



Article

Activist performance and performative activism towards intersectional gender and sexual justice in contemporary South Africa

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Abstract

Democratic South Africa post-1994 boasts an impressive constitutional and legal commitment to human rights, including the enshrinement of sexual and gender rights. Notwithstanding, a growing body of work documents continued widespread homophobia, heterosexism and violence against gender and sexual non-conforming people that intersect with other inequalities. However, there is also a rich terrain of resistance to intersectional gender and sexual injustices evidenced by proliferating decolonial, feminist and queer activism and art. Located in the South African post-apartheid and postcolonial context, this article draws on the last few years of decolonial, feminist and queer engagements, focusing in on two current examples of activist performance and performative activism. The article explores the socio-political possibilities of interventions which transgress, disturb, disrupt and queer contemporary rigid and re/calcifying gender and sexual normativities for the larger decolonial, feminist and queer sexual and gender rights and justice project, as well as for critical scholarship directed at such goals.

Keywords

Activism, decolonial, feminist, LGBTIQ+, performance, queer, South Africa

Introduction: Paradoxes of freedom and injustice in a human rights framework

Post-apartheid South Africa, at least on paper through impressive constitutional and legal reform, has been a model of human rights, including with respect to sexual and gender equality and freedom. The constitution of the new democracy founded in 1994 clearly

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articulates the right of sexual and gender orientation through the Bill of Rights (Section 9 equality clause) which specifically recognizes freedom from discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and gender equality. Further, a range of legal victories, such as the Civil Union Act (Republic of South Africa, 2006) which legalized same-sex marriage (see de Vos, 2008; Judge et al., 2008), and the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act (2003) speak to further legalized spaces to ensure freedom and protection against discrimination for those with non-heteronormative gender and sexual desires, identities and practices.

Notwithstanding the efforts of what has been globally acknowledged as an excellent piece of constitutional and legal machinery in support of gender equality (Rustin, 2018), South Africa remains characterized by high rates of gender and sexual violence, homophobia and homophobic violence and sexism and racism at multiple levels of the societal, political, ideological and material. Furthermore, in spite of the apparent legal gains with respect to changing gender classification, transgender, gender non-conforming or intersex persons still face challenges in achieving the promise of accessible, achievable and safe choice of gender (e.g. Legal Resources Centre [LRC]/Iranti-Org/Genderdynamix, 2016; LRC/Iranti-Org/Triangle Project/Genderdynamix, 2017). Indeed, there is increased evidence of continued hostility and violence against transgender, gay men and lesbians in contemporary South Africa across diverse contexts (Henderson, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2011; Judge, 2015; LRC/Iranti-Org/Genderdynamix, 2016; LRC/Iranti-Org/Triangle Project/Genderdynamix, 2017). It has also been widely acknowledged that the high rates of sexual, gendered and homophobic violence in South Africa are entangled with systemic violence shaped by centuries of colonization and decades of apartheid (Boonzaier, 2017; Gqola, 2015; Kessi and Boonzaier, 2018) which has flagged the importance of a decolonial feminist framework for understanding and challenging intersectional sexual and gender injustices.

Even in educational contexts such as universities and schools which are supposedly invested in democratic goals, engaged in a project of 'transformation' and viewed as a prime space for social justice pedagogies, a growing body of work flags how students who do not fit the normative model of white, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied and so on, do not feel 'at home' (e.g. Jagessar and Msibi, 2015; Munyuki et al., 2018; Pattman and Carolissen, 2018; Robertson and Pattman, 2018). Researchers in schools in Southern Africa have increasingly reported the continued normalization of heterosexuality and homophobia by both young people and teachers (Bhana, 2014a, 2014b; Francis, 2017; Francis and Brown, 2017; Langa, 2015; Msibi, 2018). Similarly, research on sexuality education at school foregrounds the complex conditions that undermine an LGBTIQ+ affirmative context in schools, and sexuality education is shown to be a site of heteronormative regulation and discipline rather than a space for facilitating freedom and diversity (e.g. Francis, 2017; Macleod, 2009; Ngabaza et al., 2016). Studies in schools provide qualitative evidence of the silencing and marginalization of learners with non-conforming desires and practices (Bhana, 2014a, 2014b; Francis, 2012; Msibi, 2012; Mthatyana and Vincent, 2015; Ngabaza et al., 2016). A lack of knowledge and sensitivity among teachers as well as resistance to teaching sexual and gender diversities in sexuality education classes has been illustrated (Beyers, 2012; Bhana, 2014a; Francis and Msibi, 2011; Wilmot and Naidoo, 2014). Further, prescriptions of heteronormativity

and the rationalization of homophobia in the teaching of sexualities education, as one example, that draw on religious, culture-deterministic and moralistic discourses, have been increasingly documented (Baxen, 2010; Bhana, 2014a; Francis, 2013; Helleve et al., 2009; Johnson, 2014; Khau, 2012).

While on paper the South African possibilities for living in a society that is free of exclusionary and discriminatory practices are evident, challenges in meeting ideological shifts in consciousness and material practices continue. Rather, we see a (re)calcification of the rigid divides of gender and sexuality within the deterministic matrix of relations that Judith Butler (1990: 17) has illuminated so well in which ‘certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender’. In South Africa, with its particular conditions of the post-apartheid and postcolonial where sexualities and genders are entangled with and shaped by raced conditions, many forms of identity and practice are confined to the margins and made unimaginable.

In this context, it is particularly welcoming to witness the burgeoning of cultural, political, artistic, scholarly and activist interventions that ‘trouble’ binaristic thinking, that shake up entrenched notions of sex, gender and sexuality as well as their entwinement with persistent divides and lines of privilege along the lines of race, class, age, language and many more. Notably, in the face of resistance to change and the challenging context of continued and possibly even increasing evidence of homo-, trans-phobia and gender and sexual violence in general in South Africa, it is also evident that LGBTIQ+, queer, feminist activists, artist and scholars are increasingly active through campaigns, public statements, research, art and other activities to raise public consciousness and challenge intersectional gender norms, heteronormativity and associated violences. Organizations such as Iranti-Org, Genderdynamix, Triangle Project and Legal Resources Centre are engaged in much advocacy and activism and also engaging strategically with global, African and South African forums to strengthen the implementation of gender and sexual rights and equalities (see e.g. LRC/Iranti-Org/Genderdynamix, 2016; LRC/Iranti-Org/Triangle Project/Genderdynamix, 2017). While there has been a growing scholarly literature on queer politics in African and South African contexts, documenting continued practices of marginality and violence as well as agency and resistance (e.g. Ekine and Abbas, 2013; Lock Swarr, 2012; Matabeni, 2014; Matebeni et al., 2018), the acknowledgement of the scholarly value of decolonial, feminist queer activism and art in sociological scholarship is less evident.

Student protests beginning in early 2015 have strengthened existing efforts and inspired further political activism and artistic engagements among South Africans. Notably, such protests, both on and off campus, promoted a decolonial discourse as well as emphasis on sexual and gender justice as entangled with decolonial challenges. An intersectional decolonial struggle has been increasingly articulated within the larger framework of student and public protest as well as in critical art and performances. As part of student resistance beginning in 2015 at South African universities, constituting what has become known as the #fallist movement, feminist and queer activism as part of a larger decolonial movement has been bolstered (Gouws, 2016, 2017; Kessi and Boonzaier, 2015; Macleod and Barker, 2016; Shefer, 2018) with global resonances and impact too (e.g. Omarjee, 2018). Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw

(1989) and widely taken up in recent years across global contexts and particularly within postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship and activism, was from the start a key narrative among student activists and in community settings including public pedagogical and activist efforts (Gouws, 2017). Notably in the South African context where feminist discourse has been strongly associated with whiteness and global Northern privilege (Dosekun, 2007; Gouws, 2016), young Black women and trans people have taken the lead and been significantly visible in inserting gender and sexual justice agendas in the decolonial movement among students and elsewhere (Gouws, 2016, 2017; Kahn, 2017; Mdluli, 2019). A strong feminist and queer agenda was evident in student activist calls for intersectionality in the decolonial activism on university campuses but also represented in larger public performance, art and activism, both in material and online spaces, as will be elaborated further below.

Student resistance movements and discourse have also spoken powerfully to the project of transforming South African universities, including the intensification of current inequalities through the creeping hegemony of global neoliberal capitalist logics in higher education. A proliferation of scholarly work that speaks to rethinking pedagogies and research, not only with reference to South African contexts, but further afield, has been a productive result (see e.g. Pattman and Carolissen, 2018; Shefer et al., 2018). Part of current thinking are calls to resist the colonial logics that persist in higher education and in sociological and other humanities and social science disciplinary practices globally, such as the devaluation of student knowledges and the ‘othering’ of research subjects through extractive, representational and exploitative research methodologies. Calls for ‘emerging alternatives to a framework of scholarship and pedagogies that is located in a didactic paradigm hinging around authoritative knowers/researchers and subjugated learners/research subjects and that destabilize dominant ways of knowing and making meaning for social justice’ (Hearn et al., 2018: 12) are growing. A strong voice has been the argument for creative, participatory methodologies which destabilize the authority of researcher/teacher and include a challenge to the divides between art, activism and scholarship as key to this decolonial turn. Such calls may resonate with arguments in sociology and social and cultural analysis more broadly for what has been termed a ‘minor sociology’ (Andrews, 2019) or ‘minor inquiry’ (Mazzei, 2017) or ‘the minor’ (Manning, 2016) in general. In elaborating the value of marginal knowledges within larger academic canons, Andrews (2019: 9) elaborates:

Minor sociology does not aim to upend sociology’s major ‘language’; after all, sociology has given us profound insight into our shared world. Rather, minor sociology presents the possibility of thinking differently about the social, of imagining other-wise.

This article is located in such a theoretical and methodological framing, directed at a project of queering everyday scholarly practices, of doing scholarship differently, through arguing the value of multiple sites of queer scholarship, both in more normative academic work but also through dialoguing with the current online and popular sites of queer scholarly practices through activism and art.

In particular there is currently a proliferation of interventions in contemporary South Africa that work across the divides of art, activism and scholarship, that are particularly spurred on by an impatience with the lack of material change in line with the policies and

legal reform directed at challenging discrimination on the basis of gender, sex and sexualities. A wide range of performative activism/activist performance that speaks to intersectional, decolonial, feminist and queer goals is increasingly operating across and between the divides of activism, art and scholarship in current South African contexts, in both the formal and informal creative arts arena (see e.g. Pather and Boulle, 2019) but also at a community, activist and digital level (see e.g. Hussien, 2018; Shefer, in press). Such installations, performances, events and moments also represent a pedagogical and consciousness-raising project. I argue that it is imperative and valuable for academic scholarship and related policy and practice around LGBTIQ+ challenges and sexual and gender justice projects in general to acknowledge and dialogue with contemporary activist, performative and artistic work towards sexual and gender justice.

Methodology

This article explores two examples of the rich context of contemporary locally based moments, occasions or installations of what may be termed *performative activism* and *activist performance* (Shefer, in press) directed at resistance to social inequalities and towards social justice and change in South Africa. The former refers to activist engagements that deploy performance while the latter to performance that serves as activism or social justice pedagogy in shifting consciousness. These terms are used here to refer to forms of political, ideological and affective mobilization and activism that include performance and art in practices of activism, advocacy, pedagogy and consciousness-raising. The acknowledgement of the entanglements of artistic, activist and pedagogical also gestures to the important move to challenge the dominant privileging of academic text-based forms of knowledge and towards valuing the scholarly and pedagogical contributions of the creative arts, both mainstream and in more marginal public spaces.

The article focuses on two case studies of this rich space of critical gender and sexual justice work to foreground the way in which dichotomies shown to be entrenched in the colonial logics of the university are troubled and destabilized, including the privileging of certain forms of scholarship and normative divides between scholarship and art, the intellect and the body, rationality and affect, research and activism, theory and practice, and so on. The first case study represents an intervention that was primarily activist but deployed a performative modality, while the second represents a primarily artistic project that is also activist and pedagogical. The first example refers to an activist intervention by a student activist group the Trans Collective, who were active within the larger #Rhodesmustfall movement which began at the University of Cape Town in 2015 (see e.g. Kahn, 2017; Kessi and Boonzaier, 2015) and became widely known through their well-publicized activism in 2016, elaborated below. For the non-South African scholar, what has become known as the #fallism movement since 2015 refers to a decolonial movement which began in protests at the University of Cape Town, against a statue of notorious colonialist Cecil John Rhodes, that had pride of place on this university campus, notably a university historically preserved for whites only in an apartheid racist state. Many scholars (e.g. Badat, 2016; Jacobs, 2016; Langa, 2017; Mbembe, 2015a, 2015b) have argued the significance of the wave of protests by students and workers that began with emphasis on the imperative to decolonize higher education which remains

steeped in colonial history; was extended to foreground poverty and the continued challenges of material inequalities in South Africa (#feesmustfall) with calls related to student fees and focus on the exploitation of contract staff; and included an intersectional lens on sexual and gender injustices and marginalities (Gouws, 2018; Kahn, 2017), which the example shared here relates to.

The second case study is that of FAKA, a well-known duo of performers Fela Gucci and Desire Marea, located in Johannesburg, a large cosmopolitan centre, who perform live, generate music, music videos, photos and installations, while also having a strong online presence through Twitter and blogs. FAKA, which began in 2015, describe themselves as a ‘cultural movement’ with a ‘hybridised mode of practice and challenging subject matter’:

The artists explore a combination of mediums ranging from sound, live performance, literature, video and photography, to create an eclectic aesthetic with which they express their ideas about themes central to their experience as black queer bodies navigating the cis-hetero-topia of post-colonial Africa. (FAKA website, 2019)¹

FAKA have increasingly received international attention and interest through invitations to festivals, which they argue relates to their unapologetic representation of Black Queer Culture in South Africa, one that embraces the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and spirituality (FAKA website, 2019).

I come to the research in this article as a scholar who has been in South African higher education for over three decades, having been a part of the anti-apartheid struggles within the university and community-based education prior to democracy in 1994, and the post-apartheid shifting terrain of transforming higher education. My scholarship has also had a long engagement with researching sexualities and intersectional inequalities that shape possibilities for safer, equitable and pleasurable sexual practices. It is through these lenses that this article makes an argument for the value of current activist and performative artistic contribution to rethinking and remaking equal and just gender and sexual possibilities as well as reconceptualizing everyday scholarship, research and pedagogical practices. My intention is not to attempt a critical sociological or discursive analysis of the two cases presented here, but rather to explore and illuminate how the larger body of artistic and activist occasions disturbs everyday binarisms of gender and sexuality within continued racist realms and to open up new imaginaries for ways of living and being. I locate this argument within the intersecting project of reimagining scholarship that goes beyond the repetition of colonialist and patriarchal privileging of certain knowledges.

Queer performative activism as part of a feminist decolonial queer and LGBTIQ+ rights project

There are many current examples of performative activism and activist performance that speak to intersectional gender and sexual justice goals, and queer activism and the larger LGBTIQ+ struggle have undoubtedly been an integral part of student activism over the last few years. The argument that sexual and gender justice and intersectionality

in general is central to the decolonial struggle has been powerfully articulated within student protests, though of course also contested (as is evident from the Trans Collective activist performance narrated below). A strong voice from queer and feminist activists emerged in student activism within the #Rhodesmustfall movement and engaged in some powerful forms of activism. One significant example is the Trans Collective (#transfeministcollective), who took up the continued exclusion of non-heteronormative sexualities and genders in higher education and within the student movement itself. Their project was to place LGBTIQ+ concerns firmly on the decolonial agenda of the student movement and the decolonial movement more broadly. An intersectional approach was powerfully foregrounded (Trans Collective Facebook Page, 2016):²

An intersectional approach to our blackness takes into account that we are not only defined by our blackness, but that some of us are also defined by our gender, our sexuality, our able-bodiedness, our mental health, and our class, among other things. We all have certain oppressions and certain privileges and this must inform our organising so that we do not silence groups among us, and so that no one should have to choose between their struggles. Our movement endeavours to make this a reality in our struggle for decolonisation.

In March 2016, the Trans Collective presented a powerful embodied intervention which serves as poignant example of queer performative activism towards disrupting erasures, marginalizations, discrimination and violences against queer bodies and persons. The group performed a piece of guerrilla theatre when they disrupted the opening of a photo exhibition held at the University of Cape Town (UCT, where the #RMF movement started in 2015) to commemorate a year of decolonial student activism. The group protested by lying in front of the entrance to the exhibition, with text inscribed on their partially dressed bodies, and matching red painted text³ over some of the exhibited photographs. Their narratives, both embodied and on the exhibition photos, challenged the erasure of their contributions to the larger student movement and their sense of a lack of serious commitment to an intersectional struggle. As they argued: 'It is disingenuous to include trans people in a public gallery when you have made no effort to include them in the private. ... We have reached the peak of our disillusionment with RMF's trans exclusion and erasure' (Wagner, 2016: n.p.).

This disturbing moment powerfully articulated the experience of misrecognition and erasure, both in the student movement and of course in larger public terrains. Significant also was the presentation of semi-nudity and non-conforming bodies in the university which is still shaped by the colonialist and humanist logic which privileges intellectual over affective and embodied knowledges. Many bodies remain invisibilized, while certain bodies, particularly those that do not conform to white, middle class, male, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied and so on norms, still do not belong. The Trans Collective, in this moment of inserting their bodies that resist regulatory and normative dress and gender, and in a manner and place (lying down at the entry to the venue) that cannot be ignored, into an event and space 'sanitized' by scholarly association, are multiply transgressive. The deployment of a semi-clothed body in this context, made vulnerable at multiple levels (such as the lack of material and symbolic protection in the form of clothes; positioned in a prostrate position, vulnerable to being stood on; exposure of

bodies that are 'othered' in gender and raced binaried hegemonies), represents a powerful subversion of the heteronormative, patriarchal, colonialist and humanist project of the university and the larger social world. Further, the performativity of lying down at the door to the exhibition, so that all who enter are forced to step over their bodies, symbolizes, in graphic terms, the sense of 'being walked over', of being both brutalized and invisibilized, not only in terms of the exhibition itself but within a larger heteropatriarchal society in which non-normative desires, bodies and practices remain 'othered' and subject to symbolic and physical violence.

Queer activist performance in the disruption of racist heteronormativity through mainstream visual cultures

Queer and LGBTIQ+ activism, both within the larger decolonial project as argued above, and also increasingly evident within a contemporary artistic and performative activism, is growing rapidly in South African public and internet spaces as well. Such activism has often been characterized by public and publicly available performative activism and activist performance. A wide range of online performances, YouTube videos, Instagram, Facebook and other online vehicles that challenge heteronormativity and its embeddedness in colonial logics have proliferated in recent years.

The Jo'burg-based performing duo FAKA, Fela Gucci and Desire Marea, are one such example. They outline their project as being directed at social justice and change through art, in particular 'to create an eclectic aesthetic with which they express their ideas about themes central to their experience as black queer bodies navigating the cis-hetero-topia of post-colonial Africa'.⁴ Performing music and making and releasing online YouTube videos and engaging on Instagram, the duo disturb heteronormative expectations, presenting themselves proudly as non-binary people taking pleasure in diverse dress and embodied practices (see Disemelo [2019] and Malcomess [2019] for further analysis of FAKA's work and other examples of queer performativity). I echo Disemelo's (2019: 221) call for the 'necessity of paying critical attention to transgressive performance of identity categories within mainstream visual culture'. These widely available public and online performances of Black, queer desire, pleasure and relationality arguably serve to challenge sexual and gender binarisms as well as racialized expectations of queerness, contributing to a 'queer archive' (Disemelo, 2019: 221). This seems particularly pertinent in a context where same-sex desires and practices are considered un-African (see e.g. Epprecht, 2018; Msibi, 2018; Tamale, 2011; Vincent and Howell, 2014). FAKA's performances also gesture to the imperative to 'normalize' non-conforming gender and sexual practices and raced stereotypes in order to challenge the continued subjugation of and violences against queer people of colour. Such performances disrupt heteronormativity while also calling into question cultural essentializing discourses such as that of the un-Africanness of gay, lesbian, trans and queer desire and practice. Visiting international performance and artist icon Mykki Blanco (2017: n.p.), who worked with FAKA and other local performers, argued that activist artists like FAKA are 'redefining what it is to be African, queer and visible where all over the world queer voices are being silenced'. Similarly, reflecting on continued practices of ostracism and erasure of being Black and queer, Desire Marea, one of the duo, shares their personal narrative of

discrimination to argue for the intersectionality of 'othered' identities and highlights the decolonial, feminist and queer advocacy and interruptions that FAKA contributes to:

This feeling of spatial exclusion became all the more reified when I grew older and certain contrasts my body made within spaces put me in positions of danger. In many other instances, it was not only my very 'blackness' that was in conflict with spaces, it was my femininity and my queerness.⁵

Arguably, FAKA's performative activism and activist performance not only engages a political and pedagogical project of raising consciousness and advocating against racist, heteronormative rigidities that are fuelled by patriarchal colonial logics, but they also open up spaces for representation and recognition (Fraser, 2003). In presenting desires and practices that remain 'othered' and stigmatized, performances that articulate the social exclusions that many experience for not occupying a hegemonic position of whiteness, cisgender, heterosexual and so on, while also representing agency, pleasure and pride, may be deployed as a powerful tool of advocacy. Creative projects such as FAKA may raise awareness at a public level across local and diverse geopolitical communities. Such interventions may also set up a positive and safe space, a space of identification and belonging, a 'safe space', possibly even a place of healing and inspiration for many excluded in continued racist, gendered, heteronormative and homophobic spaces. This is particularly well articulated by local queer activist Nigel Patel (2017: n.p.), who reflects on a new local television show, *Siyanibona*,⁶ developed through a partnership between a local TV platform and Iranti-Org,⁷ a queer human rights visual media organization, which is specifically aimed at engaging LGBTIQ+ advocacy:

Siyanibona's importance is multidimensional. For many, the authentic queer stories will be significant because they may be the first or only ones in which people either see experiences similar to theirs, or learn about experiences different from their own. It is a sincere hope that the show has the ability to transform feelings of confusion, loneliness and fear into safety, affirmation and hope.

Patel powerfully articulates the argument that critical, transgressive and 'troubling' social media and activist art have the potential to make a difference, not only to challenge discrimination and violence but also to work at a subjective and community level of change.

Conclusions

I have located this article in the South African context but the examples of pedagogical and political engagement towards LGBTIQ+ rights and freedom in transnational contexts are evident. While the article has drawn on two case studies by way of example of forms of popular and university located performative activism and activist performance, the arguments made refer to a larger body of creative work in South Africa and globally. These two examples are among many but have been explored here as the basis for arguments about the value of multiple sites of resistance, pedagogy and knowledge that speak to a larger project of gender and sexual justice, while also challenging normative forms of scholarship and pedagogy within the university in its goals of social justice, which includes challenging

continued exclusions and erasures on the basis of colour, gender, sexuality and more. My project is to illustrate that scholarship directed at sexual and gender justice with goals for policy and practice intervention has much to gain from such forms of intervention and certainly is invited to engage in a productive dialogue with these. Pather and Boule (2019: 9), in their volume on transgressive live art in South Africa, argue that by ‘interfering with accepted logics, live art in South Africa forces us to scrutinize our own constructions and to be vigilant’ (p. 9). The acknowledgement that transgressive live art may serve to ‘trouble’ particular and oppressive normativities resonates with a critical scholarly project directed at ‘troubling’ existing rigidities and hegemonies that govern our lives, including gender, sexuality and intersecting and other identities. This brief sharing of two examples of such artistic performative activist and pedagogical interventions flags the importance of drawing on such creative and destabilizing forms of knowledge as part of the larger project of intersectional sexual and gender justice. The value of the deployment of subversive artistic interventions, activism and alternative, non-representational methodologies for teaching and research has similarly been increasingly acknowledged and promoted in global contexts (see e.g. in the special edition of *Kohl, Charlton and Sayegh*, 2019).

The argument for challenging the rigid notion of what counts as knowledge and which knowledges count most is interwoven with the imperative to challenge colonial patriarchal heritages which privilege regulation, control and violence. Colonial logics take shape in the academy through the Cartesian divide in which mind and rationality are most valued, while embodied knowledge and affect are othered and ‘controlled for’ in empiricist scientific logics. A project of challenging such heritages and their associated symbolic and material violences requires opening up more space for the entangled projects of transgressive and queer art as scholarly and pedagogical production together with other forms of research and theoretical work. A dialogue with performative activism and activist performance in contemporary postcolonial contexts (and indeed globally) is then further important as part of the larger decolonial project in higher education to challenge the divides of mind–body, intellect–art, rationality–emotion. Taking seriously the contributions of transgressive creative forms of knowledge within the authoritative textual based academy is arguably a significant component of such a decolonial and anti-patriarchal endeavour.

Arguing for the value of the creative arts in scholarship on sexuality and gender does not however mean assuming all art as inherently a critical and social justice project. Indeed, mainstream art has of course always played a role in the repetitions of colonial subjugation and rationalization of oppressions, reproducing a white and male gaze, as a growing body of decolonial, feminist and queer art gallery and museum projects which are attempting to disrupt these traditions remind us (see e.g. the Museum of Equality and Difference [MOED] Project – Buikema et al., 2019). Even critical and social justice orientated artists may be coopted into a global artistic elite and their works repackaged for capitalist markets while their political sting is defused (Hearn, personal communication, 16 April 2019). Within the narratives of the cited examples, there may also be possible readings that reinforce notions of unitary and fixed identity, definition and belonging, which while serving a particular project of resistance at a particular time and place, may bolster rigid hegemonies and divisive discourses. Nonetheless, the project of reflexive dialogue between and within critical and transgressive art, politics, pedagogies and research offers a range of possibilities for rethinking everyday efforts of scholarship towards sexual and gender justice.

Also importantly, much of the research on sexualities and gender in South African, as in many global Southern contexts, has tended to reproduce deterministic and unitary victimizing and negative constructions of sexualities and gender with emphasis on sexual and homophobic violence and binaristic and raced constructions of violent Black men and subjugated Black women victims (Boonzaier and Kessi, 2018; Ratele, 2018; Shefer, 2016, 2018). Dominated by a 'tired polemics of violence, disease and reproduction' (Tamale, 2011: 30) there has been little work documenting resistance and agency, not to mention pleasure or joy in sexualities and gender. A turn to 'agency' is of course not a panacea since a focus on survival and strength may equally serve to obfuscate the extreme violences and discrimination faced by those on the margins and disadvantaged by poverty, race, citizenship, sexual and gender orientation, and so on (Hemmings and Treacher Kabesh, 2013; Jungar and Oinas, 2011; Shefer, 2016). In this sense, critical creative scholarship as illustrated by many examples in contemporary South Africa and elsewhere, and unpacked within the two examples elaborated on here, also may serve to destabilize binarist thinking, and open up new imaginaries and critical hope for different ways of being, for multiplicities and fluidities in desire, practice and relationality to be acknowledged and valued. Reinforcing Donna Haraway's (2016) provocation to 'make trouble' and 'stay with the trouble', researchers in the more 'traditional' academy may gain much from engaging with artistic and activist practices of 'troubling' gender and sexual binarisms and normativities that undermine justice, equality and freedom:

Artists trouble our worldviews and test our ability to function without familiar coordinates, chipping away at false certainties. The effects are often disorienting, but vital, it would seem, if we intend to do more than dream of a fair, critical and robust society from the safe remove of intractable ideological standpoints. (Pather and Boule, 2019: 14)

At the same time, dialoguing with 'troubling' performative activism and active performance may also inspire scholarship (both pedagogies and research) which 'troubles' its own colonial and patriarchal logics which tend towards reinstating binarisms and disciplinary frameworks, while also opening up space for a reflexive queer(y)ing of dominant knowledges on sexualities and genders in social and political contexts.

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Notes

1. FAKA's home page, www.siyakaka.com/about-1 (accessed 16 April 2019).
2. Trans Collective Facebook Page, www.facebook.com/transfeministcollective/posts/113220963351248 (accessed 18 June 2016).
3. Thanks to Chantelle Gray van Heerden for this insight; see also Gray van Heerden (2018).
4. FAKA's home page, www.siyakaka.com/about-1/ (accessed 19 April 2019).

5. Desire Marea (2016) On visibility and the illusion of the safe space. *Between 10 and 5*. <https://10and5.com/2016/09/22/on-visibility-and-the-illusion-of-the-safe-space/> (accessed 19 April 2019).
6. *Siyaniibona* has generated 13 television episodes so far which highlight discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people as well as resistances and advocacy (see e.g. www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ew-A8B-II0; www.mambaonline.com/2018/02/08/sas-first-lgbti-tv-show-celebrates-coming-closet/).
7. 'Iranti is a queer human rights visual media organization based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Iranti works within a human rights framework as its foundational platform for raising issues on Gender, Identities and Sexuality. Founded in January 2012 by Human Rights activist, photographer and curator, Jabu Pereira ... formed with the clear intention of building local partnerships and movements that use media as a key platform for lobbying, advocacy and educational interventions across Africa. Through the use of various visual mediums such as videos, photography, audio recording, among others [Iranti] sets itself as an archive of Queer memory in ways that destabilize numerous modes of discrimination based on gender, sexuality and sexual orientation' (www.iranti-org.co.za).

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Author biography

Tamara Shefer is Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape. She has researched primarily in areas related to intersectional gender and sexual justice, including young sexualities, masculinities, memory and apartheid, gender and care, and decolonial, feminist and queer activism, art, pedagogies and scholarship. She has recently published *Engaging Youth in Activist Research and Pedagogical Praxis: Transnational and Intersectional Perspectives on Gender, Sex, and Race* (2018, with Jeff Hearn, Kopano Ratele and Floretta Boonzaier).

Résumé

L’Afrique du Sud démocratique d’après 1994 s’est dotée d’un impressionnant arsenal constitutionnel et juridique en faveur des droits de l’homme, y compris en matière de sexualité et de genre. Malgré cela, un nombre croissant de travaux rendent compte de la persistance de l’homophobie, de l’hétérosexisme et d’actes de violence généralisés à l’encontre des personnes non conformes

en matière sexuelle et de genre, des phénomènes qui se conjuguent à d'autres inégalités. Cependant, il existe également un terrain fertile de résistance aux injustices intersectionnelles liées au genre et à la sexualité, comme en témoigne la prolifération de l'activisme et de l'art queer, féministes et décoloniaux. Situé dans le contexte post-apartheid et postcolonial sud-africain, nous nous intéressons dans cet article à ces dernières années d'engagements queer, féministes et décoloniaux, en examinant plus particulièrement deux exemples actuels de performance activiste et d'activisme performatif. L'article explore le potentiel sociopolitique de ces interventions qui transgressent, dérangent et perturbent les normativités sexuelles et de genre rigides et (re) calcifiantes contemporaines pour le projet plus général queer, féministe et décolonial en matière de justice et de droits sexuels et de genre, et pour la recherche critique menée dans ce but.

Mots-clés

Activisme, Afrique du Sud, décolonial, féministe, LGBTI, performance, queer

Resumen

La Sudáfrica democrática posterior a 1994 cuenta con un impresionante compromiso constitucional y legal con los derechos humanos, incluida la consagración de los derechos sexuales y de género. A pesar de tales compromisos, un creciente número de trabajos pone de manifiesto la persistencia generalizada de la homofobia, el heterosexismo y la violencia contra las personas no conformes en materia sexual y de género, los cuales se entrecruzan con otras formas de desigualdad. Sin embargo, también existe un amplio terreno de resistencia a las injusticias interseccionales sexuales y de género, evidenciado por la proliferación del activismo y el arte descolonial, feminista y *queer*. Ubicado en el contexto post-apartheid y postcolonial de Sudáfrica, este artículo se interesa por estos últimos años de compromiso descolonial, feminista y *queer*, centrándose en dos ejemplos actuales de lucha activista y activismo performativo. El artículo explora las posibilidades sociopolíticas de las intervenciones que transgreden y perturban las normatividades sexuales y de género rígidas y (re) calcificantes contemporáneas para el proyecto más general descolonial, feminista y *queer* en materia de justicia y derechos sexuales y de género y para la investigación crítica dirigida a estos objetivos.

Palabras clave

Activismo, descolonizado, feminista, LGTBI, representación, Sudáfrica