**Transcript: Gender Reveal Season 12, Episode 162: Checking in with Salimatu Amabebe**

Tuck: Cisnormative sex shops suck. Trans-owned Aphrodisia Boutique is different. They stock body-safe sex toys and lingerie for all genders, as well as packers and binders, breast forms and gaff panties, and books on sex, gender, and relationships. Shop online at aphrodisia.boutique and use the offer code GENDERREVEAL for 15 percent off your order, or visit their store in Port Orchard, Washington.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host, and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone, hope you’ve all been hanging in there. This week on the show, I am so excited to share my recent conversation with the one and only Salimatu Amabebe. Salimatu has been a great friend of mine for almost a decade now, and over that time it has been honestly such a treat and a joy to watch him grow and flourish both creatively and…uh…genderly. We first spoke with Salimatu on the podcast three years ago, and a lot has changed in his life since then. So today on the show, we talk about grad school, complicated top surgery feelings, and Salimatu’s high-concept drag persona, Barracuda.

Salimatu: Something’s really gone wrong about it, so it veers into the vulgar, the perverse, and it just hasn't quite figured out how to do sexy.

Tuck: We also talk about the pros and cons of making earnest and vulnerable work, and how that relates to Salimatu’s first solo exhibition, which explores the experience of becoming his father’s son after his father's death.

Salimatu: My relationship to him is changing based on how I change, after a point where he would have been able to acknowledge that change.

Tuck: But before we get to that, just a quick reminder that our merch store is still stocked with Palestinian and trans solidarity designs. We've got three of those available ’til the end of the month. And then we also have our trains flag designs; a ton of y'all asked me to restock them and then you did not buy them, so I'm not gonna restock them again (I probably will at some point, but not for a while). So if you want a trains flag shirt or mug or sticker, please go grab that now. It’s at bit.ly/gendermerch.

Tuck: And now, it's time for This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: So, last week, we got a five star Apple podcasts review. Thank you so much for five stars, really appreciate it. And then the text of the review said: “I'm begging someone to talk about how TSA genders every single person on a binary and will misgender you during pat-downs.”

[Ambient music plays]

And I guess the way to get me to talk about something is to request it in a five star review. But to be clear, we have talked about this in the past. We have, in fact, done *two* This Week in Gender segments about this very topic previously. But to be fair, the first one was way back in early 2020, and I am always insisting that y'all don't dig into the archives. So you know what? That's on me. I'll do it again. But yes, two years ago, our busted Disney animatronic of a President promised that the TSA would phase out their terrible gendered body scanners and replace them with gender-neutral body scanners. And while I have seen those new neutral body scanners in my recent travels, many airports still have what amount to penis detection machines that you have to go through in order to get on your flight.

But here's the thing: this is a podcast for trans people, so we know this! We know that for trans people with penises, the TSA scanners are a sort of guaranteed groping checkpoint.In fact, several different transfemmes have done comedy sets about this topic; I have seen them. We also know that the TSA agents tend to flag dilators and then not know what they are, which leads to some really fun and wild interactions. And of course, we know that the TSA’s dick detection services serve no demonstrable public good. Nor do the security checkpoints writ large, because as we discussed previously on this segment, the TSA was created in November 2001 for the explicit purpose of performing security theater. Not providing actual security, just tricking the public into thinking that the government was doing literally anything to prevent *9/11 2: The Squeakquel*besides starting various wars in the Middle East. And most of you probably remember that in 2015, the TSA made headlines for failing to stop 95 percent of the weapons that inspectors attempted to sneak through the airport screening stations as part of their regular auditing program. 95 percent. At that rate, I genuinely assume the only way they caught any weapons was because those bags also contained, like, a candle or a burrito or a souvenir bottle opener from the airport, which are all real reasons that my bags have been flagged in the last year.

[Ambient music ends]

Anyway, I don't know what I can add to this that has not already been said by me on the show, as well as by other trans people for the last 22 years. So I guess I will just tell you another silly little story from my own experiences – that's what I did last time – but here's a different one. A year or two ago, I was flying out of PDX. I was wearing a Girlpool shirt and a mask, and my chest got flagged by the body scanner, so someone had to pat me down. So of course the TSA man and the TSA woman just stood there looking at each other, trying to figure out who should pat me down. And finally the TSA man said, “how do you…identify?” And the thing about me is that I'm very annoying, and if a cis person asks me my gender, I typically will not give them a straight answer. So instead I said, “You know, you can do it.” And he was like, “So I'll pat you down?” And I said, “Look, there's nothing up there, if that's what you're asking.” And then he laughed, and he patted me down. And as he was doing it he said, “I just got confused because you have really nice eyes, and also your shirt says ‘Girl’ on it.” So, key intel if you, like me, own several items of merch from the now-defunct band Girlpool. Otherwise, the most common solution for trans people is to get TSA PreCheck, where you give the government $78, and they send you through a metal detector instead. This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: We've got a TheyMail message for you today. TheyMails are of course little messages from listeners, and there's a link in the show notes for you to submit your own. This message is from Max Burns UX, and it says: “Are you looking for a new website or logo for your small business or nonprofit? Max Burns is a queer, trans, nonbinary web and logo designer based out of North Carolina, who specializes in making accessible and affordable websites and logos. Mention that you heard them on Gender Reveal, and Max will give you 10 percent off your first project together. Learn more at maxburnsux.com.

Tuck: OK. One quick ad, and then we'll go to the interview. Here we go.

[Ambient music plays]

Believe it or not, I'm a pretty private person. I don't like to share intimate details with people I just met. I certainly don't want strangers to be able to look up my home address, or my family members’ names, or any other personal info, really. And that's why I continue to use DeleteMe. DeleteMe routinely scans hundreds of data broker websites to make sure that my personal information is not easily available online. DeleteMe can also scrub info tied to deadnames and other aliases. You can join today at joindeleteme.com/genderreveal, and use the code TUCK20 to get 20 percent off your entire order. That is TUCK20 for 20 percent off at joindeleteme.com/genderreveal.

[Ambient music ends]

[Gender Reveal theme music by Breakmaster Cylinder plays]

Tuck: Salimatu Amabebe is a trans, Nigerian-American chef and multimedia artist working in food film photography, sculpture, and installation. His work focuses on the intersection of food and art, while centering community activism, African diaspora culinary traditions, and Black queer and trans liberation. Amabebe is the founder and Director of Black Feast, a culinary event celebrating Black artists and writers through food.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays out and ends]

Tuck: The way we always start the show is by asking: in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Salimatu: I should've expected this question. [Both laugh] I describe myself as trans.

Tuck: Totally. Anything new in your gender since we last spoke, which for context was almost exactly three years ago?

Salimatu: Oh my God.

Tuck: On the podcast – you and I have spoken…

Salimatu: Yeah. [Laughs]

Tuck: …but on the public record.

Salimatu: I had top surgery, I started taking testosterone. [Laughs] So yeah, those are definitely new developments in the last three years.

Tuck: OK. Beyond gender, what’s new in your life since we last spoke three years ago that people might want to know?

Salimatu: I moved to the Bay Area, and I started grad school. Oh! I started performing as a drag performer. I had my first museum solo show, that feels like a big update.

Tuck: Great! These are all things I'm gonna ask you follow-up questions about. Let’s go down the list. [Salimatu laughs] You're in grad school – why are you choosing to do this program, and what are you hoping to explore or learn or get out of it?

Salimatu: Well, I'm in grad school for art practice, and so a lot of that came from making work with Black Feast, and making work that was very community-centered. And also kind of being in this constant cycle of production, and event production. So I came to the Bay Area for residency, and then I had all of this studio time, and it just felt really good to be back in a space where I got to make and create things in a room. [Salimatu laughs] And so I definitely haven’t abandoned community-centered work, time-based work, or social practice by any means. But I do feel like it's really exciting to also be in a space where I get to make things, and have a studio practice, and that's felt really, really special. And also getting to have input. So even though it's also hard to have input sometimes, or it's hard to have this kind of concentrated time of constant input, and constant deep, deep thinking and digging around in your mind…that's also the thing that I wanted, that's what I came to grad school for. And it’s also the part about grad school that's really, really difficult. Because you have all of this work, and all of this deep internal processing happening in a very condensed amount of time. With a lot of stress, and a lot of time restrictions.

Tuck: You work in so many different mediums, and I was wondering: do you feel like there are themes that tie all of your different work together?

Salimatu: I think the themes that tie them together is that I'm doing all of them. [Laughs]

Tuck: Totally, totally.

Salimatu: I don't know. I feel like a person with a lot of interests, and I haven't really figured out a way to package those things, and I've gotten kind of bored with the idea that I should have to. Not saying that you're saying that I should have to.

Tuck: Nah.

Salimatu: It often makes me feel very chaotic to be pulled in these different directions. I often imagine what my neighbors think as I am rushing huge catering trays into my car, and then the next day I have a full drag outfit made all of synthetic hair that I'm rushing to my car, and then the next day I'm covered completely in blue paint because I'm doing a Violet Beauregarde drag number. [Both laugh] You know, I think about it. I'm just kind of embracing. For me, it is about gender. It does relate to gender, because I just think of myself as a house for many different beings, and they all are employed. [Both laugh] They all have jobs. They have all different jobs, they have different outfits, they have different likes and dislikes, and they're all trying to make this human vessel their home. Sometimes chaos ensues. [Laughs] That's how they’re all tied together: they all live in the same house.

Tuck: Oh my god. Speaking of which, tell us about Barracuda.

Salimatu: Barracuda is one of the people who lives in the house…

Tuck: Yep! [Laughs]

Salimatu: …one of the beings. It is a drag monster, and Barracuda is really known for pulling things out of its body… [Both laugh] …and putting things into its body. It loves a surprise ending. The idea behind it is that it's this amalgamation or compilation of crowdsourced desires that is experiencing a glitch. So the idea is that it's from a different reality, and it's learned about what humans like – kind of a chronic people pleaser, also – learned what humans like from Instagram, TikTok, Google search, popular trends. [Both laugh] And then it's trying to be those things, but something’s really gone wrong about it, so it veers into the vulgar, the perverse, and it just hasn't quite figured out how to do sexy, so it just goes into overdrive. [Both laugh] That's the idea behind Barracuda – just does everything at 150 percent, to the point where it doesn't really make sense anymore.

Tuck: OK, you said something about “pulling things out of its body.” What are some things that've been pulled out, I need to know. [Both laugh]

Salimatu: Well, there's one performance where I made this coat that's all blonde hair. Barracuda learned that people really have a thing for blonde hair. [Both laugh] So it made this coat out of all blonde hair, along with this blonde wig, and then it has a bra made of blonde hair, and a thong made of blonde hair. And then it pulls a blonde braid out of its boot that has a butt plug attached, and then puts the butt plug in on stage. And then has this long blonde tail, and then at the end of the performance it pulls a blonde braid out of its cunt, and that's the other reveal. So you know, it's like, “oh, you love blondes? What about this?” [Both laugh]

Tuck: Well, as the gender podcast, I have to ask: what relationship does Barracuda’s gender and expression – which seems really informed by what it thinks other people want – how does that relate to your own gender and presentation as it's evolved?

Salimatu: I think that before Barracuda emerged – came into my life – that I had this crisis every time I went out. Which was trying to figure out who in the house was being the loudest [Both laugh] and wanted to dress the body that day. And now, I feel like Barracuda has its time and its space, and it knows that. And definitely if I don't get to do a show for a month, I can feel Barracuda’s rearing to get out and to express itself. So it is very much an outlet for that “heels, hair, ass out” kind of persona, which very much lives inside of me. And I think that the more that I'm able to really celebrate them, and honor them, and give them space to express themselves, the less it feels like they are fighting with each other or competing with each other to be heard. And I really feel – I said this once that I often felt like I was not using a singular they but I was using a plural they – I feel like there are a lot of spirits that are existing inside this form, and drag made it so Barracuda has its time and its space to express itself, and so that also puts less pressure on the day-to-day in a way. And now it feels like I can just get dressed in the morning and it doesn't really matter that much, because I'm not trying to figure out how to express all of these things accurately – I've given them their stage, I’ve given them their space to exist, and it just feels more harmonious now.

Tuck: As you mentioned, you recently had your first solo museum show, called *Son* (S-O-N), and my understanding is that it's so much about your father and masculinity. Do you feel like you learned anything about your own masculinity, or just masculinity as a concept writ large, while you were working on that exhibition?

Salimatu: I'm still figuring out what the fuck masculinity is.

Tuck: Totally. I mean, I have no idea, so I was just hoping maybe you had figured it out and would tell me – but that's an understandable answer. [Both laugh]

Salimatu: Yeah, I still have no idea, and I think that that's a little bit what it's about. It’s thinking about these possible realities, and creating the space for speculation around what relationships could have been, or how they could've changed, and I think that being someone's kid is really interesting, because we talk about it in such a gendered way. So that this movement into being someone's son is directly about that language – is about what you are to someone else – but also based on how you identify. And I think that my dad, no longer living…it was really interesting to think about how my relationship to him is changing based on how I change after a point where he would have been able to acknowledge that change. So there's some grief in that, but then also thinking about how does one become a son? And what does that hold, and what does that mean? And where did I come up with my ideas around what masculinity is, and what it is not? And so a lot of it stemmed from this footage that I had found of my dad and I dancing. I think I was maybe two or three, and I'm trying to mirror my dad's movements, and he's wearing this white ribbed tank top and blue sweatpants, dark blue sweatpants. And when I found that footage, it felt really emotional for a lot of reasons, but also because I really recognized myself in my dad, but also had never felt like I wanted to be him or become him ever in my life.

And so seeing that this thing was happening, and also thinking about how I had thought about what type of body I wanted to have, too. And then thinking about having top surgery, I had a lot of trouble thinking about flatness in relation to myself, and also in relation to what I thought was a masculine chest for me – or that made sense for me – just didn't feel like it could be flat. And then looking back at this footage, and seeing my dad's body and my brother’s body, had me like “well yeah of course you thought that, because that's what their bodies look like.” And so also wondering or meditating on there were all of these messages and mirroring that was happening that I wasn't fully aware of. So in this video, I am very consciously mirroring what my dad is doing, and just thinking about where all of that comes from, and where are the conscious decisions, and what are the unconscious decisions? I think oftentimes I'm making work about things that feel unresolved for me, or things that I have a lot of questions about. And also thinking about how my dad lives in my body through the way that I carry myself, through the way that I move, and also at least a little bit in how I've chosen to transition.

Tuck: Something that I have experienced – having a father who passed away – I increasingly have a hard time not retconning him into something easier than it was. And I feel like so much of my explorations into what a relationship with my dad might look like now if he were alive is so ahistorical in a way [Salimatu laughs] because I'm like [Laughs] “realistically, this just wouldn't be working at all.” And because he did pass away, it's easier for me to forget all of the rough edges, and just think about what it would be like to have a dad that I wanted to have, that I'm imagining. So as someone who's making work about your dad, how do you avoid making up a new version of your dad that would be more convenient? Or do you not avoid it – maybe that’s part of the work in itself is reenvisioning something?

Salimatu: Fuck! What a great question. [Laughs] Damn! This is why they pay you the big bucks. [Both laugh]

Tuck: Five dollars a month, baby. [Both laugh]

Salimatu: Honestly, you can interview me anytime. You can interview me every morning if you want – I feel like it would be helpful. [Laughs]

Tuck: Perfect.

Salimatu: No, that's actually exactly what it's about: this space of misremembering things, and thinking about how memory functions. And how in a way that footage that I have – I don't have that as a memory, you know – I have that as footage, which then becomes a memory, because I've watched that footage so many times. And to me, that became this light in such heavy, heavy, and dark memories of my childhood. I don't have a lot of positive memories of my dad, and I don't really know, actually, what our relationship would be like now. But a lot of how I got through a really tough childhood was through disassociation, and through creating imaginary worlds that I was able to exist in simultaneously to existing in a really tough environment. So when I think about my own memory, I'm sure that it's so dysregulated. It's so murky, and so fictional. And I kind of am in a place where I think that that delusion might actually be the best thing for me. And so it's moving back-and-forth between the real and the surreal, or the real and the imagined, and thinking about how we kind of build retroactively, or build our own backgrounds – our own memories – for ourselves. And I think that that's actually a really exciting space to be in.

So for my thesis, I'm working a lot with performing artists. And so for that piece in the museum, there's also this video projection where I was working with Black trans and nonbinary performers, who then looked at that dance, and then created their own performance, wearing the same white tank top and blue sweatpants. So there's this way which it’s being translated and re-translated, and then also becomes a fiction, and I think that to me is a really exciting space to be in. And I think that it can be really good to do that, because some of us don't have that many great memories to build off of – but we can kind of…I think you're allowed to make things up. [Both laugh] I think you have to make things up, because if I didn't make up a future for myself, and imagine something better than the things that I was experiencing at any given time, I just wouldn't be here. I've had to do that my whole life, and so I think that this is a place where I am consciously doing that in work. It’s talking about the people who don't have a beautiful history to reflect on, but we can speculate a beautiful history, or we can imagine a beautiful history, or a beautiful future, and fill in the spaces that are empty with something that we want to be there.

Tuck: Yeah. So this whole conversation is reminding me how uncomfortable I get when I try to do sincere work. [Laughs] And I feel like that’s something that you're very good at. Your work is generally extremely sincere – not that it can't have playful elements and moments, and I guess Barracuda, things like Barracuda are a lot more playful – but a lot of your work is pretty sincere. Is that something that comes naturally to you, or is that something that you have to also work at, allowing that vulnerability to happen?

Salimatu: Wow, I want to ask you so many questions about why is it difficult to make work that feels sincere.

Tuck: I think it's a combination of two things, and one is that it's not anyone's business, and that's the main one. It's like, “I don't wanna tell you my actual feelings, those are mine.” And similarly, having a feeling witnessed by someone who is going to take it in bad faith, or who is going to just not understand it on a fundamental level, is not appealing to me. It's nice to share something with someone where you know, like, “oh, you've had a similar experience, this might resonate with you.” But just like putting it out in the world, it's like “well, if this doesn't resonate with you, I actually don't want to hear what you have to say about it,” you know? [Laughs] Well, I think I'm used to being misunderstood, and I don't really feel the need to invite that in my life about anything that matters. Whereas if someone misunderstands a joke, I'm like, “whatevs, you know, who gives a shit.”

Salimatu: That makes a lot of sense, people can be really shitty. And I think that, for me, is maybe the opposite…or the same thing, but an opposite method? I feel like people can be really shitty, but I feel like it's super hard to be shitty when you know that someone just…that they're not bullshitting you. They're really like “this is real, this is the real honest truth of what I am experiencing.” And sometimes I actually feel like I need to do the opposite, because – especially in school – I think I'm in a way so afraid of people’s criticism that I make the most [Laughs] overly-involved, deeply vulnerable shit that I possibly can, and I don't know if that's a particularly healthy approach either. [Both laugh] So I'm actually trying to reel it in a little bit, because I think that sometimes it happens where I look at my work, and I'm like “damn, why is this so sad?” [Both laugh] It’s happened a lot this semester in school, where I’ve looked at things and I’m like “I really didn't mean to make this that sad, but it's *so* sad.” Yeah I think that also probably that's a big part of it, is just being like “well, if I'm gonna make something, and people are going to say things, or be harsh or do whatever, at least I want to feel like I'm saying something that is the most honest.” So people are like, “that sucks.” I'm like, “well yeah, I mean…then it's not for you.”

Tuck. Yeah. [Exhales] Well, at the last Gender Reveal live show, we spoke to Fran Tirado about the Fire Island Doll Invasion, where a bunch of trans people went to Fire Island and had a good time. And she mentioned feeling that the media covering the event was trying to make it into something that was *necessary* and *historic*, and she was like “actually, we’re just trying to have a good time.” And before we talked this time, I asked Ozzy to find other interviews with you, in case there's anything about your life that I missed by just sort of being your friend ambiently. [Laughs] And so many of the interviews were all about Black Feast in like 2020, 2021 – and I was wondering if any of what I just said about Fran’s thing resonated with you and the coverage of your work.

Salimatu: [Sighs] Oh yeah. [Tuck laughs] It feels like if you Googled me, you’d think that after 2020 I just stopped making things. [Laughs] Which is *wild*, actually. But it's unsurprising at this point. It really felt like actually just one summer of people really, really, really, giving a shit…and then…not. I don't even know if this is really your question.

Tuck: I guess what I'm asking is like: do you feel like people’s incredible need right now to be like “look at this powerful, Black, trans person doing important work” [Laughs] ...does that ever overshadow the actual message or actual intent of your work? Because I guess what I'm saying here also is what I noticed in a lot of interviews is that it was all the same questions. And the questions were like: “how did you know you wanted to make things for Black people? How do you combine food and art? Why did it feel important to do this?” And I didn't see a lot of questions about ingredients, or sourcing, or plating, or food ethics, or anything about that. It was all like “what does identity have to do with this?” And I think that identity is really important in the work that you and I do, but I also think you're doing other things, like making art and food. [Laughs] And I'm like not really seeing that being discussed from the outside, from just Googling. So I was just curious if you feel like people are ever overlooking your intent behind things in their urge to attempt to See You TM TM.

Salimatu: Yeah. During that time, definitely. Very strange feeling to be a chef, and have so many people worried about your work without ever trying your food. [Laughs] It’s a very strange thing. I am a really good chef, y’all. I just wanted you to know. [Both laugh] I make food for Black people, and also I’m a very good chef. [Laughs]

Tuck: And also it’s good! Totally.

Salimatu: And actually, the weird thing is that it being good matters *so* much. Because the point of it isn't actually that we're giving people food, you know? It’s that we're giving people food that is made with a lot of care, and a lot of love, and a lot of thought, and that there are concepts around every single aspect of these dishes. And I feel like some things have definitely shifted in the last…

Tuck: Good.

Salimatu: …three years. Mostly people just don't really interview me anymore. [Laughs]

Tuck: Oh. Well, I take back my “good.” [Both laugh]

Salimatu: But when they do, it feels more about the things that I’m making and less about the fact that I'm making them for Black people. Things have changed a lot, and I don't know that people are thinking about things in a different way. I think it's also just that the heat of the moment has passed for a lot of people, so they're not focusing on those same issues, and they're not really interested in talking about them or writing about them.

Tuck: Well. You mentioned you had top surgery. The whole thing seemed like kind of an ordeal. [Salimatu laughs] And none of the ordeal was your fault, obviously. But since people every day are having top surgery, do you have any advice for other people embarking on the top surgery journey? Things that you think other people should know?

Salimatu: Yeah, it really was an ordeal. I mean, I'm excited to get to the point where we're thinking maybe more creatively about the things that we want, and I think that that's happening more now. But the thing is that a lot of surgeons, I think – and I'm sure people have things to say about this – but I feel like a lot of surgeons have in their mind the way that many people might want their top surgery to go and to look. And some surgeons, you may have to be really specific. I think it's really helpful to have a person go with you. I think it's helpful to have things written down that you want, and things that you don't want. And you can also share images of things that you don't want, and be like “hey, I don't like the way that this looks.” I had a surgeon who had me down for a different type of surgery up until the day that I was having surgery. And that is a scary thing, and it's a hard space to be in. And I have a hard time talking about it, because I think since there is so much anti-trans bullshit, it feels like the only narrative that can exist is that we feel really lucky to have these resources and to have these surgeries available. And that is true. And it's also true that there are still issues – there are still issues with care, there are still issues with how Black people are treated in the medical system. Those things are not automatically erased because we're receiving gender-affirming care. It's not the great equalizer. [Laughs]

Tucks: Mhmm. Mhmm.

Salimatu: So just to be really fierce in how you're advocating for yourself. And to ask for help from people, ask for advice. There are some really amazing groups and forums out there that have been super helpful. And you've been an amazing resource for me – I think Gender Reveal is an incredible resource, truly, truly. And to be able to talk with people about things that feel hard. I felt super disappointed with my first surgery, and I was having a really, really, tough time – some of the heaviest days ever. But I also had people who I was able to reach out to, like you. And I had other friends who were able to talk with me, and tell me that things were gonna be OK. And things are OK. Yes, I need to get a revision. [Laughs] Yes, mistakes were made. [Tuck laughs] And also, not everyone loves their surgery, and that's OK. It's OK to be one of the people who did not have this moment of a truly life-affirming reveal, and I think we have to be able to hold those narratives as well. And it's really hard when it feels like the only narrative that we can hold is one of gender euphoria. We deserve to have access to these resources. We deserve to have access to gender-affirming care. And also, people may feel disappointed, and there will be fuck ups, and we have to be able to hold peoples’ experience as well.

Tuck: Right. Well, what I heard from you is not like “wow, I wish I never had top surgery and had my tits back.” What I’m hearing from you is “I wish that the quality of care that I received was better.” Which are two really different things. And I think when there's all of this talk about regret among transition and surgery, and how we have to be really on message that no one has ever regretted transitioning, like you're saying – it does seem like it's taking away our right to not be happy with it. But I would argue there's a huge difference between regret, parentheses, wish that this had never happened, and regret, parentheses, wish that people would get it together [Salimatu laughs] and stop doing medical racism and stop being bad at their jobs, you know? [Laughs] And the reason why so many surgeons are allowed to be bad at their jobs is because trans people have that pressure to accept whatever they're given, right? And so if we had more space to demand better, this would happen less often, because people would be held accountable for their work in a more real way, I think. And looking back through the archives of trans surgeries, that's been true the whole time. Since the advent of vaginoplasties et al was the situation where people who received care felt like they couldn't criticize the shitty care they were receiving, because they need to be grateful. And honestly in that way it almost ties back to what you were saying about Black Feast and being like “it's not just that we're giving them food, we're giving them beautiful food.” It's like “we shouldn’t just get surgery, we should get beautiful surgery.” [Laughs]

Salimatu: Yeah, exactly. And I feel – even now talking about it – I feel sometimes a little bit guilty, like I feel I shouldn't say I wasn't happy with my first result. And also, I am *so, so* happy that I had top surgery. And so, exactly what you're saying. The regret is not at all about having the surgery – I would do it again a thousand times, and will have to do it again one more time. [Both laugh] But you know, it feels like I don't want to be the party pooper, but I also would love for us all to be receiving the highest, best, greatest quality of care possible. And that's what I hope for, that's what I want.

Tuck: I love to whisper network about surgeons, because that's the only way you're going to get info, right? [Laughs] Is Reddit, and your friends being like “ope, heard that one's wild.” “Ope, heard that one actually listens to you.” You know? Like, where else you gonna go?

Salimatu: Yeah.

Tuck: Anyway, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about today that we haven't talked about? Anything on your mind?

Salimatu: I feel like revisiting our last interview because I think that I hadn't talked to my family about being trans.

Tuck: That's true.

Salimatu: It actually went kind of badly, which was interesting. And I think that when I did the last interview, I thought that people would mostly just find it irritating. And then when I did talk to some people in my family about having surgery, people got really mad. And I'm sure that many people have had that experience, but I was expecting sadness or grief. I wasn't expecting people to be angry with me, for some reason. People are really attached to tits, like family members who you didn't even think knew about your tits. [Laughs] Knew about your about tits, cared about your tits! [Both laugh] Apparently they had whole fan accounts for your tits! [Both laugh]

Tuck: OK. The way we always end the show is by asking: in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Salimatu: I think that we're all just out here, with our genders, living. Maybe that we have an understanding with each other around what we feel gender to be, and it doesn't mean like a universal definition. But it's really fascinating to me that in all of these conversations, a lot of the language – like, anti-trans language – a lot of the people using that language also don't really know what being “trans” is. Or “gender” is. And so, I don't know that I have a specific hope, but I wonder what would happen if we were to gain or gather a collective understanding of how we want to talk about gender. What I really hope for is for people’s safety and freedom, like the freedom to express yourself without fear. That feels like such a cheesy answer to say. But I think more and more, the more places that I go, and I can feel when I feel safe, and when I feel unsafe – in my body, in the way that I dress – I just want that feeling of safety all the time for myself. And I want that feeling of safety all the time for everyone else. And I think that my own futures are being constantly reimagined, like the things that I want are constantly shifting and growing over time. But I also really hope for people the space to fantasize about future genders, and forms of expression that go well beyond what you see around you. And for people to be able to exceed their own expectations of what they thought they could become. I feel like that as a process is happening within me, and it feels very exciting. And also sometimes scary, but…yeah.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays]

Tuck: That's gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with folks in your community. You can find Salimatu on Instagram @salimatuamabebe and @black.feast.We are also on Instagram, and at genderpodcast.com, where we’ve got transcripts of every episode. And you can also join us at patreon.com/gender, where as a thanks for supporting the show, we will sign you up for our bonus podcast *Gender Conceal*, and our weekly behind-the-scenes newsletter. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman, and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. Free Palestine.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays out and ends]

Salimatu: Yeah I also usually just say “trans” when people ask me, but people don’t really ask me that often. People love to not ask me. [Laughs]

Tuck: They really do, and it's *so* wild. [Both laugh] I feel like you specifically somehow attract people not asking, and then me…just every person who does that becomes my enemy personally. [Both laugh] And I’ve acquired quite a list.