

**VARC March 3rd 2024: Intersectional Black
Anarchafeminism**

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Femme Queen, Warrior Queen

Beyond Representation, Toward Self-Determination

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This piece comes after the International Transgender Day of Visibility and is born from discussions I have engaged in about gender/sexual variance in Black and Indigenous cultures. It takes on the idea of “centering” Black trans women and transfemmes, and asks us to move from a politics of “representing” our identities toward a politics of self-determination and Third Worldism. It draws on insights from the Street Trans* Action Revolutionaries, Claudia Jones, the Combahee River Collective, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, and more. It emphasizes how liberal reductions of Black QTGNC identity will always, inevitably, lead to both transmisogynoir and bourgeois treachery in movements, thus hindering freedom for all.

Bear in mind that this text is like a rant or read, so some of the sentences are run-on, full of words. The content is an expression of frustration with how overlooked the material and structural positions of Black trans women and transfemmes is. There are resources at the end to help one get a context for all the topics raised here. Please engage this document with honesty, good faith, and without co-option. It is an ongoing project, not a static piece. The aim is to push Black liberation as a whole to a more developed phase. If you do not intend to engage in a culture of revolutionary learning and movement building while engaging this piece, move along.

”Look for me in the whirlwind

With the bow in the cloud

My light will appear

In ribbons all around.

I’m the angel of grace

Not greed nor guile.

I’m the promise of life

As the fire rains down.”

Elegy for the Dolls Who Could Fly, prof.Ound

In Black Trans struggle in the United States, there are intramural issues that have exploded around the idea of who should be at the "center." In today's climate, the discourse has become divisive, although it did not begin that way. Rather than suggesting that the notion of 'centering' be discarded, I want to revisit it, and ask us to basically 'go back to the drawing board,' ideologically speaking. There is too much exclusion and expression of pain happening among those of us of trans, nonbinary, gender variant experience; and yet, the concept in question did not come into our history for no reason. I am here to make a critique, as well as an offering.

Let us start by first differentiating reactionary versus revolutionary criticism. A revolutionary criticism moves us to higher unity, both practically and ideologically. It seeks to help us advance movements that radically transform the material conditions and internalized antagonistic ideas, relations, and behaviors we have. A reactionary criticism, however, only adds to the divisiveness and theoretical unclarity. It seeks to have movements simply preserve, cosmetically alter, maintain some or all aspects of the current material structures, and the related antagonistic behaviors, relations, and thinking we internalize. A revolutionary criticism is also expressed tactfully whereas a reactionary criticism is not. There is a time and a place and if one is aware that a certain population is currently under attack, then critiques of their movements should not be publicly aired right at that moment unless it is done in a careful way.

These are principles I learned from my Anarqa-Pantherist background, based on how the Panthers spoke of proper criticism of national liberation movements and socialist movements that are often being attacked by the United States. Anarqa-pantherism is a trans- and disability centered expression of the "Autonomist" and feminist legacies that were present in the history of the BPP, despite its cisheteromasculine and top-down structure. We combine socialist and nationalist insights with transfeminist, disability justice, abolitionist insights. That's the perspective I come to this discussion with.

There are a lot of reactionary criticisms of how the "centering" of Black trans women and transfemme struggles looks. These criticisms punch down at the gurls, and do not help us understand our conditions better or resist them more effectively. Some people look at these criticisms as "Oppression Olympics," which means that people are essentially clambering to see who is most oppressed. In my opinion, the reactionary nature of these criticisms of 'centering' is not really about people competing to see who is more oppressed. At its core, the issue is people clambering for supposed discursive or material power in movements, by throwing daggers at other people of trans and gender variant experience. What we see is competing visions of the "proper" way to represent or include or name our experiences in movement spaces, because ultimately folk are vying for resources.

This issue is inherently liberal. And it is transmisogynoir because it means people are not understanding something all Black people should know full well: visibility isn't privilege, neither discursively nor materially.

Transmisogynoir is a term coined by writer Trudy. It builds on the notion of "misogynoir" coined by Moya Bailey which describes antiblack misogyny (sexism faced by Black women both from outside and within the Black community). With misogynoir, Black women undergo "complete dehumanization as a "contradiction" to White womanhood." This is done oftentimes through a hypersexualization that comes from the history of enslavement. Misogynoir means that since antiblackness and slavery shapes modern definitions of what it means to be human,

then to be properly woman (i.e., she who isn't animalized or criminalized, but civilized) is to be white.

Transmisogynoir as a concept moves the discussion of antiblack misogyny to an analysis of media portrayals and the structural position forced onto women of trans experience. The Transgender Law Center outlines that transmisogynoir is about cultural attitudes and interpersonal violence as well as institutional oppression (including at the hands of the State). In transmisogynoir, the convergence of antiblackness and misogyny is complicated by the "set of beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes that cis people's gender identities and expressions are superior to those of trans people," known collectively as *cissexism*.

Cissexism comes from social formations and structures such as the nuclear family, medical industrial complex, and the church. Through cissexism, these institutions reinforce a very rigid, binary, and biologically reductionist understanding of gender. Their purpose is to control our relations and behavior through legal and extra-legal means (including violence) to ultimately divide our labors in a way that serves capitalism/colonialism and enslavement. It complicates the discussion of misogynoir because it allows cisgender (especially heterosexual) Black women to legitimate their gender at the expense of Trans and gender variant Black women, even as all of us face a common dehumanization, animalization, criminalization under antiblack logics. Therefore, if the racial figuration of humanity means that to be properly woman (or man) one must be white, well, to even approximate whiteness in the first place (which equates to not being seen as animalistic, criminal, and uncivilized), one must be cisgender or heterosexual and fit the mandates of the church, nuclear family, and biomedical institutions. Anyone who fails to do so is, according to the Anarkata Statement, "scapegoated as the quintessence of negro depravity," and this is the position that Afro-trans women and Afro-transfemmes confront.

Due to this, Black trans women are not just dehumanized in contradistinction to white womanhood, but also specifically demonized as "treacherous" (like Trudy implies) to manhood/patriarchy. We are painted as *predatory* or *threatening* to all Black people, including cis women. We are seen as a "stumbling block," so to speak, in the way of Black people's quest to be given humanity and civilized, non-criminalized status. This *demonization* and *scapegoating* is rationalized by religious beliefs and pseudo-scientific ideas about human gonads, chromosomes, and other phenotypic/genetic characteristics that are marked as "biological sex" according to the West. More than just considered inhuman, Black trans women and transfeminine people are painted as essentially *monstrous* (please see the story of Mary Jones), and the premier evidence of what is wrong with Black people in the history of evolution.

Along with the ascription of monstrosity, there is the *pathologization* of Black trans womanhood and transfemininity, which can be traced back to the colonial accounts of many forms of African gender/sexual variance. The Europeans who witnessed and documented these experiences often marked them as either profane or as symptoms of mental illness. Doing so allowed them to rationalize their invalidation of African self determination *across the board*. Pathologization of Afro-transness and Afro-queerness helped the Man create an excuse for their "civilizing" mission and cultural imperialism, and ultimately the robbery of land and bodies and labor.

Transmisogynoir is not just a specific kind of discursive project (a way of framing Black trans women and transfeminine people). Transmisogynoir is a specific set of *material struggles* under capitalism and colonialism, that position Black trans women and transfemmes at the crossroads of multiple forms of domination: national oppression, gender exploitation, ableist suppression,

and class war. It's for this reason that transmisogynoir is used to delegitimize Black liberation as a whole.

One example of this is the story of Frances Thompson. After the US Civil War, Black people in the South established a radical set of changes to society known as "Reconstruction." In response to these political, economic, and cultural advancements in Black life, our people were met with increased waves of violence from white people. Media narratives abounded at the time which implied that because slavery was over, Black people were "reverting" to our savage/heathen ways. In Memphis in 1866, the police and fascists raided a Black town and committed unspeakable atrocities against Black people, especially women. One of those women, Frances Thompson, was Transgender/gender variant. Frances Thompson was also physically disabled. She helped testify in the legal system about the violence done to her and other Black women, and against her community as a whole. However, doubt was cast on her story, and this skepticism was used to call the entire project of Reconstruction and radical Black freedom into question. It is a strong possibility her transness was used as an example of the "reversion back to savagery" that white people had said required their violent suppression of our communities. What enables this narrative is the historical legacy of transmisogynoir: how cissexism, misogyny, and antiblackness intersect to dehumanize, animalize, criminalize, demonize, pathologize and scapegoat Black disabled trans women.

"She's giving me fierce

She's giving me proud

She's giving me wild thing

Man caint house!

She's giving me fierce

She's giving me proud

She's giving me wild thing

Man caint hold me!

giving me fierce

giving me proud

giving me wild thing

Man caint purrrr!"

SQuAD chant

It serves the capitalists to throw Black trans women and transfemmes under the bus. Transmisogynoir is a fascist and imperialist strategy. From that perspective, we must assume that the recent waves of visibility given to some of the gurlz is not liberation but a *bourgeois* project. It is not according Black trans women and transfemmes uneven power or "privilege" in any way, whether in the broader society nor in organizing spaces. The murders of Black trans women and transfemmes are becoming hyper-visible only because of a *certain profit oriented version* of 'centering' that *makes a resource* out of us and our histories for others' gain. The framing of trans issues around these murders is a tokenizing and voyeuristic project run by opportunistic forces: whether the media, various liberal trans and non-trans led nonprofit/advocacy organizations, and even some individualistically minded trans folk (gurls included), who use this discursive edifice for clout and for their coin. The "centering" here does not translate to addressing the *material conditions* that put working class Black trans women and transfemmes at risk. And in fact, the movement spaces taking up this project tend to be absent of Black trans women altogether; or they exploit the labor of the very few gurls who are present.

One of the main ways transmisogynoir exploits us in movements is that Black trans women and transfemmes are reduced to what a Black trans woman radical I know named Lilith Asieo calls the *infomammy*. The infomammy, according to Asieo, is a "beacon of subversive information." It is like the general Mammy trope from slavery, where the sexual logics of white supremacy are used to deny the so-called "Mammy's" agency, positioning her on behalf of someone else's interests. The Infomammy is a specifically trans relegation that blends with hostile attitudes about Black trans women and transfemmes' supposedly dangerous nature, to then say we are valuable as people only in terms of how much "information" or inspiration we can provide (how much people can be educated by us).

The infomammy trope is almost always shaped around appeals to the memory of Black trans women radicals like Marsha P Johnson. Marsha's life, class politics, her humanity, the experiences she was responding to, her journey as both a person and a revolutionary, her creativity, her spirituality, are often flattened when people talk about her. She is turned into *merely a touchstone for the political and intellectual inspiration of everyone else*. That is Infomammy. This trope is forced onto many other Black trans women and transfemmes, whether they are radical or not, and creates a standard to which we must be held, as well as an essentialist understanding of Black trans womanhood and transfemininity.

Then, due to Marsha P Johnson's relationship to other militant trans women of color like Sylvia Rivera, a similar form of political idolization as the "infomammy" trope is projected onto all colonized trans women (as Feroz Anir makes clear), violently and reductively. This further marginalizes Black trans women and transfemmes, because it is used by certain radical spaces to adopt a "TWOC" (trans women of color) framework as a form of political minstrelsy. Here, real or feigned *proximity* to Black trans womanhood and transfemininity is used to move resources to non-Black QTGNC people while still *claiming* to "center" and include or represent Black trans women and transfemmes even if that is not the case. This is *not a relationship of material solidarity* in the way Marsha and Sylvia operated.

This political minstrelsy operates alongside the general *cultural* minstrelsy in which people of all genders and races (including straight people) who aren't Black trans women and transfemmes are more increasingly adopting the gurls' aesthetics, lingo, practices, ideas, historical references, and more in their everyday lives, for social capital, and in their careers for actual clout and coin – all while disrespecting us. The general society treats Black trans women and transfemmes as

nothing more than a cultural resource; a lot of movement spaces are doing the same regarding our intellectual and political contributions and history. The more this trend heightens, the more danger is brought to us in the broader world as cis/het people continue to bemoan the moral state of the world and serve segregation-nostalgia teas in their desires for a world before Pride.

On the heels of this reaction, waves of police repression, interpersonal violence even at protests against our oppression, and transphobic legislation converge to endanger all QTGNC people, both in the US and abroad. Meanwhile, in movement spaces transmisogynoir in the form of an "Infomammy" experience means that whenever Black trans women are being included in so-called radical settings, the voices supposedly being "centered" are again only heard on *someone else's terms*. We are never allowed to step into our own revolutionary destinies to address what is affecting us. And our past is often weaponized against our interests. For example, the memory of Marsha P Johnson is decontextualized in a similar way to how liberal multiculturalism has watered down Martin Luther King, Jr (or how white leftists water down Fred Hampton): it is used to uphold chauvinism and further deny Black trans agency under the guise of "centering." We are not allowed to discover our mission as a generation on our own authority; all we can do is that which fits other folks' interests, or else we are invalid. And this is because people want to exploit our histories and political praxis for their own ends. There is no actual, unconditional respect just for who we are as people, periodt, without strings attached.

This is the subtext for even Huey P Newton's famous speech in which he critiqued homophobia, and sexism in the Black Panther Party. And such chauvinism therefore shows up in many (often straight led) revolutionary Black left movements. While it is possible that Newton made this speech after meeting Sylvia Rivera at some point and was speaking in good faith and with good intentions (for example, he acknowledged his own prejudices and he was emphatic that the mistakes of individual women and gay people should not be used against our movements as a whole), his views echo a precedent where QTGNC people are often positioned as *always already needing to prove* to cis men and to others that our movements are not a threat to their liberation, a sentiment that stems from transmisogynoir.

To reiterate: political fetishization, especially in the form of an Infomammy trope, means respect for Black trans women and transfemmes' lives, labors, and liberation is only ever framed around demonstrating how much our politics benefits someone else's political values, interests, sentiments, rather than it being valid *simply our own terms*. Due to this, whenever Black trans women and transfemmes try to assert *our* own political legacies and *our* political agency in many radical settings, we are ignored or even villainized and cast out, framed as aggressive, controlling, manipulative, even abusive, dangerous, power hungry... all because we push things that don't align with the interests of those claiming to "center" us.

To make matters worse, the more unagreeable you are, especially if you are dark skinned, fat, or disabled, and if you do not fit limited standards of femininity that are often used to police the boundaries of womanhood – then if your politics don't conform to or if they challenge the interests of the tokenizing/voyeuristic discursive economy disguised as 'centering,' on top of that – the likelihood of you being first Infomammied then ignored, demonized, blackballed, shaded, or disposed of is raised. In all, this creates a milieu where in order to be somewhat believed or somewhat included, Black trans women and transfemmes must be subject to respectability politics and the dehumanizing experience of 'pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind' (to quote from the Combahee River Collective); constantly proving our worth in order to suppos-

edly be represented in the space. And this is while retriggering ourselves constantly, because we have to navigating a discursive arena that amounts to nothing but trauma porn in its hyperfocus on our deaths; and while our innovations and insights and theorizing are coopted on the regular, and our every move is regarded as potentially threatening or malicious in some way.

None of this serves Black trans women and transfemmes. Who benefits are often so called 'allies,' especially cis gays (including cis queer women) who use proximity to the gurls for clout, and through the pretense of 'centering' us can hoard power and limited resources for themselves. Oftentimes they abuse other trans folk, both women and other maGes. Some of them will frame these practices as a feminist project and create language like "women and femmes" to push others out like trans men and trans masc folk and even so-called "AMAB" TGNC people. Some of them will throw around the language of 'male socialization' or 'toxic masculinity' to castigate any Black QTGNC person across the gender spectrum who doesn't fit their standards of behaving, and to police the political discourse present. Some of them will justify this (bio)essentialist pseudofeminism under the guise of "sisterhood" with trans women defined as a so-called 'femmeprimacy,' that forgets that masc women, including TGNC women exist; and forgets that manhood and masculinity are neither synonyms nor completely wedded to the dictates of cis life/practice/culture; and forgets that femininity and womanhood are also wrought with the contradictions of internalized patriarchal and misogynistic standards; and forgets that biological sex alone can not be used to explain the existence of trans/nonbinary people who still need to unlearn cisheteronormativity; and ultimately neglects to understand that class and hierarchy provide the material context for the toxic and oppressive things each QTGNC person must unlearn. Though they claim this neglectful project is about protecting Black trans women and transfemmes from violence, really it becomes about bourgeois self-interest: about punching down at trans people to hash out their issues with cis/het men and develop social clubs that benefit their interests.

All around, a toxic organizing culture ensues: now, trans folk who are not nonbinary will punch down at nonbinary folk by projecting their issues with greedy, bourgeois, transphobic cis people onto the whole nonbinary community. Then, nonbinary people who are not also trans women, in turn, instead of seeing the broader context of tokenization and voyeurism happening, will punch down at the gurls because they don't feel 'represented' in a discursive arena built around supposedly 'centering' those who are dying.

In the end, this is divisiveness that harms the whole community, but because, as Malcolm X said, "the most disrespected is the Black woman," the divisiveness ends up falling at the feet of Black trans women and transfemmes as if we are to blame, as if we are at fault, and as if the risks of violence facing the gurls is something to be clambered for.

"Get off the grind!

Get on the prow!

Be the wild Thing

Man cannot house!

Sis, get off the grind!

Get on the prow!

Be the wild Thing

Man cannot house!

Sis, get off the grind!

Get on the prow!

Be the wild Thing

Man cannot house!" - SQuAD chant

I want to espouse a revolutionary criticism of how "centering" is currently being practiced. In order to do this, we must revisit our understanding of identity politics. Let's start with the Combahee River Collective. The women of the CRC were Black lesbian/queer feminists. They had been involved in the Civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, and they were socialists. In all these movements they kept being pushed aside because, again, as Malcolm X once said, the "most unprotected is the Black woman." This erasure was true then and is true now.

It's the 60s/70s though, one of the most revolutionary periods in modern history, so the women of the CRC were not going to let themselves be pushed out of radical struggle. They came together and decided that they needed to take the various revolutionary understandings and frameworks being developed, and ground them in an analysis of the *particular material conditions and histories that Black/queer women face*. The women of the CRC identified that *because* these conditions kept being ignored, a *fuller understanding of the whole* totality of capitalist and imperialist oppression was severely limited. This was an analytical assumption that Black feminists from before their time, such as Claudia Jones and Frances Beal, have acknowledged. As a result, the CRC espoused the idea that "[i]f Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression."

This was never, and has never been an attempt to develop a discursive hierarchy built on essentializing Black women, but rather to upend the hierarchies that already exist through advancing class struggle from the margins. Their analysis helps us fight the convergence of "interlocking" oppressions through "centering" the struggles that are forced to experience and theorize around those intersections yet get overlooked. Centering was never about inverting the exclusionary discourse of the cis male and white led movements at the time. It was about "stretching" class analysis, like Fanon did, through attention to often "invisibilized" aspects of the material conditions, labor exploitation, control over bodily autonomy, and other features of capitalist/colonial domination.

In conclusion, Identity politics was about taking a revolutionary anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics and grounding it in the struggles of the most marginal, period. The emphasis was on anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics, because the women of the CRC were Third Worldists. We need to apply this to how we talk about queer/trans history of struggle too.

Let's look at the same time period, 60s/70s. Now everyone talks about Stonewall. The uprising against the police. I want to highlight that at Stonewall, a similar thing was going on as to what led to Combahee. You had trans and gender variant folk who were also in the Civil rights movement, and the anti-war movement, and other movements. Sylvia Rivera talks about this. She was in the Young Lords Party. Marsha P Johnson had a "Gay Power" sign because they were both involved in the Black Power movement, but from a trans centered standpoint. She co-founded the Gay Liberation Front that supported the Black Panther Party materially (this actually caused a split in the org between more liberal, white queers, and the more radical, non-white, often gender variant activists).

Marsha and Sylvia eventually co-led a whole autonomous revolutionary formation known as the Street Trans Action Revolutionaries (in response to liberalism and white/cis exclusion in even the GLF). STAR put out a manifesto. What we see in this Manifesto is a Third World outlook: an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics. When they talk about trans liberation, they use the term "self determination." Self determination means when a community has the right and the material structures or material power to control their collective destiny. It is an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist concept central to Afrikan liberation movements. The STAR gurls were defining it in a trans and gender variant context. They start out the Manifesto by naming STAR as part of the "revolutionary armies" of that day, referring to the various anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles of that time period. They end the Manifesto by demanding a people's government, which was, again, a Third Worldist concept; and they literally say that trans people should have "full participation" in revolutionary struggle. The STAR gurls were therefore practicing something very similar to what the women of the CRC were doing: they were grounding revolutionary politics in the experience of the most marginal. STAR, in their outlook and praxis, focused on the various *material conditions* the QTGNC working class community faced, from medical apartheid to the carceral state and its violences, to workplace discrimination, and more. From a completely different angle then, without necessarily using the term "identity politics," STAR developed a revolutionary framework from the same kind of approaches as the Combahee River Collective.

This was true across the 60s/70s when it came to organizations led by women and other marginalized genders. From their contributions we "stretched" revolutionary traditions, so that we would address both the contradictions of labor and land exploitation that anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements battle with, as well as the contradictions of love, the lived bodily experience, and even the hierarchical praxis in our liberation movements themselves. This allows us to understand what exactly are the five general spheres of contestation, that make up the iron fist by which the Man maintains a hold of the earth and of our people. And so now we affirm that what we must transform from the root are these affairs of land, labor, love, lived bodily experience, and liberatory struggle. This is so the material structure of our societies can be chirally re-oriented in a revolutionary fashion: from the right to the Left, from domination, integration, and exploitation to autonomy, intersectionality, and self determination. That's how Anarkatas roll at least.

However, today, when trans, gender variant, queer identities are discussed, the approach being used is not the dialectic between Third World (anti-colonial and anti-capitalist) politics and the material conditions faced by the most marginal under the QTGNC Umbrella. It is not a CRC "identity politics" approach. It is not a STAR "full participation"/"self determination" approach. The focus isn't on addressing the contradictions of the Man's world in a conscientious, intersectional, even anti-hierarchical fashion. What we see instead is a neoliberal representation politics,

where people insist on simply being able to show up as they are in whatever label/community under the Umbrella they occupy, and that is enough. This is true even though many trans and queer organizations practice the politics of Abolitionism.

Now, I'm not here to shade abolition movements. I am an abolitionist. The development of Anarcha-pantherism would be impossible without Abolitionism because it is in the prison struggles where the Panther and other Black Power era autonomists and feminists synthesized their critiques of cisheteromasculinism and hierarchies in the revolutionary movement. This is especially true as the carceral state was eventually used to decimate Black radical movements and suppress their impact into today. Anarcha-pantherists affirm abolition from an autonomist standpoint because we believe that our people must understand that in terms of community defense and the arbitration of disputes, addressing interpersonal violence and abuse: we must rely on our own means, not that of the master's government system and technology of suppression. We build safety when we provide for our people materially.

But Anarcha-Pantherists also taught me abolition from a feminist perspective, by pointing out that it is disseminated in the political movements led by QTGNC people for valid reasons. STAR's praxis was Abolitionist too: in an interview, Marsha P Johnson makes clear her and her sisTars' concerns with the experiences that working class TGNC folk had with the legal system, prisons, police, and the economic oppression it all operates in. The STAR manifesto explicitly demands an end to police repression, and at the end of the day, STAR came out of unrest that had exploded at Stonewall (a riot against the police). To this day, Black QTGNC communities in particular are on the front lines of both criminalization and poverty. This is due to the hybridly *de jure* and *de facto* "Jewel Crow" segregation structure that raises our risk of facing the police. It takes the form of exclusion from families, religious communities, and radical movements, as well as denial of access to housing, employment, healthcare, civil liberties, physical safety, and more that are reinforced by people's biases. Abolition is a central part of what it means to fight for Black trans liberation because of these material conditions.

However, when we are starting from an anti-carceral politics *first and foremost*, this can limit our political vision. It often pushes aside an analysis of the colonial and capitalist contradictions that the *carceral state is a function of*. "Jewel" Crow, which is to say the legal and extra-legal suppression of our Pride, and the exploitation of "star people" as Marsha called us like we are diamonds mined in blood to be held, is an imperialist project. Compare this to the Civil Rights struggle. This struggle also contends with the legal- and extralegal forms of racial violence visited upon Black people under colonialism and capitalism. It was/is a response to segregation, which served imperialist interests. Yet, rather than the struggle against the old Jim Crow being a revolutionary project, it was often about about human rights. Today, Abolitionism is a struggle against the new Jim Crow; especially for QTGNC people in particular, due to the unique kinds of criminalization we continue to face across the colonial and capitalist world. Yet, it is not necessarily a revolutionary movement. And so, just like integration was often the face of the struggle against the old Jim Crow, today we continue to see reformists lead the anti-carceral movement, with their focus on policy and Trojan horse- style proceduralist, pseudo-militant reclamation of allocated resources...rather than focusing on class struggle, autonomy, and decolonization.

"Kitty kat, kat-kat

kat-kat-kat

Power!

Kitty kat, kat-kat

kat-kat-kat

Power!

Kitty kat, kat-kat

kat-kat-kat

Power!

Kitty kat, kat-kat

kat-kat-kat

Wild thing man caint purrrrr!" - SQuAD chant

The neoliberal angle is the context for why our movement spaces get focused more so on which labels under the TGNC Umbrella is 'represented' in an organization, or "named" in a movement, rather than on the *context* for that representation and self-naming. But, more insidiously, it is why conflict over discursive "privilege" in this economy of representation, or more specifically over limited resources and power, starts to get waged. This means, the fact that the deaths of Black trans women and transfemmes are becoming a point of media attention and visibility, the fact that spaces are claiming to "center" us with that in mind, is seen as material/political power or access, even though these spaces are not revolutionary enough to be truly guaranteeing that power to the most marginal. The representation of Black trans women and transfemme issues, presumably eclipsing the representation other issues under the TGNC Umbrella becomes the main focus and even a site of anger and competition, as if representation or visibility is saving the gurls, or is Black trans power, or is a substitute for revolutionary analysis, or is synonymous with the model that STAR and the CRC was using.

Now, we all know that nonblack people of color seeing the media cooption of Black death as "privilege" is idealistic, its own form of antiblack dismissal and trivialization. Why would we then subject Black trans women and transfemmes in particular to the same erasive, immaterial, and completely baseless line of thinking? This is what is happening in reactionary criticisms of "centering" as a concept. We have trans/nonbinary folk under the Umbrella who are not trans women and transfemme trying to vie for represented space within what the gurls know to be a tokenistic, voyeuristic, and bourgeois discursive space of visibility, on behalf of their "experiences." These individuals direct anger or resentment at the gurls for being overrepresented here, which is a myopic view of the situation: it is reactionary, transmisogynist, idealist, and is not even beneficial to their own liberation or that of all QTGNC people.

The only people who benefit from hypervisibility are the institutions which put attention on Black people's deaths of any gender: media executives, academics, bag chasers and clout chasers, nonprofits, and other agents of capitalism and colonialism (as well as individualistic QTGNC ppl of all genders who want to exploit the discursive terrain for their gain). But to arrive at that understanding takes looking at the actual material conditions of the situation, and one cannot do that if they are so focused on representation of trans experiences in movement spaces (because their politics is informed not by revolutionary traditions, but an orientation toward reform). Liberalism is the cause of infighting and divisiveness in our community as Black QTGNC folk begin to vie over representation and limited access in inherently counterrevolutionary discursive and political projects.

The only corrective is to consolidate our Abolitionist resistance to the new Jim crow (carceral violence) and shift toward a revolutionary phase. We need a Third World (anti-colonial, anti-capitalist) approach such as that espoused in the gender/sexual politics of the CRC and STAR. This means we will focus on addressing the material conditions affecting the most marginal through *revolutionary movement building*. Representation and self-naming will, of course, happen (because there is no sense in organizing around our radical traditions and not letting marginalized people step into and define these legacies by our own participation), but the context of that representation and self-naming will be truly radical, not liberal. The maneuver I'm calling for is similar to what Malcolm X called for when encouraging folk to move from just a civil rights phase to an international focus.

Malcolm X was asking for folk to move to a Third World politics when he said that. He wanted folk to see racial segregation in terms of anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism; I'm asking us to see our racialized gender/sexual oppressions in the same light. Malcolm X spoke about this right before the Black Power era came along, before CRC and STAR came on the scene. He was observing the fact that many Third World movements could use the appeal to the United Nations to bridge anti-apartheid and anti-imperial struggles, and advance their struggles for self determination. He wanted Black folks in the US to move accordingly. Martin Luther King, Jr also reached a point where he saw the need to shift from just a civil rights phase to anti-capitalist and anti-colonial revolution, and used similar language as Malcolm X in terms of asking folk to look to a "new phase" of the struggle. James Baldwin called the civil rights phase a "slave revolt," in line with a Du Boisian and Cedric Robinson-style outlook, and so he was also interpreting racial oppression of the time from a broader, anti-imperial/anti-capitalist standpoint.

By the time the Black Power era was under way, by the time the CRC and STAR and other organizations had formed, Black folk, including Black QTGNC folk, had been moving on this same idea, and that is why the 60s/70s period was so impactful. That is the legacy we need to see our gender/sexual oppression in as QTGNC ppl: a revolutionary anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics.

"Colonization

built this nation

*Burn down the f***n*

plantation!

Colonization

built this nation

*Burn down the f*****n*

plantation!

Colonization

built this nation

*Burn down the f***n*

plantation!”

SQuAD chant

If we merge today’s Abolitionist/anti-carceral movement in this Third World approach, we reframe the violence against trans women and transfemmes as well as all the ways QTGNC people are oppressed. No longer is it about the media attention or narratives we can create in our think pieces, magazines, verbose academic analyses, bite-sized reformist and procedural projects, single-issue campaigns, social media platforms, YouTube videos, artistry, and podcasts – all of which ultimately benefit bourgeois institutions and allow clout and coin to go to opportunists, agents of counterinsurgency, and to the Man himself.

Instead we will identify that all of these things and the so-called power they claim to afford, the benefit they claim to provide, are a strategy of cooption, distraction, disruption, division, tokenization, voyeurism, pandering; all buttressed by the promise of ”representing”/”naming” our experiences and the supposed material or discursive ”privileges” that people mistakenly think trickle down to the most vulnerable of Black QTGNC people when ”proper” representation and self-naming is achieved.

If we do not change our orientation toward gender/sexual liberation, and abandon this neoliberal and representation politics; if we do not revive a STAR-inspired self determination approach, Combahee inspired identity politics, we will see a new precedent under the QTGNC Umbrella: increasingly violent forms of divisiveness and transmisogyny in particular. We already see this a bit. So many people want to claim that they have ”maGes” (short for ”marginalized genders”) in their organization but they never include trans men or trans masc folk in that category. Already we see so many people project cisness onto certain nonbinary people to gatekeep movement spaces. And already we see people continue to tokenize trans women and transfemmes for clout and coin, only to then discard and dehumanize the gurls, keeping our experiences caught in a voyeuristic economy of hypervisibility that denies our agency. In all these cases the most marginal of TGNC folk are not being liberated, and Black trans women and transfemmes are catching hell for it. This is transmisogynoir and has to end.

When the Civil rights movement got to a certain point, Dr King realized that the campaign against the old Jim Crow (segregation) was integration into a burning house. We have to realize

that the neoliberal approach to addressing the new Jim Crow (carcerality) is doing the same. Unsurprisingly, we are beginning to adopt the master's tools, even while claiming to dismantle the master's house, which Audre Lorde specifically warns against because it creates new forms of xenophobia. We are fighting among ourselves with static, reductionist understandings of identity when really we need to be addressing *neocolonialism*.

We are starting to sound like who Fanon called the "national bourgeoisie" in "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" (*Wretched of the Earth*). This is true even though our Abolitionist spaces call themselves radical, and name drop anti-capitalist and anti-colonial theorists. When Fanon spoke, he was observing that bourgeois elements were present in national concerns, so that the focus was on, as he said: "ending certain definite abuses: forced labour, corporal punishment, inequality of salaries, limitation of political rights, etc."

Again, this is the phase we as QTGNC people are in as we wrestle with various forms of violence and discrimination. It is a phase that Fanon says characterizes all colonized people's struggles, by the way. Don't let anyone tell you that only QTGNC people are doing this; the whole Black community is, and has been for decades. Anyone who makes it seem like only QTGNC Black folk are currently stuck in bourgeois consciousness is a chauvinist or a pick-me, framing QTGNC/feminist movement as treacherous to Black liberation (and assuming that cisheteronormativity in movements is not bourgeois). If even Huey Newton warned against conflating bourgeois contradictions with the whole QTGNC/feminist movement (despite his own self acknowledged biases), then surely anyone else can remember not to do so.

That being said, from Fanon's words, we learn that the initial approach of *all* colonized people's national concerns is something that "leave[s] the confusion of neo-liberal universalism to emerge." This neoliberal outlook takes the place of an anti-colonial/anti-capitalist outlook. In this context, as Fanon says, "national consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been."

In our case as Black QTGNC people today, we have some degree of national consciousness: more of us are naming the fact that throughout Black radical and cultural history there has been a Queer presence and that throughout Queer history, Blackness has been at the fore. We are naming that the mother of Blues, Ma Rainey, was queer; we are naming that the earliest depictions of homosexuality in human history were on rock paintings in Africa; we are naming that Queen Nzingha, the *minon* or so-called Dahomey Amazons, Kimpa Vita of the Congo, Romaine-La-Prophetsse in the Haitian Revolution and other spiritual leaders and militants in African history often stood outside of modern Western gender norms; we are identifying various pre-colonial and present day indigenous African labels to describe so-called gender/sexually variant experience, from the "Sekhet" in Kemet, the "jimbandaa" of the Kongo, the "Mangaiko" among the Mbo people, the "Mashoga" in Kenya, the "chibados" of Angola, the "Ashtime" in Ethiopia, the "lagredis" in Dahomey, the "uzeze" and "kitesha" of West-Central Africa, the "ikihundu" and "ikimaze" of Burundi, the "yan daudu" of Nigeria, the "ngor-jigeen" of Senegal, the "esenge" among the Ambo people, the "mwaami" among the Ila people, the "inzili" of Tanzania, the "mugawe" of the Meru people, the "wandarwarad" and "wandawande" among the Amhara, and others; and we are naming that modern Black figures, like Claude McKay, a Marxist and member of the African Blood Brotherhood, and Bayard Rustin, an organizer in the Civil Rights movement, and Billie Holiday, the famous singer, and Langston Hughes and many other participants in the Harlem

Renaissance, were also queer; and we are naming that homophobia and transphobia only became globalized because of a legacy of European religious demonization, colonial-era buggery laws, and other anti-queer legal dictates and forms of criminalization, as well as the modern collaboration between religious movements and neocolonial government leaders visavis anti-LGBT legislation. Therefore, more explicitly now than ever, we are reclaiming a *national* context for our QTGNC experiences, and naming how it diverges from the white/European often "biocentric" and "binary" frame of reference for gender and sexuality.

But while we remain stuck in a "civil rights phase," and neglect internationalist/anti-imperial approaches, bourgeois thought predominates, and the national concerns are limited. At the theoretical level, the accounts of our indigenous and precolonial African gender/sexual variance often rely on idealistic, monolithic reductions of the Continent. This causes folk to ignore the *existence of class contradictions in even the "queer" past and present African traditions*.

For example, in many precolonial African societies, gender/sexually variant people show up as cultural workers, specifically as priests and shamans and spiritual leaders. This is obviously a labor division, but bourgeois nationalist thought in the QTGNC movement causes people to essentialize these legacies rather than question the material realities connected to why so many precolonial gender/sexually variant people had to occupy those roles. This is often reinforced by a reductive understanding of the thought of Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers, who teach us that modern gender/sexuality correlate to Western cultural and material interests. Wynter and Spillers' work serves to explain why white people often exclude African people from comfortably occupying the social formations and material benefits associated with "proper" gender norms. Spillers in particular actually calls straight people toward *embracing* this exclusion, in the name of Black liberation, as opposed to trying to find inclusion within Western gender systems. Wynter implores us to understand that our experience of both racial dehumanization and its ties to gender exclusion means we should act on a *distinct* cultural and material interest than that of Man, suggesting that we reject the narrative that Black people get free when we reclaim Eurocentric notions of humanity and gender.

These women's ideas are sometimes twisted, however, to mean that *only* Western gender/sexual norms require discussions of *material struggle* and societal interests. This misappropriation of Wynter and Spillers is so that people can avoid discussions about the way Black folk across genders/sexualities have internalized bourgeois/Western relations, as well as to avoid conversations on precolonial forms of hierarchy and class vis-a-vis gender relations. The watering down of Spillers and Wynter allows folk to imply that we must not establish new institutions, infrastructures, modes of being through *self-determination*. Folk go further by creating a sort of "Black Essentialism," where the structural exclusion of African gender by the white world is misunderstood to mean that basically all African lifeways are either inherently genderless, or inherently queer, and that Black people are "always already" outside of any and all modern gender struggles. This allows people to then ascribe labels from the modern LGBT+ framework to our ancestors that they themselves may not have used, and it is purely as a stunt for a *sense of cultural affirmation/uplift* for the sake of a neoliberal representation politics. Even more insidiously, it can allow people to paint both ancient and modern day African life as a gender/sexual utopia, in a way that mirrors how "hotep" thinking and Afrocentricity treats the African past in general, vis-a-vis the modern construct of so-called Blackness. This allows them to push a "race first" political logic and avoid any other aspect of struggle.

Now, yes, this all might sound like it is purely an issue of historical accuracy and argumentative rigor. But it actually has great relevance for the more immediate concerns of this piece. I'm not just being a nerdy stickler for facts: because transmisogynoir will always come from an idealistic, monolithic, essentialist approach to Africans. "Hotep" bourgeois 'Afrocentric' nationalists (and their "womanist" counterparts) often focus on cultural reclamation or "self naming" for its own sake alone, and not on decolonization/anti-imperial struggle. They are never just wrong intellectually. They are also wrong politically and ethically too: because their theoretical errors correlate to ways they have historically thrown women's liberation under the bus.

Theory and practice is always intertwined. Black feminism holds our people, especially straight/cis people, accountable for their theoretical naturalization of cisheteronormative institutions (like the nuclear family, which they want to reclaim). Black feminism is therefore not just theory; it *practically* threatens the material interests in maintaining capitalistic relations and hierarchical quests for power among members of our community who *don't* want liberation for all. To paraphrase Claudia Jones, the capitalists know better than most progressives that once Black women undertake action, the militancy of "the whole Negro people" (borrowing her words), "and thus of the whole anti-imperialist coalition is greatly enhanced." Translation: anyone not opposed to imperialism, who isn't interested in anti-colonialism or anti-capitalism, will no doubt advance misogynoir and anti-feminism. They will use the focus on purely cultural and representational smokescreens to uphold it.

Keeping that in mind, once bourgeois nationalism (and its "womanist" junior partner) comes into the QTGNC context, folk erase anti-colonial/anti-capitalist queer and trans identity politics and self determination. They get focused on the purely cultural affirmation of gender/sexual identity. Not surprisingly, there will be a hostility to Black trans women and transfemmes and our revolutionary traditions and issues. This is because our movements threaten theoretically idealist understandings of queerness (which are the flip side of the same coin as naturalistic accounts of cisheteronormativity). Our movements also pose a *practical* challenge to certain liberal class pursuits and hierarchical investments maintained among those who have no actual interest in revolutionary struggle.

In other words, anyone who essentializes Africanness (including Afro-queerness/Afro-transness) theoretically will push (trans)misogynoir practically because they have to find a way to mystify the bourgeois gender institutions which don't ever serve the gurlz. To reiterate: they must cast a cultural or naturalistic smokescreen that prevents us from critically examining and actively resisting bourgeois/hierarchical gender relations and infrastructures, so they can continue not being accountable to revolutionary struggle and liberation for all. Bad theory and bad practice are always linked.

"Assimilation is not our liberation

Integration is not our liberation!

Assimilation is not our liberation

Integration is not our liberation!

*F**k the State, nigga*

I said liberate, nigga!

*F**k the State, nigga*

I said liberate, nigga!"

SQuAD chant

So now, bourgeois movement leaders come and ask us as QTGNC people to stop looking at the crisis facing the gurls: the "quadruple jeopardy" of racial oppression, gender exploitation, ableist suppression, and class war. They claim that this is about better ways to represent the Umbrella of QTGNC experiences, but really its about mystification (again, it's a smokescreen). If you avoid centering us, you avoid looking at how we are structurally positioned, and you can sideline *revolutionary transfeminist* politics emerging from, still paraphrasing Claudia Jones, "the responsibility of caring for the needs of the [Negro] family, of militantly shielding it from the blows of Jim Crow... of rearing children in an atmosphere of lynch terror, segregation, police brutality, and of fighting for an education for her children." These people know that, as anyone can attest, it is Black trans women and transfemmes who have done exactly what Jones describes, who have mothered the QTGNC community, who have provided the blueprint for every political, spiritual, and cultural infrastructure under the QTGNC Umbrella that we have.

They understand that, for example, in the US records, the first reports of Black gender variant people are all self identifying women, queens, and mothers like Mary Jones or Frances Thompson or William Dorsey Swann, each fighting cops or resisting the State in other ways or testifying against racist violence enacted on the whole Black community. The bourgeois QTGNC nationalists also know that, again borrowing from Claudia Jones, the gurls fight "against the Jim Crow ghetto existence which destroys the health, morale, and very life of millions of [our] sisters, brothers, and children," and our nonbinary siblings included. Our movements have shown this, and not because we just dropped from the moon in this way, but because of the *material conditions we respond to*, which in the words of Assata Shakur are what shape all revolutionaries. Viewed in this light, paraphrasing Claudia one more time, of course while the bourgeoisie intensifies its oppression not only of Black people in general, but of Black women in particular, they "display and cultivate" a "callous attitude" (Jones) toward Black trans women and transfemmes especially. Basically, middle class and boujie wanna be elements in the Black/QTGNC movement come with transmisogynist vitriol to protect their integrationist pursuits and erase our anti-imperial traditions.

The bastions of the discourse I am making a criticism of are removed from the masses (and the margins) and operate on an ideological inertia, and should not be seen as radical or revolutionary. Periodt. Returning to Fanon, "the unpreparedness of [these] educated classes, the **lack of practical links between them and the mass** of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give **rise to tragic mishaps.**" They say what they say and do as they do because their material interests is different from that of the masses and especially those of us on the margins.

Fanon goes into what their class-derived political mishaps can be. He says that these bourgeois nationalists use “[their] class aggressiveness to corner the **positions formerly kept for foreigners...** violently **attack[ing] colonial personalities:** barristers, traders, landed proprietors, doctors and higher civil servants... fight[ing] to the bitter end against these people ‘who insult our dignity as a nation’ ... wav[ing] aloft the notion of the nationalization and Africanization of the ruling classes.” He then emphasizes that “such action will become **more and more tinged by racism**, until the bourgeoisie bluntly puts the problem to the government by saying ‘We must have these posts’. They will not stop their snarling until **they have taken over every one.**”

Now, mind you, all the examples that Fanon looks at are ethnoreligious tensions between various distinct African faith/cultural communities. The closest analogue we have in the US today would be the anti-immigrant ideas pushed by movements like ADOS/FBA, which water down the conversation on reparations (which was originally a partial demand within a Pan-African framework) in order to divide Black communities over the question of winning material gains from the State. Another analogue we see throughout the African world today would be the framing of LGBT movements as a “gay agenda” by neocolonial forces who want to hoard power, resources, wealth for themselves by criminalizing and invalidating QTGNC progressive vanguards in their nations. Another example would be the transmisogynoiristic Gay Assimilation movement or even the transphobes in mostly white expressions of lesbian feminist movements, all of whom betrayed Marsha and Sylvia because they wanted crumbs from the State. We can include in this all the homophobic Black straight bourgeois feminists/womanists who continue to throw lesbian feminist socialist traditions under the bus, too.

What I’m arguing is that we as Black QTGNC people are also popularizing a gender/sexual (rather than just ethnic/religious) xenophobia and divisiveness *among ourselves too* that mirrors all these toxic, divisive precedents. Like the ethnoreligious conflict that Fanon was critiquing, like the ADOS movement, like the “homosexuality is unAfrican” line, like the “love is love” gay assimilation line that centers monogamy, like the pseudo-feminism that upholds either cissexism or the nuclear family or both: our nascent gender/sexual xenophobic *infighting is resultant from the same crude, neoliberal empty shell of a radical politics*. In our case, it is framed in a false anti-colonialism and false anti-capitalism that is masquerading as “Abolition.”

Thus, in the modern Black QTGNC context, we have people vying with white queers for political terrain and visibility. We have Black QTGNC people cornering positions of visibility and power and control in certain industries. We have Black QTGNC people waging bitter struggle against anyone who assaults our dignity as a QTGNC “Umbrella,” and they do it all in the name of Black liberation. They even oppose the myth that “homosexuality is un-African”; they denounce the “gay agenda” narrative too. And they are even critical of TERFs and homophobic “marry up”/“boss girl” feminists.

But these same elements sow competition among us about claims to discursive “privilege” in our movement spaces. They create a political atmosphere of contestation that is ultimately about clambering for the limited resources of the “nonprofit-advocacy-clout chaser-academic-entertainer-think piece-podcast-speaking gig-content creator-youtuber-social media influencer” industrial complex. They, like the national bourgeoisie of Fanon, will stop at nothing until they can cement these posts for themselves. Their movement is not grounded in collective interest; it does not extend the national interest it claims on the surface toward its most fully liberating horizons. This is why they use the term ‘Blackness,’ to center a *solely cultural* understanding

of our queer/trans/gender variant identities; and they neglect a *Black radicalism* that is class-conscious, intersectional, anti-hierarchical.

As a result, their approach does not serve everyone, especially the most marginal, and therefore it will divide us. Being simplistic and reactionary, it will not account for the manufactured scarcity and trauma created by colonialism and capitalism that affects all Black QTGNC people. Lacking an orientation toward the transformation of these conditions, the neoliberal "Blackness is Queer; Queerness is Black; Queerphobia is un-African" milieu will, however, exploit the material impact of said scarcity and trauma, which ultimately benefits the class pursuits of anyone pushing representationalist, integrationist, reformist, cultist, or otherwise reactionary approaches. Finally, because, like Malcolm X said, the most unprotected and disrespected are Black women, of course it means Black trans women and transfemmes are most underserved and left at risk by this toxic movement infrastructure, and will get blamed for the existence thereof. Even despite the claims of "centering" the most marginal.

In conclusion, so long as "centering" is being done through a neoliberal representational mode, hypervisibility will be mistaken as the grounds for identity politics qua the promise of access and redress. All while the real politics of Black trans/queer *power* is overlooked. In neglecting Black trans *power*, Black queer *power*, our capacity in the United States to effectively liberate ourselves and build in solidarity with our Black QTGNC cousins worldwide will be greatly diminished. This is dangerous. The State, religion, civil society, and capitalism are all working at faster rates to have Black TGNC people and marginalized genders criminalized and in danger (see: Nigerian and Ghanaian QTGNC struggle for example). The same forces suppressing our siblings overseas are also increasing waves of transphobic legislation, particularly in the Southern United States, on our soil. These things are connected. We cannot effectively analyze or organize against these developments if our approach will, instead, rely on a Rainbow Afrocentricity, a Queer Hotepism, Black Essentialism, and a transmisogynoir that essentializes and idealizes Black relationships to precolonial gender/sexual identities; and we cannot keep competing with each other for claims of 'proper' inclusion or "naming" of our identities within this discursive economy.

What we really need is a Third Worldist (anti-colonial, anti-capitalist) mode, whether it is socialist like that of Combahee and STAR or even an autonomist politics like that of Kuwasi Balagoon and the Anarcha-pantherists. We will understand this once we go beyond the Civil Rights framing to the international framing of our battle with the carceral state. We will look at the hybridly de jure and de facto 'Jewel Crow' experience of transphobic criminalization and discrimination, understand that it is a fascist suppression of Pride to uphold imperialism, in a way the old school anti-segregationists began to realize about their human rights struggle at the time. But we will only know to move accordingly because we start truly centering the margins, because all revolutionaries are shaped by their conditions (according to Assata) and so the most stark conditions of quadruple jeopardy will require the most developed politic.

When we put priority on studying and deepening the revolutionary traditions being advanced by the most vulnerable working class Black trans women and transfemmes in particular, we elevate the revolutionary capacity and consciousness of Black QTGNC people as a whole. When we move in this way, we will also, finally allow the gurlz to be "levelly human" in community and struggle, freeing us from the snares of tokenism and voyeurism and disposability and queendom and infomammydom and pedestals and walking ten paces behind and proving our personal/political worth. We will finally begin to *address the material conditions* under colonialism, capitalism

and the carceral State that continue to leave the gurls "defined by proximity to death." And Black trans women and transfemmes will then be able to take up full participation in revolutionary struggle like STAR demanded. Without this, none can truly shake up the matrix of interlocking oppressions under capitalist-imperialist modernity as Combahee emphasized. But through a true understanding of how to "center" Black trans women and transfemmes, we advance both Black women's liberation as well as the universal freedom of all African and oppressed people.

"Follow me into the storm

Let's fly away, fly away.

To a world beyond the shore

Let's fly away, fly away.

So the world caint do me wrong

Let's fly away, fly away.

Follow me into the storm

Let's fly away, fly away."

prof.Ound

Suggested Resources

Defining transmisogynoir - Transgender Law Center

Defining misogynoir - writer Trudy

Mary Jones

Huey Newton on Feminism and homophobia

Frances Thompson

Reversion back to savagery trope

Merricattherine - On Social Capitalism

Lilith Asieo - on the Infomammy

Feroz Anir - on political idolization

The Combahee River Collective Statement

STAR Manifesto

STAR zine (please bear in mind that the publishers of this zine have been called out for transmisogynoir [see link])

STAR history

More information on STAR

Tourmaline - Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson
Che Gosset - on Black Trans Feminist Thought
Captive Genders - Trans anti-carceral struggle
Malcolm X - from civil rights to human rights
Malcolm X - on Black women
Dr Martin Luther King Jr - New phase of struggle
Frantz Fanon - Pitfalls of National Consciousness
Message from the Whirlwind
William Dorsey Swann
OluTimehin Adegbeye - Men can be wives
A Third Sex Around the World - global gender variance
Beyond Binary Definitions of Gender
Hortense Spillers - Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe
Oyeronke Oyewumi - The Invention of Women
Claudia Jones - An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman
Jim Crow and Jane Crow concept
AID Feedback Loop - Anarchy, Intersectionality, Decolonization
Autonomy as a Revolutionary Tendency
Clout Culture
Transphobia is a Respectability Politic
Look At the Material
Mapping our Legacy
Kwame Ture and Molefi Asante - Revolutionary nationalism (Pan Africanism) versus cultural
nationalism (Afrocentricity)
Sylvia Wynter - race, gender, consciousness, colonialism
Pan African Revolt for a New Century - Haiti, Nigeria, the US

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Until All Are Free

Black Feminism, Anarchism, and Interlocking Oppression

Hillary Lazar

December 15, 2016

If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression. —The Combahee River Collective

We are all feminists, united in our recognition that women's subordination exists. Our struggle needs to be fought alongside the struggle against other forms of oppression. ... We are all anarchists, united in our belief for the need to create alternatives to this capitalist, patriarchal society wherein all are dominated and exploited. —Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group of Dublin

There is growing recognition among activists that we need to acknowledge the interconnect- edness of our struggles if we are to harness the collective power necessary to overcome inter- locking systems of domination. As Francesca Mastrangelo comments in an editorial piece for *The Feminist Wire*, we need to begin to “recognize that our liberation is bound up in the liberation of every person.”¹ Or, as expressed by labor organizer Ai-Jen Poo, “The way we try to think about it and the way the world is, we’re all interdependent and interconnected... Those connections are fairly invisible to most people most of the time. We’re taught not to see those connections.”²

In part, this sentiment—the need to recognize that “we” are an “us”—may speak to the times. Since the heyday of the alter-globalization movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s, critiques of global capitalism and neoliberalism have been a thread across mobilizations. This current has only become more pronounced in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008–9 and the widespread adoption of austerity measures that benefited big business, banks, and those in power, at the expense of everyone else. And economic inequality and the trend towards corporatization only continue to deepen. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that there is a sense of common cause across struggles in their shared anti-capitalist thrust.

There is also an atmosphere of intense urgency in recent movements, as we seem to have reached a crisis point on numerous fronts. The deleterious impact of climate change is ever more evident as extreme weather disasters are becoming par for the course. Fascism appears to be rearing its ugly head in Europe, and now here in the US with Trump’s surge in popularity. And people of color and trans* folks face daily instances of systemic oppression, the possibility of violence and death or other threats. So, feelings that “we’re all in this together” and the need to find ways to cooperate, at the risk of financial, climatic, and societal collapse, may also be contributing to calls for united struggle.

Yet, along with the current historical moment, there may be another reason activists are coming to see their efforts as intertwined—namely, the importance of Black feminism in con- temporary activist thought. In fact, while Jo Reger has noted that feminism is everywhere and has “become a part of everyday cultural beliefs and norms,” and “like fluoride... is simply in the wa- ter,” it is equally arguable that *Black feminism* in particular has come to inform current activist culture in the way it underscores interlocking oppressions.³

It also seems that the analysis of Black feminism has a particularly deep resonance with an- archist understandings of mechanisms of power, which similarly foreground a linking across all

¹ Francesca Mastrangelo, “Love is Not Enough,” in “Love as a Radical Act Forum,” *Feministwire*, 10/29/2013.

² Sally Kohn, “Activists Use Love and Empathy to Create New Alliances and Possibilities with the ‘Enemy,’” *YES! Magazine*, 7/1/2013.

³ Jo Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

systems of domination. Again, this is important to note, so as to ensure that the impact of Black feminism on contemporary anarchism is not overlooked. This currency across the two schools of thought is also notable, however, as it very well may be the coming together of Black feminism and anarchism that is encouraging the shift in orientation away from a more fragmented conceptualization of struggle, and towards the idea of our struggles as interdependent. And, especially given the increased presence of anarchism in mobilizations since the Zapatista uprising in 1994, it seems plausible that the confluence of these streams of thought is having a powerful combined impact on radical political thought and culture.

Regardless of what is driving it, the notion of interlocking oppressions holds real revolutionary potential. In underscoring the connectedness of all forms of domination, it leads to creation of stronger movements that are capable of mounting more successful challenges to oppressive systems by breaking down structural barriers that prevent communities from building power. However, the question remains as to how activists can begin to move beyond simply espousing their connectedness towards actual practices of working to address domination simultaneously in all its forms. Looking to Black feminism and anarchism can help to advance theoretical and practical models for how to do so.

Black Feminism: From Intersectionality to Interlocking Oppressions

As Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin comment in the introduction to their collection of essays on intersections in communication scholarship, “During the midst of multiple, interwoven struggles for liberation catalyzed in the middle of the twentieth century, in the United States, feminists of color, working-class feminists, and lesbians articulated the ‘interlocking’ nature, as well as the ‘double’ or ‘multiple jeopardy’ of having several oppressed identities.”⁴

One of the earliest and most influential articulations of this was Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of “intersectionality.” There have been, however, numerous expressions of what metaphor or concept best illustrates the complex nature of multiple oppressions. Among these, the idea of interlocking oppressions as posed by the Combahee River Collective perhaps best captures the interconnectedness of all systems of domination.

In 1989, Crenshaw first debuted the idea of “intersectionality” in her essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex.” Noting that “the experiences of women of color, poor, and immigrant women are subsumed and erased in legal practices, political decisions, and social norms,” Crenshaw explains that this erasure reflects an inability to “think outside of singular axes of identity” and results in the assumption that all women are middle-class white women.⁵ To illustrate this, she suggests that domination should instead be thought of as analogous to a four-way traffic intersection in which injury can come from a number of directions: “[It] may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimi-

⁴ Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin, *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 5.

⁵ Chávez and Griffin, *Standing in the Intersection*, 4.

nation or race discrimination.”⁶ While clearly a critical and necessary intervention into Second Wave feminist thought and the invisibility of interactions across racial, class, sexual and gender analysis, too often this particular metaphor has been limited by its interpretation of oppression as having an “additive” quality, rather than a more slippery and dynamic relationship.

Consequently, feminist theorists have struggled to find alternative ways to best capture the messiness and conceptual complexity of the overlapping, interactive nature of multiple oppressions. Adding nuance to Crenshaw’s notion of intersectionality, these theories have sought to underscore the ways in which multifaceted identities are shaped by the many structures of domination and ever-shifting contexts. These metaphors have included everything from Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Theory in the Flesh” to María Lugones’ “Curdling.” And as Chávez and Griffin comment, “Each metaphor or perspective offer[s] something slightly different.”⁷ Yet, the idea of “interlocking” oppressions seems to be most instructive for understanding the ways in which, regardless of the exact relational nature between the specific sets of oppressions in any given case, one thing remains certain—that all forms of subjugation and domination are integrally related to one another, and that striving for an end of any form of oppression necessitates struggling to end all oppressions. They are not only intersecting, but are inextricably tied together.

This conceptualization of interlocking oppressions was first expressed by the Combahee River Collective more than a decade prior to Crenshaw’s coining of the term “intersectionality.” Writing in 1977, this group of Black feminist lesbians issued a statement in which they asserted that

the most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.⁸

As they argue, it would be impossible to address only a single issue at a time. In other words, as Black women; as Black women lesbians; as Black women lesbian workers; as Black women lesbian workers with family, and from communities where others remained subjugated for numerous reasons—in order to be truly liberated requires addressing these simultaneously occurring and inseparable experiences of oppression. Hence, their insistence that “... we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions... if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”⁹

Or as they write elsewhere in the statement, “We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women’s lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often

⁶ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991), 1241–1299.

⁷ Chávez and Griffin, *ibid*

⁸ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement, 1977,” in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table / Women of Color Press, 1983), 210.

⁹ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement, 1977,” 215.

find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously.”¹⁰ Consequently, they maintain that one cannot even conceptually parse them out and must instead conceive of the idea of “racial-sexual oppression.” Moreover, although it was a “combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position [that] drew [them] together initially,” over time, the Collective members had come to realize that, along with addressing heterosexism, “the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy.”¹¹ In other words, in order to contest any form of subjugation means the need to take on “the System” as a whole.

To be sure, other analytical frameworks certainly offer useful theoretical contributions to unpacking the dynamic, overlapping, and interactive nature of oppression. Yet, this more holistic understanding put forth by the Combahee River Collective on the interrelated and interlocking dimensions to systems of domination is essential for understanding how power, privilege, and subjugation operate in contemporary society. Given what can be considered the deeply diffused Foucauldian capillaries of power throughout society, coupled with the overarching reach of capitalism and corresponding systems of racial-sexual domination into every facet of life, it would be impossible to address each instance of oppression a single case at a time.

By extension, if all oppression needs to be confronted concurrently, the Combahee idea of interlocking oppression is also vital, as it suggests a need for a politics of solidarity. For instance, although they recognize the complicity of Black men in upholding patriarchy, they also recognize the subjugation of Black men along lines of race and/or class. Similarly, while white feminists very actively participated in upholding racism, they were nonetheless impacted by patriarchal domination. In other words, context is key for understanding the complicated and dynamic nature of domination and subjugation. Oppressors may be oppressed, and oppressed may be oppressors—so the only solution is to work together to eliminate all forms of oppression.

Since the Combahee first issued their Statement, Black feminists and other activists have taken on this language of interlocking oppression. For example, Black feminist and lesbian poet Audre Lorde, in her 1985 address, “I am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities,” draws directly on this approach to oppression theory. In this talk she speaks to the prevalence of homophobia in Black feminism and Black women’s activism, commenting, “When I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggle on both these fronts are inseparable.”¹² Along with these inseparable struggles, she also calls on her audience to recognize the necessity of contesting homophobia with these efforts as well. As she comments, “Homophobia... is a waste of woman energy, and it puts a terrible weapon into the hands of your enemies to be used against you to silence you, to keep you docile and in line. It also serves to keep us isolated and apart.”¹³

This kind of exclusion, she explains, does a disservice to the movement as it robs it of the “vital insights and energies” of Black women who are part of the wider “Black family,” regard-

¹⁰ Ibid, 213.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Audre Lorde, “I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities,” (Women of Color/Kitchen Table Press, 1985), 3.

¹³ Ibid, 6.

less of their sexuality.¹⁴ In essence, by failing to see their struggles as related, and by actively excluding Black lesbians from Black feminist spaces, they were limiting their radical potentiality to overturn patriarchy, while bolstering heteronormativity. For this same reason, she demands recognition for the interconnectedness—and the possibility of this interconnectedness—of being a Black, a woman, and a lesbian, insisting that these oppressions can and do exist simultaneously, hence demanding simultaneous “destruction” (to draw on the language of the Combahee River Collective).

Patricia Hill Collins also underscores interlocking notions of oppression in her concept of the “matrix of domination.”¹⁵ As she explains, “Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought re-conceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance.”¹⁶ Collins, however, explicitly emphasizes the importance of avoiding “additive models” for understanding dynamics of oppression reflected “in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought.”¹⁷ This, she argues, fails to capture the dynamic and multiple axes and levels of oppression, hence necessitating adoption of a “both/and” model.¹⁸

bell hooks, in her idea of a “politics of domination,” further helps to elucidate this paradigm shift. As she explains, looking at the multiple axes of oppression such as race, class, and gender and their situational relationships elucidates the ways in which they share “ideological ground.” This common ground is “a belief in domination, and a belief in the notions of superior and inferior, which are components of all of those systems... [It]’s like a house, they share the foundation, but the foundation is the ideological beliefs around which notions of domination are constructed.”¹⁹

In a very similar way, over a decade later, in “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” Peggy McIntosh speaks about the interlocking nature of oppression. In this piece, McIntosh discusses the invisibility of systems of privilege that confer unearned benefits and resources on certain social groups at the expense of others—namely, men at the expense of women, and whites at the expense of people of color, or heteronormative individuals at the expense of homosexual and non-gender conforming persons. In so doing, however, she seeks to avoid the pitfall of an additive approach to understanding oppression. As she comments,

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms that we can see and embedded forms that members of the dominant group are taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring racial dominance on my group from birth. Likewise, we are taught to think that sexism or heterosexism is carried on only through intentional, individual acts of discrimination, meanness, or

¹⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination” in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 221–238, accessed March 4, 2016. <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/252.html>.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

cruelty, rather than in invisible systems conferring unsought dominance on certain groups.²⁰

To be fair, there are certainly significant limitations in the theoretical usefulness of privilege theory, and an identity politics corresponding with this. Namely, much like additive approaches to intersectionality, privilege theory can be grossly reductionist, erasing more complex relational dynamics of power and oppression. And we might easily critique McIntosh for failing to actually incorporate an interlocking model of oppression in her analysis of privilege. Even so, the salient point here is that McIntosh's piece is clear evidence of the infusion of Black feminist discourse into generalized understandings of oppression and domination among white feminists. In fact, this piece in particular may have had an especially influential role in helping the broader diffusion of Black feminism into activist theories of power, as it remains one of the foundational essays (for better or worse) used in activist anti-oppression trainings. So, again, although McIntosh may not have ultimately avoided relying on an additive theoretical model, it is still noteworthy that she also explicitly states that these mechanisms of domination are interlocking.

Anarchism: Collective Self-Liberation For All

Although a bit of a question of the chicken and the egg, we can see a similar adoption of this type of interlocking analysis of oppression in contemporary anarchism. To be sure, conceptualization of systems of control as interconnected, and hence requiring the concurrent rooting out of all forms of domination, is at the very heart of anarchist theory and praxis. That being said, contemporary anarchist thought also undoubtedly reflects the influence of Black feminists such as Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, and bell hooks among countless other Third and Fourth Wave scholars. Indeed, this is particularly evident in queer anarchism and poststructuralist anarcho-feminisms. Either way, there is at the very least a clear resonance across the two. And given the prominent role anarchism has played in twenty-first-century movements—what some suggest has been an “anarchist turn” in activism—it becomes all the more necessary to consider the connections across them.²¹

In order to understand the relationship between anarchism and its emphasis on interlocking oppressions, it is helpful to look at its historical roots and philosophical underpinnings. Contemporary or traditional Western anarchism—what is considered to be “classical” anarchism—has always been predicated on the belief that one must look at all centralization of power as problematic, and view all systems of domination as inextricably interrelated.²² Seeking to make sense

²⁰ Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” Working Paper No. 189. (Wellesley Coll., Mass. Center for Research on Women, 1986)

²¹ Duane Rouselle and Süreyyya Evren, eds., *The Anarchist Turn Symposium*, May 2011.

²² It is important to make the distinction here that what I am looking at, and what is typically considered classical anarchism and of the anarchist canon is largely Western in origin, beginning in mid-eighteenth-century Europe (albeit, including Russia, which is also part of Asia). That said, there is arguably a much longer and deeper tradition of anarchist thought (or, if not in name, at least anarchist sensibility) that extends back as far as many of the ancient Eastern philosophies and certainly beyond the boundaries of the West. For an important collection on non-Western anarchism see Raymond Craib and Barry Maxwell eds., *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global Anarchisms* (Oakland: PM Press, 2015) as well as Maia Ramnath’s *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India’s Liberation Struggle* (Oakland: IAS/AK Press, 2011).

of the rapidly changed social landscape in the wake of industrialization, nineteenth-century anarchist thinkers such as Mikhail Bakunin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Max Stirner, among others, endeavored to resolve how to respond to new forms of inequality and coercion that now derived less from feudal or manorial rule than from an increasingly centralized state and exploitative labor conditions under capitalism. Unlike their Marxist counterparts, however, for whom the primary concern was the working class, for these early anarchists the real goal was to ensure freedom from domination of *all* types and for *all* peoples—including women and men, and (usually) people of all races. As Bakunin expresses,

What all other men are is of the greatest importance to me. However independent I may imagine myself to be, however far removed I may appear from mundane considerations by my social status, I am enslaved to the misery of the meanest member of society. The outcast is my daily menace. Whether I am Pope, Czar, Emperor, or even Prime Minister, I am always the creature of their circumstance, the conscious product of their ignorance, want and clamoring. They are in slavery, and I, the superior one, am enslaved in consequence.²³

This emphasis on the necessity of eliminating all forms of oppression as integral to attaining a fully free society has remained one of the fundamental principles of anarchist thought. To be sure, being anti-doctrinaire, anarchists may conceive of numerous visions and versions for what this may look like in practice, or what steps are necessary for achieving this form of liberated society. As Peter Marshall describes, anarchism is “a broad river” within which “it is possible to discern a number of distinct currents.”²⁴ In the most general of terms, however, some of the primary concerns for anarchists are with ensuring freedom for all from domination and top-down coercion of any kind, and the ability for all humans (and living beings, for that matter) to achieve their highest potential and the greatest well-being possible. Moreover, this further implies that all are freely able to participate in the decisions that shape their lives, while enjoying equal access to the resources necessary to do so.

Necessarily, this idea of a free society as being dependent on whether or not all members are liberated implies that one cannot decouple one’s own liberation from that of another.

Alexander Berkman summarizes this nicely in “ABC of Anarchism”:

Anarchism means that you should be free; that no one should enslave you, boss you, rob you, or impose upon you. It means that you should be free to do the things you want to do; and that you should not be compelled to do what you don’t want to do. It means that you should have a chance to choose the kind of a life you want to live, and live it without anybody interfering. It means that the next fellow should have the same freedom as you, that every one should have the same rights and liberties. It means that all men are brothers, and that they should live like brothers, in peace and harmony. That is to say, that there should be no war, no violence used by one set of men against another, no monopoly and no poverty, no oppression, no taking advantage of your fellow-man. In short, Anarchism means a condition or society

²³ Mikhail Bakunin, “Solidarity in Liberty: The Workers’ Path to Freedom,” 1867.

²⁴ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), 6.

where all men and women are free, and where all enjoy equally the benefits of an ordered and sensible life.²⁵

Simply looking at these principles, it is easy enough to see the resonance with the Combahee collective's perspective on interrelated struggle. There is the idea of one's personal liberation being dependent on the liberation of all. There is emphasis on empathetic concern for the well-being of others, not out of obligation or paternalist duty, but rather from the notion of a shared struggle and shared fate among all living beings. And there are the ways in which this perception catalyzes reciprocity, cooperation, and mutual aid—other mainstays in both Black feminist and anarchist practice.

Certainly, there is also a long tradition of feminist-informed anarchist thought dating back to the late-eighteenth century, which helped to clarify understandings of the interdependence of struggles with a feminist lens. As explained by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz in the introduction to *Quiet Rumors*, a collection of anarcho-feminist texts, “Up until recently the terms anarchism and feminism were rarely found in the same sentence, much less interpreted as integrally related, Emma Goldman being the single example people could identify.”²⁶ Yet, as she points out, there were countless others lost to the annals of history—Lucy Parsons, Mother Jones, Helen Keller, Louise Michel and “thousands of other historical figures and contemporary feminist anarchists.”²⁷ These women were helping to advance the critical perspective that “true equality can never be achieved within the capitalist system... [and] we need to be clear that when feminist gains are won, it is in the name of true equality for all people... [r]eal feminism requires complete social restructuring which can essentially be equated with true anarchism.”²⁸

Even in the early days, there were some threads within anarchism coming from feminists of color who helped to further push anarchist political theory towards even more recognition of the dynamic, overlapping nature of all oppressions. Lucy Parsons—one of the founders of the Industrial Workers of the World and widow of Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons—was one of the first celebrated anarchists of color, having likely been born a slave and documented as having both Mexican and Native American ancestry. Reflecting her commitment to syndicalism, she provided incisive critique of divided struggles and called on radicals to “sink such differences as nationality, religion, politics, and set our eyes eternally and forever toward the rising star of the industrial republic of labor.”²⁹ Meanwhile, in Argentina, early anarcho-feminists, some of whom helped to publish *La Voz de La Mujer*, saw their “anarchist feminist propaganda... [a]s inseparable from a growing awareness of the mechanisms of economic and social exploitation of Argentinean women with immigrant origins,” and as “[materializing] these working women's expectations within a vast project for a libertarian society.”³⁰

Yet it is in contemporary forms of anarcho-feminism that we see explicit connection with (and influence of) Black feminism in terms of emphasizing simultaneity of struggle. In “Insurrection at the Intersections: Feminism, Intersectionality, and Anarchism,” Jen Rogue and Abbey Volcano

²⁵ Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism* (Freedom Press: 1977, reprint 1929)

²⁶ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. “Quiet Rumors: An Introduction” in Dark Star Collective, *Quiet Rumors: An Anarcho-Feminist Reader*, Third Ed., (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 11.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Revolutionary Anarcho-Feminist Group, “Why Anarcho-Feminism?” in *Quiet Rumors* (2012), 14.

²⁹ Lucy Parsons. “1905 Speech to the IWW.”

³⁰ H. Finet, “Female Anarchism and Conviviality Among Workpeople in Buenos Aires (1890–1920),” in Gwendolyn Windpassinger, *Queer Anarcho-feminism: An Emerging Ideology? The Case of Proyectil Fetal*, Diss. 2012,138.

put anarchism in conversation with Black feminism and offer a specifically anarchist critique of the “additive” approach to intersectionality. Instead, they highlight the importance of adopting a lens “through which to view race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. as mutually-constituting processes... categories [that] do not exist independently from one another; [but] rather, they mutually reinforce one another... [in] overlapping, complex, interacting, intersecting, and often contradictory” ways.³¹

Meanwhile Chris Crass, founder of the Catalyst Project, directly speaks to how Black feminism informed “the anarchism taken up and developed in the 1990s [which] was a product of the movement experiences of the preceding four decades,” including “The Black Freedom movement, the women’s liberation movement, and other liberation movements... challenging multiple forms of oppression.”³² In fact, he credits the Combahee River Collective’s “integrated analysis of oppression” that “suggests that systems of racism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and ableism operate with and through each other... interconnected” as “truly revolutionary” and highly influential for the anarchists of the 1990s who “increasingly took up this ‘integrated analysis.’”³³ In an interview, Crass further explains how, for the Catalyst Project, intersectionality specifically means taking on a more “collective” approach to liberatory politics by

... addressing our privilege as white people by examining the differences in the ways those privileges manifest based on gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, etc. Intersectionality complicates how we understand relationships of power and what’s needed to transform them... If intersectionality is a framework for recognizing the ways in which oppressions are wrapped up together and structure society, then collective liberation is a corresponding framework for looking at how we organize to transform those relations of power. [It] is an approach to organizing that recognizes that our liberation as white people is wrapped up with and dependent on the liberation of communities of color who are living on the front lines of racial and economic oppression.³⁴

Similarly, Richard Day, in his account on anarchist currents within contemporary movements, describes how “feminist critiques of power” have come to be a critical influence on alter-globalization organizing.³⁵ Moreover, as he sees it, due to their increasing anarchist underpinnings, there is a growing confluence across struggles as they come to adopt what he refers to as a “groundless solidarity/infinite responsibility”—the idea that “increasing numbers of people all over the world are converging on the notion that the new global order needs to be fought on all levels, in all localities, through multiple, disparate—interlocking—struggles.”³⁶

Chris Dixon’s recent work, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements*, however, perhaps most expressly addresses the relationship between anarchism and Black feminism, as well as interlocking oppressions, as he specifically focuses his analysis of contemporary

³¹ Jen Rogue and Abbey Volcano, “Insurrection at the Intersection” in *Quiet Rumors* (2012), 48.

³² Chris Crass, *Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement Building Strategy* (Oakland: PM Press, 2013), 3. The Catalyst Project is an activist training organization that focuses on racial justice and workers’ rights.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 255. Here Crass is directly referencing the Combahee conceptualization of interlocking oppressions.

³⁵ Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 197.

³⁶ *ibid.*, 201–2.

movements on the interconnectedness of struggle.³⁷ Dixon reflects on the ways that contemporary movement participants—from indigenous rights to labor to racial justice mobilizations—have come to understand their struggles as shared. As he notes, for these activists, it is clear that

systems of oppression and exploitation—whether we’re talking about patriarchy, heterosexism, white supremacy, ableism, capitalism, so on—actually work with and through one another and cannot be disentangled from one another. And in fact require, if we’re going to try and ultimately do away with them and create a different way of relating, a whole different social structure. That’s going to require us to have a kind of multilayered revolutionary politics that takes on all of these things at once.³⁸

In particular, Dixon highlights the coming together of three political currents—Black feminism, prison abolitionism, and anarchism—as formative for the kind of “integrated analysis” and anti-authoritarian sentiment that he argues has come to be at the heart of contemporary activism in the US and Canada.

Towards a United Struggle

What, then, is the importance of recognizing a perception of interrelatedness of struggles among activists and the relationship between Black feminism and anarchism? To begin with, at the very least, it suggests a need to acknowledge the critical value of Black feminist thought in contemporary activism. To-date there remains a deeply problematic erasure of the important contributions by activists of color and feminist scholars of color from our movement theory and literature. This not only replicates racist-sexist dynamics of power in how we talk about and understand our struggles, but in our interpersonal relationships and internal movement dynamics as well. It also points to a natural resonance across Black (and Third/Fourth wave) feminism and anarchism—which has been largely overlooked by activists and academics alike. These facts alone suggest a reason to explore activist conceptualizations of interlocking oppressions.

At a practical level, there are still other reasons for considering the interconnectedness of struggles and the salience of the relationship between anarchism and Black feminism. To begin with, at a more emotive or affective level, this implies a changed subjectivity, wherein we are beginning to see ourselves as intimately connected with others outside our own individualized lives or direct experiences. There is a transcendence of divisions—a sense of coming together, common cause, and shared humanity. This sense of “relatedness” among activists also points to the potential for deeper engagement in politics of solidarity. Indeed, interlocking oppression theory as articulated by both anarchism and Black feminism is instructive for moving beyond the rhetoric of interconnected struggle to real actionable solidarity, in providing specific models for how activists can rethink working together.

For instance, the Bay Area Fireworks Collective’s “Revolutionary Solidarity: A Critical Reader for Accomplices” offers a powerful and important critique of the concept of “allyship.” The pieces in the reader suggest that the term “ally” has become bound up with liberal identity politics

³⁷ Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

³⁸ Carwil Bjork-James, “Beyond a Radical Minority: An Interview with Anarchist Writer Chris Dixon,” 2015,

and “the ally industrial complex,” and ultimately been “rendered meaningless.” For this reason, the authors recommend adoption of the term “accomplice” as a way to shift towards a more interlocking approach to understanding struggles, and as a way to emphasize action over words.

As one essay comments, while being an ally has come to be adopted by white activists seeking recognition as anti-racist and paying lipservice to their commitment to racial justice, being an accomplice moves past superficial or patronizing forms of false solidarity. Rather, it means acknowledging that as long as any are oppressed, then all are subjected to the mutually-reinforcing systems of domination. They suggest that

... [this] framework of solidarity affirms that other groups have something of worth to be gained through interactions with them, whether materially or by gaining something less tangible like perspective, joy, or inspiration. The solidarity model also dispels the idea of one inside and one outside, foregrounding how individuals belong to multiple groups and groups overlap with one another, while demanding respect for the identity and self-sufficiency of each of those groups.³⁹

Allied frameworks, however, underscore “ideas of *I* and the *other*” as opposed to a more united, collective conceptualization.⁴⁰ Moreover, the accomplice model reinforces the notion that struggles are inextricably bound together. As explained in “Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex,”

The risks of an ally who provides support or solidarity (usually on a temporary basis) in a fight are much different than that of an accomplice. When we fight back or forward, together, becoming complicit in a struggle toward liberation, we are accomplices.⁴¹

Along with the anarchist emphasis on shifting from an allied politics to the solidarity politics of being accomplices, another possible inroad for promoting a more interlocking feminism within activist spaces is in the idea that that one learns by doing—something that Third Wave, Chicana-feminist scholar Aimee Carrillo Rowe’s “politics of relation” illuminates. In her article, “Be Long: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation,” Rowe argues that whom we love is political. As she comments, “The sites of our belonging constitute how we see the world, what we value, who we are (becoming).”⁴² Consequently, she aims to “make transparent” the political conditions that shape our belonging and affective ties. Ultimately, she suggests that in order for us to be able to struggle together we need to develop “coalitional subjectivities” that arise through working together across difference while adopting a “politics of relation.”

This occurs through the very act of doing together, when individuals jump into alliances allowing us “to see [our] oppression and privilege as inextricably bound to others and [in which we] cannot envision [our] existence and politics as separate from others’ existence and politics.”⁴³

³⁹ Anon, “A Critique of Ally Politics” in Fireworks Collective and Cindy Milstein eds., *Revolutionary Solidarity: A Critical Reader for Accomplices*, 2015, 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁴¹ Occupy Oakland. “Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex” in *Revolutionary Solidarity*, 2014), 35.

⁴² Aimee Carrillo Rowe, “Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation,” *NWSA Journal*, 17 (2005),16.

⁴³ Chávez and Griffin, *Standing in the Intersection*, 11.

In turn, this enables activists to build a politics across power lines, so that they can begin to understand their respective experiences and collaborate towards an emancipatory struggle for all.

Certainly this may be easier said than done; yet Rowe's call for us to reject normative relations predicated on "power over" in favor of "power with," which means a turning "towards" one another, is another example of the kind of shift necessary for advancing a stronger movement for the liberation of all.⁴⁴ As she writes, what we most need is to see "that radical modes of belonging hold tremendous potential for transforming who we think we are and how we imagine something called 'feminism.' This is the aim of a politics of relation... the inclination of one toward another, as the basis for community, intimacy, and awareness."⁴⁵ In sum, then, as Rowe suggests, perhaps the best way to encourage the development of an interlocking feminist framework is in fact to begin to relate to one another through our interlocked positions. It is not only our oppressions and privileges that are inseparably intertwined, but we ourselves. Recognizing this kinship within our individual experiences or put more simply, our shared humanity—together with the anarchist call for the critical need to work together as accomplices and not allies—may be the best route to our collective liberation.

Still, there continues to be an absence of nuanced analysis of what it means to adopt an interlocking framework in practice. For many, this leads to a naïve and deeply problematic erasure of difference in favor of a totalizing universal understanding of how oppression operates. Calls for empathetic recognition of common cause can lead to the pitfall of reinscribing oppressive dynamics and eliminating differences of experience. This is something that anarcho-feminists such as Rogue and Volcano speak to directly—making the relevance of examining anarchism hand in hand with intersectional and interlocking analysis all the more clear. As they note, "We call for an end to all exploitation and oppression," yet they further observe the necessity of avoiding reducing or flattening "all these social relations into a single framework" in a way that fails to account for how "the gamut of hierarchically-arranged social relations are in their own ways unique."⁴⁶ Or, as they further explain,

As anarchists, we have found that intersectionality is useful to the degree that it can inform our struggles. Intersectionality has been helpful for understanding the ways that oppressions overlap and play out in people's everyday lives. However, when interpreted through liberal frameworks, typical intersectional analyses often assume myriad oppressions to function identically, which can preclude class analysis, an analysis of the state, and analyses of ruling institutions. Our assessment is that everyday experiences of oppressions and exploitation are important and useful for struggle if we utilize intersectionality in a way that can encompass the different methods through which white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, class society etc. function in people's lives, rather than simply listing them as though they all operate in similar fashions.⁴⁷

Chris Crass makes a similar point about his organization's anti-racist work, and admits that "we've made a mistake about applying intersectionality to our work; in some cases we organized

⁴⁴ Rowe, 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁶ Rogue and Volcano, "Insurrection at the Intersection," 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 45.

white people as if they were a homogenous group... and we've alienated people we were working with by flattening out differences that can actually be a source of power."⁴⁸ In short then, as these writers suggest, adopting an interlocking framework requires recognizing the uniqueness of differences—"unity in diversity," to use a term favored by social ecologist and libertarian communalist, Murray Bookchin—or of the divergent systems of social domination, and each individual experience of subjugation, as being central to a nuanced analysis of mechanisms of control. If all forms of subjugation are reduced to a single axis, oppression cannot be contested, and indeed may only be reified. Consequently, anarchist and Black feminist approaches to interlocking analysis help to underscore this need to account for complexity, uniqueness, and dynamism within the mechanisms of power.

Even so, it is one thing to say that we need to take a cue from Black feminism and anarchism in adopting an approach to oppression analysis that recognizes difference, and another to understand how to navigate the challenges of doing so in actual practices of solidarity. How does one account for difference of experience, or the fact that society confers power on some at the expense of others, while still working towards the simultaneous collective liberation of all? One need only think of the profoundly problematic calls being made by some alleged "allies" to adopt the motto of #AllLivesMatter to see a clear example of how an ostensibly interlocking approach—"we all matter and need liberating, right?"—can still lead to oppression.

One possible solution may be to turn to a new metaphor for interlocking oppression—that of a tangled knot. There are countless strands in this knot, each one representing a different expression of domination, and all tightly bound together. Given their entanglement, it is therefore necessary to loosen all the strands if the knot is to be undone. In some moments, however, one strand may need more immediate attention and loosening than others. In other moments, perhaps it may be necessary to pull on multiple strands at once. While the knot of oppression will remain ensnared until all strands are freed, it is vital to understand that interdependent as the threads may be, each must be attended to both as an individual strand and as part of the collective tangle. This kind of conceptualization helps to avoid totalizing "alls" that erase distinct experiences of subjugation, while still allowing for an understanding that "none are free until all are free." In any case, as we endeavor to figure out how to put into practice a better politics of solidarity based on an understanding of shared and interdependent struggle, at least we have both Black feminism and anarchism as theoretical and practical models to help point us in the right direction.

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⁴⁸ Crass, *Towards Collective Liberation*, 255.

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