

Session 4: ANALYSIS

Session Four was an evening session. In this session we looked to go deeper into analyzing the workings of male supremacy in order to deepen our collective understanding of male supremacy as a component of oppressive systems. In particular, we were interested in developing a very grounded and intersectional understanding of male supremacy in relation to white supremacy and capitalism. Our second major objective was to use this analysis as a foundation for exploring opportunities and openings for action to challenge male supremacy in order to make progress on our individual commitments and move toward our collective vision of liberation.

Preparation

As preparation for this session, we asked participants to:

- Continue with a daily centering practice.
- Think about one or more of the contexts discussed in Session Three and practices that you want to commit to changing in relation to these. Think about why it is important for you to make a commitment around these specific areas of your life/practices.
- Read a 23-page excerpt (pp92-115 + 129-131) from Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia 2004.) We sent participants the following notes and questions to accompany this reading:

“With this 23-page excerpt, you will be jumping right into a rich, dense book. This may feel a little odd or difficult so this is a little something to help you get started. The author, Silvia Federici, is an Italian Feminist and Autonomist Marxist who was active in the wages for housework movement in Italy in the 70s and later worked in Nigeria during the years of IMF-imposed structural adjustment. In *Caliban and the Witch* -written in 2004- Federici is looking at the emergence of capitalism, fueled by the concurrent colonization and extermination of indigenous populations of the New World, the enslavement and trade of African peoples, the English enclosures (privatization of communal, peasant land), and the witch hunts in Europe. She refers to all of these as methods of 'primitive accumulation.'

Other terms she uses are:

- a) “The Commons” to refer initially to the land that provides crucial resources (grazing, gathering fuel and food, fishing) to peasant economies while fostering community cohesion and cooperation (festivals, games and gatherings). She uses it more generally to speak of any resource that is shared 'in common.' Destruction of the commons is a major factor in creating the 'worker' under capitalist discipline through dependency and scarcity. This destruction through privatization is referred to as “enclosure” and she also applies this term to many different situations in the development of capitalism.

b) “Composition” is a term she generally uses to refer to the make-up of the working class (defined very broadly to encompass everyone oppressed within capitalism). When the working class or proletariat is becoming more divided (such as through racism, sexism or wage hierarchies) this is referred to as decomposition. When the working class overcomes divisions this is referred to as recomposition. Federici explores how divisions within the working class, in this case male supremacy and white supremacy, were imposed and enforced on the emerging proletariat in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

As you are reading, try to list the many different ways that these systems of oppression were imposed on the working class and the reasons why these divisions were created and imposed. In our first session together, we began a discussion about what we, as men (cis and trans), have to gain and lose by weakening or ending male supremacy. What does this excerpt from Caliban and the Witch tell us about what we will have to give up and what we might gain through this struggle?

- If you can make time, read two more short pieces:
“Dismantling Hierarchy, Queering Society” by Andrea Smith in Tikkun Magazine, (July/August 2010) at <http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/july2010smith>
Excerpts from “Race, Class, Gender and Prisons” by Beth Richie at <http://incite-national.org/page/race-class-gender-prisons>

Opening activities

We opened the session with an overview of the session’s objectives and agenda, and a review of the goals, timeline and working agreements for the study-into-action process as a whole. We followed this with a centering practice and a mutual connection practice, focusing on the questions “How are you?” and “Which of your current practices of challenging male supremacy have you become more aware of since we last met?”

Looking at male supremacy

As a beginning to our collective analysis, we watched Barack & Curtis: Manhood, Power & Respect (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5YoS3bqk5g>), a short documentary film examining the different styles of racialized masculinity exhibited by Barack Obama and Curtis Jackson, aka 50 Cent. We then led a discussion of the film, and a debrief of people’s thoughts about and reactions to the readings, with the following guiding question: What do the readings and the video tell us about the workings of male supremacy in relation to other systems of oppression?

Sites of male supremacy

Moving on from this general discussion of an intersectional understanding of male supremacy, we explained that we wanted to look more closely at how male supremacy works at the particular ‘sites’ in which we live our lives. We presented the following six

sites as the ones we would be working with for this activity: Work and workplaces; Home and family; Prisons and policing; Hospitals and health care; Schools and education; and Media and culture. A card for each site was placed on the wall in different parts of the room, and participants were asked to gather in groups of 3 or 4 around each of these cards, so that each site was held by one group. Each small group then had 10 minutes to respond to the following two questions with respect to their particular site, by posting answers to these questions on cards up on the wall:

- How does male supremacy show up here at this site?
- How is it being challenged and/or undermined here?

The small groups were then given another 15 minutes to move around to the other sites and add their responses to those of the initial group. We then came back together to de-brief in the large group, in particular focusing on what we were learning about opportunities to challenge/undermine male supremacy. We used the following questions to structure this debrief:

- What are the forces beyond our immediate experience that shape our experience of male supremacy at these different sites?
- In what ways are these forces material? In what ways are they symbolic?
- What forms of resistance to these forces do we see?
- What possibilities for resistance to male supremacy are there at each site?

We summarized the main points coming out of this discussion, before moving on to the next activity, which looked at people's individual commitments.

Working on commitments

Working in the Support Groups we had established in Session Two, we reviewed and discussed each participant's Commitment Worksheet, and asked people to think about the implications of the foregoing analysis for how they were conceiving of and describing their commitments. Each person then had a few minutes to do some work on their own Commitment Worksheet.

Closing activities

We then closed the session with a reminder on self-care and the preparation assignments for Session Five. One of the assignments was to complete the Commitment Worksheet and then meet with another participant from the group to discuss their worksheets, and what it felt like to be thinking about and articulating commitments in this way. To prepare participants for this, we asked everyone to think about with whom they would like to partner for this assignment, and to remember to practice the partner consent practice when asking someone to partner with them. We ended with a closing circle, in which everyone was asked to share how they were feeling at the end of the session.