Primary School Teachers Misrecognizing Trans Identities? Religious, Cultural, and Decolonial Assemblages

Deevia Bhana, PhD

Abstract

Background: Teachers’ support for addressing cisgenderism and cisnormative cultures in schools is necessary to support students’ freedom to express gender in expansive ways and to embrace trans identities. However, few questions are asked about how primary school teachers grapple with trans identities in South Africa.

Purpose: The article fills this gap by focusing on how school teachers negotiate their understandings of gender identity and gender expression by showing their capacities and potential in creating a trans-affirmative climate in primary school.

Participants: Participants were 30 self-identified heterosexual primary school teachers of diverse race and class backgrounds who were located in one primary school in South Africa.

Research Design: This qualitative study employed in-depth face-to-face and telephone-based semi-structured individual interviews. The article draws from new feminist materialist approaches to “assemblages” and decolonial thinking to consider how participants negotiated gender expectations.

Findings: Trans identity is conflated with being gay and misrecognized through a reliance on historically produced religious and cultural norms that are part of the colonial and apartheid legacies in South Africa. While the trans assemblage shows potential to challenge and question the sex-gender conflation, historical legacies, suffused with cis-heteronormative logics, lead to a fundamental misrecognition and erasure of trans as a sign of being gay.

Conclusions/Recommendations: The utility of a decolonial trans assemblage is evident in examining how epistemic erasure occurs through historical mechanisms, while denaturalizing the reliance on binary gendered systems and Western knowledge. If primary schools are to support gender-expansive ways of being, addressing how
historical processes, cisgenderism, and cisnormative cultures permeate teachers’ understanding of gender remains vital work.

**Keywords**
gender, primary school teachers, transgender, assemblages, decolonial, South Africa

Debbie: In South Africa, in my age group, with the kind of Calvinistic education . . . we were literally brainwashed into believing that people had a place and a box to fit in whether it be your color, your gender, your age. . . (White female, age 52)

Siya: We, the cultural people, the black people . . . are more aligned to what we know, which is male and female. (Black male, age 27)

A striking feature of research and debate on gender and sexuality in South African schooling is that questions about how primary school teachers understand and grapple with transgender people are hardly commented on. Although teachers could play a central role in confronting the pathologization of “gender-nonconforming people to traditional gender normativities” (Camminga, 2017, p. 2), a focus on primary school teachers’ “trans informed gender justice” work (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018) is missing in the country. Trans is a practice that “assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being, and that allows for their reassembly” (Stryker et al., 2008, p. 13), and it is both a disciplinary tool and a line of flight. Because transgender people do not align with the sex and gender assigned to them at birth (Ansara & Hegarty, 2013; Namaste, 2000), teachers’ “cultural intelligibility,” through which “bodies, genders and desires are naturalized” (Butler, 1990), may be challenged. This could open up possibilities for questioning cisgenderism—“the discriminatory ideology that delegitimizes people’s own designations of their genders and bodies” (Ansara & Hegarty, 2013, p. 162). Bodies and gender are entangled with ideological and cultural framings about birth-assigned sex (Neary, 2021), which relies on cisnormative male–female binaries and cisgenderism (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020). Cisgenderism and cisnormative cultures can thus erase, marginalize, and misgender individuals. Furthermore, the common conflation of trans with homosexuality often results in misrecognition, which, as this article shows, is deeply embroiled in the remnants of—and continued power assigned to—the cis-heteropatriarchal colonial-apartheid project.

This article examines teachers’ understandings of gender identity and gender expression to illustrate their potential to address “trans-affirmative and gender expansive practices” (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018, p. 687), in line with the legal protection offered in South Africa to trans and gender-diverse people. Given this context and the need to address cisgenderism, trans-affirming approaches in schools are vital. Teachers’ support can foster and embrace more expansive ways of doing gender
(Martino & Omercajic, 2021; Paechter, 2021). However, this requires an analysis of cismisgenderism and cisnormativity in teachers’ conceptualizations of gender.

The fragments of conversations with primary school teachers Debbie (white) and Siya (black), with which this article began, introduce two central arguments that form the basis of this study. The first argument, as noted by Debbie, relates to normative conceptions around religion and their embeddedness with Calvinistic education, which was used by the apartheid state to indoctrinate Christian religious principles and heterosexual monogamy and to reinforce racial inequalities. Such religious codification produced contempt for nonnormative sexualities, and, through proselytizing activities, indigenous customary practices were harnessed to serve both religious laws (and the extirpation of nonnormative sexualities) and women’s subordination. Critical to this process of delegitimizing bodies and genders is the discriminatory ideology of cismisgenderism, the binary production of sex and gender, and the conflation of all other sexualities with homosexuality. It is important to emphasize that this sex–gender conflation is suffused with cis-heteronormative logics and, hence, a particular sort of assemblage that leads to a fundamental misrecognition and erasure of trans, and of gender nonnormative expression as being gay.

The second argument explicated by the teachers is inextricably entwined with the first. Local customary practices and Christian religious laws coalesce to reinforce cis-heteropatriarchal norms (Thornberry, 2019), which foreclose understanding trans identity by reducing it to a manifestation of homosexuality. As Delius and Glaser (2002) noted, contemporary customary practices have “mutated,” shaped by socioreligious, historical, and material forces. Siya presents Zulu “cultural people” as reaffirming the cis-heteropatriarchal gender binary and firmly understanding gender as mapping neatly onto sex. Among the isiZulu majority in KwaZulu-Natal province, scholars have suggested that customary practices underpinned by gender and generational hierarchies revolve around respect for elders and deferential conduct that is deeply embroiled in heterosexuality (Hunter, 2010; White, 2016). “We [Zulu], the cultural people” is an entanglement of race, ethnicity, customary practices, cis-heterosexual compulsion, and disassociation from (and misrecognition of) trans identity. Several scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which Zulu cultural practices, while always changing, uphold gendered, spiritual, and ancestral meanings that are based on male–female dualism and reinforced through historical association and convergence with Christian principles (Hunter, 2010; Rudwick & Posel, 2014). This complex web through which nonnormative genders are rendered outside of Zulu cultural life is also used to demarcate appropriate ways of being Zulu. “We, the cultural people” uses “Zuluness” to patrol gendered behavior and provides legitimacy to labeling gender diversity as “un-African.” Zuluness and customary practices are invoked to delineate a collectively produced obligation that associates custom with Zulu identity, the maintenance of the male–female binary, and the process through which trans identities are denied and pathologized. As I will show, the portrayal of gender within religious and cultural realms has profound effects on the capacity for teachers to address and support trans-inclusive schooling in South Africa. Of concern here is an overall
gendered system in which gender nonconforming expressions are read as a sign of homosexuality.

The aggregation of social-material, religious, and cultural relationalities forms what Doan (2010) referred to as the “tyranny of gender,” through which teachers’ potential to support and challenge gender normativity—and specifically cisgender-ism—is apprehended. However, as Butler (2004) noted,

transgender itself enters into the political field . . . by not only making us question what is real, and what has to be, but by showing us how contemporary notions of reality can be questioned, and new modes of reality instituted. (p. 217)

In this article, I extend this analysis to show how cis-binary categorizations of gender within local cultural framings fail to include trans and more expansive understandings of gender and embodiment. Thinking about trans as a practice and an assemblage has the potential to challenge cisgenderism and its binarized logic, opening up alternative ways of understanding gender identity and trans personhood that decenter the assumed authority granted to birth-assigned gender. In other words, this potential encompasses a broader, more expansive understanding of gender beyond a minoritized focus. This requires, as Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2018) stated, “attention to the institutionalized regimes of cisnormativity and cisgenderism and their harmful impact, which affect all individuals with respect to the constraints that they pose for embracing more creative and independent gender expansive understandings and practices” (p. 689). The potential of teachers to question what is real enables possibilities for disentangling gender from its oppressive binaries and working toward new configurations and capacities. This potential is made possible through a decolonial trans assemblage, the focus of the next section.

Decolonial Trans Assemblages

Central to this article is a conceptualization of primary school teachers’ perspectives of trans within a decolonial assemblage, within which their misrecognition is bound to religious-cultural norms and cisgenderism that are rooted in and mutated through the effects of colonialism and apartheid. Teachers’ misrecognition of trans is based on the authority granted to the gender assigned at birth, and within a dualistic cis-heteropatriarchal framework and an “effect to be explained” (Ansara, 2010). Bartholomaeus and Riggs’s (2017) concept of erasing—referring to the denial of people “whose gender differs from that normatively expected of their assigned sex at birth” (p. 15)—is useful for explaining how primary school teachers make sense of trans. Such erasure means that it is not possible to “see” gender except through cisgenderism, and so trans and gender-expansive identities are misrecognized and pathologized. Individuals who differ from the gender assigned at birth are thereby denied an existence.

Cisgenderism is thus maintained through erasing and delegitimizing trans people. Built into this institutionalized system of unmarked privilege and gender entitlement
(Serano, 2013) is a fundamental misrecognition of trans identity and a refusal of trans personhood, which is collapsed into a cisgenderist-heteronormative binary. At the same time, however, the very basis of misrecognition and erasing allows cisgenderism and cis-heterosexual cultures to be challenged. This challenge creates the “space for the emergence of counter discourses so as to multiply the available range of gender identities and decentre the prescriptive capacities” (Vincent & Camminga, 2009, p. 697) of the cisgenderist framework. Following Camminga (2019), the aggregation of social-historical-religious and cultural forces makes particular capacities available. Misrecognition is complexly entwined within these entangling forces.

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of assemblage illuminates the complex interplay between normative forces and transformative capacities that can yield a positive pathway to thinking about what teachers can do in addressing trans inclusivity in primary schooling, beyond simply viewing teachers as key actors in proliferating gender normativities based on social-religious and cultural norms. A decolonial trans assemblage is thus useful for examining the ways in which epistemic erasure occurs through historical mechanisms and hierarchically ordered conceptions of knowledge, while denaturalizing the reliance on binary gendered systems and Western knowledge.

Colonialism and apartheid in South Africa were based on rigid notions of gender, race, and sexuality, which criminalized sodomy and put the body under (legal) surveillance. In writing about trans experiences in South Africa under apartheid, Vincent and Camminga (2009) suggested that the repressive apparatus of the state and the idealization of heterosexual white masculinity revolving around racial purity and male power produced a context in which nonnormative genders were erased, denied, and under constant surveillance. Apartheid South Africa, they argued, was a highly charged militarized state underpinned by tightly knit norms around patriarchy, race, and gender, and through which Christian national principles were mobilized to regulate racialized and gender binaries. In this system, cis-heteronormativity and male-female dualism were preserved.

The end of apartheid in 1994 has provided expansive opportunities for the freedom of sexual expression. Yet, Vincent and Camminga (2009) pointed out that it is a less favorable environment for the trans community—a consequence of the intractable framing of cisgenderism and the injunction to fix identity to that assigned at birth. Teachers’ perspectives are interwoven with these notions of sexuality and gender that curtail new possibilities through misrecognition based on the bifurcation of gender and sexuality.

In the book Heterosexual Africa?, Epprecht (2008) draws attention to the imposition of white-cis-heteropatriarchal hegemonies and their effects with respect to a colonial logics of enforced gender and sexual binaries. He shows how coloniality produced a singular heterosexual narrative of African societies but that, before colonial domination, gender and sexuality were considered much more fluid. Such decolonial challenges are not unique to Africa. In the United States and Canada, for instance, Morgensen (2016) and Driskill (2010) focused on Two Spirit peoples and the ways in which colonial and racialized violence was based on the pursuit of erasing gender creativity to a singular binary narrative of heterosexuality.
This binary system thus has a historical basis, embedded within the civilizing project of the West, and has been highly racialized (Mbembe, 2000). The binary system through which gender diversity is delegitimized is thus, as I will show, conjoined with race, gender, sexuality, religion, patriarchy, and apartheid/colonialism—all elements through which subjugation and relations of power are produced. Colonialism and apartheid cannot, therefore, be disregarded in the production of teachers’ knowledge of gender, sexuality, and culture; indeed, the historical roots of their notions of trans identities are often reinforced, and this provides specific capacities for teachers to validate cisgenderism. Simply put, coloniality continues to be the air we breathe, and it fortifies hierarchies and entrenches cis-heterosexual hegemonies.

In this configuration of sexuality, trans identities and personhood are outside of canonical thought and practice. Epistemic erasure is intricately entwined in historically produced notions of sex, sexuality, gender, and race, and embedded in cis-heteropatriarchal colonial assemblages of gender and sexual hierarchies that were enforced and imposed on African people. As scholars working on African sexualities have suggested, the everyday operation of power is very much part of the lives of the “coloniality of beings” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 240; see also Nyeck, 2021; Spronk & Hendriks, 2020; Tamale, 2020). Within this context of coloniality, teachers’ perspectives on gender diversity raise important questions about how epistemic erasure functions and how an understanding of trans is colonially coded. In this configuration, it is treated as a sexual identity and embodied through naturalization and cultural and religious discourses, and conflated with “being gay.” Coloniality thus remains deeply entangled with the contemporary context.

As Debbie and Siya noted in the introductory interview excerpts, culture and Calvinistic traditions are entangled with heteropatriarchal epistemic projects that have legitimized particular ways of being and knowing (Tamale, 2020). Of importance here is noting that no cultural or social system is unaffected by colonial logics. While Siya suggests that Zulu cultural authenticity is based on a binary system of gender, as Spronk and Hendriks (2020) noted, culture is co-constituted in socio-material processes, systems of rituals, religion, and subjection to colonial logics and an ongoing process of invention and reinvention. These cultural ways of knowing, as Camminga (2019) showed, are based on a binary organization of gender that objects to mixing gender and sexualities in ways that prohibit expansive ways of being and personhood. When gender diversity is relegated to homosexuality, trans identity is reduced to same-sex desires and the tropes associated with it. Gender and sexual hierarchies are thus part and parcel of a cis-heteropatriarchal colonial regime that treats gender and sexuality in binary terms, and as fixed and static.

The endeavor to decolonize knowledge that is based on a rigid categorization of gender and a misrecognition of trans, and to theorize from teachers’ own perspectives, is an attempt to illustrate the ways in which historical processes are embroiled in the epistemic erasure and subordination of trans identity. Beyond this, a decolonial focus, as illustrated by Tudor (2021) and Allen (2016), offers a space for negotiation. It aims
to denaturalize the sole reliance on religion and culture as canonical and thereby question the disciplinary framework through which the “tyranny of gender” manifests (Butler, 2004; Doan, 2010).

Following Camminga (2019) and Tudor (2021), a decolonial perspective on gender is “conceptualizing it as always already trans” (Tudor, 2021, p. 238). Decolonial thinking is about objection to colonial embedded norms. The idea here is that decolonial thinking and gender converge to question dominant ways of knowing gender and to challenge “the conditions that cause trans phenomena to stand out in the first place, and that allow gender normativity to disappear into the unanalyzed, ambient background’ (Stryker, 2006, p. 3). Decolonizing gender is thus always trans (Tudor, 2021).

In this sense, gender is under a constant interrogation to loosen itself from its binary and cisgenderist hooks (Ansara & Hegarty, 2013) and make space for new ways of knowing and thinking gender that do not reduce it to a fundamental misrecognition as a sign of homosexuality. Decolonizing gender thus demands a review of naturalization, culture, and religious forces as universal ways of knowing, pointing away from fixity to gender malleability and a refusal of cisgenderism.

According to Camminga (2019), despite the power of binary gendered systems, trans is malleable. Its malleability is defined through its ability to travel through different geographical spaces and is marked by different cultural, political, and social conditions that allow for different meanings. As Stryker et al. (2008) stated, “Any gender-defined space is not only populated with diverse forms of gendered embodiment, but striated and cross hatched by the boundaries of significant forms of difference other than gender, within all of which gender is necessarily implicated” (p. 12). Trans conceptualized here as travel, and striated by other forms of difference, is simultaneously transforming in that it changes and is inflected by local settings, including gender, race, class, and customary practices. Gender may often be fixed according to a dualistic notion based on a “God-eye view” (Grosfoguel, 2012, p. 27) or local customary practices, but it is flexible and dissected by legislative changes, bodies, forms of expression, content, and ideas, and can therefore be transgressive. Decolonizing trans therefore involves an examination of the ways in which epistemic erasure occurs through teachers’ production of knowledge, which has a historical basis and is hierarchically ordered but is also malleable and open to new potentials.

A decolonial trans conceptualization of teachers’ views is valuable in that it challenges cisgenderism and provides possibilities for thinking and entangling ideas that are not fixed or bound to a binary system of knowledge. This requires, as Bettcher (2014) indicated, a focus on the “representational relation between gender presentation and genitalia,” where there are “different resistant gender practices” (p. 403). Applying Hickey-Moody and Malins’ (2007) idea of malleable concepts to trans, it is possible to see trans not as predetermined, but as always on the move or travelling (Camminga, 2019), being reinvented from the perspectives of teachers themselves as they both reinforce and question cisgenderism. Concepts, as Coleman and Ringrose (2013) suggested, are creative and can be plugged in various ways to enable new ways of thinking.
In putting decoloniality and trans together, this article draws on the ways in which concepts and thoughts “flow within assemblages of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions” (Fox & Alldred, 2013, p. 769). Here, I am interested in the ways that teachers’ capacities are produced, intra-act, and are affected by other materialities in the assemblage. Materialities constitute bodies, objects, things, and ideas, and are entangled with social forces in everyday life (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). It is in the relations and entanglements between the material and social forces that teachers’ perspectives are produced. In between social-material dimensions of everyday life, specific trans patterns become visible and are negotiated, accommodated, and refused. Thus, nothing is fixed and is always heterogenous, fluid, travelling, and changing, providing possibilities for questioning, interrogating, and challenging cisgenderism. Assemblages, therefore, provide a framing through which dynamic intra-actions between and across gendered spaces can provide insight into the reassembling of gender through a disciplinary gaze and as a path, or flight, toward becoming something different. The assemblage does not privilege the teacher as the sole agent making sense of trans, but the analytical optic moves from the human to movement, flows, and affects. Within the assemblage—which is always dynamic—things, objects, ideas are always moving or traveling and continuously form new ways of doing and thinking (Fox & Alldred, 2015). The interconnection within the assemblage produces affective flows and creates capacities to generate new assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). As Colebrook (2002) said, “The law of any assemblage is created from its connections” (p. xx). These connections are related to a cis-heteropatriarchal assemblage of colonial domination and resistance to its laws that comes with a decolonial and anticolonial embracing of trans. This capacity is produced as bodies and elements affect or are affected by other bodies and elements within the assemblage (Coleman, 2008), affective flows that are the product of intra-actions and entanglements within socio-material spaces. It is these flows and intra-actions that I explore to examine how teachers make sense of trans identity. Teachers’ sense-making, as noted, cannot be extricated from the cisgenderist colonial apartheid system that has perpetuated the pathologization of trans identity, its conflation with homosexuality, and the erasing of the multivalent ways of becoming gendered. Thus, the need to address the politics of the continued subjugation of—and desubjugating (Stryker, 2006)—trans from its colonial hooks remains vital in decolonizing trans assemblages. Camminga (2017) suggested that decolonizing trans involves attention to subjective, situational, and lived experiences in order to denaturalize cisgenderism and the fixation on the anatomical power granted to gender assigned at birth, and the norms attached to gender. This requires critical recognition of the South African historical and social landscape, how “gender operates within a colonial matrix of power,” and the “toxic nature of gender” (Camminga, 2017, p. 34), in that gender is also implicated in other matrices of power and oppression. As such, a decolonial trans assemblage can draw attention to cisgendered erasing, misrecognition, and pathologization, while critically engaging with the potential for radical gender politics.
A decolonial trans assemblage is dynamic and permits different possibilities and capacities to arise through different connections and intra-actions. The assemblage is a whole made up of different parts that, as DeLanda (2006) stated, can be “detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (p. 20). This process is one that is never static, always fluid, transforming, moving, and reassembling, based on different force relations and flows of energy (Fox & Bale, 2018). Thus, assemblages do not “operate as a free flow of energy or desire, but are cut through with relations of power” (Ringrose, 2013, p. 81). As Camminga (2019) illustrated, gender normativities can close down gender creativity but can also de-territorialize and offer new possibilities and capacities in thinking trans—a “potential that far exceeds what is currently understood as the sexual” (Fox & Bale, 2018, p. 405).

Using the concept of the “rhizome,” Deleuze and Guattari (1988) suggested that assemblages can move, change, and reverse as they continuously assemble to create new assemblages. Within this movement of things, ideas, objects, bodies, and discourses, teachers’ capacities to “territorialize” and reproduce static accounts of gender become possible, as does the potential to “de-territorialize” elements by shifting and transforming connections. Territorializing can “either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it” (DeLanda, 2006, p. 12). Through the process of de-territorializing gender and refusing its cisgendered, colonial-apartheid manifestations, new possibilities and becomings are realizable. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988) suggested, “lines of flight” are transformative and hold potential for change. Because the assemblage functions in ways that plug in with different elements, it can also reverse and change to “re-territorialize” previous assemblages. For teachers’ understandings of trans, this means there is the potential to express lines of flight, transformation, and new becomings, and also to plug into old ways of being that can reaffirm colonial- and apartheid-produced logics, gender binaries, and anti-trans perspectives.

This article suggests that developing a decolonial trans assemblage framing opens the space for considering teachers’ potential to provide a trans-informed gender justice approach in primary schooling. In doing so, the article foregrounds trans politics as a necessary move toward decolonial shifts and a trans-informed gender justice approach that has to date, with few exceptions, been dominated by a focus on gay male identities (Makofane, 2013).

Methods

This research draws on a larger project entitled “Learning From the Learners: Growing Up as Girls and Boys and Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in and Outside of School.” The study engages with learners, teachers, and parents to understand how young people understand gender identity and how schools can support trans inclusion and enable healthy sexual development for all learners. One of the key areas in the larger project is a focus on trans and what this means for gender and sexual diversity in schools.
across a range of race- and class-specific school contexts in 10 primary and high schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. In this article, I draw from semi-structured interviews conducted with 30 teachers in one primary school. Under apartheid, the school was designated all-white, but after more than 25 years of democracy and changing demographics, the racial makeup is altering. Historically, white schools were strikingly different from black schools in terms of resources, school performance, access to teachers, and teacher–learner ratios.

The teachers who participated in the study were recruited by a trained researcher who was working in the school, and their participation was based on their willingness and availability to engage with the researcher. The sample constituted 24 self-identified female and six male teachers, so he/she pronouns are used in this article. All participants were aged 27–54 years. Two identified as colored, 14 as white, six as Indian, and eight as black. These racial categories emerge out of apartheid and still have saliency in the post-apartheid experience as they illustrate particular histories and experiences in relation to power.

The study was approved by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the university. All ethical considerations were met. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point. Semi-structured interviews were 30–45 minutes long and were conducted using photo-elicitation methods and vignettes; in this article, I draw only on the interviews as a data source for my analysis. Three interviews were conducted by telephone, and 27 were face-to-face interviews. The interviews focused on teachers’ knowledge and experience in dealing with trans as a gender category, and their own positionality regarding religion, culture, and the possibilities of teaching about trans inclusion in line with an expansive sexuality education program in primary schools. Within this semi-structured schedule of interviews, participants were encouraged to express their thoughts about what mattered to them in understanding trans identities.

Following Ingram (2021), I understand the teachers’ narratives or verbal data as enactments where the socio-religious-cultural materialities are entangled and produce affective forces, intensities, and capacities as they talk about trans. Like Barad (2007), I view their talk as material articulations that intra-act within a specific moment and under specific social-historical positionings. A teacher’s particular narrative is thus a momentary articulation, based on the availability of specific entities, materialities, bodies, ideas, discourses, and thoughts, and is therefore open-ended and part of the ongoing process of becoming (Renold & Ringrose, 2013). In other words, while I focus on teachers’ own voices about trans, there is nothing central about the teachers. Instead—and within a Baradian (2007) conception of knowledge—teachers’ words are fragments of lively matter within an assemblage where everything is entangled and intra-acting to produce capacities and potential for change, or are constrained as they apprehend trans identities within cis-heteronormative logics. In this regard, teachers’ histories, ideas, discourses, gender, sexuality, understandings of trans, religion, race, and ethnicity all assemble to create particular intensities. They aggregate to form the vibrancy and affective capacities that generate the assemblage.
In making sense of the multiple ways through which affective capacities were generated with respect to (mis)understanding and (mis)recognizing transness, I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to identify some of the main themes and patterns through which the colonial assemblage can be delineated and resisted as part of a commitment to embracing a critical trans decolonial project. In this regard, the data were read and reread, and patterns were identified and developed, producing the themes that I describe in the next section.

Analysis

Trans Assemblages: Religious Cis-Hetero-Cultural and Material Entanglements

In this section, I demonstrate how teachers draw on religious/cisnormative and cultural discourses through which their capacities to work toward a trans-informed gender justice approach (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018) in primary schooling are both enabled and apprehended. In line with Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2018), the analytical attention here is concerned with the interrogation of cisgenderism as it weaves into the legacies of colonial and apartheid governance and continues, in the post-apartheid context, to fuse gender and sexual binaries in ways that enforce cis-heteropatriarchal systems of power and domination.

Here, I am interested in the associations teachers make between religion, culture, and gender, and the consequences this has for addressing the pathologization of people who do not align with the sex and gender assigned at birth (Bartholomaeus et al., 2017; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020; Neary, 2021). Put more simply, cisgenderism and cisnormativity are placed under scrutiny as religious principles comingle with changing sexualities, genders, and legal structures in South Africa. Teachers’ narratives reflect these histories and contemporary changes—and the legacies of colonization and apartheid.

For example, Gerald, a 52-year-old white male teacher, said, “I believe that if you are born who you are, you must accept who you are and live according to who you are.” Trans thus materializes alongside bio-essentialist arguments through which gender variations are pathologized and rendered invisible. Religion is entangled with the sex–gender binary system in territorializing and stabilizing cisnormativity while privileging heteronormativity—and consequently misrecognizing and erasing trans. Gerald plugs into religious discourses to stabilize and pathologize identity:

I need to speak with God because I’m actually against it [being trans]. I need to be honest with you. . . . I do not judge them. My place is not to judge people. God says that he’s the only one who can judge you one day. . . . You cannot go and change God’s will to fit what your desires are. . . . Except those intersex—it is something different, I believe, then the poor kid cannot decide.

Many other teachers were constrained by the narrow and circumscribed ways through which God and social and moral norms produced material-social-affective intensities
that materialized gender differences and hierarchies. Trans, gender, and sexuality were connected to other components in the assemblage, including, but not limited to, human bodies, discourses, and social norms. Trans was disruptive of a historically produced disciplinary framework of gender and unsettled heteronormative and cisgenderist religious moralities. Notably, while trans identity is constituted as a self-inflicted, choice-based sexuality within cis-heteropatriarchal colonial assemblages—and thus violates socioreligious norms—intersex bodies are not. This is because personal choice (becoming trans) is set against biological maladaptation (being intersex). Affective intensities are ignited in this binary and produce contempt for trans identities and sympathy for intersex people. Both intersex and understandings of trans as signifiers congeal within the tyranny of gender, where gender intelligibility is made possible only through the sex-gender binary system. Gender identities and gender expression that exist outside of this system of intelligibility are thus traduced. God, gender, the Bible, and sexuality connect within the colonial assemblage and flow between bodies, norms, and ideas, colliding with and penetrating each other (Chidester, 2018; Coole & Frost, 2010):

Ntombi: In the Bible there is no place where God mentioned somebody who was a girl change to be a boy and then God also says in the Bible that if you change yourself it’s not allowed, it’s not allowed because God created you as you are so he knows . . . why he created you as a girl and God knows how or why he created you as a boy. (Black female, age 54)

Ally: As a Christian the Bible tells us that when God created the human race he created male and female. . . . As a Christian we believe that you don’t hate the person . . . you hate the sin. . . . I personally don’t think that it’s correct to be gay or lesbian but I don’t hate the person . . . and Bible bash them. (White female, age 41)

God, sins, and cisnormative ideologies do not exist in isolation: They coexist with gender ideals that are historically produced, relational, and “micropolitical” (Braidotti, 2013). They occur within assemblages where trans is excluded and gender variability is prohibited. There is mutual dependency among the elements within the assemblage, and the affective flows of colonial ideas, things, and bodies remain pervasive and are implicated in the maintenance of cisgenderism and ideas around religion, sin, and God. This intra-action causes the conflation of trans with gay and lesbian. Homophobia is transposed onto transphobia, with the added effect of erasing and misrecognizing trans identities. Teachers encounter trans as disruptive of bio-essentialist and religious norms, and this intensifies their capacity to apprehend gender within normative binary conceptions. The legitimacy of trans lives and identity is thus disallowed, while misrecognition is bolstered by the authority granted to cisgenderism. As Bennett (2010) suggested, the relations of forces render all matter active, such that what is produced in the assemblage is always the consequence of vibrancy and of active ways through which all matter intra-acts, and therefore is not deterministic, but part of an ongoing process of becoming.
Christianity and cultural practices converge around the misrecognition of trans identity and are part of the relations of forces—both historical and contemporary—that normalized cisgenderism:

Ntombi: In the Zulu culture, this thing is not allowed at all. It’s a boy it’s a boy, a girl it’s a girl. (Black female, age 54)
Sibongile: I’m still stuck in that cultural thing that you need to be male if you are male and if you are a woman you need to be married to a man. So, I mean it’s just it takes time for me to process the whole information. . . . Having friends that are actually gay and lesbian, I understand where they’re coming from, but in my culture—like at home—I know for a fact that . . . to be a lesbian or gay or be a transgender [sic], that they won’t accept. (Black female, age 34)

Ntombi and Sibongile situate gender as an intractable domain of culture as they bind race, culture, and sexuality together to form particular relationalities. Zulu cultural norms, gender, sexuality, ideas, cultural things, heterosexual marriage, and gay and lesbian identities are all entities within the assemblage that dynamically intra-act to produce particular affects and relationalities. This socio-cultural-material-religious entanglement precludes teachers’ capacities to include trans.

Connections between the different elements and discourses are not fixed and can combine with other entanglements in the assemblage. Zulu cultural practices, for example, affect and are affected by other relationalities that produce particular capacities for teachers to challenge or constrain new ways of thinking. This has a nuanced micro-effect on bodies and other relations in the assemblage (Fox & Bale, 2018). For the teachers cited earlier, culture is territorialized and specifies the capacities of trans bodies, which in this case closes down opportunities for what bodies can do as it tries to stabilize and fix identity as firmly cultural and heterosexual.

*Christianity, Culture, Coloniality: Trans Erasures.* Different components of the assemblage thus strongly affect each other. Biological essentialism, cis-heteropatriarchy, cisnormativity, social and cultural norms, and religion diminish teachers’ capacities to recognize trans and understand trans:

Grace: Transgender, I think its confusion. That’s all it is. It’s difficult for me because I’m not a type of person that judges. I’ve never met a person that is “T.” I’ve met people that are “L” [lesbian] or “G” [gay], okay. So, it’s actually difficult for me to say how I feel because I have never interacted with them. . . . It’s really difficult for me because I don’t actually know anything about it. I don’t know. (White female, age 44)

Grace refers to trans as a “confusion” and consigns trans people to “other.” This illustrates how teachers’ capacities are diminished through the confluence of a complex
array of affective connections that create particular intensities and ignite restricted accounts of gender and sexuality, with the latter eclipsing the former. These affective connections intermingle with historical processes that served the colonial and apartheid heterosexual project in South Africa and that are still evident in the way teachers territorialize trans and contain gender. Territorializing can “either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it” (DeLanda, 2006, p. 12). The trans assemblage thus far territorializes trans bodies, but there is more to this:

Debbie: I think religion is based on keeping . . . people in little boxes and everybody has their own place in the world. That’s how religion is . . . made up, and when people are not fitting into that box I think religion finds it very difficult to almost put some kind of control. . . . I don’t know a lot of religions but if you look at Christian rules and laws there’s definite ideas of how you’re supposed to be. (White female, age 52)

Within postcolonial contexts and legal structures that guarantee gender justice, teachers questioned dogmatic principles, disrupting moral conventions and pointing to gender as a state of flux while illustrating the messy ways in which gender identity is negotiated in/through religious-cultural discourses (Neary et al., 2018). Trans destabilizes the very category of gender and has potential to de-territorialize it. However, this potential is reterritorialized through the othering of trans identities:

Grace: I believe that it’s wrong. . . . I’m a Christian and even though it’s wrong in God’s eyes it’s also wrong to judge. . . . We grew up Afrikaans you know, Boere Afrikaans . . . but I’m never gonna be judging them, or like not allow them in my church. I’m a bit more liberal in a sense. . . . In today’s life it’s easier because there’s people that accept them—more people are out there saying, so, like they’ve got like more support. So maybe there were people like this way back but they never said anything and they never told everybody and they were stuck in their ways, and today it’s easier to get out of the closet than it was way back.

Using the term “Boere Afrikaans”—referring to the Dutch-speaking colonial settlers in South Africa and their power under the apartheid state—Grace co-constitutes race, ethnicity, and gender within a historically produced classification. Grace territorializes Boere Afrikaans within Christian Calvinistic traditions, through which moral conventions are reinforced, and her coding of race and ethnicity with sexuality renders identity more rigid. However, there is nothing stable about this. Indeed, whereas the earlier examples show attenuated capacities, here Grace unhooks gender and sexuality as a stable category and suggests trans-forming understandings of gender identity—but under the guise of being more liberal. In this way, she hedges her own complicity in powerful gender(ed) orders. She creates a distance between herself as Christian, and
the “people that accept them” and the trans-inclusive community. The changes in the sociopolitical context in South Africa that she implies—“In today’s life it’s easier,” meaning that “things are better now, they have support”—function to absolve her own responsibility for a trans-affirmative stance.

As noted earlier, the disciplinary framework of gender and culture does not necessarily reinforce gender, but it does signify a changing process that is always involved in gender. As Tudor (2021) argued, gender is always already trans. Trans opens up new realities while confronting the messiness of gender (Neary, 2021). In this light, Grace says,

It’s a man’s world. It’s definitely a man’s world where a lot of times. . . . We are inferior to them. . . . Especially in Afrikaans . . . he is the man of the house and he says what comes and what goes. . . . Times have changed, but still it’s a man’s world. Especially the jokes that are made it upsets me a lot, because um, without men knowing it, it’s “stop whining like a girl” and “stop being like that,” “do you sit and pee? or do you stand and pee?” Without knowing it, it’s degrading a woman. You can’t do that cos you not strong enough. So, I think that’s why.

Here, historically produced versions of white Afrikaans masculinity are aligned with the reinforcement of cis-hetero-gender normativities that subordinate women. Camminga (2019) argued that the concept of gender has colonial roots. Grace underlines the racializing process through which historical manifestations of power derived through colonialism and apartheid produced particular classifications that are thickly enveloped in contemporary masculine norms, even though “times have changed.” Grace embeds her own experiences of cisnormative heterosexism in relation to trans experiences and thus extends the erasure experienced by trans people, but also presents possibilities for inclusion.

Teachers can do different things when they encounter trans, which, through modulating bodies, discourses, and ideas, can create capacities to attenuate and enhance trans visibility. As Deleuze (1988) noted, bodies are always in a state of flux; the relations between bodies and other parts and elements within an assemblage produce affective capacities:

Miss Bee: Christians are hypocrites, like whatever is good for them and convenient for them they will accept it. But then . . . you practice a sexuality [misrecognized as trans], they think that you are a devil worshipper. . . . I accept them [trans] as they are. . . . It’s not my call to judge them. (Black female, age 42)

Miss Somm: There are gays in the Bible who haven’t been exposed and God still accepted them because he accepts people for who they are if they show love towards him. . . . Bible bashing Christians tend to be narrow minded towards this sort of thing. I know people who were in the church who have become—who have come out. . . . I’m part of a church that’s very accepting of it and I think I’ve
been very blessed with that. I’ve got some very close friends who are um, gay. . . [I] think that some churches are starting to open their eyes a bit more and not be so narrow minded. But on the whole, I would say Christianity is not as accepting as they could be. (White female, 44)

Responding to the question of trans, Miss Somm’s default position is to refer to gay people, connecting homosexuality to parts of the assemblage while erasing trans. Christianity, sexuality, trans, devil worshippers, church, and social norms assemble together and illustrate how trans is territorialized, while circulating new potentials, mobility, flows, and fluctuations, moving from “narrow mindedness to acceptance.” The different elements of an assemblage are generative of becoming something “other,” but at the heart of this assemblage is a fundamental conflation of trans with homosexuality. Accordingly, the assemblage has both territorializing and de-territorializing consequences.

Different coordinates provide new possibilities for changing and transforming understandings of trans, a process that is marked by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) de/reterritorialization. For example, Cas, a 44-year-old black male teacher, affirms his belief in “God as creator” and expresses concern about celebrities coming out in South Africa:

It’s becoming like a new norm to have celebrities who would normally be in the closet coming out. . . [It] encourages even the young ones who are growing up to say “I have a choice.” For example, there’s . . . Somizi, Lasizwe. Those are the people that are dominating the social media, so . . . we get to see them everyday and the little ones really look up to them. . . . It would be wise to sort of introduce such matters to the learner because already they are bombarded with . . . these figures who are forever in their faces. And they will ask questions “isn’t so and so a man? Why is he acting in this manner?” . . . It would be beneficial for them . . . [to] educate them. By doing so we know that we won’t be troubling on anyone’s rights but we would try to find a common ground so there would be no making fun of the people who are different.

Cas, too, conflates trans identity with being gay when he mentions Somizi and Lasizwe, who are openly gay South African celebrities. He links the changing environment in the country, which now legally permits “coming out” and choice, with the power of social media to address what children know outside of school and to educate learners about gender diversity. He declares he has “no problems with what each person chooses to do with their own life,” but this notion of choice as Cas sees it conflates gender and sexuality—where gay black celebrities are seen to be making choices—while misrecognizing and erasing trans people. The process of coming out through social media visibility reinforces the reduction of gender expression and identity to homosexuality and highlights the need for a decolonizing education about gender and sexuality in ways that understand the trans assemblage as produced within, and an effect of, historical processes.
Ancestral Spirits: Conflating Gender and Sexuality. Similarly, while emphasis has been placed on the ways in which culture apprehends and territorializes trans possibilities, it may be opened up—as a line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) from its assumed fixity—to generate new and unexpected capacities, although these, too, may be reterritorialized by misrecognizing trans identity:

Siya: We take our information from the elders because the elders know what happens and what steps are to be taken. . . . As African people, there’s something called indlozi [ancestral spirit], which is your ancestor . . . those are the people who have passed away, as you know. We all know that they live within us. So, what I’ve researched . . . is that some males have lady ancestors that live within them. So, if they living within you then obviously you have a chance of going to the gay side of things. So. . . with that happening it’s gonna make you more feminine than usual, than the usual male, cause you have that lady ancestor within you.

Once again, possibilities to interrogate cisgenderism are foreclosed through the misrecognition of trans as gay. For Siya, the closest connection to God is through ancestral spirits, the elders, and spiritual identities, which shape all aspects of life, including sexuality. In this cosmological view of life, descendants must not sever their ties with their elders/ancestors (Mfecane, 2018). Every aspect of social life is premised on the presence of and respect to the amadlozi (ancestral spirits). The Zulu ritual of ukubuyisa, for example, marks the presence of an ancestor within a household. As Chidester (2018) noted, ukubuyisa “links the past with an unbroken continuity, unbroken by death, which extends into the future” (p. 53). Mishaps are often assumed to be caused by the wrath of ancestors, who need to be appeased, for example, by slaughtering a cow (Thornberry, 2019). An essentialist conceptualization of culture as African and gender nonnormativity as un-African feeds into a narrative that violating gender norms can incite the wrath of the elders (Epprecht, 2018). Siya’s perspective indicates a reconstituted notion of culture and provides possibilities that see gender beyond the binary. Yet, during the process of attempting to reconstitute culture, gender and sexuality become conflated. To acknowledge the legitimacy of trans as a gender identity in its own right, it thus needs to be decoupled from an assemblage of gender nonnormativity that is equated with same-sex sexuality.

This assemblage shows that local narratives require cultural intelligibility to understand the ways that trans is apprehended by cis-hetero norms. This happens automatically as trans has so powerfully been erased from the possibilities of gender. While it is possible to see how gender is stretched and culture is reimagined from its prescriptive formulations, it is still bound to a cisnormative and cisgenderist logic that does not permit gender identity to be decoupled from sexuality. The result is a fundamental foreclosure that fails to understand that trans is not a sexual identity.
Trans is situated within a sociohistorical and cultural moment and is pivotal in both othering and rupturing the gender binary framework. Siya states, “I wouldn’t say they’re [trans people] not accepted now . . . . We know there’s a whole lot of African gay people. And they are out there about it. They’re not hiding behind closed doors.” This portrayal of trans as gay circumscribes definitions of gender and sexuality and funnels bodies into heteronormative dualisms. In this regard, Camminga (2019) raised concerns that the conflation of trans and queer makes certain “trans subjectivities that do not identify with queer invisible” (p. 1).

Conclusion

Given the significant paucity in research dealing with primary school teachers’ understandings of trans students (Bartholomaeus et al., 2017; Neary, 2021) and their potential to address “trans-affirmative” (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018) gender justice work, this article has shed light on the saliency of a decolonial trans assemblage to examine the capacities generated when teachers encounter trans, how these capacities are produced, and the consequences for trans visibility and recognition. The utility of a decolonial trans assemblage is its ability to reveal the multiple forms, bodies, and flows through which trans visibility is constrained and challenged. By addressing teachers’ own narratives, the article has examined how assemblages constitute different forms, entities, expressions, and content, and are entangled and relational. The teachers in this study conflate not only trans and homosexuality, but also gender and sexuality, drawing on a discourse that is part of the continuing legacy of the colonial-apartheid assemblage. Cis-heteropatriarchal systems and logics suffuse this discourse, facilitating the misrecognition of trans as simply a manifestation of sexuality. The affects producing these capacities include socioreligious, cultural, and cis-heteronormative discourses and ideas, entangled with a wider historical context shaped by colonialism and apartheid, to create stickiness to a male–female binary and reliance on a cisgenderist logic. Through the decolonial trans framework, the article shows that the assemblage forecloses possibilities to render trans knowable, coupling trans with sexual identity and the affective flows of colonial, cultural, and apartheid logics, all invested in the maintenance of cisgenderism.

A wide range of affective relations within the assemblage include cultural-religious discourses, things, bodies, norms, ideas, invisible spirits and ancestors, as well as distinctive elements of South Africa’s social media platforms. The assemblage is complexly connected, generated by affects, and the affective flows intra-act to create specific possibilities for teachers to know and do. All entities in the assemblage are entangled through colonial, cultural, and apartheid legacies, and striated by local specifications in which gender is implicated. By situating teachers’ perspectives of trans in an ever-shifting and changing assemblage, entanglements with particular social and cultural conditions of the local context provide possibilities to reinvent trans as it travels. Connecting trans and decoloniality, as Camminga (2017) suggested, opens up possibilities for new ways of existing as gendered beings within a decolonial framing that
brings to light and questions how trans is apprehended and its movement curtailed. In this article, this has allowed insight into the organization of gender, its religious-cultural anchorings, and the heteronormative and cisnormative compulsions through which trans is negated or interrogated, showing epistemic erasures and potentials. The question of gender-transformative capacities thus emerged through complex relationalities within assemblages that were constraining, emergent, and dynamic.

A decolonial trans assemblage thus allows for the possibility of de-territorializing and destabilizing religion and culture. However, trans remains tied to sexuality, and is thus misrecognized and seen by teachers as a sign of homosexuality. The vibrant force (Bennet, 2010) through which the assemblage is constituted, however, and through which different forms and elements are connected, highlights “agential entanglements,” indicating that teachers’ encounters with trans are open to shifts and changes. Their ideas and thoughts are entangled with other materialities—culture, religion, heterosexuality, masculinity—and gender intra-acts through other forces, illustrating the perpetuation of colonial logics and reterritorialization. The openings for questioning gender are small, particularly because trans remains seen as a sign of same-sex sexuality, and trans as a sexual identity.

As trans becomes more visible in schooling and at younger ages (Neary, 2021), teachers’ gender justice framing requires far more attention, as I have shown in this article. The delegitimating ways through which trans identities are condemned, marginalized, and misrecognized within local settings emphasize the strong associations made with religion, heteronormativity, and culture. A focus on trans thus permits a critique of the conditions that make trans “stand out” while allowing gender normativity to disappear without any interrogation of why this is the case (Stryker, 2006). It is no wonder, then, that primary school teachers express discomfort, distress, and disinclination about a trans-informed gender justice approach to teaching gender and sexual diversity (Neary, 2021). As I have shown, the ongoing flow of colonial and apartheid codings based on cisgenderism constrains such efforts, leading many scholars to conclude that schools are spaces that delegitimize and misrecognize trans identities and make trans lives unknowable, unrecognizable, and unwanted (e.g., Bartholomaeus et al., 2017; Martino & Omercajic, 2021). Yet, gender is always already trans—dynamic and in process. Its fixity, fluidity, and duality have implications for working with teachers within a decolonial trans project.

Working with teachers will involve addressing the fundamental misrecognition (and ensuing erasure) of trans as a manifestation of being gay, not least because it does not produce the necessary conditions for fostering an understanding of gender justice and democratization. In fact, it further intensifies transphobia. In 2021, for instance, the South African Human Rights Commission intervened when a trans boy at a Cape Town school was forced to wear a girls’ uniform. This example highlights how cis-heteronormativity is reified. The analysis in this article suggests that there is need for a radical approach to sex and sexuality education in primary schooling that addresses the fundamental logics at play in the misrecognition of trans. As suggested by Martino and Omercajic (2021), an approach that interrogates misgendering and the
pathologization of trans is central to a trans pedagogy of refusal to participate in the tyranny of gender (Doan, 2010). Martino and Omercajic (2021) argue further that schools must integrate trans as part of a gender-expansive education committed to gender democratization, where the fundamental logic that misrecognizes trans as a sexual identity is interrogated. Cisgenderism and cis privilege need to be addressed to allow for the development of an expansive vocabulary around gender.

This article described how Grace saw trans through a gendered lens as she associated white Afrikaner masculinity with the historical framing of power and male entitlements. A trans pedagogy of refusal asks teachers to reflect on trans, to question and critique it while “deepening their understanding of trans and non-binary intelligibility and gender expansiveness” (Martino & Omercajic, 2021). For the teachers in this study, this will mean not relying on socio-religious-cultural conceptions of gender and the colonial legacies that refuse to uncouple gender from sexuality.

Central to the need for understanding and questioning narrow definitions of gender is addressing the misrecognition of trans as a manifestation or sign of homosexuality. In this line of flight, opposing the disciplinary framework of gender and understanding how the assemblage shifts to make space for “endless permutations and possibilities for embodied and material sexual becoming” (Fox & Bale, 2018, p. 406) are necessary. This article has shown promise that a trans decolonial assemblage can provide insight into affective capacities and teachers’ potentials to squeeze out the heterosexual impulse in framing gender. The data in this article suggest that what teachers do and can do within a shifting and changing assemblage can also constantly reverse to reify transphobia—the genesis of which is in the legacy of colonial assemblages and systems. The continuing colonial-apartheid legacy that produces a certain foreclosure in understanding trans and that is built on erasure and a fundamental misrecognition of trans remains powerful. This insight makes one thing clear: Despite the vibrancy of the assemblage, socio-historical-religious-cultural-colonial and material relationalities do not yet accommodate trans bodies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work is based on the research supported wholly by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number 98407).

References

Allen, A. (2016). The end of progress: Decolonizing the normative foundations of critical theory. Columbia University Press.

Ansara, Y. G. (2010). Beyond cisgenderism: Counselling people with non-assigned gender identities. In L. Moon (Ed.), Counselling ideologies: Queer challenges to heteronormativity (pp. 167–200). Ashgate.
Ansara, Y. G., & Hegarty, P. (2013). Misgendering in English language contexts: Applying non-cisgenderist methods to feminist research. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches, 7*, 160–177.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.

Bartholomaeus, C., & Riggs, D. W. (2017). *Transgender people and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bartholomaeus, C., Riggs, D. W., & Andrew, Y. (2017). The capacity of South Australian primary school teachers and pre-service teachers to work with trans and gender diverse students. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 65*, 127–135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.03.006

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.

Bettcher, T. M. (2014). Trapped in the wrong theory: Rethinking trans oppression and resistance. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 39*(2), 383–406. https://doi.org/10.1086/673088

Braidotti, R. (2013). *Metamorphoses: Towards a materialist theory of becoming*. Polity Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Routledge.

Camminga, B. (2017). Where’s your umbrella? Decolonisation and transgender studies in South Africa. *Postamble, 10*(1).

Camminga, B. (2019). *Transgender refugees and the imagined South Africa: Bodies over borders and borders over bodies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Chidester, D. (2018). *Religion: Material dynamics*. University of California Press.

Colebrook, C. (2002). *Understanding Deleuze*. Allen & Unwin.

Coleman, R. (2008). The becoming of bodies: Girls, media effects, and body image. *Feminist Media Studies, 8*(2), 163–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770801980547

Coleman, R., & Ringrose, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Deleuze and research methodologies*. Edinburgh University Press.

Coole, D., & Frost, S. (Eds.). (2010). Introducing the new materialisms. In *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, and politics* (pp. 1–44). Duke University Press.

DeLanda, M. (2006). *A new philosophy of society: Assemblage theory and social complexity*. Continuum.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1988). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Athlone Press.

Delius, P., & Glaser, C. (2002). Sexual socialisation in South Africa: A historical perspective. *African Studies, 61*(1), 27–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020180220140064

Doan, P. L. (2010). The tyranny of gendered spaces—reflections from beyond the gender dichotomy. *Gender, Place & Culture, 17*(5), 635–654. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2010.503121

Driskill, Q. L. (2010). Doubleweaving Two-Spirit critiques: Building alliances between Native and queer studies. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 16*(1–2), 69–92. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-013
Epprecht, M. (2008). *Heterosexual Africa? The history of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of AIDS*. Ohio University Press.

Epprecht, M. (2018). Two decades of sexuality research in Africa south of the Sahara. *Sexualities, 21*(8), 1276–1281. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460718774530

Ferfolja, T., & Ullman, J. (2020). *Gender and sexuality diversity in a culture of limitation: Student and teacher experiences in schools*. Routledge.

Fox, N. J., & Alldred, P. (2013). The sexuality-assemblage: Desire, affect, anti-humanism. *The Sociological Review, 61*(4), 769–789. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12075

Fox, N. J., & Alldred, P. (2015). Inside the research-assemblage: New materialism and the micropolitics of social inquiry. *Sociological Research Online, 20*(2), 122–140. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3578

Fox, N. J., & Bale, C. (2018). Bodies, pornography and the circumscription of sexuality: A new materialist study of young people’s sexual practices. *Sexualities, 21*(3), 393–409. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717699769

Grosfoguel, R. (2012). The dilemmas of ethnic studies in the United States: Between liberal multiculturalism, identity politics, disciplinary colonization, and decolonial epistemologies. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, 10*(1), Article 9.

Hickey-Moody, A., & Malins, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Deleuzian encounters: Studies in contemporary social issues*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hunter, M. (2010). *Love in the time of AIDS: Inequality, gender and rights in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Ingram, T. (2021). “I feel pretty”: Beauty as an affective-material process. *Feminist Theory*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001211100015

Makofane, K. (2013). Unspoken facts: A history of homosexualities in Africa. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 15*(1), 114–116.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2–3), 240–270.

Martino, W., & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2018). Transgender and gender expansive education research, policy and practice: Reflecting on epistemological and ontological possibilities of bodily becoming. *Gender and Education, 30*(6), 687–694. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1487518

Martino, W., & Omercajic, K. (2021). A trans pedagogy of refusal: Interrogating cisgenderism, the limits of antinormativity and trans necropolitics. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 29*(5), 679–694. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1912155

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony* (A. M. Berrett, J. Roitman, M. Last, & S. Rendall, Trans.). University of California Press.

Mfecane, S. (2018). Towards African-centred theories of masculinity. *Social Dynamics, 44*(2), 291–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2018.1481683

Morgensen, S. L. (2016). Conditions of critique: Responding to indigenous resurgence within gender studies. *Transgender Studies Quarterly, 3*(1–2), 192–201. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3334379

Namaste, V. (2000). *Invisible lives: The erasure of transsexual and transgendered people*. University of Chicago Press.

Neary, A. (2021). Trans children and the necessity to complicate gender in primary schools. *Gender and Education, 33*(8), 1073–1089. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1884200

Neary, A., Gray, B., & O’Sullivan, M. (2018). Lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers’ negotiations of civil partnership and schools: Ambivalent attachments to religion and secularism.
Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 39(3), 434–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2016.1276432

Nyeck, S. N. (2021). Routledge handbook of queer African studies. Routledge.

Paechter, C. (2021). Implications for gender and education research arising out of changing ideas about gender. Gender and Education, 33(5), 610–624. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2020.1798361

Renold, E., & Ringrose, J. (2013). Feminisms re-figuring “sexualisation,” sexuality and “the girl.” Feminist Theory, 14(3), 247–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113499531

Ringrose, J. (2013). Postfeminist education? Girls and the sexual politics of schooling. Routledge.

Rudwick, S., & Posel, D. (2014). Contemporary functions of ilobolo (bridewealth) in urban South African Zulu society. Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 32(1), 118–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2014.900310

Serano, J. (2013). Excluded: Making feminist and queer movements more inclusive. Seal Press.

Spronk, R., & Hendriks, T. (Eds.). (2020). Readings in sexualities from Africa. Indiana University Press.

Stryker, S. (2006). (De)subjugated knowledges: An introduction to transgender studies. In S. Stryker & S. Whittle (Eds.), The transgender studies reader (pp. 1–17). Routledge.

Stryker, S., Currah, P., & Moore, L. J. (2008). Introduction: Trans-, trans, or transgender? WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly, 36(3–4), 11–22.

Tamale, S. (2020). Decolonization and Afro-Feminism. Daraja Press.

Thornberry, E. (2019). Colonizing consent: Rape and governance in South Africa’s Eastern Cape. Cambridge University Press.

Tudor, A. (2021). Decolonizing trans/gender studies? Teaching gender, race, and sexuality in times of the rise of the Global Right. Transgender Studies Quarterly, 8(2), 238–256. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8890523

Vincent, L., & Camminga, B. (2009). Putting the “T” into South African human rights: Transsexuality in the post-apartheid order. Sexualities, 12(6), 678–700. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709346108

White, H. (2016). The materiality of marriage payments. Anthropology Southern Africa, 39(4), 297–308. https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2016.1243448

Author Biography

Deevia Bhana is a professor and the DSI/NRF South African Research Chair in Gender and Childhood Sexuality. Her research has explored sexualities and gender across the young life course. Her latest book is entitled Girls Negotiating Porn in South Africa: Power, Play and Sexuality (Routledge).