This past February, the Trump administration released its new policy outlining a plan to deny federal prisoners access to gender-affirming healthcare, with a road map that leads from pathologizing the trans experience as a "mental illness" to forced detransition.

The stated scope and purpose is: "To establish professional guidelines for the mental health evaluation and treatment of inmates meeting the diagnostic criteria' for Gender Dysphoria (GD) to assist their progress toward recovery, while reducing or eliminating the frequency and severity of symptoms and associated negative outcomes."

Independent journalist Aleksandra Vaca wrote an article with critical analysis: this policy is a testing ground for conversion therapy, wherein the government uses prisoners in an attempt to prove dangerous conversion practices can work. In it she writes: **"The BOP is giving trans people no other choice but to conform to their sex assigned at birth by forcing them into a societal role that they reject and ignoring clinical guidelines—all hallmarks of harmful and dangerous conversion practices recognized by the United Nations to be a form of torture."**

Dissonant Times reached out to Sofia De Ferrari, currently incarcerated at at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, Oregon, for an interview about her experience as a trans woman in prison, and her perspective on some of the terms and strategies this administration is using to oppress and erase gender-nonconforming people being held behind bars.

Dime: Please tell us a little about yourself – what do you want people to know about who you are, what you value, how you like to spend time?

Sofia: I am Sofia De Ferrari, a nonbinary femme(woman fine, too), she/they. My father's side descends from Venezuela, and my mom from here. I am likely autistic, diagnosed with ADHD currently – though I'll touch on diagnoses later. I love math – most of my interests are math derivative (dy/dx). Poetry, music, lyric – I am a creator, a composer. I am a poet philosopher. My current fascination is Foucault, his collected works on "power" sits on my shelf along with Graeber, new AK Press releases, and my (heavily) annotated copy of *The Prince*. Oh, and two undergraduate math textbooks I bought.

I am a lesbian – I love women. This is…interesting housed in a 'female' prison. My favorite color is pink – like the ink I scrawl in. I enjoy finding myself lost in the eyes of women ;P

I value: autonomy, liberty. I do believe in the possibility of a world without hierarchy, oppression which would unlock the potentiality dormant of society; maximize each individual's liberty, liberty as in potential-to-do, not possibility-to-maybe-think-about-doing. In my utopia, society benefits individuals, not reversed. I've grown disillusioned, however, with a term like 'anarchy'.
I write a lot of music on my fantam and my schecter. I'll consume myself writing music, practicing guitar, writing lyrics, and producing. My days look like: exercise, cooking (vegetarian food! rice and lots of nuts.), socializing, and reading. Since transitioning, I've become a(n) (socially

anxious) extrovert! You can find my music on Soundcloud, and pictures of my prison make-up'd me on Insta.

My favorite days are hot, humid, no wind, and drama free – with good company

Dime: We are communicating by writing. I'd like to give myself and the readers a chance to connect with you a little as a person before we take on these other questions. How are you feeling in this moment?

Sofia: Oh. I'm stressed and terrified. My best friend in here, Sasha Zay, was recently sent out to a men's prison. I am scared I could be next for no reason. I am a year out from my mammoplasty, and at least 1.5-2 [years] from my vaginoplasty. I already have a lawsuit for trans care – I do not want to need one for my housing. The warden has captured the Machiavellian ideal: better to rule through fear than love -_-. I managed two months with men in jail- and that I very much resemble a woman (duh) made me a target for (attempted) extortion and rape. Essentially, I prefer being somewhat-fetishized with attempt-at-seduction compared to (threats of) violence and violation; we do not choose evil of better options.
Though I have cause for some joy: I'm still here, still on HRT, have my surgeries scheduled, and receive electrolysis on Wednesdays (at OSP! even with $6/gal gas lol…). I can get my nails polished, my hair braided, and I can socialize as a woman around examples (other women). I don't want my joy taken.

Dime: Our intention with this interview is to discuss a policy from the federal administration and Bureau of Prisons that, if enacted, will directly harm trans and gender-nonconforming people who are trapped in the carceral system. How do you relate to these topics?

Sofia: I am trans, first and foremost. To borrow from Heidegger, I am "thrown" into my transness. I am trans before I am a woman, a musician, whatever. My trans positionality pervades the rest of my life; a constant dysphoric distress, thoughts of self-castration, and never feeling woman enough – plus a pathologizing society focused on profits which denies me a transition without forcing me to adopt its language, subsume my experience unto it.
Knowledge is power, and power is knowledge. Policy outlines an end, a prescribed outcome – prose, the errant of the affadavit and indictment – but ultimately power achieves the ends. Power – cynically – reduces to violence, with language the justification for use of and precursor to use. We understand the importance of words.
I relate to this dilemma as an incarcerated trans woman. While the BOP does not have jurisdiction over Oregon State prisons, the larger war of words and the cultural shifts in "treatment" of trans prisoners could come to one day impact me. An injury to one. I have been thrice taken off my hormones in my incarceration – all times through calculated abuse of trans women.

Dime: This policy starts out by outlining it's purpose: "To establish professional guidelines for the mental health evaluation and treatment of inmates meeting the diagnostic criteria' for Gender Dysphoria? (GD) to assist their progress toward recovery, while reducing or eliminating the frequency

and severity of symptoms and associated negative outcomes." What is your response to the intention of the federal government and the Bureau of Prisons to diagnose and treat gender dysphoria, and to, as they say, reduce/eliminate symptoms and "associated negative outcomes"?

Sofia: The obvious question is: what the fuck is a negative outcome? Who gets to decide? For me, that is surely: self-harm, self-death, or not transitioning. For the transgender disbelievers, like Trump and whomever, my negative outcomes appear: life, survival, thriving, happiness, joy, love, truth… perspective is key, and "my policy" would not have the same weight as the BOP policy. Power flows from the bottom up – and so long as the decrees of the U.S gvmt (sorry, hate the word too much, can't spell it) and its bureaucratic facilities are hegemonically regarded as valid, they will continue to "have" power. All emperors wear no clothes.
I want to live and thrive – as a woman. I lived 20 years of a lie – in Florida. I do not need convincing I "am a man", I need acceptance of my womanhood. My acceptance is a desired outcome, not a symptom to be eliminated; a positive not negative. Let me be myself.

Dime: I'd like to touch on the "Definitions" section in the policy. In what ways do they diverge from how you would define these terms, based on your own lived experience and political lens?

Sofia: Lets do the important ones.
Gender Dysphoria: distress associated with incongruentcies or inconsistencies in one's gender identity and one's current reality. A troubling aspect of my transgender experience.
Gender Identity: the sense of self one has
Sex Trait Modification Surgeries: I prefer "Gender Confirmation". The light at the end of the tunnel, for me; the end of my gender dysphoria. The means by which my physical, current reality is scientifically, medically, aligned with my gender identity! Go science!
Social accommodation: this one was a doozie, wow. I don't even use this word. I think of these as half-measures that gatekeepers require of me prior to my gender confirmation -_-

Honestly, this whole section [of the policy] really dripped in contempt for trans people. I feel viewed as a lunatic, sub-human. Othered. Because the cishetero norm is defined in relation to what it is not: me. And I am thus a subject of its power x_x

Dime: This policy essentially outlines the denial of gender-affirming care, including hormones, for anyone diagnosed, through their process and criteria, with Gender Dysphoria, and implements a "tapering plan" for those already receiving hormones. Independent journalist and writer Aleksandra Vaca wrote an essay titled "The Trump Administration is Testing Conversion Therapy By Medically Experimenting on Trans People in Prisons" (which I believe you've had a chance to read), in which she names this policy as forced detransition. Would you like to respond to this?

Sofia: 100% a forced de-transition. This essay was spot on. I don't see a great reason to say more as I'm in agreement. Sorry if you wanted more- less

is more.

Dime: What can solidarity and struggle look like for those inside who will be most impacted by this policy, especially from those who are outside?

Sofia: Litigation, first and foremost. A federal habeas corpus for every federal trans prisoner? In this respect, prisoners will need the support of competent counsel, and will need help with filings. Trans prisoners should not allow themselves to be forcibly detransitioned: resist, even if it means hole time and/or looking some type of way in front of whomever. Not only must the cruel unusuality of it be apparent, but teh BOP and KOJ should not gain any twisted affirmation of conversion therapy (e.g. false statistics). Struggle as yourself, don't live the coerced lie. Be an annoyance, if possible: annoy prison staff, medical or security. For people outside, beyond abolishing the prison system, I'm unsure what more I'd suggest. I've been incarcerated for 4 years now lol. Protest? Resist? Revolt?

RIOT

Dime: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Sofia: Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts on this. In addition to my music which can be found on Soundcloud, you can find my scholarly work on PDX Scholar ("epistemic injustice"), and my less scholarly anarchist stuff on the Anarchist Library. You can write me here at Coffee Creek using plain white envelopes, non-lined paper, and "regular" pen. And – Free Sasha Zay! ^_^

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