

# nymph(o)

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# On Being a Parent

AMID THIS LATEST ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE

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A child is a gift.

When you were born, you came into the world as a gift, to your family, to your community, to all of us. Through your very being, you brought us new energy and new light. Our lives are richer because you are alive.

I know this is true because I am a parent. I have welcomed a child. I have received this gift.

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At first, I thought this gift belonged to me.

I was wrong. As soon as I held this hour-old baby in my arms, I saw how much they were not mine or anyone else's. They were so very clearly their very own person. They had their own needs, their own wants, their own preferences and desires.

This baby also had their own character, one that—to our surprise—thwarted all of the names we had chosen for them. Not one fit. So we held off naming them. Instead, we whispered softly, “What’s your name?” by which we meant, “Who are you?” We didn’t know. We knew that we could learn, but only if we gave up our ideas about who we thought they should be and focused on who they really are.

As a parent, I learned that children come to us as mysteries, as beautifully singular beings, and that we, as parents and as a culture, have the gift of honoring them.

We don’t have to. We can also destroy them.

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What does it look like to destroy a gift?

Right now, in Texas, it looks like the governor’s 2022 executive order to the state’s Department of Family and Protective Services, requiring officers to treat instances where trans children receive gender-affirming care as child abuse, with the threat that these children could be taken from their parents, denied care, and placed into foster homes.


In Florida, it looks like the 2022 Parent’s Rights in Education Act that silences teachers and other educators from discussing gender identity or sexual orientation with students in kindergarten through third grade under the threat of legal prosecution.

In Ohio, where I live, it looks like the state’s House Bill 151, which would bar any student accused of being transgender from participating in athletics until this student proves they are their assigned gender at birth by undergoing a genital examination by a physician, a process that essentially forces children to undergo state-mandated medical rape.


In these and in the hundreds of anti-trans bills that are currently being proposed and enacted by Republican legislators—every one of them based on lies—it looks like the state systematically targeting, silencing, and attempting to eradicate trans children.

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This is no exaggeration.



Alejandra Caraballo, a trans woman and Clinical Instructor at Harvard Law School, clarifies the nature of the anti-trans order in Texas by referring to the United Nations' treaty on genocide.



"One of the elements of genocide," she explains, "is the forceful removal of children from one group to another, specifically to eliminate the characteristic that makes them a unified and immutable group. And so when you look at [the executive order in Texas] from that lens, they're attempting to forcefully take trans children out of families [and] homes to detransition them. And also it's the infliction of intentional physical and emotional harm."

Caraballo then clarifies the nature of this violence, "[G]iven how life-saving this care is...I don't say it lightly, but this is eugenics...this is genocide against trans-people."

Destroying a gift looks like eugenics. It looks like genocide.

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Why would you destroy a gift?

Among the many answers, from the scapegoating of trans people to the rise of white Christian extremism to the enduring human capacity for evil, another answer comes from the non-binary artist and activist Alok Vaid-Menon.

"They hunt us because we feel," says Alok. "And what is more dangerous than that in a world that anesthetizes our souls into thinking they are merely bodies?"

Trans people feel. We feel the truth of who we are in spite of the lies that would erase us. And this refusal makes us targets.

"[T]he reason that they do violence to us," Alok continues, "is because they've done violence to themselves first. I know that the first perpetuation of gender-based violence is to the self.... It is all the people killing their own fluidity, such that when they see it templated in us, instead of saying, 'Oh wow, this is possible,' they have to destroy us, because our existence calls into question their own performance art."

You destroy a gift because you're afraid of what's possible. You destroy a gift because you've been taught to destroy yourself.

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I was taught to destroy myself.

I was born at a time and into a world that policed, erased, and punished queerness.

Because of this violence, I lived for fifty years before I could truly see the nature of my own soul, before I realized that one of the gifts of being me is being, in Alok's phrase, "beyond the binary."

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What does it look like to honor a gift?

As a parent, I have the joy of being close to young trans children whose parents love and support them. I watch them build with Legos and romp in the dirt, laughing and shrieking like any other kid, because they get to be like other kids, precisely because their parents are making sure they're growing up in spaces where they aren't othered.

I also have the joy of encountering parents of older trans children, children who know their gender is not the one they were assigned at birth. And I see these parents seeking out the resources their families need—the counselors, physicians, teachers, and communities—so their children can become their true selves.

You honor a gift by loving your child for who they are. You honor a gift by helping your child discover who they are.

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Not all parents, we know, honor their gifts.

For so many trans children, this state-sponsored violence merely extends the violence they face inside their homes from their own families.

For so many, too many—one is too many—trans children, no one, no place, is safe.

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And yet, being trans remains a gift.

At its root, “trans” means “across” and “beyond.” The radical meaning of trans is to go across and go beyond, and that’s exactly what trans people do. We go beyond the binary, across the racial and ethnic divides, beyond the ageism and sizeism and ableism and classism that poisons our culture. We cross borders and abandon biases.

“Trans people,” attests trans woman and journalist Imara Jones, “just through our existence, show the power and the resilience of change, and possibility of how we can do things differently. We are creating a future less defined by gender roles, and defined more by what we can create than what we can destroy.”

Jones leads us toward this future by noting how Black trans women, as “the most marginalized” among us, are also the people who can see most clearly what’s possible for us. “Because when everything fails you,” observes Jones, “you’re more clearly able to reimagine what it would look like if things worked.”

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And what would it look like if things worked?

Jones offers us a vision of the future through specific examples of work being done by black trans activists, “including Toni-Michelle Williams in Atlanta, who is helping to reimagine how we imagine a world without incarceration; Ianne Fields Stewart who is fighting food insecurity; and Micky B at the Transgender Law Center, who is coordinating a project reimagining Black trans liberation and life across every spectrum.” Jones mentions these among “countless others” who are working towards fundamental change in our collective lives.

If things worked, it would look like justice. If things worked, it would look like all of us having the basic rights we need to thrive.

“Because,” as Jones says, “if we’re able to secure the rights for the most marginalized, then everyone is going to have rights.”

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Right now, our rights are being taken from us. Right now, our children are being taken from us.

Right now, our lives are being taken from us. And so right now, in the midst of this violence and knowing the violence still to come, I want you to know what I know in my soul: you are a gift.

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