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Constructing subjects that matter: A case of conditional recognition for Pakistani Khawajasiras

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Abstract

This paper examines how media discourses on gender and work play a part in regulating the lives of a community of Pakistani gender diverse people, called *Khawajasiras*. Developing a critical discourse analysis of media news, we show how this regulatory process results in discursive mechanisms positioning Khawajasiras' work as "dirty" and in need of "respectable" and exclusively "feminine" alternatives. This regulatory process revolves around delegitimizing Khawajasiras' non-normative work and their gender fluidity in the job market. Khawajasiras' recognition is thus conditional upon their reproduction of a socially heteronormative notion of work and gender. We conclude that this regulatory process not only forecloses possibilities of resignification for this historically disenfranchised community but also risks producing new forms of abjection by enforcing notions of "fake" (with an implicitly assumed notion of "authentic") Khawajasira. The findings of this paper ultimately problematize contemporary ideals of recognition of non-normative gendered groups.

KEYWORDS
discourses, Khawajasira, Pakistan, third gender, work

1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2009, a verdict of the Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan recognized a particular gender minority group known as *Khawajasiras* and gender diverse people in general as distinct but equal citizens of Pakistan. This verdict marked the beginning of a yet another era of the state indulging in identity management by way of creating a "gender order" (Meadow, 2010, p. 830–831) and gendering individuals based on that order (Meadow, 2010; Ward, 2010). The verdict called for mainstreaming programs to allow Khawajasiras to live in a "respectable manner" by granting them access to "respectable jobs" (Khaki v. S.S.P, 2009). Since then, Khawajasiras' assimilation into the workforce has emerged as a "solution" in the pathway of this community out of marginalization (Khaki v. S.S.P, 2009). This "solution" has also been at the center of public debate that culminated in the approval of the 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, granting Khawajasiras the right to be recognized as per their affirmed gender identity and safeguarding them from any type of discrimination (Redding, 2019). However, several years after this landmark verdict, most Khawajasiras remain vulnerable to violence, abuse, and harassment, at times even more than before due to their increased visibility in the media (Khan, 2014; Pamment, 2010).

This situation prompts us to interrogate contemporary discourses of recognition of non-normative gendered groups as they emerge in public debates, particularly in the media. Notably, numerous studies have investigated the relationship between gender and media discourses (Capuzza, 2015; Davis, 2018; Meyer, 2010; Ringo, 2002; Riseman, 2021; Westbrook, 2010). Existing literature suggests that media discourses play a role in "the construction of policy problems" (Hamilton et al., 2021; Fenech & Wilkins, 2019, p. 12) and (re)production of gender norms (McLaren et al., 2021; Meyer, 2010; Serano, 2007; Westbrook, 2010). This literature explains how the media has the potential to both reinforce and challenge a hegemonic societal understanding of sexuality and gender (Maaranen & Tienari, 2020; Riseman, 2021). For instance, media are often said to reinforce stereotypical ideas of (trans)gender (Serano, 2007) and stigmatize them as "deviant," thus contributing to the (re-)production of a binary and heteronormative social order (Capuzza, 2015; Davis, 2018; Westbrook, 2010). Along the same lines, Westbrook's (2010) review of media stories on transgender people from 1990 to 2005 shows that the media discourses continuously rely on unscientific rationales, myths, and generalizations. Such discourses tend to discredit transgender people's "human" identity and rationalize discrimination against them and other such gender diverse communities, through discourses of victim-blaming (Benedict, 1992; Meyer, 2010; Westbrook, 2010). At the same time, other studies have also shown that, even when negative, media portrayals have also paradoxically facilitated the processes of identification with the protagonists of these stories helping some non-binary persons to reach a deeper awareness of their gender identity (Ringo, 2002; Riseman, 2021).

Expanding on this literature, we are especially interested in understanding how narratives on work become part of discourses that regulate the identity of gender diverse communities. Accordingly, the aim of the paper is to explain how gender and work play a part in media discourses on the mainstreaming of the Khawajasiras community following the 2009 verdict of the SC. To do this, we undertake a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Pakistani news on Khawajasiras' work and on their social assimilation in the workforce as a solution to their condition of abjection.

The following sections discuss our analytical lenses informed by Judith Butler's theorization of the dialectic of abjection and subjection. We then offer insights into the context and the conditions of the Khawajasiras' community, followed by a description of the method adopted in the study. Subsequently, we offer a detailed analysis of three discursive mechanisms positioning Khawajasiras' work as "dirty" and in need of "respectable" and exclusively "feminine" alternatives. This CDA contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into how gender diverse communities' way out of abjection becomes conditional upon their reproduction of normative notions of work and gender. Their gender and work identity are indeed viewed through binary lenses, also resulting in externally enforced notions of "fake" (with an implicitly assumed notion of "authentic") gender identity. (Gendered) discourses of "dirty" and "respectable" work are mobilized to delegitimize non-normative work occupations and gender fluidity in the job market. Thus, in the final sections of the paper, we conclude that this regulative process forecloses the subject

positions available to Khawajasiras and gender diverse communities in general and consequently their possibilities of becoming recognized as subjects that matter beyond multiple binarism.

2 | THE REGULATORY PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION

This study draws on Judith Butler's work to investigate the role of societal discourses in regulating the recognition of gender diverse communities. According to Butler, we exist as subjects only to the extent that others recognize us as such (Butler, 2004, 2010). Recognition always implies a struggle between the self and the other that results in denial, deconstruction, and redefinition of oneself (Butler, 2004; Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). The philosopher conceives recognition more as a *continuum*, as an impossible normative ideal in which *becoming* abject means being denied recognition in the encounter with the other in ways which transforms a life into a progressively less livable (Butler, 2004, 2010). Butler (1993, 2005) explains that recognition requires that my doing is intelligible to others, but what is and is not intelligible is predetermined by broader social norms and discourses. In other words, recognition is governed by regimes of intelligibility that define who counts as a subject and who does not (Tyler, 2019). These regimes are naturalized through the sedimentation of (gendered) discourses producing the idea of a "real" and "natural" gender and sexuality and, in opposition, non-binary gender and homosexuality as fictitious and unnatural constructs, a failed copy (Butler, 1990). Societal discourses create a matrix of gender relations constituting the domain of subjects in opposition to "abject beings" (Butler, 1997). The latter are denied social recognition insofar as they fail to meet the normative demands (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Accordingly, the significant of "a body that matters" (Butler, 1993) occurs through the production of gender hierarchies and mechanisms of subordination. The domains of abject beings and subjects thus co-exist, and together they reinforce a power relation that gives the latter acceptance into the normative order while simultaneously decrees the former as uninhabitable (Butler, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Defining and stigmatizing the domain of abject beings is therefore a fundamental aspect of the discourses through which the process of regulatory identification takes place (Butler, 1993). Drawing on this conceptualization of the relationship between recognition, abjection, and discourses, this study problematizes the ways in which media discourses construct individuals' possibilities of social recognition.

Gender diverse communities, such as transgender people,[1] have historically populated the domain of abject beings because they disrupt the working of gender binary norms and heterosexuality (Butler, 1993). This threat to heteronormativity (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009) results in abjection in the forms of poor access and availability of education (Whittle, 2000), healthcare (Richards et al., 2016), as well as work and economic mobility (Jolly, 2010). In this respect, the few existing studies on transgender (at) work have investigated the specific challenges and opportunities that transgender people face in a usually gender normative workplace (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Muhr et al. (2016), for instance, have introduced the concept of "situated transgressiveness" to explain the situated ways of "doing transgender" (Connell, 2010). Similarly, Schilt and Connell (2007) have documented the experience of employees who transit to another gender category while crafting a distinctive gender identity. These studies have mostly investigated how transgender people experience work (Ashraf et al., 2021; Pullen et al., 2016), but little is known about how the work that transgender and gender diverse people perform is constructed through public discourses. Delving into a previously well-recognized notion of work being a regulating mechanism for gender (Ashraf et al., 2021; Jeanes & Janes, 2021; Vayreda et al., 2019), we suggest instead that this discursive construction is an important part of heteronormative regulatory processes of identification. Our analysis thus explores how the relationship between gender and work is constituted by a particular type of public discourse, that is, the media. In so doing, our study thus bridges the literature on media discourse on gender diverse people and the literature on (trans)gendered work to investigate the media's constitution of Khawajasiras' identity and work. The following section will offer further information about the context and protagonists of the study before explaining our data collection and analysis.

3 | THE KHAWAJASIRA COMMUNITY

In Pakistan, the term *Khawajasiras* has been traditionally preferred by many working-class male-sex-born people who do not conform to dominant gender norms, and upon facing a lack of acceptance from birth families formally join a community that re-constructs the family experience under a culturally distinct and historically unique *guru-chela* (teacher-disciple) structure (Ashraf et al., 2021; Khan, 2014; Nisar, 2018; Pamment, 2010; Reddy, 2005). The term Khawajasira comes from the Mughal era when the male-born persons, who underwent castration, voluntarily or under coercion, hence, not necessarily trans "gender," generally called "eunuchs," were bought as slaves and employed to perform some critical tasks inside the *harem* (Manucci, 1906). Male-sex born non-binary persons existed outside the royal courts too since the ancient times and have been recognized as a group under a variety of terms across the time (Reddy, 2005). However, in contemporary Pakistan, the title Khawajasira is taken as the socially and politically accept-able term for all male-sex born non-normative persons who formally join the community arguably because, of the many historical titles, Khawajasira remains the least derogatory one to date.

Despite being slaves, the nature and importance of Khawajasiras' roles in the harem had increased their socio-political importance during the Mughal era. But the colonial rule stripped off not only their status and occupa-tions but also tried to erase them as a socially visible group with its policies and legislation, particularly the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 (Hinchy, 2014, 2017; Pamment, 2010; Reddy, 2005). The introduction of CTA attempted to completely shun them from social space by restricting their public activities and their livelihood sources as well as preventing them from adopting (abandoned non-normative) children (Hinchy, 2014; Narrain, 2009; Pamment, 2010; Reddy, 2005).

The Guru-Chela system has its own norms and regulations. A new Chela—or *Moorat*—as they are called in certain cases, joins the Khawajasira circle under a guru through a proper process, called *Chitai*. While the closeted and non-closeted Khawajasiras (locally called, *Kachi Moorat* and *Pakki Moorat*) adopt a range of occupations, the following historical occupational choices of Khawajasiras remain a prime focus of mainstream media debates on the commu-nity's work and identity: (1) going to people's homes in groups (*tolis*) to offer dance (of spiritual nature) and receive congratulatory alms, also called *badhai*, on the occasions of weddings and births of male children, (2) dancing at night functions (of erotic nature), including weddings, parties, and festivals, (3) begging on the streets in individual capacity, also known as *dhenga*, and (4) sex work.

The gender performances of Khawajasiras, Khan (2014) and Khan (2016) argues, vary significantly from one situation to another, hence, making their gender ambiguous, or more appropriately, queer or non-binary. The 2017 population census enumerated the total Khawajasiras in Pakistan to be 21,774 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). However, this figure is considered an underestimation and fails to capture the complexity of sexual and gender minority groups in the country. Significantly, research on transmen is close to non-existent, and homosexuality is criminalized in the country (SOGIE, 2019). As a result, many LGB people conceal their gender identity for fear of marginalization, and there are no visible Pakistani LGB communities (SOGIE, 2019). Non-governmental Organizations also keep their activities for LGB people under the blanket of activities for the Khawajasira community to avoid public scrutiny (SOGIE, 2019).

As opposed to gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons, the visibility of Khawajasiras has gradually granted them more social and legal recognition while simultaneously exposing them to violence and hate crimes. It was after a violence-related incident in Taxila district of Pakistan in 2009 that a series of verdicts from the SC of Pakistan recognized basic human rights for Khawajasiras (Khaki v. S.S.P, 2009), which gave a legal cover to the debates and activism for accepting gender diversity, culminating later in the first-ever Act on the protection of transgender persons' rights in May 2018 (Redding, 2019). Khawajasiras are also now issued separate identity cards and passports. However, in the sex-segregated legal structures of Pakistan, what those rights mean, and their limitations, continue to unfold (Nisar, 2018). The next section explains the method informing the study before discussing the findings and recommendations.

TABLE 1 Data collection.

Source from HRCP's news archives	Number of articles	Language
Dawn (& Herald)[a]	127	English
The Express Tribune	138	English
The News International (& The News on Sunday)[a]	97	English
Daily Times	72	English
The Nation	74	English
Pakistan Today	28	English
Aaj Kal	15	Urdu
Jang	52	Urdu
Express (& Express Magazine)[a]	28	Urdu
Khabrain (& Khabrain Sunday Magazine)[a]	76	Urdu
Nawa-i-Waqt	64	Urdu
Pakistan	8	Urdu
Mashriq	18	Urdu
Nai Baat	24	Urdu
Dunya	36	Urdu
Total	857	321 in Urdu; 536 in English

Note: All the newspapers included in HRCP's archives are nationally published and printed in one of Pakistan's official languages—English and Urdu.

[a]These newspapers have a weekly magazine as well which is included in HRCP's archives.

4 | METHOD

4.1 | Data collection

This study is part of a broader research project aimed at analyzing media discourses between two key events: July 2009, when the SC of Pakistan issued a verdict on a violence-related case against Khawajasiras in Taxila district and August 2017 when the Transgender (persons) protection of rights bill was tabled in the National Assembly of Pakistan. The overall data collected for the project consisted of news reports on Khawajasiras in Pakistan's newspapers obtained from the transgender news register of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)'s news archives. To date, HRCP offers the most comprehensive news archive as many nationally published newspapers do not have digital archives and many do not go as far back as 2009. The HRCP collects all nationally published print newspapers, cuts them into news-wise clippings, and archives the clippings by attaching them onto separate registers based on the subject of the news. The HRCP divides these newspapers into more than 40 registers.[2] News clippings on gender diverse people are archived in a register titled "Transvestites" (register number 39A in HRCP's registers of news archives).

In total, 857 news reports were collected from 15 national print newspapers and four magazines, English and Urdu combined (see Table 1). Urdu newspapers reach more readers whereas the English ones are highly influential on opinion-makers despite having a smaller readership (Shah et al., 2019). The latter have given significantly greater coverage to Khawajasiras compared to Urdu newspapers.[3] Finally, the analysis focused specifically on print newspapers and magazines because, whilst the circulation of print reports is in decline and most of the newspapers have now digital editions, the lack of broad-based access to the Internet and widespread digital illiteracy preserves the historical role of print media as an important source of news and information in Pakistan in the time considered for the analysis (Yusuf & Schoemaker, 2013).

4.2 | Data analysis

Drawing on Butler's work, our analysis aimed at exploring how media discourses concur in defining, reinforcing, or challenging the regimes of intelligibility regulating Khawajasiras' social recognition. To do this, we followed the poststructuralist tradition of CDA (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Vayreda et al., 2019) that, in line with Butler (1990, 1997), defines discourse as "a situated social practice" (Vayreda et al., 2019, p. 435). It is through texts, speeches, and images that a societal discourse is formed which naturalizes "social relations—particularly unequal, iniquitous and/or discriminatory power relations" (Cervi & Brewis, 2022; Richardson, 2007, p. 42). In accordance with Butler's work (1993, 1997, 2004), for CDA analysts, discourses play a role in the constitution of identities and "include imaginaries—representations of how things might or could or should be" (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 195). Therefore, this method has been often used to unveil how media discourses are implicated in the reproduction of a gendered order (Hamilton et al., 2021; Lazar, 2005; Maaranen & Tienari, 2020).

Our analysis interrogated media texts with a view to the broader social practices (Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005; Robinson & Spivey, 2007). We followed Richardson's (2007) application of Fairclough's CDA that places textual analysis as the first and core dimension of CDA. In interrogating our data, our purpose was not to identify dominant themes and their prevalence in the media, the objective was to read a text and question: "Why was this said, and not that? Why these words, and where do the connotations of the words fit with different ways of talking about the world?" (Parker, 1992, p. 3). The analysis focused on how Khawajasiras are positioned within media discourses (Benozzo et al., 2015; Sørensen, 2017). As a result, we identified that Khawajasiras positioning in the news text is often done in relation to work. That prompted us to focus our inquiries to how Khawajasiras work is framed in media discourses—we explored the lexical choices, reflecting the assumptions and presuppositions upon which a discourse on work was being constructed (Fairclough, 1995). We then moved from the text to the second dimension, the discursive dimension, of Fairclough's CDA where Richardson's (2007) application considers the text with a view of news production and consumption as encoding and decoding ideological beliefs about societal relations (Richardson, 2007). This second dimension of the analysis resonate with Butler's idea of regimes of intelligibility being discursively (re)produced. At this stage, we identified some discursive mechanisms framing Khawajasiras' work at times as "dirty," "feminine," or "respectable." We asked ourselves "who" is producing/consuming the text, "when," and in "what context" (Rabelo et al., 2021). Conversations between the authors allowed for a more reflexive engagement with the text, revealing some "implicit discriminative mechanisms" (Alejandro, 2021).

Thus, in a third stage, our interest focused on the implications of these discursive mechanisms, leading us to the last dimension of Fairclough's CDA, which is of societal practices. Richardson (2007, p. 42) invites to delve into the following questions: "What influence or impact do we think that the text may have on social relations? Will it help to continue inequalities … or will it help to break them down?" Seeing how gender and work relations are (re)produced in media discourses helped us to reflect on recognition vis-à-vis the dialectic of abjection and subjection (Butler, 1993). We concluded that Khawajasiras' recognition in some media discourses appears conditional upon the exclusionary reproduction of dominant norms of gender and work.

The following section presents our CDA by referring to the examples of the many texts which regulate Khawajasiras gender identity and/through work. The section presents our situated interpretation of the data, not to foreclose the possibility of alternative interpretations but rather with the intent of inviting further interpretations and problematization of this empirical material (Benozzo et al., 2015; Table S1).

5 | FINDINGS

5.1 | The "dirty work" of Khawajasiras and the blaming-the-victim discourse

As noted in Section 3, dancing, begging, and sex work have been part of Khawajasiras' historical occupations. News reports acknowledge these activities as "the main source of earning bread and butter for eunuchs" (The News International, June 18, 2009, 14). Our analysis reveals that these occupations are not treated as equal in rank to the mainstream occupations. The degradation of these occupations and those performing them is implied through words such as "vulgarities" (The Express Tribune, July 04, 2013, 5), "immoral" (Nawaiwaqt, April 13, 2015, 12), "indecent" (Pakistan Today, November 25, 2015), and "shameful" (The Express Tribune, June 14, 2012, 15). Nawaiwaqt (April 13, 2015, 12) reports one such case where a birthday party of a Khawajasira is raided by the police:

> The police took gratulatory alms worth millions, claim Khawajasira; raided because of immoral/vulgar activities.[4]
>
> (Nawaiwaqt, April 13, 2015, 12)

In another news report:

> According to a report, around 400 Khawajasiras were jailed in the last five years in the province of Punjab. Most of the cases against Khawajasiras fall under indecent/immoral practices. In Lahore's courts, there have been at least four such cases where women filed for khula' (separation) on the basis that they allege their husbands have Khawajasiras and do not pay attention to them.
>
> (Jang, August 19, 2009, 12)

Khawajasiras as subjects are arguably positioned through their occupational activities, and the focus remains on activities that are normatively "abject." Further note that, the narrative on husbands who "keep" Khawajasiras, implying that they have sex (typically, paid) with them and ignore their wives, is not of them committing a crime, the crime, in the news report's overall narrative, is still being associated with Khawajasiras. Such subject positionality that is founded on work activities sets the basis of this discourse as well as the regulatory mechanisms of recognition for Khawajasiras. It is also noteworthy that cases are registered because an act is deemed potentially in violation of the law. By calling these acts indecent/immoral, the news report is suggesting a social interpretation of the law, which is that abiding by the law is about maintaining the normative sense of decency/morality and violating the law disrupts or threatens the normative social order of decency and morality.

Sex work is consistently framed as immoral or unacceptable. Referring to sex work, a newspaper article explains that Khawajasiras do "dancing and *other vulgarities*" (The Express Tribune, July 04, 2013, 5). This latter newspaper article presents the story of Sanam Fakir who "moved out" of the transgender community and "decided to engage in social work." Her story is presented as a story of "resilience, entrepreneurship, courage, and hope." This is done using occupational binarism which opposes "dancing and *other vulgarities*" to "social work." Contrary to the former, the latter is presented as useful ("helping others"). More importantly, redemption comes with a type of work that is deemed socially valuable. This appears in the last sentence of the news article: "For her fellow transgenders, she [Sanam Fakir] has only one message: to refrain from indecent activities and find respectable living." Sanam Fakir's story is thus presentable as a story of success and redemption to the extent that it embodies the broader discourse of recognition and reinforces a discourse that frames Khawajasiras and their non-normative activities as abject and uninhabitable.

The notion of immorality in discourses on Khawajasiras' non-normative work is not new as it has its origins in the colonial era. It was the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 that declared Khawajasiras' occupational activities in public, a disturbance to the social order, and therefore, declared such activities punishable, and the community,

a criminal tribe. However, one slight change because of which post-2009 has been a redefining time for the domain of abjection is that now Khawajasiras are not always formally seen as criminals but some news reports also frame them as victims. Headlines like "3 eunuchs raped 'by wedding guests'" (The Express Tribune, January 25, 2011, 15), and "unidentified persons murdered a Khawajasira by hanging them to gallows" (Jang, September 29, 2014) have helped build a narrative of Khawajasiras' victimization in the society. However, a victimization narrative combined with a "dirty" work narrative has turning the discourse into "blaming the victim." Such "blaming-the-victim" discourse develops along framing the guru-chela family system of Khawajasiras as exploitative, particularly, focusing on gurus on account of exploiting young chelas. The lexical choices that describe the guru-chela build up a narrative that shows chelas forced into a "life of shame" (Dawn, June 16, 2009, 2), helpless at the hands of exploitative gurus. Gurus forcing their chelas into prostitution, extorting money, and forcefully castrating them are some of the themes around which the guru-chela relationship is described in the news. For example, in 2009, news media reported SC's instructions calling the social welfare departments to "prepare a report on the living conditions of Khawajasiras and report … whether gurus oppress them" (Aaj Kal, July 11, 2009, 3). From there on, a notion blaming the gurus, or the guru-chela family system for Khawajasiras' "immoralities" has repeatedly appeared in the news reports.

> Abandoned to the world of merry makers … handed to gurus … forced into prostitutions.
>
> (Dawn, November 14, 2011, 4)

> Some so-called gurus who act as merciless pimps, exploiting disoriented young people instead of behaving as the protective adoptive mothers.
>
> (Dawn, February 21, 2017, 3)

These reports tend to link "dirty" work with gurus and the guru-chela system, implying that if there were no gurus and guru-chela system, the chela (disciple) Khawajasiras would not find themselves "forced" into "dirty work," and without "dirty work," they could not be victimized. That is how victimhood narrative apparently turns into blaming-the-victim discourse. A counter voice presenting gurus as father figures and society as the "problem" exists as well, but the possibility of such counter-narrative increases with Khawajasira sources in the news reports. Some examples are as follows:

> My parents abandoned me, but this is where I belong! My Guru Parveen is everything to me. She taught me to recite Quran, educated me.
>
> (Pakistan Today, July 23, 2013, 5)

> If the society was not full of sexual predators who preyed on us, we wouldn't have to live our lives for the entertainment of others.
>
> (Pakistan Today, April 15, 2016)

> It is Gurus who raise us and protect us, yet CNICs [computerized national identity cards] want to see the [birth] father's name who has thrown us out on to the streets.
>
> (Dawn, March 05, 2017)

Such inclusion of Khawajasiras as the sources of the news reports point to the potential of media discourses to challenge the *status quo*. The discourse that "society" is the problem, and therefore, the normative structures of the society need to be challenged, extends to the (largely, legal, and somewhat, social) acceptance of the third gender. However, the performance of gender through work particularly, continues to be regulated in the media discourses through the binary lens of "dirty/respectable," resulting in a "mainstreaming" practice that builds on "blaming-the-victim" rather than "blaming-the-society" discourse, placing Khawajasira voices and the latter discourse to the margins in the media discourses.

5.2 | The "respectable work" and the mainstreaming discourse

The previous section explained how the historical non-normative occupations of Khawajasiras are repudiated. In accordance with this view, some news discourses reinforce a notion that if the occupational activities change, Khawajasiras' plight could also come to an end. They are marginalized and maltreated because of their occupations. That is why, some news discourses maintain, Khawajasiras must be saved "from a life of shame" (Dawn, June 16, 2009, 2). A keyword that repeatedly appears in the news discourses regarding what needs to be done for Khawajasiras is "mainstreaming." A news text for instance explained "Transgender people need to be accepted into mainstream" (Dawn, January 15, 2012, 2).

As noticed in the story of Sanam Fakir, the way out of "shame" is to have "respectable" jobs. One news report notices

> To help Khawajasiras earn a respectable livelihood just like common citizens, government should provide financial assistance to them.
>
> (Pakistan, July 15, 2009, 1)

Keywords like "productive citizens" (Khabrain, December 16, 2010, 8), "useful citizens" (Express Magazine, February 16, 2017, 17), and "dignified living" (The News on Sunday, February 19, 2017) are used in the news clarifying what mainstreaming entails. Four things are noticeable in the discourse of "mainstreaming." Firstly, it assigns the government the patron's role in deciding Khawajasiras' occupation for earning money. Secondly, it establishes that Khawajasiras are not currently equal to "common citizens" because of their occupational choices. Thirdly, "common citizens" as a unifying term for humans with equal rights is applicable, as a necessary condition, only to those who earn a "respectable livelihood." And finally, it infers from the premises that "mainstreaming" of Khawajasiras could become possible only when they earn a "respectable" livelihood. By equating "respectable livelihood" with that of "common citizens," the discourses reinforce a demand that Khawajasiras should perform just as the normative members of the society do and uphold the normative social order. In this way, the news discourses establish a criterion to earn respect and equality in the society. Khawajasiras are therefore, reduced to quasi-human that ought to operate in a certain way if they wish to be recognized as "subjects." In other words, news discourses reinforce a notion that "subject" is a status for which taking "respectable work" is a necessary condition. In particular, the government should "provide incentives to transgender individuals such as …respectable jobs for their social development … the court observed that steps should also be taken to discourage professional eunuchs" (The News International, November 21, 2009, 9).

Initially, as shown in the previous section, the judiciary declares them equal citizens, and the news discourses call Khawajasiras "victims," but the fact that victimhood narrative comes with a pre-assumed role for the state, reinforcing state's position as the one that "gives gender" (Ward, 2010, p. 246), creates room for holding back on equality until a desired social order is established. A piece of news, for instance, reported that

> While recognition through the census is the first step, work should not be stopped here. As the scheduled census would bring new and updated information about the community, that should be used for their targeted social uplift. Transgender individuals need to be mainstreamed in Pakistan, not just through the provision of equal opportunities, but also through breaking the de facto barriers that so often prevent them from doing so. Special quotas need to be reserved for them for government jobs.
>
> (Daily Times, January 15, 2017, 6)

Once the registration process (survey, identity cards, inclusion in the census) is passed, the next and the most crucial step for the mainstreaming of Khawajasiras becomes their participation in the formal labor force, entrenching the process of recognition in regulatory mechanisms of productive power (Foucault [1978] 1980). That is why, the discourse uses the term "mainstreaming" interchangeably with "productive citizens," "abled citizens" and/or other such terms identified earlier. So, from accepting Khawajasiras as victims, the discourse moves to discriminating against and labeling their non-normative occupations, emphasizing the need to register them, making them visible

and using the visibility to then instate them into the formal labor force, make them "productive," so they can also be like other "common citizens." In these examples, the discourse of mainstreaming becomes a combination of stigmatizing the non-normative work-lives and emphasizing the need to bring Khawajasiras into the normative workforce.

Repudiated for their non-normative work occupations, but accepted as victims who need saving, yet de-humanized Khawajasiras have indeed been offered several occupational opportunities since 2009. Numerous governmental and non-governmental initiatives have targeted to train and or employ Khawajasiras for different occupations. A news article, for instance, reported

> Sargodha[5] is giving transgender people basic literacy and certain skills to enable them to earn a digni-fied living.
>
> (The News International, February 19, 2017, 30)

Butler's (1993) theorized regulatory process here is about making Khawajasiras "useful" with an underlying normative demand of "earning a dignified living." An example widely discussed in the news during 2011–2012 is the job of retrieving loans from defaulters. This particular job was recommended to the government by the SC (following India's example). Newspapers have described this job for Khawjasiras as a match to their "*talent*" (Daily Times, January 28, 2010). The underlying idea was that Khawajasiras' lifestyles are unacceptable for the normative persons to the extent that people cannot stand to be around them. Therefore, to avoid being seen with them, they will quickly pay back or commit to paying back their loans/taxes. Jobs like these and related supportive news text reinforce Khawajasiras' abjection because the eligibility criterion for this job is their stigmatized existence. Rather than devising a "third space," the process of mainstreaming also reinstates gender binarism. With Khawajasiras identifying as ones having a "feminine soul" and being increasingly described as transwomen in English speaking globally connected circles (as evidenced through English news reports), the notion of "feminine" (using the masculine/feminine dyad) joins the discourse of "dirty/respectable" work. The next section offers a detailed account of the enforcement of "feminine" work on Khawajasiras and its implications, as evidenced in the media discourses.

5.3 | The "feminine work" and the gendering discourse

The hiring of Khawajasiras to run a cafeteria at the National College of Arts, Akhuwat Foundation's Khawajasira reha-bilitation program, Sargodha district administration's vocational training center for Khawajasiras are among some of the popular initiatives that appeared in the news reports. These initiatives are presented as important steps toward making Khawajasiras "useful citizens" (Express Magazine February 16, 2017, 14). Beyond using such actions for gendered "institutional prestige" (Davis, 2018), our textual analysis of the news reports shows that such initiatives are treated as those fulfilling the key objectives of mainstreaming Khawajasiras because of their gendered characteristics, as expressed in the following quote:

> To make them useful citizens, get them out of poverty, and protect them from the life of crime … the training center will teach them courses in makeup and tailoring.
>
> (Express Magazine, February 16, 2017, 17)

A closer look at this quote unveils that these jobs and training centers use Khawajasiras' notion of *feminine soul* to reinforce gendered occupational roles. In this respect, SC's verdicts recommend giving Khawajasiras occu-pations that they can "conveniently" perform (Khaki v. S.S.P, 2009). *Feminine soul* and *convenience* here point to the gender norm that defines femininity as being weak and delicate—or in the case of Khawajasiras, effeminate. The discourse becomes that, because of their "feminine soul," Khawajasiras can only perform certain (convenient) jobs. These projects, training centers, and occupational opportunities train or employ Khawajasiras for occupations such as

cooking, sewing clothes, and beauty makeup. The reason is that such activities are commonly perceived as feminine in the normative discourse, and the news texts reinforce the stereotypical notion of gender binaries and gender roles. This emerges clearly in the following quotes:

> Feminine [identifying] Khawajasiras should spend their lives as females.
>
> (Express, December 03, 2011, 8)

> He [Aslam Khaki, a lawyer] says initiatives like employing them in beauty parlors and clothing stores would go a long way in integrating them in society.
>
> (The Express Tribune, November 21, 2014, 14)

Another interesting example is a news item published in Dawn (February 21, 2017), where the reporter uses the term transgender throughout the article with an exception, that is, when describing the difficulty of finding a job: "access to education and employment is a major challenge for *these women*." Therefore, the discourse on Khawajasiras in Pakistan's newspapers plays a productive role in enlisting Khawajasiras into gender binaries. Despite accepting a third gender, the regulatory processes operate in such a way that for Khawajasiras to enter the domain of subjects, the only option appears to take jobs that are socially deemed in line with the gender binary. In this way, the integration of Khawajasiras into the mainstream society would also continue to protect the masculine patriarchal space. News text on dues/loans recovery jobs shows that the Khawajasira's presence in what are perceived as masculine spaces is seen as an undesirable disturbance to the social order, as the following quote reveals: *What trouble has come home? In Karachi, soon after Khawajasiras arrival, people start paying their outstanding taxes … as soon as they open their doors, they feel ashamed and say take them [Khawajasiras] away [from us]* (Nawa-i-Waqt, October 03, 2015, 12). Therefore, giving them feminine jobs limits them to the perceived feminine spaces only, allowing their mainstreaming and social order maintenance to coexist.

An important implication of enlisting Khawajasiras in "feminine" work also creates an opportunity in the discourses for reconfiguring their identities. An externally imposed view of Khawajasira identity first appeared in the SC's verdicts. The SC's verdict in 2009 viewed Khawajasiras as "Eunuchs" or people with "biological deficiencies" and "gender disorder" (Khaki v. S.S.P, 2009). Soon after the SC's verdict (wrongly) assumed Khawajasiras' identity difference as biological, the Khawajasira identity started to get limited to intersex persons only. For instance, a news item notes

> Transgender … terms used for people who biologically do not conform to male or female.
>
> (The Express Tribune, March 02, 2016, page unknown).

In and through the news discourses, any non-intersexual Khawajasiras started to be labeled as "fake." The notion of "fake" Khawajasiras seems to have evolved over time in such discourses. Initially, the news text used the term "fake" about the idea that some people pretend to be Khawajasiras to earn money through professions that historically Khawajasiras have adopted.

> Fake Khawajasiras are involved in begging … for money.
>
> (Khabrain, November 21, 2009, 8)

Then while reporting on identity cards for Khawajasiras, which initially required medical examination for certainty of intersexuality, those who failed or opposed the test were reported in news discourses as "self-made" or "fake" Khawajasiras.

Medical examinations to sort out 'fake transvestites'. (Daily Times, December 25, 2009, 2)…The self-made eunuchs have opposed the medical test to verify their gender for registration.

(Nation, December 08, 2010, 3)

Along the same lines, another news item reported that: *Registration process for Khawajasiras' identity cards underway, 92% are male.* (Aaj Kal, November 24, 2009, 3). However, the notion did not just remain limited to identity cards, it seeped into the general discourse too. In 2016, for example, news of the death of a Khawajasira appeared. Later, a newspaper said that the dead were rather a "male" (Nation, March 12, 2016, page unknown). It happened because of the newspaper's lack of understanding or acceptance for the dead's (perhaps closeted) gender identity, since it focused only on the sex of the body.

In addition to the "dirty/respectable" and "masculine/feminine" dyad, the notion of "fake" Khawajasiras (relying on the "fake/authentic" dyad) introduces another level of normativity in the media discourses, which appears as another example of how discourses produce a normative ideal of citizenship constituting some as bodies that do not matter (Butler, 1990, 1993). "Fake" Khawajasiras indeed cannot become part of the state's welfare-oriented Khawajasira mainstreaming program. Thus, Khawajasira whose bodies do not conform to the body norms established by the broader societal forces, including but not limited to the state are doomed to continue to be victims of marginalization by being formally excluded from the process of mainstreaming. Interestingly, Khawajasiras themselves use this notion leading to abjection from within the community. For instance, The Express Tribune (2017) while reporting on Khawajasiras' inclusion in census reported a Khawajasira demanding that the "census should list true transgender persons" only (p. 9). The regulatory process of identification is thus further refined through an internalization of the state's norms by some Khawajasiras themselves.

6 | DISCUSSION

The role of public (media) discourses in the regulatory processes of identification has been the subject of extensive theoretical and empirical investigation (Benedict, 1992; Fenech & Wilkins, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2021; Meyer, 2010; Serano, 2007; Westbrook, 2010). Similarly, a long tradition of organization studies has explored the gendered nature of work and its functioning as a regulatory ideal of identity (Ashraf et al., 2021; Johansson et al., 2017; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015). Yet, investigations into the role of work as an ideal regulating gender diverse people have just begun (Ashraf et al., 2021; Hines, 2010a, 2010b; Muhr et al., 2016; Pullen et al., 2016; Schilt & Connell, 2007; Thanem, 2011). The few organizational studies on gender diverse people have mostly explored their lived experience in standard binary gender work settings, whereas the nature and characteristics of non-normative work performed by them continue to be underexplored (Ashraf et al., 2021). In this study, we were interested in investigating how work and gender play a part in media discourses on gender diverse communities. The case of Khawajasiras was especially apt for our analysis due to their increased visibility in Pakistani public debates and the enforcement of mainstreaming programs by the state which aimed to regulate Khawajasiras non-normative work.

Our CDA offered insights into the ways in which some media discourses regulate Khawajasiras' recognition in ways that produce inclusion through exclusion—a reiterative process which necessarily produces a constitutive outside (Butler, 1993). We were thus interested in exploring those regimes of intelligibility regulating the recognition of the subject (Fotaki, 2011; Tyler, 2019). Butler (2004) explains how discourses and subjects are never distinct insofar as discourses constitute individuals socially and predefine possibilities of existence. In this sense, individuals are subjects located outside of themselves, constituted as such by preexisting categories of identification and regimes of intelligibility (Butler, 2004; Kenny, 2010). The latter produce abjection of/in those who fail these ideals (Rizq, 2013; Tyler, 2011).

This dialectic of subjection and abjection, and how it comes to define individuals' recognition, is the central theme of our analysis. In this respect, we argued that media discourses can be seen as processes of subject formation,

and we were interested in exploring the particular "Khawajasiras subject," being constituted in the media. We identified a mainstreaming discourse which uses the notion of work to redefine boundaries of recognition for Khawajasiras. Khawajasiras' work and gender identity had been historically criminalized relegating them to the "zone of uninhabitability" (Butler, 2004, p. 235). In the contemporary times, regulatory norms operate through productive and relational power rather than repression (Butler, 1993; Foucault [1978] 1980). Work thus became the tenet of gender mainstreaming initiatives aimed at relationally and productively assimilating Khawajasiras into the "respectable" workforce, following the 2009 SC's historical verdict.

Through our analysis, we argue that the emergence of this new mainstreaming discourse in the media subjects Khawajasiras to new dynamics of ex/inclusion thus producing conditional recognition. The discursive construction of work is indeed performative (Butler, 1990, 1993) in its upholding of a heteronormative social order. In particular, the media's framing of Khawajasiras' non-normative work as what it is ("dirty") and what it should be ("respectable," "feminine") functions as a discursive regulatory ideal naturalizing normative views of gender and work. In other words, Khawajasiras' recognition (or way out of abjection) becomes conditional upon their reproduction of a socially heteronormative notion of work and gender. In so doing, our contribution shows how the abjection/subjectivation dynamic is not unidimensional, that is, regulated directly through a single mechanism. For instance, the normative expectations are not simply met by a Khawajasira doing "feminine" or "respectable" work, it is through a combination of multiple such discursive dyadic mechanisms (of which the paper identifies three) that the regulatory process of identification is upheld.

We offered examples of how the dynamic of "conditional recognition" functions through a set of binarism wherein the "superiority" of one term (i.e., respectable work, feminine work, and authentic gender identity) makes sense only in reference to the respective opposites (i.e., dirty work, masculine work, fake gender identity). Through the discursive binarism, Khawajasiras' non-normative occupations are framed as "dirty work" (Hughes, 1951; Tyler, 2011) and their traditional work performances as morally, physically, and socially tainted. Their work and identity are "abject" insofar as they fail in meeting the predefined ideals of "respectable" work. The latter construct, in turn, is gendered as "feminine" work. Some discursive mechanisms relegate Khawajasiras to stereotypically feminine occupations, thus reinforcing gender binary and traditional gender roles. As opposed to "dirty work," what distinguishes respectable work is also its compliance with dominant gender norms of femininity and masculinity. For instance, the performance of respectable femininity in terms of gestures and mannerisms is deemed essential for female work to be considered respectable. In the Pakistani context, work performances indeed continue to be highly normatively regulated along gendered lines (Ashraf et al., 2021). Moreover, failing gender norms of "femininity" and "respectable work" result for Khawajasiras in externally enforced notions of "fake" (with an implicitly assumed notion of "authentic") Khawajasira. The discursive ideal of "authenticity" in turn transforms "fake" Khawajasiras into victims to be blamed for their occupational choices and identity. Thus, the "abject" and "subject" notions manifest not only in the occupational binarism of dirty versus respectable work but also through gendered discourses of masculine versus feminine work and the discourse of fake versus authentic.

7 | CONCLUSION

Our analysis problematizes the intertwined relationship between work, discourse, and gender identity by showing how the abjection of a disenfranchised community is discursively used to reinforce multiple binarism. We have seen how the emerging subject positions available to Khawajasiras in the media discourse often reinforce binary normative ideals of work and gender and how Khawajasiras constantly occupy the normatively inferior end of multiple binarism. While Khawajasiras' recognition becomes conditional upon their reproduction of a socially heteronormative notion of work and gender, new mechanisms of abjection are being produced in the process. At the same time, as Butler (2004, 1997) reminds us, regulatory processes of identification simultaneously produce inclusion and exclusion, subjection, and abjection. This is to say that, paradoxically, abjection also creates conditions for agency (Butler, 2004;

Butler, 2020; Kenny, 2010), thus the dialectic between subjection and abjection is continually in process, and their boundaries continually "policed and maintained" (Rizq, 2013, p. 1282). In our case, we found that the visibility of Khawajasiras in the media news also opens a space for them to voice their views while also exposing the daily violence that accompanies their lives. However, what this space means in terms of the possibilities of resignification continues to unfold.

Further research can build on the theoretical and empirical findings of this paper in multiple ways. Future studies may provide additional insights into the experiences of subjection and abjection of non-normative individuals from Pakistan (and even India) who identify with the broader globally recognized category of LGBTIQ+ persons, but not as Khawajasiras (Roy, 2020). An analysis of how this international umbrella term is being reclaimed in localized media discourses would also further problematize and expand the findings of this research (Roy, 2020). Also, insights into media representation of cisgender sex workers as compared to transgender sex workers have the potential to add new perspectives on work as partially constituted by workers' identity. Finally, as digital media and social networks are increasingly shaping public opinion, values, and beliefs, further investigation on the portrayals of gender identity emerging in online visual and textual contents is also needed (Maaranen & Tienari, 2020). Expanding the scope of this study to include netnographic research would also allow a better understanding of the struggle between official state sources and unofficial individual accounts to see if and how structural and non-structural resistance makes its way into the discourses and what room and opportunities it could create for a meaningful change in the representation of gender identity.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria, educational grants, participation in speakers' bureaus, membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest, and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships and affiliations) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) at https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/.

ENDNOTES

[1] In Pakistan, institutions, activists, and gender diverse communities themselves have increasingly re-claimed the term "transgender" partially to be intelligible to transnational audiences (Roy, 2020). Accordingly, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 adopted the term "transgender" to introduce a new legal category of identity in line with other international initiatives. However, anglophone categories such as the LGBTQ acronym often fail to fully capture the experiences of gender diverse communities in other parts of the world, such as Pakistani Khawajasiras (Dutta & Roy, 2014).

[2] The same news can be archived into more than one register. For example, a piece of news that talks about transgender people's participation in national elections will go into both the "transgender" news register and the "election" news register as well. The "human rights" focus of the HRCP does not define or delimit the news archiving process of the organization. Although a separate register for news on transgender people was made at HRCP archives in 2013 in recognition of it being a human rights issue, what or which news clippings are included in this register is not limited to human rights only.

³ Several reasons could be hypothesized to answer this question, but primarily we feel that due to the rising global visibility of non-binary groups, English newspapers may have found it pertinent to give great coverage to Pakistan's non-binary groups as well. English newspapers tend to locate themselves in the global discourses and, hence, reinforce a narrative that is globally acceptable, while Urdu newspapers tend to reinforce a culturally acceptable discourse regarding Khawajasiras.

⁴ First author's translations from Urdu.

⁵ District of the province of Punjab.

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