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# Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System

MARÍA LUGONES

*The coloniality of power is understood by Anibal Quijano as at the constituting crux of the global capitalist system of power. What is characteristic of global, Eurocentered, capitalist power is that it is organized around two axes that Quijano terms “the coloniality of power” and “modernity.” The coloniality of power introduces the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of race, a replacing of relations of superiority and inferiority established through domination with naturalized understandings of inferiority and superiority. In this essay, Lugones introduces a systemic understanding of gender constituted by colonial/modernity in terms of multiple relations of power. This gender system has a light and a dark side that depict relations, and beings in relation as deeply different and thus as calling for very different patterns of violent abuse. Lugones argues that gender itself is a colonial introduction, a violent introduction consistently and contemporarily used to destroy peoples, cosmologies, and communities as the building ground of the “civilized” West.*

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In a theoretico-praxical vein, I am offering a framework to begin thinking about heterosexism as a key part of how gender fuses with race in the operations of colonial power. Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. Thus, it introduced many genders and gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing. But we cannot understand this gender system without understanding what Anibal Quijano calls “the coloniality of power” (2000a, 2000b, 2001–2002). The reason to historicize gender

formation is that without this history, we keep on centering our analysis on the patriarchy; that is, on a binary, hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests on male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other. The heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical framework of analysis. To understand the relation of the birth of the colonial/modern gender system to the birth of global colonial capitalism—with the centrality of the coloniality of power to that system of global power—is to understand our present organization of life anew.

This attempt at historicizing gender and heterosexualism is thus an attempt to move, dislodge, complicate what has faced me and others engaged in liberatory/decolonial projects as hard barriers that are both conceptual and political. These are barriers to the conceptualization and enactment of liberatory possibilities as de-colonial possibilities. Liberatory possibilities that emphasize the light side of the colonial/modern gender system affirm rather than reject an oppressive organization of life. There has been a persistent absence of a deep imbrication of race into the analysis that takes gender and sexuality as central in much white feminist theory and practice, particularly feminist philosophy. I am cautious when I call it “white” feminist theory and practice. One can suspect a redundancy involved in the claim: it is white because it seems unavoidably enmeshed in a sense of gender and of gendered sexuality that issues from what I call the light side of the modern/colonial gender system. But that is, of course, a conclusion from within an understanding of gender that sees it as a colonial concept. Yet, I arrive at this conclusion by walking a political/praxical/theoretical path that has yet to become central in gender work: the path marked by taking seriously the coloniality of power. As I make clear later in this essay, it is also politically important that many who have taken the coloniality of power seriously have tended to naturalize gender. That position is also one that entrenches oppressive colonial gender arrangements, oppressive organizations of life.

So, on the one hand, I am interested in investigating the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality in a way that enables me to understand the indifference that persists in much feminist analysis. Women of color and Third World feminisms have consistently shown the way to a critique of this indifference to this deep imbrication of race, gender, class, and sexuality. The framework I introduce is wholly grounded in the feminisms of women of color and women of the Third World and arises from within them. This framework enables us to ask harsh but hopefully inspiring questions. The questions attempt to inspire resistance to oppression understood in this degree of complexity. Two crucial questions that we can ask about heterosexualism from within it are: How do we understand heterosexuality not merely as normative but as consistently perverse when violently exercised across the colonial modern gender system so as to

construct a worldwide system of power? How do we come to understand the very meaning of heterosexuality as tied to a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns devised to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power? In the work I begin here, I offer the first ingredients to begin to answer these questions. I do not believe any solidarity or homoerotic loving is possible among females who affirm the colonial/modern gender system and the coloniality of power. I also think that transnational intellectual and practical work that ignores the imbrication of the coloniality of power and the colonial/modern gender system also affirms this global system of power. But I have seen over and over, often in disbelief, how politically minded white theorists have simplified gender in terms of the patriarchy. I am thus attempting to move the discussion of heterosexuality, by changing its very terms.

I am also interested in investigating the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in a way that enables me to understand the indifference that men, but, more important to our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color.<sup>1</sup> I want to understand the construction of this indifference so as to make it unavoidably recognizable by those claiming to be involved in liberatory struggles. This indifference is insidious since it places tremendous barriers in the path of the struggles of women of color for our own freedom, integrity, and well-being and in the path of the correlative struggles toward communal integrity. The latter is crucial for communal struggles toward liberation, since it is their backbone. The indifference is found both at the level of everyday living and at the level of theorizing of both oppression and liberation. The indifference seems to me not just one of not seeing the violence because of the categorial<sup>2</sup> separation of race, gender, class, and sexuality. That is, it does not seem to be only a question of epistemological blinding through categorial separation.

Feminists of color have made clear what is revealed in terms of violent domination and exploitation once the epistemological perspective focuses on the intersection of these categories.<sup>3</sup> But that has not seemed sufficient to arouse in those men who have themselves been targets of violent domination and exploitation any recognition of their complicity or collaboration with the violent domination of women of color. In particular, theorizing global domination continues to proceed as if no betrayals or collaborations of this sort need to be acknowledged and resisted.

Here, I pursue this investigation by placing together two frameworks of analysis that I have not seen sufficiently jointly explored. I am referring, on the one hand, to the important work on gender, race and colonization done, not exclusively, but significantly by Third World and women of color feminists, including critical race theorists. This work has emphasized the concept of intersectionality and has exposed the historical and the theoretico-practical

exclusion of nonwhite women from liberatory struggles in the name of women.<sup>4</sup> The other framework is the one Quijano introduced and which is at the center of his work, that of the coloniality of power (2000a, 2000b, 2001–2002).<sup>5</sup> Placing both of these strands of analysis together permits me to arrive at what I am tentatively calling “the modern/colonial gender system.” I think this understanding of gender is implied in both frameworks in large terms, but it is not explicitly articulated, or not articulated in the direction I think necessary to unveil the reach and consequences of complicity with this gender system. I think that articulating this colonial/modern gender system, both in large strokes, and in all its detailed and lived concreteness will enable us to see what was imposed on us. It will also enable us to see its fundamental destructiveness in both a long and wide sense. The intent of this writing is to make visible the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system in subjecting us—both women and men of color—in all domains of existence. But it is also the project’s intent to make visible the crucial disruption of bonds of practical solidarity. My intent is to provide a way of understanding, of reading, of perceiving our allegiance to this gender system. We need to place ourselves in a position to call each other to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations.<sup>6</sup> In this initial essay, I present Quijano’s model that I will complicate, but one that gives us—in the logic of structural axes—a good ground from within which to understand the processes of intertwining the production of race and gender.

#### THE COLONIALITY OF POWER

Quijano thinks the intersection of race and gender in large structural terms. So, to understand that intersection in his terms, it is necessary to understand his model of global, Eurocentered capitalist power. Both race<sup>7</sup> and gender find their meanings in this model (*patrón*).<sup>8</sup> Quijano understands that all power is structured in relations of domination, exploitation, and conflict as social actors fight over control of “the four basic areas of human existence: sex, labor, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, their resources and products” (2001–2002, 1). Global, Eurocentered, capitalist power is organized characteristically around two axes: the coloniality of power and modernity (2000b, 342). The axes order the disputes over control of each area of existence in such a way that the coloniality of power and modernity thoroughly infuse the meaning and forms of domination in each area. So, for Quijano, the disputes/struggles over control of “sexual access, its resources and products” define the domain of sex/gender and the disputes, in turn, can be understood as organized around the axes of coloniality and modernity.

This is too narrow an understanding of the oppressive modern/colonial constructions of the scope of gender. Quijano also assumes patriarchal and

heterosexual understandings of the disputes over control of sex, its resources, and products. Quijano accepts the global, Eurocentered, capitalist understanding of what gender is about. These features of the framework serve to veil the ways in which nonwhite colonized women have been subjected and disempowered. The heterosexual and patriarchal character of the arrangements can themselves be appreciated as oppressive by unveiling the presuppositions of the framework. Gender does not need to organize social arrangements, including social sexual arrangements. But gender arrangements need not be either heterosexual or patriarchal. They need not be, that is, as a matter of history. Understanding these features of the organization of gender in the modern/colonial gender system—the biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organizations of relations—is crucial to an understanding of the differential gender arrangements along “racial” lines. Biological dimorphism, heterosexuality, and patriarchy are all characteristic of what I call the light side of the colonial/modern organization of gender. Hegemonically, these are written large over the meaning of gender. Quijano seems unaware of his accepting this hegemonic meaning of gender. In making these claims I aim to expand and complicate Quijano’s approach, while preserving his understanding of the coloniality of power, which is at the center of what I am calling the modern/colonial gender system.

The coloniality of power introduces the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of ‘race’ (Quijano 2001–2002, 1). The invention of race is a pivotal turn as it replaces the relations of superiority and inferiority established through domination. It reconceives humanity and human relations fictionally, in biological terms. It is important that what Quijano provides is a historical theory of social classification to replace what he terms the “Eurocentric theories of social classes” (2000b, 367). This move makes conceptual room for the coloniality of power. It makes conceptual room for the centrality of the classification of the world’s population in terms of races in the understanding of global capitalism. It also makes conceptual room for understanding historical disputes over control of labor, sex, collective authority, and intersubjectivity as developing in processes of long duration, rather than understanding each of the elements as predating the relations of power. The elements that constitute the global, Eurocentered, capitalist model of power do not stand separately from each other and none is prior to the processes that constitute the patterns. Indeed, the mythical presentation of these elements as metaphysically prior is an important aspect of the cognitive model of Eurocentered, global capitalism.

In constituting this social classification, coloniality permeates all aspects of social existence and gives rise to new social and geocultural identities (Quijano 2000b, 342). “America” and “Europe” are among the new geocultural identities. “European,” “Indian,” “African” are among the “racial” identities.

This classification is “the deepest and most enduring expression of colonial domination” (2001–2002, 1). With expansion of European colonialism, the classification was imposed on the population of the planet. Since then, it has permeated every area of social existence, constituting the most effective form of material and intersubjective social domination. Thus, *coloniality* does not just refer to racial classification. It is an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations. Or, alternatively, all control over sex, subjectivity, authority, and labor are articulated around it. As I understand the logic of “structural axis” in Quijano’s usage, the element that serves as an axis becomes constitutive of and constituted by all the forms that relations of power take with respect to control over that particular domain of human existence. Finally, Quijano also makes clear that, though coloniality is related to colonialism, these are distinct as the latter does not necessarily include racist relations of power. Coloniality’s birth and its prolonged and deep extension throughout the planet is tightly related to colonialism (2000b, 381).

In Quijano’s model of global, Eurocentered, capitalist power, *capitalism* refers to “the structural articulation of all historically known forms of control of labor or exploitation, slavery, servitude, small independent mercantile production, wage labor, and reciprocity under the hegemony of the capital-wage labor relation” (2000b, 349). In this sense, the structuring of the disputes over control of labor is discontinuous: not all labor relations under global, Eurocentered capitalism fall under the capital/wage relation model, though this is the hegemonic model. It is important in beginning to see the reach of the coloniality of power that wage labor has been reserved almost exclusively for white Europeans. The division of labor is thoroughly racialized as well as geographically differentiated. Here, we see the coloniality of labor as a thorough meshing of labor and race.

Quijano understands modernity, the other axis of global, Eurocentered capitalism, as “the fusing of the experiences of colonialism and coloniality with the necessities of capitalism, creating a specific universe of intersubjective relations of domination under a Eurocentered hegemony” (2000b, 343). In characterizing modernity, Quijano focuses on the production of a way of knowing, labeled rational, arising from within this subjective universe since the seventeenth century in the main hegemonic centers of this world system of power (Holland and England). This way of knowing is Eurocentered. By *Eurocentrism* Quijano understands the cognitive perspective not of Europeans only, but of the Eurocentered world, of those educated under the hegemony of world capitalism. “Eurocentrism naturalizes the experience of people within this model of power” (2000b, 343).

The cognitive needs of capitalism and the naturalizing of the identities and relations of coloniality and of the geocultural distribution of world capitalist power have guided the production of this way of knowing. The cognitive needs of capitalism include “measurement, quantification, externalization (or objectification) of what is knowable with respect to the knower so as to control the relations among people and nature and among them with respect to it, in particular the property in means of production” (Quijano 2000b, 343). This way of knowing was imposed on the whole of the capitalist world as the only valid rationality and as emblematic of modernity.

Europe was mythologically understood to predate this pattern of power as a world capitalist center that colonized the rest of the world and, as such, the most advanced moment in the linear, unidirectional, continuous path of the species. A conception of humanity was consolidated according to which the world’s population was differentiated in two groups: superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern. *Primitive* referred to a prior time in the history of the species, in terms of evolutionary time. Europe came to be mythically conceived as preexisting colonial, global, capitalism and as having achieved a very advanced level in the continuous, linear, unidirectional path. Thus, from within this mythical starting point, other human inhabitants of the planet came to be mythically conceived not as dominated through conquest, nor as inferior in terms of wealth or political power, but as an anterior stage in the history of the species, in this unidirectional path. That is the meaning of the qualification “primitive” (Quijano 2000b, 343–44).

We can see then the structural fit of the elements constituting global, Euro-centered capitalism in Quijano’s model (pattern). Modernity and coloniality afford a complex understanding of the organization of labor. They enable us to see the fit between the thorough racialization of the division of labor and the production of knowledge. The pattern allows for heterogeneity and discontinuity. Quijano argues that the structure is not a closed totality (2000b, 355).

We are now in a position to approach the question of the intersectionality of race and gender<sup>9</sup> in Quijano’s terms. I think the logic of “structural axes” does more and less than intersectionality. Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other. The move to intersect the categories has been motivated by the difficulties in making visible those who are dominated and victimized in terms of both categories. Though everyone in capitalist Eurocentered modernity is both raced and gendered, not everyone is dominated or victimized in terms of their race or gender. Kimberlé Crenshaw and other women of color feminists have argued that the categories have been understood as homogenous and as picking out the dominant in the group as the norm; thus *women* picks out white bourgeois women, *men* picks out white bourgeois men, *black* picks out



black heterosexual men, and so on. It becomes logically clear then that the logic of categorial separation distorts what exists at the intersection, such as violence against women of color. Given the construction of the categories, the intersection misconstrues women of color. So, once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of the intersection so as to avoid separability.<sup>10</sup> It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color.

The logic of structural axes shows gender as constituted by and constituting the coloniality of power. In that sense, there is no gender/race separability in Quijano's model. I think he has the logic of it right. But the axis of coloniality is not sufficient to pick out all aspects of gender. What aspects of gender are shown depends on how gender is actually conceptualized in the model. In Quijano's model (pattern) gender seems to be contained within the organization of that "basic area of existence" that Quijano calls "sex, its resources, and products" (2000b, 378). That is, there is an account of gender within the framework that is not itself placed under scrutiny and that is too narrow and overly biologized as it presupposes sexual dimorphism, heterosexuality, patriarchal distribution of power, and so on.

Though I have not found a characterization of gender in what I have read of his work, Quijano seems to me to imply that gender difference is constituted in the disputes over control of sex, its resources, and products. Differences are shaped through the manner in which this control is organized. Quijano understands sex as biological attributes<sup>11</sup> that become elaborated as social categories. He contrasts the biological quality of sex with phenotype, which does not include differential biological attributes. On the one hand, "the color of one's skin, the shape of one's eyes and hair do not have any relation to the biological structure" (2000b, 373). Sex, on the other hand, seems unproblematically biological to Quijano. He characterizes the "coloniality of *gender* relations,"<sup>12</sup> that is, the ordering of gender relations around the axis of the coloniality of power, as follows:

1. In the whole of the colonial world, the norms and formal-ideal patterns of sexual behavior of the genders and consequently the patterns of familial organization of "Europeans" were directly founded on the "racial" classification: the sexual freedom of males and the fidelity of women were, in the whole of the Eurocentered world, the counterpart of the free—that is, not paid as in prostitution—access of white men to "black" women and "indians" in America, "black" women in Africa, and other "colors" in the rest of the subjected world.
2. In Europe, instead, it was the prostitution of women that was the counterpart of the bourgeois family pattern.

3. Familial unity and integration, imposed as the axes of the model of the bourgeois family in the Eurocentered world, were the counterpart of the continued disintegration of the parent-children units in the “nonwhite” “races,” which could be held and distributed as property not just as merchandise but as “animals.” This was particularly the case among “black” slaves, since this form of domination over them was more explicit, immediate, and prolonged.
4. The hypocrisy characteristically underlying the norms and formal-ideal values of the bourgeois family are not, since then, alien to the coloniality of power. (Quijano 2000b, 378, my translation.)

As we see in this complex and important quote, Quijano’s framework restricts gender to the organization of sex, its resources, and products and he seems to make a presupposition as to who controls access and who become constituted as resources. Quijano appears to take for granted that the dispute over control of sex is a dispute among men, about men’s control of resources which are thought to be female. Men do not seem understood as the resources in sexual encounters. Women are not thought to be disputing for control over sexual access. The differences are thought of in terms of how society reads reproductive biology.

#### INTERSEXUALITY

In “Definitional Dilemmas,” Julie Greenberg tells us that legal institutions have the power to assign individuals to a particular racial or sexual category:<sup>13</sup> “Sex is still presumed to be binary and easily determinable by an analysis of biological factors. Despite anthropological and medical studies to the contrary, society presumes an unambiguous binary sex paradigm in which all individuals can be classified neatly as male or female (2002, 112). Greenberg argues that throughout U.S. history the law has failed to recognize intersexuals, in spite of the fact that 1 to 4 percent of the world’s population is intersexed. That is, they do not fit neatly into unambiguous sex categories; “they have some biological indicators that are *traditionally* associated with males and some biological indicators that are *traditionally* associated with females. The manner in which the law defines the terms *male*, *female*, and *sex* will have a profound impact on these individuals” (112, emphases added).

The assignments reveal that what is understood to be biological sex is socially constructed. From the late nineteenth century until World War I, reproductive function was considered a woman’s essential characteristic. The presence or absence of ovaries was the ultimate criterion of sex (Greenberg 2002, 113). But

there are a large number of factors that can enter into “establishing someone’s ‘official’ sex”: chromosomes, gonads, external morphology, internal morphology, hormonal patterns, phenotype, assigned sex, and self-identified sex (Greenberg 2002, 112). At present, chromosomes and genitalia enter into the assignment, but in a manner that reveals biology is thoroughly interpreted and itself surgically constructed.

XY infants with “inadequate” penises must be turned into girls because society believes the essence of manhood is the ability to penetrate a vagina and urinate while standing. XX infants with “adequate” penises, however, are assigned the female sex because society and many in the medical community believe that the essence of womanhood is the ability to bear children rather than the ability to engage in satisfactory sexual intercourse. (Greenberg 2002, 114)

Intersexed individuals are frequently surgically and hormonally turned into males or females. These factors are taken into account in legal cases involving the right to change the sex designation on official documents, the ability to state a claim for employment discrimination based upon sex, the right to marry (Greenberg 2002, 115). Greenberg reports the complexities and variety of decisions on sexual assignation in each case. The law does not recognize intersexual status. Though the law permits self-identification of one’s sex in certain documents, “for the most part, legal institutions continue to base sex assignment on the traditional assumptions that sex is binary and can be easily determined by analyzing biological factors” (Greenberg 2002, 119).

Greenberg’s work enables me to point out an important assumption in the model that Quijano offers us. This is important because sexual dimorphism has been an important characteristic of what I call “the light side” of the colonial/modern gender system. Those in the “dark side” were not necessarily understood dimorphically. Sexual fears of colonizers led them to imagine the indigenous people of the Americas as hermaphrodites or intersexed, with large penises and breasts with flowing milk.<sup>14</sup> But as Paula Gunn Allen (1986/1992) and others have made clear, intersexed individuals were recognized in many tribal societies prior to colonization without assimilation to the sexual binary. It is important to consider the changes that colonization brought to understand the scope of the organization of sex and gender under colonialism and in Eurocentered global capitalism. If the latter did only recognize sexual dimorphism for white bourgeois males and females, it certainly does not follow that the sexual division is based on biology. The cosmetic and substantive corrections to biology make very clear that “gender” is antecedent to the “biological” traits and gives them meaning. The naturalizing of sexual differences is another product of the modern use of science that Quijano points out in the case of “race.” Not all

different traditions correct and normalize intersexed people. So, as with other assumptions, it is important to ask how sexual dimorphism served and continues to serve global, Eurocentered, capitalist domination/exploitation.

#### NONGENDERED AND GYNECRATIC EGALITARIANISM

As global, Eurocentered capitalism was constituted through colonization, gender differentials were introduced where there were none. Oyéronké Oyewùmí (1997) has shown us that the oppressive gender system that was imposed on Yoruba society did a lot more than transform the organization of reproduction. Her argument shows us that the scope of the gender system colonialism imposed encompasses the subordination of females in every aspect of life. Thus Quijano's understanding of the scope of gendering in global, Eurocentered capitalism is much too narrow. Allen argued that many Native American tribes were matriarchal, recognized more than two genders, recognized "third" gendering and homosexuality positively, and understood gender in egalitarian terms rather than in the terms of subordination that Eurocentered capitalism imposed on them. Gunn's work has enabled us to see that the scope of the gender differentials was much more encompassing and it did not rest on biology. Allen also showed us a gynecentric construction of knowledge and approach to understanding "reality" that counters the knowledge production of modernity. Thus she has pointed us in the direction of recognizing the gendered construction of knowledge in modernity, another aspect of the hidden scope of "gender" in Quijano's account of the processes constituting the coloniality of gender.

#### NONGENDERED EGALITARIANISM

In *The Invention of Women*, Oyéronké Oyewùmí raises questions about the validity of patriarchy as a valid transcultural category (1997, 20). She does so, not by contrasting patriarchy and matriarchy, but by arguing that "gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West" (31). No gender system was in place. Indeed, she tells us that gender has "become important in Yoruba studies not as an artifact of Yoruba life but because Yoruba life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the Western pattern of body-reasoning" (30). The assumption that Yoruba society included gender as an organizing principle is another case "of Western dominance in the documentation and interpretation of the world, one that is facilitated by the West's global material dominance" (32). She tells us that "researchers always find gender when they look for it" (31). "The usual gloss of the Yoruba categories *obinrin* and *okunrin* as 'female/woman' and 'male/man,' respectively, is a mistranslation. These categories are neither binarily opposed nor hierarchical" (32–33). The prefixes *obin* and *okun* specify a variety of

anatomy. Oyewùmí translates the prefixes as referring to the anatomic male and the anatomic female, shortened as *anamale* and *anafemale*. It is important to note that she does not understand these categories as binarily opposed.

Oyewùmí understands gender as introduced by the West as a tool of domination that designates two binarily opposed and hierarchical social categories. ‘Women’ (the gender term) is not defined through biology, though it is assigned to anafemales. Women are defined in relation to men, the norm. Women are those who do not have a penis; those who do not have power; those who cannot participate in the public arena (Oyewùmí 1997, 34). None of this was true of Yoruba anafemales prior to colonization.

The imposition of the European state system, with its attendant legal and bureaucratic machinery, is the most enduring legacy of European colonial rule in Africa. One tradition that was exported to Africa during this period was the exclusion of women from the newly created colonial public sphere. . . . The very process by which females were categorized and reduced to “women” made them ineligible for leadership roles. . . . The emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted, in part, from the imposition of a patriarchal colonial state. For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of “women” as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was unthinkable for the colonial government to recognize female leaders among the peoples they colonized, such as the Yorùbá. . . . The transformation of state power to male-gender power was accomplished at one level by the exclusion of women from state structures. This was in sharp contrast to Yorùbá state organization, in which power was not gender-determined. (123–25)

Oyewùmí recognizes two crucial processes in colonization, the imposition of races with the accompanying inferiorization of Africans, and the inferiorization of anafemales. The inferiorization of anafemales extended very widely—from exclusion from leadership roles to loss of control over property and other important economic domains. Oyewùmí notes that the introduction of the Western gender system was accepted by Yoruba males, who thus colluded with the inferiorization of anafemales. So, when we think of the indifference of nonwhite men to the violences exercised against nonwhite women, we can begin to have some sense of the collaboration between anamales and Western colonials against anafemales. Oyewùmí makes clear that both men and women resisted cultural changes at different levels. Thus, while

in the West the challenge of feminism is how to proceed from the gender-saturated category of “women” to the fullness of an unsexed humanity. For Yorùbá obinrin, the challenge is obviously different because at certain levels in the society and in some spheres, the notion of an “unsexed humanity” is neither a dream to aspire to nor a memory to be realized. It exists, albeit in concatenation with the reality of separate and hierarchical sexes imposed during the colonial period. (156)

We can see, then, that the scope of the coloniality of gender is much too narrow. Quijano assumes much of the terms of the modern/colonial gender system’s hegemonic light side in defining the scope of gender. I have gone outside the coloniality of gender in order to examine what it hides, or disallows from consideration, about the very scope of the gender system of Eurocentered global capitalism. So, though I think that the coloniality of gender, as Quijano pointedly describes it, shows us very important aspects of the intersection of race and gender, it follows rather than discloses the erasure of colonized women from most areas of social life. It accommodates rather than disrupt the narrowing of gender domination. Oyewùmí’s rejection of the gender lens in characterizing the inferiorization of anafemales in modern colonization makes clear the extent and scope of the inferiorization. Her understanding of gender, the colonial, Eurocentered capitalist construction is much more encompassing than Quijano’s. She enables us to see the economic, political, and cognitive inferiorization as well as the inferiorization of anafemales regarding reproductive control.

#### GYNECRATIC EGALITARIANISM

To assign to this great being the position of “fertility goddess”  
is exceedingly demeaning: it trivializes the tribes  
and it trivializes the power of woman.

—Paula Gunn Allen

As she characterizes many Native American tribes as gynocratic, Paula Gunn Allen emphasizes the centrality of the spiritual in all aspects of Indian life and thus a very different intersubjectivity from within which knowledge is produced than that of the coloniality of knowledge in modernity. Many American Indian tribes “thought that the primary potency in the universe was female, and that understanding authorizes all tribal activities” (Allen 1986/1992, 26). Old Spider Woman, Corn Woman, Serpent Woman, Thought Woman are some of the names of powerful creators. For the gynocratic tribes, Woman is at the center and “no thing is sacred without her blessing, her thinking” (Allen 1986/1992, 13).

Replacing this gynocratic spiritual plurality with one supreme male being as Christianity did, was crucial in subduing the tribes. Allen proposes that transforming Indian tribes from egalitarian and gynocratic to hierarchical and patriarchal “requires meeting four objectives:

1. The primacy of female as creator is displaced and replaced by male-gendered creators (generally generic) (1986/1992, 41).
2. Tribal governing institutions and the philosophies that are their foundation are destroyed, as they were among the Iroquois and the Cherokee (41).
3. The people “are pushed off their lands, deprived of their economic livelihood, and forced to curtail or end altogether pursuits on which their ritual system, philosophy, and subsistence depend. Now dependent on white institutions for their survival, tribal systems can ill afford gynocracy when patriarchy—that is, survival—requires male dominance” (42).
4. The clan structure “must be replaced in fact if not in theory, by the nuclear family. By this ploy, the women clan heads are replaced by elected male officials and the psychic net that is formed and maintained by the nature of nonauthoritarian gynocentricity grounded in respect for diversity of gods and people is thoroughly rent” (42).

Thus, for Allen, the inferiorization of Indian females is thoroughly tied to the domination and transformation of tribal life. The destruction of the gynocracies is crucial to the “decimation of populations through starvation, disease, and disruption of all social, spiritual, and economic structures” (42). The program of degynocratization requires impressive “image and information control.” Thus “recasting archaic tribal versions of tribal history, customs, institutions and the oral tradition increases the likelihood that the patriarchal revisionist versions of tribal life, skewed or simply made up by patriarchal non-Indians and patriarchalized Indians, will be incorporated into the spiritual and popular traditions of the tribes” (42).

Among the features of the Indian society targeted for destruction were the two-sided complementary social structure; the understanding of gender; and the economic distribution that often followed the system of reciprocity. The two sides of the complementary social structure included an internal female chief and an external male chief. The internal chief presided over the band, village, or tribe, maintaining harmony and administering domestic affairs. The red, male, chief presided over mediations between the tribe and outsiders (Allen 1986/1992, 18). Gender was not understood primarily in biological terms. Most individuals fit into tribal gender roles “on the basis of proclivity,

inclination, and temperament. The Yuma had a tradition of gender designation based on dreams; a female who dreamed of weapons became a male for all practical purposes" (196).

Like Oyewùmí, Allen is interested in the collaboration between some Indian men and whites in undermining the power of women. It is important for us to think about these collaborations as we think of the question of indifference to the struggles of women in racialized communities against multiple forms of violence against them and the communities. The white colonizer constructed a powerful inside force as colonized men were co-opted into patriarchal roles. Allen details the transformations of the Iroquois and Cherokee gynocracies and the role of Indian men in the passage to patriarchy. The British took Cherokee men to England and gave them an education in the ways of the English. These men participated during the time of the Removal Act.

In an effort to stave off removal, the Cherokee in the early 1800s under the leadership of men such as Elias Boudinot, Major Ridge, and John Ross, and others, drafted a constitution that disenfranchised women and blacks. Modeled after the Constitution of the United States, whose favor they were attempting to curry, and in conjunction with Christian sympathizers to the Cherokee cause, the new Cherokee constitution relegated women to the position of chattel. (Allen 1986/1992, 37)

Cherokee women had had the power to wage war, to decide the fate of captives, to speak to the men's council, they had the right to inclusion in public policy decisions, the right to choose whom and whether to marry, the right to bear arms. The Women's Council was politically and spiritually powerful (36–37). Cherokee women lost all these powers and rights, as the Cherokee were removed and patriarchal arrangements were introduced. The Iroquois shifted from a Mother-centered, Mother-right people organized politically under the authority of the Matrons, to a patriarchal society when the Iroquois became a subject people. The feat was accomplished with the collaboration of Handsome Lake and his followers.

According to Allen, many of the tribes were gynocratic, among them the Susquehanna, Hurons, Iroquois, Cherokee, Pueblo, Navajo, Narragansett, Coastal Algonkians, Montagnais. She also tells us that among the eighty-eight tribes that recognized homosexuality, those who recognized homosexuals in positive terms included the Apache, Navajo, Winnebago, Cheyenne, Pima, Crow, Shoshoni, Paiute, Osage, Acoma, Zuñi, Sioux, Pawnee, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, Illinois, Mohave, Shasta, Aleut, Sac and Fox, Iowa, Kansas, Yuma, Aztec, Tlingit, Maya, Naskapi, Ponca, Maricopa, Lamath, Quinault, Yuki, Chilula, and Kamia. Twenty of these tribes included specific references to lesbianism.



Michael Horswell (2003) comments usefully on the use of the term *third gender*. He tells that third gender does not mean that there are three genders. It is rather a way of breaking gender with sex and gender bipolarities. The “third” is emblematic of other possible combinations than the dimorphic. The term *berdache* is sometimes used for “third gender.” Horswell tells us that male berdache have been documented in nearly 150 North American societies and female berdache in half as many groups (2003, 27). He also comments that sodomy, including ritual sodomy, was recorded in Andean societies and many other native societies in the Americas (27). The Nahuas and Mayas also reserved a role for ritualized sodomy (Sigal 2003, 104). Interestingly, Pete Sigal tells us that the Spanish saw sodomy as sinful, but Spanish law condemned the active not the passive partner in sodomy to criminal punishment. In Spanish popular culture, sodomy was racialized by connecting the practice to the Moors and the passive partner was condemned and seen as equal to a Moor. Spanish soldiers were seen as the active partners to the passive Moors (102–4).

Allen has not only enabled us to see how narrow Quijano’s conception of gender is in terms of the organization of the economy and of collective authority, but she has also revealed that the production of knowledge is gendered, as is the very conception of reality at every level. Allen supported the questioning of biology in the construction of gender differences and introduces the important idea of gender roles being chosen and dreamt. Allen also showed us that the heterosexuality characteristic of the modern/colonial construction of gender relations is produced, mythically constructed. But heterosexuality is not just biologized in a fictional way; it is compulsory and permeates the whole of the coloniality of gender in the renewed, large sense. In this sense, global, Eurocentered capitalism is heterosexualist. I think it is important to see, as we understand the depth and force of violence in the production of both the light and the dark sides of the colonial/modern gender system, that this heterosexuality has been consistently perverse, violent, and demeaning, turning people into animals and turning white women into reproducers of “the (white) race” and “the (middle or upper) class.” Horswell’s and Sigal’s work complements Allen’s, particularly in understanding the presence of sodomy and male homosexuality in colonial and precolonial America.

#### THE COLONIAL/MODERN GENDER SYSTEM

Understanding the place of gender in precolonial societies is pivotal to understanding the nature and scope of changes in the social structure that the processes constituting colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism imposed. Those changes were introduced through slow, discontinuous, and heterogeneous processes that violently inferiorized colonized women. The gender system introduced was one thoroughly informed through the coloniality of power.

Understanding the place of gender in precolonial societies is also essential to understanding the extent and importance of the gender system in disintegrating communal relations, egalitarian relations, ritual thinking, collective decision making and authority, and economies. Thus, it is important to understand the extent to which the imposition of this gender system was as constitutive of the coloniality of power as the coloniality of power was constitutive of it. The logic of the relation between them is of mutual constitution.<sup>15</sup> But it should be clear by now that the colonial, modern, gender system cannot exist without the coloniality of power, since the classification of the population in terms of race is a necessary condition of its possibility.

To think the scope of the gender system of global, Eurocentered capitalism it is necessary to understand the extent to which the very process of narrowing of the concept of gender to the control of sex, its resources, and products constitutes gender domination. To understand this narrowing and to understand the intermeshing of racialization and gendering, we must consider whether the social arrangements prior to colonization regarding the sexes gave differential meaning to them across all areas of existence. This will enable us to see whether control over labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity, collective authority, sex—Quijano's "areas of existence"—was itself gendered. Given the coloniality of power, I think we can also say that having a dark and a light side is characteristic of the co-construction of the coloniality of power and the colonial/modern gender system. Considering critically both biological dimorphism and the position that gender socially constructs biological sex helps us understand the scope, depth, and characteristics of the colonial/modern gender system. The sense is that the reduction of gender to the private, to control over sex and its resources and products is a matter of ideology, of the cognitive production of modernity that has understood race as gendered and gender as raced in particularly differential ways for Europeans/whites and colonized/nonwhite peoples. Race is no more mythical and fictional than gender—both are powerful fictions.

In the development of twentieth-century feminism, the connections among gender, class, and heterosexuality as racialized were not made explicit. That feminism centered its struggle and its ways of knowing and theorizing against a characterization of women as fragile, weak in both body and mind, secluded in the private, and sexually passive. But it did not bring to consciousness that those characteristics only constructed white bourgeois womanhood. Indeed, beginning from that characterization, white bourgeois feminists theorized white womanhood as if all women were white.

It is part of their history that only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates. They were also understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense

of “without gender,”<sup>16</sup> sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity.<sup>17</sup> Women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of “women” as it fit the processes of global, Eurocentered capitalism. Thus, heterosexual rape of Indian or African slave women coexisted with concubinage, as well as with the imposition of the heterosexual understanding of gender relations among the colonized—when and as it suited global, Eurocentered capitalism, and heterosexual domination of white women. But the work of Oyewùmí and Allen has made clear that there was no extension of the status of white women to colonized women even when they were turned into similes of bourgeois white women. Colonized females got the inferior status of gendering as women, without any of the privileges accompanying that status for white bourgeois women, although the histories Oyewùmí and Allen have presented should make clear to white bourgeois women that their status is much inferior to that of Native American or Yoruba women before colonization. Oyewùmí and Allen have also explained that the egalitarian understanding of the relation between anafemales, anamales, and “third gender” people has left neither the imagination nor the practices of Native Americans and Yoruba. But these are matters of resistance to domination.

Erasing any history, including oral history, of the relation of white to nonwhite women, white feminism wrote white women large. Even though historically and contemporarily white bourgeois women knew perfectly well how to orient themselves in an organization of life that pitted them for very different treatment than nonwhite or working-class women.<sup>18</sup> White feminist struggle became one against the positions, roles, stereotypes, traits, and desires imposed on white bourgeois women’s subordination. They countenanced no one else’s gender oppression. They understood women as inhabiting white bodies but did not bring that racial qualification to articulation or clear awareness. That is, they did not understand themselves in intersectional terms, at the intersection of race, gender, and other forceful marks of subjection or domination. Because they did not perceive these deep differences they saw no need to create coalitions. They presumed a sisterhood, a bond given with the subjection of gender.

Historically, the characterization of white European women as fragile and sexually passive opposed them to nonwhite, colonized women, including female slaves, who were characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor. For example, slave women performing backbreaking work in the U.S. South were not considered fragile or weak.

First came, led by an old driver carrying a whip, forty of the largest and strongest women I ever saw together; they were all in a simple uniform dress of a bluish check stuff, the skirts reaching

little below the knee; their legs and feet were bare; they carried themselves loftily, each having a hoe over the shoulder, and walking with a free, powerful swing, like *chasseurs* on the march. Behind came the cavalry, thirty strong, mostly men, but a few of them women, two of whom rode astride on the plow mules. A lean and vigilant white overseer, on a brisk pony, brought up the rear. . . . The hands are required to be in the cotton field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given to them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night. (Takaki 1993, 111)

Patricia Hill Collins has provided a clear sense of the dominant understanding of black women as sexually aggressive and the genesis of that stereotype in slavery:

The image of Jezebel originated under slavery when Black women were portrayed as being, to use Jewelle Gomez' words, "sexually aggressive wet nurses." Jezebel's function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women. Jezebel served yet another function. If Black slave women could be portrayed as having excessive sexual appetites, then increased fertility should be the expected outcome. By suppressing the nurturing that African-American women might give their own children which would strengthen Black family networks, and by forcing Black women to work in the field, "wet nurse" White children, and emotionally nurture their White owners, slave owners effectively tied the controlling images of jezebel and mammy to the economic exploitation inherent in the institution of slavery. (Collins 2000, 82)

But it is not just black slave women who were placed outside the scope of white bourgeois femininity. In *Imperial Leather*, as she tells us of Columbus's depiction of the earth as a woman's breast, Anne McClintock evokes the "long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment."

For centuries, the uncertain continents—Africa, the Americas, Asia—were figured in European lore as libidinally eroticized. Travelers' tales abounded with visions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminized men's breasts

flowed with milk and militarized women lopped theirs off. . . . Within this porno tropic tradition, women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess. Folklore saw them, even more than the men, as given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial. (1995, 22)

McClintock described the colonial scene depicted in a sixteenth-century drawing in which Jan van der Straet “portrays the ‘discovery’ of America as an eroticized encounter between a man and a woman.”

Roused from her sensual languor by the epic newcomer, the indigenous woman extends an inviting hand, insinuating sex and submission. . . . Vespucci, the godlike arrival, is destined to inseminate her with his male seeds of civilization, fructify the wilderness and quell the riotous scenes of cannibalism in the background. . . . The cannibals appear to be female and are spit roasting a human leg. (25–26)

In the nineteenth century, McClintock tells us, “sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power” (47). With the development of evolutionary theory “anatomical criteria were sought for determining the relative position of races in the human series” (50) and “the English middle-class male was placed at the pinnacle of evolutionary hierarchy. White English middle class women followed. Domestic workers, female miners and working class prostitutes were stationed on the threshold between the white and black races” (56). Along the same lines, Yen Le Espiritu tells us that

representations of gender and sexuality figure strongly in the articulation of racism. Gender norms in the United States are premised upon the experiences of middle-class men and women of European origin. These Eurocentric-constructed gender norms form a backdrop of expectations for American men and women of color—expectations which racism often precludes meeting. In general, men of color are viewed not as the protector, but rather the aggressor—a threat to white women. And women of color are seen as over sexualized and thus undeserving of the social and sexual protection accorded to white middle-class women. For Asian American men and women, their exclusion from white-based cultural notions of the masculine and the feminine has taken seemingly contrasting forms: Asian men have been cast as both hypermasculine (the “Yellow Peril”) and effeminate (the “model minority”); and Asian women have been rendered both superfeminine (the “China Doll”) and castrating (the “Dragon Lady”). (1997, 135)

This gender system congealed as Europe advanced the colonial project(s). It took shape during the Spanish and Portuguese colonial adventures and became full blown in late modernity. The gender system has a light and a dark side. The light side constructs gender and gender relations hegemonically, ordering only the lives of white bourgeois men and women and constituting the modern/colonial meaning of men and women. Sexual purity and passivity are crucial characteristics of the white bourgeois females who reproduce the class and the colonial and racial standing of bourgeois, white men. But equally important is the banning of white bourgeois women from the sphere of collective authority, from the production of knowledge, from most control over the means of production. Weakness of mind and body are important in the reduction and seclusion of white bourgeois women from most domains of life, most areas of human existence. The gender system is heterosexualist, as heterosexuality permeates racialized patriarchal control over production, including knowledge production, and over collective authority. Heterosexuality is both compulsory and perverse among white bourgeois men and women since the arrangement does significant violence to the powers and rights of white bourgeois women and serves to reproduce control over production and white bourgeois women are inducted into this reduction through bounded sexual access.

The dark side of the gender system was and is thoroughly violent. We have begun to see the deep reductions of anamales, anafemales, and “third gender” people from their ubiquitous participation in rituals, decision making, and economics; their reduction to animality, to forced sex with white colonizers, to such deep labor exploitation that often people died working. Quijano tells us that “the vast Indian genocide of the first decades of colonization was not caused, in the main, by the violence of the conquest, nor by the diseases that the conquerors carried. Rather it was due to the fact that the Indians were used as throwaway labor, forced to work till death” (2000a, my translation).

I want to mark the connection between the work that I am citing here as I introduce the modern colonial gender system’s dark side and Quijano’s coloniality of power. Unlike white feminists who have not focused on colonialism, these theorists very much see the differential construction of gender along racial lines. To some extent, they understand gender in a wider sense than Quijano; thus they think not only of control over sex, its resources and products, but also of labor as both racialized and gendered. That is, they see an articulation between labor, sex, and the coloniality of power. Oyewùmí and Allen, for example, have helped us realize the full extent of the reach of the colonial/modern gender system into the construction of collective authority, all aspects of the relation between capital and labor, and the construction of knowledge.

Important work has been and has yet to be done in detailing the dark and light sides of what I am calling the modern colonial gender system.<sup>19</sup> In

introducing this arrangement in very large strokes, I mean to begin a conversation and a project of collaborative, participatory, research and popular education wherein we may begin to see in its details the long sense of the processes of the colonial/gender system enmeshed in the colonality of power into the present, to uncover collaboration, and to call each other to reject it in its various guises as we recommit to communal integrity in a liberatory direction. We need to understand the organization of the social so as to make visible our collaboration with systematic racialized gender violence, so as to come to an inevitable recognition of it in our maps of reality.

## NOTES

1. I use the U.S.–originated *women of color* throughout this piece as a coalitional term against multiple oppressions. It is a problematic term and not necessarily one of self-identification for many of the women who had the modern/colonial gender system imposed on them. Those women were and continue to be the target of systematic and extensive state and interpersonal violence under global, Eurocentered capitalism.

2. I use *categorical* to mark arrangements in accordance with categories. I certainly do not mean *categorical*.

3. There is a very large and significant literature on this question of intersectional. Here I refer only to a few pieces: Spelman 1988; Barkley Brown 1991; Crenshaw 1995; Espiritu 1997; Collins 2000; and Lugones 2003.

4. To the work mentioned already, I want to add Amos and Parmar 1984; Lorde 1984; Allen 1986; Anzaldúa 1987; McClintock 1995; Oyewùmí 1997; and Alexander and Mohanty 1997.

5. Anibal Quijano's has written extensively and influentially on this topic. The interpretation I offer is gathered from 1991, 2000a, 2000b, 2001–2002.

6. Popular education can be a method of collective critical exploration of this gender system both in the large stroke, and most importantly, in its detailed space/time concreteness toward a transformation of communal relations.

7. Quijano understands race to be a fiction. He always places quotation marks around the term to signify this fictional quality. When terms “European,” “Indian,” are in quotation marks, they signify a racial classification.

8. Quijano prefers *pattern* to *model* as a translation for *patrón*. His reason is that *model* suggests something to follow or copy. Because this use of *pattern* is often awkward, I use *model*.

9. In dropping the quotation marks around race here, I do not mean to disagree with Quijano about the fictive quality of race. Rather I want to begin to emphasize the fictive quality of gender, including the biological “nature” of sex and heterosexuality.

10. See my *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes* (2003) and “Radical Multiculturalism and Women of Color Feminisms” (n.d.) for an unpacking of this logic.

11. I have not seen these attributes summarized by Quijano. So, I do not know whether he is thinking of chromosomal combinations or of genitalia and breasts.

12. I want to mark that Quijano calls this section of his "Colonialidad del Poder y Clasificación Social" (2000b), not the coloniality of sex but of gender.

13. The relevance of contemporary legal disputes over the assignation of gender to intersexed individuals should be clear since Quijano's model includes the contemporary period.

14. See McClintock 1995.

15. I am sure that those who read this piece will recognize much of what I am saying and some may think that it has already been said. That is quite fine with me, so long as it is accompanied by a theoretico-practical recognition of this mutual constitution, one that shows throughout the theoretical, the practical, and the theoretico-practical work. But I think something that may well be new here is my approach to the logic of intersectionality and my understanding of the mutuality of construction of the coloniality of power and the colonial/modern gender system. I think they are both necessary, but it is only the logic mutuality of construction that yields the inseparability of race and gender.

16. Spelman's interpretation (1988) of Aristotle's distinction between free men and women in the Greek polis and slave males and slave females suggested this claim to me. It is important to note that reducing women to nature or the natural is to collude with this racist reduction of colonized women. More than one Latin American thinker who decries Eurocentrism, relates women to the sexual and the reproductive.

17. It is important to distinguish between being thought of as without gender because an animal, and not having, even conceptually, any gender distinctions. That is, having gender is not a characteristic of being human for all people.

18. The deep distinction between white working-class and nonwhite women can be glimpsed from the very different places they occupied in the evolutionary series referred to by McClintock (1995, 4).

19. I am clear now that there is an ambiguous in-between zone between the light and the dark side that conceives/imagines/constructs white women servants, miners, washerwomen, prostitutes as not necessarily caught through the lens of the sexual or gender binary and as racialized ambiguously, but not as white. See McClintock 1995. I am working on the inclusion of this crucial complexity into the framework.

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