

# Global Queering and Global Queer Theory: Thai [Trans]genders and [Homo]sexualities in World History

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## Introduction

Since the early 1990s, many authors [e.g. Plummer, 1992; Altman, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2001; Drucker, 2000; Jackson, 2000] have identified the transnational proliferation of new same-sex and transgender identities and cultures as a significant instance of cultural globalisation. In 1992, Plummer wrote, “Homosexualities have become globalised”. [Plummer, 1992: 17] Altman has labeled this phenomenon “global queering”, [Altman 1996a] and in a 1997 article “Global Gaze/Global Gays” he observed, “What strikes me is that *within* a given country, whether Indonesia or the United States, Thailand or Italy, the *range* of constructions of homosexuality is growing”. [Altman, 1997: 424, emphases in original] Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan observe, “Queerness is now global. Whether in advertising, film, performance art, the Internet, or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies, images of queer sexualities and cultures not circulate around the globe.” [Cruz-Malavé & Manalansan 2002, p. 1] These observations raise the question of what has produced apparently similar transgender and homosexual identities in diverse social, political, and cultural settings.

Recent research on queer Asia<sup>1</sup> presents challenges for understanding the globalisation of homosexual and transgender identities. Firstly, this research has critiqued early accounts that explained global queering primarily in terms of the spread of Western, especially American, sexual and gender cultures. Transnational similarities amongst queer cultures are indeed emerging. However, diverse new queer identities have also developed in Asia that are not converging towards Western forms. These local sex cultural differences are not merely residues of premodern Asian traditions,

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1. While now used widely in anglophone countries to refer collectively to diverse gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual identities, the term “queer” is not used in all societies. Nonetheless, the growing influence of queer studies in Asia was reflected in the more than 160 papers presented at the *1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Asian Queer Studies* convened by the Australia-based AsiaPacifiQueer Network in Bangkok in July 2005. See: <http://bangkok2005.anu.edu.au/>

but have emerged in the modern era. The new forms of sex and gender difference in Asia – which are different from both their own historical traditions and Western queer cultures – show that cross-cultural borrowing is not the only, or necessarily predominant, force producing the broad-scale sex cultural transformations of global queering. Recent research emphasises the importance of local agency in indigenous processes of sex cultural change and reveals that the emergence of local differentiation within and cross-cultural similarities amongst sexual cultures are equally salient modern phenomena. In brief, this research confirms that local processes remain powerful forces for cultural transformation and are central to both new forms of sex cultural difference *and* the transnational convergences that are emerging in world sexual cultures.

In the first part of this study I summarise some of the misconceptions of first generation studies of global queering that have been debunked by recent research. In the second section I summarise the results of research on Thai homosexual and transgender cultures as a basis for considering the theoretical challenge of producing a more adequate account of global queering. Untangling the presumptions that underpin homogenizing “McWorld” [Barber, 1996] or “McGay” [Boellstorff, 2005] misunderstandings of global queering requires both empirical studies queer cultures beyond the West and a re-assessment of Western-derived queer theory. None of the models developed to explain modern Western queer history account fully for global level changes in homosexual and transgender cultures. I conclude by proposing that hybridising the alternative queer historiographies presented by Foucault, Trumbach, and D’Emilio, respectively, may provide a basis for developing a more adequate account of modern transnational queer history.

## Correcting misconceptions about global queering

### *Globalisation is Not Homogenising World Queer Cultures*

Comparative research on Asia’s diverse queer cultures [e.g. Morris, 1994; Jackson, 1995, 2004; Garcia, 1996; Johnson, 1997; McLelland, 2000; Sinnott, 2004; Martin, 2004; Costa & Matzner, 2007; Graham Davies, 2007] has questioned earlier views that, “[g]lobalisation has helped create an international gay/lesbian identity”. [Altman, 2001: 86] This research has revealed a proliferating diversity of sexual and gender identities that in some, but not all, countries have drawn upon the English identity labels “gay” and “lesbian”. As Boellstorff [2005, 2007] writes in the case of Indonesia, these labels have often been appropriated to mark new local forms of same-sex identity rather than the borrowing of Western cultural patterns. Adam *et al.* argue that while “parallels in the development of gay and lesbian movements are striking”, [Adam *et al.*, 1999: 344]

*[S]imilarities in activities, styles, symbols, institutions, language, and so on... do not imply the identities are the same... [A]pparent commonalities must not blind us to differences that exist in the meanings of these practices. Country-specific elements remain important... [Adam *et al.*, 1999: 348]*

Weeks observes that the many forms of local difference recognised in recent studies of queer globalisation are, “helping to dissolve the idea of a single universal

lesbian or gay identity”, [Weeks, 2007: 219] and he concludes that, “[T]he Western gay is not seated at the top of an evolutionary tree... notions of what it is to be sexually different are likely to be radically modified as the “perverse dynamic” at the heart of so many cultures... confronts the imperatives of global interconnectedness.” [Weeks, 2007: 218] Research on Asia’s queer cultures reveals the local meanings of global tendencies, presenting a complex picture of processes that are producing the apparent paradox of simultaneous sex cultural differentiation and convergence. In summary, research on global queering in Asia confirms Appadurai’s account of cultural globalisation as a multifaceted phenomenon, “[G]lobalisation is... [an] uneven and even *localising* process. Globalisation does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenisation or Americanisation”. [Appadurai, 1996: 17, emphasis in original].

### *Americanisation is not the main source of global queering*

In the study in which he coined the expression “global queering”, Altman quotes a 1996 article from *The Economist* on the internationalisation of gay identity, “In effect, what McDonald’s has done for food and Disney has done for entertainment, the global emergence of ordinary gayness is doing for sexual cultures”<sup>2</sup>. As Wilson observes, many discussions of Asian queer subjectivities have assumed “an import-export calculus” by assuming that queer sexualities beyond the West “derive from US-inflected Western modes of sexuality or from Western-based systems of modernity, such as capitalism”. [Wilson 2006] She critiques such views for recapitulating Western hegemony by locating the source and agency of modern queer life solely in the West.

Altman points out that while American economic power may be at the centre of the globalisation of capitalism, there are limits to the scope of American cultural influence. For example, American religious culture has much less impact internationally than American economic, political, and military power, “The peculiarly American combination of free-market economics with restrictive sexual morality means that [American] sex panics are not always easily internationalised. Indeed the US moral right, despite considerable efforts, has had at best a patchy influence on the rest of the world”. [Altman, 2001: 153] Altman adds, “Similarly, the internal arguments of American feminists and homosexuals often seem largely irrelevant outside the United States”. [Altman, 2001: 154] That is, religious and sex cultural issues that are of defining importance within the United States are often ignored by the rest of the world and “despite considerable efforts” many American cultural attitudes have not been internationalised. Altman’s account of American cultural specificity shows that American economic dominance has not always led to cultural Americanisation, and that theories of cultural globalization, including global queering, need to highlight the extent of local autonomy that exists even with the growth of transnational capitalism.

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2. *The Economist*, 6 January 1996, “Let Them Wed”, p.84, cited by Altman [1996a].

Drucker argues that “deep-going social processes like urbanisation, and a minimum of political space to organise a [queer] community” [Drucker, 2000: 15] have been more important than cultural borrowing in the internationalization of queer cultures and he resists, “any implication of a uniform process moving more or less quickly in a single direction”. [Drucker, 2000: 15] Summarising research on Indonesian gay cultures, Boellstorff writes, “A frequent Western misunderstanding is that gay tourism or international gay organizations have played a significant role in the translocation of ‘gay’ subjectivities to Southeast Asia, an assertion commonly made without a shred of supporting evidence”. [Boellstorff, 2007: 198] He also argues that, “[T]here has been a failure in queer studies... to set forth any theorisation of the Southeast Asian gay subject that does not presume inauthenticity, complicity, or domination [by presumed Western precedents]”. [Boellstorff, 2007: 198]

Several lines of inquiry demonstrate that cultural borrowing from the West has not been the main source of either the emergent similarities or the new forms of difference among world queer cultures. Linguistic evidence played a key role in early arguments that cross-cultural borrowing of Western homosexual identities had been the main process driving global queering. The fact that increasing numbers of homosexual men in both Western and non-Western societies use the label “gay” was central to arguments about the “global gay” [Altman 1997]. However, the vocabularies of Thailand’s queer cultures reveal a high degree of local linguistic autonomy rather than a copying of Anglophone Western models.

The contemporary labeling of Thai male homosexual identities as “gay” indeed involves appropriation from English, with the word “gay” first being used by Thai men involved in relationships with Western men in Bangkok in the early 1960s. [Jackson 1999, 2004] However, the role of Western expatriates in the origins of Thailand’s new queer identities should not be over-emphasised as adaptation of the term “gay” beyond the West often marks the emergence of distinctive new local worlds of homosexual meaning. As Adam *et al.* [1999] observe, the globalisation of the word “gay” does not signal the rise of a universal gay identity but rather the adoption of a set of strategies that may produce different forms in different places. Western observers have often misinterpreted the borrowing of the term “gay” to label these strategic local engagements as the borrowing of a Western identity. Indeed, Thai gay populations have drawn creatively on foreign idioms to label local sex-cultural patterns and often use English in ways that are alien in English-speaking countries. For example, in Thailand the “top/bottom” or “actif/passif” pairing is labeled with the borrowed terms “gay king”/“gay queen”, or often simply “king/queen”. While “queen” has historical associations with effeminate homosexuality in English-speaking countries, its pairing with “king” to denote a preferred variety of homosexual activity is unique to Thailand. It is likely that the paired idioms “gay king”/“gay queen” are not a direct borrowing from Western gay cultures but rather derive from the names of two now-demolished cinemas in post-War Bangkok. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Kings Cinema and Queens Cinema were co-located in Bangkok’s Wang Burapha shopping precinct, with both venues often screening foreign erotic movies.

Thai homosexual women have a much more ambiguous relationship to English than Thai gay men and generally resist the label “lesbian” and ignore the English-language lesbian idiom of “butch/femme”. Nonetheless, Thai homosexual women have adapted other English terms to coin the paired expression *tom-dee* [from “tom boy” and the second syllable of “lady”, respectively] to refer to female same-sex partners involved in butch/femme-type relationships. [see Sinnott 2004] Like their gay compatriots, Thai *toms* and *dees* have drawn on English as a resource to coin their own distinctive neologisms.

In contrast to both the gay and *tom-dee* cultures, the main local terms for male-to-female [m-t-f] transgenders and transsexuals in Thailand ignore English and reflect Thai terminologies. The most common local term for m-t-f transgenders is *kathoey* and even many popular synonyms for this term, such as *phu-ying praphet sornq* [“second type of woman”], draw on Thai rather than English. The local neologism “lady boy” is sometimes used by Thais when speaking to an international audience, but again this reflects a Thai usage that is not found in the English-speaking world.

If language use does indicate the origins of a modern queer culture, then the above evidence shows that even when English is used in Thailand it indicates linguistic innovation and local autonomy as much as foreign borrowing. The mix of creative adaptation, active resistance, and nonchalant indifference that Thailand’s gay, *tom-dee*, and *kathoey* cultures, respectively, show to queer English show the need to look for a highly uneven mix of forces in explaining global queering.



Figure 1 – A 2007 postcard used in safe-sex outreach activities amongst Thai MSM [men-who-have-sex-with-men] reflects the distinctive local uses of English to describe the diverse identities that make up Thailand’s contemporary male homosexual cultures. “King” and “Queen” denote “top” and “bottom”, respectively. “Bi” is an abbreviation of “bisexual”, while “both” denotes sexual versatility, or a gay man who is “both king and queen”. [Source: Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand]

Historical evidence also challenges the view that cultural borrowing from the West provided the impetus for the development of modern Asian queer cultures. What Wilson [2006] calls the “import-export calculus” of global queering assumes that the West has imposed its form of modernity on the rest of the world, whether by imperialism in the colonial era or neo-imperialism since World War II. However, not all modernisation in Asia has resulted from colonial rule or neo-colonial expansionism. It is often forgotten that not all of Asia was colonised by the West. Japan and Siam<sup>3</sup> both remained independent throughout the colonial era and significantly it is in these two countries that Asia’s first modern homosexual communities emerged<sup>4</sup>. An import-export model of global queering does not explain why Tokyo and Bangkok emerged as Asia’s first “gay capitals” rather than the metropolitan centres of former colonies, such as Jakarta, Bombay, and Saigon, where direct rule by Europeans extended over many decades if not centuries. The import-export model does not explain why modern Asian homosexualities emerged first in those societies that suffered the *least* direct impact from Western imperialism. Contact with the West, at least in its imperialist colonising form, delayed rather than assisted the development of modern gay cultures in Asia. In contrast to the view that global queering in Asia emerges from the region’s subordination to the West, it is clear that the relative *autonomy* of politically independent Siam and Japan vis-à-vis the West was central to the early emergence of modern gay cultures in both countries.

### *Contemporary Asian transgenders are not “traditional”*

Early global queering studies, including my own, [Jackson 1995] often presented an opposition between m-t-f transgenderism, imagined as a site of persistent premodern “tradition”, and gay male homosexuality, represented as a domain of transgressive, Western-influenced, commodified modernity. This is a view I have since revised. [Jackson 2003a]. Recent research reveals Asia’s gay, lesbian, and m-t-f transgender cultures to all be modern forms that differ from both Western queer cultures *and* the premodern gender/sex cultures of their own societies. Boellstorff criticizes the emphasis on “tradition” in accounts of transgenderism in Asia, observing that in the case of Indonesia “although *warias* [m-t-f transvestites] live in a postcolonial nation-state, analyses often frame them in terms of locality, tradition, and ritual”. [Boellstorff 2007, p. 81] Summarizing research on m-t-f transvestites in Southeast Asia, he writes:

*[M]ale transvestites in Southeast Asia are not legacies of prior “traditions.” Rather the available evidence suggests that male transvestites emerged as “commodified transgender” subject positions only in the late nineteenth century or early twentieth.* [Boellstorff 2007, p. 192]

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3. The country was called Siam until 1939, when the name was changed to Thailand.

4. For accounts of the modern history of male homosexuality in Japan see Pflugfelder [1999] and McLelland [2000, 2005].

My research on Thai queer genders and sexualities reveals that contemporary patterns of *kathoey* transgenderism are just as recent and as different from pre-modern forms as Thai gay sexualities, with Thailand's *kathoey* cultures taking their current forms as a result of a 20<sup>th</sup> century revolution in Thai gender norms. [Jackson 2003a] The antiquity of the term *kathoey* has masked the modernity of the identities now labeled by this word. While research on Asian queer cultures has critiqued "Out of America" explanations of global queering, it confirms Altman's contention that capitalism has played a central role. Indeed, new Asian transgender identities have emerged within the same context of market capitalism that Altman argues has supported the globalisation of gay-type identities. Future historical research will need to abandon the mistaken association of transgenderism with pre-capitalist residues of tradition and instead trace how the market has provided a space within which new transgender identities have formed around the commodification of modern norms of feminine beauty.

### *Global queering began before "globalisation"*

Some discussions of global queering have suggested that new Asian queer identities emerged only in the 1990s as part of the most recent wave of post-Cold War globalising influences. For example, Berry *et al.* state, "The recent emergence of gay and lesbian communities in Asia and its diaspora is intimately linked to the development of information technology in the region." [Berry *et al.*, 2003: 1] However, this historical sequence, which positions non-Western queer cultures as emerging after sex-cultural transformations that it is assumed took place first in the United States in the 1960s is inaccurate. Global queering has a considerably deeper history than is represented in many accounts of the phenomenon, with new forms of sexual subjectivity being apparent in Thailand since at least the early 1960s. Gay and transgender *kathoey* cultures emerged in Bangkok decades before the internet era, and the word "gay" was being used by masculine homosexual men in that city several years *before* the June 1969 Stonewall uprising in New York City saw the establishment of the modern gay liberation movement in the West. [See Jackson 1999]

Chauncey [1994] maintains "the hetero-homosexual binarism, the sexual regime now hegemonic in American culture, is a stunningly recent creation", [Chauncey, 1994: 13] and identifies the mid-twentieth century as the period when modern American ideas of homosexuality emerged. This chronology of American sex cultural shifts is very close to the periodisation revealed in my research on Thailand, [Jackson 1999, 2000] where contemporary understandings of both *kathoey* and gay emerged in the years after World War II. Given that sex cultural changes in Bangkok were largely contemporaneous with those in America, the question then is not how Asian societies such as Thailand borrowed Western queer cultural patterns but rather why sexual cultures in parts of Asia and the West *both* underwent major transformations in similar, but also distinctive, ways over the same period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Answers to this question will need to identify *common transnational processes* that impacted on both Asian and Western sexual cultures.

Boellstorff [2005, p. 219] points to three spatio-historical scales at which Asian queer subjectivities have been analysed: [1] the local or “ethnolocal”, which anthropological studies often identify as the site of premodern transgender and homoerotic traditions; [2] the national, which historical research links with the tradition-disrupting impact of colonialism, the imposition of Western heteronormative sexual regimes, and movements for national independence; and [3] the global, which political-economy and cultural studies approaches interpret as reflecting the contemporary postcolonial moment of transnational capitalism. Of these three scales, he identifies the nation as the most important in defining the distinctiveness of modern Indonesian gay, lesbian [*lesbi*], and transvestite [*waria*] identities, all of which differ from ethnolocal traditions while also failing to conform to what he terms “McGay” accounts of a homogeneous global queer culture. Boellstorff opens the way to consider the nation as a third space of global queering analysis between anthropological emphases on the “local difference” of premodern homoeroticisms, on the one hand, and political-economy approaches that assume an emerging transnational “sameness” among globalisation-era [homo]sexualities and [trans]genders, on the other.

My research confirms the value of this approach and reveals the importance of the emergence of the Thai nation in modern Thai queer history. However, distinctive national orders have developed in each country, with a modern state emerging in Thailand in the absence of a colonial history while in Indonesia the state has emerged from a context of centuries of Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule across the archipelago. Furthermore, gay, lesbian, and transgender subjectivities in each country have somewhat different relations to their respective orders of national modernity. Boellstorff regards the post-independence nation-building ideology of Indonesia as a single “archipelago” [*nusantara*], and in particular the post-1965 New Order regime discourse of the ideal heteronormative family that should inhabit this newly minted national space, as having had a pivotal influence on the country’s new queer sexualities. He also identifies the national mass media as important to the consolidation of new *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities. [Boellstorff 2005, p. 216]

New Thai gay identities emerged over a decade before Indonesian gay subjectivities. Rather than being a by-product of a specific political ideology of nation building they appear related to broader processes that led to the creation a geographically bordered Thai state controlled by a centralised national bureaucracy and imagined through the discursive lens of a single national language. More specifically, modern Thai queer identities appear to be related to the development of a national level market and the rise of print capitalism, which Anderson [1983] identified as a key source of modern ideas of nationhood. From the early 1960s, nationally distributed newspapers published in the national Thai language based on the Bangkok dialect were central to the rapid dissemination of evolving notions of *gay* and *kathoe* identity [Jackson 1999]. From the 1970s, mass-circulation popular magazines helped consolidate the meanings of new identities in regular columns dealing with *kathoe*, *gay*, and *tom-dee* issues, [Jackson, 1995] while

gay-identified men began taking control of discursive representations of homosexuality with the publishing of nationally distributed commercial gay magazines in the early 1980s. Modern Thai queer subjectivities can thus be seen as constituting a nation-level “imagined sexual community” whose emergence has been facilitated by both mainstream and community-based forms of Thai print capitalism.

### Reading [and re-reading] Thai queer history

I have tried to bring a comparative perspective to studies of global queering by exploring the histories of Thailand’s new queer cultures in light of the results of the research summarized above. Using the Thai press and popular gay and lesbian publications as primary sources, I traced the emergence of new same-sex and transgender identity categories into public discourse. [Jackson, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003a] This research revealed that starting from the early 1960s there was a rapid differentiation of queer identities and an expansion in publicly visible transgender and homosexual cultures. This explosion of Thai identities and cultures had both similarities with and differences from the West. Sexuality-based gay identities very similar to those in the West emerged. However, for the female homosexual *tom-dee* and m-t-f transgender *kathoey* cultures masculine/feminine gender difference rather than sexuality was the most important determinant of identity. The modern explosion of Thai identities was thus a proliferation of queer genderings as well as queer sexualities. The cultural prominence of gender in Thailand is reflected in the intense popular fascination with the transgender *kathoey* and the relative invisibility of Thailand’s large population of gender-normative gay men in both local and international media representations of queer Thailand.

#### *Foucault – biopower in Thailand ?*

From this basis of research on Thai sources, I then considered whether Foucault’s [1980] account of the origins of modern European homosexualities might account for the explosion of Thai queer genders and sexualities. Foucault argued that 19<sup>th</sup> century modes of biopower [mediated through the law, medicine, education, and religion] were linked to Western Europe’s transformation to an industrial society, and radically restructured patterns of sexual identity. However, I found that the forms of power that Foucault identified as the sources of modern European homosexualities were mobilized in Thailand *after* the new queer genders and sexualities had emerged and been identified in the Thai press as “social problems” [*panha sangkhom*] that needed to be “solved” [*kae-khai*]. [Jackson, 1997] Medical, educational, and other forms of biopower were adapted from Western models in the 1970s as part of a state-based regime aimed at controlling and suppressing non-normative genders and sexualities. A biomedical regime over homosexuality and transgenderism arrived late in Thailand, being established in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to put the genies of the new queer genders and sexualities back into the bottle of Thai tradition.

These findings left me with two key questions. Firstly, where did the new Thai queer identities come from if not *via* a Foucauldian mechanism and, secondly, why was gender difference rather than sexuality the dominant domain over which so many of the new identities had emerged? In seeking answers I could not fall back on the notion that the new identities reflected the persistence of premodern Thai gender culture. The historical record left no doubt that all the gay, *tom*, *dee*, and *kathoey* identities had taken their current forms in recent times.

### *Trumbach [via Foucault] – Thailand’s gender revolution*

The discursive and representational dominance of queer genderings in modern Thailand led me to the work of Trumbach [1987], who argued that an early eighteenth century revolution in gender norms in Britain preceded and laid the foundations for modern homosexualities. Trumbach’s findings led me to revisit the Thai archive for signs of a possible gender transformation. Retracing the historical record, I found that the modernising Thai state had enforced a restructuring of normative gender culture that largely ignored homosexuality and transgenderism until the 1970s and 1980s. [Jackson, 2003a] In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Foucauldian forms of biopower had indeed been instituted in Thailand via reforms of the law, education, and other domains. But the aim of these reforms was to refashion heteronormative male and female genderings as “civilised” and “modern” rather than to establish normative patterns of sexual behaviour.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Siam’s increasing engagement with the imperialist West led to the society’s gender culture – in particular, the perceived “androgyny” of male and female fashions – becoming an object of elite concern. The British and French, in particular, viewed the relative lack of difference between Siamese men’s and women’s fashions, hair styles, and occupations as signs of a “semi-barbarous” lack of civilization. From the 1890s, Siam’s royal elites responded to these criticisms by using state instrumentalities to “civilise” the populace and ensure that Siamese men and women dressed and looked differently from each other. This regime of biopower included the regendering of men’s and women’s dress codes, speech forms, and personal names. In responding to Western critiques of “semi-barbarous” androgyny, the Siamese state drew on new forms of power to institute a regime of European-styled masculine-feminine gender differentiation. That is, forms of power that Foucault identified as the source of the homosexual/heterosexual divide in Europe were adapted in Siam to institute a masculine/feminine gender binary across cultural fields that previously had not been strongly marked by gender difference.

This research, using a gender-focused hybridisation of Trumbach’s and Foucault’s ideas, revealed that Thailand’s new queer identities emerged from a history of state interventions in gender that initially took place in the absence of an intensified policing of sexuality. Foucault’s ideas on power, discourse, and subjectivity thus provided a *method* for studying Thai queer history even while empirical aspects of his study of French history proved not to be relevant to understanding transformations in Thailand.

The hybridised Foucault-via-Trumbach method explained the predominance of gender over sexuality in modern Thai queer cultures: it has emerged from a self-modernising regime of biopower that focused intensely on the public performance of heteronormative gendering but largely overlooked private sexual practice. However, another major question remained. Gay identities based on notions of homosexuality had also emerged as part of the explosion of Thai identities. While Trumbach's ideas helped in developing a gender-focused Foucauldian account to understand the modern proliferation of Thai transgenderism, it did not explain the parallel emergence of sexuality-based gay homosexualities. This gap indicated that yet other historical processes had also been in train. In reflecting on this situation, I realised that while Foucault and Trumbach had led me to consider the place of state power in modern Thai queer history, I still had no clear picture of the role that capitalism may have played in the explosion of Thai identities. In seeking to redress this gap I turned to D'Emilio's account of the place of capitalist urbanization in the origins of modern homosexual identities.

### *D'Emilio – capitalism and queer autonomy beyond the West*

D'Emilio argues that in 19<sup>th</sup> century America the marketisation of labour broke down the heteronormative restrictions of family-based subsistence farming communities, while urbanisation provided spaces for new sex cultural networks to emerge:

*Only when individuals began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity – an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex. [D'Emilio, 1993: 470, emphasis in original]*

D'Emilio's account of modern American homosexualities as indigenous forms of sex cultural differentiation produced by market processes within the United States provides a model for understanding other new homosexual cultures as equally local consequences of the rise of other national varieties of capitalism. I have turned to D'Emilio because of the need to consider the role of the market in the emergence of pre-globalisation era modern queer cultures in Thailand. In contrast to recent accounts of cultural globalisation that emphasise the impact of transnational capitalism, D'Emilio considered capitalism in an earlier, national-level phase. As noted above, new queer identities emerged in Thailand before the 1990s intensification of globalising forces. In considering the impact of capitalism on Thai homosexual cultures we therefore need to reflect on relations between the market and sexuality in the pre-globalisation era.

Drawing on D'Emilio, I have explored the extent to which national, not transnational, forms of capitalism have been sources of some of the commonalities that now link gay and transgender cultures across borders. [Jackson forthcoming] I have sought to understand the key finding of first generation global queering studies – transnational queer similarities are emerging in the context of the

expansion of capitalism – in terms of the central conclusion of comparative research that modern queer cultures beyond the West are expressions of local agency. Drawing on Altman’s account of the way that American economic dominance does not necessarily lead to the Americanisation of cultures my aim has been to develop a narrative of global queering that decouples the spread of capitalism from cultural Westernisation and considers how the growth of market economies may enhance queer autonomy beyond the West.

While more research on capitalism and Thai queer history needs to be done, case studies from 20th century Thai gay and *kathoey* history confirm that global queering has emerged at least in part from national-level, market-based sex cultural differentiation. For example, the commodified cultural forms of gay magazines and male sex work emerged in Bangkok from local commercial conditions in an urban mass market. Only *after* these market-based sex cultural forms appeared locally did they subsequently come into contact with similar commercial phenomena in the West. Wilson [2004] has researched the place of the market in Thailand’s contemporary female same-sex *tom-dee* culture. She points out that shopping malls are key sites of *tom-dee* socializing and small trading and franchise businesses provide a basis for some *tom*-identified women to attain a degree of sexual autonomy. This research reveals that while the West’s political and economic dominance has clearly impacted on Thailand, the arrival of capitalism does not necessarily lead to an imposition of Western forms of cultural modernity that destroys local identities. Capitalism is indeed central to global queering, but in its national as much as its transnational varieties, and it deracinates premodern traditions and produces novel cultural forms time and again in each society in which it takes root.

## Hybrid queer theory for the hybridities of global queering

### *Negotiating tensions between “global” and “queer”*

Better understanding global queering requires further empirical and theoretical work. The empirical task is to incorporate the histories of more queer cultures beyond the West into an expanded narrative. Without detailed comparisons of Western and non-Western societies we cannot make informed judgments about what processes are operative, or dominant, whether globally or in individual societies. The analytical task is to negotiate tensions between different schools of queer historiography. Reading Foucault in conversation first with Trumbach and subsequently with D’Emilio has been highly productive, leading me to re-engage the Thai archive from a range of perspectives and revealing the diverse processes that underpin global queering. However, drawing on these authors also entails negotiating tensions within the notion of global queering that emerge from a disjuncture between the different frameworks from which the two elements of this compound concept respectively derive. On the one hand, accounts of the “global” are typically understood in terms of the impact of transnational capitalism. On the other hand, “queer” is usually, although not exclusively, understood in Foucauldian

terms, in which shifting relations of power and discourse are emphasized more than the effects of capital. To bring these two streams of queer historiography into closer dialogue will require augmenting Foucauldian accounts of biopower with D'Emilio's capitalism-focused account of modern homosexual history.

While D'Emilio sees the discursive factors explored by Foucault as having genuine force, he views them as ideological responses to transformations wrought by capitalism, not as an autonomous domain of power. He makes this clear when he states that the biomedical understandings of homosexuality that Foucault sees as central forces in the emergence of new discourses of sexuality:

*did not represent scientific breakthroughs, elucidations of previously undiscovered areas of knowledge; rather, they were an ideological response to a new way of organising one's personal life. The popularisation of the medical model, in turn, affected the consciousness of the men and women who experienced homosexual desire, so that they came to define themselves through their erotic life. [D'Emilio, 1993: 471]*

Like Chauncey's [1994] research on gay New York, my studies of queer Thailand also raise questions about the relationship between the forms of biopower outlined by Foucault and the historical emergence of sexuality-based identities. A Western-styled medical model of homosexuality and transgenderism was only established in Thailand in the 1970s, after the marketisation of labour and after patterns of same-sex culture were already changing in significant ways. This same historical sequence in both New York and Bangkok suggests that while the medicalisation of sexuality contributed to consolidating new patterns of homoeroticism it may not have been a key originating influence.

### *A queer political economy of proliferating gender and sexual difference*

Altman argues that, "current debates around changing forms of homosexuality [present] a choice between political economy, which argues for universalizing trends, and anthropology, which argues for specificities". [Altman 1996b, p. 87] I agree that positions taken in debates on cultural globalisation often relate to analysts' theoretical assumptions. [see Jackson, 2003b, 2003c] I also agree with Altman that "[w]e badly need a political economy of sexuality... which recognises the interrelationship of political, economic, and cultural structures". [Altman, 2001: 157] This political economy of global queering needs to relate the market to *both* the localising and the transnational dimensions of cultural globalisation, and it needs to explain how capitalism produces both modern forms of sex/gender cultural differentiation in some domains alongside homogenisation in others. In contrast to America-centred models, we need a political economy of global queering that represents globalisation as multi-centred. If capitalism is the engine of cultural globalisation, and if, as revealed by research on queer Asia, local sex cultural differentiation and international homogenisation are equally salient and co-existing trends, then the task is to explain how the market produces new local forms of sexual difference as well as transnational commonalities.

I have tried to begin addressing this analytical gap by bringing the universalist political economy and particularist anthropological approaches to global queering into dialogue. In contrast to Altman, [2001: 158-9] I do not believe that engaging a political economy approach to global queering entails abandoning queer theory. Research on Thai queer history shows that no current account of queer history, whether following Foucault or D'Emilio, fully explains the emergence of new forms of transgenderism and gender-normative homosexuality in that country. Queer theory is part of, not apart from, the development of a more adequate political economy of global queering. The place to begin building such theory is in a conversation amongst contributing streams of political economy and queer studies analysis. Such a theoretical conversation may provide a first step to developing a hybridised model of global queering that is better able to account for the hybridising processes that are at work in all contemporary sexual and gender cultures societies, Western and Non-Western. In collaboration with Fran Martin, Mark McLelland, and Audrey Yue, I have elsewhere considered global queering through the lens of theories of cultural hybridity. [see Martin *et al.* Forthcoming]

In comparative queer studies Western theory cannot be viewed as edicts set in stone but must be part of an open-ended exploration of whether processes identified by Western analysts are local and specific to the West or are general conditions. Expanding the empirical archive on global queering beyond the West to include countries such as Thailand requires us to rethink the work of Western analysts. Further comparative research exploring processes of sex cultural differentiation and convergence in the context of globalisation will help us assess the extent to which the ideas of Foucault, Trumbach, D'Emilio, and indeed other Western queer theorists capture the processes of change that are at work in all of the world's sexual and gender cultures.

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