

Editorial

Transgender studies in Mexico

TRANS STUDIES is an interdisciplinary and intersectional field of studies that focuses on the experience, identity, and culture of trans*, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people. We speak of trans* people—with an asterisk—to refer not only to the community of transsexual, transgender and transvestite people, but also to any other experience that questions the binary and essentialized logics of traditional gender systems; this includes both western and westernized identities and subjectivities, on the one hand, as well as identities and subjectivities alien to the colonial logic of the medical nomenclature that is usually used to name generic diversity (Halberstam 2017).

Succinctly, this area of knowledge comprises a set of approaches around the contributions, challenges, reflections and concerns of trans* people, that presuppose a deep epistemological break with the ways in which until very recently these were theorized topics. Let us remember that it was not until 2018 that the World Health Organization (WHO) stopped considering transsexuality as a mental illness (De Benito 2018).

It is important to note that trans studies have fruitful dialogues with other fields such as critical studies of race, disability, ageism, and, of course, the body, sexuality, and gender. Likewise, there are analyzes within trans studies that have an emphasis on the microsociological dynamics related to the construction of the identity of trans* individualities in a given context; in more recent times, identity has been losing centrality in favor of issues related to discrimination, violence, and even political agency. On the other hand, there are macrosociological approaches interested in the intersections between biopolitics, geopolitics and coloniality. It is these last approaches that have made a strong call for attention to the possible co-optation of the trans* discourse within trans/homo/fem-nationalist logics.

Said that, from a conceptual perspective, trans studies can be considered as a relatively new part of gender studies sharing a range of interests with studies on women, masculinities, sexualities—whether hegemonic or dissident—and studies on lesbian, gay and bisexual people. In general, all this knowledge is interested in understanding how the process of social construction of gender and identity occurs, and the ways in which such constructions are inserted and produced under logics of oppression that privilege certain bodies over others by

generating hierarchies. in which some subjects are considered natural and functional while others are placed in the realm of the suboptimal or even the abject.

However, a characteristic element of trans studies lies in the centrality that it gives to the way in which trans* people challenge binary gender norms and how this generates specific exclusion dynamics that today are named with the terms “cissexism” and “transphobia” (Guerrero Mc Manus & Muñoz Contreras 2018a). Likewise, this body of knowledge is also interested in carrying out a critical, de-essentializing and de-pathologizing approach to the set of terms with which it has sought to understand and explain human sexuality. In this sense, the concepts of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation are explored, but leaving aside the biologist readings historically mobilized by medicine (Guerrero Mc Manus & Muñoz Contreras 2018b).

Regarding its history, trans studies stem largely from the contributions of a transfeminist nature that authors such as Sandy Stone (2013), Leslie Feinberg (2013), Susan Stryker (2013), Paisley Currah (2008) and Kate Bornstein (2016) carried out in the 1990s. Although the theoretical and conceptual tools that these authors used are heterogeneous, it is worth noting their interest in developing criticisms of the medical system that erected itself as a safeguard of the limits of gender and the sexed body. Likewise, these thinkers undertook the task of beginning a profound critique of both the biological sciences and the social and human sciences—including feminism and gender studies—to reveal the existence of cissexist biases within these spaces.

It is necessary to clarify that neither trans studies nor transfeminism can be subsumed under the queer theory developed by academics such as Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick or David Halperin. Although both bodies of knowledge could be considered as feminist currents of the third wave, the truth is that the tools and genealogies of transfeminisms are multiple and highly varied. In this sense, authors like Sandy Stone are much more influenced by the cyborg thought of Donna Haraway (2000), which is considered the predecessor of the new feminist materialisms of the present. Something similar could be said of the work of Leslie Feinberg, who is much closer to Marxism and the American anti-fascist movement. From the perspective of Susan Stryker and the philosopher Talia M. Bettcher (2016), transfeminism and trans studies distance themselves from queer theory to the extent that they do not take as their starting point a post-identitarianism and a merely cultural and discursive understanding of the body and the identity.

In the Anglosphere, trans studies and transfeminisms have been developing for more than thirty years. To this first generation of authors we should add another set of names such as Dean Spade (2015), Julia Serano (2016), Emi Koyama (2020) or Jack Halberstam (2017, 2019), to mention just a few. Spade, for example, has developed a thought whose main influence can be traced to the black

feminism and abolitionist of the prison system of Angela Davis (1983). Julia Se-rano, for her part, carried out one of the first critical reflections on transmisogyny from a perspective clearly different from queer approaches. Emi Koyama was the author of one of the founding texts of this field of knowledge, the famous *Transfeminist manifesto*. Finally, Halberstam is an author who has combined both queer approaches and transfeminisms, thus developing a thought around what is trans* that combines the deconstructive tools of what is queer with the interest of transfeminism in understanding the historicity and materiality of trans* subjectivities.

It goes without saying that trans studies, as well as transfeminism, have developed in other parts of the world as well. In Spain, for example, there was a fusion of queer and transfeminist thought that gave rise to a very characteristic political thought of the Madrid and Catalan scene. Authors such as Paul Preciado (2020), Miquel Missé (2010) and Lucas Platero (2016) are important references to this. In Latin America there are also indisputable regional references, although the academic production does not rival that of the global north. Specifically, characters like Lohana Berkins (2003), Diana Sacayán, Alba Rueda (2019), Mauro Cabral (2011) and Blas Radi (2019) —all of them of Argentine nationality— have undoubtedly shaped transfeminism in the South. There is also heterogeneity there, although a point in common is their effort to intervene in the public policies of the Argentine State to develop affirmative action mechanisms that allow mitigating the effects of transphobia and cissexism.

In our country, the past decade saw the emergence of a transfeminist thought that has eventually brought the first steps for the incipient development of trans studies. Spaces such as the Trans Youth Network have been essential not only for the construction and articulation of a transfeminist discourse and practice that puts on the table the importance of attending to the realities and needs of trans* people, but also because they have had a commitment to influence educational spaces and legal frameworks to give visibility, recognition and justice to trans* lives. Works such as those developed by us since 2018 have sought to account from philosophy and science and technology studies for the political and material history of the trans* body (Guerrero & Muñoz 2018c; Guerrero 2018; Muñoz 2018), its controversies (Guerrero & Muñoz 2018c), as well as the injustices (Guerrero & Muñoz 2018b) and violence (Guerrero & Muñoz 2018a) that are exerted on it. Likewise, efforts such as the one carried out by the Center for Trans* Studies of QuereTrans have sought to create spaces where theoretical knowledge about trans is produced and made visible, in many cases carried out by trans people themselves, questioning the epistemic frameworks anchored in the cissexism.

In any case, trans studies not only focus on understanding the dynamics of the present, but also on the very history of the sexed body and the experience of

gender dissent throughout time. That is why it is not uncommon to come across analyzes ranging from ancient cultures that recognized multiple genders to the construction of the category “gender identity disorder” in modern psychiatry. Another historical object of enormous interest is the advent of the trans* liberation and depathologization movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and which found their zenith in the 21st century with the depathologization of trans identities by the WHO (Meyerowitz 2004; Stryker 2017).

From a political perspective, trans studies focuses on the current struggles for equal rights and social justice for trans* people. In Latin America, given the context of transphobic violence that sadly characterizes the region, transfemicide has become a particularly important topic of analysis (Guerrero & Muñoz 2018). In this sense, it is common to find discussions that deal with issues such as access to health, employment discrimination and violence against trans* people (Blanco 2019). Government policies aimed at resolving these issues are also proposed. Finally, there is a link between this academic work and the transfeminist social movements that mobilize to demand greater rights for this community.

However, despite the diversity of topics addressed, there is a common element that characterizes the bulk of trans studies. Namely, that in all these cases there is an epistemological rupture that we mentioned earlier but that we have not elaborated in greater detail. For this, it is necessary to allude to the work of the philosopher and transfeminist activist Talia Bettcher. For this philosopher, historically there has been a trend that reduces the trans* experience to a mere topic of research. This has occurred in a particularly clear way in the biomedical and psychiatric approaches aimed at explaining why trans* people exist, something that usually ends up invoking pathologizing narratives that we have already criticized.

According to Bettcher (2021), this type of approach to the trans* is one of the multiple ways in which we are dehumanized and stripped of dignity and, eventually, of agency and voice. This author emphasizes that the only way to break with the legacies of cissexism —that is, the hierarchization of the cis over the trans— is through an epistemological rupture that would entail, among other things, renouncing that cis perspective that characterized to a large part of the 20th century academy. As we have pointed out, this bias has been present whether we are talking about medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis or anthropology, since the bulk of expert knowledge has assumed the naturalness of cisgender lives and, therefore, has placed trans* people in the mainstream place of the abject, the unexpected and even the inexplicable. Our existence generated a perplexity that had to be addressed, and our lives, therefore, became a challenge to be explained. We were a mystery.

That imprint of a cis perspective that never crosses the possibility of being itself a product of history and contingency thus marked practically every aca-

democratic discipline throughout the 20th century. The task was to account for our stock, using the tools of whatever knowledge was at hand. However, the enormous blind spot that characterized this type of approach was leaving aside the very questions that trans people had about our lives. The fact that we trans also think and are epistemic agents was forgotten.

Bettcher affirms that trans studies are based on the rupture involved in realizing that trans* people also have an inquisitive look that must have a place in the vast universe of human knowledge. This break thus requires daring to dialogue between identity borders and recognizing in trans* people something more than a sub/alternity to investigate. It requires listening, empathy and, often, solidarity and laughter to know how to connect with an experience that may not be one's own.

The Spanish anthropologist Alba Pons Rabasa (2016) describes this rupture as an act of thinking and looking from the trans* even if one person is not trans*. This precision is important because Bettcher's reflection does not intend to lead to a new essentialism in which it is prohibited or considered impossible to study an experience that is alien to us. This is not a matter of decreeing that one cannot or should not talk about what one does not live. Such an attitude implies the collapse of the collective creation of knowledge and, with it, of the very idea of what science is, be it natural, social or formal.

The epistemological break that we describe is not, therefore, the exaltation of identity as if it implied some kind of epistemic privilege in one's own self-understanding and, without a doubt, it does not entail the consequence that the experience of others is ineffable and necessarily opaque and unknowable. Both, one thing and the other, reduce identity to an epistemological prison that cannot be broken and throw us collectively into a monological solipsism.

On the contrary, the rupture that Bettcher and Pons Rabasa speak of in different ways implies recognizing that, beyond one's own identity, it is possible to connect with other lives and with other experiences. This requires embracing collaborative epistemologies that do not presuppose that the construction of knowledge goes through the objectification of our otherness or the attempt to cancel our own subjectivity. Collaborating epistemically speaking is daring to think together and listen to each other's stories, but not to expropriate them, but rather to become a collective subject that thinks and reflects.

There is, of course, a genealogy here that connects trans studies with feminist epistemologies, especially those developed by, i.a., Donna Haraway (1988), Sandra Harding (1986), and Chela Sandoval (2013). This is so since the claims of objectivity and universality that have historically characterized expert knowledge are questioned, hiding in the process the existence of an epistemic and politically privileged subject: the white cis-heterosexual male, who has recently been joined by other subjectivities, although practically all of them are cis.

On the other hand, trans studies share with the work of Chela Sandoval the recognition of a double consciousness that characterizes those subjects who must understand the hegemonic logic of a social order that at the same time marginalizes them. Trans* people, in this sense, understand the cissexist logic that prevails in our society while developing narratives of resistance to be able to face the naturalization of cisgenderism. Note that the fact of double consciousness illustrates in which sense identities are never epistemological prisons, since in principle it is possible to understand experiences and logic even if they are not centered on the values associated with our own identity.

Having said this, it is necessary to emphasize that trans studies are not an academic reflection unrelated to the reality of trans* people. They are, in any case, a tool to deal with the very variegated contexts of violence that we still experience and that in recent years seems to have even intensified. Let us think, in this sense, about some of the following points to give us an idea of the intensity of transphobia in today's societies.

We are currently facing two movements at the international level that promote hate speech with the objective of counteracting the achievements at the macropolitical and micropolitical level that the trans movement has achieved in the last twenty years in different parts of the world. In the first case, we are referring to the movement that calls itself against “gender ideology”, and in the second case to gender-critical feminism, also known as trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

In both cases we are dealing with movements of the 21st century that have emerged in the past decade, but whose roots and concerns date back to the 1960s and 1970s. The first part of the concerns of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches of what they consider is the erosion of a natural gender order that the feminist and LGBT+ movements have brought, while the second part mainly of the essentialist approaches of radical feminism that they see in trans women an attempt by the patriarchy to control and invade the bodies and spaces of cis women. The particularity of both movements is that today they have globalized not only thanks to the Internet and information technologies but also because they feed on moral panics, alluding to discourses that are built with the grammars of science and/or human rights. We notice this in the statements that accuse trans rights of denying what the biology of sex says, or that the discourse of gender identity is an ideological discourse not anchored in science, as well as an attempt to violate the rights of cis and/or childhood women. This discursive convergence has led to the fact that in both cases these movements feed back and even form pragmatic alliances to have a political impact on legal frameworks and legislative spaces that reverse or block the advancement of trans rights.

The effect of these movements and discourses is that in different countries that had previously been at the forefront in the advancement and recognition of transgender rights —this is the case of the United States and the United Kingdom— today they are facing major setbacks due to the expansion of these hate speeches as well as laws that in one way or another criminalize the trans reality. In the case of Mexico, although openly anti-trans laws have not been approved, it is important to point out that proposals of this type are beginning to be made in different states of the country, in addition to not forgetting that in recent years the progress of trans rights in different parts of the country has been slow partly due to the pressure of these movements and their links with the different political parties. In any case, along with the spread of these anti-trans movements, we find that discrimination, violence, family and work exclusion, as well as transfemicides and hate crimes have not ceased to be part of trans daily life in the country and at the national and international levels.

It is in light of all of the above that the relevance of a special issue on transgender studies in a country like ours can be understood, which, as has already been said, occupies second place worldwide in terms of transfemicides, refers to (Guerrero & Muñoz 2018). In general, this issue brings together approaches written by both trans and cis people, but who in any case share an interest in denouncing cissexism that operates in various areas of life. To do this, a battery of interdisciplinary approaches are used that include anthropology, philosophy, social psychology, film criticism and, of course, gender studies.

Specifically, the special issue is made up of a dossier of refereed articles followed by an interview, two short texts (not refereed) on current issues and, finally, a review of the literary work of a trans author. The dossier itself is made up of eight essays that range from the political philosophy and biopolitics of the new materialism, through ethnographic approaches to the trans* experience, to issues related to the presence of trans* people in sports or cinema.

The first of the refereed texts was written by Siobhan Guerrero Mc Manus and is entitled “A transfeminist critique of unconditional deliberationism in science and politics”. In said essay, Guerrero presents us with a normative analysis of how a deliberative exercise should be developed between those positions that are in favor of the rights of trans* people and those that could be described —generously— as trans-skeptics. What this author defends is that currently there are no conditions to carry out an exercise of this nature and that this requires a strengthening of the legal frameworks in charge of safeguarding the rights of trans* populations.

In second place we have the work of Irazú Gómez on “Narratives of trans* bodies in Chiapas. Between biomedical hegemony, the sex-gender system and political resignification”. Here, Gómez presents an example of collaborative epis-

temology through an ethnographic study carried out in Chiapas. Beyond the novelty of undertaking a study with indigenous trans* people in southern Mexico, the work of Irazú Gómez allows us to understand the modes of operation of cissexism through biomedical discourse. The author shows us the ways in which trans* identities are constantly invalidated, having to fight at all times to establish them as legitimate in the daily contexts of coexistence.

This essay is followed by the text “Teen Titans: Reflections on the learning and challenges of co-facilitating an online group of trans* adolescents and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic”, written by Dani Damián Cruz Gutiérrez and Jason Josef Flores. In this work, the authors share their experience as facilitators of a group focused on accompanying trans adolescents, known as Teen Titans. The essay in question narrates the difficulties in carrying out this task in accompaniment in the context of COVID-19 and the confinement that accompanied him during the first two years of the pandemic. This work thus offers us a particularly interesting look at how to accompany in a context of crisis in which the traditional forms of socialization were extremely limited. In the same way, she presents us with a testimony of the wear and tear involved in accompanying in a pandemic context.

The fourth refereed work corresponds to the essay prepared by Lu Ciccía and entitled “The anachronistic use of the category sex in the biomedical field: towards the notion of bioprocesses in the postgenomic era”. In this text Ciccía defends an eliminativism of the category of sex in favor of the notion of bioprocesses. This essay is written in the context of a deep disagreement in high performance sport between those who are in favor of the inclusion of trans women in women’s sports leagues and those who, on the contrary, consider that this is unfair since it would imply that bodies that had puberty exposed to testosterone competed with bodies that did not. As Ciccía well defends, this idea that there is a clear sexual dimorphism between men and women and that this translates into the physical superiority of the former over the latter is at least problematic, if not openly fallacious and even misogynistic. Ciccía suggests leaving behind the notion of sex and all its semantics in favor of the notion of bioprocesses, which would not be associated with the symbolism of sexual difference as it has been understood up to now.

Subsequently, Alba Pons Rabasa presents us with the article “Critical files, methodological landslides and ethnographic complicities: a feminist approach to trans* masculinities”, here again we find an ethnographic approach that is articulated through a collaborative proposal. In general, the text addresses two issues. On the one hand, she carries out a critical exercise of the ways in which anthropology has approached trans* experiences. Pons Rabasa proposes a collaborative scheme to thus break with the extractivist legacies that have histori-

cally characterized these approaches. On the other hand, Pons Rabasa builds a series of conceptual tools to address the construction of trans* masculine identities and the role that affects embodied in a body play in it that must, in any case, reappropriate the ways in which it is understood masculinity rejecting at the same time the elements it considers undesirable and re-signifying with it what it is to be a trans* masculinity.

In sixth place we have the contribution of Dani Damián Cruz Gutiérrez with the essay “Families that accept and accompany their trans* children. An approach to their experiences and the effects they generate for their children”. In this text, Damián Cruz tells us about the experiences and challenges of families that decide to positively support the transitions of young children who have begun to identify with a different gender from the one assigned at birth. This work was carried out in a pre-pandemic context and used narrative methods to recover the experiences and challenges that these families experience. In this sense, the work is a contribution to research on gender-affirmative care models but in a Mexican context. What this approach reveals to us is that the families themselves face profound challenges and wear processes due to transphobia and the open refusal to acknowledge the existence of trans* childhoods.

The previous text is followed by the essay by Kani Lapuerta whose name is “Relatos trans*: [re]-twisting the narrative contracts in documentary cinema”. This text is written from a situated and intimate perspective and criticizes the ways in which narratives around trans* have been built up to now in documentary cinema. Kani Lapuerta speaks here both as a trans man and as a filmmaker and documentary maker. It is thanks to this fortunate combination of elements that Lapuerta can offer us a purposeful critique to rethink the ways in which we narrate the lives of trans* people. To do this, the text recovers tools developed by Donna Haraway, Úrsula K. LeGuin and Jack Halberstam, among others. What emerges from this analysis is an approach that recovers in an important way the epistemic rupture that we talked about at the beginning of this introduction and that was originally articulated by Talia Bettcher.

Finally, the dossier is closed by the work of Leah Muñoz Contreras, which is called “New materialism and new biopolitics: sexual difference and the trans body”. In this text, the author presents what the new feminist materialisms are and the reason why they are an attractive theoretical and political proposal for gender studies in general, and trans studies in particular, due to their promise to leave behind the associated dichotomies to biological and cultural determinisms. Despite these promises, Leah Muñoz points out that these new materialisms are not free to participate in a new biopolitics on trans bodies. The author analyzes this in the work of the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, one of the main exponents of the new feminist materialism, who, working on a new conceptu-

alization of the body, ends up constructing sexual difference in a trans-exclusive way.

As we have said, beyond the refereed texts there is a collection of contributions that seek to offer an enriched landscape about trans studies in Mexico today. This is particularly important if we take into account that much of the trans* intellectual production is not published or known in academic spaces, given the difficulty involved in being able to access this type of space as a trans* person.

In this sense, an interview is offered that introduces us to the project of *El Archivo Memoria Trans México*. In this interview we find the testimonies of Emma Yessica Duvali and Terry Holiday, both older adult trans women and survivors of a particularly hard period in the history of the Mexican trans movement. Both testimonies offer us a look at the lives of trans women who lived in the 1960s-1990s. We are, therefore, before an exercise of living memory that accounts for the prevalence of cissexism in the second half of the Mexican 20th century.

This interview is followed by two short research notes (not refereed). The first of these, prepared by Carlos Adrián Chablé Miranda, deals with the importance of including binary and non-binary trans people in population censuses. The relevance of this essay lies in the centrality that statistical information plays today when it comes to knowing the needs and challenges that a specific population faces. At this point, it must be taken into account that cissexism has historically resulted in making the existence of the trans* population invisible, which is not only unknown but is often reduced to harmful and unfounded stereotypes. Hence the importance of producing solid statistical knowledge that allows the construction of better public policies for this sector of the population.

This note is followed by a brief essay by Marcos Xander Rodríguez Mora entitled “Weaving the trans/travesti resistance”. In this text we distance ourselves from the Mexican reality and move to Argentina at the beginning of the 21st century, in which a small newspaper entitled *el Teje* was published. In this space, reflections by authors such as Lohana Berkins and Diana Sacayán appeared, to mention only two names. As Rodríguez Mora makes us see, this newspaper was an important point in the construction of a Latin American trans/transvestite discourse that thus began to confront cissexism in our region.

Finally, the special issue ends with a literary review of the work of Casey Plett that Julianna Neuhouser was kind enough to write. Entitled “Separatism and its discontents: Casey Plett’s trans Mennonite literature”, this essay addresses not only Plett’s literary work but also the issue of separatism, so popular today. Briefly, Neuhouser’s essay is an invitation to get to know the work of this author, but it is also an invitation to recognize the existence of trans* realities that are built from other experiences —some of which have to do with experiences that for the bulk of the population they are alien and unknown—. It is at this point

where the discussion about the separatism that has historically characterized the Mennonite community that, in some way, wants to live outside the world while inhabiting the world, is inserted.

Having said all of the above, we dedicate this work to the countless trans people that hate has stolen from us. Our place will not be the pantheon. Our place will not be forgotten.

Universitary City, Monday, May 15, 2023

Siobhan Guerrero Mc Manus and Leah Muñoz Contreras
Guest Editors

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