

# A Queer Feminist Ethics of Eros

## *A Chapbook of Feminist Poems*

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The following works inspired this chapbook of poems: *Transforming Carceral Logics: 10 reasons to Dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex Through Queer/Trans Analysis and Action* by S. Lamble, *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action* by Audre Lorde, *Are the Lips a Grave?* by Lynne Huffer, *Educating a Women: A Feminist Agenda* by Bell Hooks, and *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* ("Towards a New Consciousness") by Gloria Anzaldúa. Using these works, I am going to creatively construct a call to advocacy, through poetry, for those people to whom the theories I am advocating for speak. I am advocating for communities through writing in an effort to push for the application of the theory into practice. After each poem is an annotation about each poem demonstrating what I am advocating for, how the theory should be applied to practice, and the theoretical details I chose to focus on in my process of writing.

### **Chains**

How many cages  
to fit the whole nation?  
punishing all ages,  
through mass incarceration.

Isolating communities  
of lives unfavored;  
diminishing unities  
with injustices savored.

To love and to be,  
are no such crime,  
but to be and be free;  
you must do the time.

“War on terror”  
against women, queers, and trans

leaves no room for error  
as the prison expands.

As immigrants build,  
Hate crimes pursue.  
Their work holds no guild  
in the red white and blue.

Policing the streets,  
piecing the dove.  
The law defeats  
walls between violence and love

The cells leave them blisters,  
though they bear no arm.  
Free our brothers and sisters  
who have done no harm.  
You leave them in  
silence; Strip them of  
their rights.  
Punish them for violence  
when the *state* is who fights.

Heal our caged nation!  
Equalize their deserved gains!  
You can't expect a revelation  
when you lock the world in  
chains.

#### Annotations (Lamble)

This piece was inspired by *Transforming Carceral Logics: 10 reasons to Dismantle the Prison Industrial Complex Through Queer/Trans Analysis and Action* by S. Lamble. In the first stanza, I address the urgency of the increase in mass incarceration. The United States leads for the amount of incarcerated individuals in the entire world. In the second stanza, I address how prison systems isolate prisoners from the community as a means of punishment. I also reinforce the idea that the prison is often populated or stereotyped disproportionately by members of minority communities, including queer, trans, and gender non-conforming people. The third stanza is meant to address LGBTQ+ people in prisons. This stanza also addresses the over policing of communities high in queer, trans, and other minority groups. The fourth and fifth stanza quotes the “war on terror” mentioned by Lamble on page 236. These stanzas emphasize how the incarceration rates are affected by the war on terror against migrants and people of color, as well as the violence imposed on women and the LGBTQ+ community, especially in the United States. While immigrants have been contributing excessive labor for low wages, they are still being discriminated against and stigmatized by society. Stanza six revisits the over-policing in minority communities, as well as the violence enacted by the police force against members of the LGBTQ+ community. The irony in this stanza is the wall between violence and love collapsing

at the hands of the “law” also known as the police. The seventh stanza addresses the idea that most people locked up in prison are locked up for non-violent crimes, such as drug offenses and crimes of poverty (Lamble 243). Both stanzas seven and eight address the violence and rights violations experienced by people in prisons, especially members of the LGBTQ+ community. Gender non-conforming people are often put in prisons that do not reflect their gender identity, and this stigma could lead to lots of hate and violent experiences in prisons. Stanza eight refers to violent prison treatment, including solitary confinement, strip searches, and other immoral practices. The irony of this stanza is that a majority of people arrested are in prison for non-violent crimes, and the state is the one that is disproportionately targeting members of minority communities, which is indirectly and directly violent. The last stanza is advocating for rehabilitation of prisoners and integrating them back into communities rather than demoralizing them through punishment by putting them in cages. I emphasize healing the nation and allowing prisoners equal opportunity to maintain community with the world. Lastly, I blatantly say that you cannot expect societal growth by locking people in cages and punishing them. The goal of this poem was to address the injustices placed on prisoners, recognize LGBTQ+ treatment by police and the prison system, as well as apply theory to practice by urging the reader to rethink the stigma behind prisoners and realize the underlying inequalities plaguing minority communities.

### **One Day**

I know I am going to die one day.  
Though I do not know when that will be,  
that day will be the end of me.

But when I die one day,  
whenever that may be,  
will my voice be free?

One day  
will my fear flee?  
Will my words dance with glee?

One day  
will the silence decree?  
Will it consume me?

One day  
will my identity see  
the bounds that limit me?

One day  
Will my actions guarantee  
A legacy lived just for me?

No.

Let that one day  
be today.

I am Angelina Pacholczak.  
I am a white woman, daughter, sister, student, friend,  
survivor, and I am unapologetically me.

### Annotations (Lorde)

This poem was inspired by *The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action* by Audre Lorde. The first stanza relates to Lorde addressing her possible diagnosis with breast cancer. When someone is diagnosed with cancer, one cannot avoid the possible consequence of death. Lorde addresses how she had a three week involuntary reorganization of her life due to this news, even though her tumor was benign (40). The first stanza is where I address my mortality. The second stanza is where I begin the longer part of the poem. The second stanza begins and involves me questioning what I will accomplish in life before I die. The second stanza asks if I will overcome my silences. It also questions whether or not I will speak out on my experiences and what has happened to me. The third stanza asks if I will overcome the fears that are hidden by my silence. Lorde addresses fear and claims bluntly that she is afraid, but it is the silence that draws the face of our fear (42). The third stanza suggests that if I overcome my fear, I will overcome silence, and overcoming that silence will bring joy. The fourth stanza resembles my doubts. I am a person that will always think of the worst possible outcome in order to be prepared. Once again, I am questioning my silences, and almost worrying if my silence will consume me until the day I die. The fifth stanza addresses my identity. My identity is compiled with many features, and I related this part of the poem to when Lorde declares herself as a Black lesbian poet (40). Lorde also acknowledges the limitations that have come from her identities, such as racial vision due to difference (42). This part of the poem holds true to the idea that “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” By recognizing and questioning my own limitations, I will become stronger from them. The sixth stanza addresses my actions. Lorde’s entire work is about transforming silence into language and action, so I questioned my actions. This suggests that by taking action and overcoming silence, I could create a legacy for myself. This entire questioning part of the poem is meant to reflect the three week involuntary reorganization period Lorde experienced after her life threatening news. After the sixth stanza, the seventh stanza disrupts the rhyme scheme. By declaring no, I am taking my life in my own hands and turning my doubts and questions into a concrete statement. Lorde states that the silence will not protect you (41), so why wait to break my silence when that may be the death of me. The last stanza is me breaking my silence. The last two stanzas were meant to not have a rhyme scheme because I am overcoming my silence rather than maintaining the rhythm that society expects of me. Society continues to run its course despite systemic inequalities, unless silence is broken. My disrupting the rhyme scheme is me turning my silence into language and action. Like Lorde, I recite all of my identities for readers to see. The last stanza serves as an inspiration for other women to share their stories and identities with the world. The goal of this poem is to embody all the concerns Lorde addresses when it comes to the fear of overcoming silence, advocate against the silencing of women, as well as further push people, specifically women, to share their stories with the world to build a supportive community that can address all women’s injustices. My theory to practice is advocating for women to use their voices and tell their stories, in other words, joining me in the act of turning our silences into language and action.

### **A Queer Feminist Ethics of Eros**

Men.

The dominant figure.

The subject of sexual  
morality. A superior being.

Women.

A man's sex appeal.

An object of pleasure.

An inferior complement.

Homosexual.

Brotherhood.

Confining women into boxes.

Illusion of sexual difference.

Queer.

A spectrum.

Performing Sexual difference.

Inclusion of all sexuality and identity.

Morality.

Historical relationships.

What is right and wrong.

Foundation.

Ethics.

Desubjectifying relationships.

What is morally autonomous.

Anti-foundation.

Eros.

Questioning categories and binaries.

Love is spiritual.

Sex is gender neutral.

### Annotations (Huffer)

This piece was inspired by *Are the Lips a Grave?* by Lynne Huffer. This poem was meant to educate those on feminist and queer theories surrounding sexual ethics. This piece was extremely difficult for me to understand at first, so I wanted to make it clear for readers to understand using poetry. Throughout the poem, each stanza represents the binary of another. For example, the first stanza is about women, while the second stanza is about men. The third stanza is about homosexual, and the opposite of homosexual, according to Huffer, is queer (528). Throughout the poem, the first line of each stanza is the word I am defining using what is explained throughout Huffer's work. The positionality of the stanzas is significant as well because I wanted men to line up with homosexual and morality while women lined up with queer and ethics. Each stanza represents the polarity of difference that Huffer describes as damaging to minority communities such as women and members of the LGBTQ+ community (527). The positionality of the stanzas also contributes to the ideas of morality Huffer describes using Foucault ethics. According to Foucault ethics, morality is a matter of right and wrong, and this right and wrong has been constructed historically (534). Throughout the poem, I am demonstrating what history has created as the right and wrongs of sexual ethics. Foucault also pushes for a sexual ethics that is morally autonomous and antifoundationalist, which I represent in the second last stanza. By exercising moral autonomy, Huffer stresses the idea of antifoundationalism, meaning that we

should rethink who is the sexually moral subject (517). The last stanza represents the concluding idea reached by Huffer in her work. The title of the poem is “A Queer Feminist Ethics of Eros,” which I am ultimately leading up to throughout the poem. This ethics of eros is meant to redefine a sexual ethics that is not in favor of men, morality, or homosexuality. The last stanza conveys that love is spiritual, rather than physical, and that love does not have to have a man as the dominant figure in the equation. The last stanza is deconstructing the historical meaning of what sex is considered right and wrong. Finally, the last stanza rejects the binaries that have been created sexually, and combines queer and feminist theories regarding sex. In the beginning of the work, Huffer describes the philosophical dissonance that has split queer theorists and feminist theorists in regards to sexual ethics (517). The historically constructed sexual ethics not only depreciates women as inferior to men, but it also depreciates homosexuals for disrupting the male and female sexual morality. The goal of this piece was to educate readers on the inequalities created by sexual morality, as well as advocate for an ethics of eros as the new backbone to sexual ethics. This piece also advocates an ethics of eros and turning this theory into practice. The ethics of eros builds a healthier outlook on sexual relationships, and is more inclusive to all communities, especially the LGBTQ+ community. My theory to practice in this poem suggests that the ethics of eros should become the new norm in modern day society to deconstruct the violence that has surrounded heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

## Salihah

Imagine:

You are sitting in your room  
writing a paper on feminist theory.  
Your pen gently strokes the paper;  
your ideas paint themselves in perfect  
calligraphy, A natural gift.

Well let me tell you about Sally.  
Her real name is Salihah.  
She is an African Black woman born in Sierra  
Leone. She is 19 years old.  
She wants to be educated,  
but she cannot read or write.

Sally has tried to teach herself to read.  
She used to sit in her room,  
gathered up a book titled  
*The Combahee River Collective Statement*,  
but it was written in English.  
She speaks Krio.

A lot of Sally’s country speaks English.  
English words have been spoken to her such as  
sew, knit, wash,  
but one word in particular stood out:  
*Woman*.  
That’s the first English word Sally has understood.

Sally wasn’t called Sally until 17 years old.  
Her brother came home from the university one day; he

spoke a language she and her mother couldn't understand.

He spoke to his father.

He then turned to Sally and asked in Krio,

“Salihah, can I call you Sally from now on?”

Sally asked in Krio,

“What does that mean?”

Her brother explained that his friends spoke English and his friends were teaching him lots of English words. When he told his friends about his sister, they said her name was weird. They liked Sally better.

Sally became jealous of her brother.

How come he could learn to read and write but she couldn't do either?

She felt like an outsider in her own home, watching her brother and father speak in what sounded like tongues.

One Friday afternoon,

Sally's brother came home from the university.

Sally asked him,

“What did you learn today?”

He told her about what he phrased as “stupid women stuff.”

Sally was intrigued.

“What kind of women stuff? she asked.

He went on and on about names she has never heard of before;

Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler.

He talked about their experiences as women from minority communities and how they applied their experiences to their work on feminist theory.

For the first time, Sally felt inspired.

Everyday after that,

Sally asked her brother about what he learned, but only in the class that taught feminism.

After weeks, she's heard dozens of theories and formed her own opinion on what her brother calls,

“Feminist analysis.”

Another day after Sally's brother came home from the university, Her brother asked,

“Why do you ask so many questions?”

Sally couldn't think of the right words to say.

As her lips trembled, she muttered in Krio,

“Because it is my right to, and call me Salihah from now on.”

### Annotations (hooks)

This free verse poem was inspired by *Educating a Woman: A Feminist Agenda*, by bell hooks. In this poem, I created an imaginary story about Salihah, a girl from Sierra Leone who could not read or write. I chose Sierra Leone as the setting because according to google, Sierra Leone has one of the highest

illiteracy rates in the world. I chose to make Salihah Black and African to address the lack of education on feminist theory for marginalized communities in the US (110). I start off the poem by forcing the reader to imagine themselves writing a paper on feminist theory. I purposefully do this to evoke a sense of privilege in those who can read and write. Reading and writing comes naturally to those in developed societies, so these skills are often taken for granted. I myself did not realize how feminist education is notoriously limited to higher education, and this left me with deep concern. I wanted to write something that put my experience into the perspective of others. I retrieved this inspiration from hooks' talk of the urgency behind lack of literacy skills amongst poor classes (108). A common occurrence in this poem is referring to Salihah as Sally. I purposefully include this story in the poem to recognize the diminished diversity in English-based education. Hooks states that most feminist works are only available in higher education, and with this comes the language barrier because most works in higher education are transcribed in English (109). Since feminist education is limited to the upper class, I also decided to include how in some areas of the world, education is limited to just men. Hooks focuses on the financial cutbacks of United States education that may contribute to lack of women's pursuit of an education (110). I touched on this idea through the relationship between Salihah and her brother. Salihah's brother is able to receive higher education, and he even learns about feminist theory. Most importantly, he even is taking his class on feminist theory for granted, while Salihah remains so moved and inspired by the works. She envies her brother's ability to learn about all of these things, which I acknowledged to further emphasize the importance of educating women across classes and differences. Then, I chose to include Salihah asking her brother everyday about his feminist education. I purposefully did this to touch on hooks' idea that the limitations of teaching feminist theory limit the spread of feminist teachings to word of mouth (110). The last stanza is meant to represent Salihah finally being empowered by feminist education. She embraces the diversity of her African name Salihah. This is meant to convey the importance of teaching feminist education to women of all communities and backgrounds. A feminist education can lead to inspiring women, and allow women to relate and resonate with feminist theories that are applicable to their everyday lives. The goal of this poem was to bring awareness to readers on the lack of education, especially feminist education, across the world's communities. I wanted readers to feel empathy for Salihah, and further inspire them to advocate for women's education in rich and poor communities. In this poem, I am applying theory to practice by demonstrating bell hooks' advocacy for female education in a personal imaginary poem, and forcing readers to reflect as well as be empowered by Salihah's adavance to the practice the feminist education she rightfully deserves.

## **Two sides to be**

A life  
so bittersweet  
when there are  
two sides to be.

A knife  
of self defeat  
leaves a scar  
for all to see.

A consciousness,  
so ambiguous  
it disrupts  
the dual mind

An unconsciousness,  
so continuous  
it erupts  
your own kind.

The power  
that others hold  
can change the meaning  
of their word

to empower  
those young and old,  
and start convening  
what must be heard.

#### Annotations (Anzaldua)

This poem was inspired by *Towards a New Consciousness* by Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa uses poems to describe the contradictory nature of her mestiza identity, so I decided to use a poem that conveyed these exact same ideas from a less personal approach. The first stanza addresses

the ups and downs experienced by the mestiza. Anzaldúa describes the pain a mestiza feels being torn between two opposing worlds, and how the conflicting ideas from both worlds lead to “psychic restlessness,” (99-100). The second stanza is meant to help the readers visualize this pain Anzaldua describes as being outcasted by both worlds. This tolerance for ambiguity described by Anzaldúa is what a mestiza learns when an emotional event causes a mestiza to battle the contradictions of both the dominant white world and the Indigenous Mexican world (101). The third stanza touches on the new consciousness discussed by Anzaldúa throughout her work. This consciousness challenges the painful duality and ambiguity Anzaldua conveys to readers. The fourth stanza addresses that the pain experienced by the battle of cultural ideas of the mestiza occurs at the mental level. Anzaldúa describes the struggle of these opposing identities as inner, and by initially bringing awareness to the inner struggle, this struggle can be communicated to outsiders (109). The last two stanzas are meant to allow readers to envision Anzaldua’s calling out to members of dominant communities. Anzaldúa addresses the violences and inequalities that have been imposed on women by dominant cultures as well as the patriarchy. Anzaldúa directs her words towards the male community and tells them that she and others will not tolerate this violence anymore. Not only does Anzaldúa call them out, but she also tells them that she and others are willing to work together to develop equal power with those who have oppressed them (105-106). Anzaldúa is trying to create an alliance with the oppressor in order to build an equal and just world. Anzaldúa’s bravery is extremely empowering, and I felt that it was extremely important to include this part of her work in my poem. The last two stanzas of the poem are my version of calling out the “others” that Anzaldua is referring to, such as men and white people. The goal of this poem is to advocate for not only mestizas, but other mixed communities who struggle with the duality of conflicting identities. It also allows readers to acknowledge their relationship to this poem and whether or not their identities line up with the oppressed or the oppressor. With that being said, this poem is directed towards mixed communities, as I am demonstrating my understanding of their pain and conveying my allyship with them. I call out to people to recognize the nature of their potential privilege, and what their

power can do to change the meaning of what it means to be a mestiza or mixed. Anzaldúa's theory is demonstrated as practice in my poems by calling out the oppressor to create change in societal narratives, as well as promote the oppressor's need for allegiance in deconstructing the effects of racial oppression.

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