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Beyond the Incongruence of Gender Identity

Expanding the Political-Theoretical Imaginary of Trans Studies

ERIC LLAVERIA CASELLES

Where Is Trans Studies Taking Us?

It is mid-October 2022 in Berlin and I find myself at a meeting organized by one of the biggest trans organizations of the country, the Bundesverband Trans (BVT). The topic for the afternoon is “Trans Studies in Germany – where are we and where do we want to go?” (Bundesverband Trans 2022). Considering the institutional non-existence of Trans Studies in the German context¹, I look around, wondering what personal trajectories, texts discussions and activist encounters have shaped our understanding of this field of study and brought us here today. The event and the attendance speak to the relevance of Trans Studies. But the group discussions and informal conversations show another side: the experiences with teaching, researching or writing leave some of us politically frustrated. It seems as if Trans Studies, a space we seek to occupy for thinking and acting towards transformation, has its own agency, one that limits the kinds of questions we can ask, the demographics of the people who feel interpellated, and the analysis we are able to formulate. This agency is one that limits, in the end, the possibilities we can mobilize for change and the futures to which we can contribute.

This discontent is not unique to the German context. Andrea Long Chu is a trans writer and critic based in New York who voiced her anger in one of the most-read articles from “Transgender Studies Quarterly” in 2019: “Let’s face it: Trans Studies is over. If it isn’t, it should be” (Chu/Drager 2019, 103). In this article I engage with the critical dialogue between Chu and Harsin Drager, and identify moments of agreement and disagreement in order to formulate my own discontent with the field, but also to articulate ways in which Trans Studies can better hold and nourish the kind of political and epistemic projects that I am interested in. Trans Studies should be over, says Chu, constructing Trans Studies as an external and irreparable entity. There is truth in the view that we don’t decide on voluntary terms “where do we want to go with Trans Studies?”, as the BVT asked. Trans Studies is already taking us places. But, by the same logic, we can’t create an alternative space unaffected by the wider social dynamics that make Trans Studies so frustrating. Chu and Drager propose to embrace “trans satire” and to write without “*political* optimism”, giving in to “the bitter disappointment of finding out the world is too small for all our desires, and especially the political ones” (ibid., 105-106). I refuse this on the grounds that there is too much at stake to use the academic space as a platform for voicing despair. Considering the intensification of the global economic, ecological and political crisis and

the rise of a right-wing populist force specifically targeting feminist, trans and queer movements, I want to reclaim the academic space for political-theoretical practices committed to radical social transformation and Trans Studies as a site of political contestation and hope.

I begin with a rebuttal of the notion expressed by Chu and Drager (*ibid.*) that Trans Studies is theoretically exhausted in order to claim a multivocal and multidimensional critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm as one of the central contributions of the field. Starting with the critique of ‘gender identity’ as an accomplishment of Trans Studies scholarship, I tackle the contradiction that the category of ‘gender identity’ remains central to the field. I will make the case that the hegemony of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm in Trans Studies is a side effect of the political pragmatism of the trans rights movement. This pragmatic focus on the legal and public arena has meant a dismissal of the political relevance of gender theory. My argument is that this depoliticization of gender theory is one underlying reason for the theoretical and political limitations of current Trans Studies scholarship. I argue that an expansion of the imaginary of Trans Studies needs to be mediated by engaging with the Marxist-feminist tradition in gender theory and, crucially, with current trans Marxist interventions. I conclude by elaborating three political-theoretical commitments for Trans Studies that integrate the critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm and an expanded political imaginary.

A Critique of the ‘Gender Identity’ Paradigm

In which ways is Trans Studies holding us back? Chu and Drager point to the theoretical superficiality of current trans theory, which according to them, sustains itself by mobilizing queer theory rhetoric combined with trans identity politics (*ibid.*, 103-104). The political horizon of this mix, as they identify, is a notion of antinormativity, a celebration of subversion that seeks to establish that “we are no longer the medicalized transsexual”, but rather on the “woke side” (*ibid.*, 107-108).² For Chu, this situation is a testimony to the fact that “trans studies has largely failed to establish a robust, compelling set of theories, methods, and concepts that would distinguish itself from gender studies or queer studies” (*ibid.*, 103).

I want to suggest an alternative view, namely, that the political-theoretical superficiality of large segments of current trans scholarship actually ignores crucial aspects of the body of knowledge made available by Trans Studies. In this article, I am interested in reclaiming Trans Studies’ critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm as one unique and fundamental contribution of this field to feminist gender theory. This critique represents a collective achievement that exposes how the lens of ‘gender identity’ inevitably constitutes trans people as others from a reductionist perspective and reproduces colonial power relations. Additionally, the critique provides valuable building blocks towards creating an alternative analytical lens.

Othering

The notion of 'gender identity' relevant to the theorization of transsexuality was introduced by medical doctors who sought to define a protocol for the medicalized normalization of intersex children and adults during the 1950s and 1960s in the US (Meyerowitz 2004, 114-115). Medical doctors viewed intersex patients as a problem of 'correct' sex assignment, but they lacked a significant criterion for the assignment. Neither hormones, gonads, chromosomes, nor gender of rearing proved reliable indicators. This led to the formulation of 'gender identity' by Robert Stoller in 1964 as a subjective sense of self, taken up by John Money and Harry Benjamin and extended to discussions of transsexuality (Meyerowitz 2004). As Sandy Stone (2006, 227) points out, no objective test for 'gender identity' could be developed, and yet decisions on surgical interventions were made on this notion. What this category stood for, in a practical sense, was the doctor's "individual sense of the appropriateness of the individual to their gender of choice" (ibid., 227). Through Harold Garfinkel's case study of Agnes, the medical category of 'gender identity' travelled into the analytical repertoire of feminist gender theory. His chapter on Agnes in his "Studies in Ethnomethodology" (Garfinkel 1967) was taken up by Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna and later on by Candance West and Don Zimmerman (1987) in the development of the feminist notion of gender as a performative accomplishment. Despite its crucial contribution to feminist gender theory, this conceptualization of gender perpetuates the othering of trans people as exception and naturalizes 'gender identity' by either drawing directly from the work of John Money or by limiting the social meaning of gender to conventions around attribution processes, leaving the process of subjectification outside of a social constructivist theorization of gender (Kessler/McKenna 1978, 42-80, 121; for a critical reflection see Meißner 2008, 11-12 and Connell 2009).

Judith Butler's (1990) exposition of the fundamental instability of gendered subjectivities paved the way for queer and trans embodiments to acquire academic capital in the context of the postmodern turn in humanities and social sciences. Trans Studies emerged as a critical project arguing against the epistemic subjugation of the trans subject, building thereby a subversive attachment to its own abjection. Queer trans theory embraces deviance as an act of defiance against the "binary phallocratic founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorized" (Stone 2006, 231; see also Stryker 1994). This approach has been criticized by other trans scholars for the theoretical instrumentalization of trans embodiments as that which renders the performative quality of gender visible, and for inserting a divide between the politically subversive transgender subject and the conservative transsexual (Prosser 1998; Namaste 2009; Connell 2012). Viviane Namaste suggests an empiricist approach based on "the mundane assumption that TS/TG people (transsexual/transgender, ELLC) exist, that we live – and die – in the world (...) (,) that we merit consideration not because we have decided to live in a gender other than the one to

which we were assigned at birth, but simply because we live in the world” (Namaste 2000, 55). Yet the strategic essentialism of this approach (Namaste 2005, 7; critically Connell 2012, 865) ignores that the problem of othering is not theoretical, but practically relevant for trans people living in this world.

Building on these debates, an approach informed by the historical materialist tradition in feminist social theory seeks to theorize gender not as a personal attribute or identity, but as a specific mode of relating to each other that is linked to human bio-social reproduction, as well as economic, political, symbolic and emotional dimensions (Adamczak 2017; Connell 1987, 2021b). Following Bini Adamczak, this perspective does not define gender relations as relations between ‘men’ and ‘women’, but rather understands the figurations of ‘men’ and ‘women’ as effects of gender relations (Adamczak 2017, 207). Embodiment, as Raewyn Connell (2012) proposes, refers to the social quality of human bodies, linked and shaped through social structures and history. Connell theorizes a quality of bodies that cannot be reduced to the social, yet she argues:

These bodily capacities, and the practices that realize them, constitute an arena, a bodily site where something social happens. Among the things that happen is the creation of the cultural categories “women” and “men” and any other gender categories that a particular society marks out. This may be called the *reproductive arena* in social life (Connell 2021b, 48-49).

Connell’s notion of “contradictory embodiment” (2012, 866-867) offers a different epistemic object than ‘gender identity’ and its incongruence. The contradictory element in the gender of transsexuals, transgender persons and other gender marginal groups, is the material conflict between the multiplicity of the generative capacities of human bodies, and the mode of organization of the reproductive arena. In the case of the transsexual, this social conflict is erased or contained through its displacement to the interiority of the unassimilable individual. ‘Gender identity’ is a social artifact that creates transsexual and intersex subjects, while protecting investments in the mode of organization of the reproductive arena in culturally established notions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’. Instead of taking ‘gender identity’ as an analytical category within gender theory and Trans Studies, Connell’s and Adamczak’s theorization of gender relations illustrate the availability of a range of alternative conceptual tools in materialist feminist gender theory that undermine the reification of the transsexual subject and hold the potential to overcome two further problems of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm in gender theory: reductionism and coloniality.

Reductionism

The reductionism of ‘gender identity’ builds on its othering, that is, on the fact that the transsexual subject emerges only through (incongruent) ‘gender identity’. Mediated by the institutionalization of the category of ‘transgender’ in activism, social

services, research, etc., ‘gender identity’ has obtained the status of an ontological category, which

ignores the complexity of lived experience, the historical constructedness of the categories themselves, the racial and class locations of different experiences and theorizations of gender and sexuality, feminist understandings of gender and sexuality as systemic and power-laden, and transforms an analytic distinction into a naturalized, transhistorical, trans-cultural fact (Valentine 2007, 62).

The empirical reductionism of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm has two main expressions: one is the almost exclusive interest on trans lives as examples of gender transgression or gender authenticity and the second is the construction of a collective term of ‘trans people’. To counter both forms of reductionism, Trans Studies scholars have been reclaiming a stronger attention to the role of labor: “(I)t is in and through work that transsexual women are able to physically embody our sex changes, and thus to interact with the world as women. It is through work that the gender of transsexual women is constituted” (Namaste 2009, 19-29). Namaste’s empirical research shows the crucial division in social experience and exposure to violence within trans groups based on HIV status, race, sex work, poverty, age and homelessness (2000, 187-189). Trans Studies scholars have further compiled valuable studies of trans life trajectories within the relations of inequality of global capitalism and transnational migration across differences of class, race, nationality and citizenship status (among others Aizura 2018; Posso/La Furcia 2016).

Coloniality

The othering that structures the category of ‘gender identity’ is historically ingrained in the coloniality of gender. This refers to the co-constitution of race and gender as vectors of oppression in the establishment of the modern/colonial capitalist world order (Oyěwùmí 1997; Spillers 1987; Lugones 2007; Segato 2021). Historical records of the Spanish colonial conquest, for example, document a specific brutality against bodies and communities that blurred the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, such as the “Joyas”³ (Miranda 2010). At the same time, the trajectory of Catalina de Erauso shows that gender non-conforming subjects could be perpetrators of colonial violence and also receive official protection and acknowledgement (García/Cleminson 2010).

‘Gender identity’ participates in the coloniality of gender through the universalization of a culturally specific notion and the erasure of its racial and geopolitical investments. Riley C. Snorton in “Black on Both Sides” (2017) shows how Black gender non-conforming subjects occupied a different socio-political territory than white trans subjects in the United States. For Snorton (ibid.), the ungendered Black bodies of a slavery-based economy and its political system constitute different social figurations of transness compared to those articulable from embodiments within the

matrix of whiteness. Following this approach, Jules Gill-Peterson (2018) proposes to understand the medicalization from which the transsexual and transgender subject emerge as a form of racialization: “(E)ven in the most pathologizing and disenfranchising medical models, the abstract whiteness projected onto the white trans body justified the attention given by its doctors” (ibid., 27). Black trans children were routinely rejected from gender clinics in the 1960s and 1970s based on diagnoses of homosexuality or schizophrenia (ibid., 31).

Considering this racial and geographical specificity of the figure of the transsexual, its export across the globe through HIV/AIDS funding, the World Health Organization and its diagnostic terminology, trans activism, human rights or academic discourse are in need of critical attention (Dutta 2013). As queer necropolitical analyses show, the emergence of the queer or trans subject as having a claim to state protection goes hand in hand with the externalization of homophobia and transphobia, and with the dispossession of the migrant or racialized queer or trans subject through border regimes (Haritaworn/Kuntsman/Posocco 2014). From this analytical viewpoint, ‘gender identity’ functions as a site for the negotiation of political modernity and nationalist investments that is silent about capitalism and imperialism as structures of dispossession. As Gill-Peterson (2018, 25-26) argues, the task is not one of inclusion and representation of diversity, but of developing modes of analysis that undermine imperialist investments in the deployment of the categories of ‘gender identity’ and transgender.

In summary, Trans Studies scholarship has formulated a profound critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm that provides crucial anchor points for a framework that has the potential to overcome the political-theoretical problems of othering, reductionism and coloniality. Despite this achievement, a quick look into Trans Studies publications shows the ubiquity of the category of ‘gender identity’. Why is this category still so central in Trans Studies writing? It looks like in order to overcome the ‘gender identity’ paradigm, we first need to come to terms with our own attachments to it.

Expanding the Political Imaginary of Trans Studies

‘Gender Identity’ in Practice

Trans Studies scholars have articulated the critique of ‘gender identity’ mostly as a political-theoretical critique in an explicit and programmatic manner. But what happens if we consider how the category of ‘gender identity’ is used in Trans Studies writing? A review of three recently edited volumes of Trans Studies (Martínez-San Miguel/Tobias 2016; Ryan 2020; Doan/Johnston 2022) provides a number of insights.⁴ First, the category of ‘gender identity’ is pervasive and appears 96, 178 and 137 times respectively in each volume. Second, the category is used without any theoretical substantiation, evidencing the superficiality in trans scholarship that Chu

and Drager reproach in their intervention. And finally, the category appears as the site from which the meaning of ‘trans’ or ‘transgender’ is derived, making it a central analytical category.

If we acknowledge the critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm as a contribution of Trans Studies, the pervasiveness, theoretical vagueness and centrality of the category of ‘gender identity’ in Trans Studies needs to be confronted as a limitation to the political and theoretical potential of the field. But since it would be absurd to assume a conscious self-sabotage, the question we need to ask is: What does this use of the category of ‘gender identity’ achieve? What benefits does it have?

The category of ‘gender identity’ as it is used in the kind of Trans Studies scholarship found in the selected volumes, refers to a personal attribute that is presented as a gender- theoretical concept and from which a series of political claims is derived. As an individual attribute, ‘gender identity’ is defined by the interiority and depth of a sense or feeling of belonging to one among many gender groups. ‘Gender identity’ is constructed as a moment of authenticity, governed by a logic that is irreducible to social influences or individual will. In the case of trans people, this interiority is defined by a mismatch or inner conflict that is implicitly or explicitly connected to the notion of dysphoria or incongruence from the medical discourse. As a gender-theoretical category, ‘gender identity’ is constituted through its delimitation to other categories, such as gender expression, sex assigned at birth and sexual orientation. In some instances, ‘gender identity’ appears delimited by a gender order, named “heteronormative hegemonic gender binary” (Ryan 2020, 12) or something similar. In this usage, the gender order appears as an external force allowing or constraining the true expression of ‘gender identity’. Finally, ‘gender identity’ as a personal attribute is correlated with unequally distributed harms: trans people experience a lack of social acceptance, mistreatment in educational and healthcare institutions, discrimination at the workplace and diverse forms of state violence. The demands for protection against these harms constitute the political dimension of ‘gender identity’. The demands consist of a selection or variation of legal gender recognition and self-determination, anti-discrimination policies, hate crime legislation, and/or access to state subsidized gender-affirming care without formal pathologization. In summary, this use of ‘gender identity’ by Trans Studies scholars not only fails to acknowledge the political and theoretical critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm and to engage with its implications, but it also enshrines a trans-friendly version of its othering logic while it perpetuates the ontologization and coloniality of the category. This use of ‘gender identity’ within Trans Studies represents an import from the liberal rights-based transgender movement that has supplanted gender theory by an agnostic gender pluralism. In the beginning of the formulation of the project of a ‘transgender movement’, we find a full transparency and intentionality about pursuing a gender theoretical agnosticism in the name of political survival. Paisley Currah, an architect of the Transgender Rights movement, writes:

The challenge for the movement as a whole, then, is not to identify the ‘right’ theory of the relationship between sex and gender. (...) To forge a new social movement out of so many very disparate groups (...) is a matter of political survival to adopt a robust notion of gender pluralism that includes as many ways of embodying gendered subjectivities as possible. (...) Indeed, one could say that agnosticism about gender is the constitutive political tenet of transgender activism (Currah 2009, 255).

Not only was gender theory pushed to the side, but Marxist critiques of liberalism were as well even though Currah makes explicit that this dismissal is not motivated by the inadequacy or irrelevance of the Marxist critique (Currah 2006, 6)

In order to be successful, the transgender rights movement has to operate within the logic of the legal system, which obliges their spokespersons to use a language of individual rights and naturalize ‘gender identity’ as a personal attribute. The decision to reject gender theory is equally necessary in order to be able to mobilize whichever understanding of gender seems more convenient in the public arena or in court. It is then out of a political decision, that the transgender rights movement constructs a political imaginary in which both gender theory and Marxist traditions are sacrificed in the name of political pragmatism and opportunism. The problem is that, while the scholars and activists of that time might have been purposeful and made this decision in full awareness, a new generation of scholars and activists has entered a political and academic space in which there seems to be no alternative. As a field of knowledge production, Trans Studies needs to regain consciousness about the political character of these decisions, free itself from the domination of its imaginary by the liberal trans rights movement, and reclaim the political relevance of gender theory and Marxist thought.

The Political Relevance of Gender Theory

In “Transgender Rights without a Theory of Gender?” (2017), Currah proposes a thought experiment: to separate the question “who needs trans rights?” from the question “what is gender?” (ibid., 444). The first one becomes the proper object of the transgender rights advocacy and the second of trans scholarship. Following Currah, if we bracket out the consideration of gender theory, the most effective approach for transgender rights is a broad identity politics that enables the “transgender community” to become “visible against the backdrop of the civil rights tradition in the United States”, its successes “can be written into a new chapter in the story of progress that underwrites the liberal world view in the United States” (ibid., 449-450). Currah is fully aware of the political limitations of a liberal strategy, which “does not advance the needs of trans people who are economically precarious, incarcerated, or made vulnerable by a regime of racial terror” (ibid., 450). In the face of the anti-trans backlash, he rightly expects after Donald Trump’s electoral victory, Currah remains firm in his adherence to a trans rights movement and its necessary gender theoretical agnosticism: “Agreement on the origin of gender is not required to challenge the

ability of employers and judges to force people to adhere to gender norms. What is required is a shared commitment to the political value of gender equality” (ibid., 451). Yet the question ‘what is gender?’ distorts the object of feminist gender theory. What gender theory seeks is not a truth or origin of gender, but to develop analytics of gendered oppression (see for the German context for example Hark 2005; Paulitz 2019). To define the political horizon of a movement through the notion of gender equality as the individual freedom from gender norms is neither agnostic nor pluralist. It imposes a liberal category of gender as an individual property to be defended and protected. It constructs a collective experience of oppression that is a selective abstraction from the heterogeneous and complex realities of an imagined political constituency named ‘trans people’.

What shifts if we consider gender as a social arrangement that structures the organization of human bio-social reproduction in unjust terms? What if we think of our ‘gender’ not as something we own, but as that through which we are situated in an interdependent generative web of life and, at the same time, a structure of dispossession? Our political horizon expands from specific norms to the organization of human bio-social reproduction as that which needs to be changed. If we consider gender as a complex and multidimensional social structure of an unequal distribution of life chances, the question is not ‘who needs trans rights?’, but ‘which trans rights are needed?’.

This question generates collectivity in a different way. It is not a call for victims of discrimination, but a call for political subjects who have a stake in defining strategies and demands within a struggle to improve the living conditions of gender marginalized groups. It is a question in which it is up for debate if it is ‘rights’ we need, or if ‘trans’ is the name under which we come together. This question does not define the political subjects with an identity term nor does it create a homogenous collective. Instead, the question makes us start from the differences in social experiences and works towards forms of solidarity. It is a question that can hold the double temporality of the reform and the revolution and practice inclusion as a strategy of radicalization (Gago 2021, 199-206). In the question ‘which trans rights are needed?’ democratic guarantees, accessibility of housing, taxation politics or external debt cancellation demand a place in the discussion of trans politics.

In this expansion of the political imaginary, Trans Studies should pay attention to the rise of a Marxist current within trans debates. Their voices can be found in the edited volumes of “Transgender Marxism” (Gleeson/O’Rourke 2021) and “Matérialismes Trans” (Clochec/Grunenwald 2021), but also in blogs and online magazines (see, for example, Suekama 2022; Hybris 2021). Marxism is used here as a broad tradition, which challenges both the hegemony of liberal politics and an orthodox Marxism based on a narrow definition of class and worker. While these Marxist trans interventions also show certain attachments to the ‘gender identity’ paradigm and are sometimes economically reductionist, I think they provide important impulses. First, trans Marxists center capitalism as an object of analysis and historical structure of

dispossession in understanding trans experiences and formulating visions of trans liberation. Integrating a feminist and decolonial analysis of capitalist relations, this translates into an increased attention to the household as a site of struggle, which is connected to the workplace, state institutions and the clinic through the mechanisms of value extraction. Acknowledging the imperial nature of modern capitalist states, Marxist trans voices refuse to see official civic identity as a form of liberation. Instead, liberation is theorized from the perspective of social reproduction as a critique of orthodox economic analysis. Second, Trans Marxism refuses the morally charged and individualizing focus on antinormativity by claiming the social embeddedness of trans agency: “(W)e resent the society that birthed us, just as we refuse to set aside the tools it has offered us. We find ourselves at one immersed and resistant” (Gleeson/O’Rourke 2021, 9-10). Finally, Trans Marxism holds itself accountable to a historical materialist perspective, which is a powerful antidote to the ontologization found in liberal identity politics.

In order to expand Trans Studies beyond the grip of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm we need to refuse the strategic decision of the trans rights movement to supplant gender theory by a ‘gender identity’ concept in the liberal tradition. The theoretical agnosticism of trans identity politics is neither agnostic, nor the asset that Currah pretends it is. For the trans political imaginary, it has had the effect of eliminating the definition of what constitutes gendered oppression as a site of analysis and political contestation. It has limited our capacity to generate transversal political practices and visions of how we want to live. It also forces us to take on the risks of relying on and further stabilizing essentialist and individualizing notions of gender in legal and political institutions. And finally, it has complicated the task of dealing with the contradictions that result from pursuing lines of argumentation based on political pragmatism and necessity, while anti-trans parties exploit these contradictions. For example, the contradiction between rejecting a pathologization of transgender identity, but needing a medical diagnostic term; or the challenges that establishing a political notion of gender based on an act of individual self-identification poses for institutional arrangements addressing gendered oppression at a structural level.

Commitments for Trans Studies

The political-theoretical commitments that I propose here seek to synthesize the previous analysis in a constructive answer to the question ‘where do we want to go with Trans Studies?’. Building on the critique of the ‘gender identity’ paradigm, a materialist analytics of gender, and the interventions of trans Marxism, it is possible to articulate a series of political-theoretical commitments for a Trans Studies project that also refuses the defeatism of trans satire. It is a personal response, yet one crafted in conversation with past and current debates.

First, I propose a commitment to the improvement of the living conditions of gender marginalized groups that also suffer from material dispossession or limitation in

access to relevant social resources. We don't need to subsume these groups under a collective identity, nor do we have to reduce the marginalization to a single experience. This commitment involves a step back from the ontologization and reification of 'gender identity' and centering of 'trans' in order to engage empirically and theoretically with the multi-dimensional life trajectories and material realities of situated groups. It involves the contextualization of these groups within a global, historical and relational perspective. This commitment demands from Trans Studies scholarship that it makes itself practically relevant, that is, that the definition and evaluation of what constitutes 'improvement' is never undertaken within the protected walls of the university, nor only in relation to one community or group. An international and multivocal conversation with agents in different social locations is the point of departure and the space of accountability for Trans Studies.

Second, Trans Studies scholarship should be committed to the articulation of gender marginal subjects as politically emancipatory subjects. The key here is that the meaning of emancipation is neither imposed from the academic space nor limited to a single framework, but rather aims at wider transversal coalitions. The work of Trans Studies scholars should instead be responsive to the political potential already contained or actively expressed in the lives of gender marginal groups. If we move beyond an identity framework, gender marginal subjects would not constitute a group that can be liberated by one struggle. Instead, they should appear next to other groups in all struggles seeking to dismantle oppressive structures.

Third, and building on Connell's use of the term (2012), I provisionally propose the notion of gender intransigence as an epistemic object for Trans Studies scholarship. The commitment to the critique of gender intransigence introduces structuralist gender theory as an anchor for Trans Studies. Gender intransigence can be understood as a feature of the organization of reproductive relations, complementing the notion of gendered hierarchies that can be tracked in the persistent use of violence as the mode of dealing with the 'excessive' capacities of bodies. Gender intransigence is therefore defined by a tension between a generative multiplicity of bodies and institutional efforts to contain these capacities within a specific social order. The 'excessive' is always relational, that is, in relation to a dominant model that is not only gendered, but saturated with other investments. As an epistemic object that is not delimited by a particular identity, gender intransigence explicitly seeks to bring together analyses from Trans Studies with those from Inter Studies, Black Studies, Postcolonial/Decolonial Studies, Gender Studies, Disability Studies, Political Economy, and potentially other fields of inquiry.

These programmatic commitments do not seek to establish a closed disciplinary boundary, but they are clearly partial and take a stance. They seek collective engagement in order to be developed as much as they seek to be contested by alternative commitments and critiques. Their contribution is to hopefully open a space for debate across political and theoretical differences within Trans Studies.

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Notes

- 1 The academic field of Trans and Inter Studies in the German-speaking context consists of a decentralized network of students and researchers, predominantly from the humanities and social sciences. Despite the lack of formal institutionalization, a consciousness about the existence of a shared field of research has been developed through conferences, mailing lists and publications (Hoenes/Koch 2017; Baumgartinger 2017; Hoenes/Schirmer 2019). The field of Trans and Inter Studies in the German-speaking context largely relies on US-American queer and trans theory and debates, which is why I center them in my argument.
- 2 On more detailed critiques of the focus on antinormativity, see among others Pearce/Connell 2016 and Connell 2021a.
- 3 "Joya" was the name Spanish colonizers gave to those whose non-heteronormative embodiments and practices in indigenous societies in current California challenged the colonizer's notions of 'man' and 'woman'. Miranda (2010) refers to 'Joyas' as "third gender".
- 4 The three volumes were selected based on the following criteria: through their titles, they frame themselves as belonging to "Trans Studies", their publication years allow to trace potential changes in the discourse over the past six years, and, as edited volumes, they allow to make an argument that does not target a specific researcher but a generalized discursive pattern.