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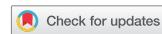
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Trump, trans students and transnational progress

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ABSTRACT

The Trump Administration's attempts to rescind trans students' domestic legislative protections is part of a new period of backlash against trans rights progress globally. This article examines the USA's changing role concerning trans students in education policy and rights progress internationally. It outlines developments in transnational policy for trans students. It contextualises US leadership in this policy area, particularly US President Obama and US President Trump's use of executive powers. It considers theoretical conceptualisations of trans rights 'progress' using the work of queer and trans theorists, before analysing data from 60 interviews with key informants participating high-level global networking for trans students' rights, documenting how stakeholders characterise recent US contributions. Several informants identified a period of 'progress' in trans rights during the Obama Administration, but others were more sceptical of such claims and critical of recent policy change by the US Government's Trump Administration. Alternative models for Northern and Southern engagement in global networking for trans students' rights are outlined and discussed.

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Introduction

Battles are being waged over trans students' rights globally following a period of unprecedented progress in transnational policy protection between 2010 and 2016. This article examines recent United States (US) impact on transnational progress for trans students' rights, and subsequent backlash. It begins by outlining global development in international policy for trans students. It then offers a theoretical conceptualisation of trans students' rights progress and ensuing debate, reporting on findings from a study of key stakeholder responses to US influence.

The article uses the term 'trans students' in inclusive, complex and unstable ways. It includes students whose gender identities differ from their allocated sex at birth: including both female-to-male/FtM and male-to-female/MtF trans students, and genderqueer (pan-gender, fluid or otherwise) students who identify beyond binary sex models (Boellstorff et al. 2014; Jones et al. 2016; Smith et al. 2014). It includes those fulfilling culturally specific gender roles such as Malaysia's *mak nyahs* (including feminised men doing 'female work'

and MtF tran persons); Thailand's *kathoey* (MtF trans and feminised gay men); India's *hijra* (third sex); Iran's *tara-jinsi* (who have undergone state-sanctioned gender transition), Pacific Islands' *fa'afafines* (those of male sex who later embody male and female roles) and others (Najmabadi 2014; UNESCO 2016c). Students – both in school and in higher education – engage with such identities inconsistently, in response to the protections and prohibitions surrounding them.

Recent global developments

Since 2010, advocates in all parts of the world have sought to protect gender identity and expression through the use of international human rights legislation (Vance 2011). The former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, described transphobic bullying in schools as a public health crisis (UN Secretary-General 2011). Two-hundred UN member states subsequently convened to discuss the prevention of transphobic bullying, clarifying provisions in the UN's (2012) *Born Free and Equal* policy. Brazil hosted UNESCO's first international policy consultation on transphobic bullying in schools, developing inclusive education policy guidelines (UNESCO 2011, 2012). The Global Network Against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Schools formed and has met annually, promoting key policy goals (Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy 2013).

In parallel, trans students' experiences of poor educational, physical and mental health outcomes from school-based discrimination has been documented in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK (GLSEN 2012; Jones and Hillier 2013; Jones et al. 2016; Russell et al. 2011). Over time, international consultations have facilitated the conduct of similar research in Africa, Asia and the Middle-East (UNESCO 2015, 2016b, 2016c). International and regional bodies including the UN and the European Union (EU) have promoted policy implementation, and a Ministerial Statement committing to trans students' protection has been released (UNESCO 2016a). Whilst several countries (Chile, South Africa and Thailand) and international organisations have played a role in supporting transnational policy rollout, advocates have argued that the USA in particular has sought leadership influence in progressing trans students' rights (Jones 2016).

US leadership

Progress in transnational action on trans students' rights was supported by the US Government's Obama Administration (2009–2016). The Obama Administration sought to support transgender people through policy, not fanfare: minimising press coverage for example when launching policies to (i) enable transgender people to more easily change the sex marker on their passports (US Department of State 2009); (ii) receive protection against discrimination in Federal Government contracts (US Department of Labor 2015); and (iii) serve openly in the military (US Department of Defense 2016). During this period, the White House created LGBTQ Webpages, LGBTQ Liaison Officers and gender neutral bathrooms in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The Obama Administration also sent an eight-page *Dear Colleague Letter* to all educational administrations outlining trans students' rights to access education under the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender (US Departments of Justice & Education 2016). It outlined the responsibility of educational institutions to provide a safe

non-discriminatory environment, to treat trans students according to their gender identity regardless of their sex on education records or identification documents, to allow access to sex-segregated facilities and activities according to gender identity, and to protect gender history privacy. In particular, it advised US Education Departments to:

... treat a student's gender identity as the student's sex for purposes of Title IX and its implementing regulations. This means that a school must not treat a transgender student differently from the way it treats other students of the same gender identity.

This policy was accompanied by a 25-page document containing examples of inclusive approaches to transitions, records, policies and resources (US Government 2016).

US officials, and President Obama himself, sought to promote trans students' inclusion through diplomatic pressure, boycotts and aid-restrictions particularly in African nations – especially Uganda and Kenya which had banned the dissemination of LGBT'propaganda'in schools (Leroux-Nega 2014; New York Times Editorial Staff 2016). The US Government's Consulates and the US Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) also funded events, dinners and meetings of the Global Network Against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Schools to stimulate dialogue on global protections for trans students (Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy 2013). UNESCO, UNAIDS and UNDP invited key GLSEN representatives, and grass-roots US LGBT education networkers, to discuss transphobia at global meetings and events.

Backlash

Intense backlash to the period of progress in transgender students' rights coincided with Trump's 2016 campaign and 2017 rise to power. The Trump Administration's domestic and international policies have sought to turn back much of the progress made by the former Obama Administration; claiming publicly to support trans people, whilst attacking them via policy retractions. In January 2017, President Trump announced he would retain protections against discrimination for federal contractors but by March of the same year he had removed the requirement for companies to demonstrate compliance – a loophole allowing transphobic discrimination (Kutner 2017).

Throughout his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump claimed his future administration would protect trans people. However it subsequently took down the White House's LGBTQ webpages; fired the LGBTQ Liaison Officers; and hired people known for their anti-LGBT stance including Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of Education Betsy Devos (Smith 2017). In February 2017, the Trump Administration disseminated a two-page *Dear Colleague* letter to educational administrations rescinding Obama's directive interpreting gender identity as included under Title IX's definitions of 'sex', devolving jurisdiction over the treatment of trans students to States:

The US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit concluded that the term 'sex' in the regulations is ambiguous and deferred to what the court characterised as the 'novel' interpretation advanced in the guidance. By contrast, a federal district court in Texas held that the term 'sex' unambiguously refers to biological sex (...) the Departments believe that, in this context, there must be due regard for the primary role of the States and local school districts (...) and rescind the above-referenced guidance documents. (US Departments of Justice & Education 2017)

This repeal proved inconsistent with US law and in May 2017, the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the rights of trans student Ash Whitaker (represented by the Transgender

Law Centre) to use the toilet matching his gender identity in a Wisconsin school (Trotta 2017). This move typified grass-roots trans student and non-governmental organisation efforts to combat anti-trans policies through local courts and campaigns. Nevertheless, the actions of the Trump Administration had created another loophole: schools in jurisdictions such as Texas and North Carolina with lacking or repealed local protections (Drake 2017) could allow transphobic discrimination. In July 2017, President Trump announced his aim to ban trans people from military service via Twitter (Phillip, Gibbons-Neff, and Lamothe 2017), despite their effectiveness and lack of cost burden (Schaefer et al. 2016), reinforcing a repeals-based approach to trans people and issues.

US-based evangelical Christian organisations have systematically funded attacks on trans student rights both internationally and domestically (Jones 2016; Parke 2016). These organisations contributed to, and were supported by, Trump Administration members including Education Minister Betsy DeVos (Smith 2017). *Focus on the Family* (which has \$88 million annual revenue, 13 international offices and funds from the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation), the *Family Research Council* (which advocates conversion therapy for trans students), and the *Alliance Defending Freedom* among others, have cumulatively supported hundreds of local and international anti-trans legislative efforts including the repeal of existing trans student protections (Parke 2016). Rick Warren's Saddleback Church; Scott Lively's Californian Ministry; Republican Senator Charles Grassley's The Family Ministry; Republican Senator James Inhofe and other US evangelicals in political and faith leadership were active in backing/funding Uganda's LGBT education 'propaganda' ban (Edwards and Tencer 2009).

In May 2016, the UN headquarters in New York hosted a 'Uniting Nations for a Family Friendly World' event, sponsored by anti-trans groups, the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam) and Family Watch International (which focuses on removing LGBT-friendly language from international policy). The event was co-sponsored by 25 countries of the Group of Friends of the Family (GoFF, a coalition created in 2015 to save religious liberty from gender-identity based rights pushes). A Belarus Minister advanced Goff's Statement in Support of the Family, expressing disappointment in UN 'attempts to withdraw the theme of the family (...) for the sake of controversial issues' (Group of Friends of the Family 2016). Anti-trans non-government organisation (NGO) representatives – the Family Rights Council and Family Watch International among others – claimed heteronormative families' rights over children's gender expression were 'entitled to protection by society and the State' (Sprigg 2016). Several NGO representatives promoted gender complementarity curricula (i.e. lessons pushing gender norm dogma) through transnational outreach into the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Canada and England (Parke 2016).

Having previously reduced international funding for anti-violence, HIV and services aiding trans youth (Coughlin and Messenlehner 2017), President Trump and his administration have also promoted policies privileging an assertive nationalism which shifts burdens to external bodies, threatening international networking previously central to transnational trans student rights progress (Jentleson 2017). At the 2016 Cleveland Republican National Convention, Trump claimed foreign bodies and Islam were *central* to US trans oppression, when the most significant attacks came from his own administration:

... in Orlando, Florida, 49 wonderful Americans were savagely murdered by an Islamic terrorist. This time, the terrorist targeted LGBTQ community. No good. (...) As your president, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology. (Lowder 2016)

The role of recent US Governments in leading transnational networking around trans student rights has therefore been substantial, but somewhat contradictory. While the Russian Federation, Uganda, and Nigeria have banned LGBT advocacy altogether (Malkin 2014; Onuah 2014; Rogers 2014), and Russia has supported anti-LGBT political and pressure groups for decades (Dugin 1997), the USA has had a more complicated role in leading both transnational protection *and* attacks on trans students' rights. Importantly, the increased use of the US president's executive authority in response to terrorism under the Bush Administration (Thrower 2017) later enabled new styles of US political action around trans students. Both President Obama's and President Trump's actions on transgender rights constitute primarily executive, not legislative, processes deriving (at least in part) from personal commitments and beliefs. Such wild shifts in policy have a destabilising transnational influence.

Southern perspectives on trans progress

Writers have theorised LGBT rights progress in varying ways. Dennis Altman and Jon Binnie have argued that the global epidemic of HIV, which impacted heavily on trans communities, stimulated government responses to gender diversity issues once allocated to 'private' rather than public ethical realms – casting HIV as a metaphor for the globalisation of LGBT awareness (Altman 2001; Binnie 2004). Others have worked to deconstruct global narratives of LGBT rights progress by considering how neoliberalism is both generative of and hostile towards LGBT students; authorising certain forms of participation by LGBT people above others (Binnie 2014; Cover et al. 2017). Queer theorists have critiqued the notion of 'trans rights progress' as non-hierarchical or global in nature; arguing that LGBT rights movements are often grounded in Anglo-American contexts, which fail to recognise how identities are framed beyond them (Binnie 2014; Connell 2014). Much queer writing on transnational issues focuses on travel, HIV and consumerism. It thus colonises trans issues in unhelpful ways under the 'LGBT' umbrella, relying on the 'visibility' of non-conforming trans people as part of the push for other groups' goals (West 2014).

Academics in diverse contexts have sought to decolonise trans studies by unpacking colonising psycho-medical discourses and gender norms (Boellstorff et al. 2014; Spade 2015; Towle and Morgan 2002). Raewyn Connell's book *Southern Theory* (2007), for example, critiques how the colonialist history of sociology privileged contributions from the North: contexts demonstrating political autonomy/imperialism and relative economic sufficiency including the UK and the USA. She notes how sociology often overlooks contributions from the South: contexts demonstrating coloniality/postcoloniality and insufficient resources for the majority, including India and South Africa (Connell 2007). This has created partialities in research theorisation, methods and findings. However, she also argues that there are no strict binaries between Northern and Southern perspectives; Northern and Southern perspectives can and do influence each other, and Norths exist within Souths in particular regions of the world. The reverse also occurs (Connell 2007, 2014) – with 'trans communities' providing vibrant examples of this (Valentine 2007).

Connell's work is especially helpful in explaining reductionist 'third sex' approaches present in anthropological assessments of trans identities in many contexts (Towle and Morgan 2002) and the complexities of belonging to culturally specific trans groups (Valentine 2007). Thus, the terms North and South are not used here in geographic ways, but for their political

meaning, and also for their effort to include trans people who often lack access to the means to share their experiences and views through academia and education.

Key informant interviews

As part of an ongoing review of the impact of the US policy and advocacy on educational developments for trans students, key informant input was collected from Southern, gender diverse, and Indigenous individuals as well as from a range of others. Sixty semi-structured interviews were conducted during global networking events in Dublin, Stockholm, New York, Paris, Krakow and Johannesburg in 2014–2017.

Informants were identified through their involvement in UN system activities and global networks on trans issues. All were over 18 years of age and received no payment for their participation. They included education ministers and ministry officials, government members, civil society leaders, the directors and employees of NGOs, and academics. Together, they represented a diverse range of regions, contextual categories, occupations and gender identities (Table 1).

Recognising that participants in a study such as this may encounter risks by highlighting the negative aspects of transnational relationships in their work, individuals were interviewed separately and given time to privately voice their perspectives without risk of interruption and with a level of confidentiality that they themselves chose.

Data collection acknowledged nuance relating to different trans identities in international settings, a key issue in decolonising trans studies (Najmabadi 2014). The study stressed its concern with underexplored Southern perspectives on US transnational work, framing transnational ‘progress’ around trans students as provisional and subjective depending upon the perspective of the interviewee.

One hour recorded interviews took place in pre-booked rooms or participant-selected spaces, or via telephone or email. Interview questions explored US leadership contributions to global work of relevance to trans students.

Ethical approval for the study was received from the University of New England’s Human Research Ethics Committee for pilot work in 2014 (HE14-005) and from La Trobe University’s

Table 1. Key informant characteristics ($n = 60$).

<i>Informants' region</i>				
Africa 10	Asia-Pacific 13	Americas 15	Middle-East 6	Europe 16
Global South 38	Global North 22			
<i>Informants' role</i>				
Civil society leadership/ staff 6	Government members/ staff 12	Education ministers/ leaders/teachers/coun- sellors 12	NGO directors/staff 20	Academics 10
<i>Informants' gender</i>				
Male/masculine identifying 26	Female/feminine iden- tifying 25	Non-binary/gender- queer 9		
Transgender 18	Cisgender 42			

Human Research Ethics Committee for the main project in 2016 (HEC16-021). Interviewees' details below (including name, role and organisation) are those determined by individual participants.

Analysis

Connell's (2007)'dirty theory' approach to thematic analysis was used in the study. This way of theorising recognises the difficulty of achieving equality in contexts where colonial, cissexist and funding-related power dynamics affect conversation (ordering who can speak, for how long, on what topic and with what level of risk). It (1) seeks to generalise in a thematic manner while acknowledging contextual specificity; (2) avoids privileging dominant constructions of practices (e.g. mainstream US perspectives on US international work on trans students); and (3) aims to report on practice-related concerns (i.e. with respect to US international work on trans students in dialogue with local perspectives and alternative practices such as the international support provided by other countries and groups). In the account below, Southern, women's and trans concerns are privileged, grouped loosely together in a grounded thematic analysis of responses.

Findings

Responses to US leadership

The majority of key informants (40 out of 60) expressed concern about US leadership in trans student issues. Concern ranged from frustration about styles of working (voiced in the responses of Northern participants) to more urgent anxieties about the potential impact on violence (more prevalent in the responses from Southern participants). Informants expressed frustration about US imperialism in global work styles. An Irish NGO worker explained,

Cultural superiority, competitiveness and claiming to be 'first' are significant problems. Under Obama, American organisations and governments workers naively offered to 'aid' more advanced countries. Even before Trump they could assume 'America was first'. We had earlier, more contextually appropriate documents pitched carefully over years and built in structurally to outlast different leaders. Our government, the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) and others all held stakes in it, we didn't need it 'overseen'.

Several comments negatively contrasted US leadership against a more grass-roots civil society response, highlighting the more collaborative approaches taken by European or South American work on trans students. A Norwegian Government informant commented,

EU sex discrimination protections include transgender people's gender identities as their 'sex'. So the EU, UNESCO and civil societies' and our own parallel efforts pushed each other onwards. It is important to distinguish this collaborative approach from competitive, punitive or isolationist US efforts. EU relations are based on sharing advances together, because not doing so leaves all vulnerable to reversals.

A school principal from South America described how government officials and NGO workers in Spain, Malta and Brazil found the use of emotional South American stories about individual trans youths more relevant to their contexts than the emphasis on statistics present in the US approach:

[The] US [has sought to] lead rather than join our journey. Briefly, we were inspired to join with regional South America in longer term networking shaped by local attitudes on trans identities and examples we could work with, not under.

The school principal had been relieved that schools no longer relied on US leadership as 'We would [have] be[en] "fired" by Trump! Leading nations destroy progress in a single regime change, regional collaborations outlast multiple regimes'.

Key informants involved in transnational work through UNESCO or who worked in Southern contexts described the need for US and other Northern leaders to understand cultural and language issues relating to trans students. Constructions of trans students differ greatly from country to country, complicating conceptualisations of and responses to transphobia. An informant from Egypt explained that in their country trans students were seen as having a socially stigmatised medical mental health problem, so young people struggled to access and pursue treatment while living with their families: 'I see critical American studies discussed (sometimes there), but it would be unsafe to study young transgender Egyptians critically'. The same informant added that trans people face police and media harassment, preventing the US-style of schools work currently promoted in academic journals.

A young Thai transgender activist reflected that Thai transphobia also differed from Northern patterns,

Some believe all ladyboys are men who cheated on their wives in a past life ... so men sort of judge me less especially if they like many girls, but think my existence is my punishment ...

A Samoan fafafine' activist explained that in Pacific Island nations 'transphobia is subtler'. Trans identities often served practical purposes ('because a family lacked a daughter') so discrimination relates more to restrictive lifestyle options. Reflecting on the US leadership issues a UNESCO official explained, 'What works in the North is not what works in the South necessarily, and a lot of Northern activists do not realise this'. The need to acknowledge cultural and linguistic complexity had informed UNESCO's use of 'the right to education' as a motif for policy development, rather than the concept of 'rights' as often discussed in US trans student resources. The rights of the child (and not the rights of trans students specifically) however could be useful in advancing progress in African and South American countries.

Frederik Nilsson, Ombudsman for Sweden's RFSL (an LGBT NGO), said his organisation tried to adopt a similarly consultative approach, training representatives from up to 15 countries at a time in trans advocacy, including 'Russia, Indonesia and Uganda ... The aim is to make international activism sustainable and locally-driven rather than to (...) tell them what they need'. Democratic processes were key to success:

Sometimes it seems USA efforts are not based on this method, that they are not sympathetic but punitive to foreign governments and people who do not comply with their idea of what is acceptable. US organisations are used to having stronger internal control and power, they are not as answerable to individuals they assist in the same way as Swedish models require us to be.

Michael Nanci-Barron, Director of Belongto Ireland, explained that the Irish Government had supported quiet diplomacy which contrasted with US Government efforts. Irish Embassies had hosted LGBT activists and academics for capacity-building events in Lithuania and other Baltic nations. As an organisation impacted upon by the UK's colonising influence, Michael believed Belongto's trans youth empowerment and capacity building efforts in Eastern European and African contexts were perhaps more appealing than work by Northern

nations leading by force: 'We are a postcolonial country which makes the dynamic less threatening.'

Comments from mainly Southern participants emphasised the lack of employment opportunities and funding for research and activism on trans students. Working with US allies meant that 'across Africa certain rights champions get trained in foreign ways, celebrated for that and then [they] get all the funds', A South African informant reflected. 'This takes funding from the grass roots groups, and means that [that] individual leaves their old grass roots thinking and contacts – so especially essential to work for Black transgender young people'.

Southern and trans individuals struggled to explain the complexity of collaboration with the USA without harming those relations. A young NGO worker said 'transgender youth are not always given a direct voice or invited to consultation and planning at the global or regional level', while US leaders were. Furthermore, they feared that research or policies about transgender youth would be 'prepared without us and handed out at those events long after there was any chance for us to comment on it. I'm not attacking the work; I'm saying we want a say'. An informant from the Russian Federation said '[US] punitive approaches and boycotts won't promote trans rights, they harm us. If you won't fund our change, don't use bans escalating Russian anti-LGBT resentment'.

Backlash as a response to US leadership

Over half of the informants noted backlash to work for trans students in their region since the Trump Administration's rise. A US MtF trans drop-in centre worker said,

Two thirds of LGBT murders were committed against young trans females of colour (the group hosted most here), and their life expectancy was early thirties. [That was] under Obama. Under Trump? Attacks are increasing. Bricks being thrown at our centre. Trans youth suicide rates are rising. Trans girls of colour have always experienced American hypocrisies; but this is combat.

An Indian NGO worker commented, 'Like Britain, Trump's America encourages transphobic legacies here and policy protection there. It brings damaging contradictions like any colonising influence'. They continued, 'We didn't want our work for hijra to be a "trendy" US change, gone when the trend ends. Our protections must be grounded in Indian history to have an Indian future'.

An Australian informant and several others believed transnational conservative activism funded by US evangelical organisations and by the Russian Federation increased backlash in their contexts. They commented,

Trump's evangelical supporters reach well beyond their borders. Online anti-trans groups systematically recruit disenfranchised individuals (here, Chinese immigrants) to right-wing politics, gaining local power by punching downwards in huge online campaigns against local trans student supports. We've always had conservatives like the Festival of the Light extremists advocating against us, but only in early 2016 did they campaign in an organised manner after being trained by globally-oriented US-funded groups.

Such organisations were perceived as using both family protectionist and nation protectionist discursive tactics – asserting that heteronormative families or alternately, traditional nationalist citizenship identities were the 'real' victims in pushes for trans' rights. Since the 2016 Australian and US federal election campaigns, an Australian non-government worker explained that reference to *The Safe Schools Coalition* – which works to protect trans students'

wellbeing through resource aid – and related research on trans students has appeared ‘in over 300 features in [the] conservative media (including the right-wing newspaper *The Australian*) in response to agitation from the Australian Christian Lobby, Family Voice and groups specifically working against transgender youth rights’. Researchers in even tangential fields have been attacked by the media as ‘either Marxists, biased pro-LGBT feminists or the pushers of paedophilia (...) These tactics [have] hailed from American campaigns’.

Informants argued that as part of the backlash, US tactics have constructed trans students as ‘enemies’ for politicians to unite against, strengthening support for conservative political parties in Australia and elsewhere. Informants in many contexts described how Trump-style tweets and evangelical campaign terminology were entering local lexicons through their media, online and networking presence. Terms including ‘repeal and replace’ (to undo progressive policies), ‘conversion therapy’ (to correct trans students through treatments and torture), ‘fake news’ (for news critiquing right-wing standpoints), and ‘libtard’ (an insult against progressives) were cited as hindering trans student progress in the Russian Federation, Viet Nam, Kenya, Nigeria, Canada, Australia and the UK. Responding to US policy repeals in 2017, local right-wing calls for Trump-style ‘rescindments’ of policies, programmes or research supportive of trans students were described by informants in Vietnam, Australia, the UK and Canada.

In Mexico, South Africa and Uganda, there were more urgent concerns over the impact of US leadership on local transphobic violence. A young Mexican trans NGO worker explained,

US and Mexico’s LGBT rights grew from our interwoven borders and pride cultures. Trump’s destruction of protections for trans Mexican asylum seekers leads to us being beaten as Mexican ‘bad hombres’, asylum seeker ‘illegals’, and trans youth he dismisses as ‘a very very small group’. We’re fighting not just for school toilets; it’s for *our lives*.

Two South African informants described the negative influence of US pastor Steven Anderson’s ministry in promoting transphobic conversions, laws or violence.¹ A Ugandan education worker discussed how a combination of nationalist and family protectionist discourses which had circulated ‘with widely known [about] American input and funding’, together with religion, had harmed LGBT locals. Although LGBT organisations had tried to fight this, ‘there is so much more funding for the conservative family organisations and churches from America’. Another LGBT community organiser from Uganda commented,

American evangelicals pushed Ugandans against LGBTs, especially in schools. Our Kampala pride parade was attacked by police. Trans students are tortured and killed. US influence means our being murdered is not immoral now.

Resistance to negative US influences

Resistance to negative US influence on trans student rights was seen as important by several US informants, especially those fighting right-wing movements against trans students’ bathroom/toilet use. A US public policy worker explained,

[The] Republicans have been ‘gaming’ Americans into thinking trans girls become male rapists in bathrooms; when trans girls are statistically the most victimised kids. This tactic aided evangelical and right-wing groups politicking for Republican power by creating Others, who they claim to be saving America from ... they intentionally created fear, transphobia and hate for power.

US-based informants also discussed protests fighting policy repeal, against local attacks on trans students, advocacy for conversion therapy and bathroom debates. A US trans activist commented,

We need to focus on fighting the Trump Administration's effort to rescind protections for trans students under Title IX. We are now looking to supporting our trans students in our courts to resist this action state by state.

Internationally, however, resistance to negative US influences was sustained largely by non-US organisations in conjunction with civil society members and the courts. Australian and Canadian informants said they were beginning to take a more protective approach to data around trans students, or bringing legal actions against the conservative media who broke laws through sensational reporting on trans kids experiences. An Australian informant said, 'Now we are taking lines out of talks, holding back papers, marking drafts [as] "confidential", because our right-wing press jump on any sensational line on transgender kids'.

In Uganda, an educator commented that research on trans students' experiences was being provided by organisations like Sexual Minorities Uganda and described how 'Ugandan activists [with] legal support [had] sued an American religious extremist for his malicious international interference in our LGBT rights issues'.

An Indian NGO worker stated,

India has been working in her Supreme Court and individual schools very successfully considering our history, since 2014, to undo the legacies of British legislation and American religious fervour, which attacked our native *hijra*.

A South African civil society worker and others argued that US LGBT groups had never done 'enough to combat the negative US influences internationally, perhaps because there is no funding in that area'. Therefore, 'combatting US influence was left to foreigners', and for some African nations, 'this is too much of a burden when dealing with poverty, corruption and other education barriers'. South Africa has unique constitutional protections for LGBT people, which make it a centre for African regional events on trans student issues. The same informant commented,

Decreasing the negative US interference was urgent, especially now with Trump, Pence and DeVos. In September 2016, our government banned US pastor Steven Anderson and his companions from entering South Africa, making them undesirables. This placed South African LGBTs above US extremism, colonising power and money.

These actions were viewed as showing the 'correct interpretation of the South African *National School Safety Framework* include[s] protecting trans students. Policy is interpretation; we need South Africa's interpretation, not Trump's'.

Enhancing positive, mutual influences across Norths and Souths

Informants maintained that multi-level leadership could overcome lack of government leadership or other limits on work with trans students. This included 'borrowing' from high-end policy leadership by the UN and the EU; regional networking; looking 'across' at national level NGOs for leadership; and ground-up community-led efforts.

Some US-based informants indicated they were looking overseas for inspiration. Ileana Jimenez, a New York teacher, had travelled to Mexico and India to see how progress had been achieved in these contexts despite transphobia and (past) punitive legislation. She observed how leaders had emerged at multiple levels in these contexts – in the form of

students, parents and NGOs. She had met the Director of the Centre for Rights Education and Advocacy (CREA, a sexual rights NGO) and a 'lawyer fighting against 377', and later over 2000 international private school students leading the nation in trans rights activism. The school concerned – Tagore International School – 'featured the first "campaign" named Breaking Barriers – what an American terms a student-run Gay Straight Alliance', Ileana explained. 'It was amazingly advanced compared to an American GSA – firstly they had over 50 student members; a number unheard in the US. Further, they had achieved so much in a context that was more punitive.'

The students received three weeks LGBTQI activism training from CREA and had then trained school staff. They imported LGBTQI books, wove LGBTQI themes into the curricula, created LGBTQI history displays and marched in Delhi Pride. The school's media clippings were displayed in the foyer 'so it was the first thing you would see', Ileana noted. Their campaign had,

a real liberationist, student-run, critical, in-your-face intensity that you don't see students doing in the US, where kids call their clubs 'diversity clubs' or something safe and try not to offend the religious people. It was at the fore of the school's identity.

Ileana was struck by how young people were meeting their own needs through action-research approaches, because 'they had to, just to feel safe'. She argued complacencies had come about as the result of Obama-era US activism when safety was a given and leadership was top-down, preventing the development of multi-level leadership as part of trans youth activism that can be seen elsewhere.

Informants also highlighted the importance of alliance-building. Carol-Ann, Belongto's Advocacy Director, engaged the Irish education sector 'gently, with praise and without critique'. John Duffy, who managed Belongto's LGBT Asylum Seeker programme, said researchers and support workers for trans youth should partner with schools and education departments, government and other organisations. 'There is no use parachuting into (...) a foreign country, without researching first what is there, who is there, if they need what you have' he reflected. 'It is not fruitful to compete with local providers for anyone, you must work together to be successful and carefully negotiate (where relevant) issues of gatekeeping'.

A Japanese Ministry informant commented,

Regional networking with UNESCO, the UNDP and other Asian countries is helpful. Joining 'Wear it Purple' and 'Being LGBTI in Asia' is stronger than working alone. Seeing [the] Cambodian LGBT curricula, Thai research [and] China's Aibai ... inspired us.

Similarly a Vietnamese informant explained how alliances 'between the local UNESCO representatives, the Ministry of Education and Teaching, LGBT organisations, school administrators, teachers and researchers' had enabled research on transgender students. Joe Kosciw of USA's GLSEN explained how they had built alliances with international academics at global networking events, creating a special journal issue showcasing 'a variety of voices' in trans youth research.

Informants discussed the need for legal, financial and capacity-building aid. Southern participants wanted Northern governments to give financial and legal support to local existing grass roots organisations. A Pakistan NGO worker in opposition to ongoing aid withdrawal efforts called for, 'financial or legal aid (...) to ensure crimes against transgender people and students are taken more seriously'. A South African NGO worker called for Northern investment in established Southern trans organisations: 'The North must resist

feeling that it “leads” the way completely ... can it not be content to lead by funding our own capacity-building?’ She recommended funding for South-South capacity-building.

A Polish academic endorsed Northern and civil society investment in local university ‘sexuality and gender study’ programmes, which included visits to Trans-Fuzja, a Polish NGO supporting trans people. A Ugandan education worker stated ‘legal support must be a priority where laws are prohibitive.’ They argued the US should ‘take responsibility’ to fund foreign lawyers and fight US-based anti-LGBT groups working internationally. Several informants encouraged Germany and other wealthy nations to provide more transnational aid to trans students. German reticence was seen as tied to the country’s avoidance of international interference after past world wars. However informants praised the German Government’s current efforts as ‘contributing’ without ‘overtaking’.

Conclusion

Recent US executive orders affecting trans students have had local and transnational impacts. However the former Obama Administration’s positive trans student policy initiatives between 1997 and 2013 have lacked durability (Thrower 2017). That both President Obama and President Trump have used their executive powers to influence the lives of trans people rather than other groups is significant. Gay and lesbian (i.e. larger) populations, contrastingly, have not to date been targeted in a similar way. Importantly, the marriage equality victory achieved under the Obama administration was achieved through judicial means and not executive directives. Executive intervention appears reserved for action against small, more heavily stigmatised populations. In the light of this, sustained US support for trans students both domestically and transnationally will likely require Congressional backing, and not just executive and grass roots support.

Global networking parties’ support for US ‘leadership’ on trans student rights progress has been limited by their experiences of US cultural imperialism, cultural and linguistic complexities, and competitive and punitive practices. The Trump Administrations’ recent policy repeals, US evangelical groups’ systematic international interference against trans youth rights, and the global right’s adoption of harmful Trumpian-era terminology and concepts have meant that US interference is increasingly resisted internationally (alongside court-based and grass-roots resistance domestically).

Informants overwhelmingly rejected leading, colonising and/or contradictory US approaches. Key problems included outsider ignorance concerning transgender acceptance locally, the different contextualised strategies necessary to effect change, and the different pre-existing advocacy dynamics. In contrast, civil society and the EU’s more collaborative approaches to promoting progress towards trans student rights were seen as more sensitive to contextually specific settings, needs and modes of organising; as were the efforts of governments and NGOs from the Netherlands, Sweden and Ireland. Calls for increased German contribution to trans student issues may reflect increased international confidence in German transnational leadership broadly.

Both Northern and Southern participants saw multi-level leadership models and alliances as central to future work with trans students. Nevertheless, Southern informants wanted legal, financial and capacity-building support for local work. In moving forward, both the USA and other countries must better understand the contribution their past and present action makes to Southern experiences of transphobic policy and practice. There is a need

for consultative, culturally specific and ground-up alliances and collaborations that *facilitate* but do not seek to *lead* useful work. Belongto's youth empowerment strategies, RFSL's democratic voting processes and India's Tagore campaign provided examples of how trans youth themselves can become actively involved in rights promotion. Their work, and perhaps that of UNESCO, best evince Binnie's (2004) stress on the need for sensitivity to cultural specificities in North-South collaboration.

Note

1. Steven Anderson was declared an 'undesirable' in South Africa due to his use of homophobic and transphobic hate speech to seek to influence South African policy and people; see <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37349683>

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