

*Alliance Against Displacement
Conditions of Struggle Series IV
Class 2: Sex/Gender Systems
The social powers of sex/gender*

CLASS 2A:

MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER

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Film we will screen in class:

Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton Cafeteria
(Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman, 2005)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-WASW9dRBU>

CLASS 2B:

PATRIARCHY, GENDER VIOLENCE, AND RACE

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Elle-Maija Tailfeathers, 2012. Red Girl's Reasoning.

TRANSGENDER OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

In July 2013 Bradley Manning, the American soldier who passed thousands of classified documents to Wikileaks in protest at US military operations in the Middle East, was sentenced to 35 years in Fort Leavenworth military prison.¹ The day after sentencing Manning caused a media sensation by announcing that she had had gender identity issues since childhood and from now on was to be known as Chelsea Manning and that she intended to pursue gender transition.² She now faces many difficult years in a US military prison and a long struggle to access medical support from an institution which is under no obligation to provide her with the medical care that a transgender person may need.³

Early in 2013 transgender schoolteacher Lucy Meadows, who was undergoing gender transition, killed herself after being ridiculed in a Daily Mail column by Richard Littlejohn, who repeatedly referred to her as “he” and argued that she was “not only in the wrong body...but in the wrong job”.⁴ The coroner at her inquest singled out the adverse media attention as a contributory factor to the intolerable pressures she had experienced.

On 24 August 2013 20 year old Australian transgender activist and revolutionary socialist Amber Maxwell took her own life after years of transphobic oppression,⁵ finding it impossible to get permanent employment or stable housing. Australian surveys of LGBTI people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) have found suicide rates between 3.5 and 14 times higher than their heterosexual counterparts.⁶ A study in the US by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found that 41 percent of 6,450 trans people surveyed in 2010 had attempted suicide compared to 1.6 percent of the general US population.⁷

The situation is just as bad in the UK. A Press for Change survey in 2007 for the Equalities Review found that 73 percent of trans people surveyed had experienced public harassment including violence: 19 percent had experienced GPs refusing to help or being unwilling to access gender reassignment services, 29

percent had been refused treatment by doctors or nurses who objected to their trans status, and a staggering 35 percent had attempted suicide at least once.⁸ This is twice the rate reported for a similarly vulnerable group of people who had suffered childhood abuse and trauma. A 2012 survey by the Scottish Transgender Alliance and Sheffield Hallam University found that 84 percent of trans people surveyed had thought of suicide, 27 percent thought of it during the week prior to the survey, one in three had attempted suicide, one in four more than once.⁹

These studies and examples illustrate the high levels of institutional and societal transphobia that transgender people commonly face. Despite capitalism's ability to accommodate certain limited formal and legal rights in respect of transgender people the extent of such rights falls well short of what socialists mean by liberation and, like all such measures, they exist on sufferance as far as the ruling class are concerned.

How socialists approach the question of fighting oppressions like transphobia is not an abstract matter. It goes to the heart of how we work with oppressed groups and individuals such as trans people and how we persuade them to become part of building a mass united working class movement to overthrow capitalism and create a socialist society.

TERMINOLOGY

Many people, including many on the left, will be unfamiliar with transgender terminology and may find gender variant drives or desires hard to comprehend. Many may also be unsure how to address a trans person to avoid giving offence. There are certainly terms which should be understood as deeply offensive—examples include “she-male” or “he-male”, “tranny”, “gender bender”. More acceptable terms, such as “trans” and “transgender” should, however, only be used as adjectives, not nouns—a person is a trans person, not “a trans” or “a transgender”. In general a trans person should be addressed by whichever pronoun, “he” or “she”, is applicable to their gender presentation, and by their chosen name, never a former name if you happen to know it. It is also deeply offensive to refer to a trans person by their former gender pronoun (he, she), although most trans people will understand the difficulties and slip ups that this may sometimes lead to if someone may have known them in their former gender. If there is doubt

about the gender of a person or about how they might want to be addressed, asking them sensitively how they want to be addressed stands a good chance of resolving the matter.

Most trade unions now have model trans rights at work policies which will give all sorts of guidance about trans issues, providing representation for a trans person and so on. The TUC publishes guidance from The Gender Trust online¹⁰ and various organisations such as Press for Change¹¹ have very useful glossaries of terms, information and advice.

Transgender terminology can be problematic because, like language in general, it continually evolves. New terms emerge and others shift their meaning. For example, in addition to the term transgender, “cisgender” or “cis” has more recently come into use to refer to those people whose gender identity is consistent with their assigned birth gender. Cis is seen as the antonym of trans. Some trans people may still use the term straight rather than cisgender, or may more commonly use “gender normative.”

The term “transsexual” was originally a medical term of diagnosis coined in the post Second World War period which came to be applied to a person who had “Gender Identity Disorder” (GID) as defined within the psychiatrist’s bible, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association, and it tends to retain this medical sense more so than the term “transgender”. The latest edition of the DSM (DSM-5, published in May 2013) has signalled a change of thinking about gender identity in that the outmoded diagnosis of GID has been replaced with “Gender Dysphoria” defined as a mismatch between a person’s inner sense of gender identity and their biological sex.¹² A gender dysphoria diagnosis is still required as a condition of access to NHS support for gender affirmation—what used to be called “sex change” surgery.

The terms “transgender” or “trans” are fairly broad and include anyone who expresses aspects of gender variant or gender diverse behaviour or desires and who may or may not wish to pursue gender transition. Such people might include drag queens and kings, crossdressers, genderqueer people and others. Those who do transition may be “MTF” (male-to-female) or “FTM” (female-to-male).

However, some trans people may not want to describe themselves by such binary terms and might describe themselves as “genderqueer”¹³ or gender diverse or just as queer instead. On the other hand, some other trans people are wary of using the term queer because of its associations with homophobia in the past and because they recognise that you don’t change thinking and ideas by changing words. Most trade unions do not include queer in the title of their equality organisations.

When discussing gender transition the media often use terms like “sex change” or “sex swap” but these are inaccurate and sensationalist. Trans people used to use the term “gender reassignment” but most now prefer the term “gender affirmation”.

THE EXTENT OF GENDER VARIANCE

In recent years increasing numbers of trans people have sought support. The number of children and young people doing so has increased very significantly. In 2012 there were about 600 such referrals in the UK, more than double previous years.

According to a survey by the Gender Identity Research and Education Society in 2009 there are around 1,500 to 1,600 new referrals to gender identity clinics in the UK each year and the figures are increasing by about 15 percent per annum.¹⁴ Several thousand trans people (not all of whom have had gender affirmation surgery) have taken advantage of the Gender Recognition Act (2004) which granted transsexual people certain basic legal rights and the opportunity to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate (on fulfilment of certain criteria) which is intended to confer complete confidentiality about a person’s gender history as well as the right to a new birth certificate.

While there are clearly fewer trans people than there are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) people there are nevertheless many millions worldwide and in recent decades more and more have sought to live outside the closet. GIRES estimates that there are around 500,000 trans people in the UK if one assumes equal numbers of male-assigned and female-assigned people in the trans population, and if one uses a broad definition to include transsexual people, regular and occasion-

al crossdressers, various gender variant people, drag queens and drag kings. This suggests around 600 people per 100,000 of the population—a small proportion but a large absolute number.

Contrary to popular mythology by no means all trans people want medical support for transition. For many trans people, altering their body is not part of their gender expression. Some may want hormone treatment but not surgery.

Space does not permit a detailed examination of the causes, or etiology, of some people's gender variant desires and behaviour. Suffice to say that a smorgasbord of causation has been suggested from various quarters such as insensitivity or hyper-sensitivity to pre-natal hormones, various genetic anomalies, having the “wrong” brain, incomplete parental bonding, the failure to resolve unconscious parent/child conflicts (a perennial Freudian favourite), the effects of pesticides, or for those with religious or millenarian tendencies, a consequence of the spread of moral debauchery and even a sign of the imminence of the coming apocalypse. Assuming that the apocalypse is not about to intervene, this article will concentrate on the politics of trans oppression.

TRANSGENDER, INTERSEX CONDITIONS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

At birth, in practice, doctors and nurses ascribe gender on the basis of what an infant's genitals look like rather than checking the child's chromosomes to see whether they are XX (female), XY (male) or something else. There are, however, anomalies and exceptions throughout the natural world, including humankind, to the biological binary that occur more frequently than may generally be appreciated.¹⁵ People may in fact be born with a variety of intersex conditions. In the past these have sometimes been described by the inaccurate, offensive and outmoded term “hermaphrodite”. Such medical conditions may arise from insensitivity to the male hormone androgen, chromosomal or genetic inconsistencies with one's apparent physical sex, or a number of other biological conditions.

The medical profession in capitalist society, however, has generally been unwilling to accept such variation. Medical practitioners traditionally have sought to use the technological sophistication available to them to surgically and/or hormonally intervene to ensure that such people will best fit one gender category or the other, almost exclusively without allowing the person concerned to exercise

any choice in the matter. This means carrying out procedures on infants that are difficult or impossible to reverse. Many intersex people and organisations regard this as unwarranted and intrusive at best and a form of genital mutilation at worst.¹⁶

Being trans, however, is not the same as having an intersex condition. A trans person is extremely unlikely to have any biological manifestations such as chromosomal or endocrinal inconsistencies. Some researchers in recent years have claimed that structural brain differences have been found in male to female transsexuals.¹⁷ It is claimed that tiny areas of the hypothalamus or other structures in the brains of trans women have been found to have similarities to the brains of genetic women. Many trans people find this possibility very attractive. However, the evidence for such male/female differences is weak and contested.

Some studies that claim to have found differences have used post-mortem brain samples of transsexuals. What can be overlooked when these studies are promoted by neuropundits is that the numbers of subjects are small and often they (MTF usually) will have been on significant oestrogen medication for many years. Not the least of the criticisms of these brain-fishing expeditions using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) and PET (positron emission tomography) scans is that our behaviour, personality and desires cannot be read off from claimed physical differences in localised areas of the brain. Correlation between various stimulants and activity in areas of the brain is not the same as causation. What we do know about the brain is that it is highly complex, integrated and continually adapting and changing.¹⁸

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

It is essential to distinguish between sexual orientation (whom we may be sexually attracted to) and our gender identity. They are conceptually and practically distinct. In the past many sexologists, campaigners and doctors were keen to conflate gender identity and sexual orientation. Think of the slurs that implied that gay men must be effeminate, or lesbians must have masculine tendencies. Trans people may, of course, be gay, straight, bisexual, asexual or pansexual.¹⁹ Conversely, homosexuality or bisexuality does not connote any incongruence between a person's biological sex and their gender identity. Most gay people seem to be as secure in their gender identity as most straight people are.

Nevertheless, sexual orientation and gender identity are intertwined. First, some trans people will also be gay or bisexual and these issues of sexual orientation, and the associated homophobia, will interact with the person's gender identity and associated transphobia.

Secondly, a trans person's sexual orientation will be regarded differently if they transition from one gender to another, assuming their sexuality does not change in the process (which it usually does not). Someone who was a pre-transition gay man becomes, in society's eyes, a straight woman. A formerly straight (in terms of sexual orientation) transgender genetic woman, who remains attracted to men, becomes a gay man on transition. In this sense sexuality and gender, while conceptually distinct, cannot be neatly and separately packaged in terms of societal perceptions and reactions.

Homophobia and transphobia are thus co-related. The growing recognition of this co-relation is one of the factors which justified the development of collective campaigning and organising since the 1990s under the acronym LGBT—lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.²⁰

MEDICAL ISSUES

Having to deal with the medical establishment has been and remains a source of great stress and difficulty for many trans people. In the UK, for a trans person to have any chance of accessing NHS support, she or he must convince psychiatrists and the relevant gender identity clinic (of which there are very few) that they have a medical condition called "gender dysphoria". Hormones and genital surgery are nominally available on the NHS but to access them requires a minimum of two years while the person is required to undergo the "real life test" and live in role, that is, to dress and live publicly in their desired gender. This can prove to be hugely difficult for the continuity of any employment, housing and personal relationships. Genital surgery, hormones, cosmetic procedures and electrolysis to remove unwanted hair such as beard growth for genetic males are accessible privately if the trans person has money. But access is very much a class issue. Many countries still have few or no facilities for trans people, and few provide treatment as part of state funded healthcare.

Thus trans people who wish to transition must overcome many hurdles and face numerous gatekeepers. The impact of funding cuts for waiting times, helplines, homelessness organisations, LGBT support groups, reduced access to education through Education Maintenance Allowance cuts and tuition fee rises, cuts to housing benefit, etc mean that life for many trans people could get even harder.

Nevertheless, there have been improvements. For around a hundred years until the last quarter of the 20th century in the West the medical establishment generally and wrongly regarded gender variance as an aspect of homosexuality,²¹ which itself was characterised, even on the left, as something genetic, even as evidence of a third sex.

One of the predictable downsides of this was that many doctors and psychiatrists regarded evidence of trans desires or behaviour as pathological symptoms of a mental illness worthy of incarceration in mental institutions and the application of aversion therapy through the use of electric shocks or nausea-inducing drugs. This continued up to the 1960s and 1970s. Most trans people had no choice but to stay in the closet and try to suppress their gender variance. It is heartbreaking to read some of the desperate letters that trans people wrote to doctors and scientists throughout much of the 20th century asking for help and advice and access to gender surgery which just did not exist in most countries at the time.²²

Susan Stryker describes this period as one in which the first gay rights (and women's rights) movements became stalled and both homosexuality and gender variance became increasingly medicalised, pathologised and legally proscribed.²³

In the US laws had been passed in some states such as California and New York in the mid-19th century to enforce gender specific dress codes and even hair length. These were often strengthened in the first half of the 20th century, aimed not only at men but also in response to first wave feminism and the conflation of women wearing trousers with demands for female emancipation and women's rights. Much of the hostility was directed at men failing to be "masculine" enough, but there was also deep suspicion directed at women who transgressed such gender codes. There are many examples of biological women who as adults lived their lives in stealth as men ("passing women") and who were not discov-

ered to be biologically female until after their death. Many of these penal codes persisted until quite recently and were used to criminalise, in particular, cross-dressing men. Wearing less than three items of gender-appropriate attire meant a person could be subject to arrest. Such codes were used to harass gender variant people such as crossdressers and drag queens and were one of the causes of the pent-up frustrations and anger that triggered the watershed Stonewall rebellion and other acts of resistance in the 1960s.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

It is tempting to suggest that sex and gender are only simple if you are an earthworm. People, however, are about as different from earthworms as you can get.

Many trans people have tended to take a highly essentialist view of gender identity, which treats gender as somehow natural and given—"a man's mind in a woman's body", "a woman's mind in a man's body". A glance at a selection of trans people's autobiographies will confirm this.²⁴ Transgender is also often presented in the media in this over-simplified way.

In this view a transgender person's problem is that somehow the wrong switch got thrown at some point early in life and they now need to find ways to get back to the gender they were really supposed to have been. Since this could have happened to anyone and is beyond the individual's control the trans person should not be penalised and should be enabled to live life in the gender of their choosing. "Gender dysphoria" should therefore open the door to appropriate treatment which might include hormones, genital and cosmetic surgery, counselling and so on, to enable the person to live in their gender of choice.

Socialists, of course, defend the right of trans people to live freely in their chosen gender but there are serious problems inherent in such an essentialist approach to gender identity. An alternative view starts by recognising that our biological, chromosomal sex can be thought of as analogous to other physical characteristics that we inherit—skin colour, eye colour, and so on. Most people's gender identity (their deeply rooted sense of being male or female) will be in accordance with this. However, for trans people there is a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity.

For everyone, though, trans and gender-straight (or cisgendered people), our gender is socially constructed in a dialectical relationship with our material circumstances and is to some extent fluid. People's self-identification and self-description (including trans people's) can change and develop over time. There is a certain fluidity because our identities are structured within given material, historical and cultural frameworks such as the class relations dominant within a given mode of production like capitalism.

It is the material circumstances in which we are required to live under the capitalist system which distort and limit everyone's gender role and gender identity by seeking to constrain us within a binary gender straitjacket in a system dominated by the ideology of the nuclear family. As a result we are all alienated,²⁵ to a greater or lesser extent, from each other, from ourselves and from our true humanity.

Trans people are highly motivated to resist that gender straitjacket, which suggests that, while gender identity may not be fixed and unchanging, it is deeply rooted in us; otherwise trans people could presumably be socialised out of our gender variant behaviour and identity. Everyone, after all, is showered in cot-loads of gender conformative reinforcement from the moment of birth. Conversely, this also suggests that in a saner and freer world many different gender expressions and arrangements for living together could be possible outside the nuclear family structure and the gender binary.

The nuclear family is crucial to capitalism for the continued accumulation of profit, as will be discussed later. One of the greatest cruelties of capitalism for all oppressed people is that it possesses the practical and material potential for our liberation from oppression. Yet by its pursuit of profit maximisation the ruling class is driven to deny the possibility of such fulfilment to the vast majority of the world's population.

It follows from this approach that for Marxists "the trans person" is as much a social construction as "the homosexual", traceable to a particular (but not the same) historical period, mode of production, and material conditions. One of the problems with essentialist views is that they ignore such changing material circumstances and tend to regard the ideas of a given period as having always been just so, ie they are both idealist and ahistorical. On the contrary, Marx

argued that ideas in society emerge from the material circumstances of the production of goods and necessities and from the reproduction of labour power itself. As material conditions change, so will the prevailing ideas.

The existence of considerable gender variant desires and behaviour in very many societies, from pre-history to the present, is well documented.²⁶ Based on this evidence we can claim with some confidence that transphobia has not always existed. It was the development from hunter-gatherer clan societies to patrilinear class societies, and more recently the emergence of capitalism and the nuclear family, which led to the increasing oppression of women, gays and transgender people.

TRANSGENDER COMMUNITIES

Communities of trans people have existed for centuries in some societies, such as the numerous katoey of Thailand—who are often referred to as “ladyboys” and who often exist through entertaining tourists and the sex industry. Another community are the hijra in India,²⁷ who have a very long history but who now generally live a marginal communal existence surviving through begging and sex work. In reality such groups are tolerated rather than accepted or celebrated. Their very marginal existence, excluded from mainstream employment, housing and families, typifies the situation of more isolated trans people in other societies. At least where there are trans communities there can be company and practical support.

Thus many trans people’s employment options are extremely limited and they may be effectively forced into hustling, prostitution and the sex industry.²⁸ There are particular niche markets which trans people may find in prostitution and pornography. Certainly there are many men who desire trans women but identify as straight, perhaps another illustration of the limitations of binary definitions of gender or sexuality.

Only very recently have openly trans people in Thailand, for instance, sought successfully to enter other types of work. In January 2011 a new Thai airline hired three katoey as “third sex” cabin staff.²⁹ The fact that this was so newsworthy illustrates its rarity.

TRANSPHOBIA

Transgender people constitute a small, increasingly visible, but highly stigmatised and oppressed group in capitalist society. Transphobia can range from unwanted attention, verbal harassment and ridicule, discrimination in employment, access to healthcare, education and other services, up to physical attack, sexual assault and murder.³⁰ There are many murders of trans people worldwide each year.

Nevertheless, despite high levels of transphobia in society, trans people are not simply victims and objects of history. There is also an inspiring history of individual and collective trans resistance which can inform our understanding of the struggle against transphobia today.

In some countries, including the UK, there have been a number of significant recent advances in terms of legal protections and equal rights at work for trans and other LGBT people. In general social attitudes, particularly among young people, have become more favourable. But this is far less so for attitudes to trans people than to gay, lesbian and bisexual people.³¹ As a result of campaigning by trans and LGBT organisations, trade unions and others since the 1990s there have been significant legislative advances from which trans people have benefited, such as the Gender Recognition Act (GRA, 2004), the Equality Act (2010), and now the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act (2013). Despite such advances, trans people still face significant hostile incomprehension from bigoted individuals and institutions.

Examples are not hard to find. In late 2012 the Observer carried a column by Julie Burchill that attacked trans people from a radical feminist perspective using the kind of foul transphobic language generally associated with the views of right wing bigots.³²

Protests by trans groups and others were quickly organised.³³ Twenty thousand signed a petition criticising Burchill, and the Guardian/Observer offices were picketed. The Observer's editor had to apologise and Burchill's column was dropped when she refused to withdraw the comments. In the case of Lucy Meadows referred to earlier, thousands signed a petition calling for Littlejohn's sacking, motions supporting her were passed at trade union conferences and

National Union of Teachers members, including SWP members, organised a solidarity demonstration in her home town.

Being outed can cost trans people their lives. In the case of Brandon Teena (a young transman murdered in the US in 1993) he was beaten to death after the local police outed him.³⁴ There are problems collating figures for such hate crimes. The UK police did not start monitoring hate crimes against trans people until 2007. However, many attacks which are regarded as gay bashing may be more accurately described as “gender bashing”. Attackers have picked up on gender cues (the “masculine” woman or the man or boy who is not “masculine” enough) as indicators of “queerness”. Michael Kimmel writes:

To the “that’s so gay” chorus, homosexuality is about gender nonconformity, not being a “real man,” and so anti-gay sentiments become a shorthand method of gender policing. One survey found that most American boys would rather be punched in the face than called gay. Tell a guy that what he is doing or wearing is “gay”, and the gender police have just written him a ticket.³⁵

There is a disturbing pattern of police and judicial transphobia: perfunctory investigations, the perpetrator’s violence being justified by defence lawyers on the grounds of the “bizarre lifestyles” of the victims and so on. Indeed, the legal defence of “trans panic”, where someone accused of killing a trans person claims they went into an uncontrollable panic upon discovery that their victim was trans, has on occasion been upheld by US courts. It is strongly opposed by LGBT organisations and since August 2013 also by the American Bar Association.

Studies by Schools Out show that, like homophobia, transphobia remains widespread in schools and indeed throughout the education system.³⁶ Perhaps this is partly explained as one of the damaging legacies of the Tories’ infamous Section 28 legislation, an opportunist piece of homophobic bigotry that forbade any discussion of gay sexuality in schools. It was repealed in 2002 but has echoes today in the reluctance of many teachers and teacher educators to deal with issues of sexuality and gender identity in schools.

A 2009 report by the Equality Challenge Unit of UK Higher Education institutions showed that reported transphobia aimed at staff and students in British

universities was even more prevalent than homophobia.³⁷

EARLY TRANS ROLE MODELS

Christine Jorgensen, an ex-US marine, wrote about her trailblazing search for help for gender transition in the early 1950s.³⁸ Jorgensen became a household name on the basis of claims that she was the first to undergo gender reassignment surgery. In fact she was not: several such surgeries had taken place in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s, before it was closed and destroyed by the Nazis, at Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin.³⁹ Jorgensen was, however, a crucial role model for many, being the first American to do so and the first to combine the surgery with hormone therapy.

In the post Second World War period a few pioneering supportive medical professionals began to emerge, notably Harry Benjamin in the US, who set out formal standards for how to deal sympathetically and supportively with trans people in a profession where the dominant attitude at the time was at best dismissive but much more likely to be extremely hostile.⁴⁰

The economic background to these developments is important. The long economic boom, fuelled by arms competition, demanded a huge expansion of labour in conditions of virtual full employment. Large numbers of women were drawn into paid employment, having been mobilised in the war economies of 1939-45, and ever higher numbers of young people entered higher education, again involving large increases in the proportion of women. In a period of rapid expansion capitalism could incorporate some of the growing demands for greater equality in terms of race, gender and sexuality coming from the mass movements which developed during the 1960s and 1970s.

The best of the analysis of that period has recognised that women have become a permanent part of the capitalist workforce, that they constitute a majority of workers in a range of industries and services, and that they are now at least as likely to join trade unions and socialist organisations and take part in industrial action as men.⁴¹ For example, a majority of those taking part in the great public sector pensions strike in the UK on 30 November 2011 were women.

Underlying this situation is the fact that there are very few, if any, roles in

capitalism, apart from the direct reproduction of the next generation of labour, which are necessarily gender specific. But the nuclear family's role in capitalism remains crucial. The privatised reproduction and care of the next generation of labour in the nuclear family constitute an enormous saving for the capitalist class. Nevertheless, the changing economic activity of women just described has had consequences in that ideas about women and gender roles have changed considerably in the last 50 years as struggles and mass movements have taken up issues like reproductive rights, equal pay and sexism.

Women's oppression (in terms of exclusion, domestic violence, lack of abortion rights, sexism and so on) clearly remains a major element of the capitalist system because the system requires it economically, and battles may have to be re-fought as many of the gains of the past 40 years come under renewed threat in an age of austerity.⁴² Nevertheless, in the last half century capitalism has undoubtedly been able to accommodate some of the demands of the women's movement, as it has with LGBT demands.

Paradoxically, that room to manoeuvre tended to encourage a variety of reformist theories and strategies among many anti-oppression activists. This is at odds with the original aims of many of the campaigners for sexual freedom, women's rights and gay rights in the early 20th century, as well as of many in the early WLM (Women's Liberation Movement) and the GLF (Gay Liberation Front) in the late 1960s and early 1970s who were strongly influenced by socialist ideas and identified capitalism as the enemy.

Before we return to this more recent trans history and consider how these factors have impacted on trans activism and the fight against transphobia in recent times we must consider the roots of trans oppression.

MARXISM AND OPPRESSION

For Lenin and the Bolsheviks, opposition to oppression was central to their revolutionary strategy. In 1905, in the midst of a revolution later regarded as the great dress rehearsal for the successful 1917 Revolution, Lenin wrote: "Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other times are the masses of people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution".⁴³ In order to win unity inside the

working class, and win the mass of the oppressed to play an active role in the struggle for socialism, revolutionary socialists must at all times, he insisted, be “tribunes of the oppressed”.

Socialists oppose oppression whatever the social class of those it affects. It is not OK to turn a blind eye to transphobia when directed at someone who is not working class, for example. Marxists offer a historical materialist explanation⁴⁴ of the roots of oppression and a class struggle perspective—that is, as Marx argued in drafting the Rules of the First International, that “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves” in order to achieve human liberation and end oppression.⁴⁵

Marxists argue that while any progressive collective struggle—the Poll Tax campaign for example, or the anti-capitalist movement, or the Stop the War Campaign—deserves support and solidarity (and of course these can win), particular oppressions are not best fought in isolation from the fundamental causes of those oppressions. Since the fundamental cause is the drive by the capitalist system to maximise profits through exploiting workers’ labour power, it follows that the key arena for struggle is the workplace and the labour movement.

Struggles outside the workplace are still important not least because they can feed back into and help generate strikes and walkouts. But the workplace is what brings together men and women, gay, straight and trans, black and white on a daily basis in the common experience of our exploitation and oppression. This makes possible the use of our collective ability to block the lifeblood of capitalism, the extraction of surplus value, and to formulate demands which link economic issues like pay to political issues of oppression. Examples include campaigns backed by strikes for equal pay, for example, or against racist discrimination, or against a homophobic/transphobic attack. That is why one strike is worth a thousand resolutions.

Thus Marxists focus on workplace struggle because when such struggles break out they inherently pose the potential for the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist system by the exploited and oppressed, and therefore the potential, through such “festivals of the oppressed”, for the creation of a socialist society free of oppression.

We see this inspiring potential in all the recent revolts and upheavals—the Arab Spring and Tahrir Square, Gezi Park, Brazil, the Greek general strikes. The experience of such struggle—democratic decision making, the demonstrations and meetings, standing together on picket lines—strips away the ideological masks of the system exposing the ugly inhumanity just below the surface. It can change people’s consciousness and their confidence in their own powers and abilities to be the collective agents of fundamental change. Each strike, big or small, that creates and strengthens the networks of activists makes our side stronger and more united and their side weaker.

Forms of oppression vary historically and culturally but their effect is to bolster so-called common sense differences that mask the fundamental class divisions upon which exploitation—the extraction of surplus value—rests. In Russia at the time of Lenin’s comments the Bolsheviks particularly had in mind the struggle against anti-Semitism, various national oppressions, and women’s oppression.

In each of these cases the Bolsheviks demonstrated in practice before, during and after the 1917 Revolution how socialists can challenge and overcome divisions inside the working class based on oppression. It is a complete myth that Marxism is economically reductionist, only interested in economic struggle. It is also a myth that Marxism is homophobic or transphobic. Unfortunately in some cases the attitudes of some of the “old left” Stalinist parties fed such distorted views of Marxism. Despite the liberationist Marxist tradition on oppression, however, even today many LGBT activists seem completely unaware of the fact that immediately after the 1917 Revolution the Bolshevik government passed a range of measures on divorce, women’s rights and national self-determination, proscribed anti-Semitism and decriminalised homosexuality.⁴⁶ Such measures were unprecedented anywhere in the world.

Key tasks for revolutionary socialists today, therefore, are both to fight against transphobia and homophobia in the here and now,⁴⁷ and to recover and reassert the links that have existed at high points of working class struggle between socialist analysis and organisation and the struggle for liberation against all forms of oppression, including the right of LGBT people to express their sexual orientation and gender identity freely.

THE ROOTS OF TRANS OPPRESSION

There is very little literature on trans oppression from a Marxist perspective. A landmark exception to this is work by the American transgender activist and Marxist Leslie Feinberg.⁴⁸ In her groundbreaking book *Transgender Warriors* Feinberg argues that echoes of ancient gender variant traditions survive in the crossdressing common in folk ceremonies and festivals around the world and in historical forms of rebellion and protest. Rebecca and her Daughters, for example, were crossdressed men protesting violently from 1839 against the imposition of turnpikes in Wales.⁴⁹ Similar crossdressed protesters were the Abbots of Unreason in England and the Lords of Misrule in Scotland in the 16th century.

To explain the roots of trans oppression Feinberg argues that the subordination of women also resulted in greater rigidity of gender roles and stricter policing of gender boundaries. She refers to Frederick Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.⁵⁰ Drawing on the then recent work of anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, Engels identified the emergence of the family and class societies as the key to understanding women's historical subordination and oppression.⁵¹

Prior to the emergence of class societies, although there may have been role differentiation due to biological differences (pregnancy, childbirth, breast feeding), these differentiations were not necessarily imbued with social status and power. The family structure, however, which increasingly replaced earlier matrilinear and matrifocal clan societies, imposed female monogamy so that the inheritance of wealth, property and titles could be assured.

Prohibitions and strictures against crossdressing and other crossgender behaviour which relate to this period of social and economic transition can be found in the Bible, for example in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These strictures are less about the word of god and rather more about examples of law setting by ruling groups seeking to consolidate their power to further accumulate wealth and power.

This process happened over quite long periods of time in parts of the ancient world from the 11th to the 7th century BCE as significant surpluses began to be accumulated through trade and conquest. As a consequence, the sexual activity

of women became tightly regulated in the drive to control procreation within forms of marriage. It is at this time that gender variant behaviour also became more proscribed as part of the efforts more strictly to enforce defined and sharply differentiated gender roles.

Interestingly, what seems to be implicit in the process of prohibition against, for example, men wearing their hair long and in “feminine” styles, or either gender adopting the clothing or the roles of the other, Feinberg argues, is that this behaviour seems likely to have been fairly common practice in earlier forms of human society and to have been previously relatively tolerated. Feinberg presents a range of evidence that this was so.⁵² The consolidation of the power of these emergent ruling classes and the associated social/legal codes was uneven, took a long time and generated resistance to the various forms of oppression it required. The roots of trans oppression therefore have similar material roots to the oppression of women and that of lesbians and gays.⁵³

Some of the sharpest clashes between the old ways of what Engels called “primitive communist societies” and Morgan called “barbarism” and the emergence of expansionist class societies and empires can be found in chronicles of European colonialism of the Americas from the Middle Ages onwards.⁵⁴ The Catholic church’s and the Spanish and Portuguese states’ approach to native cultures was that these societies needed to be subjugated and sometimes enslaved for their own good and in the interests of the primitive accumulation of capital for their spreading empires and the growing class of mercantile capitalists. The ideological justification for this brutality and genocide often came from an enthusiastic Christianity.

A few examples will suffice. In 1530 the Spanish conquistador Nuño de Guzmán reported that the last person he captured in a battle, who “fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman, for which I caused him to be burned”.⁵⁵ One of Feinberg’s illustrations in *Transgender Warriors* is a 1594 engraving by Theodore de Bry of Balboa’s Panama expedition⁵⁶ which shows him using dogs to murder “Two-Spirit” (trans) native people in the Americas. To Balboa these trans people were examples of diabolical and primitive debauchery. When the Spanish invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, “they found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites or homosexuals, they slew them”.⁵⁷

Yet despite the genocide and oppression directed at Native Americans (or First Nation people) over the past 500 years of colonialism, the acceptance and enhanced status of “Two-Spirit” people have persisted in many communities. Some writers have referred to the existence of “berdaches” among First Nation peoples. The term “berdache” has been used to denote genetic males among the original Americans who dressed as women, did women’s work and had sex with non-berdache men. However, as Pat Califia points out the term does not derive from any Native American language.⁵⁸ It may well be originally Persian, then via Arabic and Spanish to French. It was used to refer to the “passive” partner in gay male intercourse and Califia suggests it is a misapplied term, an example of native gender variant people being viewed through Western homophobic lenses.

In fact the original Native American terms used, such as the Lakota “winkte”, the Cheyenne “he man he”, and the Crow “bade” all have meanings like “not man/not woman” or “half man/half woman”; in other words they focus on gender rather than sexuality. The Gay American Indian History Project published a list of more than 130 Native American tribes who had such roles for men, and many of them had similar gender variant roles for women.⁵⁹ Many considered that there were not two but three, four or more genders and they seemed to tolerate both gender variant and homosexual relationships.

Such gender variant individuals performed crucial roles and were highly respected as counsellors, story-tellers, teachers, healers and sometimes female-born hunters and warriors. Having a Two-Spirit wife was often seen as increasing the resources for the family group or the tribe. Thus in such pre-class social formations gender variant individuals were often perceived as a benefit and a material resource to the community.

Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to take a romantic or uncritical view of gender variance in Native American societies. Califia points out that some Western gay and trans historians have been naive about the extent to which such gender variant or same-sex behaviour was universally accepted. She suggests that it varied quite a lot. She does, however, also point to a serious problem for trans history—the way that it has frequently been subsumed within the history of varieties of sexual orientation. She argues that some gay writers have misappropriated gender variant roles and behaviour as being only about sexual orientation.

She accuses Jonathan Katz of doing this in his *Gay American History*.⁶⁰

Stryker has also argued that the history of trans people and of trans rebels has been largely either hidden altogether or buried within lesbian and gay history.⁶¹ Some researchers, including transgender Native Americans, have recently been working to reconnect with that history.⁶²

The impact of colonialism was corrosive and genocidal in the Americas. But it was not just the Portuguese or Spanish empires that tried to stamp out any acceptance and respect in many societies for variant sexualities and crossgender expression. The history of the British Empire's relationship with less advanced societies is also instructive. The imposition of Western, Christian legal codes on colonial possessions such as India and various African countries by Britain and other imperialist countries clearly included the intent to criminalise and eradicate both sexually and gender transgressive behaviour.⁶³

CAPITALISM AND THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Engels, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*,⁶⁴ described how industrial capitalism, with mass migration to the cities, extreme poverty and privation, was destroying the working class family. It is a major internal contradiction, pointed out by writers such as Jeffrey Weeks⁶⁵ and John D'Emilio⁶⁶ for example, that while the developing capitalist mode of production was creating the conditions for the emergence of freer and more varied sexual relationships and gender roles among working class people, including the potential for homosexual relationships, it was also undermining the family as a social unit which could provide relatively cheaply for the reproduction of the working class. On the other hand, capitalism needs men and women in families at least long enough to reproduce the next generation of workers. The ideological pre-eminence of the family guarantees that a capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexism and homophobia (and transphobia). In the most profound sense, D'Emilio argues, capitalism is the problem.

The drive towards the destruction of the working class family in early capitalism through rapid urbanisation and the factory system horrified many in the bourgeoisie and led bourgeois reformers to look for the means to ensure its survival in the longer-term interests of capitalism. Legislation to control child labour and

to create the “family wage” (intended to exclude women from industrial occupations) helped to encourage the material conditions for the privatised reproduction of labour through the promotion of the working class nuclear family, modelled on the bourgeois family. Such material and legislative changes had to be underpinned with an ideological drive towards notions of fidelity (at least for women) and strict regulation of sexual behaviour.

Increasingly, as Weeks, Dee, Stryker and others have shown, homosexual (and other “deviant” sexual and gender behaviour) became more heavily proscribed and enforced from the latter half of the 19th century.⁶⁷ The trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 was a watershed in this process. A crucial outcome of this social and legislative proscription was the creation of the category of “homosexual person”. Homosexuality became an identity, a type of person rather than a type of activity. Around the turn of the 20th century it was from this emerging identification of a category of person that the resistance to the oppression of homosexual people began to coalesce around early campaigners like Havelock Ellis in the UK (a friend of Eleanor Marx), socialist pioneer Edward Carpenter, and Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany.

DISTINGUISHING SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY

In the eyes of most of the sexologists, doctors and campaigners of this period up until the mid-20th century gender variant behaviour remained essentially undifferentiated from homosexuality. Someone who expressed the desire to “change sex” was generally regarded as a homosexual unable to face up to their homosexuality—a “self-denying homosexual”. Many Freudians persisted in that view for decades after the notion of the transsexual became differentiated from the homosexual. The term transsexual did not really emerge as a medical or social category, or a self-identification in more general use, until after the publication of Harry Benjamin’s book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, in 1966.⁶⁸

Benjamin had become convinced of the validity of distinguishing between transsexuals and transvestites on the one hand and homosexuals on the other after the sexologist Alfred Kinsey published his reports on human sexuality, including data on trans people, from 1948.⁶⁹

TRANSGENDER RESISTANCE

Transgender resistance has a long history. There were riots against police raids on Molly houses in London, which were popular venues for transgender men (ie biological males) in the 17th and 18th centuries. Getting caught crossdressed in such a place could result in public hanging.⁷⁰

Later the first wave of struggle against homosexual oppression in the late 19th and early 20th century was fairly inclusive of gender outlaws who campaigned for the rights of homosexuals and other oppressed people. Key activists such as Edward Carpenter had strong links with socialist organisations in Britain. Similar links existed for American and European, especially German, socialists, sexologists and sexual radicals.⁷¹ These links were almost completely lost during the assaults of Nazism and the Stalinisation of Communist and left organisations from the 1930s onwards. Tens of thousands of LGBT people perished in Nazi concentration camps.

It was the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion in New York that marked the re-emergence of a radical, revolutionary current in the fight for sexual and gender liberation. The political temperature had been rising throughout the 1960s. New radical anti-war, anti-racist and left wing political organisations emerged independent of the old Stalinised left. Many of the young gay and trans activists explicitly saw themselves as revolutionaries such as Sylvia Rivera, a young Puerto Rican drag queen at the time she fought back against the police at Stonewall. In an interview with Leslie Feinberg in 1998, a few years before her death, she said:

We were not taking any more of this shit. We had done so much for other movements. It was time... All of us were working for so many movements at that time.⁷² Everyone was involved with the women's movement, the peace movement, the civil rights movement. We were all radicals. I believe that's what brought it around... I was a radical, a revolutionist. I am still a revolutionist... If I had lost that moment, I would have been kind of hurt because that's when I saw the world change for me and my people. Of course, we still got a long way ahead of us.⁷³

In the political ferment of the period after the Stonewall rebellion in 1969 the 1970 manifesto of the GLF explicitly described itself as a revolutionary move-

ment formed to fight for gay liberation against an oppressive capitalist system, alongside other oppressed groups.

Despite trans people being heavily involved in the four nights of the Stonewall revolt the event later became more synonymous only with a gay and lesbian revolt. Trans people's role was largely forgotten despite trans people like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Hunt.⁷⁴

Sylvia's role, and the role of other trans people in the riots, was later recognised by Martin Duberman in his classic book about the events, *Stonewall* (1993). Sylvia was one of the six leading activists of that period whose recollections form the core of Duberman's book⁷⁵ but she left the gay liberation movement in 1973 after an argument about whether she, as a trans person, could speak at the Gay Pride march that year. The argument was symptomatic of the growing marginalisation of trans people in the GLF.

The spirit of rebellion had been growing among young trans people well before Stonewall erupted. In the US there had already been militant local campaigns against exclusion from social venues. As early as 1959 there was a campaign by trans people, who tended to self-identify as queens at that time, against exclusion from Coopers Bar in South Side Los Angeles.⁷⁶ Stryker describes other examples. In 1965 in Philadelphia Dewey's lunch bar refused to serve young trans people. Three trans people who refused to leave were arrested. Gay and trans people set up a week-long picket until the owners backed down.

There was often a very natural overlap between gay and trans activism in working class areas. Their circumstances forced them to support one another and organise collectively to fight back. In just trying to live their lives, in trying to keep body and soul together through sex or domestic work, they risked arrest, strip searches, being forced into oral sex with corrupt cops, humiliation in (male) cells and having their heads forcibly shaved.

In 1966 the Compton's Café riot took place in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. The story, popularised by Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman in their Emmy award-winning documentary film *Screaming Queens*, shows that the riot erupted, much like the later riot at Stonewall, as a result of heavy-handed policing.⁷⁷ Transsexual women, gay men and prostitutes fought back against the

police. It was reported that “drag queens beat the police with heavy purses and kicked them with their high heeled shoes”.⁷⁸

The social context of the time impacted on the shared tactics used in these struggles, such as those of the Black Power movement. It was natural to offer solidarity to the struggles of other oppressed groups on the basis of “An injury to one is an injury to all”. In the case of the Compton Café riot, they won. It led ultimately in San Francisco to trans people at least formally being entitled to recognition as citizens with rights and with entitlement to access services and legitimate employment opportunities.

FRAGMENTATION

As the long economic boom ended in economic and financial crises such as the oil price shock of 1974 ruling class room to manoeuvre was replaced by the first ruling class assaults in what became the neoliberal offensive intended to reboot rates of profit and blunt working class confidence and organisation.⁷⁹ The radical wave receded as levels of working class struggle declined after the high point of the early 1970s.

Splits quickly emerged in the movement for gay and trans liberation. In its early days it included trans people and trans aspirations. Very quickly, however, these were seen as beyond the pale, an impediment to the achievement of gay rights advances. There were increasingly “safe” LGBT activists and there were those deemed to be unrealistic and too radical. For example, San Francisco’s first Pride in 1972, which celebrated the Compton riot and welcomed drag, ended in fighting between the organisers and a lesbian separatist group. In 1973 there were two Prides, one of which banned trans people and drag.

The notion of “homonormativity” (that gay people’s goal should be acceptance and accommodation within capitalist society) began to dominate among activists. The fight for liberation and the transformation of society that many of the early activists aspired to had become anathema. In the process the trans movement, which had much less potential for incorporation and tended to retain a more radical ideology, quickly lost its alliances with both the gay liberation movement and the emerging women’s movement.

From the early 1970s trans women began to be excluded from the women's movement by some radical feminists.⁸⁰ The militant movements of the 1960s and early 1970s fractured. In a perceptive interview in 2004 Joanne Meyerowitz pointed to the sad irony of such exclusion and separation:

Feminists need to remember that we (feminists) did not invent the concept of gender. We were not the first to separate gender and biological sex. In fact, we inherited and reworked a version of gender that was pioneered by scientists who worked on intersexuality and transsexuality. This history should remind us that the concept of gender is not inherently feminist.⁸¹

As the retreat from class struggle accelerated in the 1970s the dominant view among gay men became a reformist and assimilationist one, excluding the more radical and socialist elements, especially trans. Among women's movement activists notions of radical separatism and political lesbianism, and a complete rejection of working with men (and trans women) or of involvement in the class struggle, gained in strength.⁸²

Various reformist ideologies subsequently developed, particularly in academia, which served to justify these retreats, such as postmodernism, patriarchy theory and identity politics. These treated Marxism and any serious orientation on working class struggle with hostility as they were seen as outmoded and economically reductionist. This was all the more tragic given the strong links that had existed between the first homosexual rights movement and socialist organizations.

IDENTITY POLITICS AND QUEER THEORY

The notion that one's oppressed identity supersedes class identity—and should be struggled against independently from other “identities”—has invariably had a corrosive impact on the potential for common action and involvement in class struggle. The rise of identity politics in the last quarter of the 20th century took its political toll on LGBT activism.

Getting to grips with identity politics is like arm wrestling an octopus—no sooner do you get one arm pinned down than another pops up and starts waving about. Queer theory and queer politics, deriving from the writings of Michel

Foucault⁸³ and later Judith Butler,⁸⁴ emerged out of a period of defeat in the late 1970s and 1980s for the left and for anti-oppressive movements. The shift from the high levels of often successful industrial struggle and the confidence of the trade union rank and file in the early 1970s to the reversals and decline of the social contract years in the mid-1970s onwards was especially marked in the UK.

Queer theory is a contradictory phenomenon. On the one hand it rejects the rise of individualism, the pink pound and the notion of the “safe gay” but it also continues to express the retreat from class politics and Marxism which resulted from this decline. Queer theorists reject the depoliticisation and commercialisation of the gay movement. They take a social constructivist view of sexual orientation and gender expression, and they demand a return to the activism and radicalism of the early gay rights movement. They make a range of welcome and pertinent criticisms of the current demands for limited LGBT rights, the notion that there is a “gay movement” and a “gay community”, but their claims can also be criticised from the left.

Marxist writers such as Noel Halifax⁸⁵ and Colin Wilson,⁸⁶ in developing the constructive critique of queer theory associated with this journal, have pointed out that despite sharing elements with which Marxists can agree, queer theory in practice incorporates the intellectual retreats and fragmentation of post-structuralism and postmodernism. Thus at its heart it represents a continuation of the break from Marxism and any orientation on the centrality of class struggle as the way to change society, or of the working class being the agent of change.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Some have suggested that the notion of “intersectionality” may be of value in dealing with some of the criticisms of identity theory. Intersectionality is not a new concept having first emerged in multiracial feminist theory in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a theory, however, it was first popularised by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.⁸⁷

Its basic contention is that oppressed people may have multiple intersecting vectors of oppression, such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, etc, and that the

lived experience of marginalised people needs to be understood as being based on such multiple identities that contribute to their systematic social inequality. In essence, a person's "intersectionality experience" will be greater than the sum of its parts (the specific forms of oppression they experience). There are debates among those using the idea of intersectionality about the nature of particular social categories and the relationships between categories, as well as interest in theorising the experiences of people who cross the boundaries of societally constructed categories, such as trans people.

It can be argued that in essence intersectionality does little more than name the reality, ie that many oppressed people and groups are multiply oppressed (the black, lesbian, disabled person for example). On the crucial question of what to do about this, how to best resist those oppressions and fight for liberation, a search of intersectionality theorists produces little other than the notion that we can resist oppression by seeking greater self-awareness to increase self-value and achieve a stable self-definition.

The problem is that such consciousness-raising is also not new and, in its refusal to recognise the fundamental role which class plays in oppression (class is not simply yet another oppression since it is based on the exploitation at the heart of the capitalist mode of production), intersectionality remains unable to escape the tail-chasing identity-chopping at the heart of identity politics.

While those motivated by intersectionality, like those who define themselves as feminists, should be regarded by Marxists as potential allies, it is not a theory which can be approached uncritically. For it to provide a bridge to Marxism in resisting oppression, as some have argued, Marxists need to engage in joint struggles but also to argue for the centrality of class struggle as the crucial way to change the balance of class forces in capitalism and people's confidence, self-esteem, and self-value. Without this, intersectionality can in fact act as a bridge that leads away from Marxism rather than a bridge into Marxism.

THE DRIVE TOWARDS GREATER UNITY IN ACTION

What changed in the 1980s and 1990s to push gay, lesbian and transgender people back towards less sectarian and more combined and unified campaigning? One factor in the UK was the shared opposition to and campaigning against the

Tory government's Section 28, adopted into law in 1988 and repealed in November 2003 in England and Wales during the Labour administration. Section 28 banned any discussion in the state education system of gay relationships being acceptable or normal.

From the early 1970s in the UK gay activists in the unions had begun pushing a number of unions to support equal rights at work and to fight homophobia. It was significant that the links of solidarity forged between striking miners and the LGBT community during the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-5 helped to undermine homophobia in the National Union of Miners to the extent that the NUM supported calls for LGBT rights at the TUC conference in 1984. In 1985 South Wales miners paraded their banner on the Pride march. In the 1990s trade unions began to play a significant role in campaigning against Section 28 as well. These efforts bore fruit both in terms of pressuring Tony Blair and Labour and also in persuading the TUC to set up an LGBT committee and an annual LGBT conference from the late 1990s.

Meyerowitz suggests this welcome rapprochement was at least partially driven by the impact of more radical trans ideas on thinking about gay liberation.⁸⁸ The development of queer theory, particularly in academia and student milieus, which incorporated a more inclusive social constructivist approach to gender and gender variance, was, despite its theoretical defects, also a motivator in this respect in its critique of homonormativity and "pink consumerism".

But these ideological factors flowed from the material circumstances of the time. An important material factor was the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS among LGBT people in the 1980s, particularly in the US and UK. The failure of national administrations, particularly the Reagan administration, to fund research and healthcare to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic condemned many thousands of predominantly gay men and haemophiliacs to death.⁸⁹ The epidemic has now killed many millions worldwide. The attitude of moral condemnation in the West resulted in a major boost to homophobia and transphobia in the mid-1980s.

The joint political campaigning (for example through ActUp, Queer Nation and so on), which was necessary in the fight for medical help, support and justice, demanded a pooling of resources and energy by all groups affected. Trans peo-

ple were part of such campaigning. Many people are not aware that trans people have been one of the groups at highest risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Finally, the rapid development of the internet over the past 20 years has meant that resources, communication, online communities and role models are much more visible and available than before. Thus since the late 1980s objective circumstances once again made it practical political sense for gay, lesbian and the growing movements of bisexual and trans people to unite and fight back together. It does so even more today as we face the greatest austerity assault on working class gains since the Second World War. This is an assault which poses for LGBT people and other oppressed groups all the key questions we need to ask about what sort of society we need and how all the oppressed can win liberation.

The greatest gains for LGBT people, as we saw from the examples of the Russian Revolution, the first movement for homosexual reform in Germany, the US and the UK, and the 1960s and post Stonewall rebellion period, have been when we have struggled together alongside other oppressed people and as part of working class and socialist movements.

Trans people have a history of resistance to transphobia and are increasingly organised and visible in struggles today. There is much to uncover and learn about the involvement of trans people in past struggles, a history which recognises the role of trans activists in helping to clarify concepts of gender, sex and sexuality and the necessity for solidarity in the fight against homophobia, transphobia and sexism and which can thus help to arm trans people, other oppressed groups and socialists generally for the urgency of today's struggle for liberation.

The role of Marxists will be crucial in convincing people that this liberation is unachievable in capitalism, indeed that it requires the overthrow of that system through working class revolt and the building of a socialist society. Leslie Feinberg provides a fitting clarion call to this struggle:

None of us will be free until we have forged an economic system that meets the needs of every working person. As trans people, we will not be free until we fight for and win a society in which no class stands to benefit from fomenting hatred and prejudice, where laws restricting sex and gender and human love will be unthinkable. Look for us—transgender warriors—in the leadership of the

struggle to usher in the dawn of liberation.⁹⁰

NOTES

1: Thanks to Alex Callinicos, Colin Wilson, Dean Harris, Hannah Dee and Sheila McGregor for their supportive and very helpful suggestions and comments on early drafts of the article. Thanks also to the many comrades who have made thoughtful and often moving and inspiring contributions in meetings at Marxism and in the many branch meetings where I have spoken on trans, LGBT and women's oppression. I also want to record my thanks to comrades and friends in the SWP and in my union, the UCU, and to family and especially my partner Sheila Hemingway for unfailing support and encouragement during my own gender transition in recent years.

2: Gender transition-the process through which a trans person moves from living as one gender to living as another.

3: Allison and Pidd, 2013.

4: Littlejohn, 2012.

5: Todman, 2013.

6: Suicide Prevention Australia, 2009.

7: National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, 2011; www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/ntds

8: Whittle and others, 2007.

9: McNeil and others, 2012.

10: Go to <http://gendertrust.org.uk/>

11: Press for Change is the predominant trans advocacy group and made submissions to the government in respect of transgender rights prior to the Gender

Recognition Act, 2004, www.pfc.org.uk

12: American Psychiatric Association, 2013. Some trans people have welcomed this shift away from a diagnosis of a form of mental illness to an emphasis on the stress which may be caused by the mismatch. Others remain uncomfortable that there remains any formal association of trans with mental illness or distress.

13: Nestle, Howell and Wilchins, 2002.

14: Reed and others, 2009. GIRES (gender identity research and education society) is a UK open resource and research organisation on trans issues. Go to www.gires.org.uk

15: See Roughgarden, 2004. Roughgarden's book, *Evolution's Rainbow*, has much useful information on gender diversity in the natural world and will reward a critical read. It also, however, makes some criticisms of Darwinism which many readers of this journal would regard as unfounded.

16: The website of the UK Intersex Association (www.ukia.co.uk) urges medical practitioners and family members of an infant with an apparent intersex condition to be cautious and consider the long-term interests of the child. Most conditions do not require urgent medical intervention.

17: For example, see Luders and others, 2009, but also see Fine, 2011, and her very astute and funny book *Delusions of Gender* in which she debunks what she calls neurosexism; or Burke, 1996; Cameron, 2008; Fausto-Sterling, 1992; or Jordan-Young, 2011.

18: For an excellent discussion of these issues see Satel and Lilienfeld, 2013.

19: Attracted to people of all gender identities.

20: Some may argue that the acronym should be LGBTQI (Q for queer or questioning, I for intersex) but this article uses LGBT as being the most accessible acronym since the 1990s, the one which is most common in the labour movement, and the one which arguably makes fewest concessions to the dangers of separatist and identity politics.

21: Stryker, 2008, is a fascinating examination of transgender history over the last 150 years. The drawback for a UK readership is that it is written very much from a US perspective. It is also written from broadly feminist assumptions rather than a Marxist materialist approach. See also Meyerowitz, 2004.

22: Stryker, 2008, chapter 2.

23: Stryker, 2008, chapter 4.

24: For example, see Christine Jorgensen's autobiography-Jorgensen, 1967.

25: For an accessible and readable introduction to the concept of alienation see Swain, 2012.

26: Leslie Feinberg reviews a range of historical and anthropological information in her inspiring book, *Transgender Warriors*, 1996.

27: Feinberg, 1996, catalogues numerous expressions of gender variance in the histories of many societies. There is strong evidence that many pre-capitalist societies included respected roles and a high level of acceptance for gender variant people.

28: Whittle and others, 2007.

29: Sydney Morning Herald, 2011.

30: Many murders are catalogued on the website Remembering Our Dead, <http://www.gender.org/remember/#>; there is an annual International Day of Remembrance on 20 November, instigated after the brutal murder of Rita Hester in the USA in November 1998. TransOralHistory.com is also worth a visit as it records many stories of trans oppression and resistance.

31: See, for example, Norton and Herek, 2012: Also the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2010.

32: Burchill, 2013.

- 33: For example, Protest Transphobia, a Facebook group which has mobilised protests and vigils.
- 34: The film *Boys Don't Cry*, 1999, starring Hilary Swank as Brandon Teena, is harrowing.
- 35: Kimmel, 2011; see also Kimmel, 2009.
- 36: Go to www.schools-out.org.uk, an excellent source for advice and materials.
- 37: Equality Challenge Unit, 2008.
- 38: In addition to Jorgensen's autobiography, Meyerowitz, 2004, follows her life story and discusses the medical and social context.
- 39: Stryker, 2008.
- 40: Benjamin, 1966.
- 41: Orr, 2007.
- 42: McGregor, 2011; 2013; Cliff, 1984.
- 43: Lenin, 1990.
- 44: See Harman, 1998.
- 45: Marx, 1871.
- 46: This is well discussed in relation to LGBT rights by Wolf, 2009, and Dee, 2010.
- 47: For example by working with various anti-cuts organisations such as *Queers Against the Cuts*.
- 48: Feinberg, 1996; Feinberg, 1998

49: Feinberg, 1996, chapter 10.

50: Engels, 1884.

51: A number of writers on women's oppression including Lindisfarne and Neale in a recent issue of this journal (summer 2013) have been dismissive or highly critical of Engels on the origin of the family. Brown, 2013, and some other Marxist or socialist feminist writers have sought to distinguish between Engels's supposed economic determinism and Marx's dialectical approach to the relationship between humanity and nature in relation to production and reproduction. While the anthropological limitations of Engels's sources in 1884 should be recognised, his method and conclusions, I would argue, have been vindicated by much subsequent evidence and analysis. See Leacock, 1981, as a keynote work; also Campbell, 2013; Chris Harman's defence of Engels-Harman, 1995; and Smith, 2013.

52: Feinberg, 1996, chapters 5 and 6; Harman, 1999, chapters 2-4 especially.

53: German, 1998, Dee, 2010; Wolf, 2009.

54: Feinberg, 1996, chapters 9-11; Harman, 1999, Parts 3 and 4.

55: Feinberg, 1996, p25.

56: Feinberg, 1996, p29.

57: Feinberg, 1996, p23.

58: Califa, 1997, chapter 4.

59: Go to <http://gayhistoryproject.epgn.com/>

60: Katz, 1976.

61: Stryker, 2008.

62: For example Keshema, 2010; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang, 1997.

63: Feinberg, 1996, Chapter 9.

64: Engels, 2009.

65: Weeks, 2009.

66: D'Emilio, 1993.

67: Weeks, 2009; Weeks, 2007; Dee, 2010; Stryker, 2008.

68: Benjamin, 1966.

69: Kinsey and others, 1948. Even so, many in the medical profession have continued to worry about how to distinguish between the “true” transsexual who may be worthy of medical intervention, from the “pseudo-transsexual” who may be “deluded”, and many in the psychoanalytic tradition have regarded trans people as self-denying homosexuals in any case.

70: Feinberg, 1996, pp87,88.

71: Dee, 2010; Wilson, 2011. Also see Sheila Rowbotham's 2009 biography of Edward Carpenter.

72: Sylvia was a member of the Puerto Rican Young Lords and a founder along with Marsha P Hunt of STAR, the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.

73: Feinberg, 1998, p107.

74: It is ironic that the UK organisation Stonewall to this day refuses to advocate for trans people and remains a steadfastly LGB organisation.

75: Duberman, 1993.

76: Stryker, 2008, chapter 3.

77: Stryker and Silverman, 2005.

78: Stryker, 2008, p65.

79: Harman, 1988, especially chapters 4 and 5

80: An early example of this was the exclusion of Beth Elliott, a transsexual lesbian singer and experienced activist, who was accused of being a “violin of women’s space” through her transsexualism and denounced and vilified by separatist lesbians in 1973. Music engineer Beth Stone was another target in 1977. As the US political right stoked up its anti-homosexual campaigning at the time, some radical feminists unfortunately turned on an even more marginalised group.

81: Meyerowitz and Rosario, 2004, pp479-480.

82: See Raymond, 1979. She attacks trans women’s authenticity as women and their right to be part of the women’s movement. Also see Sandy Stone’s response-Stone, 1992. Echoes of this transphobia persist among some radical feminists. The RadFem 2012 conference in London excluded women who were not “women-born women”. This generated a campaign of opposition by trans organisations and feminist allies and the venue cancelled the booking.

83: Foucault, 1981, see also Wilson, 2008.

84: Butler, 1990; Butler, 2004.

85: Halifax, 2011.

86: Wilson, 2011.

87: Crenshaw, 1989.

88: Meyerowitz, 2004.

89: Gill, 2006.

NANCY FRASER, 2013.

How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden - and how to reclaim it

As a feminist, I've always assumed that by fighting to emancipate women I was building a better world – more egalitarian, just and free. But lately I've begun to worry that ideals pioneered by feminists are serving quite different ends. I worry, specifically, that our critique of sexism is now supplying the justification for new forms of inequality and exploitation.

In a cruel twist of fate, I fear that the movement for women's liberation has become entangled in a dangerous liaison with neoliberal efforts to build a free-market society. That would explain how it came to pass that feminist ideas that once formed part of a radical worldview are increasingly expressed in individualist terms. Where feminists once criticised a society that promoted careerism, they now advise women to “lean in”. A movement that once prioritised social solidarity now celebrates female entrepreneurs. A perspective that once valorised “care” and interdependence now encourages individual advancement and meritocracy.

What lies behind this shift is a sea-change in the character of capitalism. The state-managed capitalism of the postwar era has given way to a new form of capitalism – “disorganised”, globalising, neoliberal. Second-wave feminism emerged as a critique of the first but has become the handmaiden of the second.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that the movement for women's liberation pointed simultaneously to two different possible futures. In a first scenario, it prefigured a world in which gender emancipation went hand in hand with participatory democracy and social solidarity; in a second, it promised a new form of liberalism, able to grant women as well as men the goods of individual autonomy, increased choice, and meritocratic advancement. Second-wave feminism was in this sense ambivalent. Compatible with either of two different visions of society, it was susceptible to two different historical elaborations.

As I see it, feminism's ambivalence has been resolved in recent years in favour of the second, liberal-individualist scenario – but not because we were passive victims of neoliberal seductions. On the contrary, we ourselves contributed three important ideas to this development.

One contribution was our critique of the “family wage”: the ideal of a male breadwinner-female homemaker family that was central to state-organised capitalism. Feminist criticism of that ideal now serves to legitimate “flexible capitalism”. After all, this form of capitalism relies heavily on women's waged labour, especially low-waged work in service and manufacturing, performed not only by young single women but also by married women and women with children; not by only racialised women, but by women of virtually all nationalities and ethnicities. As women have poured into labour markets around the globe, state-organised capitalism's ideal of the family wage is being replaced by the newer, more modern norm – apparently sanctioned by feminism – of the two-earner family.

Never mind that the reality that underlies the new ideal is depressed wage levels, decreased job security, declining living standards, a steep rise in the number of hours worked for wages per household, exacerbation of the double shift – now often a triple or quadruple shift – and a rise in poverty, increasingly concentrated in female-headed households. Neoliberalism turns a sow's ear into a silk purse by elaborating a narrative of female empowerment. Invoking the feminist critique of the family wage to justify exploitation, it harnesses the dream of women's emancipation to the engine of capital accumulation.

Feminism has also made a second contribution to the neoliberal ethos. In the era of state-organised capitalism, we rightly criticised a constricted political vision that was so intently focused on class inequality that it could not see such “non-economic” injustices as domestic violence, sexual assault and reproductive oppression. Rejecting “economism” and politicising “the personal”, feminists broadened the political agenda to challenge status hierarchies premised on cultural constructions of gender difference. The result should have been to expand the struggle for justice to encompass both culture and economics. But the actual result was a one-sided focus on “gender identity” at the expense of bread and butter issues. Worse still, the feminist turn to identity politics dovetailed all too neatly with a rising neoliberalism that wanted nothing more than to repress all

memory of social equality. In effect, we absolutised the critique of cultural sexism at precisely the moment when circumstances required redoubled attention to the critique of political economy.

Finally, feminism contributed a third idea to neoliberalism: the critique of welfare-state paternalism. Undeniably progressive in the era of state-organised capitalism, that critique has since converged with neoliberalism's war on "the nanny state" and its more recent cynical embrace of NGOs. A telling example is "microcredit", the programme of small bank loans to poor women in the global south. Cast as an empowering, bottom-up alternative to the top-down, bureaucratic red tape of state projects, microcredit is touted as the feminist antidote for women's poverty and subjection. What has been missed, however, is a disturbing coincidence: microcredit has burgeoned just as states have abandoned macro-structural efforts to fight poverty, efforts that small-scale lending cannot possibly replace. In this case too, then, a feminist idea has been recuperated by neoliberalism. A perspective aimed originally at democratising state power in order to empower citizens is now used to legitimise marketisation and state retrenchment.

In all these cases, feminism's ambivalence has been resolved in favour of (neo) liberal individualism. But the other, solidaristic scenario may still be alive. The current crisis affords the chance to pick up its thread once more, reconnecting the dream of women's liberation with the vision of a solidary society. To that end, feminists need to break off our dangerous liaison with neoliberalism and reclaim our three "contributions" for our own ends.

First, we might break the spurious link between our critique of the family wage and flexible capitalism by militating for a form of life that de-centres waged work and valorises unwaged activities, including – but not only – carework. Second, we might disrupt the passage from our critique of economism to identity politics by integrating the struggle to transform a status order premised on masculinist cultural values with the struggle for economic justice. Finally, we might sever the bogus bond between our critique of bureaucracy and free-market fundamentalism by reclaiming the mantle of participatory democracy as a means of strengthening the public powers needed to constrain capital for the sake of justice.

Class 2B:

Gender violence and men's grasp to power

LAKEYMA KING, 2015. *LIES JOURNAL*.

Inversion and invisibility: Black women, Black men, and anti-Blackness

*For four hundred years I was neither your man nor my own man. The white stood between us, over us, around us. The white man was your man and my man ... Across the naked abyss of negated masculinity, of four hundred years minus my Balls, we face each other today...
— Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice*

*Look at all these young women going to college. When you [Black women] come with your degree, he [the Black man] is already behind. The only thing he has is his physical strength and his sex. To have power, the white man broke the black male. Once your male is broken, you [Black women] are fair game for being the victim.
— Louis Farrakhan, in a speech to a graduating class of mostly Black young women[1]*

In the quote above, Eldridge Cleaver surveys the damage white supremacy has wrought upon Black men's psyches. This letter "to all Black Women," which concludes *Soul On Ice*, is saturated with emotion: citations of historical trauma give way to self-effacing apologies to Black women for his, and all Black men's, failure to protect them from white racial violence. Highlighted in this final chapter are Cleaver's feelings of impotence in the face of gratuitous racial violence. "Impotence" here is key. Cleaver's analysis of racial violence in the United States is structured around a critique of how anti-Black regimes have mounted attacks upon the masculinity of Black men.

Farrakhan proceeds along a similar route. In the quote above, he does not refer to Black women being victimized by white men — he does not argue that once Black men are broken, Black women have no one to protect them from white men's violence. Rather, those to whom Black women are "fair game" are Black men; Farrakhan states that once Black men are "broken" by white men's brutality, they will in turn victimize Black women. For Farrakhan, the cause of intra-racial gendered violence is Black men's emasculation by white men.

Though separated by more than 30 years, these two quotes are linked by a central premise: that racist regimes do not operate on gender-neutral terrain. Instead, according to both Cleaver and Farrakhan, white supremacy specifically targets Black men for emasculation—the subjugation of whole communities is effected through the humiliation of Black men. Cleaver alludes to this consistently throughout *Soul on Ice*. In these masculinist narratives, the goal of white supremacy is not merely to suppress or destroy Black people, but to specifically attack Black men by feminizing them. In other words, the traditional concepts of gender and vulnerability are inverted. It is Black men, rather than Black women, who are more vulnerable to attack based on their gender, and it is Black maleness and masculinity that is targeted for elimination rather than Black femininity. While it is true that demasculinization was a technique of white supremacy — one need only to look at the decidedly non-masculine minstrel or the historical defenses of slavery which assert that Black people, men included, were like helpless, simple “children” — I want to show also how theories of racial castration are fused to a narrative about racial authenticity that leaves Black women politically isolated from the overarching Black community, their efforts to survive attacked as forms of race-betrayal, their struggles within and without their homes elided.

I WHITE SUPREMACY AND DEMASCULINIZATION

The racial castration narrative does not begin with Cleaver or Farrakhan. Both are influenced by E. Franklin Frazier, a Black sociologist at Howard University, who wrote during the 1930s. It is worth noting that Frazier was studied by a vast array of people of decidedly opposing political aims. His work made it into the Black Panther Summer Reading list, but his dissertation, *The Negro Family in the United States*,^[2] was also heavily referenced by the conservative US government policy maker, Daniel Patrick Moynihan.^[3]

As the title suggests, Frazier’s work is centered on Black family formations. Frazier’s analysis of Black social conditions begins, of course, with the cataclysmic effects of chattel slavery in the southern US. He then traces their reverberations through Black communities, even as these communities attempt to distance themselves (geographically and temporally) from them. Though a brief component of his work, Frazier’s most influential assertion concerns the

dispossession of patriarchal authority within Black families. For Frazier this dispossession begins with slavery, as Black men are violently separated from their families through both the slave trade and the investment of ultimate masculine authority in the white slave master. As he traces Black families through the outset of emancipation he anxiously wonders who will “take the place of the master’s [authority] in regulating sex relations and maintaining the permanency of marital ties.” Frazier asks, “Where could the Negro father look for sanction of his authority in family relations which had scarcely existed in the past?”[4] This anxiety is revealing for Frazier the problems plaguing Black communities are rooted in the “traditionally” fatherless families caused by slavery.

While Frazier laments the effect of fatherlessness on the organization of the Black family, Eldridge Cleaver focuses more explicitly on emasculation. Cleaver outlines the contradictory notions of masculinity created by white supremacy. According to him, Black men are bequeathed a brutal hyper-sexualized masculinity, but this is a ruse deployed by white men who occupy the position of Omnipotent Administrator — that is, the ideal masculine position. He states: “The white man turned himself into the Omnipotent Administrator and established himself in the Front Of ce. And he turned the black man into the Supermasculine Menial and kicked him out into the fields. The white man wants to be the brain and he wants us to be the muscle, the body.”[5] Later, Cleaver reveals the epicenter of white obsession with Black male sexuality:

The Omnipotent Administrator conceded to the Supermasculine Menial all of the attributes associated with the Body: strength, brute power, muscle, even the beauty of the brute body. Except one.... even though this particular attribute is the essence and seat of masculinity: sex. The penis. The black man’s penis was the monkey wrench in the white man’s perfect machine....You can seize the Body in a rage, in violent and hateful frustration at this one great flaw in a perfect plan, this monkey wrench in a perfect machine, string the Body from the nearest tree and pluck its strange fruit, its big Nigger dick, pickle it in a bottle and take it home to the beautiful dumb blonde... [italics in original][6]

The Omnipotent Administrator grants the Supermasculine Menial access to a superficial masculinity that covers over his emasculation, which for Cleaver is illustrated by the limitations the Administrator imposes upon the Menial’s sexual relations with others. White men’s ability to control Black men’s sexual

access to women, on pain of death, produces a Black masculinity attenuated by the system of white supremacist capitalism. Cleaver alludes to the actual cases of castration throughout the history of Black men in the United States when he states that he feels as if he's been metaphorically castrated by the violence of racist regimes in the US.

Part of resisting white supremacy for Cleaver, then, is a vigorous assertion of masculinity that involves (1) sexual access to all women (especially white women, because they are understood as the possessions of the enemy, white men) and (2) the organization against the prevailing trend of unisexuality or androgyny. These assertions of masculinity that seek to exaggerate the distinct poles of the (fictitious) sexual binary are the rationale for the infamous "penis pants," a pair of trousers with a separate, hanging cod piece for the penis, that Cleaver designed in the mid-70s. The pants, he brags, "cannot be worn by women".[7]

This line of thought culminates in Cleaver's "political" rapes of white women, which land him in the jail where he writes *Soul on Ice*. He calls his obsession with seeking revenge upon white supremacy by attacking white women a revolutionary sickness — an effort to reassert his thwarted masculinity that he later condemns, but only because "the price of hating another human being is loving oneself less." [8] That he is selfishly mobilizing a devastatingly harmful stereotype that has haunted Black men in order to gain access to women's bodies apparently does not merit concern for him. Neither is he concerned that his strategy of first "practicing" rape on Black girls in ghettos before mounting an attack on white women relies on and perpetuates the same norms of erasure and impunity that enable white men's violations of Black women, even as Cleaver claims that his actions are a protest against this history of rape. [9] Here a bell hooks quote is strikingly relevant: "In their eagerness to gain access to the bodies of white women, many Black men have shown that they were far more concerned with exerting masculine privilege than challenging racism." [10]

Resistance, for Cleaver, must take place on the terrain of masculine privilege because attacks on Black men's masculinity through their sexuality is not merely the consequence of historical processes as with Frazier, but rather is essential to the stability of the white supremacist social order. What for Frazier is a history of oppression is, for Cleaver, part of the ontology of white supremacy.

II INADEQUACIES OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Intersectionality has helped orient many theoretical efforts to recon- cile anti-racism and anti-sexism. But intersectionality, as advanced by Kimberle Crenshaw,[11] reproduces many of the assumptions found in Cleaver, Farrakhan, and Frazier. In Crenshaw’s conception, “race” and “gender” are two distinct vectors of oppression. When these vectors and the violence that comprises them meet — for instance when a woman of color faces sexual violence (gender) and must appeal to a white-staffed rape crisis center (race), women of color are marginalized by the collision of these two axes of oppression.[12] Later, Crenshaw demonstrates how some anti-racist politics jettison a consideration of gender from their analysis through their suppression and denial of gender violence within their communities. Crenshaw references the many logics that undergird the erasure of violence against women of color within their communities: concern that reports about domestic violence will be mobilized to stereotype men of color as violent, the reluctance non-white communities have toward appealing to a racist police force, the conception of domestic violence as a reaction to the stressors of racism. On this last point, she writes: “Of course, it is probably true that racism contributes to the cycle of violence, given the stress that men of color experience in the dominant society. It is therefore more than reasonable to explore the link between racism and domestic violence. But the chain of violence is more complex and extends beyond this single link. Racism is linked to patriarchy to the extent that racism denies men of color the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy.”[13]

Here Crenshaw echoes theorists of Cleaver’s ilk whose work proposes a link between the denial of male privilege and systems of racial oppression. However the two speak past each other: for Cleaver, the denial of male power and privilege, “symbolic castration,” and racist regimes are not merely linked together, they are the same system. Denial of male privilege is how racism functions, not merely a consequence. These sorts of theorists conceive of white supremacy as mounting sexualized attacks against Black men. Their historical evidence stretches from “studding” during chattel slavery, to lynching in the Jim Crow-era South, to present-day invasive stop-and-frisk searches during which police officers sometimes pull down the pants of their victims. In other words, for these thinkers the traditional, feminist concept of gender and vulnerability is flipped — it is Black men who are more vulnerable to (sexualized) attack be-

cause of their gender, it is Black maleness and masculinity that is targeted for elimination.

Cleaver was preoccupied by white hypersexualization of Black communities. For him, and many others since, this hypersexualization — and vulnerability to sexualized assault — at the very least levels the power differential between Black women and Black men (hence his obsession with counteracting “unisexualty”). White sexual objectification of Black bodies originates as a racial attack that interpellates male and female subjects alike and as alike. The most pressing concern from this standpoint is that racial attacks always bear a sexual component, and men are not spared: the object of this violence is to dissociate them from power by associating them with the lack of power that femininity signifies.

Intersectionality cannot be mounted as a critique of the line of argumentation that sees Black women as less oppressed than Black men, and attacks Black women on this basis. Intersectionality associates the axis of “gender” exclusively with women’s oppression, and in so doing either ignores or brackets off the type of sexualized violence against men that is described by men like Cleaver. The cause of this bracketing is intersectionality’s use of separate, autonomous axes of oppression that interact, rather than the conception of systems of subjugation as concentric which informs Cleaver’s theorization. Frazier, Cleaver, and others who write similarly already explicitly address gender. The problem isn’t that their work fails to acknowledge the interaction of race and gender. The issue is that the gender hierarchy they use in their analysis is inverted. Their formulations around gender, femininity, and racial attacks create a paradigm which inverts assumptions around maleness, femaleness, and vulnerability. For Cleaver et al., racism’s goal to dissociate Black men from masculinity makes them singularly attacked and especially vulnerable to attack.

Framing racial attacks as feminizing coincides with what feminists have stated for decades — that femininity functions as a short-hand for lack of power in a patriarchal society. Cleaver offers his re-masculinizing efforts as the antidote to this dispossession of agency. Other theorists followed a similar route, mobilizing false perceptions of what traditional African societies looked like in order to justify the ratcheting up of patriarchal relationships within African American communities.[14] These analyses — which assert that Black men need to be remasculinized — fail to interrogate the fact that their standard for masculinity

is often the archetypal rapist of peoples and continents: the white man. When Black men petition for access to a toxic sort of masculinity which requires the submission of women and compulsory heterosexuality, they seek inclusion into an exploitative relation rather than the liberation of all entities from it. Masculinity's connection to violence, especially against women, as it is defined by patriarchy, is left unexamined. Because this analysis inverts the gender hierarchy to privilege and affirm Black men, there is no functional analysis regarding Black women. By this same logic, racialized pressure on Black women to be feminine does not count as evidence of oppression. Rather, it is the natural order of things.

Interpreting racism as first and foremost an effort to subjugate Black men because of their gender creates an "endangered Black male" narrative. This narrative functions to prioritize the political needs of Black male subjects above those of Black women. Devon Carbado explains:

As a consequence of this myth of racial authenticity and the currency of the endangered Black male trope, when an individual Black man is on trial for some criminal offense, the Black community sees first and foremost his status as a racial victim. Furthermore, when the alleged crime involves violence against women, the fact that a Black female or a woman of any race may be the victim of Black male aggression is subordinate to the concern that a Black man may be the victim of a racist criminal justice system.[15]

Here Black men mobilize their experience of emasculation under the yoke of white supremacy to excuse acts of violence inflicted on female bodies, particularly those of Black women. Black men's acts of gendered violence become an assertion of masculinity in a world that deprives Black men of the privilege male gender normally grants.[16]

III AUTHENTICITY AND BETRAYAL

As racism is defined as a system that primarily affects Black men, an interrogation of racial authenticity occurs which further privileges a masculinist analysis of white supremacy. Racial authenticity is often used to assess one's allegiance to one's race, particularly its political interests. Black women often find their allegiance to their race questioned when they speak about the violence they face

within their communities. In this context, Black men, by virtue of their race and gender, are defended on the grounds of racial authenticity because the terrain upon which they are being attacked — as men who harm women — mirrors racist tropes used to unfairly persecute Black communities. Here narratives of lynchings and the white gaze come into play again: when assaults on Black women by Black men are made public, this evokes well-known pretexts for lynching, with the figure of the white woman replaced by a Black woman determined to betray her people by publicly airing her grievances. Condemnation of these men is read as the reanimation of the lynch mob.

Appeals to racial authenticity are also used to jettison “undesirable” people from the Black community. In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver alienates James Baldwin from his Blackness, stating that he and other Black homosexuals are worse than Uncle Toms. Because Black homosexuality represents for Cleaver the reiteration of the emasculation enacted by white men, for him James Baldwin represents a racial death wish:

The white man deprived him of his masculinity, castrated him in the center of his burning skull, and when he submits to the change and takes the white man for his lover as well as Big Daddy, he focuses on ‘whiteness’ all the love in his pent up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against ‘blackness’ — upon himself, what he is, and all those who look like him, re- mind him of himself. He may even hate the darkness of the night. The racial death wish is manifested as the driving force in James Baldwin.[17]

When the concept of racism is so closely tied with emasculation, Black persons who are not heterosexual are accused of being in collusion with genocidal white supremacy. And neither is Cleaver the only theorist to espouse this. Mole Asante blames the disintegration of Black communities on the “outburst of homosexuality among black men fed by the prison system.”[18] More contemporarily, Dr. Frances Cress Welsing writes that “Black male passivity, effeminization, bisexuality and homosexuality,” all caused by white supremacy, are responsible for the disintegration of Black communities.[19] Welsing’s writings are especially troubling because they are featured in a series of documentaries called *Hidden Colors* [20] and therefore reaching a wide and newly politicized audience of young Black people.

Moreover these documentaries are peppered with popular musicians like Nas, so that the somewhat marginal opinions of those like Wesling are given extra credence when presented next to those of more recognizable gestures. Moreover, narratives that center white supremacy and castration threaten Black lesbians who frequently encounter the argument that they are contributing to the genocide of their people by not participating in Black heterosexual relationships. According to nationalists, they should be breeding. This argument ignores the fact that many Black lesbian and gay couples start families which include children from previous relationships, from family members who could not take care of their children, or adopt children from unrelated families.

Arguments that racism emasculates Black men often insist that Black women are de-feminized usurpers. If we return to E. Franklin Fraizer's writings, we find him arguing that slavery did not subjugate women, as women, well enough. "... Save for the interference of the master or overseer, her wishes in regard to family matters were paramount. Neither economic necessity nor tradition instilled in her the spirit of subordination to masculine authority." [21]

This thesis is extended by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a Swedish sociologist commissioned by the Johnson administration in 1965. In *The Negro Family: A Case for Action* [22] Moynihan alleged that social problems, such as unemployment among Black men, forced Black families into a matriarchal pattern of family formation. In his study he cited Frazier's assumption that Black women were "accustomed to playing the dominant role in family relations," agreeing that it was an aberration originating in slavery and still replicated within contemporary Black families. [23] This supposedly matriarchal family organization within Black communities is thus responsible for the further marginalization of those communities because it contradicted American social norms, making efforts at assimilation all the more fraught. Moreover, Moynihan proposed that Black women invest more, emotionally and materially, in their daughters; resulting in lower self-esteem and lower achievement for their sons, and thus reproducing these matriarchal family forms. [24] In short: Black women preside over a matriarchal family structure that marginalizes all Black Americans in order to maintain power within Black communities.

In agreement with Frazier and Moynihan, Cleaver extends their characterization of Black women as "dominant," and like these widely influential sociologists,

roots the origins of her “subfeminine,” “in-complete womanhood” in slavery. Cleaver also contends that white men gave Black women preferential treatment to enable the latter’s subjugation of Black men, accusing them of participating in the symbolic neutering of Black men and therefore Black people as a whole.[25]

And it’s a very effective tactic: the specter of authenticity obstructs Black women’s participation in radical, self-emancipatory movements. By claiming “dominant” Black women hinder racial progress by “castrating” Black men, the discourse of authenticity prevented many women involved in Black liberation struggles in the ‘60s and ‘70s from being taken seriously when they spoke out against sexism within the movement. Elaine Brown described the difficulties that emerged out of the party internalizing the myth of Black matriarchy:

A woman attempting leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the ‘counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.’ It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of the people.[26]

Angela Davis describes being accused of orchestrating a “matriarchal coup d’etat” whenever women in the SNCC began work on some- thing important, while ironically noting that most of the work she had taken on had fallen to her by default.[27]

Orlando Patterson, a Jamaican sociologist known for his work on slavery, takes this position to its (il)logical conclusion, stating that while the burdens of Black men are always oppressive and soul-killing, those encountered by Black women are “generative, empowering, and humanizing.”[28] Patterson posits that Black women’s identities give them an advantage over Black men and white women: their identity as women remove their racial stigma, and their Blackness means that they aren’t seen as feminized sex objects by their white male bosses.[29]

Patterson explicitly states what is usually implied: that Black women psychically and materially benefit from racism, are relieved from the most brutal aspects of racial oppression by their gender, and protected from sexist dynamics by their status as less-than-feminine subjects. This absurdity proceeds directly from an

analysis of racism I have traced to Frazier, one which asserts that white supremacy feminizes Black men, and de-feminizes Black women. As Patterson writes quite overtly, Black women's de-feminized status also de-races, protecting them from the full brunt of white supremacy. Again, the hierarchy of sexual power and vulnerability is inverted. According to Patterson, Black women are less affected by racist regimes and benefit from anti-Black social constructions — by virtue of their gender, not in spite of it.

In *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe* [30], Hortense Spillers does much to undercut the logic of Frazier and his theoretical progeny by attacking the belief in the matriarchal organization of Black social life. Spillers argues that the social organization of the family in slavery was neither patriarchy (the inheritance of land/money by the legitimate male heir) nor matriarchy (matrifocality, and matrilineal naming in particular). Rather, white civil society arranged slavery such that children born by Black women had one specific inheritance: their enslaved position. Attempts at naming, matrilineal or otherwise, were impossible given that Africans lost their names and their ability to name during the middle passage. Moynihan's "Fatherless Negro Family" is fatherless because the master owns his enslaved progeny, but he does not sire them, and the enslaved man cannot be a father, as he does not have a family. Furthermore, any child born from an enslaved woman inherits only her debased status, and does not have a family, so all that is left is the "mother," whose child does not belong to her either. Spillers argues that Black women birthed many children, but were mother to none of them. The family loses meaning, as it is always obliterated by the requirements of the slave economy.

Gender, according to Spillers, originates within the domestic sphere where the sexual division of labor first manifests itself. For the slave, the "home" is obliterated and replaced by the slave quarters, the opposite of the domestic haven that shields its inhabitants from the evils of society. The absence of a domestic realm within chattel slavery de-genders Black women, relegating them to "femaleness" rather than "womanhood." Womanhood, purified and protected by domesticity, is distinct from femaleness. Women are not subject to brutalities "generally reserved for men." [31] Any gendering of Black women is "merely" the harnessing of reproductive capabilities and labor associated with women. Because this gendering is utilized if and only if it resulted in the production of human capital for slaveholders, it is too circumspect to be considered an essential component

of the Black “female” identity. For Spillers the designation of “woman” ignores the historically specific positions of Black women during and after slavery: the sacredness of domesticity and femininity were always foiled and truncated by the fact of slavery and race.

The “Black female” does not belong within the privileged category of “women” — she is subject to the obligations of “womanhood” (such as reproduction and reproductive labor) only insofar as it generates profit for the slaveholder. [32] There is no “matriarchy” because slavery obliterated gender and linear bequeathal of a name altogether. Ultimately, as with Frazier and his cohorts, Spillers asserts that slavery de-feminized Black women.

Arguments like those made by Spillers in *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe* are alluring because they attend to aspects of Black women’s identities that have been ignored in the name of a superficial concept of sisterhood within white-dominated feminism. Furthermore Spillers touches on what theorists like Frazier and his progeny have merely circled around: she attempts — without success — to explain why there is a disjunction when one attempts to apply traditional concepts of gender to Black experiences in the US. Put mildly, Black bodies do not map neatly onto European male and female archetypes.

I disagree, however, with her extremely rigid definition of “woman” and “patriarchy.” Spillers defines “patriarchy” as the linear bequeathal of a name, wealth, etc. Her critique of gendered categories and terminology (such as patriarchy and matriarchy) stems from what she alleges is the loss of gender through racialized dehumanization. She defines gender rigidly — stating that gendered roles are created within the domestic sphere, and then they proliferate into the public sphere. The brutality to which Black women were subjected during slavery (because they were unprotected) is a brutality generally reserved for men, and so is evidence of their de-gendered condition. Some violence was surely gender-neutral — for example, whippings, for which Masters would accommodate pregnant women by digging holes into the ground for their swollen abdomens. But some violent interactions targeted Black women specifically. The advent of the “mammy” stereotype, for instance, reveals a material reality particular to women slaves. The “mammy” is forced to ignore her own children in order to provide reproductive labor for her white Master and Mistress — childcare, emotional labor, housework, and so on. Only women fulfill this role.

While Black men who participated in slave rebellions were generally hanged, Black women, ostensibly because seeing underneath her dress would be scandalous, were instead burned at the stake. This death was crueler, slower, and gender specific — a punishment for being a woman and an insurrectionary.[33]

It seems like a sleight-of-hand to allege that violence is what would eject Black women from the category of women, when violence is what makes the categories of gender relevant to begin with. Black women are targets for specific kinds of violence: they are inherently rapeable (or un-rapeable, insofar as rape of Black women is never considered rape), their bodies are scandalous or monstrous (an obsession which has famously included the “monstrous” body of Saartjie Baartman, or the “Hottentot Venus”), their labor should not be remunerated because it is not categorized as labor at all, their reproduction is subject to another’s whims, their bodies can be violated as long as whoever does it “owns” them, their problems are always “personal,” never political. Historically white women and Black men alike have ignored Black women’s gendered position. Yet if any identity embodies surviving the violence that makes the category of “woman” operational, it is Black women. Maybe this is what white women strain to recognize when they say that housewifization [34] is akin to slave labor. And maybe this is what Black men are gesturing toward when they call the racial violence they experience a process of “feminization” — in nascent recognition of the fact that being controlled, and being subject to violence regardless of whether one acquiesces to control or rebels against control, describes the category of woman. Perhaps instead of dissolving patriarchy, Blackness highlights the contradictions of a patriarchal social order.

Within the Black community, as well as without, there is a particular economy of gender roles, even if this economy is the result of mimicking white hegemony. One cannot dismiss the category of gender when gender is replicated within communities. The evidence of this is in part the very existence of the community. The “matriarchy” that is constantly misnamed is in fact the private-public, reproductive labor that black women, as women, have performed to keep their communities intact as they are constantly under siege. Disproportionately represented in churches, neighborhood associations, and nearly every other aspect of social organization (except of course in the leadership), this is what makes them ‘pillars of their community.’ Surely an aspect of why Black women took

on this work involved their gender: women, whether by “choice” or by historical circumstance, are always seen as responsible for keeping their cultures and communities intact.

IV CONCLUSION

The problem with the argument that Black women have been historically “treated like men” is that this is not borne out, historically or contemporarily, in Black women’s lives. Often the conclusion reached from these examples is that there is no component of a feminist analysis that applies to Black women. Again, this conclusion can only be reached if “woman” is a mystical, privileged category, marked only by reproductive labor that is exploitative only because it is unpaid and supplants waged work. Ironically this critique of gender as a concept often ends up doing precisely the work of gender by rendering much of the violence excised against Black women exceptional, private, and invisible. For example, lynching is the hallmark of white racism mobilized over and over again in narratives about Black existence in this country, the systematic rape of Black women is not, or if it is, it is made into a joke.[35] The fact that Black women’s political organization in response to these rapes helped usher in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s was covered over, as were the rapes themselves, until very recently.[36]

In the present, most recognize how mass incarceration and the extrajudicial murder of Black men evidence continued anti-Black racism. But when systemic racism impacts Black women it is suppressed by being stamped as exceptional. When a racist “War on Drugs” materializes through monitoring Black women’s pregnancies rather than arresting them, no one notices.[37] When police brutality ends with a rape of a Black woman rather than a baton to a man’s face, no one notices. When police murder a 7-year-old girl, no one notices. Marches for “safer streets” and demands to end “black-on-black crime”[38] follow when Black men are shot in broad daylight, but none are organized for 11-year-old Black girls raped in ghettos, or women murdered by jilted ex-boyfriends. When we write that Black women are ejected from bourgeois, white notions of womanhood, we must also interject that this does not mean they are not leading exceedingly gendered lives.

Eldridge Cleaver writes in his letter to all Black women that that the white man

is “your man and mine.” In doing so he suggests that the white man’s denial of Black masculine power is on the same plane as Black women’s vulnerability to rape at the hands of white men. In his analysis, the “castration” wrought by white supremacy functions as a symbolic rape that covers over the actual rapes and other forms of violence that Black women have endured. Cleaver and the other theorists I’ve critiqued here exploit language around gender violence in an anti-racist posture that silences and controls Black women. This reanimates, obscures, and condones the myriad of violences Black women face from at least three parties: white men, white women, and Black men. When Black women protest their treatment at the hands of Black men who are more concerned with becoming patriarchs than with the healing of Black communities as a whole, these Black women are associated with race-betrayal. This specious accusation of betrayal anticipates and masks the constant political betrayal of Black women by Black men.

Like Spillers, I look toward a sort of re-appropriation of the Black female power that is mislabeled as “matriarchy,” but I don’t agree that Black men are the only ones who have had the opportunity to understand us.[39] If they do indeed have that ability, what explains the decades of negligent misunderstanding? The problem is that our brothers think that they understand us because they think feeling powerless because of racism is the same as feeling powerless due to the rapacious nature of sexual and racial violence from which there is no relief, not even at home. The notion that these two things could combine, are in fact always consubstantial for us, and have cataclysmic effects that we must bear both outside our communities (in white space, where we feel uncomfortable) and within them (where we are supposed to be protected from the antagonisms of the outside world), evidently never crosses their minds.

NOTES

[1] Cited from “Black Male Racial Victimhood” by Devon W. Carbado, in *Calaloo* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998): 337-361.

[2] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939)

[3] *The Negro Family* has also been subject to critique by many Black women,

most famously Angela Davis in *Women, Race, Class and Hortense Spillers in Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*.

[4] Frazier, p. 89.

[5] Cleaver, 191.

[6] Cleaver, 191-4.

[7] Mark Stillman, "Eldridge Cleaver's New Pants," *The Harvard Crimson* (1975). Cleaver's negation of androgyny is especially interesting when considering the history of lesbian- feminisms. A year before the *Harvard Crimson* article was written Carolyn Hielburn published *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* — feminist organizations were enacting or debating androgyny as a strategy for women's liberation.

[8] Cleaver, 36.

[9] Cleaver, 33.

[10] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 113.

[11] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6. (July 1991), 1241.

[12] Crenshaw, 1244.

[13] Crenshaw, 1257-8.

[14] See: E. Frances White, "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counterdiscourse, and African American Nationalism," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (Spring 1990), 73-97.

[15] Carbado, 337-8.

[16] Carbado, 348.

[17] Cleaver, 128-9.

[18] Mole Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton: Africa World, 1992)

[19] Frances Cress Wesling, *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors* (Chicago: Third World, 1991)

[20] Tariq Nasheed, Dir. *Hidden Colors: The Untold History of People of Aboriginal, Moor, and African Descent*, 2011. Film.

[21] Frazier, 125.

[22] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* (US Department of Labor, 1965)

[23] Moynihan, 17.

[24] Moynihan, 31.

[25] Cleaver, 190.

[26] Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. (Anchor Press, 1993)

[27] Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race in America* (New York: W. Morrow, 1984), 312.

[28] Orlando Patterson, "Blacklash: The Crisis of Gender Relations Among African Americans," *Transition* 62 (1993): 4-26.

[29] Patterson, 13. Cleaver also aligns Black men and white women, calling them "psychic" bride and groom within the present society. Weigman also aligns Black men and white women, to the elision of Black women.

[30] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No.2 (1987), *Culture and Counter-memory: The "American" Connection*, 65-81.

[31] Spillers, 68.

[32] Spillers, 74.

[33] Giddings, 35.

[34] Liberal feminists are guilty of exploiting this comparison — Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch*: "[Women]... represent the most oppressed class of life-contracted unpaid workers, for whom slaves is not too melodramatic a description (329)." But materialist feminists are guilty of this as well (see *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen*, Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox). For more on housewifization see Chapter 3 of *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* by Maria Mies.

[35] For example, Russell Simmons released a "comedic" Harriet Tubman "sex tape;" Saturday Night Live comedian Leslie Jones performed in a skit making light of the sexual exploitation black women endured on plantations.

[36] See *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance — a New History of the Civil Rights Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* by Danielle L. McGuire.

[37] See *Killing the Black Body, and, Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies: Women of Color, Equality, and the Right of Privacy*, both written by Dorothy Roberts.

[38] Here I am setting aside the rather spurious and conservative origins of the term "Black-on-Black Crime." As many have stated, most crime is intra-racial. "Black-on-Black Crime" is a way of consigning and equating Black people with violence. Leaving this aside, there are always people in the community organizing against violence when brothers kill each other. Tellingly, this does not happen as often when Black women are murdered.

[39] Hortense Spillers, et al. ““Whacha Gonna Do?” Revising “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: an American Grammar Book”: A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffith, Shelly Eversley, and Jennifer L. Morgan,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1/2, The Sexual Body, 299-309.

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First Women, Then the Nation: Confronting Colonial Gender Violence in Canada and the US

I first began writing this essay more than a year ago, motivated by the urgent need for the nascent Idle No More (INM) movement to commit to ending violence against Native women. It was January 2013 then, less than two months since INM had begun as an internet teach-in on the consequences of a Canadian omnibus bill that stripped the protective status of tribal lands in order to make them more accessible to private corporations. It had since become a broader movement for Indigenous self-determination manifesting in round dance rallies across North America and eventually railroad and highway blockades in Canada as well as declarations of solidarity and support across the globe.

I lived in New York City then, and for the first time many of my non-Native friends seemed finally interested in understanding and protesting colonial power over Native lives. Some knew of the movement as a response to Bill C-45 and the harmful policies of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Some got involved through environmental movements. Others conceived of the movement as a “new Occupy.” (The two latter approaches are steeped in their own colonizing mentalities, which see the protection of Indigenous peoples’ relationships to land and nation as only a steppingstone for their own movements.) Regardless of some of these problematic motivations, Native people were on the news and in my daily conversations almost every day — and not as drunken tragedies or exoticized curiosities, but as real people fighting for their lands, lives and nations.

While I was incredibly excited to lend my voice and presence to INM, I kept waiting for the broad rallying cries of “protect the land” and “stop Harper” to gain nuance. I wanted to see them address that bills like C-45 and other colonial policies aren’t just issues of environmental destruction or state-sponsored corporate greed, but fundamentally about which people are valued in settler

colonial societies and which are seen as superfluous or resistant in the onward march of capital. I kept waiting for people to acknowledge that we could not talk about Indigenous self-determination without understanding how gender violence, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation meet in destructive ways to harm our relationships with the land and each other.

When I was following and participating in Idle No More, there were simultaneous discussions in the US about how changes to tribal legal sovereignty could mitigate violence against Native women. While this may seem exactly like the kind of discourse I was hoping would come from a global Indigenous resistance movement, the discussion unfortunately centered around the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a bill that supposedly bolsters Native people's ability to deal with an epidemic of sexual violence on reservations, but only through greater law enforcement and incarceration. Neither INM nor VAWA were providing solutions, or even rigorous dialogue, about gender violence in settler colonial societies. In both instances, I was frustrated with how public discourse — and even the less prominent discourses within radical, Indigenous and feminist movements — often fails to truly account for the violence faced by all Native women.

Many things have changed since that winter, while many things have stayed the same. I have had to put Idle No More into the past tense. In fact, for many people the INM acronym doesn't even mean the same thing anymore, it has been transformed into the Indigenous Nationhood Movement. According to the website nationsrising.org, which was launched in November of 2013 by a collective of scholars, writers, and activists, this renewed INM is “a movement for land, life, languages and liberation” which is “fighting for the survival and independence of Indigenous nations.” So, while there aren't as many regularly scheduled round dances and marches, the spirit of resistance that was sparked by (and predates) INM continues in the anti-fracking blockades at Elsipogtog, anti-pipeline movements across North America, and continued information and media campaigns. Meanwhile in the US, a version of VAWA was signed that puts in place a pilot program for only three tribes to begin prosecuting non-Native sexual offenders who assault Native women. Things have changed, but not nearly enough. Even as Idle No More has grown and made a much greater effort to incorporate an end to sexual violence into its demands and message, trans women and others disproportionately targeted by colonial violence remain on

the extreme margins of our movements and communities. And talk of solutions, from VAWA to the calls for a National Inquiry in Canada, remains rooted in capitulation to an oppressive government. In order to truly address sexual violence against Indigenous women, we need to look deep into our peoples' ways, not the state, for strategies to end violence; and we need to completely untangle our ways of thinking from colonial notions of gender.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE

One of the most inspiring and important aspects of the Idle No More movement has always been the women who are leading the charge. The internet teach-in which first generated the now famous hashtag and movement name was begun by four women: Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean. Rarely do Native women get the level of recognition they deserve for being activists for their people and defenders of the land. Both Natives and settlers may know the Native woman as victim, but rarely do they know the strong Native woman as leader. The two most well-known Indian movements of the past fifty years, the American Indian Movement of the 1970s and the Oka standoff of 1990,[1] are most often remembered and represented by the image of the warrior: a typically masculine figure, sporting a handkerchief and a gun. The image of the imposing male Indian figure is much more suited for the front pages, whereas there is rarely mention of the many women who fight right alongside the hyper-masculinized warrior. Leonard Peltier, the Lakota Sioux man spending life in prison for allegedly killing an FBI agent, is a household name. But Anna Mae Aquash, a Mic'maq activist and AIM leader who was shot in the head in the wake of the Wounded Knee occupation, remains an obscure historical figure for most outside the Native communities of North America.

On December 11, 2012, INM captured increased media attention and intensified public pressure on the Canadian government when Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence began a hunger strike. She demanded to meet with both the Canadian government and with a representative of the British Crown, under whose authority the treaties that currently structure Indian-Canadian relations were made. Spence's hunger strike was a bold and definitive illustration of how it is women's bodies and women's leadership are so degraded by colonial society, and are so crucial to the survival of Indigenous peoples. The hunger strike also shifted the INM conversation to consider the roles of women in our movements.[2]

On the afternoon of December 17, 2012, just six days after the beginning of Chief Spence's hunger strike, a 36-year-old First Nations woman was walking to the store in the Ontario city of Thunder Bay when two men pulled over, forced her into their truck, beat her, strangled her, and raped her while explicitly telling her Indians didn't deserve treaty rights. The men told their victim they had raped First Nations women before and would do so again. As of today, the rapists' identities remain unknown. In the panicked wake of the crime, women in Thunder Bay were told to travel in groups, and First Nations students returning to school from the winter holiday were given personal alarms to carry with them. Unfortunately this atmosphere of fear is nothing new for Native women, especially those living in border towns or impoverished areas, places that are seen as prowling grounds for white predators. While the Thunder Bay case has received a significant amount of media attention because of its connection to INM, the town has been reported as a site for sex traffickers who kidnap and sell Native women and children across the border in Minnesota.[3] It was after I read about the December 17th rape and beating in Thunder Bay that I sat down to begin this essay. My main concern was that as movement created and led by women, INM was not living up to its responsibility to incorporate the goal of ending violence against women into demands for tribal sovereignty. It is specifically by attacking, raping, and killing Indigenous women that settler societies and governments attempt to gain control of Indigenous lands. In order to combat colonial intrusions onto our territories, one of the purported missions of INM, we need to defend the Native bodies that are all too often desecrated when settlers come to extract resources from Indigenous lands.

Pueblo Laguna feminist scholar Paula Gunn Allen states that the reason for the "physical and cultural genocide of American tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy." [4] Gynocracy is a societal structure that Allen argues was common to many North American tribal nations; one which centers women as leaders and decision makers, as well as care takers, storytellers, and producers. Once tribes began to interact with foreign governments, Native women were deemed illegitimate leaders or negotiators, and this tradition of gynocracy became one of many aspects of Indigenous governance targeted for destruction by the foreign government. For a settler colonial government to recognize the power Native women have historically held in their communities would be to recognize an alternative to a system that promotes men as superi-

or to women. If an alternative to the patriarchal structure of settler societies is recognized, other seemingly taken-for-granted aspects of this society might also be scrutinized — most crucially, their claim to land.

The presence of Native peoples and their embodied histories is always a threat to the progress of a patriarchal capitalist state that is founded and dependent on stolen land, previously governed according to radically different principles. Not only does their physical presence inconvenience access to land and resources, but their political and social history represent an ideological resistance to Western ways of life. When governments have been unable to completely eradicate Native presence, they have turned to policies of assimilation. These processes of assimilation are usually no less violent than armed conflict. Bill C-45 is just the latest in a long string of attempts to absorb Native lands into Canadian and corporate ownership. The sexual assault at Thunder Bay and the hundreds of other attacks on Indigenous women are myriad examples of how settler men try to intimidate First Nations into accepting this assimilation through acts of sexual terror. The Thunder Bay rapists essentially told their victim that they were punishing her and other women in her community for daring to be publicly noticed. If settler societies are invested in subjugating nations that recognize the power of women, they must also be invested in subjugating individual women. Thus, sexual violence becomes a tool to attack the nation through the person.

By attacking and degrading women specifically because they are Native, settlers attempt to claim ownership of the land by asserting their dominance over Indian bodies. However, it is important to note that these brutal attacks are not just the work of a few roaming sociopaths. Sexual violence may be publicly condemned, but it is implicitly supported by a government and settler society that must necessarily deem Indian life less worthy in order to justify their own presence. When I say settler society I mean not only the foreign government, whether it be Canadian or American, but the entire structure and attitudes that these governments support.

In her writing on the death of First Nations Sakimay woman Pamela George,⁵ Sherene Razack examines how sexual assault against Native women bolsters white settler men's sense of their own masculinity and their control over physical spaces. These physical spaces are often represented, for white men, by the bodies of Native women. Similar to the settler government's violent relationship

to the land, the sexual assailant relates to Native women as objects to be contained, exploited and disposed of.

Through their violent acts, these men attack the physical bodies of those people whose presence on the land is inconvenient for them. Razack explains that, “While it is certainly patriarchy that produces men whose sense of identity is achieved through brutalizing a woman,” sexual assault against Native women in particular confirms their national identity as “men entitled to the land and full benefits of citizenship” (126). The two young men who were eventually found responsible for the death of Pamela George, a woman who sometimes supported herself through sex work, had committed their crime with the sense that there would be little consequence for killing an “Indian hooker.” Throughout the trial of the Alex Ternowetzy and Steven Kummerfeld, the judge explicitly told the jury to consider the fact that George was paid to have sex with the men. By marking George as criminal, and not the men who paid her, the judge was already punishing George for her own murder.

The implication seems to be that George, as an Indian woman who did sex work, was accustomed to and deserving of a certain kind of violence. From the perspective of the white male settler, a sex worker cannot be raped and an Indian cannot be killed; they are already violated and dead by nature of their identity. It is the aim of the sexual assaulter to confirm this identity. The constant refrain of “murdered and missing” Native women, even amongst those working against the gender violence epidemic, collapses female Indigeneity with victimhood and seems to detract from the uniqueness and individuality of those women targeted for sexual violence. Pamela George, like many Native women, was stuck in a colonial limbo between a reservation and a city: both places where it was incredibly difficult for her to access public services or find consistent employment. Sex work was one of the ways she made money to survive. It is a choice made by many Native women living on the margins of a colonial society that does not provide a multitude of opportunities for them. However, while the Indigenous sex worker is a subject that comes up again and again, the clients who are on the other side of these transactions are largely unscrutinized. Native women are thus punished further for their own dispossession and the means by which they provide for themselves. This was all too apparent in the trial of Kummerfeld and Ternowetsky. The inability to see Native women, and especially Native women who are sex workers, as possessing the same quality

of personhood as settler men not only serves to justify the sexual violence that Native women experience at higher rates than any other group, but also further naturalizes the perspective that Native women are inherently violable.

In *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, author Andrea Smith argues that “attacks on Native women’s status are themselves attacks on Native sovereignty.” [6] Through her study of genocidal practices such as forced sterilization, environmental contamination, high numbers of rape cases, and the history of prolonged sexual violence at Indian boarding schools, Smith articulates the deep connection between interpersonal violence and state violence. When non-Natives sexually assault Native women, they do so with the understanding that those lives are inherently worth less in the eyes of settler governments. This dehumanization is necessary in order to justify the genocide of millions of Native people on which the US is founded; they must continue to be seen as worth less if non-Natives are to benefit from living off that stolen land and its many resources. Like the US soldiers in 1890 at Wounded Knee, who stretched the uteruses of murdered Native women across their hat bands, non-Native men have always employed violated Native women’s bodies as symbols of their conquest of Indian land.

This far-reaching history of sexual violence is so vast that many of our efforts include simply trying to document the problem and make it known against the dominant society’s desire to see cases of Native people’s murder or disappearance as past aberrations. After the Thunder Bay sexual assault, Operation Thunderbird was launched as an online map project marking the locations of hundreds of sexual violence crimes committed against Native women in Canada from 1975 to the present. This map was actually a recreation of the Missing Sisters map [7] created and maintained by the Save Wiyabi Project, a decolonization and anti-violence movement led by Native women. While the map and its huge concentrations of red dots was a shock to some outside of Canada, most Canadians seem well aware of the epidemic of violence against Native women. They just don’t seem to care enough to do anything about it. Highway 16 in particular is an infamous location for these hate crimes. A billboard sign on the highway warns, GIRLS DON’T HITCHHIKE—a typical call for women to change their behavior in order to prevent being attacked, instead of addressing the men who attack them. The government and general public does not investigate ways to stop men from seeing and treating Native women as inherently

violable, and instead encourages Native women to be fearful about inhabiting certain spaces.

When I moved to Vancouver in the fall of 2013, I began to truly understand how colonial violence against Indigenous women has been completely engrained in the fabric of society. In Vancouver's Downtown East Side, a neighborhood sometimes called the "urban rez," at least sixty Native women have disappeared in the past thirty years. Even if they have not disappeared, the Native women of the DTES have already been assigned to a fate of impoverishment. All too often, they suffer the ironic fate of not being noticed outside their tightly knit community until they have disappeared. While the population at large may choose to overlook the colonial circumstances these women live under, organizations in Vancouver and other areas with large Native populations have been working to end these patterns of violence before INM was ever tweeted. Some of these groups include tears4justice, Families of Sisters in Spirit, and the organizers of the Women's Memorial March, which happens every year on February 14th in the Downtown East Side.

Despite the efforts of such groups, every year we hear about more deaths and more disappearances, and the lists become a kind of numbing chant of defeat. In my darkest imaginings, the future appears only as a series of ever larger memorials: where rage and sorrow rise to a higher and higher pitch, yet nothing changes. More recently, people have been mourning the death of Loretta Saunders, an Inuk graduate student researching the disappearances and/or deaths of three Indigenous women in Nova Scotia. Saunders' body was found on the side of the Trans-Canada Highway in New Brunswick on February 26, 2014, thirteen days after she had gone missing. After her death a new hashtag was born: #ITENDSHERE. This became a heading for a series of essays posted on the Indigenous Nationhood Movement website and then shared a thousand times over on social media sites. From her death there also arose renewed calls for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Native women.

In the face of such relentless tragedy, is a national inquiry enough? I want to challenge the often automatically accepted idea that government recognition of the problem we already know exists is a productive goal. Instead of calling for a national inquiry, why not call for an action plan rooted in Native communities?

LEGISLATIVE APPROACHES TO ENDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A rare discussion about strategies for ending sexual violence against Native women in the United States arose in 2012 around Congressional debate over the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a federal law that strengthens federal penalties for sexual offenders and allocates funds to law enforcement as well as support services for survivors. VAWA has been around since 1994 and has been regularly renewed since. However, the 2012 additions to the act were rejected by the GOP-majority House because it gave “too many concessions” to LGBTQ, immigrant and Native American populations. One of these concessions granted tribal courts the power to prosecute non-Natives who sexually assault tribal members on tribal lands. Ever since the Major Crimes Act was passed in 1885, certain cases which occur on reservation lands (including incidents of rape) are under federal jurisdiction and thus handled by the FBI, which has a history of under-investigating and failing to convict non-Native sexual offenders.

Interestingly enough, it is those who opposed the additions to VAWA who made most clear the connection between tribal self-government and sexual assault against tribal women. The Heritage Foundation, an influential far-right think tank that has spearheaded a campaign of misinformation against VAWA claimed that the updated legislation would give unconstitutional federal power to tribes, thus violating the civil rights of alleged rapists and abusers. However, VAWA clearly states that any non-Indian prosecuted in tribal courts maintains all of their rights under the US constitution. Even this small amount of conditional sovereignty offered to tribes—basically, the right to prosecute offenders only according to American criminal justice standards—is far too much in the eyes of the Heritage Foundation. This group promotes the idea that allowing tribes to protect their communities is a menace to the US citizen’s freedom, when in fact the only freedom VAWA actually threatens is the freedom to rape and abuse Native women without consequence. The fact that VAWA, a piece of legislation that does not fundamentally challenge the conditions or precepts of settler-perpetuated violence on tribal lands, is met with such opposition says a lot about what Native people can expect from the US government.

Florida Senator Marco Rubio made similar remarks about his concerns “regarding the conferring of criminal jurisdiction to some Indian tribal governments over all persons in Indian country, including non-Indians.” This comment

reflects the problem that most US settlers have in understanding tribes as sovereign nations. When a US citizen enters the borders of any other nation, it is generally understood that they must abide by the laws of that country. If they break one of those laws, they will be prosecuted according to the laws of that nation. Thus, it would hold that when entering the borders of an Indian nation, you are beholden to their particular laws and courts. Statements such as Rubio's and those coming from the Heritage Foundation reveal the conservative's view that tribal nations are not worthy of full nationhood. Even in cases of sexual assault perpetrated by non-Natives, tribal nations are not even considered worthy of the conditional nationhood needed to prosecute these perpetrators.

While VAWA also has very vocal supporters both in the government and from various feminist organizations, very few voices are heard speaking about how to conceptualize an end to sexual violence against Native women that does not rely only on more law enforcement and legal convictions (Canadian, Tribal, or otherwise). In a post entitled "VAWA—A Black Feminist's Dissent,"⁸ blogger computerblu takes a critical look at how VAWA, as a type of "law-and-order legislation," supports a criminal justice system with a long history of hurting as many survivors as it helps. Instead of supporting such a system, computerblu hopes "feminist advocates would promote a politics grounded in racial justice that address the profound structural conditions that help drive domestic and sexual violence for so many of us."

For Native peoples these structural conditions are inextricably tied up with the colonial government that seeks to control Native bodies. By seriously investigating how internalized colonial notions of patriarchy and justice have allowed sexual violence to reign in terror over women's lives, tribes may find that it is their communities and traditions that hold the real power to overcome this problem. In the words of one of Andrea Smith's favorite maxims, it might motivate tribes to take power by making power. Many Native people have supported VAWA because it gives tribes power to prosecute sexual violence cases, but what if Native people instead took that power by creating their own responses to crimes that do not rely on recognition from the US government?

These considerations are important when we consider that any power of jurisdiction given to tribes by Congress is only permissible in a framework that mirrors the US justice system. This fact not only reveals the absurdity of con-

servative claims that non-Natives would lose their constitutional rights in tribal courts, but also raises questions about how sovereignty can be practiced when it is granted by a colonial government. By miming the institutions of the settler state, tribes essentially assimilate into a foreign form of governance, thus lending legitimacy to that dominant system. By supporting this kind of law and order legislation, tribal courts will send more people into the same prison system in which Native people are vastly over-represented. Putting more non-Native people into jails where there are already many Native people is nothing close to justice or progress. By asking for and accepting the judicial power to prosecute and send non-Native rapists to jail, tribes lend legitimacy to the oppressive institutions of the settler nation-state and the specific idea that it can “grant” tribes this power.

If tribes stop seeing sovereignty as something that can be given back and only under certain conditions, they might be able to get down to the very serious work of figuring out what asserting that sovereignty looks like. Much of the discourse around Idle No More centered on re-establishing a nation-to-nation relationship and it is important to consider what that means. Who can Native communities trust to represent their nations? The tribal governments who negotiate (and often compromise) with the federal governments have proven many times to protect myopic economic interests more than the interests of its members. If Idle No More is a movement about Native people reclaiming control of their lands and lives, decision-making cannot be left to what is essentially a tribal board of directors. The tribal governments are caught in a constant desire to be recognized by the federal government, and this recognition requires a mirroring of those same colonial institutions that support the oppression of Native people, in particular sexual assault. However, I see a troubling reflection of these desires for recognition in even our most “radical” and grassroots Indigenous movements. For instance, consider the blockade of Canadian Highway 401 that began on March 3, 2014, by a group of around 100 Mohawk men from Tyendinaga. Their single demand was a National Inquiry into the murdered and missing Indigenous women of Canada. This call is appealing because it has the appearance of a feasible goal: it would provide the sense that the murders and disappearances of so many women are no longer being ignored. But still, it is nowhere near a solution.

In her contribution to the #ItEndsHere series, “I am Accountable to Loretta

Saunders,” Sarah Hunt explains her rightful cynicism about the strategy of demanding a national inquiry:

Even if the Canadian government conducts an inquiry, we may see, as we did with the Pickton inquiry or the inquiry into Frank Paul’s death[9], that the government is not bound to implement its own findings. In these two examples, the answer to “justice” only seems to go as far as actually conducting an inquiry. The inquiry itself stands in for change. This is how colonial power perpetuates itself — the negligence and violence of Canadian law is precisely how violence against us is normalized. So the solutions to be found there are limited.[10]

As Hunt points out, “justice” for the murdered and missing women cannot be reached with something as paltry as the Canadian government confirming what so many people already know: violence against Native women is a systematic result of colonial policies. Our struggles do not need to be legitimized by an illegitimate governing force. Beyond these matters of principle is the plain truth that an inquiry without a commitment to implementation is useless to Native women.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

What other stances can we take to combat violence without relying on the institutions of our oppressors? In the 2012 short film “A Red Girl’s Reasoning,” director Elle Maija Tailfeathers presents a vision of how Native people can find “justice when the justice system fails.”[11] The protagonist, presumably the “Red Girl” of the title is a First Nations sexual assault survivor turned motorcycle-riding vigilante. Women who have seen their rapists let off easy by police and the courts hire the Red Girl to track down their rapists, force a confession from them and punish them physically for their acts. The Red Girl frames the necessity of her violence in terms of the historical precedence of sexual violence against Native women: “I’ve been on this warpath for six long lonely years but white boys have been having their way with Indian girls since contact.” It’s clear to our protagonist and the survivors who seek her out that they will never get their justice in the courts; those institutions have allowed white men to go about their ways without consequence for years. Having witnessed the failure of the state to protect them let alone hold their assailants accountable, the survivors create

their own means for determining how to address their assailant. It is no surprise that it is through a counter-attack of physical violence that the Red Girl and her fellow survivors find justice. Being able to put their assailants into a state of fear not only empowers them, but creates a much more effective deterrent to sexual violence than victim-blaming legal institutions. “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” may be a fictional film, but it provides a radical alternative and much more effective vision for the end of gender violence than state-based measures.

It is state-based measures and “criminalization-based strategies in general” which blogger computerblu states have been “a catastrophe for many survivors of color.”[12] Envisioning other strategies is something tribal communities will have to come together to work out, unrestrained by the need to conform to the colonial model of addressing sexual violence.

Tribal nations have their own forms of governance outside the imitative neo-colonial tribal governments; they simply need the courage and strength to enact them. It won’t be a simple or quick process, but it is time to stop waiting for foreign colonial governments to fix the problem which is inherent in their existence: the subjugation of Indigenous peoples through gender violence. The name Idle No More suggests this reversal from passively requesting tribal rights be respected, to actually asserting those rights. There is a realization of our power. This realization is the rumbling at the center of every round dance ash mob. First Nations aren’t asking the Canadian government, but demanding they meet them at the negotiation table as equals. Idle No More speaks to Indigenous peoples globally because it is more broadly about Native peoples revolutionizing their relationship to colonial power. We know treaty violations are one among the many violations committed against Native people’s bodies and the lands to which they are so intimately connected.

It is women whose bodies have been specifically targeted in the settler campaign for lands and resources. These women challenge their nations to consider how to solve the problem of settler violence instead of waiting for a federal or tribal government that has little interest in helping them. The lack of enforcement on reservations in the US, and the appalling number of missing women in Canada whose disappearances fade into bureaucratic obscurity, are signs of the settler nation-state’s total dismissal of Native lives as equal to those of settler lives. Our bodies and land are seen as that which can be sacrificed for the greater good.

But Idle No More and the developing Indigenous Nationhood Movement can be the beginning of our refusal to be sacrificed. We begin to fight back by refusing to see ourselves the way they see us. We begin to fight by testifying to the strength of our nations, our relations, our mothers.

The sexual assault case in Thunder Bay should be a wake-up call for those who would wait to address settler violence against women until after the revolution. There is simply no way for an Indigenous nationhood movement to succeed without its women. And by empowering tribal women, respecting their place at the forefront of the battle for nationhood, Native communities will already deliver a blow to the colonial notion that Native women are insignificant easy victims.

So far, I've addressed how and why certain colonial policies have exploited Native women and made them more vulnerable to sexual violence. However, we need to also unpack what insidious colonial attitudes are actually replicated in our movements. We need to stay ever vigilant about making truly anti-oppressive discourses. For instance, in her piece for the #ItEndsHere series, Leanne Simpson states that the issue is not just violence against women but gender violence more broadly. "The idea and implementation of a gender binary is at the root of heteropatriarchy the system of power which has created the dire situation for Indigenous peoples, women in particular." Simpson also makes the important point that "we do not even have statistics about violence against Indigenous Two Spirit, LGBTQIA and gender non-conforming people." [13] Too often when we talk about Indigenous women we fall back into the comfort of this colonial gender violence. We cannot continue to tack on "two spirit" to the end of our conversations and believe we are doing right by our trans and gender variant relatives. Simply acknowledging "two-spirit" peoples (a generalization in itself of a multitude of tribal conceptions of gender identity) does not account for the particular ways in which Western conceptions of gender have wreaked violence on Indigenous peoples.

The hierarchy of innocence that silently underlies the discourse around Indigenous victims of gender violence is troubling. In her essay "Against Innocence," Jackie Wang discusses how "innocence becomes a necessary precondition for the launching of anti-racist political campaigns." [14] Wang primarily addresses anti-Black acts of violence, but her argument about the preconditions for empa-

thizing with racialized victims of state or interpersonal violence can be extended as well to Native women. Innocence for victims of violence, Wang points out, is usually equated with “nonthreatening to white civil society.” [15] However, it is not just white civil society which rejects certain peoples as deserving of empathy; movements themselves will often neglect those marred by lack of respectability in order to make their demands or appeals more palatable. If our movements fail to account or fight for sex workers, prison inmates, the homeless, the mentally ill, the addicts, we will only be reinforcing the twisted values of the settler colonial state and its conception of which lives matter.

Our conception of Indigenous womanhood remains far too narrow. It is all too often the straight, cis, mother figure who is upheld as the Indigenous women worth fighting for. We forget the trans women whose lives are equally important and often overlooked. Mothers are crucial to our nations, but they are not all women. People who can bear children are important to our nations, but they are not all women. What about the women who are not mothers? What about the women who are alone, who are excluded from their reserves and communities because of the enforcement of colonial law? All Native women and those whose gender has made them targets of the violent imposition of colonial heteropatriarchy should be a part of our movements, not just cis women. Loretta Saunderson's death was tragic, but the media coverage often made me uncomfortable because it was a light-skinned, white-passing, reportedly pregnant member of an academic community that propelled the call, #ITENDSHERE. When our movements reproduce colonial hierarchies of who is deserving of our attention and energies, our nations and communities are only made weaker and more aligned with our oppressors than with our people.

Since my initial engagement with INM in 2013, I have only begin to truly understand the scope of violence and history of resistance Native women and peoples have faced. There have been times I wanted to abandon this work because it was too hard to focus on the particulars of a seemingly endless assault against the people I love. As I was putting the final edits on this essay, I learned about Marlene Bird, a homeless First Nations woman beaten and burned so badly in Prince Albert, Saskatoon, that she has had to undergo two leg amputations and facial reconstruction surgery. As with the woman in Thunder Bay and so many other Indigenous women, her assailant remains at large.

So I ask, what is to be done? Much of the work has been about spreading awareness and raising consciousness. These are important projects, but they are not a solution. This essay, a collection of words built on the words of so many before me, is not a solution. In the end, it is Native communities themselves who must create the solutions, but I have some ideas about where to start. I believe in arming Indigenous women with weapons to fight back against those who would threaten their lives. I believe in halting all ongoing and proposed resource extraction projects such as oil pipelines and tar sands operations which not only destroy Indigenous lands but also create situations disproportionately dangerous for Native women. I believe in centering our discourses and movements around trans women, sex workers, and all those who do not fit nicely into our idealized vision of Native women. I believe in empowering all Native women and remembering all victims of colonial violence, the mothers and sisters and daughters and also those who stand alone on the extreme margins formed by dispossession, poverty and prejudice. As the movement moves forward, we must never forget the women who brought us to this moment and the history of sexual violence that has worked to stop them. In remembering them, we remember what makes us not only survivors, but warriors. We should remember the women warriors who came before us and fight like hell for the lives of all Native women today.

NOTES

[1] These two movements are perhaps the most influential predecessors to Idle No More. AIM began as an organization of urban Natives and grew into a kind of pan-Indian action group, which organized a march to Washington DC and occupation of Wounded Knee, The Oka Stand-off occurred over the summer months of 1990 when the Mohawk communities at Kanasatake refused to allow a golf course to be extended into their territory and Canada responded with the largest deployment of troops since the Korean War.

[2] Although, further conversations about colonial gender violence still seem sidelined in the overarching calls for renegotiating nation-to-nation relations between tribes and the Canadian government, and in internal debates about the movement's end goals.

[3] Christine Stark, a Masters student at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, has spoken widely with the press on her research into the sex trafficking of Native women. In a news article from August, 2013, she is quoted saying, ““I have spoken with a woman who was brought down from Thunder Bay on the ships and talks about an excessive amount of trafficking between Canada and the Duluth-Superior harbor.” That same news article from CBC News also draws a connection between a lack of housing for Native women and survival sex work. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/native-canadian-women-sold-on-u-s-ships-researcher-says-1.1325167>

[4] Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. 3.

[5] Razack, Sherene. “Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George.” *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, edited by Sherene Razack, pp. 123-156.

[6] Smith, Andrea. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2005. pp 138.

[7] <https://missingsisters.crowdmap.com/>

[8] “VAWA—A Black Feminist Dissent.” *Computer Blue*. <http://computerblue.tumblr.com/post/38322273971/vawa-a-black-feminist-dissent>

[9] The Pickton inquiry refers to an investigation into the disappearances of more than twenty women in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side. Robert Pickton was charged with 27 counts of first-degree murder and convicted of six. Many of Pickton’s victims were Indigenous sex workers, many of whose remains were found disposed of on the Pickton pig farm. The Inquiry into Frank Paul’s death occurred after Frank Paul, a 48 year old Mi’kmaq man, died of exposure and hypothermia after being dumped in a Vancouver alley by the police. The inquiry was to decide whether the Crown prosecutors were biased in their decision to not charge any of the police officers involved with manslaughter or criminal negligence. It was found that they were not.

[10] Hunt, Sarah. “I am Accountable to Loretta Saunders,” *Indigenous Nation-*

hood Movement. March 3 2014. <http://nationsrising.org/i-am-accountable-to-loretta-saunders/>

[11] A Red Girl's Reasoning. Dir. TailFeathers, Elle-Maija. 2012.

[12] "VAWA—A Black Feminist Dissent." Computer Blue. <http://computerblue.tumblr.com/post/38322273971/vawa-a-black-feminist-dissent>

[13] Simpson, Leanne. "Not Murdered and Not Missing." Indigenous Nationhood Movement, March 5 2014. <http://nationsrising.org/not-murdered-and-not-missing/>

[14] Wang, Jackie, "Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety." *Lies.1.1* (2012):145-172.

[15] Wang, Jackie. p. 147.

