Submission to OHCHR's inquiry into colonialism and sexual orientation and gender identity

1. Introduction

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The submission describes how the internationalisation of the LGBTQIA+ movement represents a new form of colonisation that is enforcing Western SOGIE on non-Western countries, erasing Indigenous queerness as exemplified in the context of muxe community in Mexico.

2. Muxes: background and context

Muxes are male-bodied Indigenous people who experience both masculinity and femininity, and who self-identify as a third gender that is neither male nor female. While Spanish colonisation erased a lot of Indigenous gender and sexual diversity forcing the colonies to convert to Catholicism, the muxe identity survived in Juchitán de Zaragoza, Mexico. Nonetheless, as a result of globalisation and the internationalisation of the LGBTQIA+ movement, an increasing number of muxes have begun to identify with transnational understandings of queer gender identities and sexualities, shifting from the Indigenous third gender to a more conventional Western binary.

3. How has the legal and social regulation of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity been relevant for imposing and maintaining colonial power?

Despite the historical and contemporary existence of Indigenous queerness in the Global South, Indigenous voices and experiences are frequently silenced. Western countries, and particularly Europe, take pride in being sexually progressive and tolerant of LGBTQIA+ identities, whereas the Global South is rarely perceived as a locus of sexual diversity. Rather, countries in the Global South are frequently perceived as 'backward' and sexually

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[1] Among Cebuano/Bisaya-speaking Filipinos in the island of Visayas and Mindanao, "Bayot" is a collective term which refers to gender non-conforming men, effeminate men, or transgender women, and may be used differently depending on the context.

conservative, and thus in need of sexual modernisation and development support from the Global North. This understanding of Global South's gender identities and sexualities is rooted in colonisation, which is reproduced by imposing and normalising Western LGBTQIA+ identities in 'colonised' countries.

Anthropologists date the muxe gender identity to pre-columbian times, finding evidence of crossdressed Aztec priests and Mayan gods who appeared to embody the third gender. During the European colonisation of the 16th century, the Spanish colonists erased a lot of Indigenous gender and sexual diversity forcing the colonies to convert to Catholicism, introducing the notions of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity, but Zapotecs were able to maintain the majority of their traditions and cosmology, including their Indigenous concept of third gender.

Colonial powers, like Spain in the muxe context, commonly employed the reinforcement of gender norms and binaries as a strategy within colonised societies. They enforced Western ideals and expectations of gender roles, leading to the exclusion and stigmatisation of those who deviated from these norms. This enforcement aimed to establish control over colonised populations and perpetuate hierarchical power structures. Additionally, colonial powers imposed their own version of sexual morality, branding Indigenous sexual practices as immoral, deviant, or primitive. This imposition aimed to assert cultural dominance and undermine Indigenous cultural values and practices related to gender and sexuality. The legal and social regulation of gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity further contributed to the erasure of Indigenous knowledge and identities, diminishing the cultural richness and diversity of colonised societies.

In the contemporary context, muxes are experiencing a second process of gender colonisation that operates more subtly. This wave involves the globalisation and exportation of Western queer politics in non-Western countries through mass media, advocacy, activism, and the transnationalization of Western queer politics accomplishments. In particular, over the past two decades, muxes have been exposed to and influenced by dominant Western narratives of queerness, profoundly altering their Indigenous experience of the third gender and leading them to 'dub' Western queer models. This process of dubbing includes a change in language and awareness in defining their gender identity, which is increasingly related to Western conceptions of homosexuality and transgenderism, as well as an increase in interest in plastic surgery to meet Western beauty standards.

These patterns of 'Western dubbing' can also be observed in other Indigenous queer communities, such as the hijra in India, bissu in Indonesia, teduray in the Philippines, and mahus in French Polynesia.Thus, the internationalisation of the Western LGBTQIA+ movement positions Western queerness as a superior, hegemonic model of queerness, encouraging muxes to distance themselves from their Indigenous queer identity in order to embrace more internationally recognised gender identities. While advocating for international LGBTQIA+ rights and initiating development programmes to support queer people around the world is not colonial in nature, when these practices prioritise the dominant culture's set of values and knowledge, they often simplify, disregard and marginalise the non-dominant culture, reproducing colonial power dynamics.

The legal and social regulation of gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity has played a crucial role in imposing and maintaining colonial power. Its effects, including the marginalisation and erasure of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, continue to resonate today. Recognising these impacts and engaging in decolonising efforts are crucial steps toward challenging and dismantling the power structures, uplifting marginalised communities, and restoring agency and self-determination. By acknowledging the colonial history of gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity, researchers, practitioners, and change actors can work towards raising awareness, promoting inclusivity, and fostering social justice in the field of gender and sexuality studies.

4. Posing solutions

What can policy makers, researchers, practitioners, and change actors do to decolonise how they think about and work on SOGIE?

The maintenance and internationalisation of a universal, colonial gender system was found to have problematic consequences to muxes' cultural and personal gender identity, as well as on their lifestyle and safety. Similar patterns have been reported in other Indigenous queer communities, most remarkably among Two-Spirit communities in Canada and North America. Thus, it is crucial that queer and decolonial researchers and practitioners worldwide find ways to decolonise how we think about and work on gender and sexuality on an international level to welcome and support non-Western queerness. This submission suggests the general recommendations following actions:

1. **Questioning Eurocentric knowledge**: researchers, practitioners and change actors must work to decolonise Western understandings of gender and sexuality by historicising gender and recognising the effects of colonisation and contemporary processes of colonisation on 'colonised' nations. By conducting this analysis, it is possible to defamiliarize concepts such as gender and sexuality, which are assumed to be universal and ahistorical, and to reveal the intersectional ramifications of Western imperialism. When advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights, doing research, or working on a development initiative, we could ask ourselves: who is this project serving?; whose knowledge and skills are being utilised?; whose needs are being met, and whose are not being considered?. Raising these questions and troubling the Eurocentricity that has so far represented the mainstream approach to queerness and development is crucial to actively engage with critical race and Indigenous theories and geopolitical issues such as imperialism, colonialism, globalisation, neoliberalism, and nationalism.

2. **Decolonising language**: researchers, practitioners and change actors must decolonise how we think about and work on gender and sexuality engaging in a process of decolonising language. The use of English as lingua franca in academia, international development and queer activism is resulting in the erasure of Indigenous languages, which is considered to be one of the most powerful tools of Indigenous resistance, and is therefore perpetuating a form of epistemic violence. Using terms such as 'gay' or 'transgender' to define muxes, for example, simplifies and distorts muxes' gender identity, and violates Zapotec's Indigenous culture. Resisting the temptation to universalise meanings and experiences through the use

of a unique language, most frequently English, dignifies and respects Indigenous knowledge, and is therefore of paramount importance to decolonise the way we speak and think about gender and sexuality.

3. **Awareness raising on the colonial history of SOGIE:** researchers can delve into the historical archives and literature to uncover the colonial roots of SOGIE-related discrimination and stigmatisation. By examining colonial laws, policies, and practices, researchers can provide evidence of how colonial powers imposed their cultural norms, gender binaries, and heteronormative ideals on colonised populations.This knowledge should then be disseminated through conferences, trainings and educational curricula in collaboration with with community leaders, activists, and organisations from affected communities.

4. **Strengthening relationships with Indigenous groups:** researchers and practitioners should enhance Western queer organisations' and individuals' knowledge of Indigenous gender and sexual identities through local encounters to enable them to anchor their decolonisation efforts in ongoing political activities outlined by Indigenous peoples themselves. If local encounters are not possible, then research should be conducted in partnership with local organisations and charities. Engaging in a process of development or decolonization without familiarising oneself with local realities risks implementing ineffective, potentially damaging changes and threatens local communities as ‘objects’ as opposed to ‘subjects’. Referring back to the case study of the muxes in Mexico, it could be argued that a smaller proportion of researchers or journalists would have defined them as ‘transgender women’ if they had spent time within the community learning about their history, cosmology, and gender identity.

5. **Amplifying Indigenous queer voices:** promoting the rights of Indigenous queer identities should be a primary focus for international researchers and practitioners dedicated to supporting the global LGBTQIA+ community. While the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole faces discrimination, hate crimes, and violence, Indigenous queer communities endure additional layers of violence and the erasure of their existence within structural systems. It is crucial to amplify the voices of queer Indigenous individuals and ensure that advocacy efforts encompass both Indigenous communities and the broader LGBTQIA+ community.

6. **Decolonise funding of local queer organisations:** policy makers need to prioritise local queer organisations in funding allocation. Instead of coursing through funds through intermediaries, prioritise funding to local queer community-based organisations who undertake direct action in serving and supporting queer communities. Intermediaries such as government bodies, large NGOs, and consulting firms may not have a strong connection or understanding of the local context. Additionally, intermediaries have significant overhead costs, including administrative expenses and salaries for staff operating at national, regional and global levels. As a result, a substantial portion of the funding may be spent in bureaucratic processes rather than directly benefiting the communities. Reduce stringency or strictness of criteria used to allocate funds. Make it easier for queer organisations to access financial resources such as loans, grants, or subsidies and

work with the queer community in revising existing policies, standards, or compliance requirements to make funding more accessible.

What can the OHCHR do to decolonise its work on SOGIE?

This submission provides suggestions to the OHCHR on the basis of their current work on the UN Free & Equal campaign, the online course on the human rights of LGBTI people, the LGBT-inclusive response to COVID-19, and the Born Free and Equal publication (Second Edition). Specifically, the submission suggests action to be taken in the following areas: 1) Awareness raising on the colonial history of SOGIE; and 2) Indigenous queerness advocacy

1. **Engage in self-reflection:** the OHCHR can critically examine its own practices, policies, and frameworks to identify any colonial or Western-centric biases that may exist. This involves acknowledging and addressing any underlying assumptions or power dynamics that may influence its work on SOGIE.

2. **Build on Indigenous knowledge and expertise**: the OHCHR can provide resources, support, and training to local organisations and activists working on SOGIE issues in different regions. This helps strengthen their capacity to advocate for and protect the rights of individuals within their communities, taking into account their unique cultural and contextual circumstances. In this process, it is crucial to recognise Indigenous queer communities as experts on the interventions that affect their community instead of mere recipients of aid.

3. **Indigenous-led research and knowledge production:** The OHCHR can support and promote research conducted by Indigenous scholars and organisations on the issues related to SOGIE. By amplifying Indigenous voices and perspectives, the OHCHR can contribute to the decolonization of knowledge production and ensure that policies and interventions are rooted in Indigenous knowledge, experiences, and self-determination.

4. **Community-centred approach:** The OHCHR should prioritise community engagement and participation by actively involving Indigenous queer communities and other marginalised groups in decision-making processes, policy development, and program implementation. This can be achieved through consultations, dialogues, and partnerships that empower communities to shape and drive the agenda on SOGIE.

5. **Resource allocation:** The OHCHR should allocate sufficient resources, both financial and human, to support the decolonisation of its work on SOGIE. This includes investing in capacity-building initiatives, funding Indigenous-led projects, and providing technical assistance to countries and communities to address SOGIE-related issues in culturally appropriate and inclusive ways.

Overall, decolonising the OHCHR's work on SOGIE requires a commitment to inclusivity, cultural humility, and recognizing the agency and expertise of marginalised communities. It involves actively challenging and transforming existing power dynamics to ensure that human rights frameworks and interventions are relevant, respectful, and effective for all individuals, regardless of their cultural and geographical backgrounds.

Appendix

Queerness among the muxes in Mexico: a decolonial critique of homotransnationalism

Abstract

In the Global North and, more especially, in Europe, the LGBTQIA+ community has benefited from a modest but steady growth in legislative reforms over the past few decades. Such advancements in queer politics have come to represent nationalism and ‘Europeanness’, giving rise to a discourse on queer development that aims to ‘transnationalise’ European accomplishments in the supposedly conservative Global South. Although this trend can be regarded as beneficial for international queer communities, it is contested whether it actually reinforces Western values through a process of neocolonisation of gender.

Arguing that homotransnationalism is undergoing a second colonisation of gender, this essay examines the case study of muxes in Mexico, an Indigenous queer community who resisted Western gender colonisation, but is now being shaped and transformed by the internationalisation of the LGBTQIA+ movement. Specifically, the essay applies the concepts of coloniality of gender, homotransnationalism, and homodevelopment to the case study of muxes in Mexico to investigate how muxes are influenced by homotransnationalism and how the international community can decolonise knowledge and practises surrounding gender and sexuality. Ultimately, this essay aims to contribute to the still under-researched but growing field of decolonial queer studies by providing an overview of the consequences of homotransnationalism on non-Western and Indigenous queer groups.

1. **Introduction**

In the last few decades, a significant number of countries in the Global North, especially in Europe, have enacted legal reforms to better recognise and support the LGBTQIA+ community (Klapeer 2017; Sabsay, 2012). Such progress in queer politics has become a symbol of nationalism and 'Europeanness,' spawning a rhetoric of sexual progress that seeks to 'transnationalise' European achievements in the supposedly sexually conservative Global South (Klapeer, 2017). This process of homotransnationalism disregards the vast history of Indigenous queerness in the Global South and seeks to expand LGBTQIA+ rights without contextualising them within local histories and geographies (Klapeer 2017). Despite its good intentions, such an approach could be argued to result in the neocolonisation of the sexual Other, as it perpetuates cultural othering and disregards contextual specificity in favour of a Western, homonormative, imperialist design.

Drawing from decolonial, Indigenous and international development scholarship, this essay demonstrates how homotransnationalism perpetuates a necocolinisation of gender by examining the case study of muxes in Mexico, an Indigenous queer community who resisted Western gender colonisation, but is now being shaped and transformed by the internationalisation of the LGBQIA+ movement (Sartini, 2020; Redaccion ClickNecesario, 2016). Specifically, the first section of the essay provides a theoretical background engaging with the concepts of coloniality of gender, homotransnationalism, and homodevelopment. These concepts are later applied to the case study of muxes in Mexico to investigate how muxes are being influenced by homotransnationalism as well as how the international community can decolonise knowledge and practices around gender and sexuality to welcome and support non-Western queerness and Indigenous queerness more specifically. Overall, this essay aims to contribute to the still under-researched but growing field of decolonial queer studies and provide an overview of the implications of homotransnationalism on non-Western and Indigenous queer communities.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The Coloniality of Gender

The process of colonisation that began in the 15th century radically altered the cosmologies and social structures of the colonies, creating a new world order. The imposition of a Victorian and Catholic Western worldview permeated every aspect of social life, exercising hegemonic control over authority, labour, sexuality, and subjectivity (Lugones, 2008). According to Quijano (2007), one of the pioneering scholars of decolonial studies, this power matrix that he refers to as 'coloniality of power', still makes up the modern/colonial world

based on ‘racial’ social categorisation of the world population, and the unequal access to resources and power across the globe (Restrepo, 2018). Importantly, Quijano suggests that ‘coloniality represents the dark and inseparable side of modernity’ (Kulpa and Silva, 2016, p. 3), where Europe experiences modernity and the ‘colonised’ world is subjected to coloniality. While this analysis is useful for comprehending the legacy of colonialism in modern times, it does not elaborate sufficiently on the historical context of modern gender systems. Lugone's work, on the other hand, provides a more comprehensive examination of how contemporary hegemonic gender systems are also the result of colonialism and are still imposed through a process of ‘coloniality’.

Pre-columbian societies have a long history of sexual diversity and queerness, and there are many records of a third gender that differs from the biological binary of men and women. Evidence of this include the muxes in Mexico, which are further studied in this essay as a case study, hijra in India, bissu in Indonesia (Subero, 2013), and mahus in French Polynesia (Stip, 2015). However, Indigenous queerness was erased by European colonists, who imposed Catholic binary and heteronormative gender systems and institutionalised the oppression of gender and sexual diversity (Ramirez and Muran, 2022; Lugones, 2008, 2010). This process, described by Lugones as ‘coloniality of gender’ imposed a gender system that eradicated precolonial matriarchal practices, the existence of a third gender and the acceptance of queer sexualities. This was frequently accomplished through what Lagunes refers to as the ‘dark side’ of gender coloniality, that is the violent imposition of colonial gender systems through the colonised's participation in rituals, their reduction to animality, sexual violence, and extreme labour exploitation (Lugones, 2008). Importantly, the presumed relationship between gender systems and the European colonial project was instrumental in the eradication of communities, ecological practices and cosmologies, as well as the modification and control of reproductive and sexual activities (Bhambra, 2014).

Despite the historical and contemporary existence of Indigenous queerness in the Global South, Indigenous voices and experiences are frequently silenced (Picq and Tikuna, 2019). As described in greater detail in the following paragraph, the West, and particularly Europe, takes pride in being sexually progressive and homotolerant, whereas the Global South is rarely perceived as a locus of sexual diversity (Klapeer 2017, Picq and Tikuna, 2019). Rather, countries in the Global South are frequently perceived as ‘backward’ and sexually conservative, and thus in need of sexual modernisation and development support from the Global North (Klapeer, 2017). Lugones (2010, p.746) argues that ‘unlike colonisation, the coloniality of gender is still with us’, implying that specific ways of understanding gender and sexuality have been and continue to be reproduced, imposed, and normalised in ‘colonised’

countries. In agreement with this statement, this paper understands the (neo)coloniality of gender to be inextricably linked to the processes of homotransnationalism, which aim to transnationalise European achievements in Other cultures to 'save' queer people of the Global South.

2.2 Defining homotransnationalism

In recognition of sexual diversity, organisational, legal, and discursive shifts have increased slowly but steadily over the past two decades, in part due to the demands of the queer and feminist movements (Chisholm, 2018). These changes have been especially pronounced in Europe, generating the notion that gender equality and sexual modernity are synonymous with Europeanness, whereas homophobia and sexual conservatism have been attributed to countries in the Global South (Klapeer, 2017; Smith, 2010; Mason, 2018). Puar (2011) defined the increasing inclusion of LGBTQIA+ rights in Western ideas of nationhood as 'homonationalism'. However, for the purposes of this essay, it is useful to shift the focus away from the nation-state and toward an examination of how this phenomenon can be witnessed on a global scale, transcending national boundaries (Waites, 2019). In academia this is often referred to as 'homotransnationalism' (Klapeer, 2018), a process based on the idea that European achievements in queer politics should be 'transnationalised' in non-European, less homotolerant countries. This project can be understood as one of the many forms of globalisation, which specifically involves the globalisation of LGBTQIA+ rights through international advocacy, activism, and 'homodevelopment' (Klapeer, 2017), in an attempt for the Global North's to support queer communities in the Global South through development programming.

Numerous commentators have been critical of homotransnationalism and the related process of homodevelopment, asserting that they are perpetuating a (neo-)colonisation of the sexual Other (Wahab, 2016). Specifically, homotransnationalism and homodevelopment rely on the notion that Global South nations must 'catch up' with European liberal values and politics, and that societies should follow Western developments along a linear axis of 'sexual modernization' (Nichols, 2012). Furthermore, homotransnationalism victimises the sexual Other, holding that European nations should save queer communities by modernising and aligning the Global South with European laws and values (Klapeer, 2017). Lastly, a decontextualized internationalisation of queer rights assumes queerness and development to be trans-spatial, universal, and ahistorical (Klapeer, 2017) and, consequently, reproduces an imperialist agenda by imposing Western queer politics without contextualising it. Thus, it could be argued that despite the supposedly altruistic intentions of European politicians,

IGOs, and NGOs, they are in reality imposing European values and politics to ‘discipline the sexualities of the undeveloped Others’ (Klapeer 2017, p.48) in a neocolonial fashion.

This section has outlined some of the problematic characteristics of homotransnationalism and homodevelopment. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognise how they can simultaneously benefit organisations and communities in the Global South. The diversity of European governments and development organisations suggests that certain initiatives may be able to support local needs without implementing ‘one-size-fits-all’ programmes or reproducing colonial power dynamics (Klapeer, 2017). An example of this is the 'Decolonial Cafè' Initiative (Decolonizing Sexualities Network, 2021), which gave queer Indigenous activists a platform to share their knowledge and experience of queerness with international audiences. In addition, numerous organisations and programmes in the Global South rely on external funding and would struggle to operate without financial support from the Global North (Klapeer, 2017). While this essay's emphasis is on the colonial nature of homotransnationalism, it does not imply that international queer development is ineffective or unnecessary. Instead, it seeks to emphasise its neocolonial foundations in order to advocate for more radical and decolonial approaches.

3. Case study: the muxes gender identity in Mexico

As stated previously in the essay, gender and sexual diversity have always existed in the Global South, and many pre-Columbian societies included a third gender in their cosmology (McGee 2018; Ramirez and Munar, 2021). Muxes in Juchitan, Mexico, represent one of the most renowned instances of Indigenous queerness and third gender, as well as an excellent example of resistance to the coloniality of gender. However, globalisation and homotransnationalism are transforming the Indigenous muxe identity into a more Western-friendly one.

Muxes, a Zapotec term coming from the Spanish ‘mujeres’ (women), are male-bodied Indigenous people who experience both masculinity and femininity, and who self-identify as a third gender that is neither male nor female (Mirandé, 2014, 2016; McGee, 2018; Ramirez and Munar, 2021). Anthropologists date this gender identity to pre-columbian times, finding evidence of crossdressed Aztec priests and Mayan gods who appeared to embody the third gender (Ramirez and Munar, 2021). While Spanish colonisation erased a lot of Indigenous gender and sexual diversity forcing the colonies to convert to Catholicism, the muxe identity survived in Juchitán de Zaragoza, a small town in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico

(Ramirez and Munar, 2021; Lacey, 2008; Synowiec, 2018). Muxes were traditionally regarded as a blessing from the gods, and they continue to play a central role in Zapotec culture today (McGee, 2018). They express their gender identity in a variety of ways: some wear traditionally feminine attire, while others prefer men's clothing; some date men, while others date women (Dihel et al., 2017). However, muxes are typically not expected to have long-term relationships or marry, so that they can provide emotional and financial support for their parents until they are alive (Synowiec, 2018). As Ramirez and Munar (2018) interestingly note, the social collocation of muxes in the Zapotec culture challenges Western binary heterosexist gender norms by embracing gender and sexual fluidity, but it still limits muxes' individuality by imposing a culturally predefined lifestyle and social role. This tension could be understood as being the result of Juchitan's matrifocal family structure, which promotes gender equality on the one hand but imposes significant cultural and ritual roles on men, women, and muxes in the social, economic, and family spheres on the other (Mirandé, 2016). Muxes, then, are not only highly valued for their cultural significance, but for the central role they play in their communities' labour market and family structures.

National and international interest in the muxe gender identity has increased since the mid-1990s (McGee, 2018). The existence of a 'progressive' gender identity and a 'queer paradise' in a country known for its patriarchy and machismo has quickly become the subject of academic research, documentaries, queer tourism, and news articles, exposing muxes' experiences to communities all over the world (McGee, 2018; Sartini, 2018). While this spotlight allowed for Indigenous queer voices to be acknowledged and amplified, it also accelerated the process of globalisation in Juchitan, which spawned a number of transformations in the ways muxes understand and perform their gender identity. Prior to Juchitan's exposition to the international community and Western LGBTQIA+ rights movements, muxes did not subscribe to the definitions of transgender, gender fluid, or homosexual (Subero, 2013) and actively refused the need to adopt terms and fights that they thought did not represent them (Ramirez and Munar, 2021). However, as a result of globalisation and homotransnationalism, an increasing number of muxes started identifying themselves with transnational understandings of queer gender identities and sexualities (Subero, 2013). Namely, many muxes are identifying as transgender women, and deploy several strategies to get closer to the Western ideal of 'real woman', including hormonal therapies and genital operations, which was not the case until a couple of decades ago (Sartini, 2018). This is significant of a radical change within the muxe community: a shift from the Indigenous third gender and its fluidity to a more traditionally Western binary understanding of genders and sexualities. Muxes are now more likely to identify as women than as a third gender, and they strive for Western beauty ideals, moving away from

traditional Zapotec looks (Sartini, 2018; Redaccion ClickNecesario, 2016). The identity change of muxes has also been noted to have practical ramifications in their daily life. For instance, because many muxes want to undergo surgical operations to change their sex, they often become sex workers to finance them (Subero, 2013). Furthermore, in recent times muxes have experienced an unprecedented spawn of homophobia, which has led to increased rates of tortures and homicides (Miano Borruso, 2018). While there is not a straightforward link between rising homophobia and the changing gender identity of muxes, the two phenomena seem to have developed during the same period of time, and some commenters understand them to be the consequence of international modernisation (Miano Borruso, 2018).

The case study of muxes demonstrates how gender systems are subject to change in history, and how such changes can have practical repercussions on individuals and communities alike. The muxe gender identity first profoundly transformed during the Spanish colonisation of the 1500s, when the idea of different genders was first introduced in the Zapotec community (Lacey, 2008; Ramirez and Munar, 2021), and is now slowly undergoing a second, more radical transformation with the influence of Western media, queer tourism, and homotransnationalism (McGee, 2018; Sartini, 2018; Redaccion ClickNecesario, 2016). In the following section, the essay further examines how homotransnationalism is reproducing what was earlier defined as 'coloniality of gender' and suggests ways to decolonise international queer advocacy and development.

4. Analysis

4.1 The coloniality of gender in the muxe community

Earlier this essay examined how muxes, along with many other Indigenous queer communities worldwide, underwent a colonisation of gender during the centuries of European colonisation. There is a plethora of decolonial academic research (e.g., Picq and Tiquna, 2019; McGee, 2018; Ramirez and Munar, 2022) attesting to how Indigenous queerness was transformed by the imposition of Catholic gender systems on the colonies, and how often brutal this transformation has been. However, the contemporary methods by which gender is colonised are much less acknowledged and have only recently become a field of academic study.

Returning to Lugones (2008) concept of coloniality of gender, it is possible to historicise gender from pre-colonial times to its contemporary deployments, unpacking how colonial

and racial structures may shape it. Applying this framework to the specific case study of muxes, we can examine two main waves of coloniality of gender: one in the 1500s, the other in present times. During the European colonisation of the 16th century, the colonisers introduced the notions of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity, but Zapotecs were able to maintain the majority of their traditions and cosmology, including their Indigenous concept of third gender (McGee, 2918, Sartini, 2018; Lacey, 2008). In the contemporary context, muxes are experiencing a second process of gender colonialism that operates more subtly. This wave involves the globalisation and exportation of Western queer politics in non-Western countries via homotransnationalism, which employs mass media, advocacy, activism, and homodevelopment to transnationalise Western queer politics accomplishments. In particular, over the past two decades, muxes have been exposed to and influenced by dominant Western narratives of queerness, profoundly altering their Indigenous experience of the third gender and leading them to 'dub' Western queer models (Bollstorff, 2003). This process of dubbing includes a change in language and awareness in defining their gender identity, which is increasingly related to Western conceptions of homosexuality and transgenderism, as well as an increase in interest in plastic surgery to meet Western beauty standards (Sartini, 2018). Thus, homotransnationalism positions Western queerness as a superior, hegemonic model of queerness, encouraging muxes to distance themselves from their Indigenous queer identity in order to embrace more internationally recognised gender identities.

Di Pietro (2019) coined the term ‘benevolent violence’ to examine how dominant media seeks to simplify nonwestern cultures to create an agreement between the west and non-west. However, for the purposes of this essay, it is more useful to understand it in its broader sense, which is the engagement in actions that are well-intentioned toward a cultural Other but end up violating it (Ratel-Khan, 2020). This concept efficiently describes what could be argued to be one of the main flaws of homotransnationalism; advocating for international LGBTQIA+ rights and initiating development programmes to support queer people around the world is not colonial in nature. However, when these practices prioritise the dominant culture’s set of values and knowledge, they often simplify, disregard and Other the non-dominant culture, reproducing colonial power dynamics. As previously quoted in the essay, Lugones states that although colonialism is history, ‘the coloniality of gender is still with us’ (2010, p. 746), in the very structure of how the Global North makes sense of gender in the contemporary context. Following this line of reasoning, it can be contended that homotransnationalism is contributing to a second wave of gender colonialism, but the question of what can be done to decolonise it still remains. While this essay does not aim to

answer this question, testing the limits of homotransnationalism and investigating decolonial alternatives can be instrumental for further research in the field.

4.2 Toward decolonial queerness

The maintenance and internationalisation of a universal, colonial gender system was found to have problematic consequences to muxes' cultural and personal gender identity, as well as on their lifestyle and safety. Similar patterns have been reported in other Indigenous queer communities, most remarkably among Two-Spirit communities in Canada and North America (Tran, 2022; Hunt and Holmes, 2015). Thus, queer and decolonial researchers and practitioners worldwide are being tasked to find ways to decolonise how we think about and work on gender and sexuality on an international level to welcome and support non-Western queerness. Drawing from literature on the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and White colonialism, this section proposes three strategies to decolonise Western ways of 'doing gender': questioning Eurocentric knowledge, decolonising language, and strengthening relationships with the sexual Other. These suggestions are far from being exhaustive, but can still provide insights into how gender decolonisation may look like in practice.

Decolonising homotransnationalism and, more broadly, Western understandings of gender and sexuality begins by historicising gender (Lugones, 2008) and recognising the effects of colonisation and contemporary processes of coloniality on 'colonised' nations (Kulpa and Silva, 2016). By conducting this analysis, it is possible to defamiliarize concepts such as gender and sexuality, which are assumed to be universal and ahistorical, and to reveal the intersectional ramifications of Western imperialism. However, awareness alone is insufficient. To decolonise our thoughts and actions, we must reconceive our own practices of 'doing knowledge' and, by extension, 'doing gender'. When advocating for LGBQIA+ rights, doing research, or working on a development initiative, we could ask ourselves: who is this project serving?; whose knowledge and skills are being utilised?; whose needs are being met, and whose are not being considered?. Raising these questions and troubling the Eurocentricity that has so far represented the mainstream approach to queerness and development is crucial to actively engage with critical race and Indigenous theories and geopolitical issues such as imperialism, colonialism, globalisation, neoliberalism, and nationalism (Hunt and Holmes, 2015).

Another crucial step that needs to be taken to decolonise gender is decolonising language. The use of English as lingua franca in academia, international development and queer

activism is resulting in the erasure of Indigenous language, which is considered to be one of the most powerful tools of Indigenous resistance, and is therefore perpetuating a form of epistemic violence (Tuck et al., 2014). Many authors, including Tuck et al. (2014), Kulpa and Silva (2016) and Hunt and Holmes (2015), highlight the centrality of language in the decolonial project, arguing that bringing attention to language is essential to dismantle the cognitive imperialism of Eurocentric universalism and its hegemony over ontology and epistemology. Using terms such as 'gay' or 'transgender' to define muxes, for example, simplifies and distorts muxes' gender identity, and violates Zapotec's Indigenous culture. Resisting the temptation to universalise meanings and experiences through the use of a unique language, most frequently English, dignifies and respects Indigenous knowledge, and is therefore of paramount importance to decolonise the way we speak and think about gender and sexuality.

Lastly, enhancing Western queer organisations' and individuals' knowledge of Indigenous gender and sexual identities through local encounters would enable them to anchor their decolonisation efforts in ongoing political activities outlined by Indigenous peoples themselves (Hunt and Holmes, 2015). Engaging in a process of development or decolonization without familiarising oneself with local realities risks implementing ineffective, potentially damaging changes and threatens local communities as 'objects' as opposed to 'subjects'. Referring back to the case study of the muxes in Mexico, it could be argued that a smaller proportion of researchers or journalists would have defined them as 'transgender women' if they had spent time within the community learning about their history, cosmology, and gender identity.

5. Conclusion

International movements advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights are living in a transformative historical time in which the support and recognition of gender and sexuality dissidents is at the forefront of many organisations and governments worldwide, especially in Europe. National and international gains are often attempted to be transnationalised in non-European countries through a process termed homotransnationalism, which has been criticised for resulting into a top-down approach that reproduces neocolonial dynamics. This essay engaged with this highly debated topic aimed at demonstrating how homotransnationalism specifically perpetuates a form of neocoloniality of gender by imposing Western queer politics and devaluing Other experiences of queerness. This was achieved by engaging with decolonial, Indigenous, and international development literature, and examining the case study of muxes in Juchitan, Mexico, who despite having a strong Indigenous identity are still

being influenced by international queer models and epistemologies. Lastly, the paper proposed three strategies for LGBTQIA+ organisations and individuals to decolonise the way they 'do gender' and better validating and supporting Indigenous queerness.

While issues of homotransnationalism and queer development are fiercely contested, little research has been conducted on the practical implications of these phenomena and what decolonising them might entail. Despite these limitations, this research has provided a useful overview of the contemporary phenomenon of homotransnationalism as well as the key concepts and approaches to the decolonisation of gender and sexuality. In conclusion, it is essential to emphasise that, despite the fact that there is still much work to be done, research in this area is advancing rapidly, which may allow for queer development frameworks and politics to become more contextualised, intersectional, and decolonial in the foreseeable future.

6. Reference List

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