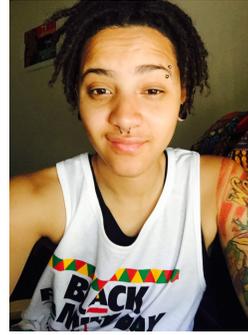


Open Letter to the Oppressor

TORI-ANN PORTER



WRITER'S COMMENT: As Queer and Transgender people of color, I, like many of my siblings who are Queer and Transgender of color, carry traumas which are placed on our bodies due to systemic oppression. These traumas occur through the ways in which systems of oppression inflict violence on our bodies. For my final for Chicax Studies Queer Latinidades course, I decided to write a letter to the oppressor, warning him my people understand the ways in which he works and letting him know we are resilient and are going to dismantle all that he is. Professor Rojas told us to be creative, and as a poet, I decided to write my letter in poetry form while incorporating Chicax Queer revolutionaries who came before me. This letter serves as a warning to anyone who follows oppressive ideologies that my people aim to dismantle you.

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: Dear Tori, As a matter of introduction, I can only offer a response to your fierce and gripping letter, to your prophetic vision of the transformation that is already underway, and to the necessary forces, energías y voces that are paving that path. I failed you. I am but a fledgling unlearning so much. I offer an account of the ways my spirit, maybe mind, may have succumbed to the oppressor. What are the ways the classroom, the syllabus, our learning and learning community might look different if we are to "listen to our jotería?" How does the work of a teacher, my teacher, shift when it is responsive, accountable to the poor, undocumented, non-binary, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans folk living with disabilities? How do we*

alter the compulsive obsession with the oppressor, take flight toward another way of living? What will it take to cease the endless destruction of our capacity to live love?

– Clarissa Rojas, Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies

Dear Oppressor,
Thank you. I *woke* up, flipped and struggled, but I am awake now. I became an expert; an expert on the ways you strangle and slaughter all things I know of myself. I used to be your loyal companion, following behind you closely, hoping you'd throw me a bone. I laughed at your jokes, not knowing those jokes were on me. I watched your every move, studying carefully to see how you move around me, examining the ways my magic frightens you. I obtained degrees in the ways you breathe, in the ways you live, the ways you are free - to understand that that is not something I can do so gracefully. I lived to please you, to be accepted by you, when I was *sleeping*. I woke up. I am awake now. Worthless to you, a mind you can no longer colonize, an unapologetically non-binary BlaQueer¹ polyamorous socialist.

Hey oppressor, you thought you had me. I see myself differently. Learning from powerful queer people of color, teaching me ways to liberate, ways to breathe, ways to think critically. I used to see myself as worthless, something for your enjoyment, something for you to mold into obedient. But you have not won. I see the trauma and the pain you cause, wrecking and stripping whole cultures and traditions, infiltrating legacies and taking them as your own. I continue to chip away at the chains you shackled on me. You continue to change the locks, making my muscles stronger during the struggle to break free. I see you. Don't forget, I am watching.

I have used your institutions to gain privileges not afforded by many of my siblings. I am taught to forget in your institutions, taught to forget about the traumas, taught to forget about my hxstory. Taught to forgive you. I got an education and sometimes I wonder if it protects me from the violences² your institutions inflict on my people. If this distances me

1 Combination of Black and Queer to emphasize intersectional identities.

2 Using violence with an 's' to emphasize the different forms of violence inflicted on bodies due to different forms of oppression (i.e. Racism, Classism,

from my oppression, if it takes away the traumas you place on my body. But then, I realize no matter how educated, how well read, *how good I speak English*, I will always be less than to you. You have always kept me in your margins. I gave up trying to fit into your boxes and sat with the implications that I will no longer allow you to take my autonomy away from me. I will always be me, as long as I am a BlaQueer non-binary polyamorous socialist, and you will always see me as deviant, as something too divergent, as something non-normative, as less than human.

You have created a world unfit for me. Ableist cisheterosexist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy prevents me from navigating worlds in which I feel safe. It prevents my people from being human, it prevents us from healing, it prevents us from retaining. ‘Society has constructed what I call a set of *oppressive epistemologies* of taste that frame mainstream notions of what is in good or bad taste.’³ You have told the world that I am the bad taste left on your tongue. The dirty scent lurking in the streets. Knowing too much and knowing too little is in bad taste, and as I continue to study your ways, I will continue to taste worse. I am the bad fruits, strange fruits, fallen, rotting on the grounds. Fruits that longed for freedom.

My people are going to ruin all that you know, all that you are. If you aren’t ready to learn then you will burn. You have colonized my people, so much so that they do not listen, but I have faith. ‘People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying.’⁴ Like me, they will all find their paths. Soon joining in line with the masses. They are coming around, they are waking up, they are cultivating education, they are listening. Remembering. Remembering, we are a community of people, who see, know, and understand the ways you work against us. You may believe you have us all wrapped around your fingers, but the people are watching. We see right through your ableist cisheterosexist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, we see how they are intertwined, interconnected and how we can dismantle one, and dismantle them all.

Genderism, Sexism).

3 Calvo-Quirós, William A. “The Aesthetics of Healing and Love.” *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39.1 (2014): 181-93. Print.

4 Anzaldúa, Gloria. “La Conciencia De La Mestiza.” *Borderlands: La Frontera*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999. 98-113. Print.

You are clever, my friend. Where did you come up with all of these institutionalized systemic marginalizations? Making it hard for people like me to survive. You've created binary systems, placing one specific group of people subordinate to another group, you've created economic systems which are intertwined and interconnected with racism, sexism, colonialism, heterosexism and patriarchy to insure it is hard for anyone who is not white, cisgender, heterosexual, male to thrive in this world.

All of your institutions and systems place loads of trauma onto our bodies. Making it hard for us to remember much of ourselves without a heavy load. I was once born whole, then I was circumcised, stripped and cut. You replaced the holes with shame. This is no longer invisibilized, I now see and recognize. I watched you and studied you. Capitalism and Colonization are your favorite games, and you play them satisfactorily, but your mistake was in making all of your other systems and institutions dependent on it. I know how these games work, observant of it all. Lived your games and often lost in the battle.

Colonization works when you brainwash us with ideologies aimed at controlling people who are not like you, who don't think like you. Creating ideas which make my people believe we need you to be free, need you to be whole, need you to be affirmed. Brainwashing them into forgetting you have shackled us, sliced us, denied us. Without ideologies, your control would see no reign. With decolonization and re-indigeneity, you will wither in your insecurities. Your insecurities made you believe that you needed to express to everyone *how much better you are*. You were jealous, so you took our cultures, land and our people. Traded our legacies, and codified us. You became offended at our diverse, innovative, rich peoples, so you aimed to destroy us, you aimed to bury us, to exterminate us. '[You] tried to bury us but [you] didn't know we were seeds.'⁵

We grew from our graves, and grew stronger from the struggle, dug out of your trenches. You are such a coward, you did not see how resilient we were, so now you are still using your insecurities, and fragilities to perpetuate the same ideologies against us. They are old, they are worn out and outdated. Don't you see, we are unafraid? Unapologetic? Don't you see, we are surviving?

⁵ Unknown, Mexican Proverb.

Colonization helped you keep your women from going against you. You had to teach them that they too were superior to those who were being colonized. You had to teach them to not see their own oppression. You taught them your filthy ways of erasure. Funny thing is you couldn't erase it all. Latinx theorist, María Lugones wrote:

Erasing any history, including oral history, of the relation of white to nonwhite women, white feminism wrote white women large. Even though historically and contemporarily white bourgeois women knew perfectly well how to orient themselves in an organization of life that pitted them for very different treatment than non-white or working-class women. White feminist struggle became one against the positions, roles, stereotypes, traits, and desires imposed on white bourgeois women's subordination. They countenanced no one else's gender oppression.⁶

White women rallied against colonized women, not understanding their struggle was interconnected with colonized women's struggles. You taught people how to go against others, you taught people inhumanity, you taught people oppression. White women learned your ways, they watched as you oppressed us. Separated themselves, not wanting to be treated in similar ways. You taught them how to ignore. Your women gave in, and isolated us from the conversations, and used your tools to gain their liberation, not knowing we too wanted liberation from you.

You should have been much wiser, more prepared, subtler. We see how your game, capitalism, is working to control us all. We see how it creates violence, oppression, and is killing our people. We see how we are starving, criminalized and murdered. We see how you use capital to produce more institutions which keep you holding control over my people. We see how capitalism pins some of our people against one another. You use capital to keep my people oppressed. You use capitalism to create institutions that imprison my people and leave you broke, but because you are a coward and insecure you hold people in these institutions for your own good.

⁶ Lugones, María. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007): 203. Web.

You believe you will fix the illnesses of the world by placing people like me into these institutions, not knowing that you have been the problem all along. ‘The rapid and far-reaching growth of relationships between government and private interests is known as the prison industrial complex (PIC), a system that promotes prisons as “solutions” to social, political, and economic problems while reaping political and economic benefits from incarceration.’⁷ Are you that narcissistic to think that we don’t see these as solutions? You even wrote in the constitution that anyone who becomes a criminal or who is incarcerated becomes a slave. You have created a modern day slave trade. You are not fooling anybody; we are all watching.

You used capitalism to perpetuate and justify your violence. You used it to build up patriarchy, to continue gender inequity, to promote transphobia, racism, sexism, classism, you used capitalism to justify murders of Black and Brown people. Do you like the way the blood feels on your hands? Is it lonely up there at the top? Watching us as you threw obstacles at us one at a time? Do you ever wonder what it’s like to be the people you harm? I sometimes wonder how lonely you could be. You have created all these things and have shown you are against coalition building. It must be lonely to not have community. Although it may seem like you have community with folks who take your ideologies as truths, all that you are is divisive, and they will be awake soon. I know all ways to liberate myself and my people.

You are afraid, and we know it, we see as you scramble to create more systems to keep us obeying, to keep us quiet, to keep us silent. You don’t like as we scream about our experiences, you watch in fear, praying most of the world won’t catch on, and but they are. You try to brainwash us with your reforms and try to regain our trust with your backhand apologies. You lie to our faces and take light accountability for the traumas you cause. You aren’t ready for us, but we are no longer waiting on you.

Oppressor, you must think I have no options, think I have no drive, no dreams. I hope you remembered I have become an expert in all you do, and all that you are. I have thought of ways to dismantle you. I

7 Mogul, Joey L., Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock. “Introduction.” Introduction. *Queer (in)justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. Boston: Beacon, 2011. Xi-Xx. Print.

have incorporated all people who have been left in the margins. What you don't understand is my people are resistant to your oppression, to your normativity, to your violence. I have spoken with them, we have organized, and rewritten our histories.⁸ You underestimate us, we are powerful.

This is your final warning. This is no longer about you, this is all about us, the people, the mass. We are coming for you and I have envisioned great outcomes. I have seen your ashes float to the pavement, watched as all your institutions crumbled under the strength of my people, seen fires blaze around your place of rest. I am warning you, great things are going to come. The revolution has already begun. I am writing this to you to give you a head start because my people are rolling in deep, rolling in fast, and we have the greatest of numbers.

Like many of my siblings in the struggle, I have dreams about the revolution, about our liberation. All of my people, Black, Brown, Queer, Trans*, Polyamorous, non-binary, undocumented, poor, working-class, with disabilities, fighting together for a common goal of dismantling your toxic oppressive institutionalized hate. We will not use your tools, for they have been used in our oppression against us. Unlike you, my people and 'I recognize the dangers of nationalism as a strategy for political change. Its tendency toward separatism can run dangerously close to biological determinism and a kind of fascism.'⁹ We want to build a coalition, build in solidarity with all people with all identities. There is no separation, we will no longer be divided or use our differences against one another, like you have done in the past. We are reclaiming our lives for ourselves.

I sometimes dream about the revolution, the violence we must cause and the struggles we will face to obtain our liberation. I dream our liberation will be together, undivided, and led by powerful Black Trans* womxn¹⁰ and Trans* womxn of color. I want to warn you there is going to be a violent struggle, we know because you have inflicted so much violence on us already, we have prepared for this. We collectively know you will not give up without a fight, we have prepared, physically, emotionally,

8 Using the x in "histories" to dismantle patriarchal ideas of the past.

9 Moraga, Cherríe. "Queer Atzlán: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe." *The Last Generation*. Boston, MA: South End, 1993. 149. Print.

10 Using x in "women" to emphasize the there is no one way to be a woman. Also using it to dismantle patriarchal ideas that women need men.

and spiritually. We have educated our youth and decolonized their minds from the lies you teach them in schools. We planted seeds of resilience, pride and truth into our souls and cultivated legacies forgotten, stolen.

The people you have left in the margins are ready to move together. All people with disabilities, Black folks, Brown folks, Queer and Trans* folks, working class folks and poor folks, we understand this to not be a race war, or an identity politics wars, we understand this to be a class liberation. We understand you are controlling us through your capital, and we must dismantle your game of capitalism before we dismantle any of your other systems and institutions. We understand capitalism is the entity that feeds and nourishes all of your other systems of oppression, and we are going to fight until the death of it.

The movement is for the people, this means it is run by the people and it is sustained by the people. 'We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, that we are spawned out of similar souls.'¹¹ We understand the revolution will not be financed, we will have to come together and find innovative ways of feeding each other, clothing each other and sheltering each other. I once dreamed about our liberation after the revolution, we were all growing life on our lands. We were feeding our villages of people with plants cultivated on our lands, we were feeding knowledge through oral hxstories and singing songs of praise that we are now free.

You have taught us how to leave our siblings out of conversations, positioning them as different than us as individuals, making it hard for us to recognize that our oppression is interconnected. You have not succeeded, we now know our liberation is tied to others liberation, we now know growing the mass is the final step to dismantling all of you. I have imagined the unraveling of all of your systems, where all people of all races, genders, classes, abilities come together to fight for our liberation.

I will need to especially give space to all of my transgender siblings of color, for we have marginalized them in every story. We have excluded them from many stories, and we must continue to center them in our movements. 'In the decolonial imaginary, transgender Chican@s are also actors and part of the project of re-writing and disputing what is written

11 Anzaldúa, 107.

in history.¹² Our Trans* voices spread across many axes of oppression, holding the key for dismantling the gender binary system and all hierarchies which came with it. Leading the revolution with power and magic. Aiming our foci on many intersections of identity, teaching us our privileges and our disadvantages, and helping us develop thought on how to use our privileges to benefit the masses.

We have to use our privileges to liberate our undocumented siblings, for they are the ones who hold all the violence which the United States inflicts. They are exploited, mistreated and devalued. We must build a movement which protects our undocumented siblings, especially those who are Trans* and Queer.

We must build our movement to be accessible to those with disabilities, for you have made it inaccessible for them their whole lives. You made the world inaccessible for those who do not fit able bodied white maleness. You have created a world that does not cater to bodies and minds which do not align with normative standards. My people will not exclude those you have continued to be left in the margins. Left for others to jot down lines of their stories, misinterpreted and changed.

This battle will be deadly. We will have to fight against and wreck any counter revolutionary act that stands in our way. We have to remember we must fight against those who have caused us harm throughout our lives. I hope you are ready because we are.

I have dreamed about the revolution; I have dreamed about our liberation. All Black, Brown, Queer, Trans*, poor, working class, non-binary, folks with disabilities are coming to wave their hands in freedom, for you have fed us false hope. You will never give us freedoms, and we will never be afforded the same retention, healing and respect the ways that you do. This is a letter of thanks, thanks for being transparent, for you have taught me great things on how to dismantle you. I am now awake, and so are my people.

Sincerely,
An Unapologetically non-binary BlaQueer Poly Socialist

12 Galarte, Francisco J. "Transgender Chican@ Poetics." *Chicana/Latina Studies*. 2nd ed. Vol. 13. N.p.: n.p., 2014. 118-39. Print.

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