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*gender and its refusal
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echo azure

We will not deceive ourselves into believing the refusal of gender is truly revolutionary – for instance, refusing to be racist will not in and of itself end racism – but we must start somewhere. The first step is in recognizing gender is not something to be embraced, but rather is to be escaped and negated. For us, this process starts (but does not end) with its refusal.

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Is the rise of the tradwife because women are “inherently” submissive, or might it be rooted in finding that the world of wage-labor – work – is in fact unfulfilling and coercive. Faced with the choice, we too would rather stay at home, raise children, and can vegetables from our garden. We just understand such a world is only possible for us all if we abolish the capitalist social relations which require us to work in the first place.

Similarly, how much of the rise of “the manosphere” could be explained by even a baseline understanding of social reproduction? In a society based upon the production and accumulation of capital, the vast majority of us have only one thing to sell on the market: our very selves, in the form of our capacity to work. We quite literally trade the hours of our lives in order to simply live.

But to bring ourselves to market every day we must reproduce ourselves. We must be fed, we must wear clean clothes, we must have a bed and a roof over our heads. All of these necessities not only exist as commodities on the market which must be purchased with our wage, all of the work of reproducing ourselves is itself unwaged. It is unpaid work, but work just the same. How convenient then that one can adopt a “traditional” viewpoint in which you expect another person – one marked “woman” – to do all of the work of your social reproduction for you?

Recently, a co-worker’s teenage child, in explaining why they had impulsively bought expensive new makeup, stated matter-of-factly it was due to “girl math.” In another instance, a friend absent-mindedly explained their dinner choice was because of “hot girl tummy troubles.” Another friend, in re-telling how their dinner had consisted only of a six-pack of beer, had explained it was “boy dinner.” While these phrases are presented as a bit of harmless fun, we find the rise of such sentiments questionable to say the least when they have become trendy at the same time as the gender binary seems increasingly unstable.

In a time where people who are transgender and/or non-binary have somehow come to the forefront of ‘the culture wars,’ what does it mean when the supposedly progressive youth appear to be re-creating the worst tropes of the *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* generation? The suggestion girls are inherently bad at math is, on its face, a misogynistic viewpoint. This viewpoint is rooted in the notions women are illogical and irrational – the reality this viewpoint is conservative and reactionary cannot be overcome by simply putting the sentiments into the mouth of “a girl” rather than “a boy.” Yet, this sentiment and others like it proliferate. From the rise of the “tradwife,” to notions of “divine femininity,” “the manosphere” and “looksmxing” it increasingly appears the youth are making a conservative turn.

In one absurd example, a recent GQ article entitled “Why Men are ‘Rawdogging’ Flights,” examines a TikTok trend in which “a small group of hardy men” choose to stare silently at the real-time flight map on the screen in front of them for an entire long-haul flight. One person interviewed for the article expresses their opinion that “taking flights raw seems to be a masculine thing.” Another states their belief “men don’t have the same ‘treat culture’ that women do” and “a long flight, for women, is the perfect venue to organize an entire itinerary of treats, and I do think men tend to be more stoic and weird about the spaces in which they allow themselves to receive pleasure.”

For us, the very idea that *women do this, men do that* accepts from the outset an essentialist view of gender. Such a view posits there are certain stable, distinct, and inherent qualities and behaviors which can be attributed to either “man” or “woman.” Yet, if we cast our eyes across different cultures, societies, and epochs, we find the supposed stability of gender is anything but. In some societies those marked as “male” are expected to exhibit traits which are directly contradictory to the supposedly “inherent” male traits of our own society. Further, in many societies there are not only two genders, but three, four, five, and so-on. This is not to argue that any one society is “correct” in its conception of gender, but rather to point out there is nothing “essential” to be found there. Gender, like race, class, and capital itself, is *purely social*.

For instance, as *Baedan* has argued, the experience of sexual assault “is not the sole experience of women” but is instead “a disgustingly widespread experience of all genders.” Therefore, “the assertion that any form of gendered violence is the exclusive property of one category of people would be laughable if it weren’t for the litany of horrors which serve to disprove it.”

Thus, for us there can be no abolition of patriarchy without the abolition of the social relation which undergirds patriarchy itself: gender. And given that gender is co-constitutive with race, class, the state, and a host of other-social relations, to abolish one requires the abolition of them all. In short, everything must go.

If, as communists, we accept seriously the notion that communism *is the real movement which abolishes the present state of things*, this then begs the inevitable question: how?

For us, we must start from the concept of communist measures. Such measures refuse, at the very least, to reproduce the social relations of capitalism. Likely to be communist then are those measures which refuse to reproduce gender.

This begins not only by refusing the imposition of gender upon ourselves, but in refusing to impose gender on others. The notions of “girl dinner,” “boy math,” and so on, only reproduce this imposition.

More simple facts: in a culture wherein we are told it is “weak” or “feminine” to seek mental health treatment, the suicide rate among “men” in the US is more than four times higher than the rate among women. Those marked as “male” are also more likely to be killed at work, are more likely to be murdered, and are more likely to die of a drug overdose.

Perhaps it is not surprising then that as of 2023 those marked as “men” have an average lifespan that is nearly six-years shorter than those marked “women.” This is not to argue patriarchy “is not real” or some other nonsense, but rather to point out we are *all* victims of gender – not just those we can obviously see.

This is because common understandings of patriarchy and gender are frequently upside-down. There is no natural dimension to gender. The person who has been marked as “man” is no more “inherently dominant” or “prone to violence” than the person who has been marked as “Black.” To make the latter assertion would be seen on its face as a case of overt racism, but the former assertion is shockingly common among those who want to “smash the patriarchy.”

To establish one gender as the dominant gender, you need, from the very outset, gender itself. We then must be clear: *Patriarchy is a consequence of gender; gender is not a consequence of patriarchy.* To argue otherwise is, in the words of *Baedan*, to fall into the trap of essentialism.

To paraphrase Fredy Perlman, the everyday activity of gendered individuals reproduces gender. However, these individuals are not born “man” or “woman” and the modern gender binary is neither the natural nor final form of “gender.” Instead, “man” and “woman” are a specific response to material and historical conditions. The danger, for us, in these trends is not just the mere blind acceptance of gender norms themselves, but *the continual reproduction of gender as-such.*

It might be tempting here to raise the question – what’s the use? Can’t we just have a little fun? Who is harmed when I joke about making myself a “girl dinner?”

We cannot simply hand-wave-away the reality that gender is not harmless. It is imposed on us and this imposition is a process of violence. “Each trans woman murdered, each intersex infant coercively operated on, each queer kid thrown onto the streets is a victim of gender.” Even those who are “lucky” to fall within the socially-constructed binary of “man” or “woman” are subjected to violence, domination, and control on the basis of their “gender.”

While gender itself is an abstraction – a “mere expression” of the purely social – the lived experience of gender is material and concrete. One’s imposed gender shapes and conditions the way one interacts and exists with the world and vice versa. Housing, employment, relationships, opportunity, education, and so on are shaped and conditioned by one’s gender.

Often, gender is a site of violence, domination, and control. As those marked as “female” are so obviously policed and controlled based on their assigned gender, we then focus much of our following examination on those marked “male.”

The violence, domination, and control of “gender” occurs not just interpersonally, but also by the state. It is a simple fact the overwhelming majority of the US prison population is made-up of those marked as “male.” Of course, we need not explain the relationship between the US prison system and racism, but this gets to another point: the relations of social power, whether racial, class, gendered, or otherwise, cannot be disarticulated.

These relations do not merely “intersect,” they exist inside of each other – *they are co-constitutive*. “Rather than standing at intersections, we stand in the river of life, where multiple creeks and streams have converged in a complex, pulsating system.” Every Black man imprisoned, brutalized, or murdered by the state is a victim of gender and racism, not merely one or the other.

It is here then that we should draw a distinction between “gender,” which is imposed upon us all, and “gender identity,” which implies some level of self-determination, no matter how narrow. For us, if we take seriously that gender is socially constructed, to “identify” as a particular gender is not only to accept these social constructions, but to also impose them upon yourself. Even identifying as “non-binary” for us tacitly accepts there is a binary itself.

Besides, what exactly is an identity anyway? It is certainly not a coherent set of beliefs. There are plenty of “women” who both initiate and defend attacks on abortion and reproductive rights, just as there are plenty of “people of color” who support locking-up and murdering other people of color. Black cops are still cops, “Hispanic” border patrol agents are still border patrol agents, female prosecutors are still prosecutors, and so on.

This is, for us, one among many of the problems with reducing gendered violence, anti-black racism, settler colonialism, and so on to “individual attitudes” or “privilege.” As Wendy Trevino has pointed out, the concept of “privilege” does the exact opposite of what analysis should do, which is make relations more clear, rather than obfuscating them further. Either we accept, for instance, that white supremacy and patriarchy are a structure, or we somehow come to the conclusion they are individual psychological attitudes which can simply be renounced. “Acknowledging” white privilege does nothing to break down the foundations of white supremacy.

The victims of gender even extend to that which is marked as non-human: consider for instance in modern US society the link between “masculinity” and its expression through environmental destruction and violence against nonhuman animals – see the driving of oversized pickup trucks and “rolling coal;” the cultural obsession with meat consumption *vis-a-vis* “soy boys;” the support of extractive and destructive industries such as mining and logging as being “manly;” and so on.