

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# What Sexuality? Whose Knowledge? Mapping "Heterosexuality" and "Homosexuality" within Transnational Feminisms

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## Introduction

This essay expresses caution about labeling within contemporary feminisms regarding the meanings that certain labels carry. Recently, feminist perspectives, such as those under the heading of "transnational feminisms," have been productive in articulating insights into the ways in which feminist projects and practices have been implicated in and/or entangled with colonialism, imperialism, and US-centrism and Eurocentrism. In this manner, for instance, they have clearly and in many ways successfully challenged problematic feminist representations of a "global sisterhood" that featured a generalized and subordinated category called "Third World women." While there are many strands and practices that carry the term "transnational feminism" that stand outside/beyond U.S. academia, the main focus of my criticism in this paper is on the manifestations of transnational feminisms emerging from North America. The focus of this essay is on the significance of transnational feminist critical approaches to discussions of 'sexuality.' While emphasizing important contributions, I want to explore what is gained and what is lost when labels such as "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transgender," "transsexual," "queer," "intersex," and "asexual," ("LGBTQTQIA")<sup>1</sup> are uncritically imposed by the powerful and dominant Global North onto non-Western 'Others.'

This critique of labels also applies to the "homophobic," or "anti-homosexuality," views coming from political and religious leaders from places such as Kenya (where I come from), Uganda, and other African contexts. Such leaders have helped to popularize the colonial idea that "homosexuality" is "un-African," in contrast with "heterosexuality," which they assume to be universally given. The deployment of such views among political and religious leaders as well as rights activists and academics gives an impression that heterosexuality, homosexuality, and LGBTQTQIA exist everywhere in the world in those very Western terms.

My point is that the use of such labels within contemporary feminisms (as well as in queer studies) is a double-edged sword: potentially helping to bring visibility to various marginalized and undermined erotic practices while also powerfully reproducing a familiar US- and Eurocentric tendency toward the imposition of presumed universals. The use of such labels may present some temporary benefits to rights campaigns around the world, such as providing links to a globalized network of resources and sympathetic support. This essay focuses, however, on problems that arise when feminists and queer activists uncritically mobilize and impose them outside the Anglo-Western medical-scientific and political contexts where they originated. The uncritical application of these Western-produced labels renders invisible and insignificant locally situated histories and erotic performances in various contexts, which stands as an example of a "continuing dominance of delocalized Western feminist theoretical models," as suggested by Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, and Koobak (2016, p.211).

Peter Jackson (2000) offers an important example that is useful to my argument, commenting on "some of the universalist assumptions that have dominated discussion of the international proliferation of forms of erotic diversity" (Jackson, 2000, p.405). Focusing on Thai sexual identities, he articulates "the cultural limits of Foucauldian-modelled histories of sexuality," critiquing them as universalizing, while they downplay or ignore localized particularities. Specifically, he "demonstrates the inability of Foucauldian history of sexuality,

<sup>1</sup>The acronym has evolved over time, and is differently expressed by various authors cited in this essay. The trend of expansion, originating with LGB and then LGBT, has been to include an ever-broadened range of sexual identities in the global North. The form expressed here (LGBTQTQIA) includes the identities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, intersex, and asexual. Even longer expressions are available, such as LGBTQTQIAAP, which adds "questioning," "ally," and "pansexual."



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and queer theoretical approaches drawing on Foucault, to account for" non-Western practices, such as "shifts in Thai discourses in which gender and sexuality do not exist as distinct categories" (Jackson, 2000, p.406). In other words, "while Foucauldian modelled queer theory is open to the analysis of complexity and difference within Western societies, it is typically closed to acknowledging difference between Western and non-Western cultures" (Jackson, 2000, p.406).

If we insist on employing heterosexuality and LGBTTTQIA, are we then not obligated to at least acknowledge or come to terms with the localized practices and histories that get marginalized in the process? Whose stories and visions of the past and future are rendered supremely visible so that all "others" have no choice but to carry labels and categories that make themselves globally intelligible? As Jackson suggests, "Failure to take cultural [and historical] difference seriously means that within much critical theory the non-West often exists only as a site for the projection of Western expectations and fantasies, which are then misconstrued as 'data' to 'prove' the 'general validity' of theory" (Jackson, 2000, p.406).

## Contextualizing Transnational Feminisms

Transnational feminist perspectives are an academic mode of critical engagement that has recently emerged within women's and gender studies (WGS). The viewpoints productively address gender, race, and sexuality in the context of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, liberalism and neo-liberalism, and social justice and globalization, emphasizing interrelationships among a broad array of topics that transcend national boundaries. Alexander and Mohanty's definition of transnational feminism is specifically grounded in "intellectual and political genealogies—in studies of race, colonialism, and empire in the Global North, in the critiques by feminists of color in the USA, and in studies of decolonialization, anticapitalist critiques, and LGBTTT/queer studies in the North and the South" (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.25). As they explain, their utilization of transnational feminism is grounded in a specific situatedness within the Global North, as well as in their dedication "to work systematically and overtly against racialized, heterosexist, imperial, corporatist projects that characterize North American global adventures" (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.25). Kaplan and Grewal add to this discussion by resisting the temptation to assert transnational feminisms as a solution to the problems of prior feminist representations:

*It would be impossible for us to advocate a transnational feminism as an improved or better or cleaned-up kind of international or global feminism. Transnational feminism, for example, is not to be celebrated as free of these oppressive conditions. In fact, there is no such thing as feminism free of asymmetrical power relations. Rather, transnational feminist practices, as we call them, involve forms of alliance, subversion, and complicity within which asymmetries and inequalities can be critiqued. (Kaplan, Caren, & Grewal, 2002, p.73)*

Importantly, as Nagar and Swarr point out, the term "transnational" does not have the same salience in places such as "South Africa, India, Egypt, or Brazil as it does in US and Canadian academic feminist studies" (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p.3). Within North American academic settings especially, transnational feminisms have emerged in relation to postcolonial and other critical perspectives expressed in discourses such as "Third World Feminisms," "women of color feminisms," "Black feminisms," "Indigenous feminisms" and "Chicana feminisms." Resonating with these sources of critique, some feminist scholars associate transnational feminist perspectives with the earlier work of scholars such as Mohanty (1991), Lazreg (1988), and Trinh (1991), who, as Nagar and Swarr point out, critically analyzed "the contradictions and dangers inherent in a feminist project where 'difference' is only allowed to unfold according to external standards and within an external frame of reference" (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p.4).

In this sense, transnational feminists have consistently been critical of the ways in which women and others from non-Western contexts have often been appropriated in WGS classrooms, represented as mainly passive victims of various economic, social, and cultural struggles and problems. These common practices tend to prioritize, normalize, and universalize North American feminists' agendas and "liberation" goals as the benchmarks by which all women and others are measured. Such criticism, as Nagar and Swarr write, has "underscored the need to highlight Third World women's activism to imagine new forms of transnational solidarity and collaborations" (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p.5).

Given the varied contexts in which the perspectives apply, transnational feminisms should not be viewed as monolithic or unified areas of study with “shared meanings and assumptions,” but rather as a “diverse and diffuse field where hierarchies and practices pertaining to knowledge production have been unevenly treated in theoretical interventions” (Nagar & Swarr, 2010, p.2–3). Similarly, Desai, Bouchard and Detournay describe transnational feminisms “as a contested field of enquiry shot through with disagreements and productive tensions” (Desai, Bouchard & Detournay, 2010, p.46). It is therefore important, they suggest, that we pay attention to the ways in which transnational feminisms, like other critical feminist discourses, are both similarly and differently situated in their historical formations, rather than assume that they are interchangeable (Desai, Bouchard, & Detournay, 2010, p.48).

Following in the footsteps of such self-critical transnational perspectives, particularly those situated in North American contexts, my work addresses two questions: What kinds of “productive tensions and contradictions” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.32) would be made visible if transnational feminisms are critical of the ways in which the Northern American conceptualizations of heterosexuality and LGBTTTQIA are mobilized outside of North American contexts? What is gained and lost in the promotion of such labels and concepts elsewhere? More specifically, what are the individuals, groups, and societies that are supposed to be rescued from heterosexist (and anti-homosexuality) violent agendas by Western conceptions of LGBTTTQIA’s rights campaigns forced to give up or forget?

I contend that an uncritical approach can ironically contribute to marginalization. It keeps Western perspectives at the center, deploying purportedly universal concepts to represent diverse and divergent identities, while masking and obscuring others’ histories, cultures, and conceptions. Transnational feminists and queer studies perspectives under consideration here should consider whose sexual identities and narratives are the ideological force and mechanism behind both the inclusion or rights discourses and the anti-homosexuality discourses (that promote violence). Some transnational feminists’ scholarship within North America has addressed such questions individually or collaboratively (see, for instance, the recent collection, *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, by Nagar and Swarr (2010)). But while such works have addressed important questions and concerns, I suggest that transnational feminisms will need to go even further to redraw the specific maps and rewrite the stories that travel with Western-based concept of heterosexuality and LGBTTTQIA categories to non-Western contexts, even as we continue to build on and to broaden the many radical and critical visions that transnational feminisms have helped to facilitate at this historical and theoretical moment.

## Some Transnational Feminism’s Approaches to ‘Queer’ and LGBTTTQIA

Concerns about labeling are commonly expressed within various transnational feminist perspectives. For instance, Alexander and Mohanty (2010) note the “discursive violence that comes with imposing U.S. social categories on cultural configurations that were not U.S. based” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.36). Swarr (2012) likewise asks readers “to suspend their categorical assessments” regarding the deployment of familiar “Northern and medical terms” (Swarr, 2012, p.40). She notes, for instance, that “‘Transgender’ is a term with growing significance in the Global South that functions paradoxically as a community-building tool and Northern imposition simultaneously” (Swarr, 2012, p.40).

And yet despite such admonitions it is quite common for writers to set aside caveats and utilize such labels in a seemingly uncritical manner. A pair of essays included in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* help to illustrate my point about problems with the use of labels. Without a consistent interrogation, such labels quite easily become normalized as essential categories. For example, in their essay, Peake and de Souza (2010) address the meanings and development of their collaborative work over the years with a Guyanese women’s organization called Red Thread. While their work is centered on “the power dynamics of the transnational research processes” involved in their collaborative effort, they also address dimensions of power involved in silences that remain within the Red Thread movement, especially with regards to issues of sexuality (Peake & de Souza, 2010, p.106). The authors are clearly critical of the politics of feminism along the North/South divide, although in this

essay the critique does not extend to the politics of labeling. With regards to sexuality, Peake and de Souza indicate that Guyana is a “homophobic country” in that the only form of sexuality that is accepted is “heterosexuality.” According to Peake and de Souza, in a deeply religious and culturally intolerant location such as Guyana, “gays and lesbians are seen as ‘unnatural’; in our research they are generally described as being wicked, depraved, corrupt, impure, immoral, polluted, filthy, and profligate” (Peake & de Souza, 2010, p.116). They go on to write:

*Such is the opprobrium attached to homosexuality that there are no gays or lesbian couples living openly in the country. There are no clubs, bars, cafes, restaurants, or other sociable public spaces where gays or lesbians would be tolerated. It follows that there is no social or political space for gay men, lesbians, or trans folk in Guyana. Given their low to practically nonexistence public profile, neither had Red Thread—until 2006—taken any public position on issues of sexuality. (Peake & de Souza, 2010, p. 116)*

In addition, Peake and de Souza elaborate on tensions that arose between them as they tried to navigate the best approach to introduce the topic of discrimination to Red Thread:

*Coming from North America, where nondominant sexualities are often celebrated or at least tolerated, into a society where there is no room for discussion of the discrimination faced by those who are not heterosexual has been a struggle between the two of us, with Linda advocating that it should be an issue that is raised within Red Thread and Karen not being convinced that it was an issue (until recently) that had the capacity to generate discussion and hence social action. (Peake and de Souza, 2010, p. 117)*

The authors seem to suggest that there are no unique alternative or nonconforming practices of sexuality in Guyana for which to account, besides the North American-based ‘heterosexuality,’ or LGBTTQIA. In other words, all potential alternative practices that escape the totality of oppressive regimes must register through a globalized LGBTTQIA and heterosexuality in order to be recognized. In this case I cannot help but to wonder, if it is possible that Peake’s and de Souza’s understanding of the practices of sexuality in Guyana was imagined too far in advance, and thus making it impossible for a different account to emerge, even if it was glaringly nearby.

Similarly, in their chapter, “Conflicts and Collaborations: Building Trust in Transnational South Africa,” Bullington and Swarr theorize the meanings of their collaborative relationships with one another (as US Americans) while living in South Africa where they worked and lived for many years, “promoting rights for lesbian and gay South Africans” and “advocating equitable access to AIDS medications for poor people” (Bullington & Swarr, 2010, p.87). Their work also explores how knowledge is produced in context. In one of the letters discussed in their work, Bullington writes:

*During our first visit in 1997 to South Africa to conduct pre-dissertation research, we were primarily involved with self-defined gay and lesbian communities. I was studying lobbying around and the impact of the sexual orientation clause [in South Africa’s constitution], and you were exploring drag and trying to learn about trans communities that were isolated and hidden. We stayed entirely in Cape Town and spent most of our time in gay-identified spaces—clubs, cafes, bath houses, retail shops—conducting interviews with owners, workers, and patrons. And we quickly realized that ‘gay and lesbian’ meant exactly that. The categories people used to identify themselves and others rarely included ‘bisexual,’ ‘transgender,’ or ‘queer,’ but specifically defined what it meant to be gay or lesbian in the so-called new South Africa. (Bullington & Swarr, 2010, p.88)*

While the authors focus their study on an urban context of clubs and bathhouses, etc., from a transnational feminist perspective, the authors do not seem compelled to scrutinize in their essay the broader historical context under which labels like “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “transgender,” and “queer” have become dominant and accepted in such settings. Such a discussion would have helped to explain how these Western terms of sexual identity were able to dominate discussions in a country where heterogeneous and unique nonconforming practices existed prior to European colonial and imperial occupation and continue exist to this day. Such practices include the cultural practices of female-female relationships (also commonly known as woman-woman marriages), among others, which have been largely ignored in contemporary queer and sexuality discourses.

As I explained elsewhere, such relationships are practiced heterogeneously around the continent of Africa and are produced through a variety of overlapping and relational needs and



desires (Njambi & O'Brien, 2000). The cultural tradition of woman-woman marriages continues, for instance, among the Gĩkũyũ of Kenya, taking a variety of shapes and forms. In this cultural context, there is no label or term that defines relationships, which enables household relationships to take on unique and localized meanings that are not easy to generalize. Instead of a label, the Gĩkũyũ language provides a description that does not separate the act from the process, but also, and more importantly, that does not create a hierarchical order among relationships; the practice of woman-woman marriages (*or andũ aka ariā mahikagia andũ aka*) are thus not situated at the periphery of Gĩkũyũ social, political, and economic organization, and thus could not be easily isolated from other relationships. Although Christian missionaries and colonial officials had worked tirelessly to erase these relationships because they did not adhere to Christian values of "heterosexuality," they are performed to this day and are very much part of Gĩkũyũ social fabric (Njambi & O'Brien 2000). The pre-existence of such relationships across the continent – prior to the creation of concepts of "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality," through which some individuals can be singled out for marginalization and punishment – provides a means of questioning the Western presumptions and universality that the concepts purport to carry.

I would note that in her book, *Sex in Transition*, Swarr (2012) does discuss the historical context of LGBT labels but limits discussion to the apartheid and post-apartheid eras and does not address non-Western-based practices in South Africa such as female-female relationships. I find such limits to be problematic because, as postcolonial scholars such as Gayatri Spivak, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, Edward Said and others have taught us, histories in Africa, India and other colonized places did not begin with colonialism, and that the transformative impact of colonialism or apartheid itself was not total. Accounting for the myriad expressions and practices requires reframing the discussion to include a broader range of histories and everyday life practices.

The two essays that I described above problematize the exclusions of sexual identities, such as "bisexual, transgender, or queer," from the categories of "gay and lesbian" (in the case of South Africa), and "gay men, lesbians, or trans folk" from social and political spaces (in the case of Guyana). While perhaps unintentional, however, the uncritical approaches in the two essays concerning such sexual identity make the categories appear as unproblematically universal. The characterization by Peake and de Souza, I would suggest, also perpetuates a familiar hierarchy, with the West represented as more advanced in politics and knowledge than their "lagging," so-called Third World, counterparts.

In her groundbreaking book, *Women's Movements in the Global Era: The Power of Local Feminisms*, Amrita Basu challenges such tendencies in part by bringing attention to the specific and diverse ways in which women organize themselves in their locally situated spaces. As she points out, the main focus of her book "is on women's movements that are national in scale, influence, or structure but are also active at the local level" (2010: 2). Additionally, she writes, in order "to depict the range of issues that women's movements address, some of the chapters explore struggles by women who have been historically marginalized by the mainstream women's movement" (Basu, 2010, p.2). The recognition of such diverse organizing activities is an important feature of transnational feminisms. Without such local emphasis, non-white women have too often been represented as little more than victims of their various "backward" cultural restrictions.

And yet, as valuable such discussions are, like Bullington and Swarr and Peake and de Souza, the book uncritically presents LGBTTTQIA as universally given. According to Basu, "Some of the broad factors that influence the strength of women's movements and lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and intersex movements are the same. Strong and effective LGBTI activism has occurred when it has found transnational and international support, when gays and lesbians have participated in broader social movements, and when states prohibited discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation" (Basu, 2010, p.21). In that sense, the book does an excellent job of undoing the problematic notion of "global sisterhood" (hooks, 1989), but in its place it presents a presumed global LGBTTTQIA-hood, differentiated only by geographical region. Different countries are then assessed in the book based on how well they promote or grant such rights. My concern, which I believe is also a core concern of many transnational feminists, is to find ways to address simultaneously diverse practices aimed at achieving social justice that emerge from and are tailored to particular parts of the world, rather than universalizing what is already approved and normalized in the Global North.

On the other hand, the essays by Alexander and Mohanty and Desai, Bouchard, and Detournay critique the problematic ways in which not only the “transnational” is often framed in transnational WGS and queer studies, but also the problematic ways in which “queer” concepts themselves are structured or outlined in such programs. In “Cartographies of Knowledge and Power: Transnational Feminism as Radical Praxis,” Alexander and Mohanty focus on the deployment of “transnational” in WGS and in LBGTQ/queer studies courses in their readings of U.S.-based contemporary syllabi. They seek to understand the “way curricula and pedagogies mark and become sites for mobilization of knowledge” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.31). With regards to LBGTQ/queer studies specifically, Alexander and Mohanty explain that although the intersectionality of “racialized gender and sexuality as well as the attention to non-U.S. feminist geographies” was included in such syllabi, “[g]enealogies of sexuality studies remain largely U.S.-centered in otherwise multiply layered courses. Thus, while racial and colonial histories were often threaded through the courses, these histories remained focused on the United States or Europe” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010: 33). In other words, the syllabi overall represented diversity in the scope of covered topics “while also reproducing a white Eurocentric center” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.34).

In their essay, “Disavowed Legacies and Honorable Thievery: The Work of the ‘Transnational’ in Feminist and LGBTQ Studies,” Desai, Bouchard, and Detournay suggest that “transnational LGBTQ studies often holds up diasporic queers or US-based queers of color as paradigmatic subjects” while leaving “US-or Eurocentric privilege unnamed and unacknowledged” (Desai, Bouchard & Detournay, 2010, p.49). They go on to say that, by not challenging “its epistemological frameworks, privileged location, or its mobility,” transnational LGBTQ studies ends up making the same mistakes usually “associated with global feminism and global gay studies”; i.e., presenting fully self-realized subjects that are unmarked by specific historical formations, “who are located in the West as it simultaneously ignores the contributions of postcolonial feminism to critiques of Eurocentricism and US-centrism” (Desai, Bouchard & Detournay, 2010, p.50).

In presenting these critiques, the authors of these two essays relate ways in which some transnational feminist approaches can become a conduit for normalizing and perpetuating a global hierarchy, as opposed to performing “a radical, decolonizing function” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010, p.24). While I find such critical approaches to “LBGTQ/queer” refreshing, what I think is missing from these essays (as well as others in the Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis collection) is attention to particular historical, political, and intellectual formations of LBGTQIA itself. This attention is needed not only when LBGTQIA is applied in non-Western contexts, but also when it is been employed within a given Western context, in order to render visible the epistemic violence and/or temporality that comes with such conception. After all, LBGTQIA, too, is an invention that is situated in particular time and place.

Not only does the contemporary Western LBGTQIA-hood make us forget its own inventiveness, like heterosexuality, it creates a global agenda that freezes all other practices and imaginations to the naturalizing tendencies of here and now. In his work, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Muñoz makes this point regarding what he views as “the anemic political agenda that dominates contemporary LGBT politics in North America today” (Muñoz, 2009, p.19). This agenda “is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that [he] associate [s] as endemic to a forward dawning queerness that calls on a no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining a futurity” (Muñoz, 2009, p.19, 21). The present is not enough, he argues. “It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and ‘rational’ expectations.” Instead, “[t]he present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and special maps provided by a perception of the past and future affective worlds” (Muñoz, 2009, p.27).

## Inventing Sexuality

The discussion above is underscored by Nikki Sullivan’s assertion that “classifications of sexuality (or even of what might be seen to constitute sex or sexuality) do not simply describe being, but rather constitute it in historically and culturally specific ways” (Sullivan, 2003, p.2). She points out that “terms such as invert, queer, sodomite, sophist, dyke, and so on, are cultural artifacts that are tied to ways of understanding and of being that are specific to a particular [location]” (Sullivan, 2003, p.3). Scrutinizing “the discourses surrounding and informing sexuality can provide clues as to why particular knowledges, practices, and

subjectivities emerge when and where they do, and what purposes they might serve" (Sullivan, 2003, p.2).

It is by now well known that the very terms "sexuality," "homosexual," "heterosexual," and "gender" are recent inventions within Western medical discourses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Lugones, 2007; Katz, 1996; Halperin, 1990; Somerville, 2000; Terry, 1995; Jagose, 1996). The non-universal character of such taken for granted concepts is easy to forget, although it should be a crucial point for transnational feminisms to grapple with when applying them in divergent contexts. As David Halperin suggests, "Far from reflecting a purely natural and un-interpreted recognition of some familiar facts about us, sexuality represents a peculiar turn in conceptualizing, experiencing, and institutionalizing human nature, a turn that (along with many other developments) marks the transition to modernity in northern and western Europe" (Halperin, 1990, p.25).

Ned Katz reinforces this point, stating that while researching his book, *Gay American History*, he was stunned to find out that "the now common, unquestioned bifurcation of people, their emotions and acts into 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' was a recent manufacture" in Euro-American medical discourse (Katz, 1997, p.177). The terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual," as Katz came to learn, were invented in the latter nineteenth century, when the label "homosexual" was used in the medical field "as way of naming, condemning, and asserting their own proprietary rights over a group then parading into sight in the bars, dance halls, and streets of Europe's and America's larger cities" (Katz, 1997, p.177). Katz explains that Karl Maria Kertbeny in 1896 was the first to use the term "homosexual" publicly, in his "petition against the German law criminalizing 'unnatural' fornication" (Katz, 1997, p.177).

Simultaneously, the term "heterosexual" was appropriated by doctors to mean "the erotic intercourse of men and women." And because such intercourse was not necessarily associated directly to meanings of reproduction *per se*, the term "heterosexual" was coined with a negative meaning and "continued to signify an immoral relation" (Katz 1997, p.178) through the early decades of the twentieth century. In fact, as Katz indicates, it was not until well into the 1920s that both terms gradually gained popularity and that their full use within Euro-American medical publications settled on "heterosexual" as referring to "a 'normal' male-female eroticism" (Katz, 1997, p.178).

Adding complexity, in *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, Siobhan Somerville argues that "it was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between 'black' and 'white' bodies" (Somerville, 2000, p.3). "Questions of race," she argues, and especially "the formation of notions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' – must be understood as a crucial part of the history and representation of sexual formations, including lesbian and gay identity and compulsory heterosexuality in the United States" (Somerville, 2000, p.5). She challenges "a persistent critical tendency to treat late-nineteenth-century shifts in the cultural understanding and deployment of race and sexuality as separate and unrelated" (Somerville, 2000, p.3). Somerville suggests "instead that the simultaneous efforts [within medical /scientific and legal discourses] to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply intertwined" (Somerville, 2000, p.3). Indicating that such a separation is erroneous considering the role that race played in the invention of homosexuality. In other words, the specific context matters greatly regarding the development of such concepts. Yet, she points out that at this point in time, "the analogy often drawn between lesbian/gay and African American studies has produced unfortunate effects, including the illusion that they are parallel, rather than intersecting, bodies of scholarship" (Somerville, 2000, p.4). Hence, as Somerville reminds us, "the structures and methodologies that drove dominant ideologies of race also fueled the pursuit of knowledge about the homosexual body: both sympathetic and hostile accounts of homosexuality were steeped in assumptions that had driven previous scientific studies of race" (Somerville, 2000, p.17).

In order to further elaborate Somerville's point, a brief discussion of the documentary film, *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* (2008), one of the key figures in the American civil rights movement, might be useful here. The film explores Rustin's life under Jim Crow in the South and the horrific treatment he underwent both because of the color of his skin and for his sexual preference. As Steven Thrasher points out, "neither Rustin's sexual openness nor his controversial political positions came without great costs. He wound up behind bars for

practicing his nonviolent Quaker faith (from 1944 to 1946 in a Pennsylvania prison for conscientiously objecting to serving in World War II) and for practicing homosexuality (60 days in a California jail for 'sex perversion' in 1953)." The imprisonment of Rustin, and not the white man whom he supposedly had "sex perversion" with, exemplifies here the horrific and specific ways in which white supremacy operates in the racialization of sexuality and vice versa. As Alexander Weheliye points out, "If racialization is understood not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that disciplined humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans, then blackness designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full status and which humans cannot" (Weheliye, 2014, p.3). Consequently, Dylan Rodriguez notes that white supremacy must be understood in this manner as a sense "of social organization that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized 'human' difference" (Rodriguez, 2006, p.11; Weheliye, 2014).

Ann Stoler (1995) has also presented a similar idea that the Western inventions of sexuality could not have been enough "without a racially erotic counterpoint, without reference to the libidinal energies of the savage, the primitive, the colonized [the enslaved]—reference points of difference, critique and desire" (Stoler, 1995, p.6–7). This broader influence is significant because "[t]he sexual discourse of empire and of the biopolitics state in Europe were mutually constitutive: their 'targets' were broadly imperial, their regimes of power synthetically bound" (Stoler, 1995, p.7). Likewise, Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien offer this observation regarding the interlocking of empire, race, and sexuality:

*The Prevailing Western concept of sexuality ... already contains racism. Historically, the European construction of sexuality coincides with the epoch of imperialism and the two inter-connect.... The personage of the savage was developed as the other of civilization and one of the first 'proofs' of this otherness was the nakedness of the savage, the visibility. (In Somerville, 2000, p.5)*

M'Baye's analysis of Armand Corre's writing in 1894 about Senegal is a case in point. According to M'Baye, Corre strongly disapproved "the sexual behaviors of French soldiers in Senegal," including what he called "vices against nature," although he was sympathetic to the fact that these soldiers were very far from home and could not be expected to be like monks or nuns (M'Baye, 2013). In his descriptions of sexual behavior of French soldiers in Senegal, Corre note that "soldiers exchange mutual and ignoble services, or, if they do not get the consent of an indigenous person, take them by force, to the detriment of our moral influence" (M'Baye, 2013, p.117).

But what Corre disapproved even more was what he saw as the "corrupting influence" of the Senegalese, which he saw "as a threat to the colonial soldiers' manhood and probity and as undermining to the French civilizing mission and its cult of domesticity" (M'baye, 2013, p.117). But perhaps what is most telling about Corre's argument, according to M'baye, is "the fantastical elements" that become visibly clear "since this quite florid tale of sexual license (homosexual acts among the troops and even violent rape committed against the local population) is viewed in terms of the corrupting influence of the Africans" (M'Baye, 2013, p.117). In fact, "[a]ccording to Corre's idealized vision, it is the soldiers who must be shielded from the decadence of the African colonies in order to behave as extensions of an immaculate and pristine metropole" (M'Baye, 2013, p.117).

Therefore, as Stoler (1995, p.7) again demonstrates, "Europe's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses on sexuality, like other cultural, political, or economic assertions, cannot be charted in Europe alone," as Foucault would have us believe. According to Stoler, "in short-circuiting empire, Foucault's history of European sexuality misses key sites in the production of that discourse, discounts the practices that racialized bodies, and thus elides a field of knowledge that provides the contrasts for what a 'healthy, vigorous, bourgeois body' was all about" (Stoler, 1995, p.7). As such, "Europe's eighteenth-century discourses on sexuality can—indeed must—be traced along a more circuitous imperial route that leads to nineteenth-century technologies of sex. They were refracted through the discourses of empire and its exigencies, by men and women whose affirmations of a bourgeois self, and the racialized contexts in which those confidences were built, could not be disentangled" (Stoler, 1995, p.7). And as a result, "Discourses on sexuality" in this sense "do more than define the distinctions of bourgeois self; in identifying marginal members of the body politics," they also simultaneously "mapped the moral parameters of European nations" (Stoler, 1995, p.7). Tracing and re-telling



the history of western invention of sexuality allows transnational feminism to be mindful of whose stories and histories are elevated and whose are ignored or simply forgotten.

## Inventing Gender

The Western colonial and imperial imposition of sexuality on African societies parallels the imposition of gender concepts. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, for instance, traces the ways in which assumptions about gender were imposed on Yorùbá society in Nigeria through a colonial and knowledge production processes that ignored and undermined an existing system of seniority that characterized the society prior to British rule. Oyěwùmí writes, “[I]n order to analyze how and why gender is constructed in Yorùbá society (and indeed in other contemporary African societies), the role and impact of the West are of utmost importance, not only because most African societies came under European rule by the end of the nineteenth century but also because of the continued dominance of the West in the production of knowledge” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p.x). In that respect, the “body-reasoning and bio-logic that derives from the biological determinism inherent in Western thought have been imposed on African societies. The presence of gender constructs cannot be separated from the ideology of biological determinism” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, x). In fact, as Oyěwùmí makes clear, impositions of Western scholarship are not alone in this tendency. “Western conceptual schemes and theories” she argues, “have become so widespread that almost all scholarship, even by Africans, utilizes them unquestioningly” (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p.x).

In Western contexts, even though gender is meant to emphasize a co-constitution of social/cultural/political/economic elements that are already at work in bodily practices, the concepts ends up reinforcing even more powerfully the biological governing of bodies, producing a hierarchy of male (with a penis, and therefore “superior”) over female (without penises, and therefore “inferior”). For Yorùbá society, as well as many other societies in Africa, such ranking simply did not exist because social organization is based on other elements, such as seniority, which is defined by relative age. With the colonial imposition of Western gender systems in parts of Africa where there were none before or were locally characterized differently, colonialism also imposed the “subordination of females in every aspect of life” (Lugones, 2007, p.196). In fact, according to Oyěwùmí, such imposition explains how one of the first things colonizers did immediately, based on gender presumptions, was to remove female leaders from positions of power in many African societies replacing them with male “chiefs” (Lugones, 1997). Colonialism, in this sense, “did not impose pre-colonial European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers” (Lugones, 2007, p.186), one that was heavily dependent on racialization as well as sexualization.

In her recent book, *What Gender is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity*, Oyěwùmí reiterates this discussion of gender as a colonial introduction. Oyěwùmí writes, “All too often, I found, research betrayed a glaring lack of understanding of local realities. In fact, many researchers who had written about gender in Yorùbá culture did not recognize—indeed never even did a systematic analysis of—current, every day, every time, gender-neutral categories of kinship and the related seniority-based organization of families and social groups (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.2). Oyěwùmí’s point reflects my assertion in this article about the disregard of localized practice in favor of Western conceptions: “For so many academics, both local and foreign, indigenous categories and experiences did not seem to drive their work, at least not in the first instance” (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.1–2).

*What Gender is Motherhood?* focuses on *Ifá*, which Oyěwùmí describes as “the most important endogenous system of knowledge” in Yorùbá, based on “its significance in the culture—its historical depth and its continuing resonance in postcolonial society” (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.2). Based on the nongendered ontology of Yorùbá, Oyěwùmí explores the ways in which “gender is implicated in interpretations of the *Ifá* knowledge system, as social and ritual practice, and as a cultural institution in a changing world” (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.2). The book centralized the organization of *Iya* (motherhood), considered to be “historically the most consequential category in social, political, and spiritual organization,” and as such “has been shunted aside as the new gender-saturated colonial epistemology gains ever-deeper resonance in the culture even though “the category *Iya* is not originally a gendered category”

(Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.2).

Oyěwùmí employs the notion of “coloniality of power” in order to demonstrate “the ways in which race and gender identities of intellectuals enable and disable” their approach to knowledge production (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.2). In demonstrating the significance of the coloniality of power concept, Oyěwùmí relates her experience in attending a conference where participants were asked to “say their names and the preferred pronouns with which are to be addressed” in order to accommodate transgendered audience members (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.5). Remarking on the relative newness of such ideas on U.S. university campuses, she points out that they might look to the Yorùbá language as a model for this request:

*...I was amused at the very idea of choosing one's own personal pronoun. What a pity, I thought. Learn to speak Yorùbá! North Americans would not have to reinvent the wheel if they adopted Yorùbá, one of the many African languages whose pronouns and personal names do not 'do gender'” (Oyěwùmí, 2016, p.5).*

It is hard to image Oyěwùmí's request being taken seriously by North Americans that wish to escape from the tyranny of gender. To “[l]earn to speak Yorùbá” would likely be perceived as odd, considering the continuing coloniality of power that helps determine whose experiences are held valuable, and thus worthy of consideration, and whose are less valuable, and thus can be ignored.

This entanglement of white supremacy, sexuality, and gender highlights their interwoven historical character, which can be traced and located in time and place. The export of such inventions as foundational and universal risks promoting a familiar biological determinism that tends to assume that un-invented race, gender, and sexuality already exist everywhere. That is, such global mappings tend to ignore important work in understanding local historical formations and performativities of all erotic practices, including those that exist in the Global North. Additionally, the presumption of a global LGBTTQIA-hood, perhaps surprisingly and paradoxically, like heterosexuality and anti-homosexuality rhetoric, renders invisible and unintelligible other unique worldly erotic practices that have long been ignored, and have not yet registered in the dominant knowledge circles associated with the Global North. Paying close attention to such invention demonstrates a way to rethink our uncritical tendencies to universalize them.

## Inventing ‘Anti-homosexuality’ Rhetoric and ‘Rights Campaigns’ Rhetoric

Like heterosexuality and LGBTTQIA, the time-and-place-specific character applies also to the formations of “anti-homosexuality” (or “homophobia”) and “rights campaigns” (or “inclusion”) both of which have specific histories. I am not suggesting that the two are equal by any means, or that one should ignore that anti-homosexuality rhetoric promotes hatred and violence. Such violent rhetoric was recently put on global display in the form of an “anti-homosexuality” law that was signed by President Museveni of Uganda (and applauded by many members of parliament in Kenya). According to Jeff Sharlet, the provisions of the bill carried “up to three years in prison for failure to report a homosexual: seven years for ‘promotion’; life imprisonment for a single homosexual act; and, for ‘aggravated homosexuality’ (which includes gay sex while HIV-positive, gay sex with a disabled person, or, if you’re a recidivist, gay sex with anyone-marking the criminal as a ‘serial offender), death” (cited in M’Baye, 2013, p.112). The death penalty, however, was removed from the bill due to international pressure from donor countries.

Uganda is not unique in its “anti-homosexuality” practices in Africa. Countries such as Tanzania, Senegal, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, and Malawi, among others, have similar anti-homosexuality laws (Ireland, 2013). From the 1990s to today, a number of African political and religious leaders have vilified homosexuality and homosexual practices. Sylvia Tamale, a Ugandan feminist legal scholar, points out that the country’s anti-homosexuality bill was introduced in parliament in 2009 by ruling-party MP David Bahati (Tamale, 2013, p.33). According to Tamale, the transnational event “took place against the backdrop of a conference to expose the ‘dark and hidden’ agenda of homosexuality organized by a fundamentalist religious NGO called the Family Life Network and funded by right-wing American evangelicals” (Tamale, 2013, p.33; see also M’Baye, 2013).

In discussing the issue, Reverend Kopya Kaoma notes that “the demographic center of Christianity is shifting from Global North to the Global South” (Kaoma, 2009, p.3), and that “the recent upsurge in politicized homophobia has been inspired by right-wing American evangelicals who have exported U.S.-style culture-war politics” (Kaoma, 2012, p.12). But, as M’Baye points out, Kaoma is also keenly aware that “pejorative attitudes toward LGBTT people in Africa have been widespread, and indeed, the exportation of fundamentalist American Christian politics cannot be considered the sole cause of the homophobic furor in Uganda” (M’Baye, 2013, p.112). The surge of such discrimination reflects colonial histories of imposed terms in African countries. It also reflects a right-wing U.S. political view that seeks to reinforce fundamentalist Christian values abroad to counter its losses in the culture wars at home. In addition, it is a religious and political tool used by many dominant groups in various parts of Africa “to promote their self-serving agendas” (Tamale, 2013, p.34).

Around Africa, the intensification of this punitive “anti-homosexual” discourse and practice employs a very familiar American fundamentalist Christian doctrine as well as 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific discourses, which argue that homosexuality is “abominable” and “unnatural.” The political and religious leaders who pioneered such discourse also claim that homosexuality is “un-African” altogether, suggesting that it was brought by Western modernization. Note that they do not suggest that ‘heterosexuality,’ like the science and Christianity that they cite and prefer, and the very ‘homophobia’ they embrace, is itself a Western colonial construct. They forget that Africans across the continent have always engaged in “nonconforming sexual practices and identities, defined and expressed variously across societies and cultures” (Tamale, 2013). As Keguro Macharia (2013) points out, in their rush to protect “real African traditional families,” such policy, for instance, “erases the histories of intimate and erotic innovation that are a rich part of Kenya’s multi-ethnic heritage. Gone are the gender-bending practices in which biological women functioned as cultural men; erased are the woman-woman marriages practiced in a range of groups; muted are the practices of partner sharing within age group; censored are the intergenerational relationships that are central to growing up rituals” (Macharia, 2013, p.283).

In the case of Kenya, for instance, to emphasize Macharia’s important observation, erased from view are discussions of a whole host of practices in addition to Gĩkũyũ practices of *andũ* aka *arĩa mahikagia andũ* aka, commonly known as “woman-woman marriage; *ngwĩko* (or age-set multiple partnered erotic sharing) after *irua* (the circumcision of males and females); ‘*kĩhiũ mwĩrĩ*,’ an age-set related event for older Gĩkũyũ women who chase the newly circumcised men for erotic purposes, etc. (Njambi, 2007). None of these practices are included in the dominant narratives of contemporary sexuality, whether the “anti-homosexual” discourses or LGBTTQIA rights campaigns discussed in this essay, even though these and many others are still widely practiced in various places in Kenya and around the continent of Africa. Such erasure, as Macharia states, “assumes that Kenya’s intimate histories need neither elaboration nor consideration, that terms like ‘family’ and ‘kinships’ [as well as LGBTTQIA] exhaust how we have lived and constructed our intimate lives” (Macharia, 2013, p.283). Macharia continues, such “silence renders a-cultural what should be deeply cultural, a-historical what provides texture to history, a-specific what enables multi-ethnic specificity” (Macharia, 2013, p.283).

This “cognitive failure,” to use Gayatri Spivak’s phrase, ignores the heterogeneous inventions that exist around the continent of Africa, leaving unchallenged the assertion that “heterosexuality” is synonymous with the continent of Africa and that Africa is and is simply a “homophobic” continent. This assumption in turn, justifies why intervention is needed from the Western-based LGBTTQIA rights campaigns partnered with NGOs and neo-liberal government agencies, a point that has not gone unnoticed by feminist African scholars and queer African activists, such as Sylvia Tamale (2013), Ayo A Coly (2013), Keguro Macharia (2013), and Sokari Ekine (2013), among others. Tamale describes a scenario that was witnessed by many in Uganda when the anti-homosexuality bill was introduced, as Western researchers, activists, students, donors, and journalists all frantically flocked to Kampala. As Tamale explains, they all seemed to have one poignant question: “Why is Uganda so intolerant of gay people?” Tamale watched with horror a BBC documentary by Scott Mill titled, “*The World’s Worst Place to Be Gay*,” and thought, “Gosh, it’s so easy to fill 60 minutes with exclusively negative material that depicts Ugandans as passive, helpless victims with no agency” (Tamale, 2013, p.37). Tamale goes on to say that “[t]he unbalanced film portrays a

perfect juxtaposition of modern, 'civilized' Western sexuality and backward, 'uncivilized' Africa: the archetypal 'us' verses 'them'" (Tamale, 2013, p.37). Tamale argues that by disregarding and "glossing-over important issues, such as the role of Western evangelicals in fueling homophobia on the continent, or the brave challenge that the local activists have mounted against the bill, individuals like Mill do a disservice to the global struggles against homophobia" (Tamale, 2013, p.37). By erasing complexities, what is left then is a single story of "homophobic Africa," as Macharia (2010) and Coly (2013) suggest.

In contrast, a similar anti-homosexuality bill was introduced in Russia not long after the Ugandan bill was produced. As Coly writes, "[o]n January 25, 2013, the Russian House of Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of legislation that would make punishable, by a fine of up to US\$16,000, the dissemination of information and organization of public events about sexual minorities" (Coly, 2013, p.21). Yet, as Coly observes, the Russian bill and "similar legislation projects in Ukraine" did not create the same kind of frantic reaction from Euro-American media as the Ugandan bill. The international attention that the Ukraine and Russia received, Coly writes, was lukewarm. In this respect, "[t]he International frenzy surrounding the Ugandan bill undergirds an existing difference in the discursive translations of African and European homophobias" (Coly, 2013, p.21–22).

On the one hand, as Coly explains, "lies the hypervisibility of homophobias in Africa as 'African' homophobia. On the other hand is the tepid international attention to the violated rights of sexual minorities in Eastern Europe and the perception of homophobias in Eastern European nations as homophobias *tout court*" (Coly, 2013, p.22). As Macharia points out in the newspaper *The Guardian* in 2010, yes, homophobia is a problem that needs to be challenged in all contexts, including Africa. "[B]ut not as *African* homophobia, a special class that requires special interventions. And certainly not the kinds of special interventions that reconsolidate old, ongoing and boring oppositions between a progressive West and an atavistic Africa" (cited in Coly, 2013, p.22). In this respect, right in front of our eyes and ripe with colonialist legacies, the international LGBTTTQIA rights campaigns against the "Ugandan anti-homosexuality bill" became cast in terms similar to the ongoing campaign against "FGM," expressing the need to rescue Africans from their purported atavistic tendencies.

Ekine suggests that the idea of "African homophobia," which has emerged recently from the dominant LGBTTTQIA activists from Global North, "is rooted in colonial discourses of deviant and peculiar African sexuality and in a contemporary neoliberal, global 'LGBT' agenda which seeks to universalize white Euro-American sexual norms and gender expressions" (Ekine, 2014, p.78). Similarly, Caroline Tushabe reminds us that even the notion of "African homophobia" must be understood in relation to the colonialism that introduced such homophobic perspectives in the first place. This is because the colonizers' understanding of various African practices including erotic practices was viewed through the "civilizing" tool of Christianity that condemned all practices that did not fit into its narrow vision (Scarlet & Black, 2011; see also Tushabe, 2013; Njambi, 2004).

In an attempt to understand the basis of today's expression of "homophobia" in Senegal (promoting the idea that "homosexuality" is "un-African"), M'Baye locates its roots in French colonial sexual discourses, dating back to 1894–1935. By analyzing such discourses, M'Baye found out that although such portrayals of "homosexuality as a nonindigenous and unnatural foreign import" is indeed "part of the growing homophobia in many parts of Africa, its discourses are traceable to the late nineteenth century and colonial times, when many Europeans denounced African cultures in order to justify their 'civilizing mission' (*mission civilisatrice*) on the continent" (M'Baye, 2013, p.110). M'Baye notes that the idea that "homosexuality" is "un-African" was first promoted by people like "Sir Richard Burton, who claimed that 'the negro race is mostly untainted by sodomy and tribadism'" (M'Baye, 2013, p.119). According to M'Baye, such colonial discourse:

*suggests both the ambivalence and the single-mindedness of Europeans. Whether the notion of indigenous homosexuality in Africa was accepted or denied, either position could be used to support the general notion of Africans as culturally backward and/or morally deficient. Whatever their perceptions, the European writers had the same purpose: to support the colonialist policing of sexual behavior in the African colonies and the moral authority of the colonial administration's civilizing mission. (M'Baye, 2013, p.116)*



It is also important to remember that when British and French colonizers and Christian missionaries embarked in many regions of the continent of Africa, “anti-homosexuality laws” were already established in their own home countries (Tamale, 2013; M'Baye, 2013). The situation becomes more complicated, as Coly (2013) points out, as both British and French colonial “anti-sodomy” laws remained on the books after colonies gained independence, but were largely dormant until the last two decades or so, when the intensely homophobic political discourses commenced among the leadership in a number of African countries. In this regard, Coly's question, “Why now?” is an important one. Coly writes, “Why is antigay legislation and ‘re’-legislation taking place on the continent now? Why are American antigay Christian groups gaining traction in Africa now?” (Coly, 2013: 25).

There are signs of tensions and contradictions that are at work as all these groups come together. As Coly shows, on the one hand, “African LGBTI activists cannot but engage with the assertion that homosexuality is ‘un-African’” (Coly, 2013, p.24). On the other hand, “in order to gain access to ‘pink money’ (the financial power of LGBTI communities in the Global North) and international LGBTI advocacy networks, LGBTI activism in Africa finds itself needing to use –and hence obliquely promote–the concepts of African homophobia to boost their visibility to potential Western donors” (Coly, 2013, p.24). Such dependence, Coly writes, also encourages African LGBTI activists to use “Western gender and sexual identity terminology” (Coly, 2013, p.24). In that sense, “[s]exual minorities in Africa have the burden of making themselves intelligible and legible to Western donors and audiences, and Western NGOs, in fact, often fund gender and sexual identity workshops to familiarize African sexual minorities with Western terminology” (Coly, 2013, p.24). As a result, as Coly points out, such appropriation of Western concepts then ends up normalizing the very ideas of heterosexuality and homophobia in non-Western discourses (Coly, 2013).

Ekine points out that these tensions in both the “anti-homosexuality” and “rights campaigns” discourses create “a serious strategic challenge for African queer anti-colonialist politics caught at various points between the meta-narratives of LGBT imperialism and homophobic religious fundamentalism on the one hand and indigenous contemporary constructions of sexuality and gender on the other” (Ekine, 2014, p.78). More importantly, such discourses potentially end up reaffirming notions of heterosexuality and gender as well, as if to suggest that heterosexuality and gender are not also colonial and imperial constructions.

## Conclusions

I am not suggesting that individuals and communities should not use whatever labels they see fit to their identity formations; I am simply suggesting that the transnational feminisms and queer activists embrace the intellectual responsibility to scrutinize heterosexuality and LGBTTTQIA labels and their goals in order to render them more visibly accountable. I agree with David Halperin's suggestion that there is nothing “necessarily wrong in granting those terms [‘heterosexual,’ ‘homosexual,’ and ‘LGBTTTQIA’] a wide application, so long as we recognize that they are not native to the pre-modern and non-Western societies to which we apply them, and that if we do insist on applying them, and to those societies we must be careful not to mistake the ‘data’ produced by our research for something we discovered, rather than something we have put there ourselves” (Halperin, 1990, p.45). The problem I see is that such concepts are typically “universalized” and applied uncritically beyond the contexts of their development, while also forgetting the various ways in which these are consistently contested within the place of their origin, let alone in the places where they are imposed.

For instance in the essay, “How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays,” Allan Bérubé describes the various ways in which “many whitening practices” are structured in what is often considered to be “the ‘gay community’ and ‘gay movement’” (Bérubé, 2001, p.246). And if we take seriously Judith Halberstam's idea that “gay/lesbian/straight simply cannot account for the range of sexual experience available” (Halberstam, 1999, p.126), should we then not make the same argument with white LGBTTTQIA? In fact, nothing speaks more loudly about the insufficiency of sexual identification than the (unwieldy and always expanding) acronym LGBTTTQIA.

In this sense, understanding the historical overlap among colonial discourses, the various local practices and identities of sexuality in history and culture, and the contemporary globalized terms and trends is important within transnational feminisms to ensure a richer dialogue that avoids uncritical universalization. If heterosexuality and LGBTTTQIA are indeed a

powerful and a specific way in which some individuals and communities in Global North in particular invent and re-invent themselves, I suggest that transnational feminisms do have an obligation to ask what happens when such inventions/re-inventions are then exported outside of the Global North, and in very those same words? The challenge here applies not only to U.S.-based transnational feminists, me included, but also to those who are situated in non-Western places, to insist on making space for possible alternative conceptions and meanings.

Múnoz's point, that "QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here," offers one possible alternative. As an ideality, Múnoz suggests that queerness "is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there" (Múnoz, 2009, p. 1). Múnoz rejects the idea that "all we have are the pleasures of this moment," suggesting that "we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (Múnoz, 2009, p. 1). Similarly, insisting on exposing the various ways in which the coloniality of power operates in the production, as well as erasure, of 'Others' histories and everyday life practices provides an important alternative that cannot be ignored. Oyěwùmí employs Ndlovu-Gusheni to point out that what makes the coloniality of power different from colonialism is the insidious ways in which it continues to be a dominant force, "long after the end of direct colonialism... It is hidden in discourses, books, cultures, common sense, academic performances, and even self images of Africans... Africans have breathed and lived coloniality since their colonial encounters and it continues to shape their everyday life today" (Ndlovu-Gusheni, 2013; cited in Oyěwùmí, 2016, p. 4).

Likewise, Alexander Weheliye (2014) provides useful perspectives regarding the various ways in which the Western inventions of sexuality, heterosexuality, and gender are already fashioned through the "racializing assemblages" that discipline humanity into full and self-realized human, not-quite-human, and nonhuman, where the human is synonymous with White Western Man (Weheliye, 2014, p. 3, 5). In the footsteps of Weheliye, I suggest that Western LGBTTQIA-hood and rights campaigns, like global-sisterhood prior, tends to rely heavily on the assumption of agency and resistance that are not only prefigured in advance, but are also dependent on the complete and self-present White, Western/human/man with all its trademarks of hierarchically ordered human difference. Perhaps we are better off, as Weheliye points out, following in the footsteps of the Black feminist scholarship of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, as well as Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, which insists on the urgency and importance of disrupting the ruling notion of "humanity as synonymous with [White] Western Man, while also supplying the analytic tools for thinking the deeply gendered and sexualized provenances of racializing assemblages" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 5).

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