

GENDER & POWER: THE GENDER AND POWER TOOLKIT

Sé Sullivan: “How did you get your gender? Who gave it to you?”

Guiding question: *What is gender? How do we begin to think about gender? What is the relationship between gender and race?*

REVIEW – Butler, Judith. 1993. “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion” in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* New York: Routledge Press (pg. 82-97).

- Butler’s main points: gender is a social construct that is *performed*. There is no “natural” gender for us to return to or embody, but we must reach towards that “natural gender” or else get punished. We are mimicking an empty signifier, a copy of a copy of a copy.

Guiding question: *How was gender used as a tool for nation-making and colonialism? How is it tied with notions of race?*

Thomas, Greg. 2007. “The Madness of Gender in Plantation America” in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press (pg. 24-50).

- Thomas critiques the idea that all genders are socially constructed *equally*—in other words, he critiques the idea of “man” and “woman” as constants on their basis of being *specifically* Western constructs.
 - “...Oyêwùmí unearths a politics of race behind the sex and sexuality manufactured by Europe, She argues that ‘woman’ is a culturally specific category of the West which finds no existence in Yorubaland, for example, before the onslaught of empire...” (24).
 - “Critically, ‘woman’ is seen as the social construction of the anatomical female, or a universal subject constructed, outside of time and space, to be always and everywhere subordinate to her equally monolithic counterpart, ‘man’” (24).
- On empire, chattel slavery, and gendering:
 - “One cannot qualify as human if one is not identified as man or woman, and vice versa, since manhood, womanhood, and humanity are not apolitical notions (as if there were such a thing), but very political notions of empire” (28).
 - **Relate back to power:** Conceptions of gender in the West have always been linked to conceptions of the “human.” In other words, to be “human” is to be gendered as the binary “man” or “woman.” The imposition of these categories as “universal” onto other places allows for the justification of different forms of violence.
 - “There is surely no gender to be shared by white and Black persons in Plantation America” (42).

- “...this slavocratic concept of sex reserves womanhood for white female bodies alone....Woman is taken for granted as a biological entity even though such biologism never grants its womanhood to Black female slaves, and biology is itself constructed to construct gender in white racist fashion....There is no biologically based unity to be contradicted across the divide between a slave and a master in such a case....This is no less the case for slave and mistress. ***Together, manhood and womanhood are manufactured for a heterosexuality of white supremacy which academic historians and critics have yet to explode***” (42-43).
- Critiquing Angela Davis: (29).
- Problematizing “Gender vs. Sex”
 - “While the rhetoric of sex often denotes an anatomical biology that can refer to human beings and non-human animals alike, the rhetoric of gender refers to what has come to be called the social construction of sex as gender among human beings alone—as if its anatomical-biological base were not also itself socially constructed or instituted....the fact that gender appears to always, inevitably, get collapsed with sex in Western accounts proves that bot sex and gender have been conceived in culturally specific and historically static, Western terms” (29).
 - Sex as a category is just as socially constructed as gender is—why are there “only two sexes,” and why do these sexes always correlate to a binary gender system?
 - If we think of sex as a “natural” or “biological” binary, who falls out? What are the consequences? What violence is allowed to happen?
 - Teen Vogue: Hanne Gaby on what it’s like to be intersex (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86cNy7tN04k>)
 - Teen Vogue: Intersex genital mutilation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mT4dDO-ZwcQ>)
 - If we think of sex as a “natural” or “biological” binary, what biological features become salient for “sex?” And how might these be racialized?
 - Relate to Snorton
- Western gender categories and sexual violence
 - “Not only is sexual violence [in the Western gender system] reduced to whatever qualifies as rape, narrowly construed, but rape is also reduced to penile penetrations of female bodies, perhaps not even those unless they result in pregnancy and offspring....Hence, heterosexualizing rape is especially nonsensical when it comes to the enslaved” (46).
 - In chattel slavery, “There is no gender restriction in this show of sex and violence” (46).

Snorton, C. Riley. 2014. “Anatomically Speaking: Ungendered Flesh and the Science of Sex” in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (pg. 17-53).

- Snorton builds off Thomas and further points to how, under regimes of chattel slavery, not only did the Western category of “womanhood” not apply to chattel persons, but

under discourses of “sex” and “gender,” their bodies could be transformed into merely flesh under which advances for (white) womanhood could be created.

- Like Thomas, Snorton argues here that race *precedes* gender.
- “...captive and divided flesh functions as malleable matter for mediating and remaking sex and gender as matters of human categorization and personal definition” (20): **in other words, sex and gender as *socially-constructed categories cannot be separated from the racial context of chattel slavery.***
- J. Marion Sims: “father of modern gynecology”
 - Got this term by experimenting on Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy, and other unnamed chattel peoples
 - How does Sims’ gynecological experiments on Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy, and other unnamed captives show us that race and gender are fundamentally interlinked *for the purposes of maintaining a racial structure of power?*
- “...it is fairly certain that the restorative effects of these procedures would be physical rather than social, as the possibility of ‘being made again a normal woman’ would not be available to her as a slave” (25)
- “If being an object of disgust is allegorical to the status of the disabled slave, it is particularly meaningful that ‘patients’ like Anarcha ‘never die’ in the context of captivity, they ‘must live and suffer’ to create and reproduce the boundary between being and object...to produce the possibility of distinction in the form of gynecology as a distinct field of medical inquiry” (27).
- Pg 29: resistance
- “...*white femininity is conferred in relation to an unwillingness to view white female genitalia, that is, to look upon white women as flesh*...the unrelenting scopical availability that defined blackness within the visual economy of racial slavery becomes the necessary context for producing a field of sex/gender knowledge” (33)
 - “From this vantage point, *one could consider the various ways ‘gender’ functions as an effect of plantation visuality, wherein captive flesh expressed an ungendered position that defines race as the sine qua non [essential condition, indispensable condition] of sex.* In this arrangement, *gender socially constructs sex, and captive flesh becomes the material and metaphorical ground for unsettling a view of sex and gender as neatly divided according to each term’s relation to medicoscientific knowledge*” (33).
 - How does this scene show us that race constructs gender?
 - White femininity is medically created through the unwillingness to view what has been construed as white “female genitalia,” but the condition of being “Black feminine flesh” is visually displayed as the opposite of that.
 - Here, instead of sex constructing gender (physiological differences being made into social differences), we see gender constructing sex (social differences rendering these physiologically similar bodies as different): why is this? The underlying project of chattel slavery.

- The project of “returning” Sims’ experimentees to heteronormativity and feminine normalcy is rendered impossible under the institution of chattel slavery (38)—they are being used as raw materials from which femininity (nonblack femininity) can be contrasted against.
- “The founding of American gynecology and the distinct contrast between chattel experimentees and an ‘imagined constituency of suffering white womanhood’ highlights how flesh acted as a condition of possibility for the hospital as laboratory, creating a structure in which bodies were made flesh by way of medicoscientific discourses, techniques of examination, and objectification born from a possessive scopophilic dynamic that characterized the enslaver’s relation to the captive.” (40).
 - In other words, the transformation of enslaved African peoples into “Black feminine flesh” to be experimented upon *to alleviate suffering white womanhood* was only possible through the infrastructure of chattel slavery (Betsey, Anarcha, Lucy, and other enslaved experimentees existed as, in an a plantation system, raw material to be experimented on, for the *alleviation of [white] women’s suffering*, not women themselves). This shows us how race constructs gender *and* sex.
 - “The medical planation thus served as a key site for the refinement of biopolitical and necropolitical techniques in the production of medical knowledge that critically disavowed chattel slavery as a constitutive grammar to express *sex and gender as effects of racial science*” (40-41).
- Citing Jennifer Morgan: “[enslavers’] wealth and, indeed, that of entire colonial empires, derived from the reproductive potential of African women” (42).
 - *Here we can link gender and power together: the power of the nation to build up itself, the economic power of the United States and the colonial apparatus in general, is reliant on the ability to force “Black feminine flesh” (who do not get the benefits of “femininity,” and are not gendered “women”) into reproduction.*
- *The narratives of American gynecology’s founding clarify how chattel slavery functioned as one cultural apparatus that brought sex and gender into arrangement; the instrument in such encounter occurred in and as flesh” (52).*
 - ***“...flesh gives rise to how sex and gender have been expressed and arranged according to the logics that sustained racial slavery....As a shared node in the collateral *genealogies of blackness and transness*, Sims’s archive presents one side of flesh’s vestibularizing paradigm, wherein *Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy, and the unnamed other captives were rendered as raw materials for making the field of ‘women’s medicine,’ from which they were excluded as women according to the attenuating frame of plantation medicine’s sexual economies*” (53).***

Miranda, Deborah A. 2010. “Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California.” *GLQ* 16(1-2): 253-284.

- ***while Miranda uses terms that naturalize a two-sex system, we must be critical of this, following Thomas and Snorton***
 - We are still using the terms of the colonizer’s model of sex

- Who were/are the *joyas*?
 - “Third-gender” Indigenous people (characterized as “men living as women,” but we want to follow Thomas and Snorton’s lead and be critical about the “inherence” of those gendered categories).
- What is a *gendercide*?
 - Citing Maureen S. Heibert: “Gendercide would then be...an attack on a group of victims based on the victims’ gender/sex. Such an attack would only really occur if men or women are victimized because of their *primary* identity as men or women...*As such, we must be able to explicitly show that the perpetrators target a gender victim group based on the victims’ primary identity...*” (258-259).
 - Spaniards’ *gendercide* was part of a larger process of *genocide* (the complete elimination of Indigenous peoples) but this *gendercide* specifically aimed for the elimination of the *joyas*.
 - **Return to power:** *why* were the *joyas* targeted? For what purpose? (again, to impose a rigid set of gender binaries that allow for the *genocide* of Indigenous peoples; this is part of the bloody process of conquest).
- Challenging the myths of “homophobic ethnics”
 - “...the Indians were not suddenly surprised to find *joyas* in their midst, and dragging people to certain death went far beyond discrimination or culturally condoned chastisement...What the local indigenous peoples ***had been taught was gendercide, the killing of a particular gender because of their gender***” (259).
 - “Now that the Spaniards had made it clear that to tolerate, harbor, or associate with the third gender meant death...the indigenous community knew that demonstrations of acquiescence to this force were essential for the survival of the remaining community” (259).
 - “Often, *joyas* were driven from their communities by tribal members at the instigation of the priests and made homeless; this, after a lifetime of esteem and high status, must have been a substantial blow to both physical well-being and emotional health” (264).
 - This comes down to a central issue that we see in pop culture and politics—the image of the “naturally homophobic” ethnic group who targets “LGBT people” – where do these attitudes come from?
 - If we follow the history that Miranda, Thomas, and Snorton give us, these attitudes come from colonization and the force of an imposed system of gendered binaries onto these populations.
 - Not recognizing this history allows colonizing powers—which imposed these ideas of a strict gender binary in the first place—to
 - This is another way that gender and power are fundamentally interlinked.
 - Physical and religious violence *and* the re-naming of the *joyas* as both equal parts to *gendercide* – why?

- "...in exercising power over the land and inhabitants, one of the first things the Spaniards did was invent a name for the third-gender phenomenon..." (260).
- "...the 'third gender' status of *joyas* may have been extended, in some fashion, to postmenopausal women as well..." (267)
 - This challenges both the binary gender system *and* genders that are affiliated with a "natural" binary sex.
- Resistance
 - "To exterminate *joyas* entirely, *all* California Indian people would have to be killed, down to the very last; thus it makes sense that during missionization and postsecularization, as in the past, *joyas* rose out of the general population spontaneously and regularly" (268).
 - Kitsepawit Fernando Librado (1839): example of a *joyas* in resistance ("in the closet") – this as a form of resistance; rather than *closeted* as something to be ashamed of, this is something that we see as a strategy for *joyas* to survive in a world that is intent on eradicating them (flight)
 - "Two-Spirit people did not cease to exist, they did not cease to be born, simply because the Spaniards killed our *joya* ancestors..." (277).
- "...the words *gay* or *lesbian* do not fully define a Two-Spirited person, because those labels are based on an almost exclusively sexual paradigm inherited from a nonindigenous colonizing culture" (277).
 - "Using the word 'Two-Spirit' emphasizes the spiritual aspect of one's life and downplays the homosexual persona" (278).

TAKEAWAYS:

- Gender both has been used as a tool of power *and* power has reinforced hegemonic Western gender categories.
- Science/medicine/biology as much a tool of power as direct physical violence—perhaps, even, much more pervasive.
 - "sex" as just as constructed as gender is