

Gender Skirmishes on the Edges:

Notes on gender identity, self-determination and anticolonial struggle

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I'm still trying to think of ways to rewrite this. Someone pointed out, accurately, that it was really written very clearly for a white trans and genderqueer audience. True enough. Trying to figure out what sort of changes might need to be made. Love any input.

Tremendous changes are tearing across the globe in the configuration of bodies, gender, identity and power. In Africa and Latin America, movements of people living with HIV have been demanding a comprehensive restructuring of international trade policy and patent law in accessing affordable HIV medications. New technologies of drug regimes and implants are rebuilding people's bodies in developed countries, restructuring relationships to gender, identity and self. Information technologies, especially computer networking, have opened up a dramatically new world to some, trans-regionalized virtual communities organized around specific sexual orientations or gender identities. Indigenous people in Brazil and Panama have entered into the global scientific debates around human genetics, challenging the privatization of genetic material. Gay rights movements face a rapidly changing political terrain, as corporate capitalism seems both increasingly cruel to the bodies of poor queer, trans and gay people, and increasingly enthusiastic about selling products to a gay, rich demographic.

These struggles over the control of bodies have deep and far-reaching implications. Centuries old battles over labor exploitation, colonization, slavery and imperialism are changing as the global flows of capital rapidly intensify in their cruelty, flexibility and creativity. In these changing times, the very possibility of politics is shifting. Our struggles increasingly take place across the site of our very bodies. These are wars over bodies where race, class and gender have absolutely everything to do with science, technology and biomedicine. Wars over bodies that are sick, bodies that are rebuilt, bodies that are mapped. Wars over bodies described in dramatically new languages, with changing systems of identification and understanding. New wars that much of the ideological

production of the left has failed to adequately track and understand, that we are struggling to conceptualize new modes of describing our contemporary political terrain.

One of the most striking sites of cultural and ideological response to the changing terrain of global capital is taking place in the subcultural networks linking communities of gender variant people. This essay seeks to recognize the emerging debates around gender, identity, bodies and power in a few distinct networks. I draw from an online discussion board known as strap-on.org, in particular its trans*forum, the interconnected social networks strap-on is linked to and dynamics between transgender and gender variant communities in Philadelphia. I want to reframe a given set of discussion around gender identity in a new direction, one that shifts from thinking about radical gender politics in terms of competing identities, and towards imagining a politics of self-determination within broad anticolonial and anticapitalist struggle.

A quick word on vocabulary: I discuss at some detail the historical and cultural evolution and by extension my usage of the words genderqueer, transgender and transsexual. The various linked meanings of both should become clear. Trans I use with some ambiguity, possibly as short for transgender, possible for transsexual, possibly for something else. All these terms I am referring primarily to people that would self-identify around these words, and not as a means of labeling someone nonconsensually. Gender variant is my resorting to a less historically located and consensual language. I use the word to refer to anyone whose relationship to gender is not easily located in the transphobic, dominant, binary, essentialized, hate-filled, Euro-American gender codes that pervade our society. I use it, with reservation and cost, to refer to people of many different gender identities who might never be comfortable with the strangely clinical phrase gender variant.

trans resistance

Trans people face severe oppression and abuse. Interconnected systems of misogyny, homophobia and transphobia produce systematic violence and suffering in the lives of gender variant people. Transphobia can take many forms: street violence, police harassment, job discrimination, lack of respectful sexual validation, lack of access to decent healthcare, exclusion from all sorts of institutions such as social service centers, medical centers, bathrooms, businesses and public spaces. Hatred of gender variant people was one of the many bitter fruits of European colonial

domination, and the intensifying violence by capital and right-wing state regimes globally. In turn, these broader structures of transphobia are reproduced within a whole range of subcultural networks, subaltern communities and interpersonal spaces. From the disappearance and murder of drag queen sex workers on the streets of San Salvador to a white transsexual unable to find a decent doctor who will see her in Washington DC, transphobic oppression takes many forms across the world.

In a handful of developed regions, especially the United States and several northern and western European countries, a specific model of transsexual movements and identities have taken shape. Drawing from both the self-identifying work of transsexual women (male-to-female) and a body of medical discourse developed by a body of self-appointed experts of transsexuality. Through the 50s, 60s and 70s, a whole constellation of non-trans endocrinologists, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and surgeons came together to advocate for specific models to provide medical care to transsexual women. Many trans women contributed their own experiences and self-perceptions to this model, seizing and changing it as a means of accessing necessary medical care. The transsexual people who had a significant say in the development of this biomedical model and were able to access the gender reassignment technologies it offers were, and are, overwhelmingly white and middle to upper class.

This model, exemplified today by the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care, outlined the circumstances and means of transsexual women to access hormone therapy and surgery. The Harry Benjamin Standards of Care offers an industry standard in identifying, diagnosing and treating transsexuals. Like a few other standards of care, it both identifies a long series of bases for denial of care, and on the other hand, recognizes the need for gender reassignment among some transsexuals. It calls for a specific period of psychotherapy, during which a transsexual person would need to be diagnosed with Gender Identity Dysphoria, a pathologizing psychological disorder listed in the DSM. At times these standards called for transsexual people to engage in a "real life test", often involving medical providers gauging a transsexual woman's degree of passable, conventional femininity to determine her access to care.

This model had numerous bases for excluding trans women from healthcare. Women were frequently excluded from care for their sexuality: trans women that wanted to have sex with other women were

identified as not being correctly transsexual. Trans women who had struggled with mental illness, such as psychosis or schizophrenia, were often automatically denied care. Trans women who didn't perform a specific psychological profile – such as recounting stories of childhood femininity – were labeled as not trans. And the financial cost of numerous therapists' and doctors' visits, not to mention the exorbitant prices of surgery, excluded all but wealthy women. If a trans woman didn't eventually desire Genital Reassignment Surgery, that could be a basis for denying access to hormones and other practices on the assertion she wasn't actually serious as a woman. And, of course, trans women were constantly suspected of being deceitful in misleading providers as a means to access care.

Having been psychologically diagnosed, had her femininity deemed adequate, a transsexual woman might then be provided a prescription for hormone therapy or access to surgery – identified by many women as fundamentally key to claiming a well-being and life in one's body.

The position of trans women themselves in the development of this model is complex. The early clinical experts that constructed the standards based their work on the psychological profile of a small pool of middle and upper class white trans women. As a result, if a woman wanted to access transgender care, she would by necessity have to perform a certain role the clinical providers expected. Failing to convincingly perform this roll, she could be denied care and access to crucial gender modification technologies. Yet this model does accurately describe the experience of some transsexual women. It has provided a crucial means of normalizing transsexuality in some medical communities, and expanding access to care for some trans people.

In recent decades, this same model has been expanded and developed to include providing care to trans men (female-to-male), gay or queer trans people and to trans people who don't desire Genital Reassignment Surgery. This growing inclusion has been the result of organizing, agitation and movements among trans people previously excluded from access to adequate care.

More recently, a handful of medical providers have begun to dramatically rethink such standards, in favor of models of informed consent. Clinics such as Callen-Lorde in NYC or Tom Waddell in SF don't attempt full psychological profiles of trans clients, or base hormone prescriptions on someone's degree of correspondence to a preconceived model of

transsexuality. Instead, the focus shifts to attention to people's capability to make decisions, seeing that they understand what hormone therapies do to bodies, and providing adequate monitoring.

The Harry Benjamin Standards of Care is embedded in a larger history of trans people struggling to have their identities heard, understood and validating by institutional systems. Despite its numerous faults, it was one of the few medical discourses through the 50s and 60s that recognized the reality of trans people, and offered what many trans women were actively and clearly demanding: accessing to hormones and surgery.

Beyond the narrow circles of institutionally-validated expertise and biomedical discourse, trans people have been fighting hard to be heard and recognized. The full histories of trans struggle is a hard one to tell, for the very language of self-identification varies so considerably across racial, class, historical and geographical divides. So many people's voices have been erased along the way, it becomes almost impossible to tell the stories of trans insurgency without succumbing to projection. For the moment, I want to hold off making such an attempt, and instead refocus back on the forms of transsexual identity that found themselves interlinked with medical discourse.

Alongside medical expertise, a clear and specific understanding of transsexual identity was being pushed by many trans people themselves. Many transsexual women, for example, tell a story that is familiar from support groups, medical literature and testimonial writing: having grown up identified as a male, she forever felt out of place and alienated from her body and those around her. Early childhood experiences of feminine expression were repressed as the pain of puberty and transphobia set in. But deep inside she held onto an understanding of herself as a woman, an inner true-self she was able to eventually to express in transitioning. Through hormone therapy and surgery, she is able to correct her body to correspond to her inner gender identity. In the 70s, a similar understanding of transsexual gender identity emerged into public and medical discourse concerning and used by trans men. Throughout, again, access to public, institutionally recognized voice was heavily classed and raced. It was white economically privileged trans women, and later white privileged trans men, who were able to have a (limited) say in shaping transsexual identity and biomedicine.

Today, many transsexuals recognize a more flexible understanding of

transsexual identity, including people who have other, complex histories. At this point, many would agree that a transsexual is one who understands their gender identity as being specific as male or female, and this identity not corresponding to the gender they were assigned at birth. These people might choose to modify their bodies in any number of ways to develop their own well being in their bodies and how other people will treat them. Many, many people find this identity to be an empowering, helpful and accurate means of describing their experience.

The languages, ideas and politics of transsexual and transgender have had an enormous impact on the development of social services and medical care for gender variant people. The access to many gender modification medical technologies is regulated on the basis of specific ideas about transgender identity. While gender variant people are overwhelmingly brutalized and disrespected in all sorts of social service agencies, the few that provide any remotely decent service to gender variant people do so on the basis of similar, tokenized ideas of transgender. In a handful of places, health care providers have significantly improved access to transgender biomedical practices for low-income trans people and trans people of color. Many body modification practices, and even basic trans medical care in most regions, is still accessible exclusively to those trans people with money. Equally, white trans and non-trans people continue to totally dominate the national, public debates around gender rights and politics at the exclusion of communities of color.

While gender-variance exists in all cultures, classes and racial communities, the specific languages of transsexuality are not quite as broad. While there are certainly many poor people of color who identify as transsexual, much of the content of the term's public circulation is embedded in the experiences of middle and upper class white trans women. While people of color have been able to individually claim transsexuality as a personal gender identity, they have not had significant power in shaping transsexuality as a publicly circulating biomedical, political and social concept. Gender variant people of color lead the riots at Stonewall and have been are the core of some of the most remarkable political organizing of our century. They are excluded, however, from the limited organizational leadership positions, published racks and academic jobs that white trans people hold to effect public policy.

genderqueer politics

Through the 80s and 90s several new gender variant identities emerged. Transgender emerged to first to describe people who were interested in hormone therapies but not genital reassignment surgery. By some, it was adopted as an umbrella term to a whole range of gender-variant communities. In some contexts, transgender provides an identity linking the experiences of cross-dressers to transsexuals. Today transgender is a far more common phrase in the slightly more progressive sides of medical discourse. Many transsexual people, however, have some level of discomfort with the extent to which the specific medical and social needs of transsexuals has been eclipsed by a larger, more privileged demographic of cross dressers. These tensions became far more intense around the notion of genderqueer.

Like transgender, genderqueer has at times been deployed as an attempt at an umbrella, inclusive identity covering a whole range of gender variance. As such, it's pretty much failed. Mentioning genderqueer in many circles of transsexual and transgender people elicits blank uncomprehending stares, tension and potential hostility. Instead, genderqueer has been claimed by some as a means to self-identify a range of ways of relating to gender. Some people have described themselves because they see their own gender as particularly self-conscious and self-aware, and one that patterns their experience in the world. Some use it to describe experiences of multiple genders and gender flexibility. Perhaps the most common definition is to include many different experiences of gender that couldn't be identified as simply male or female. Perhaps they locate gender identity in between male and female, perhaps both, perhaps neither.

What made the form of genderqueer as a concept so clearly distinct from transgender and transsexual, however, is the extent to which it as an identity has been linked to a particular analysis of gender oppression and resistance. Transsexual organizing centered on securing rights, dignity and healthcare for a particular oppressed social group, and most of the identity politics has remained grounded in that need. While genderqueers have organized around demanding respect, the identity politics of genderqueer has become linked to a critique of the binary gender system as an institutionalized form of oppression. Both transsexual and non-transsexual genderqueer people have put forth a vision of gender oppression and positioned themselves as the vanguard of a new world beyond binary gender dualisms.

The recent anthology *Genderqueer* and the writings of Kate Bornstein and Riki Anne Wilchins perhaps outline genderqueer as a radical politics of gender insurgency most clearly. They outline the expectations that gender fits into one of two categories – male or female, masculine or feminine – as an oppressive binary system that hurts all people. All celebrate transgressive, nonconventional and complex gender identities as means of resisting the enforced violence and coercion of binary gender expectations. They argue that gender-transgressive people – often explicitly against transsexual people who identify around a single, particular, relatively stable gender identity – are offering the means of envisioning a world beyond the gender binary, one where all people could be liberated in unimagined ways.

Genderqueer caught on. Bornstein's and Wilchins' books have become vogue in some academic gender theory circles and the new radical thinking on gender. A huge range of gender identities have sprung up linked to genderqueer as a cultural and political strategy and personal identity: bigendered, multigendered, drag kings, trannies, gendertrash, trannybois, lowho/noho (low hormone/no hormone) trans men. The gender neutral pronouns ze/hir, ze/zir, ce/hir and others finally caught in some circles as means of genderqueer people to self-identify themselves. In some urban queer women's communities, female-assigned genderqueer people have become objects of sexual fetishism and invested with a certain hip popularity.

New political networks have also taken shape linked to genderqueer identity. Genderqueer people have shown an increasing presence at the annual FTM conference True Spirit. Plan Z has offered two conferences trying to build alliances between mostly female-assigned genderqueers and other feminists. Camp Trans, over the last few years, has become a major gathering of genderqueers and young trans men (with a very recent shift of leadership towards trans women). GenderPAC, a major national organization organizing around gender identity antidiscrimination legislation, has increased excluded trans people and transsexual issues from its strategy, instead focusing on a broader vision of genderqueer politics to try to build antidiscrimination platforms that might appeal to transphobes.

Within the more subcultural spaces that have placed a strong political and sexual value on genderqueer identity a pretty specific vision of a genderqueer person has emerged: female-assigned, white, young, queer, urban, hip, non-transsexual, middle-class, politically radical and

feminist. This stereotyped, fetishized model of genderqueer has dominated many spaces.

Many people, however, who are thoroughly excluded from the circles where genderqueer is valued as hip, or where genderqueer identity is more extensively elaborated, have instead found their own reasons to identify with the term. These genderqueer people include many communities that might never appear on stage at drag king shows – such as poor people, people living in rural areas, male-assigned genderqueers, transsexual genderqueers, and genderqueer people of color. For many folks of different backgrounds, genderqueer has offered a powerful, healing and empowering way to self-identify complex and difficult experiences with gender identity and expression.

The public discourses on genderqueer have been overwhelmingly dominated by white middle-class people. Like transsexuality, genderqueer offers a broad set of gender identities that have been meaningful and valuable for some people of color. As well, however, genderqueer is a notion that has been most thoroughly defined in scenes that are both white-dominated and racist. People of color and poor people have been excluded from the subcultural and public discourses where genderqueer politics have been most thoroughly defined. Much of genderqueer identity has taken shape in queer communities at liberal, progressive private liberal arts colleges around the country -- spaces thoroughly defined by racist and classist regulation of access.

The linking of genderqueer as an identity to a broad, sweeping critique of gender politics has not been an altogether successful and positive event. In part, I'm here concerned with the destructive effects of extrapolating overall political strategy and analysis from particular relationships to gender. While a powerful means of speaking people's real experiences, it too easily has slid into a nasty ground of competitive, divisive tensions between different gender variant people.

tensions

Within this emerging genderqueer political model, many transsexuals are dismissed as reproducing an oppressive gender binary system, and hence enemies of gender insurgency. Both Bornstein's and Wilchins' writing contain explicit passages attacking many transsexuals as being gender conformists. In much of the new hipness of genderqueers in some circles, passing transsexuals were left behind as anachronistic and reactionary.

In the hip queer womens' circles becoming enthused about drag kings and trannybois, trans women have been increasingly excluded and disrespected.

GenderPAC offers a particularly striking example of the way a broad, genderqueer-inspired political vision can actively exclude transsexuals. GenderPAC claims to work "to end discrimination and violence caused by gender stereotypes by changing public attitudes, educating elected officials and expanding legal rights." They are the major national organization mobilizing around gender expression and identity rights. Less well known as a hushed rumor passed at trans gatherings throughout the country, GenderPAC has decided that its strategic public image relies on not being too strongly identified with transsexuality. They have one public trans figure -- Rikki Wilchins -- and have actively resisted hiring more. Even more hush-hush, the word on the street is that transsexual people on the staff of GenderPAC remain in the closet, fearful that they will be immediately fired if they came publicly out as trans. I personally know of no such people, but if true this is a frightening testament to how damaging the devaluation of transsexuality in gender liberation movements can be.

For transsexuals, such dismissals are intimately interconnected with the numerous other experiences of transphobic oppression, exclusion and disrespect. Genderqueer critique of the supposed normativity of transsexuals is a new form of disregarding and insulting the crucial legitimacy of transgender identity. Much like transphobic feminist attacks such as Janice Raymond, this disrespect can be all the more painful for its proximity – the fact that many transsexual people might share spaces, movements and communities with genderqueers.

Genderqueer ideological attacks on trans identity I consider to be a gross mistake, a gravely destructive misdirection of energy that is doing severe, long term damage to building effective movements for the liberation and self-determination of gender-variant people. Whatever someone's feelings about binary gender systems, it is transphobic, wrong, unethical and politically divisive to push forward a critique that dismisses the very real needs of many transsexuals to identify clearly with a particular gender identity. I think genderqueer people, particularly movement leaders, need to carefully, and quickly, rethink the ways they are relating to transsexuals and their political criticism of transsexual identities.

Some transsexual people, in turn, have also shown nasty disrespect to

genderqueer people. On strap-on and elsewhere, genderqueer people are dismissed on not being serious, as just superficially playing around with gender, as being far more privileged than transsexuals, and a wide range of other critiques. Often genderqueer people in such discourses are blamed for the popularity and hip value assigned to genderqueer identity in specific subcultures. These attacks on genderqueers are rooted in multiple experiences, including reacting defensively and critically to inappropriate attacks from genderqueers, lack of personal experience and awareness on genderqueer identity, need to hold onto some notion of status and authenticity, and a threatening defensiveness at genderqueers as actual and perceived threats. Often these critiques conflate the behavior of genderqueer people – who engage in transphobic/anti-transsexual activities – and genderqueer identity itself.

This too has been a divisive, destructive and dead end political strategy. As I hope to outline throughout the course of this paper, there is a profound and pervasive need to envision a politics not rooted in gender variant people competing over rights and dignity that are perceived to be scarce and earned at other's expense.

Of course, both genderqueer and transsexual people have a definite right to define themselves, correct false stereotypes and ignorant assumptions made about their own identity and to demand to be treated with respect and dignity. At times, the mutual antagonism between genderqueers and transsexuals is rooted in very legitimate needs to defend oneself, and to challenge disrespectful attacks. My issue here is instead centered more on the ways that this tension gets translated in ideological terms, overprivileging genderqueer vs. transsexual identity and vice-versa.

The most common critique of genderqueers by transsexuals is they simply are not serious. Many genderqueer people choose not to modify their bodies, or only modify their bodies in only some ways but not in others. This, along with a lack of clear commitment to specific gender, is linked to the repeated accusation from transsexual people that genderqueers simply do not need to be taken seriously. Whatever issues they are dealing with are comparably trivial; their oppression is minor, and they are really just playing around with identity without having any real issues. This critique relies on a whole set of ideas around authenticity, the ranking of oppression and who has proper access to claiming gender issues. In the next section, I want to go into some of these underlying assumptions.

This charge of having an inauthentic or superficial identity is closely linked to a number of other accusations. Genderqueer people are charged with coopting and appropriating transsexual identity. They are seen as competing with transsexuals for access to limited social and political resources. Genderqueers are attacked for having an identity that was only recently developed, and hence not being actually gender variant people. Sometimes genderqueer is labeled as a phase, one that people grow out of to leading gender normative privileged lives, leaving transsexuals behind to deal with the wrath of transphobia.

Genderqueer as an identity is also attacked for being white and middle-class. Genderqueer identity has found most presence and recognition in communities of young queer punk circles with a dominance of white middle class kids. I've heard transsexuals repeatedly dismiss genderqueer pronouns such as ze and hir to be clear games of college kids with too much time, too much privilege, and who never have to deal with the real world. Genderqueer forms of body modification often create bodies that are unable to clearly pass as male or female. Many transsexuals identify their survival as being dependent on passing as gender normative successfully, and perceive a disinterest (or inability) to pass as a sign of economic and social privilege.

I want to try to challenge these criticisms one by one. Ultimately, such attacks on genderqueers reflect, fuel and reproduce the systemic violence and oppression against all gender variant people, including transphobic hatred of transsexuals.

First, though, I want to backtrack a moment and admit some truth to the transsexual voices I'm critiquing. It is true that some genderqueer people are non-trans, and have successfully found some level of recognition within certain spaces and communities frequently denied to trans people. I too have been deeply hurt to watch female-assigned genderqueers be showered with adoration at dyke parties, and meanwhile as a trans woman I find myself scorned and ignored. In some cases, genderqueer people have used this recognition in unethical ways that betray and hurt trans people, and reflect and reproduce the ongoing oppression of trans people. These problems are real and valid, and should be recognized and challenged. Some trans women have been courageous in expressing such frustrations against genderqueers. However, I'm have a deep discomfort with the extent, form and assumptions of anti-genderqueer arguments emerging from some trans communities.

In challenging transsexual's attacks on genderqueers, there are a few clear places to start. There are many genderqueer-identified people who are also transgender or transsexual. I for example, am a genderqueer transsexual woman. Some genderqueer people are working class or poor. Many genderqueer people live in rural areas, or have no connection to dyke communities, or who otherwise are isolated far away from any community that considers them remotely hip. Some genderqueer people have been serious allies in challenging the exclusion and oppression of trans women. All of these facts challenge the attacks on genderqueers based on overgeneralized stereotypes.

Many genderqueer people struggle with serious oppression, suffering and pain. Not being able to locate oneself in gender systems can be a profoundly scary and painful experience for people. Many genderqueers face serious discrimination for housing, employment, healthcare and social isolation. The handful of resources developed for transsexuals are frequently denied to anyone who expresses genderqueer sentiments. Genderqueer people who choose to modify their bodies with hormones are required to lie about their own identities and experiences, often performing as conventional transsexuals. Genderqueer people who do not pass as gender-normative, as many do not, face high levels of street harassment and violence.

Both these acknowledgements undermine accusations of genderqueers as simple being a mass of privileged hipsters. The rest of the attacks on genderqueer as an identity rely on some notion of authenticity, legitimacy, and propriety. Genderqueer people are seen as the illegitimate thieves of a politics, a language and identities that properly belong to transsexuals. This theft is identified as cultural appropriation – a familiar phrase to those rooted in anticolonial and antiracist political struggle.

rethinking appropriation

This particular charge against genderqueer people is worth exploring in more detail: the notion that genderqueers are illegitimately appropriating transsexual identity.

I'd certainly agree that some genderqueers, at times, have claimed experiences and identities that they simply do not share. The language of transsexuality is a convenient one, in that it has some broad social recognition and legitimacy, and provides easy access for genderqueers to

reference in articulating struggles around gender identity. Such a drawing from a language that does not accurately describe one's own experience is problematic and disrespectful. Further, there are infrastructures such as GenderPAC that were originally developed to meet the needs of transsexual people, but have been dramatically redirected to centering around an anti-transsexual genderqueer politics. These are problems, and need to be addressed.

But I want to call into question the politics reflected and reproduced in assertions of genderqueer appropriation.

The notion of appropriation comes out of critical writing by people of color analyzing the cultural logic of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and neocolonialism. Many anticolonial writers have written brilliantly and articulately on the destructive, racist and oppressive dynamics of white theft of cultural practices by people of color around the world. The religions, dress, music, languages and values of communities of color are repackaged as exotic enrichments to the lives of white yuppies – in a context where the wealth, power and privilege of white people already depends on the material, social and political domination and exploitation of communities of color. bell hooks, Chrystos and Deborah Root have all written articulately on the dynamics of cultural appropriation as a system of white supremacy, neocolonialism and capitalism.

To begin with, I seriously question the application of such anticolonial critiques to gender dynamics. The racial politics of such a maneuver are highly questionable. Much of the debate between transsexuals and genderqueers happens in white dominated subcultures with little serious attention to white supremacy. While people of color do participate in such debates, the charge of appropriation has been most deployed by white people.

Further, translating notions like appropriation developed in the context of a particular struggle – in this case the work of people of color in challenging neocolonialism – to another – here intercommunity dynamics among gender variant people -- is a dangerous, problematic step. Transphobia and white supremacy are drastically different forms of domination. While some people are oppressed by both, and their clear historical links between the two, I argue they function very differently. Appropriation has been central to racial domination – the translation of colonized people's culture into exotic products to enrich the lives of colonizers has been going on for centuries. Appropriation of gender,

gender identity or gender performance simply hasn't been as key to the systems of patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia. While a trans woman or non-trans woman might be offended by a particularly gaudy drag queen, drag queens simply are central to the maintenance of gender domination. Revolutionaries should pause before drawing such easy analogies between multiple forms of oppression.

I first argued such a distinction in response to transphobic feminists accusing me of appropriating women's identity, an attack I continue to face on an ongoing basis. Accusations of appropriation have been key, not to trans liberation, but to the enforced transphobic denial of trans people to self-determining their gender identities. When I first heard it getting translated as a critique of genderqueers, it freaked me out. This is a telling point: the same transphobic attacks I experienced as a trans woman I watched other trans people unleash against genderqueers.

Unlike, say, an indigenous spiritual practice of rural Brazilian communities, gender and gender experience doesn't properly belong to anyone. Our gender identity and expression belongs to each and every one of us, uniquely and personally. Asserting that some people can't reasonably claim a gender expression easily slides into deeply transphobic and ridiculous attempts at dividing up, analyzing and judging people's inner experiences of gender. Trying to carefully separate legitimate transsexuals from illegitimate gender deviants is a dangerous political step that seriously jeopardizes the building of effective movements for the self-determination and liberation of all people around their gender identity, expression and choices with living with our own bodies. Gender, gender transgression, gender identity and gender presentation belong to everyone. Or, put differently, it belongs to every single one of us personally and profoundly. Challenging transphobia, I believe, must start from a refusal to deny anyone's gender identity.

Obviously the issue is far more complicated than simply dismissing all claims to gender appropriation. All gender identities have a cultural, historical and racial dimension. Besides the genderqueer issues addressed here, one could easily imagine the appropriation of a language of gender identity across a brutal neocolonial power divide. Later on in this text here I discuss Two Spirit and Femme Queen identities -- both forms of self-identification I'd be quite critical and uncomfortable with a white person claiming. I don't honestly know how all this fits together. Thinking through such a critique of appropriation as a political concept across multiple historical, social and political circumstances would require

a great deal of work. Instead, I want to trace the critique I can here -- one that makes sense in this context, and leave the work of extrapolation and delineation to future papers.

The charge of cultural appropriation is a tempting one for trans people. I know for myself how desperate and scared I am, how very deeply transphobia has scared me in my psyche and soul. From that fear and pain, it's easy to be terrified that someone is stealing the only thing left that clearly belongs to me -- my identity and politics as a transsexual. Watching other people get some validation for their gender transgression while I face overwhelming disrespect is really, really hard and it's easy to blame genderqueers. While occasionally they might be hip, I don't have to worry about their base ball bats or guns.

It's a frequent step of identity to politics to see one's one identity -- or system of linking identities -- as more radical, more liberating, more legitimate, more authentic or more substantive than another. Both genderqueer activists, privileging gender transgression, and transsexuals, privileging legitimate gender identities, have engaged in a destructive form of privileging certain systems of gender identity about others. We have put our identities, our liberation, our movements, in contradiction and competition with each other. This is a grave mistake.

Ultimately, the charges against both genderqueers of appropriation and transsexuals of conformity rely on a politics of scarcity that is profoundly destructive to envisioning a viable movement. Liberation is not something we have to compete or fight over. It's not something like privilege, that one person has access to because another is denied it. Justice is not something that I ever, in the end, benefit from its denial to anyone. The old slogan 'No one is free when others are oppressed' couldn't be more true, especially when we remember that real freedom and privilege are never the same. My access, as a transsexual, to a particular way of thinking about and challenging some notions around gender, is not something that I lose because someone else also finds it useful and empowering. Scarcity is a pervasive and tempting politics, one that feeds the competition between oppressed communities.

That competition between marginalized communities feeds the profound trauma of transphobia. Facing rejection, violence and discrimination in a whole range of spaces, gender variant people are often left deeply emotionally scared. We turn to each other for love and support, to heal each other of the pain of oppression. Too often, though, those

relationships end up reproducing this very violence – unleashing on each other the pain, anger and rage we have accumulated in our daily lives. Even more insidious, that pain gets directed inward into self-hatred and self-denial. The tensions between genderqueer and transsexual people, like many tensions between marginalized communities, is one of many products of the traumatizing and corrupting effects of that fear.

Too often, I have come to believe, we forge our politics from those spaces of fear and desperation. When we are rooted in our fear, it is easy to find enemies, to find anger, to find fights with those people close at our sides. Our fear fuels our desperate, defensive need to hold onto particular ways of being that are legitimately ours. It is easily to believe that others are inauthentic and should be denied access to what little we have, when we are scared we have almost nothing at all. Evaluating who should have access and who shouldn't relies on developing elaborate systems of ranking, judging and dismissing people based on degrees of oppression, privilege and suffering. Our right to liberation is not based on our degrees of suffering. Our fear fuels a politics of competition and scarcity, a dead end of judging and attacking each other.

Something else is profoundly needed.

getting along

Genderqueer and transsexual people need to get along. There are too few of us, as gender variant people, to spend our energy and time attacking each other. Both communities – and the folks in the overlaps – face severe and real oppression we all need allies to resist and overthrow. There have to be ways of discuss legitimate political grievances that are rooted in a serious respect to other people's languages for their own experiences.

As a place to start, genderqueer people need to seriously rethink our politics as being primarily about challenging binary gender systems. Many, many people across the globe consent to, appreciate and derive pleasure and joy from binary gender identities. Transsexuals are among the most oppressed, but that is not the basis of gender identity. All people – including ultramasculine men, ultrafeminine women, transsexuals, everyone – have a right to self-determine and self-express their own gender identity. How people speak about themselves and the mode of presentation around gender is not something anyone has a right to judge, dismiss or denounce. Any politics critiquing any notion of

gender dualism has to start from a clear, unambiguous recognition that all gender identities and expressions are legitimate. Each of us must self-determine our own gender path for ourselves.

I imagine such an assertion could be a hard one for some people. It takes away the altar of genderqueer people as the radical transgressors heralding a new movement. It denies genderqueer people the hip radicalism ascribed to the identity in some circles. Genderqueer, as an identity, is no more radical or challenging or transformative or legitimate than any other consensual, self-determined gender identity. Period.

By the same token, denying transsexuals as the sole owners of a language of gender identification, transformation, transgression and awareness could also be a difficult one for some. Transsexual people don't have much in this world, and giving up on controlling a language of gender politics could undermine people's self-esteem, social legitimacy and limited bureaucratic and biomedical tolerance. These languages, and their restricted use, have benefited trans people in accessing medical care and some measure of social recognition. Jettisoning a politics of restricted access to language calls on us to develop new modes of demanding dignity and care for trans people.

Instead of these desperate, fearful competitive struggles between various gender variant people, we need to begin forging a different kind of identity politics. We need a politics that is founded on love and respect, on the crucial need to heal. We need a vision of a movement where each of our struggles benefits and assists the liberation of everyone else. We need forms of thinking about gender that aren't about competing systems of gender identity, but instead rooted in the rights of each and every person to live themselves as fully and profoundly as possible.

One place to start in forging such a politics is in talking about self-determination. Self-determination means honoring the rights of each person to make their own choices concerning their body, their identity, their languages and the way in which they present their gender. Being a gender revolutionary isn't about having a gender that's more legitimate or transgressive than someone else; it isn't about locating oneself in a discourse of gender identity that one sees as privileged or more valuable than another. It is about, I believe, being committed to building a world where each and every person is able to express and live their gender and bodies in ways that are liberating, full and healing. Each person –

genderqueer, transsexual, neither – has the absolute right to self-determine their own choices around body modification, gender presentation and gender identity. It is our work to challenge the numerous obstacles that encroach on people’s abilities to make those decisions for their own.

I talk with medical providers and social service workers about respecting trans people’s rights to self-determination. It’s not the job of medical providers, I argue, to evaluate or judge the legitimacy of someone’s desire to access services; their job is to provide adequate care. And in the end the only proper judge of the care needed is a patient or client themselves. So I talk with providers about acknowledging, respecting and standing by the rights of trans people to self-determine their access to services, their choices with transforming their own bodies, and the languages other they are comfortable with other people using to refer to their bodies and identities.

I mention self-determination frequently as a way of thinking about gender in the support group I facilitate, with considerable success. It centers someone’s thoughts around gender on their own needs, experiences, and decisions. It recognizes an unchallengeable, uncompromising respect that all trans people have a right to deserve.

Our struggle for gender self-determination must take many forms. We must put an end to violence against all people based on gender, including gender variant people and all women. We must respect and support the difficult process of each person to come to terms personally with their own gender, with their own choices around body modification, with their own needs around language. As a movement for gender liberation, we must build institutional support system to provide gender variant people with medical care, jobs, housing and other basic needs. And countless other forms of work people are already doing – in performance and the arts, in writing and theory, in building social justice institutions, in loving our friends, in fully being ourselves.

Talking about self-determination highlights the need to be learning to listen to each other. To respect each other’s rights to self-determination and to build movements that could make some real changes in the world, we must really hear each other. Listening requires patience, commitment and caring. Through this caring we can begin to build coalitions, finding ways of supporting each other’s personal and collective struggles. Self-determination provides a conceptual ground for building solidarity and

movements that aren't organized around particular identities. Instead our movements can link communities of people that understand their relationship to gender, bodies and language in drastically different ways.

There's been a lot of debate about self-determination as a concept. I've traced these debates on strap-on, on some friends' livejournal, in critical theory around colonialism, structuralism and capitalism. Most of these debates I'm not going to take the time and space to fully address here. Instead, I want to shift the scope of this paper in a way to enrich self-determination as a concept.

inscribing race and class

The idea of self-determination brings with it a lot of cultural baggage around individualism, American bourgeois settler capitalism and white supremacist colonizer consciousness. To many perceptive and conscious folks, talking too glibly or naively about self-determination as a political ethics implies a whole set of connotations around rugged European American individualist settlers advancing into occupying land, obliterating indigenous culture and benefiting off the labor of slaves, all to then be able to express their free will and make whatever decisions they like. Or, in a more contemporary setting: white American yuppies engaged in constant materialistic appropriation of colonized cultures of people of culture and working and consuming in exploitative ways, all rationalized with some rhetoric of doing what feels right. A substantial body of anticolonial and working class thought has foregrounded the bankruptcy of individualist free will as a political concept, instead focusing on the complex, embedded relationship of interdependency that constitute many marginalized, subaltern and resisting communities.

I stand by a certain irreconcilably personal dimension to decisions about gender, especially body modification. It is possible, however, to begin to envision self-determination in ways that aren't so thoroughly racist and middle-class. As I've tried to identify throughout this essay, both genderqueer and transsexual are identities forged across complex social histories, embedded in complex contestations and struggles around bodies and identities. While each person must decide for themselves how to live and express their gender, that decision is always linked to access to different cultural and historical languages and practices to describe and transform bodies. I am a genderqueer transsexual woman because of very deep, extremely personal things inside me. I am also a genderqueer transsexual woman because I have been exposed to

complex subcultures, languages and practices located as genderqueer, transsexual and female that make particular sense to me.

I want to recognize the historical and cultural dimension to gender variant identities, while not denying the very real, legitimate and personal reasons that some identities resonate with some people at particular moments. Understanding this is a good place, now, to shift the scope – and look a bit at race, class and other gender variant identities, particularly within communities of color. Doing so is a tricky and dangerous shift. As a white, middle-class trans person, it would be far too easy to speak of gender variance with an arrogant disrespect, tokenized exoticization or similar racist, neocolonial discursive violence that reentrenches my own race and class privilege. I will do the best I can to avoid such violations.

There are many people of color who identify as genderqueer or as transsexual. I in no way want to deny their very real existence across multiple social spaces. Everyone has a right to access the discourse that makes sense to them, regardless of whatever associations or baggage those words might have for others.

As I traced briefly above, however, both concepts are embedded in specific racialized and classed histories. Transsexual was forged in a complex political alliance between medical providers and communities of gender variant people who were overwhelmingly white, upper class and male-to-female. These transsexual women and their white, upper class medical doctors, had an enormous impact on the evolving notions of transsexuality that we continue to use today. The racial and class politics of genderqueer are easily as charged. Genderqueer gained parlance within particular subcultural communities of young, urban, politicized dykes and queer punks. It gained meaning with specific urban scenes. While there are certainly people of color and working-class people in these scenes, there is no question the overall circulation of fashion, language and politics is heavily dominated by white, middle-class people. Even more than transsexual, genderqueer has mostly been limited in use to similarly white, middle-class dominated spaces.

The dominance of white, middle and upper class people in defining and promoting genderqueer and transsexual identities has implied to some gender variance is primarily a white phenomena. I've heard such implications from racist genderqueers and transsexuals, from transphobic and homophobic people of color, and from generally naïve folks from many

spaces. Nothing could be further from the truth. Gender variation, in many different forms, has been present in all cultures around the globe and historically.

I've been briefly exposed to two specific systems of gender variance that are distinct from the configuration of transgender-transsexual-genderqueer I've outlined here. Me talking about these identities entails some risk, as they are located in marginalized communities of color of which I'm not a part. It could easily be, and probably is, a colonial and racist step to presume my ability to speak about these communities. The purpose of this discussion is not to ethnographically trace these cultures, a step I consider to be overloaded with racist entitlement. But a brief acknowledgement of their existence I hope is fair. I'll just try to locate myself explicitly with some humility, and hope it doesn't get too fucked up.

I lived for four years going to college in Minneapolis. Minneapolis has the largest indigenous communities in a U.S. city. The city has been some home to some remarkable and extraordinary political organizing among American Indians. A number of prominent indigenous activists in Minneapolis were coming together around two-spirit identity. Two Spirit refers to a large, interconnected range of gender variant identities and practices that were widespread in pre-colonized Native American communities. Throughout many Native American cultures, gender variant folks were respected and revered as powerful spiritual people. In some cultures, two spirit people were seen as possessing both male and female characteristics; in others two spirit people were legitimately recognized in their gender of choice.

European colonial domination of indigenous communities was particularly brutal in attempting to wipe out two spirit identity. The racist, capitalist politics of the European conquest and settlement had another dimension: a deep fear, loathing and hatred of gender variance and cultures that respected it. Two Spirit people were violently wiped out by European Americans, and the massive attempts at cultural assimilation and genocide against indigenous people include substantial attempts at indoctrinating American Indians in transphobic values.

These transphobic colonizing attempts had a lasting and horrible impact on Native American communities. Today, many indigenous communities are often as transphobic and hateful as white people. Even the radical and revolutionary movements reclaiming native culture against colonization, like the American Indian Movement, hold onto transphobia

and homophobia.

Meanwhile, of course, white trans people have shown consistent disrespect to Two Spirit and other indigenous people. In Minneapolis I witnessed countless incidents of white trans people talking in racist, offensive ways about Native Americans, focusing on a narrow understanding of transphobia and homophobia in native communities. The indigenous people who have tried to find their place in transsexual movements have faced racist disrespect from many white trans people. Instead, white trans people have often been found of talking about Two Spirit identities with a glib entitlement, making sweeping neocolonial cross-cultural assertions with little antiracist grounding.

In the middle of this, Two Spirit indigenous people have been making remarkable, admirable and powerful strides in reclaiming their gender and cultural identities. Two Spirit activists have begun to organize in Minneapolis, bringing together gender variant people in indigenous communities from around the continent. This organized has challenged both racism within white trans communities and transphobia within indigenous communities. Two Spirit people have pushed forward an analysis of European conquest as a force that obliterated the diversity of gender expression in indigenous communities, advancing their own existence as an anticolonial politics.

I certainly don't know the relationship between my white genderqueer transsexuality and Two Spirit people. Some Two Spirit also identify as transgender, some do not. As a white person benefiting from racism and colonial domination, it is important to me to work in solidarity and respect with indigenous people. And in building a movement dedicated to self-determination in gender expression and identity, I clearly locate Two Spirit folks who are doing that work, helping to build a new, liberated world.

I moved to Philadelphia two years ago. During that time, I've been working GLBT and HIV/AIDS community activism and social services. Here I've been exposed to another gender variant community: the Ball Scene. It's a subculture I had only vague knowledge of before moving to the city. Like Two Spirit people, it's a community of people in which I clearly do not belong. Like in talking about Two Spirit politics, discussing the Ball Scene is very dangerous ground of inappropriately discussing communities of color in ways that could easily be racist, ethnographic, objectifying and disrespectful.

The Ball Scene evolved as a competitive dance culture among gender variant people and sexual minorities in working class African-American and Latino communities on the East Coast in the 1980s and 90s. Within white queer spaces the Ball Scene is often best remembered through the controversial film *Paris Is Burning*, a film that's sparked a storm of debate around gender performativity, the colonial gaze and white supremacist and transphobic politics.

Here in Philadelphia there is a large and vibrant Ball community. Balls bring together hundreds of people in major events of skilled performance and community building. The scene is composed almost entirely of poor and working class African-Americans. Within the scene, people are organized in House families. These social structures provide folks with a regional infrastructure of social support. At the Balls, families compete against each other for reputation and status. Outside of these events, families might provide housing, emotional support, company, financial assistance and logistical support. People in the Scene face multiple forms of severe social oppression, including poverty, racism, homophobia and transphobia. Many folks in the Ball Scene lack access to virtually any other resources outside their Houses, denied access to housing, employment, healthcare or social sources.

Many families have supported people in male-to-female body modification practices, including securing access to hormones, silicone injections and surgery. The Ball Scene has provided a home for many young gender variant people who have never been welcome in the city's white dominated transsexual and genderqueer communities. For many young gender variant people, the Ball Scene has provided the only support available in claiming an empowering gender identity.

In the terms that I'm most familiar with, folks in the Ball Scene are Black gay men, drag queens or trans women. In the terms of social service institutions, they are often identified as Men who have sex with Men (MSM), African-American Non-Hispanic, with rare acknowledgement of Transsexual or Transgender Women. In the paragraphs above, I used the strange and uncomfortable phrases 'gender variant people' or 'sexual minorities'.

Within the Ball Scene, however, language is far more complex. People compete in performing across specific categories of identity. Common gender identities include Femme Queen, FQ in Drag, Butch Queen, BQ in

Drag, Butch, with numerous other words to refer to styles of performance or body types. Most of the people in the scene who have accessed hormone therapy identify as femme queens. Terms like transgender or trans have been a recent development, taking up by femme queens in the last few years. This has partially been in response to the developing awareness concerning a specific range of gender variant identities among social service providers. Identifying as trans has helped people access needed services and care, when providers might have no idea what femme queen refers to. Today many people identify as trans women who have their personal roots and history in the Ball Scene.

In recent months, for the first time anyone remembers, white and black trans people in Philadelphia have begun working together on a few projects. Black trans women who came out of the Ball Scene have begun developing relationships with white trans men and women. This is a new political development, and one that offers a lot of hope for Philadelphia. I feel honored to be able to have a part in these developing cross-racial relationships.

I don't mean to report these two communities as interesting cultural examples or ethnographic information. I'm instead interested in the implications for the existence of these communities in developing radical gender politics. Discussions between transsexuals and genderqueers are too often embedded in white, economically privileged spaces. Racism and classism has a thorough and pervasive impact on how gender is understood, conceived and contested within these spaces. In the interests in envisioning a liberating and healing gender politics that challenges white supremacy and capitalism, it's crucial to instead locate the discussion across differently racialized and classed communities, and in the intersections and relationships between them.

interlocking oppression

The debate between transsexual and genderqueers is dominated by a contradiction between notions of gender legitimacy vs. gender transgression. This opposition is not meaningful in looking at Two Spirit people and Femme Queens. Neither are identities organized primarily around transgression, or embedded in institutional systems of authenticated legitimacy. They have different systems of organizing belonging. Each community has its own codes of who belongs and who doesn't, and the codes of white-dominated communities function differently than those within communities of color. These two

communities, I argue, reveal the whole frame of the discussion between white transsexuals and white genderqueers as missing some basic points. White gender-variant folks develop ideas of gender identity within particular spaces and discourses that are historically and culturally located; taking these codes of too seriously as ways of understanding the world blinds us to the myriad of other ways someone could organize their complex relationships to gender.

It is a mistake to translate these systems of legitimacy into the ground of a movement politics. The common phenomena of policing who we feel comfortable with at a party or show simply does not provide an effective way for understanding who needs to be at the table when we are trying to change social institutions. Our survival depends on building movements across different identities, cultures and spaces. Precisely because of the urgent political necessity of building cross-cultural political coalitions, we cannot base our politics on the particular systems of identity that we may identify with. As a white genderqueer transsexual woman, it is imperative and powerful for me to be developing mutually respectful relationships of solidarity with black femme queens. I can't do so if I base my organizing on the specific languages I grew up with. The many gender variant communities in Philadelphia all have a tremendous political stake in learning to respect each other and work, especially when we have drastically different systems of understanding our relationship to gender and our bodies. We need to learn to stand by each other, even when we use different words to identify our experience.

Recognizing the struggles of Two Spirit people and the Ball Scene has another crucial political dimension – thinking critically about the relationships between white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism and transphobia. In the lives of white middle class genderqueer and transsexual the multiple forms of class and race privilege that mediate experiences of transphobia are often invisible to those benefiting. Class and race privilege function to never quite be recognized directly by white, middle class people. In the lives of gender variant poor people of color like Femme Queens and Two Spirit people, these relationships are much more stark and evident. White supremacy, colonialism and capitalism are deeply interwoven with the oppression of transphobia and homophobia.

Both Femme Queens and Two Spirit people are often a part of larger colonized communities. Working class black people in Philadelphia face deep and pervasive systems of economic and social racism. Decades of poverty and economic underdevelopment, militarization of neighborhoods

and mass incarceration have maintained most African-American Philadelphia neighborhoods as internal colonies of state white supremacist capitalism descended from slave economies. In a similar sense, Two Spirit people in Minneapolis today come at the tail end of centuries of the continuous focused brutality of colonization. Native Americans face ongoing economic exploitation, poverty and underdevelopment, linked to campaigns of cultural genocide and assimilation. It is within this context of colonization, white supremacy and capitalism that transphobia operates.

Black, working class Femme Queens in Philadelphia and poor indigenous Two Spirit people in Minneapolis face tremendous social oppression. Living in communities facing systematic racist and capitalist assault, many are locked into brutalizing poverty, totally excluded from wage labor economics and face extreme social marginalization. Many poor gender variant people in Philadelphia spend a lot of time in the social institutions US state capitalism uses to manage, benefit and punish poor people: emergency and transitioning housing facilities, prisons, jails, welfare and social security offices, social work centers, hospitals, public health centers, HIV/AIDS clinics or drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers. Overwhelmingly in Philadelphia, like in most places, these institutions are thoroughly transphobic and homophobic. Gender variant people are assaulted, and raped within prisons and shelters, denied care or ridiculed at health clinics, facing constant judgment, hatred and insult at social service offices. Poor black Femme Queens face ongoing brutality, disrespect, violence and humiliation in accessing or being subjected to these institutions. Many poor black trans women are driven to sex work to pay the bills and afford hormones, where people face intensified brutality from police.

towards revolutionary self-determination

Within this context of interlocked poverty, racism and transphobia, self-determination takes on powerful meanings. A commitment to self-determination in these contexts still includes people having the absolute right to define themselves, finding languages that make sense to them personally and to make their own choices around body modification. Self-determination means for me to listen to and acknowledge these languages and words even with they differ from my understanding of gender. It means adopting a nonjudgmental, person-centered, respectful harm reduction approach in relating to Femme Queens choosing to engage in potentially dangerous forms of body modification such as

unmonitored street hormone use, silicone injections and use of drugs. It means listening to the developing political analyses, perspectives and movements emerging out of Two Spirit communities.

Self-determination must go far beyond simply acknowledging someone's right to choose their own pronouns or take hormones. For a Femme Queen doing sex work on the streets of Philadelphia to pay for mones, self-determination could refer to getting access to a decent place to live, a decent job, some social respect and freedom from police brutality. Self-determination for a Two Spirit person might include space to practice indigenous spiritual practices, freedom from incarceration, and the federal reauthorization of their community as a legal nation.

Ultimately, talking about self-determination is talking about revolution. Counter to the most basic structures of capitalist domination, working class and poor people of all races have the absolute right to self-determine our future, our communities and human society. In opposition to colonial and neocolonial white supremacy, communities of color have an unquestionable right to define cultural, social and economic systems free of racist tyranny. For gender variant people in poor communities of color, self-determination is ultimately about the revolutionary transformation of social power.

A revolutionary politics of self-determination must also be about recognizing and challenging systems of white supremacist capitalism and neocolonialism. Self-determination isn't just about making individual decisions – it's about communities, classes and nations seizing control of one's own destiny from the grips of the domination of capital, state violence and colonization. A substantive radical gender politics must challenge all structures of domination as they are deeply interconnected across the surface of our lives and across this planet.

We are all at the cusp of movements of tremendous transformative potential. Trans liberation is profoundly interrelated and inseparable from anticolonial, anticapitalist and antiimperial struggle. Self-determination, as a commitment to both personal and collective revolutionary liberation, offers one means of beginning to make these connections and establish a bases for broad, inclusive and effective social, economic and gender justice movements. These movements are already forming, in the streets of Philadelphia or Minneapolis, Guatemala City or Bangkok. Gender variant people are organizing on an unprecedented scale -- for healthcare, for rights to language and identity, for economic survival.

Standing against transphobia, neocolonialism and capitalism, self-determination offers one of many languages for describing the emerging demands of gender variant people. We are standing against violence, domination and social marginalization, and self-determination is a way of envisioning and linking these demands. Gender variant people are demanding a place in broader movements for social justice, equipped with a profound understanding of how thoroughly politics goes into our bodies, our psyches, our daily lives. We will self-determine our own bodies, and self-determine our future. We will stand against the empire, the armies, the police and the ruling classes. And our demand, our pride, our bodies will provide the ground for a new world.

Tonight I will give myself another shot of delestrogen, the hormone I take through an intramuscular injection into my butt cheek every two weeks. In that shot I find my hope. It is there I am closest to my desire for finding a place of self-love, pride and healing in myself. In that hope in my deep yearnings for a politics of liberation that refuses competition, fear and scarcity. A commitment to liberation that sees how deeply interwoven our lives are. A yearning for a movement that will touch us all, that will heal our wounds, that will open up ways for us to listen to, love and support each other. In that shot, I am closest to that part of myself that is true to an unconditional love for all beings. And in that love I locate myself in the revolutionary struggle against state capitalism and white supremacist colonization, against domination in all its forms.

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