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# Against Sex Class Theory

Some Notes On Science, Materialism, and Gender  
Self-Determination

Nsambu Za Suekama

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of revolution have largely occurred in the struggle for liberation as an organizer first in my earliest more liberal days, then my time as a Black nationalist, and now my time with the Anarkatas and in the Third World People's Alliance.

I say all this not as an anti-intellectual form of virtue signaling, but so that people understand that, in a word, this shit is real to me, not removed to an ivory tower position. This is why I started out with discussing my background, who I am, where I come from, what I'm about, how I get down. All I ask is that I be engaged in good faith.

Forward, in love and struggle. We shall rise in the whirlwind.

“History isn't something you look back at and say it was inevitable, it happens because people make decisions that are sometimes very impulsive and of the moment, but those moments are cumulative realities.”

-Marsha P. Johnson

## Part One

### *A Roots Grasping Doll: On Gendered Coloniality, the Nexus Hypothesis, and my Journey toward a Black Autonomous Transfeminism*

#### I.

To understand my perspectives on gender self-determination, on historical materialism, and on science, it is necessary to tell the story of my origins. I hope that by doing so, it will make our forays into the other parts of this series more concrete. My name is Nsambu Za Suekama, a Bl3ssing in Disguise. With my comrades I go by Bl3ssing. But in general movement it's Nsambu Za Suekama or N.Z. Suekama for short.

I am an Afro-transfeminine soul, a gender expansive being who roots my womanly lifeways in a spiritual/cultural heritage my ancestors carried over from the Motherland. Part of my lineage is New Afrikans of the South, formerly enslaved, and so hoodoo culture runs through me: belief in the power of dreams and of spirit. The other part of my lineage is Black Natives of the North, a landowning family for quite some time, with our own history of participation in African liberation struggle.

A deep religiosity nurtured in the Black folk church was the context of my birth, with its emphasis on the “old time religion” that carried the enslaved through what Cedric Robinson called a racial capitalism. And then there is an activist bent in my family: my grandfather, a Vietnam vet, had been involved in student movement during the Black Power era, and my grandmother organized her community to establish a park, turning an abandoned lot into a place for her kids, including my mother, and other neighborhood kids to play. My Dad instilled a concern for the poor in me from a young age, a skepticism of the ruling establishment, and a critique of the prison system for its inherent racism. My Mother, she rein-

forced these lessons, but what stuck out for me the most was her love for science. Lessons about the water cycle, about reproduction, about cloud formations, and more, these were the most captivating lessons from my mom in my early childhood. And when it came time for me to learn to read, my newfound literacy allowed me to make sense of the encyclopedias my mother had for us, and I could learn more about the sciences on my own. It's this that put me on a track towards the "roots-grasping" shit I be on today.

One thing I recall reading about most vividly were these explanations of a process I later in life learned is called *biomagnification*. There is the trophic ladder, I learn, which most people call a food chain. Living organisms have metabolic needs and we require energy, and we get that energy through consumption and other processes. Plants and other producers (autotrophs) can pull that off using sunlight via photosynthesis; but herbivores and carnivores, fungivores, omnivores, are all consumers (heterotrophs) who must eat. But what happens if the organisms being eaten have pollutants, toxins, hazardous chemicals accumulating in them because their environments were polluted? Well some organisms require a lot more food than others, and if the organisms they are consuming have these toxins, then those toxins will get magnified up the trophic ladder. This is biomagnification.

I didn't fully understand what I was reading, but I did learn that a chemical called DDT caused a famous instance of biomagnification in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. DDT was a fertilizer used in industrial agriculture and whenever it would rain, this thing called runoff would happen, and the chemical DDT would make its way into water bodies, and from there affect aquatic plants, fish, birds, and human populations. This was actually what led to Rachel Carson writing *Silent Spring*. The modern Western US based environmental movement often traces its origins to Carson's book. I remember being floored by the fact that industrial agriculture really would allow the persistent use of a harmful chemical like that. And from

supremacist and then racist-bioreductivist pathologization of PAI-GIERILs has consequences for those who Sanyika Shakur speaks of as gender outlaws; and how this relates to colonial and capitalist oppression and the contradictions in decolonization and socialist struggle. I draw heavily from Sanyika Shakur's notions of Minor Patriarchy and Grand Patriarchy here, and try to suggest that both serve as nexus of imbrication for the Western liberal humanist State as well as for the Political/class contradictions in neocolonial, State socialist/State capitalist settings. I will be using this section to intervene in discussions of the State and of autonomy/anarchism as a Third Worldist and Black Anarchist.

Yet, my treatment of this topic will be neither exhaustive nor encyclopedic; it will also not be a closed or fully formulated "framework" either. I consider this document a vignette of sorts, an expression of how, in the context of anti-colonial struggle, materialism and science may be used to think of gender, sex, class, and consciousness via transfeminism and how transfeminism may be used to think of gender, sex, class, and consciousness via materialism and science. In other words, a transfeminist material analysis rooted in the decolonization imperative. I am no expert: I am a student of the street and prison based revolutionary legacies (a la Assata Shakur, Lorenzo Ervin, Kuwasi Balagoon, Ashanti Alston, George Jackson, Martin Sostre, Jamil al-Amin, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Sanyika Shakur, Malcolm X, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Street Trans\* Action Revolutionaries etc), and of Black revolutionary feminism (a la Claudia Jones, Frances Beal, Third World Women's Alliance, Ella Baker, the Combahee River Collective), who learns where I can from the Intelligentsia (Fanon, Wynter, Rodney, Cabral, and a host of others), who has an exposure to use of the scientific method during my time working on aquatic restoration projects (especially through water quality testing and water quality data collection), and who wrestled directly with the pitfalls of bourgeois philosophy of science during that time (hence, my interest in the works of SJ Gould, RC Lewontin, and related thinkers), and whose studies

metaphors — that of a “swinging pendulum” and a “rotating parallelogram” are key to tying together the ideas of this section. Here we critique sex class theory alongside a host of other views. My focus is on the constriction and expansion of Patriarchy as evidenced in cisheterosexist ideas that have emerged in various theories on race and gender in particular. I insist that class struggle and national liberation as well as the Political all provide context to those developments. Through a focus on these various ideas, I try to argue for the validity of my Nexus hypothesis.

Part Four — A Nature-Nurture Spectrum: On Assimilation, Spandrels, Gender Expansivity, and the Interpenetration of Parts and Wholes starts out as a continuation of the preceding section, looking specifically at flaws in “gay assimilationist” movement. It defines what the notion of a “spandrel” is according to Gould, Lewontin, and the CHE framework. It touches on views of sex and gender from a dialectical perspective, and specifically looks at my take on the key concepts needed to approach a historical material evolutionary view of the diversity of gender/sexual relations as it relates to the range in biophysical trait presentations. This section will try to make things more concrete as best as possible by providing examples of what I call genre specific inflections of nature-nurture, including outside the West, framing gender/sex in the context of the historical material evolution of PAI-GIEIRILs, an acronym I coined that is short for precolonial, ancestral, indigenous and genre inflected experiences, identities, roles, institutions, and lifeways. I emphasize that “interpenetration” as a notion is useful in clarifying these perspectives. Ultimately I try to give more clarity to my Nexus hypothesis especially as it relates to my readings of Fanonian and Wynterian critiques of biocentrism.

Part Five — Quadruple Jeopardy: On Statecraft, Pathologization, Neocolonialism, and the Production of Gender Outlaws starts out with explanations of how I define Gender Self-Determination, and touches on the origins of such a concept within struggles for National Self-determination. My focus is on how ethnoreligious

there I kinda just developed this anti-capitalist and environmentalist inclination in my mind.

People around me saw these tendencies in me, and as I started to grow and learn more about things like slavery, patriarchy, and colonialism, those early anti-capitalist environmentalist inclinations developed into a politic. I didn’t really start moving on these ideas until when I was in high school. See, there was this environmental restoration organization near my block, and my mother kept encouraging me to go. It took a while for me to actually listen to her, because they had kids on boats, and here I am a teenager in the Bronx; and while, yes, I loved water/nature, it seemed out of place for a city kid!

I fell in love with the Bronx River though. Learning about water quality, birds, fish, learning to row, being in nature, learning about pollution, learning about climate risks: I adored the experience. I also fell in love with myself. I found confidence, and I found bravery to explore how I wanted to see the world, and outside of green related things, I carried this with me, in the arts, my faith, and into my studies.

## II.

A key interest of mine that emerged in that period was my desire to learn as many languages as possible. I turned to the Cherokee language first, because it was the only Indigenous language in the United States that I was aware of at the time which had its own writing systems. Reportedly either created or revealed by Sekwoyah (there are two origin stories), the Cherokee syllabary is not an alphabet: most of its characters, except for the vowels, are a combination of consonant and vowel, or consonant cluster and vowel. There are 86 syllabics and the system was eventually changed to make printing over a press easier.

Much of Cherokee grammar is also structured around root words that have prefixes, suffixes, and infixes attached to com-

municate things like who is doing what, to whom, when, and how, among other things. This is different from English, which is an “isolating” language that doesn’t rely so much on bound morphemes (word parts) to communicate this information. So, for example, the word translated as “woman” in Cherokee is “a-ge-hya,” which uses the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular prefix “a-” and the root “-gehya” literally corresponding to “that person is a woman.” If someone replaced the prefix “a-” with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular “tsi-” this becomes “I am a woman,” (tsigehya). Similarly, the word translated as “man” in Cherokee is “a-sga-ya,” which again uses that same 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular prefix “a-” but with the root “-sgaya” thus corresponding to “that person is a man.” If someone replaced the prefix “a-” with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person dual “sdi-” this becomes “the two of you are men” (sdisgaya). Unlike English, then, Cherokee uses bound pronouns.

As I started learning more of this language, looking through documents like *Notebook of a Cherokee Shaman* (and other works from the Kilpatricks), the *Swimmer Manuscript*, even James Mooney’s ethnography, and the beloved *Cherokee-English Dictionary* by Durbin Feeling, I was shocked to learn that in traditional Cherokee society, relations between *anigehya* and *anisgaya* had not been Patriarchal, but rather matrilineal and complementary. Theda Purdue has worked on gender in Cherokee traditional society. Matrilineal relations meant that one’s Clan (of which there were 7) was passed down through the mother, and that “paternal” authority came from the mother’s brothers. Additionally, the division of labor, patterns of ownership, and diffusion of power were not hierarchically and exploitatively structured along gender lines.

When European colonists invaded southeastern Native territory, some of them used a contrast between their own Christian Patriarchal society and the matrilineal-complementary society of *anitsalagi*, the Cherokee people, to explain why the latter were civilizationally inferior. This is what began to negatively reshape

torical drawing board to look more closely at the questions I say Sex Class Theory cannot answer.

I close out the series with another personal reflection on my journey that I hope will give life to what’s been covered.

The title of each part is set up to give a rough idea of what concepts will be covered in each part.

I’m hoping that in providing notes on these concepts, people will better grasp the particular terms I find most useful in clarifying Gender Self-Determination, and formulating a decolonial trans-feminist material analytic. Part One — A Roots Grasping Doll: On Gendered Coloniality, the Nexus Hypothesis, and My Journey to a Black Autonomous Transfeminism is this section here, which introduces the whole series and its overall focus, especially my particular theoretical coinage “imbrication nexus,” as it relates to Lugones’ coloniality of gender thesis, and my personal journey as a thinker and revolutionary.

Part Two — The Kinematic: On Reductionism, Mechanical Materialism, Idealism, and False Universalism will try to define what a kinematic law is, what reductionism is and its different varieties, what mechanical materialism versus dialectical and historical materialism is, what idealism is, and what false universalism is. What I suggest here is that Sex Class Theory as well as orthodox Marxisms hold to a flat understanding of historical material evolution, especially regarding gender/sex. I see this as unscientific, undialectical, and Eurocentric as much as it tends to be cissexist. So this installment will give an idea of the particular philosophical and theoretical synthesis I’m working from. I will offer perspectives on how Lineal kinship customs provide evidence for my Nexus hypothesis too.

Part Three — The Swinging Pendulum, Rotating Parallelogram: On Sociogeny, Potentiality, Reterritorialization, and New Biologies In the Postcolonial Age will try to define sociogeny, what biological potentiality is, what Sylvia Wynter’s reterritorialization thesis is, and what Oyeronke Oyewumi’s idea of “new biologies” is. Two



is a Respectability Politic, *My Gender Is Marronage: A Revisitation; Theoretical and Practical Lessons for the Struggle* (the conclusion to *The Devil Wears Dashikis* exposé series), and *Dispatches from Among the Damned: On the History and Present of Trans\* Survival*.

This series will also diverge from some of my earlier claims, correct them even, sharpen them. During the course of the summer of 2022 in which I began writing this, I had to revisit both my own works and those I already read. I also began to read, listen to, and study things I had never encountered before (including things I don't agree with or only began recently to unite with). It is now fall 2022 when this series is done and the journey involved with it has not only grown me as a theorist, but it's been both cathartic and a message to myself about what I need to examine more deeply in future works.

Part Two and Part Three will deal with philosophical issues in modern and then contemporary scientific and critical thought I find most relevant to this conversation. I want to answer the question: how do these notions reinforce and reflect bourgeois society, colonialism, the State, and what are their implications for our understanding of gender?

Part Four and Part Five bring what I consider dialectical and decolonial transfeminist (critical, materialist) alternatives covered in the previous two sections to an overview of gender relations outside the West and in the context of colonization and colonized liberation struggles. This will seek to answer the question: how does gender self-determination challenge colonialism, bourgeois society, and the State?

I have structured these notes in this fashion because, while it is ultimately a critique of Sex Class Theory, it is first an overview of the context for its flaws, and secondly a correction of those flaws shared among both Sex Class Theory and alternative and adjacent, sometimes even conflicting views. Third, these notes are an attempt to offer metatheoretical alternatives, and demonstrate their uses methodologically, before finally going to the ideological and his-

the conditions of not just Cherokee *anigehya* but also those considered *asegi udantehdi* or *nudale udantehdi* in Cherokee (translation: "strange hearted," or "different hearted"). The latter would be populations that Western anthropologists folded under the label "berdache" and who are now being called "Two-Spirited." Cherokee society, like many Indigenous cultures of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific had not organized themselves as far as gender with a rigid binary/dualism in all instances as is commonly assumed.

Now, as I'm learning the Cherokee language and about Cherokee experience of colonization and gender, I am also getting into theatre and performance. I had mentioned that my grandmother and mother are creatives; and that my involvement in environmentalism sparked a desire to go after new experiences. I started to more seriously concentrate on artistic work, auditioning for films, writing plays, submitting poetry during these years.

I got three different forms of training in theatre: the first focused on improvisation, the second ranging from improv to devising to voice/speech and diction and more, and the last touching on all these plus immersive theatre, documentary theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed (a la Augusto Boal), and playwriting.

Each experience prioritized helping students use the arts as a form of commentary about social issues. This is typical of progressive or liberal non-profit organizations in the hood. I remember one project was focused on studying either the Rwandan genocide or the Cambodian genocide. Another project was focused on educational inequity in NYC.

A key theme for me, in looking at these issues from a theatre lens, was to identify the drama inherent to real-life shit. When one is an actor, you are typically challenged to look at a script or a scene with questions like: what are the given circumstances? the central conflict? the objective and tactics? relationships? You want to think about the context in which a story is unfolding, and specifically the way the characters are negotiating or wrestling with things both

internally and externally. There tends to be an emphasis on making sense of the contradictions between the things different forces and characters want or are in pursuit of, and overall obstacles involved, be those human or more-than-human; there also is a need to identify or concoct as a performer the specific actions and choices that are made because of the above stated, both within the world but also as far as technique (articulation, gait, body language, etc).

Bringing this approach to the examination of social issues was very interesting, especially if I was looking at primary source materials, documents written from first hand knowledge of a time period in the past. It meant I was to regard historical events not as something removed or something that happens just because, but as things that occur because of human persons literally struggling for their interests.

While there are dangers to flattening actual phenomena to mere drama, the theatrical lens did open up possibilities for me to start paying attention to social issues as things that are complex, situational, dynamic matters of contestation. A play wouldn't be enthralling if the story being told did not exude these characteristics; it would just feel lifeless, removed, directionless, an endless shift in happenings onstage like a deck of cards being shuffled over and over again, with no purpose...

A perspective like this was germane with what I needed once I began to feel called to the movement for Black Lives. See, the Ferguson Uprising pops off that summer. I can remember it clearly: I was somewhat late to one of my theatre classes, and the news was on. I could remember hearing Dorian Johnson, Michael Brown's friend. Watching the news reports and overall responses on social media awoke something in me. I felt challenged to go beyond just seeing social issues as dramas to be retold. Maybe it was time to start wrestling with contradictions off the stage and off the page. To get involved in and to understand communities and relations, antagonisms, conflicting wants and wills and interests, backgrounds and

this, nuance is highly necessary. There are ways that with some phrases or words, I have a unique way of using them that it would take patience with the context of this text and my previous works in order to appreciate how and why I use it as I do.

Each section will be split up by Roman numerals in the same manner as this here introduction so that readers can take breaks with the information, especially since my writing style involves such very long sentences. Furthermore, some level of familiarity with Leftist theory, scientific vocabulary, transfeminist thought, and anti-colonial theories may be needed in order to best grasp the topic at hand as I am dealing with it. None of this is content that proves immediately familiar or apprehensible per se; I myself am a learner, still learning, and have to constantly revisit material concerning the matter to sharpen my understanding. We are dealing with heavily layered questions: there should be no expectation of uniform ease in parsing those layers. One could easily just dismiss transphobia in general and Sex Class Theory in particular as "bioessentialist," which is a correct statement. But without understanding what bioessentialism is, studying and struggling around the theoretical bases for how it comes up, and analyzing the overall historical material and cultural bases for why it's used to repress transness, that qualification can become a mere reflex or rote (and potentially meaningless) epithet. A Black revolutionary should strive for self-consciously radical "roots grasping" action, however, including in the terms and ideas we utilize. This is most especially needed in an age where various so-called trans affirming agents know how to use the right lingo to conceal their ulterior, often cult-like motives and recruitment strategies.

So, I encourage patience and continued, repeat engagement, and to see this work as in conversation with both *Femme Queen*, *Warrior Queen* as well as *To The Ones Who Can Fly: A Message from the Whirlwind*, along with my other works like *Who's Man is This: Black Radical Ecology and the Anthropogenic Question* and *Clout Culture: Queer Liberation and Social Capitalism; Transphobia*

apartheid and to advance homonationalism and military intervention. Meanwhile, reactionary forces in the Grand Patriarchy are going to work with political and religious leaders in the Minor Patriarchy against a so-called ‘gay agenda’ or against a ‘trans agenda’ and unfortunately, you have supposedly progressive forces within the Minor Patriarchy that will adopt these ideas, particularly through notions of ‘sex-based oppression.’”

The “sex based oppression” view is the main animus for why I had to start writing this project. It is becoming one of the more common views, drowning out even culturalist and ontologically reductionist interpretations of gender struggle, or perhaps even combining with and swallowing them, refashioning them anew. Even revolutionary feminist circles that hold to ideas like Triple Jeopardy, or conception of class/race/gender oppression that aren’t additive, have fallen victim to it. They have joined into a reactionary anti-trans politics that essentially wields Minor Patriarchy in the name of combating sexual and racial oppression. In fact, some of these have gone so far as to triangulate trans liberation itself with either coloniality or with (neo)liberalism.

## V.

The crux of this series, *Against Sex Class Theory: Some Notes On Science, Materialism, and Gender Self-Determination*, is to help confront the “sex based” interpretation. The bulk of this work will have to be abstract and metatheoretical, but we will bring things to the concrete when necessary. There are occasions when I will define terms but other times I will be using particular words, phrases, terms, for the sake of precision (not verbosity as some like to incorrectly assume). No two words mean the exact same thing; even synonyms have different nuances in meaning, and for a subject like

circumstances, the situational and dynamic and complex nature of obstacles and objectives, etc. not as an actor, but as an activist.

For a period I was swept up in the more reformist reaching-across-the-aisle spaces. I remember a homie of mine, older and more seasoned and experienced, saw me talking with pride about these things. He didn’t approve, as he was a socialist, but he figured that time would humble and correct me. He was right.

Thinking that I could use the arts to get through to politicians was certainly idealistic, but I was a teenager. What really convinced me that my friend was correct about the uselessness of the approach was when I heard from one of the supposed “good cops” who was invited to an event and that cop acknowledged he reality of antiblack policing, but still asserted that their hands were tied and therefore the onus of responsibility for avoiding death was on us as Black youth. Being told in roundabout ways that “comply or die” was the mindset of even the cops with good intentions eventually woke me up towards the consideration that perhaps I needed a more radical approach.

My friend was right.

“In Marxism (especially Marxist feminism) I found a basic understanding of the evolution of class antagonism, from ancient forms of slavery to feudal society into the present bourgeois order... I found an explanation of how modern gender/sexual oppression came into being with this in mind, tied up with the property system that was pivotal to Capitalism.” — Nsambu

The process of moving toward radical politics was not linear and smooth though. I did encounter Black nationalism though. I joined a civil rights organization focused on police brutality that was founded by the child of a former Panther.

And, I encountered Marxism around then too. I specifically was taught a Marxist analysis of gendered labor divisions. One of my

high school teachers put me on to this. In Black nationalism I found affirmation of my culture and the legacy of indigenous African values and spiritual beliefs. I found an emphasis on self-emancipation of our people as those oppressed along national and class lines. I even found affirmation of gender/sexual liberation in one of Huey Newton's speeches. In Marxism (especially Marxist feminism) I found a basic understanding of the evolution of class antagonism, from ancient forms of slavery to feudal society into the present bourgeois order. I found an emphasis on how exploitation of labor, as opposed to either Divine Will or progressive reason as an extension of natural selection, constituted the basis of modern society's institutions and values and relations. I found an explanation of how modern gender/sexual oppression came into being with this in mind, tied up with the property system that was pivotal to Capitalism.

The convergence of these two — Black nationalism and Marxist feminism — helped kickstart a long and complicated journey toward reclaiming my spirituality and my gender variance as an African person, and to developing a revolutionary ideology. My interests in science and language always followed me.

### III.

I was to be considered for leadership in the Black nationalist organization I was with. It was my first time participating in organization meetings and in phone zaps, writing letters or emails to officials. I learned how to help coordinate crowdfunds and disaster relief efforts, and to host or attend teach-ins about different topics and skills.

There was a very vibrant culture of discussion and debate in this organization, too. Our mission statement was modeled on the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Program. But, the organization was also dominated by cisgender men and cisgender women. The men in the organization wanted to insist on the traditional kind of

females; most injuries to them—with the important exceptions of clitoridectomy and infibulation in some societies—were severely punished. And there were some matrifocal communal societies, famous for their tradition of women leaders.”

Clearly there is immense complexity that disallows any flat construction of African societies as inherently gender equalized or gender oppressive across the board. It's the presence of these internal contradictions that is the material basis for why when the dominant capitalism-colonial system and its imbrication-nexus of Patriarchy is imposed exogenously, we get what Sanyika Shakur calls a “Minor Patriarchy.” This may not be the “Grand Patriarchy” of the colonizers, but it still is organized as a hegemonic imbrication nexus for relations endogenous to colonized communities vis-a-vis the effects of imposed class and Political contradictions.

It is because of my Nexus hypothesis that I argued in *Dispatches from Among the Damned*, that the colonial-imperial Grand Patriarchy is able to:

“externalize the cisheterosexist violence of colonial class society from the imperial core to the peripheries, including domestic colonies. This helps to produce a Minor Patriarchy among the exploited. This is why legislation and representation can reap so many rewards within capitalism for white cultural expressions of queerness/transness, meanwhile for those on the other side of the color line, we *les damnés de la Terre*, progressive reason has done nothing but incite more violence against us. The forces of Minor Patriarchy look upon it and pretend that being pro-trans/queer or even feminist is to be pro-Empire; and progressives within Grand Patriarchy absolutely will point to these manifestations in order to pinkwash genocide and

dered per se may get modified or absorbed too and renegotiated; if Age was a nexus, in say a gerontocephalous and communalistic setting, now suddenly Age is structured through Patriarchy, which is why ideas like “it takes a village” and “respect for elders” can be warped into a matter of reproducing the authority granted by the State or church and the labor divisions of class society (rather than about particular relations of leadership and shared labor from less alienated models).

Centering the Third World is key to elucidating this, especially Africa, as a lot of these processes can be demonstrated within even the last 200 years, or even 100 years for some cultures. There are African people living today who were alive when their societies still practiced gender expansivity; there are elders whose children and grandchildren are the first generations to live in a context of such rigidity of gender as we have now. This doesn't mean that oppression of African people, especially gender expansive people, hasn't existed for a long time, however. Similarly, the imbrication nexuses of precolonial, ancestral, indigenous, genre-inflected experiences, identities, roles, institutions, lifeways are not utopic, as the societal contexts in which they are situated aren't utopian. Age nexuses threaded feudal relations in some places; some forms of non-biocentric construction of gender, were tied up with forms of servitude, to name a few.

Furthermore, regarding even communalism, the more predominant mode of production in many African societies, Sam Mbah and IE Igariwey write, in *African Anarchism*:

“communalism was not an anarchist utopia. Nowhere is this more evident than in the generally low status of women in some forms of communalism. This was made worse, at least on the surface, by the practice of polygyny (one man married to several women, often sisters). In many African communities, however, tradition and custom accorded certain protections to

cultural nationalism that one might associate with, say, the NOI and some of the less developed Panthers of the last century, or even with Christian clergy style activism associated with leaders during the Civil Rights era. The women in the organization either tended to follow suit, or they would push a sort of liberal-progressivism aligned with the Democratic Party. Sometimes these divergent paths clashed, and the organization became hostile and volatile, but the leadership always demanded unity.

I found myself tailing these different tendencies for a time, as I had many internal and external contradictions to work through: my own backwards ideas and issues of self-esteem, battles with religious propaganda, the complications of familial trauma, the weight of bullying and ableism and ostracism and ridicule throughout my childhood — I had to wrestle with all of this.

But even then, I knew who my Soul was calling me to be, and also I knew what I was learning from Marxist feminism and what I learned from the Panthers and Black Power era figures that I was beginning to study. Which is to say, I realized that we could not stand by a cisheteropatriarchal vision of nationalism, nor a vision of nationalism that aligned with bourgeois institutions like the State or religious structures. I became critical of how the organization emphasized a spirit of Self-Determination which I valued, but did not extend that beyond certain established structures. I fought and studied and argued tirelessly in this organization around these questions.

I was also getting involved in campus organizing too. There I am, trying to weave all these things together, but I'm not finding a coherent place or ideology to do so, much less a community. My organization had no established presence at my school; some of its chapters were in disarray because of abusive men in the organization, and then the women stood by them because of their insistence on “unity” at all costs.

Whenever I tried to address gender contradictions, I was thoroughly shut down. Men would attack me verbally; women would

agree with me but then tell me to accommodate the men. Membership insisted that we were to be “womanist” and not feminist, and as far as the role of Marxism or communism, that was completely pushed aside (ironic since the Panthers were socialist). Womanism was seen as conducive to Black unity because it was family centered and ideologically Afrocentric; whereas feminism (and communism) were said to be divisive because of not privileging the nuclear family nor spiritual belief systems in its approach to Black liberation.

I remember finally connecting with a brotha who helped to pull together a circle within the organization focused on helping brothas deal with gender contradictions. In this circle there was a gay man, and there was also my Closeted though genderqueer self (I didn’t use any labels back then, however). There, we would discuss the non-patriarchal and non-nuclear formations in traditional African societies. We would talk about different social roles, how they weren’t restricted along gender lines. One of the brothas would talk about what he saw to be an evolutionary (adaptive) basis for queerness. I would then try to discuss what this would mean for organizing as Black nationalists.

At that point, however, there was never an interest in taking ideas to practice. The cultural and evolutionary basis for gender expansive relations in the African societal context was always relegated to the past. When brought to the present it was mentioned only to explain why so-called “males” in the Black community were excluded from proper alignment with Eurocentric Patriarchy; or, only to explain why so-called “females” in the Black community were excluded from proper alignment with Eurocentric Patriarchy. From this perspective, gender expansivity doesn’t exist beyond the enclosures associated with the racialized anatomical reductions that have been used to sexualize and criminalize African people. Those reductions are taken on face value, as a given, *a priori* (and oftentimes, enclosure, atomization, and the host of structural consequences involved as regards to gender relations

turned by the bourgeois nuclear family. That’s the material basis of Transmisogyny, which itself, particularly in the anti-black context of Transmisogynoir, tends to be used as a fulcrum for maintaining sexual anatomical reductions, in reactionary defense of the threads of so-called Civilization.

What we have, then, are reductive accounts of biophysical trait presentations associated with sexual reproduction, that are coerced and regulated in varied ways to maintain the structural consequences of the process of enclosure and atomization, most especially the advance of the property relation and exploitation of socially necessary labor, vis-a-vis the unraveling of non-hegemonic imbrication nexuses in place of a hegemonic Nexus.

This is an ongoing process, constantly negotiated against the potential re-emergence or persistence of the non-hegemonic imbrication nexuses for which gender expansivity is a structural consequence, as these would upset the normative function of modern material/power relations at the interpersonal and institutional level. All of these processes are co-occurring even as their imposition happens in different ways for the different societies forced under colonialism and incorporated into Capitalist relations and the State. They do not render uniform positionalities across time and space, although this does not exclude the possibility of objectively identifying a range of positionalities, that is, should we consider them ontically vis-a-vis imbrication Nexuses. That is part of why gender/sex *spandrels* encompass a range of labels and understandings across human history, and sometimes exhibit varied characteristics and identifiers even within the same context, much less in the life of the same individual person. The magnitudinous amount of labels being coined to recognize the range involved with gender and sexuality speaks to this.

Additionally, this is also why the character of Cishetero-Patriarchy is also in flux, capable of becoming more rigid or somewhat fluid depending. Nexuses that weren’t historically gen-

ics, even in the occasional feudalistic and slaving orders of precolonial societies. As such, whatever forms of “manhood” or “masculinity” that emerged were rarely or sometimes never biocentric, unlike the European Patriarchy that was imposed exogenously by the colonizer.

In response, Europeans would pathologize colonized, especially African men as “lazy” for not participating in labor and leadership in the manner which they were most familiar and which their societies required. The Nexus Hypothesis is also essential here because it can elucidate why it is that the resulting positionality fostered onto cisgender Black men under Grand Patriarchy cannot be characterized as a form of gender marginalization on par with the Triple Jeopardy with which other populations are faced. This is because the production and reproduction thereof does not involve exploitation under both endogenous and exogenous dynamics along sexual lines, save for those men who are trans, queer and non-binary.

The various kinds of transphobia are a consequence of these structural developments: imbrication nexuses where so-called “anafemale” manhoods (from a Western, atomized, dimorphist, intersexist lens) could exist are being subordinated where a cissexist construction of manhood was imposed, whilst communalism and other modalities were overturned by the bourgeois nuclear family. That’s the material basis for Anti-transmasculinity. Imbrication nexuses where so-called third gender, fourth gender, fifth gender, etc roles could exist, are being subordinated as the Cissexist Gender Binary and Sex Dimorphism is imposed vis-a-vis the overturning of communalism and other modalities by the bourgeois nuclear family. That’s the material basis for nonbinary erasure, genderqueer erasure, intersexism, transphobia and cisheterosexism when broadly considered etc. Imbrication nexuses where so-called “anamale” womanhoods (from a Western, atomized, dimorphist intersexist lens) could exist are being subordinated where a cissexist construction of womanhood was imposed whilst communalism and other modalities was over-

are not even taken into account altogether). This was untenable for me, and frustrating, although I was the youngest member of the organization and very ignorant in many ways, so I lacked the knowledge and vocabulary to explain why I diverged from this view. Still, I tried my best to express myself, to no avail.

Since I’m in school at this point, I’m being taught about how race is a social construction. I learn about the environmental justice movement too, and Afrofuturist ecology, postcolonial ecocriticism, Black feminist and queer theory. I try to bring these insights with me, in order to critique flawed views of Eurocentric Patriarchy I was being exposed to, but again my own immaturity and the ideological inertia in the organization prevented any successes here.

Eventually, these and the other gender contradictions in the Black nationalist organization I was part of forced me to exit that formation. It would be the first and last time I had joined an organization for quite some time.

Now an ideological nomad, I’m trying to find my way in environmental justice organizing because it was a lifelong interest of mine. This was contemporaneous to the struggle of the Standing Rock Sioux against the Dakota Access Pipeline. I would do research, try to hold teach-ins about the struggle, even lead solidarity actions from afar in my little corner of the world on that campus.

I began to read Assata around that time, and Paulo Freire. Assata had very cogent criticisms of the Panther legacy’s relationship to women’s struggle and class struggle that I was resonating with. Freire’s work helped to sharpen my understanding of how consciousness raising within the Marxist tradition can be theorized. I drop out of college about a year later. This was for many reasons I will not divulge here, but they centered on my health and a traumatic event (the aftermath of which affects me to this day). During the course of that tumultuous struggle, I am learning to embrace my gender nonconformity and my proclivities toward the sacred and toward the scientific and towards storytelling and towards the struggle. I encounter Disability Justice, critical human ecology, and

transfeminism. I find myself ultimately attracted not to Black nationalism and Marxism per se, but to Black anarchism and Third Worldism as ideologies. I start to see my gender expansivity neither as a thing of the past nor as something limited to how a racialized sex assignment is animalized in the white imagination, but rather as an ongoing legacy and tradition of resistance. I would call this “gender-as-marronage.”

I started to reference those folktales about the people who could fly. These symbolized the runaway slaves and those who practiced ancestral religions. I saw myself, and my blossoming transness/queerness, in these stories. I was beginning to wear flowers in my hair too, like Marsha P Johnson. I wasn't telling people I was a trans woman yet, but I was wearing new jewelry, new clothes, and I was eager to become militant like Marsha and Sylvia and the gworls of STAR.

This puts me in an uncomfortable position with my home life and family dynamic, to the point of forcing a wedge that drove me out, something I would learn other Trans\* and Queer Black youth were experiencing. These young folk were also starting to make sense of their gender expanses in terms of a legacy of resistance, and pointing to African Traditional Religion to explain it. I met quotidian archivists in these settings, regular folks digging through colonialist resources, anthropological literatures and other sources, trying to excavate lost and hidden knowledge about African (and other Third World) forms of gender expansivity.

At protests and demonstrations, I would see these folks erect community altars and sites of mourning, pour libations, and honor Black folks, especially Black QTGNC folks killed by the police, combining our culture and the struggle and an honoring of gender expansivity all at once. This was something that spoke to me and what I needed to be around. Many were artists too, and healers, herbalists, etc and would put these creative and cosmological skills to use, organizing through mutual aid; and so I found communities I could learn with and learn from. We would perform ceremonies

trans or not, colonized people who don't necessarily occupy this ideal in the way white supremacy demands are scandalized as evidencing a social “backwardness,” and proclivity to “savagery” or “criminality.”

But the problem is not primarily or solely about these narratives, as these narratives are not solely informed by atomized, racialized, sexualized views of our bodies or our cosmologies/epistemologies. If this were the case, we couldn't make a materialist and power analysis of how it is that forces from the colonizer, and the forces internal to our societies, will adopt these myths to mark us as the pinnacle of danger, threat, savagery, criminality, demonic activity, etc. all as a way of maintaining cisheterosexism and Patriarchy, precisely because they are trying hold onto the hegemonic Nexus that is the nuclear family.

This is especially the case for Black Trans\*/Queer folk. The cultural calibration of Nexuses yields nationalistic, ethnocentric violences being turned inward, to the exclusion of especially gender expansive populations, hence the claims that “homosexuality is un-African” or that “transness is Blackface.”

My Nexus Hypothesis is useful here, since in many traditional gender expansive Nexuses, there was a place in society for and thus no reason to be “Othered” and marked as “queer” or “trans” per se. That seeming inclusion is inverted by the hegemonic Nexus such that our presence is to not just be accommodated but subordinated to backseat assistive roles within the home, church, and broader community — part of what comrade J. Mzizi terms a “nonmarket enclosed household and community laborer” class (*On Class, Pt. 1*). Even the racialized classism that typically marks colonized cisgender and heterosexual men as “failed” men when compared to bourgeois and European (cishet) men is a consequence of the aforementioned process. The existence of complementary and otherwise gender expansive imbricatory Nexuses in our societies was one among several limiting factors on the evolution of widespread and defining endogenous Patriarchal and sexually exploitative dynam-



archal” feature of our communities, and I argue that this is because the memory and materiality of gender expansive imbricatory Nexuses from our traditional cultures is still apparent, although such Nexuses have been swallowed into the hegemonic Nexus that is cisheteropatriarchy. Thus the dominant Nexus of Patriarchy has absorbed the roles associated with so-called traditional “matriarchy” into the socially necessary labor exploitation upon which modern bourgeois colonial class society and the State are imbricated. The dominant misinterpretation of “matriarchy” conveys the idea that Black women are strong, inhuman entities who have taken up “leadership” in African communities, emasculated our men. In this way, Patriarchal labor divisions are mystified.

Many popular critical views on this phenomenon incorrectly assume that the atomized, racialized, sexualized view of “Black bodies” (or even of African cosmologies) is what primarily or solely grounds these relegations. This fails to account for how alienation of the body relates, again, to the undermining of precolonial, ancestral, indigenous Nexuses of imbrication and their overall material/power relations.

Such a misapprehension carries over into discourses about the pathologization of supposedly atypical family structures (like extended and blended families) among colonized people, including queer/trans families. The pathologization is a structural consequence of first how those atypical family structures are dialectically interpenetrated with non-hegemonic Nexuses (and the material/power relations they imbricate) at the level of endogenous cultural dynamics, and then how such dynamics are transformed by the imposition of cisheterosexist Patriarchy as a hegemonic Nexus for the dominant, exogenously imposed class society and Political order. The Nexus Hypothesis here is keen on emphasizing how the nuclear family, two-parent home ideal is about the atomization of kinship groups, in advance of the enclosure, property system, and sexual labor exploitation that are foundational to capitalist and colonial exploitation. *Queer/*

together, crowdfund together, host teach-ins: all the things I saw in the National Self-Determination struggle, including the insistence on Black unity. That was present here as well, though it was focused on Transness and Queerness, disability and more.

This is why I suggested recently in *Dispatches from Among the Damned: On the History and Present of Trans\* Survival*, that the same way African liberation struggles of old began to arrive at a level of self-consciousness to where they abandoned racist and religious nationalism for a revolutionary conception that insists on a communistic view of National Self-determination, so also now more often than before there are those who contextualize those principles around struggles for bodily autonomy. We are, therefore, abandoning sexual and anatomical reductions imposed by class society and colonialism and the State, struggling to determine our orientation to the biophysical (especially but not solely along gender and sexual lines) with our culture and a history of Black struggle in mind. But the scientific examination of this phenomenon, the evolution of what I call a struggle for Gender Self-Determination has not been adequately discovered, synthesized or theorized. Similarly, there are culturalist varieties of nationalism (like in the organization of which I was once part) that hinder a sound conception of National Self-Determination. There have been attempts to foster the needed outlook, in the form of Transfeminism, including Black Transfeminism, but what’s often lacking is a thorough engagement with the question of class, nation, hierarchy, and human biology, geography, ecology as they relate to gender in both a dialectical and decolonial perspective.

Black nationalism has its idealist phase, and so also Gender Self-Determination is wrestling with its own idealist phase. I interpret both of these tendencies from the lens of Franz Fanon, who writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

“For a very long time the native devotes [their] energies to ending certain definite abuses: forced labour,

corporal punishment, inequality of salaries, limitation of political rights, etc. This fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave the confusion of neo-liberal universalism to emerge, sometimes laboriously, as a claim to nationhood.” (The Pitfalls of National Consciousness)

The fascistic conditions which *les damnés de la Terre* must confront often forces our struggles to circle around the question of civil and human rights, allowing for a neoliberal stranglehold on national consciousness. In *Femme Queen, Warrior Queen*, my focus was on how that reproduces divisiveness within the Black trans struggle. Many Black trans people, for example, still theorize their gender expanses solely or primarily around how their anatomy has been racialized and sexed, which privileges the Eurocentric mind and often has detrimental consequences for a materialist praxis of resistance to the institutions and roles that are tied up with the enforcement of gender rigidity.

For a long time, failed views such as this made me afraid to publicly identify as a trans woman, for fear that I would be misread as someone merely trying to avoid the purported behavioral and psychological consequences of a “socialization.” Put differently, a dimorphist interpretation of Black gender struggle had it so that I was seen as only ever having to prove that I was not actually “male,” which only increased my fears around the violence came with my transfemininity. Inherent to such interpretations is the assumption that sexual/anatomical dualism is a fact, and that it renders humanity the passive recipient of historical material forces, or that it contains an innate blueprint for behavior that everyone operates on at a fundamental level even if variation (like transness) can be acknowledged superficially. This was because gender expansivity still could not be apprehended beyond the enclosures associated with anatomical reductions, as the process of enclosure doesn’t fig-

relations. But a material and power analysis is typically not put at the fore in the existing literature on these questions.

Misogyny is no doubt a structural consequence of the historical material process by which various both gendered and non-gendered nexuses and the local material/power relations they imbricated were transformed under capitalism-colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy. This is especially true for antiblack sexism or misogynoir (à la Moya Bailey), which reproduce oppression of especially gender non-conforming African women at the level of endogenous contradictions and exogenously imposed ones. Many misogynoirist narratives are generalized off misinterpretations of those who European invaders and their researchers called “women warriors” in African societies, such as the Mino or so-called “Amazons” of Dahomey. These non-conforming women and otherwise gender expansive peoples were reductively interpreted by Westerners as essentially “masculine females” and even animalistic. This was because the roles they occupied emerged from an imbricatory Nexus which was not gender-rigid in the manner Patriarchal Europeans were most used to.

Dahomey society was of course, no utopia: it was a feudal order in some respects, and in attempts to negotiate the sovereignty thereof, this meant an unfortunate track record of involvement in the slave trade. Still, Nexus theory is more useful than a narrow sex dimorphist interpretation to understanding how Patriarchal narratives about Black women and other marginalized gender peoples were developed, in this instance. Many accounts simply take the visuocentric alienation of the Agojie’s bodies at face value, as though the atomized view of their “sex” is primary or central, therefore absenting an analysis of the Nexus of imbrication and overall material/power relations that contextualize the diversity contained within even the “Amazon” category itself.

My Nexus Hypothesis is helpful when thinking about the “double jeopardy” of domestic plus formal economic labor exploitation put on Black women. Many will interpret this is a so-called “matri-

are interpenetrated with the process of imbrication for particular arrangements of authority in the Oyo-Yoruba context.

When I look at the Cherokee context, the Igbo context, the Dagara context, I try to examine what the local Nexuses for each are, and how they are calibrated, too. For the Cherokee, it seems Age and Gender are a nexus, but the arrangement thereof is both matrifocal/matrilineal and complementary, as well as gerontocephalous. Their self-conception involves stories about their people having intentionally abolished hereditary castes/spiritual authority and plays a role in the structure of their governance systems in the Council House, which themselves are threaded by clan, elders, and gender complementarity. In the Igbo context, it seems Gender is a nexus, including a pairing of *nwoke* and *nwanyi*, but the arrangement thereof is not Patriarchy (not dualist, nor binary-oppositional) although there is a degree of patrilocality or patrilineality. This nexus, however, is complementary, and exhibits a fluidity that, as Ifi Amadiume makes clear, allows for so-called “female” patrilineages, and as Nwando Achebe makes clear, for “female” monarchs. Add to that the relative statelessness that is reported of traditional Igbo society, and the communal arrangement of the market-life, plus the inflection of the spiritual belief systems *Odinala* or *Omenala*. There is an emphasis here on collective care for the earth as the ground for society and social relations (communalism).

In the Dagara context, if we take Malidoma Patrice Somé’s words into consideration, the Nexus is not gender at all whatsoever, such that matters of sexual reproduction also do not anchor how roles are assigned; and instead a notion of “energy” conveys gender, while social roles are linked to communalism and not coercively assigned, and inflected by spiritual beliefs (especially those regarding the Dagara conception of birth years and medicinal elements). In these and many more examples, there are different degrees of gender expansivity that are a structural consequence of how imbricatory nexuses thread the local material/power

ure prominently in the theoretical landscape of many Black queer/trans radical spaces I was in.

Thus, my gender expansivity was solely or primarily a consequence of how my racialized anatomy was “always already” excluded from Eurocentric gender categories in an ontological sense, a perspective which would have it that a “male” anatomical sex assignment, even despite racialization, would inherently carry “privilege” and be “socialized” a certain way.

Such a flawed view shows up in the Black feminist movement very often as well. For example, in the text *Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches: Gender, Generation, and the Ethics of Black Queer Kinship*, Savannah Shange examines stud/femme dynamics among young Black queer girls in a pedagogical setting. An autoethnographic work, Shange examines a school that claims to be progressive and liberatory for kids of color, including non-cis/non-heterosexual ones, but which also is in proximity to carceral issues. While the text brilliantly traces the violent gendered dynamics that show up in the conflict between two students of Shange to “the range of antagonisms that lie within the frame of The Black Family,” sex dimorphism and a binary interpretation of both gender and gender performance are taken as a given, even as transness and Black gender variance is acknowledged and theorized.

Thus, Kairo, a young stud among the many “young studs of color in Frisco [who] were hypercriminalized” as Shange writes, is somewhat interpreted through the notion of a “confluence of high risk and high reward that masculinity entails,” a view which starts from commentary on the criminalization of cisgender Black boys and men, before suggesting that such “risk and reward” can “stretch beyond those assigned male at birth.” This is an additive conception of “privilege” and oppression that takes anatomical sex reductions as their deictic center prior to acknowledgement and theorization of expansive gender/sexuality as it relates to Black relations to the nuclear family as a bourgeois and colonial institution.

Such a view yields what I term a form of “ontological reductionism,” that I will critique in more depth later. In this case, ontological reductionism poses a few major theoretical issues. To illustrate, if we look at footnote number 26, Shange insists on using the term “non-trans” as opposed to “cisgender” because of the idea that “dominant genders... are based on white bourgeois normativity.” Citing Cohen and Spillers (the latter of whom I will talk about later), Shange suggest that there is no way for Black women to ever achieve ‘real’ or legitimate womanhood” and that “this dynamic holds for Black men, just with different stereotypes.” Shange even goes so far as to assert that one would be “fronting” to suggest that Black “non-trans” women “wield structural power.” It is as if the sole or primary structures we must consider in Black feminism are the ideative and metaphysical constructions of gender which weaponize animality against Black womanhood in order to castigate Black cis women as unfeminine/unwomanly.

The obscurantism that this relies on, regarding the role many Black cis women play in maintaining the material/power structure involved with the violences of the nuclear family, especially through repression of transgender Black children, and even through collaboration with non-trans men in the State and bourgeois relations for those territories dealing with neocolonialism: all of this is an issue for me. The ontological reductionist view was the case for the cultural nationalist organization I was in, insofar as gender expansivity in the African context was acknowledged but always reduced to the supposed sexed body (albeit in a trans-exclusive rather than trans-inclusive model). Ontological reductionism in those spaces meant class obscurantism as well, such that even as metaphysical/ideative discussions of Black gender variance were held, a refusal to acknowledge the necessity of challenging the structural power cis Black men yielded in my former organization (sometimes with the help of cis women) was pushed aside.

cation nexuses in the realm of “sociogeny” and ecogeny, including but not limited to fluid gender systems, stand “alongside” (to borrow Fanon’s words) forms of gender/sexual diversity that exist at the level phylogeny and ontogeny.

Patriarchy is not the only imbrication nexus that has been calibrated in human societies, just as class and the Political (the State) are not the only kinds of material and power relations that have existed. It is, however, due to euromodernity and colonialism-imperialism, that the hegemonic Nexus is Patriarchy, just as the dominant material and power relations are a bourgeois class society (Capitalism) and the humanist/Westphalian nation-state.

The reductionism characteristic of modern Western thought absolutely should be critiqued precisely because of its inability to contextualize gender in terms of how a hegemonic Nexus called Patriarchy, whereby Capitalism and the State are imbricated (especially as the nuclear family and private property are tied together as a basic economic unit), is first endogenous to the dynamics of European societies. But “postmodern” and other currents that claim to stand outside of Western epistemology *have similarly* failed to account for how a hegemonic Nexus is globalized to absorb and transform and erase or marginalize pre-existing Nexuses during the course of transformation of correlated material/power relations endogenous to the societies of *les damnes de la Terre*.

Some examples of a few different Nexuses:

Age in the context of Oyo-Yoruba society according to Oyeronke Oyewumi. In *The Invention of Women*, she suggests that matters concerning sexual reproduction take a backseat to the organization of material and power relations. In this way, the gender pairing of *Obinrin* and *Okunrin* end up being non-biocentric, and that’s because rather than “gender” it is Seniority that anchors the Oyo-Yoruba social world. She highlights the role of a spiritual “worldsense” in what I would term the inflection of this Age-nexus. Thus, we have culturally calibrated notions of age and sex that

thought,” I think it important to synthesise them with a decolonial struggle, offering a dialectical conception of Black trans radicalism and of transfeminism. I have on other occasions dubbed this a “Transfeminist Materialism.”

A transfeminist materialism might look at the full history of humanity, especially African societies and non-Western cultures more broadly. It unites with the Marxist thesis, as per Engels, that modern sexism is traced to the dissolution of communalistic kinship structures centered on the clan, and transfiguration of socially necessary labor into a form of domestic sexual exploitation. But, I suggest that those communalistic kinship/clan structures calibrated nexuses of imbrication, including but not limited to diverse formulations of matrilineality and patrilineality, and that these had gender expansive characteristics.

Understanding that is also why my view is not anti-culturalist. I unite with Black critical understanding that white supremacist views of African people’s bodies play a role in the particular ways Blackness must relate to now global bourgeois relations. But, I suggest that the supremacist views of African people’s bodies involve denigration of nexuses of imbrication in our cultures, atomizing their attendant metabolic praxes to mystified, pathologizing rhetoric about animalistic and hypersexual inferiority. This was especially the case for so-called third gender or gender expansive social roles, as the Nexuses for which these phenomena were structural consequences, needed to be cleared away in the imposition of the nuclear family, Patriarchy, and its labor divisions and binary/dimorphist metaphysics.

Understanding that is also why the my perspective isn’t anti-biology. I acknowledge a convergence of class- based and colonial sexual and racial oppression on the body, with implications for gendered subjecthood. But, the degree to which this involves biophysical realities cannot be assumed to be static or uniform, especially if racialist and dualist notions of “phenotype” are taken at face value. And this is precisely because an array of culturally calibrated imbric-

I do not view the problems in Shange’s scholarship as being on the same level as the issues I encountered with the organizing spaces I was in, but I do find that the theoretical absenting which ontological reductionism yields can be applied in harmful ways at the level of practice.

And bad theory and bad practice are linked, and this particular germ of rot has infected other emancipatory movements. Neoliberal universalism has not just crept up in our transgender struggles for bodily autonomy and gender self-determination. In fact, it’s the reactionary iteration of neoliberal confusion that’s most pertinent to Fanon’s commentary, particularly as it manifests in the form of ethno-religious supremacism, and which I discussed from a Transfeminist lens before in *Femme Queen, Warrior Queen: Beyond Representation, Towards Self-Determination*. I find that the calibration of sexual relations along ethno-religious supremacist lines is an under-explored yet extremely pertinent problem as regards the contradictions within National Self-Determination struggle (hence, the need for a Gender Self-Determination struggle).

This is something I claim anti-colonial and anti-imperialist theory has not dealt with in a satisfactory manner, not without tracking in some flavor of idealism: be it bioreductive, culturalist, or a mechanical materialism. This is why we need a transfeminist corrective.

#### IV.

To say that sexual relations are calibrated along lines of the *ethnos* is, in other words, to say that what gets called “gender” is endogenous to each cultural context.

When I say culture, I don’t mean it in the modern sense we understand it, associated with nationalities and so-called races. I’m referring to geography-specific populations that have developed a “transmitted historical consciousness,” to borrow Cedric Robinson’s words. That transmission of historical consciousness may to-

day be oriented around belonging to a nation-state or race because of the history of colonialism, but for much of human history the mode of transmission was oriented around belonging to one's clan/extended family, tribe, kin group. Gender patterns would be calibrated within that context differently than how they are today. In the modern world, the *ethnos* calibration is through how specific populations have become racialized and associated with a nation-state. This is because of how power differentials exist across populations and thus across racialized groupings and nation-state territories under colonialism-imperialism and racial capitalism.

We can understand this if we look at the prevailing overrepresentation of whiteness as the face of queerness and transness. White/European or First World nation-states dictate the Political struggle for queer/trans rights protections and the cultural depictions of queerness and transness reflect this. We can contrast this with the ways that, in the Black context, QTGNC people continue to develop culture-specific labels and practices with regards to our gender/sexual expanses (ballroom and its lingo being the most well known). Colonized people more broadly exhibit culture and geography-specific calibrations of our so-called gender/sex patterns. Some of this involves both the culture and systems imposed upon us in modernity, as well as our pre-existing histories and ongoing legacies of struggle. Unfortunately, the Global South nation-state territories we occupy have a differentially poor track record regarding queer/trans rights protections. This is a reflection of the overall underdeveloped conditions forced onto us by the Global North.

It was encountering Maria Lugones' "Coloniality of Gender" thesis that helped me to first begin theoretically considering this in a more serious manner. Maria Lugones used Anibal Quijano's analysis of a *coloniality of power* when elucidating her idea of the "coloniality of gender":

Therefore, moving away from either anatomically/ontologically reductive views, and moving away from a primarily cultural/epistemic focus, we could make sense of the "Nexuses" whereby material/power relations imbricate. Cisheterosexism, intersexism, allosexism comprise the hegemonic Nexus: Patriarchy. As I argued in *Dispatches from Among the Damned*, using Sanyika Shakur's framework of Grand Patriarchy versus Minor Patriarchy:

"[T]here are non-hegemonic nexuses that the Grand Patriarchy has decimated, with detrimental consequences for the internal relations of the colonized, which incentivizes the growth of a Minor Patriarchy to fill the vacuum."

Attending to material/power relations and their nexuses of imbrication is ultimately about addressing how Self-Determination struggles have collapsed into reactionary interests of various kinds. The diversity of gender/sexual relations is a structural consequence of geography-specific historical material developments, particularly regarding various so-called "imbrication nexuses," as I term them. But, when gender is assumed to always already be classed or dimorphic or binary or dualist across human societies, made a determinative and defining descriptor for historical materiality, this alienates the "loci of interaction" (a phrase from *The Dialectical Biologist* that I will revisit later) that are threaded by nexuses of imbrication. Such a misapprehension is because of what Oyeronke Oyewumi calls a Western "body reasoning" (we will come back to this term later as well) that inflects the *ethnos* calibration of Eurocentric gender/sexual relations. It obscures phenomena within the material/power relations of geography-specific human ecological contexts. This has implications for how mystification under capitalism operates, which I hope to demonstrate.

That is why, instead of "rejecting" philosophically emancipatist and secular-scientific currents associated with "modern

Wynter's thinking to what I once called an "anthropogenic question." It is in line with, but distinct from, the "embodied materialism" of Ariel Salleh and the Global South womanists and ecofeminists with which her work is in conversation, to challenge "idealist" approaches to feminist and anti-capitalist struggle. Though many Black Queer/Trans discourses prefer idealism in the name of nationalist-esque cultural sovereignty, I think it totally possible, necessary even, to be rooted in a cultural paradigm that still attends to material praxis, historical evolution, questions of social reproduction.

Thus, I use terms like "endogenous," typically associated with medical contexts to differentiate between phenomena like hormone production in the body, versus when "exogenous" hormones are introduced to the body from without. The terms are not exclusively about hormone production or hormone remediation therapy: endogenous refers to any phenomenon which has as its cause or site of emergence the dynamics that are internal to a given system (biological or otherwise). Exogenous refers to any phenomenon which has as its cause or site of emergence dynamics that are external to a given system (biological or otherwise).

The need for attending to exogenous and endogenous dynamics when looking at how culture-specific calibrations of gender emerge is ultimately about clarifying what I think is the major flaw in pretty much most accounts of gender/sexual oppression. A scientific and materialist view, a human ecology and human geography view, still critically oriented, is most suited to this, in my opinion, because it illuminates the way material and power relations become "imbricate" or are "imbricated." *Imbrication* refers to a particular type of connection, where two or more things overlap at the edges. Fish scales, shingles on a roof, some tiles are connected through imbrication. I choose this term because gender/sex oppression is usually put at the edge of analysis on material and power relations. My argument is that, however, those very same relations connect at those "edges," in an imbricated manner.

"In Quijano's model of global, Eurocentered, capitalist power, capitalism refers to 'the structural articulation of all historically known forms of control of labor or exploitation, slavery, servitude, small independent mercantile production, wage labor, and reciprocity under the hegemony of the capital-wage labor relation' (2000b, 349). In this sense, the structuring of the disputes over control of labor is discontinuous: not all labor relations under global, Euro centered capitalism fall under the capital/wage relation model, though this is the hegemonic model. It is important in beginning to see the reach of the coloniality of power that wage labor has been reserved almost exclusively for white Europeans. The division of labor is thoroughly racialized as well as geographically differentiated. Here, we see the coloniality of labor as a thorough meshing of labor and race." (*Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System*)

Lugones sought to use Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power thesis to elucidate how the construction of heteronormativity established a modern gender system specifically for bourgeois relations. Her goal was to intervene in liberal and Eurocentric feminist discourses. For Lugones, the modern heteronormative and bourgeois gender system effaced the gender relations that pre-existed it both in Europe and among colonized peoples. Lugones strove to offer an alternative to interpretations which viewed the problem of Patriarchy as a question of sexual dimorphism: that there are two sexes, where males "naturally" dominate females. A coloniality of gender thesis would instead understand how heterosexism, colonialism, and racism mutually inform and depend on one another in the creation of a capitalist binary gender system.

I first encountered Lugones' scholarship during my brief stint in college, around the time I was still in a Black nationalist orga-

nization. Her work was as influential as my learning of Marxist feminism and Panther ideology in the ways I began to try and formulate critiques of gender oppression in the Black struggle. I agree with her claims that modern heterosexism serves a bourgeois gender system globalized by colonialism. I find that heterosexism itself would not have come to redefine both European and non-European gender relations in this manner if not for cissexism. Unlike Lugones, however, and other theorists, I want to put a critique of cissexism at the center of my analysis; this is what makes my thinking Black/Third World transfeminism as opposed to just a Black/Third World feminism.

The modern construction of the “heterosexual” itself relied on conception of a so-called “homosexual” that was deeply informed by insistence on a binary or sexual dualist conception of humanity. Pathologization of the so-called “homosexual” in biomedical rather than religious terms involved the notion that non-heteronormative sexual desires arose from some kind of “disorder” of gender inversion. Liberal feminisms and Eurocentric feminisms certainly need to be critiqued for theories of Patriarchy that take categories of maleness and femaleness at face value, but that should not come with an eclipsing of the role such categories play in the coloniality of power and coloniality of gender in the first place. These categories and thus the heterosexualism of which Lugones speaks, and the naturalization of a modern bourgeois gender system, is what I theorize as having emerged “endogenous” to the dynamics of the geography-specific contexts, especially European societies. They do not exist as objective truths; they are, to use words from Sylvia Wynter, “truths for” a certain system of relations.

Lugones’ thinking is absolutely in line with this perspective, but for me she doesn’t privilege an analysis of Cishetero-Patriarchy. That is my angle, on the other hand, as opposed to examining either cissexism versus heterosexism, or heterosexism versus Patriarchy; and this is what I consider to be a unitive theory that I bring to

and cultural affirmation can and should be reconciled with an anarchist and Leftist politic. I agree with this assessment, and myself came out of nationalism into Black Trans Radicalism with my own cultural nationalist sentiments. But many of the Afro-queer/Afro-trans perspectives don’t articulate themselves as nationalist or anarchist/leftist. Even as they either negotiate bourgeois relations and the social contract with the State, especially rights-based advocacy, or they aim to challenge these structures, by centering racial/cultural specificity – in a way that is similar to cultural nationalist impulses. If we look at each of the organizations that Che Gosset mentions in the article *Black Transfeminist Thought Can Set us Free*, each of them to varying degrees exhibit a similar ethic as the Black nationalist organizations Ashanti Alston mentions in terms of

“underst[anding] that we must primarily look to ourselves to free ourselves. And none of these thinkers felt it was necessary to ‘check in’ with The White Man – from the ruler to the revolutionary – to see if it was okay. It was about our survival as a people, not as that mythical ‘working class’ or that equally mythical ‘citizen.’ For me, as this teenager who had just witnessed the 60’s Rebellions in my own thoroughly racist hometown, nationalism was a lifesaver: ‘WE MUST LOVE EACH OTHER.’ ‘BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL.’ ‘WE MUST CONTROL OUR OWN COMMUNITIES.’”

I can personally attest to that, having been around some of the organizers in question on the ground in NYC. While I have unity with their intentions and cosmological inspirations, I strive to express a dialectical Black transfeminism. Rather than a rejection of science, I argue that the *ethnos* calibration of gender/sexual relations has to do with how gender/sex emerges vis-a-vis material dynamics that are endogenous to geography specific cultural/regional groups of people. This is based on my application of Sylvia



“The reason that the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight. The differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin color, and cranium size is a testament to the powers attributed to ‘seeing.’ The gaze is an invitation to differentiate. Different approaches to comprehending reality, then, suggest epistemological differences between societies.”

Throughout *The Invention of Women*, Oyeronke Oyewumi focuses on what she calls the “world-sense” (as opposed to “world-view”) of Yoruba society, in order to examine and argue for the absence of a gender-based system of social stratification. For example, on page 69, she writes:

“In societies where there is a sexual division of labor, it is usually accompanied by an ideology that seeks to restrict each gender to its own specific arena. There are no such ideologies in the Yoruba world-sense.”

The turn towards precolonial, ancestral, indigenous experiences, identities, roles lifeways in articulating a queerness/transness that is culturally calibrated reminds me of what Ashanti Alston insists in *Beyond Nationalism, but Not Without It*,

“Folks outside of our experience need to respect that they ain’t got no monopoly on revolutionary thinking and damn sure ain’t got none on revolutionary practice. It is easy to sit back and intellectualize about our nationalism from the modernist, eurocentric framework of rational, scientific, materialist models.”

Alston is making a defense here of the positives of Black nationalism, even as he critiques certain Statist and Patriarchal formulations thereof. For him, the emphasis on epistemic sovereignty

my analysis of the ultimate contradictions of colonialism and racial capitalism.

Despite using the term “transfeminism” to describe my particular orientation towards the notion of gendered coloniality, my thinking stands apart from what Emi Koyama elucidates in the “Transfeminist Manifesto” of the early 2000s. Koyama’s text is often cited as an important and distinct evolution within the early transfeminisms that began to circulate within queer theory, feminist thought, and trans discourses towards the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Accurately privileging the expansive view of gender/sexuality at the heart of transfeminism, Koyama’s response to certain exclusionary rejoinders directed at trans women – which rest on the notion of “male privilege” – are a major point of departure from my own thinking. For Koyama, a trans woman denying they have “male privilege” flows from the same logic undergirding the white and bourgeois women in the early feminist movement who denied having “white privilege” or “class privilege.” Central to this comparison is once again an additive conception, likely to be interpreted through the lens of liberal notions of “intersectional” theory that take the characteristics of oppressive social dynamics associated with atomized notions of “identity” and then stacks them on top of each other (like the “knapsack” in Peggy McIntosh’s explanation).

What I prefer, in contrast to an additive view, is the perspective of, say, a Triple Jeopardy as theorized by the Third World Women’s Alliance. The TWWA came out of the SNCC- based Black Women’s Liberation Caucus and built on Frances Beal’s notion of a Double Jeopardy. Beal and her comrades sought to address both racism and sexism at once within the civil rights and Pan-African struggles, an idea that would be echoed in the Combahee River Collective’s notion of the “simultaneity of oppressions,” and which Claudia Jones among others had struggled to name, theorize, and elevate. Eventually shifting to a class analysis, as Karla Mendez reminds us, the “TWWA’s focus on race, gender, and class from an anti-imperialist

lens set them apart from other feminist groups of their time” (*At the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class*).

The TWWA and Black feminist organizations influenced by them did not necessarily privilege a critique of cisheterosexism, but their non-additive analytical model paved the way for a materialist transfeminism insofar as it could account for the mutual impartation and dialectical interpenetration of the constitutive oppressive social dynamics associated with categories like “white” “bourgeois” “woman” at their level of *direct co-occurrence* (a Gouladian phrasing I shall revisit later). Intersections, therefore, aren’t *a priori* or disparate phenomena that then come together, retaining independent social dynamics; the latter misinterpretation simply flows from taking the context of their atomization within our consciousness at face value: an error which notions like Triple Jeopardy, identity politics, and more aimed to address.

When synthesized with the notion of gendered coloniality that, as per Lugones, explicitly questions the universality of a sex dimorphism and gender binary, which I then formulate as a critique of cisheteropatriarchy, this means that the idea of a categorial “male privilege” does not hold up. If maleness and femaleness alike are both calibrated within culture specific contexts that have been reshaped by racial capitalism and a Eurocentric cisheteropatriarchy, then privilege cannot be isomorphic with any sex assignment in the alienated view central to additive interpretations.

There have been attempts from outside of a Triple Jeopardy and colonialism of gender approach to dealing specifically with Cishetero-Patriarchy. These tend to push for solidarity within or between Black trans and cis populations primarily through a unity around shared victimization under antiblack racial myths. For example, the womanism of the late Monica Roberts centered Black cis and trans women’s experiences of antagonistic sexual narratives in order to articulate itself. And the abolition feminism of Che Gossset (as conveyed in a Truthout article by George Yancy) turns to Afropessimist, Black Optimist, and Counterhumanist discourses –

Fanon, Wynter, Wilderson, Sexton, Hartman, Zakkiyah Iman Jackson, Spillers, Moten – relates cis Black men’s pathologization to that of gender expansive peoples. Texts from QTGNC writers, like my own *My Gender Is Marronage* (2017), the article “Gendering Ungender: Notes On Nonbinary Blackness” (Dashaun Harrison, 2021) and “My Gender Is Black” (Hari Ziyad, 2017) and “Black is the Color of My Gender” (Mia Harrison). As I tried to allude to earlier, these approaches are indicative of the legacy of Black cultural nationalism on how QTGNC Black struggles formulate. Many of them focus on aesthetic and spiritual movements in Black/African history within which variance from Eurocentric cisheteronormativity can be detected.

In my own work, I used the Hoodoo stories that focus on people can fly to symbolize Black queerness/transness. Other writers, like Emeka Joseph Nwankwo in *The Gender Nonconforming Spirit: Identity, Disruption, and Performance in Igbo Culture* focus on artists like Area Scatter. James Padillioni Jr’s *Cosmological Queerness Across the Yoruba Diaspora* also looks at performance, especially ritual, and myth in its account of Black/African gender expansivity. Shanna Collins’ *The Splendor of Gender Nonconformity* also privileges the ceremonial, as does *Black Gender Variance and Self-Naming: A Two Head Manifesto* and its second installment *Two Head Statement* by Birdie Touray.

These are just a few of the many examples. Such aesthetic/spiritual frameworks have a mass and broad based appeal. I interpret them as part of a trajectory towards Gender Self-Determination that shares traits with aesthetic and spiritual emphases within the National Self-Determination struggle. The reason why is because many of them turn towards spirituality in order to assert epistemic autonomy from the modern Western order of knowledge which, channeling words of Oyeronke Oyewumi’s *The Invention Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, privileges the visual above other sensory faculties. This visuocentric *episteme* yields reductive views of the body, according to Oyewumi: