

Notes Toward a Decolonial Feminist Methodology: Revisiting the Race/Gender Matrix

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What constitutes the meaning of “gender” has and continues to be the subject of much debate among feminist scholars and theorists of gender. Feminisms of all kinds (Liberal, Radical, Postmodern, Transnational, etc.), have long struggled to produce theories about gender that speak to the concerns, oppressions, and experiences of a multiplicity of “women” (Tong 2009). However, as the second wave of feminism moved into the realm of the transnational, “gender” has become increasingly descriptive. It has become descriptive in that analytically gender tends to descriptively refer to *the* biological sexual difference (think: males vs. females) as well as the sets of institutions and power dynamics that produce the sexual difference and its concomitant heterosexual imperative cross-culturally (Scott 1986; Scott 2010).

While there is an understanding that anatomical females do not comprise the same kind of “Woman,” and that “Women” do not have the same kind of struggles, analytically the assumption is that “Woman” is a cross-culturally identifiable category comprised of an identifiable set of bodies throughout the world (Scott 1986; Tong 2009; Scott 2010). However, the tendency to reduce gender to a referent for body type and or even a particular set of social dynamics makes it practically impossible to take into account the ways in which gender has historically been reconstituted and racialized through, what in the context of the Americas and the Caribbean can be understood as, colonial relations of power. Moreover, it fails to recognize how gender has been and continues to be deployed in (neo)colonizing ways (Gunn Allen

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1986; Spivak 1988; Oyěwùmí 1997; Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005; Wekker 2006; Paredes 2008).

It is with this in mind that this article seeks to examine some of the processes through which gender comes to be racialized in order to challenge the tendency in many feminist theories of gender to analytically separate these categories. Notably, my intention is not to do away with “gender” as a category of analysis, but instead to be attentive to its presuppositions and cultural-historical (re)formations as well as to the citational and reiterative practices of how it has been theorized such that we can begin to explore what difference it makes to rethink its usefulness, particularly as it pertains to “women of color”¹ and how we understand modes of relating within communities of color. Part of what this article explores is the extent to which “gender” and its concomitant “Man” and “Woman” functions to obscure the histories and bodies of those that bear the historical mark of slavery and colonization, whether intentionally or not. What, if anything, does rethinking gender have to offer in terms of moving feminist and decolonial scholars towards more nuanced analyses of power? More importantly, what are some necessary theoretical and methodological shifts for feminist and decolonial scholars politically invested in using gender to denounce oppressive and (neo)colonial relations of power?

1. Clearing Theoretical Ground: Historicizing “Gender”

In her 2007 article entitled *Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System*, feminist philosopher María Lugones suggests that gender was necessarily (re)constituted through the practices and processes of slavery and colonization. Her analysis begins from an attempt to historicize gender in order to emphasize the relational process through which it becomes racialized and a marker of humanity for colonizers. Building on Anibal Quijano's (2000) “coloniality of power”² where

¹ I refer to “women of color” in two distinct ways throughout this paper. In this instance, it is a reference to those females that have been racialized through colonial processes, as both non-”white” and non-”European.” The second usage of “women of color” refers to the specific movement by racialized females in the United States to politically seek coalitions with one another, learn each other's histories, and think and love across “non-dominant” differences (Alexander 2005; Lorde 2007).

² Quijano's (2000) “coloniality of power” is important in that it highlights the relationship that colonization had to the racialization of labor and the extent to which racialized labor became foundational to and for capitalist production and power. In addition, Quijano as well as other decolonial thinkers consider the consequences of the fusion between race and capitalism as systems, laws, institutions and modes of being that persists long after formal colonialism has ended. However, their analyses do not flush out what consequences this fusion had for how “gender” gets reconstituted.

“race” gets (re)constituted in relation to the capitalist system of power, Lugones argues that whatever arrangements existed between “Men” and “Women” in Europe, the colonization of the Americas provided fertile ground for establishing “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” (Lugones 186).

Lugones’ claim is suggestive because it describes how, within the context of slavery and colonization, the existence of and later further introduction of physiognomically distinct laboring bodies become produced as the constitutive outside of “gender.” In other words, these physiognomically distinct laboring bodies functioned to give gender new meaning and to systematically attach gender to a humanity that is racialized as “European” and “white”-in-the-making.³ For example, consider the ways in which chattel slavery by definition reduced Africans to the legal status of objects that could be bought and sold as opposed to beings that could be understood as either “Men” or “Women.”

Accordingly, historically, and objectively speaking, “gender” was reconstituted in relation to the material conditions of the Atlantic Slave Trade (Spillers 1987), colonization, and the creation of a humanity that defines itself over and against the bodies of the enslaved and colonized (Wynter, “Unsettling” 257-337). It is within this context where various categories of inferiorization (think: Christian models of gender, barbarism, Spanish conceptions of “*raza*,” etc.), converge, transform, and mutate in the project of justifying the practices of dehumanization and exploitation. It is the convergence of Christian formulations of “gender,” “sexuality,” one’s location as a laboring body, “religion,” etc., that collectively become the stuff of race and are mobilized in ways that give meaning to race (McClintock 53-56; Santiago-Valles 2003). This is just one example of how *other* categories of marking difference themselves become racialized in particular ways within the colonial context of the Americas and the Caribbean. Significantly, it is an examination of the historical reconstitution of the categories that can serve to challenge the tendency to reduce gender to a biologized descriptor, or primarily a referent for *the* “sexual difference,” the social relation between “Man” and “Woman,” or even the more nuanced tensions between the “masculine” and the “feminine.”

³ Ann Laura Stoler (1995; 2002) and Anne McClintock (1995) are particularly instructive on this point. Their work highlights how racialization as it was defined in the colonies traveled back and redefined the social lives of those in the metropole, regardless of their being cognizant of it or not.

Lugones attempts to map out these colonial relations of power and to challenge the analytic separation of race and gender through what she refers to as the “colonial/modern gender system.” While her model remains limited as a result of her less nuanced approach to history,⁴ her analysis nonetheless remains suggestive in that it provides a way to read/think about what Elsa Barkley Brown refers to as the “relational nature of our differences” (Barkley Brown 298). It provides a way to read/think about the “relational nature of our differences” in that “Women” (namely European, heterosexual, bourgeois females) got to occupy the position they did because the enslaved and colonized occupied the position they did (Barkley Brown 298). At least within the context of the Americas and the Caribbean, “Women” were (re)defined in relation to enslaved physiognomically distinct laboring bodies, and were in fact partially empowered in relation to these bodies (Wynter, “Afterword” 355-373).

Using Lugones’ model, we can begin to see the problem with reducing gender to a descriptive biology and or a referent for the social relation *between* “Men” and “Women,” since to do so means to overlook or obscure the sets of laboring bodies that served to give these categories new meaning. Within the colonial/modern gender system, gender can be understood relatively from what she terms the “light” and “dark” sides (Lugones 206). The “light side” is comprised of “white” bourgeois heterosexual males and females, where white bourgeois heterosexual males (a.k.a. “Man”) represent the body and being that matters and has the greatest amount of authority and power within this system. Unlike all others in the colonial/modern gender system, “Man” is understood to be the sole possessor of subjectivity and knowledge as pre-determined by his “natural evolution” as a “rational” being. For all intents and purposes he can be considered the literal embodiment of the modern liberal subject (think: Western European philosophy) as well as the subject who is protected and systematically benefits from the notion of “rights” and laws. It is this

⁴ Lugones' model is more about articulating an idealized conception that impacts people's desires, conceptions of self, and ways of engaging the social. Politically it remains suggestive, even when taking into account Lugones' less nuanced approach to history. For instance, her framework overlooks competing models (i.e. “purity of blood” statutes) that also regulated social relations in both the colonies and the metropole and complicates our understanding of the differences between “colonized” and “colonizer.” I would like to thank Kelvin Santiago-Valles for offering a critical engagement on this point, and the question of historical specificity and periodization during my presentation entitled “Embodying A Black Cosmos: Reading the Interstices of Santería” at the 5th Biennial Conference of The Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD), “African Liberation and Black Power: The Challenges of Diasporic Encounter Across Time, Space and Imagination” at The University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. November 3-6, 2011.

“Man” who is free to impose his body and will with relative impunity, sexually or otherwise, on any Other that is understood to be naturally inferior to him.⁵

“Woman,” namely his “light side” counterpart, is reduced to his negation within the colonial/modern gender system. Thus, if he is of the “mind,” she is of the “body”; if he is of the “public,” she is relegated to the “private;” if he represents authority, she is banned from having authority, and so on and so forth. Here, you can think of the Cult of Domesticity as a manifestation of this logic at work (Welter 151-174). Within Lugones’ model, being a “Man” or a “Woman” in the colonial/modern gender system not only refers to a specific body type but also to the specific arrangement of bodies and power that those males (mostly) and females idealized for themselves. Within the context of the colonies, “Woman” is subordinated to “Man” and her worth is linked to her ability to reproduce the “race” and capital on his behalf. In the colonial/modern gender system, “Woman” is reduced to an instrumental vehicle for the reproduction of race and capital in exchange for the privileges/benefits that come with being construed as feminine. These privileges/benefits, which I consider to be the “wages” of gender, include but are not limited to patriarchal “protection” from hard work in the fields and patriarchal “protection” from the “wild dangers” of the public sphere.

In this sense, her model is a lot closer to Sylvia Wynter’s understanding of gender and race as being produced through a genre of “Man,” a notion of humanity that becomes racialized through colonial relations of power (Wynter, “Unsettling” 281-2). What is important here are the ways in which being recognized as “Man” or “Woman” already presupposes an acknowledgement of one’s humanity and a systemically supported freedom, because no one enslaved would be referred to in these terms or be recognized as such under the law. Without an understanding of how gender comes to be racialized through such colonial relationships of power we end up with a category of analysis that obscures as much as it claims to reveal. For instance, while “gender” reveals the ways in which free “Women” were subordinated in relation to free “Men,” it obscures the ways in which those same free “Women” were partially empowered in relation to enslaved males, females, and everything in between (Wynter, “Afterword” 360-363).

Thus as Spelman has argued, it is not enough to understand the arrangement of bodies and power that free “Men” and “Women” had for themselves, since that relation is co-constituted by those outside of it (the enslaved or unfree) that served to give it meaning.⁶ Returning to Lugones’ model, on the “dark side” of the

⁵ I would argue that we see this logic and racialized gender arrangement enacted in the acquittals of the police officers who murdered Eric Garner and Mike Brown.

⁶ Elizabeth V. Spelman's makes this argument regarding how gender is understood in the

colonial/modern gender system are the laboring bodies of the enslaved who are relatively imagined and viewed as animalistic in nature. The enslaved, understood and treated as less than human, come to represent the embodiment of degeneration, a subhumanity with various degrees of non-humanness. Rather than rewrite their history as a different experience of “manhood” or “womanhood,” Lugones' analysis provides a theoretical space from which to consider the dehumanizing and racializing work that gender performed in the colonial context. More importantly, there is an implicit insistence that we cannot address “Patriarchy” writ large without also attending to the sets of bodies that served as the constitutive outside of those arrangements.

As a result, gender here is not reduced to a descriptive biology or even the social relation *between* “Men” and “Women,” because to reduce it in this fashion means to obscure the bodies and histories of the enslaved and the critical role they played in giving gender new meaning. Indeed, if we are to use gender to produce critical analyses of power and to denounce exploitative and oppressive modes of relating, then gender *must* include the racialized relations of power that have historically given it meaning, that continue to be a part of the culturally specific characteristics that are hegemonically associated with the categories “Man” and “Woman,” and that served to make the oppressive relations between those “Men” and “Women” relatively attractive. Although Lugones' framework is schematic, it does not preclude the fact that these arrangements of power were contested and themselves at times a product of resistant struggles by “Euro-identified” peoples.⁷ Moreover, it does not assume that all “colonizers” fit these categories or themselves aspired to them. It does, however, attempt to resist the tendency to think of gender in non-racialized terms.

When gender does not primarily presuppose a descriptive biology or center the relationship *between* “Men” and “Women” we are able to see how gender, *as the arrangement of bodies and power of those on the ‘light side,’* was part and parcel of codifying “racial” difference and vice versa. Shifting the meaning of gender in this way allows us to also take seriously the claims made by women of color feminists regarding our

Greek *polis*. She argues that if we want to really understand “gender” in its complexity, then in addition to examining the relationship between those recognized as “Men” and those recognized as “Women,” we must also consider all the male and female bodies that were excluded from those gender categories (49-55).

⁷ Thomas Laqueur (1990) and Anne Fausto-Sterling's (2000) work both provide examples where an investment in the “sexual difference” in Scott's sense was a product of social-political struggles in the “European” context. For instance, the space opened up by the French Revolution motivated “Women”(of a particular breed of course) to demand access to this political space on the basis of their difference. Since as Laqueur points out, “if women have no special interests or legitimate grounds for their social being, [then] men could speak for them as they had in the past” (197).

varied theoretical and systemic exclusion from this category as well as raise new kinds of critical questions. For instance, feminist and decolonial scholars can ask what is the relationship between the production of the “sexual difference” (Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category” 1053-1075) and processes of racialization?

When Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, considers the end of sexual difference she does so from the experiences and perspectives of bodies that do not conform to dichotomous and dimorphic understandings of the masculine and feminine or the heterosexual imperative (174-203). However, Butler's clarity on the discursive limits of sex, on the necessity for a constitutive outside as its condition of possibility, does not necessarily lead to a consideration of the ways in which racialization is fundamental to how non-normative sexualities and inhabitations of the body get construed as the “abjected outside” in the first place (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 3). Returning to the history of colonial relations that come together to reconfigure these categories gives us insight into some of the ways in which the categories that are hegemonically associated with gender, such as “sex” and “sexuality,” were used to denote racial/species difference and in the process became racialized long before their emergence as biomedical “truths.”

2. “Gender” From the Bodies of the Colonized: The Limits of the “Sexual Difference”

In his article entitled, *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature* (1985), Sander L. Gilman reveals the extent to which “sexual difference” within the aesthetic and medical practices of the West referred to not only the assumption of a physiological difference between “Men” and “Women,” but it also signaled a “difference” in sexual desire among different kinds of females as well as how that supposed difference in desire “manifested” in particular types of physiognomy. Through an examination of the representations of the prostitute in the visual arts of the 18th and 19th centuries, Gilman concludes that the function of the black body was “to *sexualize* the society in which he or she [was] found” (209).

These aesthetic conventions illustrate the ways in which the “white” prostitute's non-normative sexuality is given meaning in and through her proximity to black laboring bodies. The prostitute herself is racialized through her own status as a laboring body but also through her status as a being whose sexuality was presumed to be closer to that of the physiognomically distinct others placed in close proximity. It is the entry of assumptions such as the presupposed “sexual differences” between “Europeans” and “Blacks” that circulated within literature and art, into the pseudo-scientific context that integrates racialization into biomedical “facts.”

One example of this is the life and death of Saartjie Baartman, the most famous of the Hottentot Venuses, whose body was put on display in the human zoos of the early 19th century. Her racialization was partially established through the meanings given to the physiognomic differences obtaining between her body and that of the European-in-the-making. These meanings were part of the effort to transform her body into a comparative point, an example of what degeneration away from humanity “looks like.” According to Gilman, the pseudo-scientists of the time translated her “darker skin,” “horribly flattened nose,” “voluptuousness,” “protruding buttocks,” and “overdeveloped clitoris and labia” into the markers of a primitive physiology and sexuality and presented it as evidence of a primitive nature (Gilman 213-218).⁸

Central to my argument, however, are the ways in which Baartman’s “sexual difference” was not just a matter of a difference in genitalia from that of male bodies and those understood to be “Men.” Her “sexual difference” also included a difference in genitalia from those understood to be “Women” as well as the assumption of a difference in sexual desire from both the “Men” and “Women” that were bio-logically-in-the-making. It is through these practices that Baartman was translated into and (mis)represented as a “man-eater,” and even understood as having a predisposition towards “lesbian love” (218).

Baartman’s “sexual difference” encompassed a non-normative/excessive sexuality and a non-normative physiology supposedly innate to “Hottentot Venuses,” and was part of the effort by pseudo-scientists to locate the human/racial differences between “Europeans” and “Blacks” in the material and biological body. Thus, it is of no surprise that “white” prostitutes’ bodies were later subjected to similar “medical” examinations in an effort to identify physiognomic similarities to the Hottentot Venus that would serve to explain their predisposition towards sex work (Gilman 224). Evident in this example are some of the processes through which 19th century conceptions of “sex,” “sexuality,” and “gender” became constitutively racialized and vice versa. It is from this historical complexity that we can begin to get a sense of how “gender” has functioned and continues to function as a racializing and colonizing force.

Gilman's work is just one concrete example of how gender is co-constitutive of and co-constituted by one’s status as a laboring body, notions of sexuality, and processes of racialization, such that reducing its meaning to the differences between “Man” and “Woman,” social or otherwise, functions to invisibilize a far more

⁸ Although autopsies were performed on Black males during this time, Gilman notes a relative absence of any discussion regarding their genitalia (218).

complex matrix of bodies and power. Specifically, it obscures the role that colonized bodies played in giving “gender” a new reconstituted meaning. When “gender” is considered from Baartman’s body, then the dehumanizing impact of how “Woman” and “Man” gets articulated in relation to her becomes painstakingly clear. However, the tendency to perform “gender” as the “perceived difference between the sexes,” unwittingly shifts attention away from the colonized to those bodies for whom that was the gender arrangement, particularly when we take into account the ways in which gender was transformed into a referent for those who could be recognized as fully human.

3. Notes Toward a Decolonial Feminist Methodology

It is with this in mind that I consider the incorporation of the enslaved into the “gender” categories of “Man” and “Woman” not only ahistorical, but also a (mis)translation of the operative logic of the time. Incorporation (mis)construes the experiences of enslaved African males and females as a “different” experience of “manhood” or “womanhood,” which in many ways performs a conceptual violence that relies on erasure. Rather than destabilize its colonial logic, incorporation instead obscures the profound dehumanizing and racializing work that gender performed. This becomes clear when we consider how from a colonial logic the enslaved were not understood as different kinds of “Women” or “Men,” but rather imagined and treated as altogether different types of beings, a different type of species.

It is from this ground that I rehearse and move towards what I consider to be a decolonial feminist methodology. I refer to it as decolonial because part of the goal is to denounce and transform colonial relations of power and colonial ways of relating that continue to persist in our present, a concern that resonates with and builds on the work of many postcolonial thinkers as well as transnational and women of color feminists. This methodology begins from a theoretical clearing wherein using gender as a critical category of analysis means being attentive to the complex racialized arrangement of bodies and power that were integral to its formation within the practices that came to “bio-logically” define “Men” and “Women.”

As a starting point, I can think of at least four ingredients⁹ that need to be part of

⁹ I am using the word “ingredients” here purposefully. Different from the word component, ingredient carries with it other layers of meaning that I think are important for this work. For instance, the word ingredient conjures up the idea of cooking, an activity that is often linked to female bodies and often includes creatively bringing very different things together in order to create something new (a meal) that both contributes to life and is life-sustaining. In addition, the ingredients of any recipe are things that are open and creatively tweaked to suit different needs, i.e. allergies, or food restrictions, etc. I propose these steps as

a decolonial feminist methodology and approach. First and foremost, we have to develop a practice of historicizing gender from within multiple histories and bodies, so that it does not become solely a referent for the social relation between “Man” and “Woman.” On the contrary, rethinking gender in this manner calls us to attend to the violent and *relational* processes and practices that construe one set of bodies as “Human” and the other set of bodies as degenerate. Rethinking gender means expanding the meanings of “sexual difference” to include the layers of racialized meanings produced through the aesthetic, epistemological, legal, economic, and pseudo-scientific practices and institutions of colonial empires. Instead of reducing its meaning to an immediately identifiable and cross-culturally observable set of relations and or bodies (think: “Men” and “Women” or “Men” versus “Women”), this theoretical shift calls for a political commitment to recognize and work against some of the colonial logics explicitly and implicitly at play in such deployments as well as pave the way towards new political possibilities.

Second, we must develop a practice of mapping out the *relational* power dynamics between variously racialized bodies. In so doing, at least two critical possibilities are opened up. On the one hand, we are able to acknowledge and denounce the oppressive set of relationships that free white heterosexual elite “Women” had/have in relation to free white heterosexual elite “Men.” On the other hand, we are able to make visible how that oppressive set of relationships gets construed as a “privilege” in relation to those enslaved. As a result, we can begin to consider how the oppressive modes of relating between those “Men” and “Women” were undergirded by the material conditions of those enslaved. In other words, not only are the “wages” of gender bound up with a recognition of one’s humanity, and in the case of “Women,” a partial empowerment in relation to those enslaved as well as patriarchal “protection” from the world of hard physical labor, but I am suggesting that undoing “Patriarchy” in some sense means attending to the bodies that were sacrificed in order to make that oppressive set of relations seem relatively more attractive and even “liberatory” by comparison.

Historicizing gender paves the way for feminist and decolonial scholars to, third, identify the colonial relations of power and modes of relating that serve to undergird contemporary capitalism and draw us into a multiplicity of oppressive relations. Rather than ignore these continuities for the sake of a false unity or collectivity as “Women,” identifying the ways in which those historical dynamics inform and shape our contemporary relationships will allow us to explore how being oppressed and

ingredients because they may need to be adjusted depending on the specificity of local and historical contexts. Finally, different from the word component, in-gredi-ent also carries with it the idea of “walking into” or “entering” something, perhaps a journey, together. So for me, the term functions as an invitation to create a new path and world together.

oppressing can be simultaneously operative. Far from construing these states of being as mutually exclusive, the goal here is to identify how both can be true.

For example, while it is true that “Women” on the ‘light side’ are oppressed in relation to their “Men,” it is also true that in order to maintain their position as “Women” they are called to oppress and be complicit in the oppression of those on the ‘dark side,’ both male and female (Glymph 1-31). Although both are true, an either/or logic would have us ignore the second half of the statement above. Obscuring the deep structural interrelation between these categories also means overlooking the fact that many of those claiming to be oppressed are also engaged in the act of oppressing. However, what becomes politically interesting here is how complicity in the oppression of the ‘dark side’ is what partially sustains the oppressive relationship within the ‘light side.’ Thus, *“Women” who disidentify with or distance themselves from the ‘dark side’ in exchange for the wages of gender are in some sense complicit in their own oppression.*

Moreover, tracking the historical/colonial continuities allows us to maintain gender as a political category of denunciation as opposed to a category of identification or a category into which women of color seek to be incorporated. For instance, when Sojourner Truth asks the question in her now famous speech “Ar'n't I a Woman?” not only can we explore all of the ways in which the answer to this was and is “no,” but we can also consider the extent to which her question challenges those recognized as “Women” to acknowledge how their recognition as such is predicated on a system that relatively reduces Truth to chattel. Being “Woman” in this context is synonymous with the arrangement of bodies and power on the ‘light side.’ Her speech articulates in explicit terms the culturally specific and racialized arrangement of bodies and power being pressed against her body. Truth describes this ‘light side’ arrangement from her location when she tells us that:

Dat man ober dar say dat woman needs to be lifted ober ditches, and to have the best place every whar. Nobody eber helped me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gives me any best place and ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me – and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well – and ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me – and ar'n't I a woman? (cited in White 14).

While being recognized as a “Woman” for Truth has the potential of accessing some of the wages of gender which include being recognized as human and being liberated from the violence of slavery, it simultaneously means being integrated into the

oppressive modes of relating prevalent on the 'light side.'

Here, we can begin to consider the gender trappings that come with a recognition of her as a fully "human" "woman" (Rowley 1-15). Indeed, if as the man states, "women should have the best place everywhere" then to what extent is the fact that she is strong enough to survive back-breaking labor or that nobody ever helps her over mud-puddles or into carriages become the markers of her dehumanized location? In order for Truth to be recognized as human she is put in the position of having to conjure up a conception of "Woman" that includes patriarchal protection only for the "feminine" and "weak" and excludes her being, strength, experiences, and person in every which way. Part of the bind here is that her hope and struggles to be recognized as "Human" require her to translate herself and her experience through the dominant conception of gender in ways that are (re)colonizing. In other words, she is put into the position of articulating her experience of dehumanization through the arrangement of bodies and power that "Europeans" idealized for themselves. Rather than being a liberatory incorporation, or dismantling the logic that produces Truth as outside of its definition, "gender" in this instance functions to limit the range and scope of possibilities for what it means to be "Woman," a category that partly includes what it means to be Human.

Paradoxically, rather than being a privilege and benefit, her incorporation into the category "Woman" only serves to integrate her into another set of oppressive relationships. In exchange for the wages of gender, Truth's incorporation into the category means being integrated into a hierarchical arrangement of power wherein she is not only systemically subordinated to racialized males now identified as "Man" but her body is reserved for the reproduction of race and potentially capital for his behalf. In many ways, we can think of the politics of respectability that emerge much later as **both** responding to the violences that have come from being systematically and legally excluded from these categories **and** as enacting a new set of violences that maintain the logic of the 'light side' intact.

Without a theoretical understanding of how "gender" is racialized, it becomes difficult to make sense of the double and triple binds resulting from the anachronistic incorporation of racialized males and females into these categories. These binds look different depending on the particularities of one's racialization. I do not wish to erase or obscure those differences or conflate them in favor of a more generalizable account. Instead for the purposes of this article, I prefer to think from the specificity of the bodies, social relations, and particular circumstances of those that have been racialized as "Black" (Wright 1-26). I do not do this with the intention of playing into some Black/White dichotomy. On the contrary, I am interested in the various layers of interrelation between the ways in which "Blacks" are racialized, the impact that has on the racialization of others, as in the case of the

prostitute and Baartman, and vice versa. It is because of these deeply imbricated layers of interrelation that I extend an invitation for exchange where there are resonances and or dissonances with those that have been racialized in other ways.

At stake is how gender has functioned and continues to function in (neo)colonizing ways. The tendency to reduce “gender” to *the* “sexual difference” makes it impossible to address the tensions that surface for those who deal with multiple and simultaneously operative categories of oppression (Crenshaw 1241-1299). Although there are instances that call for an analytic separation between “race” and “gender,” as Spelman in her critique of mainstream feminist methodology points out, the separation between the categories only makes sense when we are examining a set of relationships for which no other identities “complicates the situation” (Spelman 51). In other words, we can use “gender” to unearth “sexism - discrimination, exploitation, oppression on the basis of sex or gender” only when those being analyzed are not subjected to any other form of discrimination (as in the case of upper middle class white heterosexual males and females within the context of the United States) and or if the other forms of discrimination are somehow the same, i.e. examining the power dynamics *between* specifically self-identified African-American, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class males and females (51). As a result, Spelman concludes that it is “no wonder” that gender analyses in the U.S., beyond a question of intentionality, have tended to center “the lives of white middle-class women” (51). Alternatively, troubling this reduction allows us to begin to make sense of some of the complexities and tensions that surface between racialized males and females, particularly in the context of liberatory and resistant struggle.

For instance, Frantz Fanon writes that the “white world, the only decent one, was preventing [him] from participating. It demanded that a *man behave like a man*. It demanded that [he] behave like a black man – or at least a Negro” (94, emphasis added). Fanon is not solely pointing to the fact that he is foreclosed from the possibility of inhabiting the world as “*a man among men*,” but to his denied entrance into the world of Mankind (the human) (92, emphasis added). His subhumanity (from within a colonial logic) is partially marked by the fact that he cannot occupy the position of masculinity, power, and authority reserved for white bourgeois heterosexual males.

However, what I would like to point out here is how the systemically produced and structurally supported aspects of racialized “gender,” can then impact both personal and interpersonal dynamics. For example, Fanon’s struggle to be recognized as (Hu)Man requires him to translate himself and his experience through a ‘light side’ conception of gender. It is here that we gain insight into the limited range of possibilities available for his being recognized as “Man,” and the narrowness in

which gender and humanity have been conceived. Moreover, his own possibility for being recognized as (Hu)Man, beyond a question of his own desires, partially rests on his *having to aspire to* or take on a superordinate position of power in relation to his racialized female counterpart, because the dominant arrangement of bodies demands it.

For instance, we can think of this logic and expectation being explicitly laid out and articulated in the analysis and “recommendations” of “The Moynihan Report” (Moynihan, “The Negro Family”). In 1965, Daniel P. Moynihan in his assessment of “The Negro Family” writes that American society is a society “which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. *The arrangements of society facilitate such leadership and reward it.* A sub-culture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage” (Moynihan, “The Negro Family,” emphasis added). As a result Moynihan suggests that, in order to address this “gender” imbalance in the African-American community, American policy and the official “national action plan” should include promoting military service for African-American males. According to Moynihan,

there is another special quality about military service for Negro men: it is an utterly masculine world. *Given the strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life* in which so many Negro youth come of age, the Armed Forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change: *a world away from women*, a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance. (“The Negro Family, emphasis added)

Part of the bind here is that in order to be structurally and systemically recognized as “Men,” or as Moynihan suggests thrive in a society where male leadership is “facilitated” and “rewarded,” African-American males are encouraged to establish an interpersonal superordinate position of power in relation to their racialized female counterparts in exchange for their “own well-being.” In the analysis claiming to redress racist hierarchies of power, i.e. the systemic exclusion of racialized males from occupying positions of authority and accessing education and economic opportunities, Moynihan strategically shifts the blame onto Black family structure and “castrating” Black females. However, in exchange for occupying their “rightful place” in society, African-American males are paradoxically enlisted to embrace “gender” in a (re)colonizing vein. In other words, the Moynihan report is about enlisting African-American males to enact gender in the terms of the ‘light side.’ Rather than presuppose an oppositional tension between African-American males and females, a decolonial feminist approach to “gender” provides a space for, and demands that we engage the nuances of, this paradox in the interest of moving towards *a politics of collective and communal well-being.*

Finally, rather than aspiring to the wages of gender, which means aspiring to the modes of authority and oppressive forms of relating available to those on the 'light side' we can instead begin to consider what other liberatory possibilities and alternative modes of relating are available to us from the communities and ways of being relegated to the 'dark side.' For instance, in my own research on Afro-Cuban Santería, I have been able to identify concrete ways in which ritual enactments introduce alternative formulations of the body that are productive of *non-gendered/non-racialized* logics, culturally-specific modalities of empowerment, and an alternative system of valuation for what it means to be human (Méndez "Transcending Dimorphism"; Méndez "An Other Humanity"). In my mind, Sojourner Truth's liberatory possibilities do not lie in her being included or incorporated into a category that requires her to translate her body and experience into the terms of the 'light side.' Instead, her liberatory possibilities are more likely to be found in definitions of humanity and gender that do not depart from or require Truth's relative dehumanization in order to exist.

4. Conclusion

Indeed, how we understand "gender" makes a difference not only for how we frame our contemporary relations, but also for what we will consider to be the necessary ingredients for re-imagining our various communities in liberatory ways. If feminists or feminisms, regardless of what kind, have a political investment in using gender to denounce oppressive relations of power and to move us towards anti-racist and decolonial struggle then it becomes important to take seriously the claims made by women of color who insist that the thinking on "gender" has excluded our histories and bodies in the making of "Woman," and ultimately "Man"(kind). It becomes necessary to engage the arguments made by women of color feminists who insist that the enslaved, from the perspective of colonial practices, were understood to be "beings without gender" (Spillers 1987, Lugones 2007). It becomes necessary to historicize "gender" from multiple histories in order to consider, as historian Elsa Barkley Brown (1992) has long urged us to do, the relational and violent processes that produce "women" as differently gendered, and through which the lives and work of one set of "women" makes possible the lives and well-being of another. And yet it is not just the claims of women of color, but History that tells us that if the "sexual difference" in the more reduced sense was important for those colonizing, that the opposite was enforced among the enslaved population who were considered bestialized laboring bodies for the sake of capitalist (re)production. It is from this ground that we see the extent to which "gender" as primarily a referent for the social relation between "Man" and "Woman," regardless of intentionality, fundamentally obscures a far more complex and violent matrix of power and

difference. Ultimately, such a reduction makes room for gender to continue to be a (neo)colonizing force as well as a force that forecloses our turn towards more egalitarian and decolonial possibilities.

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