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Self-Determinism

What is It?

Nsambu Za Suekama

15 January 2022

In the Black struggle there are debates on the question of if it is race or it is gender that play a central role in our oppression under capitalism and colonialism. Some have proposed a “gender abolition” framework to liberate their bodies from certain antiblack interpretations of their anatomy. In this way, race is put before gender. But others propose “gender self-determination,” understanding gender as a class modality and not an anatomically/sex-reduced reality, in pursuit of an entirely different conception of biology in the first place, and this piece aims to provide some insight into why.

We are born, we live, we die. During that time, the world or universe we live in and our very Personhood—we get told that the way it is, the way we experience ourselves and our external reality: it cannot be changed.

The white Man tells us that this is because of his god, his church, his bible, his cross. And plenty of other religions have done the same in their own way. They push these narratives because it helps their subjects, the people they oppress and exploit, to be convinced that the dominant system of governance and ruling civilization: it

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is all divine will. Through religious supremacism the haves can say that their power over the have nots cannot be transformed because this world is fallen and the body is evil, justifying their control over us and the earth's resources and its other creatures.

When the have nots receive this message, some decide to reject the white Man's god or any other god of coercion or repression. They turn to the wisdom of their ancestors instead, or to spirits of nature and of the cosmos. They will say that from these deities flows who we are as a people, and that from these divinities comes how we supposed to live and relate and understand and organize in this world and in ourselves. This spirituality serves to explain another kind of societal structure and another way of being. And so it is seen as backward and demonic by the so-called haves.

Now, there are those who choose to go beyond trying to understand who we are and the universe we occupy in either a religious or ancestral sense.

They wanted freedom from oppression and so they turned to science and reason to justify it. They rebel against the white Man's god and other gods and say that they have a right to change themselves and the planet because they are human.

But they also went to invade other lands and took slaves and established new civilizations and economies in these territories only for those considered human, themselves. When they saw geographical landmarks and constellations in the air, plants and animals, but also people, that were not familiar to them, cultures that looked and dressed and spoke and lived and labored different, the white Man scientists decided that these things were "naturally" inferior. This was so that their systems of invasion could then be thought of as "superior" because of natural law.

And so these new haves and dominators used both religion and their science to say that their power over the indigenous, the enslaved have nots cannot be transformed because our worlds are unnatural, our bodies are flawed, inhuman, again justifying their control over us and the earth's resources and other creatures.

When the enslaved, the indigenous have-nots receive this message, some decide to reject the white Man's science, and any kind of science of coercion and oppression. They turn to a study of their history instead, and a radical study of the planet and the universe. It was easy for them to do this because their spirituality had already told them to see the earth and cosmos as sacred.

So they inaugurated a new science: one that realized that the world or universe we live in, and our very personhood, the way we experience ourselves and our external reality: it was one way before and then it got changed by the oppressor. They began to notice that things are always changing, too, and that even how we understand and define ourselves are always transforming too. And so they Revolted. So they could take charge over those processes of transformation. And break out their chains.

It is from these Revolts that we develop a revolutionary ideology, to combat the white Man's lies and instead justify why we can and should restructure our societies and change who we are on our own terms, and how we inhabit this planet.

The haves call us extreme, delusional, and worse, for standing on this radical Self-Determinism. This is especially true for those of us who have transgressed (which means to "cross over") the color line, by struggling against the sexual reductions which have threaded it together. Today, our transgression has simply been called "*trans-*" which in Latin meanings *going too far away or beyond* while and it is locked in a conversation about *gender*, which in Latin had to do with what was laid out for us at birth, or in the Family, or in the Nation, or in the very essence of human Kind. In the slavemaking, warmongering, imperialistic religious societies, the relations of dominance and dominion over stolen goods, stolen labor, over resources reduced to property, including human bodies marked as slaves because they were snatched from among defeated peoples: it also required a simple, binary gender system based in sexualized notions of who was human or inhuman, who therefore deserved the position of dominance. So

their larger systems of oppression needed a reproductive division to help them function on an immediate level of labor/property relations. Therefore, the idea of a human sex and inhuman sex came about to paint this system as “natural” or “God’s will.” It was based around reductive views of sexual (especially reproductive) anatomy because that could be easily looked at as the basis of the Civilized (more natural and more god-willed) nation.

They structured a Manhood that required exploitation of womanhood from within the Family and Nation at the top of “civilized” humanity; and they structured a Womanhood that was merely the compliment-subordinate to the Man, like Eve to Adam, from within that same Family and Nation at the top of “civilized” humanity. But there were and are manhoods which expanded beyond this structure, in the life of the indigenous and enslaved: so these were marked as an “uncivilized” contradistinction to white manhood. If their biological realities “transgressed” the anatomical (reproductive) reduction which the master insisted was the “natural”/“god-willed” basis of its rigid and hierarchical gender relations, these particular gender expanses became positioned as “transgender” manhoods. Similarly, there were and are womanhoods which expanded beyond the rigid and hierarchical models of the Man and his Mistress, that existed among the indigenous and enslaved: and these were marked as “uncivilized” contradistinction to white womanhood. If their biological realities “transgressed” the anatomical (reproductive) reduction that the master insisted was the “natural”/“god-willed” basis of its nuclear relations, these became positioned as “transgender” womanhoods. Finally, there were gender expanses among the indigenous and enslaved that can neither be spoken of as forms of manhood or forms of womanhood. If these did not necessarily “transgress” sexual reductions, they were simply understood in the way that the Eunuchs and Virgins among the Christian monks were understood. However, if their gender expansive embodiment, activities, did “transgress” the reproductive/sexual divisions which

slave narratives in the form of letters and autobiographies and biographies from Black radical prison/street intellectuals: especially Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, George Jackson, Sanyika Shakur, Ojore Lutalo; and my organizing and studies in the Third World People’s Alliance and Pan African organization Forward Ever/Backward Never and with my fellow contributors to Red Voice News.

#MessageFromTheWhirlwind

and hierarchical matrix. A consciousness of the dynamic (not reductive) spectrum of personhood, the dialectical and historical situatedness of culture wherein that spectrum emerges, the role of our collective and individual action in class development and thus the evolution of culture and transformation of personhood, the capacity/responsibility of the oppressed to Determine our processes of personal and collective metamorphosis altogether: this is what we must catalyze. Transfeminist Materialism brings the necessary clarity to account for all of this.

We must now take time to set out some definitions. Because a true revolutionary never takes any word or idea or phenomenon for granted, even those things we deem important. What, then, is this concept of “self-determination”? Where did it come from? Who contributed to our understanding of this principle? Furthermore, what does it have to do with indigenous people, with slavery, with race, with gender, and with class?

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This work is indebted to my readings of Anarkata: A Statement and organizing in/studies of Black Anarchism (especially via the work of Kuwasi Balagoon, Lorenzo Ervin, Ashanti Alston, and Martin Sostre) in Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas; my studies of Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Katherine McKittrick, Alexander G Weheliye, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Black Ecology in the Nathan Hare variety, of dialectical biology in the Stephen Jay Gould/RC Lewontin/Ruth Hubbard and critical human ecology variety, of Cedric Robinson and the Black Radical Tradition framework, of Yahya Touré’s Two-Head Manifesto and the online archival work of other Black TGNC folk around African traditions of gender variance, of original slave narratives like that of Harriet Jacobs well as modern

the master said was a “natural” or “god-willed” basis for the slaver-imperial-class society, then these other gender expanses also became positioned as “transgender” (or other terms were used, such as “third gender” or “metagender”).

All of this was because the gender expanses among the indigenous and enslaved proved that class/material relations was possible that went outside the institutions necessary for the imperial-religious-slaver culture. The anatomically “transgressive” gender expanses specifically proved that these other, more Self-Determined class/material relations, were possible: demonstrating that these other realities were apparent in human nature and in human spiritual beliefs (challenging the appeals to Nature and God’s will which the Man uses to universalize its systems). The master needed to squeeze the indigenous and enslaved out of our worldsense, out of the labor and institutional relations our gender expanses were born in, in order to control and weaken and divide us. And they specifically targeted the biologically (and spiritually) “transgressive” gender expanses: those of us who are now classified as transgender. Because their views of our reproductive and anatomical features meant it was harder to squeeze us into the Family/Nation-building project that anchored the slaving-religious-imperial cultures’ class pursuits and civilizational dominance.

So, one of the first Self-Determinists, a *nganga* or spiritual leader named Kimpa Vita, the Church killed her for combatting their doctrines and for trying to fight for sovereignty in the Kongo, and for claiming that she had a male spirit in her body. A gender transgressor. Another Self-Determinist, a priestess in Haiti, Romaine-La-Prophetess, nobody knows what happened to them after they led a wave of anti-slavery uprisings, but the white Man called her a “maniac” and a “hermaphrodite.” Yet another gender transgressor. There was a woman named Mary Jones, who was arrested for theft, and they called her “man-monster” and she was also a Self-Determinist, and she claimed that among her

own people (Black folk) she had always been accepted in her transgressive gender ways. Frances Thompson was a disabled woman, who suffered alongside the cisgender Black women in Memphis in the late 1800s, and she testified on behalf of her people against lynch terror: a Self-Determinist she was too, helping to pioneer in the legacy of anti-segregation struggles in the US, although they considered her a liar in part because she was a gender transgressor. There are others, all beautiful people, star people, and the white Man saw us moving in Self-Determinism, and they created sodomy laws and buggery laws in every land they took over, to condemn us to hell, prison, or a psych ward, all of us gender transgressors. Among the Union soldiers, too, those who joined the “General strike” of the civil war, and among many of those runaway slaves and those engaging in a legacy of maroon activity, and palenquerismo and quilombismo: there were also Self-Determinists, and some of them the white Man decided to call many of them “crossdressers,” although it is likely a many of them were transgressive gender peoples. Another rebel: William Dorsey Swann, a self-identified queen, leader of an early drag house, probably one of the first ball mothers on record in the US; a Self-Determining soul, who led an uprising against the police, also transgressively gendered. And there were many gender (and) sexual transgressors who took up the struggle against Jim Crow during the Harlem Renaissance and Civil rights movement (one was in the African Blood Brotherhood, and went by two names: Claude McKay at times, Sasha at others). All contributed to the legacy of Self-Determination. There were gender-transgressive people at the Compton Cafeteria Riots and the Stonewall Uprising during the Black Power era; although these Self-Determining women and queens and souls get erased or maligned. So it was among those involved in the Panthers, in the BLA, in the New African Independence Movement, in the prison struggle, the abolitionist movement, socialist struggle, anarchist struggle, and other revolutionary movements.

to keep the civilizationally dominant class in power (and making a profit)

9. Resistance gets suppressed because it often takes shape in the forms of Revolts that destroy property and that snatch resources back from the ruling class (which is a fundamental threat to capitalism). Part of the Resistance also includes folks breaking out of oppressive labor relations or trying to change how they are Positioned within them to make life better for themselves (known as class consciousness). There is also an Upheaval against various ruling institutions across the world, and people then begin to demand their full cognitive and bodily/behavioral and cultural autonomy (this is the beginning phase of Self-Determinism). Revolt, Class Consciousness, and Self-Determined activity combined are dangerous to the oppressor because it advances a class and decolonial/anti-slavery struggle and thus the potential for folk to destroy capitalism and imperialism. It involved not only structural transformation at an economic and political level, but also attempts to gain national independence from the white Man, and the re-establishment of sovereignty for indigenous peoples, reparations for the enslaved. Inherent to this revolutionary process is destruction of ableist limitations on human life, behavior, thought, alongside advancing the emancipation of gender/sexually marginalized people from any limitations on who we are, since these anchor the civilizationally dominant class’ family/nation-building project and their entire worldview. A true revolutionary transformation can flow when the People start to affirm all these things. That is the most complete type of Self-Determinism: when there is a wide-ranging attempt to transform how we inhabit our planet and our own selves through destruction of the authoritarian/religious, colonial-imperial, racial capitalist, patriarchal/cisheterosexist, ableist

archy is to blame, and it works with religion, the government/school, police, military, doctors, and even every day vigilantes to force cisheterosexism onto everyone.

8. The oppressed are then convinced that specific class relations are Universal, natural, divine, unchanging, and so participate in sexist, especially transmisic/transphobic oppression among ourselves, to prevent any form of resistance against them. This is why they defend cisheterosexist notions of manhood and womanhood; and why they always enact thought and behavior control by way of ableist assumptions; and why religion and so-called biology are both used to explain the validity of these strategies. The oppressed are then taught to denigrate all cultures which do not conform to these paths laid out by Patriarchy, Organized Religion, and the State (plus its schools and media) in their supremacist and pseudoscientific dogmas, and therefore to see any Person as Inhuman/uncivilized who does not stick to the standards which the ruling class needs us to obey. Should the people fail, however, to keep ourselves in line, the Police, Military, Doctors, or Vigilantes will take up violent means to enforce order. This is known as Fascism. It generally comes around during periods of heightened resistance from the oppressed, when the people begin to question the entire existence of the system of Haves and Have Nots and each aspect of it. If Fascism is not used to suppress the resistance, the Liberal politricks, where ruling forces try to show love and give rights to the oppressed, is used to pacify us. Liberalism always leads back to fascism, however, because even as there is a claim to “integrate” and “tolerate” the indigenous and enslaved and gender transgressive Have Nots, the capitalist system still has to maintain its Family-and-Nation project, and its structural exploitation of the oppressed and dispossessed, in order

And yet we gender/sexual transgressors get disrespected: they call us “tr*nny” and “f*ggot” and “d*ke” and heathen and savage and depraved and predatory, all for being Self-Determinists. And really, when the white Man call the Black cisgender Brotha “boy” or “brute” or “lazy” because if he is poor and unchristian he may not necessarily align with Bourgeois manhood the way colonialism says a man should; when they call the Black cisgender Sista degrading names of “b*tch” and “wench” and “jezebel” and “mammy” because if she is poor and christian she may not necessarily align with Bourgeois womanhood the way colonialism says a woman should; when they treat all our children as animals, as manipulative, as “grown” even as babies, they victimize them yet blame them for it or laugh it off; brutalize them and worse: these are also ways of keeping the gender/sexual threads of the color line firmly in place. These are ways of maintaining the suppression of all “uncivilized” gender expanses among us, and to erase the memory of our pre-colonial, ancestral, indigenous genres, identities, experiences, roles (PAIGIERs) which, while not inherently perfect, were not as rigidly and hierarchically gendered as the systems developed by Man and his Mistress.

The Haves despise any form of Self-Determination, however small or large. They don’t want us to Revolt, and they don’t want us to do gender or our culture, lives and loving and dressing, use of our bodies and behavior and thinking, they do not even want us to breathe, and definitely do not want us to reclaim land and natural resources, and care for the earth, in a way that is African or liberated, at all. Because then they cannot keep us in a certain Position that is vulnerable to exploitation, and without that, they cannot make money off our labor and our domination.

So the Haves tell us that we cannot transform the world, and they are insistent that we cannot change ourselves or define ourselves. Especially for the gender transgressors. Again, we get born, we live, we die, they say: and all that time, supposedly the universe we live in and our very Personhood, the way it is is just the way it

is and that's it. And it would be against nature/biology or against either some god or some metaphysic/ontology to change anything about the world system or about our very body.

What the Have Nots must understand, however, whether we are transgender or cisgender, is that we do have a capacity for Self-determination. It is both natural (a biological potentiality) and it is decided upon in our belief systems (drawn from our origin stories). But the indigenous, enslaved, disabled, under-and-working class have nots need a *material* analysis to help make our power and duty for Self-Determinism clear.

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change.

God
Is Change.

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- Earthseed, The Book of the Living, 1; Octavia Butler

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, ple-

going accumulation and production that squeeze profit off our exploitation.

6. The religious/scientific authority of the oppressor and its effect on our consciousness are held in place by how narratives of Divine Will or Natural Law render certain brains, bodies, cultures, and behaviors intrinsically or inherently inhuman: sinful (for the religious) or sick (for the rationalist). This is known as Ableism and through it, notions of what it means to be properly or fully human, ie Godly or eugenic (naturally superior) are defined. Without this, the indigenous and enslaved Have Nots would prioritize our autonomy at cognitive, behavioral, bodily, cultural level, because we would see the game being played on us by a civilizationally dominant class, and thus deciding to fight to take power back from the hands of the few, and step into our own decisions about who we are and about how we will live on this earth.
7. Authorities wield these Ableist and disempowering boundaries around so-called human cognition and emotions, bodies, cultures, behaviors, to categorize people not just in terms of civilizational supremacy vs Inferiority, but in terms of Sex. Male and female, or “dimorphic” (two-form) and binary (two-system) gender categories and boxes are forced onto the organism and even our very soul. Any deviation is fundamentally seen as sinful or sick, and therefore Inhuman, and that is because the Bourgeois society and its property system rest upon a Family-and-Nation building project. All heterosexual conformity is seen as truly or more close to human (godly, eugenic) because it fits with the reproductive labor divisions/exploitation that the Haves need. This is known as Cisheterosexism, and through it, that is how specific labor roles and institutions are conserved, keeping us atomized and in place, thus more easily able to be exploited. Patri-

trajectory. That means all development, evolution, transformation, happens dialectically. People are trying to change ourselves as much as we are trying to change and respond to our shifting environments. Societal and civilizational systems and identities and roles and thought patterns are made and unmade by our participation in collective and individual struggle. Change therefore must be structurally grounded, not isolated to one person, one figure or formation, one mind or idea, one facet of reality.

4. Since structural revolution, at a personal and wider level, occurring within and among complex nature-nurture persons, evolving by way of class antagonisms and conflicts and struggles, is happening in the context of geography-specific cultures and relation to our environments, the process of transformation must be guided actively by the oppressed ourselves, in pursuit of our own and our people's needs. Cognitive, cultural, and behavioral/bodily autonomy is therefore essential.
5. Supremacism taught by organized religions and pseudoscientific naturalism taught by the government and its schools and media, however, are used by those in power, the dominant and exploiting class (the "haves" or capitalists) to warp our view of oppression, of history, of reality, and of ourselves. And because they hold the resources, we become convinced that their narratives are the Truth. Limits on our Autonomy (cognitive, cultural, behavioral) are pioneered as a result, to keep oppressed people in certain Positions. This convinces us that who we are and how the world is: it's immutable (unchanging), allowing the private property/economic system to remain unchallenged. This is the Bourgeois society, founded on dispossession of the masses from common use of resources, as well as violent processes of primitive and on-

beians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones."

— *the Communist Manifesto*

"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**

"One... understands the technical and other lags to be the result of a different kind of development based upon absolutely objective fundamental causes. Thus, there is no longer any reason for embarrassment. Once this awareness achieved, we can immediately and fully in almost every slightest detail relive all the aspects of African national life: the administrative, judicial, economic, and political organizations, that of labor, the technical level, the migrations and formations of peoples and nationalities, thus their ethnic genesis, and consequently almost linguistic genesis, etc. Upon absorbing any such human experience, we sense deep within ourselves a true reinforcement of our feeling of cultural oneness."

— *Precolonial Black Africa, Cheikh Anta Diop*

My name is Nsambu Za Suekama, a Bl3ssing in Disguise. I chose this name because names have power. Names tell a story or they foretell a certain future. Names can specify a role for you to play in life, in society, in your family, in the world. Or names might indicate the day of the week one was born on, as in the Akan culture. Names are sacred, so sacred that in some cultures people refuse to call someone by their name publicly, and only in ritual settings. Names can vary, too: they can be only for your family, or only for your friends, or only for the streets, or restricted to official lo-

cations. There are names that mark you by the government or by other institutions of control, like when white Man religion forced Biblical names onto enslaved Africans, or when white Man science makes those of us with “transgressive” gender expanses stick to our birth names.

I was born with a man’s name. It was the name of my biological father. This was supposed to be a marker of patriarchal inheritance. But the only thing I inherited through him was the generational curse of paternal abandonment that had been passed down in our community precisely of patriarchy, and colonialism, racial capitalism. So I never wanted this name, because this man never wanted me, and I never wanted manhood period, nor did I want to bear the curse of his (my biological father) or its (my biological gender assignment) absence and all that supposedly meant for how much lesser me or my people were.

My mother had tried to impart a spiritual meaning to the given name, “a blessing in disguise,” and I believe it was her way of seeing beauty in a child who looked so much like, and was named after, the man who had visited cruelty upon her. She had even declared that I “made” the birth name “my own” by being who I was, or rather, who she knew me to be, as her firstborn, her eldest, her son. But, I knew deep inside that there was only one way that my beauty and blessings could unveil themselves, only one way to truly make my name my own: I needed to go beyond the guises of memory and maleness alike, and chart my own path, and actually create my own name, and my own self.

For, there are those who grew up like roses from the cracks in the street, who grew up in the trenches, who saw bullets on the stoop, who watched the death parade march through the torso of the earth, who saw bloodthirsty maggots prayed to and saluted, who were beaten and bullied and bludgeoned, and for us, it is not true that going by any old name would make us just as sweet. No, a name means a lot, for us, when it is chosen, when it is determined

phase, too. Currently I’m trying to curate, nurture, flex my Euconsciousness. It is constant work, constant struggle, and the Dysconsciousness and Triple Consciousness always come around to interfere with my “resonance” and throw me out of alignment with my Chi/Ori. That’s part of why I eventually get frustrated with the whole system and turn to radical politics, to Transfeminist Material Analysis. Because how else can I have the breathing room to transform myself in the way I want to if there is still a world system that weighs on me that needs to be transformed too? At that point, now I have to name the ideology and the world system I will need so that I can establish my truest/highest self on a regular, without any interruption.

A Transfeminist Material Analysis teaches the movement for Self Determination the following:

1. Race, gender, disability, and all so-called human identities and beliefs and behaviors are not biologically based, nor are they ontological (based in a mystical notion of what it means to be or not be human). Instead, who we are and how we think/act is a nature-plus-nurture Spectrum. These nature-nurture complexes each emerge in diverse and geography-specific cultures.
2. Material conditions, relations of labor and power, subsistence practices, modes of production and environmental inhabitation: they both reinforce and are reinforced by these nature-nurture complexes of personhood. Therefore, the cultural populations and geographic regions within which our nature-nurture spectrums of personhood develop: are all shaping of and yet shaped by class and hierarchy. This is why they are dynamic, and cannot be statically reduced to God’s will or Natural Law.
3. Our dynamic nature-nurture spectrums of personhood culturally evolve with and in our planet along a historical

“disease of the mind” and spiritual failure by white scientists like Dr Sam Cartwright (he called it “drapetomania”), Black trans* thinking is demonized and framed as sickly. Ableism, especially Sanism, works alongside class oppression, racial oppression, and gender oppression, together forming what I call a “Quadruple Jeopardy.” This is so that we cannot come into who we are as gender expansive people, and so that we can instead be criminalized and treated as a medical pathology that has to be cured or eliminated. If you identify your gender expanse, your name, and your consciousness, and give name to a revolutionary politic, the full weight of Quadruple Jeopardy will fall on you. If you do not take up Self-Determinist ideology, or name your experience as a trans* person, or try to discover and define yourself and make yourself as an individual, Quadruple Jeopardy is still there as a risk. One of the first things Black people must do when fighting to get free is name these things and de-pathologize our consciousness. We must name ourselves anew, or name our experiences. When Frantz Fanon was dealing with patients that had internalized racism, he needed to name “sociogeny” as the dimension of experience in which their sense of inferiority had emerged, as Sylvia Wynter reminds us, because the Western scientific model of “phylogeny” and the Freudian model of “ontogeny” were too biologically-reductive and individualized to actually explain the institutional and economic and political factors that went into the issue. Similarly, I not only had to change my name to affirm myself, and decide the referential and honorific and pronouns I wanted folks to use for me, and lay out my identity too: I told folks I was like the maroon, the runaway, the fugitive, the people can fly and I did that because the prefix “trans” means “away.” I also had to name the stages of consciousness that went into this process of self-discovery. I had to name that there is dysconsciousness happening due to the legacy of racialized cisheterosexism and all the class systems they reinforce. I had to name that there is a triple consciousness happening because of these same factors and forces. And, I had to name, finally, that there is a Euconscious

by us, when it is a signal of resistance to whatever was forced onto a person, when it signifies a decision to chart out a new path or legacy for ourselves. We actually become sweeter, so much sweeter, and are able to grow, when we decide upon our new names. So, I became my own “blessing in disguise.” I took that spiritual meaning my mother saw of my very Soul, and I found a way to channel it on my terms through how I would transform and define my body and its place in this world, and how I could change my name, and the way people would receive it, and receive me.

My unveiling process was not, and is not easy. It is very difficult to become conscious of your own spirit, and give name to yourself, when there is a Veil, as W.E.B. du Bois correctly observed, a “color line,” that separates the enslaved and indigenous have nots from the Man, that subordinates us, thereby messing with your consciousness. I had to struggle against this Veil, by trying to untie its sexual threads, because what I was told growing up was that my gender expanses were a “white thing.” Even though it is white Man religion that forced homophobia and transphobia on our people, the master now pretends to be in support of queerness, but only if it’s for those with whiteness and legality supporting them. Many Black people have then internalized this idea that we have no “right” to gender self-determination at all: and this way we do the master’s dirty work of suppressing gender expanses among ourselves. Whenever I was told to “man up” therefore, I was also told to “act Black,” and this was how the Veil could be pulled against the wisdom of my eyes, to make the kind become the blind, the blind become a bind, which is to say: keep me dysconscious.

Dysconsciousness, according to Joyce E King, writing in the 90s, describes a state of mind which takes the existing order of society for granted, as if it is a given. This leads to accepting inequity as, justifying it even. Despite so-called integration, and the end of Jim Crow, systematic racism still persisted into the 90s, and even to today. Instead of people bring critical about why that was, looking at the legacy of mass incarceration as a “new Jim crow,” and its sister,

the “Jane Crow” system used to target Black mothers, people fell into dysconsciousness. They assumed that it must have just been a curse or flaw in Black people making us suffer. It was assumed we deserved the terms of our oppression for being “lazy” or criminal or whatever. So gender dysconsciousness is what I experienced: when Black people take for granted the idea that civil rights for gender/sexual minorities is a white privilege. Many Black people see the State giving recognition in media and other institutions to white LGBT people and assumed that the inequities against Black TLGB+ people were a given. Instead of being critical about “Jewel Crow,” or the specific ways Black queer/trans people are segregated against both legally and extralegally, it is just assumed instead that our gender expanses deserve to be suppressed. When a trans person internalizes gender dysconsciousness, we start to believe we don’t deserve to stand in our truth, or that we are flawed, sinful, that our bodies are wrong, or something is wrong with our brains, that we are ugly or that we should die. Most people describe these as “feelings” of “gender dysphoria,” but I am arguing that these feelings arise from a racialized struggle around gender dysconsciousness. Because of this, it became unimaginable to me that I could change my name, even though I disliked it; and I definitely didn’t think I could transform my very Self into the transfeminine Soul I wanted to be.

One will strive against the Veil, though, is what W.E.B du Bois spoke of. It is a question of needing access to resources, jobs, education, healthcare. This is part of why there was a civil rights movement, and ongoing racial justice struggle. And today, there are transgender iterations of that same movement, led by Black people, who are in need of access to basic material needs, to protections, to freedom from the prisons, and more. These battles have to be waged all over the world, especially since the same Amerikkkan forces behind Jim Crow-Jane Crow-Jewel Crow like to invade other countries and force their fascistic, neocolonial laws and relations onto the people of those nations. So there are global Black trans*

wear flowers in my hair like Marsha, it was because some girls and I picked the flowers, and I was choosing now to pursue my womanly/feminine “resonances” (aligning with my Chi/Ori). I was learning to unpack my gender dysconsciousness in those days because I was questioning the religious beliefs I was raised on and I was becoming more informed about Black radical tradition. I still had to wrestle with the Triple Consciousness, though, and I can remember all the stares and comments I got for wearing flowers, and the skepticism and suspicions and eventually the harassment: and it was all very reminiscent of stuff that I experienced growing up, but it felt more pronounced. It was more prominent. I was nurturing my Euconsciousness now, which means I was sexually Transgressive by choice, and people’s attempts to suppress my gender expanse had to be sharper now if they were to protect cisheterosexist relations, the nuclear family, white Man religion, and of course the reproduction of Western bourgeois civilizational dominance. I could not stay in school or in my parents’ home or keep jobs subsequent to that point, because once a gender expansive person is now transgressively Euconscious, rather than just dysconscious or triply conscious, that gender expanse begins to actively challenge the social norms and presuppositions of the world around them. And this can become an economic and spiritual and political threat if it is radicalized. That’s part of why regardless of what a trans woman believes, transphobes will accuse her of trying to “destroy” their church, family, government, and more. They recognize that transgressive Womanhoods, if moving in a Euconscious mode, might rally together for a total structural change that allows us the full self-determination over who we are. And indeed, I am one of these revolutionary transgender women, as was Marsha before me.

Society does not want us to give name to ourselves or to the stages of our consciousness at all, and definitely do not want us to give name to any revolutionary ideology. So, they they say we are simply sick in the head, that we are twisted, pathological, insane. Just like when the desire to run away from slavery was framed as a

you are gonna subjectively define all those things. If these choices “resonate” and feel true to who you are deep down, perhaps in your very sense of Self, your Soul, your spirit, and how you want to occupy the world or need to occupy the world, people call that “euphoria.”

I’m suggesting that for the Black transgressive gender expanse, this experience is often more than just something affective, or emotional, although it can include that. This experience is often informed by the historical awareness of ourselves as Black people, or informed by aspects of our culture or spirituality as African people. This is why we often coin our own terms for our gender/sexual expanses that are very specific to the Black experience. So I am calling it Gender Euconsciousness, since it is an extension of “resonance” with self-discovery around our spiritual/cultural experience, and it is often in direct response to the oppressive systems that cause us to undergo Dysconsciousness and Triple Consciousness. See, I would feel “resonance” in my Soul whenever I listened to my mother or aunt or girl cousins speak, or when I watched women and girls in movies and television, and they would bear witness to who they were as individual women/girls, or how they had to move through the world as such. Gender Euconsciousness is what happens when I claim that my transgender womanhood is the basis of that “resonance,” and I begin to follow my Chi/Ori. The “resonance” was an inkling of awareness that what they were saying had implications for me, who I was, and how I had to move through the world. But the Euconsciousness is when that awareness is informed by an understanding that I have my individual Black Womanhood, separated from theirs by a certain thread (cissexism), but subordinated like theirs along the same lines (antiblackness). And even if it isn’t exactly posed politically, as not all Black Trans* people are revolutionaries or radicals, Euconsciousness still emerges from a specifically African/Black experience of gender.

It was Euconsciousness that went into why I don’t ever suggest that I had a “coming out” as Trans* moment. When I was starting to

rebellions against the police. What we end up experiencing in this phase is what I will call Triple Consciousness. du Bois had spoken of a “double consciousness” where as he, a Black man, strove within and against the Veil erected by white/antiblack society against him, there was a dual perception of his very Self, of his body, his soul. In the case of Black people with “transgressive” gender expanses, that perception is tripled: how we understand ourselves, versus how white supremacy/antiblackness understands us, versus how the transphobes/homophobes within our own community understand us, all at once.

When I was a kid, I can remember the rigorous attention I had to pay to my every move wherever I was: how I held my head or my wrist, the ways I moved my eyes, how long I pronounced my vowels, how soft I pronounced my consonants, the speed at which I walked, the way I held my chest or my hips while walking, and more. And all of this was a question of negotiating safety: because there was how I felt about myself inside, but also how the cops might feel about me, but also how the transphobes might see my femininity. This is on top of the crushing poverty, religious trauma from toxic churches, and other things we face in the hood. Triple Consciousness caused me to look for various forms of acceptance and safety so that I could hope to escape the psychological as well as social dangers around me. I often tried to blend in with the Christians, to submit to the move of the Holy Spirit, where through the quickening and Shouting I had room to express my emotions in ways I was often told I could not. Triple Consciousness also made me accept certain things being forced onto me that I may not have wanted: like when certain boys would try to fondle or peek on me, or when certain forms of labor in the home were put on me. Triple Consciousness made me turn toward even internalized (trans)misogyny, to trying to police other people’s gender expanses, or to internalizing colorism/racism, and other backward ideas from this society. In each case I was trying to negotiate the ways I felt of myself with how I was perceived along both the color

line and its gender/sexual threads. Even if I didn't fully align with all the theologies put onto me, or did not want young men dealing with me in nonconsensual ways, and even if I didn't want to step up with certain quasi-parental domestic responsibilities, or didn't truly agree with cisheterosexism and colorist and racist ideas, I was trying to strive, as best I could, as a young Afro-transfem, to just deal with the world around me. And so made certain attempts to overcompensate that were as fucked up as the ways I was being mistreated by others.

To this day, I have to be very discerning about where I travel, how I'm dressed, the pitch and octave at which I speak, when or if to use my "they" pronouns versus my "she" pronouns, when to use my chosen name versus the name on my birth certificate, and more, to navigate safety, including the pursuit of jobs or housing, public assistance, and more. And to this day, I have to struggle internally to not reproduce harshness and cruelty to my other Black sibs, especially gender marginalized folks, fellow dark skinned and disabled folks, poor folks, fat folks, etc. So many Black trans people have to negotiate safety in these and other numerous, complicated ways. While it is often spoken of in terms of what it means to "pass," I'm choosing to speak of it in terms of Triple Consciousness and the structures of racialized cisheterosexism (and ways they interlock with other systems).

In African traditional religions, one of the ways that an individual gets in touch with their higher self (called "Chi" for the Igbo or "Ori" for the Yoruba) is through "resonance." It's almost like there is a frequency, and one's personality traits, likes, habits, dislikes, inclinations, these are things that draw a person, or seem to "call" to a person. And they are taken to be indicators for the spiritual path, and indeed social role, a person will eventually discover and define for themselves. The Chi/Ori is in tune with those things, it is said. The Chi/Ori knows those things to be connected to it. The Chi/Ori leans the person toward them, and that person can choose to align or not. Nobody can dictate your Chi/Ori for you but you. And if you

do align, it makes it feel easier for you to move through life, like a rowboat cruising over still waters. Whenever I was alone, reflecting, chilling, relaxing, from a young age, I would detect that "resonance" in the universe somehow. It would lead me to adopt certain things into my behavior and thinking that just always seemed to "make sense" for how I had to or wanted to move through the world. Some of these things were neutral "resonances," that had to do with basic living, maybe even instincts, like if I am hungry I need food, or if I am tired I need to sleep, if I am bored I want to play. But some of them were womanly, feminine resonances. The songs I liked, the clothes I wanted to wear, the ways that I wanted to walk and talk and move and express myself and relate to others, my interests in certain hand games and ways of holding my wrist, and more. Kids will watch movies and pick a character they want to be or emulate and before I ever experienced Dysconsciousness or Triple Consciousness, I leaned into my "resonance" enough to pick out the girl characters. I believe that once I began to discover what the basis of that "resonance" is, that was when I arrived at Gender Euconsciousness.

If gender dysconsciousness is what happens when one internalizes the conditions of racialized transphobia, and Triple Consciousness is what happens when one begins to negotiate three different self-perceptions in pursuit of safety and rights and resources against racialized transphobia, Euconsciousness is when one is simply move toward self-naming/self-discovery, even if in a small, not-necessarily-political way, in spite of racialized transphobia. The prefix "eu-" can be found in words like "euphoria." It means "good" or "well." Typically, when Trans* people discuss our journey, we describe gender euphoria: that good feeling, that sense of wellness for a trans* individual, which comes along when you choose your name or how you will relate to that name, or when you choose what label you will or will not use, choose your pronouns, choose your ways of expressing yourself either behavior ways or in terms of fashion, aesthetics, or when you choose how