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TOWARDS A SITUATED APPROACH TO SEX/GENDER IDENTITIES

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Summary

Transsexual and transgender identities pose interesting challenges to the prevailing understanding of sex/gender. This article considers and discusses some of these challenges and their consequences for the examination and psychosocial understanding of the sex/gender identities that lie outside the hegemonic norm. First, we outline a frame of reference from which we can approach the topic of identity and, particularly, sex/gender identity. Then we explore the way in which trans identities contribute towards undermining essential sex/gender identities while they challenge the dominant biomedical perspective that considers them pathological. Subsequently, we put forward a brief outline of the multiplicity and the difference of identity and political positions that prevail within the trans discussion. Lastly, using the figure of *trans-knowledge*, we propose a situated perspective to tackle this multiplicity, which facilitates a transforming co-existence and an escape from homogenising theorisations.

Keywords: transgender identities, transsexuality, depathologisation, situated knowledge, trans-knowledge.

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1. Introduction

The demands of transsexual and transgender activism (Platero, 2011; Stryker & Whittle, 2006), and reflections in this field of studies (Butler, 1990, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Namaste, 2000, 2005; Prosser, 1998), have led to animated debates in such varied fields as trans identities, understandings of the sex/gender system, public policies and sanitary systems. The diverse -and, at times, contradictory- positions on "trans" phenomena[1] have social, economic and political consequences both in the life of the people who affirm -or want to affirm- their gender and on society as a whole.

Among the different voices participating in these debates, we find those corresponding to professionals from the "psy" disciplines. According to Rose (1979, 1990), "psy" disciplines deal with the "psyche" (psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis) and generate a framework of knowledge that contributes to the social regulation of subjectivity, family, sexuality, mental health, etc. The forms of diagnosis and treatment stemming from these "psy" disciplines have received immeasurable criticism on account of their contribution towards the stigmatisation and control of trans people and, therefore, towards the pathologisation of these groups (Brown, 1996; Hakeem, 2010). Smith et al. (2012), using examples of psychological intervention, argue that the language currently used in this field reinforces the dominant heterosexual discourse. The results emerge as micro-attacks and oppression towards minority groups that transgress gender norms.

These considerations set out a double challenge for critical psychology: to question the prevailing understanding of sex/gender which pathologises and stigmatises trans people, and at the same time, to create alternative understandings that promote the inclusion of non-normative identities, and preserve the multiplicity of expressions and the complexity of the problems they encounter, taking into account the criticism (Linstead & Pullen, 2006).

In this article, we discuss some challenges that the trans topic poses to the psychosocial understanding of sex/gender identities,[2] as well as to the knowledge policies related to non-normative identities. We will focus on the way in which understandings of trans issues are generated and transformed. We will argue that these challenges not only question

1 In the field of "transgender studies," different aspects related to the phenomena of transsexuality and transgender are frequently discussed. In this article, following a certain tradition in the field (Elliot, 2009), we will use the word "trans" to refer to the wider community that includes these phenomena. In other words, as an "umbrella" term to refer to people who identify themselves as transsexuals, transgender or trans. This includes: people who modify their bodies via hormones or surgery in order to live as another sex; individuals who change their gender identity, but who decide not to change their bodies; and people who have a political project in mind related with the dismantling of the gender binarism (Soley-Beltran & Coll-Planas, 2011).

2 When we refer to the notion of "sex/gender," we use as our basis the feminist criticism of the separation of the two terms as independent elements. For Judith Butler (1997, p. 8), there is no sex that is not always gender: "sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along." We start with the notion that there is no 'natural body' that exists before culture and discourse, since all bodies are gendered from the beginning of social existence.

the prevailing psychosocial view, but they also offer cues for transforming it. Rather than providing definitive answers or solutions to these questions, we seek to outline a map that highlights some key vectors in this critical and transformative task, and to suggest 'situated sensitivity' as a useful instrument for the practical and theoretical understanding of non-normative identities.

We begin by considering the question of identity, and particularly that of gender identity, as a space for problematising the psychosocial perspective of sex/gender. We will then go on to discuss some forms in which trans identities disrupt normative understandings and the psycho-medical paradigm. Then, we seek to show the multiplicity and complexity of positions within the trans controversy, and the limitations shown by queer and performative perspectives. Finally, we suggest that an approach towards trans identities that does not imply the suppression of multiplicity and complexity, can be articulated from the perspective of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991), a perspective briefly outlined by the trans-knowledge figure.

2. Identity as a question

The word identity, from the Latin "*identĭtas*," refers to: (1) the quality of that which is identical; (2) the combination of traits of an individual or a group that makes them different from others; and (3) to the equality within a being or a group, to that which defines them as particular, authentic and stable (RAE, 2001[3]). The definition of identity also includes difference; that which differentiates one identity from another, that which divides *I* from *not I*, and *us* from *them*. The understanding of identity as a relatively stable aspect that defines people and groups in a set of similarities and differences is present in different approaches used in social science to explain identification and differentiation processes. In this logic, identity may serve as a teleological element, as the cause and origin -often a mythical and revered one- of everything else that occurs to it; that emerges from it as a correlate.

However, critical perspectives towards this hegemonic concept of identity have explored the ways in which certain crystallizations of identity and difference specific to a historical context are formed -in the realm of social interaction and the public space-. The concept of identity, therefore, is not used as something that explains, but rather, as something that has to be explained. Identity moves away from being a solution and becomes a question. In this way, the notion of identity as an original and essential internal unit that once generated meaning and produced intelligibility in people and social processes, is now a complex and elusive category. Thus, identity -and difference- are problematised, both in their theoretical (ontological) and political aspects.

Regarding the ontological aspect, far from understanding identity as an isolated inner core, critical perspectives understand identity as a process, as a *relation*, a phenomenon

3 RAE. Diccionario de la Real Academia Española. Trasnlated from Sapanish and revised in English with *The Century Dictionary*, The Century Co. New York, 1911.

that occurs *between* people, and that intervenes and contributes to create the social space (Bruner, 1986; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Gergen, 2006). Identity is understood as an inter-subjective, contingent process; the product of a number of political relations and specific practices. Identity, in this regard, is a construction that materialises through social and discursive practices (Butler, 1990, 2004; Foucault, 1976). From here, the concept of identity is radically relocated: from the private sphere of cognition and experience, it moves to the public sphere of semiotic-material practices that make up the social field. Thus, instead of an original identity being reflected or projected in social discourses and practices, these activate and dynamically create identitarian positions. Likewise, the question concerning difference -as a social relation- refers to the ways in which difference is constructed and organised in systematic relations through institutional practices and economic, cultural and political discourses (Brah, 1996). These processes are socio-historically structured to produce and regulate certain categories and subject positions.

The political aspect is linked to these theoretical developments. On the one hand, they reveal the contingent, partial and constructed nature of identities, and on the other hand, they show the effects of political exclusion and the power and domination relations involved in the establishment of any identity considered to be stable and consistent. That which constitutes both identity and difference is not understood as a fixed and stable quality, but rather as a *contingent relation* that comes into effect in specific social practices. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the social and political cost of understanding identities as essential, natural and transcendental, in terms that define what we can become (or not), what is desirable or abject; what forms of life are possible (Butler, 2004).

However, the political problem of identity does not only concern the capacity to criticise the essential identities, and the inclusion and exclusion processes established by social categories at a given moment and in a given context. The political problem set out on the basis of these perspectives is even more complex when it involves the ways in which people identify with one, or various, social categories that help them to understand themselves, or when it is about performing political claims or demands, based on certain identitarian categories, in order to question hegemonic forms of social relations, such as patriarchy, homophobia and racism, among others.

The coherent identities of certain social groups -such as women, male and female homosexuals, or trans groups- have been used to undertake and link actions seeking to formulate and pursue specific political objectives. As a result, the critique and deconstruction of the idea of identity itself associated with certain personal characteristics assumed as problematic, may contribute towards weakening social movements based on these same identities. Therefore, what would the subject of political action be without set identities to which we can refer to, in order to criticise domination relations? What kind of demands is possible?

The understanding of identity not as an inner and foundational unit, but rather, as a kind of contingent "suture", constructed in the framework of socio-historical context (Hall, 2003), leads us to political questions involved in the constitution of sex/gender identities. These complexities presented by the concept of identity can be observed in the field of transsexual and transgender experiences. They invite us to (re-)think the problem of sex/gender identities, as well as the possible construction and reconstruction processes in a

space that, on the one hand, is profoundly defined by scientific discourses, and in which, on the other hand, there is a wide variety of personal and political positions in the experiences of specific people who have been categorised in this way, or who feel "inappropriate" in the dominant sex/gender regime.

3. Trans identities: a challenge to normative sex/gender identities

The dominant biomedical and psychological perspectives consider transsexuality as a mental disorder defined according to two international reference manuals: the DSM-V (APA, 2013) and the ICD-10 (WHO, 2010). In the former, it currently appears as "Gender Dysphoria" which is referred to as the distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and the sex at birth, changing the previous denomination of Gender Identity Disorder (GID), due to the stigmatizing effects of the term "disorder", which was made visible by trans activists. With the use of this terminology, emphasis is given to clinically significant distress associated with the condition of incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and one's assigned gender. In the ICD-10 the diagnosis appears in Chapter V, relating to "Mental and behavioural disorders," and appears as transsexualism:

> "[a] desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by a sense of discomfort with, or inappropriateness of, one's anatomic sex, and a wish to have surgery and hormonal treatment to make one's body as congruent as possible with one's preferred sex."

In Spain, the institutionalization of the medical and psychiatric treatment of transsexuals, legitimized by recent legal changes, has promoted the consolidation of transsexuality as an identity category (Soley-Beltarn & Coll-Planas, 2011). Indeed, the medical institution facilitates body-sexual modification, as a response to the internalization of the institutional narrative of gender binarism, the repetition of which contributes to the static representation of transsexuality and transgender experience that is present today (Kaufmann, 2010). The diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria (nomination used before the publication of DSM-V) works as an obligatory step in administrative procedures, such as changing name or sexual reassignment (Soley-Beltran & Coll-Planas, 2011). Although the discourse about the inconsistency between the physical sex and the gender identity continues to be hegemonic, multiple voices have emerged questioning the heteronormative matrix of this discourse, as well as arguing for the socially constructed nature of the the sex/gender binarisms (Kaufmann, 2010). Gender Dysphoria and transsexualism, as defined in the institutional documents used by different professionals in the "psy" disciplines, have been condemned as powerful products of cisgender order that regulates expressions of gender and sexuality[4]. This critique is based on understanding the sex/gender system as a structure of

4 The effects of terminology shift in DSM-V (APA, 2013) from Gender Identity Disorder to Gender Dysphoria are still to be analized. This analysis is beyond the scope of this article due to the short period elapsed since this shift has taken place.

knowledge/power, which generates a regime of truth that helps to differentiate between "legitimate and natural" identities and "deviant or abnormal" identities (Foucault, 1975). The "psy" disciplines share this regime through diagnosis and treatment procedures in which it is decided which ways of inhabiting gender are correct and which are not, contributing to the generation of intelligible lives through the disciplines that regulate the body, sexuality and identity. This gesture medicalises identities, and unveils a game of truth and false around sexual practices and expressions, determining the frontiers that divide normality from disorder (Crowe, 2000; Martínez-Guzmán & Íñiguez-Rueda, 2010). Thus, this network of knowledge/power acts as a force that shapes the subject and provides them with the conditions of their existence (Butler, 1997).

Likewise, as stated by Garaizabal (2010), the categories that emerge in regimes of power/knowledge do not only have the function of social control, exclusion and stigmatisation of that defined as deviant, but they also function as a type of "inverse affirmation" in the sense that they can be transformed into an affirmative policy that is capable of putting the sexual system itself in question. In the context of the order established by the "hetero-patriarchal matrix," or of the institutionalised sex/gender system that distributes individuals into conventional groups and assumes a certain sexuality code (Soley-Beltrán, 2009), it becomes important to examine the way in which trans identities challenge codes of the sex/gender system, and the way in which this is monitored and legitimised by medical and psychological knowledge.

Firstly, transgender experiences question the assumption that a certain sex univocally corresponds to a particular gender identity, which is the base of the prevailing sex/gender order. The idea that gender identity is a correlate of the sexed body becomes problematic when trans identities reveal different trajectories: bodies that do not correspond to the identities assigned to them, or cases of full or partial body modifications that correspond to different experienced identities.

Secondly, the transit between genders also questions the assumption that gender identity is a fixed attribute, hiding the power relations that deem sex and gender correspondence as mandatory. Trans identities are shown as fluid identities, where *masculinity* and *femininity* become permeable and transitable membranes instead of hermetic nuclei that are essentially defined. Likewise, identity inscriptions can change through time, space, discourse or interaction, and multiple identities can be a human characteristic rather than a pathological form of the being (Linstead & Pullen, 2006).

Thirdly, a sector of the trans community also questions the *man-woman* binomial as an exclusive, and excluding, identification system. From this point of view -greatly influenced by the aforementioned critical perspectives- these categories are social constructions that coerce the multiple forms of possible identification and generate an unnecessary exhaustiveness. Some trans people, therefore, refuse to define themselves essentially and univocally as men or women, and fight for the possibility of living in intermediary positions that are outside the binomial (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Preciado, 2004a).

Lastly, challenges related to transitions in gender categories question the idea that normative men/women identities exist independently of the categories that describe them,

and the discursive practices where these are put into effect. They show the way in which gender is established through different symbolic and material practices that name, identify, emulate and repeat it. These identities are possible in a context where said identity positions have been stated, and where repeated social practices exist which reproduce them and grant them a material nature. In this way, the disciplinary power is shown as a defining power, aimed at securing and establishing identities (Foucault, 1976).

This questioning facilitates a critique of the ways in which, from the "psy" disciplines, people are categorized or, as we have mentioned before, people are led towards a narrative of the self that is consistent with the institutional hetero-patriarchal-cisgender matrix that reinforces the dominant sex/gender system. Likewise, they question the ability of biomedical professionals to establish truths about the bodies and identities of people that need to reshape their body in correlation with their identity. If identity is artificially articulated, then it is possible to think about multiple, and new, identifications and articulations of sex, gender and desire.

Nevertheless, these critical perspectives, by assuming identity to be a product of the historical systems of knowledge/power, also generate problematic consequences when considering trans identities. In this case, due to the fact that for a considerable portion of people who identify as trans, the identity category associated with the biomedical diagnosis is not only not experienced as problematic, but it results in advantages when performing, for example, sex reassignment processes; and furthermore, as we have said before, because it hinders the social and political incorporation of people defined as transsexual or transgender into the pursuit of specific political demands. This, in turn, shows how the field of trans identities is far from being homogeneous. On the contrary, it is a space where the multiplicity and diversity of positions, perspectives and interests prevail.

4. Multiplicity and coexistence within the trans issue

The critical narrative on the sex/gender matrix that supports interventions around the trans issue has helped to put the focus of attention on biomedical institutions that contribute to their reproduction and, at the same time, create a base for the political struggles that question the pathologisation of trans identities by biomedical institutions. The elimination of the pathologizing effects of certain definitions of transsexuality –such as those previously defined in the DSM and the ICD- is sought, as well as guaranteeing access to health services for transsexual and transgender people who require them[5]. This narrative reveals the possibility of understanding the relationship between body and identity precisely as a transitive condition, as a process and not as an affirmed place. Likewise, this narrative has defended "ambiguous" forms of identification or non-specific gender positions within the dominant code (Bornstein, 1994; Feinberg, 1999).

5 Refer to the Stop Trans Pathologization campaign (2012) and the Best Practices Guide to Trans Health Care in the National Health System within Stop Trans Pathologization campaign (2012).

However, the narrative according to which gender consists of a series of repeated social practices that reproduce and grant a material nature to the normative system of sex/gender collides with other stances, according to which people who wish to change their bodies in order to correlate with their experienced gender claim as suitable and legitimate the masculine or feminine identities that are difficult to attain to them by the norm that governs correspondence between bodies and identities. Institutional recognition is needed of different forms of identification and the body modifications that these identifications require. In this way, the perspective informed by the performative concept of identity has been called into question because, although recognising the importance of the material nature and incarnation in the construction of sex and gender, it is precisely the body that disappears in these increasingly abstract theorisations of gender and desire (Coll-Planas, 2012; Prosser, 1998). The ability of the performative perspective to explain and represent a considerable part of the experience of the trans community is also called into question:

> "there are transgendered trajectories, in particular transsexual trajectories, that aspire to what this scheme devalues. Namely, there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be non-performative, to be constative, quite simply to be" (Prosser, 1998, p. 32).

In accordance with Viviane Namaste (2000, 2005), for example, the majority of transsexual and transgender people are not interested in questioning the hegemonic ideas about identity, or in becoming involved in the cultural analysis of gender. This author accuses some theorists, such as Butler or Halberstam, who support this perspective, of being insensitive towards the fundamental matters of daily life of transgender people, and of appropriating trans identities in the interest of their own theoretical projects criticising sex/gender binarism. Sally Hines (2006), conversely, condemns a tendency towards the homogenisation of identities from performative perspectives due to the failure of these theories to investigate the particular characteristics of the different life situations of people.

These different stances have provoked discussions about whether institutional order around transgender identities reinforce the essential and deterministic relation between sex and gender, and contribute to strengthening the established opposition between the masculine and the feminine (Schleifer, 2006). Tension is shown between a performative concept of sex/gender, which seeks to reject essentialism and questions the man-woman binomial, and the institutional order which, assuming this binarism, makes this assumption obligatory for people that have the right to live in accordance with the sex/gender to which they feel they pertain (Elliot, 2009).

Likewise, recent discussions have noticed a kind of "neoliberal" model of the queer character, according to which there are as many genders and sexes as there are bodies: a position regarding identity that is announced as an infinite collection of gendered bodies (Halberstam, 2010). It is considered that this reading often overestimates people's capacity to decide about their sexuality and sets out scenarios of self-construction that are accessible - materially and symbolically - to very few people. Furthermore, it is criticised that, rather than breaking with the dominant gender discourse, some queer readings can contribute to reinforcing it:

> "they fall into the same game of neoliberal ideology that fosters an obsession about the desire to obstruct the creation of strengths that consider other questions related to material needs, where concessions would have to be made and variations in the correlation of strengths would have to be faced" (López, 2008, p. 304).

Therefore, the debate related to the ontological concepts with which trans identities are examined mixes, in turn, with the discussion about the specific material conditions (public policies, administration and access to sanitary resources) relating to trans people in particular geopolitical contexts. Judith Butler (2004, p. 76) describes this controversy as follows:

> "Thus, on the one hand, the diagnosis continues to be valued because it facilitates an economically feasible way of transitioning. On the other hand, the diagnosis is adamantly opposed because it continues to pathologize as a mental disorder what ought to be understood instead as one among many human possibilities of determining one's gender for oneself […] One can see from the above sketch that there is a tension in this debate between those who are, for the purposes of the debate, trying to gain entitlement and financial assistance, and those who seek to ground the practice of transsexuality in a notion of autonomy. We might well hesitate at once and ask whether these two views are actually in opposition to one another."

In view of this dilemma, some trans activists and researchers have proposed a change of direction that moves from the "paradigm of disorder" to the "paradigm of diversity" (Missé & Coll-Planas, 2010). In accordance with these authors, the key point lies in not confusing, or equating, "error" and "variant" when explaining the origin of transsexuality. The way in which the medical discourse incorporates these two words as synonyms is quite remarkable, when the use of one or another term "situates us in different paradigms and generates political effects" (Missé & Coll-Planas, 2010, p. 48). Whereas the idea of "variant" leads us to the radical singularity of every person who cannot be reduced to a rigid dichotomy (precisely because of the existence of multiple variants), the notion of "error" refers to a supposedly normal and healthy development from which trans people stray. Noticing this distinction and committing to diversity means moving from the paradigm of illness to that of Human Rights, where the free expression of people's gender must be recognised as a fundamental human right (Spades, 2011).

Towards a situaded approach to sex/ gender identities

The possibility afforded by the "paradigm of diversity," proposed by Missé and Coll-Planas (2010), is linked to the discussion about the open and relational nature of identity that we outline above, and in some way defends different ways of experiencing sex and gender as well as the possible transitions that can take place in different personal trajectories. As Stephen Whittle (2006) argues: cultural spaces and diverse historiography constantly reshape the community, identities, cultures, and even language; new terms and new grammars are continuously developed in different places (this is the case of *gender bender* or *trans* in contemporary English-speaking communities) and these neologisms often coexist with voices that inherit an ancestral tradition (such as *muxes* in Mexico and *hijras* in India) (Barbosa & Bensusan, 2012). Moreover, Whittle (2006) argues that the active participation of trans people in the dawn of the Internet and new information technology has been

crucial to developing a diverse and geographically disperse trans community; a network of exchange and dialogue that facilitates the emergence of multiple ways of experiencing identity itself.

In any case, the challenges posed by trans question go beyond the assumption of a critical change of direction in sex/gender concepts. The result of the deconstructive exercise that critical perspectives have applied to categorical values, and to gender, in particular have questioned, at least in part, stability of sex/gender. The question that remains is whether or not, in this deconstructive period, a reconstructive process can occur. As indicated (Rubin, 2003; Ryan, 2004; Whittle, 2006), the question lies in how trans people can recover the notion of *gender* - as a self-concept instrument - to generate processes of intelligibility concerning their own identity trajectory, and create collective spaces of recognition and affirmation. Although the notion of gender has been diluted and trans identities can represent ambiguous gaps or non-places in this territory, daily life exposes them to stigma and exclusion based on the dominant framework posed by cisgenderism.

This is, on the contrary, the interrogation with which trans identities challenge critical perspectives stemming mainly from a constructionist and queer background. Although these identities reveal the malleability, porosity and artificiality of naturalised identity categories, take part in the subversion of the heteronormative and essentialist order, and provide ways to transcend binarism and think of the body in different terms, what is certain is that today a large majority of trans people find themselves compelled to survive in contexts where gender is strictly controlled. And so, transphobia intensifies outside some safe spaces in politicised everyday contexts, and is no longer based on genitals or desire, but on how identity can (or cannot) perform in ways that contradict the heteronormative framework.

5. Final considerations. Towards a situated knowledge of identities: trans-knowledge

The situation exposed shows that although the performative/queer perspective is a powerful instrument to denaturalise dominant categories and reveal their power relations, as well as to carry out a convincing critique of the ways in which the "psy" disciplines contribute to the pathologisation of the trans group, it is essential to avoid its dominance as the only valid narrative concerning the experiences and interests of a multiplicity of ways of inhabiting gender, since one of the possible risks of this situation consists of replacing a normative canon with another; in this case, the biomedical model with the deconstruction model. Paradoxically, a perspective that opens the sex/gender categories up to an emancipating indeterminacy can become, in certain circumstances, a new prescriptive code about how sex/gender identities should be understood or approached.

Although it is crucial to preserve the critical background of the constructionist and queer perspectives to highlight the way in which different semiotic-material practices form -instead of reflect- identities, we must, at the same time, seek to guarantee the possibility that a multiplicity of narratives can emerge and coexist; multiplicity that not only arises from the

diverse possibilities of identification and the cultural resources to bring them to fruition, but facilitated by the different life trajectories, rooted in the specific lives of people, their experiences, desires and needs in particular geopolitical contexts. In other words, narratives that facilitate an account of situated experiences where, despite having different versions, for example, about the role of biology in relation to identity, it is possible to construct intelligibility and autonomy for personal trajectories and contextualised groups.

In this regard, the idea of *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1991) is relevant to approach this multiplicity of positions and concepts of sex/gender identities. Haraway (1991) argues that the relativism resulting from constructionist concepts taken uncritically can hinder the affirmation of stances and protest possibilities concerning a specific matter, and therefore, it becomes tricky ground to demand or propose better conditions for marginalised social subjects. Situated knowledge, on the contrary, seeks to generate a concept of "objectivity" that takes the existence of a multiplicity of notions and experiences about a particular matter seriously. While the contingent and partial nature of all knowledge is described and an attempt is made to critically recognise the semiotic-material devices that produce it, there is also interest in generating well-founded and reliable links with testimonies, experiences and positions located in a real and specific world (Nightingale, 2003).

This sensitivity, therefore, invites us to generate an approach towards sex/gender identities that recognises their position as temporary and non-essential "sutures," but that also facilitates the emergence of different structures of intelligibility and habitability around them, encouraging a situated and strategically diverse theorisation. Thus, not only are the identities contingent and political, but so, too, are the approaches towards them.

In this logic, we can say that these debates demand a disposition towards transmutation and an affirmation of identity concepts according to localised socio-political contexts. Like trans identities, the ways in which sex/gender identities are approached can pass through different moments, different degrees of stability or change, and can seek or require different degrees of adherence or vagueness regarding the normative canons, all in relation to particular itineraries that are facilitated by equally diverse, everyday structures. Opening up to problematisation and to the situated exchange of ontological frameworks about identity, can contribute towards escaping from homogenising and totalising readings (whether these are "alternative" or "mainstream"), and help to generate spaces that promote coexistence, dialogue and alliances within the multiplicity inside - and outside - the trans community.

We can refer to this disposition through the figure of *trans-knowledge* (Martínez-Guzmán & Montenegro, 2010). The perspective of trans-knowledge aims to manage the diversity of the different critical movements related to the dominant sex/gender system in the framework of localised contexts where these struggles take place. It seeks to be a notion that suggests spaces to create alliances that are not based on dogmatic or definitive theoretical or ontological perspectives, but that respond to the desires, needs and possibilities of groups in specific situations. The direction of knowledge about identity will, therefore, be from bottom to top, and the transformation strategies will be contextually multiple. The notion of trans-knowledge helps us to think about the connections and concomitance between different movements and initiatives which, in a certain context, can generate allianc-

es in one direction. It involves analysing static definitions and identifying settled practices that predefine a specific political field to construct -on the basis of elements that involved in this field- transforming practices and understandings that represent new subject positions. Such is the case, for example, of the different initiatives of groups that had been the subjects of psychiatry, which mobilised against pathologisation.

In the same way that we consider that committing to non-essentialist perspectives of identity and, especially, to non-pathologising perspectives, should be a common starting point and has a considerable transforming potential, it is equally relevant to generate mobile and self-critical approaches towards trans identities; approaches that do not reproduce an expression of homogeneous theorisation, but that acquire meaning and legitimacy with regard to the specific semiotic-material conditions of actors in a given social field. Thus, since there is no resource of universal truth on which we can base our argument, the issue of the legitimacy of knowledge is relegated to the level of the local issues of *effect* and *inclusion* produced by the identity categories themselves (Lewis, 2003).

Trans-knowledge seeks to give rise to paradoxical and ambivalent readings that question the dominant order of sex/gender and celebrate alternative practices, at the same time that they are sensitive to the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives of those who incorporate these practices. Trans-knowledge does not reject the use of identity categories, but it does not hide behind them. It does not seek to solidify perspectives, nor to bring identity positions to a closure, but to keep both open to the possibility of transformation hoping to generate increasingly inclusive social conditions.

What is important in this case is not only the (re)production and use of identity categories (man, woman, transgender), but the debate about the divisions that are established and the spectrum of possibility that they generate. From here, theorisation about sex/gender is not understood as a descriptive method, but as a *performative* method, since these approaches will facilitate or hinder certain transformation and agency movements, of specific collective demands in favour of more habitable conditions and greater possibilities of self-determination.

Regarding *situated* perspective of knowledge and policy about identity, it is interesting to generate conditions of self-determination and autonomy in each given context. However, this is not an ideal or abstract autonomy, but rather, a partial but specific autonomy that successively acquires depth according to its localised implementation, and that is always closely related to a social context. In accordance with Castoriadis (1988), individual autonomy only acquires full meaning if the community is not lost, but the community that we are discussing here is a specific and *embodied* dialogue.

The subject of sexual dissidence is often thought of as an individual submerged in a personal process of self-construction, turned into itself through its agency ("active towards oneself, but not towards others") and making its sexuality a type of personalised mark (Coll-Planas, 2012). However, in second place are the social forces that grant or prohibit these possibilities, and the collective projects of transformation in the pursuit of sufficiently inclusive coalitions and spaces. Therefore, it does not entail supporting a private or individual place of identity construction (my genes, my gender, my perspective, my choice), but

rather, pointing towards a collective agreement, the result of a transverse relation of the differences within, and across, communities. The aspiration driving this perspective is to always see with the Other, but never in his/her place (Preciado, 2004b). The desired result is an understanding of identities (normative and non-normative) produced by a particular community and useful to this community.

From this perspective, for example, we observe a renewal of the recognition and legitimacy of the identity struggles that particular groups have had to face in certain moments and contexts in order to widen the possibilities of autonomy and wellbeing of the trans community. Autonomy, in this sense, consists of the gradual exercise of questioning the specific laws that control our conditions as individual and collective subjects, and the quest for political and social frameworks that facilitate different degrees of self-determination (and less coercion) regarding forms of identification that are possible in a given space.

In this endeavour to approach and recognise the multiplicity of possible identity positions, the contributions of post-colonial and decolonial perspectives to accomplish the task are profoundly valuable (Romero, 2005). Recognising that sex/gender identities and, particularly, non-normative identities, are interdependent on other categories and positions within different regimens of knowledge and power (e.g. identity and non-identity policies), leads to the generation of more complex approaches that are better equipped to consider their transformation. Political and cultural configurations typical of local contexts have a considerable influence on the way in which transsexual and transgender identity is experienced and, more extensively, the way in which sex/gender identities are formed.

The perspectives that link dissident sex/gender identities with other political identity codes, and that seek to generate an analysis that considers the material and geopolitically determined conditions, set out very interesting paths (Anzaldúa, 1990; Somerville, 2000). This is because they incorporate socio-political dynamics that are not confined to individual sexuality, and that have a powerful influence on the ordering that produces some identities (and not others), that promote or hinder movements or fixations, and lead to the mobilisation of relevant sex-gender categories.

Considering the challenge posed in these debates, it becomes relevant to point towards situated approaches towards sex/gender identities, which grant an ontological and epistemological value to the local semiotic and material conditions, and which are interested in specific and meaningful strategies of social transformation for trans communities in their complex heterogeneity. Likewise, a critical analysis of other identity forms, beyond isolated sexuality itself, is also useful to obtain more complex concepts of identity and to reveal the wider social structure that conditions it and sets it within certain fields of possibility. Finally, the challenge consists of producing situated knowledge about specific identities in everyday worlds; knowledge that is theoretically sophisticated, but also politically committed and, especially, relevant in practical life, with the aim of creating more habitable spaces.

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