DECOLONIZING GENDER: a curriculum

with excerpts from "my gender is MyGender" (a comic book!)
Our Intention

This zine is an attempt to start a conversation.

I (Khari) want everyone to rise above colonial understandings of gender. It's fucked up, simple as that.

I (Malcolm) want us to make contact with our ancestors. We have been lied to; we didn't know they existed, but they're reaching out now. We need to answer the call, and allow them to heal through us.

What do we hope you'll do with this zine?

- Learn from it.
- Grow from it.
- Share it.
- Create your own ways of learning and teaching.

We learn from each other in the streets, not just at expensive conferences. We're very happy to assemble some of these stories, images, and ideas for you to take with you anywhere you want to go.

This zine is by no means a whole or exhaustive work, nor do we desire the pretense of wholeness. Our histories are pieces. We are pieces.

Please enjoy, learn, grow, and act.

- Malcolm & Khari, 2017
In a workshop like this, there will likely be a lot of hard and heavy feelings that come up, as well as some joyful and pleasurable ones. With good reason: we deal with our unjust exclusions as trans, gender variant, gender creative, expansive, and non-binary people of color, black & indigenous people.

Then we realize that we’ve been lied to.

After being cast into darkness, our eyes adjust to older, deeper sources of power. To seeing the beauty and life in our people. Then, we break open at the enormous violence that has been done to hide us.

Finally, we let our ancestors seep and wedge into our joints and breaks, so that we can be fully reunited with them and begin the real journey.

Knowing this, whether you intend it to or not, gathering and sharing stories is a healing practice. We recommend that you acknowledge this and think about how you can incorporate intention-setting, ritual, and manifesting into your educational context. We have been transformed by what we learned looking into our stories; we hope you’re open to the same.

*Don’t forget to create some community agreements!*
Introduction Activity

There are many activities to ground people in the space, with each other, and with the intentions of the workshop. The goal with this time is to create a shared, interactive experience that gets everyone talking to each other.

Here's our suggestion:

Sun & Moon Activity

Participants divide into sun & moon. The moon is made of people in a circle facing outward, the sun is a concentric larger circle facing inward. The aim is to match everyone so that every moon in the inside circle has a sun partner in the outside circle. You can rotate the sun or moon circles to the left or the right as much as you like to change pairs and share with someone different.

Participants answer the following questions:

A) Names, Pronouns*, Where you're from/Where you call home
B) What are you hoping to get out of today's session?
C) What does decolonization mean to you?

*Pronouns are a word you want others to use to refer to you
For example: they/them/their, she/her/hers, ze/hir, he/him/his, etc.
where do we begin?

stop me if you’ve heard this before:

a European settler colonial nation (the U.S., Israel, and so on) goes into a Brown and/or Black country so they can condemn them for having such backwards views on gender and sexuality, every major news outlet praises the empire for taking a stand against those people.

2016

1865

1776

1619

1492

1441

this is unfortunate given the history of white people shaming Black and Brown people for having “deviant” sexualities and genders. These empires carried out physical, spiritual, mental and psychological warfare on the Black and Brown folks they tried to colonize, turning them against one another and their own ancestry and beliefs.

Acknowledging this history and centering trans and nonbinary identities is important to me because we’re still affirming our identities and putting ourselves at risk of violence, employment discrimination, family rejection, homelessness and more.

yet we’re left out of many anti-oppressive conversations and movements.
but nonbinary folks have always existed we're a part of this human history like everyone else.

these days many people across the world still expect us to choose between either male or female identities.

forcing us to choose is not acceptance it's not inclusion and it's certainly not liberation that's assimilation at the expense of our identity.

we shouldn't have to continue to deal with othering m/f boxes. 'othering' is a process that alienates and isolates us from our homes based on our identities.

i am 'othered' when i am harassed by a police while doing something as simple as grocery shopping similarly i am othered when i am constantly forced to check that m/f box sometimes there's an explicit "other option".

i am being forced to choose between m/f at an LGBTQ+ organization...
what is imperialism?

"The policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas."

- Merriam-Webster

"From the beginning, Europe assumed the power to make decisions within the international trading system...in accordance with European interests."

- Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa

"...the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well."

The Negro Family: The Case for National Action

Imperialism happened everywhere, and European gender norms traveled with it.

(but what does imperialism have to do with me? Find out what on the next page...)

The first step towards lightning

The White Man's Burden
is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness.

Pears' Soap
is in poison fire in brightening the dark corners of the world so civilization advances, while amongst the nations of all nations it holds the highest place—it is the ideal toilet soap.
When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?
Every generation brings a new definition of masculinity and femininity that manifests itself in children’s dress.

Before jumping into this story, let’s acknowledge the imperial elephant in the room. Imperialism often seems big and like something that happens “out there” or “back then.” But it’s also as small and current and close to us as the labels on our clothing.

Activity Directions:
1) Take the moment to check the tag on an article of clothing or accessory that you have on. If you need assistance from a neighbor, please help each other out.
2) Please place a tag on the world map on the country where your clothing comes from.

What patterns do you notice about where your clothing was made? What might these patterns have to do with “imperialism”? Imperialism makes other countries into farms and factories for the rich (at a reduced price, of course)

The countries below in white are the only nations in the world that Great Britain has never invaded, colonized, or been at war with.
A gender/sexual history of imperialism

We won’t tell you what story to tell here. There are parts of this journey that you have to span with your own traveler’s tools. Not all well-worn paths are worth taking, right?

With that said, here are a few stories that we found interesting. Type these keywords into an internet search engine and see what you find. What images show up? What websites, stories, videos, and news stories will you get?

1) Conquest of the Americas
2) Transatlantic slave trade
3) Manifest Destiny & Indian boarding schools
4) Page Act of 1875
5) Scramble for Africa
6) Japanese imperialism & comfort women
7) Bandung Afro-Asian Conference of 1955

Iceberg model of Patriarchal Capitalist Economies by Hannah Allen, Ecosocialist Horizons.
around the year 1556, Vitoria was stolen from their homeland of present day Benin and enslaved by trashbag paulo manquiques. Vitoria knew themself and immediately after arriving on ilha terceira, they assumed a gender identity that their enslavers could not recognize.

Vitoria, an enslaved African ripped from everything they knew back home, straight up REFUSED to wear the clothes that the enslavers gave them.

Instead, Vitoria wore a white waist jacket buttoned down the front with a vest made from old woolen cotton they found in their enslaver's stables, a wrapped white linen around their head with a hat on top. Some read Vitoria as "woman".
Vitoria's gender identity had a term in the languages of Angola and Congo—Jinbandaa.

The word stem “Mbândá” means “medicine person” and words similar to Jinbandaa implied religious power.

There's a description of the Angolan coast in the 17th century that suggests “Quimbanda” were a discreet and powerful group in Angolan society.

Quimbandas had ritual expertise in their culture, but the Portuguese prosecuted these individuals for “transvestism and sodomy.”

Referencing captain logs from 1681, although Captain Cadornega made some nasty remarks about Quimbandas, his own insecurities and ignorances allows us to learn more about them. His logs suggest that Quimbandas' community respected them and people in power kept them close to receive guidance, counsel, and their approval before making any act in society. Quimbandas were the spiritual go to person in matters of military and political decisions. Lastly, Quimbandas performed traditional burial ceremonies and carried out a wide range of spiritual roles.

Quimbandas communities stolen from Africa were shattered and scattered, and they were unable to collectively gather and share knowledge and grow their spiritual and religious power.
Vitoria was ultimately incarcerated for committing the... “abominable sin of sodomy against nature.”

Vitoria lived out the rest of their life in a cage for living their truth and refusing to allow their oppressors to destroy them.

On top of all that, the colonizers transformed the term Jinbandaa into a slur.

Personally, this makes me think of how colonization was a direct attack to our physical AND spiritual beings. Colonizers murdered the people who held roles like healers and spiritual guidances, and they scattered the survivors across the world. They cut off a line to that ancestral knowledge and almost guaranteed that history would be lost.

When Núñez de Balboa threw Quaracans to his dogs, he also worked to turn the Quaracans who fit his understandings of gender against their own people who did not fit in.

The legacies of colonialism makes it hard for some of us to even leave the house today.

It’s a struggle, everyday.

And the status quo denies most of us, especially Black and Brown folks, a chance to learn about these legacies.
Small Group Reflection

With these examples in mind, how does this history fit into your current understanding of gender?
Does this conflict with the way you were personally taught about gender?
How would the people designing your history curriculum (past or present) feel about this history being included?

Special challenge: Find an image that you think represents the dynamics of imperialism, and try to describe why and how it is without using the word “imperialism.”

Editor of Northern Indianian

Sir,

Sojourner Truth, an elderly colored woman well known throughout the Eastern States, is now holding a series of Anti-Slavery meetings in Northern Indiana. Sojourner comes well recommended by Harriet Beecher Stowe and others, and was welcomed and received by the friends of the slave in this locality. Her progress in knowledge, truth, and righteousness is very remarkable, especially so, when we consider her former low condition as a slave.

The Slave Democracy of Indiana, however, appear to be jealous and suspicious of every Anti-Slavery movement. A rumor was circulated that Sojourner was an impostor; that she was, indeed, a man disguised in woman's clothing.

At her third appointed meeting in this vicinity, which was held in the meeting house of the United Brethren, a large number of Democrats and pro-slavery persons were present, and at the close of the meeting Dr. T. W. Strain, the mouthpiece of the Slave Democracy, called upon the large congregation to “hold on,” stating that a doubt existed in the minds of many persons present respecting the sex of the speaker, and that it was his impression that a majority believed the speaker to be a man, and [he] also proposed that Sojourner should show her breast to some of the ladies present, so that by their testimony the doubt might [be] solved.

A large number of ladies were present, who were ashamed and indignant at the Doctor’s proposition.

Dr. Strain further said (which was not believed by the friends of the Slave) that it was particularly for the speaker’s sake that he made this demand.

Confusion and uproar ensued. A gun or pistol was fired near the door. However, the tumult was soon suppressed by Sojourner rising in all the dignity of womanhood, and demanded [demanding] why they suspected her “to be a man?” and was answered, “your voice is not the voice of a woman, it is the voice of a man.”

October 4th, 1858

“Balboa founde the house of this kynge infected with the most abominable and unnatural lechery...”
to end this section, and this goes along with the earlier point on degendering our language. It'd be cool if we all didn't phrase our statements like "men and women who were stolen from Africa." Colonizers stole Vitoria from Africa, they killed non-binary and trans Quaraquancan people. When someone says cissexist things like this, I believe it's another way of erasing or further hiding our history and the diversity of experiences. Many different people had to endure this oppression.

It's dishonest and harmful to exclude us from oppressive histories, and definitely stop excluding us from resistance histories. If someone doesn't know, they should try to learn. We're learning about these histories anyway. We might as well make sure we're learning the full truth and not just the ones that help some remain comfortable with the way white supremacy has set up gender for us.

Colonization literally rewrote human history and inserted lies where it felt necessary. We live under this legacy. It lives within us.

Making space for the erased, for the resisting.

Here's to honoring the many diverse representations of gender representations that existed long before North Africans taught Europeans how to bathe and take care of personal hygiene. Representations that still exist long after European colonizers tried to annihilate our cultures.

In the sovereign kingdom of Hawai'i, mistakenly described as the 50th state of the U.S., Mahu people follow a multiple gender tradition that existed among the Kanaka Maoli indigenous society. Mahu folks could be males or females inhabiting a gender role somewhere between or encompassing both masculine and feminine characteristics.

They also have sacred social roles that include serving as educators and promoters of ancient traditions and rituals. European colonizers of Hawai'i almost eliminated this culture, and today Mahu face discrimination in a settler culture where White European gender ideology dominates.
A decolonial history of gender

When colonizers arrived in new places, they often encountered people who had major differences in how they lived their lives. Some of these differences included how they dressed, how they divided labor, how and where they had sex, how people cared for one another, etc. Oftentimes colonizers violently suppressed any ways of being that they didn’t like; often the first people to be affected by this violence were people who didn’t match European understandings of a binary gender.

"...[Balboa] saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by the dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard."

Many of the things associated with “proper” masculinity and femininity were activities that were illegal, inaccessible, or undesirable for many black & indigenous people & POC. Gender expression was also legislated, stratified and segregated racially.

The “tignon laws” passed in 1786 prescribed and enforced appropriate public dress for creole women in colonial society...

To correct the looming threat to the social status of white women growing and the attention garnered as a result of the jewelry adorned hairstyles from women of African descent, The governor decreed that women of African descent, slave or free, should cover their hair and heads with a knotted headdress and refrain from “excessive attention to dress” to maintain class distinctions.

The women who were targets of this decree were inventive and imaginative. They decorated tignons with their jewels and ribbons, and used the finest available materials to wrap their hair.
At the same time, myths about the inferiority of colonized people was often attributed to their inability to do gender like white people in Europe. Lack of proper men and women was evidence of savagery, backwardness, the devil, and lack of humanity.

The binary is enshrined in laws that are usually used to prosecute people of color, especially people who crossed or existed outside of the binary. Gender non-conforming people were demonized, ridiculed, excluded from society, erased, and most often, criminalized.

A *quimbanda* in Central Africa, seventeenth century. Spiritually and politically powerful in Africa, the *quimbandas*’ ritual expertise waned in Brazil’s slave communities, as the Portuguese prosecuted these men for transvestism and sodomy. Watercolor by Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi, “Missione evangelica al regno de Congo, 1665-1669”, Museo Marzorati, Pavia, Italy, 1669. Mary Jones (above), prosecuted multiple times (most famously in 1836) for pickpocketing and cross-dressing, depicted in cartoon.
the prison industrial complex + gender + prison abolition

our oppressors criminalized our non conforming gender and that criminalization still continues to this day. our criminal punishment system is another tool of oppression and colonization that controls our very understanding of gender and punishes those who do not fit into the binary.

during earlier years of european colonization, colonizers worked to impose the gender binary in order to create hierarchies in non-hierarchical societies so they could better divide and conquer the people. these non-hierarchical civilizations didn't have patriarchy and cissexism. the colonizers had to introduce their ideologies and beliefs to poison and weaken these societies.

agents of the state went into these communities to disrupt them and control them. one of the agents who was assigned to the Apsaalooke Nation incarcerated nonbinary people they read as men and forced them to cut their hair and wear "men's clothing". this didn't just happen in their communities but was exacerbated by other colonizing tactics such as forced boarding schools.

colonizers instituted laws that defined First Nation gender and sexuality as immoral. this was a practice common throughout the colonized world including what many of us call "the Caribbean" and "Latin America". cortes degrades Aztec people and their identities in the same way colonizers spoke about First Nation people further north.
Prisons are another issue. Prison reform movements created gendered cages, this gave rise to reformatories that served to rehabilitate offending women into socially acceptable women. Black womxn were excluded from this destructive process because they weren't seen as real women who could be rehabilitated.

And prisons, jails, immigrant detention centers, group homes, juvenile detention centers, and other facilities themselves are incredibly violent because they also force a gender onto you. While working at an organization defending incarcerated folks, a guard told me that they determined the location of the folks incarcerated "by their real gender, not what they think they are." Despite us representing the rights of incarcerated folks, the guard did not think there was an issue with what they said.

The cages—actually the entire criminal punishment system—doesn't acknowledge the identities and humanity of anyone—especially nonbinary and trans folks. Reforming a prison so it'll acknowledge correct pronouns and names won't make these cages any less violent. They still don't address societal issues at its roots (I think honestly engaging with the nature of prisons will allow us to agree on that one day...)
also think about what prisons do to people and how the most vulnerable members of society end up in them (not the white wealthy banker or even their poorer cousin).

I recently learned about singer Shea Diamond who was born in Arkansas, raised in Tennessee, and eventually landed in Michigan. At a young age, Diamond was growing into her identity but felt her community wouldn't accept her, so she ran away at 14 years old. She was a ward of the state, in multiple foster homes, and emancipated at age 17. Struggling to survive, she committed a crime and the state incarcerated her for 10 years in a men's prison. This practice harms trans womxn on multiple levels.

While incarcerated, Diamond discovered and embraced her own trans identity and the power of her voice.

"I was locked up but my mind was free!"

"There's an outcast in everybody's life, and I am her. There's a shadow in everybody's front door, and I am her."

Shea Diamond wrote this anthem while in prison "as a statement to the world that said I shouldn't exist."
people keep saying police are here to “protect and serve.” people keep saying prisons exist to keep “the bad people” away. in reality, they weren’t protecting or serving my enslaved ancestors they chased after. they aren’t keeping the “bad people” away when they target the oppressed and defend our oppressors, when they shut down a protest, when they bomb a community.

history is telling us a more disturbing story about the police and prisons. the receipts tell us that we’re being scammed.

well, nonbinary and trans folks never accepted their oppression. Vitoria shows us that there’s such a long, deep history of Black and Brown nonbinary and trans resistance.
Move In/Move Out activity

Directions:
- Participants get cut out stars and should write their initials and a symbol on them to distinguish them from one another.
- Participants form a large circle. Facilitators read a series of questions. The center of the circle represents our “gendered-self” in this moment, and participants move their star closer to or further from the center depending on how much they agree with the statement.
  o The closer to the center your star is, the more it represents your “gendered-self.”

Here are some questions that we used:

1. I often find myself being spoken over or interrupted by white men when I am speaking.
2. I am often affirmed and supported by my friends when I express discomfort or anger because of racism.
3. I am often affirmed and supported by my friends when I express discomfort or anger because of misogyny.
4. I’ve been told that I can’t change my appearance in a certain way because it will make me look ugly.
5. I have heard someone disparage a specific style or way of dressing associated with black women.
6. I have been told that my natural state of hair, skin, or body shape is “un-ladylike” or “unfeminine.”
7. I have been told that my natural state of hair, skin, or body shape is “unmanly” or “too feminine.”
8. My everyday, casual dress would not be perceived negatively by my coworkers.
9. I worry about and experience consistent street harassment when I dress how I want to.
10. I worry about and experience consistent harassment or violence from police and other security officers because of how I am dressed.
11. I can easily find clothes that both match my gender expression and fit my body type.
12. I often have trouble finding clothes that fit both my gender expression and my body type.
13. I often soften my tone or raise the pitch of my voice when speaking to people in positions of power.
14. I feel like there aren’t the right words in the English to describe my gender.
15. I know of words in a non-european language spoken by my community that describe trans and non-binary people in a neutral or positive way.
To a Healing Place: Story Circles

Storytelling is a powerful way to build community connection, and also to make our own histories known. Story circles are an organizing tool from John O’Neal, Doris Derby, and the Free Southern Theater, the cultural wing of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a central southern Civil Right Movement organization).

Activity: Participants will pair up and answer a set of questions:
- What was a time when you were told you couldn’t or shouldn’t do or be something because of your assigned gender?
- How did that experience make you feel? How does it shape your understanding of gender?
- How do you carry this memory in your body, and where do you carry it?

This might offend some people but... These are all men, and as a mother this concerns me. How are we going to raise our sons to know the difference between a real woman and a transgender?
while in college, people kept saying that gender is fluid, and I could only think about setting fire to it to watch it evaporate.

they told me that gender is flexible and that it can bend, but I could only think about shattering it.

you know the feeling of being in a crowded room? as you move to get somewhere you feel like an inconvenience because each step you take you find yourself apologizing.

sometimes I feel that when I embrace my gender identity, I am consenting to erasure from society for doing so.

I think that accurately describes my experience with my nonbinary gender identity.

I decided that I didn't want to live by any other truths but my own. So to hell with gender and the associated gender roles I was forced to internalize. I feel no need to apologize.

but I don't want the western name brand packaging of gender.
A re-visioning of our bodies

Colonialism has tried to determine a lot of what our bodies do, how our bodies look, and what our bodies mean. Let's do some re-visioning of our bodies from a self-determining place.

Activity: Participants have 5 mins to draw: What would your body be like without oppression and exploitation? How would you be shaped? How would you move?
"nobody's free until everybody's free."

European colonialism colonized our Earth and forced boiling hot heterosexism, cissexism, patriarchy and white supremacy down our throats. Now People of Color throughout the world are regularly seen as backwards, as ignorant.

We're seen as backwards by both the descendants of the colonizers and the descendants of the colonized, and those holding both identities. I think about how Black folks view each other as criminal because of what these democrats and republicans did as they fought over power. They villainized us all over media to criminalize us.

My homie Cherise has these words that I always think about and repeat in my comics.

She reminds me that oppression lives around us, oppression lives within us.

I hate European colonialism and what it did to us throughout the world, but we can always work to restore this inclusion and we need to also acknowledge those folk who never stopped accepting us, the ones who never stopped loving us.
Reducing Harm and Resisting Imperialism

What are some examples of imperial/colonial relationships in LGBTQ advocacy?

**Activity:** Get into groups of 5 people, and choose one of the dynamics listed. Brainstorm some interventions or actions that interrupt the dynamic or reduce harm in the relationship.

"Balboa found the house of this kyngge infected with the most abominable and unnatural lechery..."

Which of your kin paved the way for you?

South African students speak out against 'aggressive' ban on afro hair
Students describe prejudice at prestigious Pretoria school where natural hair was deemed 'untidy' and 'un-ladylike'

(but let's challenge "jargon")
DEDICATED to Vitória/Antônio, whose shade and defiance has rippled through time.

- khari + malcolm

What's the nastiest shade you've ever thrown?
Existing in the world
free complete pdf of "my gender is My Gender" is available at:
jkharij.com/mgmg
you can also purchase physical copies here!

feel free to donate to help support my art. you can
use cash.me/jkharij or PayPal.Me/jkharij or www.venmo.com/jkharij.
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