonic relationship between the two. In that sense, to claim that homosexuality is implicated in heterosexual norms or in the hegemonic

culture is not to derive homosexuality from heterosexuality nor to say that homosexuality is only implicated in the power networks of heterosexuality (313). This claim just signifies the inevitable interdependency of the two, an impossibility of defining one specificity independently of the other.

One can see that Butler's argument is insightful and provocative, producing a multidimensional understanding of the implications of drag performance and self-stylization. However, one can also make the argument that Butler's psychoanalytic/deconstructive understanding of drag at both theoretical and material level is problematically ahistorical[42]. As Esther Newton warns in her more recent article "'Dick(less)' Tracy and the Homecoming Queen: Lesbian Power and Representation in Gay-Male Cherry Grove" (1993), the construction of butch-femme as form of drag/camp seems a provocative and flip abstraction, ungrounded in *history* (163, emphasis mine). Newton states that gay-male camp culture in the 1960s was self-consciously theatrical, played on incongruity and had to be funny while butch-femme bar culture in the late 1950s and 1960s was not ironic, not a camp, "and certainly not, as Judith Butler had suggested, a parody, at least not then" (163-164). As Newton highlights, "…until the performance theorists came along, no one positioned lesbian butch-femme as comparable to drag queen-centered camp, primarily because it had so lacked the element of humor, light theatricality, [and] self-conscious play" (164). Furthermore, as Newton underscores, drag and camp are not simply antiessentialist performances that actively subvert conventional gender

[42]By arguing that Judith Butler's deconstructive theorization of performance and drag is dehistoricizing, I do not suggest that deconstruction as a theoretical methodology is inevitably ahistorical. As I discuss in chapter two in my reading of Butler's theoretical framework through Prosser, Butler's privileging of drag and transgender risks erasing the histories and materialities of transsexual bodies. In her *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000), Viviane Namaste also critiques Butler's account of "transgender and drag" on similar grounds. For an insightful comparative analysis of Namaste's and Butler's accounts and a nuanced discussion on the political status of transsexuality in feminist and queer writings, see Trish Salah's review essay "Undoing Trans Studies" (2007).

dichotomy, “nor are they to be diluted into the broader concept of transvestism or cross-dressing without first specifying how they function ethnographically” (165). On the other hand, drag and camp do not necessarily reinforce conventional gender system either. They are signification practices that cannot be separated from the material conditions or from the intentions of actors and audiences who embody and interpret them (165). Besides, conflating butch with drag and butch-femme with camp ignores the fact that it is not always clear “when and under what conditions lesbians consider butch appearance and clothing to be drag” (165).

Newton’s reconsideration of the problematic equation between butch and drag raises important questions about Butler’s theorization of subversive performance based on drag and butch. One can also make the argument that Newton’s emphasis on the authenticity of butch as opposed to the theatricality and intentionality of drag reveals the underdeveloped conceptual relationship in Butler’s model between the theatrical operation of the subject (performance) and the linguistic operation of the self (performativity). Butler does acknowledge that the subject cannot take a radical distance from the performance and that there is no subject that precedes the performance the subject is said to perform (1991: 311). In other words, there is no volitional subject behind the performance but the subject is performatively constituted by the very performance itself. However, by understanding this discursive/linguistic/corporeal process of performativity (which obliterates the idea of volitional subject) through the concept of drag that signifies theatrical and volitional performance, Butler produces, as Newton’s discussion suggests, an incomplete theorization of the relationship between butch and drag. In fact, Butler’s model of performativity (not performance) as opposed to the problematic models of other performance theorists, articulates similar concerns to those expressed by Newton’s new reconsideration of butch-femme, drag, and camp in that both highlight the fact that they are not

always necessarily political and subversive acts/performances/identifications. However, Butler's framework still lumps butch and drag under the same roof without paying attention to their specific cultural histories and social manifestations. In that sense, Newton's reconsideration of this problematic, through its discussion of the symbolic, cultural, historical, and ethnographic dimension of butch-femme identities/identifications as well as drag and camp, sheds more light upon the ways in which the signification of butch-femme depends on the socio-cultural and historical contexts. In the end, as Newton puts it, the popularity of the proposition in the 1990s "that lesbian butch-femme and female impersonation have an equivalent relation to the drag/camp system" can be understood as a sign and strategy of emerging lesbian empowerment aimed at destabilizing male monopolies (165-166). This observation, in turn, reveals that the reclaiming of butch-femme dynamics mostly by queer scholars in the 1990s had a distinct signification in, for instance, comparison with the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, which points out how butch-femme identities/identifications were differently signified in different conceptual and contextual matrices in the twentieth-century USA and how they are open to potential re-negotiations/re-significations in different ideological climates and thus cannot solely be grasped in abstract theorizations.

The construction of butch-femme as a form of drag/camp is not the only dehistoricizing implication of Butler's theory of performance. Her psychoanalytic/deconstructive reading of performance, drag, and transgender is also problematic in terms of her ahistorical reading of desire and intelligibility in *Paris Is Burning*. In fairness to her, Butler acknowledges the historical structure of racially saturated sexual/gender hegemonies and how these hegemonies work through re-articulation when she discusses why the denaturalization of sex either through drag performance or passing as cis does not imply an emancipation from hegemonic constraints

(1993: 132-133). However, this historical analysis disappears when Butler insists on producing a psychoanalytic analysis of the relationship between the director and her subjects, which subtly dehistoricizes, depoliticizes, and abstracts the issue of appropriation. As Coco Fusco argues, Butler does not engage with a history of racial exploitation that crosses genders and sexualities (1995: 73). Her insistence on searching for moments of subversion that result from the intersubjective desire potentially incited through camera movements between the filmmaker and her subjects ignores the (white) voyeuristic gaze of Livingston as well as the perpetuation of the Global North's conventions of colonial ethnographic documentary. In Fusco's words, Butler refuses to critically engage with the fact that "Ethnographic cinema, in light of its historical connection to colonialist adventurism, and decades of debate about the ethics of representing documentary subjects, is a genre that demands a special degree of scrutiny" especially when there are historical imbalances in terms of power relationships (72). This surely does not mean that one's hegemonic identity, and in this case Livingston's whiteness, automatically disqualifies one from making a documentary about the lived experience of colonized and marginalized communities. However, when the historical power imbalances between the North and the South are not critically reflected upon, when issues of insider/outsider as well as asymmetrical cultural and economic capitals are taken for granted, one's hegemonic identity becomes implicated in the process of ventriloquizing, commodifying, and producing a spectacle[43] out of the marginalized communities. Livingston's documentary driven by an interested desire to celebrate cultural and

[43] In "Is Paris Burning?" (1992) bell hooks seems to describe drag as misogynistic and reactionary, which Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) rightly critiques as being a reductive conceptualization of the complexity of drag performances. Whether bell hooks also thinks that there might be politically progressive drag performances is not entirely clear from her article but the fact that she references Marlin Frye to support her claims about drag and female impersonation warrants Butler's critique. On the other hand, however, in her critique of bell hooks, Butler curiously avoids a critical engagement with hook's arguments that center on the commodification and exploitation of black culture through the conventions of colonial ethnography deployed in *Paris Is Burning*.

racial alterity can mask but does *not* eradicate the historically shaped power dynamics. Even though she, through self-effacement, lets her subjects speak and act for themselves, the Global North's voyeuristic gaze as well as the conventions of colonial ethnography spectacularize and appropriate her subjects' identities and culture.

Different Faces, Same Stories: A Diasporic Filmmaker Goes to Iran

> "In other words, histories of homosexuality often read like narratives of progress towards the Western model of egalitarian homosexuality, wherein both partners can be active as well as passive regardless of any masculine or feminine identification on either's part...Although such observations may have sociological or anthropological validity, they leave little room for dissidence and are remarkably similar to the narratives of progress that established between Europeans and the rest of the world a pseudoevolutionary hierarchy that justified the civilizing machine and, therefore, colonialism."
>
> Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*

Now a swift segue to Tanaz Eshaghian's famous documentary in Euro-American circles, *Be Like Others* (2008), which is, to use the film's description on IMDB, "a provocative look at a generation of young Iranian *men* choosing to undergo sex change surgery" (emphasis mine). As Trish Salah states in her insightful article "Backlash to the Future: Screening Transsexuality as Fundamentalism" (2011: 215), note the language used in the description. Eshaghian is interested in revealing the plight of the "homosexual Iranian men" who feel that, to live free from harassment in Iranian society, their only option is a sex change operation. Nowhere throughout the documentary, nor in the subsequent interviews she has, does Eshaghian clarify why her

documentary portrays, to use Salah's words, transsexuality's real reference point as non-transsexuals who have been socially coerced to undergo sex change surgeries (214). Moreover, she does not elaborate on why, in a documentary supposed to be on transsexuals in Iran (the second title of the documentary is *Transsexual in Iran*), she does not feel the need to talk to Iranian "transsexuals" who could possibly inform her targeted audience in the Global North about their lived experiences. Since Eshaghian is a diasporic, Iranian-American individual, she "has a certain measure of access to her subjects that other, non-Iranian filmmakers lack" (215). However, her semi-insider positionality does not enable her to question the uncritical use of Global North's medico-cultural capital to analyze the so-called transsexuals in Iran, nor does it prevent her from deploying the conventions of colonial ethnography in her project. She positions herself as the enlightened and agential subject of Anglo-American feminist theorizing and performs a paternalistic form of whiteness in her portrayal of Iran's culture and disenfranchised communities. Her documentary aimed at understanding why homosexuality is a crime punishable by death in Iran while transsexuality is accepted and supported by Iranian medico-legal state apparatuses provides, when the conventions of colonial ethnographic documentary are taken into account, an unsurprising and banal answer: since Iran is a "pre-modern" state invested in maintaining a rigid binary gender system, the diagnostic category of transsexuality enables the state to delegitimize homosexuality and mandate it out of existence.[44] Eshaghian's "masterful" deployment of representational politics (read ventriloquism) presents a totalizing and tropological view of Iran and transsexuality as pre-modern and fundamentalist. Her neocolonial

[44] This is a familiar culturalist conclusion as we are reminded by Vek Lewis in his interview with Viviane Namaste (2011). Lewis argues as follows: "Too often concepts like 'Mexican culture' or 'Brazilian culture' are invoked especially in relation to things like gender norms…In the main, Mexico is attributed with all manner of homogenous characteristics, especially by people writing in the United States, in such a way that culture reads like ethnicity. This is what 'they' are like because of tradition and custom, which implicitly assumes a difference that centers the position of the United States".

ethnographic documentary inevitably casts the Global North as the modern subject and homosexuality as its teleological and privileged category.

Eshaghian's word and subject choices seem to be uninformed, at best, and manipulative, colonial, and transphobic, at worst. She does not problematize the asymmetrical medical-ideological traffic between the North and the South. The question of why the Western diagnostic medical categories of homosexuality and transsexuality should have the same import, trajectory, and signification in a non-Western context remains unanswered. The categories of transsexuality and homosexuality are homogenized, rendered cross-cultural, universal, and fully transparent. What is also left unexplained are the multivalent ways in which the various Iranian medico-legal bureaucracies over the course of the twentieth-century were shaped and structured by the Global North's "sexological" colonialism. A critical analysis of the ideological nature of the global travel of sexology is precluded. That this global travel is ideological is not only to suggest that the process of classification is ideological and that this ideology is transferred transnationally to different geographies, resulting in multilayered epistemic violence. It is also to argue that the very travel itself deconstructs the linear/progressive temporal logic and narrative of modernity, potentially revealing the ways in which the Iranian medico-legal, military, and governmental apparatuses have ideologically and "perversely" borrowed from so-called modern Euro-American sexological classifications. In Eshaghian's ethnographic documentary that "looks at" and "represents" the fully transparent pre-modernity of Iran with its fundamentalist categories and ways of living, there is no space to theorize what Lisa Lowe and J. Halberstam aptly termed "perverse modernities"[45].

[45] "Perverse Modernities" is the name of the series edited by Lisa Lowe and J. Halberstam and published by Duke University Press. Lowe and Halberstam summarize the concept of Perverse Modernities as follows: "Perverse Modernities transgresses modern divisions of knowledge that have historically

In her exploration of the neo-imperialist militarization within the United States as "characterized by a new phase of empire- building", M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) demonstrates the ways in which this phase, where "hegemonic heterosexual masculinity wishes to assert a Pax Americana within its own borders as well as in different parts of the world", is ideologically linked to different histories and events from different geographical and temporal sites (183). According to Alexander, a re-reading of these different histories through a transnational lens reveals how these temporally and geographically distant and separate events, namely neo-imperialist militarization in the United States, neocolonial state's criminalization of lesbian and gay sex in Trinidad and Tobago (1986 and 1991, respectively) and in the Bahamas (1991), and the moment of Spanish colonization of the Americas in 1513, are governed through the states' investments in the heterosexualization of the nation (183). Alexander's analysis shows the ways in which hegemony works through separation and distancing, segregating events that, if brought together, threaten to uncover the crises and paradoxical operations of the states and imperial/colonial networks.

Alexander's transnational analysis has a vital "global" import for a critical examination of the travel between the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Western sexology and the Iranian government's deployment of sexology in the classification of homosexuality and transsexuality. The dialectical analyses of these two histories together with their bureaucratic, institutional, and medical reception demonstrate that the ideological traffic, as is also emphasized

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separated the consideration of sexuality, and its concern with desire, gender, bodies, and performance, on the one hand, from the consideration of race, colonialism, and political economy, on the other, in order to explore how the mutual implication of race, colonialism, and sexuality has been rendered perverse and unintelligible within the logics of modernity. [Perverse Modernities] have elaborated such perversities in the challenge to modern assumptions about historical narrative and the nation-state, the epistemology of the human sciences, the continuities of the citizen-subject and civil society, the distinction between health and morbidity, and the rational organization of that society into separate spheres".

by Alexander in her exploration of the continuities and disjunctures of practices within and among various state formations (191), between the two contexts governed by the medical power of sexology have to be exposed in order to reveal the anxieties of the heterosexualization and cissexualization[46] of Iran. This dialectical move through the lens of a transnational methodology can reveal how within the Iranian medico-legal bureaucracy, there is no "sexually deviant" without the presence of the Global North's sexological capital, which, in turn, underscores the significance of mapping out the itinerary of sexology as it is attached to certain bodies and marks them as deviant, morally corrupt, and psychosexually ill. One should emphasize that the transnational act of bringing together these two histories are not, as Alexander discusses in her transnational praxis, "collaps[ing] historical moments and conceptual categories into one another, nor collud[ing] in an unwitting gesture of homogenization" (192). Rather, the intention is to reveal the ways in which cissexuality and heterosexuality work as an analytic framework and hegemonic mechanism to normativize the ideal subject of the Iranian citizenship, legislate cissexuality/heterosexuality, and thus render homosexual bodies deviant and dangerous. These two separate events can therefore be juxtaposed and interpreted as indicative of the Iranian state apparatuses' re-enactment of cissexualization and heterosexualization with undertones of the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Global North's sexological violence.

At this juncture, echoing M. Jacqui Alexander, one needs to inquire into how hierarchies of bodies that mark their difference from one another depending on their (lack of) perversion mobilize and what that very mobilization tells us about the valorization of heterosexuality and cissexuality in Iran (193). In order to think through these questions, one needs to chart the

[46] Cissexual (or the abbreviation cis) is generally used as a term for those who do not identify as trans. However, in this chaper, I use the verb form "cissexualize" to refer to not only bodies and individuals but also the processes through which nation-states are coded as "cissexual".

epistemic universe of the Iranian ideological state apparatuses in relation to their legal, medical, institutional, and bureaucratic manipulation of perversion through transnational framing of temporality, by rereading and reinterpreting the classification of homosexual bodies in the form of gender inversion from two different geographies through scrambled and palimpsestic time. Alexander states that palimpsestic time "is neither vertically accumulated nor horizontally teleological (190). Its central idea "is that of the palimpsest– a parchment that has been inscribed two or three times, the previous text having been imperfectly erased and remaining therefore still partly visible" (190). Representing the idea of the new configured through the old scrambled, palimpsestic time subverts the distance of the linear time and "dislodges the impulse for incommensurability, which the ideology of distance creates" (190). In that sense, palimpsestic framing of two seemingly different and separate events /histories reveals that the traces of the erased one still remain in the construction of the other, meaning that two are always already connected in multivalent and complicated ways. Therefore, such a palimpsestic reading can allow one to comprehend not only how the classification of homosexuality as compulsory transvestism/transsexuality in two different contexts is intimately interlinked, but also how this intimate connection depends on an ideologically selective manipulation that operates nonlinearly or, in other words, through a "perverse temporality".

The ways in which the Iranian medical and institutional apparatuses collapse the issue of sexual object choice with gender non-conformity, which erroneously postulates homosexuality as compulsory transvestism/transsexuality are, unsurprisingly, not disconnected from the Global North's sexological literature's sphere of influence. This confusion is clearly reminiscent of the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Western sexology, which arbitrarily and confusingly took homosexuality for transsexualiy and transvestism (*avant la lettre*). In his article "From

Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female 'Deviance" (1989), George Chauncey articulates this fact by stating that a person could not invert any aspect of his gender without completely inverting that role in the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Western world (91). By casting homosexuality within a developmental and teleological matrix that ends with transness and compulsory transvestism, the medical and institutional accounts in this period seem to discursively conceptualize homosexual identity as a temporary period, similarly to the concept of sodomy, waiting to be superseded by a complete gender inversion.

Moreover, a comparable slippery and contradictory medical positionality is also reflected in the different versions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association[47]. Particularly, reading entries on transvestism in a comparative manner reveals how the meaning and precise characteristics of the very term in the sexological literature have changed throughout the decades, indicating the blurry nature of the conceptual and scientific framework underlining it as well as the term's precarious collapse with homosexuality and/or transsexuality. Even the signifier transvestism is not used in exactly the same form and under the same categories in all seven manuals, signifying, in linguistic terms, the inability of the Global North's medical world to coherently settle on precise borders demarcating what counts as what when it comes to sexuality, which, one can argue, is symptomatic of the larger confusion about sexuality/gender in the medical/sexological circles throughout the twentieth-century. For instance, in the *DSM-I* (1952), transvestism is listed under the code "000-x63 sexual deviation" as a kind of deviant sexuality, "which is not symptomatic of more

[47] American Psychiatric Association. (1952, 1968, 1980, 1987, 1994, 2000, 2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th ed.). Washington, DC.

extensive syndromes such as schizophrenic and obsessional reactions" (38). It is under the same category as homosexuality, very much in line with the medical regulations which, in the process of diagnosing transsexuality in Iran, ground the transformation of homosexuals into transsexuals on a medico-moral basis. In the *DSM-II* (1968), transvestism, just like homosexuality, is again listed under sexual deviations with the code number "302.3". In this manual, the category for sexual deviants including transvestites describes those whose sexual interests are primarily directed towards objects other than people of the opposite sex. What is quite striking in this section is the so-called scientific claim that the diagnosis is not appropriate for those who perform these deviant sexual acts "because normal sexual objects are not available to them" (449). Interestingly, these acts characterized as pathological suddenly lose their pathological dimension when they are performed out of necessity, which is reminiscent of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's arbitrary distinction between perversion and perversity in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and which also resonates with the dominant discourse adopted by the Iranian state apparatuses. As Harry Oosterhuis (2012) argues, the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century psychiatry advanced a paradigm change in the understanding of sexual deviance by "shifting the focus from a temporary deviation from the norm to a more or less permanent state of being –be it pathological or not" (151). Sexual deviance was no longer characterized as a kind of temporary, fleeting digression but rather was theorized as a constant and immutable feature or quality of one's inner being or personality (151). In that sense, sexual deviance started to be conceptualized less and less in religious or moral terms and this newly conceptualized classification initiated a process of constructing a permanently distinct sexual species. As Oosterhuis underscores, one could see the roots of this pivotal paradigm shift in the writings of Krafft-Ebing, where he makes a distinction between perversion and perversity as follows:

> Perversion of the sexual instinct, as will be seen farther on, is not to be confounded with perversity in the sexual act; since the latter may be induced by conditions other than psycho-pathological. The concrete perverse act, monstrous as it may be, is clinically not decisive. In order to differentiate between disease (perversion) and vice (perversity), one must investigate the whole personality of the individual and the original motive leading to the perverse act. Therein will be found the key to the diagnosis (1925: 75-76).

As is clear in Krafft-Ebing's words, engaging in perverse acts and thus committing a vice should not be thought to correspond to suffering from perversion and thus having a disease. Krafft-Ebing further elaborates on this curious slippery distinction in the section on "homo-sexual" feeling as acquired manifestation in both sexes:

> The determining factor here is the demonstration of perverse feeling for the same sex; not the proof of sexual acts with the same sex. These two phenomena must not be confounded with each other; perversity must not be taken for perversion…We find homo-sexual intercourse in impotent masturbators or debauchees, or *faute de mieux* in sensual men and women under imprisonment, on ship-board, in garrisons, bagnios, boarding-schools, etc. There is an immediate return to normal sexual intercourse as soon as the obstacles to it are removed. Very frequently the cause of such temporary aberration is masturbation and its results in youthful individuals (1925: 273).

As one can see, Krafft-Ebing contends that engaging in morally perverse sexual acts is a very common phenomenon in homosocial settings. No matter how monstrous or morally degenerate these acts can be in Krafft-Ebing's eyes, there is always a hope for transforming the pervert into what nature originally intends them to be. In that sense, working/serving in a predominantly homosocial environment might result in the state of "becoming" a homosexual and thus perversely engaging in temporary aberration; however, it should not be thought to be equal to the ontological state of "being" and thus suffering from perversion. As Krafft-Ebing highlights, there will most likely be an immediate return to normal sexual intercourse once one is no longer

present or active within the very homosocial setting that one inhabits. This epistemological and ontological differentiation coming from an authoritative Western medical figure from the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century can be geographically and temporally transported into the twenty-first century Iran, where homosexuality is conceptualized as perversity while the diagnostic category of transsexuality is understood, albeit unwillingly, to be a form of perversion. Similarly to Krafft-Ebing, who designates the perversity, not the perversion, evil, the Iranian medical and state apparatuses designate homosexuality, not transsexuality, evil. "Not the deed, but only an anthropological and clinical judgment of the perpetrator can permit a decision as to whether we have to do with a perversity deserving punishment, or with an abnormal perversion of the mental and sexual life, which, under certain circumstances, excludes punishment" (541) states Krafft-Ebing. What matters most for him are not the potential dangers of psychopathology but rather the evils of moral perversity given that perverse acts, according to him, are morally irresponsible acts that prey on the traditional values of society. Since, in the case of perversion, the psychopathological conditions that are considered necessary for judgment on the basis of responsibility are absent, perverse acts "that occur outside of states of mental defect, degeneration, or disease [could] never be excused on the ground of irresponsibility" (475). Looking at this sexological archive transnationally, one can see that the curious "fact" with which Eshaghian provides the Global North's audience at the beginning of the documentary through text stills "In the Islamic Republic of Iran, sex change operations are legal. Homosexuality is punishable by death" is far from being a paradox specific to the so-called pre-modern Iranian culture. Precise boundaries of diagnostic categories and their medico-legal reception might be subjected to arbitrary inversions and modifications in the process of the Global North's sexology's geographic and temporal journey but none of these surface-level

shifts can justify an unwitting and epistemically violent culturalist designation of Iran as a sui generis pre-modern state riddled with illogical diagnostic criteria.

Examining the different versions of the *DSM* provides more insights into the arbitrary epistemic content of the diagnostic categories. In the *DSM-III* (1980), transvestim is listed under paraphilias with the code number "302.30". Its essential feature is described as "recurrent and persistent cross-dressing by a heterosexual male that during at least the initial phase of the illness is for the purpose of sexual excitement" (269). Not only is transvestism described as a heterosexual male-only condition, but also transvestites are differentiated from transsexualism, some forms of male homosexuality, female impersonators and fetishists in very unstable terms, giving the readers the impression that it is a matter of a short time before one can cross the border and inhabit the realm of another pathologized "condition". Moreover, in the *DSM-III-R* (1987), one finds the term "transvestic fetishism" instead of transvestism with the code number "302.30" under the section of paraphilias. More details and characteristics are added to the term's definition. The fact that it is only diagnosed in heterosexual males is emphasized. It is noted that it should be performed at least for six months (temporal dimension is added), and that it might be accompanied by sexual masochism (288). Once again, the boundaries are not fixed and an individual might move from one pathologized condition to the other. In the *DSM-IV* (1994), one finds transvestic fetishism listed under the section of paraphilias with the same code number "302.3". It is repeated that transvestic fetishism has been described only in heterosexual males even though it is argued that the transvestic fetishist person might occasionally engage in homosexual acts or that transvestic fetishism might rarely progress into "transsexualism" (531). When one comes to the *DSM-IV-TR* (2000), one sees that transvestic fetishism is listed under paraphilias with the same code number "302.3". This time it is also claimed that in most cases,

sexual arousal is produced by the accompanying thought or image of the person as female, which is referred to as autogynephilia[48] (574). Being a new addition to transvestic fetishism, autogynephilia, is elaborated on in the *DSM-V* (2013) and listed under paraphilic disorders with the code number "302.3-F65.1". Furthermore, for the first time, the *DSM-V* talks about the prevalence of transvestism, stating that "it can also be found in females in extremely rare cases" (703). It is claimed that fewer than three percent of males report having ever been sexually aroused by dressing in women's attire (703).

As one can understand from reading not only the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Western Sexology but also the entries on transvestism and its changing boundaries in different versions of the *DSM*, Iranian medical and institutional state apparatuses involved in the process of codifying transsexuality and ruling out homosexuality as a potential diagnostic category ideologically adopt and reflect the slippery and blurry trajectory of discourses produced on the classification of perversion and perverse acts. One should note that such a critical understanding comes to the fore only through a palimpsestic framing of time or, in other words, through the act of reading modernity perversely. Only by reading these two sexological histories and geographies, which the ideology of distance separates, perversely together, can one understand the quintessence of the globalized cissexist and heterosexist logic that governs the ideological travel as well as the selection of "certain kind of Western sexology". After all, what mattered/matters for both contexts in light of the sexological data, which were dominant during the late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Euro-American circles, and which were ideologically selected to travel into the institutional and medical apparatuses of the twenty/twenty-first century

[48] For an insightful critique of autogynephilia as a diagnostic category, see Julia Serano's "The Case Against Autogynephilia" (2010).

Iran, was/is the preservation of the cissexual and heterosexual male subject, upon whose body nation-states are symbolically founded.

Echoing similar concerns, Robert Nye (1993) argues that a pressing cultural anxiety about the health and the size of the population pushed the French to tackle the issues of fetishistic perversions and to understand the causes of these phenomena. He states that in France, the "traditional emphasis on conventional marital sexuality was strongly reinforced by the deeply felt anxiety about the falling birth rate at the end of the nineteenth-century" (19). In that sense, fetishistic perversions were regarded as dangerous and subversive phenomena that had a great potential to threaten the power and the welfare of the nation-state. Therefore, any deviance from the reproductive heterosexual intimacy was understood to undermine the normality of the heterosexual and cissexual male subject, the ideal citizen of the nation-state. On the other hand, if one goes back to the processes of conceptualizing/diagnosing transsexuality and homosexuality in Iran, one can see that the same concerns are present and implicated in the logic of the Iranian state apparatuses. Such transnational close reading reveals how Iran's adoption of the Global North's sexological classification of homosexuality/transsexuality/transvestism reflect its mission of institutionalizing heterosexuality/cissexuality as well as linking these hegemonic identities with the very foundation of the nation-state. Eshaghian's ethnographic documentary conveniently ignores these historically structured and complicated connections between sexological colonialism, nation-state formation, asymmetrical epistemic division between the North and the South, and configurations of ideal citizenship. Preoccupied with the neocolonial narratives of linear modernity that zeroes in on the so-called fundamentalist and pre-modern aspects of Iranian society and culture, Eshaghian's documentary sanitizes the messy archives of medico-cultural colonialism and instead offer its Western audience plenty of exotic audio-visual

material through which the Global North's "haves" can feel sorry for the plights of Iranian "have-nots".

Eshaghian opens her documentary with the shots of Tehran's impoverished cityscapes and women in chador, which effectively serves to exoticize the "Orient" from the very beginning and provides the Global North with a stereotypical and familiar "Oriental" imagery (poverty, veils, repression, unenlightened subjects, and pre-modernity). The camera then turns toward Dr. Bahram Mir-Jalali's surgical center at Mirdamad Boulevard in northern Tehran where we witness a dialogue between Mir-Jalali and a prospective FTM[49] transsexual Iranian. This scene turns out to be the only scene that provides a representation of an FTM transsexual since the rest of the documentary centers on two so-called "MTF" transsexual individuals, Ali (now Negar) and Anoosh (now Anahita). In an interview[50], Eshaghian explains her decision to focus more on the "plights" of MTF transsexuals as follows:

> What you see with a lot of my characters is that the families are very traumatized especially when a man becomes a woman. It is such a like, what is the opposition of promotion? Demotion! It is such a demotion. Because there were women who were at the clinic…[who were becoming man], it was like almost a different story…It is not like this constant source of embarrassment [for families] whereas a feminine man is just like the honor of the family.

Since Eshaghian essentializes the Iranian culture and conceptualizes heteropatriarchy as its integral part, she automatically assumes that in Iranian culture MTF transsexual experience is always more difficult than FTM transitioning process. As a result of this phallogocentric

[49] In this chapter I mostly follow the documentary's lexical choices. However, the use of such terms as FTM, MTF or sex reassignment surgery does not mean that these terms are not problematic, nor does it represent a refusal to acknowledge the rich history of gender-variant communities' insightful critiques regarding such terminologies.

[50] "FilmCatcher: Interview with Tanaz Eshaghian on her film *Be Like Others*", *Youtube*. Retrieved December 13, 2015 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwnZTJIAGrU

homogenization of both the Iranian culture and the individuals that inhabit it, she does not feel the need to elaborate on economic, political, structural or historical factors that play a pivotal role in how gender is understood or institutionalized. This culturalist and homonationalist[51] framework solely focuses on a culture-based symbolic violence and obsessively searches for and reads a homophobic agenda in the state-sponsored acceptance of transsexuality in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwa that allowed sex reassignment surgeries in Iran in 1981 is implicitly conceptualized as the tragic end of "gay Iran". However, as Afsaneh Najmabadi reminds us in her *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (2014), "Simply casting the advent of the Islamic Republic as the brutal end of gay Tehran does not do justice to the complexity of the tale" (120). Najmabadi's critique of a certain diasporic Iranian queer tendency to read Tehran (and also Iran) as gay before the Islamic Republic took over is important particularly because it enables one to move away from the Global North's epistemic universe and to see the often-obscured "important continuities and different sorts of discontinuities" between 1970s and post-1980s (122). Ignoring these complexities due to her Western-centric agenda, Eshaghian characterizes the advent of Islamic Republic as a rupture, imposes Western identity categories on the Iranian culture, presents an ideologically partial account predicated on hegemonic ventriloquizing, and normatively positions sex reassignment surgeries as an essential and central part of gender-variant lived experience.

In the same interview, Eshaghian argues that "[homosexuality being a taboo subject in Iran] is a cultural phenomenon, which I think, you know, was probably the same here [in the USA] like fifty years ago". This seemingly naïve evaluation which, in reality, is a very

[51] For a more detailed discussion on homonationalism, see Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007).

problematic relegation of Iran to the realm of pre-modernity and which upholds the superiority of the modern and civilized Global North, is further reinforced in another interview[52] where she reveals that she decided to make this documentary upon reading an article in *New York Times* and being fascinated by the fact that sex reassignment operations are legally allowed in a "Muslim" country. This naïve ignorance is surprising, to say the least, considering that she is a diasporic "Iranian-American" but what is certainly not surprising is that her way of thinking which codifies the Global North and the Global South as occupying different temporal realms (read modern and pre-modern) is characterized by a neocolonial logic that follows a problematic trajectory of modernity. Basing the ethnographic documentary about the "so-called" transsexuals in Iran on the Global North's identity constructs ensures the reductive and paternalistic treatment of this complex phenomenon. Khalid El-Rouayheb's discussion of this Euro-American tendency in the context of Arab-Islamic civilizations are particularly relevant and can be applied to Eshaghian's documentary on Iran. El-Rouayheb (2005) claims that the debates surrounding the concept of homosexuality and its potential (in)tolerability in Arab-Islamic civilization are very misleading. Stating that much of what has been written on homosexuality in Arab-Islamic civilization proceeds on the basis of unquestioned "essentialist" homo/hetero binary assumptions of the West (7), he goes on to argue that many historians reduce different strands of same-sex relationships and identifications in Islamic cultures to the binary Western identities classified under the category of homosexuality. This tendency on the part of the scholars not invested in decolonizing knowledge production then leads to attempts to "point out the extent to which 'homosexuality' was practiced or tolerated", and to come up with explanations of this phenomenon (7). In the end, this search for (in)tolerability of homosexuality ignores the fact that

[52] "Interview with Tanaz Eshaghian", *The Documentary Filmmakers Group*. Retrieved December 13, 2015 from http://thedfg.org/news/details/326/interview-with-tanaz-eshaghian

"there [is] simply no native concept that [is] applicable to all and only those men [women] who are sexually attracted to members of their own sex, rather than to women [men]" (153, parenthetical additions mine).

A similar critique comes from Martin Manalansan, who in his article "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma" (1995), casts a critical eye on gay transnational politics and rightfully states that gay ideologies, practices, and images are tracing the trajectories of modernity (425). Examining the cultural production, circulation and reception of an international gay and lesbian movement, Manalansan wonders who legitimizes this circulation of Western-centric ideas and practices and asks "what political strategies are deployed to justify, establish, execute, or resist either the 'authentic' nativist search for primordial 'gay and lesbian' phenomena or the imposition of international egalitarianism?" (426). Stating that the globalization of gay and lesbian oppression obfuscates hierarchical relationships between metropolitan centers and sub-urban peripheries, that is, between the Global North and the Global South, Manalansan points out that "the term 'gay', as a category of analysis, is multiply inflected across various cultural and political locations –even within a single group (426). Hence, these western-centric discourses propagated by "international gay agenda" present a universalized and formulaic picture of all gay and lesbian socio-cultural politics while imposing a modern, Eurocentric, and universal subjectivity (429).

Conclusion

As Jennie Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* and Tanaz Eshaghian's *Be Like Others* show, whether the subject-in-control of ethnographic documentaries is an outsider or a diasporic subject that

partly acts as a native informant, ethnographic documentaries have a strong potential and possibility to produce culturalist representations through hegemonically appropriating, ventriloquizing, epistemically erasing, and spectacularizing their marginalized and disenfranchised subjects. Their colonial representational politics problematically efface the historical, material, structural, and medical conditions that determine the lived experiences of their subjects and instead focus on their spectacle/consumption value. Even when they are motivated by benevolent intentions to bring to the spotlight the discriminations and exclusions that their subjects experience on a daily basis, they either strategically overlook the asymmetrical socio-cultural and economic relationships or naturalize neocolonial modes of representation through their teleological and tropological abstractions. Since they are, most of the time, seemingly limited to national and regional geographies/identities, only a critically deployed transnational methodology can challenge their multilayered implication in the global traffic of colonial ideologies.

Coda

I concluded the introduction of this dissertation by asking "what does the Global South want?" and attempting to imagine the Global South as a dynamic site of anticolonial knowledge production that challenges the Global North's epistemic erasures and politics of citation. Understanding the Global South as a critical concept rather than a mere spatial signifier is surely nothing new when one considers the recent scholarship that exposes the problems of using the Global South as a simplified geographic metaphor. Sinah Theres Kloß, for instance, emphasizes the need to conceptualize the Global South as "a political consciousness, an engaged and possibly liminal practice through which global unequal power structures are actively restructured" (2017: 14). Echoing Kloß's concerns, I intended to forge the Global South as subversive practice and critique the hegemonic politics of translation that domesticates the so-called gendered specificity of the South to fit the North's socio-cultural frames of intelligibility. Throughout the dissertation, I made the argument that "translating into transgender" (or its other Eurocentric variations) did, more often than not, result in a subtle erasure, rather than a manifestation, of global gender diversity.

My analysis brought together various geographies under the umbrella of the Global South. One could question the decision to label such distant spaces as Turkey, Iran, Brazil, and Mexico as discrete but relevant manifestations of the Global South given that even a quick google search returns so many conflicting maps that cannot settle on whether Turkey, for instance, constitutes a part of the North or the South. Those maps very often use as their criteria such complicated and controversial issues as economy, development or political affiliation that are not always transparent, nor impartial indicators with which to evaluate a country's global

position. While I acknowledge the significance of the intersections between those indicators, the main rationale I used for my seemingly random geographic grouping was the question of language, which I argue, determines what one can call the international division of knowledge production. Theories, methods, and conceptual prisms are produced in English (or less frequently in other dominant Western languages such as French and German) and other languages are seen as vehicles that provide a convenient access to a rich reservoir of case studies and empirical data. In other words, who deploys or understands the world through the epistemic frames of these hegemonic (read colonial) languages also speak the global language of transgender, in particular, and LGBTQ, in general, politics/rights. As I tried to show in this dissertation, even benevolent and activist attempts to analyze and showcase the assumed gender, racial, ethnic, or sexual diversity of the Global South through the Global North's epistemological lens distort, if not erase, through translation (into transgender) the specificity of the very diversity in question.

In chapter one, I proposed translanguaging as an anticolonial alternative to translation in order to not only highlight how translation traffics in colonial power relations but also challenge the translational erasure of peripheral multiplicity and polyvocality. I should note, however, that advocating for translanguaging as an ethical reading praxis with which to foreground (mostly incommensurable) polyvocality, multiplicity, diversity or foreignness does not mean an unwitting idealization or romanticization of the term. Just like the term "Global South", translanguaging cannot be imagined without regard to the complex and shifting temporal and spatial relations between cultures, languages, and geographies. Moreover, critical feminist, trans, and postcolonial scholarship has also demonstrated how such fashionable terms as diversity, multiplicity or polyvocality frequently operate as an alibi for the epistemic erasure of the Global South's socio-cultural, political, and economic specificity. In other words, the political utility of

terms, categories or concepts cannot be set once and for all, their critical potential always being subjected to their situatedness within larger networks of power as well intersecting axes of identity.

Essential to my critique of translation was a reading of metaphor, analogy, and likeness as colonial tools, *par excellence*, that domesticate and render accessible the alterity of the foreign. In my introduction I critiqued the tendency in the oral history project *80'lerde Lubunya Olmak* to use Eurocentric categories such as transgender and transsexual interchangeably with local ones such as lubunya, which I argued, not only universalized the Global North's epistemic universe but also obscured the complex (imperial) histories of the geography in question, namely Turkey. Chapter one built on that critique by discussing how ethnographers/sociologists from Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey used the Global North's cultural capital to both universalize sexological modernity and domesticate in gendered and sexualized terms the lived experience of *travestis, homosexuales, jotas, vestidas,* and *transsexuals*. Chapter two elaborated on the ethical implications of translating, through queer scholarship and activist documentary, Turkey's trans religiosity into the secular global politics of transgender activism. Finally, chapter three focused on the distinct manifestations of the Global North's voyeuristic ethnographic gaze in the USA and Iran with a view to showing how the marginalized gender-variant subjects were spectacularized through their translation into the Global North's politics of representation, a translation that leaves unproblematized the asymmetrical power relationships and teleological (mis)representations.

In each section of this dissertation, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which the translation of the Global South's multiply-inflected gender variance into the Global North's transgender (as well as its different and related diagnostic manifestations) serves to erase the

power-laden differences between the North and the South, reducing their relationship to one of simplified metaphor and analogy. I hope that by foregrounding "transgender" in translation, this dissertation can open up new ways of thinking about how the transnational circulation of the category of transgender raises questions concerning not only global (in)visibility and North-South entanglements but also the reproduction of colonial ideologies and epistemologies.

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