

“You Were Gonna Leave Them Out?”: Locating Black Women in a Transfeminist Anthropology of Religion

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This article summons a transfeminist anthropology of religion and asserts that such an orientation (with a subfield to match) would be impossible to conceptualize without the scholarship of Black women—feminist, Womanist, and otherwise critically situated. Through the ethnographic analysis of interviews, documentary footage, newspaper reportage, social media, and videos, the article pays tribute to the late Reverend BobbieJean Baker (1964-2014). The article argues that Black transgender Christian women’s religious subjectivity encompasses the innovative inhabitation of Black ecclesiastical linguistic codes and gestural idioms; the elaboration of transfeminist biblical hermeneutics and discursive mechanisms of legitimation; and the simultaneous performance of culinary and relational virtuosity. The article further contends that Baker’s account of her subjectivity cannot be understood without the insights of Christina Sharpe, Hortense J. Spillers, Monica A. Coleman, Yvette A. Flunder, Savannah Shange, Geneva Smitherman, Psyche A. Williams-Forsen, and Karen Baker-Fletcher. Together, they assist in revealing that Baker’s efforts to increase the livability of trans women’s worlds were inseparable from her religious convictions, as communicated through (and constituted by) the discourses of the Black church. Equally so, her ministerial vocation and vision of beloved community proceeded from her experience as a seasoned—and expertly seasoning—southern-born-and-raised Black trans woman.

Keywords Transfeminism, Blackness, Anthropology of Religion, Gender/Sexuality

In October 2010, I met Reverend BobbieJean Baker at San Francisco’s St. James Infirmary, the justly acclaimed peer-based occupational health and safety clinic for sex workers of all genders and sexual orientations. I had arrived to speak with its executive assistant, Tumeka Godwin, a Black transgender prison rights activist and counselor, after having introduced myself via email as a University of California president’s postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Berkeley. My positionality as an outsider in the context of my current project—a cisgender, then-newly minted PhD—was duly noted by my host (as were the oversized hoop earrings and hairstyle that, Godwin said, made my self-identification as Cuban American intelligible to her). I was recruiting interview subjects to testify to the presence of transgender people in Afro-Cuban Lucumí—popularly called Santería—among other Black Atlantic religious formations that crystallized during the transatlantic slave trade. To review

the first messages I sent out to social service agencies in the Bay Area is to confront a queer, now-elapsed temporality, when among my interlocutors, the *x* in *Latinx* was yet to arrive and *transgender* more often carried an *ed* as a past participle suffix.

After two hours of taped conversation with Godwin and another counselor at one of the long office tables in the poster-bedecked meeting room, Reverend Baker and Deaconess Alexis Dolleman joined us. They allowed me to record an impromptu joint interview.¹ The story Baker went on to tell me, that day and in subsequent exchanges, explained how she became the radiant face of the 2006 documentary *The Believers: The First Transgender Gospel Choir* and one of its featured subjects.² Baker had been a lay minister at the Transcending Transgender Ministries of the City of Refuge United Church of Christ (CORUCC) in San Francisco, then Oakland. After being ordained, she went on to serve as the West Coast regional coordinator for TransSaints (a “national network of faith-based transgender and gender variant people”) as well as TransSaints Minister of the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. She became a lead singer for the Transcendence Gospel Choir and was a peer advocate, case manager, housing manager, and substance abuse and transgender health counselor, specializing in HIV risk assessment and intimate partner violence.³ She auto-signed her emails, “Celebrating 9 Years of Radical Ministry.”

Drawing inspiration from the 2018 *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* roundtable titled “Toward a Transfeminist Religious Studies,” this article summons a transfeminist anthropology of religion whose methods, pedagogies, and presuppositions unseat cisnormative definitions of womanhood and femininity that rest on racialized gender binaries (Koyama 2003).⁴ Such an orientation (with a subfield to match) would be impossible to conceptualize without the scholarship of Black women—feminist, Womanist, and otherwise critically situated. It is to their writing that we must turn to locate, with some degree of adequacy, Baker’s account of her own religious subjectivity. Indeed, her contribution to enlarging feminist anthropology’s discursive terrain cannot be comprehended without the insights of Christina Sharpe, Hortense J. Spillers, Monica A. Coleman, Yvette A. Flunder, Savannah Shange, Geneva Smitherman, Psyche A. Williams-Forson, and Karen Baker-Fletcher. Their investigations of Black girls’ and women’s lives edge us closer to an appreciation of Baker’s reality that would be consonant with—if not identical to—her own understandings.

In what follows, I conduct an ethnographic narrative analysis of Baker reliant on interview data, documentary footage, newspaper reportage, social media, and online videos (Souto-Manning 2014). Based on these sources, in addition to my ethnographic and archival research conducted since 2010, I argue that Baker’s preferred modes of religious expression (reaffirmed in dialogue with Dolleman) are not only characteristic but exemplary of Black trans Christian women’s religious subjectivity.⁵ This subjectivity encompasses the innovative inhabitation of Black ecclesiastical idioms, development of transfeminist biblical hermeneutics, and simultaneous performance of culinary and relational virtuosity (Hershock 2003). I submit these aspects of Baker’s self-narration as evidence that Black trans women have crafted distinctive communicative and embodied strategies in the pursuit of religious fellowship and social recognition.

The first narratives to be explored were inscribed through direct yet fleeting ethnographic engagement with Baker. The last discursive moment is historical. In 2014, Baker was killed in a car accident in the wee hours of New Year’s Day, just four months shy of her fiftieth birthday. In the wake of her death, grieving colleagues uploaded tribute videos of her to YouTube and Vimeo to facilitate her commemoration.⁶ I consider one of these to assist in the examination of Baker’s exegetical praxis. More than a record of Baker’s commitment to feed others as a modality of care,

the video throws into relief the Bible-infused alimentary metaphoricity that nourished her activism and ministry. Baker's efforts to increase the livability of trans women's worlds were inseparable from her religious convictions, as communicated through (and constituted by) the discourses of the Black church. Equally so, her vocation and vision of beloved community proceeded from her experience as a seasoned—and expertly seasoning—southern-born-and-raised Black trans woman.

"Another Way"

Baker was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1964. The sixth child of sixteen siblings, Baker described growing up in the "Missionary Baptist Church way"; her mother had been a founding member of her home church in Memphis.⁷ Echoing scholars who have dubbed the Black church only a semi-voluntary institution, Baker told me that she attended services for Bible study, prayer meetings, choir rehearsals, and Sunday worship: "Church was a given. Services was a given. Talking about Jesus the Savior was a given, in my house, in my surroundings." Baker was the youth choir president when she came out to her mother: "I kicked the door down at thirteen or fourteen, *honey!* ... I came out of the closet running." When church elders saw the changes to her dress, hair, and "positioning as a girl," they condemned them—and Baker herself—as "an abomination." "I said, 'I'm a woman.' They said, 'No, you're not.'" And they unceremoniously ousted Baker from her family's congregation.

Baker attended Mitchell Road High School from 1977 to 1980. She recalled the next decade as a difficult period in which she drifted further away from her family and started using drugs. She moved to San Francisco in 1992 and, as she put it, began "running the streets of the Tenderloin," a neighborhood in which municipal governance and policing had combined to produce its now-infamous queer criminality and precarity. A self-described "fugitive from justice," Baker was extradited to Tennessee from California to complete a prison sentence for robbery and second-degree murder.⁸ Upon her release and after a year of sobriety, she returned to San Francisco. While a client at the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center, she applied for a position to manage the cases of others living with HIV/AIDS and lead groups for trans people. She stayed on from 2002 to 2007, then in 2010 she became an HIV risk assessment counselor at the Glide Foundation. From 2013 until her death the following year, she was lead patients navigator of the TransAccess Program for trans women of color at the API (Asian and Pacific Islander) Wellness Center.⁹

There would be much in Baker's career and testimony to enlarge a fugitive and queer abolitionist anthropology aimed at dismantling the carceral state (Berry et al. 2017; Shange 2019a; Stanley and Smith 2015). Baker spoke often about her former substance addiction, criminalization, and reliance on sex work. She advocated for restoring the voting rights of felons and the imprisoned, as well as for transgender visibility within the Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People's Movement (FICPM). Underscoring the urgency of grassroots mobilization, Baker declared on one occasion, "We're not building another nonprofit, we're building a movement."¹⁰ In this, she labored alongside her "transgender grandmother" Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, the Stonewall Rebellion veteran, Attica State Prison survivor, Black trans rights activist, and organizer. Baker volunteered with the Transgender Gender-Variant & Intersex Justice Project (TGJJP) founded by Alex Lee and cultivated by Miss Major's leadership to amplify the voices of trans women of color within and outside the detention center and prison industrial complex.

While Baker's liberatory vision was far-reaching, she articulated it through linguistic codes and gestural idioms firmly rooted in the Black church. Casting incarceration as a prelude to sanctification, she reclaimed confinement as a metaphor for both interpersonal isolation and

sociopolitical oppression: “If any message of any song I sing helps someone get out of their inner locked-up cage, that’s what I’m for,” Baker said, “because it took me a while to get free” (Marech 2004). In our interview at St. James Infirmary, she credited her elderly aunt for her eventual return to the church; when Baker phoned her one day from jail, her aunt asked, “When are you gon’ try God again?” As she learned from other Black women, getting free is not an individual achievement or question of interiority alone, but requires communal cooperation, concrete resources, and embodied strategies for material liberation (Taylor 2017). In addition to the Good Book, Baker trusted in the power of sacred objects, such as consecrated oil or *chrism*. As she said during our conversation,

It’s for the healing of the laity. The crushing of the olive oil [was a ritual] and the people would pray over it for certain periods of time and consecrate it to the Lord as a sacrifice. And then take it and touch you and—I’ve always believed in the healing of the oil. I still use it today myself, oh yeah.

Also employed in the anointment of leaders, holy oil tied Baker to her forebears within the Holiness-Pentecostal movements as well as the Missionary Baptist tradition.

Baker’s vital connection to the historical Black church also materialized in her reappropriation of its linguistic conventions. She told me of her impending entry into the Theological Education for Leadership program (formerly the Certificate of Ministry Studies program) at the Pacific School of Religion:

As a forty-six-year-old African American trans woman, it is time for people like me—who’ve been through the storm, who knows the ins and outs of the madness—to step up and say, “Look, God loves *all* of you and he *wants* all of you. *Honey*, if you’ve got mental health [issues], come on in God’s house. There’s help here.” Because when I was a little child, the church was a place of help. There’s help, hope, and refuge there. “*Honey*, if it’s tore up the way you [were] doing it, let’s try another way.”

This passage not only encapsulates Baker’s ideal of the Christian congregation as a mutual aid society. It also invokes what might be termed the Black southern chronotope of church as sanctuary, haven, and hush harbor—a site for enslaved people to gather in secret to practice their religion(s), temporarily safe from white supremacist surveillance (Bakhtin 1981; Nunley 2011). As literary theorist and critical race scholar Christina Sharpe (2016, 104) writes, anti-Blackness remains a “total climate,” and Baker’s notion of church carries the expectation that “God’s house” might yet shelter the most vulnerable from “the storm.” Baker’s words also bring to mind theologian Monica A. Coleman (2008, 33) on “making a way out of no way” as “a central theme in [B]lack women’s experiences of struggle and of God’s assistance in helping them to overcome struggle.”

It is crucial to note Baker’s qualification, however: she had the “help, hope, and refuge” of the church as “a little child,” before she was evicted from God’s house for coming out. Here, as in other instances, Baker used the autoethnographic relation of her testimony to “signify on” the church as well as to “read” it, in the quare sense of critiquing it both obliquely and straightforwardly (Johnson 2001). Told “that’s not a she, that’s a he” by church elders, Baker was counseled to change her behavior to match her sex assignment: “you’re a boy, you must act like a boy.” While Baker shares the attempted negation of her girlhood with many other trans and nonbinary people, the denial of femininity has a particular sting for Black girls and women disciplined into an always-already unavailable standard for gender conformity. Baker echoes trailblazing literary critic Hortense J. Spillers’s (1987) assessment of enslaved Black women as “vestibular” to normative femininity, formulated according to the aesthetic dictates of bourgeois whiteness, settler-colonial logics, and binary gender constructs (Shange 2019a). “I lost family,” Baker said, mourning her estrangement

from transphobic relatives and acquaintances poised to "entertain ... gayness" on her part—due to the number of (closeted) gay men already in the church—but unable to accept her womanhood.

Baker went on to say that she "ran straight to the gay club" after her rejection by the church, but that did not end her passion for singing sacred music. "I was doing the same things I was doing at church, I was just doing it at the gay club," she said:

The songs that I wanted to sing with the youth department, I was singing with a bunch of "girls" behind me... . Some of my best numbers when I was doing drag shows were Gospel songs. I could rack up in tips, doing my Gospel songs—because my heart really was in church.

Baker's allusion to the youth department calls attention to the fact that she was only an adolescent at the time of her ejection from the church. This anecdote emphasizes the degree to which she had internalized the Missionary Baptist discourses, institutions, and rituals in which she had been steeped since birth, to the extent that she brought them with her into the most secular of arenas. Church choir training served her well in the club. McCune (2004, 161, 163) notes that audience members reward drag queens monetarily for what they perceive to be "a sincere routine/performance," explaining, "Realness is the ability to produce a naturalized effect. It is the gospel diva's ability to pass, a reiteration of the church norm."

Like many other trans women before her—including the legendary Black activist and Stonewall veteran Marsha P. Johnson (1945-1992)—Baker had paid her bills as a drag queen, at the risk of being (mis)taken by spectators as a cisgender man in women's clothing. Just as Baker's womanhood was not feigned, but an integral aspect of her personhood, so too was the religious sentiment expressed in her singing, which her audience may have imagined to be simulated for entertainment purposes. In fact, her performance troubled the prevailing assumption that LGBTQ subject positions and Christian identities are incommensurable (and not simply incompatible), due to the biologically essentialist approaches to gender espoused by culturally conservative religious communities. Contrary to the expectations of both her devout family members and "unchurched" peers, Baker insisted that singing at the gay club and in church were ultimately "the same things" for her. Since her heart was still in church, those Gospel songs were *hers*.

"Two of Everything"

Baker's remarks open up an avenue of anthropological inquiry into the discursive mechanisms of legitimation adopted by Black trans women, to claim their rightful place as actual bodies within the body of Christ. In a broader set of comments about the indivisibility of God's creation, Baker told me,

Now it was never in God's divine plan to separate anybody or anything that He created—He, She, It, Us, whatever you want to call your higher power. It was never in God's plan to separate anything, even when He told the man to build the Ark. "Build it, *honey*, and take two of everything." Don't you know that if it was eunuchs there, in that time, that two eunuchs went up in the boat? My God, two eunuchs with two girls, and two boys; two eunuchs, two dogs, two cats. He said, "Take two of *everything* that I have made, and put it in the Ark."

And the eunuchs were there—What, you were gonna leave them out? That's two of what He made. I just think that each individual is made in the uniqueness and the likeness of God. Now the way they seem to portray that, or people *portray them as*, that's their call. I personally believe in a power greater than myself and I choose to believe in the radical, inclusive love of Jesus. Everything else, it doesn't bother me.

Switching to a Pentecostal-style sermonic register held in high esteem at CORUCC, Dolleman elaborated on this point, as Baker provided her with phrases that Dolleman would restate:

D: Transgenderness is not new in the Bible. *That's not new.* You read the Book of Isaiah and you will speak of the eunuch.

B: Yes, the eunuchs! They were quite popular in Jesus' time.

D: The eunuchs. They were quite popular. And God has a special place designed for eunuchs. Now why these big preachers of these big churches, and these big theologians and doctors, and all of these don't tell you—

B: With these degrees!

D: With these degrees!—don't put it out like it *should* be, is beyond me... . Because the Word of God says take nothing from the Book, and add nothing to it... . So it's already in there, He already knows. We were already there.¹¹

With its repetition and “completer” statements that have been a staple of the Black preaching tradition, this exchange interests me for three reasons (Smitherman 1977, 104). First, it attests to the adoption of the eunuch trope by Black trans women apart from academic textual exegesis, in the context of everyday life. Second, their dialogue reveals that this trope addresses Black trans women's bid for recognition as both unique and ordinary subjects “already there” in the religious and historical record. Finally, Baker's and Dolleman's call-and-response bears the distinctive influence of CORUCC's founder and pastor, Black lesbian theologian Bishop Yvette A. Flunder.

Let's consider these claims one by one. It may strike many as deeply offensive to reduce trans women to castrated men, which the term “eunuchs” conventionally connotes.¹² Surprisingly, perhaps, the religious studies literature furnishes ample evidence that trans people have sought to compare their modern day situation to that of biblical eunuchs, shown favor by God for their virtue in numerous scriptural passages. These include Acts 8:26-40, in which an Ethiopian eunuch converts to Christianity (Burke 2013), and Isaiah 56:4-8:

For thus says the LORD: “To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, even to them I will give, in My house and within My walls, a monument and a name, better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.”

The comparison began circulating in English-language sources written by trans people long prior to my meeting with Baker and Dolleman in 2010 (Cole and C. 1993; Guest 2006; Kolakowski 1997; Mollenkott and Sheridan 2003; Payne 2004; Reay 2009). The earliest citation my interlocutors might have come across in a popular periodical would be “A New Way to Live” by trans author Dianna C., in the Winter 1995 issue of a magazine for trans readers, *TV-TS Tapestry*. It is also plausible that Baker and Dolleman encountered the eunuch trope in ministerial and confessional works like *Transgender Good News* (Conover 2002) or *Trans-gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Tanis 2003). In speaking with me, they may have leaned on research that “‘outed’ and celebrated the biblical eunuch as a gay ancestor,” then “transed” him to suit their purposes (Guest 2006, 137).

Trans Christians' connection with this eunuch has hewn to certain rhetorical models. According to Katherine Apostolacus (2018, 5), “[Helen] Savage identifies three major hermeneutical methods employed by transgender Christians to alleviate [their] cognitive dissonance: 1) Establishing a hierarchy of texts, 2) resolution through historical/redaction criticism, [and] 3) changing the subject.” Apostolacus adds two further categories to Savage's: allusion to scripture as a precedent,

and self-insertion. Apostolacus explains, "*midrashic self-insertion* is about filling in the gaps of a narrative, whereas *reconstructive self-insertion* is about filling in the gaps of one's life with 'headcanons' of specific biblical characters in their texts as transgender" (8, emphasis in original). While Baker may be seen as practicing midrashic self-insertion by interpolating eunuchs into the story of Noah's Ark ("the eunuchs were there"), Dolleman maintains explicitly what must be read between the lines in Baker's testimony, equating the eunuch from Isaiah with herself in a feat of reconstructive self-insertion: "*That's not new. You read the Book of Isaiah and you will speak of the eunuch... . We were already there.*"

Apostolacus's taxonomy of hermeneutical methods undoubtedly brings us closer to grasping the rhetorical tools wielded by trans Christians. It is also of paramount importance to understand the racial/ethnic facets of their interpretive frameworks and the discursive contexts in which they have been erected (Cooper 2018). Despite the degree of academic attention paid to the eunuch as a feature of "transgender hermeneutics," there have been no ethnographic studies of this trope as deployed among trans people within speech genres, such as the conversion narrative.¹³ Moreover, scholarship on the racialized dimensions of the biblical eunuch center on the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8:26-40, and weigh the implications of reading him as a Black man, yet without a concomitant concern with whether (or not) trans people of African descent have championed him. In fact, my Black and white trans ethnographic interlocutors have only ever mentioned the eunuchs praised in the Book of Isaiah, whose race and ethnicity are unspecified.¹⁴

I would argue that the eunuch trope—as invoked by Baker, Dolleman, and other Black trans women—is nevertheless a racialized and gendered one. While the historical reality of eunuchs in the ancient world is far more complex than the chaste stereotype suggests, Black trans women have identified with them as a means of rhetorically combating Black hypersexualization and fetishization. In Dolleman's words, eunuchs "were quite popular" yet prone to abstain from heteronormative sex. Eunuchs also subvert homophobic Black American discourses of quare and femme men of African descent as castrated and therefore effeminized by white supremacy (Johnson 2001).¹⁵ Even criticism within the realm of cultural studies has perpetuated violent stereotypes by referring to desexualized Black male caricatures in television and film as examples of "the [B]lack eunuch (clown, buffoon, entertainer, happy to serve)" (Pieterse 1992). Baker's and Dolleman's rhetoric relexicalizes eunuchs, transporting them from a secular semantic field replete with denigrating patriarchal representations (how "people *portray them as*") into a sacred one and supplying eunuchs with a chain of exalted references.

The eunuch trope has targeted trans women's vilification for sex work in particular, assuring listeners of their high status in the afterlife and in the church's collective memory. Contrary to the customary silencing of their contributions, "a special place designed for eunuchs" assures trans women of a position in the eschatological future as well as the spatiotemporal zone of queer futurity. Syrus Marcus Ware (2017, 173) writes of both institutional repositories and "cartographies of resistance," arguing that "The question thus becomes not where is the archive but, rather, why are [B]lack subjects always already conceptualized as new additions?" The eunuch trope corrects the misperception of Black trans folk as historical novelties: both recent and strange. There is no more potent rejoinder to Ware's question than Dolleman's triple assertion, "it's already in there, He already knows. We were already there." She and Baker professed that their existence long preceded Christianity, confidently setting the venerable history of trans spiritual favor against its ostensible brand-newness. It was big preachers, theologians, and doctors who had to defend trans people's erasure.

The biblical symbol most frequently cited by LGBTQ Christians has been the post-Flood rainbow, the sign of God's covenant with Noah. Baker's revision of the Noah story indicates the priority of radical inclusion as both sociopolitical mandate and theological precept. Stressing the church's duty to provide this-worldly protection and tangible support, she believed it should be an ark of safety—a phrase redolent with meaning in African Methodist Episcopal and Holiness-Pentecostal history.¹⁶ After coming out, Baker did not find that sort of “help, hope and refuge” again until she started attending CORUCC, founded by Yvette A. Flunder in 1991 as “a ministry of restoration and reconciliation” (Blair 1998). The church began with thirteen disciples in Flunder's home and has grown into a thriving congregation of over 1,200 members that she has dubbed “African American Metho-Bapti-Costal” in orientation (Flunder 2015, 123; Howard 2015). The terminology of radical inclusion and “radical inclusivity” has been Flunder's signature since the genesis of her pastoral career.

Flunder elaborated on these themes in her 2005 book, *Where the Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion*, and exhorted the church to foster “an atmosphere of radical inclusivity” for the benefit of trans people in particular. Flunder's scholarship has yet to attract the same attention as her ministries (Lewin 2018), but I cite it here to thematize the mutual influence between Black trans and cisgender women, referred to as “non-trans” by Shange (2019b, 53n26) “as a racially appropriate alternative to ‘cisgender’” and “to center transness as a site of epistemic privilege while also not fronting like non-trans Black women wield structural power.” Flunder was raised up in the Church of God in Christ, and she is among the third generation of female ministers in her family (Flunder 2005, 45). “An avowed womanist and a reconciling liberation theologian who dances in the Spirit and speaks in tongues,” she has herself cited such Black women scholars as Womanist theologian Delores S. Williams, philosopher of religion and Catholic theologian M. Shawn Copeland, and Ghanaian Methodist theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye.

Any account of Flunder's theological groundings must also include her former teacher James H. Cone, to whom she has paid poignant homage:

Dr. James H. Cone introduced me to Black Liberation and Liberating Theology at a time in my life when I was emerging from an apolitical, theologically ultra conservative Church environment... .

Dr. Cone's presence in my theological formation was the soil for my evolution to Womanist and LGBTQ Liberation Theology. (Blackmon et al. 2018)

Among Flunder's other influences are two Black theologians on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum: queer HIV/AIDS activist, scholar, artist, and mystic Ibrahim Farajajé (formerly Elias Farajajé-Jones) and gay minister and theologian Peter J. Gomes. Flunder has drawn on their writings to formulate a trenchant critique of the Black church as progressive in confronting white supremacy yet oppressive in its misogynist and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic teachings on gender and sexuality. Baker came of age theologically under Flunder's tutelage, and it was Flunder's idea to organize TransSaints, inviting Baker to be one of its four original members (Paige 2019). While no one can refute Baker's originality, it would be folly to deny her an intellectual genealogy that incorporates the figures named above, especially if it would aid in exploding the myth of solitary genius that erases Black women like Flunder as colleagues and mentors.

“Feed the People”

On the night of her death, Baker helped Flunder officiate a New Year's Eve Watch Night Service at CORUCC in Oakland. No public recordings of this event exist, but it is not difficult to imagine Baker's

testimony; according to language scholar-activist Geneva Smitherman (1977, 58), "when church folk gather to 'watch' the old year go out and the new one come in—they testify to the goodness of the Lord during the past year." A cherished feature of Watch Night historically has been the feast that follows the ceremony, and after the CORUCC service, Baker repaired to Deacon Bobby Wiseman's home to share a meal of cornbread and black-eyed peas (Opie 2008; Serven 2014). Offered by Wiseman in an interview, this detail appeared in news reports as a nod to Baker's lifelong embrace of Black southern tradition, despite the pernicious framing of "trans*-ness" as a departure from it. Along with collard greens and cornbread—the color of paper money and gold, symbolizing wealth and prosperity—black-eyed-peas mean good luck in the Black culinary lexicon, especially when served with rice and pork in a dish of Hoppin' John on New Year's Day.

In life, Baker was more renowned for her preparation of food. On January 2, 2014, former colleague Beck Witt posted a video taken by Conrad Wenzel to YouTube entitled, "BobbieJean Baker - RIP - How to cook smothered porkchops."¹⁷ It enters into my argument here as an artifact that documents Baker's undeniable culinary and relational virtuosity and consolidates several aspects of her subjectivity. The YouTube clip is four seconds shy of four minutes long.¹⁸ Standing in front of a double basin sink, Baker tells Wenzel, holding a smartphone camera, that she is "getting these pork chops ready for tomorrow." Her olive T-shirt reads "life is good" in lowercase letters, above the phrase "optimistic by nature." She beams with pride that she has been invited by Miss Major to cook for a retreat group and sets the scene:

Christmas Eve dinner, there are going to be some smothered pork chops, onions and gravy, rice, brussels sprouts, and cornbread, we just ain't got no red Kool-Aid. I love that—Christmas Eve dinner, here in *Lake Tahoe*.

Baker puts on a faux-British accent to pronounce *Lake Tahoe*, relishing the contrast between her soul food banquet—lacking only "the official soul food drink"—and the exclusive, white-coded resort setting for the meal (Miller 2013, 54). She seems surprised by her friend's desire to record and bemused by the attention but game to play along.

Wenzel prompts her for the next step after cleaning the meat. "Oh seasoning, it's always about the seasoning," Baker replies. "The seasoning is the combination of something of everything. I brought my own bag from my house." Pulling the containers out of a plastic bag one by one, she says, "You need pepper—you can't do nothing without pepper—this is Old Bay, onion powder, grill powder, the seasoning salt, and some spicy steak seasoning. That's what we're going to do today." Shaking the red and black box of what looks like McCormick ground black pepper over a pot, she says, "We're just going to put some seasoning on here. That's how we do it in Memphis." To the question, "Is this your signature dish?" Baker responds, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. My signature dish is spaghetti, peach cobbler, and whatever meat I do." After archly reciting the uses of Old Bay off of the yellow tin, she sums up (deepening her southern drawl), "it's just a[n] old-time remedy."

Kneading the pork chops already placed in the pot, Baker says,

After we season this, we're gonna rub them together, let them get to know one another, so the seasoning can go through. And after that, we're going to put [them] in the bag at the bottom of the refrigerator until tomorrow. And tomorrow, see, when you get through mixing them, the seasonings move around, well they're going to marinate one another, when you get [them] in the bag.

And tomorrow when you get up—some people do [the breading] in egg white, I don't do it in egg white, *honey*. I'm from Memphis, and we don't do egg white on *meat*. We do straight flour, because

[the pork chops are] already seasoned, and put them in the frying pan, brown 'em on each side, get 'em ready for the oven so they can bake, then you make your gravies and your onion ...

An unidentified white acquaintance—Beck Witt—comes up to Baker, puts his arm around her neck, and gives her a kiss on the cheek. When Baker pauses, Wenzel interjects, “This is the BobbieJean Cooking Show.” Baker smiles and resumes, “You put your gravy and your onions together and you let them come to a complete boil and before you know it, you’ve got gravies, onions, and ...” She trails off to see her friend—identified by Wenzel as “the creepy sidekick”—posing mock-menacingly with a butcher knife, then finishes her thought: “and ... pork chops.” Baker explains to her imagined audience, “Yeah, he’s my extended family member, don’t pay him no mind, he won’t—he ain’t from the same blood as I.” After some banter with her companion, she chides Witt, “I say, you’re *extended*, you’re from the *extended* part of the family.” Her last words are, “So that’s it, nothing much.”

The viewer might be tempted to agree, concluding that this vignette is nothing much. In fact, this clip condenses volumes about regional identity, class, nurturance, and queer(ed) kinship. In our interview at St. James Infirmary, Baker had prefaced her discussion of household religiosity by saying, “As a southern child, from down South, the Bible Belt state—Tennessee ...” She also jokingly reclaimed stereotypes of rural Black southerners (despite her Memphis upbringing), as when she would exclaim, “I’m country!”¹⁹ “Memphis-born blues singer for real,” Flunder eulogized Baker after her passing, placing her in an illustrious line of twentieth century Black women’s musicianship that includes Alberta Hunter and Memphis Minnie.²⁰ When Baker herself says, “I’m from Memphis, and we don’t do egg white on *meat*,” she accentuates her fidelity to the dietary taboos into which she had been habituated from birth, and invokes foodways as synecdochic of authenticity. Wenzel’s question about a “signature dish” gave her the opportunity to advertise the range of genuine culinary delicacies in her repertoire.

Baker’s performance of skill and mastery in the kitchen recalls that of Black women cooks in the historical studies of such scholars as Psyche A. Williams-Forsen (2006), for whom food preparation is a chief ingredient in their gendered self-fashioning. Baker relishes the chance to display her foresight in packing her spices and to broadcast her wide inventory of them. The act of bringing her own bag belies her suspicion that an upper-class Anglo retreat site would not come equipped with the necessary collection of aromatics. In Black and Latinx communities, to know how to season is to know how to cook, and Baker’s remark that “it’s always about the seasoning” reflects her deference to this gastronomic paradigm (Pérez 2016). In confiding her recipe for smothered porkchops, she not only “signified on” the televisual genre of the cooking show (Smitherman 1977), but also “transed” the twentieth century homemaker chronotope of heteronormative wifely domesticity and feminine respectability deemed synonymous with corporeal and emotional nurturance.

The video also encapsulates an ethical and affective formation shared by many Black trans and non-trans women as well as queer men. Director Barry Jenkins said of the cooking in his 2016 film *Moonlight*, centered on a Black love story between a bisexual man and a gay man, “When you cook for someone, this is a deliberate act of nurturing... . This very simple thing is the currency of genuine intimacy” (Bainbridge 2016). Baker’s offhand remark about the alchemy that occurs when the pork chops acquire carnal knowledge of one another—thus activating the seasonings—reflects an *eros* of cooking as passionate care.²¹ As systematic theologian Karen Baker-Fletcher (2006, 201-202) writes,

Black women, in all that we do—from cooking greens, to braiding hair to making love—are often suspicious of *eros*, associating it with popular understandings of the “*erotic*” in pornography

or with "doing the nasty."... But this is a false understanding of *eros* and the *erotic* learned from patriarchal structures that denigrate women's power to love in a way that unites body with spirit... . Properly understood, *eros* is the desire for union with the sacred.

Seasoning, frying, browning, and baking to perfection for the pleasure of other Black trans folk, Baker cooked to keep their bodies and souls together, to sustain Black being in its intimate yearning for the divine. In doing so, she joined generations of Black women in numerous Christian denominations, Muslim communities, and Black Atlantic traditions whose religious vocation has encompassed the feeding of fellow devotees (Pérez 2021).

In Baker's ministry, the *eros* of cooking (as glimpsed in the YouTube video) complemented the type of love usually associated with Christianity, referred to as *agape* in New Testament writings. Whereas *eros* is intense, self-actualizing, and exciting, *agape* (sometimes rendered as charity or *caritas*) is unconditional, disinterested, and tireless.²² The dominant symbol of *agape* has been the "table fellowship" of early Christianity, and it undoubtedly shaped Baker's vocation. In an interview about Miss Major's impact on Baker's life conducted for the 2015 documentary *MAJOR!*, she said,

I've taken on some of [Major's] characteristics within the church and in my work. And it's gotten me in trouble on several occasions! Several occasions.

Feeding—I work with the homeless, and one agency, and the man [there] said, "Well, you're giving them too much food!" And I'm like, "Well, we ain't gonna do nothin' but throw it away anyway. *Let's feed the people*"—if we really gonna say we're about the business of feeding the people. And so I got that kind of liberation from Major where, if you're gonna do it, do it. But if you're not gonna do it, then step aside and let somebody else do it.²³

Baker knew from her own experience of hunger and economic precarity that stinginess was—ironically—wasteful, something that the very agencies dedicated to ameliorating hunger failed to appreciate. But without Major's example of vocal, assertive protest and grassroots leadership on causes ranging from HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, police brutality, and homelessness among trans youth, Baker might not have had the courage to defy her administrative superiors and stand up for other marginalized people. Major liberated Baker to convert "feed the people" into a crucial component of her rhetorical and exegetical program.

If Baker approached nourishment as both figure of speech and concrete objective, feasting—eating in abundance and celebration—expressed the fulfilment of *agape's* promise in beloved community. In my interview with Baker, she had defined CORUCC as "Pentecostal-, Baptist-, Apostolic-based, and Judaism all wrapped up in one," noting that the church had "a lot of Jewish brothers and sisters," since "everyone is welcome at the Lord's table." For Baker, feasting conveyed the utopian potential of radical inclusivity (Allen 2009). This figuration is exemplified by an exchange between Dolleman and Baker:

D: What I like about the City is—and it really is inclusive ... when my Bishop says that there's a table, and at that table there's a seat for everyone, just as Minister Baker said, there is a seat for everyone, regardless of whatever your condition is, whatever your circumstances is, whatever your *financial* situation is, whatever your color is, whatever your mental state is, whatever it is—you come sit at the table. And not only can you sit at the table, but you can share in what is going on at the table. And you can *eat* from the table!

B: *Even if you didn't buy no meat!*

D: Even-if-you-didn't-buy-no-meat! And that's what I love about it, that the table is truly spread... . There's a scripture in the Bible that I love best. You know, "God is neither male nor female. But He is a spirit." So we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. And once we as [a]

society get off of looking at the flesh, and get into who the spirit of God is, then we will be able to all really sit at that table. And be able to feast. That's what I believe.

Flunder (2005, xi) opens *Where the Edge Gathers* with the metaphor of church as table—asserting that “all those who have been exiled to the margin are welcome at the table”—and quotes theologian Letty Russell on this “table principle” as “the critical principle of feminist ecclesiology.” Dolleman powerfully extended this metaphor, and by adding that there is no purchase required to eat at CORUCC's table, Baker underscored that the relationships it brings into being are not transactional. They are, ideally, reciprocal and transformative, free and freeing.

Flunder (2016, 136) concludes a short scriptural meditation entitled “Good Food” by beckoning the reader, “Come over here, the table is spread and the feast of the Lord is going on!” If commensality—eating together—has been metonymic of social solidarity, it is only natural that social conflict within the church should be enunciated in the same alimentary idiom. In speaking about disagreements at CORUCC, Baker said,

Even in the radical, inclusive church, we don't all get along... . Because in a family, you know everybody doesn't eat broccoli. In a family, everybody don't eat melted cheese. So we have to work things out... . Some of us will leave, and may not never come back... . But those who are really committed to the Gospel of Jesus will work it out and be together for the cause, and that's to make sure everybody is whole.

Like flavorful seasoning, community is “the combination of something of everything,” in an absolute acceptance of difference. Baker's concern for fostering “holy wholeness” can be heard in her contralto at the 2013 Las Vegas Trans Pride Vigil, serenading attendees with an acapella rendition of Black Gospel singer-songwriter Micah Stampley's “The Corinthian Song” (Jones 1987, 111). Baker sings, “I'm a treasure full of Holy Ghost power, hidden in me” and asks her audience, “How many of you know you're a vessel for the power?”²⁴

Baker understood human beings—not only born-again Christians—as a community of saints, but her primary allegiance was to transfeminine BIPOC. Feeding them was not only an ethical obligation, but also the affective basis for queer(ed) kinship as a modality of care that “possess[es] a particular moral excellence” (Young 2016). The production of LGBTQ family through the sharing of meals has been the focus of two recent publications on potlucks, particularly as organized historically by lesbians (Gattuso 2019; Ryan 2019). While the religious dimensions of the LGBTQ potluck tradition have yet to be explored, Baker's “business of feeding the people” cannot be conceptualized outside the context of her ministry. Whereas the cis-sexist and heteronormative structures of African American Christianity had placed trans women beyond the bounds of hospitality, Baker's sacred commensality offered them the warmest possible welcome. In turn, she was loved as “girlfriend, an othermother, play sister, god sister, cousin, [and] sisterfriend—all terms of the nonfilial, visceral bonds of sisterhood between adult Black women” (Quashie 2004, 18).

Baker's vision of queer(ed) kinship was intentionally intergenerational. In the 2015 *MAJOR!* documentary interview, Baker described herself as a diligent researcher, “do[ing] my history on who [Major] was, through the community as well as what's documented,” prior to seeking her mentorship. She spoke proudly of Miss Major “taking me as her grandchild”—thereby placing herself within a revered lineage of resistance—while she herself assumed the role of “play auntie” and second mother to many, such as the goddaughter seen traveling with her in *The Believers* (Shange 2019b).²⁵ At the time of her death, Baker was “the driving force” of the SisthaKin Empowerment Project, created to broaden the coalition of trans women collaborating for “wellness, recovery, and radical inclusion”

(Transfaith staff, 2013).²⁶ Acknowledging the aversion of some trans women, "especially those with brown and dark skin," to socializing in "a church setting," SistaKin was Baker's attempt to reach, "Trans women of color who are just broken ... [who] don't even have the spirit of wanting to do something collectively."²⁷ She spread the table for them.

"Honey"

The foregoing was an attempt to hold in equipoise Baker's autobiographical narratives and Black women's contributions to an anthropology that might reckon with them. In upholding the necessity to #CiteBlackWomen, I convened a politics of citation that revisits anthropological questions of power and representation. Rather than taking Baker's statements as the basis for theory and introducing the aforementioned authors as those most qualified to theorize, I proceeded on the premise that Baker's theorization of her own subjectivity was substantial enough to be brought into conversation with her academic peers. In this sense, Patricia Hill Collins's oeuvre, particularly *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), may be regarded as the meta-citation for this article. Collins (2000, 269) writes,

I place Black women's subjectivity in the center of analysis and examine the interdependence of the everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women as a group, the more specialized knowledge produced by Black women intellectuals, and the social conditions shaping both types of thought.

Collins's research on Black women's everyday theorizing provided a template for the investigation undertaken here, in the interest of demonstrating the importance of Black women's scholarship to the project of documenting Black trans religiosity.

The scholarship integrated within my argument was selected to harmonize with Baker, treated here as the lead singer she was in life, although discordant notes could well be struck if one were to #CiteOtherBlackWomen. As one anonymous reviewer for this article put it, she "is not, by virtue of her [B]lack trans femininity, automatically, unwaveringly, right about things."²⁸ In the age of Transfaith's #BlackTransPrayerBook (Mase and Edidi 2020) and the 2020 #TransphobiasASin social media campaign, Baker's provocations from within the Black church may seem far from revolutionary. Yet her story is uncontestably reflective of her own subject formation, and prods us to rethink how Black trans women might contribute to an emancipatory politics of citing Black women. Neither Baker nor Dolleman published any of their sermons or other writings, beyond the scant traces left on Facebook; like many other Black trans women, they did not enjoy full access to the academy (despite Baker's presence at the Pacific School of Religion) or traditional paths for publishing. The intellectual production of trans Black women must be sought beyond these narrow venues so as to devise a (more) radical politics of citation, attuned to the channels through which their thought and praxis are currently disseminated.

Baker's account of her Christian subject formation, interiority, and ministry resonates with those of American evangelicals well documented within religious studies, as well as a burgeoning literature on CORUCC. Other aspects of her autobiography call for modes of interpretation developed by Black and Afro-Latinx feminist theorists writing in various disciplines: Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr.'s (2004) coinage of "transformance" as revisionary praxis; Marquis Bey (2016, 2017), whose analyses bring forth "The Trans*-Ness of Blackness, [and] the Blackness of Trans*-Ness," to quote the title of one essay; Roberto Strongman's (2019) elaboration of "transcorporeality" within Black Atlantic traditions; and C. Riley Snorton's (2017) operationalization of "transitivity" and "transversality"

as pivots on which to spin “centrifugal histories” of Black trans experience (Seeber 2001). This scholarship has laid the foundation for approaching Blackness and trans identity as conjoined categories with implications for the “transing” of the anthropology, history, and historiography of religions that are yet to be fully realized (Wilcox 2018; Green and Ellison 2014).

To my knowledge, Baker did not refer to herself as a feminist, much less as a transfeminist, and she may have rejected the label in favor of Womanist—or no label at all. Baker’s rhetorical strategies (such as her midrashic self-insertion into the story of Noah’s Ark) do not frame trans people as the exclusive, extraordinary inheritors of God’s covenant with the Israelites, but as creatures worthy of survival like any others: “two of what He made ... in the uniqueness and the likeness of God.” One might well ask, then, what work the invocation of “transfeminist” is doing here. I do not wish to conflate “woman” and “feminist,” positing a necessary relation between the two terms. The rationale for the transfeminist angle of this argument derives from my own concerns, chiefly that trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people be represented and retained within feminist anthropology, as both discipline and profession. The institutional gains of transgender-exclusionary, transantagonist, and transmisogynist feminism(s) demand an anthropology of religion that can conjure with the ethnographic realities of ordinary Black trans girlhood, womanhood, and divinity (Shange 2019a).

A secondary, though not insubstantial, concern of mine is that the feminist anthropology of religion enter into more robust engagement with an emerging transfeminist religious studies. Rita M. Gross (2002, 42) asserted almost two decades ago,

I have only rarely encountered citations of the work of feminist scholars of religion in the writings of feminist anthropologists... . More striking is the fact that few feminist scholars of religion are conversant with feminist anthropology and rarely cite its literature.

What Gross called “mutual ignoring” remains a problem (as evinced by the book reviews published in the leading journals within each field) despite enhanced opportunities for collaboration and intellectual cross-fertilization. As a means of addressing this issue, I would push for a reconceptualization of gender from a transfeminist perspective, and for the enactment of a qualitative shift that does not merely sprinkle trans women lightly into the dominant recipes for cisgender womanhood, “adding a longer chapter on women into a new edition of an old classic” (Gross 2002, 44). Instead, I would advocate that we “really do stir all our information thoroughly together” while “center[ing] transness as a site of epistemic privilege,” thereby generating fresh methods for the analysis of gendered becoming in the anthropology of religion and religious studies (Gross 2002, 44; Shange 2019b, 53n26).

As Coleman (2008, 169) writes, “Salvation fits into a unified view of the entire world, and yet it is also gritty, localized, and contextual. It is grounded in the concrete experiences of the world. It must always look, feel, and taste like something.” Baker’s salvific vision tasted like the seasoning for smothered porkchops—“it’s always about the seasoning”—but honey gets the last word here. “In southern [B]lack vernacular among women, ‘honey’ is a term of endearment or expression of sisterhood,” with celebratory profane and sacred associations (Johnson 2019, xiii, xi). Among the most subtle of the communicative and embodied strategies that Baker adopted, her repeated exclamations of “honey” strove simultaneously to attach her interlocutors to her as a person(a) and to her message of radical inclusivity. Her *honeys* flowed from the desire to attract listeners to her ministry—and to the beloved community she helped to realize at CORUCC—through the sheer force of her charisma. Recall that Baker’s God calls Noah “honey,” exhibiting the relational virtuosity

she herself exemplified. Such interpretive maneuvers adumbrate those that will be necessary to locate trans women—midrashically and reconstructively—in “the ‘bibles’ of feminist anthropology” (di Leonardo 1991, 7). They are, as Dolleman said, already in there.

Notes

- 1 Tumeke Godwin, Reverend Baker, and Deaconess Dolleman gave me permission to publish their real names. I remain grateful to Tumeke Godwin for her tremendous generosity in making time to speak with me and encouraging her colleagues to do so. I would like to dedicate this article to the memories of Reverend Baker and Deaconess Dolleman.
- 2 I attended a rehearsal of the choir in 2011, but there were only a few exchanges with Baker.
- 3 This thumbnail biography closely tracks with those published online after her death (such as Amyx, n.d. [ca. 2015]) that seem to have been copied and pasted from Baker's professional bio at the Glide Foundation, https://bearsofficialsstore.com/company/glide_foundation (and presumably on web domains that have since expired).
- 4 To my knowledge, this is the first usage of “transfeminist anthropology.”
- 5 The latter includes extended research trips to the GLBT Historical Society archives, the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division's LGBT historical collections (under the auspices of a Martin Duberman Visiting Fellowship), the Stonewall National Museum and Archives, the University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library, and the Kinsey Institute.
- 6 Dolleman passed away only a few months later, on July 13, 2014, following an illness. No obituaries or public recordings of her speaking appear to be available at this time.
- 7 The quotations in this and subsequent paragraphs derive from the interview I conducted with Baker, unless otherwise specified.
- 8 Although in several obituaries, Baker is listed as having spent four years in prison, she says clearly in a YouTube video, “I spent fourteen years in the Tennessee Department of Corrections.” She told me the same, but it is unclear how many years she may have spent in prison prior to her extradition. Alicia Dorsey, November 29, 2015, “Miss Major and Rev. Bobbie Jean Baker on Why We All Must Vote,” YouTube, video, 5:43, accessed November 17, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyF4XALmW_0.
- 9 One resume posted online by Baker has this position overlapping with her tenure at the Glide Foundation. https://www.linkedin.com/in/rev-bobbiejean-baker-73063b76?trk=people-guest_people_search-card, accessed December 7, 2020.
- 10 “Miss Major and Rev. Bobbie Jean Baker on Why We All Must Vote.”
- 11 This echoes what I had been told only an hour earlier about the biblical eunuchs by Godwin, before Baker and Dolleman had arrived at St. James Infirmary.
- 12 I thank one of the anonymous readers of this article for pressing me on this point.
- 13 In an ethnographic account of Pentecostal Christians in Indiana's Rust Belt, [redacted] (2014, 60, 62) writes, “In order to solve the textual dilemma of their marginal sexualities, Pentecostals in the Rust Belt have latched onto the biblical narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch” and offers that for his LGBTQ interlocutors, “The eunuch is their biblical equivalent.” Unfortunately, they are not quoted.
- 14 Here I am thinking not only of Baker and Dolleman, but of other trans Christians I have interviewed as part of a larger research project on trans religious identity.
- 15 “The Allegory of the Black Eunuchs” is a late chapter in Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*.
- 16 The Ark of Refuge, Inc. was Flunder's nonprofit agency which provided housing, direct services, education, and training for persons affected by HIV/AIDS in the Bay Area. It became the YA Flunder Foundation in 2011.
- 17 I am enormously grateful to Mr. Witt and Mr. Wenzel for their permission to include it in my discussion.
- 18 The only comment on the video is an admirer's exclamation, “Rest well!”
- 19 JM (performer Lady Jazmyne Matthews), January 1, 2014, “BobbieJean Baker Las Vegas Trans Pride Vigil 2013,” YouTube, 5:34, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKqP44eJj0Q>.
- 20 For a visual representation, see Corey Brown, n.d., “Memory of Minister Bobbie Jean Baker,” *Queer Ancestors Project*, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.queerancestorsproject.org/artists-2014-2015?pgid=jf1q7cot-dc9acbc0-1fe1-4a15-8917-c80372335e81>. Baker was also portrayed by actress and trans advocate Jazzmun in the 2017 ABC miniseries *When We Rise*.
- 21 As of September 2017, there has been a Twitter account ascribed to Bobbie Jean Baker (@BJBSoulSF). The descriptor reads, “Bobbie Jean Baker's Soul Food Restaurant is a legacy to Bobbie and re-entry portal into delicious community.” It has only tweeted four times on subjects unrelated to food, however (and, as of this writing, there are only two retweets and one original tweet left). There is also a dedicated Facebook page that uses the same photos. It is unclear whether this project was begun without success or has yet to be launched.

- 22 Martin Luther King Jr.'s gloss of *agape* as "purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative" is among the most frequently quoted in Black theology (Gill 2000, 32).
- 23 What Do We Want Films, 201, "MAJOREttes Ep1: The Business of Feeding the People," Vimeo, 2:21, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/channels/1164140/192504389>.
- 24 "BobbieJean Baker Las Vegas Trans Pride Vigil 2013."
- 25 "MAJOREttes Ep1: The Business of Feeding the People"; "Miss Major and Rev. Bobbie Jean Baker on Why We All Must Vote."
- 26 In February 2013, Baker was also conference coordinator for "WHAT ABOUT US," a mini-conference focused on trans people of color for the organization Trans Faith in Color (now the Transgender Faith and Action Network/TFAAN) at CORUCC in San Francisco. See <http://www.tgijp.org/transfaithincolor-mini-conference.html>.
- 27 There is no information available online as to whether a SisthaKin Summit advertised for October 2013 on TransFaith (and rescheduled for that December) took place, but Baker planned to seek 501(c)(3) status for SisthaKin as a charitable organization.
- 28 I would like to thank this article's anonymous reviewers for improving this article immeasurably through their terrific suggestions and incisive critiques.

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