

# **Abolitionism in the 21st Century: From Communization as the End of Sex, to Revolutionary Transfeminism**

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Gender abolition was a contentious point of discussion among the communization current in the early 2010s. The communizers predicted future historical developments for class politics, in the face of collapsing support for the labor movement, social democratic parties, and the established left. Gender abolition was introduced to this discussion by piece in the French Marxist theory journal *Theorie Communiste (TC)*.<sup>1</sup> *Theorie Communiste* used stark terms to emphasize the centrality of gender abolition to their envisioned pathway to communism: ‘The revolution as communization is borne by this cycle of struggles, which produces its characteristics; as such, however, it is predicated on the abolition of the gender distinction.’ \*

For *Theorie Communiste* abolishing gender is foundational to any movement beyond capitalism, an indispensable feature of this development (which they anticipate as forthcoming in the foreseeable future):

There is no abolition of the division of labor, no abolition of exchange and of value, no abolition of work (the non-coincidence of individual activity and social activity), no abolition of the family, no immediacy of relations between individuals which define them in their singularity, without the abolition of men and women. There can be no self-transformation of proletarians into individuals living as singular individuals, without the abolition of sexual identities.<sup>2</sup>

Exactly reversing commonplaces that matters of gender could be settled ‘after the (economic) revolution’, *Theorie Communiste* predicated communization’s success on the abolition of sexual differentiation. Any successful revolutionary process required at first a struggle of women against their position, ensuring a crisis of social reproduction.

*Theorie Communiste* rejects currents within materialist feminism that identify the domestic sphere as its own mode of production (a position defended by Christine Delphy), instead arguing that the capitalist mode of production can only function through the surplus labor drawn from the men/women division. Surplus labor could be appropriated only through the division of labor possible along these lines, with all waged work predicated on the unwaged contribution made by women as domestic laborers. The necessity of domestic labor’s existence, and the continuing denial of its value in order to elevate the worth extracted from labor-power, leaves the role of women ‘bound up’ with capitalism in such a way that revolutionary change can only occur through the overturning of female oppression. Labor-power’s reproduction continues as a consequence of gender demarcation, and to cease this process would require an end to this dyadic gender division.

Given the existing division within the working class, a revolutionary situation would immediately expose the role of women, and require them to overcome not only Capital but their male ‘comrades’.<sup>3</sup>

*Theorie Communiste*’s account is helpful in furthering a Marxist account of abolition, through its elaboration of labor power’s foundation in domestic labor. They argue this leaves this form of unwaged work the source of potential exploitation of waged work:

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<sup>1</sup>This publication had existed for several decades prior to turning its attention to the question of sex, and as such the starkness of their position came as some surprise to many of its followers.

<sup>2</sup>*Theorie Communiste*. “Gender Distinction, Programmatism and Communisation – Roland Simon.” *Libcom*, 17 Apr. 2011, [libcom.org/library/gender-distinction-programmatism-communisation%20](http://libcom.org/library/gender-distinction-programmatism-communisation%20).

<sup>3</sup>“When women fight, whether in the private or public sphere, when they attack the very existence of those spheres which is constituted by their separation into public and private, they must confront their male comrades, insofar as they are men and insofar as they are their comrades. And they (the women) are the men’s comrades, but women. ‘Comrades, But Women’, *Théorie Communiste* 23, (2011), [libcom.org/library/comrades-women-theorie-communiste](http://libcom.org/library/comrades-women-theorie-communiste).

Domestic labor does not create value, but it increases the surplus value captured by the capitalist who exchanges the wage for labor-power. The wage pays the value of the commodities entering into the reproduction of labor-power, which neither includes the labor-time necessary for their further elaboration post-purchase (e.g. cooking or assembling IKEA furniture) nor the labor-time necessary for their maintenance to preserve them as use-values.<sup>4</sup>

The worker and their labor-power is the creation of the domestic laborer, in a way at once absent in the formal exchange of labor for wage, and indispensable to it. As *Theorie Communiste* summarized in their later ‘Response To The Americans on Gender’ (2012), gender determined capitalism as a whole exactly through its divisiveness:

In connection to the gender distinction we can then formulate the following methodological approach: *it is the very dynamic of that particularity which makes it a particularity of the totality*. In other words, by its specificity, the gender distinction, male dominance, exists as determination (particularity) of capital as ongoing contradiction.<sup>5</sup>

This contradiction could not be resolved without communization, but as such also stood as a blockage between the present and any hopes of advancement towards communism.

A response was presented by Maya Gonzalez (then a member of the *Endnotes* collective, which originally brought the communization discussion to wider attention in Anglophone theory), in a piece entitled *Communization and the Abolition of Gender*. For Gonzalez, gender abolition is presented as a prerequisite for revolution, with the current differentiation demanding that singularity come to replace existing gendered divisions:

Since the revolution as communization must abolish all divisions within social life, it must also abolish gender relations – not because gender is inconvenient or objectionable, but because it is part of the totality of relations that daily reproduce the capitalist mode of production. Gender, too, is constitutive of capital’s central contradiction, and so gender must be torn asunder in the process of the revolution. We cannot wait until after the revolution for the gender question to be solved.<sup>6</sup>

While agreeing with their original conceit of abolition as key to communization, Gonzalez criticized TC for simply leaving women’s oppression ‘sutured’ to their existing model of historical development. For Gonzalez domestic labor alone was too narrow a focus. Gonzalez argued gender analysis demanded a focus on biological reproduction (a fact which predates class society).<sup>7</sup> Women have become victims of a society which relegates them to private life as social property rather than actors upon the social: men are the actors and the owners, while women are relegated to mere ‘not men’, and as such are acted upon (and owned) by society.

As this definition of womanhood (as centered around biological reproduction) would suggest, Gonzalez sought to emphasize the role played by women specifically in childbearing and upbringing, over *Theorie Communiste* and their vaguer ‘domestic labor’ account. Gonzalez terms

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<sup>4</sup>Theorie Communiste. “Gender Distinction, Programmatism and Communisation – Roland Simon.”

<sup>5</sup>Theorie Communiste. “Response to the Americans on Gender – Theorie Communiste.” *Libcom*, 10 Apr. 2012, libcom.org/library/response-americans-gender-theorie-communiste.

<sup>6</sup>Maya Andrea Gonzalez, ‘Communization and the Abolition of Gender’ in Benjamin Noys (Ed.), *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, New York: Minor Compositions/Autonomea, 2011. Reproduced at: libcom.org/library/communization-abolition-gender.

<sup>7</sup>It must be noted that Gonzalez’s later contribution to *Endnotes* 3, *The Logic of Gender*, seemed to have developed a considerably more refined perspective, albeit at the cost of abolitionism being replaced with a primarily descriptive mode of argument: endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/endnotes-the-logic-of-gender. Unlike her earlier abolitionist piece, *Logic of Gender* has yet to receive an adequate response, and sadly this piece will not correct that lack.

this accumulated burden of particularity ‘baby bearing,’ and affords it a role which tacitly makes it gender’s ‘base’. For Gonzalez, the declining fertility rates among women, and lengthening of lives in general, were the true foundations of the current ‘loosening’ of gender mores: women spending fewer years of their total lives involved in raising children. Within a capitalist system, this largely amounted to more years spent as wage laborers.

This reduction of sex distinction to participation in natalism cannot be considered satisfying. The queer collective Bædan addressed this debate in their second issue, helpfully (if idiosyncratically) drawing attention to the discussion’s absence of gender as continually reproduced through disciplinary violence:

Gender is of course something outside of ourselves which imprisons us, but this has been realized from its most primal origin; this realization has been the continuous source of the revolt which tends toward its decomposition. The faggot heretics, witches, and gay rioters show us that domesticated gender has always been experienced as an external constraint. This is exactly why it must be constantly re-naturalized and re-imposed.<sup>8</sup>

Bædan’s provocative tableau seems a good deal closer to the mark than any reduction of womanhood to ‘baby bearing’.

A more extended critique of communization’s account of gender was staged by P. Valentine, who argued that *Theorie Communiste* had introduced gender abolition as an awkward and only partially realized addition to their existing millenarian politics of rupture:

(TC) merely added gender to the list of things to be abolished through communization, amounting to little more than buttering the toast of communization with radical cultural gender theory... The mere shift from women’s liberation to gender abolition cast in these basic terms represents little advance in theory over the well-trodden ‘postmodern’ shift to de-essentialize identity...<sup>9</sup>

Valentine further questioned the definition in use, which *Theorie Communiste* seem to have kept especially limited to an outgrowth of the Mode of Production, as well as an unclear view of the connection between the body and womanhood as a social position. Valentine calls into question the focus on ‘baby bearing’ Gonzalez attempted as an expansion on *Theorie Communiste* and their even simpler model of womanhood as founded in unpaid surplus value reproduction. Valentine reintroduces a focus on foundational violence:

Sexual violence is not an unfortunate side effect in the appropriation of women – it is a necessary element of that appropriation. Sexual and domestic violence (‘private’ violence within intimate family or friend relations) are the types of violence that are constitutive of the gender relation. [Ibid]

Valentine attempts to bring the communization position on gender in line with accounts that assert it as a distribution system of regulatory violence. This piece seems a necessary rejoinder to the earlier communizer debate, and much more in step with queer and trans writing proposing the abolition of gender. Tellingly, neither the earlier *Gay Communism* of Mieli, nor the trans-abolitionist pieces we will introduce below, replicate *TC*’s error of an account of gender viewed from such remote distance that no rapes are visible.

Especially pertinently, Valentine introduces the issue of the murder of Black and Latina trans women (which she described as ‘endemic’). This is in fact the first mention of transgender identi-

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<sup>8</sup>*Bædan: A Queer Journal of Heresy*. Unknown: Unknown, 2014. Print. p. 58

<sup>9</sup>Valentine, P. “The Gender Rift in Communisation.” *Mute*, 17 July 2012, [www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/gender-rift-communisation](http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/gender-rift-communisation).

fication in the communizer exchange, revealing the failings of this discussion as a contemporary contribution to gender theory. Women (trans or otherwise) are often kept from public life by force, and the threat of it, and must overcome this fate politically. Even if we are to forgive the communizers this oversight, there clearly remains much work to be done imagining the place of trans women with regards to abolition.

## **Gendered Violence (On the Left and Elsewhere) and Communization in Hindsight**

The proliferation of left-wing groups struck by severe crises around sexual violence on the part of their leadership shows the astuteness of communization's consistent rejection of calls for the primacy or pre-eminence of economic revolution. *TC* correctly predicted that meaningfully revolutionary organization without action taken against sexism is not possible.

Significant failings existed in the account of gender found in these texts, however. A fair amount of 'refitting' would be needed for these texts to be brought into dialogue with queer or trans perspectives, with only preliminary work having been done by Valentine. Framing womanhood around viability for biological reproduction (as both *TC*'s and Gonzalez in 2010 seem to) requires explicit clarification to avoid excluding trans women from consideration as 'true' women on the same grounds that apply to many cis women for reasons of age, or other causes of infertility.

Violence against gender deviants is primarily disciplinary, and a clear connection can be drawn between the commonplace attacks on us and practices such as 'corrective rape' of lesbians. Trans women are often raped. We face harassment on the street, and those of us imprisoned (often for acts of self-defense) face especially intense attacks from the prison system even by its standards. As Bædan correctly note, gender requires continual reproduction, which occurs through violence. Put simply, while it certainly instrumentalizes female fertility, society's mistreatment of women clearly does not proceed in any straightforward emanation from it. Fertile female bodies are not the only bodies marked female.

To sum up: whereas Mieli and Wittig began with the homo/transsexual and lesbian as the centerpiece of their revolutionary gender politics, the communizers appear to have begun with the normative conditions demanded by capitalism (heterosexual households as the crux of labor power's social reproduction), and left queer relations conspicuous by their absence. As a consequence they are of little use in developing political lines opposing heterosexism. This is a commonplace failing for Marxist Feminism, which at its worst lapses into functionalist accounts of gendered oppression as bourgeois expediency via unspecified conspiracies, leaving queer developments an afterthought at best. Yet the deficiencies of the communizer perspectives are highlighted starkly by the admirably eschatological tone these texts were written in. Their exuberant style seems to outstrip their blunted analysis. Nevertheless, communization's early 2010s transatlantic exchange on gender abolition did much to re-open the revolutionary horizon which the later 20th century had seemed to indefinitely shutter.

This dialogue within the communization debate has fallen quiet, but the call for gender abolition has come to be echoed by a diverse set of trans collectives.

## Trans Collectives Calling for Abolition

Throughout the 2010s, new voices have joined calls for gender abolition. A number of trans women have written pieces which advocate gender abolitionist politics. The earliest of these anonymous documents is from 2010, 'Towards An Insurrectionary Transfeminism':

As trans women, as we experience the legacy of trans subjectivity within capitalism, we also feel the weight of the corporeality of women in capitalism crush our existences. We experience the implicit violence in gendered division of labor every time we are raped and beaten and condescended to and treated as a hot she-male sex toy.<sup>10</sup>

Contrasting the expectations of the female body with the realities of trans womanhood, the Anonymous trans-insurrectionist proposes a destructive pathway towards self-abolition:

Trans women experience corporeality in a unique way. While capital hopes to continue to use the female body as proletarian machine to reproduce labor-power, trans women's bodies cannot produce more workers and are constantly already viewed as denaturalized... in this affront to capitalist-produced nature and matrices of heteronormativity which are crucial to the functioning of capitalism, we see the kinship between the human strike of trans women and the materialization of a non-reproductive, purely negative queer force. It seems that the trans woman too has no future, and thus...might have a stake in wrecking everything and abolishing herself in the process.<sup>11</sup>

Although the politics of the 'human strike' are vaguer than we'd like, this text's emphasis on the particular non-reproductive feature of transfemale embodiment is welcome. As we have already discussed, women resisting supposed responsibilities to reproduction, and actively abdicating manhood, now even use the same pills.

More recently, gender abolition has been called for by two more collectives of trans feminists. The Laboria Cuboniks collective released their *Xenofeminist Manifesto* in Spring 2015, and another theorist using the pen name Alyson Escalante released *Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto* in July of the same year.<sup>12</sup>

Each of these texts has some considerable idiosyncrasies, with the Xenofeminists inscrutably proposing their position as 'a rationalism', and displaying considerable exuberance towards recent technological developments (which we cannot share in any straightforward way, if at all). Escalante defends at some length an 'anti-humanist' stance. Neither of these features will concern us directly here, and we will instead focus exclusively on each document's abolitionism.

The Xenofeminist collective conceives in these terms of abolition as a reduction of bodily differences which currently serve as the basis for sexed and racialized abstract differentiation into mere physical features. Unlike *Theorie Communiste*, Cuboniks see abolition as merely 'inclined towards' the end of capitalism, rather than surely precipitating it directly.

Laboria Cuboniks pairs gender and race abolitionism, making both dependent on the ultimate emancipation of ending class:

'Let a hundred sexes bloom! 'Gender abolitionism' is shorthand for the ambition to construct a society where traits currently assembled under the rubric of gender no longer furnish a grid for

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<sup>10</sup>*Towards an Insurrectionary Transfeminism*. Chicago, Ill.: Not yr cister Press, 2010. Print.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>These two texts have previously been considered together as a means of addressing sexism within the discipline of Philosophy by Nina Power, 'Philosophy, Sexism, Emotion, Rationalism' (2016). The *Gender Nihilist* text was later disavowed by its author, citing her acceptance of various decolonial feminist criticisms.

the asymmetric operation of power. ‘Race abolitionism’ expands into a similar formula — that the struggle must continue until currently racialized characteristics are no more a basis of discrimination than the color of one’s eyes. Ultimately, every emancipatory abolitionism must incline towards the horizon of class abolitionism, since it is in capitalism where we encounter oppression in its transparent, denaturalized form: you’re not exploited or oppressed because you are a wage laborer or poor; you are a laborer or poor because you are exploited.<sup>13</sup>

While the claim that oppression under capitalism is uniquely clear and apparent seems ill conceived, the abolition of capitalist class distinction being set as an ultimate goal rather than a (necessary predicate in struggles against sexism and racism) is most welcome.

Contrasting this stance to the failings of existing gender abolitionists, Cuboniks continue by asserting the need for a holistic revolutionary drive in order to achieve any form of revolution at all:

Absent such a universal, the abolition of class will remain a bourgeois fantasy, the abolition of race will remain a tacit white-supremacism, and the abolition of gender will remain a thinly veiled misogyny, even — especially — when prosecuted by avowed feminists themselves. (The absurd and reckless spectacle of so many self-proclaimed ‘gender abolitionists’ campaign against trans women is proof enough of this.)<sup>14</sup>

Here, class is an underlying division which ensures the futility of other struggles against oppressive particularity. The accord between the Cuboniks’ collective and Mieli’s earlier criticisms of queerphobic ‘radical’ feminists is quite striking.

A rather bleaker perspective was offered by the *Gender Nihilism Anti-Manifesto*. In contrast with the Xenofeminist vision of genders ‘blooming’, Escalante proposes an anti-identitarian abolitionist analysis defined by dogged negativity:

‘The current politics of trans liberation have staked their claims on a redemptive understanding of identity. Whether through a doctor or psychologist’s diagnosis, or through a personal self affirmation in the form of a social utterance, we have come to believe that there is some internal truth to gender that we must divine....We are not looking to create a better system, for we are not interested in positive politics at all. All we demand in the present is a relentless attack on gender and the modes of social meaning and intelligibility it creates.’<sup>15</sup>

This proposal of total rejection of gender is knowingly written against the current conventional orthodoxies of trans activism and its institutional reformist focus, which will be explored in more detail below. Rejecting their womanhood as an underlying truth, the Gender Nihilists argue that reliance on existing institutions can only perpetuate the violence which gender not only requires, but consists of. Escalante asserts gender as a system for distributing violence which accommodates difference without allowing for escape, and which can only be corrected through its destruction:

‘...the violence of gender cannot be overestimated. Each trans woman murdered, each intersex infant coercively operated on, each queer kid thrown onto the streets is a victim of gender. The deviance from the norm is always punished. Even though gender has accounted for deviation, it still punishes it. Expansions of norms is an expansion of deviance; it is an expansion of ways we

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<sup>13</sup>Laboria Cuboniks. *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, 2015. Print.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Alyson Escalante. “Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto.” *Libcom*, 22 Jun. 2016, libcom.org/library/gender-nihilism-anti-manifesto.



can fall outside a discursive ideal. Infinite gender identities create infinite new spaces of deviation which will be violently punished. Gender must punish deviance, thus gender must go.

It is the very normative grouping of bodies in the first place which we push back against. Neither contraction nor expansion will save us. Our only path is that of destruction.<sup>16</sup>

This unremitting negativity draws a clear line against the imposition of gender as such.

The *Gender Nihilist Anti-Manifesto* pointedly refuse to advance any explicit means by which their end will be achieved. This text's intransigent pessimism should not be overlooked nor dismissed, and is also not unique to it. The struggle of effecting systemic change is one many trans women have struggled with, and worked through. Another anonymous piece from 2011, *Dysphoria Means Total Destroy*, explores the same break between these systemic approaches, and the liberal politics of identity:

It is important to recognize that I am not talking about individuals, beliefs, choices, or actions here, but of a conflict that takes place between graininess and the world within gender and manifesting itself through gender. There is no revolutionary identity here, only an irreconcilable conflict *against* and *through* identity. This despair and this hatred is the result. Subsequently, identity-based attacks upon gender will not be able to collapse gender. My taking hormones or getting surgery or whatever is simply my performing the conflict by the lines of power that run through me. It does not follow that these things constitute an attack upon gender itself, although it may stimulate it to evolve in order to maintain its existence. Through and against are distinguished by where (and thus how) the conflict takes place. These overlapping circles – the impossible existing and the nonexistent – produce one another endlessly.<sup>17</sup>

This apparently intractable impasse has not proven politically paralytic. An increasing number of trans people exist in revolutionary groups, and one particularly thriving tendency will be addressed before we conclude.

## Abolish prisons, abolish the family, abolish gender?

'Racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in the criminal legal system cannot be excised because they are foundational to it—there is no way it exists without these systems of domination, and it was established to enforce them... Queer liberation and sexual and gender self-determination require that we reach toward abolition, not just of prisons and police, but of the systems that produce them.'<sup>18</sup>

While gender abolition has become repeatedly obscured as a strategy by the tangled and uneven development of revolutionary thought, another form of abolitionist politics has thrived in the 21st century. Increasingly, anti-racist and trans activists have converged around the cause of prison abolition.<sup>19</sup> This movement is well expressed in the *Captive Genders* anthology, which captures a range of perspectives supporting and developing abolition as a shared aim. In the second edition's foreword, prison abolitionist CeCe McDonald relates how her commitment to the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>*Dysphoria Means Total Destroy* (2011) . 8 Jan. 2012, anarchalibrary.blogspot.com/2012/01/dysphoria-means-total-destroy-2011.html.

<sup>18</sup>From *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* (2011) by Ritchie, Mogul and Whitlock. For a more specific introduction of the interplay of queer and anti-prison activism see: [againstequality.org/files/queering\\_prison\\_abolition\\_now.pdf](http://againstequality.org/files/queering_prison_abolition_now.pdf).

<sup>19</sup>For an introductory historical bibliography courtesy of Black Perspectives, see: [aaihs.org/prison-abolition-syllabus](http://aaihs.org/prison-abolition-syllabus).

cause began while imprisoned for killing a neo-nazi in self-defence. The ‘abolitionist’ position of Captive Genders towards prison systems across the globe is directly informed by the work of two scholars: Angela Davis, and Dean Spade.<sup>20</sup>

Angela Davis’ current focus on prison abolition follows directly from these earlier historical readings, and revolutionary feminist proposals, which approached this theme in multiple lights. Studying the original United States slave abolitionism, Davis emphasized the role outspoken (bourgeois) women played in the movement, necessarily defying religious gender conventions typical to the protestant family in the United States. She also proposed the abolition of housework through its systematic industrialization.<sup>21</sup> Having left the Communist Party USA in 1991, Davis was involved in the 1997 founding of prison abolitionist group Critical Resistance (following a large anti-prison conference held at UC Berkeley). In the same year, Davis came out as a lesbian in an interview with LGBT magazine *Out*. Based in Oakland, Critical Resistance has played a key role in advancing prison abolitionist perspectives across the US, with its non-sectarian approach ensuring participation by an array of left-wing groups and tendencies. Davis then can be said to have proven unusually true to Marxism’s originating drive of not only accounting for, but working to undo, society’s many inequities.

In one of the most clear and thorough revolutionary works of recent years, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Davis identifies the prison system as a key site of gender’s reproduction, continuing as a direct outgrowth of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, and work actively to continue the brutalization and subordinating violence demanded by white supremacy and capitalism.<sup>22</sup> While unsparing of her account of the prison system, politically Davis is no insurrectionary nihilist. For Davis, the abolition of prisons cannot be a straightforwardly negative project, and indeed demands positive efforts to undo the harm already done by these institutions. Abolition runs as a positive process, undoing damage done by today’s systems of regulation, discipline, and oppression.

The prison system is a political target which seems firmly protected by a mesh of naturalization. Trans theorist Dean Spade has done much to elaborate an unflinchingly negative, holistic view of the prison system’s place within what he terms a system of “administrative violence”<sup>23</sup>. Spade argues that gender regulatory violence is enmeshed with transmisogyny and what he terms ‘state racism’. Spade bases his unremitting abolitionist perspective on a Foucauldian criticism of previous efforts to reform the prison systems.<sup>24</sup> While prisons reform drives are framed as improving

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<sup>20</sup>Ruth Wilson Gilmore is another revolutionary scholar associated with this political tendency, and another co-founder of Critical Resistance, working from a black feminist and geographical perspective.

<sup>21</sup>[www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/davis-angela/housework.htm](http://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/davis-angela/housework.htm)

<sup>22</sup>Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003), see especially page 60-84, “How Gender Structures The Prison System”.

<sup>23</sup>Spade has lucidly accounted for the very violence directed at trans people as exposing the mandatory process of gendering every contemporary subject is subject to: ‘Trans peoples’ experience and our articulation of resistance can be a location for articulating the political implications of classification processes. People are dying from the daily violence of not being able to get basic necessities because systems are organized in ways that require everyone to be gendered in a particular way... Trans people die because of exposure to police violence and criminalization. Trans people die early because we often live with serious untreated health conditions when health care systems won’t treat people whose gender makes them incomprehensible to that system. Transphobic violence isn’t constituted only in individual acts by intentional perpetrators, but in the enforcement of gender norms broadly on everyone, shaping everyone’s field of action, existence, and self understanding.’ [uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/14-dean-spade](http://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/14-dean-spade).

<sup>24</sup>Much of Spade’s analytic writing concerns the LGBT/queer movement, including trans activism, about which he has written unsparingly: “Too often, I fear, trans activism has borrowed strategies from the most well-funded, well

conditions for inmates (for instance through adding specific wings for ‘gender nonconforming’ inmates), Spade argues that these efforts have simply increased the funding of an irredeemable feature of US society.

The existing focus of anarchist politics on prison abolition should not be undermined or dismissed, but added to. (That anarchist scenes have so far made a better effort of integrating Marxist gender-race theory into their politics should be addressed as a foremost matter of embarrassment.) Particularly, communist theory is well placed to avoid the potential risk for over-emphasis of the role of the state. As I have helped argued previously, a return to the old communist slogan ‘Abolish the family!’ is timely.<sup>25</sup>

The family serves as a unique bastion organizing heteronormativity, and through ensuring the inter-generational procession of wealth and access to fixed capital, also anti-blackness. Upbringings and intimacies existing outside of norms which have developed along with capitalism are widely disparaged, and culturally subordinated.<sup>26</sup> For as long as heterosexual parents are relied on for giving queer kids upbringing, widespread dispossession will be the rule.<sup>27</sup> The role of social reproduction parents are tasked with at present can only be relied on to produce alienation, and rejection. For as long as the family remains ‘private’, the actual lives of many queers will feature commonplace threats from regret to physical attack.<sup>28</sup> Only through breaking the current monopoly of families on inter-generational recreation of society can we truly liberate successive generations from the arbitrary brutalization of gender.

This move will be a move towards communism: upbringings in private households replaced by communal labor, undoing the many generations of degradation and coercive differentiation which preceded them. This is already prefigured by the largely unnoticed labor of trans women to preserve ourselves as-such.<sup>29</sup> The work still to be done is a political overcoming of the existing order which we exist against.

## One Slogan, Many Voices

We have seen that everyone from gay communists to millenarian Marxists to anarcho-nihilist transfeminists have proposed gender’s abolition. The very pluralism of scenes and perspectives which have pointed towards this shared conclusion demonstrates the damage done by the coercive face of gender differentiation across generations. Yet between these writers, we are still left

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publicized lesbian and gay rights work with an assumption of its success and a blindness to its shortcomings...”. Informed by this theorizing of existing queer activism, Spade was a founding member of an NYC-based radical law group focused on supporting vulnerable GNC people, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. [deanspade.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Spade-Methodologies-of-Trans-Resistance.pdf](https://deanspade.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Spade-Methodologies-of-Trans-Resistance.pdf).

<sup>25</sup>I contributed to a piece outlining how such an abolition could be brought about last year: [ritualmag.com/kinderkommunismus](https://ritualmag.com/kinderkommunismus).

<sup>26</sup>A point foundational to black feminist theory at least since Spillers’ reading of the Moynihan Report and the spectre of ‘black matriarchy’, 30 years ago. [jstor.org/stable/464747](https://www.jstor.org/stable/464747).

<sup>27</sup>For a glimpse of this ongoing crisis, see Rachel Aviv’s piece on homeless queer New Yorkers: [newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/10/netherland](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/10/netherland).

<sup>28</sup>I’m indebted to Sarah Schulman’s *The Ties That Bind: Undoing Familial Homophobia* (2012) for its work on the role families play in sustaining homophobia as the field of the ‘private’, and also her conception of ‘homophobia as a pleasure system’.

<sup>29</sup>See Jules Joanne Gleeson, ‘Transition and Abolition’, *Viewpoint* [viewpointmag.com/2017/07/19/transition-and-abolition-notes-on-marxism-and-trans-politics](https://viewpointmag.com/2017/07/19/transition-and-abolition-notes-on-marxism-and-trans-politics).

with only the skeleton of a strategy. Abolitionary politics are becoming more timely than ever, however, and so this stance is due urgent development.

Abolition is accepted as a destination by many, but the path towards it remains unclear. What seems apparent from this reading of revolutionary theory's history, however, is that much work has already been done to develop strategies of emancipatory abolition. The retrieval of these by-gone dialogues and forgotten analyses can hopefully point out the pathway toward a queer communism.

\* This is the second installment of a two-part series. You can find the first part [here](#).

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Jules Joanne Gleeson  
Abolitionism in the 21st Century: From Communization as the End of Sex, to Revolutionary  
Transfeminism  
2017, August

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