

“IT ISN’T HATE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH”:
ANTI-TRANS (GENDER) POLITICS IN THE UK AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE GENDER CRITICAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT
a critical look into the colonial remnants of gender discourse

By

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ABSTRACT

The UK is currently experiencing a backlash against transgender rights coming from a group of people calling themselves gender critical feminists, who debate the existence of transgender people and what political and social rights they should be afforded. Little is known outside of transgender activist circles and scholarship about the impact this movement is having on trans(gender) politics and transgender lives, and so this thesis project hopes to bring greater awareness to the subject within studies of European societies in sociology. Through an extensive literature review of scholarship on the discursive battles in feminism over the concepts of gender and sex, and transgender people's place within the greater feminist movement, I discuss the implications of the gender critical feminist movement on transgender lives and rights. Despite great work by these scholars, no effort has been made to understand the importance of colonialism in maintaining domination of sex, gender, and intersubjectivity. Using a feminist critical discourse analysis methodology, I analyze 16 different texts from prominent gender critical voices in the UK to examine the question: how is our view of trans(gender) politics and people shaped by gender critical feminist discourse? In order to more completely understand the systems of oppression that construct our gendered reality in the Western world and how they shape transgender experiences and how we understand them, I take a decolonial feminist approach to discussing the results by examining them through the coloniality of gender. This framework provides me with a way to unpack the constructed realities of transgender people in order to think critically about the origins of gender politics in the UK to reveal a legacy of colonialism which is present in the gender critical feminist discourse. The results demonstrate how transgender politics and lives are constructed by a Eurocentric hegemonic gender order where boundary-making around essentialist notions of womanhood promote coercive, violent colonial constructs of gender and sex.

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DEDICATION

“But what does it mean to speak for those who have been refused access to reason and knowledge, for us who have been regarded as mentally ill? With what voice can we speak? Can the jaguar or the cyborg lend us their voices? To speak is to invent the language of the crossing, to project one’s voice into an interstellar expedition: to translate our difference into the language of the norm; while we continue, in secret, to practice a strange lingo that the law does not understand.”

Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus*

*This thesis is dedicated
to the queers of the past who acted up;
to the queers in the now who struggle to keep up;
& to the queer futures that are brought up in this esoteric process;
there may never be a path,
but we will forever find a way
to speak our truths*

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Statement of Intent

I set out to write this thesis as a continuation of my previous research project, *J.K. Rowling and the Order of the TERFs*, which examined the trans exclusionary radical feminist discourse in the UK, to reveal the ideological power that structures their language use and how it privileges an essentialist view of the category of sex and a regressive, anti-feminist politics of gender. Feminists like J.K. Rowling refer to themselves as being 'gender critical', rather than trans exclusionary, to sidestep being seen as hateful towards transgender people. My experience as a transgender person and as a feminist scholar living in Europe has led me to follow the discussion of transgender rights closely, and the threats posed to it by not only right wing and religious leaders and governments, but by liberal feminists like Rowling as well. The lack of discussion outside of transgender feminist circles as to what exactly this more liberal and secular countermovement to transgender rights is, led me to want to develop a more robust project around it. I also was purposeful to write a thesis that somebody with no understanding of feminism, transgender rights, and/or a sociological approach to critical discourse analysis could understand and appreciate, which is why I make it a point to explain all of my concepts as clearly as possible.

After concluding my aforementioned research project, I noticed a lack of analysis regarding the role that colonial power structures of gender play in the anti-transgender discourse. Thus, this unique project whole-heartedly adopts a decolonial feminist approach in its understanding and analysis of the literature and data. As such, my intent from the beginning was to fundamentally reassess what knowledge production means by using as many sources as possible from people that weren't cisgender men, heterosexual, white, and/or European. In following the program course of study (Sociology of European Societies), this thesis has been written to provide a thorough sociological understanding and discussion of the development of the Gender Critical Feminist movement in a postcolonial Britain, because *transgender rights are human rights*.

Transgender Rights Are Human Rights

The question of what exactly those rights entail became a fiery debate recently in the United Kingdom (UK), between feminist transgender rights activists who wish to center transgender rights in the fight for social justice, and “Gender Critical Feminists” (GCFs) who are critical of “(trans)gender ideology” and believe transgender rights pose a threat to women’s “sex-based” rights. According to transgender feminist sociologist and scholar Sally Hines (2020), these debates in feminism and attacks on transgender rights entail ideas about the “truth” of the sexed body and morality tales and origin myths about telling the “truth” of gender. As the new millennium ushered in an unparalleled era of visibility and acceptance for transgender people in the UK, in 2004, the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) was put into effect granting transgender people the right to change their assigned sex at birth on legal documents to match their gender identity. Demands from feminist transgender rights activists to simplify the lengthy and complicated process of changing their documents by way of “self-identification” led to the UK government beginning a process of reforming the GRA in 2018. In 2020, this all came to a head when the government opened up the review process for public comment and came to a final decision.

While feminist critique and exclusion of transgender people is neither a new phenomenon nor unique to the UK (it was born out of 1970’s radical feminism in the USA and is visible in Latin America as well), the internet and social media have given a platform for more and more people to express their views easily and publicly on social justice issues. As transgender rights become centered in human rights debates, the discourse surrounding it has amplified and transphobia (the dislike of and prejudice towards transgender people) becomes apparent and visible. A recent post in the UK-based group Mayday4Women claimed “Transgenderism is currently one of the biggest threats to feminism in the UK” (Tudor, 2021:244). One of the biggest news stories in UK media in 2020 was J.K. Rowling’s twitter feed being filled with claims questioning transgender people’s legitimacy in the public sphere and their right to identify as men and women, leading to other high-profile feminists in UK media and academia speaking up about their discontent with transgender rights activism. This thesis will therefore be looking at some of the loudest, most powerful voices in the

GCF movement and be drawing its data from several sources including Twitter, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, personal blogs and websites, and official GCF organization statements.

The conflicts between GCFs and transgender rights advocates reflect the current political conditions of the UK, in which public discourse is dominated by polarization, and deepened by the extensive amount of misinformation and distrust in 'experts' whose knowledge may not speak to citizens' cultural common sense (Pearce et al., 2020). As anti-gender ideology movements spread across Europe and seek to roll back rights for women and LGBTQ people, the mobilization against "transgender ideology" growing in the UK is very concerning, especially coming from people who call themselves feminists. Whereas with the former, the Catholic Church and right-wing populist leaders are leading a moralistic charge against gender; the latter feminist mobilization are employing an epistemological force. That is, their anti-gender agenda is about questioning how we know what we know in the world – are transgender men and women *really* who they say they are, men and women, male and female? and just what is gender, what is sex? These are contemporary phenomena with deep historical roots, which must be interrogated to make sense of the current landscape. Analyses GCF discourse provide an important contribution to sociology, not only because they offer us an insight into the production of ideologically fixed, anti-evidential politics, but also because of what we can learn about power relations rooted in colonialism (Pearce et al., 2020). Additionally, just how these discourses impact marginalize people is a meaningful element of sociological inquiry.

The emergence of the GCF movement, its relation to feminism, and the politics involved in the debate have been discussed by several scholars which will be outlined in the literature review of this thesis. This includes Vincent et al.'s (2020) publication "TERF Wars: Feminism and the fight for transgender futures", an anthology that explores topics such as sex separate spaces/"the bathroom divide", detransitioners, autogynephilia, and 'rapid onset gender dysphoria', thoroughly outlining the battles taking place between feminist camps. Sara Ahmed (2016) critiques the GCF claim that being called transphobic is a way of silencing them and calls this 'rebuttal' system something that hammers and chips away at trans existence, and offers up a political model of encouraging cis and trans feminists to unite as a single feminist force (an

“affinity of hammers”) to break down the larger system of patriarchy. Hines (2019) uses original case study material to highlight political and epistemological tensions between feminism and trans lives, drawing out central themes from the cases. Yet despite this thorough scholarly discussion of GCF, I could find no studies that utilize critical discourse analysis or adequately examine the discourse of GCFs.

Furthermore, this thesis will be taking a theoretical approach to the analysis of discourse that has yet to be discussed in the literature – decolonial feminism and what Maria Lugonés calls the coloniality of gender. GCFs are coming out of the woodwork during a time when we are witnessing some of the most significant anti-racist demonstrations in decades, during a global pandemic that has disproportionately affected Black people and people of color; making this battle over gender all the more significant for black and transgender people of color. As people in the UK mobilize to dismantle centuries of inherited racism and white supremacy, it is important to understand the relationship of transphobia in GCF discourse to colonialism. Because this is taking place in a Western, European country with an imperial past, a country that is witnessing a resurgence in nationalism and hostility towards the ‘other’ post-Brexit, it is necessary to analyze it in a way that recognizes the ways in which colonialism still operates through gender discourses upholding white supremacy and patriarchy.

As postcolonial scholarship shows, there is a definitive history of British men and women wanting to regulate gender for the sake of empire. British colonizers were as much concerned about maintaining class and gender distinctions between themselves as they were in constructing their racial superiority over those they colonized. In “Imperial Bodies”, Elizabeth Collingham shows how political insecurities about the legitimacy of British rule in India gave rise to a regime of bodily regulation that created the anglicized body as one that “became an instrument of colonial rule” (2001:82). Kathleen Wilson’s “The Island Race” (2003) demonstrates the ways in which imperial contact and the gendered performances they produced allowed British national identity to be formed and reinforced through the 18th century as the British interacted with populations in the South Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Caribbean. Anibal Quijano (2000) theorized the coloniality of power, by which European imperialists violently and forcefully imposed their hierarchical and binary

ways of doing and knowing and understandings of society upon indigenous populations, including introducing the concept of race, thus putting forth the idea that racialization was crucial for colonization and that Western modernity constitutes a project of dominating civilizations claiming universality the moment they encountered 'the Other' and subsequently concealed the violence. Maria Lugonés further expands upon Quijano by drawing upon decolonial feminism to theorize that gender is a social category that was imposed in colonial encounters through different technologies of dehumanization. Postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship is very successful in showing the ways in which gender, race, class, and sexuality were central to creating and managing imperial structures and maintaining national identities, and as such, this thesis hopes to further contribute to scholarship in the field.

Throughout this project I therefore use decolonial feminism as a critical lens to analyze the discourse. In surveying the existing literature on the topic, I found no studies that examine how the coloniality of power is manifest in GCF discourse through the domination of gender subjectivity and control of knowledge production of gender. As such, this study fills a gap in the literature on the topic. To accomplish this, I identified JK Rowling, Maya Fortstater, Susanna Rustin, Suzanne Moore, Dr. Kathleen Stock, Julie Bindel, Jess De Wahls, and Hadley Freeman as prominent GCFs with different backgrounds using their high-profile platforms to discuss sex and gender and critique transgender rights activism. I also included Women's Place UK and LGB Alliance as two organizations who pursue political action that is against the GRA. I drew from a sample of several online texts, including tweets, news articles, personal blog statements, and official statements from them for this project and utilize a Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) methodology to identify major themes and reoccurring ideas related to how gender and sex are discussed by GCFs. CDA attempts to identify how social relationships shape discourse, and how, vice versa, discourse shapes social relationships, via mechanisms of power and ideology. It is a specifically *feminist* CDA because it deals with gendered social practices imbued with power and it is aimed at ultimately effecting social transform. It is assumed in CDA that discourse is a social activity that cannot be considered separately from a given social and historical context. Accordingly, feminist CDA is an appropriate method to

use for analyzing text when the expectation is that historical social conditions – such as those identified by decolonial feminism - are expected to influence the text in ways that are likely reproduce these social conditions.

The central research question of this thesis is as follows: *how is our view of trans(gender) politics and people shaped by gender critical feminist discourse?* Through my analysis of the selected texts, I was able to uncover power relations hidden in the discourse that reinforce ideologies of discrimination and marginalization of transgender people by fashioning transgender politics as a dangerous ideological movement that is indoctrinating vulnerable people and eroding the status of women as a “biologically sex-based” class, that can only be saved by their version of feminist gender politics, which are built upon an ideological system of colonial domination. Transgender people are formed as subjects in the discourse by unequal power relations through a colonial system of gender domination that privileges a Eurocentric understanding of sex and gender via several mechanisms of intersubjective relations, which include using a) statements of ‘truth’ to exclude subjects and claim superiority by classifying subjects based on biological essentialism to control and regulate bodies for the maintenance of gendered hierarchies, b) dismissing ‘other’ forms of knowledge production, and c) employing statements of defense and feeling threatened by difference. These results are incorporated with the literature review and the theoretical background in the concluding discussion to suggest an emerging transgender resistance to decolonizing gender and abolishing the modern/colonial gender system.

Terminology

Throughout this thesis, there are several important concepts that appear. Many of them will be defined in the chapters and sections that utilize them the most. It is important to outline them here first.

Sex and Gender.

In contemporary Sociology and feminist theory, *gender* is understood to be a social construction and central characteristic for social organization, separate from our *sex*, which has also been theorized as a social construction (see Butler, 1990). Gender is cultural, and includes the behavior, roles, and norms associated with being a man,

woman, girl, or boy and as such varies in society and across time. Sex is a complex biological expression associated with being a man or a woman and can include a variety of things such as hormones, chromosomes, and genitals. When a person is born, they are assigned into a category of male or female based on genital appearance and will carry that marker with them throughout their life, as much of our Western society is segregated by this distinction. Most importantly though, scholars have discussed the implications that neither gender nor sex operates in a binary mode (for example, intersex, transgender, and non-binary people). How a person feels internally about whether they are male, female, both, or neither, is their *gender identity*. The expression of this feeling, through mannerisms, clothing/style, and body features, is *gender expression*. *Cisgender* people are those who feel like their gender aligns with their assigned sex, i.e. they were born assigned male and identify as men. *Transgender* (or *trans*) people are those who feel like their gender doesn't match their assigned sex and may or may not seek physical and legal congruence of such (like taking hormones, having surgeries, changing sex identification on legal documents). For example, I was born assigned female (sex) and was raised as a girl (gender), but felt more like a boy (gender identity) and acted in masculine ways (gender expression), and began my physical transition to socially and legally became a man who is therefore, transgender.

Gender Recognition Act of 2004.

The Gender Recognition Act (GRA) was an extremely important piece of legislation that gave trans people the right to change their gender on their birth certificate, without the previous requirement of having to have had surgery or any kind of medical intervention. While the GRA did not require trans people to be "medicalized" in order to change their gender, the criterion for receiving a certificate was an exceedingly bureaucratic process involving long NHS wait times and excessive fees, requiring trans individuals to seek the consent of several medical practitioners and psychologists and having a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria (Figure 1); thus needing to provide sufficient evidence of their "transness" to a panel of medical and legal experts. Furthermore, it did not recognize or make space or accommodations for people that were outside of, or in between, the binary of woman/man and female/male. It was under these grounds that trans rights

advocates argued that the GRA was outdated, exclusionary, and discriminatory and should be reformed. Trans rights advocates insisted that the UK government allow trans people to self identify as trans (without medical diagnosis) in order to receive a gender recognition certificate and change their legal status, thus removing extensive barriers faced to the recognition of trans people as equal and legitimate under the law. In June 2020, the European Commission stated the UK GRA as it stood lagged behind human rights standards and involved intrusive medical requirements ("Gender Recognition Act, 2004", 2021). However in September 2020, after conducting public opinions surveys where the majority (64%) of the 100,000+ respondents supported allowing self-ID (Smith, 2020), the UK ministers decided against reforming the GRA. UK Equalities minister Liz Truss said of the decision:

We want transgender people to be free to live and to prosper in a modern Britain ... It is the government's view that the balance struck in this legislation is correct ... We have also come to understand that gender recognition reform ... is not the top priority for transgender people.

("Changes to gender recognition laws ruled out", 2020)

Despite not revoking the GRA, the UK government did promise to cut the waiting times at NHS clinics and reduce the cost of applying for a gender recognition certificate, making it a more straightforward process. In December 2020, officials in Scotland decided to abandon attempts at allowing self-ID for trans people as well.

Gender Critical Feminis(m/ts).

Colloquially known as "Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists" or TERFs, they contemporarily prefer to call themselves gender critical feminist (GCFs) to distance themselves from the explicitly hateful rhetoric of the former - so that is what they will be called throughout this project, as I also believe it represents a particularly unique form of this kind of transphobic feminism emerging out of fourth wave feminism and post-queer theory. Feminists who have been critical or exclusionary have been around since the 1970's in Western feminism, and the gender critical feminism of the UK informs and is informed by American feminist transphobia (Tudor, 2021). This brand of feminism has always been hostile to including transgender people in their

movement, but because of the visibility and recognition of legal and political rights being sought by transgender people in the 21st century, there is a greater, more public backlash taking place. GCFs argue that allowing transgender people to self-identify will cause harm to cisgender women, by opening up single-sex segregated spaces to men who might exploit the GRA legislation. They hold that biology is fixed, that transgender people cannot change their sex, meaning a transgender woman will never be a real woman or can identify as female. They have stirred up quite a panic in the UK by calling the increase in people identifying as transgender “transgender ideology”, something that is being imposed on vulnerable gender-questioning children and being upheld in universities, where any questioning of the transgender rights movement is called transphobic. They demand answers and justifications from transgender people, or they believe they are being silenced and cancelled. They critique transgender people’s gender identity and experiences (yet never their own) and seek to undo decades of feminist scholarship on the sex/gender divide – including work by black feminists, feminists of color, working class feminists, and disabled feminists - that has pointed to the ways in which minority women are not accounted for within dominant feminist frameworks that narrowly define what a woman, a feminist subject, is (western, white, able bodied, heterosexual, middle class and cisgender) (Hines, 2020).

Colonization, Colonialism, and Coloniality.

It is crucial to this project to emphasize the differences between these three concepts. *Colonization*, as an event or period during which a nation physically takes over another. *Colonialism*, as historically specific acts and processes through which a nation imposes its sovereignty on and rule over another nation and whose perpetuation is explained by the persistence of social formations that resulted from this rule. *Coloniality*, which refers to the enduring systems of power that develop in the context of colonialism, which “redefine culture, labor, inter subjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer” (Icaza, 2020:63). Icaza further distinguishes here, “coloniality is not colonialism, but a complex set of logics, e.g. dehumanization of the colonized, that is common to all forms of colonialism (2020:63). It is something

that continues even after colonialism and colonial empires have been overthrown and imbues the consciousness of, and social relations in, modern societies.

Decolonial Feminism.

This thesis is firmly situated in the practice of decolonial feminism. Broadly speaking, decolonial feminism is a feminism which seeks to counter and revise the white, Eurocentric understandings of society and modernity in global politics. It is anchored in “the desire to smash sexism, racism, capitalism and imperialism, and to change everything” (Vergès, 2020:13). Decolonial feminists position their studies from the understanding that racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism diffuse into all relations of domination, even when the imperial regimes associated with the phenomenon have disappeared (Vergès, 2020). It is also a critique of what Vergès (2020) calls “civilizational feminism”, a Western, privileged, white feminism that imposes a perspective that contributes to a continued domination of people based on race, class, and gender - one that upholds a white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist, patriarchal society. A feminism which has decolonial politics contributes to the fight against oppressive social structures and is undertaken by marginalized people to assert their right to existence. A decolonial feminism “goes beyond the category of ‘woman’ based on biological determinism, and it restores a radical political dimension to the notion of women’s rights” (Vergès, 2020:41). By exploring the colonial obligation to control people’s bodies and sexualities, decolonial feminist approaches analyze how this process works for the benefit of empires, in the past and present, and how to overcome them in the future. A decolonial feminism would ask that If gender is a social construction, and imposed upon people as a way of organizing and controlling societies, who imposed it over whom, what existed prior, and what still remains?

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is separated into six chapters. Following my chapter one introduction, chapter two is a review of the literature essential to understanding the context of the debate surrounding trans rights in the UK, and what role GCF has played in it. This includes a historical review of the development of the gender critical feminist movement and discussion of their discourse, and the events leading up to

and including the debate on the Gender Recognition Act reform. In chapter three I discuss the colonality of power and gender, and how it best serves as a theoretical tool and critical lens to use throughout this thesis. Chapter four explains the specific methods and procedures that went into developing and operationalizing this empirical research project. I detail first the criteria and rationale for selecting the texts featured in my sample, and then delineate the steps taken to examine, code, and analyze the tweets. This chapter also includes a statement of my positionality as a researcher and personal investment in this project. In chapter five, I present my analysis of the major themes that emerged during my examination of the sample texts. The final chapter concludes the thesis with a discussion of the implications of the analysis, the limitations of my research, and how we can move forward from here.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Before any analysis in this thesis can be conducted, it is vital to consider the literature that this project engages with in conversation and builds upon. The first part of the review will be an overview of the “TERF Wars”, which discusses the history of trans exclusion in feminist writing and activism and chronicles the debates taking place within feminism of how to conceptualize of and respond to “trans”. After contextualizing the subject of the thesis, the second part will discuss empirical research that has been done on the GCF movement in the UK and their discourse. Each section includes an address of how this thesis fits with what has been done before and how it can contribute to furthering our knowledge of the topic.

History of Feminism and Trans

Born or Becoming (Trans Exclusionary)?

In her pioneering 1949 work of feminist philosophical thought, Simone de Beauvoir famously argued that, while women’s bodies may be formed by nature in such a way that they can do things like have children, gender norms were a cultural and political position laid on top of a woman’s sexed nature. She conceptualized of the differences between sex as being biological, and gender as being cultural, in a move that would set the tone for the second wave of Western feminism’s focus on the body as the source through which women’s oppression was socially made real or embodied. A woman was freed from biology (“one is not born a woman ...”) but rooted in culture (“but rather becomes one”). She saw gender as imposed across multiple sites such as the family, education, and work, all having the effect of limiting women’s experiences and reducing their power (Hines, 2020). In taking an embodied, phenomenological standpoint, a woman “was someone who had been socialized from birth into the restrictive structures of patriarchy and had endured subsequent oppressive life-experience” (Hines, 2020:703).

In *Sex wars and (trans) gender panics: Identity and body politics in contemporary UK feminism* (2020), Sally Hines explains that during this time in the UK, socialist feminism emerged as the dominant political feminist framework, and centralized

reproductive rights as their political goal. They believed the inequalities brought about by reproduction were the center of their oppression, or the “remanent[s] of unenlightened thought that tied women to their biology” (Hines, 2020:703). Hines further points out that while the biological basis of gender was disrupted through Beauvoir’s philosophical interventions, the biological premise of sex very much remained anchored in feminist thought. For second wave feminists, an understanding of the body and the family as central, for example, around health and reproductive rights and sexual harassment and violence, “meant that the female body became not just a political issue, but a site of feminist politics in and of itself” (Hines, 2019:149).

Beauvoir’s ontological approach to understanding “woman” would be further complicated by the mid-1960’s and 1970’s. As sexual liberation movements erupted and the term “transgender” began to appear in medical discourses, groups of feminists in the West began excluding certain women from feminist spaces. In *The Ontological woman: A history of deauthentication, dehumanization, and violence*, Cristan Williams (2020) analyzes how these feminists justified their exclusion of certain women and constructed social forms by relying on the natural, binary, sexed embodiment of womanhood, which served to objectify ontological embodiment. Their first target was lesbian woman, who embodied a femininity outside of the norm, and were “considered akin to being an un-woman: someone who had left the ‘Territory of Womanhood’ altogether” (Williams, 2020:718). American feminist and author of another seminal second wave feminist text, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan called lesbians “the lavender menace”, and refused to integrate their rights into the National Organization for Women platform.

The rampant exclusion of transgender women from feminism and the questioning of their female embodiment came after the publication of Janice Raymond’s book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* was published in 1979. Widely considered by trans feminist scholars as the first trans exclusionary radical feminist text, the book’s central argument is that cisgender bodies are natural, whole, and as such ‘good’, while trans bodies are unnatural, defective, and therefore ‘bad’ (Williams, 2020). To quote Raymond’s (1979) book:

[Transsexuals] purport to be the real thing. And our suspension of disbelief in their synthetic nature is required as a moral imperative.

(p.xxiii)

Transsexualism itself is a deeply moral question rather than a medical-technical answer. I contend that the problem of transsexualism would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence

(p. 120)

Williams (2020) explains how this moral reasoning is a rhetorical tactic that is a bad faith argument because of its appeal to nature to define the good or bad of something. Raymond also maintained that trans women's identities are based on patriarchal ideas of womanhood, by "rape[ing] women's bodies ... reducing them to an artifact ... appropriating this body for themselves" (1979:104). But as Williams (2020) argues, this moral trap distracts us from the way cisgender women work to construct their own bodies into a binary or in patriarchal ways.

As it was lesbian women first being excluded from feminist spaces, lesbians like Raymond (and to follow, British academic Sheila Jeffreys) now promoted exclusion through a "woman-born woman" framework and policy, where there exists a discrete 'woman' that is authentic, rooted in the natural sex assignment, and one that is not (Williams, 2020). This policy was a part of many important women's only spaces, such as the US Michigan Women's Festival in the 1990's, where trans and non-binary women were excluded from attending. This argument supposes that real women are born with XX chromosomes, a vagina and uterus, and naturally producing a certain amount of estrogen, and that trans women, by virtue of being born assigned into a male sex, will never be able to fit into their ontological woman. According to Williams (2020), Vincent et al. (2020), and Hines (2017, 2020), this biological essentialist argument for the exclusion of trans women from feminist and women's spaces is a cornerstone of contemporary gender critical feminist thought and activism.

This battle over what constitutes a woman divided the feminist movement into two camps: those who enjoyed the visibility and inclusion in feminist spaces and those who were deserted or had to fight for their place in the feminist movement. Whether

it is heteronormative women excluding lesbian women for being too manly or not proper women, or lesbian women excluding trans women for not having a “true” woman’s experience and body, the ontological debate over the meaning of what a woman is rages on into the 21st century as trans rights become a major political issue. As Williams shows in her text, trans exclusionary activism is founded upon a sex-essentialist ideology wherein a ‘woman’ can be reduced to her biology – one cannot become a woman, since the characteristics of womanhood are fixed at birth and reinforced by life experience (through socialization and experiences of gender) (Hines, 2019) - a total inversion of Beauvoir’s original claim.

While Williams (2020) provides a great discussion on the ontological framework that animates gender critical feminist discourse, by only focusing on white women’s experiences in the second wave feminist movement and trans exclusionary development, she overlooks the ways in which black women and women of color have experienced exclusion in feminism based on their race (i.e. during suffragism) and for being viewed as not “womanly” enough either (as Sojourner Turth’s famous “Ain’t I a woman?” claim demonstrates). The ways in which black women’s and women of color’s bodies have been policed by, and viewed as threatening to, white women’s version of womanhood has been extensively documented by feminists such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. By exposing the unreliability of the body as a fixed site of identity, there is a necessary alliance to be formed with black feminist thought. By taking an intersectional approach, and accounting for racialized women’s experiences of embodiment, especially in the context of a postcolonial country such as the UK, Williams’s ontological discussion of the meaning and experiences of woman(hood) could only be strengthened. This thesis project will therefore take a decolonial feminist approach to understanding the racialized and colonial implications of understanding how the category of woman is constructed and deployed in trans exclusionary/gender critical feminist discourses.

Trans Today – From Third-Wave TERFs to Territorial Toilets.

In her previously mentioned work, Sally Hines (2020) provides a great analysis of how gender critical feminism grew out of the second wave feminism’s trans exclusionary feminism. The work of third wave feminism in the 90’s became to rethink

the relationship between sex and gender as well as integrate the voices of feminists of color, black feminists, and working-class feminists. The recognition of 'difference', in relation to race, class, sexuality, age, and embodiment, Hines (2020) argues, led to more intricate models of feminist analysis. By theorizing difference, feminist scholars wrote against biologically determined models of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler famously critiqued the gender/sex model and inspired a slew of scientific and social research on the history of sexing people and categorizing bodies under various sources of cultural, institutionalized and state power, and led to the formation of queer and trans theory. Butler's work in the 1990's explored how sex, too, was a socially constructed concept:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.

(Butler, 1990, p. 6)

Throughout the 1990's and into the fourth wave of feminism in the 21st century, multiple and differently gendered identities and experiences were being addressed by feminist scholars in the form of queer and trans theories. They outlined the distinctions between gender identity, a person's internal sense of their gender (such as a man or woman), gender expression, a person's behavior, mannerisms, or appearance that is associated with being a man or a woman (such as masculinity and femininity), and sex assignment, the designation of male, female, or intersex at birth. The Western feminist understandings of the categories of gender and sex as being separate or fluid, led to the recognition of gender being liberated from its binary framework and acknowledging that gender was plural and allowed for gender expressions that were outside of the binary. Hines comments, "Genders were thus made visible in feminist thought" (2020:704). Suddenly, intersex people, and transgender people became visible, as did people whose bodily practices changed their bodies (like women body builders and athletes who no longer have periods). People such as Leslie Feinberg, Jack Halberstam, Susan Stryker, and Julia Serrano

wrote extensively on why trans voices belonged to and should be centered in feminism. Further, sociologists and anthropologists studying non-Western cultures found concepts of gender existing outside of man/woman, such as the hijras of India, two-spirit people of Native America, the muxes of Mexico, and the 6 genders of Judaism's Halacha.

With regard to the concept of sex, Hines (2020) lays out a thoughtful discussion of the diversity of biological sex brought up by third wave feminism. She says how intersex people have always been a part of humanity, with variances in both genitalia and reproductive organs (women born without ovaries, men who do not produce sperm). Additionally, there are significant diversities in the hormonal and chromosomal makeup within the categories of male and female. Anne Fausto-Sterling, a scholar and sexologist working on intersex conditions, says how Western culture is "deeply committed to the idea that there are only two sexes" (Hines, 2020:709). Sex, like gender, is a complicated concept influenced by society and not reducible to a single, binary model.

Hines discusses how feminism turned its attention to transgender matters in the fourth wave as the 'sexed body' again shifted into focus. Because so much of mainstream feminist theorizing and political action had been tied up in liberating cis women from the confines of their biology, this left open for debate where trans men and trans women fit in the larger movement. As the new millennium brought in unprecedented awareness of transgender people in social and cultural sphere in the UK, trans feminist writers and queer scholars wrote exhaustively against the previously discussed, singular feminist ontological position of the sex and gender binary (Hines, 2020). With this increased visibility, in feminism and in public, trans rights were put onto the political and legal agenda, as they demanded protection from discrimination, healthcare access, and legal gender recognition.

One of the most important pieces of legislation for trans rights in the UK was the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 (GRA). It allowed for trans people over the age of 18 who were not in a pre-transition marriage and who identified as male or female to change their sex on their birth certificate. However, as Hines (2020) points out, many trans people were excluded from this framework, such as non-binary people, those who were still married to their pre-transition partners, and young people. Moreover,

the process required to obtain a 'gender recognition certificate' to change one's sex was seen as a lengthy, complicated process that was even more restrictive in terms of accessibility. Trans activists lobbied around these holes and proposed a model of self-identification, which "decenters the involvement of medical practitioners and psychiatrists", and streamlines the recognition process (Hines, 2020:706). This was seen to be something that brought the UK in accordance with other European countries who inscribe self-identity into gender identity law (Hines, 2019). The UK government began a consultation on reforming the GRA in 2017; a public move that tore open old wounds in feminism over trans inclusion in not just feminist spaces, but public sex-segregated spaces as well. Trans exclusionary feminists never really disappeared even though they remained a minority (Hines, 2020); with the possible reformation of the GRA and the impact of the "Transgender Tipping Point" (deemed as such by trans woman Laverne Cox's Times Magazine cover from May 2014) and academia's influential queer and trans theory, gender critical feminism was birthed to pick up where the trans exclusionary radical feminism of Raymond left off.

The backlash to the reforms of the GRA were driven by the gender critical feminists who argued that allowing a transgender person to self-declare their gender will reduce the safety and well-being of cis women. They politically campaign for women's 'sex-based rights', proposing a reinstatement of sex as the main source of women's oppressions in effort to push back against trans rights, as well as putting reproductive function as the primary and fundamental site of women's disadvantage. Women's Place UK, a British political advocacy group, was formed in 2017 to raise money to fight the GRA backed by this transphobic ideology that all trans women are a potential threat to cis women (Hines, 2020). The notion of deception, that trans women are pretending to be women and trans men are pretending to be men, runs through their denouncements of trans people. Their fear is that cis men will exploit the GRA and self-identify as women in order to gain access to women's spaces and bodies. With a high media profile, groups like WPUK have linked up with international organizations such as US Christian right hate group 'Hands Across the Aisle', a dangerous political alliance with far-reaching consequences (Hines, 2020). From this perspective, sex is defined by genitals, reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormonal makeup, while gender is characterized as identity. And while gender

may be subject to change, sex is fixed. In the eyes of GCFs, one can 'identify as' a man or woman, but will never really actually *be* a man or woman. Hines critiques their biological sex based oppression standpoint, writing that "the positioning of sex as the source of oppression presumes a universal characteristic of womanhood in which all cis women are disadvantaged in the same way" (2020:708). And as Black feminist thought has made clear, gender does not operate in isolation.

Locating trans people outside of the categories of woman (and man) and debating their place in the public and political realm has led to what Vincent et al. (2020) call the "*TERF wars*". Debates about whether trans women belong in women's spaces such as bathrooms, changing rooms, and spas led to increasing media coverage and public commentary on trans people's bodies. In their excellent piece from *TERF Wars* (2020), *The Toilet debate: stalling trans possibilities and defending 'women's protected spaces'*, Jones and Slater (2020) consider how the toilet has become an unexpected focus of feminism in the UK. The authors critique the GCF position of trans exclusion in toilets based on their cis-centric, heteronormative, and gender essentialist positions, which include the perpetuation of explicitly transmisogynist discourses. While epistemologies and ontologies of gender and sex are not restricted to the toilet, it is a curiously productive space for gatekeeping (Jones & Slater, 2020). Arguing that access to safe and comfortable toilets plays an integral role in making trans lives possible, as well as anyone who doesn't conform to gender stereotypes, Jones & Slater highlight how dangerous the policing of gender can be in the homogenization of womanhood. Jack Halberstam (1998) was the first to point out how gender policing in bathrooms affects cis women who are masculine. In what way, and by whom, can body parts and genetic make-up of strangers in these spaces be observed and regulated? These moves by gender critical feminists to restrict access to single-sex spaces "highlight the white Western-centric lens through which gender is, literally, seen, and reinstated by misogynistic tropes of how women's bodies should appear in order to be recognized and valued" (Hines, 2020:713).

Moving quickly throughout the rest of Vincent et. al's (2020) *TERF Wars* book, we have texts that further analyze the topics of trans and feminism today. In *Autogynephilia: a scientific review, feminist analysis, and alternative 'embodiment fantasies' model*, Julia Serano critiques the theory of autogynephilia (that trans women's

identities are just a by-product of their sexual orientation resulting from an eroticization of being a woman) and demonstrates how gender critical feminists use this essentialist, heteronormative, male-centered theory of womanhood to discredit their identity as women. Serrano (2020) discusses how it first entered trans exclusionary discourse by way of Sheila Jeffreys (2014) and has become a recurring talking point on gender critical websites to insinuate that trans women are just ‘sexually deviant men’. In *More than ‘canaries in the gender coal mine’: a transfeminist approach to research on detransition*, Rowan Hildebrand-Chupp (2020) discusses how gender critical feminists weaponize stories of detransition (where someone who is trans reverts to identifying as the gender they were pre-transition) in order to further their cause of delegitimizing trans people in a “gotcha! trans isn’t real” type of scenario. Hildebrand-Chupp (2020) analyzes detransition literature and research to shed light on these ‘canaries in the gender coal mine’ to discuss what we can learn from their experiences and how to best support them going forward. In *Whose feminism is it anyway? The unspoken racism of the trans inclusion debate*, Emi Koyama does an excellent job of arguing that the “no-penis” (biologically based) policies employed in trans exclusive spaces are inherently racist and classist, and how these spaces pit white middle-class women’s oppression against women of color and trans women.

An excellent source of information on the historical and contemporary hostility within and across trans/feminist movements, *TERF Wars* is hard to find fault with, but it is not without its limitations. Hines (2020) brings up that the contributions of scholars and writers of color (and by way of intersectionality theory) explain the sex/gender binary model was constructed as part of a colonial project, and who explore the ways in which colonialism, racism, and whiteness have had on the gendered understandings for people of color and indigenous people. Yet, she never gives us any examples of them doing so. Furthermore, discussions of how colonialism operates in gender discourse are absent throughout the book *TERF Wars*. as is any discussion of how British feminist movements worked to benefit the empire by upholding gender norms and seeking to civilize the ‘savage’ women they were colonizing. Except for a few quotes from Black, Indigenous, and of color feminists, and Koyama’s piece discussing Gloria Anzaldúa’s ‘borderlands’ as an analogy for trans people, discussions and analysis of the ways in which intersectionality plays into

the “TERF wars” and GCF discourse are largely absent. As such, my decolonial feminist approach to GCF discourse could provide valuable insight into further understanding and settling the trans/feminism debate.

The Dust Settles.

In the *Afterword: TERF wars in the time of COVID-19*, written after the collection *TERF Wars* was conceived of and the essays comprising it collected, Pearce et al. (2020) fire their final shots. Working in the fields of trans and feminist studies, these scholars have committed to addressing inequalities and abuses of power for all marginalized people. They highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affect trans people (who already face barriers to healthcare access), drawing attention to the fact that as overloaded healthcare systems deal with the pandemic, trans-specific services become deprioritized and interrupted, causing even more harm to trans people’s mental and physical health (Pearce et. al, 2020). They point out how “biological sex” is becoming a determining factor of social and legal identity in European countries with religious, right-wing populist governments like Hungary, and how similar that is to gender critical feminist mobilizations of using “biological sex” to deny trans women access to women’s spaces and legal recognition as such. Conservative UK Minister for Women and Equalities, Liz Truss, giving a speech in April 2020 setting out her priorities for the Government Equalities office, included statements such as the need to protect single-sex spaces, checks and balances for trans adults, and making sure that people under the age of 18 are protected from decisions they make (Government Equalities Office, 2020). Commenting on Truss’s statements, Pearce et al. (2020) remind us of the front through which the war on women and the war on trans existence is being fought in the UK – one that will:

Disproportionately affect cis women as well as trans and non-binary people, through tying legal definitions of womanhood to reproductive capacity and undermining adolescents’ right to consent to medical treatment (a move that will most likely also impact on teenagers’ current legal right to confidentially access contraception, abortions and domestic violence services).

(p. 885)

TERF Wars ends with a reminder that trans, non-binary, and intersex people are already a part of our culture, especially feminist culture, and aren't going away. And despite the battles between trans feminists and GCFs, other alliances in the name of feminism and trans rights are being forged across the world. Encouraging us to stand together, united against oppression based on sex and gender, one can't help but be reminded of Ahmed's "affinity of hammers" – and the 'transfeminist killjoys' who expose "hammering as a system of violence directed against trans people, including from some of those who identify as radical feminists" (Ahmed, 2016:28).

Sara Ahmed, a prolific British-Australian scholar and woman of color, is well known for her intersectional and diversity work critiquing academia. In *An Affinity of Hammers* (2016), Ahmed discusses the cancellation and silencing of GCF voices in academia, who published a letter in *The Guardian* in 2015, denouncing the tactics used by trans activists to dispute GCF speech that the trans activists perceived as violent towards them. She explains how GCFs feel like they are being silenced by being called transphobic and how this works to pit the "critical, questioning, and democratic" figure of the cis feminist against the "bullying, silencing, and intimidating" trans activist. Here we can see how gender critical feminist speech becomes normalized and an incitement to violence is justified as freedom of speech – "it's not transphobic to ask critical questions about the demands of trans activists" (Ahmed, 2016:25). By policing the boundaries of "women", a key mechanism of whiteness, Ahmed (2016) says, GCF has become about a specific group of women securing their right to determine who belongs in feminism.

Drawing upon a favorite metaphor of hers, the "institutional wall" which comes up because of who you are or what you're trying to do, Ahmed says that existing as a woman requires a "chipping away at the walls that demarcate who resides there, who belongs there" (2016:32). Ahmed sees feminism as being a fortress, with these walls that need to be chipped away by trying to exist or in transforming an existence – and in feminism, this becomes an affinity as we are drawn to the revolutionary possibilities it offers for us all. If feminists witness the work one another is doing, recognize one another through that work, the combined force of our

hammers can chip, chip, chip away at the institutional walls that block our access to resources on the other side.

Both Pearce et al.'s and Ahmed's texts offer us a light at the end of the tunnel. They each offer critical insights into ways in which GCF seek to limit the expression of trans lives and give suggestions on how to move forward. By seeking to be united as a full force, feminism will accomplish what at its core it seeks to: dismantle patriarchy and end oppression for all people. In choosing to align themselves with the rhetoric of right-wing regimes, GCFs cannot hope to achieve any kind of lasting liberation for women. As I sit here and write this in 2021, bearing witness to the growing movement of GCFs with the recent publication of books like Abigail Shrier's *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, Kathleen Stock's *Material Girls* and Helen Joyce's *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality*, I believe there is work to still be done. While feeling inspired by these last sentiments, this thesis project comes together to hopefully inspire more dialogue and cooperation between feminists, who can hopefully see the error of their ways and where they went wrong in conceptualizing of and discussing critically important trans lives like mine.

From TERFs to Gender Critics - Case Studies in Hostility

This part of the literature review will be looking at Sally Hines's 2019 text, *The feminist frontier: on trans and feminism*, which analyzes social media and case studies from 2008-2017 to show how hostility towards self-determination for trans people strengthens as they gain more citizenship rights, and how this hostility is especially visible in the UK from feminist writers with a powerful profile, made even more malicious through the use of social media. Hines employs a digital methodology across several social media platforms, following 50 accounts for a 6-month period and analyzing 1000 posts from those. Each of the cases studies used marks a moment where the issues of the debate were significant in terms of the coverage in social media and in national media.

Before diving in, it should be pointed out how "TERF" became "GCF". Hines locates the moment the term "TERF" entered feminist lexicon, in 2008 via an online feminist blog, developed to distinguish between radical feminists who were trans inclusive and those who were not, in order to "delineate current political battles

around gendered self-determination” (2019:147). To quote Cristan Williams (2014), the originator of the term, “it was not meant to be insulting. It was meant to be a deliberately technically neutral description of an activist grouping”. However, many feminists in the new millennium took offence to being called a TERF, calling it hyperbolic, misleading, and even misogynistic and antifeminist. They instead took to using the expression “gender critical” to describe their commitments and position themselves as not only critical of transgender people, but of the concept and ideology of “gender”. One can’t help but note the implication with this expression - that trans activism and existence requires being gender “uncritical” - rendering the decades long critiques of the category of gender made within trans communities. As Ahmed points out further, with the GCFs focus on rigid ideas of biological sex, “to be gender critical while leaving traditional biology intact tightens rather than loosens the hold of a gender system on our bodies” (2016:30).

Delusions of Gender.

The first case study comes from Dyke March London, an event that occurred on 21 June, 2014, which aims to increase lesbian visibility and is held in a number of countries around the world. The analysis is taken from a blog written four days after the event by a trans woman and prominent activist and central figure in the event. During her speech, a group of anti-trans feminist activists organizing under the name ‘Actual Dykes’, began to heckle her and held up banners that said, “Why should lesbians worship the Penis”, “We know male violence when we see it”, and “No platform to misogyny”, in addition to handing out pamphlets which included statements such as “[Dyke March London:] the taking over by men of lesbian spaces” and “[the march] is hostile to lesbians [and] enforcing the idea that [the] penis is female and lesbians should accept it” (Hines, 2019:150). Prior to the event, Hines discusses, Twitter was filled with similar sentiments critiquing Dyke March London’s inclusion of a trans woman as a speaker, such as “#Solidarity with all dykes at #DykeMarchLondon today A bittersweet event for female-loving-females as it’s being colonised by men #DykeMarch” (2016:150). The speaker addressed the protestors during her speech, noting that she was nervous because “there are those who hold the

view that because of my biology, I do not, and can never, truly qualify as a lesbian” (Hines, 2019:150).

By refuting a trans woman’s gender as a woman (as well as her sexuality as a lesbian), Hines suggests that this case study demonstrates how the idea of deception runs through GCF condemnations of transgender people. The trans woman’s self-identity is dismissed; she is only pretending to be a woman, fitting into a larger pattern of what UK media calls “cases of gender fraud” (Hines, 2019). This protection of gender and sexual norms and panic of gender fraud can be a matter of life or death for many trans people (as well as cis people who are not gender conforming). Juliet Jacques (2016) makes note of the wave of violence and murder facing trans women (especially trans and women of color) due to this paranoia of being deceived by gender, i.e. that (passing as cis) trans women are tricking people by presenting themselves as women when they are not.

Invasion of the Gender Snatchers.

The second case study of Hines’s revolves around debates about “safe spaces”. At an event that took place at Pride London in June 2008, Hines analyzes a blog written the following day by a central figure (a trans woman) in the event. During the Pride march, she went to use the designated Pride toilets and was informed by a “Pride Steward” that she could not use the women’s toilet, and that she (and other trans women), should use the disabled toilets. On her blog, the trans woman says how her and her friends made a collective fuss, and the steward used their radio to inform a colleague that they were being “attacked by a mob of trannies” (Hines, 2019:151). A police officer at the event, who was also an LGBT liaison officer, told the woman that if she wanted to use the women’s toilet, she needed to show her gender recognition certificate. Further analysis by Hines explores the 2014 Twitter hashtag “#NoUnexpectedPenises”, where UK journalist and feminist activist Sarah Ditung tweeted about “the necessity of excluding penised [sic] individuals from some women-only spaces” only to be replied to by another prominent UK feminist “it is my right NOT to have penises around me if I choose #NoUnexpectedPenises” (2019:151). In a speech at Cambridge University in 2015, and further qualifying her views in an interview with BBC Newsnight, Germaine Greer, a prominent anti-trans feminist and

academic, opposed trans women's inclusion at an all-women's college because "post-operative MtF transsexual people [don't] look, sound, or behave like women" (Hines, 2016:152). UK journalist Julie Bindel is another high-profile feminist who Hines notes has continually positioned trans women as potential predators of male violence, as she worries about "male-to-female transsexuals" serving prison sentences for rape and murder being relocated to a women's jail, putting the safety and mental health of (cis) women in jails at risk by virtue of having a "biological male" amongst them; "particularly one who still has the penis with which he raped a women" (2016:152).

Hines explains how the narratives deployed by gender critical feminists above, in seeking to exclude trans women from women's only spaces to protect cis women from male violence, positions trans women in public spaces as violent male predators, essentially denying their existence as women based solely on their genitalia. Additionally, Hines points out that GCF has moved from "a marginal sub-cultural position to enter a more mainstream and high profile feminist constituent", as both Greer and Bindel deny identities of trans women in mainstream UK media. This dangerous speech employed by the media is further discussed in Hines's third case study below.

To Speak or Not to Speak.

In her final case study, Hines explores how feminist debates about transgender have affected bigger political and media discussions in which free speech and censorship are offset in discussion about 'no-platforming', a term that can be traced back to the Left politics of the 70's where Leftist groups wanted to prevent far-right groups from organizing in public spaces (Hines, 2019). The NUS, a confederation of student unions in the UK, adopted a "no-platform" policy and chose to include Julie Bindel and Germaine Greer in it. Both Greer and Bindel denounced the NUS's decision, arguing they had been censored and that their free speech rights had been violated. Hines goes on to give examples of Bindel and Greer doubling down on their hatred towards trans people in the media, both of whom repeatedly heighten public controversy with inflammatory comments such as "I'm transphobic because I suggest that men with beards and penises shouting, 'shut up, you transphobe' at women ... might be a bit '1984'" (Hines, 2016:153).

These instances of high-profile feminist voices in the UK media demonstrate the “cyclical nature of social media debate and its intersecting relationships with off-line events”, as networks such as the BBC and newspapers such as The Guardian give a bigger platform to transphobic sentiments from gender critical feminists (Hines, 2016:153). Furthermore, Hines’s case studies show just how much social and cultural capital the GCF movement has, as evidenced by the presence of these particular feminist academics and journalist in the UK who propagate anti-trans discourse. The GCF discourse is not just restricted to public toilets, it’s moved into any space these privileged feminists see fit to claim as theirs, and theirs alone.

Hines’s 2019 text is an effective study in gender critical discourse and the tactics they employ in social media and national media to fight against trans inclusion. From her study we can see that the GCF mindset is one denies trans women’s existence as women and considers them violent male predators, only pretending to be women to gain access to women’s bodies, separating bodies in public space invoking old painful memories of segregation based on race. Any attempt to call their speech dangerous, hateful, or transphobic will be met with cries of censorship; an invocation that “obscures levels of structural power” (Hines, 2016:153). Trans people become bodies to fear, a GCF move made by linking the ‘sexed’ body and experiences of ‘woman’ in effort to regulate the boundaries of feminism.

However, Hines’s text falls short in that it only includes case studies and social media posts of instances where trans *women* are being targeted by GCFs. Discussions of trans men, and non-binary experiences with GCF, are absent, as are instances where trans people themselves are engaging in GCF discourse. This not because they are not considered worthy of being discussed by GCFs, however. For example, J.K. Rowling wrote an essay in 2020 in which she heavily critiques trans men’s gender identities, and Buck Angel is a famous trans male porn star who is very active on Twitter about his critiques of trans men and their male embodiment. While Hines did highlight the importance of social media and her use of Twitter posts in analysis is commendable, it didn’t seem like she included enough analysis of the alleged 1,000 posts she used in her sample. I also believe that more needs to be done to investigate the claims being made by high-profile feminists in the UK media, which is why this project will be looking further into Bindel’s claims and others like her to give a bigger picture of the

GCF movement. In Hines's study, it also wasn't clear to me what, if any, theoretical framework Hines was using. This thesis project will be different from that of Hines's, because it will be using the coloniality of gender to critically examine GCF discourse. And as was discussed earlier in the review of other literature on the topic, the lack of an intersectional or decolonial perspective when it comes to discussing the GCF discourse and how (trans) gender oppression intersects with race and class in a postcolonial country is something that this thesis project (at least) hopes to scratch the surface of.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Background

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the theory that will be used in this project to make sense of gender critical feminist discourse. By taking a decolonial feminist approach, this thesis will be engaging with what Maria Lugonés calls *the coloniality of gender*. Her approach builds upon Anibal Quijano's *coloniality of power* (by combining it with intersectionality), which says that racialization was key for colonization. Lugonés's theory is an invitation to consider that gender is a geo-historical and colonial construct, not a universal condition that existed prior to colonization. The concept of sex/gender is a colonial one; to understand what gender is, we must investigate the ways in which it is constructed through European colonization. The following sections will detail this further.

The Coloniality of Power

Anibal Quijano is a Peruvian sociologist that theorized the coloniality of power, which constitutes a matrix of methods and patterns of power embedded in our world system and made possible by racial and revamped gender discriminations marked during the colonization of the Americas. Quijano explains that the coloniality of power has multiple dimensions which are inseparable. "Coloniality was the result of colonialism's systematic repression of the specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols, or knowledges that were worthless to global colonial domination. while simultaneously the colonizers appropriated that which supported domination: knowledge in mining, agriculture, engineering, products, and physical labor" (Quijano, 1991:50) - through the dehumanization of humans to flesh and bodies for enslavement.

Through this power, colonial empires introduced to the global population to the universal social classification of 'race'. According to Quijano (2000), by linking notions of biological and cultural inferiority, colonizing empires (like the British) enabled the concept of race to develop into a hierarchical social system that allowed them to control human and material resources. "It reconceives humanity and human relations fictionally, in biological terms" (Lugonés, 2007:189). This concept of race reorganized all aspects of indigenous life, including sex, labor, collective authority,

and subjectivity/intersubjectivity. These “four basic areas of human existence”, and the resources and products that come from it, are fought over by social actors as they struggle for power that is structured in relations of domination, exploitation, and conflict (Lugonés, 2007). Quijano (2000) says that these are all elements that constitute the global, Eurocentered, capitalist mode of power, of which the coloniality of power is just one axis. The other is modernity.

Quijano views modernity as “the fusing of the experiences of colonialism and coloniality with the necessities of capitalism, creating a specific universe of intersubjective relations of domination under a Eurocentered hegemony” (Lugonés, 2007:190). This “myth of modernity” is a Western, Eurocentric view on what defines progress in an imposed rigged competition, and the violence generated by the myth of modernity is what is actually irrational (Dussel, 1993). Through colonialism, European knowledge production was seen as the correct and only knowledge, and indigenous epistemologies and ways of life were dismissed and considered primitive or destroyed. A format of hierarchical and binary thinking and doing was imposed through the coloniality of power and generated even more hierarchies and subcategorizations of sexuality, mental and physical capabilities, social class, and spirituality. These categorizations were based on pseudo-science and spread lies based on objective categories with ahistorical meaning. By focusing on how England (and Holland) produced a particular, relational way of knowing, Quijano theorizes that Eurocentricism naturalized people’s experiences under the hegemony of world capitalism. The ‘cognitive needs’ of capitalism that led to the naturalizing of identities and relations of coloniality to the ecocultural distribution of capitalist power meant that empires needed to measure and quantify what is knowable in order to control not only the relations among people, but also the property in means of production (Quijano, 2000). This European way of knowing was imposed by colonial empires on the whole of the capitalist world as representative of modernity.

To fully understand the nature and scope of the changes in social structure that the processes constitution colonial/modern Eurocentered global capitalism imposed, it is crucial to understand the place of gender. European colonizers used gender to “break the will of indigenous men and women, imposing new hierarchies that were institutionalized with colonialism” (Mendonza, 2015:116). Quijano’s understanding of

sex/gender and the coloniality of power is defined by patriarchal, heterosexual relations over sexual access to women's bodies. It is on these grounds that Maria Lugonés, and Argentinian Decolonial Feminist philosopher, activist, and scholar, critiques Quijano, viewing his understanding of gender as hegemonic, and a means through which the subjection and disempowerment of colonized women can be obscured. She adjusts his framework to consider gender and its entwined relationship with race more deeply.

The Coloniality of Gender

Maria Lugonés critiques Quijano's formulation of gender for being Eurocentric: it is confined only to biological determinism; it presupposes sexual dimorphism when it never existed; it naturalizes heteronormativity in cultures that didn't view homosexuality as perverse; and it supposes a patriarchal distribution of power in societies which had prevalent equitable gender relations (Mendoza, 2016). Lugonés draws from Native feminist scholarship and Oyewumi's work on Yoruba society to fix Quijano's notion of gender, arguing that indigenous societies did not have "gender" as a concept before European colonization. Just as race should be considered a colonial construct, imposing power upon individuals and society (through global capitalism), so too should gender. And while other feminisms have been successful in introducing gender as a historically constructed set of social relations of power rather than a biological fact (such as Marxist Feminism stressing the role of capitalism in introducing the centrality of the material in gender and Queer Feminism outlining the performativity of gender), gender itself is seen as the common point of departure. In Lugonés's theorization, coloniality is the point of departure and it constitutes a radically powerful perspective for critically rethinking gender and social resistance to neoliberalism in global politics (Icaza, 2018).

Gender did not exist as an organizing principle of power in indigenous societies prior to colonization – rather other principles, such as seniority, provided a basis for power and authority (Mendoza, 2016). In "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System", Lugonés (2007) explains how colonialism did not impose a precolonial, European gender system on the colonized, but instead established two different arrangements for colonized men and women than for the

white colonizers, establishing gender itself as a “colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies, and ways of knowing” (p. 186). The differentiated gender system subordinated European women to men, but it dehumanized the indigenous men and women. Europeans were gendered and civilized, but indigenous people were nonhuman, racialized, and bound to the animal function of reproduction. White Europeans considered themselves the most “highly evolved” with higher levels of sexual dimorphism, and this sexual dimorphism went down as one decreased down the civilizational rungs of the evolutionary ladder. Lugonés therefore argues that gender should be understood as a colonial construct, just as race was. Black women’s bodies were pitted against the “ideal” white women’s body and femininity, which was seen as complimentary to the white man’s body and mind. European doctors and scientists viewed colonial women’s physiologies as a sign of sexual access and aberration. They also considered black women (and lesbians and prostitutes), by virtue of their biological sex and physiological traits, to be “dangerous individuals who hid their true natures so that they could recruit nice white boys and girls into degeneracy” (Henderson, 2020). “Biological sex” was never simply binary; from its inception it was categorized along racialized degrees of difference and weaponized to police the boundaries of who could and couldn’t be a woman.

The European constructions of gender began with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean and set up a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between women and men and became “a mark of civilization” whose impositions “became woven into the historicity of relations, including intimate relations” (Lugonés, 2010:743). As European colonizers sought to subordinate the world to their rule, they wanted to eliminate the indigenous people’s diverse systems of gender, sex, and sexuality. Indigenous societies and peoples were considered savage and backwards for having non-binary/patriarchal/hetercompulsive organizations of sex, gender, and sexuality and it was on this basis that the colonizers wanted to dominant them and subject them to their civilizing modernity of capitalism. Lugonés reminds us here of Oyewùmi’s study on Yoruba society, where “the creation of ‘women’ as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state ... The transformation of state power to male-gender power was accomplished at one level by the

exclusion of women from state structures. This was in sharp contrast to Yoruba state organization, in which power was not gender-determined" (1997:123-5). One of the most defining elements of this distinction between women and men was binary sexual dimorphism, or the idea that there are systematic differences in form between men and women – which became the “grounding for the dichotomous understand of gender, the human characteristic” (Lugonés, 2010:744).

Lugonés calls this important characteristic of the coloniality of gender the “light side” of the colonial/modern gender system. Gender was introduced as a colonizing tool for the West to dominate and designated two binary oppositions and hierarchal social categories – men were to hold all of the power and women were defined in relation to men and considered less than and unable to participate in leadership roles or own property (Tiley, 2016). In precolonial tribal societies, individuals who were intersex (the condition of being born with reproductive or sexual characteristics that don’t fit into male or female categories) were recognized and respected without being forced to assimilate into the binary. Almost 150 Indigenous North American societies had a social position for a “third gender”, a person who broke with sex and gender polarities. “Gender was not understood primarily in biological terms ... most individuals fit into tribal gender roles on the bases of proclivity, inclination, and temperament” (Lugonés, 2007:199). Colonization brought fixed biological ideas of what constituted males and females and sought to cosmetically correct and punish individuals who lied outside of binary sex categories. European colonizers viewed indigenous men and women as savages because of the egalitarian relations they had in their societies (Mendoza, 2016). Gender and sex were collapsed and reduced to a question of reproductive biology that is figured only in binary terms with one side being superior to the other. In order to fully exploit, dominate, and control the indigenous communities through gender, the colonizers imposed the colonial/modern gender system on them and the indigenous women’s body became “the terrain on which indigenous men negotiated survival under new colonial conditions”, leading to what Lugonés calls the “dark side” of the system of which its effects are still visible today (Icaza, 2018).

This “dark side” of the gender system is entirely violent. The gender hierarchies introduced by European colonizers broke down the solidarity between indigenous

men and women and removed the peaceful, complimentary social ties that defined indigenous communities. “Through sexual violence, exploitation, and systems of concubinage, the colonizers used gender to break the will of indigenous men and women, imposing new hierarchies that were institutionalized with colonialism” (Mendoza, 2016:17). Indigenous men had to sacrifice women in order to survive in the new colonial world and under the European system of gender. As the Indigenous peoples were considered subhuman, they “were fit for breeding, brutal labor, exploitation, and/or massacre” (Lugonés, 2010:206). Gendered violence played a constructive role in the formation of colonial societies – “Colonization itself was a gendered act, carried out by imperial workforces, overwhelmingly men, drawn from masculinized occupations ... the rape of women of colonized societies was a normal part of conquest ... the colonial state was built as a power structure operated by men, based on continuing force” (Connell, 2014:552). Imposing the European gender system unleashed a lethal, genocidal force against the Native and enslaved women, a dehumanizing practice that we can still see today in issues such as femicide and the trafficking of non-European women.

Gender: A Powerful Fiction (for the Decolonial Feminist to Fight)

The coloniality of power acts to dismantle the ‘Other’ knowledges and ways of life and is a lasting categorical and prejudiced discourse that is present in the social and economic structures of modern societies. Lugonés’s coloniality of gender allows us to further consider gender and its interwoven relationship with race and see how the subjection of people can occur through gender systems. It helps us understand how gender was created as the precursor to the biological traits of sex to give them meaning and to dominate and control people. Gender (as well as race) is understood as a social category that was imposed in colonial encounters through different technologies of dehumanization by a system of sociability for some bodies, but not all. Colonized women were reinvented as “women” because of the norms, criteria, and oppressive practices of imperial Europeans.

Considering critically both biological dimorphism and the position that gender socially constructs biological sex helps us understand the scope, depth, and

characteristics of the colonial/modern gender system. The sense is that the reduction of gender to the private, to control over sex and its resources and products is a matter of ideology, of the cognitive production of modernity that has understood race as gendered and gender as raced in particularly differential ways for Europeans/whites and colonized/nonwhite peoples.

Maria Lugonés (2007:202)

Indigenous women weren't women like the white, European women were, and early British feminist movements legitimized their claims for empowerment on the grounds of their "civilizing projects" in the colonies. By incorporating these projects in their demands for a formal place in the imperial nation state, British feminists rested their activism on a gendered system that valued one kind of woman over another. This is what Françoise Vergès has called "civilizational feminism" in her book "A Decolonial Feminism", a feminism that has "undertaken the mission of imposing a unique perspective that contributes to the perpetuation of domination based on class, gender, and race" (2020:40).

As anticolonial movements developed in the Global South in the 20th century and they defended their own concepts of women's rights, the West marginalized them in favor of discourses that refused to question the structures of modern capitalism and made women into a homogenous social subject (Vergès, 2020). A decolonial feminist's job is thus to critically examine the fiction of gender, imposed through colonization, a total social movement "whose perpetuation is explained by the persistence of social formations resulting from this order", including studying the ways in which the complex systems of racism and sexism pervade all relations of domination, long after the regimes connected to these systems have disappeared (Vergès, 2020:63). Lugonés makes it clear that the only way to overcome the coloniality of gender is through decolonial feminism. Decolonial feminists want to not only improve the existing system, but to fight all forms of oppression and injustice; justice for women means justice for *all* women and *all* people.

This thesis will be a project that looks at how gender critical feminist discourse reproduces Lugonés's colonial/modern gender system as concrete, intricately related exercises of power. It will critically examine the matrix of ideas in which gender and

sex are collapsed and reduced to questions of reproductive biology, a biology that is fixed in binary ways where one is superior to the other; intending to eliminate diverse systems of gender and sex; needing to be dominated and disciplined in the capitalist economy; and perpetuating gendered narratives and policies of discrimination. This project will be part of the lengthy movement of scientific reappropriation that is revising the European narrative of the world, as well as undermining a feminism that has made women's rights into an ideology of assimilation and integration into the neoliberal order that reduces the revolutionary struggle to an equal share of white supremacy. Because GCFs are contesting the "truth" of gender and sex in a country with a colonial past, it is important for this project to take a systemic understanding of gender as constituted by colonialism/modernity in terms of multiple relations of power; a violent introduction to the world that has consistently and contemporarily been used to destroy peoples and communities. It is imperative for feminist scholars to critically examine the racist and colonial underpinnings of discourses that we study and expose oppressive colonial gender relations and organizations of life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

This thesis is an empirical research project that uses a qualitative methodology of feminist critical discourse analysis to examine gender critical feminist texts online through a decolonial feminist lens. In this chapter, I will first explain the methodology of feminist critical discourse analysis. I will then discuss and describe the process of collecting my sample, why each particular actor and text was chosen, and how I will analyze the data. Finally, I will discuss my positionality as a researcher and how it impacts this study.

This study serves to fill two purposes. First, it seeks to close a gap in the literature. As of now, there have been no major studies examining the discourse of any of the prominent gender critical feminists or organizations I will be discussing. Second, it explores the gender critical feminist discourse through the coloniality of gender. As such, this thesis is guided by the following research question:

How is our view of trans(gender) politics and people shaped by gender critical feminist discourse in the UK?

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

The analytical method used to examine texts in this project is a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a qualitative form of research, and my selection of such a type was deliberate. To understand the significance of selecting this method, it is necessary to define and contextualize what I mean by *discourse*, *discourse analysis*, *critical* discourse analysis, and *feminist* critical discourse analysis, and their relation to ideology and power.

Discourse.

Discourse is a set of rules that allow us to think, talk and act in particulars, and simultaneously prevent us from thinking, talking, and acting in other ways; i.e. they differ in scale and what they include as well as exclude and they are a coherent way of making sense of some aspect of the world as reflected in human sign systems (Flick, 2018). "Discourse is a particular knowledge about the world that shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (Rose, 2001:136). Norman

Fairclough, one of the founders of CDA, says that discourses and the texts that they are expressed through, represent the processes, relations, and structures in the material world, the mental world of thoughts and ideas, and the social world (Flick, 2018). Additionally, Fairclough says that discourse functions in social practices in three different ways: as part of the social activity, as a way of representing something, and in ways of being in constituting identities (Fairclough, 2014). Fairclough draws on Foucault by defining discourse as “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (1992:64). Poststructuralists like Foucault view discourses as sites of struggle “where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out” (Lazar, 2007:144), and in that way, discourses can exert a tremendous power over us by creating constraints regarding how certain things can be talked about and in determining what counts as knowledge in particular contexts. Foucault saw discourse as a form of discipline, imbedded with power, because it was productive. The disciplined subjects thought and acted in certain ways but they did not precede the discourses that constructed them; rather, human subjects are produced through discourses and our sense of self is made through the operation of discourse (Rose, 2001). This also means that power is everywhere that discourses are, and that discourse is never wholly original and that it will always escape the complete control of the intentional, speaking subject. In this manner, discourses can either work towards sustaining unequal power relations or disrupting them; this is how the discourse of white supremacy worked to justify Hitler’s exclusion and total extermination of Jewish and non-Aryan people.

Foucault also distinguishes between discursive *practices* and discursive *events*. Discursive practices, according to Foucault, such as Jews being forced to wear a yellow Star of David, are the operations of discourses and the resulting formation of knowledge (that Jews are ‘Others’ and therefore should be dominated by the ruling class). A discursive event is any instance of discourse and is seen as being “simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice” (Fairclough on Discourse - New Online Learning, 2020). Gender, as this thesis project revolves around, also can be viewed as a discursive event. Gender discourses shape subjects and place limits on what can be said and by whom, where statements like “it’s a girl” do not only describe a state of affair, they are also

prescriptive: they bring into play a whole host of pre-existing and normative ideas about what a girl is and how a girl should behave, thus requiring the recipient to act in gender normative ways, and punish those who do not, e.g. boy children who play with girl toys. The analysis of language and the way in which patterns of meaning as socially constructed versions of reality (discourses) are embedded and disseminated in texts is what is called discourse analysis.

Discourse Analysis.

Discourse analysis is a method of looking at the notion of discourse and how it is articulated through various kinds of text, images/media/art, and spoken language. It is broadly concerned with the question of “what does it mean?” and the interpretation of the meaning, viewing discourse as “sense making stories circulating in society” that are not able to be attributed to an original source (Locke, 2004:1). At its most simply put, discourse analysis is a study of the way language is used to define and describe. When doing a discourse analysis, the researcher foregrounds the constructive and performative properties of language and looks at the effects of the choice of words that are used to describe or express something (Flick, 2018). A proper discourse analysis should therefore develop a fitting description of the role of social actors in discourses, acknowledge the socio-historical contexts of discourses, and situate the results in relation to other research perspectives in Sociology (Keller, 2012). Language is conveyed through text, and its use is more than just an element of communication – it gives us evidence which shows identities, relationships, power, and social status. By studying language use, discourse analysts can reveal patterns that are vital to identify and establish the use (and abuse) of societal power, domination, or the resistance to power. Critical discourse analysis is a framework by which social science researchers are able to show a systematic and strategic way of analyzing the language use and text.

Critical Discourse Analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis is characterized by its analytical, discourse oriented, and critical approach. It is a detailed and systematic (critical) look at a particular object in order to arrive at one or more underlying principles, concerned

with language in use and the way in which patterns of meaning are socially constructed. In order to read a text “critically”, a researcher must develop an awareness of how texts mediate and sustain particular discourse and power relations. Ruth Wodak, a founder of CDA, says that to be critical is “to be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and a focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research” (2001:9). By taking a critical view of discourse, researchers see ideologies as “representations of practices formed from particular perspectives in the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance” (Lazar, 2004:7). CDA views texts as important vehicles for social and political ideologies and interaction, and commits itself to digging deeper than what the surface meaning offers. Norman Fairclough (1993:135), another founder of CDA, summarizes it as follows:

By critical discourse analysis I mean discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power.

CDA views society as being characterized by unequal power relations that appear as societal conventions. ‘Dominant structures stabilize conventions and naturalized them, that is, the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning are obscured and acquire stable and natural forms: they are taken as given’ (Wodak, 2001:3). It is thus the job of the critical discourse analyst to reveal the arrangements of structural dominance that are created “via the subtle, everyday, textual work of persuasion, dissimulation, and manipulation that sets out to change the minds of others in one’s own interests” (Locke, 2004:32). According to both Fairclough and Wodak, discourse gives rise to important issues of power, and as such, discursive practices have major ideological effects, producing and reproducing unequal power relations between social classes. As the “ideological loading” of particular ways language use and the resulting relations of power that support them

can be unclear, it is the role of CDA to bring them to light. Being able to take a critical orientation towards discourse analysis means a researcher assumes that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially-historically situated, and truth cannot be isolated or removed from some form of ideological inscription (Locke, 2014).

The following bullet points will help to sufficiently outline CDA:

- It views the current social order as being historically situated and as such, relative, socially constructed, and changeable; this social order and the social processes are constituted and sustained not by the will of the individual, but by the prevalence of certain constructions or versions of reality – the discourses
- It views power as an effect of discursive formations, and human subjectivity as (in part) constructed by discourse and discourse as manifested by the ways people are and act
- It views reality as textually mediated by language systems and views texts as sites where discourses are indoctrinated and contested
- It views power as an effect of discursive formations, and human subjectivity as (in part) constructed by discourse and discourse as manifested by the ways people are and act
- It is interested in the relationship between language, power, and ideology; the struggle and conflict in society and language; relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control, as they are manifest in language and create social forms and processes that circulate in the social world; and investigates social inequality as expressed, constituted, and legitimized by language use

As CDA is critically oriented to examining power structures that underlie language use and texts, it is fundamentally oriented towards being useful to researchers interested in the oppression of marginalized groups, and as such, a distinctly feminist approach has been developed.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis.

A CDA which is feminist in its approach seeks to understand the complicated workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining a hierarchically gendered social order. Feminist CDA's are concerned with critiquing discourse that sustain a patriarchal social order, where relations of power systematically privilege cis men as a social group, and show how social practices have a gendered nature. A feminist perspective of CDA understands gender as an ideological structure that divides people into classes based on domination and subordination and views power relations as a struggled over interests "which are exercised, reflected, maintained, and resisted through a variety of modalities, extents and degrees of explicitness" (Lazar, 2004:10). While power may be everywhere, gendered subjects are affected by it in different ways - i.e. the physical violence, misogyny, and verbal harassment that transgender women face is similar yet different than what cisgender women face. According to Lazar (2004), the gendered nature of social practices can be described in two ways: gender functions as a hermeneutical category that allows individuals in a community to understand and structure their social practices, and gender is also a social relation that enters into and in part creates all other social relations and activities. Depending on the particular and unequal meanings of "male/female" and "man/woman", and the result of being assigned to either within social practices, such a designation becomes a constraint on further practices (Lazar, 2004).

Because CDA is a research program that has a distinctly and overtly political stance and concerned with all forms of social inequality and injustice, a feminist CDA is necessarily useful for those who want to take a focus on gender. Discourse is viewed as a site of struggle and feminist CDA operates at the outset within a politically invested program of discourse analysis. A feminist CDA approach is one that consists of a feminist political critique of gendered social practices and relations and is thus aimed at effecting social transformation. Contesting the status quo, a feminist views a just society in which gender does not predetermine or mediate our relationships with others or our sense of who we are and who we might become. Feminist CDA is therefore a "praxis oriented research" which seeks to mobilize theory "in order to create critical awareness and develop feminist strategies for resistance and change", and as such, does not pretend to have a neutral stance and makes its biases part of its

argument (Lazar, 2004:6). A feminist position on CDA also draws attention to the problematic notion of scientific neutrality, which fails to recognize that all knowledge is socially and historically constructed.

Purpose for this Project.

Feminist CDA was chosen as a methodology for this project because it is a distinctly political approach that seeks to uncover power relations in the way gendered subjects are constructed through language use and offers a way to deconstruct oppression and ideologically driven discrimination. GCFs have developed a new and improved trans exclusionary feminist movement in the UK that operates on both old and new ideas of gender and gender discrimination. As such, the ways they discuss gender should be thoroughly examined and take into account the historical and social conditions under which they arrived. This underscores the central focus of the study – looking at how gender is discursively constructed by GCF texts in such a way that is based on colonial power structures. It is the aim of this thesis to bring to light the ways in which power and ideology operate in GCF discourses and enable gender to continue to function as an oppressive, hierarchal force. By taking a critical orientation towards discourse, this project will consider social-historical relations of gender and colonization and look for ways in which they function in contemporary discussions of gender by GCFs. This method allows me, as a researcher, to consider how discourse is reflective of power structures while simultaneously recreating the power it reflects. As discursive practices have major ideological affects, they can produce and reproduce power relations between cisgender people and transgender people, and this thesis project seeks to draw attention to that. A critical approach allows me to focus on dominate groups like GCFs, and how they discursively reinforce the hierarchy from within which they dominate. Feminist CDA is interested in discourses of marginalization and how they function, but it also shows us how we can push back against them – so this project is also making use of feminist CDA to show how we can fight back against oppressive gender structures.

Sample Selection

When selecting samples for analysis, I wanted to be intentional with my selection and draw texts from actors who are popular and well known in the UK for their GCF views. The original sampling source for this thesis was strictly limited to Twitter accounts, but due to private accounts and the limitations of Twitter's advanced search function, it became too difficult and time consuming for me to gather a sufficient data set. From there, I decided to use only two Twitter accounts and draw from other online sources for my sampling, including news media sites, personal blogs, and professional websites.

The choice of using the Twitter accounts of JK Rowling (13.9 million followers) and Maya Forstater (48.8k followers) was obvious; they both drew intense media attention over their use of Twitter to be critical of transgender people and the GRA. JK Rowling is a British philanthropist, film and TV producer, and author of the best-selling book series of all time, Harry Potter. Maya Forstater is a British woman who was fired from her job at an anti-poverty think tank in London for making transphobic remarks on Twitter, and the person that JK Rowling tweeted her support for, thus drawing attention to GCF in the UK. I chose to include two of the most liked and retweeted posts from her. I chose to include a sample of 5 of Maya Forstater's most "liked" tweets that were part of her employment lawsuit, which I used Twitter's advanced search function to search for.

Because I follow the subject of UK gender critical feminism closely, I am aware of several other prominent actors in the discourse and chose to include them in my sample as well as they have written for major British media outlets. Suzanne Moore (who infamously resigned from The Guardian in 2020 after 300 staffers signed a letter calling her transphobic), Susanna Rustin and Hadley Freeman are all journalists who write from a gender critical feminist perspective and for popular British media. I chose to include a text from each of them written for The Guardian.com, a left-leaning British news and media website with over 17 million readers per month. These texts from the Guardian were obtained by searching their website with the term "gender critical feminism transgender" and were used as they were ones written from a GCF perspective in 2018-2020 and published on the website. I also included a text from academic Dr. Kathleen Stock, an analytical philosophy professor at the University of

Sussex. The piece is from The Daily Mail in 2021, another British news site with a right-leaning perspective and average daily readership of 2.18 million and was found by searching the same terms.

Moving away from British media, I include one piece from 2018 taken from the personal website of Julie Bindel, a “radical feminist writer” well known in the UK for her anti-sex work views in addition to her staunchly GCF position. Another sample is taken from Jess de Wahls, who was born in Berlin, Germany, but has resided and worked in the UK since at least 2010. She is a visual artist working with embroidery and well known in the London art scene for her work tackling female liberation and gender equality. I am including an essay she wrote on her personal website in August 2019 outlining her views on “gender identity ideology”, titled “Somewhere over the Rainbow, something went terribly wrong”.

Lastly, I will be sampling two pieces from the WPUK and LGB Alliance, two organizations formed in the UK to fight against the GRA. Woman’s Place UK responded to the Scottish Government’s consultation to reform the GRA with a letter on 17 March 2020 and was subsequently published on their website. LGB Alliance’s website includes a tab with information about their position on the GRA reforms, and I use their statement as another text to round out my sample selection.

Each text has been categorized into the following four tables (“Journalism online pieces”, “Personal Websites”, “Organizations”, and “Tweets”) and all Tweets will be shown as Figures found at the end of the thesis. All of the people that are used in the sample are white, heterosexual, cisgender women, with the exception of Stock and Bindel, who are lesbians, and all of them are age 40-60. This particular social positionality (white, cisgender, middle age, mostly heterosexual) will be of importance in the analysis and discussed there further. I believe the choices of the aforementioned texts will provide a sufficient sample of GCF discourse in the UK with which to draw analysis from, as they are taken from a variety of sources and people.

Table 1, Journalism (online) texts

Author	Source	Title	Date
Hadley Freeman	The Guardian, "Hadley Freeman's Weekend Column", "Women"	Don't you just love it when a man explains to you what it means to be a woman?	31 March 2018
Suzanne Moore	The Guardian, "Opinion", "Transgender"	Women must have the right to organize. We will not be silenced	2 March 2020
Susanna Rustin	The Guardian, "Opinion", "Feminism"	Feminists like me aren't anti-trans - we just can't discard the idea of 'sex'	30 Sept 2020
Kathleen Stock	The Daily Mail	Professor Kathleen Stock was ostracised and denounced by 600 colleagues because she dared to challenge the trans orthodoxy sweeping Britain	17 Jan 2020

Table 2, Personal Websites

Author	Source	Title	Date
Julie Bindel	unherd.com, via thejuliebindel.com	What does gender have to do with genitals?	21 Dec 2018
Jess de Wahls	jessdewahls.com/blog	Somewhere over the Rainbow, something went terribly wrong...	5 Aug 2019
J.K. Rowling	jkrowling.com/opinions	JK Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues	10 June 2020

Table 3, Organizations

Author	Source	Title	Date
WPUK (Woman's Place UK)	Official Statement via womansplaceuk.org	WPUK Submission to Scottish Government consultation on GRA reform	17 March 2020
LGB Alliance (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Alliance)	Official Statement on GRA via lgballiance.org.uk	LGB Alliance Statement on reports that the UK Government plans to drop its previous proposals to reform the GRA	No Date

Table 4, Tweets

Author	Date	Figure #	Retweets	Likes
J.K. Rowling	19 Dec 2020	1	89.5k	238.2k
J.K. Rowling	7 June 2020	2	92.8k	215.3k
Maya Forstater	3 Sept 2018	3	50	309
Maya Forstater	25 Sept 2018	4	19	117
Maya Forstater	30 Sept 2108	5	44	138
Maya Forstater	1 Oct 2018	6	19	110
Maya Forstater	25 May 2019	7	35	156

Procedure

After deciding on which texts to use, to format and organize my data better I created a Word document and copied all of the texts into it. I then proceeded to copy and paste each text into MAXQDA, a computer program designed for assisting in qualitative data and text analysis in academic and scientific institutions. While MAXQDA seems like an incredible software program, I am not fluent in its use and therefore was not able to take advantage of the many functions it offers, so I used it only to help with assigning codes to parts of the texts. Each text had its own document, with the exception of the Tweets which were all under each author. Because I had read

through the texts already several times before doing analysis, I had some themes already in mind. I began a process of open coding, an analytic process where codes are attached to the data in order to develop substantial codes, or concepts, which describe the phenomenon under consideration, by separating data into meaningful expressions and assigning them a sequence of words and relevant annotations can then be attached to these expressions (Flick, 2018). I also looked for how certain terms were defined (like the ones at the beginning of this thesis) and took note of those. According to Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), a researcher must read and re-read the data in order to identify themes to code and remain open to new and unexpected ones while doing analysis. I kept a 'master' document in Word, where I tracked my progress of themes and coding, listed extra information about each text, and wrote miscellaneous notes to help me through the process of analyzing the data. I closely read all of the texts and coded twice, going back to my notes to look for major thematic elements, considering carefully how they related to my research question, each other, and how discursive themes functioned within the texts. I identified relevant quotations and examples within the texts and attached the themes to them. In the next chapter, I will analyze and discuss these themes while drawing directly from the texts.

Positionality

Before I can discuss my analysis, I think it is crucial to talk about positionality in a research project. As Maria Lugonés (2010) makes us aware of, identity is a necessary "point of departure" that shapes our research interests, observations, and responses. Because this is a research project adopting a decolonial feminist approach and working with a FCDA methodology, the acknowledgement of a standpoint is fundamental. It is therefore important to recognize how my gender and race influence my desire and my ability to conduct the research in this project, because my background and my positionality cannot be divorced from the analysis and results of this project. I am a white, Jewish, transgender man. My interest in this project cannot be removed from my transgender identity or my privilege as a white-skinned person. I think it is necessary that transgender scholars are the ones leading the research on transgender issues, for far too long have our voices been marginalized as cisgender people dissect, analyze, and discuss our lives. As a man, I must also be in solidarity

with transgender women, intersex, and non-binary people. As a white person from the Global North, I also need to make sure I am doing my best to be anti-racist and decolonize my research, which means using sources that are from black, indigenous, and people of color and centering their voices. This project would not have been developed if it were not for my commitment to a queer, decolonial feminism that seeks to decenter pre-established knowledge to bring in the experiences of everyone involved and achieve liberation from injustices done by oppressive systems of gender and race. I recognized that white supremacy and racist policing of bodies has long been employed to control gender to comfort whiteness and eliminate transgender bodies. **Knowledge production is a political act;** my desire to combat transphobia and racism in feminism is central to this thesis, as is the passionate dedication to the Jewish ideal of justice for not only myself, but for everyone.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results and Analysis

After collecting and analyzing my data, some very interesting patterns and themes arose in the sample of the selected texts. This analysis will examine the gender critical feminist discourse by looking at who it benefits and what ideologies and power structures it reinforces. The following chapter is divided into two primary areas of analysis. In the first section, I analyze the ways that GCFs define the 'terms of the debate' in order to establish their epistemological basis: sex and gender (woman/man, male/female, transgender, gender identity), gender critical feminism, and transgender rights activism. The second section will analyze how the discourse creates intersubjective relations under a Eurocentric hegemony, through the themes I identified as "'Truth'-Telling: Biological Essentialism, Gender Hierarchies, and Regulating Bodies", "Dismissing 'Other' Forms of Knowledge Production", and "Statements of Defense and Feeling Threatened by Difference". Lastly, I want to note that I intentionally chose to save my discussion of the results for the last chapter to conclude the thesis.

In Their Own Words

In my introduction, I mentioned that the GCF movement operates as an epistemological force, questioning what we know and how we know it, so the first step in analysis of their discourse should be to outline how they define the things they discuss. I also outlined my own definitions and understandings in Chapter One and draw further from the literature review. Following Wodak (2001) in highlighting how ideology is expressed in language, this part of the analysis will focus on criticism of the text to find inconsistencies, self-conflicts, paradoxes, and dilemmas in the internal structure of the GCF discourse. GCFs contextualize their texts with definitions of key concepts, such as sex and gender, and also outline their version of feminism proceeding from those definitions, contrasting it with transgender rights activism. As Jess de Wahls (2019) mentions in her personal blog, "Definitions matter. Respecting people matters. Criticizing bad ideas also matters." Proceeding from her own words, this analysis and discourse breakdown will do just that.

Sex and Gender.

For GCFs, sex and gender are seen as two contrasting ideas, with the former having more significance, value, and meaning for individuals than the latter. Sex, as the discourse holds, is something that is “material” – it is biological, it is physical, it is factual, it is logical, we are born with it, and it is *real*. Sex is based on anatomy and defined in terms of reproductive and sexual organs:

Female is the sex of organism that produces non-mobile ova (egg cells) ... it is not ‘assigned’, but ... based on external sex characteristics (de Wahls, 2019)

Genitals determine our physical, biological sex, and indicates whether we are male or female (Bindel, 2018)

Female is a biological classification that applies to all living species. If you produce large immobile gametes, you are female (Moore, 2020)

Biology is a physical fact ... there are significant physical differences between male-born bodies and female-born ones (Freeman, 2018)

Further, GCFs define sex as being binary, meaning that you are either male or female, and perhaps most importantly, that someone cannot change their sex:

There are only two sexes, male and female (LGB Alliance, n.d.)

Males don’t have vulvas and females don’t have a penis (WPUK, 2020)

Sex is either of the two categories (male and female) into which humans are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions ... Humans cannot change sex (de Wahls, 2019)

... the truth that men cannot change into women (Forstater, Fig. 5)

Throughout the texts, the authors refer to themselves as “biological women” (Moore, Bindel, de Wahls, Rowling, Forstater, Freeman, Rustin), “biological females” (Bindel, Moore, Stock, Forstater), and/or “adult human females” (de Wahls, Forstater, Bindel), but never refer to themselves as cisgender, further putting emphasis on their view a woman is defined solely in terms of biology. Because they view sex as an immutable, biological state of being either male or female, this means that transgender people are always the sex they were assigned at birth. In this way, GCFs believe transgender women are male and transgender men are female. They constantly refer to transgender women as being “male bodied” (de Wahls, Rustin, Moore, Freeman, Bindel, LGB Alliance, WPUK) and transgender men as being “female bodied” (de Wahls, Rowling). Jess de Wahls (2019) defines transgender women and transgender men as such:

Transwomen are biological males that choose to live as women, or believe they actually are women. Transmen are biological females that choose to live as a man, or believe they are actually men.

While trans inclusive feminism prefers to use the term “trans women/men” to denote trans as a descriptor of a kind of woman (like gay woman, Jewish woman, etc), GCF discourse (like deWahl’s above) doesn’t make that distinction when she refers to them as “transwoman” to exclude trans women from the more general category ‘women’ by conflating the word ‘women’ with ‘cis women’. In this way, their language is being deliberately used to exclude transgender women from womanhood and reveals power relations present in the discourse.

GCFs also want to make it clear that they support spaces that are separated on the basis of their definition of sex, because transgender women have male bodies, which they see as threatening to cisgender women. In their official statement of consultation to the Scottish government regarding the reformation of the GRA (2020), WPUK (a group that campaigns for ‘women to have separate spaces and distinct services on the basis of [their] biological sex’, as Moore states in her 2020 text) warns

of the “psychological harm perpetrated on women by the presence of someone who is male-bodied” and objects to women “sharing spaces with male-bodied people”.

By discussing sex in such a black and white way, the GCF discourse leaves little room for nuance and is neglectful of the decades upon decades of scientific and feminist theorizing and researching that has gone into showing how sex is discursively constructed and disproving the notion that sex is based solely reproductive anatomy and that there are many variations between just male and female. The existence of intersex people, and the physical changes a transgender person experiences due to hormone therapy or surgery cannot be explained if we are to adhere to a GCF conception of sex. For example, I am transgender man who was assigned the category of female as my sex when I was born. I have taken testosterone for over a decade leading me to develop male secondary sex characteristics such as facial hair and a deeper voice, as well as had top surgery (removal of breast tissue) and a total hysterectomy. According to my doctor, I am as much at risk for heart disease as cisgender men, and at zero risk for ovarian cancer. So why should I be called a “biological female”? It’s also just not me who “believes” I am a man; I am regularly afforded the privileges of moving through the world as a man without anyone having to see my chromosomal makeup. Additionally, if we are to take the GCF route to organizing our society around their definition of sex, then I should be using the women’s restroom and other women’s only spaces, because I have XX chromosomes, even though all of my legal documents say I am male. This is clearly illogical and ultimately discriminatory - the GCF understanding of sex implies transgender people are lying to themselves and not deserving of any place in a society that is hellbent on upholding resolute boundaries on who can be considered a woman (or a man).

Scholarship in gender and post/decolonial studies has also allowed us to see how biological conceptualizations of sex are negotiated by wider colonial and racialized norms that guide the social positions ascribed to different women, which includes the ability for someone to claim the position of ‘woman’ in the first place. The GCF discourse that positions sex in such a limiting way upholds a power structure that marginalizes not just transgender bodies, but non-white and cisgender bodies as well. This effect is most evident in the way women athletes from the Global South, whose bodies are different from the white European standardized women’s, are

disproportionately treated in Olympic Sports. Castor Semenya, a two-time Olympic gold medal runner from South Africa, was forced to undergo “sex testing” to determine if she was actually female because she was excelling at her sport. It was determined she was actually intersex (she had XY chromosomes and elevated testosterone) and would not be able to compete in the Olympics or World Championships unless she took medication to suppress her “deviant” sexual characteristics. There have been at least 10 other cases of women athletes, all from developing countries, who have also been forced to undergo invasive and humiliating “sex verification” processes in order to compete. It is incredibly dishonest to define sex by one particular parameter and exclude women from taking part in something when they live their lives as women. Historically, during colonization, European women were compared to African women which promoted arbitrary markers of racial difference and inferiority and justified the exclusion of non-white women from the category of “women” altogether. By setting the white, European cisgender woman’s body as the ideal type for understanding what a woman and female is, and thus considering those who deviate from that in need of fixing, you allow colonialism to live on and racism to become institutionalized in sports and any other system that using sex as a measuring stick.

In GCF discourse, gender is, on the other hand, less significant than sex. It is a social understanding or social construction of the material, so it should not hold much weight in terms of understanding who we are and thus how we organize ourselves socially. Because of their heavy focus on defining what womanhood is based on sex in the discourse, discussions of what gender is are limited and casually dismissed by the authors as being less important. In her text “What does gender have to do with genitals?”, Bindel (2018) comments that,

Gender has no basis in material reality. It is comprised of sexist stereotypes. It is a tool of the patriarchy, made up to keep girls and women in place, and to privilege men ... Gender is a social construct to keep girls and women subservient to men and boys ... but sex is biology.

GCFs view gender as something that matters less than sex *because* it is socially constructed, as Bindel correctly notes, but casually dismisses her assessment of the impact of gender by ending her statement with “but sex is biology” and therefore reigns supreme. The discourse further downplays the significance of gender by referring to it as an identity or feeling (versus sex as biology and being a physical fact). In her personal blog, Jess de Wahls (2019) ends statements where she defines “woman” and “female” by stating at the end of them “(not an identity or feeling)”. Hadley Freeman (2018) writes “Gender is feeling and biology is physical fact”. For GCFs, gender identity is an ideology and a theory, and should not replace sex as a way of defining ourselves or providing protections under the law:

Understanding sexual difference to be an important facet of human experience, we seek a form of equality that recognizes it. We do not accept the much newer concept of gender identity (the feeling of being male or female) as a substitute
(Rustin, 2020)

We have seen widespread changes to policies on women’s spaces and resources so that, now, gender identity is the official criterion of legitimate access. Essentially, if you feel like a woman, you can now go into a woman-only space
(Stock, 2021)

The GCF position is that if the law is to define what a woman is on the basis of whether or not one identifies as a woman (by reforming the GRA to allow people to change their ‘legal’ sex by self-identification rather than following strict medical and psychological protocols), the category of woman becomes meaningless and women will lose out on rights and protections that are based on them being women.

If sex isn’t real, there’s no same sex attraction. If sex isn’t real, the lived reality of women globally is erased (Rowling, Fig. 1)

Erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives (Rowling, Fig. 1)

I don't think inner feelings are a good basis for legal protections (Stock, 2021)

Not only do the GCFs believe that using gender (instead of sex) to identify ourselves renders their identity as adult human females insignificant, it also is an open invitation for "adult human males" to gain access to their bodies and cause physical harm. In her essay, Rowling (2020) is especially critical of the effects of allowing self-identification and gender to take precedence over the biological "truth" of sex:

I do not want to make natal girls and women less safe. When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman ... then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside. That is the simple truth.

Immediately before making this statement, Rowling dives into discussing (for the first time publicly) her experience of being a domestic abuse survivor. She says how she was 'triggered' by the GRA reform, spending much of her day "in a very dark place inside [her] head, as memories of a serious sexual assault [she] suffered in [her] twenties recurred on a loop" (Rowling, 2020). She found it "hard to contain [her] anger and disappointment about the way [she] believe[s] [her] government is playing fast and loose with women's and girls' safety" (Rowling, 2020). By talking at length about her abuse at the hands of a (cisgender) man, the underlying message here is that all males are inherently dangerous and violent, and because transgender women are biological males, they are violent predators who will take advantage of vulnerable (cisgender) women if we are to allow them to change their legal sex via self-identification.

While GCF discourse recognizes that gender is a social construct, it does so only to downplay its significance in society and delegitimize it as unscientific in favor of the "truth" of biology as expressed by sex. But as entire schools of social thought have shown (social constructionism, sociology of knowledge, poststructuralism, queer theory, etc), just because something is "socially constructed" does not invalidate its existence or make it any less real. When we say something is socially constructed,

what we are saying is that the meanings of things (like what a man is, what marriage and family are, and even time) does not exist objectively; they are developed in coordination with others and are shared ideas or perceptions that only exist because a society accepts that they do. There is absolutely no way to deny that gender is a social construct, and that is not what GCFs want to do. They do, however, want to *privilege* the concept of sex over that of gender, rather than seeing them as being discursively co-constructed, in order to create barriers and deny access to resources and critical public and private spaces for transgender people. For example, a GCF would not want a transgender woman to use a domestic violence shelter for women because GCF women view transgender women as biologically male in their sex and therefore too dangerous to be in vulnerable women's spaces. Further, this way of discussing biological sex as the only way in which women are oppressed, and not because of the *shared ideas or perceptions of women* as being less valuable in a patriarchal society, privileges the bodies of cisgender women over transgender women and ignores the ways that misogyny affects transgender women as well. Transgender women are not only assaulted and murdered because they are transgender, but because they are viewed by society collectively as *women*. Transgender women suffer similar violence at the hands of men as do cisgender women. Claiming gender has no basis in material reality and is nothing more than a feeling is a blatant falsehood that puts the onus on transgender people to justify their gender de/construction while leaving cisgender people free to live uncritically gendered lives.

GCF v. TRA

GCFs define their gender critical feminism as stemming from women's sex-based rights and in staunch opposition to transgender rights activism. GCFs believe women's rights are derived from their sex and not on what someone identifies as their gender. They believe women are "oppressed on the basis of [their] biological sex" as "biological sex is the bedrock of [women's] oppression" (Bindel, 2018), which means their feminism in action is women "centering and celebrating [their] reproductive organs" (deWahls, 2019), placing a definitive "importance on the body" (Rustin, 2020) and "not on how [women] identify" (Bindel, 2018). J.K. Rowling (2020) believes the GCF movement is "standing up for freedom of speech and thought, and for the rights

and safety of some of the most vulnerable in our society: young gay kids, fragile teenagers, and women who are reliant on and wish to retain their single sex spaces". The figure of the GCF standing up for the vulnerable women to have protected spaces is a constant point GCFs like to make:

Male violence is an issue for women, why is why we want single-sex spaces. Vulnerable women in refuges and prisons must be allowed to live in safe environments (Moore, 2020)

Radically expanding the legal definition of 'women' ... will undermine women's rights & protections for vulnerable women & girls ... Women and girls lose out on privacy, safety and fairness if males allowed into changing rooms, dormitories, prisons, sports teams (Forstater, Fig. 3)

GCF are keen on insisting they are harmless and that their feminism is definitely a legitimate, rights-based feminism. In J.K. Rowling's (2020) essay, she positions herself as an inoffensive woman who has been "empathetic to trans people for decades" and that to be a GCF is to just simply be concerned with the effects a "socio-political concept" (gender identity) is having on medical practice and safeguarding; as diametrically opposed to being hateful and discriminatory towards transgender people.

In contrast to their feminism of truth, GCFs see transgender rights activism as an ideology, which is often referred to as dangerous and violent. The LGB Alliance (n.d.) says they "are proud to stand against the gaslighting of young vulnerable people and in total solidarity with millions of women concerned that their rights are being eroded in the pursuit of a strange ideology that has no place in our laws". de Wahls (2019) says she will not compromise herself and bow down in service of "an oppressive and, increasingly, actually violent, dogmatic ideology". Bindel (2018) says that transgender activism has, in recent years, "produced some crazy views" and that people are "scared to challenge the trans activist extremists". Stock (2021) speaks of "the trans lobby and its increasingly aggressive behavior" and believes that the "trans orthodoxy" stifles her academic free speech. Rowling (2020) comments that "huge

numbers of women are justifiably terrified by the trans activists” and that she, like de Wahls, will not bow down to a movement she believes “is doing demonstrable harm in seeking to erode ‘woman’ as a political class and offering cover to predators like few before it”. GCF discourse posits transgender rights activism, in proposing that transgender people be allowed to self-identify as the gender they say they are, as akin to a “social contagion” (Rowling, 2020) that will weaken the protections of women and “underpin the basis for all services and activities currently segregated on the basis of sex” (WPUK, 2020). Rowling (2020) comments that transgender rights ideology is “misogynistic” and “downright regressive” because transgender women who transition and pass (to be viewed unquestioningly as cisgender) as women are making a mockery of womanhood by imitating sexist stereotypes:

Woman is not a costume. Woman is not an idea in a man’s head. Woman is not a pink brain, a liking for Jimmy Choos or any of the other sexist ideas now somehow touted as progressive.

Rowling (2020) follows up this statement implying transgender women are just cosplaying womanhood (at the detriment of cisgender women, who are somehow not guilty of this) calling out transgender rights activism for their insistence on using inclusive language around sex and gender:

Moreover, the ‘inclusive’ language that calls female people ‘menstruators’ and ‘people with vulvas’ strikes many women as dehumanizing and demeaning. I understand why trans activists consider this language to be appropriate and kind, but for those of us who’ve had degrading slurs spat at us by violent men, it’s not neutral, it’s hostile and alienating.

In their discourse, GCF position themselves as the true, virtuous feminists saving the world from the vicious transgender activists who want to indoctrinate naive women and children into their orthodoxy of transness. Women are seen as passive recipients that are stripped of their agency and unable to make decisions for themselves. In this way, GCF feminism fails even those it claims to be fighting the

most for by making them out to be incompetent. GCF is a feminism that only focuses on being critical of transgender people's bodies and gender presentations yet remains blissfully uncritical of their own cisgender bodies and gender presentations and how they might reinforce sexism and patriarchal thinking. The GCF discourse always describes the transgender rights activists in monolithic negative terms, as if they are some kind of boogeyman, going as far as to say they use "sinister suppression tactics" to shut down the GCF speech at "an obvious cost to democracy" (Stock, 2021). But as Pearce et al. (2020) have shown in *TERF Wars*, there is not one definable '(trans)gender ideology' and transgender activism and lives represent a wide spectrum of people and needs. It is ridiculous for one to claim a marginalized group (that GCFs claim to be a very small minority of people) can wield more power than their oppressors. The GCF discourse on their feminism versus trans feminism takes advantage of their position of privilege as cisgender women and further marginalizes transgender people by dismissing their concerns for an equal place at the table.

Additionally, GCF is the epitome of what Vergès calls civilizational feminism. A recurring statement GCFs use in their discourse is the "concerned white woman" who is looking out for the innocent and helpless women and children by promoting their beliefs as "the simple truth" (Rowling, 2020). This kind of discourse is shockingly reminiscent of the same rhetorical tactics that British feminists used when they were taking part in colonizing practices by attempting to save the black women from their savage male counterparts in order to bring them into the civilizing ways of white womanhood. This discourse of the GCF positioning "biological women" as more deserving of rights than transgender women implies that a biological basis for political womanhood is another tactic feminists used to exclude black women from womanhood during colonization. This point will also be drawn upon further in the next section of analysis.

Intersubjective Relations Under a Eurocentric Hegemony

This part of the analysis will look at how GCF discourse operates as an ideology of domination that privileges a Eurocentric understanding of sex and gender via several mechanisms of intersubjective relations: using statements of 'truth' to exclude subjects and claim superiority by classifying subjects based on biological essentialism

which controls and regulates bodies for the maintenance of gendered hierarchies, thereby dismissing 'other' forms of knowledge production, and employing statements of defense and feeling threatened by difference as a reactionary response. Revealing the layers of subjugation in this way will allow for a broader understanding of transgender marginalization and illuminate the ruling system of gender oppression in GCF discourse.

'Truth'-Telling: Biological Essentialism, Gender Hierarchies, and Regulating Bodies.

The language used by GCFs in every text sampled refers to biology being a scientific reality and a truth that cannot be passed over in favor of the more complex understanding that sex is discursively co-constructed with gender and that the truth of their relationship is more much more nuanced. They say "biology is a physical fact" (Freeman) and speak of the "biological realities" of women (de Wahls) and "the materiality of having a female body" (Moore), insisting that there are "real and tangible differences between male and female biology" (Bindel) and the "significant physical differences between male-born bodies and female-born ones" (Freeman); that women's lives are "shaped by their physical differences from males" because they have "female anatomy that makes [them] vulnerable in specific ways to sexual violence" (Rustin). Rowling (Fig. 1) implies that she supports people's free expression of gender, but that it is not transphobic for women (like Forstater, who lost her job because of transphobic tweets) to state "sex is real" or "point out that males don't have vulvas and females don't have a penis" (LGB Alliance). Forstater (Figs. 5 & 6) implies that you cannot be "pro-science" and believe that men can "change into" women and further, "a man's internal feeling that he is a woman" has no basis in "material reality".

Further, GCFs see women-only spaces such as bathrooms and changing rooms, prisons, shelters, and sports as being only for people with a very specific kind of female biology. This centers around what they consider female genitalia (a vagina), female reproductive organs (a uterus), and XX chromosomes. Forstater (Fig. 7) tweeted a cartoon that shows an encounter taking place at the Hampstead Heath Ladies Pond (a natural swimming pool that the City of London has allowed transgender women to attend under the Equality Act of 2010) where two (presumably) cisgender women in bikinis show confusion at a (presumably) transgender women

wearing a t-shirt (and of larger stature and hairy legs) who has her towel open towards them and includes the caption “it’s alright – it’s a woman’s penis”. The text of her tweet speaks of excluding “male-bodied” people from “female intimate spaces” and of the need to “maintain single sex spaces”.

What discourse like this does is promote an ideology of biological essentialism – where an individual has an innate and natural ‘essence’ – that defines what a woman is in terms of biological capacities most commonly associated with reproduction and considers anything that falls outside of that dangerous and perverse. This ideology is based on a white, Eurocentric understanding of what constitutes sex as male and female, leaving no room for the variation of bodies, especially those of intersex people, black women and women of color. To claim access to an undeniable “material reality” of the sexed body ignores how these very same arguments have been used historically to exclude black and brown bodies from the category of womanhood. It therefore creates a power dynamic that privileges a certain type of woman over another based off of these certain biological characteristics and positioning cisgender women as authentic women and transgender women as the eternal ‘Other’. This sets up a gendered hierarchy where bodies are regulated according to what somebody perceives as belonging to a “real” woman. In GCF ideology, transgender women are not women because they have different biology than cisgender women, even if that “difference” is not visible to the naked eye. As Halberstam (2014) outlines, women’s public bathrooms are policed according to femininity (cisgender women who are more masculine can face scrutiny for the way they look), not chromosomes or genitals; there is literally no way to police people entering single sex spaces upon the notion of a “biological reality”.

Despite their insistence on “truth” and a scientific, biological, material, reality of sex, only two of the texts reference any academic or scientific studies to back their claims up. The academic that GCF do cite as proof of the importance of biology in determining womanhood is Simone de Beauvoir, a white woman and feminist philosopher from France. Both Rustin (2020) and Rowling (2020) make reference to Beauvoir, with Rustin claiming Beauvoir’s intention of her seminal work *The Second Sex* was to situate the body as the starting point for understanding woman’s oppression in the world and Rustin’s analysis is that “women’s lives are shaped by

their *fundamental physical differences* from men” (emphasis my own). I would argue that this claim is a fundamental misunderstanding of Beauvoir’s feminist philosophy.

Ever since Beauvoir stated that one is not born a woman, but becomes one, feminists have been exploring the entanglements of conceiving of sex and gender as social and cultural constructs. By interpreting *becoming* as an idealistic call to absolute self-agency and the power to create womanhood out of a process, rather than predetermined biological origination, Beauvoir understood that there can be no singular experience that defines woman since a woman creates her own definitions through the remarkably diverse process of actualization as individual freedom. What a woman is, therefore, is an identity and a personal possession that is self-styled and intentionally produced by means of personal intention and action. There is also ultimately no direct access to biological realities, as they too become cognitively significant to us through discourse, including that of biology, which is itself structured by political values. To use and define the concepts of woman and female by referencing biological sex then itself is a political choice full of privilege and power to give superiority to cisgender women over transgender women, rather than one that can claim to impartially reflect what the world is “actually” like.

Dismissing ‘Other’ Forms of Knowledge Production.

When GCF discourse employs the language of telling the “truth” about sex and gender and the reality of women, it privileges their knowledge over that of the ‘Other’ and implies a power dynamic. A critical aspect of GCF discourse is the denial of transgender people’s legitimacy as being transgender and downplaying their experiences in the world and the knowledge they bring to our collective understanding of gender and sex. For example, Bindel (2018) says that “the trans debate has produced some crazy views: that men can get pregnant, for example, and that boys can get periods” and that “fact and logic – the very bedrock of academic study are disappearing” as society learns more about the experiences of transgender people. The texts often discuss a child being transgender as a phase and something they will grow out of, with Rowling (2020) citing a (since debunked and retracted) study claiming 60-90% of teens outgrow their gender dysphoria. Several texts also highlight how the number of children being referred to gender identity clinics in the

UK is “alarming” (Rowling, 2020) and “shocking” (Moore, 2020), and that allowing children access to medically transition is dangerous, setting them on path of being infertile - a process they may later regret. At the same time, they mention that the push for reforming the GRA is coming from a “small number of lobby groups” (WPUK, 2020) comprised of a transgender community which is a “very small minority” (LGB Alliance, n.d.).

GCF discourse uses the power of claiming to hold the truth of sex and gender and suppressing the voices of those knowledge doesn't fit within their Western understanding of the social world. When Bindel says that a transgender man who has gotten pregnant is a crazy idea, she says that his experience is less significant/doesn't matter which can lead to discrimination at not only the interpersonal level of ridicule, but at the institutional level in things such as healthcare during pregnancy and in the workplace for taking paternity leave. Every day more and more transgender people “come out” because society is becoming more accepting towards them. The number one reason people cited for detransitioning in Hildebrand-Chupp's (2020) study of detransitioners was social pressure, discrimination, and society not being as accepting of them as transgender. While the British government does not have accurate numbers on the amount of people in the country who identify as transgender, Stonewall estimates there to be around 600,000 (*The truth about trans*, 2021). In comparison, there are about 270,000 Jews living in Britain. According to the GCF logic, because Jews are a “very small minority”, their experiences of discrimination and antisemitism shouldn't matter. Further, as scholarship shows, the experiences of transgender people are vast and differing, and the more we learn about how they experience themselves as gendered people in the world, the more we should consider what they have to say about who they are and further insights they can provide into settling the debate about what sex and gender really are. Transgender people have been standing up and speaking truth to power and truth to the people for decades, but GCF doesn't want to hear it.

Statements of Defense and Feeling Threatened by Difference.

Because transgender people have been speaking up about their experiences and asking for their knowledge to be taken seriously, GCF has emerged on the defense

to protect the sacred “truth” of what they see as the biological reality of sex. Out of all of the themes I coded for, this was the most predominant, appearing in over 100 instances throughout the texts. The GCF position, as previously discussed, is an overtly political one responding to the emergence of a transgender rights activism that seeks legal, political, and social recognition and protection. Two of the texts sampled (WPUK and LGB Alliance) are from political organizations working directly against transgender rights policies like the reformation of the GRA. WPUK, founded in 2017, advocates for restricting access to women-only spaces on the basis of “sex, not gender”. LGB Alliance was founded in 2019 to oppose LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall’s pro-transgender inclusion policies. LGB Alliance’s text (n.d.) is their official statement of their position against the GRA reform, in which they claim allowing people to self-identify “would spread confusion and would inevitably be a threat to our rights” and that there is a “conflict between trans rights and the rights of LGB people” which has “been exacerbated because of a radical change in the demands of trans people”. WPUK’s submission to the Scottish Government on their GRA consultation (2020) talks of “the impact these proposals will have on women-only spaces, services, and occupations”, worrying that women may “lose the ability to take an equal pay claim if her comparator is man who has changed their legal sex to female” and that their “experience of holding 27 public events over the past two and a half years has demonstrated the real concern that women have about the potential impact of these proposals”, ultimately criticizing the Scottish government for “uncritically accepting the views of a small number of lobby groups”. They go on:

Women highly value their hard-won sex-based rights and protections enshrined in UK law. These have already been eroded at the level of policy, ahead of any changes to the GRA 2004. These changes have taken place by a process of policy capture, whereby public policymaking has been skewed in favor of one interest group over and above others ... in defiance of the norms of democratic accountability ... Before changing the law to open up the legal and political category of womanhood to anyone who declares themselves to be female, the Scottish Government must offer women a cast iron guarantee that these proposals will not negatively impact their existing rights and protections.

Statements like these are not just limited to political organizations. Time and time again, the authors of the texts repeated similar mantras of being concerned about the impact that allowing transgender people to self-identity would have on their rights. Jess de Wahls (2019), like the LGB Alliance, says she finds it “disturbing” and “unsettling” that transgender rights seek advocacy under the banner of a rainbow (gay rights) flag. Stock (2021) says that the effects of transgender activist lobbying have been “rapid and seismic” because of the “placing [of] trans women – some of them sex offenders – in female prisons”. Everywhere, Moore (2020) warns us, women are being silenced; “you either protect women’s rights as sex-based or you don’t protect them at all ... I won’t go down quietly”. It’s not just women’s rights they are concerned about, but it is the welfare of children and even transgender people themselves. Quoting Moore (2020):

How did we arrive at a situation where there shocking and rising numbers of teenage girls presenting at specialistic clinics with gender dysphoria, while some who have transitioned are regretful and infertile?

Rowling’s essay (2020) was written in direct response to her being called transphobic for her tweets that are used in this sample. Much of the essay is therefore written from an automatically defensive position. She speaks of the “climate of fear” transgender people perpetuate in calling out transphobia and her desire to speak up and not keep quiet.

It becomes quite clear that the GCF is someone who adopts language that sees themselves as oppressed, and not the oppressor. They use the language of ‘woman’ to defend the ontological category of ‘woman’ from anyone who does not fit their definition. They speak of defending women’s rights at any cost, but that does not include transgender women, because they believe that they are not really women. Stock makes it a point to note that some transgender women are sex offenders, suggesting that they are inherently threatening to cisgender women and should not be allowed to be placed in women’s spaces. Instead of opening up categories of identity to accommodate different experiences, GCFs employ language that sees the

'Other', the transgender person, as being disruptive and threatening to maintaining an order of cisgender normativity. The message is that transgender bodies, because they do not adhere to a cisgender narrative, are a disruption to the Eurocentric hegemonic gender order of what constitutes womanhood.

CHAPTER SIX

Concluding Discussion

A Polemic on GCF

As CDA outlines, language is a communicative event and a form of social practice that can create change and thus becomes a tool of power. The previous chapter looked at the discourse of GCF in-depth by analyzing 12 samples of online texts, considering how GCFs utilize their positions of privilege in society as white, cisgender women with high profile media platforms, to define important key terms in the debate over transgender rights in the UK in order to uphold a system of domination shaping our understanding of transgender identities and politics. This is done by defining their terms in strictly binary, immutable ways, which cannot be overcome through “gender ideology”, or understanding sex and gender as being discursively co-constructed. This chapter also considered themes in the sample which examine how GCF discourse employs an ideology of power that centers Western, European understandings of these terms. Politically, GCFs position themselves as a group of people who are concerned about the impact transgender rights activism will have on women’s rights and women’s spaces and the disruption transgender identities pose to a cisgender-normative world. Through this analysis, it becomes quite clear that GCF discourse wants nothing to do with understanding anything that doesn’t fit within their ideology of truth, as they actively employ discursive strategies to defend their position as superior and their desire to protect their womanhood, at the expense of subjugating transgender people.

Scientific discourse on sex and gender has been subject to deconstruction for decades from feminist scholars looking to decenter white, male, European knowledge production. This includes important work by Black feminists in the field of intersectionality, where race, class, religion, sexuality, and other identities all simultaneously interact with gender, and one another, to position subjects differently within the matrix of oppression. Transgender feminists, like those discussed in the literature review, have explored just how complicated the relationship between sex and gender is, and further documented the historical and contemporary hostility within trans and feminist movements around these discursive battles, culminating in

the modern day “TERF wars”. Through my analysis, I was able to see discursive tactics used by GCF to marginalize and oppress transgender people that were similar to the ones discussed in the literature review: the focus on sexual dimorphism and the female body being the ultimate source of women’s oppression; defending the category of ‘woman’ from anything that doesn’t fit within the binary; the regulation of bodies based on this binary; and the resulting positioning of transgender people as a dangerous ‘Other’ for crossing the binary.

What was not explored by those looking at GCF was the role that colonialism plays in the GCF discourse, which is important because the GCF discourse is coming from within a country that was, at its height, the biggest imperial empire in history. As postcolonial and decolonial scholarship has shown, the impact of colonialism can still be felt in the persistence of racialized discourses of white supremacy and global capitalism as indicative of modern societies. Gender, in addition to race, was an important social category based on inherent and biological differences that allowed for European domination of the colonized. Maria Lugonés’s expansion of understanding how gender wasn’t just a social construction, but a colonial imposition, acts an important framework to unpack our social realities and critically examine the origins of social problems and the legacies of colonialism that continue to shape identities and global politics.

I would like to revisit my original research question through a decolonial feminist framework: **how is our view of trans(gender) politics and people shaped by gender critical feminist discourse?** Based off of my analysis, I would argue that our view is shaped by the power relations previously discussed because the GCF discourse reinforces a racial and colonial order of gender allowing for naturalizing claims of superiority over transgender identities and hegemonic gender politics based off of difference, while also generating constant resistance among transgender people to advocate for policy change, gender abolition, and emancipation from the modern/colonial order.

GCF language centers around the discourse that “sex matters” – the same reason European colonizers gave to distinguish between their identities as gendered people and the inferior colonial identities as nongendered. Lugonés argues that the Western gender system can’t be understood apart from the colonial and racial history

of gender serving in the formation of identity. She wants us to view hegemonic accounts of gender (or sex, in the case of GCF) – which include sexual dimorphism, heterosexuality, and patriarchy – as not having been applied equally across colonial lines. European white colonizers understood their identities through the “light side” of this gendered framework (biologically dimorphic and human) and viewed the colonized through the “dark side” (ambiguous and nonhuman), where alternative understandings of gender were erased, and the colonized people were continuously portrayed as sexually deviant and dangerously threatening. This system allowed for a way to naturalize the divide between human/nonhuman, superior/inferior, and colonized/noncolonized. The portrayal of gender as being “actually” about biological sex allowed for dominate accounts of gender to erase the differential allocation of gender across colonial lines. The reduction of gender to sex plays a crucial role in racial and colonial history. To quote Marie Draz:

The turn to anatomical criteria also finds its unsettling history here, as the body (and especially genitalia) is consistently appealed to in order to determine the hierarchical arrangement of the races. Sex becomes an origin story. This use of sex allows for naturalizing claims of inferiority and superiority across colonial lines.

(2017:380)

A person’s genitals become directly tied to social orders in this modern/gender system of coloniality. Lugonés (2007:196) writes: “As with other assumptions, it is important to ask how sexual dimorphism served and continues to serve global Eurocentered, capitalist domination/exploitation”. When GCF advocates for the “biological reality” of sex as their gender politics, they are advocating for a binary, biological idea of sex to serve as the anchoring point for contact between people and administrative systems, which reiterates the power of the state to classify, know, and control its citizens on their terms. By advocating against reforming the GRA, GCFs do not want to allow transgender people the power to identify their sex marker on their state documents, instead insisting that they undergo a series of government-mandated “tests” in order to “prove” that they are the gender they say they are. This puts

transgender people in the subjugated position to validate their identities under a colonial/modern gender system in order to survive by forcing them to fit within a binary of biological sex. A hegemonic account of gender as being organized by biological sex only functions to conceal the role that racial and colonial domination play in in modern Western societies like the UK, which is crucial for the kind of capitalist state-building work that makes populations legible.

Under the GCF vision of colonial gender politics, divided between human/nonhuman, a transgender identity becomes impossible to inhabit because transgender identities do not fit within their definitions of gender. There is also no room in GCF for the racialized women, as she too lies outside of a political womanhood that is based on colonial identity. In GCF politics, the sign “woman” stands for white women and their superiority as such relies on a colonial hierarchy of gender. GCFs insist on the truth of identifying a man or a woman based on a model of sexual dimorphism: all men have certain biological characteristics that are definitive of their realities as men, in opposing contrast to women, who all have certain biological characteristics that are definitive of their realities as women. A transgender woman can never actually be a woman like the GCF white woman can be based on her “biology”; but this raises a lot of complicated questions that GCF cannot answer: what if the transgender woman has a vagina? what about intersex people like Castor Semenya? and where do I fit in as a transgender man who has had gender affirming surgery to remove my “female” body parts and hormone therapy to alter my secondary sex characteristics to those that are “biologically male”? I am certainly not a woman, but I am also not a man according to GCF logic. There is absolutely no place for transgender identities in the GCF political vision. By holding onto the idea that there are systematic differences in form between men and women that are tied to a binary, biological understanding of sex, and therefore setting up a gendered hierarchy, GCF discourse can be seen to sustain a colonial structure of gender.

In contrast to GCF politics, and as a form of resistance to it, a decolonial trans(gender) politics emerges to ask us to consider the implications of defining ourselves under gender categories with no stable definitions and question whether those understandings serve to uphold a hegemonic order of Eurocentric knowledge production resulting from a colonial order. It critiques the language of “woman” due

to the hierarchical dichotomies of modernity. It draws attention to the intersections of our identities as racialized and gendered subjects in colonial, hegemonic systems of power. It asks us to consider how our gender is racialized and what we can do to move beyond that. To decolonize gender is a practical task that Lugonés calls “a lived transformation of the social”. A decolonial trans(gender) feminist politics seeks a transformation by abolishing the modern/colonial gender system which marks us with the violent enforcement of gender through state-mandated gender assignment and regulation; everyone should be free to choose from a multitude of ever-changing gender expressions no matter what their body looks like and the state should not enforce complacency within boxes of “Male”, “Female”, or “Other”. Central to this task of transforming the social through gender abolition is a dedication to liberation of ourselves and an affirmation of something that is outside of the dominant system of values and norms, as we enrich our lives by learning from new localities and as we embrace the uncertainty of plurality. As O’Laughlin (2019) comments - human beings are more than what the colonizer imagines them to be (nonhuman); they are surviving, communicating, connecting; in human ways that are paradoxical to the colonial nonhuman paradigm. I think that the best way to win the “TERF Wars” is for every transgender person to fall in love with the beauty of a self that is prohibited by gender critical feminism and thrive, despite the imposition of difference and conflict between identity and lived experience.

Limitations and Future Research

A major limitation I encountered while writing this thesis was the amount and type of data I could use. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic limiting access to in-person, physical resources, my project was limited to data I could easily source online. Searching the internet for data to use is not always the easiest thing to do and can be very time consuming, so my selection of texts was limited to sources that were well known or I was already very familiar with. This means my thesis only drew from GCFs who were popular figures in the movement, rather than looking at “every day” actors in the discourse – something that could be looked into in future research. My original intent was to draw from Twitter because of the large amount of discourse happening on it regarding transgender rights in the UK, but due to the limitations of

Twitter's search feature and account privacy, on top of time restrictions, I was unable to dedicate enough time to dig through thousands of Twitter posts to come up with a data set for this project. Additionally, because the GCF is a current, constantly developing movement in the UK, it was a challenge to select texts that would be properly representative.

I think it is important for future research projects dealing with backlash to "gender ideology" to incorporate discussion and analysis of the gender critical feminist movement because they share a common enemy (gender) and are powerful, reactionary movements that target transgender people. As Judith Butler (2021) recently outlined in an article for the Guardian, attacks on "gender ideology" are currently growing throughout the world, dominating public debate, fueled by online networks, and backed by expansive rightwing Catholic and evangelical organizations, all claiming "gender" is a dangerous ideology threatening to destroy families, local cultures, civilization, and even "woman" herself:

For this reactionary movement, the term "gender" attracts, condenses, and electrifies a diverse set of social and economic anxieties produced by increasing economic precarity under neoliberal regimes, intensifying social inequality, and pandemic shutdown. Stoked by fears of infrastructural collapse, anti-migrant anger and, in Europe, the fear of losing the sanctity of the heteronormative family, national identity and white supremacy, many insist that the destructive forces of gender, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory are to blame. When gender is thus figured as a foreign invasion, these groups clearly reveal that they are in the business of nation-building. The nation for which they are fighting is built upon white supremacy, the heteronormative family, and a resistance to all critical questioning of norms that have clearly restricted the freedoms and imperilled the lives of so many people.

(Butler, 2021)

Exploring links between anti-gender movements in Europe will only strengthen our understanding of increasingly authoritarian governments which Butler (2021) views

as a new fascist trend; encouraging state powers to intervene in university programs (as the recent debate over Dr. Kathleen Stock's position at the University of Sussex for holding GCF views shows), forbidding transgender people their legal rights (like changing their gender and legal sex), effectively banning them access to public spaces, and undermining the struggle against violence directed towards transgender people. These are all things that should be considered more deeply when considering "gender ideology" backlash across Europe.

I also think that future research could deal with collecting data from interviews with transgender people living in the UK who are being directly impacted by the GCF movement. As I mentioned before, the pandemic limited my access to online resources only, so the data and methodology I chose was what was easily accessible to me. Transgender people's perspectives and experiences in dealing with GCF discourse and politics could offer up rich insights into the everyday workings of transgender identities and politics in the UK, especially those with racialized experiences. Exploring the intersections of race, gender, and class through the personal, intimate lives of transgender individuals in the UK would only strengthen the arguments of this thesis; for it is important to remember that not every transgender person is marginalized in the same way. The coloniality of gender affects black and brown transgender people the most.

If We Don't End War, War Will End Us

This thesis project sought to give a comprehensive overview of the gender critical feminist movement in the UK, providing a critical analysis of their texts in order to examine how our view of trans(gender) politics and people are shaped by their discourse. From the literature review, we can see how feminists have asked questions about gender and sex (how society is organized according to gender and what consequences there are for understanding bodies and lived experiences in systems of gender) and the resulting battles that have erupted within feminism over the concepts of gender and sex as we incorporate transgender lives in our studies. I was able to explore what these disruptions were and discuss how they frame transgender lives and politics in the UK, making sufficient use of Lugonés's theory of the coloniality of gender to show how the discourse upholds a colonial structure of

gender. Through my analysis, it became clear that gender critical feminism wants nothing to do with understanding anything that doesn't fit their ideology of the "truth" of gender and sex, itself being a colonial imposition. The over-arching theme of GCF discourse under a Eurocentric hegemony boils down to the discriminatory discursive practice of employing biology as the essential and penultimate 'truth' of who we are as subjects and how we relate to one another from there. This ideological underpinning in GCF promotes itself through the discussion of who can and cannot be included in the category of 'woman', a power move that historically has been used to exclude racialized, colonial subjects. When European colonizers invaded countries and set themselves apart from the colonized as superior based on their gender system, they didn't care to understand how the civilizations they conquered produced knowledge about their society. They privileged the views of their people and called the colonized people savages, they didn't care for the way they lived their lives or the knowledge they had and sought to destroy their way of being in service of their "civilizing mission". GCF discourse is no different when it comes to favoring their "truth" over another, seeking to continue to hold onto power structures that favor themselves as being "true" women (and men) and transgender people as mere imitations of gendered beings, if being gendered at all.

GCF position themselves politically as a group of people who are concerned about the impact transgender rights activism will have on women's rights and women's spaces, thus insinuating the dangerous disruption transgender bodies pose to a cisgender world by forcing us to consider more deeply the complex process of sex assignment. Transgender people and transgender activism do not seek to deny sex, but rather want us to ask questions about how sex is established through medical, legal, and political frameworks, how it changes throughout time, and what difference it makes to the social organization of our world when we disconnect sex assigned at birth from the life that follows (Butler, 2021). Positioning transgender rights as wholly antithetical to women's rights is a dangerous political position to take because it will only give strength to the people who don't care about women's rights or transgender rights. It does nothing to advance the rights of women, instead erasing the vast experiences of women across the world as we learn more about the construction of sex and gender.

At the end of the day, there is nothing “critical” about a feminism that lacks an understanding of gender and sex as internally diverse and incredibly complex and refuses to interrogate its assumptions as being based on colonial power structures as well as aligning itself with reactionary, totalitarian, fascist movements that target all women and LGBTQI people, all the while dehumanizing people in the process. And contrary to the quote that titles this thesis, it *is* hate to speak the truth if that truth is based on discrimination, domination, and exclusion. There needs to be a peace accord made in the “TERF Wars” as we are all losing in a battle that divides us, and it starts with recognizing each other’s humanity and opening ourselves up to learning about how we got to be where we are. For as the “golden rule” of Judaism has told me, “That which is hateful to you do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is explanation; go and learn”. As feminists, we must stop seeing each other as the enemy and build a community by taking up Ahmed’s hammers in synergetic resistance to the patriarchy, white supremacy, and global capitalist domination that keeps us all trapped within its seemingly impenetrable walls. Hegemonic gender structures based in colonialism need to be abolished for the benefit of everyone. Transgender and cisgender women need to see their gender politics as a unifying force; one that is based in the ability to live with self-respect, promoting safety and respect in public spaces, freedom from discrimination, access to life affirming healthcare, and adequately funded social services. Pursuing a decolonial feminism in unison will allow us to question knowledge production of gender as entrenched within global systems of power and develop solidarity across all intersections of oppression as we learn to embrace indigenous, non-Western, queer ways of thinking, doing, and being for the sake of liberating the self and seeking justice for all.

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Figures

Figure 1



Tweet from J.K. Rowling, 19 December 2019

https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1207646162813100033

Figure 2

 **J.K. Rowling** ✓ @jk_rowling

If sex isn't real, there's no same-sex attraction. If sex isn't real, the lived reality of women globally is erased. I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn't hate to speak the truth.

12:02 AM · Jun 7, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

35.2K Retweets **57.5K** Quote Tweets **215.4K** Likes

 **J.K. Rowling** ✓ @jk_rowling · Jun 7, 2020

Replying to @jk_rowling

The idea that women like me, who've been empathetic to trans people for decades, feeling kinship because they're vulnerable in the same way as women - ie, to male violence - 'hate' trans people because they think sex is real and has lived consequences - is a nonsense.

4K 9.1K 71.1K

 **J.K. Rowling** ✓ @jk_rowling · Jun 7, 2020

I respect every trans person's right to live any way that feels authentic and comfortable to them. I'd march with you if you were discriminated against on the basis of being trans. At the same time, my life has been shaped by being female. I do not believe it's hateful to say so.

11.8K 17.8K 92.2K

Tweet from J.K. Rowling, 7 June 2020

https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269389298664701952?s=20

Figure 3

 **Maya Forstater** 
@MForstater

UK gov consultation on reforming the [#GenderRecognitionAct](#) - proposes to dramatically change scope of the law; from requiring medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria for change of sex on birth certificate, to using the basis of 'self identification'



Reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004
We are seeking your views on how best to reform the Gender Recognition Act 2004.
[gov.uk](#)

12:08 AM · Sep 3, 2018 · Twitter Web Client

7 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 80 Likes

 **Maya Forstater**  @MForstater · Sep 3, 2018

Replying to @MForstater

I share the concerns of [@fairplaywomen](#) that radically expanding the legal definition of 'women' so that it can include both males and females makes it a meaningless concept, and will undermine women's rights & protections for vulnerable women & girls.

6 13 113

 **Maya Forstater**  @MForstater · Sep 3, 2018

Some transgender people have cosmetic surgery. But most retain their birth genitals. Everyone's equality and safety should be protected, but women and girls lose out on privacy, safety and fairness if males are allowed into changing rooms, dormitories, prisons, sports teams.

5 14 115

Tweet from Maya Forstater, 3 September 2018

<https://twitter.com/MForstater/status/1036375230279819264>

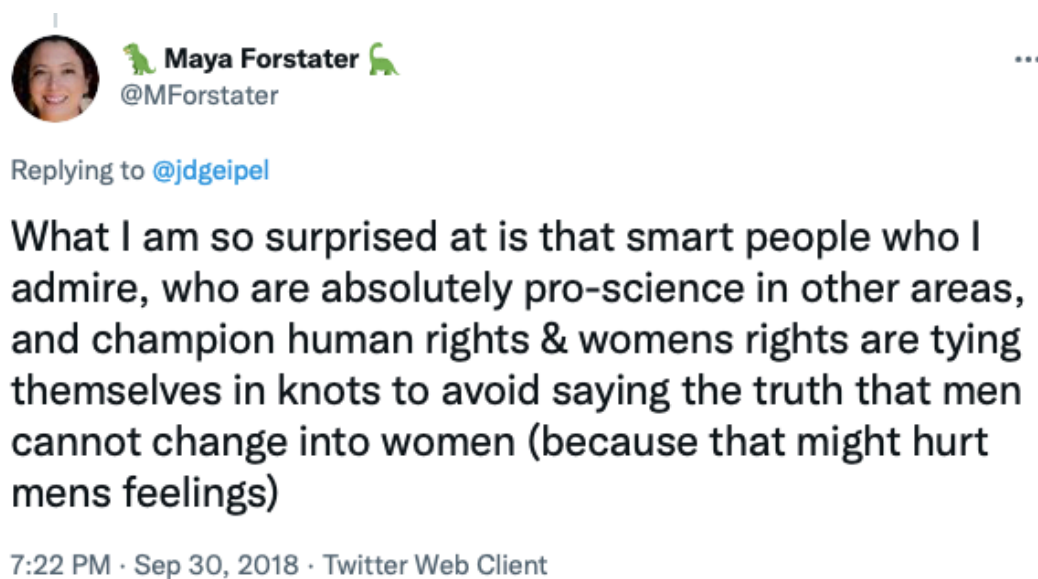
Figure 4



9 Retweets 10 Quote Tweets 116 Likes

Tweet from Maya Forstater, 25 September 2018
<https://twitter.com/MForstater/status/1044588721423638529>

Figure 5



25 Retweets 19 Quote Tweets 140 Likes

Tweet from Maya Forstater, 30 September 2018
<https://twitter.com/mforstater/status/1046450304986812416?lang=en>

Figure 6



Figure 7



Maya Forstater  
@MForstater

...

Replying to @MForstater @AdamWagner1 and @EmmaDixon_EU

Some people believe that a person with a penis can be a woman, some (a majority) don't. Neither group should be discriminated against in everyday life. But in situations involving taking your clothes off with strangers, integration of the two groups is not possible.



8:48 AM · May 25, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

26 Retweets 6 Quote Tweets 123 Likes



Maya Forstater   @MForstater · May 25, 2019

...

Replying to @MForstater @AdamWagner1 and @EmmaDixon_EU

So one or other group will be indirectly discriminated against by either allowing or excluding male bodied people into female intimate spaces (& vice versa). Where there is a mixed/unisex option it is proportionate to maintain single sex spaces, since no one is excluded overall.



Maya Forstater Tweet, 25 May 2019

<https://twitter.com/MForstater/status/1132176625058107392?s=20>