

This is the version of the article accepted for publication in *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8.2 (The Europa Issue) published by Duke: <https://read.dukeupress.edu/tsq>

Accepted version downloaded from SOAS Research Online:

Decolonizing Trans/Gender Studies: Teaching Gender, Race and Sexuality in Times of the Rise of the Global Right

Alyosxa Tudor

Centre for Gender Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK

at53@soas.ac.uk

In this article, I argue that a decolonial perspective on ‘gender’ means conceptualising the category of gender as always already trans.ⁱ My object of investigation is ‘gender’ as a category and ‘gender studies’ as a field of knowledge. This article discusses a range of material, from media representations to academic debates and activist interventions. In order to carve out what decolonizing trans/gender studies in Europe could mean, I aim to bring different strands together that have been held apart so far: resistance against global attacks on gender studies, resistance against transphobic feminism, and the ‘decolonising the curriculum’ⁱⁱ movement in the UK.

Part I revisits global ‘anti-gender’ attacks in the context of the rise of the far-right from a decolonial and trans perspective – trans as in both transgender and transnational (Tudor 2017). Bringing an explicitly transgender focussed perspective to the debate, I analyse transphobic feminist attacks on both trans people and gender studies that call themselves ‘gender-critical’ or ‘radical feminist’ and show how transphobic feminists are aligned with masculinist ‘anti-gender’ and far-right anti-immigration rhetoric. Moreover, acknowledging the role (binary and heteronormative) gender plays in right-wing discourses, I argue that European/Western gender studies need to address questions of Eurocentrism, colonialism and racism in order to investigate their own understanding of gender as a category (Méndez 2015). As I will show, this leads to locating gender studies as part of the epistemological project of decolonizing academic knowledge production.

In the second part of the article, I bring these thoughts together with the ‘decolonising the curriculum’ movement in the UK. At British universities, a mostly student-led movement

has started to emerge that fights for decolonizing higher education. This intervention gets transnational inspiration from *Rhodes/Fees must fall* student activism in South Africa (Xaba 2017, Khan 2017) and calls for challenging racist, colonialist, nationalist and neoliberal paradigms in knowledge production by addressing both issues of epistemology and access to higher education. The movement, however, has mostly been distorted in media representations as misguided identity politics. Applying central political claims of ‘decolonising the curriculum’, I explore potentials and challenges of the task of ‘decolonizing’ trans/gender studies in Europe/the Global North. With this, my intervention opens up a discussion on how to conceptualize knowledge on ‘transgender’ with a central focus on decolonial and transnational perspectives. Furthermore, I see the attacks on the decolonizing movement as part of global attacks on emancipatory fields of knowledge production like gender studies and queer- and transfeminist scholarship. In this vein, I suggest that meaningful resistance against ‘anti-gender’ argumentations needs to adopt a decolonial perspective.

While my analysis focuses on the UK, many of the claims of this article are relevant for European gender studies and the conceptualisation of trans/gender in the Global North. As TSQ is a US based journal, my intervention also contributes to making transgender studies in and from locations that are ‘not the US’ⁱⁱⁱ into generalist knowledge production. Whereas my approach stresses the importance of going beyond US-centric scholarship^{iv}, it is important to keep in mind that intervening in US scholarly dominance and methodological nationalism from a European perspective cannot mean re-centering ‘Europe’ instead, or mourn its peripheral state in comparison to the US. In addition, I argue that in order to ‘decolonize’ scholarship and teaching, it is not enough to refer back to anti-racist knowledge productions from the Global North that intervene in the racialized premises of Western nation states. This undertaking is crucial for teaching trans/gender studies in Europe/in the Global North, but at the same time, transnational knowledge productions, especially from the Global South, need to be part of a ‘decolonized’ curriculum.

I work in Gender Studies at SOAS University of London and I understand myself to be a critical Europeanist who investigates how the understanding of what Europe even is is constituted by migrations and diasporas. At the beginning of each course, I point out that it is important to position Europe as an object of study, especially at a school in the heart of a nostalgic European empire that in some cases sees “Africa, Asia and the Middle East” (it is the

School of “Oriental and African” Studies after all) as its object and raw material. Gurinder Bhabra (2009, 2) underlines how a focus on Europe from a postcolonial perspective can do the work of deconstructing Eurocentrism. Ideally, ‘Europe’ is analysed as the product of transnational and global processes and not seen as a neutral location. Applied to the teaching of European trans/gender studies, this claim encourages us to look at the potentials and pitfalls of trans/gender conceptualisations through both Western anti-racist interventions *and* through knowledge productions from the Global South.

Part I: Overlaps of ‘anti-gender’ and transphobic ‘gender-critical’ rhetoric

In recent years, right-wing discourse globally has targeted gender studies, feminism and LGBT rights, using ‘anti-gender’ and ‘anti-genderism’ and accusing their targets of ‘gender ideology’ or ‘genderism’. Especially the term ‘gender ideology’ assumes that gender studies and queer, trans and feminist movements produce an ‘ideology’ that attacks and opposes the majority of the population, while heterosexuality and a stable gender binary are seen as unideological and natural (Corrêa 2018, Corrêa et al 2018, Paternotte/Kuhar 2018, Grzebalska/Kovats/Peto 2017, Bracke/Paternotte 2016, Hark/Villa 2015). The landscape of gender studies bashing is complex. Nationalist and religious agents like the pope or Brazil’s far-right president play a part alongside religious, conservative and far-right publics opposing gay marriage, feminism and women’s rights. They re-affirm the importance of assuming and perpetuating a stable sex/gender alignment with often overlapping but sometimes competing argumentations on gender as a concept: it is demonized as feminist or anti-feminist; as colonizing or as postcolonial deconstruction gone too far; as unscientific or as a secular attack on the traditional family; as misguided identity politics or as destroying proper natural identities. Often, emancipatory analyses of power relations that are rooted in the fields of postcolonial, queer/trans/feminist studies and anti-fascist traditions of thought get appropriated and used in twisted ways. Feminists are called ‘feminazis’, and attackers often see their ‘freedom’ jeopardized or construct themselves as the peoples’ voice against elitist gender studies/feminist dictatorship (Bracke and Paternotte 2016). Repetitive claims that can be found in supra-national ‘anti-gender’ argumentations are frequently tied to religion and/or nationalisms and insist on traditional family values and a natural sex/gender alignment. Separating gender from sex, so the story goes, and indeed ‘inventing’ gender as a flexible concept, endangers the ‘truth’ of the body and biology and with this, puts the unquestionably

heterosexual family and the nation in danger. Some see gender studies as a paedophilic sexualisation of children; as an attempt to steal ‘natural’ and ‘biologically determined’ identities from men and women; as either unscientific or blasphemy. ‘Anti-gender’ voices often construct themselves as the marginal and/or the oppressed and vulnerable^v.

As Elzbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff (2018, 800) assert, in debates that are framed as anti-establishment resistance, the concept of gender gets equated to neoliberalism. Meanwhile, Sarah Bracke and David Paternotte (2016) note that the Catholic church associates ‘gender ideology’ with ISIS and constructs itself with reference to its Latin American pope as a ‘postcolonial church’ for the people that promotes religious freedom. What is important to pin down here is that some strands of feminism join the ‘anti-gender’ choir led by the Catholic church, populist politicians and right-wing or conservative publics which complicates the question of the relationship between gender studies and feminism (Bracke and Paternotte 2016; Garbagnoli 2016).

In the following, I will show that to effectively understand attacks on gender studies and feminism, we need to draw connections to transphobic attacks on trans people in the name of feminism that accuse ‘gender’ and gender studies of harming ‘women’ *and* at the same time we need to tackle racist and migrantist^{vi} discourses that often accompany these argumentations.

Lesbian/Feminist Transphobia

As a concrete example, I turn to recent incidents of lesbian/feminist transphobia in the UK, in order to point out that this phenomenon uses the same vocabulary and logics as right-wing ‘anti-gender’ argumentation. While the latter openly attacks feminists and queer people (and within this lesbians), some lesbians and feminists eagerly use the same strategy to attack trans people, queer and trans theory, and – a sign that the fight is epistemological – poststructuralism. Moreover, as I argue, we are witnessing an overlap between transphobic positions and misogyny, racism and migrantism, a simplistic focus on sexual violence, and a re-writing of feminism as a single-issue-project (Tudor 2019). Let me be clear in outlining the tensions and paradoxes here: We are dealing with ‘anti-gender’ attacks that target ‘gender studies *and feminists*’ and at the same time we are confronted with transphobic attacks that target ‘gender studies *and trans people*’ in the name of feminism. The latter explicitly thinks

of itself as 'gender-critical' feminism. This means, feminist transphobia is a phenomenon that can be seen as a specific conjuncture of anti-genderism.

To highlight these connections, I discuss a concrete topos of feminist transphobic argumentation that at the moment is very much at the centre of public debate in the UK: the construction of trans people in general and trans women in particular as sexual predators. For example, on May 8th 2018, Channel 4 hosted a live debate on national TV called 'Genderquake' which gave room to voices that demonize the intended reform to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) in the UK. If successful, the reform would be a legal intervention to existing restrictive regulations and, with this, help to stop pathologizing trans people and take away the pressure of evidence of the 'truth' of our gendered identities from us.^{vii} The transphobic argumentation, however, understands the reform as fostering sexual violence. Self-declared feminist panellists on 'Genderquake' accused the reform of making it possible for 'men' to pretend they were women to commit sexual violence in women's spaces. The speakers who reproduced these ideas were cheered on by members of the audience who shouted 'penis' whenever a trans woman on the panel spoke. This expression of feminist essentialism in the gross form of transphobia actually amounts to a widespread discourse with academic and public dimensions. For example, a similar view was expressed a few months earlier at SOAS, my place of work, on the union email list, a traditionally leftist organ. On March 8th 2018, under the heading "Happy Women's Day", one of the emails, written by a colleague not personally known to me, stated that a reformed GRA in the UK should rather be labelled the "sexual predator's charter" because it would allow 'men' to self-identify as women and enter 'women only spaces' to commit sexual violence and harassment. The argument is based on a form of transphobia that Talia Bettcher (2013, 235) calls "the basic denial of authenticity" – "whereby trans women are identified as 'really men'".

A prominent lesbian-feminist example that explicitly combines transphobia with attacks on gender studies is Australian-based Sheila Jeffreys's (2014) book *Gender Hurts*. Written as a polemic rant, she claims that both trans people and gender studies scholars should be faulted for reproducing essentialist concepts of gender. This accusation is utterly problematic, of course, given the fact that Jeffreys's approach relies on 'sex' as a biological, eternal and universal category – which is the cornerstone of essentialism.^{viii} Gender studies, queer theory and poststructuralism, in Jeffreys's view, are responsible for all sorts of attacks on feminism, they have 'overwhelmed' feminism (2014, 36); have made 'gender' into a 'moveable feast'

(2014, 5); have ‘assaulted’ feminism and have always been in opposition to lesbian feminism (2014, 41). Jeffreys mourns the disappearance of the category ‘lesbian’ which she thinks has been given up by young women in favour of ‘genderqueer’ and blames gender studies for this phenomenon as some sort of brainwashing programme to strip lesbians of their stable female, lesbian identity (Jeffreys 2014, 47). Temporality is interesting here. Jeffreys makes this claim as if there ever was the kind of feminism she longs for without queers (versus lesbian), trans people, trans women and genderqueer people. There never was; the vocabulary might have changed and media debates might have made transgender more publicly recognized, which both enables more people to identify and name themselves as such and makes (certain) trans people more visible and therefore potentially more ‘attackable’ and vulnerable (Gossett et al 2017; Malatino 2016).

Similarly, in the US in January 2019, a group of radical feminists appeared at a panel titled “The Inequality of the Equality Act: Concerns From the Left” at an event hosted by the Heritage Foundation – a conservative, right-wing organisation which has a long history of lobbying against LGBTQ rights, feminism and immigration, and serves as a think tank that advocates against gender theory.^{ix} The foundation proclaims on its website that the sex/gender distinction is a ‘cultural war’ which can be traced back to second wave feminism, and which interrupts the “confidence in the very idea of man and woman” and destroys the family. Anti-feminist, queer- and transphobic rhetoric come together with an overall focus on anti-immigration, one of the key concerns of the foundation. Scott Yenor, a right-wing political scientist states on the website: “Transgender theories are part of the feminist goal of a sexual revolution that eliminates the proprietary family and celebrates non-monogamous sexual experiences.”^x

At the panel itself, self-proclaimed ‘leftist’ feminists participated in an event organized by an openly anti-feminist, anti-immigration think tank, endorsing its right-wing politics and with this, emptying the word ‘left’ of its meaning. Feminist transphobia is not a phenomenon exclusive to the UK, as the long history of TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) attacks on trans people and especially trans women in the US shows.^{xi} The UK debate both informs and is informed by US based feminist transphobia. However, it becomes clear that in both contexts, transphobic feminists and far-right/religious argumentations are concerned with the alignment of sex/gender. Transphobic feminists do not only copy the language of the far-right but are actually part of far-right discourse.

The investment in a stable sex/gender alignment^{xii}

As a response to lesbian/feminist transphobia, Sandy Stone (1987) explains attacks on trans women as ‘morality tales and origin myths about telling the “truth” of gender’. Reproducing similar ideas about the ‘truth’ of the sexed body, a recent post in the UK based group *Mayday4Women* claims: ‘[T]ransgenderism is currently one of the biggest threats to feminism in the UK’.^{xiii} This supposedly ‘radical feminist’ rhetoric overlaps with religious ‘anti-gender’ rants, like uttered for example by the Pope, or the Spanish cardinal Cañizares Llovera, who sees ‘gender ideology’ as the biggest threat to humanity.^{xiv} Most of these transphobic and anti-gender-studies incidents unite in attacking Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* ([1990] 2007) in which Butler questions a fixed subject of feminism and critically investigates ‘women’ as an absolute and essential category. With this, Butler shows that sex has always been gender: rather than a social role attached on top of a natural body, it is conventionalisations of ‘gender’ that make ‘sex’ appear to be a pre-given stable category. This insight, perhaps unsurprisingly, still seems to be so radical that it is not only the *biggest threat to humanity* for the Catholic church, but also the *biggest threat to feminism* for some feminists. While the ‘threat to humanity’ position ties ideas of humanness back to the binary oppositions of Western modernity, the latter position ironically ties also feminism to the very same cementation of binary oppositions. With this in mind, I argue that to seriously analyse global anti-feminist attacks on gender studies, we need to extend the focus to the explicitly feminist attacks on trans people and on trans- and queer-feminist knowledge productions.

Using a simplistic understanding of ‘sexual violence’ in order to legitimize feminist transphobia is not a new phenomenon (for a more detailed discussion see Tudor 2019). The strategy of accusing trans people of sexual violence echoes a discourse that externalizes sexual violence as taking place somewhere else, outside the West, or ascribed to migrants, and/or Black and Brown persons and/or to Muslims – all of whom are constructed as the eternal migrants who can never belong in the Western nation state (see Haritaworn 2012, El-Tayeb 2012, Tudor 2018). With this ascription, sexual violence gets displaced to an elsewhere, and the imagined ‘here’, in this case white heterosexuality (or some forms of homonormative sexuality) built on sex/gender alignment, becomes the pure place free of sexual violence that needs borders in order to be protected from the phantasmatic outside. What to do with this apparent certainty expressed by some of ‘knowing’ the perpetrator of sexual violence? Trans

women. Trans men. Gender-nonconforming people.^{xv} Migrant men. Muslim men. Black men. The recurring topos of ‘externalizing sexual violence’ and ascribing it to the ‘pervert other’ is shared in transphobic, Islamophobic, migratist and racist debates. It is the idea that sexual violence takes place ‘somewhere else’ and will be ‘invited in’ through migration and weak border controls – and trans/gender studies, LGBT rights and legislature. This allows for a displaced debate on sexual violence in lieu of addressing it in the realm of the normative of gender and nation where it actually regularly happens without the need of ‘importing’ it from the outside.

What is also important to note about these externalisations of sexual violence is that they come in what I call complex ‘cross-fadings’, in ever shifting shapes that require shifting forms of resistance. For example, Islamophobic ideas of Muslim men as the sexual perpetrators can come in the form of homo- or transnationalism (Puar 2007, Tudor 2017) – in the name of ‘protecting’ vulnerable queer and trans people from queer and transphobia imported from the phantasmatic outside of the nation. Similarly, in transphobic narratives, it is vulnerable women or lesbians that need to be ‘protected’ from trans people. While right-wing anti-gender polemics, in the style of Brazil’s Bolsonaro, attack feminist, trans and queer people alike and explicitly deny the existence of sexual violence against women (Assis/Ogando 2018), self-proclaimed ‘gender-critical’ feminists use simplistic understandings of sexual violence as the main argument of their transphobia.

As a further example of the twisted argumentations in the ‘anti-gender’ debates, some strands of ‘anti-gender’ in the Global South and Eastern Europe see gender studies, feminism and LGBT rights as a ‘colonizing’ import from the West, as for example Kapya Kaoma (2016) points out. Very often this idea is perpetuated by the Catholic church and the Pope. Bracke and Paternotte (2016, 150) show that “[t]his postcolonial discourse positions the Global South in general, and Africa in particular, as a location where family relations are both more ‘authentic’ and more in line with Catholic doctrine”. While they open up important points, Bracke and Paternotte do not fully elaborate on the implications of the use of ‘postcolonial’ here. We need to be clear that the Catholic church appropriates the term ‘postcolonial’. In fact, Catholic officials suggest that the modern binary heteronormative sex/gender system that was imported through colonialism, as many approaches show (e.g. Lugones 2007), is an ‘authentic’ non-Western one. Christian missionaries and international right-wing Christian money flows (Kaoma 2012) play an important role in stabilizing the colonial

sex/gender/sexuality nexus in the Global South. Therefore, it is more than hypocritical to claim the postcolonial position as inherent to the Catholic church. It is certainly important to join Kaoma in criticizing this simplistic Christian propaganda, but how can a decolonized gender studies project avoid falling into the trap of understanding 'gender as a (neo)colonial category' solely as a call for a return to an imagined pre-colonial gender-free or non-homophobic authenticity? As Rahul Rao (2014, 180) points out, liberal studies like Kaoma's (2012) offer "a valuable corrective to the neo-Orientalist view of an essential and irredeemable 'African homophobia'" while at the same time problematically construct both African clergy and publics as operated by Western remote control without the capacity for their own agendas beyond (neo)colonial power.

It is my argument that it is the investment in a stable sex/gender alignment that all these examples have in common. More precisely, I have sought to unpack and bring into connection different agents that see a deconstructed gender concept as a threat. What seems to be contradictions in fact is deeply related. With these interconnections in mind, in the next subsection I will investigate what a postcolonial/decolonial understanding of 'gender' might entail and in which ways it destabilizes the very category of gender and therefore bears the potential of transing it. Finally, I discuss what 'decolonizing trans/gender studies' could mean in practice.

Part II: Decolonizing the Curriculum

Student Activism

Decolonizing higher education is not only a question of representation, but a broader project that looks at issues of representation, access and epistemology alike (Bhambra/Gebrial/Nişancıoğlu 2018, Sabaratnam 2019).^{xvi} Challenging the traditional curriculum is an intellectual project that changes the way we think of knowledge production, concepts and history, and it will have an impact on student demographics and the composition of the class room. Especially the student-led interventions across the UK (like for example at SOAS, Cambridge and Goldsmiths)^{xvii} and transnationally are often radically intersectional (Olufemi 2015, Xaba 2017, Khan 2017). In many cases they are founded and sustained by women/queer/trans of color, migratized and working-class students who point out the complex overlaps of racism and migratism with other power relations and connect

epistemology and representation with questions of access/non-access to higher education. In relation to the South African movement, Khadija Khan (2017, 114) remarks that “black queer womxn and nonbinary people are creating both epistemological and material possibilities for expanding liberation.”

A lot of the UK media representation on decolonising the curriculum movement is hostile.^{xviii} Not only the right-wing press, but also many liberals are outraged and accuse the movement of essentialism, anti-male, anti-white and anti-western resentments and even racism. Knowledge, as the tenor of the argument goes, is neutral and gets de-neutralized and re-racialized through the decolonising movement. It is actually the white English people who are the colonized, and the imposition of decolonizing is the actual colonialism. To scholars who are used to ‘anti-gender’ argumentations and this type of gaslighting, these accusations will seem very familiar. However, academics like Meera Sabaratnam,^{xix} who is a vocal representative in the theorizing of the ‘decolonising the curriculum’ movement, have partly gained access to mainstream media platforms in order to advocate for the cause. As I want to stress, it is mainly the students whose interventions assure and maintain the radical character of ‘decolonising the curriculum’. *Radical Residency*, a SOAS student group, squatted an empty building of the British museum, only a few blocks away from SOAS, and converted it temporally into a social centre in 2018, during the UK wide lecturers’ strike over pensions. They not only supported their striking teachers with actions and information campaigns on campus (and suffered extended verbal and physical abuse from both faculty members and fellow students for their activism),^{xx} but also raised broader questions of knowledge production and radical democracy, and of the connections between discrimination, dispossession and resistance. Unsurprisingly, the students who stuck their necks out were confronted with racist, misogynist and homophobic harassment and online violence. The attacks are of a similar viciousness as the anti-gender attacks and, as I want to stress, the students and academics who are involved in the decolonising movement are not not-gender studies scholars either. These students bring their amazing politics and knowledge productions to the classroom, and they take queer- and transfeminist tools from the classroom back to their activisms and knowledge productions. *Radical Residency* point out that accepting the status quo of a racist, sexist, migratist, classist, ableist, queer- and transphobic higher education system is deeply entrenched with the histories that allow the British Museum to represent stolen goods as neutral objects and detach their stories from

the violence of colonial conquest.^{xxi} And this is connected to the theories and epistemologies, the stories told at universities that normalize these violent pasts and presents. It is these narratives that the decolonising movement wants to see changed, deconstructed, questioned and transformed. Importantly, the student activism makes clear that ‘decolonizing’ does not overlap with nationalist respectability projects – it is not a ‘global Britain’ we should be fighting for, it is about tearing down nationalist, colonialist and imperialist paradigms.

Teaching trans/gender studies in Europe/the Global North

What happens to the category of gender, to the question what gender even is – and with this, what transing gender could be – if we take seriously the commitment to decolonize higher education and to challenge the Eurocentric/white canon? This endeavour can indeed be challenging in terms of how to teach new or relatively less cited work, how to translate concepts and terms, and how to engage with the traveling/non-traveling of theories. Zethu Matebeni and Thabo Msibi (2015) remind us of the difficulty of transnationalizing terms and the variability of the dominant meaning that is attached to them – it is not a coincidence that terms like ‘queer’ and ‘trans’ that have a US-centric history are seen to be universal, while other terms from non-US, non-Western, non-English-language communities are seen as specific. Therefore, when teaching transnational gender studies, there is no easy way out when trying to find a common language of solidarity, affinity and critical positionality. This is why Nivedita Menon (2009) analyses ‘gender’ as a contested concept that needs to be dramatically deconstructed every time we use it, and Howard Chiang (2012, 10) remarks that the “most radical approach to developing something that we might want to call Chinese transgender studies is perhaps by leaving behind Western-derived meanings of gender altogether.”

These challenges to gender as a category change knowledge paradigms and open up various ways of transing. I argue that decolonial understandings of gender actually make it hard to think of gender studies as not already ‘trans’ – *transing* gender, *transnational* and in *translation*. At the same time, this points towards understanding the relation of cis-gender to trans-gender as a much more complex one than a simplistic binary approach that does not take racialisation and transnational translation of concepts into account. Investigating the role of racialisation for the emergence of gender makes clear that colonial ideas of gender rely on the fact of having a gender, *being* one of two genders, as necessary for being

recognized as human (Spillers 1987). Eva Hayward and Che Gossett (2017, 18) read Spillers as an account on “how blackness is trans/gender trouble”. With this in mind, it becomes evident that to trans gender, to go beyond gender, if you already *have* a gender or *are* a gender, is different than transing gender from a position of contested gender, un-gender. This also shows the importance of gender in global discussions and why seemingly differently positioned figures like transphobic feminists, the pope, conservative publics or neo-nazis are invested in stabilizing and holding on to normative gender. But it also means something for theorizing transgender. Building on Spillers, Riley Snorton (2017) carves out how trans identity, the fungibility of gender, has a racial history. He questions traditions of thought that hold transness and blackness (and sex, gender and race) apart and asks: “What pasts have been submerged and discarded to solidify – or, more precisely indemnify – a set of procedures that would render blackness and transness as distinct categories of social valuation?” (Snorton 2017, 7)

Many feminist, queer, trans and critical race approaches make clear that the concept of sex/gender is a colonial one (e.g. Carby 1982, Lugones 2007, Méndez 2015, Snorton 2017). This means we cannot even understand what gender is if we do not investigate the ways in which it is constructed through racialisation. Feminist and queer knowledge production on diasporas, like for example Michelle Wright’s (2004), point out that Black male efforts to introduce Blackness into modernity often reproduce normative gender, male privilege and heterosexuality within the process. Snorton (2017, 12) refers to Christina Sharpe’s approach to tell a different story of “Black modernity” in which “black gender is [...] open to manipulation and rearrangement.” Xhercis Méndez’ and Yomaira Figueroa (2019, 71) remark that “to dismiss the critique of patriarchy out of hand as ‘Western,’” leaves no room for addressing sexism, homo- and transphobia within diasporic communities.

The same is true for many decolonial nation building processes in the Global South. One example in terms of a heteronormative and masculinist decolonial knowledge production is Frantz Fanon. Rahul Rao (2014, 183) points out that Fanon associates homosexuality with whiteness and underlines that this problematically turns non-white queers in the Global South into the abjects of the decolonial nation state. “Having experienced colonialism as emasculation”, Rao explains, widespread consequences are nationalist attempts to “recuperate a putatively lost African male virility through violence against” women and queer people. The violent gender and sexuality norms rooted in Western colonialism cannot be

equated with those working in decolonial nationalism and a decolonized curriculum that addresses both also needs to find ways to teach their different histories and meanings. “Challenging Fanon”^{xxii} is therefore what Wanelisa Xaba (2017) suggests in order to push back against the erasure of “radical Black feminists, queers and student activists living with disabilities” in the dominant, masculinist representation of the Rhodes/Fees must fall movement. Queer and transfeminist scholars like Zethu Matebeni (2013), B Camminga (2019), Stella Nyanzi (2013), and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2004) intervene in the idea of ‘pre-colonial’ gender-free (and with this sexism and homo- and transphobia-free) utopia, and at the same time point out the ways in which Western concepts of gender, rights and development are problematic and reproduce colonial hierarchies. It becomes evident that the violence of Western colonisation and the violence of the decolonial nation state are not equivalent, nor symmetrical. When it comes to analysing these complexities, Rahul Rao’s (2014) knowledge production makes us sit with the contradictions and refuses simplistic answers that either romanticize or demonize the Global South while trying to deconstruct the “location of homophobia”.

How can dominant Western ways of doing trans/gender studies be criticized and interrupted? Or in other words, how can gender, queer and trans studies teachers and scholars based in the Global North make sure that their scholarship does not hurt? As too often Western(-based) scholarship and teaching still is a methodologically nationalist monolithic field ignorant of racism, or engages in wanting to ‘save’ women, queer or trans people elsewhere, or randomly appropriates or romanticizes knowledge productions from the Global South or marginalized contexts. Moreover, how can we prevent the decolonising movement from becoming the neoliberal academia’s next buzzword, emptied of any critical content^{xxiii} (Tuck & Yang 2012, Mehta 2019)? And what to do with the already beginning tendency of institutions trying to make ‘decolonising the curriculum’ into a brand to attract students-consumers? I see the endeavour of decolonizing higher education as a necessarily multi-layered and collective process that pays attention to gaps, complex contradictions and differently positioned complicities. In my view, any ‘decolonisation’ must bridge diaspora approaches with approaches from the Global South, connect indigenous studies with migration studies, and question the paradigm of the nation state. Moreover, feminist, queer and trans perspectives and their deconstructions of gender and sexuality are crucial for decolonizing epistemologies and spaces.

Any inclusion of new knowledge production – be it queer or trans or challenging the Western canon or all of this – depends on putting a lot of work into reading and getting familiar with the field. All these approaches make the claim that one cannot pick and single out knowledge productions and place them as add-ons to one’s curriculum, but one needs to become familiar with a whole field and the complex discussions and contradictory approaches within it. In order to avoid what Diana Courvant (2011), Kate Drabinski (2014) and Hilary Malatino (2015) call a “special guest approach” in relation to trans inclusion into the women’s studies canon, a decolonized, transnational and trans-/queer-feminist gender studies curriculum ideally challenges paradigms of knowledge production. However, the challenge, especially for scholars positioned in critical European studies and privileged by whiteness (like me), is how to find these knowledge productions and how to actually use them in ways that are not appropriating. Madina Tlostanova (2017, 28) suggests looking at decolonial art as a way to rethink the ‘body-political’ and ‘geo-political’ in order to prevent “Western theory always taking the default position”. It is not enough to assign that one text that is the easiest to get a hold of and make it into the authentic example (Tuck/Yang 2016). For example, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf points out in which ways Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí’s (1997) claim that the “Yorubas don’t do gender” (Bakare-Yusuf 2003) is based on heteronormative assumptions on social reality and its relation to language. Yet, it is still only Oyěwùmí’s approach that ends up on the syllabi in order to introduce *the* ‘authentic’ African position. Furthermore, following Awino Okech (2018), it is important to assign African feminist knowledge production not only for teaching focused on Africa but as generalist expertise in gender and queer studies.

Conclusion

This article does not only aim to point out that there is no thinking about the question what gender is without investigating the role of racism, colonialism and nationalism for the emergence of gender. It also provides an important argument for decolonizing the curriculum: We need to decolonize trans/gender studies if we want to begin to learn to understand what their subject even is. Moreover, gender studies and queer- and transfeminist approaches can give the decolonising movement an important theoretical foundation.

I suggest – maybe a bit provocatively – to understand decolonized gender studies as always already trans. The concept of trans, as I use it here, refuses a fixed meaning and

centers decolonial, critical race and transnational approaches. As I have argued, a transnational critical perspective on 'gender', feminist transphobia, and attacks on gender studies leads to the question how to 'decolonize' Western/European gender studies within the broader project of decolonizing higher education. However, as colonisation and the knowledge productions derived through it have existed for centuries, it would be naïve to think that 'decolonizing' can be achieved swiftly through the voluntary acts of a few scholars. Decolonizing trans/gender studies is necessarily a collective process that cannot be done individually. It also means to link attacks on gender studies with attacks on broader movements like the decolonising movement, transnational feminist, anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-nationalist and anti-colonial struggles. In line with many of the above cited approaches that analyse attacks on gender studies, I think it is important to understand the phenomenon as connected to the global rise of the far right. However, it becomes clear that we also urgently need to pay attention to feminist 'anti-gender' argumentations – or to put it the other way round, pay attention to the way in which some feminisms are racist, oppressive and right-wing (even if they claim not to be). In this article, I suggested that thinking these strands together calls for a change of paradigms in queer/trans/feminist pedagogies and epistemologies and a commitment to understanding gender studies as already being 'trans' in multiple ways. Transing, going beyond a category, deconstructing a category (Tudor 2017), can do the work of creating solidarity and at the same time of challenging borders and boundaries (with respect to the nation and migration). Moreover, trans-gender demands for trans-nation – for fiercely anti-nationalist, anti-colonial politics and knowledge productions. Both the endeavours of countering 'anti-gender' attacks and 'decolonizing trans/gender studies' require ongoing deconstructions of the category of gender and analyses that see trans/gender as defined through racialization, post/colonial geopolitics, transnational movements and translation.

Acknowledgements

This article is the product of a thinking process that would not have been possible without intense exchanges. Thank you to Samia Khatun and Kata Kyrölä for thought-provoking engagement with the draft, to Nydia A. Swaby for teaching with me in the early years and to the anonymous peer-reviewers and TSQ editors for their critical comments. I have learned so

much from teaching highly politicized brilliant students in at SOAS. *Radical Residency*: Thank you!

References

- Akward-Rich, Cameron. 2017. "Trans, Feminism: Or, Reading like a Depressed Transsexual". *Signs*. 42(4), 819-841.
- Aizura, Aren et al. 2014. Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary. *TSQ* 1(3).
- Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. 2003. "Yorubas don't do gender: a critical review of Oyeronke Oyewumi's 'The invention of women: making an African sense of Western gender discourses.'" *African Identities*, 1(1), 121–142.
- Bettcher, Talia. 2013. "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman'". In A. Soble, N. Power & R. Halwani (eds.), *Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*. Rowan & Littlefield, 233-250.
- Bey, Marquis. 2017. "The Trans*-Ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans*-Ness." *TSQ* 4(2), 275–295.
- Bhambra, Gurinder K. 2009. "Postcolonial Europe, or Understanding Europe in Times of the Postcolonial". *Sage Handbook of European Studies*. London: Sage, 69–85.
- Bhambra, Gurinder K, Nisancioglu, Kerem and Gebrial, Dalia, eds. 2018. *Decolonizing the University*. Pluto Press, London.
- Bracke, Sarah, & Paternotte, David. 2016. "Unpacking the Sin of Gender". *Religion and Gender* 6(2), 143-154.
- Butler, Judith. 2007. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Camminga, B. 2019. *Transgender Refugees and the Imagined South Africa. Bodies Over Borders and Borders Over Bodies*. New York: Palgrave.
- Chen, Mel Y. 2012. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham: Duke.
- Chiang, Howard. 2012. *Transgender China*. New York: Palgrave.
- Corrêa, Sonia. 2018. "Gender Ideology: Tracking its origins and meanings in current gender politics", *Global Policy Journal*. <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/13/02/2018/gender-ideology-tracking-its-origins-and-meanings-current-gender-politics>
- Corrêa, Sonia et al. 2018. "The globalisation of anti-gender campaigns. Transnational anti-gender movements in Europe and Latin America create unlikely alliances". *International Politics and Society*. <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/human-rights/article/show/the-globalisation-of-anti-gender-campaigns-2761/>
- Courvant, Diana. 2011. "Strip!" *Radical Teacher* 92, 26–34.
- Drabinski, Kate. 2011. "Identity Matters: Teaching Transgender in the Women's Studies Classroom." *Radical Teacher*, 92, 10–20.
- El-Tayeb, Fatima. 2012. "Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay": Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City'. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19(1), 79–95.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta, and Agnieszka Graff. 2018. "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism". *Signs* 43(4), 797-821.
- Garbagnoli, Sara. 2016. "Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican's 'Gender' as a New Rhetorical Device Against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order" *Religion and Gender*, 6(2).
- Garriga-López, Claudia et al. eds. 2019. *Trans Studies en las Américas*. *TSQ* 6(2).
- Gossett Reina, Eric Stanley, and Johanna Burton. eds. 2017. *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Grzebalska, Weronika, Kovats, Eszter, and Peto, Andrea. 2017. "Gender as symbolic glue: how "gender" became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order". *Political Critique*.

- <http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/> [08/10/2019].
- Haritaworn, Jin. 2012. "Colorful Bodies in the Multikulti Metropolis: Vitality, Victimology and Transgressive Citizenship in Berlin". In *Transgender Migrations. The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition* edited by Trystan Cotten, 11–31. New York: Routledge.
- Hark, Sabine, and Paula-Irene Villa. 2015. *Anti-Genderismus: Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Hayward, Eva and Che Gossett. 2017. "Impossibility of That". *Angelaki*, 22(2), 15-24.
- Jeffreys, Sheila. 2014. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Khan, Khadija. 2017. "Intersectionality in Student Movements: Black Queer Womxn and Nonbinary Activists in South Africa's 2015–2016 Protests". *Agenda* 31:3-4, 110-121.
- Kaoma, Kapya. 2016. "The Vatican Anti-Gender Theory and Sexual Politics: An African Response" *Religion and Gender*, 6(2).
- Kaoma, Kapya. 2012. *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa*. Somerville: Political Research Associates.
- Koivunen, Anu, Kyrölä, Katariina, and Ingrid Ryberg. 2018. eds. *The Power of Vulnerability: Mobilising Affect in Feminist, Queer and Anti-racist Media Cultures*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Koyama, Emi. 2006. "Whose Feminism is it Anyways?" In *The Transgender Studies Reader* edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: Routledge.
- Kyrölä, Katariina. 2018. "Negotiating Vulnerability in the Trigger Warning Debates". In *The Power of Vulnerability: Mobilising Affect in Feminist, Queer and Anti-racist Media Cultures*. Manchester University Press.
- Lewis, Gail. 2013. "Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacements". *Signs* 38(4), 869–892.
- Lugones, Maria. 2007. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System". *Hypatia* 22(1), 186–219.
- Malatino, Hilary. 2015. "Pedagogies of Becoming: Trans Inclusivity and the Crafting of Being". *TSQ* 2(3), 395–410.
- Malatino, Hilary. 2016. "The Transgender Tipping Point: The Social Death of Sophia Buset". In *Feminist Perspectives on Orange Is the New Black: Thirteen Critical Essays* edited by April Kalogeropoulos Householder, and Adrienne Trier-Bieniek Jefferson: McFarland&Company, 95–110.
- Matebeni, Zethu. 2013. "INTIMACY, QUEERNESS, RACE". *Cultural Studies*, 27:3, 404-417.
- Matebeni, Zethu and Thabo Msibi. 2015. "Vocabularies of the non-normative". *Agenda* 29:1, 3-9.
- Mehta, Akanksha. 2019. "Teaching Gender, Race, Sexuality: Reflections on Feminist Pedagogy". *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, 5(1), 23-30.
- Méndez, Xhercis. 2015. "Notes towards a decolonial feminist methodology: Revisiting the race/gender matrix". *Trans-scripts* 5, 41–59.
- Méndez, Xhercis, and Yomaira Figueroa. 2019. "Not Your Papa's Wynter: Women of Color Contributions toward Decolonial Futures," In *Beyond the Doctrine of Man. Decolonial Visions of the Human* edited by Joseph Drexler-Dreis and Kristien Justaert. Fordham Press.
- Menon, Nivedita. 2009. "Sexuality, Caste, Governmentality: Contests over 'Gender' in India." *Feminist Review*, 91(1), 94–112.
- Nyanzi, Stella. 2013. "Homosexuality, Sex Work, and HIV/AIDS in Displacement and Post-Conflict Settings: The Case of Refugees in Uganda". *International Peacekeeping*, 20:4, 450-468.
- Okech, Awino. 2018. "Cite African Feminists: Some Readings". *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@awino.okech/reading-list-bddc1e71f6fd> [07/10/2019].

- Olufemi, Lola. 2015. "Our curricula are white, and they shouldn't be". *Varsity*. <https://www.varsity.co.uk/comment/9064> [07/10/2019].
- Oyèwùmí, Oyeronke. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Paternotte, David, and Roman Kuhar. 2018. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality*. Rowman&Littlefield.
- Prandini Assis, Mariana, and Ana Ogando. 2018. "Bolsonaro, 'gender ideology' and hegemonic masculinity in Brazil". *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/bolsonaro-gender-ideology-hegemonic-masculinity-brazil-181031062523759.html> [07/10/2019].
- Puar, Jasbir. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, London: Duke University.
- Rao, Rahul. 2014. "The Locations of Homophobia". *London Review of International Law* (2)2, 169-199.
- Sabaratham, Meera. 2019. "If we Want a 'Global Britain', We Need to Decolonise the Curriculum". *The Times*. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/if-we-want-a-global-britain-we-need-to-decolonise-the-curriculum-xr6vvhlg> [08/10/2019]
- Sharpe, Alex. 2018. *Sexual Intimacy and Gender Identity 'Fraud'*. London: Routledge.
- Snorton, Riley. 2017. *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Spillers, Hortense. 1987. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book". *Diacritics* 17(2), 65-81.
- Stone, Sandy. 1987. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto". <https://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back.pdf> [12/04/2020].
- Stryker, Susan, and Bettcher, Thalia. 2016. "Introduction". *TSQ* 3(1-2), 5-14.
- Tlostanova, Madina. 2017. "Transcending the Human/Non-Human Divide". *Angelaki*, 22(2), 25-37.
- Tuck, Eve, and Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is not a Metaphor". *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1-40.
- Tudor, Alyosxa. 2017. "Dimensions of Transnationalism". *Feminist Review* 117, 20-40.
- Tudor, Alyosxa. 2018. "Cross-Fadings of Racialisation and Migratisation: The Postcolonial Turn in Western European Gender and Migration Studies". *Gender, Place and Culture* 25(7), 1057-1072.
- Tudor, Alyosxa. 2019. "Im/Possibilities of Refusing and Choosing Gender". *Feminist Theory* 20(4), 361-380.
- Williams, Joanna. 2017. "The 'decolonise the curriculum' movement re-racialises knowledge". *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/decolonise-curriculum-movement-re-racialises-knowledge/> [08/10/2019].
- Wright, Michelle. 2004. *Becoming Black. Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*. London: Duke University.
- Xaba, Wanelisa. 2017. "Challenging Fanon: A Black Radical Feminist Perspective on Violence and the Fees Must Fall Movement". *Agenda* 31(3-4), 96-104.

ⁱ 'Trans' is used both in relation to transgender and with a broader signification. See Chen (2012, 137), Bey (2017, 284), Tudor (2017).

ⁱⁱ I use the British spelling 'decolonising' when referring to the UK movement.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am borrowing the formulation 'not the US' from Eliza Steinbock's paper 'Not the US: Transnational Organizing in "Other" Hotspots of Trans Visual Culture Activism', given at the conference *GenderX: Transnational and*

Decolonial Perspectives on and beyond the Gender Binary at the Centre for Gender Studies, SOAS, in May 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/events/2231966987116689/> [12/04/2020].

^{iv} TSQ special issues that tackle US-centrism are for example Aizura et al (2014) *Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary* and Garriga-López et al (2019) *Trans Studies en las Américas*.

^v See also Koivunen, Kyrölä & Ryberg 2018 who discuss the phenomenon of the privileged claiming and appropriating the language of marginalisation within their theorisation of the politics of vulnerability.

^{vi} ‘Migratist’ is a term to name migration-based discrimination. *Migratism is the power relation that ascribes migration to certain people, constructs them as strangers, as not belonging to the Western nation state* (Tudor 2018).

^{viii} See Awkward-Rich 2017; Stryker/Bettcher 2016; Tudor 2019 for interventions.

^{ix} <https://www.heritage.org/gender/report/sex-gender-and-the-origin-the-culture-wars-intellectual-history>

^x Yenor gets the connection between feminism and trans politics better than the transphobic feminists. What if the worst conservative/right-wing nightmare is true, and ‘transgender theories’ are a feminist project to eliminate the heterosexist proprietary family; undo, question and change the categories of men and women; celebrate desire and pleasure and tear down racist nationalisms?

^{xi} See for example Koyama’s (2006) and Stone’s (1987) critique of feminist transphobia in the US.

^{xii} This point was also discussed by Clare Hemmings, first presented at Uppsala University in 2019: <https://www.kalendarium.uu.se/Evenemang/?eventId=42428> [07/10/2019].

^{xiii} <https://www.mayday4women.com/about/> [09/09/2019].

^{xiv} https://www.eldiario.es/cv/desgravio-virgen_0_527398033.html [09/09/2019].

^{xv} Alex Sharpe (2018) analyses cases in the UK in which trans men/gender-nonconforming masculine representing subjects were prosecuted as sexual predators for failing to tell the ‘truth’ about their gender history. Looking at these cases, it becomes clear that recent feminist transphobic incidents in the UK are backed up by this legal discourse that sees the failure to reveal one’s gender history to sexual partners as always already sexual violence.

^{xvi} See also SOAS resources: *Decolonising SOAS Learning and Teaching Toolkit* <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/decolonisingsoas/files/2018/10/Decolonising-SOAS-Learning-and-Teaching-Toolkit-AB.pdf> [12/04/2020].

^{xvii} *Radical Residency* at SOAS <https://www.facebook.com/radical.residency/>, Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action <https://www.facebook.com/goldsmithsanti/>, Cambridge Decolonisation Network <https://www.facebook.com/DecoloniseCambridge/> [all 09/09/2019].

^{xviii} For example, Williams (2017) in *Open Democracy*: “The ‘decolonise the curriculum’ movement re-racialises knowledge”, while *The Daily Mail* titles: “They Kant be serious”. In relation media representation on *Rhodes must fall*, see Xaba 2017: 100. See also Kyrölä 2018: 44.

^{xix} See for example: <https://www.historyextra.com/period/modern/decolonise-history-curriculum-education-how-meghan-markle-black-study/>; <https://timeshighered.podbean.com/e/the-podcast-decolonising-the-curriculum/> [12/04/2020].

^{xx} https://www.facebook.com/radical.residency/posts/178749309432621?_tn=K-R [12/04/2020].

^{xxi} <https://pastebin.com/UxXNsEXf> [09/09/2019].

^{xxiii} The danger of absorbing and depoliticizing of anti-racist approaches has also been identified in the European take on intersectionality, see for example Lewis 2013.