Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color?

Black Trans Feminisms and the Exigencies of White Femininity

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Abstract This article takes as its starting point a recent appearance by musician, actress, and TransTech Social Enterprises CEO Angelica Ross on Caitlyn Jenner's reality television show, *I Am Cait*. The first section places Ross's exegesis in conversation with C. Riley Snorton on the representation of Black sexual duplicity in popular culture and Audre Lorde's critique of white saviorism. Part 2 turns to contemporary discourses of transmisogyny and demonstrates that the term is ill equipped to address the structures of power that manifested in *I Am Cait*. The discussion suggests that race and class surreptitiously impact the emergence and circulation of transmisogyny as an analytic. Julia Serano's scholarship is read alongside Marlon B. Ross on the universalization of whiteness in theories of gender and sexuality. A final, briefer section posits alternative genealogies of trans feminism that focalize the writing, activism, and performance work of trans women of color.
Keywords transmisogyny, transmisogynoir, Black feminism, women-of-color feminism, intersectionality

We are living in a moment in which it is common practice among trans activists and sympathetic media to outline trans vulnerability in the following way: "We need to care about trans lives, especially trans women's lives, especially trans women of color's lives." This essay questions the straightforwardness of a trajectory of vulnerability from the categories "trans people" to "trans women" to "trans women of color," suggesting that key aspects of race and class supremacy are elided within it. A recent article entitled "Is Transmisogyny Killing Transgender Women?" does not pose its titular question, seeming to suggest it needs no answer (Compton 2015).[1] Behind that which is deemed unquestionable, even or especially by trans activists themselves, often lie important questions of power. I suggest that contemporary discourses of transmisogyny are

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sustained not only by critical vulnerabilities but also by unacknowledged white privilege and class oppression in ways that impact even conversations aiming to be intersectional. The discussion unfolds in three sections: part 1 centers the narrative of musician, actress, and chief executive officer of TransTech Social Enterprises Angelica Ross's experience on Caitlyn Jenner's television show, *I Am Cait*, in fall 2015. I place Ross's exegesis in the "Black Voices" segment of the *Huffington Post* (Ross 2015b)in conversation with interviews I conducted with her, with C. Riley Snorton and other Black feminist scholarship on the representation of Black women in popular culture, and with Audre Lorde's critique of white women's saviorism.[2] The second section turns to contemporary discourses in transmisogyny, a term coined by Julia Serano. I read Serano alongside Marlon B. Ross's critique of the universalization of whiteness in gender and sexual theories. The final section moves away from academic genealogies of trans feminism to highlight trans feminist-of-color theories emerging from activism and performance.

Part 1

> The first step to dismantling a system of oppression is recognizing your role in its perpetuation.
> —Angelica Ross

After weeks of deliberation, Angelica Ross agrees to fly to San Francisco to tape two episodes of Caitlyn Jenner's show, *I Am Cait*. She is motivated largely by the opportunity to promote her new start-up, TransTech Social Enterprises. After becoming disenchanted with the top-down economics and power structures in the nonprofit world, Ross founded TransTech so as to empower Chicago's community of low-income trans people by training them in information technology and software engineering, with the idea that they could then work anywhere in the world with access only to a computer (Ross 2014).

At the show's taping, Ross is joined by six other trans women, most of whom she knew personally and four of whom were women of color. Ross writes:

> As we sat down for our conversation at the HRC [Human Rights Campaign] store in San Francisco, there was a palpable sense of sisterhood in the air, Cait included. We began sharing our stories and together shed light on the systems of oppression that impact trans people, but more acutely affect trans women of color. I felt seduced into a false sense of safety in opening up for the cameras and sharing our stories. After all, I knew most of the people there way before the show. After months of being silenced by a non-disclosure agreement, my excitement and anticipation to finally see the conversation on television turned into me feeling

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> hurt and further silenced by the end of the episode. My story—and the story of TransTech—had been truncated down to the fact that I had once been involved with sex work. (Ross 2015b)

The reduction of Ross to her brief past as a sex worker in the show follows the salaciousness in which Black sexualities have been depicted, as C. Riley Snorton (2014) observes, from the days of the overseer on slavery plantations to modern-day popular culture. Snorton demonstrates how duplicity is constitutive of representations of Black sexuality, wherein blackness is wrought through a kind of vestibularity through what Snorton terms, drawing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "the glass closet." Whereas she had and has careers in retail, photography, software development, performance, nonprofits, and entrepreneurship, Ross is reduced to her past as a sex worker by Jenner (who is an executive producer) and her production team. Thus, Jenner's show becomes the prurient proscenium upon which Black trans feminine duplicity is both displayed and confined, as per Snorton's glass closet. We can hear the producer's imagined audience responding both, "I would never have known you were trans!" and "I would never have known you did sex work!" almost in the same breath. Thus, duplicity and/as blackness become a hinge that cleaves Black trans femininity to salaciousness, all while highlighting Jenner's show as the stage upon which the reveal(s) takes place. It is notable that Ross herself did not see her past as shameful or salacious, and she went to pains on social media after the fact to explain that her critique should not be understood as a critique of sex work.[3]

Hortense Spillers (1987) evidences that the logics of slavery reduced Black femininity to/as a commodity at the site of the body's flesh, a flesh capable of birthing other commodities: "The captive female body locates precisely a moment of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange" (65). The ways in which Ross is reduced to her past as a sex worker should be thought through the economic structures and representational paradigms of slavery. If antiblackness is experienced in particular ways by gender and sexually dissident subjects, as Snorton (2014) suggests, then Ross's transgenderism makes her potentially particularly vulnerable to the intersections of antiblackness and antisex work. To the extent that transphobic discourses construct her as an inauthentic woman, she is not even ascribed the (albeit abjecting) productive quality of fertility extended to her cisgender counterparts.

Following the first episode's airing, media outlets like the *Los Angeles Times* promoted the anti-Black rhetoric of the show: "[Caitlyn] hears from one woman [Ross] who's been transitioning since age 19 and wound up as a sex worker after being trans got her fired from four jobs. And then it's time to hear from Blossom Brown, who's not about to hold back" (as quoted by Ross [2015b]).

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This framing of two Black guests traffics in the racist history of representation in which blackness is rendered "uninhibited, aggressive, excessive," as Ralina Joseph has observed (2013: 106). Furthermore, having been framed as the duplicitous, promiscuous Jezebel, Ross was constructed in the second episode as "the angry Black woman":

> I was the first . . . to speak, saying, "A lot of people who want to be seen as heroes and want to save our community . . . " The camera then cuts to Caitlyn looking a little overwhelmed, as I continue, "They want these kind of direct, wrap a bow around it, now this person is all better and they have a job," followed by the rest of the girls chiming into what is starting to sound like an argument. . . . [This] sound bite was cut out from another part of the conversation where I was explaining what TransTech does and how it's different from what other organizations are claiming to be doing for the trans community. The editors . . . make it seem like Chandi is coming to Caitlyn's defense when she says, "We made it clear to Caitlyn that a lot of girls are going to be jaded . . . because the things that Caitlyn has been able to achieve in a few months, some of them will never achieve those things their whole entire life." During this part of the show, the camera cut to me a total of eight times not saying a word. [At first], I thought, "Alright girl, you look sickening!" But, after the eighth close-up, I felt silenced. . . . The show's editing pits trans women of color against each other. As trans women of color, our intersectional identities as black women face us with the challenge of being portrayed as angry black women. At no time during the filming of those episodes was I angry, not at any of the other trans women, and certainly not at Caitlyn. Actually, I laughed, teared up, and snapped my fingers encouraging my sisters to speak the truth. What you were really seeing was a group of women passionate about the change they want to see in our world and speaking about a system and not about individuals. (Ross 2015b)

Shifting the focus from systemic change to individual characters, the repeated close-ups of Ross's unsmiling face (in a context in which she was listening to another guest) represent Ross as the 'Sapphire' or 'angry Black woman.' This caricature naturalizes and invisibilizes the cause of women of color's anger, and, along with the Jezebel and Mammy, is one of several stereotypes or angles in the "crooked room" that Black femininity occupies in the popular imagination (Harris-Perry 2011: 33, 42, 105).

Jenner's emergence as the innocent and beneficent host, passionate about helping women of color, is inseparable and produced via the same mechanisms as Ross's apparent dissidence, demonstrating the ways in which Black feminine abjection and white feminine innocence are imbricated (Carby 1987: 23–32). Ross's manufactured anger is projected visually, along with images of her host as slightly overwhelmed. The white feminine brand of saviorism, as Abu Lughod (2013),

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Mimi Nguyen (2011), and others have theorized, recenters white women's stories and renders further invisible women of color's agency and activism. In this case, *I Am Cait* literally silences Ross by foregrounding the reaction of Jen Richards, a white trans woman and close friend of Ross's, to Ross's voice, while overdubbling Ross's story with that of Chandi, another guest who is both lighter skinned and younger than she is:

> [The] editors . . . go the extra step to make it seem like Jen Richards is wiping tears. . . . Jen and I now laugh about it, but you can tell that Jen is actually getting emotional about something I am speaking about. The editors forget to cut my moving hands out of the frame. People who have seen me speak know that I talk with my hands, but I'm not usually moving them when others are speaking. (Ross 2015b)

As I indicated earlier, the literal muting of Ross's voice amplifies the imbrication of white privilege with anti-Black racism. As the only dark-skinned Black woman on the show for those two episodes, Ross cannot be seen as the source of Jen Richard's tears. If she were, it would undermine both the value of white feminine tears and the unsympathetic portrayal of the constructed "angry Black woman." I argue that this elision should not be read as simply editorial convenience (whatever that might mean) but as integral to the structure of the transmisogyny Ross faces as a dark-skinned Black woman. In other words, the editing out of her voice demonstrates how the privileging of white feminine feelings works in tandem with the production of a dark-skinned Black woman as angry and undeserving of sympathy. Ross cannot be seen or heard to be evoking white feminine tears; conversely, Ross's silencing allows those tears to be attributed to another source, and white feminine feelings can retain their value and validity. Interestingly, Ross's hands remain a visual trace of the affective structures that produce white women as sympathetic, caring, and feelingfully human to dark-skinned Black female voices as flat, angry, or simply nonexistent.

The fact that Jenner's production team found a way to center Jenner in the face of an actual (in the sphere of the show) critique of white saviorism speaks to the capacity of whiteness to adapt and change in the face of resistance (Hiram Pérez, pers. comm., December 20, 2015). Ross's candid and courageous (given the context and the possibility that it would be misinterpreted) explanation of white saviorism is converted into an entirely different conversation, one that revolves around Jenner, rather than Ross or the community TransTech serves.

Tania Modleski observes that Black female characters on-screen "serve either as an embodiment of female sexuality (Black female body as sexualized body) or of the maternal (Black female body as procreative body)" (2009: 290). *I Am Cait* traffics in both, casting Ross as the Jezebel/Sapphire and a lighter-

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skinned Black woman named Chandi as the "mammy" who mediates between Ross and Jenner. Colorism is at work here, where Chandi performs the emotional labor of mediating between blackness and whiteness for a conversation that, to be clear, never happened. This labor should be read in the context of a long history of representation of racialized domestic work in and outside the United States as "natural," representing Black women as committed to serving white families rather than as working for a wage (Johnson 2003). In more recent popular culture manifestations, as Harris-Perry (2011) observes, the mammy figure is represented as the "sidekick" to the white female protagonist. The Black feminine figure's sole purpose is to assist in the white protagonist's self-actualization, and she undergoes little to no character development. Via a rhetoric of Black duplicity and material history of racialized labor, Ross becomes the foil to Jenner's innocence.

Audre Lorde observes that white savior narratives silence Black women's voices, critiquing Mary Daly's reference to Afro-diasporic traditions as always sexist. She writes, "I felt that you had misused my words, utilized them only to testify against myself as a woman of color . . . this feels like another instance of the knowledge . . . and word of women of color being ghettoized by a white woman" (2015: 91–92). I find Lorde's direct address useful for understanding Ross's response to Jenner as part of a genealogy of Black women's resistance to white women's racism.[4]

> I want to take this opportunity to hold Caitlyn Jenner responsible as an Executive Producer for the editing and misuse of her new found power. The first step to dismantling a system of oppression is recognizing your role in its perpetuation. This is a step we all have to take regardless of race or ethnicity. If Caitlyn wishes to be a part of the solution, then she must be willing to examine the ways she has contributed to the problem. The way "The Road Trip" episodes parts 1 and 2 were edited, were just some of the ways she is contributing to the problem. I urge Caitlyn to retreat from the "White Savior" narrative. As trans women of color we are capable of saving ourselves if given the tools. (2015b)

Ross's experience troubles the idea that feminine persons might find more freedom in community with one another rather than, as they are so often represented, playing the counterpart to butch or masculine persons. Kara Keeling writes that "television relies for its legibility on its tenuous ability to put into circulation images of official common sense" (2007: 96). Keeling asserts, via Gilles Deleuze, that visual media are crucial sites for the study of racism, sexism, and homophobia because they not only represent cultural norms but also work to construct them (3–5). Extending Keeling's analysis, I am interested in how the episodes of *I Am Cait* in which Ross appeared offer an opportunity to study the logics that sustain the intersecting vectors of power Black trans women face. In many of the

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films Keeling investigates, the femme performs (though is never reduced to) such a function. A trans analytic supplements Keeling's "Black," "femme," and "lesbian," a useful frame which nevertheless largely takes cisgenderism for granted. "The Black femme function," as Keeling names it, is an analytic for the representational work of the Black femmes (I use the plural intentionally here to signal the capaciousness of what Black femme is or does) in cinema and television. Ross's written exegesis in the *Huffington Post* represents the breakout that Keeling insists is necessary for politics of visibility. Keeling observes that it is not enough simply to be represented in cinema, but one must break out of cinematic representation itself for a politics of visibility to have a chance of success (2007: 10). Ross's narrative aptly makes it clear that, even in a community that lulled her into a sense of safety, the forms of sexual and gendered oppression of Black and white trans women are not coterminous.

Part 2: Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women?

Julia Serano coined the term *transmisogyny* in *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007) and expands upon her thinking in *Excluded*: *Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* (2013). Serano argues that the abjection of femininity in conjunction with transgenderism constitutes a particular form of oppression that trans women face. She calls this oppression "transmisogyny." Serano's scholarship has contributed greatly to the conversation on cis/sexism and the devaluation of femininity both in and outside feminist communities. However, her scholarship elides race and class and allows white middle-classness to stand in as a universal, greatly diminishing the capacity of transmisogyny to describe the oppression(s) that trans women of color, and Black women in particular, face.

An illustrative anecdote in *Excluded* demonstrates not only how transmisogyny operates but how race and class operate surreptitiously in Serano's thinking. She narrates her experience at a feminist psychology conference, in which a cisgender psychologist presents on two of her transgender clients:

> First the therapist discussed the trans masculine spectrum person, whose presentation she described simply as being "very butch." She discussed this individual's transgender expressions and issues in a respectful and serious manner, and the audience listened attentively. However, when she turned her attention to the trans feminine client, she went into a very graphic and animated description of the trans person's appearance, detailing how the trans woman's hair was styled, the way her makeup was done, and so on, [which] elicited a significant amount of giggling from the audience. (2013: 51)

In this scene, as in her scholarship generally, the genders of the participants are given in detail, while their race and class identities go unnamed. I argue that this

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silence is both undergirded by and productive of the invisibility of women-of-color feminisms generally and trans women of color in trans feminisms specifically.

In his essay "Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm," Marlon B. Ross explores the epistemological effects of and ontological roots by which whiteness stands in as a universal in canonical theorizing on gender and sexuality. He begins with Michel Foucault's seminal formulation of the emergence of the homosexual in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Ross argues that the precondition for the homosexual's becoming is in fact an elision of race, by both Foucault and the psychoanalysts:

> Foucault . . . needed to erase the question of racialized bodies in order to theorize the invention of the body homosexual as a *unified*—that is, unmarked and implicitly *ubiquitous*—Anglo Saxon subject. Foucault's scientists can script their human subjects as *total* homosexual compositions only because those bodies are not already marked as Negroid or Oriental; that is, in other words, because they are silently, invisibly already marked as unspecified Anglo-Saxons. . . . Assumed racial sameness between the Anglo-Saxon sexologist and his Anglo-Saxon sexual subject not only makes their racial identity invisible but also makes possible the sexual difference between them. (2005: 167; emphasis added)

The added emphasis is meant to underscore how the very coherency—the double meaning is crucial here—of the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual* are consolidated through already drawn racial, national, and, I would add, classed and abled borders. Ross offers some examples:

> Foucault can script the formation of homosexuality as a totalized identity only by leaving unremarked the racial ideology undergirding these emerging sciences. . . . An African man is sexually deviant because of his racial difference, whether owing to a larger cock or a diminished brain size that prevents sexual self-discipline or a primitive jungle environment that fosters exaggerated sexual passions. Even if the African male's sexual difference is not physically marked, his racial deviance is, such that racial difference necessarily overdetermines the capacity for sexual deviance as a bodily affair. (167–68)

Thus, the distinction between queerness and heterosexuality the psychoanalysts document is made manifest through a mutual middle-class whiteness, without which said difference would not hold. Siobhan Somerville (2000) has determined that ideologies of gender/sexuality and race mutually inform one another and have done so since their inception.

Building from Somerville and Ross, I argue that the categories upon which Serano's theory of transmisogyny depends not only erase race, class, and nation

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but are made possible through that erasure. Her work and the contemporary discourse of transmisogyny broadly, as others have noted (Enke 2012), depend upon hard-line distinctions in the categories "cisgender" and "transgender," as well as "trans femininity" and "trans masculinity," distinctions between the categories that both depend upon and reproduce normative whiteness. I argue that the literal and figural absence of trans people of color, as well as cis people of color, in her examples consolidates the borders of the categories on which her definition of transmisogyny depends.

Any consideration, for example, of the ways in which bodies of color, particularly Black and native bodies, have been subject to and subjects of the medical industry (e.g., Washington 2006) would necessarily complicate Serano's analysis of the ways in which power was operating in that conference presentation. In what ways might Serano obscure the ways in which the ridiculed white woman, abjected as she is, cannot be thought apart from the trans woman of color who may not be deemed valuable enough to receive therapeutic care to begin with? Angelica Ross's life story being reduced to sex work evidences the ways in which a Black trans feminine body may have elicited reactions more pernicious than laughter.

Serano gives us the trans masculine patient first in the therapist's terms, and I read her as subtly criticizing the therapist's terminology of "very butch." This person becomes "trans masculine" later in Serano's description. This slippage and Serano's critique are both indicative of her theoretical imperative to sediment the borders around the categories "cisgender" and "transgender," and "trans feminine" and "trans masculine." The affective and material histories that produced white, middle-class men as deserving of thoughtful care is erased in the service of this binary trans/gender construction. This binary not only obscures the fact that people can be viewed as trans feminine regardless of their identifications; it also renders abjection of trans masculine people as impossible. A Black trans-of-color critique shows that we need theories not only for thinking about how trans women of color navigate but also for racialized transmisandry, to explain the ways in which Black trans masculine persons live in a sphere of literal and discursive policing around Black masculinity.

Put another way, how could the fact that Serano never engages race or class *not* impact transmisogyny as an analytic? Reading Ross in tandem with Serano reveals how whiteness is constitutive of binary gender as a construct, even when that binary includes transgender identifications. Her theory's implicit normative whiteness proffers rigid boundaries around trans femininity and trans masculinity, imparting upon these categories a distinctiveness that traffics in white middle-class normativity. These hard-line distinctions have gone underinterrogated, even by those explicitly doing intersectional trans feminist work. One influential trans femme of color stated that trans men experience no oppression at all, that there is only transmisogyny. That this assertion emerges over two years into the

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worldwide mobilization led by Black Lives Matter against the murder of Black men and women, and in the context of a book on "decolonizing transgender" (binaohan 2014), signals the effectiveness of trans/gender binaries, even in work that aims to be intersectional.

Serano's elision of race and class is hardly limited to this example. Her opening chapter describes a woman who challenges Serano about a race/gender analogy in a pamphlet distributed by and at Camp Trans. The pamphlet analogizes trans people at the Michigan Women's Festival to people wearing turbans on airplanes. In Serano's (2013: 27) response to this justified and important critique, she writes, "The fact that a woman of color wrote the pamphlet seemed to have little effect on her." No further text is spent analyzing this exchange. This vignette is paradigmatic of the ways in which not only Serano but many white (trans) feminists act as if intersectionality is the purview of people of color, rather than engaging it herself. Serano levies the racial identity of the author as a bulwark against having to do intersectional theorizing herself (as if people of color never say things that are not intersectional).

Broadly, as the title of Serano's book suggests, her project mutes the ways in which rhetorics of inclusion and exclusion are colonial. A discourse of "inclusion," as many critics of multiculturalism have espoused, is both anti-Black and anti-indigenous in that it posits inclusion as an antidote rather than questioning the structures that produce an inside and outside. If we take as our starting point the fact that the United States is a settler colony; foreground the ways in which national projects continue to subjugate native people and other people of color via political, economic, and environmental sanctions; or argue that antiblackness is foundational to what it means to be "American," as do Morgan Bassichis and Dean Spade (2014), calls of inclusion seem to potentially contribute to the problem.[5] There has been an "inside" only as long as imperial logics have determined an outside, and capitulating to those logics while obviating race and class obscures how, as the late Leslie Feinberg (1996: 28) wrote, "patriarchy is a tool of colonization."

The point is not merely that Serano's universalization of whiteness has a negative effect (that it fails to do something, for example, failing to include people of color) but that it also does something. Namely, it forges a theory of transmisogyny through whiteness and middle-classness while purporting to speak to all. The mechanism by which this elision occurs is the hard-line distinction of categories that themselves only hold in a nonintersectional optic. The issue of blackness for transness, then, seems to be that it uncovers the implicitly racist and classist underpinnings of hard-line categories of sex and gender.

I began this essay with Angelica Ross and Caitlyn Jenner because, despite Serano's careful work around femininity and transmisogyny, I do not think her ideas help us to understand much of anything about what the women of color

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experienced on Jenner's show.[6] In another context, Roderick Ferguson writes, "Blackness is always and already understood as a candidate for social and actual death, a history in which whiteness is socialized to maintain its independence at whatever cost" (2015: 145). I have attempted to show that transmisogyny has, from its very inception, maintained an almost perfect independence from race, an independence that may contribute to the potential for terms like *transgender* and *transmisogyny*, as they gain increasing cultural currency, to facilitate antiblackness: the social justice capital that *trans* presumes to carry is Jenner's show's raison d'être and it grants an air of radicality to Serano's work, despite that work having almost nothing to say about race, class, nation, or ability.

Part 3: Alternative Genealogies of Trans Feminism

Serano's lack of attention to race, class, and ability signals a larger myopia in trans feminism of the ways in which gender and sexuality operate as regulatory mechanisms for all people of color (Smith 2015; Snorton 2014; Johnson 2003; Vaid-Menon 2014; Koyama 2004).[7] While I do not have the space to fully argue it here, I suggest that this elision is buttressed by the marginalization of women-of-color feminism vis-à-vis (white) women's studies.[8] While academic trans feminisms are starting to try and account for race and class, the decades-long gap between women-of-color theorizing and these rejoinders is startling. Bringing these discourses into dialogue would potentially offer much toward understanding how white trans women benefit, however complexly, from discursive and material regimes of antiblackness.[9] How, for example, would the seminal Black feminist theorizing of Dorothy Roberts (1998), who showed how state control of Black women's reproductive lives troubles white women's demand for freedom of choice, intersect with trans feminist interventions in the medicalization of trans feminine bodies?

The dearth of transgender people of color, especially women, in the academy, as well as white trans feminists' privileging of the academy as the genesis of trans theory, also play a role in the lack of engagement with the terms *misogynoir* and *transmisogynoir* in the academy—terms that have been in circulation for years in the blogosphere.[10] *Misogynoir* is largely credited to activist and digital humanities scholar Moya Bailey: "Known for creating the term Misogynoir, Bailey defines it as the intersection of racism, antiblackness, and misogyny that Black women experience. The term is specific to Black womanhood, as Misogynoir cannot be experienced by women of any other race, but can be perpetuated by people of any gender or race" (Bristol 2014). The term *transmisogynoir* draws from Bailey, and a survey of the term reveals some variety in who is encompassed in that term. Some websites such as *Social Justice Wiki*, a blog that describes itself as "community centered around intersectional social justice," defines the term as follows: "Transmisogynoir (or trans-misogynoir) is the oppression of trans

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women of color, and trans feminine people of color, more generally. It exists at the intersection between transphobia, misogyny, and antiblackness" ("Transmisogynoir" 2014). Interestingly, while *misogynoir* is specifically defined as violence that Black women experience, the primary sentence in *Social Justice Wiki*'s definition of *transmisogynoir* links the concept to all trans women of color rather than specifically to Black women. Is this coincidental? Merely an effect of the timing of these writings? I suggest that it is possible that the whitening of the term is an effect of the ways in which transgenderism and trans feminism have been coded as white and the ways in which antiblackness has been sidelined in trans feminist discourse.

We may need a term like *racialized transmisogyny*, echoing Patricia Hill Collins (2004), to describe the oppression of non-Black women of color, leaving *transmisogynoir* to those who experience antiblackness. Alok Vaid-Menon (2014), a trans femme of color artivist, has articulated the racialization of transmisogyny as an ontological phenomenon. They define transmisogyny as the "policing of femininity on bodies it is understood to not belong to" and insist that all people of color experience transmisogyny. In so doing, Vaid-Menon offers us a definition of transmisogyny that melds trans feminism to antiracism.

I may seem to be contradicting myself by saying both that transmisogyny cannot account for the oppression transgender people of color face, and that it applies to all people of color, but this is largely an issue of semantics: I am critiquing the dominant (if it can be called such) understanding of *transmisogyny* and suggesting that it needs to be rethought from the ground up. The fact that cisgender Black women can enact transmisogyny is not an argument against the idea that all Black women and men face transmisogyny because trans people can enact transphobia and transmisogyny on themselves.

The standard framing of the genealogy of trans feminism has prioritized the academy as the site of trans feminism, which has tended to construct activism a priori of theory rather than in conjunction with it, as theory in action, as always ongoing.[11] We might begin a genealogy of trans feminism with Sylvia Rivera's Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), as Reina Gossett did in a recent lecture: "Rivera sitting around with her collaborators and strategizing how to run STAR and what organizing tactics they were going to do, and also just about how to survive, is theorizing" (2015). Angelica Ross's strategic and thoughtful planning with her staff is theory that generates the work of those who study at TransTech; Ignacio Rivera's groundbreaking Heal Project works to end childhood sexual abuse from a queer trans of color intersectional approach; Suzy Shock's performances of poetry and song have mobilized an entire generation of young people in Buenos Aires around transgender justice, succeeding in passing what has been called the most progressive transgender rights law in the world (Salum 2012); Indianara Siqueira, recently elected to the legislature in Rio de Janeiro, is

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currently reenergizing the Left in a conservative neoliberal regime; and CeCe McDonald's organizing around prison abolition is all critical trans feminist work.

Conclusion: Speaking Is to Singing as Listening Is to Silence

Angelica Ross's music sings of love, heartbreak, and friendship, but never of being trans. This silence is one Fred Moten might describe as occurring "in the break" between signification and sound. Per Moten, blackness is both discursively generated by and resistant to racialized capitalism that constructs it as the purview of objects (literally, in enslaved bodies) who nevertheless speak (2003: 10–12). Angelica Ross sings back to transmisogynoir by modeling strategic musical silence. Silence is, after all, the precondition for listening. But it also allows her to avoid being reduced to the matter of sound.[12] She shouldn't have to say anything in a world which "know[s] everything you need to know about me" to allow her to live and thrive (2012). Ross's musical silences are pivot points in which speech and song mechanize Black trans femininities in an anti-Black milieu.

It is foundational to women-of-color feminisms to note how feminist terms are productive of their own violence when applied universally (e.g., Alice Walker on "womanism" [2011: xi]). Lorde (2015) famously wrote, "To imply . . . that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women, is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other" (91). If we take race and class seriously as inseparable from transmisogyny, then should we even assume there exists something called "transmisogyny" that affects all trans women? An understanding of transmisogyny that claims to apply to all trans women obviates the ways in which white trans women profit from the elision of those differences. It is time for a definition of transmisogyny that focalizes the lives of trans women of color, especially Black trans women; that moves us toward a field of trans feminist studies that resists the academy's fetishization of Black feminism, as Barbara Christian presciently warned; and that works to ensure that Black feminists remain major contributors to the field (Christian 1994; see also Hong 2015: 125–46).

Although there are undoubtedly stigmas associated with even privileged trans femininity, to mute the difference in the effects of that violence is to appropriate the violence that trans women of color face potentially toward sustaining a rhetoric of white middle-class vulnerability. The slippage from "trans women" to "trans women of color" that I narrated in my opening paragraph potentially minimizes their distinction, coding the former as white and appending the vulnerability of the latter to the former, at the cost not only of trans women of color but also of trans masculine people of color, especially those without economic and able-bodied privilege. Toward the end of her essay, Ross writes, "Being trans comes at a high cost, but being Black and trans can cost you your life" (2015b). It is precisely the difference between life and everything else that marks a

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need for a new language of transmisogyny. Ross broke one kind of silence in the *Huffington Post*, but we should not assume there are not also strategic silences within that piece. It remains to be seen how and by whom they will be heard.

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Notes

1. The fact that I have had to remind the white gender-nonconforming students in recent years that race and class do not go away just because you are trans is reflective of the continued preference and prevalence of gender (coded as white and middle/upper class) over race and class as topics in my (predominantly white) gender studies classrooms.
2. These interviews and more informal conversations were conducted and transcribed by the author in Chicago and Poughkeepsie, New York, in 2015.
3. It also makes impossible a celebration of sex work as a form of labor and also of self-care, as a method of providing for herself financially. Ross went to lengths on Facebook to clarify that her frustration with the characterization of herself as a sex worker was not to be confused with a disdain for sex workers or sex work.
4. I do not uncritically parallelize Ross/Jenner and Lorde/Daly. Jenner is particularly privileged and, in Ross's terms, "wet behind the ears" vis-à-vis trans politics, while Daly was a multiply-published author on feminism. I am suggesting that these conversations resonate with one another within a genealogy of Black women calling out white women's racism.
5. In a panel presentation at the 2014 American Studies Association in Toronto, Andrea Smith (2014) theorized the imbrication of antiblackness and anti-indigeneity, arguing that the enslavement of Africans constituted a colonization of those indigenous to Africa, and that both were constitutive of the colonial project in the Americas.
6. Nor am I confident that a viewer radicalized around white trans feminism would have the tools to understand what is going on in racialized and classed terms.
7. This lack in white trans feminist scholarship has been critiqued (see Koyama 2004), but these critiques are far less common than those of white trans masculinity, in part because of the high stakes of such a critique. White women do of course experience violence, as in the recent attack on a white trans woman in Brooklyn on May 13, 2016, narrated on NBC

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news (Villeda 2016). However, the notable absence of media coverage and the earnest reportage of the cases of Monica Loera, Courtney Yochum, Maya Young, or Keyonna Blakeney, each of whom not only experienced violence in 2016 but also lost their lives to it, seems to confirm Sarah Lamble's (2008) trenchant point that whiteness is the precondition for the value of transgender life.

8. See, for example, Finn Enke's (2012) assertion that transgender studies "has a highly ambivalent relationship to women studies," a statement that covers over the ways in which all women and queer-of-color theorizing has an ambivalent relationship to women's studies.
9. Placing trans and other women-of-color theorizing in conversation (for example, Sylvia Rivera's "Queens in Exile" [2002] and the essays in *This Bridge Called My Back* [Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015]) has elicited stimulating conversations on transmisogyny among my students.
10. With the notable exception of Kelly Macías's (2015) dissertation.
11. For example, Finn Enke (2012), cites Sandy Stone in the acknowledgments to *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies*, who, "in so many ways, really started it all" (ix). This framing of trans feminism privileges those with access to (the most elite institutions in) the academy.
12. I am riffing here on Moten, who writes that sound was traditionally understood as a material that language merely used (2003: 13–14).

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