

# **Deixis and the Queer/Trans Struggle**

**A Missive from a Dialectical Transfeminist**

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# Contents

<b>1. Intro to Deictic Expression</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. The Origo, or Reference Point</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Transecting “Gender”: Beyond Performance, But Not Without It</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4. Transecting “Gender”: Beyond (re)Production, But Not Without It</b>	<b>18</b>
4.II. Transected Perspectives: Substructure & Substructure through Non-Dualism as Deictic Center . . . . .	21
4.III. Transected Perspectives: Misgendering and Ungendering Through “non-dualism” as Deictic Center . . . . .	26
4.IV. Transected Perspectives: Homophobia and Gay Assimilation through “non-dualism” as Deictic Center . . . . .	30
4.V. Transected Perspectives: Emasculation and Men’s Alienation Through “non-dualism” as Deictic Center . . . . .	36
<b>5. Language and Artificial Selection: Situating a Critical-Materialist Synthesis</b>	<b>45</b>
5.II. The Social Construction of Sex (and Race): Situating “dualism” as Deictic Center .	54
5.III. Mutable/Flexible Potentialities: Situating “dualism” and “non-dualism” as Deictic Center . . . . .	62
5.IV. Embodied Spandrels: Situating the “dualist”/ “non-dualist” Deictic Center . . . .	77
<b>Concluding remarks: “Through Sociogeny We Find Ecogeny”</b>	<b>102</b>

“Deah’s plenty cunjuh in dis neighbuhhood. Deah wuz a man and his wife libed yuh. Duh **man couldn’t git wuk** an he went away. Attuh he lef, duh wife wuz took sick; dey say she wuz cunjuhed, an dey sen fuh duh huzbun. Wen he git home he git a root doctuh tuh visit uh. Duh root man go tuh duh back step an dig a hole, an deah he fine nails an sulphuh an haiah an some grabeyahd dut. In duh pilluhs an mattresses an in duh dressuh draws, dey fine duh same ting. Dem tings run uh crazy. She ack queah an run away an stay fuh days at a time. Duh root doctuh moob duh cunjuh an she wuz cuod. He gie uh duh powuh tuh disappeah an appeah any time she want tuh. I heah bout lots uh folks wut kin disappeah lak dat. Duh ole folks use tuh tell bout duh people wut could take wing an fly right back tuh Africa.”

— pg 40, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*

Something that causes an issue in many queer/trans and feminist spaces is the use of phrases like “seen as,” “treated as,” or “socialized as,” when describing victims of patriarchal violence. This is because ‘womanhood’ and ‘femaleness’ or ‘femininity’ are often the main or primary or even sole reference points in these descriptions of gender/sexual oppression. Take for example, the following quote from Jules Gill-Peterson:

“When a straight man lashes out after dating or having sex with a trans woman, he is often afraid of the implication that his sexuality is joined to hers. When a gay man anxiously keeps trans women out of his activism or social circles, he is often fearful of their common stigma as feminine. And when a non-trans feminist claims she is erased by trans women’s access to a bathroom, she is often afraid that their shared vulnerability as feminized people will be magnified intolerably by trans women’s presence.” (*A Short History of Trans Misogyny*)

Gill-Peterson’s argument is that hostility to trans women is about fears of real and perceived experiences of feminization. What Gill-Peterson urges here is a vision of solidarity with trans women among gay men, heterosexual cis men, and women of cis experience that is forged by overcoming the fears associated with being “feminized.” It has actually become more commonplace in feminist, queer, and trans political milieus to articulate visions of unity in this manner, such as the use of phrasings like “woman-aligned” or “woman-assumed” or “femme” “femme-presenting.” It is almost as if, in popular theories and analyses of patriarchy, its targets can never be defined in terms *outside the male-female, masculine-feminine, man-woman dichotomy*, even where attempts at inclusivity are made. Thus all who suffer from gender/sexual domination must be understood as having been positioned as such *because they are seen as, socialized as, treated as women/feminine/female — or something adjacent to these entities*.

Many trans men, transmasculine folks, those subjected to anti-transmasculinity, nonbinary and genderqueer and agender folks, trans women, transfeminine folks, those affected by trans-misogyny, other expansive gender individuals, and especially those who are intersex while holding any of the previously named experiences, may feel excluded by these kinds of formulations. If how we come to know what patriarchal exploitation is, or who it harms, or the kinds of solidarity we can build against it, hinges on “feminization” as the *deictic center*, then our queer/trans and feminist spaces, or spaces that have been influenced by the various streams of queer/trans and feminist activism and scholarship, can only make sense of the context of Patriarchy in *part*

(not as a whole totality). The concept of a 'deictic center' is from linguistics and pragmatics as fields. I draw on my layperson's grasp of them here in order to suggest a way to actually grapple with Patriarchy in its full context: as a "nexus" (connecting point) whereby material and power relations are "imbricated" (literally means overlapping).

# 1. Intro to Deictic Expression

I first heard about ‘deixis’ (pronounced “dee-ick-sis” or “dye-ick-sis”) during my times studying languages like Tsalagi, and crafting a constructed language of my own, and while learning about other languages (I am a polyglot; learning other languages is my special interest). According to Andreea Stapleton (2017), any word or expression or phrase that “rel[ies] utterly on context” is usually placed under the category of *Deixis* by linguists (Deixis in Modern Linguistics, Essex Student Journal 9). The root word for deixis or deictic is the Greek word “deiknynai,” Stapleton writes, which means “to show.” Let’s keep that in mind.

Stapleton cites a 1983 article on the subject by Levinson, who emphasizes that Deixis is a process where “the meaning of certain words and phrases in an utterance requires contextual information” of specific types if it is to be understood. Usually the particular *types* of contextual information required in a deictic utterance focus on a few key things: a) who the speaker or communicant is b) the person or thing being communicated to/about c) the time in which the speech-act or communication is occurring or that the discussion/utterance is about d) or the place in which the utterance/communicative act unfolds or about which its attention focused, and e) the distance or the proximity of the communicant to either the recipient or the referents of the speech-act. Stapleton provides us an example:

“If we take a close look on the sentence *I am leaving tomorrow*, who does *I*, *am*, and *tomorrow* refer to? We cannot identify the meaning of the utterance, unless we know the time of the utterance, the place, and who the speaker is, in other words the context of the utterance. Expressions like *I*, *you*, *we*, *this*, *that*, *here*, *there*, *today*, *tomorrow*, are all indexed, and the listener needs to identify the speaker, the time, and the place of the utterance to fully understand what is being said and meant.”

In the sample sentence given, the types of contextual information needed concern Personal and Temporal deixis. That is how we are to know what *I am leaving tomorrow* refers to. Those words by themselves have a fixed semantic, basic meaning, of course. “I” is the first person pronoun (Personal) and “tomorrow” describes the next day (Temporal), but what the words “show” or denote is not clearly fixed by the utterance of those words alone. Stapleton cites a 1996 article from Yule to highlight how deixis is basically a way of “pointing through language” to the *typically extra-linguistic context of a speech-act or communicative act*. The direct context of the utterance is what mediates an understanding of the “who” at the center of the first person pronoun “I” (Personal) as well as the moment in time that “tomorrow” (Temporal) is measured in terms of.

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There are more kinds of Deixis than Personal or Temporal. Spatial is a very common form. If we modified the previous example to *I am leaving here tomorrow*, then the word *here* would be a form of Spatial deixis, referring to the actual space in which the communicative act is happening.

In that case, three types of contextual information must be accounted for if one is to understand the utterance, as “here” could not be understood without knowledge of what is being “shown” deictically (a location in physical space). And there is Social deixis, which situates reference points in a particular set of social characteristics, like distinctions in role/status between the communicator and the referent or a specific role/status of the referent without any mention of the communicator’s status/role. For example if we substitute “*I am leaving tomorrow*” with something like *my sis leaves here tomorrow*, the addition of “my sis” deictically points to a role that the referent (sister) plays in the speaker’s life. And if we change, *I am leaving tomorrow* to *Your honor, will you be leaving here tomorrow?* then the use of “your honor” deictically ‘shows’ the status or respect that whoever is being addressed as such must carry.

There are many other forms of deixis that I won’t go into right now, like empathetic deixis, discourse deixis, and more. Theorists like Buhle suggest the existence of *modes* of deixis, too, each with their own degrees of “signification separate from the symbolic” as Mary Galbraith put it (2021, Deixis, Oxford Research Encyclopedia) – a topic we also won’t go too deep into here. Further, deixis in one language may not appear in the same way as it does for a different language. In Tsalagi, for example, personal deixis is indexed by what’s called *bound pronouns*, a feature not present in the English language. If a Cherokee speaker is texting their friend an equivalent for “I’m heading that way” they would say “*uhna didla wijigati*” (this is an example from a youtube video by the user DigitalNativeMaker). The first person pronoun here is “*ji-*” and it is *bound* to the verb stem “*-ga(t)-*” (which describes the act of being on the move). Virtually all pronouns in Cherokee show up as prefixes attached to the beginning of a verb stem; very rarely are pronouns unbound in Tsalagi, which cannot be said of English.

## 2. The Origo, or Reference Point

For each type and mode of deixis in a given utterance, in any language, the reference points by which the contextual information is interpreted are called the *origo or deictic center*. The origo/deictic center is what “anchors” how the meaning of a deictic expression is evaluated. Sometimes the speaker or communicant themselves is the origo/deictic center; but the deictic center/origo can shift to other participants in a speech-act or other referents in a communicative-act.

To use another example from a video by the same youtuber as before (DigitalNativeMaker), if someone were to text the Cherokee equivalent for “I’m on my way back now,” they would say “*dvgai nogwu*.” The prefix “*dv-*” indicates that the action is being done toward the origo, but in this case, the deictic center is the person being *spoken to*, not the person speaking (the bound pronoun here “-g-” still refers to the first person “I,” though, and is attached to the verb stem “-ai-” which is translated as “walking.”)

It seems that in feminist and queer/trans spaces, there is something like an *ideological* deixis at work. To utter an analysis of or enunciate an experience of gender/sexual violence is to point to or show reference to a *particular* spatial-temporal and personal-social context. That contextual information is “anchored” to a *string of historical subjects who emerge politically as the center* of how we interpret or understand what exploitation, oppression, domination, etc under Patriarchy means. To utter the words “assault victim,” for example, typically places the white cis-perisexual upper class female subject at the center.

This was why Kimberlé Crenshaw needed a term “intersectionality.” She sought to highlight Black women’s experiences that were not being accounted for in policy and laws around sexual violence. The antiblack material/power relations that had marginalized sistas in this way were those in which the context for “assault” and “victimization” could only ever be the invading presence of some foreigner/ethno-religious other or supposed civilizational threat, manly and unfeminine, perhaps inhuman or animalistic, insane, criminal or hypersexual. Black women had historically been imagined in terms of these “controlling images” (a term from bell hooks).

Despite this being an obviously conservative line, ostensibly progressive actors like TERFs weaponize the very “manichaeon” ideology shaping it in their rationale for trying to paternalistically “defend” so-called “women’s spaces” (bathrooms, sports, and more). They, too, are struggling within a set of material and power relations, to articulate themselves as historical subjects. And so transness becomes the source of victimization/assault against the cis-perisexual (and white, bourgeois) “adult human female” as origo in their movement.

The “gender critical” (GCs) movement follows in the footsteps of the TERFs’ very ‘manichaeon’ paternalism, but their origo emerges as an “LGB without the T” figure. This is the homonationalist subject who benefitted from removal of homosexuality from the DSM in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by emphasizing his/her capacity to work and raise a family just like straight people.

Arguing that ‘love is love,’ homonationalism had achieved the recognition of same-sex marriage under the Obama administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century after rabid development of a consumer

economy around the notion of 'Pride.' The homonationalist subject now points to "wokeness" as the context of a threat to his/her historical struggle for political rights and representation and recognition.

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Even a term like "maGes," short for "marginalized gender" may take a certain historical subject as its origo. We could utter a demand like "protect Black maGes," but ours is a context where much of the available information about who is "the most unprotected," "most disrespected" as Malcolm X once put it *concerns the struggles of Black women specifically*. The deictic center of the rallying cry "protect Black maGes" has emerged as a heterosexual and cis-perisex Black female subject, because in order to interpret the phrase *we must point to the available record of information* about the material/power structures weighing against those who aren't heterosexual and cis-perisex Black male subjects.

In that record, what Malcolm had shown to be a reality of sexual violence against Black women under Jim Crow, Pauli Murray, pointing to the same phenomenon, had articulated it as a "Jane Crow." Harriet Jacobs' autobiography described the same issue, but as it existed *before* segregation, back when chattel slavery was legal in the United States (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*). Her focus was on women like herself, a mother, Black and heterosexual.

Contemporary scholars like Saidiya Hartman have assessed the disproportionate rates of sexual violence against Black women under slavery that women like Harriet Jacobs endured (*The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors*). Often, we learn from these accounts how the capacity to reproduce/bear children was exploited by masters who relied on a political/economic system that ensured they would gain from their misdeeds new "chattel" to profit off of (or gain new "3/5ths of a person" to benefit from in the legislature), since the status of slaves was inherited through the matriline. Who/what is the deictic center here?

The record has other theories focused on reproductive labor, too, like the works of Claudia Jones. She describes the "super-exploitation" of Black women (*An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman*). From her we learn that with emancipation from chattel slavery in the US came the need to justify a labor pool under newly industrial capitalist relations, one sourced from citizens who were just enfranchised after Reconstruction Amendments were passed. In lieu of matrilineal slave status, "super-exploited" Black women workers were made the primary breadwinner instead, often dispersed into underpaid jobs in white homes (whilst brothas became sucked into a criminal underclass to labor in carceral institutions). But, who/what is the deictic center here?

The record highlights the making of a 'female breadwinner' under racial capitalism from more than just the Leninist perspective of Claudia Jones; we learn about this phenomenon through Hortense Spillers' concept of "ungendering" as well. Spillers sought to challenge the myth of 'Black Matriarchy' popularized by the Moynihan Report, and she too looks at the problem of labor exploitation and sexual violence against Black women under chattel slavery and segregation. What she highlights, though, are the 'epithets' put onto Black female bodies, how they hypersexualized and animalized Black heterosexual women and even impacted the experience of heterosexual Black men stereotyped as 'absent fathers.' (*Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*). Again, who/what is the deictic center here?

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I have named only some Black interventions within distinct arenas of political affairs, with their own contributions to intellectual life that should not be lumped together hastily nor taken as the final word for all Black/African movements. They should be studied, though, and need not be dismissed simply because a particular category of experience “anchors” how the political enunciations they have yielded are reckoned. Importantly, I urge us to be honest about how they situate historical subjection under Patriarchy through a male-female, man-woman, masculine-feminine dualism. Even the beloved Combahee River Collective Statement’s articulation of identity politics has this problem. To their credit, the Collective refused to take the *heterosexual* Black female subject as their deictic center. Barbara Smith recalls in an oral history compiled by Marian Jones in 2021 for *The Nation Magazine*:

“Combahee did something novel by explicitly stating that we, as lesbians, opposed homophobia. If you go back and look at historical statements about the coming together of race and gender, you won’t see anything about lesbians and homophobia. It wasn’t allowed, and it couldn’t have happened until after Stonewall. We didn’t see our politics as being solely for lesbians, and some people in Combahee did not identify as lesbians. But in those days, lesbians were much more likely to lack the constraints that allowed them to speak out against patriarchy.”

In viewing race, class, and gender alongside each other, the Combahee River Collective had sought to account for a “simultaneity of oppressions” — a theory of interlocking domination. This was part of a submission to a book titled *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, Barbara Smith recalls in “If Black Women Were Free”: An Oral History of the Combahee River Collective.” Taking seriously the *lesbian presence* during and after the Stonewall Rebellion, the Collective did not center the historical subject typically highlighted in ‘Black women’s’ movement. Still, Barbara’s twin sister Beverly laments:

“We were talking about our racial identities, homophobia, and heterosexism, but the statement doesn’t specifically address the issues of transgender people and people with nonconventional gender identities. There are just a lot of different things that we don’t cover, like disabled and immigrant rights. There is far too much oppression in the world that the statement does not address.”

Per Beverly Smith, more could have been done to *account for other forms of oppression* including that of trans and genderqueer folks. If the Combahee River Collective Statement were to be rewritten with Beverly Smith’s comments in mind, not only would the *reference point for embodied struggles against Patriarchy be more expansive*, but the informational context being highlighted and shown in articulations of said struggles would have attended to a *wider range* of dominant and exploitative relations.

Should we utter the phrase “gender marginalization,” with Beverly Smith’s correction in mind, we would point to an array of historical circumstances, making an umbrella category like “maGes” *de-center* the embodied material struggles that are organized and configured in particular domains (namely, the binary division of labor as it is organized by racial capitalism in and outside the nuclear household and conjugal unit). To shift the origo to those who have been positioned far beyond the inherited record of historical subjecthood — or altogether configured outside of

“history” as hegemonically defined — moves us toward other streams of contextual information, which queer/feminist theory must attend to in evaluations of what Patriarchy means.

As an example, instead of seeing the experience of stud and masc lesbian students as expressions of a “privilege” that “stretched beyond those assigned male at birth,” the text *Play Aunties and Dyke Bitches* by Savannah Shange might instead take seriously the unique *juridico-discursive circumstances* that make studs/mascs targets of paternalistic institutional practices. Although the funding streams and carceral mechanisms Shange bore witness to in the school setting might have been *mapped from* programs/practices typically reserved for Black cis/het boyhood onto Black studs/mascs, we could resituate this phenomenon alongside (*rather than in binary opposition to*) the unique context of embodied struggles for Shange’s femme lesbian students.

By contrast, Shange’s text takes cisnormative masc-fem dualism at face value, particularly because the dynamics of the home life that Shange’s femme and masc lesbian students come from — household configurations which have been politically articulated with regards to antiblack narratives about absent fathers and single mothers — *is the initial point of reference*. An account of femme and masc Black lesbian youth’s embodied struggles is evaluated through reference to information about conditions that *primarily organize the lives of heterosexual Black couples* in the domestic sphere. The question remains, who or what, are the deictic centers of our political utterances?

Moya Bailey seems to be looking for answers to that question in the text *Misogynoir Transformed*. Bailey sets out to nuance the Black feminist media analyses of theorists like Angela Davis or bell hooks with a simple ask: “I challenge you, dear reader, as you read this text, to think of Black women first when you read the word ‘woman,’ to think of queer and trans women first when you read the term ‘Black women.’” Bailey acknowledges that there is an “assumed heteronormativity of the category ‘Black women’ in other texts” and looks beyond that to the “realities of queer and trans women’s lives and production.” Bailey’s coinage of “misogynoir” is therefore not merely a portmanteau combining the word ‘misogyny’ with the suffix ‘-noir,’ as though to index a form of sexism specific to binary understanding of Black womanhood.

In Bailey’s scholarship, the deictic center of ‘misogynoir’ and the historical circumstances and context within which an embodied struggle under misogynoir emerges — are acknowledged *queer/trans identities and realities*. The addition of the prefix “trans-” to Moya Bailey’s concept, traced to Trudy from Gradient Lair’s coinage of “transmisogynoir,” makes more explicit this gesture towards the “beyond” or to the “outside” of Black feminism’s historical subject and the available record of Black feminist political/economic/cultural preoccupations. Authors like g from Red Voice News take this a step further by formulating a specifically *Black transfeminist* critique of the philosophical assumptions inherent to all Western gender theories, implicating historical Black feminism in the process (*For Those Seeking or in Flight: Black Trans\*feminist Nihilism*).

I see my own Black ‘materialist’ transfeminist writings as moving along a similar or at least parallel trajectory, from works like *Femme Queen*, *Warrior Queen: Beyond Representation*, *Towards Self-determination*, to *Against Sex Class Theory: Some Notes on Science, Materialism, and Gender Self-determination*, or *Late Night Thoughts from a Dialectical Transfeminist*, as well as *Red, Black, Green — and Proud*, and *They Thought They Could Bury Me but Aint Know I was a Star Queen*, *The Letter ‘I’ Paradox: Disjointed Musings from a Dialectical Transfeminist*, and *Dispatches from Among the Damned: On the History and Present of Trans\* Survival*, *Why I am a Materialist Transfeminist and not a Marxist/Proletarian/R\*dical Feminist*, *Racial-Class Paternalism and the Trojan Horse of*

What's at stake for me is a certain dialectics of embodiment indexed by the words "cis" and "trans." After all, the prefix "trans-" contains deixis. It points to an action that goes "away" from or an object on "the other side of" the origo. Similarly, the prefix "cis-" contains deixis. It points to an action that goes "toward" or an object "on the same side of" the origo. The prefixes are not new: linguists describe the English verb "to go" as a *translocative* verb, because it is a motion in a direction *away* from the speaker, and they describe the English verb "to come" as a *cislocative* verb, because it is a motion in a direction *toward* the speaker.

These prefixes even show up in the sciences: as Jonathan Jarry writes, "two molecules can have the exact same formula — the same atoms in the same order" but the spatial orientation might be flipped around "on different sides of the double bond" (*The Word "Cisgender" Has Scientific Roots*, 2021). Jarry helps us understand that this is why some fatty acids are spoken of as "trans fats," in contrast to the cis configurations of these same molecules (those in which the atoms are *on the same side* of a plane of symmetry). Jarry describes how "trans" and "cis" are also used to differentiate between certain elements of DNA.

Gene expression involves a process of protein synthesis, one which "waxes and wanes over time" due to regulatory molecules. The latter basically give "either an all-clear signal for the gene to be turned on or ... a pause signal," according to Jarry. These *trans*-acting molecules *travel from beyond* one segment of a DNA strand to another, and they bind to *cis*-acting elements which are located on the "same strand of DNA as the gene they regulate," Jarry continues.

When the prefixes "trans" and "cis" are used by mainstream advocates to describe so-called gender identity, it means that a cis person identifies *with* their natal (birth) sex, whereas a trans person's identity is in *variance* from their natal (birth) sex. In this way, trans identity is "on the other side of" their sex assigned at birth but cis identity is "on the same side of" sex assigned at birth.

The *mainstream definition is an undialectical account of cisness and transness*, though. Its reference point is one in which biological sex is spatio-temporally invariant (a dimorphism fixed at 'birth') and the personal agency/social relations by which cis or trans experiences of their sex emerge are all naturalized (cisness is normal, transness is pathology). That is because the context this definition "points" to is, historically speaking, *a Western biomedical subject*, clarified in the nineteenth century at the hands of colonial researchers and crystallizing in the twentieth century, with some roots in the eighteenth century as capitalism was shedding its infant stages and bourgeois societies were moving towards the modern nation-state.

Foucault puts the spotlight on the biomedical subject and the field of psychiatry (4), i.e. the medical professions. These, according to Foucault, were the only settings apart from "[t]he brothel" and other sites of illicit activity that could "make room for illegitimate sexualities." Such "places of tolerance" as Foucault terms it, allowed for the "reintegration" of sexual reproduction *outside* of the "circuits of production," the latter of which Foucault reminds us was increasingly becoming organized around a "labor capacity... systematically exploited" (6). Importantly, this meant that *within* the productive economy, that is, the bourgeois mode of production, the

capitalist social order, *licit sexuality* was the purview of the formal institution known as the nuclear family. Foucault puts it as follows:

“The conjugal family took custody of [sexuality] and absorbed it into the serious functions of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom.” (3, *A History for Sexuality*)

What Foucault is describing is a paradox in which some sexual relations find themselves silenced, while others are allowed to be spoken about openly. In either case, the *deictic center* or frame of reference is those relations can be said to be “legitimate and procreative,” the focus being *social reproduction* through a particular household configuration. Foucault’s repetition of themes around “silence” and “truth,” and of speech and acknowledgement, however, betray his insistence that the problem of sexual repression involves more than just economic relations (7).

His work is oriented around the question of *discursive* “power,” particularly the ways in which sexual discourses might allow one to contest relations of power, in a manner akin to the prophetic traditions of preachers and theologians. There is a long history of religious evolution that Foucault’s work explores in order to situate how discourses around both “licit” and “illicit” sexuality relate to power, a fact that can be identified in ostensibly antiquated customs such as when “demographers and psychiatrists of the nineteenth century thought it advisable to excuse themselves for asking their readers to dwell on matters so trivial and base” (6). That Foucault then proceeds to examine non-clerical actors in his formulation is important, further, because his ultimate aim is to round out a conception of what he calls the “polymorphous techniques of power” (11) that organize themselves vis-a-vis sexual *discourses* going back *as far as the seventeenth century* in the West.

We may be wondering what a non-Western/pre-capitalist frame of reference means for the universality of a term like “cisness” or “transness” with reference to gender, though. A dialectical account “points” us both toward and beyond this legacy of material organization of the body within/by biomedical institutions. In this way, the reference point for gendered social being becomes a variety of identities, experiences, roles, lifeways — *not just* those enclosed to the nuclear household and an atomized process of social reproduction.

Cisness, for a dialectical transfeminist, is demystified, shown to be a frame of reference for that series of personages where sex-associated trait expressions (behavioral, hormonal, psychoaffective etc) are *socially embodied* in alignment with Gender. Transness, for a dialectical transfeminist, is also demystified, shown to be a reference for that series of personages where sex-associated trait expressions (behavioral, hormonal, psychoaffective etc) are *socially embodied* in variance from Gender. Once the origo is re-situated as a range of social beings in their embodied motion “away from” or “towards” the constraints of Gender, the contextual information to reckon with is much more expansive: indexing Gender as *a nexus of the substructure and the superstructure*, with changes in biological trait composition or expression as a non-adaptive consequence of the historical development thereof.

### 3. Transecting “Gender”: Beyond Performance, But Not Without It

It is quite ironic for me to describe my approach to transfeminism as ‘dialectical’ while writing an article that focuses so much on language, signification, ideology (and that even made allusions to Foucault’s “juridico-discursive” analysis set forth in *A History of Sexuality*). The emphasis on grammar and speech is often a reason to dismiss so-called “transgender ideology.” Things like “preferred pronouns” and even “neopronouns” are assumed to be at odds with the “material reality” of one’s body or how one’s body is “read” or “seen” or related to/dealt with.

But I walk us through a phenomenon such as “deixis” in order to illustrate how human consciousness is simultaneously an *embodied social* affair, which requires us to nuance our understanding of what “materialism” is. The radical feminists (and the Marxist feminists they were inspired by) conveyed a view of “gender” that foregrounds the way economic and political *structures organize the “bimodal” distribution of sex-associated traits* into “oppressor” and “oppressed” classes. It is silly to act as though the spoken, written, and signed word had no bearing on the degree to which such a claim could alter not just our understanding of “sexism,” but the actual *praxis* of sexual relations.

These mid-twentieth century feminisms, for example, had such an impact that biologists like Ruth Hubbard felt called to examine the distinction between gender and sex, research around which continues to have effects *in the real life of real persons*. Transgender healthcare is able to make itself “legible” to insurers and policymakers based on the language around “gender identity” in relation to “biological sex,” and even anti-trans ideologues can rally and mobilize that differentiation to their ends, with concepts like “trans-identified male” and “trans-identified female.”

Amidst these linguistic and conceptual shifts, there is a negotiation of material and power relations at play: the scientific realization that gender is a “social construct” correlated to *class based sexual divisions* enabled a program of inclusion within institutions historically headed by men, the expansion of access to transsexual healthcare within biomedical industries enabled avenues for educational and workplace advancement for expansive gender populations disproportionately rendered *jobless or houseless*, and the reactionary “parents’ rights” or “family rights” movements led by those who insist that sexual dimorphism and the gender binary are *foundational to the nation-state* quite obviously has the patrimonial basis of the bourgeois ‘social contract’ as its guiding concern.

None of these developments can be taken as superfluous to a “material” struggle. Inclusion policies were necessary to stave off the revolutionary movements burgeoning last century, and sustain a consumer economy that had grown in the wake of the post-world war II industrial boom. Whereas exclusionary movements have exploded in recent years on account of mass demonstrations and violent revolts against police brutality and mass incarceration during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How we communicate about gender is therefore a way of *pointing to* how we organize or dis-

organize sexual relations within *material/power structures*. Hostility to the use of the term “cis woman,” for example has less to do with the meaning of the words than with the understandings that they index: as they “show” us the existence of alternative frames of reference for womanhood (ones that are not biologically-reduced).

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This is not the same as a Judith Butler style analysis, who is blithely dismissed as the source of contemporary queer, trans, and feminist thought. For Butler, the utterance of gender is itself the “doing” or *creation of gender in real time*. Butler’s theories were drawn from performance studies, an academic discipline that the likes of Richard Schechner or E Patrick Johnson trace to research around both formal/artistic performance and quotidian/everyday performance. This kind of research has drawn upon a philosophical concept known as “performativity,” which involves ideas from thinkers such as J.L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, and more. We will not dive too deep into the debates among these intellectuals here, but what’s important to note is that the concept of “*performative*” utterances is basically about two things.

First, should you or could you distinguish a speech-act/communicative-act from the context in which it occurs? Second, does the choice to do so (or not) conceal or reveal political and economic relations? An example we can use is an utterance such as “I do” at a wedding ceremony. If a woman or man declares “I do,” does the act of saying those words make them married, or is it the circumstances within which those words are said (the presence of an officiant, the signing of marriage licenses, the gathering of family) that makes them married?

One might say that the words “I do” *create* the marital union between the couple in real time, literally *performing* it, because if one person does not say it, then the marriage did not happen, regardless of if the pastor, relatives, and documents are present. But one might also say that the performative utterance “I do” has no effect if it does not conform to religious, civil/legal, and familial/cultural expectations and processes and rituals.

This might seem abstract, but for Butler, in my understanding of works like *Undoing Gender* and *Gender Trouble*, gender is *performative* because gendered subjects are similarly produced under constraints. Through norms of self-censorship and silence, Butler recognizes a continuous, iterative demarcation of limitations on “gendered” performance. The *performance* of gender demonstrates and yet hides the existence of material/power structures, which essentially means that “gender” is an experience that is constantly being constructed in real time.

If we look back at the “I do” example, certainly, there might be an LGBT+ couple who *utters* those words to each other, but what if they live in a country that does not grant marriage licenses for LGBT+ unions? Or what if they cannot *perform* their marriage ceremony at a church or house of worship due to ecclesial and doctrinal refusals to bless or recognize LGBT+ relationships? Or what if they have access to both of these things, but their family and cultural context denies the legitimacy of the court or of the clergy and so continues to treat the LGBT+ couple as though they are not married or have no rights as a married couple?

Their marriage might exist *for them* (and their allies, supporters, etc), but their political subjecthood as “gendered” beings is literally created in context of repression of their right to marry. In a Butlerian analysis, this would mean that they are only LGBT+ because the *performative negation* of their right (a power relation) to participate in the conjugal unit (an economic rela-

tion) created them as such in real time. If they could utter “I do” with no sanction, there would be no reason for them to be an “LGBT+ couple,” then: they would just be like any other couple.

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Butler’s work has been mischaracterized as suggesting that gender is solely what one says it is, but really the argument is that gender is what particular historical conditions lead us to *say it cannot be*. The spread of Butlerian style “performativity” in recent queer/trans/feminist thought has helped many to push back against the idea that gender is simply defined from outside oneself by “objective” forces, namely biology but also “socialization.” If gender is *performed* within regulatory codes, the reinforcement and the breaking of those codes is what creates gendered subjects; which means individuals are involved in how they become gendered subjects, through the choice to either adhere to or violate performative strictures.

A man must “man up” to be a “real man” or else he is not a man, regardless of if he sees himself as one. And yet, if he sees himself as one, and declares himself to be one, regardless of external perception, is he not still a man? A woman must “act like a woman” to be a “real woman,” or else she is not a woman, regardless of if she sees herself as one. And yet, if she sees herself as one, and declares herself to be one, regardless of external perception, is she not still a woman?

We might answer “yes,” or answer “no,” to these questions depending on how you slice it, but either way the very inquiry itself is indicative of how unnatural “gender” is. It is not fixed; it is mutable; it is *performative*, and that is why even a cis man or a cis woman can still be met with standards that not only dictate or regulate how they behave, but carry implications for how their very gendered social being navigates society.

Claims such as this seem paradoxical or confusing and bring laughter and derision to some when they hear it, though, especially if it is used as a basis for accepting queer/trans identities. Some might find it irrelevant to spend time contemplating something so “liminal” or in between *realis* and *irrealis* as performativity.

Some Marxists therefore dismiss “gender ideology” and LGBT+ concerns as “idealist” or “immaterial.” For these, if we looked at the example of the phrase “I do,” it would make more sense to focus less on the performative utterance and the creation of gendered subjecthood, and instead to focus on the *class basis for discrimination around marriage rights, or the class basis for discrimination around the family unit*.

That is why in works like that of Monique Wittig, the class struggle makes it so that the only “real” (material) womanhood is a womanhood organized within what Wittig called the “heterosexual contract.” Her analysis of a “heterosexual contract” identified the conjugal unit as a fundamentally economic/political division, in which relations of property and household labor essentially organized the ‘haves,’ and the ‘have nots,’ around a sexual dualism.

Now, Wittig, herself a lesbian, did not have exclusionary intentions in her work, but some have used her work to those ends, especially in discrimination against women of transgender experience. They have suggested that the dominant configuration of sex is the ‘material’ basis for women’s liberation struggle; those whose sex-associated traits have not been organized vis-a-vis that dominant configuration do not have a “real” womanhood worthy of attention in political/economic struggle.

But such perspectives are precisely why Butlerian theories might be attractive counterarguments: the utterance of “real” (material) womanhood seems to *perform* the bounds of feminist

subjecthood and solidarity. And these performances are routinely enacted in order to iteratively *recreate the emergence of a historically contingent experience of personhood*: the modern Woman, atomized in the nuclear household and bourgeois divisions of reproductive labor.

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Thus comes the push for a subversive “performance,” which creates iteratively in real time a more *inclusive* Womanhood in feminist/queer/trans movements. We end up declaring that “trans women are women,” for example. Or we articulate the political/economic struggles of other victims of Patriarchy (e.g. transgender men) in terms of a “feminized” subjecthood that is *shared with cisgender women*. These performative utterances aim to *undo* exclusionary feminism.

But, in my view, they actually sustain its emergence, through a kind of ideological deixis. Here, instead of *performatively* expanding womanhood, they *index* a dominant frame of reference for social being entirely. Concurrently, they “point through” language at a *specifically modern/bourgeois* context of substructural/superstructural organization for which womanhood is an embodied consequence. A transfeminist is left wondering: what about Womanhoods that historically emerged at the nexus of premodern/precapitalist material and power relations?

This is a question that becomes particularly important from the perspective of Black transfeminists and the Third World struggle. In Global North countries, much of “the gurls” lingo indexes a frame of reference in which the nuclear/conjugal unit excludes, pushing a lot of TMA (transmisogyny-affected) folks into the streets and the underground sex economy. This is why those who founded the organization STAR (street transvestite action revolutionaries) were not just trans drag queens, but specifically were *street queens* (a lumpen struggle).

Aesthetic production and political struggle in these milieus becomes a question of surviving illicit trades, as much as about minimizing violence in above ground institutions, namely public spaces, hospitals, schools, workplace. Sylvia Wynter and Marsha P Johnson’s interviews demonstrate these difficulties, as does Miss Major Griffin Gracy’s autobiography. Subcultures (namely the ball/house scene) are crafted, that provide support in performative self-expression, particularly with regards to navigating licit and illicit economies or arenas of civil society. The ‘limnal’ or marginalized gender experience here ‘overlaps’ *with that of only the most underclass of cisgender (non-trans) women, who are often also pushed out of the nuclear/conjugal unit and forced to the streets*.

When this imbrication occurs, honorifics and kinship terms between underclass women of trans experience are extended to cis underclass working girls, the latter of whom may become involved in aesthetic/political co-creation and performance subculture because of it. These ‘cisters’ deal with scorn alongside trans women, because their experience is said to be misaligned with the proper expectations for a woman. The bourgeois colonial Woman is not in the underground, she is sexually pure or striving to be so; she is in the family or striving to care for or start one. The failed Woman doesn’t meet such standards and the most extreme iteration thereof is one who cannot meet such standards because she is ‘for the streets.’ That whorephobia and class oppression defines the circumstances of underclass cisgender women to make their Womanhood deemed lesser is *no analogue to the misgendering* which denies trans women of recognition as women altogether. The biologicistic explanation for gender is not completely revoked of the former although *it is still used to pressure them* or punish them in patriarchal ways, as it is with women of trans experience.



These commonalities are considered a point of solidarity in the Black struggle for womanists of transgender experience like the late Monica Roberts. In the “Free the Body, Free the Land” statement by the the New Afrikan Womanist Caucus of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, those commonalities between underclass (Black) trans women’s struggles and that of underclass cis women are also *taken as the reference point for solidarity against patriarchy* — synthesizing Black feminism, womanism, and Black transfeminist thought. Developing solidarity across these struggles with reference solely to gender or sex(uality) or is limiting however. Both struggles are associated with African and non-Western political as well as performance traditions and modes of aesthetic production, and ultimately navigate *specifically racialized conditions within class society*.

The attention to class and race alongside gender/sex is not merely an incidental or additive one, either. *These factors are mutually co-constitutive* such that when taken as a frame of reference for discussing patriarchy, the analysis is categorially more broad-based. Hence, the kinds of above ground and underground Global North experiences of transmisogyny, their overlap with the conditions of underclass cisgender women — these things are detected most viscerally in the domestic/internal colonies, especially with Black women in these parts of the world.

But, the mainstream model of feminism atomizes these conditions from one another through reductionist analysis, and effectively pushes trans womanhood and underclass cis womanhood to the fringe of discussion. This ignores both the gender marginalization experienced or those in the domestic/internal colonies as well as those in the peripheries of the Global South. Doing so is *part of the ideological deixis I’m suggesting is at work*. It absolutely has repressive faculties (as the Butlerian view would acknowledge) guiding it, correlated to who or what is centered or “shown” deictically, as much as it also upholds a “material” interest: the imperative of a socialized reproduction of colonial-capitalist relations (as the Marxist feminists would acknowledge).

## 4. Transecting “Gender”: Beyond (re)Production, But Not Without It

A theorist who helps us give name to both an issue of performative negation and an imperative of reproduction simultaneously is Sylvia Wynter, an Afro-Caribbean philosopher, feminist, and Black autonomous theorist. Wynter’s theories are not in competition with the Butlerian perspective; she is engaged with postmodern/poststructuralist thought, as Paget Henry makes clear about Sylvia Wynter’s body of work in Part II of *Caliban’s Reason*. But, as Henry posits, Wynter’s work is a synthesis of debates between what can be called “poeticist” and “historicist” traditions of Afro-Caribbean philosophy; this is similar to a balance between strengths of the “idealist” schools of thought and “materialist” schools of thought in feminism. So, across her writings, Wynter foregrounds language and performance, but she also makes sustained attention to biology and class.

For example, in her article “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Consciousness, and What It Is Like to be ‘Black’”, Wynter puts natural scientific inquiries in conversation with the critical tradition. She specifically integrates the interventions of nationalist Caribbean philosopher Frantz Fanon with the theories of consciousness offered by David Chalmers. In the former’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon grapples with the mental health issues of his patients in the colonial setting, reflecting on the role that racialized *narratives projected onto the body* played in producing these experiences of the mind. What Wynter elucidates is the following passage from Fanon:

“Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man’s alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny...”

Essentially, Fanon’s medical practice was limited by two predominant conceptual frames in the natural and social sciences: one, from Darwin, that focuses on evolution at the level of the species (phylogenetic), the other, from Freud which focuses on evolution at the level of the individual (ontogenetic). If Fanon had only stuck to these two options, then the psycho-affective issues that his patients were presenting with could only be explained as something biologically-reduced: a problem of phylogenetic development (as if his patients were another species), or a problem of ontogenetic development (as if his patients simply had individual/familial pathologies), which is exactly what racial scientists at the time often said about African peoples.

What Wynter strives to highlight is how Fanon’s notion of sociogenesis implies the existence of evolution at the level of a ‘conscious’ experience of the body/environment. Her argument is that Fanon sought to understand the *dialectical interpenetration among the phylogenetic, ontogenetic, and sociogenic factors, all amidst changes in historical relations*.

There is a historicized and *nature-nurture* oeuvre that Wynter sets out using Fanon, which she calls a “sociogenic principle.” She begins with what Marxists would deem an “idealist” concern about representation of the body across each geographical/anthropological context, but she argues that sociogenesis emerges vis-a-vis “species specific” cognitive faculties.

Therefore, embodied consciousness has a universal basis in the biological potentiality for neurochemical activities specific to our species, even as it also has a deeply local basis in various cultures/regions of the world. In particular, Wynter identifies a so-called “neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanism” as pivotal in the *sociogenic production and reproduction of material/power relations by each cultural/human group*.

Although she starts with a focus on performance, Wynter finds that human populations have developed myths, folklore, religion, cosmology, metaphysics (including racialized narratives) to *explain the embodied experience of a complex universe*, the consequence of which is that linguistic symbols interact with ways the brain might ‘encode’ a behavioral or learned response to what has been experienced as ‘dangerous’ for the body or as ‘not dangerous’ for the body.

The nature-nurture interplay here is what yields historically/regionally specific ‘symbolic life and death codes,’ as Wynter terms it. And it comes with a constellation of neurochemical effects that allow what is really an *imbrication of social structures to feel as if it were biologically real* — substituting a “truth for” a particular group as the “truth for” what it means to be human itself.

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To exemplify, Wynter points us to the context of Ayiti, examining the religion of Vodun, a West African derived faith system. Here, one’s “*ti bon ange* (i.e, ‘that component of the Vodun soul that creates character, will-power, personality)’ is traditionally regulated by the fear of becoming a zombie (33, italics in original). Zombification, according to Wynter, was historically a punishment imposed by “the secret society of Bizango, whose members were and are entrusted with the role of punishing [antisocial] behaviors” (33).

Neurochemically, according to Wynter, the toxin known as tetrodotoxin procures the zombification process, which is essentially a trance state, resembling death (not to be confused with the caricature of zombies in Western media). Now, the *embodied* experience of that neurochemical state and the effects of the toxins is encoded *sociogenically* as “*the loss of one’s ti bon ange, of one’s soul*.” This ultimately reinforces the overall local pursuit of *prosocial behaviors* as regulated by the Bizango society (34, italics in original), because of fear of the embodied experience of losing one’s soul.

Through Fanon, Wynter argues that because Vodun becomes syncretized with Catholicism in Ayiti, the context of French colonialism under which the syncretization occurred means that the “qualitative mental states which correlate with aversive sensations, or fear of behaving... in such an antisocial way as to make the threat of zombification real” is “subjectively experienced” with reference to “two different *senses of self*,” whereby a “culturally imposed symbolic belief system of the French bourgeois *sense of self*” is also structuring that of the colonized (34, italics in original).

This basically means that the French colonial substructure/superstructure reorganizes the neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanism into a *hybrid sociogenic consciousness*, caught between two worlds so to speak. Thus, for Wynter, “two quite different injunctions” end up “functioning to the same end,” such that the behavior regulatory mechanism as it is experienced

in Vodun gets reorganized in service of what *colonial/bourgeois society dictates must be feared*, precisely because they both share in an “objectively instituted... modality” (34) — sociogenesis.

Yet, the colonial context offers a rupture in human sociogenesis, to enable a transcultural awareness of the evolution of consciousness itself. This is particularly because the colonial subject’s *very embodiment is oppressed* and configured at the nexus of a ‘symbolic life and death code’ *endogenous to their ancestral relations* as well as the ‘symbolic life and death code’ *exogenously imposed by the colonizer*. The colonized subject’s embodied consciousness in this way demonstrates how *mutable* the biological potentiality for producing and reproducing a social order is: insofar as the sociogenic dimension of human-environmental life may have one “code” rewritten by another, more hegemonic “code.”

Ultimately, in Wynter’s body of work, this is a case in point against the idea that all human behavior (and thus the social systems reinforced by it) is predetermined phylogenetically or ontogenetically, for if the neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanism can be made a function of a dominant system, it can also be made a function of *other ways of being in the world*.

Why is this relevant to our discussion of deictic utterances? Well, in an interview entitled “What Will Be The Cure?” with Bedour Alagraa, Wynter proposes that a sociogenic view of humanity makes us not *homo sapiens* but rather *homo narrans* — a storytelling or *linguaging species*. She highlights the use of African cosmological “rites” in “reclaiming our past, present, and future selves” (*What Will Be The Cure: A Conversation with Sylvia Wynter*). Citing the example of Bakongo initiation ceremonies, Wynter says:

“in these societies ... education consisted of an initiation process into a master script containing the truths of that society. And when the community felt under threat, it used these initiation ceremonies with children in order to reinforce its self-conception.” (*What Will Be The Cure: A Conversation with Sylvia Wynter* (2021))

In Wynter’s view, resistance against colonialism involves sociogenic “codes,” expressed in language and symbol (performance), which can “point” us to the reinforcement of an alternative self-conception. To me, this is about the socialized production/reproduction of an *autonomous frame of reference for personhood*.

The neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanism that sociogenically “encodes” symbolic life or death may not be overwritten simply by the dominant (exogenously imposed) material/power relations. The fear of zombification in Ayiti, for example, becomes an index on the loss of bodily/cognitive autonomy that comes from enslavement (such an explanation was proposed by Maximilien Laroche, 1975) and shares traits with beliefs among some Continental African societies about magic powers that were reportedly wielded by local, slave-trading groups.

Thus, the subjugated peoples’ context for what it means to be human is *indexed* vis-a-vis reclamation of our endogenously sourced, ancestral traditions — and all the symbols, signs, languages, and performative acts they involve (as well as the relations they point to).

It doesn’t sound like too much of a stretch to say that this Wynterian view implies that the ‘master script’ of African ‘initiation process’ customs have their own *deictic centers*, their own ‘origo’ by which the context for experiences of humanness (social being) is to be reckoned. And because those other contexts, at the nexus of what Fanon called the “substructure [a]s also a superstructure,” emerge sociogenically “alongside phylogeny/ontogeny,” this means that the ‘material’ basis for how the body is organized in historical relations can absolutely *be evaluated in a more expansive perspective*.

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Romaine Riviere, an insurgent during the Haitian Revolution, indexed these expansive configurations *by referring to himself as “la prophetesse.”* When Romaine Riviere re-articulated himself as such, she drew on Catholic religion and the religions of Vodun as well as of the Bakongo which had shaped the lives of Afro-descendants on the island of Ayiti. These beliefs, along with Romaine-La-Prophetesse’s expansive gender embodiment, played a central role in how xe partook in militant struggle against colonial domination. This is so much the case that, according to Terry Rey’s *The Priest and the Prophetess*, some of the record on Romaine Riviere’s existence regards hir claims to have been possessed by Saint Mary (in becoming “la prophetesse”) to be *merely* a ruse to galvanize political support. Yet, as Terry Rey acknowledges, gendered embodiment and spiritual self-concept in Romaine-la-Prophetesse’s emergence as a movement leader share with a *historical pattern of “militaristic form of transatlantic Kongolese Marianism,”* (111) — going back as early as Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita in the seventeenth century.

Kimpa Vita had declared herself a “prophet,” according to *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* by John K. Thornton. In a period where Kongo politics were divided by civil war, Kimpa Vita emerged as a healing practitioner (*nganga marinda*) tasked specifically with social responsibilities in Bakongo culture. After falling ill, she drew on traditional ceremonies, before asserting that xe had been resurrected by the spirit of a *male Catholic saint*: Anthony of Padua, the patron of lost things. Padua’s association with care for Christ led Kimpa Vita to regard him as somewhat of a Marian figure, and she *claimed to be possessed by his spirit*, literally embodying the authority linked to him.

The ‘origo’ for Doña Beatriz’s self-declarations was not the “cross-dressing” sainthood permitted since Thomas Aquinas of virginal women during times of war/conflict (ex. Joan of Arc), but rather the ancestral duties set aside for an *nganga marinda*. The “Antonian” movement Kimpa Vita founded, then, with its own version of the *Salve* and syncretic ritual devotions, “points us” to an African context *rife with alternative configurations of gender embodiment* — one that contrasted with the church’s relegating spiritual headship to heterosexual, cisgender, celibate priests. It was in such a context that Doña Beatriz Kimpa Vita emerged as a rebellious historical figure, engaged in a religio-political struggle for Kongolese sovereignty amidst Portuguese incursions and a local civil war.

## 4.II. Transected Perspectives: Substructure & Substructure through Non-Dualism as Deictic Center

For the colonial subject, gender *non-dualist* ways of organizing spiritual headship should be the deictic center of our conversations about resistance to Patriarchy. The historical information we can “point” to does not just surround the lives of folks like Romaine-la-Prophetesse or Doña Beatriz Kimpa Vita, but also folks like Njinga of Angola. The Western record speaks of Njinga as a “queen,” but the local term for her emergence as a historical figure is *ngola*, which means “king.”

In the works of Black anarchic radical theorist Sundjata (with Red Voice News), we learn how Njinga’s journey to the role of *ngola* involved a struggle against “Minor” Patriarchy (endogenous to Mbundu society) and the “Grand” Patriarchy (exogenously imposed by Portuguese colonial-

ism). The reference point is not to be conflated with that of the few “female monarchs” who took advantage of the divine right of kings in medieval Europe; at the center of Sundjata’s contributions to the record on Njinga’s life are observations about what he calls “Gender and Sexuality as “Transgressive Chaos”” in Africa (*Black Against Profit, pt. IV: from Timbuktu to Babylon*). What does this refer to? Well, according to the National Black Justice Coalition:

“several unpublished documents were discovered at the National Archives of Torre do Tombo in Lisbon, Portugal, which have served to shed new light on the victims of the Portuguese Inquisition. Most of these victims were accused of practicing divination, healing, and/or religious rituals or indigenous religions and ceremonies in use in the “Native Kingdom of Angola, Kongo and surrounding nations.” (*Francisco Manicongo, Ubuntu Biography Project, been here dot org, March 9, 2018*)

When Portuguese colonialists encountered the Mbundu, the Bakongo, and other neighboring groups like the Imbangala, and more, their religious mores condemned the spiritual beliefs and practices that were present. What’s important to highlight is how often the Inquisitors’ religious campaign *specifically targeted forms of gender expansivity* among different groups from the Congo and Angola regions of Central Africa. For example, in the text *Boy Wives, Female Husbands*, we read:

“Father Antonio Cavazzi’s reaction to the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda, the presiding priest of the Giagues (Imbangala), a group in the Congo region, typifies the European response to African sexual diversity. In his 1687 *Istorica de scrizione de’ tre’ regni Congo, Matamba, et Angola*. Cavazzi described the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda as “a bare-faced, insolent, obscene, extremely villainous, disreputable scoundrel,” who “committed the foulest crimes” with impunity. The funeral rites held for him were so indecent “that the paper dirtied with its description would blush.” According to Cavazzi, the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda routinely cross-dressed and was addressed as “grandmother.””

The *ganga-ya-chibanda* was a social role among the Imbangala that Portuguese clergy like Antonio Cavazzi absolutely spurned. This social role emerged at the nexus of Imbangala spiritual customs and material/power relations, organizing the embodiment of those called *ganga-ya-chibanda* in a way that Cavazzi would call “cross-dressing.” Cavazzi could hardly go into details about the latter, besides projecting epithets like “obscene” onto the *ganga-ya-chibanda*, and recoiling at the idea that a term like “grandmother” could be used to describe them.

The prefix in their designation, *Ganga* seems to be cognate of the social role Kimpa Vita occupied in her Kongolese context (*nganga*) and Murray and Roscoe connect the suffix *chibanda* in the name of this social role to the term *jimbandaa* and other cognates in languages from the greater Congo-Angola region, which they describe as “terms used by Bantu-speakers in the region for nonmasculine males who are often shamans and have sex with other men.” (*Boy Wives, Female Husbands*, 10). Several groups in this part of Africa had priestly roles for expansive gender populations, with recognized labels to describe these particular configurations of embodiment. In *The ‘Deviant’ African Genders That Colonialism Condemned* by Mohammed Elnaim, reports of one of these cognates is accounted for:

“An anxiety that historians discern in the historical record is how uncomfortable European travellers, and later anthropological accounts, were with the idea that their

gendered worldview didn't easily map onto the societies they encountered. "There is among the Angolan pagan much sodomy," wrote one Portuguese soldier in 1681, "sharing one with the other their dirtiness and filth, dressing as women. And they call them by the name of the land, *quimbandas*."

It was not just clergy, but intellectuals and soldiers who demonized expansive gender in Central Africa. Colonizers had their own vocabulary for gender, with terms like "sodomy" that referred to a religious condemnation of supposedly "abominable" sexual relations (in order to regulate the conjugal unit). But, the language for gender/sexual relations among diverse Congo-Angola societies was different: *chibanda*, *chibado*, *quimbanda*, *jimbandaa*. The context being "pointed" to by either set of terms is not just distinct worldviews but distinct *social roles and structures* among these African cultures in contrast to that of the Portuguese. The sociogenic "codes" at play in the African context did not implement the same kind of behavior-regulatory effects in the brains or bodies of expansive gender folks as would occur under the valency of Grand (colonial) Patriarchy. Instead, the sociogenic "codes" anchored the embodied production and reproduction of *non-dualist* roles.

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By non-dualism, I am highlighting the existence of a gender Nexus which does not organize the body in terms of an underlying polarity (two opposing or contradicting forces, entities, objects, etc), with the degrees of hierarchy and social oppression that that entails for the West. I prefer this term over the anachronistic universalization of modern LGBT+ spectrum labels, or terms in anthropological and social science literature such as "third sex" or "third gender." To be clear though, as Sundjata reminds us, the overall reality of non-dualist/expansive gender embodiment in Africa:

"does not mean that gender oppression doesn't exist in African societies, traditional or otherwise. It is also not a uniform statement about the nature of gender relations across African cultures. What it does mean is that the peoples who were stolen from "heathen" countries typically had less intolerant and rigidly binary ideas about gender (and, as we will see, sexuality) than did their Christian captors."

In "pointing" through indigenous terms for gender beyond the *colonial* relations of substructure and superstructure, we may come across less rigid, or "non-dualist" ways of organizing the body, but the context is still a constellation of African material/power relations, which of course should not be homogenized or idealized as utopias. Minor (local) patriarchies have to be factored into the equation, if we are to properly evaluate the structures organizing embodiments among so-called "heathens" of Africa and the Third World. Reckoning with Minor Patriarchy allows us to understand how relations at the nexus of substructure and superstructure in the indigenous context *may still configure even "non-dualist" sociogenic embodiment into class dynamics and political hierarchies*. For example, returning to the case of Njinga, it is said that she:

"... ruled dressed as a man, surrounded by a harem of young men who dressed as women and were her "wives." Wherever she appeared, her subjects fell to their knees and kissed the ground (Dapper 1670: 238)." (*Africa and African Homosexualities*, Murray and Roscoe)

According to this account, Njinga emerges as a gender/sexually expansive figure alongside other gender/sexually expansive figures. But she does so *as a royal*, with authority and a degree of sexual power in the Mbundu ruling dynasty. The sociogenic production/reproduction of Nzinga's expansive gender embodiment still involves an *imbrication of an elite class*. The latter, according to Sundjata's reading of Linda Heywood's writing on Nzinga, had established a kingdom called Ndongo. On account of their accumulation of State power and cementing of class interests, the Ndongo ruling dynasty was "not opposed to slavery," Sundjata writes, but they were nonetheless embroiled in conflict with the Portuguese. This was because the Portuguese colonial and ecclesial authorities were essentially using the nearby Kongo Kingdom as a "client state," according to Sundjata's reading of Heywood.

The Kongolese *manikongo* (ruler) sought to maintain power, through the slave trade, supplying captives to the Portuguese in exchange for resources and even ecclesial personnel within the Kongolese sovereign King Afonso's branch of Christianity. Through the Portuguese military's help, the Kingdom of Kongo suppressed the dissent that was brewing internal to its polity, while also invading neighboring polities, including the Ndongo territory, in order to keep its own rulership intact via the patron-client relationship established with the colonizer.

Per Sundjata's reading, the Portuguese manipulated these divides within and between the Ndongo and Kongo kingdoms, even sourcing help from smaller, localized Cephales (leaders) called the *soba*, who committed further raids. Alongside this, the Mbundu and Bakongo rulers had to deal with raids that were committed by less powerful groups like the nomadic Imbangala from among the Lunda people (according to Sundjata's reading of Heywood).

Njinga rises to the throne occurs in the midst of these regional conflicts, after she had been "trained in military arts and politics," according to Sundjata. Despite exhibiting her gender/sexual expansive expressions within the ruling court, however, Njinga still nonetheless lived in a society "where women, while not as oppressed as those in the Christian world, were still expected to show humility and reserve."

This Minor Patriarchy *did* allow dynastic headship over Ndongo material/power structures to be inherited through a Lineal nexus (specifically transmission through enatic/maternal ties), hence Njinga was able to step up to rule in her brother's stead after his death. Yet, as Sundjata reminds us, matricephaly (headship through matrilineal inheritance) in this case was at first an "interim" process, while Njinga's *nephew* was being raised in safety by some loyal Imbangalas.

That point is important because it could explain why Nzinga felt the need to eliminate the true heir to her family's throne (her brother's son), so that she could establish herself as a *lifelong*, rather than momentary head-of-state. Njinga therefore reorganized the Lineal nexus in order to contest the Gender nexus which had exhibited constraints on her acquisition of authority as a member of the Ndongo elite.

She then became notable for inspiring rebellion against the smaller, local Cephales (leaders), by getting Mbundu slaves to rebel against the *soba*, who again had often been aiding the Portuguese. In this way, not only did she challenge the Minor (local) Patriarchy, but she stirred up what Sundjata describes as a "nationalist" unity, in order to further legitimate her claim to the throne. Eventually, the Portuguese found a way to force Njinga out of Ndongo, but the new *ngola* went to establish a kilombo with the help of the Imbangala — whose leader she married. As such, she "targeted the Portuguese slave trade" from a guerrilla outpost established in Matamba, contesting the Grand Patriarchy.



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It is in this moment when Nzinga's gender expansivity begins to resemble that of Doña Beatriz Kimpa Vita, or of Romaine-la-Prophetsse. She also developed a syncretic religious campaign as part of her political resistance. According to Sundjata, Nzinga combined her own Mbundu rituals with that of the Imbangala, and drew specifically on the latter's mythic ancestor — "a 'woman,' ... named Temba a Ndumbo; who... had declared that they are 'no longer woman, but warrior.'" (*Black Against Profit, pt. IV: From Timbuktu to Babylon*). Njinga would ceremonially re-enact the rituals by which the ancestor Temba a Ndumo's "transition" from woman-to-warrior had been sociogenically implemented, thus establishing herself not merely as *ngola* (king), but also as a *sacred warrior*.

Through Njinga's mixing of symbols from two different indigenous sociogenic "codes," even going so far to imbue xir new religion with a "messianic" tone (according to Sundjata's reading of Heywood) the neurochemical behavior regulatory effects allowed her to command greater authority in Matamba. Eventually, *ngola* Nzinga would strive to maintain her rulership by enacting occasional anti-slavery raids against the Portuguese and their collaborators; but, xe also made offers to become an ally to the Portuguese (and even a convert to Catholicism) in exchange for the formal recognition of her sovereignty in both Ndongo and Matamba (according to Sundjata's reading of Heywood). Finally, in 1656, a peace treaty was brokered, at which point Njinga murdered an Imbangala leader she had formerly conspired with, before she proceeded to keeping the *soba* in line, and allowing the Portuguese trading in slaves to resume.

What's important here is that we *do not have to evaluate* Nzinga's trajectory in terms of the archetypal 'female' subject who struggles against a male-dominated (patriarchal) economic and political system. The language of non-dualist gender in her context "point" us to a set of circumstances in which Nzinga was *not reduced to biology* by Western sexologists as a consequence of atomization in the nuclear household or a domestic labor purportedly sanctioned by God.

Nzinga's emergence was instead within contradictions that were endogenous to the Mbundu (and greater African) context: one ruling dynasty competed with neighboring kingdoms and other local groups to maintain a particular kind of Lineal configuration of its authority. Despite sociogenic pressures on the extents of that matrilineal headship, Njinga was not absolutely barred from attaining political power the way gender marginalized folks in Europe were. Which is why she endured the colonial *pathologization* of her expansive kingship/messianism.

The Grand Patriarchy of the Portuguese had installed a patron-client relationship to or through the Kongo sovereign and other, smaller, local Cephales in order to advance its own material interests. They of course had an issue with Njinga's taking headship of the Minor Patriarchy among the Mbundu who were being attacked by the Kongo Kingdom, as hers was an imbrication of her class' interest and the Ndongo state's independence. Posing a challenge to the interests of the Portuguese crown by taking a stand as a "female" king, Njinga reorganized expansive gender configurations among her own people and neighboring cultures like the Imbangala to further cement her authority.

Through maneuvers away from the dualist (Western) gender Nexus, as well as through and around the non-dualist (local) gender Nexuses, the dialectics of embodiment in Njinga's life cannot anachronistically be termed "trans" or "cis" but they certainly are not to be reduced to biology nor to a 'division of labor' or binary 'sex class.' In the end, her need to maintain national independence resulted in a newly renegotiated patron-client relationship between the Portuguese Grand

Patriarchy and the now even more expansive gender Minor Patriarchy Nzinga had created. This was why Nzinga engaged in some forms of despotism and treachery, including against xir fellow gender marginalized Africans, in order to accumulate the human and other resources required for her control over two states (Ndongo and Matamba).

#### **4.III. Transected Perspectives: Misgendering and Ungendering Through “non-dualism” as Deictic Center**

In the queer/trans/feminist struggles of today, *the conditions* that allowed for the emergence of a *ngola* Njinga can be the reference point for many a Black person today who might be assumed to be female but who uses the honorific “king.” Such an individual *does not have to reference* “feminization” visavis the bourgeois division of household labor to describe how his or xir or their or her gender expansivity might be repressed under patriarchy. He or xe or they or she might instead point to the record of information about a king (or even prophet like Kimpa Vita) in Africa who *the West* gendered as female in a dualist sense. He or xe or they or she might then evaluate the dynamics of an indigenous as well as imposed social context for non-dualist embodiment, taking *those circumstances as the deictic center of their own gender identity’s historical emergence*.

When one reckons queerness/transness via an Origo such as this, we don’t just *de-center* the European frame of reference for gendered social being. We can *expand our frame of reference* for the historical development of material and power *relations in general*. Now, instead of taking the constraints of the nuclear household and Western religion as the starting point for analyzing gender marginalization, one could evaluate these struggles by transecting information on how class and race are interwoven with sexual oppression in the lives of those whose ancestors were enslaved and colonized. In particular, we’d be identifying the negation of gender expansive kingship, masculinities, manhoods as part and parcel of the ways a subjugation of precolonial, ancestral, indigenous roles, lifeways, and societal structures is reproduced by bourgeois modernity. Then, we’d be left with the question: why must such a process of disimbrication be reproduced?

In a similar vein, these same conditions, which allowed for the emergence of so-called “cross-dressing” *nganga-ya-chibanda* priests and similar roles, are the reference point for many a Black person today who might be assumed to be male but who use honorifics like “mother.” Such an individual *does not have to reference* the cis-perisex experience of reproductive labor under the capitalist household and heterosexual contract to describe how her or xir or their or his gender expansivity might be repressed under patriarchy. She or they or xe or he might instead point to the record about grandmothers (or even a prophetess like Romaine Riviere) in Africa who *the West* gendered as male in the dualist sense. She or they or xe or he might then evaluate the dynamics of indigenous as well as imposed social context for non-dualist embodiment, taking those circumstances as the deictic center of their *own gender identity’s historical emergence*.

When one reckons queerness/transness via an Origo such as this, we don’t just *de-center* the European frame of reference for gendered social being. We expand our frame of reference for the *historical development of material and power relations in general*. Now, instead of taking the constraints of the nuclear household and Western religion as the starting point for analyzing gender marginalization, one could evaluate their struggles by transecting information on how class and race are interwoven with sexual oppression in the lives of those whose ancestors were enslaved

and colonized. In particular, we'd be identifying the negation of gender expansive motherhoods, femininities, womanhoods as part and parcel of the ways the subjugation of precolonial, ancestral, indigenous roles, lifeways, and societal structures is reproduced in bourgeois modernity. Then, we'd be left with the question: why must such a process of disimbrication be reproduced?

The answer to that final question can only be discovered if we continue making the sociogenic "codes" which inflect a nexus of non-dualist/expansive gender as our deictic center (reference point). Dispensing with a Eurocentric and campist revolutionary ideology, we should "point" to Africa and the Third World, thereby urging a more "ecumenically human" vision of solidarity in our revolutionary movements. That is what Black feminism offers, according to my reading and interpolations of Wynter. And I craft my Nexus Hypothesis and theories of substructural/superstructural "imbrication" to suggest that a dialectical transfeminist analysis can do the same.

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To illustrate how, we will have to revisit the Giles-Peterson quote from the introduction to this article about transmisogyny among heterosexual cis men, gay cis men, and feminist women of a transmisogyny-exempt experience. The latter demonstrates *more* than just a concern with the implications that a transfeminine presence might have for already existing circumstances of 'feminization' — which subject cis women to coercion in consequence of the domestic relegation.

Although that is the narrative invoked for a Eurocentric frame of reference, in the Black struggle the dynamics at play *center* on how the "ungendering" of Black women unfolds. The informational context here requires we start considering race *alongside* sex, because many of the "controlling images" directed against Black women follow in the footsteps of Western naturalists, by animalizing and dehumanizing Black women with narratives such as what Stephen Jay Gould critiques in the works of Carl Linnaeus:

"Homo sapiens afer (the African black), [Linnaeus] proclaimed, is "ruled by caprice"; Homo sapiens europaeus is "ruled by customs." Of African women, he wrote: *mammae lactantes prolixae — breasts lactate profusely.*" (*Mismeasure of Man*)

Linnaeus' taxonomy characterizes Africans as a whole in terms of capricious (meaning unstable) mood or behaviors. But his initial "sign" for this is an archetype of Black femaleness as producing more breast milk than normal. A historical awareness of tropes like this might lead us to apply Giles-Peterson's argument to how some Black cis women would respond to inclusion of specifically demonized and pathologized trans experience alongside their struggle.

Perhaps it is true that Black cis women's *animalization and dehumanization might be increased* if it is considered in an expansive gender light. And indeed, this is precisely how some may react to the increased visibility of trans women in media when they consider the already existing pop culture tendencies to masculinize heterosexual cis Black women like Ciara, or Michelle Obama, or Megan Thee Stallion. Why represent an expansive category of womanhood when the *archetypal* image thereof is *already fraught*?

Unsurprisingly, it would seem that trans inclusion could cause more cis Black women to be *confused as unwomanly*, which is exactly what happened to 59-year-old Michelle Dione Peacock, murdered in 2023 by a transphobic, racist named Tommy Wayne Earl. Yet, my argument is that the friction here goes much deeper than raced/sexed representation or interpretation of the "female" body.

We should center the capitalist-colonial *disimbrication of women's labors and leadership in expansive gender African traditions*. Linnaeus' representation of breastfeeding, for example, are less about anatomy than an index for how the West viewed social reproductive labor among Africans. I'm "pointing" us to the *nexus of material/power structures* that organizes a masculinizing of Black womanhood during the colonial encounter.

A perfect case study here is the warriors known as *agojie* or the *mino* from among the Fon people. The British projected the term "Amazons" onto them, a label currently still used to describe women that are considered unfeminine, large, aggressive, dominant, etc. In the text, "The Amazon Warrior Woman and the De/construction of Gendered Imperial Authority in Nineteenth Century Colonial Literature," Maeve E Adams tracks several Victorian era portrayals and interpretations of these figures:

"In 1864, Sir Richard F. Burton published an ethnographic account of his Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomé. Burton, the accomplished linguist, orientalist, explorer and colonial officer, was chosen "by Her Majesty's government" as an official "commissioner to Dahomé," a West African state that had been central to the slave trade (Burton I: viv). His "principle object" was, however, to report on the Kingdom's "mixture of horrors and meanness...[and sketch a] picture of its mingled puerility and brutality" (Burton I: xiv). Burton devoted a large portion of his two-volume account to describing, with the aid of detailed engravings, the chief proof of Dahomé's barbarian under-civilization: its army of women warriors, or "so-called 'Amazons'" (Burton I: iii)."

According to Adams, Richard F Burton's reports on the "horrors" of the Dahomé feudal order took what Burton called the "so-called 'Amazons'" as a *sign of the "barbarian under-civilization" of the Dahomey Kingdom*, whose ruler these warriors served under. Burton was "pointing" through the Western sociogenic "code" for civilization. Maeve E Adams' text indicates that Burton was not alone in this:

"We find the Amazon in ethnographic accounts like Burton's Mission and F.E. Forbes Dahomey and the Dahomans (1851). We also find her in accounts of live exhibitions and performances of "Amazon" warriors held in nineteenth-century London; graphic representations printed in popular periodicals, like Punch; and fictional texts, like Elizabeth Gaskell's Cranford, the first line of which states, "Cranford is in possession of the Amazons; all the holders of houses above a certain rent are women" (Gaskell 1)."

Like Sarah Baartman, whose body was put on display in human zoos as evidence of African female excrescence, those who Westerners called "Amazons" in Dahomey were used by the British in representations of African femaleness as well. And this always became a "*sign of the overall civilizational inferiority of Africa*, according to the West's frame of reference for what it means to be human.

But, it is important to emphasize that the animalization and dehumanization of the *mino/akhosi* was *in part because they were an expansive gender configuration* of embodiment. The colonial authorities and intellectuals' narrative was more than just an index on African female bodies

or African ontologies; it articulates a sociogenic regulation against a non-dualist substructural and superstructural *context* within which figures like the so-called Amazons emerge.

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The record on the Amazons' origins as a military unit and their place in Dahomé political and economic relations is complicated. It is implied that they were recruited from criminalized women (see pg 98, *Boy Wives, Female Husbands*). Recent filmic depictions have kept in line casting them all as "female" warriors, somewhat similar to Western reductions of *ngola* Nzinga as a "queen." But, as Maeve E Adams reports, even for Burton the *interpretation of the so-called Amazons was mixed*: though he projected a sexual dualism and heteronormative interpretation of their gender, Burton also reports that the *agojie* were sworn to celibacy. Yet, he also speculates about possible lesbianism among them, according to Adams.

Furthermore, FE Forbes' 1851 ethnography, according to Adams' article, supposedly records a war-chant among the so-called Amazons, in which the latter reportedly compare themselves to an iron bar changed by fire and even *declare themselves to be men*. While we shouldn't take the reports of obviously biased interlocutors on face value, what we can surmise, *based on the conflicting interpretations* of gender/sex as it relates to the *Mino* — and given what we know of, say, the spiritual transition of the "female" warrior-ancestor of the Imbangala who *ngola* Nzinga eventually modeled herself after — is that the so-called Amazons *included gender expansive individuals*, broadly defined.

Another reason why it would be best to regard them through a non-dualist lens such as this is because in Dahomé society there were other configurations of gender expansive embodiment, such as the court servant role of the *lagredi*. Most modern interpretations classify these figures as "male eunuchs" (this is mentioned in the article *Beyond Binary Definitions of Gender: The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gender in Africa*), in the same way as the Amazons are classified merely as "women warriors."

Furthermore, the practice of female husbandry is also reported as a tradition in Dahomé society. While primarily organized as an *economic* role, by which some women of certain status could take wives of their own, it certainly stands out from what was allowed for gendered subjects in the West (see *Woman-Woman Marriage in Africa* by Joseph M Carrier and Stephen O Murray). Lastly, anthropological reports from Melville Herskovitz among the Fon suggest that homosexual behavior was considered a normal phase among the youth, supposedly referred to with the local term *gaglgo* (102, *Boy Wives, Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*).

The civilizational supremacism of the West, required this reorganization of the non-dualist *lagredi* and the Amazons and female husbandry and the *gaglgo* phase into a dualist perspective, as evidence of overall 'barbarity' among the Fon. Such a process was *pursuant to colonial incursions against Dahomey sovereignty*, much as the valency of Grand Patriarchy had worked against the Ndongo and Kongo kingdoms under Portuguese colonialism.

Of course, this does not mean that Dahomé was a utopia; clearly *feudal hierarchies were at play*, and the Dahomé militants were no stranger to conflict with neighboring kingdoms and groups, including the capture and trading of slaves to Europeans. What we can say, though, is that dehumanization and animalization of the Amazons, central to the "ungendering" of African women as a whole in the colonial imaginary, was always bound up with pathologization and demonization of expansive gender/sexual embodiment in Dahomey, and by extension, greater Africa.

Only then does the valency of the Western family unit show up, as the British *needed to condemn atypical configurations of women's labors outside the West in direct proportion to the sharpening of domestic labor relegations within its own borders*. Under capitalism, the industrial proletariat in places like Britain was being dispossessed at increasing levels during that time, dispersed into cramped urban centers, and groaning against the increasingly polluted environmental conditions and dangerous workplace conditions associated with industrialism.

Prior to that shift, it was possible for the whole family to sustain itself on its labor inputs (the household was bound to the manor and paid its surplus to the feudal lord). But bourgeois relations ensured that one could only survive on the *breadwinner*. Thus, from a Marxist feminist perspective, the family unit's labor inputs *become truncated* so that a wage is "paid in compensation for the aggregate *socially necessary labor time expended by the entire family* in the production and reproduction of the commodity labor power" (to use words from Marlene Dixon's albeit limited analysis). This set-up creates the conditions of a modern "homemaker" relegated to the private/domestic sphere, in a way that differed from even the precapitalist though still gender dualist relations of medieval Europe.

The potential for configuring labor relations that did not fit within this dynamic was to be kept far away from the "civilized" heartland, so that the workers could not potentially govern themselves in ways that were less atomized and thus less manageable. The poorest and most marginalized of European proletarians were most poised to understand this, for their children and wives were often still laboring both at home and in general society *alongside* the husband/father. These subjects had their consciousness regulated, however, "pointed" instead towards the nuclear family ideal that the bourgeois social reproduction process thrives on.

If only so-called "barbaric" entities outside of European capitalism could have gender expansive configurations of labor, then it was to be no issue if they were exploited and oppressed as slaves and colonial subjects, including as low-wage domestic servants whose gender embodiment was truncated by Grand Patriarchy and its interpenetration with Minor Patriarchy. Thus the European proletariat and even its feminist subjects would fail to consider the "double jeopardy" that Frances Beal once identified of Black women's struggles.

The substructural/superstructural nexus of *non-dualist* labor configurations is key here, not the more narrow takeaway which would think of "multiple jeopardies" in terms of racialized and sexed anatomy/biology alone. As chattel slavery in particular could hardly sustain itself in the face of revolts, invigorated scrambles for African land were fueling capitalist development, which absorbed enslaved and colonized women into the forms of exploitation that discontent European women did not want to do. Let us start pointing to a *fuller context* for the controlling images directed against Black women, then, with non-dualism as our reference point, as it opens us up to a wider range of information through which we could demonstrate the anticolonial solidarity that the European proletariat (including feminist subject) failed to do, grappling with racial, class, and sexual oppression.

#### **4.IV. Transected Perspectives: Homophobia and Gay Assimilation through "non-dualism" as Deictic Center**

I challenge us to make a similar transfeminist corrective to Giles-Peterson's explanations of gay cis men's transmisogyny as well. The fear is *more* than just a concern with the implications

that a transfeminine presence might have for already existing circumstances of ‘feminization’ (that subjects gays/lesbians to exclusion from the heterosexual contract in consequence of the domestic relegation and conjugal unit).

Although that is the narrative invoked for a Eurocentric frame of reference, in the Black struggle the dynamics at play *center* on how a “rhetoric of abomination” constructed the image of a ‘homosexual’ in the colonial context. By “rhetoric of abomination,” we have to evaluate the circumstances of the Christian narratives described by Murray and Roscoe touch on in *Boy Wives, Female Husbands*:

“Phrases like “foulest crimes” were part of what Guy Poirier has termed a Western “rhetoric of abomination” directed not at particular forms of sexuality but at sexuality in general (1993a: 223). Before the eighteenth century, European writings on sexuality were nearly always part of a moral discourse, in which sexual identities, roles, and acts were represented in the terms of a Judeo-Christian code. In this code, all forms of extramarital sexuality and certain forms of marital sexuality were to one degree or another sinful and defiling, and everyone was believed to be at risk for the temptation and lust that led to such acts. The code was uninterested in why some sinners lusted for the same sex and others for the opposite — both were “foulest crimes.” Indeed, the very nature of lust was believed to cause a breakdown of moral consciousness and the ability to discriminate between proper and improper sexual objects. Hence, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, and other sexual acts were all viewed as transgressions that occurred when individuals no longer recognized distinctions of gender, kinship, age, race, and species — an “undifferentiated” state of consciousness that Europeans also attributed to people they considered “primitive.””

From Murray and Roscoe’s account, a ‘rhetoric of abomination’ is an ethnoreligious supremacist demonization/pathologization of gender expansivity in African civilizations. We have previously described this as the sociogenic “code” of the church directed by institutions like the Inquisition to repress Kimpa Vita, *ngola Nzinga*, and groups like the *ganga-ya-chibanda* and their cognates.

What Murray and Roscoe seek to underscore is how the rhetoric of abomination was originally *generalized* in its application as regulation on sexual behavior and gender expression. The legal/judicial mandates *did not not single out* “sodomy,” for example, as more exceptionally wicked than “cross-dressing,” or even “fornication” (sex before marriage) and “adultery” (extra-marital sex). *All* such acts were taken as a sign of a *total* moral disarray or decay. Because of the nature of African societies’ considerably less rigid marital, familial, and sexual/gender relations, the “code” unsurprisingly framed the African world as the *pinnacle* of such general immorality and abomination. The neurochemical behavior regulatory effects only became *targeted against specific atomized “sexual” traits* when, according to Murray and Roscoe:

“... in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did interest develop in explaining same-sex desire as a special case. Even so, the influence of moral discourse remained — and remains — strong. Indeed, nearly all the texts that we might use to document and understand African same-sex patterns employ moral rhetoric — from late sixteenth-century Portuguese reports of “unnatural damnation” in Angola (Purchas

1625: 1558), to John Burckhardt's 1882 report of "detestable vices" in Nubia (64), an 1893 report of copulation contre nature in French Senegal (X 1893: 155–56), and the 1906 report of a German missionary who observed Herrero men forsaking the "natural use of women" (Irle 1906: 58–59)."

The rhetoric of abomination *changed* once the sociogenic "code" of the Christian West now had to regulate sexual behavior with an emphasis on *atomized configurations of the body*. The new rhetoric was therefore 'pointing' to the *bourgeois nuclear family, an alienated social unit*. As such, the focus was on *repressing biomedical*, not just moral, 'difference.' New juridical and academic institutions were stepping up to the plate, with a more secular-scientific expression of the Western sociogenic "code." They indexed social embodiment in terms of the phylogenetic and later ontogenetic models of evolution that we mentioned via Fanon from earlier.

These ideological and institutional shifts did not happen to the same extent or in the same ways depending on the imperial power you are focusing on, by the way. Competition between different manifestations of racial capitalism made the contours and applications of the Western sociogenic "code" haphazard within itself. But a general trend or overview can leave us with an outline that transfeminist theorist g describes in *For Those Seeking or In Flight*:

"... from the very initial stages of significant consideration and study in the time of Darwin, sexual dimorphism was inherently racialised. Darwin himself even noted the writings of a contemporary, Carl Vogt, who argued that sexual dimorphism was hierarchical according to race, with it "increas[ing] with the development of the race". Further, in 1866, Richard von Krafft-Ebing stated in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, one of the most influential texts in psychiatry and psychopathology, "The secondary sexual characteristics differentiate the two sexes; they present the specific male and female types. The higher the anthropological development of the race, the stronger these contrasts between man and woman."

Here, Western sexologists like Vogt or Krafft-Ebing suggested that supposedly *less advanced* or backward societies exhibited far *less anatomical dimorphism* and gender binarism than supposedly more advanced or progressive societies. The capitalist nations with increasingly more nuclear kinship structures supposedly also possessed the *actual, distinct biological (and not just moral) trait expressions of a superior civilization*. Gender/sex dualism, now regulated sociogenically in terms of phylogeny and ontogeny (and not simply religion), was a trait to be *associated with a natural progression* in human evolution from inferior, non-dualist stages of development to a "modern," superior stage with all its technological prowess and aptitude.

According to Foucault, it was *this* view which organizes the "sodomite" as "a kind of anterior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul," and thus birthing the modern notion of a "homosexual" (43, *A History of Sexuality*). The homosexual was, in effect, a type for a civilizational inferiority *defined by intersex and expansive gender trait presentations*. The Germans would call the latter "Uranism" in the mid-1800s, according to Amara Wilhelm's abridged version of "Tritiya Prakriti: A People of the Third Sex" (132), and this term was used for both the populations today considered gay *and* those considered intersex as well as transgender. Some reports that Wilhelm documents include the following:

"In 1860, an American consular officer stationed in Zanzibar reported that "numbers of sodomites have come from Muscat (Oman), and these degraded wretches openly



walk about dressed in female attire, with veils on their faces.” In 1899, German ethnologist Michael Haberlandt studied “sexual contrariness” among Zanzibar natives. He reported homosexual men that he believed were born with “contrary” desires and which the natives described as *amri ya muungu* or “the will of God.” (part 8)

Here, the attention is put on ethnic groups in Southern and Eastern portions of the African continent. But, as with the pathologization directed at indigenous peoples of Central Africa like the Mbundu, Imbangala, Bakongo, or groups from West Africa like the Fon, military and intellectual personnel *projected their Western frame of reference for gender/sexual embodiment onto the Zanzibar context*. And thereby, an endogenous sociogenic “code,” indexed by terms such as *amri ya muungu* (asserting the “will” of a local deity regarding non-dualist gender/sexual embodiment), is overwritten by the exogenous sociogenic “code,” indexed by terms such as “homosexual” and “contrary desire” (as defined by Christian belief and its dualist configurations of gender/sexual embodiment).

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A key point in the Zanzibar case, per Wilhelm’s reading, is that the sociogenic regulation against the so-called “sodomite” was *also* a sociogenic regulation against “wretches... in female attire.” The rhetoric of abomination was singling out a *race-scientist definition of gender/sexual diversity* in this instance. Wilhelm’s text “A Third Sex Around the World” has other examples of this pattern, like in West Africa where European heterosexism is clearly a regulation against gender expansivity:

“In 1886, German explorer Friedrich von Hellwald noted a group of effeminate natives within the Liberian Kru tribes whose domestic services to the other men included sodomy...

... In Senegal (then Saint Louis), French ethnographer A. Corre, in 1894, encountered dark-skinned tribesmen of feminine dress and demeanor, who, he was told, made their living from prostitution. In Boke (Guinea) he saw a native prince’s dancer miming his own sexually receptive role in a tribal ceremony.” (part 7)

Here, a German explorer in Liberia reportedly describes groups of so-called “sodomites” as also being “effeminate.” A French anthropologist in Senegal and later Guinea makes a similar observation. As in the Central African case, and in the case of the Amazons of Dahomé, the information that can be gleaned about the groups targeted by Hellwald or Corre (per Wilhelm’s reading) points to ways that these social roles emerged at the nexus of material/power structures: local relations of *domestic labor, prostitution, ceremonial performance*. Hence, I argue, the colonial narratives actually “point” to the ongoing *disimbrication of the substructural and superstructural context for non-dualist gender/sexual embodiment*.

And why is this the case? The social labors performed visavis “uranism” in the African world was not conducive to the process of social reproduction necessary for the colonial-capitalist project. These were, of course, not utopias: age-stratified sexual patterns could be detected in some instances, for example, a reflection of stratification in other social arenas (this is a correlation noted by Murray and Roscoe, such that societies which are more egalitarian in a general

sense tend to also configure non-dualist gender/sexual relations within an egalitarian social structure. Nzinga's stratified expressions of gender expansivity, for example, correlate to the already stratified nature of Ndonggo society).

Still, as Marxist feminists would acknowledge, the heterosexual contract (conjugal unit) is the configuration most pivotal to bourgeois society. To quote Dixon's albeit limited perspective again: "all commodity production is dependent upon the family for the one single commodity on which all of capitalist society is dependent: human labor power itself."

Before capitalism's advance, when labor within the family largely produced *surplus product to be used collectively or given as tax to a feudal lord*, gender divisions may have existed, but they were *far less pronounced*. A shift occurs when capitalist domination swapped out collectives for atomization. Now, the family's labor was completely swept into reproduction of the household head's condition in the workplace. It is thus that the *value* of a wage worker's labor power became determined by expropriation from not just the single individual proletarian laborer but by inputs from:

"the labor of the entire family as a unit, including the reproduction of new proletarians as well as the reproduction of the husband's labor power, what the husband requires to rest, recuperate and strengthen himself for the next day's labor — all of this "domestic labor" determines the real value of the wage worker's labor power."  
(*On the Superexploitation of Women*)

In sum, the labor inputs within the heterosexual contract became essential to the reproduction of the *laborer's capacity to return to work and to provide future workers for the capitalist to exploit*, from a Marxist feminist perspective. There are, of course, more details and nuances in the argument (and pitfalls) which we do not have time to explore in this article right now. But, my point is that these *reproductive mandates regulated by the heterosexual contract* configure a pathologized "homosexual" subject in the colonies precisely *because the latter's labor inputs were never exactly organized within the dynamics of the capital-wage relation*.

Not only were their origins in non-Western material/power relations denigrated, but their contribution to the reproduction of colonial-capitalist relations had to be incorporated *from outside the household*. Thus, as Wilhelm highlights, we see the use of law (and regulations against sodomy) in places like then-British colony of Rhodesia:

"In the nineteenth century, Great Britain controlled the interior regions of southern Africa and granted exclusive mining rights to British magnate Cecil Rhodes in the 1880s. The region was subsequently divided into Southern and Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia), and the British South Africa Company was established. The lucrative mining industry attracted migrant workers from all over southern Africa and crowded, all-male camps fostered an increase in homosexual relationships that were modified according to various tribal customs. The British noticed the homosexual behavior at the camps and from 1892 to 1923 Southern Rhodesia tried over 250 sodomy cases. During the trials, the most common defense put forward was that sodomy had been a longstanding "custom" among African natives. Black Rhodesians were typically punished with less than a year in prison for the crime while Whites often received longer sentences."

Here, the capitalist-colonial industry brought about new working conditions in regions like Zimbabwe and Zambia. Black and white laborers alike migrated to these mines, owned by Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa company. But instead of Inquisitors and churches sentencing people of expansive gender/sexual embodiment to death, now long term prison sentences or stints at incarcerated labor camps became the punishment meted out by the State (particularly in the Anglophone colonies, who developed the most anti-homosexuality legislation of any other colonial power according to the article *African Sexuality and the Legacy of Imported Homophobia*).

Incarcerated labor could serve to safely sequester the “male” mine worker from the “sodomite,” while disrupting indigenous customs in which so-called “effeminate” behavior was tolerated. Proportional to the development of these repressive measures in the colonies, technical skills were utilized within the metropole to “understand” the “homosexual” — isolating these subjects within psychiatric and biomedical institutions, away from the European workers. Or, they would be arrested and sentenced to incarcerated labor within Europe’s borders (this became especially common in some territories after abolition of chattel slavery, for obvious reasons). The precursor movements to contemporary “Pride” can be detected in this historical moment, such as Magnus Hirschfield’s organizing in Germany. “Uranian” as a term was even reclaimed in places like Germany (and to a lesser extent, England) by members of early sexual emancipation movements, particularly among artists and intellectuals.

But, in some places, the more narrow takeaway was to put focus on the biomedical question, by proving that homosexuality is natural or “sane” and ultimately germane with the bourgeois reproduction of Western democracy. Meanwhile, the conditions facing folks like Frances Thompson or William Dorsey Swann or Mary Jones or Cathay Williams in the nineteenth century US, who were each Black and of expansive gender embodiment, have hardly figured into the historiography on the precursors to modern LGBT+ movements, not until recently that is (with the help of folks like Channing Gerard Joseph, Monica Roberts, C. Riley Snorton, and Raquel Willis, among others). Instead, they were ignored, or their counterparts in non-dualist gender/sexual expressions of Africa and the Third World were “pointed” to as what Sundjata calls a “variation of the “noble savage” theme” — ie, an index of how homosexuality among “premodern” peoples was supposedly “closer to uncorrupted human nature than the supposedly civilized West” (*Black Against Profit, pt IV: From Timbuktu to Babylon*).

By this, the Western sociogenic “code” was rewritten, to idealize (not pathologize) gender expansivity, all while still shoehorning it within the Western *modern* frame of reference for social being. This served to reconfigure the substructural and superstructural nexus of non-dualist gender/sexual embodiment by atomizing the “homosexual” subject, positioning him or her as an *adjunct* to the heterosexual contract, and ultimately to the *reproduction of a consumer base* via the nuclear family/conjugal unit.

Those divergences on the question of gender/sexuality within the hegemonic “code” took decades to sort out, lock in step with the uneven or tense relations at times between competing imperialist-capitalist powers (especially in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the two World Wars and the subsequent Cold War). But, eventually in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an ‘inclusive’ consumer culture — indexed as “human rights” — was gained in the West for atomized homosexual subjects while colonial era buggery and anti-sodomy and anti-crossdressing laws were rebranded under neocolonial states with the help of Western conservatives.

Now, the inclusion of trans issues becomes a problem for the contemporary gay/lesbian movement because it “points” consciously to the *fuller context* of the latter’s pathologization. Resitua-

ing non-dualism as a deictic center, the nuclear/conjugal reproduction of a consumerist subject cannot so easily be truncated as an atomized ‘homosexual’ figure: no, the cause of sexual liberation has moved *beyond class solidarity within the colonial world*.

STAR, the rebels at Stonewall, the solidarity forged with the Women’s Detention Center, the interaction between early Gay Power radicals and the Black Panthers as well as the Young Lords are all vibrant case studies on that matter. And in this contemporary moment, we see the appearance of a Philly Pride Flag that incorporates symbols about Black/brown as well as trans struggles into the usual rainbow colored Pride flag. “Pointing” to events such as this can be an index for solidarity within an *anticolonial* struggle, which challenges one to grapple with racial, class, and sexual oppression.

#### **4.V. Transected Perspectives: Emasculation and Men’s Alienation Through “non-dualism” as Deictic Center**

And now we’ll conclude this section by applying our transfeminist corrective to the third problematic raised by Giles-Peterson in the quote from the beginning of this article. The fear in a heterosexual cis man’s transmisogyny is *more* than just a concern with the implications that a transfeminine presence might have for already existing circumstances of ‘feminization’ (such as might subject straight cisgender men to conditions suffered by women and gays, in consequence of the heterosexual contract and the nuclear/family unit).

Although that is the narrative invoked for a Eurocentric frame of reference, in the Black struggle the dynamics at play *center* on a historical consciousness that expansive gender is “pointed” to as a sign of the absence of *Man’s reason in Africa*. Rationality as a trait was the origo for how the context of “civilized” manhood is evaluated in the modern West; it became an index specifically for the *entrepreneurial endeavors and industriousness of the bourgeoisie*; and it was seen as an extension of the ways “revealed” religion enabled heterosexual and cisgender male *headship over economic and political affairs*.

Thus, racial scientists would suggest that the “pagan” lack of “true” religion sustained a lack of “rational” conduct in economic or political affairs, an index for why material and power relations in Africa were organized in such a “backwards” manner compared to the West. What’s important to note here is how the evidence for these claims was the relative absence of Patriarchy in some parts of Africa, and even the existence of a “Minor” Patriarchy that did not absolutely marginalize women and expansive gender populations to the degree that Grand Patriarchy did. Sundjata succinctly describes this as follows:

“... in the encounter with Africans, nothing is more unaccountable, nothing pulls Man away in the current of unreason quite so powerfully as our violations of naturalized gender. After all, Western Man has always supported the belief in his own rationality, and his resulting right to dominate, by enforcing the idea of its inadequate development in the “opposite” gender. The variable gender norms of African people, who are already the negation of rationality in our very bodies, can only appear that much more to violate every canon of political Reason: from the biological foundations of gendered behaviors and outward presentation, and corresponding ethics; to the validly gendered labor division, that confines non-Man to devalued,

reproductive work in the household; to the necessarily patriarchal character of the State, founded on (superior) male violence and kept running by (superior) male powers of abstraction.

So for Hegel, who was arguably the greatest Western philosopher, the reports from Angola of an “inverted world,” wherein a woman (Njinga) ruled a powerful state as a king; employed women in military service; and reduced her male lovers to the social status of women concubines, all confirmed his long-held view that Africans are a people outside History, untouched by the logic of freedom that has progressively unfolded through the centuries (Linda Heywood, *Njinga of Angola: Africa’s Warrior Queen*, 250).”

As a dualist configuration of Western gender projected “irrationality” onto womanhood, femaleness, and femininity to justify labor divisions and Statecraft, the presence of an “inverted world” (as Sundjata calls it) in Africa that could have the so-called “irrational” gender at the head of class divides and hierarchies *had to be philosophical statement on the total absence of rational faculties in all of Africa*. Importantly, that supposed lack was often *blamed on African men*, as Wilhelm notes:

“In what is now southwestern Zimbabwe, Livingstone noticed “immorality” among the younger natives and asserted, in 1865, that the elderly chief’s polygamous monopolization of women was responsible for the sin.”

Here, a missionary named David Livingstone pinned the *responsibility* for expansive sexual/gender embodiment *on the actions of local male Cephales*, Particularly in the realm of conjugal patterns and familial structures, these were framed as economic control of women, while also being a source of “immorality” according to the Western sociogenic “code.” Livingstone was not alone in such narratives; according to Murray and Roscoe’s anthology, colonial observers linked what they coded as “pederasty” in the Dahomey kingdom royal court concerning the *lagredi* as having been caused by “the king’s monopolization of women” (97, *Boy Wives, Female Husbands*).

And, in the context of Zande material/power relations, these too were indexed by French observers like Adolphe Cureau as having linked what was coded by the West as “pederasty” to “the monopolization of women in the vast harems (*bodimoh*) of Sandeh royalty” (26). Narratives such as the above cannot be teased apart from ideas among some racial scientists like Carl Linnaeus (who we cited earlier), that Africans were not “ruled by customs,” in the way Europeans were, with the ultimate cause being that *African men were “indolent” (which means lazy, slothful, idle) or essentially vain in their conduct*.

Where Europeans had developed the custom to toil by the sweat of their brow as Adam did, Africans had not evolved to that point, because their men supposedly would not work like Adam did for their bread. To this day, stereotypes persist about African men’s laziness, with narratives about vain interest in lust/passion (“babies out of wedlock”), failures at proper stewardship of the State (“political corruption”) or the family structure (“paternal absenteeism”), and ideas of Black men essentially “mooching” off their women (the “hobosexual” or “broke” archetype). These are all indexes of the African man’s place in material/power relations.

Thus is born the “emasculatation” which Black/African men are often concerned with in the double consciousness foisted upon them by racial/class oppression. Across movements, the Black male subject has sought to prove his humanity against all odds, by insisting he is a man: a leader, a protector, responsible, hard-working, rational, and benevolent towards “his” woman/kids. He may reject his own native traditions as a result, or he might try to idealize his ancestral heritage as proof that his contributions are the origin of “the Man’s” civilization (these two tendencies are common in some strains of Black nationalist thought). In taking Man’s reason as the *deictic center of how he understands his disalienation*, the Black male’s consciousness has been “pointed” *solely* towards what Sanyika Shakur once described:

“... when grand patriarchy came onto the scene, as a weaponized euro-supremacy, all indigenous people, male and female, became inferiors.

Indigenous men were domesticated under grand patriarchy just as women had always been. And to insure this, a constant, blatant and open hostile state of terror and siege was used to blanket any notion to the contrary. Euro-supremacy smothered everything. Every male not a European became “boy”, “buck”, “son”, or worse. They were explicitly forbidden to look a European male in the eyes. Grand patriarchy recognized one man — the European male. This was eventually utilized in the colonization of every encountered culture of the planet.”

This is akin to the “ungendering” of African femaleness we discussed before. These circumstances configure Black “maleness” as “man-not” and so long as the African man *evaluates his condition in these terms*, the narrative of ‘emasculatation’ (feminization) *impinges on his consciousness of Grand Patriarchy in its totality*. Even Fanon, despite his sociogenic turn, failed to grapple with this properly (see his chapters on Black male-white female, and Black female-white male relations). The Black man’s dysconsciousness leads him to take the conditions of his disalienation at face value, to see his liberation in seizing headship (cephality) of the material/power structure.

What I urge is assessing how the *dynamics at play are a disimbrication of the social roles African men occupied endogenous to their cultures*. For, the Western sociogenic “code” weaponizes Reason as a neurochemical behavior regulation against the *substructural/superstructural context within which African traditional men’s roles* emerged, which J. Mzizi from Red Voice News argues is:

“central to colonial plans for getting many African men to leave their home farms, communities, and children to go for wage labor in cities and other communities. It was quite hard to get men to stay for multiple seasons when they were needed at home for childcare or certain harvest seasons, and made easier if the full-time role of women was shifted to residing in her husbands household and taking care of these affairs for him while he worked colonial wage labor.” (*On Class, pt. 1*)

What J Mzizi describes is how the colonial-capitalist wage relation facilitated *disalienation of African men from their place in pre-existing communal and feudal relations*. The traditional African family structure was atomized by the Western household, as the latter imposed upon African women (of course with the exclusion of expansive gender people), subordinating wives and children to the father.

Colonial authorities would not have had as easy a time collecting taxes, monitoring their subjects, nor guaranteeing their accumulation of the “dark proletariat’s” labor power if African men’s disalienation wasn’t cemented. We demonstrated before how this affects gender marginalized Africans, but here I am highlighting the sociogenic pressures put on African men to be a head-of-house and ultimately *a breadwinner — ie, a wage slave exploited by the Man*.

This is simultaneously a consequence of territorial dispossession, the laws against real and imagined “effeminate” behaviors plus the regimentation of women’s lives and rights, as well as the mandates of religious and “scientific” belief on marriage/family as a project of ‘rational’ (not backward) civilization. It is substructural and superstructural, or, echoing Fanon once again: “the black man’s alienation is not an individual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny” (*Black Skin, White Masks*). What appeared to the colonizer as indolence and laziness is sociogenic. But, the story does not stop there. The disalienation of African men’s roles also points back to what Sanyika Shakur described:

“Oppressed men, those forbidden to be “men” under grand patriarchy, still would oppress oppressed women. Thus women felt a double blow of oppression under grand (on a national level) patriarchy and minor patriarchy — individually, in personal social relations. What’s more is, this individual patriarchy — now sexism — was compounded with the introduction of the colonizers’ religion into the mix as a chain of control. Western religion in the colonies became “force-multipliers” for patriarchy. Another weapon used in the war. Once indigenous men had been taught that this new god had given men dominion over women and children, these fell further down the Great Chain of Being (as created by Plato and reconfigured by Euro-Christians). Women, too, however reciprocated this travesty by believing this foolishness to be true, making it that much easier for their oppression to continue.” (*The Pathology of Patriarchy*)

The colonial substructure and superstructure may have imposed the pressures of Grand Patriarchy on African men, but as mentioned before, the constraints of “Minor” Patriarchy existed in parts of Africa. This dynamic contributes to not just men’s disalienation but to the oppression of women and expansive gender folks, and the support for colonial gender dualism by all. To evaluate the conditions of African/Black men takes “pointing” *both to the exogenous dynamics and to endogenous ones*. Many of the endogenous patterns marked simplistically as “monopolization of women” or as “pederasty” quite obviously point to local class contradictions that were not at all unique to the African context (for age-stratified and economic sexual relations have existed in Grand Patriarchy as well).

The interpenetration of local phenomena and those imposed by the colonizer is key, and helpful case studies would be examining the *kinds* of disalienation that truncated the traditional African man’s roles in indigenous relations. Of course, there is the disalienation through outright exploitation, whether through the wage-relation or through enslavement. And then there may be more *circuitous* routes to disalienation, like we saw with the Kongo and Mbundu context — where a response to the external pressures of colonialism, slavery, conflicts with neighboring groups (be these collaborators with empire or not), and the drive to accumulation of human and natural resources created a patron-client situation with the Grand Patriarchy. We could also broaden our analysis of “the Black man’s alienation” as Fanon puts it to highlight forms of “soft power” under colonialism, which involves *recruitment into the clergy or military/government posts*.

And different colonial powers approached each truncation differently, depending on the nature of local relations, the size and number of local indigenous ethnic groups, and the exigencies of their own political and economic processes (especially since, once again, Western empires were in competition with each other). For the sake of time, I will limit our focus to *one* example as an illustration of my overall point.

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In places like Nigeria, the configuration of colonial authorities from local men's activities created a Minor Patriarchy *by disorganizing a Lineal nexus*. Traditionally, in contrast to Mbundu culture of Nzinga, where headship of a dynasty/state was primarily male-led, but could be expansively configured through enatic (maternal) ties, Igbo traditional society emphasized both enatic (maternal) and agnatic (paternal) ties. And this particular kind of Lineal emphasis occurred within a *non-state system that lacked significant class divides*. In *African Anarchism: A History of a Movement*, Sam Mbah and IE Igariwey describe this:

“As against large, centralized political units, Igbo society constructed small units, often referred to as “village” political units without kings or chiefs ruling over them or administering their affairs.”

The Village structure was correlated to what theorists like Walter Rodney speak of as a “communal mode of production” in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Sam Mbah and IE Igariwey describe communalism in this way:

“Among the most important features of African communalism are the absence of classes, that is, social stratification; the absence of exploitative or antagonistic social relations; the existence of equal access to land and other elements of production; equality at the level of distribution of social produce; and the fact that strong family and kinship ties formed the basis of social life in African communal societies. Within this framework, each household was able to meet its own basic needs. Under communalism, by virtue of being a member of a family or community, every African was (is) assured of sufficient land to meet his or her own needs.”

The communal order and village mode allowed members of the collective to provide for themselves, to share resources and produce in common, and to govern themselves in a more egalitarian and decentralized fashion. Importantly, Cephalicity (headship) of village life was configured through Lineality:

“The smallest unit in the segmentary political system was the extended family with a common lineage; several extended families constituted a ward; and many wards formed a village. (pg 35)

Sometimes, the specifically agnatic (paternal) ties of a Lineal nexus would be emphasized to organize village headship. Averill Earls, PhD, in “King Ahebi Ugbabe: Sex, Gender, and Power in Colonial Nigeria,” building off the scholarship of Nwando Achebe (author of *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*), talks about this:



“There weren’t many kings in Igboland at all; while West Africa was politically diverse with a range of governing structures, Igboland was largely in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries characterized by decentralized gerontocratic systems—that is, rule by a council of elder men.”

But, the distribution of Cephality (headship) towards the *elders of a patriline* is because of the valency of Seniority as a nexus, not simply Gender. Mbah and Igariwey characterize such Age-gradation as a staple of many other traditional African contexts:

“among the social institutions that bound communities together were the age grades or age-set system. According to Azikiwe, “Usually, age grading divides adult males into elders and young adults-or more rarely into elders, middle-aged, and young adults. The age-grade system is usually fed by a system of age sets, whose members move

from one grade to the next.” The rise of age grades was in itself a response to the need for greater communal solidarity, since age grades cut across families and lineages. Age grades consisted of cohorts of males who came together to perform certain functions and duties. These included farm work for their members (or other members of society who asked for their services), road building, environmental sanitation, burials, and harvest of farm produce. A female equivalent of the age sets existed, although, as we shall see, their relative importance varied from society to society.”  
(31)

The nexus of Age (seniority) could have *multiple* embodied consequences and thus *organize social affairs in a range of ways*, as far as both labor and leadership. But when it organizes patricephaly, or headship by male elders in the Igbo context, this *co-occurs with a matricephaly or headship by female elders as well*. Sundjata touches on this, drawing on Nwando Achebe as well:

“In the small-scale societies of precolonial Igboland, eastern Nigeria, leadership and power were not alien to women. Their position was complementary rather than subordinate to that of men...The Igbo had two arms of government, male and female. Female government was further divided into two arms, the *otu umuada* and *otu ndiomu-ala*... The *otu umuada* act as political pressure groups in their natal villages. They create unifying influences between their natal and marital lineages. They settle disputes between women. They also settle intralineage disputes and disputes between their natal villages and the villages in which they are married. **In fact, the *otu umuada* were the supreme court of society**” (Female Monarchs, 96, emphasis added).

The matricephality interacts with the patricephality, because of the valency of Lineage and Seniority, helping organize village life, manage conflicts, and facilitate interests within and across marital and birth relations. I would characterize this dynamic as a Dicephality, or *dyadic headship*. I differentiate a dyad from a sexual dualism or gender binary, because even while organized in “two,” a dyad does not *necessarily* connote polarity. A dyad is just a set of organized relational patterns between a socially recognized pair. Further, *non-dualist gender* configurations are reported

to exist *within* the traditional “dicephalous” nexus of Igbo substructural and superstructural relations.

Focusing on the Nnobi-Igbo context, the text *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* by Ifi Amadiume identifies the existence of so-called *female patrilineality* for example. According to Amadiume, patrilineages could be instituted/headed by both *nwoke* (male child) and *nwanyi* (female child), through the sociogenic valency of Seniority. The eldest child of a patriline would become a patriceph in these instances, *regardless of anatomy*. These “female” masculinities were recognized by terms such as *dike nwanyi*, and according to Murray and Carrier’s *Woman-Woman Marriage in Africa*, one such figure named Nne Uko was recorded by a 20<sup>th</sup> century researchers (John C McCall) as having said “[I] went as my nature was given to me – to behave as a man.”

Seniority (age) as a nexus also organized *Nwoke* and *Nwanyi* embodiments sociogenically to allow the appearance of *non-dualist gender in spiritual affairs*, which resemble the priestly roles in other parts of Africa that we discussed earlier. Olutimehin Adegbeye, in the article *Men Can Be Wives, Woman Can be Husbands*, sums up some elements of Ifi Amadiume’s research findings as follows:

“An Idemili priest in Nnobi does not wrap the cloth between his legs the way a person with a penis ordinarily would be expected to in that culture, because *the body he conducts his life in is dedicated to the veneration of a woman God*. He wraps his cloth like a person with the capacity for childbirth because this is what is correct for him. In the same way, a mother of many children in Nnobi can become a son – a “male daughter”, as Amadiume describes it – *exercising the same right to marry wives, control land and start a patrilineage as anyone born with the capacity to impregnate*. This is also what is correct for her.” (emphasis added)

According to this account, sex-associated traits concerning the capacity for childbirth or the capacity to impregnate are not being “selected for” so to speak in the sociogenic configuration of *nwoke* and *nwanyi* for the Nnobi-Igbo. Thus roles, styles of dress, and rights within Igbo tradition have not been organized according to sexual dimorphism. This more fluid “dicephality,” which configures sociogenic embodiment visavis Lineality and Seniority, is not a utopia, though, even if exhibiting gender non-dualism and emerging in a village/communal mode of production devoid of a coherent state or significant class distinctions. There is, after all, a *situational gender rigidity* reported in Igbo tradition, as Averill Earls does point out:

“there were some sex-based boundaries that could not be transgressed in Igbo society. In precolonial and colonial Nigeria, only male-bodied men, for example, were allowed to interact with the masquerades. Masquerades and the masked spirits were basically secret societies of full-men – effectively, men who had passed the final initiation of masculine development.”

When it came to secret societies, the dicephalous Igbo tradition might rigidly organize spiritual authority around anatomical maleness. As situational gender rigidity shows up in the power wielded by men’s secret societies, it also shows up in Igbo traditional market affairs. Unlike capitalism, the market historically wasn’t the center of Igbo social life. But the traditional four day week in Igbo cosmology does organize a rotating cycle of activities: in which *social surplus is to*

*be distributed in the market.* Typically the responsibility for market affairs is reserved for women. So despite relative exclusion from the authority commanded by secret societies, Igbo women held a position of prominence in the exchange of surplus products across the villages. In this way, as with Minor Patriarchies in other parts of Africa, the *occasional gender rigidity still emerged at a non-dualist nexus.*

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All these complexities in Igbo culture were steadily flattened and altered by British colonialism, however. They were not *completely* abolished, but the valency of the Grand Patriarchy and the steady intrusion of capitalism and the Western state significantly *reorganized many key aspects of Igbo traditional life* (as well as the cultures of neighboring ethnic groups). For the Igbo, the decentralized nature of the village structure could only be managed “indirectly,” and it was *through selecting male patriocephs* that the British installed an administrative and clerical apparatus.

Thus, the word *eze*, traditionally an index for a non-dualist gerontocephaly (elder headship), shifts into meaning “king,” —despite many Igbo communities lacking a tradition of monarchy — with only one “female” *eze* noted (a gender expansive figure named Ahebi Ugbabe, who *worked within the colonial administrative apparatus* alongside male chiefs). These so-called “warrant chiefs” as their colonial employers would call them, were used to collect taxes from the produce of Igbo working folk, including and especially the market women. They were also selected in other parts of Nigeria via colonial oppression of other local ethnic groups, like the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani. Because the latter two traditionally had more stratified and hierarchical social structures, the installation of the colonial administrative apparatus looked different.

But for the Igbo, Ibibio, and other groups with more non-hierarchical traditions, the contradiction came with a *steady driving of matriocephs from above ground social life* into the economic and political underground. In response, many *nwanyi* eventually conspired against their new Cephales (leaders), combating the Minor Patriarchy through what is known in Igbo as *ogu umunwanyi*. The *ogu umunwanyi* is what the West translates as the “Aba Women’s War” of the early twentieth century (for more information on this event, follow the archival/educational account on Instagram known as “decolonialigbo”). This war anticipated both nationalist *and* feminist struggle in Nigeria as the organizers collaborated in resistance across ethnic groups in southeastern Nigeria against the warrant chiefs.

One key takeaway here is that a conflict with Patriarchy (grand and minor) in this instance would not have needed to happen *if the configuration of Igbo traditional manhoods/masculinities at the nexus of Seniority and Lineality had not been disimbricated* (through colonial alterations of communalism). The bourgeois accumulation of human and natural resources ensured that a *situationally rigid gender dyad would become a more permanent condition of strict gender dualism* in Igbo and other societies, as part of the colonial project.

Thus patricephs and matricephs were set against each other, with Gender expansivity truncated, a problem I identify as having parallels across the African struggle. Ironically, though, many African/Black heterosexual cis men often feel slighted by the very idea of a women’s or trans/queer liberation movement, unless women’s and queer leadership can be situated as a neo-colonial ‘complement’ to their *gaining posts via the Patriarchy within the dominant material/power*

*relations*. The ones most poised to move away from this narrative are those who have taken an “ecumenically human” frame of reference for their historical subjecthood as disalienated men.

These “point” to a range of manhoods and masculinities in African tradition as a deictic center. They understand that anticolonial solidarity can be forged by understanding such men’s roles as *embodied consequences of non-dualist substructural and superstructural relations in the indigenous context*. They are grappling with racial, class, and sexual oppression, and dealing with *imbrication of material/power structures by Grand and Minor Patriarchy*, to advance the struggle for self-determination and bodily/cognitive/behavioral autonomy.

In contrast, those with neocolonial and reactionary desires for State power and class advancement will refuse this more robust vision of both imposed and indigenous forms of exploitation and domination. This is why Sanyika Shakur referred to Patriarchy as a “grand distortion of nature” that leads one to “default on social investigation.” Combating it means really digging into the long history of accumulation by empire, dynasties, ruling classes, national as well as ethnic conflicts, and the *dialectics of embodiment that have unfolded in consequence of the historical development of material/power relations across societies*. Misapprehension of how disalienation through recruitment into state-structures (military, bureaucratic, etc), circuitous disalienation via patron-client relations between heads of the dominant material/power structures and non-dominant ones, or explicit disalienation through the wage-labor and slave relation truncate African non-dualist manhoods in the emergence of Minor Patriarchy (or even support of Grand Patriarchy) continues to distort a firm understanding of neocolonialism and other bourgeois contradictions in the anti-imperial struggle to this day.

Above ground and underground patrimonial conflicts between headmen — tribal/traditional, political/official, cultic/ecclesial, familial/entrepreneurial — are naturalized (or sometimes taken as evidence of “corruption” or “backwardness” in the African world, Arab world, and other non-Western territories) rather than understood in context. The required violent exclusions/coercion these forces bring for women, children, disabled folks, and expansive gender folks with regards to licit and illicit relations of the substructure and superstructure are similarly naturalized or evaluated in ethno-religious supremacist terms, rather than evaluated in context. An undialectical feminism, specifically one which takes sexual dualism as its deictic center, cannot effectively “point” us to a “roots-grasping” (radical) consciousness of these phenomena. Hence, we need a dialectical transfeminism within the Black and Third World struggle.

## 5. Language and Artificial Selection: Situating a Critical-Materialist Synthesis

In this final section of our discussion on deixis and the queer/trans struggle, I will relate my interpolation of Sylvia Wynter's theories to the Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's onto-epistemic critique of the 'family idiom,' which she sees as central to Western feminism. No account of gender from an African standpoint is complete without Oyěwùmí's groundbreaking critical interventions.

As I walk us through some key points in a few of Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's works, I will also begin to lay out a natural science argument for why the language expressing both Western and non-Western ontologies and epistemologies plays a role in how material and power relations are embodied. This will mean defining concepts from Marxian biologists like Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, and help bring clarity to why I've used certain terms in this piece thus far (for example, the terms "endogenous," "exogenous," "embodied consequence," "sex-associated traits," "nexus" "valency" "biological potentiality").

Lastly, I will attempt to historicize the intellectual turn towards arguments like the aforementioned, which deal with consciousness and embodiment, in order to explain why gender contradictions have come to characterize social struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is an appraisal of the interest in a "critical" and "dialectical" synthesis, which is directly tied to particular developments in geopolitical and economic relations during the early-mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, an understanding of which is essential to remark on if we are to be fair in our treatment of the overall problematic that this article has focused on.

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Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí is most known for her book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. A central argument of hers is that non-Western societies like that of the Yoruba (her upbringing) were not necessarily "gendered" societies before colonization. Decolonial feminist scholars like Maria Lugones point through Oyěwùmí's writings when identifying the colonial destruction of "non-gendered egalitarianism" outside the West:

"As global, Eurocentered capitalism was constituted through colonization, gender differentials were introduced where there were none. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) has shown us that the oppressive gender system that was imposed on Yoruba society did alot more than transform the organization of reproduction. Her argument shows us that the scope of gender the gender system colonialism imposed encompasses the subordination of females in every aspect of life..." (*Heterosexualism and the Modern/ Colonial Gender System*).

The argument here is essentially that colonialism *altered how bodies were both organized and understood in Yoruba and other societies*, such that questions of sexual reproduction *and more*

were configured through a sex dualism that had not existed prior to colonial encounter. This is what I hoped to demonstrate in the previous sections using my transfeminist approach to Sylvia Wynter's theory of sociogenesis. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's focus is a "sociology of knowledge" critique, as she calls it in the text "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Scholarship and the Challenge of African Epistemologies," spanning discursive, anthropological, and philosophical analysis.

I find it relevant here because, to me, Oyěwùmí's scholarship makes explicit the *Western frame of reference for social being* that is inherent to modern feminist thought. While her focus is on the exclusionary implications that this has for African societies, according to the writer Lyric Prince, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí also acknowledges that "a lot of trans people find comfort in my work" (see the article *Mother as Creator: A Perfect Power at the BMA*, February 2021). Part of why Oyěwùmí welcomes trans interpolations of her scholarship is because of resonance between both in terms of a critique of biological reductionism or biological essentialism.

In that same vein, both trans studies and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí reveal a tension in the "social constructionist" view of gender, which relies on a mind-body separation in which "sex has served as the base [substructure] and gender as the superstructure" (*The Invention of Women*, 9). For Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, that mind-body or base-superstructure distinction is ultimately a farce, because "in societies where there is a sexual division of labor, it is usually accompanied by an ideology that seeks to restrict each gender to its own specific arena." (*The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, pg 69).

The substructure is also a superstructure, then, or the two at least 'overlap.' Trans people have to confront this most viscerally: legal and cultural recognitions of trans identities are also accompanied by attempts to relegate us along "sex-based" lines. According to Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí this is because how Western institutions/society comes to know events, populations, circumstances, and personhood is through a "body-reasoning." In her own words:

"the ubiquity of biologically rooted explanations for difference in Western social thought and practices is a reflection of the extent to which biological explanations are found compelling. In other words, so long as the issue is difference (whether the issue is why women breast-feed babies or why they could not vote), old biologies will be found or new biologies will be constructed to explain women's disadvantage. The Western preoccupation with biology continues to generate constructions of "new biologies" even as some of the old biological assumptions are being dislodged. In fact, in the Western experience, social construction and biological determinism have been two sides of the same coin, since both ideas continue to reinforce each other. When social categories like gender are constructed, new biologies of difference can be invented. When biological interpretations are found to be compelling, social categories do derive their legitimacy and power from biology. In short, the social and the biological feed on each other." (pg 9)

We could say, through Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, that *biology is the deictic center or reference point for how the West evaluates or understands context* surrounding and information concerning a phenomenon. Biology as the "origo" is what makes "body-reasoning" undermine even the most *well-intentioned* attempts at a "social construction" view of gender, or of race, or of class differentials, or of any other form of differentiation, oppression, exploitation, domination, etc. If biology

is the deictic center, then all “utterances” about a given set of conditions actually “point” through “body-reasoning” (*even where the biological is not mentioned*).

Whether the question is voting rights, then, or breastfeeding, or something like IQ scores, crime rates, or more germane to the focus of this piece, the prevalence of suicide rates in TGNC communities, or the experience of gender dysphoria — all must be evaluated in terms of biological essentialism. In the previous section, we explored how bourgeois colonial modernity introduced a biocentric way of knowing to the world, with respect to the pathologization of gender non-dualism outside the West; and we connected its development to changes in premodern, Christian feudal perspectives on reality.

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But, Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí traces “body-reasoning” even *further* back in time, to the ancient Greeks, and the construction of a male-dominated *Polis* within the city-state. Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí insists that unlike the Yoruba system of knowing, this ancient Greek “body-reasoning” put emphasis on *one cognitive faculty: sight*. Here is where I see some more overlap with my transfeminist applications of Sylvia Wynter’s sociogenic principle, for Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí’s onto-epistemic critique similarly deals with *culture specific ways of experiencing cognition*.

On page 15 of *The Invention of Women*, Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí argues that “[f]eminism has not escaped the visual logic of Western thought.” Cognition being experienced through a social emphasis on *one* sensory faculty was a consequence of the West’s privileging the “unseen” above the “seen” which Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí suggests historically regulated “the lack of engagement between... the Self and the Other” (15).

Through Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí we learn that the “unseen” was the realm of “Reason” — held by the gods or by God — and thus accessed by the property-owning, politically dominant “male” subject. On the other hand, slaves, women, ethnoreligious foreigners, and those who lacked property rights and political power — these dwelled in the realm of the “seen.” By contrast, according to Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí, cognition is experienced differently for the Yoruba “world-sense” as she terms it. This, she argues does not allow biology to “have an exaggerated presence” (14) in her cultural context:

“A comparative research framework reveals that one major difference stems from which of the senses is privileged in the apprehension of reality — sight in the West and a multiplicity of senses anchored by hearing in Yorubaland... the distinction between Yoruba and the West symbolized by the focus on the different senses in the apprehension of reality involves more than perception... It concerns the many worlds human beings inhabit; it does not privilege the physical world over the metaphysical. A concentration on vision as the primary mode of comprehending reality promotes what can be seen over that which is not apparent to the eye; it misses the other levels and the nuances of existence.”

Through Oyèrónké Oyěwù mí’s transcultural perspective, we see that when cognition is experienced through a society that privileges *multiple* sensory faculties, this relies on an alternative set of onto-epistemic assumptions: in which the physical and metaphysical worlds coexist. As such, the body and its relations to “the Other” are not being disciplined by a pursuit of *askesis*

(Christian monks) or *noesis* (Greek philosophers); the body is configured socially within an entirely different cosmology, with completely different spiritual practices and beliefs and customs. Some of these customs include regarding the creator (Olodumare) as genderless. Spiritual power emanates from this genderless divine source, through other divinities and deities who are immanent within the physical world, not set apart from it. These forces are bound up not just with nature, but with social bonds of the living as well as of dead communities, and the unborn.

An embodied consequence of the Yoruba “worldsense” as Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí calls it, is that Yoruba society has no “gender.” Critics take issue with this claim, but her point is that *sex-associated trait presentations do not carry a “gendered” social relevance* in the Yoruba “worldsense,” and therefore are not the *deictic center of how embodiment is organized*. According to Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, for this reason, the pairing/dyad of *obinrin* and *okunrin* should not hastily be translated as “female” and “male” or “woman” and “man.”

In the West, the *language of gender points to one category of sexual anatomy* as the rationally designed core (made in God’s image) whereas the other category of sexual anatomy is an afterthought. Hence the root words are “male” and “man” while woman and female are *constructed through a prefix* (added on).

But Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí insists that in the Yoruba world, the language of human anatomical differentiation does not put “difference” at the center: so the distinctions are *both* prefixes (*obin-*, *okun-*) attached to a shared root (*-rin*). This points to another Origo, one that, in her words says “suggests a common humanity” (33). For Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, to translate *obinrin* and *okunrin* in terms of male/female or man/woman dualism would be to *impose a Western frame of reference* onto Yoruba social realities, “a mistranslation” (32). Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí proceeds to highlight the alternative frame of reference that so-called “gender” terminology in Yoruba points us to:

“In the Yoruba conception, *okunrin* is not posited as the norm, the essence of humanity, against which *obinrin* is the Other. Nor is *okunrin* a category of privilege. *Obinrin* is not ranked in relation to *okunrin*; it does not have negative connotations of subordination and powerlessness, and, above all, it does not in and of itself constitute any social ranking. Another reason *okunrin* and *obinrin* cannot be translated into the English “male” and “female” is that the Yoruba categories only apply to adult human beings and are not normally used for *omode* (children) or *eranko* (animals).”

According to Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, the language of anatomical distinction is not an index for pervasive social hierarchies as it is for the West. Furthermore, a social recognition of distinctions around Age and Animality regulate the extent to which the language of anatomical distinction might apply: for neither animals nor children are configured with adult humans in terms of maleness or femaleness (unlike in English). While some might rejoinder that a bare linguistic analysis is a bit too Sapir-Whorf aligned to effectively describe the Yoruba social consciousness as “non-gendered,” a key point in Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s work is that sexual anatomy *only has social relevance in direct matters of reproduction*, and nothing further:

“...it is possible to acknowledge the distinct reproductive roles for *obinrin* and *okunrin* without using them to create social ranking. In the Yoruba cultural logic, biology is limited to issues like pregnancy that directly concern reproduction. The essential biological fact in Yoruba society is that the *obinrin* bears the baby. It does not lead



to an essentializing of *obinrin* because they remain *eniyan* (human beings), just as *okunrin* are human too, in an ungendered sense. Thus the distinction between *obinrin* and *okunrin* is actually one of reproduction, not one of sexuality or gender, the emphasis being on the fact that the two categories play distinct roles in the reproductive process. This distinction does not extend beyond issues directly related to reproduction and does not overflow to other realms such as the farm or the *oba*'s (ruler's) palace. I have called this a distinction without social difference."

From a dialectical transfeminist perspective, it would seem that Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí is suggesting that the regulation and coercion of the affairs of sexual reproduction is not the "nexus" (connecting point) whereby Oyo-Yoruba material/power relations "imbricate" (overlap). So, unlike the patriarchal class societies of the West, the reproductive potentialities associated with *obinrin* and *okunrin* are not polarized (or even atomized) and configured as defining principles of social role or of personhood. We could say, then, that the sociogenic "code" at play in Yoruba worldsense only *situationally* organizes reproductive/anatomical traits as "sex" distinctions.

This situational "sexing" of anatomy is akin to how in the Igbo world, spiritual headship is organized around *nwoke* only under certain circumstances, although the Yoruba concerns and overall context is different. It is also akin to the uses of phrases like "people who menstruate" or "people who can get pregnant" in trans-inclusive healthcare settings: an anatomical specificity is being *articulated without indexing a particular social position* via reference to said trait presentations. Transphobes find issue with such terminology precisely because it de-centers the biological reductionist origo (deictic center) by which embodiment is reckoned or understood in the West.

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According Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, the situational "sexing" of *obinrin* embodiments in the Yoruba context might occur visavis the configuration of *omoya*, or mother-childness (relations between children of the same mother). This is a consequence of a Lineal nexus, however, not Gender. Being "non-gendered," Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí further emphasizes that the enatic (maternal) ties of Yoruba society *transcend the household configuration*. The *omo-ile* or matriline is also *not organized primarily in terms of the conjugal unit*, as she argues in "Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Scholarship and the Challenge of African Epistemologies." For, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, Seniority (Age) plays a more central role in Lineal kinship: thus marital terms like *oko* and *iyawo* index not necessarily "husband" and "wife" so much as those *born in the family* and those *introduced into the family*. She writes:

"The distinction expresses a hierarchy in which the *oko* position is superior to the *iyawo*. This hierarchy is not a gender hierarchy because even female *oko* are superior to the female *iyawo*. In the society at large even the category of *iyawo* includes both men and women in that devotees of the Orisa (deities) are called *iyawo Orisa*."

In contrast, the Western frame of reference for the family idiom *is* a conjugal-binary unit, per Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí. This makes gender distinctions the "fundamental organizing principle of family," as opposed to Lineality or Seniority; so self-definition of so-called females takes "sex" as the deictic center, according to Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí. This would have it that, unlike in the Yoruba

context, a female married into the family and a female born in the family *share the same general social status*. On the other hand, if Lineality and Seniority organize our frame of reference, this makes a “sex-based” approach to understanding social solidarity inapplicable.

For Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, because feminist thought has become the “most important gender-focused constituency” the binary/conjugal organization of family are “taken at face value” (*Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Scholarship and the Challenge of African Epistemologies*) in all analysis of African experience.

She finds that this frame of reference is the only way to explain the *policy measures advanced by Western feminists*, as their body-based knowledge about social reality was used to make public the private sphere struggles of Western women while also assuming “the category ‘woman’ and her subordination as... universals.” In so doing, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí argues, feminists actually helped the Western household unit’s “promotion by colonial and neocolonial state[s],” operating lock-in-step with NGOs and underdevelopment agencies in particular. This is imbrication of material/power relations at work.

These are, obviously substructural changes that co-occur with the metaphysical shift in how African family structures are reckoned, although Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí is highlighting how their imposition *seems* progressive because of its “pointing” to the cause of women’s emancipation. Basically, when one takes a certain set of historical conditions (and onto-epistemic assumptions) as the deictic center, then even in claiming to combat or reform the effects of those conditions, one is actually reinforcing them. Earlier, I tried to suggest that this is the same issue plaguing the question of trans inclusivity among feminists. If the reference point for emancipation of women is *always already* the heterosexual contract, the domestic relegation, and the binary-nuclear unit, then of course the experience of transgender women will not cohere or be legible (“seen”), hence the tendency to assume that women of trans experience are “socialized” as cis men.

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí’s argument is not a suggestion that the non-universality of “gender” makes Yoruba societies or African cultures a utopia, only that it requires understanding how “other forms of oppression and equality are present.” Similarly, in the previous section of this article, I tried to examine how non-dualist configurations of embodiment *can be correlated to both egalitarian and hierarchical contexts*.

With Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí’s attention moved towards Seniority as origo, we might think of marital/familial distinctions indexed by *ako* and *iyawo* as a metaphorical “age”: a born-member of the family being “older” than that of a married-in relative, *having been part of the family much longer*. The trait being organized here is not simply biophysical age but rather *the duration of one’s presence in a given dynamic*.

The duration of time within a relation is central to how Seniority configures spiritual ties as well. When a person becomes devotee of a particular Orisa, they are *iyawo* regardless of anatomy because they have now “married in” to that deity’s lineage. And all *eniyan* (human beings) are technically “younger” than the spiritual entities around them, according to Yoruba world-sense. The material basis for this we can find in her own words:

“From the cases presented, it becomes obvious that these African social categories ... do not rest on body type, and positioning is highly situational. Furthermore, the idiom of marriage that is used for social classification is often not primarily about gender, as feminist interpretations of family ideology and organization would suggest. Elsewhere I have argued that the marriage/family idiom in many African cultures is a

way of describing patron/client relationships that have little to do with the nature of human bodies. Analysis and interpretations of Africa must start with Africa. Meanings and interpretation should derive from social organization and social relations paying close attention to specific cultural and local contexts.” (*Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Scholarship and the Challenge of African Epistemologies*)

Here, the economic and political relations that “overlap” at the nexus of Seniority and Lineality in configurations of the family/marriage *are more about patron and client roles*. The social “senior,” or the born-relative is *patron* while the social “junior,” is the *client*. Some elements of gerontoccephaly (elder-headship) show up in Yoruba society precisely because the *Seniority-Lineal nexus organizes a patron and client dynamic* (hence, seniors who do not live as good patrons may not garner respect or status as elders, a sociogenic “code” regulating behavior through insistence on *iwa pele*, or balanced conduct). Further, only ancestors who dealt *benevolently* towards community are propitiated, because they have respect according to the nexus of Seniority/Lineality *as dutiful patrons*. The “non-gendered,” or rather Age/Lineal-centered imbrication of Yoruba *patron and client relations* is key to how Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí evaluates the respect given to the *oba* (ruler) by the *oba*’s subjects in the palace:

“In Yoruba cosmology, there is the conception of *akunleyan*, literally “kneeling to choose” – which is the position that all persons assume in front of *Eleda* (the Maker) when choosing their fate before being born into the world. On closer examination, it is clear that kneeling is a position used not so much for paying homage as for addressing one’s superior. All persons who choose to address the *oba*, for example, whether *okunrin* or *obinrin*, will of necessity end up on their knees.” (*The Invention of Women*)

Here, a practice of kneeling before a superior (the *oba*) is reinforced vis-a-vis an overall spiritual conception of reality, in which one knelt down before receiving a spiritual destiny (called the *ori*) from the Creator. As with the family/marriage idiom in how devotees relate to the Orisa, both *obinrin* and *okunrin* are to kneel before the ruler, as they had done in the spirit world before the Creator.

From a Wynterian standpoint, this would mean that as with spiritual beliefs in other parts of Africa, the neurochemical regulation of obeisance customs is not experienced in terms of a dualist sociogenic “code.” That an economy of patron/client agreements is what Seniority and Lineality imbricate for Yoruba society is also why the notion of a “heterosexual contract” that we discussed earlier is not an applicable frame of reference. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí insists that sexuality cannot come to the fore in a context where motherhood is not rigidly defined by marriage/conjugal ties.

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The decentering of gender (as an index for heteronormative, nuclear/conjugal, dualist basis of social embodiment and overall material/power relations) and the move towards Seniority and Lineality is corroborated by other scholars according to Oyèwùmí. As we did earlier, she cites the work of Ifi Amadiume on female husbandry in the Nnobi-Igbo context. Oyèwùmí also points us to accounts of Shona society from Tsitsi Daagaremba, who describes a woman named Aunt Tete

that had attained “patriarchal status.” Niara Sudarkasa is another author that Oyèwùmí points us to, concerning Seniority and Lineality as the deictic center of familial organization and social embodiment in Africa, rather than Gender and the conjugal/nuclear/binary unit.

Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí points us to Ghanaian scholar Kwesi Yankah, who writes on the *okyeame*, a term referring to a spokesperson for local chief, but which literally means “chief’s wife,” regardless of gender. To Oyèwùmí, these and other examples present “challenges to the unwarranted universalisms of Western gender discourses.” These insights are important to me as a transfeminist who wants to understand the many substructural and superstructural contexts within which ‘social construction’ of embodiment occurs. As I hoped to demonstrate earlier, taking the circumstances and conditions in African societies on their own terms, with *their own local points of reference*, could strengthen what solidarity means in the queer/trans/feminist struggle through an anticolonial emphasis.

For example, among the Hausa of northern Nigeria, communities of socially stigmatized women, often but not always in the underground sex economy, find relative prominence in the possession cults known as *bori*. These women typically work alongside a category of gender expansive devotees known as *yan Daudu*; together they solicit services from heterosexual and gay men in the region, the latter of whom strive to be discreet about these dealings, due to Islamic codes against homosexuality (for more information, see: “Hausa and Queer; The Origins and Existence of yan Daudu in Northern Nigeria” on [africanreligions dot wordpress](http://africanreligions.wordpress.com), 2022). This is similar to how street queens and drag queens and underclass as well as socially stigmatized cis women in the sex trade may forge communities together

According to Murray and Roscoe, the *yan Daudu* may use a range of other labels to describe themselves and roles they occupy in relation to each other and to the women and men around them. Outsiders have typically regarded them as anything from pimps to prostitutes, and often labeling them as “homosexual” and “transvestite.” Similarly, the experience of street queens and drag queens are often flattened by these terms, despite the diversity of self-concept within such communities. Internal to *yan Duadu* circles, notions of “male lesbianism” are noted, indexed by indigenous language, although divides over sexual role/position and associations with femininity and masculinity are observed (see: Gaudio’s essay on page 110 of *Boy Wives, Female Husbands*). That complexity has parallels in Black transfeminine communities outside of northern Nigeria as well (ballroom Ebonics also makes use of its own labels, like ‘*fem queen*,’ ‘*butch queen*,’ ‘*banjie boy*,’ ‘*banjie girl*,’ etc, and navigates masc-fem divides in its own ways. These conditions are also potentials for social struggle. As the article ‘Hausa and Queer’ points out:

“Yan Daudu continue to exist within the fringes of the now predominantly Islamic northern Nigeria. However, in the recent past, they have been persecuted by their kinsmen because their lifestyle is considered an abomination under Islam, even though their presence preceded Islam within the existing region where they once freely thrived.

Furthermore, being a sexual minority in Nigeria means that the issues that affect Yan Daudu are not typically mainstreamed in development interventions and programming. As a result, the population has been adversely affected by HIV/AIDS. Insufficient institutional action has meant they have not been adequately reached with the necessary health interventions (Tocco, 2014) needed to live safer and healthier lives.”

The disproportionate exposure to HIV/AIDs alongside religious intolerance that the *yan Daudu* face, as well as their navigating the underground sexual economy, a fringe spiritual tradition, and expectations about the nuclear family, are exacerbated by the same forces that are criminalizing the Global North experiences of those in the house subculture and vogue scene and other Black queer/trans communities.

There are also parallels to the conditions shaping the experiences of and language around so-called “Two Spirit” roles among different Turtle Island Native nations, or the terms for other indigenous gender expanses in this Hemisphere like the *joyas* (described by Deborah A. Miranda in works about *generocidio*) or the *muxe* (non-dualist gender configurations in Zapotec cultures), or the *hijra* categories in India, or *fa’afafine* and similar non-dualist gender configurations from among some Pacific Islander cultures, or even the various supposedly “tumblr” era terms for nonbinary and xenogender, agender, genderqueer, and trans\* identities, or even the use of the gender neutral -x/-e in some Spanish dialects (using “negrxs” in place of “negros” y “negras”). Wherever these terms are uttered, the informational content we can grapple with involves:

- some degree of variance from nuclear family structure or the expectations (cultural, religious, marital) associated with the household unit
- some degree of proximity to a localized and/or suppressed cultural performance tradition (spiritual, aesthetic)
- some degree of association with underclass economic struggles, political marginalization, and/or social discrimination

Solidarity can be organized if we understand the following: the first circumstance is because dualist sociogenic configuration by the nuclear-conjugal-familial unit is the core of the social (re)production process for *roles within capitalist material/power relations*. The second circumstance, further, is because of historical residues, holdovers, and retention from the non-dualist sociogenic “codes” or the “world-sense” that points to the (re)production process of roles outside of (formal) capitalist material/power relations. The third circumstance, finally, is because of how the “nexuses” of the first two interact, thus constraining the ways expansive gender (and sexually non-conforming) populations *navigate both dominant as well as non-dominant relational structures*.

When we take these circumstances as our *frame of reference* for the queer/trans/feminist struggle it does not mean we are articulating some uniform, inherently revolutionary subject, though. The terms “pointing to” these conditions are rife with controversy both within and outside the communities that utter them precisely because the series of personages maneuvering through or around them have different social positions and self-conceptions.

And, as we saw with figures like Nzinga, expansive gender folks can at times contest oppression, domination, and exploitation, while also reinforcing or upholding it. Further, the conditions under consideration have implications for the actions of non-trans and non-queer individuals who may respond to or try to negotiate their experience of economic/political oppression, domination, and exploitation by reinforcing or upholding it for others. But to that point, the conclusions we can derive, the analysis we can foster, and the revolutionary practice we must craft have the potential to be more robust, or more “grasping of the roots” (aka more radical).

## 5.II. The Social Construction of Sex (and Race): Situating “dualism” as Deictic Center

Getting to the “root” of social construction by going beyond a biocentric frame of reference is not a rejection of biology or anatomy. The importance of Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s critique of body-reasoning is because, as she argues on page 10 of *The Invention of Women*:

“If gender is socially constructed, then gender cannot behave in the same way across time and space. If gender is a social construction, then we must examine the various cultural/architectural sites where it was constructed, and we must acknowledge that variously located actors (aggregates, groups, interested parties) were part of the construction. We must further acknowledge that if gender is a social construction, then there was a specific time (in different cultural/architectural sites) when it was “constructed” and therefore a time before which it was not. Thus, gender, being a social construction, is also a historical and cultural phenomenon. Consequently, it is logical to assume that in some societies, gender construction need not have existed at all.”

Her work insists on the ways that biology/anatomy is “mutable and always mutating.” Such a view allows Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí into inquire into those configurations of social being which do not involve necessarily gendered positionalities. The interplay between a “mutable” biology and the diversity of social constructions is a claim I take seriously from a transfeminist standpoint. I drew on Sylvia Wynter earlier to demonstrate a similar point, although her angle is less sociological and more human geography oriented. In an interview with Katherine McKittrick in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, Wynter’s conception of a “mutable” biology is focused on a:

“... study of nature... specifically a study of the implementing bios agency of the human brain. Here the “first set of instructions” (genetic codes) and the “second set of instructions” (nongenetic codes) emerge; the study of the Word in this light is the study of an agency that functions according to the laws of nature and its genetically programmed “first set of instructions” (biological genetic codes) whose role in this bios/mythoi hybrid context is to neurochemically implement the “second set of instructions” (nongenetically chartered origin stories and myths).”

Wynter is much more natural sciences focused than Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, a distinction which is important to name as, in some of Wynter’s works, she does not adequately question sexual dimorphism (e.g. some claims adapted from Anibal Quijano in *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Truth/Power/Freedom*). Still, I find the “hard sciences” emphasis a necessary complement to the “soft sciences” angle, and vice versa. Not only do trans people have to confront the weaponization of *both* domains against our bodily autonomy and gender self-determination, but many non-dualist configurations of gendered embodiment have involved spiritualized as well as secularized studies of nature. On the spiritual side, in the life of Igbo musician Area Scatter, we learn about a series of ritual processes they underwent during a time away in the forest, after which point they returned to the public a woman. Emeka Joseph Nwankwo writes on this:

“Towards the end of the 1970s, just as the blood had dried into the earth from the Nigerian Civil War, an Igbo man in Southeast Nigeria, said to have been a civil servant before the war, disappeared into the wilderness. He’d appear seven months and seven days later, reborn, spiritually and physically, as a woman who claimed to have been endowed by the gods with femininity and preternatural musical gifts. Her name bore strong witness to this rebirth: Area Scatter — one who comes to disorganise a place, to shock and to reclaim; an eccentric fellow who has come to cause problems and change dynamics. And Area Scatter was true to her new name.” (*THE GENDER-NONCONFORMING SPIRIT: Identity, Disruption and Performance in Igbo culture*)

We may not know the exact details of Area Scatter’s “transition,” but the interplay of spiritual culture and nature/biology here jumps out, as we demonstrated in the previous section with our analysis of dicephalous organization at the Lineal and Age nexus in Igbo village life. From a Sylvia Wynter standpoint, there is a general principle underlying such phenomena, in some ways a feature of human biology and neuropsychology as much as culture, which is described by Alexander G Weheliye:

“... for Wynter, the human cannot be understood in purely biological terms, whether this applies to the history of a biological organism (ontogenesis) or development at the level of a species (phylogeny). This is where Fanon’s important concept of sociogeny comes into play, offering Wynter an approach of thinking of the human — the ‘science of the social text’ to echo Spillers’ phrase — where culture and biology are not only not opposed to each other but discharges mutually beneficial insights. In this scenario, a symbolic register, consisting of discourse, language, culture, and so on (sociogeny) always already accompanies the genetic dimension of human action (ontogeny), and it is only in the imbrication of these two registers that we can understand the full scope of our being-in-the-world.” (*Habeus Viscus*)

Weheliye outright uses the term ‘imbrication’ to describe the nature-nurture interplay of Wynter’s sociogenic principle, finding this to be essential in an understanding of social being. Trans people have to grapple with a nature-nurture interplay often, even if unconsciously, when navigating the ‘secular’ institutions of gender affirming healthcare. The controversy surrounding “sex-change” is as much about a modern scientific *worldview* as it is about biology, which is therefore a *sociogenic* problem “alongside phylogeny and ontogeny.” Andrea Long Chu hints at this in the article titled “The Freedom of Sex”:

“The historian Jules Gill-Peterson has shown that the earliest treatments in the field of gender medicine were developed to “correct” intersex children by bringing their ambiguous biology within the range of what society considered normal. Even when these treatments were later charily extended to “transsexuals,” it was often on the assumption that some original biological sex, perhaps endocrine in nature, was being excavated.”

Much of modern gender affirming care for trans people began as biomedical “corrective” procedures directed at intersex folks. María Lugones, who we cited earlier, outlines what those intersexist procedures consist of:

“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, 114)”

The legal and medical regulations against intersex people aim to regulate sexual “difference” through the forced configuration of perisex embodiments. These processes have been reorganized for the cause of including trans people in the healthcare industry, but still operate via the rhetoric of pathology. The latter now accomodates a distinction between homosexual, transsexual, and intersexual traits (something that did not occur during colonial encounter, as we saw in the previous section).

Where surgical and hormonal procedures are often forced onto intersex kids, they are no longer used against gay/lesbian subjects as the burden of the “corrective” process was absorbed by the homonationalist’s depathologizing homosexuality through proving his/her capacity for integration within the conjugal unit (and thus bourgeois relations, as we discussed in the previous section). Similarly, even as surgical and hormonal procedures continue to be forced onto intersex kids, they are no longer used against trans subjects in the same way, as the burden of the “corrective” process was absorbed by the industry around gender affirming care. Qualifying for such care relies on being diagnosed with so-called “gender identity disorder” or “dysphoria,” though precisely because of the *corrective emphasis in the Western biomedical industry*.

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What we see here is that the rhetoric of pathology has implemented regulation against non-dualist gender/sexual embodiment through *both* coercive and “inclusive” ways (especially in the First World, because elsewhere the colonial era carceral approach is still predominant). Those who are simultaneously intersex, trans, and queer are uniquely positioned to confront this more diversified array of imbrications all at once.

The mutability of biology as Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí calls it is clear even where a sociogenic “code” that pathologizes non-dualist gender/sexual embodiment is at work. It’s an inverse of what occurs in the Yoruba world: situational “sexing” (rigidity, dualism) is met instead with situational “desexing” (fluidity, non-dualism) as organized within the nexus of substructure and superstructure. For Andrea Long Chu the situational fluidity of sex in places like the US is because the regulations are about:

“*which* sex can be affirmed — and why. It so happens, for instance, that GnRH agonists like those used in fertility treatments are also used to delay puberty in trans kids. This means your average Alabama Republican now ostensibly believes it should be a felony to give a child the same hormone blockers his mother may have used to conceive him. Our politician may rightly protest that the same drug is being used



for very different purposes. But this is the point: It is the purpose of sex change, and not the change itself, which determines its acceptability. This is why sex-affirming care has historically entailed both the withholding of sex change from some and enforcement of it for others. Like most fields of medicine, it has a bloody underbelly of coercion: the vaginal surgeries tested on enslaved women in 1840s Alabama; the testicular transplants performed on gay men in Nazi Germany; and the surgical modification of infants with atypical genitalia, which continues today”

“Purpose,” as in the conscious ends or intents that renders mutable our biology, is acceptable if it reinforces *cisheteronormative* reproductive mandates under capitalism, or if it reinforces the reproduction of a dominant nation by curtailing the bodily autonomy of members of subjugated nations like Black women, or if it is used to “correct” intersex kids and gay men.

If the purpose is not a reinforcement of the dominant system’s reproductive mandates, mutability is not accepted or it must be shoehorned into particular channels (homonationalism). I find this to be an imbrication of nature and nurture at work. When transition care is not allowed it is *to the degree that a reconfiguration of “sex” can’t be organized within the dominant substructural and superstructural relations*. That is what makes the configuration of “sex” a material question, as Andrea Long Chu acknowledges:

“... to speak only of norms is to lose sight of the role of biological sex within a larger system of material relations. It is difficult to explain why the above gender norm would exist in the first place if it were not for the actual fact of reproduction, which at this point in the descent of man still requires very specific biological conditions in order to occur, including the presence of at least one of each gamete type (sperm and ova), a well-functioning uterus, and a reasonably sound endocrine system. This is sex as biological capacity; in this sense, it is no less of a material resource than water or wheat. Every human society invested in perpetuating itself — which is to say, every society — has regulated the production, distribution, and use of biological sex. This is more than the sex-based division of labor (hunter-gatherers and all that). It is the actual division of sex.”

Here, Andrea Long Chu is alluding to weaknesses in Judith Butler’s “performativity” approach to gender, a concept we also touched on earlier in this article. My critique of Butler asked us to conceptualize performative utterances as a form of ideological deixis. I then invoked Wynter’s sociogenesis in order to explain how a discourse “pointing” to a particular frame of reference for historical subjecthood and societal relations serves not to “perform” (create) gendered social being so much as to neurochemically/behaviorally regulate the nexuses of substructure and superstructure within which gendered as well as non-gendered social being emerge. Andrea Long Chu is not engaged with Butler from the lens of deixis, much less Sylvia Wynter. Chu’s critique here puts emphasis on the “division of sex” from a Marxist feminist perspective (akin to the insights from Monique Wittig we touched on earlier).

But in the argument Chu makes, we see a case in point about what Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí identifies in Western thought: “sex” becomes the economic/material base (substructure) and “gender” is the epiphenomenon, the superstructure. Andrea Long Chu therefore takes at face value the *dominant frame of reference* for how “sex” is configured “materially,” situating it as one among

other “natural” resources organized towards the reproduction of any given society. While Chu is correct in “pointing” beyond the mere division of labor, in attempts to go beyond the “performance” of Gender, I think Chu’s claim is flawed in its universalization of the division of sex associated traits (gametes, endocrine system, etc) vis-a-vis other “material” resources.

This is why it’s necessary to not only try to transect embodiment “beyond” gender performance, but to do so beyond “reproduction” of Sex: for human relations to other “natural” resources is as variable as are human relations to *both sex-associated traits as well as traits that are not sex-associated*. On that grounds the gendered “division of labor” cannot hold up as a *universal* construction – the major point of Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s work. The varied expressions of human relations to both our own traits and to other resources is why the nature-nurture interplay of Yoruba “world-sense” materially configures “sex” in *specific circumstances only*, while largely organizing embodiment visavis lineal inheritance and age primarily, and all within a system of patron-client relations.

So, if we are to agree that *every* society exhibits regulations of sex (as Andrea Long Chu suggests), we have to assess *the degree to which and the conditions under which this does and does not occur*, and we must understand how that variation is conditioned visavis other “nexuses” of the substructures and superstructures that organize “perpetuation” of a society. Chu finds, however, that the regulation of “sex” is the “material” base, agreeing with Marxist feminists.

And it makes sense to do so if one is arguing for the *right* to sex change. The industry surrounding trans healthcare has advanced to this point precisely because of referring to cis “re-configurations” of sex. Testosterone is a controlled substance in places like the US, for example, due to massive and often unregulated markets *promoting cis men’s virility*. While estrogen and progesterone circulate the market with some relative ease due to (sometimes unregulated) health fads aimed at promoting *cis women’s fertility*.

It is within those industrial confines that a “corrective” approach to trans and intersex and queer embodiment is made to overlap *with the interests of cis consumers*, who Andrea Long Chu acknowledges are often *encouraged to essentially correct* the “risk of *losing one’s sex as a result of age, heredity, disease, physical trauma, or the side effects of medical treatment*” (The Freedom of Sex, 2024). But expanding “rights” vis-a-vis industrial practices that involve the rhetoric of pathology is a slippery slope: as the dominant neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanism anchors a bourgeois-colonial society’s dualist configurations of the body.

Should we “point” out how *civilizational supremacism* inflects the dominant sociogenic “code” that reinforce corrective regulations of sex (liberally extended now), Andrea Long Chu’s emphasis on a “sex” as a *division of the material base becomes questionable*. For, would not “race” have to be included in such a formulation as well? After all, as demonstrated in the previous section, Western sexology *was racialized from its founding*, and according to g from Red Voice News, it still is:

“sexual dimorphism even to this day has also been used to preserve the concept within forensic anthropology through comparing the dimorphism of skulls of the remains of white versus Black people (<https://www.mdpi.com/2079-7737/10/7/602>)”

No materialist analysis, however, would permit “race” as a biological fact, and for valid reason. As RC Lewontin goes over in *Some Confusions About the Races* (2006):

“The growing realization in the middle of the twentieth century that most species had some genetic differentiation from local population to local population led finally to the abandonment in biology of any hope that a uniform criterion of race could be constructed. Yet biologists were loathe to abandon the idea of race entirely.”

Lewontin argues that there is *more variation within* what gets called races than *across or between* so-called races, making it so that the use of race to understand “differences” across populations is more a *social choice than a reflection of biological fact*. Furthermore, the insistence on this chosen classification across populations has an added inconsistency insofar as it would lead to a constant redefining of what constitutes “races” in the first place given the *incredible “intra-racial” variation and diversity that exists*. And indeed, throughout the history of racist science, *different thinkers have had different conceptions*, even prior to the discovery of genes, but ever more so now since genes were discovered. In this flawed model, says Lewontin:

“every population is a separate “geographic race” and it was realized that nothing was added by the racial category. The consequence of this realization was the abandonment of “race” as a biological category during the last quarter of the twentieth century, an abandonment that spread into anthropology and human biology. However, that abandonment was never complete in the case of the human species. There has been a constant pressure from social and political practice and the coincidence of racial, cultural and social class divisions reinforcing the social reality of race, to maintain “race” as a human classification.”

Lewontin explicitly states that political interests guide the continuation of racist pseudo-science into today. That is why race is a social construct. There is still a “mutability” of biology at play, a nature-nurture imbrication at work, in the (sociogenic) configuration of “race.” Racial articulations of biological “difference” all “point” back to the biocentric frame of reference for social being that Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s work critiques of Western gender discourses (in this case, reducing minute distinctions in hair texture, skin color, etc and making them into socially meaningful positions in society with an essential division between them). Is this process not occurring in the same context which reduces distinctions in sexual phenotypes (gonad formation, karyotype, hormonal composition, fat distribution, height, muscle mass, bone density, etc) and makes them into essential divisions?

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Even Andrea Long Chu’s examples about Nazis’ coercion of gay men’s anatomy, or Southern hospitals’ coercion of Black women’s anatomy, or the medical industrial complex’s coercion of intersex children’s anatomy *constitute social constructions of human biology via more than just a sexual division*: civilizational supremacism, thoroughly racialized and ableist, is a key motivation. Clearly, where “sex” is resource, then, so also is “race” and supremacist configurations of “ability” (like the Western notion of “rationality”). Roger N Lancaster goes into this in *Sex and Race in the Long Shadow of the Human Genome Project*:

“In the early 1990s, studies by Simon LeVay, J. Michael Bailey and Richard Pillard — and, most notably, Dean Hamer (who was also the source of one of the two “thrill-seeking gene” studies) — grabbed headlines by purporting to establish a biological,

even genetic, basis for male homosexuality. Methodological criticisms, alternative interpretations, and cautions from the comparative social sciences (where studies of cultural variation square poorly with the idea of a singular, timeless, biologically-fixed homosexuality) were lost in the glare of front-page headlines: “First Evidence of a Biological Cause for Homosexuality,” announced the LA Times (30 August 1991). “Genes Tied to Sexual Orientation,” trumpeted The Washington Post (17 December 1991). USA Today matter-of-factly proclaimed: “Study Shows Homosexuality is Innate” (17 December 1991). A notorious Newsweek cover queried: “Is This Child Gay?” (24 February 1992). The Advocate (27 May 1997), went one better, depicting on its cover a pink fetus illuminated against a bright red background. The caption read: “Endangered species. This child has the gay gene. Will he be aborted because of it?”

Lancaster lets us know that in the same way the thrill seeking gene studies could not be replicated, and thus the notion had to be walked back, so it was with the “gay gene” thesis. These were both key “discoveries” in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century associated with the groundbreaking research known as the Human Genome Project. Lancaster continues:

“... you’d have to have read stories buried pages deep in the same newspapers to notice. And even while The New York Times gave coverage — on page 19 — to research that dramatically failed to replicate Hamer’s “gay gene” studies, the author of the article nonetheless spun the results as a minor setback in the quest for a gay gene, underscoring “the difficulty scientists face in finding genes that underlie complex human behaviors.””

Pop-sci overshadowed the eventual realization on part of some scientists *that complexity of behavior regarding human sexuality disallowed any reductive explanation of the same that was tied to genes*. Stephen Jay Gould, on page 228 of *The Hedgehog, The Fox, and the Magister’s Pox* also points this out, and like Roger N Lancaster, he focuses on flaws in conclusions around the Human Genome Project:

“Genes don’t make proteins directly. Rather, they replicate themselves, and they serve as templates for the formation of distinctive RNAs, which then, through a *complex* chain of events, eventually assemble the vast array of proteins needed to construct a *complex* human body.” (emphasis mine)

Earlier, we touched on what some of the “complex chain of events” that Gould refers to consists of: the interaction between *trans-acting elements* and *cis-acting* elements of DNA, which are some of the dynamics that regulate gene expression. In the case of sexual development, even Peter Koopman, one of the researchers who helped isolate the SRY gene on the Y chromosome, and thus opened up a better understanding of the “cascade of gene activity that results in the formation of testes” in mice, humans, and other mammals; also admits that scientists “don’t yet know all the genes involved in the human sex development pathway” (2020, theconversation dot com, We discovered a missing gene fragment that’s shedding new light on how males develop).

Yet, as Gould would say, agreeing with Lancaster, there is “commercial interest” in “back[ing] the simplest idea that each protein records the coding and ultimate action of a single gene.” (*The Hedgehog, The Fox, and the Magister’s Pox*, 229). And so sexual development, including sexuality,

continues to be spoken of in *reductionist terms*. Importantly, these pop-sci misrepresentations of Human Genome Project research fueled *other* forms of bioreductivism, ultimately as a response to challenges by biologists like Gould and Lewontin, two well-known opponents of *racialist* pseudoscience:

“Genomania,” the term used by Ruth Hubbard and others to describe a generalized rage for genetic models, claims, and explanations, seems as good an appellative as any for the pervasive media obsession of the past fifteen years. *This enthusiasm for genetic explanations has been especially acute wherever practices or institutions related to sex are concerned*. It wasn’t ever thus. As Micaela di Leonardo reminds readers of *Exotics at Home*, when Time ran its cover story on the new “science” of sociobiology, it gave extensive space to rebuttals by prominent anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Marvin Harris as well as Harvard biologists Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin. The upshot of the coverage in Time and elsewhere was actually quite critical of sociobiology. By contrast, throughout the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the major news venues have essentially served as cheerleaders for every imaginable variant of bioreductivism: hormonal tales, evolutionary fables, fanciful genetics — and now, a re-born scientific racialism.” (*Emphasis added by me*)

It’s interesting to note that Lancaster identifies the *most “acute” forms of “genomania” as being those related to sex*. Their role in the revival of bioreductivism became a sneaky way that *new forms of racialism could make a comeback*, even as “race” was formally demoted from biological reality to social construction. This, I believe, occurs in direct proportion to the realization that gender is social construction as well. There is a “mutability” of biology at play, here, a nature-nurture imbrication at work, in the (sociogenic) configuration of “race” alongside “sex.” When identified in terms of “body-reasoning” as Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí calls it, so-called “genomania” (per Ruth Hubbard, Stephen Jay Gould, RC Lewontin, and Roger N Lancaster) in popular conceptions of race and sex (as well as ability) highlights how these are *all “seen” as resources under Western substructural and superstructural relations*. Andrea Long Chu somewhat “points” to these *multiple configurations of embodiment* that occur in Western dominated societies, focusing on the slave system in the US south:

“As Hortense Spillers has written, the genteel system of southern patrimony was bluntly waived when it came to the rape of enslaved Black women by white slave owners, who could effectively produce new assets — that is, new enslaved people — in the form of their own disavowed children. Gender alone cannot explain such an arrangement; it cannot speak to how sex functions as a kind of material base, as the Marxist feminists might put it: a source of labor, wealth, and power from which the elaborate superstructure of gender continually emerges, breaks off, and reforms in unintended ways.” (*The Freedom of Sex*)

But Chu does not fully evaluate the conditions of possibility for division of sex in the slave economy. The only way one could suggest that the relation of antebellum patrimony “waived” its organization of “sex” is if one takes the “genteel” sociogenic “code” regulating the *dominant frame of reference for embodiment* as their starting point of analysis. But Spillers’ “ungendering” thesis

“points” to a *pathologization* by the “genteel” sociogenic “code” as something which constructs *not just sex but ability and consanguinity at the same time*.

In the previous section, I argued that the historical context behind this was because of the roles African women had occupied in precolonial, ancestral, indigenous relations. Slave *status* was inherited by a racist understanding of *blood ties* and organized in terms of racist understandings of *mental faculties and evolutionary development*. This was in consequence of non-dualist/expansive relations being *disimbricated* under the colonial project.

Grand Patriarchy’s nexus of Consanguinity and Ability alongside the “genteel” code of white “gender” norms are *all at play* in the reproduction of “material” life under slavery via violation of African people with the capacity to give birth. Such was germane with accumulation of not just “sex” as reproductive capacity, but *actual chattel in the form of a child*, as well as labor on the plantation from both enslaved offspring and their progenitors, and finally the psycho-affective reinforcement slavemasters and their allies derived from their violences (something that Saidiya Hartman theorizes).

Again, if we are to transect these embodied configurations outside a mere focus on gender, we cannot situate them in terms of biological “sex” alone, not at least without also evaluating the configuration of *biological traits that are not “sexed”* (ie, those organized in terms of a consanguineal inheritance of slave status, or an ableist construal of cognitive faculties).

In sum, what’s at stake are the *multiple* embodied consequences of a “mutable” biology or of a sociogenic “code” that emerges “alongside phylogeny and ontogeny,” according to my transfeminist applications of Wynter’s or of Oyèwùmí’s theories. If there is a universal (material) basis for social construction of biological traits (including but not limited to the accumulation of sexual reproductive capacities), it is the disconfiguration and reconfiguration of the *potentiality for the range of traits*.

### **5.III. Mutable/Flexible Potentialities: Situating “dualism” and “non-dualism” as Deictic Center**

The notion of biological “potentiality” is from Stephen Jay Gould who I have cited in this article a few times. Oyèwùmí cited Gould’s book *Mismeasure of Man* in her work. And Sylvia Wynter’s “bios/mythoi” view of the human organism bears similarities to Gould’s own nature-nurture perspectives. “Potentiality” is a non-reductionist view of biology that Gould coined in the process of his debates with Richard Dawkins and E.O Wilson, who he identified as reductionist.

In the article “The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould,” by Lawrence N Goeller we learn that the essence of the debates Gould was engaged in centered on the question of if evolution was driven *only* by natural selection or natural selection *alongside other dynamics*. This debate was pivotal in the field of biology as scientists tried to understand the structure of certain features. The evolution of some features seemed to correlate with others, but according to the “atomistic” perspective, that correlation was *very minimal*. Natural selection was therefore aimed primarily at the *individual components of features*.

Gould did not deny that this was the case to some degree, agreeing with the Darwinian understanding: evolution was possible to some extent because changes in one structure of an organism does not correspond to changes in other structures of an organism. But Gould also felt that a “strict” Darwinism, taking the reductionist method and the atomistic view too far, would

treat biology and evolution as though its laws were one with that of mathematics or physics or chemistry.

According to Goeller, Gould therefore pointed out the fact that physics and chemistry might at times involve “non-linear” phenomena, in order to emphasize that evolutionary biology *similarly contains phenomena which cannot be understood with reference to individual parts, reduced and studied in their isolation* (27–28, *The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould*).

The historical and intellectual context behind why Gould had suggested “biological potentiality” is important because the reductionist view of biology/evolution took on a new life once science was better able to understand genetics. To Gould’s frustration, some of his colleagues were insisting that selection of individual features not only had very minimal correlation to the structure of other features, but also that *selection of individual features was a 1:1 correspondence with the genes*.

This was both the implication that the forces driving evolution *aren’t* non-linear while also claiming somewhat definitively such forces *were indeed linear*. To say what something *is not* in science is one thing, to say what something *is* with confidence is another (and sometimes science cannot provide an answer in either direction!). Gould, like other researchers, were pointing to the evidence that weighed *against* a genetic determinist account of biological traits, evidence which Goeller describes:

“... with a few notable exceptions, **one gene** can influence **many features**, and **each feature** is usually affected by **several genes**. In these cases, even if the selective advantage of an organism is due to a **single modified feature**, **many genes** are effected; similarly, a mutation in **one gene** may affect an **array of features**, some of which may offer the host an advantage while others lead to a disadvantage. (A surprisingly large number of genetic changes lead to no detectable change at all, and are therefore said to be selectively neutral.)” (*The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould*, 28, *emphasis added by me*)

Gene-feature correspondence is simplistic and not an accurate depiction of genetics, in other words. There *are* occasions when the 1:1 correspondence is observed (most notably the alleles for Mendel’s peas). But, for the most part, there seems to be a huge degree of *structural correlation* among features *and* their individual components at work in the *actual* character of the gene-trait relation. This brings some amount of ambiguity (because non-linear and non-additive) *even* to the genetic level of the organism at some point.

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In response, the claim from Gould’s critics was that genes might just be coding for those very *structures of individual components of features*. Evolution could therefore still be reduced to the gene, which was determining any correlation of features, due to *selective pressures on genes first and foremost*.

So, then, Gould’s counterargument, as with that of the scientists agreeing with him, was that the genome contains a *record of information* on the biological *outcomes* of selective pressures (as it relates to the individual components and whole structures of features that genes code for): but this informational record does not determine *how* the gene and the traits it codes for may *interact*

with *selective pressures*. Part of Gould's stance was a reflection of the central dogma of genetics itself, which we alluded to earlier: genes don't make traits themselves.

Suppose the record of information in the DNA molecule is akin to the recipes in a cookbook — each recipe does not cook a meal by itself. No, the “recipe” has to be transcribed and translated. This is the role of RNA. Trans-acting DNA elements and cis-acting DNA elements are like when you flip through the pages of the recipe book to find the recipe meal you want to prepare. There are also other non-coding elements of DNA (about 99% actually) with regulatory sequences that are akin to when as you scan your eyes across the page or your finger to determine which step in the instructions you want to start at or not. You can't even begin to “read” or “copy” anything down — which is the RNA's “job” — if you did not open the cookbook and then settle on a spot in its contents in the first place (and we can't forget the DNA nucleotides, which are like the individual graphemes used to type the words of your cookbook, or the RNA nucleotides which are akin to the letters you used as you quickly jotted down the recipe onto a small sticky-note somewhere!).

Once the information has been identified and replicated, now the actual components of the meal have to be “assembled.” It's more than just the dish you are preparing, too, it's also the stuff that makes up the dish or goes into it. We can compare that to the amino acids, which comprise the proteins that (alongside hormones and enzymes) that are major components of our cells and our cells' interactions with one another.

With all these dynamics involved, to say that evolution is driven by selection of genes would have to mean that *selective pressures dictate all of these “steps” involved in gene expression*. And indeed, the fact that non-coding DNA elements regulate when/why these “steps” are initiated (in such a way as to where a fertilized human egg cycle will never somehow become a kitten, a cat's nerve cells will not suddenly replicate themselves as an elephant's blood cells, etc) is often a further justification for the genetic determinist stance.

But from the Gouldian perspective, we would have to ask our metaphorical chef: does one cook, or craft recipes to cook, or compile recipes in a cookbook, *simply* because one is hungry and wants to eat? Are there not other motivations, maybe to feed someone, or perhaps for artistic flair, or to experiment and test something out at the cookpot? And what about mistakes in cooking (failure to follow some or all of the instructions), or even novel innovations (like if you remix the recipe a little bit)?

What if the book has typos or a new edition, or if on your post it notes you jot down either an error or an improvised note about a different ingredient to throw in? What if the font is faded on one of the pages or a whole page is torn out, or some of the pages are stuck together? Or the chef has to flip through the book using something other than their hand? Or the note to self is crumpled or it gets wet during the cooking process? Or the pot being cooked with unevenly shifts how heat energy from the fire is dispersed across its contents? Or there is a flavor change because one of the seasonings is slightly old? And what about the processes that went into you getting the ingredients in the first place? Or... or... or...

Richard Dawkins, who wrote *The Selfish Gene* and was one of Gould's fiercest intellectual opponents would ignore these other questions and ultimately say only hunger drives the practice of cooking, or of crafting recipes for cooking, or of compiling recipes in a cookbook (ie, the struggle to survive is all there is to the many “steps” of gene expression, protein synthesis, and the evolution of biological traits and features). All other motivations are secondary; the contingencies and complexities and multifacetedness that Gould and company were concerned with were at



best proximate causes in evolutionary history, from the reductionist perspectives of Dawkins and company (29, *The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould*).

That assertion took on a troubling form in the fields of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, the latter of which aimed to reduce *entire human behaviors to the gene*. Gould had no issue with genetic explanation for behaviors of non-human animal life, but he was insistent that human behavior existed at a level of complexity that could hardly be explained with reference to genes or the individual traits and features whose component parts are synthesized by gene expression.

According to Lawrence N. Goeller's reading, it was E.O Wilson's claim that both human bodies and human behaviors had been "shaped by natural selection for optimal performance as hunter-gatherers" that pushed Gould to publish the text *Biological Potentiality vs. Determinism*. Gould especially took issue with what evolutionary psychology as a form of reductionist science and genetic determinism could mean for *struggles against systems of oppression*.

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I agree with Gould's cautioning, from a transfeminist perspective. If human biology and behavioral expression has been fine tuned by evolution for the most fit performance in a particular mode of subsistence, and that mode of subsistence is ad hoc organized into a gender binary, does that not reduce a *substructural and superstructural nexus* to the genome? Goeller sums up the scientific basis for Gould's critique as follows:

"he argued that it was definitely premature and probably incorrect to argue that there was a gene "for" any given behavior such as xenophobia or aggression. We are unable to predict, based on the genome, how tall an individual produced from that genome will be; the field is not sufficiently mature to be [*sic*] identified as a science (with the implication that it might never be). It was more likely, Gould continued, that what is in human genes as it relates to human behavior is the potential to behave in any one of a large number of ways. That is, what we "get" from our genes is *behavioral flexibility*."

According to Gould, the reductionist method did not even *reliably* allow one to predict the exactness of someone's height from the genome alone. It was preposterous, then, to think that something like behavior (especially behavior as organized within a particular socio-ecological context) could be reliably elucidated simply from studies of one's genes.

Although he could provide no concrete proof *against* this approach, Gould surmised that there also was no adequate proof *for* the claims, aside from the role of genes in the *potentiality* of behavioral trait expression. Thus, he urged science to emphasize that flexibility in (a range of possible) behaviors should be assessed from genomic analysis. In Gould's own words:

"Endowed with sufficient logic and memory, the brain may have substituted nonprogrammed learning for direct specification as the ground of social behavior. Flexibility may well be the most important determinant of human consciousness; the direct programming of behavior has probably become inadapative."

According to Gould, what evolution selected for was “flexibility” as a trait, with the “potentiality” for non-programmed learning, logic, memory, and consciousness in the brain being a non-linear/non-additive consequence (we see here structural correlates among component parts at different levels). If there *was* any *dissection* of traits, it wasn’t of simple alleles like Dawkins would suppose, but rather the direct programming of behavioral traits altogether.

Gould was cautious not to present this as either a definitive answer or absolute dismissal of his opponents’ position, but he did find it could at least satisfy *both* the methodological concern with evolutionary pressures on the genome and his own attention to the role of emergent/contingent phenomena in structural correspondence among different features and their component parts. Importantly, because of the “humanistic” concerns in his body of work, Gould posited that *social structure* interacts with the “subset of a possible range of behaviors” *to permit some to flourish over others*. He was keen, however, on making sure that this view

“does not invoke a nonbiological ‘environmentalism’; it merely pits the concept of biological potentiality, with a brain capable of the full range of human behaviors and predisposed towards none, against the idea of biological determinism, with specific genes for specific behavioral traits.”

Gould’s perspective was not a *mere* social constructionist one, therefore. He wanted to suggest that biological potentiality is interrelating with structures that impose *artificial* pressures on trait expression. Gould seemed to be onto something in his “biological potentiality” concept. A research article published in the journal *Science* (2021) describes computer tomography of fossilized skulls from among early species in the genus *Homo*. According to the research findings, evidence of “interdependent processes of brain-culture co-evolution” exist for the ancestors of modern humans even after the first dispersals of some *Homo* species out of Africa:

“The modern humanlike brain organization emerged in cerebral regions thought to be related to toolmaking, social cognition, and language.” (de Leon, et. al 2021, *The Primitive Brain of Early Homo*)

Stephen Johnson sums up these findings by saying that:

“*Homo* species first developed humanlike brains approximately 1.7 to 1.5 million years ago in Africa. This cognitive evolution occurred at roughly the same time *Homo* species’ technology and culture were becoming more complex, with these species developing more sophisticated stone tools and animal food resources.” (big-think.com, “Our ancestors first developed humanlike brains 1.7 million years ago”)

Tracking waves of migration out of Africa, even *before* the appearance of modern anatomical humans qua *Homo Sapiens*, the researchers suggest that those early *Homo* species that were our evolutionary ancestors seemed to have *developed traits which emerged at the interstices nature and nurture*. There is fossil evidence to suggest this interpenetration, analyzed with more recent technologies (although there is still difficulty because of not all remains being preserved in the same ways, alongside the diversity of *Homo* species’ remains that can be found).

If the areas of the brain associated with tool use and language co-evolved with diversification of early *Homo* food sources/technology (the antecedent to a substructure) and cultural relations/linguistic representation (the antecedent to a superstructure) it would seem to suggest

that Gould's flexibility concept might have some promise. These findings also bear striking resemblance to Sylvia Wynter's "Homo narrans" concept, where she postulates the evolution of a languaging-species when understanding *Homo sapiens* as a species.

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As I've cautioned in other works, though, biological potentiality does not mean there are *infinite* potentials contained in the brain or the genome, which the individual has determination over as something to personally unlock or unleash. That is a pseudo-Lamarckian view of epigenetic development pushed by the likes of Jordan Peterson. Gould looks at a range of human behavioral traits (including the aggression and selfishness that his opponents focused on), describing them each as a "subset" of what is "possible." And it sounds as though those subsets are correlated to nonprogrammed learning faculties that were selected for among our earliest anatomical ancestors visavis socio-cultural as well as ecological factors alike (even after out of Africa dispersal according to de Leon, et. al. 2021).

My Nexus Hypothesis suggests that in the wake of this early organization of cognitive/behavioral flexibility, the biological potentiality for a range of nonprogrammed behavioral traits, learning, consciousness, memory, logic, etc evolved a mutability (a la Oyèwùmí) that was regulated by the sociogenic principle (a la Wynter). This was, per my Hypothesis, likely in dialectic with the development of more varied substructural and superstructural relations, and it did not *center* on a "division of sex" into a binary system of hunters and gatherers. Instead, many configurations of embodiment can be detected, I propose.

The idea that a hunter-gatherer mode of material provisioning (to borrow a Sylvia Wynter phrase) selected the "optimal" pathways for the most "fit" genes and physical features isn't based purely on a natural science argument: it is in part a social science argument pulled from old interpretations of archeological and anthropological data. Recent findings from Anderson, et. al (2023) suggests participation by women *and* men in hunting and warfare "throughout the Homo Sapiens lineage," from the deep past *and* well into the present among a *range* of hunter-gatherer subsistence cultures. Further, a team of biologists as well as anthropologists collaborated to address these findings, making a survey of about "1400 human cultural groups from the past few centuries," according to Bridget Alex in a science.org article (2023, "Worldwide survey kills the myth of 'Man the Hunter'").

Of course, rejoinders to these new findings have come up, such as Hoffman, et. al (2024, "The ecological and social context of women's hunting in small-scale societies"), questioning the methodology of these recent studies — including the Western assumptions that render hunting an *index of social mobility* — and asserting based on the existing literature that female hunting is *rare*, not common, due to energetic and reproductive constraints. Even these authors, however, still permit a challenge in the record to common *assumptions about biological as well as social restrictions on women's hunting*, with the case of a 1985 study on the Agta people in the Philippines as an example:

"Childcare constraints were alleviated by low ratios of dependent children to adults, reducing the burden on mothers. Hunts tended to take place close to camps, and with the aid of dogs. Sterile or post-reproductive women instead took up hunting when carbohydrate roots were sparse and unprofitable."

It sure seems from this account that hunter-gathering behaviors which E.O Wilson might deem “selected” for by evolution are actually part of a *subset* of potential expressions which can be configured in multiple ways (as Gould’s flexibility thesis suggests). Not only is social reproductive labor here organized in a more expansive manner (Seniority, correlated to higher rates of adults than children), but embodiments with sex-associated trait presentations that do not line up with biological reproductive capacities (infertile and postmenopausal females) seem to be organized in the hunting practice, while the technical skills for when and where and how the hunts occur is an additional demonstration of flexibility.

Yet, a glaring question still remains: why might *this subset* of hunting expressions present in this case, while in other cases (according to the record *thus far* in the literature) the expressions of hunting that present seem to *corroborate* the “gendered” division of labor thesis? It would appear that a “mutable” biology is still going to be “selected” by evolutionary pressures in favor of certain *subsets* of potential trait expression over others (this is precisely why some researchers deem “female” hunting a rare occurrence).

Such a conclusion runs the risk of framing patterns like those among the Agta as “less efficient” (unfit) for the hunter-gatherer niche. If these were “efficient” (fit) then as a *subset* of potential trait expression, their organization would have been “selected” to be *more prevalent*, no? We have to remember that the Agta people are some of the darker skinned (called “negrito”) populations in the Philippines, though. The *purported rarity* of their hunting behavior-expressions may not be evidence of minimal adaptive advantage: it could be a *consequence of historical circumstances*, including scholars’ evaluating Agta society in terms of other cultures/societies (who present not just their own patterns of organization but even a position of dominance above the Agta). An hegemonic *frame of reference* “*points*” *researchers’ attention* to a certain set of historical conditions, by which other contexts are then understood. This is not merely about the “biases” that any researcher might bring to science; there is something about the metatheoretical outline of explanations for evolutionary “fitness” that is at play.

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The “outline” of evolutionary explanations is first and foremost a motivation to understand change, of course (per the chapter “On Evolution” in *The Dialectical Biologist* by Lewontin and Levins). It’s not just *any* theory of change, though. Change in general can be explained in *many* ways, and for a long time in Europe the reference point was that of Divine interventions and punishment within an otherwise unchanging universe (10, *The Dialectical Biologist*). These “diluvianist” — for example, Noah’s Flood — and “catastrophist” — for example, Tower of Babel — theories of change were typical of European Christians’ premodern/medieval past.

They were *not* evolutionary worldviews, although some early scientists held to them (William Buckland is an example highlighted on page 10). An evolutionary worldview understands *change as constant and material*, not a situational and spiritually derived characteristic of the universe. The laws or dynamics undergirding that constant, material condition of change might be explained differently *between* the sciences, though: where geology might focus on forces like erosion to understand changes in the earth’s features, theories about the evolution of organisms are gonna focus on genetic mutations and natural selection (11, *The Dialectical Biologist*). Only when European societies became more *atomized by bourgeois relations* were these *material and secular accounts of change more broadly accepted*, Lewontin and Levins argue.

It is important to name that outside of Europe, *some* spiritual views of change *did allow for a focus on natural causes thereof* (Sundjata identifies this, via Kimbwadende Fu-Kiau, in the belief systems of the Bantu-Kongo world). Still, *within* the colonial-imperial worldview, it is the exigencies of capitalism that draw an onto-epistemic “limit” for evolutionary thought. When European scientists could approach that “limit,” they would grapple with understanding the different material/natural forces which regulated change by trying to explain the *states of existence that have come about in the wake of an evolutionary process*. Lewontin and Levins say this was because of not simply wanting to make an “exhaustive list of attributes,” (12) but rather to give some *order and scale to the changes observed or being studied*.

Many theories and approaches emerged to try and actually *decide the scales at which to give order* to the evolutionary trajectory of a given entity, object, feature, organism etc being studied. The example Lewontin and Levins highlight is the ordered understanding of changes in populations of plant species in a given region. This might allow one to *not simply list off the different plants*, but also understand *patterns in the changes* of the species within a given time span.

Those patterns might be ordered in terms of an evolution in the number of species, diversity of types of species, size, ways the species interact, and more (13). But, some fields of science can define scales of order for change with more ease than others, Lewontin and Levins argue. Scales are more arbitrary in many fields, although in genetics one might focus on “frequency of genes in a given population” (14) and highlight the role of mutation, selection, migration, breeding, etc in those changes.

Even then, however, the *ordered description of genetic change* ends up revealing itself to be derived from an *average*, Lewontin and Levins argue. So if a science can successfully bring an ordered explanation of changes, which *only* some do better than others, there is at some point *still an onto-epistemic limit*. Because averages cannot be decided a priori; there is still a *reference point* by which they are articulated and evaluated.

Lay audiences might be familiar with the theme of a “flaw of averages,” something discussed by authors like Todd Rose in the book *The End of Average*. In the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century two different bodies of research, one associated with the airforce and one associated with gynecology, came to independent realizations that the “average” body type for men in the military or women in beauty pageants/contests did not “fit” anyone in those categories (Rose discusses this in a 2016 article for the Toronto Star, “When U.S. air force discovered the flaw of averages”).

But the research for the pageant/contest did not abandon the idea of an average: it simply encouraged an industry that *marketed a body-type ideal for women to conform to*, according to Rose. In the military, however, Rose underscores how the practical importance of *success in the armed forces* (since many pilots had been dying from plane crashes, a problem which defied explanation at that point), led to “discarding the average as their reference standard,” culminating in a revolution in aeronautical and automobile design: the invention of adjustable seats, pedals, straps, etc. We see here, via Rose’s accounts, how researchers’ *observations of phenotypical variation were responded to in different ways depending on the material interests of a given industry*. There is certainly a nexus of gendered imbrication at play as well.

This is just one example of how the dialectics of embodiment constrain formulations of scientific theories in general, a point emphasized by Lewontin and Levins when they argue that “evolution is a mode of organizing knowledge about the world” (14). This isn’t to say that there are no truths about the world or the body that science can explain; I am simply giving name to an onto-epistemic limit. And, to put it bluntly, I’m hinting at how this “outline” of the evolutionary

worldview “points” deictically through a neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanism (socio-genic “code”) most germane with the *material/power structures within which modern science is conducted*.

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Ultimately, the historical context of scientific inquiry, returning to the chapter “On Evolution,” in *The Dialectical Biologist* is why it became commonplace among scientists to describe the scales of ordered change in states with a focus on the *increase or decrease of a characteristic over time* (14). Lewontin and Levins say this gave *temporal direction* to evolutionary theory, typically a unidirectional one. Just as some sciences could not turn to ordered scales in the same way as others, however, some sciences, like geology, would *avoid* ascribing a general direction and degree to the physical outcomes of the natural processes/forces that regulate cycles and episodes of geological change (15). Distinct fields are aiming their attention at distinct phenomena, after all.

In the case of geology, its refusal of directionality likely is why the “Anthropocene” concept would *not* be ratified by the International Commission on Stratigraphy or the International Union of Geological Sciences. The idea of an *accumulated legacy of anthropogenic environmental impact* is not just difficult to reconstruct via studies of geosynchronous markers (called “spikes” in the geological record), but the candidate markers lie within too narrow a time frame for a field that looks at *cycles of geological change long before humanity even existed*.

Anthropology, biology, sociology, geography, however, would see changes in human and natural systems as becoming more ‘complex’ (16) over time, as well as more ‘diverse,’ (21) and eventually more ‘stable’ as the most fit/efficient features, pathways, processes are selected to maintain a homeostasis (20). That’s part of why recent studies of an “Anthropocene” have drawn on insights across those sciences. Directionality in *those* fields is actually *useful* in this case for tracking anthropogenic environmental impact, although only to the extent that they “point” to the mode of production at the base of why accumulation of said impacts even needed to be understood in the first place (this was why scholars like JW Moore have coined the term “Capitalocene”).

We said it took the atomized social reality of *early* bourgeois societies for Christian Europeans to begin accepting the evolutionary worldview; now, the ordered/scaled and unidirectional theorems in evolution only became more attractive and acceptable amidst the era of capitalism’s *adolescence* (22). Europeans had by now encountered more and more human populations, and had been scientifically examining more and more living as well as non-living specimens, and ultimately had increased access to technological capacities of control over the social and natural world that made. It *made sense* that directional increase of homeostasis, stability, complexity, diversity could become essential to evolutionary theory.

From a Lewontin and Levins perspective, it was almost as if the *recognition that change was constant had to be restrained* to some degree, if the laws and variables were to be accounted for in a way that *lined up with the regularity to change that bourgeois society brought* (22). But, the outlines of the onto-epistemic limit were drawn in this way because amidst the now *better understood regularity in evolutionary trends*, there was also still a great deal of change happening *beyond* the understandings coming out of the metropole. New fossils, new species, and also, many of new changes in the social sphere: class struggles, gender/sexual struggles, and most especially struggles against slavery.

A variety of human patterns/expressions could not be explained by the Western method, so it is no surprise that eugenics was formalized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century amidst the crises of fascism, finance capital, imperialist wars, nascent anticolonial struggles and the Bolshevik revolution. The complex, diverse, stable, homeostatic world modernity had come to know was undeniably one *fraught with immense divisions and contingencies*, accumulating and emerging in *direct proportion to anthropogenic environmental impact at a scale never before observed*. It had to be explained somehow: with reference to distinct phylogenetic and ontogenetic trajectories.

Folks like the Haitian anthropologist Joseph Auguste Antenor Firmin would oppose such theories, however, anticipating Fanon. Over two centuries later Françoise Vergès would do something similar, by coining the term “Racial Capitalocene” in order to better explain the apparent regularity (and increase of environmental impacts) in the last few centuries’ patterns of rapid ecological and social change without using bioessentialist explanations.

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And there were/are “*apolitical*” bodies of research that began to realize how order, scale, and evolutionary unidirectionality had limited explanatory power for the *regularity yet fraughtness of patterns of change*. Lewontin and Levins describe this when arguing:

“The principle that the genetic changes in a population under natural selection result in an increase in the mean fitness of the population, even in the special circumstances where it is true, is only a statement about the relative fitnesses of individuals within the population and makes no prediction at all about the absolute survival and reproduction of the population.” (16)

The authors are clear that *relative* fitness of an individual is *rarely increased* at the level of genetic changes. They further emphasize that such individual changes may also not *necessarily* be linked to predictions about an entire population (for example with traits like reproductive rate). This is one case *against* directionality as a component in ordered/scaled theories of evolutionary change.

Complexity as a metric is also contested. There is a circular logic involved when “pointing” to features that happened to appear *later* in evolutionary history and assuming they are *automatically more complex* than the types of cells or types of metabolic pathways or types of interactions that appeared *earlier* in evolutionary history (17). As Lewontin and Levins insist, organisms like *today’s* bacteria are *not* the same as those bacteria which were ancestors of modern vertebrates, and in either case so-called ‘complexity’ could be measured *relatively*:

“Mammals have many types of cells, tissues, and organ systems and *in this respect* are more complex, but bacteria can carry out many biosynthetic reactions, such as the synthesis of certain amino acids, that have been lost during the evolution of the vertebrates, so *in that sense* bacteria are more complex. There is no indication that vertebrates *in general* enter into *more direct interactions* with other organisms than do bacteria, which *have their own* parasites, predators, competitors, and symbionts.” (17, emphasis mine)

Relative complexity and relative fitness are why the unidirectional ordering of life into “lower” or “higher” grades *cannot be projected onto societal evolution either*. Just as “less complex” organisms coexist with “more complex” ones in evolutionary time, even as the latter appeared later in evolutionary history, so it is with supposed “grades” of human social organization (18). Extant societies considered “primitive” are not frozen in time *by sheer virtue of their having appeared earlier in human history* and cannot be reduced to windows into the life of ancient human groups. Such “arrested in their social evolution” claims as Lewontin and Levins call it also overlook how recently appearing a number of “less complex” societies actually are.

Even when the metric is the flow of information, unidirectionality is hard to maintain in all cases: the genetic material of invertebrates “turn out to have more information than many vertebrates” according to Lewontin and Levins (although it is the latter which appeared later in evolutionary history). Similarly, the knowledge accumulated by modern sciences may contain less information on some matters than the ecological and cultural knowledge systems among supposedly “primitive” peoples (see: the cognitive architecture of Aboriginal Dreaming and the computational mechanisms of Ifa/Afa divination among Yoruba, Igbo, and other West African cultures. These each demonstrate a record of data accumulated visavis the environmental and social histories of their practitioners).

Directionality also fails to “grade” organisms/populations on efficiency in maintaining physiological homeostasis amidst environmental fluctuations as well, per *The Dialectical Biologist*. The atomistic perspective takes the *individual* response to changes in resource access or to external signals/stimuli and maps it onto “entire assemblages of species that are related to each other by predation and competition” to derive patterns and correlations in adaptation.

Lewontin and Levins seem to be implying that a reductionist account renders these patterns and correlations akin to laws of thermodynamic entropy and theories of an expanding universe. But, laws of thermodynamics can be non-directional, with “entropy... increasing only locally” while “in other regions of space it may be decreasing” and a “expansion-contraction theory” of the cosmos has been suggested, which tracks an “oscillating universe” (21). On these grounds, while one can highlight *constants* (regularity) like the average density of matter in the universe or the steadiness in the mean distribution of kinetic energy in the universe, this principle cannot readily be mapped onto the stability and diversity of interactions between populations of organisms and the resources they use in the environment (22–23).

Just focusing on selective pressures of predation & competition relations alone, there are instances where the exact *opposite* of an ordered scale of directional increase in adaptive advantage occurs (“it has been shown that as this complexity increases, by adding more species or by increasing the strength of the interaction, the probability that the community will be stable to perturbation decreases rather than increases (May, 1973)”). The patterns are fraught, and so selection reveals itself to be somewhat non-directional here, too, which is why some practitioners in the sciences had to develop a sort of theoretical “middle ground” where:

“the environment is constantly changing, always decaying with respect to the current adaptation of species. In this view the continued evolution of organisms is simply keeping up with the moving, worsening environment, but nothing is happening globally. The environment worsens because resources are used up, because competitors, predators, and prey evolve, and because any change makes previous adaptations obsolete. No species can ever be perfectly adapted because each is tracking a moving



target, but all extant species are close to their optima. Species become extinct if they evolve too slowly to track the moving environment or disperse too slowly to keep up geographically with their preferred environment.” (23)

Here, what is inadapative is a failure to keep up with a decay in resource access that is steadily caused by the possession of adaptive advantages itself. In other words, selective non-directionality and lack of scale/order in evolutionary trends is *dependent on* selective directionality and the scale/order in evolutionary trends for species that exist thus far. The organisms which can “keep up” with this dilemma the best are therefore the “fittest” to survive.

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For the bodies of research that arrived at this conclusion, the dilemma/tension at the heart of it was explained in different ways. Darwin’s offerings were one of the most groundbreaking. Karl Marx’s theory of a metabolic rift was equally pivotal, as he stretched the onto-epistemic “limit” of the West’s evolutionary sciences.

With Marx, we see an explanation for change that turned the explanatory spotlight onto the very economic and political context which had made materialist accounts of natural and social phenomena legible to Europeans in the first place. At the risk of sounding overly simplistic, we could say that from a metabolic rift perspective, unidirectionality causes non-directionality on account of a *mode of production*.

John Bellamy Foster maps out the Marxist view of social metabolism and its “rupture” under capitalism in the United States; but there are Socialist theorists on the matter outside Foster, Spain, the UK, France, and elsewhere (see: *Ecosocialism, a Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe* by Michael Löwy).

For the sake of brevity, we will just say that the metabolic rift thesis tracks a steady historical process, where productive forces advance in their complexity and technical prowess, accompanied by an attendant diversification of social organization as well as networks of accumulation of natural and human resources (most especially labor power). This social order developed a scale of *metabolic exchange within the natural world*, unevenly distributed according to the “grades” or “stages” in productive modalities that only certain regions arrived at because of trade, conquest, warfare, slavery, colonialism, imperialism, dispossession, alienation.

At the highest phase of this trajectory, pollution and other environmental stressors are intensified due to the very productive demands/imperatives (and ultimately social oppression) that drove its evolutionary path forward in time. This is what makes the capitalist mode of production “irrational” according to Marxism. If one is to associate adaptive “fitness” with a “keeping up” in this dilemma (contradiction), that would require a social revolution as itself the horizon of evolutionary change, in order to resolve the contradiction (allowing humanity to survive and escape conditions entrenched by ruling class interests).

An emphasis on *revolution* introduces an *artificial dimension to the pressures that would “select” for adaptive advantage*. Bourgeois scientists were, and continue to be, hesitant to ever consider such a thing, for obvious reasons. The possibility for artificial selection visavis revolution in the mode of production (what Marxists call the substructure) is a claim that influences the Gouldian conception of “biological potentiality” in his writings on the gene-trait connection. But long

before Gould and his contemporaries would argue about the social implications of genetic reductionism, the economist Thomas Malthus (who Marx once called a “baboon”) would come out propagandizing *against* revolutionary potential.

Seeing the misery of the English working classes, whose conditions of proletarianization sparked Marx’s formulating a theory of metabolic rift, Malthus asserted that the increase in rates of reproductive success anticipated the crises in ecological and social conditions. What would be adaptive is constraints on population growth, otherwise biological reproduction would geometrically outpace the arithmetical reproduction of the means of subsistence (Marx’s frustration with these claims are found in Grundrisse 12). Malthus, along with Herbert Spencer — the godfather of “social Darwinism” — were among the thinkers who cemented a concern with not just ordered scales of unidirectional increase, but specifically what Lewontin and Levins speak of as progress from inferior to superior stages of “optimality” (25) and a criterion of “efficiency” (26).

The gradation of societal development was given a moral tone, and the natural “struggle to survive” and adapt was ultimately *described with economics discourses*. An economics frame of reference is why some sciences have adopted language around the “net” surplus of investment in reproduction, least energy “expenditure” for resources acquired, “allocation” of most acquired surplus to reproduction, minimum time, maximum “yield,” Lewontin and Levins explain.

To this day in the sciences, perspectives can broadly be sorted into two categories: those hitching their coattails to easy answers by taking an economist frame of reference (a la Malthus) for evolutionary thought, versus those who, like Marx and Darwin, tried to grapple with the more difficult questions that emerge from a tension between purported order/scale/directionality and observed decay, equilibrium/steady-state, non-directional dynamism. Pop-sci, pop-psych trails toward the former while more humble researchers (be they Marxian or not) can be placed in the latter camp.

The former orientation tends to be the most attractive, however, *when the subject of gender/sex is on the table*, including among some Marxists (and Marxist feminists). Despite Marx cautioning in his 1877 letter to the editor of Otecestvenniye Zapisky that his theory does not “pretend to do more than trace the path by which, in Western Europe, the capitalist order of economy emerged from the womb of the feudal order of economy,” the kinematic therein is still generally applied by many, since his time into today, as a universal account of human evolution. Thus, when it comes to a metabolic rift evaluation of gender/sex, the frame of reference is how the bourgeois mode of production has been “divorcing the producers from their means of production” and then “converts them into wage earners (proletarians in the modern sense of the word) while it converts into capitalists those who hold the means of production in possession.”

If this is the origo, then our analysis puts focus on how capitalism uproots the proletariat from farm life, cramps them in enclosed quarters, rupturing the extant metabolic exchanges between humanity and the environment through abrupt though regular patterns of change to settlement habits or siting/distribution of waste or uptake of nutrients and resources. The fraught nature of these patterns of a change is then indexed most viscerally by reference to *the conversion of family structures into atomized household units* and the associated reconfiguration of gender/sexual relations.

In the colonies, we might say that “events strikingly analogous but taking place in different historic surroundings led to totally different results,” (in Marx’s words) apply to discussions of gender/sex and the disimbrication of family structures visavis a metabolic rift. We alluded to this in the previous section when thinking about men’s disalienation, the juridico-discursive

repression of the homosexual, and the conditions forced onto African women. But, Engels, Marx's lifelong collaborator, offers very limited clarity here, although he in some ways hoped to chart how the metabolic rupture affects gender/sex around the world when writing *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

The text looks at configurations of sex/gender visavis the development of the mode of production in premodern classical Europe as well as in Turtle Island (North American) Native societies. Still, while moral and bourgeois economic interests might not be at work in how Engels' ordered scales of unidirectional evolution are explained, the outlines of scientific explanation for social change still evaluate the transformation of non-Western/premodern gender/sex/familial relations in terms of the "all-purpose formula of a general historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical" that Marx's 1877 letter discourages. The Western frame of reference is Engels' deictic center.

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In Engels' account, then, the earliest "grades" of development in the material mode of production organized the family in terms of "consanguinity," a claim he reconstructed based on reports of a "Hawaiian system ... still prevalent today throughout the whole of Polynesia" (from chapter II, section entitled *The Consanguine Family, the first stage of the family*). To his credit, Engels' aim was to turn Marx's notes on the available anthropological literature about the family at the time into an evolutionary theory that *did not attribute the bourgeois monogamous familial unit purely to nature*.

In combatting capitalist propaganda about the family, Engels was tracking the development of human familial/sexual patterns in comparison to that of animal species (especially what he called anthropoid apes). He found primitive forms of cooperation an evolutionary advantage for *Homo sapiens*. As opposed to the monogamous ideal many scientists at the time were projecting, Engels argued that *Homo sapiens* could only have succeeded in evolution if expressions of reproductive competition (especially male jealousy) was disorganized by "group marriage, the form of family in which whole groups of men and whole groups of women mutually possess one another."

In some ways, Engels was anticipating our earlier discussions of biological mutability and flexibility: jealousy as a behavioral expression among animals in their sexual patterns could be dissected by the adaptive strategies undertaken in some species, namely early humans, *at the level of social structures*.

But, this substructural/superstructural dissection (by artificial means) of sexual competitiveness was enumerated from observations of Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American familial structures and sexual relations, and generalizations to the African context made at the time of Engels' writing. Lumped all together under the sign of "indisputable proof" regarding the "oldest and most primitive form of family," Engels' account is indicative of the extent to which onto-epistemic "limits" of Engels and Marx and their contemporaries' evolutionary worldview can and cannot be overcome by dialectical and historical materialism when addressing non-Western historical trajectories.

Why much of my transfeminist theorizing takes Africa as its starting point for understanding the dialectics of embodiment, including configurations of gender/sex, is because the most up to date information (in both orature and literature) confounds the onto-epistemic contours of even the most well-intentioned Marxian account of social evolution. The data actually poses

major issues to any correspondence of a particular “grade” of social organization to a particular pattern of gender/sexual configuration. Returning to Murray and Roscoe’s *Boy Wives, Female Husbands*, which includes one of the more *comprehensive quantitative accounts* of gender/sexuality in African societies, we read:

“Evidence of same-sex patterns in some fifty African societies has been reported or reviewed in this book. All these societies had words — many words, with many meanings for these practices. Furthermore, these societies are found within *every* region of the continent, and they represent *every* language family, social and kinship organization, and subsistence pattern.” (268, in the chapter “Diversity and Identity: The Challenge of African Homosexualities,” emphasis added by me)

When Stephen O Murray in particular tries to come up with *statistical correlations* between “organizations of [male] homosexuality in “traditional” African societies and other social patterns,” (284) he provides a series of tables that assess colonial ethnographic reports of same-sex behavior/desire in relation to region-specific African linguistic and kinship and subsistence patterns, as well as divisions of labor, beliefs about premarital sex, genital mutilation customs, sex-segregation, class stratification and urbanization, and patterns of settlement. For the sake of brevity, we will not walk through each of Murray’s tables, but we must take time to ponder *two* of the correlations pointed out:

1. regarding male same-sex patterns, they are typically not differentiated according to gender presentation nor stratified by age-differentials in societies that have non-dualist involvement in the mode of production, lack significant divides around wealth, and exhibit tendencies towards “free love.” Classed societies, however, are typically associated with gender-differentiated male homosexuality while societies with matricephaly in production are associated with age-stratified male homosexuality
2. regarding female same-sex patterns, the data is more scant (because of bias in colonial reports), but these run a spectrum of being differentiated according to gender presentation, stratified by age-differentials, or undifferentiated/unstratified along age and gender lines. This spectrum is typically occurring in settings that demonstrate wealth distinctions as well as significant female involvement in production, and that exhibit tendencies towards “free love.”

There are still many noted exceptions to these correlations and a ton of ambiguity. Murray cautions that “correlational claims should not be misinterpreted as causal ones,” and actively sets his thinking apart from the functionalist schools of thought which suggest that “everything fits together to produce stable equilibrium.”

That free love is not *ad hoc* associated with classless, non-agricultural, non-differentiated contexts is key to my purposes here when thinking about Engels’ thesis. To me, it raises an important question about how artificial (substructural/superstructural) constraints do or do not select subsets of behavioral (and other trait) expressions. Engels makes no mention of what today is called “same sex” expressions (but was called “uranism” back then), although it would seem that enumeration from existing African societies about the evolution of family/gender/sexual relations needs to consider this phenomenon.

If we do take gender/sexual non-dualism into consideration, however, the substructural and superstructural contexts hardly fit any one particular expression into ordered scales of directional increase/grades/degrees of evolutionary development (although Murray does offer a hypothesis of “quasi-evolutionary progression” and alludes to a “guiding hunch” (285) about these “social-structural” correlates to “organizations of homosexuality.”)

So, although the Marxian heuristic might help us avoid economic accounts of biological and social reproduction that code for efficiency/fitness of gender or sex patterns in supremacist ways, the Marx-Engels theory takes regulations against “male jealousy” in reproduction as its deictic center. That can be problematic if we remember, via Oyěwùmí, that the circumstances and systems of knowledge in African cultures and indeed all Third World groups must be elucidated on their own terms (their own frames of reference). A persistent question that the Marx-Engels theory would leave us with is why, as Murray put it:

“throughout Africa, gender roles shift, and men and women exceed normal bounds in various ways, temporarily or permanently, but almost no one is exempt from the requirement to procreate” (276).

What would be the reproductive advantage of dissecting “male jealousy” in sexual behavior while selecting for “non-dualism” in sexual behavior? If there is none then why would it ever have emerged visavis cooperative tendencies that supposedly set us apart from our assumed more atavistic counterparts in the non-human primate world? Maybe there is some kind of *non-functional/non-adaptive* explanation for artificial (structural) constraints on sexual behavior. This is where we kind of circle back to Gould’s debates. Even if we were to take “male jealousy” at face value, maintaining the *Origo* as per Engels, the sociogenesis of a neurochemical behavior regulatory “code” constraining jealous male behavioral trait expression may very well be *neither maladaptive nor adaptive* (selectively neutral visavis reproductive affairs). The concept of “spandrel” is essential here.

#### **5.IV. Embodied Spandrels: Situating the “dualist”/ “non-dualist” Deictic Center**

Spandrel theory is implicit all throughout this article thus far. I have used phrases like ‘embodied consequence,’ ‘non-linear/non-additive consequence’ throughout this article as an allusion to it. The spandrel concept was formulated by Stephen Jay Gould and RC Lewontin, although I first encountered it in In the article “Critical Human Ecology: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws” (York and Mancus, 2006).

In this latter text, the authors insist that functionalist explanations are a “distorted” view of both natural and social phenomena. These authors insist that while societies are “clearly affected by their environments” they reject “the notion that most social features can be understood as adaptations to the environment.” They add:

“Cultural practices and institutions can just as well be maladaptive. Functionalist explanations tend to be imposed ad hoc on social phenomena and frequently do not reflect the complex historical routes that led up to social practices. Social structures can come into existence and be perpetuated for nonfunctional reasons.”

Non-functionalist interpretations of social features reject the idea that all praxis is uniquely “fit” to a given environment or niche. Murray’s quantitative analyses toe the line between being non-functionalist in their view of the structural correlates to gender/sexual variation in Africa; but Murray seems to suggest that a functionalist explanation is applicable to understanding why an expectation to procreate is made commensurate with said gender/sexual variation:

“In contrast to the homophobia Western homosexuals confront, the social pressure on Africans who desire same-sex relations is not concerned with their masculinity or femininity, their mental health, their sexual object preference and its causes, or the moral status of their sexual preference — but primarily with their production of children, especially eligible heirs, and the maintenance of a conventional image of married life. This social code does not require that an individual suppress same-sex desires or behavior but that she or he never allow such desires to overshadow or supplant procreation. This is a less drastic social contract than the one offered to Western gays to either repress same-sex desires and behaviors altogether or to accept a social outlaw status.” (274)

From Murray, it seems that regulations on same sex desire/behavior that pathologize mental health, sexual activity, gender expression are *unique to the Western context*. I agree here. In the African context, the regulations are absent, for the sociogenic “code” would seem to reinforce expansive gender/sexual expressions so long as they do not interfere with biological reproduction, as well as social reproduction of heirs and the conjugal/family unit (remember, many African societies are concerned with Lineal inheritance and enatic or agnatic configurations of the non-nuclear household).

I do, however, take issue with the claim that non-dualist configurations of gender/sexual embodiment are a function of the reproductive mandate as it exists in African traditions. One is left wondering why a similar or analogous commensurability between the two has become commonplace in the West only as a *consequence of contemporary homonationalism*, the consumer tendency in Global North tendencies we mentioned earlier which modifies biomedical corrective pathologization of queerness/transness by organizing LGBT+ subjects as capable of working or marrying just like anyone else.

The historical developments in Western substructural and superstructural relations reorganizing LGBT+ subjects might seem “adaptive” for Western biological and social reproduction mandates, but as we should know this fails to extend to the African context where a steady globalization of the nuclear family ideal and a Western pathologization of gender/sexual expansivity has actually *been sustained by homonationalism*.

And then, in African traditions, as well as that of other non-Western societies, the configuration of expansive gender/sexual traits within substructural and superstructural relations might seem “maladaptive” precisely because of having no bearing on the success of any one specific mode of production or of material provisioning, subsistence pattern, social organization *relative to the pre-eminence achieved currently by the West*. This is the case even when gender non-dualism gets organized within hierarchies and class divides of some indigenous societies.

As a transfeminist, I can only walk away feeling that the “color line” unevenly distributes where adaptation and maladaptation is mapped, but I know this cannot be a merely reproductive matter as “the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America

and the islands of the sea” as du Bois once put it is a *selectively neutral phenomenon*. This does not mean it imposes *no* constraints on either social or natural evolution, however, and that is the point of spandrel theory.

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When Gould and Lewontin first turned to that concept, they were addressing an audience of scientists who they accused of viewing *every outcome* of the evolutionary process in terms of optimization. This “Panglossian” optimism as they termed it (26, *The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould*) was something they compared to what the average person’s mind does if they see a domed ceiling at the top of rounded arches in a Cathedral.

Someone who is not a specialist in architecture might look at the elaborate designs on the “v-shaped” or triangular bottom edge of the dome — which connects it to the arches. They’ll incorrectly assume “these beautiful spandrels were the key design feature of that part of the building” (25, *The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould*). But, those “v-shaped,” decorated connective “spandrels” are something that an architectural expert knows to be *merely a consequence of the design and construction process*.

As Goeller’s reading of Gould puts it: “spandrels are merely an *inevitable side effect* of domes on arches. One might as well decorate them, but these decorations should not be confused as being an essential part of the design” (emphasis added by me). For those who might be struggling with this visual metaphor, suppose you drew a square. Then, suppose you drew a circle on the inside of the square, but specifically in a way where the edges of the circle touched all four sides of the square. Now, there would be space left over in between the outer edge of the circle, and the four angles of the square. These “left-over” spaces are somewhat triangular in shape, but they are not the key design feature of the image you just drew; they are a byproduct of the constraints that come of designing a circle with a circumference that touches all four sides of a square. Those “consequences” are Spandrels.

Gould and Lewontin used the difference in a layperson’s versus expert’s response to the *sight of the art put on a spandrel* to make a critique of many of their scientific colleagues. The pair felt as though, alongside selective pressures, there existed channels and constraints imposed by an organism’s *form* and its *trajectory of development* (24). These are selectively neutral pressures on how the *organism chooses to transverse the changing environment* (23).

To Gould and Lewontin, like the “beautifully decorated spandrels” of dome-arch construction, such biological features were a *nonadaptive byproduct of the evolutionary process*; they did not inherently serve an adaptive function (nor could they ad hoc be framed as maladaptive). Spandrels were not, however, irrelevant to evolution, nor did they marginalize selection. Gould and Lewontin wanted to give spandrels their due without downplaying the role of natural selection in the evolutionary process.

Many of their critics certainly felt that the pair was putting the former before the latter, though, accusing them of ultimately breaking away from Darwin. Goeller helps explain the pair’s *actual* point in detail, highlighting how they both agreed that the selection-focused “approach of looking at a feature and asking “what does this do to help its host?” has been fruitful in determining the function of such features from the pituitary gland in the brain to one-way valves in blood vessels” (*The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould*)

Selective pressures *are* important. Even in the architecture metaphor, the fact that people build shelter has its roots in some kind of benefit (keeping us warm or cool from the elements, or allowing us to protect ourselves from danger). But, there are all kinds of elaborations on the practice of building shelter that exceed such an explanation (no other shelter-building species is noted for constructing the various houses of worship that we do). Similarly, Gould and Lewontin were trying to correct their colleagues for

“invariably assuming that any feature or structure must serve, or in the past have served, some purpose that was favored over many generations by natural selection. In this view, for example, when ancestral humans lost most of their body hair but retained their eyebrows, their starting point would be that eyebrows serve (or served) a function, leading to favorable treatment at the hands of natural selection. All that remained was to come up with a “just-so story,” Gould charged, to explain what that function might be. Lip service might be paid to non-adaptationist arguments, but in practice it was almost always assumed — usually with no evidence — that the form of any given structure in an organism was the result of natural selection working on highly plastic material. Here and elsewhere, he essentially accused the adaptationist orthodoxy of replacing the all-powerful and optimizing God of “natural theology” — another popular topic in these essays — with natural selection as His secular equivalent.”

We find, according to Goeller, that Gould and Lewontin were butting up against a religious sociogenic “code” that pointed scientists to an overemphasis on selection as the explanation for evolutionary outcomes. It is in this way that the frame of reference for how any observed feature or variation was to be evaluated had to *always already be a purpose*. In “Critical Human Ecology: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws,” York and Mancus make it clear that spandrel theory is not just a useful correction in biology, but also in ecology and the field of sociology:

“Gould (2002) presents a particularly clear illustration... He explains that “snails that grow by coiling a tube around an axis must generate a cylindrical space, called an umbilicus, along the axis” (2002:1259). Although a “few species use the open umbilicus as a brooding chamber to protect their eggs” (2002:1259), most do not. Historical evidence indicates that “umbilical brooders occupy only a few tips on distinct and late-arising twigs of the [snail] cladogram [evolutionary tree], not a central position near the root of the tree” (2002:1260). It, therefore, is clear that the umbilicus is not produced for adaptive reasons, although it has been made use of in some lineages. Rather, the umbilicus is a spandrel — a nonadaptive structural side effect of a process of growth where a tube is coiled around an axis. One of Gould and Lewontin’s key points is that structural features exist for clear material reasons, and in some cases may be of utility, but their origins are not necessarily explained by functional demands.”

What’s key here is that there are unique developments of some organisms on the snail cladogram. It’s correlated to a species specific potentiality for growing around a coiled axis. Only some of these organisms occasionally apply the umbilicus which emerged from that growth process to



how they protect their eggs. But these are *not* positioned as possessors of an innate or intrinsic evolutionary advantage, if the notion of Spandrel is taken up.

In relinquishing a functionalist interpretation of umbilical brooding, it becomes clear that a phenomenon such as this one is among the many examples of realities that *have material origins, but are not ends unto themselves or even adaptively suited designs*. These being consequences of other developmental processes, some lineages *may make use of them* but that observation doesn't lend itself to a functionalist conclusion.

Another example that is a bit more relevant to human sciences: orca social relations. Orcas pods are noted for engaging at times in what some researchers can only refer to as "fads." These expressions of orca activity *have not been explained by the notion of adaptive function*, but they are also not maladaptive either. Because of that reason, it became confusing to explain why, in 2022, a particular pod of orcas off the coast of Portugal and Spain made attacks on yachts and sailboats.

While quite a few pop theories online claimed the rammings were motivated by vengeance (in response to the reported killing of a member of the pod by boaters in the region), much doubt shrouds these claims. For some researchers, it seems like the orcas view bumping against boats as a game or plaything, much like the other "fads" observed in other orca pods, such as balancing dead salmon on their noses in a pod observed in 1987 (Tara Haelle, "The Mystery of Orca Trends," scienceandthesea dot org). The fact that the 2022 orca fad involved perceived "vengeance" is probably a *consequence of* the overall problem of human (bourgeois) *encroachment* by boat of the waterways which that particular orca pod frequented.

There are other instances in the social lives of non-human species that don't line up with adaptationist explanations, and would best be explained as nonadaptive consequences of historical developments. In the 2010s, among the Fongoli band of chimpanzees, the researcher Jill D. Pruetz observed a strange twist in cooperative behaviors among these organisms: the band decided to *collectively ostracize* a member. Then, the band joined up and committed a group slaying against this outcast, killing and even cannibalizing him.

While some researchers have linked expressions of chimpanzee aggression to sexual competition *between males* (an adaptationist explanation), in the Fongoli case, *both male and female members of the band coordinated the attack*. Importantly, Pruetz who studies the Fongoli band, suggests that the chimpanzees were responding to two things: first, Foudoko, the member they had slain, was originally a leader of the band, and an abusive, overtly aggressive one at that (to the point of some Fongoli members fearing even his dead body). The second factor Pruetz points out is how *anthropogenic impacts on the Fongoli band's habitats* may have added an extra strain on their social relations, leading Foudoko's underlings to oust him from power and eventually take his life.

As with the orca pods story in 2022, the Fongoli chimpanzees are sometimes on the internet pointed to as an example of animals taking revenge for perceived injustice, although the scientific basis for such claims is wanting. For our purposes, the fact that male and female members of the band were operating in consequence of the development of human encroachment patterns, and not necessarily in competition for sexual dominance is key. Could both the orca "fads" and the group slaying be understood as spandrels?

I wanted to touch on two non-human cases that occurred in consequence of human matters because ultimately the entire reason why Gould and Lewontin's spandrel theory was met with such controversy was due to the *implications it has for biological and social studies of humanity*. As "The Worldviews of Stephen Jay Gould" sums it up, the response from critics revolved around the following questions:

"... is our large brain, and by extension our language-capable mind, the direct result of adaptive processes? That is, did a larger brain offer our ancestors a selective advantage over our primate and hominid relatives? Or is it instead a non-adaptive side effect — a spandrel — of some other process? Could it be that civilized life, which is so dependent on our huge brain and highly-developed mind, is merely a capitalization on a fortuitous happenstance? This debate, and others that appear to be about technical details and methodology, is at least in part about man's place in nature. Is man the inevitable result or the directed culmination of something, divine or secular? Or are we simply one species out of a million (albeit with the unusual ability to contemplate the distinction), a lucky accident, who too will also pass away, unmourned, like all of the others?"

Once again, there is a certain religiously-derived *reference point* for what it means to be human at play. Because of that *Origo*, researchers "point" to the features being observed in the evolutionary process and *can only evaluate those changes in a particular way*.

The onto-epistemic limit of those evaluations is, as we explored earlier, drawn by the maturation of bourgeois society. Scientists sought to reconcile the apparent directionality of their own society's evolution with an accumulation of ecological and social crises that demonstrated just how non-directional evolution could be. In particular, amidst colonial encounters with societies whose *trajectories of evolution involved distinct pathways and constraints*, an overemphasis on natural selection indexed these as out of step or even delayed in the path of Man's ascent (a relic of the earliest steps Man taken in his long, bold, and Promethean climb to civilizational pre-eminence).

A firm understanding of non-directionality and ultimately of anthropogenic environmental impact as well as the material basis of social oppression was then substituted for a moralism steeped in supremacism and racialism. Such unscientific explanations were eventually tempered somewhat by scientific realizations that the very traits coded as adaptive advantage can themselves be a cause of stressors on the environment; but bourgeois economics ensured such an insight would only be reckoned in terms of how stressors might be managed "efficiently" in society. Evolutionists then followed suit by rebaptizing fitness in the same terms, and once again "pointing" to Western Man as the deictic center.

Challenges to the old style racialized pseudoscience and the covert "new biologies" came out of Africa and the Third World consistently, of course, and as these perspectives gained ground in Marxist and other humanistic political circles, a body of research began to grow that tries still to make sense of evolutionary change without *solely* relying on selection as the answer. It makes sense that the spandrel concept would come up among such researchers, but remain unpopular in the bourgeois academe. The deictic center of evaluations concerning *selectively neutral constraints and pathways* is, I portend, those trajectories of human social evolution that *do not resemble the particular historical routes undertaken by the Man*. Gould and Lewontin may

not have articulated their critique of “Panglossian” optimism in those terms, but the point still stands (no pun intended).

A neutral constraint in African society that I want to highlight is described in Oyèwùmí’s works on gender and the Oyo-Yoruba context. As mentioned before, Oyèwùmí recognizes that trans people resonate with her scholarship; in particular she speaks of her curiosity about where Oyo-Yoruba society *might have gone in its development* as a “non-gendered” culture if a phenomenon like transness came into the equation (“Mother as Creator: A Perfect Power at the BMA, Lyric Prince, 2021). This is an important thought to keep in mind, as we do not want to ascribe functionalist intentions to Oyèwùmí’s arguments. It is not likely that her work asserts an *expressly gender expansive purpose* behind the privilege of Seniority in the Oyo-Yoruba context.

Contra Engels, the nexus of Seniority is not traced to some adaptive regulation against “male jealousy.” Instead, Oyèwùmí’s attention might be said to emphasize the *particular constraints and pathways endogenous to her context’s societal development* that have a ‘non-gendered’ world-sense and configurations of embodiment as the structural consequence. There are other subsets of human potential trait expression to consider, then.

One indication of this position can be detected in how Oyèwùmí describes obeisance customs in the Oyo-Yoruba setting, something we touched on earlier. It is not simply that anamales and anafemales all kneel (*kunle*) before the *oba*, Oyèwùmí demonstrates. There are also *variations* of this custom that appear to be gendered from a Western frame of reference:

“The distinction in Yorubaland between the way in which anatomic females pay obeisance to their superiors and the way in which anatomic males do is useful in elaborating the distinct but ungendered consideration of pregnancy. Any casual observer would notice that in the contemporary period, *obinrin* usually *kunle* (kneel down, with both knees touching the floor) when greeting a superior. *Okunrin* are seen to *dòbále* (prostrate themselves, lying flat on the ground and then raising their torsos with arms holding them up in a push-up pose). Some might assume that these two distinct forms of greeting are constructions of gender, yielding social valuations and difference. However, a simple association of anatomic females with kneeling and anatomic males with prostrating will not elucidate the cultural meanings of these acts. What is required is a comprehensive examination of all other modes of greeting and address, how they are represented in a multiplicity of realms, and how they relate to one another.”

As we mentioned before, rather than atomizing sex associated parts or *drawing causal lines to the behavioral* from them, Oyeronke Oyewumi’s attention is to how sex-associated body “parts” and a social “whole” (totality) is inflected by Oyo-Yoruba world-sense, organizing embodiments within a overall system of patron-client relations that “overlaps” (imbricates) at the nexus of Seniority.

She challenges a “body-reasoning” approach to the kneeling and prostration variations to obeisance practice, “pointing” us past the onto-epistemic limits drawn in the West. This allows her to re-interpret seemingly gendered obeisance custom, prioritizing a culture-specific frame of reference for anatomical and behavioral variation. She “points” through the Oyo-Yoruba deictic center in a way that *tracks evolutions in social embodiment*:

“It appears that in the past, *iyuka* was the primary mode of female obeisance to superiors. But over time, kneeling has become dominant. Thus, it would seem that the preferred position for paying obeisance for all persons, whether *obinrin* or *okunrin*, is for the “greeter” to prostrate to the “greetee.” I would assert that the contingencies of pregnancy led to the *iyuka* modification for anatomic *obinrin*. It is obvious that even pregnant *obinrin* can *yuka*, but they cannot prostrate easily. Johnson lends historical background to this interpretation. In the late nineteenth century, he observed that the mode of saluting a superior involved “the men prostrating on the ground, and the women sitting on the ground and reclining on their left elbow.” The predominance of *obinrin* kneeling is a more recent development. In fact, female prostration can be seen even today. I have observed *obinrin* prostrating themselves in the *oba*’s palace in Ogbomoso. Moreover, a common stance of worship of the deities is the *idobale*, irrespective of anatomic type. Therefore, the disassociation of *obinrin* from prostration is uncalled-for. Similarly, the disassociation of *okunrin* from kneeling is unwarranted.”

According to Oyěwùmí, there can be a superficial assumption that Yoruba “females” are *expected to kneel* before the *oba*, while Yoruba “males” are *expected to lay on the ground* prostrate (while lifting themselves by their arms). But this incorrect takeaway does not even line up with *some of the earliest observations* of Yoruba obeisance customs, much less with the actual context specific circumstances, Oyěwùmí suggests.

An early observer remarked that while the men lay prostrate, lifting themselves by the arms, the women also lay on the ground, but by propping themselves on the side using their elbows. Oyěwùmí puts attention to the *similarities in spatial orientation* in this earlier observation (both “sexes” are close to the ground and use their arms to lift themselves). She “points” to this similarity while naming her own observations: that it is common for both *okunrin* and *obinrin* to lay prostrate, as much as both often kneel before a superior (including during veneration of deities).

For Oyěwùmí, the apparent “gendering” of these customs is very recent. However, the “sex” differentiation is not: the variation in the low-to-ground, arms-propping custom that has anafemales laying on their side, using their elbow (as opposed to the “push up” position) is due to the “contingency of pregnancy.” This, is, once again, a *situational* “sexing” of the body, not unilaterally demanded of all those with the capacity to get pregnant.

In a Eurocentric context, though, a curtsy may be a female associated greeting or form of politeness, as rigid gender/sexual relations are central imbrication nexus for the overall relations of power, requiring a deferential posture for womanhood. One may then bring this specific interpenetration of sex-associated parts with a Patriarchal class society into analysis of Oyo-Yoruba culture and how human bodies relate more generally in that culture and other societies.

And thus, a superficial association of kneeling with *obinrin* and prostration with *okunrin* becomes a “proof concept” for the idea that sex dimorphism grounds gendered differences in social behavior and/or performance, or that every local society imposes the latter upon the former in maintenance of their power relations.

What Oyěwùmí hopes to challenge here is an interpretation of kneeling, prostration, and elbow-propping forms of obeisance that relies on Western assumptions about the interpenetration of sexed parts, gender ontology, and a social whole. To her, the elbow-propping is a *modified version of prostration*, the latter of which folks of multiple anatomical types can engage in.

This modification might be seen as adaptation, in the sense of a pregnant *obinrin* protecting the fetus from the effects of physical exertion or strain endured while laying prostrate and lifting themselves by the arm. But *functionalism is not sufficient* for explaining why it is not an ad hoc requirement of all *obinrin* nor why it was later shifted from an occasional, modified prostrate-position to now seemingly “gendered” tendency to never go low-to-the-ground at all (kneeling) instead.

No, those particular developments aren’t about the contingencies of childbearing, but rather a *non-adaptive consequence of those historical developments* that had “non-gendered” and then *only later* have ostensibly “gendered” the Yoruba world. In other words, what seems to be “gendered” about obeisance customs now is just a “beautifully decorated spandrel,” serving neither a function or design of its own, but rather emerging in consequence of *exogenous* substructural and superstructural processes. And so also, what is “non-gendered” about these customs is just a “beautifully decorated spandrel,” serving neither a function or design of its own, but rather emerging in consequence of *endogenous* substructural and superstructural processes.

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Some might find what I’m saying here confusing or just a bunch of “word salad.” If a custom *evolves as an embodied consequence of old or new conditions*, is this not the same as adaptation to a shifting environment (social context)? The answer is no, not if you want to be true to the understanding of adaptation as containing a benefit. What benefit would either variance from or alignment to some extent under foreign influence be said to have for societies that are still confronted by neocolonialism, in the wake of Grand Patriarchy and the imbrication of Minor Patriarchy?

Should selection remain our heuristic here, it runs the risk of framing the endogenous approach to reproductive questions as having been already flawed (unfit) in its development *prior* to the socioecological decay brought by colonialism-capitalism (exogenous). In that view, had it been “fit,” then the introduction of a perturbation would have caused internal changes that ultimately led to an organization of reproduction which could still allow the Yoruba to advance (survive) in spite of competition (struggle) with the West.

But obviously, the Yoruba, like other ethnic groups in modern Nigeria, are dealing with the ongoing and historical legacy of Euro-imperialism and slavery. This is the same dilemma that comes up for functionalist interpretation of non-Western cultures in other instances. Take for example discussions about anthropogenic environmental impact. The evolutionary pathways undertaken for indigenous ecogeny are sometimes idealized, according to York and Mancus. This becomes the suggestion that:

“...prior to the emergence of the “modern” scientific worldview in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for the most part there existed cultural constraints on overexploiting the environment — that is, functionalist cultural mechanisms for ensuring sustainability. Accordingly, because they viewed the earth as a living being, “premodern” societies were supposedly less inclined to commit ecocide.” (*Critical Human Ecology: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws*, 140).

In these kinds of ecological discourses, it is suggested that a non-scientific worldview among indigenous peoples was an adaptive function, a regulation on anthropogenic environmental im-

fact selected by the constraints of indigenous beliefs. For York and Mancus, this is a problem because it overlooks the “empirical evidence suggest[ing] that societies existing prior to the development of mechanistic philosophy and reductionist science had substantial impacts on the natural environment, undermining the assumption that societies free of the modern worldview live in harmony with nature” (141).

For our purposes, my issue with the claim is that it is not only idealistic concerning a biological potentiality for ecologically destructive behaviors, it stereotypes indigenous beliefs as on one hand non-scientific, and on the other, reduces them atomistically. But, just as Yoruba “world-sense” has a *context*, so also do indigenous spiritualities have a *context*. The regulatory constraints in the Yoruba tradition against permanent sexual dualism are both a matter of belief and also *an embodied consequence of evolutions in Yoruba material/power relations* (an important point for understanding how Patriarchy becomes localized). Similarly, if there are regulatory constraints in indigenous lifeways concerning the levels of ecocide associated with “modern” society, those are also non-adaptive consequences of evolutions in indigenous societies’ material/power relations (spandrels).

Viewing them as functional is dangerous because it would then leave the question: why were these indigenous systems not “fit” enough to survive the march of capitalism, and thus constrain the environmental devastations associated with the bourgeois mode of production? If they were optimized, then they would have adapted to the competitiveness of the modern Western scientific worldview, no? Had their prior evolutionary trajectory been “fit,” then they would have “caught up” amidst conditions of onto-epistemicidal decay to offer answers to *contemporary* climate crises, right?

Obviously, fitness and unfitness are irrelevant here however: indigenous peoples are dealing with the colonial-bourgeois substructure and a hybridly secular and religious superstructure. This isn’t to say we cannot *ever* identify adaptive features in societies (the relationship between cultivation of the “three sisters” in some North American indigenous societies and soil health/the nitrogen cycle is one example); it is also *not invalid* to look at maladaptive evolutionary outcomes (every revolutionary would consider the capitalist mode of production an overall maladaptive system when thinking about the sustainability of our planet and its resources).

The socialization of productive forces, furthermore, would greatly reduce added contributions to the accumulated legacy of anthropogenic impact. Even if it won’t guarantee that the extant residues of that legacy would not outlast capitalism, the *net benefits of capitalism’s destruction in long geological time* cannot be understated for the *eventual recovery* that geological cycles have demonstrated end to follow mass extinction events. Similarly, if we take Françoise Vergès’ historiography of Rapa Nui seriously, it is obvious that “Easter Islanders did not commit [ecological] suicide; they were the victims of systematic murder committed by Peruvian slave traders in the nineteenth century” (2017, *Racial Capitalocene*), demonstrating that social oppression is maladaptive for both humanity and the environment. The key is in figuring out, as York and Mancus put it, how to assess what “internal and external aspects of societies shape and constrain their evolution” while also understanding that “this dynamic does not *necessarily* lead to adaptation” (141, emphasis in original, *Critical Human Ecology: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws*).

Ironically, York and Mancus point to the much maligned Jared Diamond as an example of that approach. We will need to take time with their reading of Diamond in order to further demonstrate the uses of spandrel theory, especially visavis discussions of gender/sex(uality) and Patriarchy. Jared Diamond is quite controversial due to books like *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, which

aimed to provide a biophysical (ecology, climate, geography) explanation for why non-Western societies were so easily bested by European conquest. As the title suggests, the issue was both social (technological) and natural (involving things like the introduction of unfamiliar germs to some parts of the world, namely indigenous peoples of North, South, Central America, and the Caribbean). But York and Mancus try to show how Diamond's argument is a little more nuanced than the simple claim that Europeans brought particular socioecological features to the rest of the world.

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Diamond's account largely tries to explain why, in the development of agriculture, distinct features of the environment yielded different societal evolutionary trajectories. Agriculture in the Fertile Crescent looked different from agriculture in Australia (which, to Diamond's credit, is not always something acknowledged in the historiography of farming). This was, per York and Mancus' reading of Diamond, because in Australia there was significantly less diversity of the particular kinds of flora and fauna that are most "amenable" to domestication (141).

The diversity of *domesticable* wildlife in Fertile Crescent agricultural development increased the potential for large population sizes, heightened interactions between peoples, shifted social relations towards the development of writing, metallurgy, the rise of the state form and class societies, and allowed for the spread and concentration of disease, as well as larger-scale conquest (142). This particular account of agriculture/domestication and its correlates lines up with some ecofeminist historiography. Sanyika Shakur, whose concept of Grand Patriarchy and Minor Patriarchy we have utilized more than once here, also traces the patriarchal roots of social oppression and ecological devastation to the effects of domestication:

"Why is it necessary to speak about patriarchy if we are discussing homophobia? And, why begin with the oppression of women and children if this is about oppression of gender outlaws? Well, what we have to do is a bit of excavation — some radical anthropology, if you will, because the fact of the matter is, we know that things don't fall from the sky or magically appear out of thin air. We are looking for connections, contradictions and from these we'll be rewarded with the truth of origins and the internal dynamics in the life process of the thing. The "thing" in this particular study is oppression as manifested thru the system of patriarchy — which we contend is the origin of a vast array of other forms of oppression. Which is precisely why we brought in the domestication of animals. We are learning that the same techniques used to domesticate animals were also used in the colonization of women and children and eventually every culture they encountered. Breeding, birth control, castration, segregation, exploitation and mass murder were methods learned first on animals and then on humans. And there was always a symbiotic relationship of know-how used between the two areas of domestication of animals, including their mass killing for capitalist markets and the mass production of commodities, such as cars, in the development of capitalist industry." (2012, *The Pathology of Patriarchy: A Search for Clues at the Scene of the Crime*)

Shakur is transecting the oppression of women, children, and "gender outlaws" (a transfeminist coinage from Kate Bornstein that Sanyika uses throughout the text). There is an evolutionary

trajectory he points to, and tries to understand both *internal and external conditions that shape it*. To Shakur, domestication was patriarchal from its outset, imbricating an accumulation of techniques of control over human and non-human biological traits that culminated in the birth of capitalism. It is interesting to note that, etymologically speaking, the word “domesticate,” can also mean “to colonize” and it along with cognates like “dominion” or “dominate” are all traced to a Latin word for *home or household* (*domus*, from which we get “domestic”). The language around both human oppression and domestication of flora/fauna alike would seem to be “pointing” to patriarchy indeed.

While Jared Diamond’s account does not explicitly index patriarchy in his overview of domestication, per York and Mancus’ reading, his text does assert that “surplus facilitates the feeding of craft specialists, settlements, the accumulation of possessions, and an increase in population,” due to its shifting labor time away from matters of direct subsistence, maximizing nutrition, and bringing a more sedentary life. Diamond does not, of course, deem these outcomes inevitable: they are a matter of possibility. But, he highlights their effects on smaller, more dyadic (one-to-one) scales of organization as key to his account of the oppressive systems that result. The population question certainly makes configurations of sex pertinent, even if unspoken. York and Mancus put it this way:

“... as the population of a society grows, there is a greater tendency toward violence — because there are an increasing number of interactions between unrelated individuals — unless some novel form of conflict mediation is produced. Some way other than face-to-face interaction may emerge that serves to mediate not only conflict, but also to reach decisions that affect entire groups.” (142, *Critical Human Ecology: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws*)

According to Diamond, the sedentary agricultural societies of the Fertile Crescent, with their growing populations, increased labor specialization, and heightened conflicts. The State became a solution: it would facilitate economic distribution and information flows in order to allow for not only productive increase but management of conflict. But, the State also allowed *those who took headship thereof* to “exploit the system” of economic redistribution, conflict resolution, and information transfer that centralized authority allowed for. In York and Mancus’ words re: Diamond, by this, they could “reward themselves and their relatives, or others sharing in-group status” (143).

The fact that heads-of-state, according to this agriculture/domestication theory, would opportunistically wield decision-making power, control of information, and access to resources for both themselves and *their families or those in allegiance to them* is why such an account as this is useful for ecofeminists. The family unit in the Fertile Crescent is known to have been organized in a patriarchal manner; and those dynasties/households that commandeered the state, according to folks like Sanyika Shakur, unsurprisingly created religions to justify their political authority:

“The same patriarchy which first oppressed women, (after having perfected the methods on animals) as “inferiors”, went on to evolve into the judeo-christian and Islamic institutions or theology that have scorched the planet today. This is why in every major religion god is a he or him — Father, i.e. male (according to “gender”). The last messenger, prophet, offspring and the last one god supposedly spoke to — yep, you



guessed it, men. Coincidence? Natural? Not a chance. To make matters worse, as if patriarchy could even be content with one form of oppression, Euro-Supremacists went a step further than some unseen spirit in the sky, they painted a picture of their god-father's son in their image. They in effect became the prototype of the son of god image and thus in the direct lineage from god himself. Plato, Aristotle's teacher created the idea of the Great Chain of Being this formalized the belief of the Greeks that they ranked higher than non-Greeks, women, slaves and of course animals." (2012, *The Pathology of Patriarchy: A Search for Clues at the Scene of the Crime*)

These religious codes would come to regulate thought patterns that reflected a patriarchal set of gender configurations. They emerged in different ways across Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern (as well as North African) societies, but ultimately towards the same end: accumulation of human and natural resources visavis agricultural surplus and the state. What's missing from Sanyika Shakur's account, though, is that there are highly stratified agricultural societies which did not evolve the kinds of religious or supremacist beliefs associated with the Greeks and Levantine monotheisms. In Africa, for example, some forms of agricultural surplus did support "the emergence of powerful states" (4, *Africa and African Homosexualities*) that had "complex political and legal systems" and were "typically ruled by divine kings" (2, *Africa and African Homosexualities*).

But the assumption of patriarchal religion modeled in the eurasian context is questionable. These cultures not only had distinct belief systems that combine monotheistic and animist as well as pantheist elements, *but often recognized genderless divinities* (as Sunjdatta explored). On that note, and particularly in response to Diamond, we might also recall our earlier read of Sam Mbah on Age-gradation customs. These not only helped organize *agricultural labors* but also helped to stall intra-lineal/intra-clan conflict in parts of West Africa *without the need of a state*. Through Sundjata's reading of Nwando Achebe, furthermore, we learned about how the matricephaly of *otu umuada* played a mediating role in conflicts between Igbo lineages, a social context that was also agricultural. There, surplus was often distributed in the market by *nwanyi* and *not managed by a state*. This is why *non-functionalist challenges* to Diamond from York and Mancus become useful:

"It is perhaps more appropriate to note that in societies with small populations — for example, several hundred or only a few thousand people — it is simply not possible to have an extraordinary diversity of social positions. In large societies, of say millions, the possibility of highly specialized social roles emerges, although such specialization is not inevitable. Thus, changes in social structure as populations grow can be seen as structural consequences of this growth, where growth undermines some social forms — for example, by making impossible face-to-face interaction among all members of a society with a population in the millions — and opening up a variety of different potential pathways for social evolution. However, it is an error to see the new forms of social organization that become possible with larger societies as improving the function of the society, and particularly to see them as emerging because of a functional need. Many features of societies may, therefore, be better understood as spandrels rather than adaptations." (134)

The authors use the spandrel concept to see labor specialization, social stratification, and hierarchy as not something *caused* by agricultural surplus' effects on population size, but rather a *potential pathway for social evolution*. From this perspective, the possibility for the kinds of States/class societies in the Fertile Crescent emerges in *nonadaptive consequence* of population growth correlated to agricultural surplus. These pathways are not inevitabilities, however, just *subsets* of potential evolutionary development.

So, the fact that larger societies have more potential pathways toward a diversification and hierarchization of social positions is *not a guarantee* of the actual emergence of the same. Sam Mbah and IE Igariwey touch on an example of an agricultural society which was remarkably "homogenous, sedentary, and egalitarian" (38), that of the Tallensi of contemporary Ghana. Theirs is a clan based (Lineal) society, with both gerontocracy and patriliny present, an age-gradation system, and "the practice of convening mass assemblies" across corporate units in Tallensi homesteads.

Sanyika Shakur's analysis of patriarchy could stand to benefit from the way a spandrel interpretation nuances the domestication theory of statecraft/conquest and class society. It is important to remember that agriculture is but one form of domestication: pastoralism (which is less about flora and more about fauna) as well as horticulture (which is less about fauna and more about flora) exist. The relationship between types of domestication and forager ("hunter-gatherer" existence) or correlations between types of domestication and a sedentary or nomadic lifestyle raise even more questions for Sanyika Shakur's account.

And, we've already demonstrated throughout this article that even *some* dynasties/kingdoms (centralized states and class societies, typically agricultural and sedentary) have *exhibited gender expansive characteristics*. From Murray and Roscoe's anthology, further, we learn that a range of expansive gender/sexual configurations can be identified in Africa, correlating to contexts that exhibit all manner of domestication and subsistence practices (be these horticultural, pastoral, agricultural, and more), and occurring in both *egalitarian and stratified modes of social organization*. Clearly, the routes toward patriarchal imbrication when correlated to dynastic headship of agricultural surplus and the state in one context are spandrels: non-adaptive consequence of regionally particular constraints. The potential pathways for a development of gender dualism in the context of Shakur's consideration are *not historical inevitabilities*.

Even the "Minor" Patriarchy that Sanyika Shakur gives name to can be detected in non-agricultural, non-sedentary, parts of the non-Western world, be these stratified in other ways *or not*, and this is at times, ironically, ends up still being concordant with expansive gender/sexual configurations (such are the ambiguities that come up in the data collated in *Boy Wives, Female Husbands* concerning Africa). The particular substructural and superstructural constraints and pathways in each given context are correlated to non-adaptive (selectively neutral evolutionary) consequences that we should and can elaborate on.

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I want to be clear that the use of spandrel theory is *not* a recourse to hyperlocalism and hyperparticularism, though. Atomizing social realities endogenous to one context from exogenous forces (including more-than-human phenomena) would defeat the purpose of me having spent so much time *tracing scientific challenges to a reductionist perspective*. It also flies in the face of

dialectics to not foreground what Lewontin and Levins speak of as an “interpenetration of parts and wholes.”

My attention to forces *alongside* natural selection, that involve context-specific constraints and pathways, is a heuristic for transecting the dialectics of *sociogenic* embodiment. I look toward, borrowing words from Cesaire, a universalism that “accounts for all the particulars.” Objectivity is not relinquished in favor of subjectivity; like Marsha P Johnson I’m simply interested in how “history *isn’t* something you look back at and *say it was inevitable*, it happens because *people make decisions* that are sometimes very impulsive and of the moment, but *those moments are cumulative realities*” (emphasis added).

What were the choices made in non-adaptive consequence of historical circumstances within, between, and across societies, that appears to “cumulate” as a global, universal patriarchy? Engels could stand to ask if patterns of “male jealousy” in the ancestors of early *Homo sapiens* emerged non-adaptively visavis *context specific constraints on subsets of potential pathways of development*. By extension, the purported dissection of “male jealousy” in the cooperative life and “free love” of early *Homo sapiens* might very well have been an embodied spandrel, if it occurred at all, emerging in consequence of context-specific constraints on subsets of potential evolutionary development.

Similarly, the evolution of human substructural and superstructural relations into religiously-defended class societies and states, is this not a non-adaptive consequence of subsets of potential evolutionary development, indicative of context specific constraints on the pathways undertaken by different populations, groups, actors? I understand that the Zoroastrian turn in the Old Avestan period had its influence on the later emergence of Levantine monotheism not just because of its ethics-centered approach to cosmological dualism (regulating human will in terms of a battle between a divine source of good versus that of evil). Amidst a long regional shift from pastoralism to sedentary-agriculturalism (the history is shrouded in myth), conversion to belief in one “god” by some Avestan Cephales — often heads-of-state, household heads, or those representing the authority thereof — was invited of other nearby Cephales within the then-predominant polytheistic class societies of the ancient Near East and Central Asia as a certain tribe/class sought control of the throne or empire. This is not the pattern undergone for the evolution of monotheism among the Oromo people in the Horn of Africa, whose faith system (*Waaqeffanna*) lacks a holy book, but reveres one God, does not exclude women from being divine messengers, and is organized in support of the democratic and gerontocephalous social system called *Gadaa*. And the one noted instance of monotheism in Africa tied to a highly stratified class society and process of political transformation actually failed: the Amarna heresy in ancient Kmt (Egypt), in which Akhenaten, head of the Egyptian state, failed to get the regional priests and scribes to follow his worship of the sun deity *Aten* in place of the traditional belief in many divinities. Even when monotheism has hierarchical social correlates, the amassing of political power is not a historical inevitability.

In *The Weapon of Theory*, Cabral permits that the emergence of class divides is *not* a historical inevitability, owing to the “internal rhythms” of a socioecological process that would only change visavis the “interruption” by exogenous forces. Perhaps Cabral would do better not to regard the accumulation driving the latter as a “historical mission” — a purpose, telos — instead treating it as a spandrel (non-adaptive evolutionary consequence of the subsets of potential pathways constrained by context-specific, selectively neutral forces). And Rodney: in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* he also acknowledges that the unidirectional “sequences of modes of production noted in Europe were not reproduced in Africa...” due to how “elements that were communal co-

existed with elements that were feudal,” their transition also being “characterized by a variety of social formations... pastoralists and cultivators, fishing societies and trading societies, raiders and nomads...” But Rodney’s analysis could benefit from understanding what he calls the “progressively” interlinked relationship “with the land, with each other, and with the state through the expansion of productive forces and of the network of distribution” as a spandrel (non-adaptive evolutionary consequence of the subsets of potential pathways constrained by context-specific, selectively neutral forces). It was not historical inevitability.

And I have a feeling that comrade Sundjata would agree: the apparent rarity of a tributary mode of production in the African societies he describes via critical engagement with Samir Amin, or even the local turn to *alternative routes of surplus accumulation* (like slave labor) in place of private property in some African societies that he describes via critical engagement with Rodney, Sekou Touré, and historian John Thornton — these are more than likely non-adaptive evolutionary consequence of the subsets of potential pathways constrained by context-specific, selectively neutral forces. It was not a historical inevitability.

And, one would hope that the *expectation to procreate* which Murray describes of Africa societies, apparently *commensurate with the variations in gender/sexual embodiment* that run the gamut of productive modalities, subsistence patterns, linguistic groups, etc — is a unique feature that Murray and the contributors to *Boy Wives, Female Husbands* might consider regarding as *non-adaptive evolutionary consequence of the subsets of potential pathways constrained by context-specific, selectively neutral forces*. It is not a historical inevitability.

In Wynterian thought as well: that a sociogenic “code” is described by her as a “truth for” a given culture is likely an indication that the emergence of “bios/mythoi” neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanisms among early *Homo narrans* was a non-adaptive evolutionary consequence of the subsets of potential pathways constrained by context-specific, selectively neutral forces. Not a historical inevitability.

And, lastly, for Fanon’s interventions into phylogenetic and ontogenetic theories: that he says “[e]verything up to and including the very nature of precapitalist society, so well explained by Marx, must here be thought out again” because “[i]n the colonies the economic *substructure is also a superstructure*. The *cause is the consequence*; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (39, *The Wretched of the Earth*, emphasis added by me) could also indicate that the division of “statutory difference” between the serf and knight, or between the colonizer and colonized, are also non-adaptive evolutionary consequence of the subsets of potential pathways constrained by context-specific, selectively neutral forces. Not a historical inevitability.

This is what Jared Diamond ultimately cannot account for in his analysis of colonialism. The introduction of peoples and ecologies of the Western Hemisphere into Europeans’ social relations and worldview was a historical *contingency*, not inevitability. And it was one that Europeans *did not respond to uniformly* based on their preceding patterns of state building, class interrelation, agriculture, etc. His assertion that the latter conditioned technological superiority and introduction of germs, as well as geographical proximity to coasts that frequented trade on the high seas, is also premature.

In fact, Europeans had attempted large scale accumulation of territory prior to 1492, for example the Crusades, but failed. The technologies used during those attempted capturings of Palestine, or even in the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula did not change in the late 1400s because of metallurgy or nautical advancements alone, either. Long before the late medieval period, as far

back as the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, iron working and gold production were staples of imperial development in places like what is known now as Ghana, whilst Europeans were “devastated by plagues and interminable dynastic wars” (4, *Africa and African Homosexualities*).

Gunpowder, furthermore, was in use by the North African Muslim Moors, who ruled Al-Andalus (modern Spain and Portugal) for centuries. Other populations who had long histories of trade with medieval China in the Islamic world, or in South and Southeast Asia who had come into contact with the Mongols, gained awareness of gun technologies while Europe was in its “dark ages” too. There is no ad hoc guarantee that Islamization in parts of West Africa and East Africa, or contact with maritime traders from India to Southern African coastal societies, *could not* have at some point spread gun-based warfare to the political entities developing in these relational contexts.

Further, had Europeans’ religious mores continued to *inhibit* a certain degree of entrance into these West, North, East, Southern African and Middle Eastern as well as Asian trade networks, they could *never* have begun to even *consider* achieving a certain level of accumulation. Even then, once again, as Sundjata reminds us, it was “European “discovery” of the Americas, which displaced the world center of the gold trade from West Africa to Latin America (121).” (*Black Against Profit, pt IV: Timbuktu to Babylon*). Without the *accident* of happening upon another Hemisphere, Europeans would not have grown the trades in goods and slaves to the scales they ended up reaching, nor would the merchant towns and early bourgeoisie have actually been able to advance past what was previously attempted when Europeans had underperformed in those trades in the first place.

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The attention to beautifully (and sometimes grimly) elaborated spandrels is much more rigorous, ultimately because it forces us to think of societies and the organisms that comprise them as *both objects and subjects of evolution*. The “modern synthesis” in evolutionary thought that Gould and Lewontin were working in was *hesitant* to accommodate this kind of perspective, insisting instead on a view of the organisms as *object* of evolution, yes, but *not* a subject.

Lewontin and Levins devote a whole essay in *The Dialectical Biologist* to why the latter view was more popular (85). In brief, their critique should be kind of obvious: bourgeois society needs to rationalize itself through the idea that we are all passive, though somewhat malleable, recipients of selective pressures (objects of evolution). Feminist theories of “gendered socialization” often rely on this same conception, which makes gendered social being adapted to a given set of historical conditions.

The emphasis on selection (putting organism or society as a flexible recipient of evolutionary processes) is not inherently wrong. Darwin helped defeat a previous view which saw the organism as invariably the *subject* of evolution, *never* an object, whose internal response to a static environment could direct changes that “unfold” from inward at individual whim before passing those “advantages” down (86). Similarly, feminist theories of “socialization” depart from simplistic explanations of gender that reduced to something innate (often) spiritual about the so-called “sexes” — a la, men are from Mars, women are from Venus type thinking.

Organism as subject, not object shows up in pseudosciences of today that speak of diet and exercise or even sexual discipline as a way to “hack” one’s neurochemistry or “hack” one’s genome. These revivals of old style “transformational” views (as Lewontin and Levins call it) misrepresent

ontogenetic development, and project an often ethnosupremacist understanding of phylogenetic advantage. So their push for a carnivorous diet in places like the US is one instance of viewing the *white* human organism as a *subject/agent* of evolution. The “soy boy” myth is deeply racialized. And, in their recognizing the existence of plant-based estrogens, they reductively construe testosterone as the masculine/male hormone, and insist on augmenting its endogenous production through both brutal exercise regimens and a diet consisting almost entirely of meat, all as a *way to overcome perceived civilizational decline and avert the “great replacement” of the so-called “white race.”*

Darwin preferred to speak of “descent by modification” and not the term “evolution” precisely because the etymology of the latter implies a “traits are unrolling” view (organism as subject, not object) that he hoped a grasp of natural selection *would ultimately displace*. His was a “variational” theory (per Lewontin and Levins) that substituted an organism who *willed* variation to master a passive environment for an organism who *received* mutations “randomly” from its attempts to confront problems posed by an active, ever changing environment. In feminist thought, the “canalization” process of social forces is also posing problems to the gendered subject by which one receives their differentiation into a particular sense of self, a there has completely holding power over their own subjectivity.

But, as I’ve hoped to demonstrate, a “strict” Darwinism (per Gould’s critique) has its limits. It suggests that “development does nothing but provide the raw material for the forces of natural selection. The external chooses which of many possible internal states shall survive” (87, *The Dialectical Biologist*). Traits are sorted. Mainstream feminism operates on similar logic, which is why trans identities become seen as overdetermined by the dominant set of social relations.

On the other hand, spandrel theory and its attention to contingencies and non-linear/non-additive phenomena allow us to appreciate how much “the environment and the organism actively codetermine each other. The internal and the external factors, genes and environment, act upon each other through the medium of the organism” (89). Traits are constructed. This understanding can illuminate trans as well as cis experience of embodiment.

This latter point is why I often borrow terms from trans healthcare: endogenous, meaning “of internal origin,” and exogenous, meaning “of external origin.” When one undergoes hormonal therapy, whether they are trans or not, there are dynamics internal to one’s endocrine system and the interactions concerning the sex-associated trait composition one has within their body. Now, during hormonal therapy, these internal forces/factors become interpenetrated with dynamics and interactions concerning the external/introduced hormones or hormone blockers. These dynamics and interactions are not purely biological; one’s self consciousness is, owing to a biological potentiality for certain human cognitive faculties (though non-linearly/non-adaptively), “sociogenic” (per Wynter). And it mediates how social forces, themselves to some extent a consequence of trajectories of ecological development, are potentiated by metabolic constraints (though non-adaptively/non-functionally).

Hence, a “transition” ends up emerging at the “nexus” of substructure and superstructure, with context specific outcomes as far as the meanings and the configurations of biological traits. If the “nexus” is not Gender, then the endogenous-exogenous interpenetration will not organize sex-associated trait presentations into a dualism, even if it appears that a “transition” is being undergone (whether through hormones or other alterations to embodiment). That is why, in some contexts, the term “trans” becomes anachronistic. But, if the “nexus” is Gender, then the endogenous-exogenous interpenetration will organize sex-associated trait presentations into a

dualism, such that “transitioning” has to be described as a matter of either ‘feminizing’ or ‘masculinizing’ therapy (whether through hormones or other alterations to embodiment).

There is no pathology at the level of ontogeny for why these “transitions” emerge in the Dualist context, nor is there a pathology at the level of phylogeny for why Non-dualist contexts demonstrate a “mutability” (to borrow Oyèwùmí’s phrasing) of biology that resembles or could allow for “transition.”

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Rhetoric of pathology might lead one to embark on the pursuit of a single gene though, to explain why some people desire to “transition” or why some people exhibit “cross/mixed-gender” behavioral tendencies. But this would be a misguided attempt. Only at “simple levels of control of enzyme production and activity,” Lewontin and Levins argue, can a model be provided for *somewhat* understanding the relationship between “gene, environment, and such traits as shape, size, and behavior” (pg. 93, *The Dialectical Biologist*).

Otherwise, at more complex levels, the “consequence of gene, environment, and developmental noise is a many-to-many relationship between gene and organism” (even cisgender development, whether for intersex or perisex folks of non-trans experience, should be interpreted in this light. Although nobody ever suggests we need research to explain “why” someone *isn’t* transgender!).

Say then that one tries to isolate a particular set of neuron activities that regulate the experience of so-called gender dysphoria, or even of gender euphoria. Should those developments at the ontogeny level be isolated, they may very well demonstrate themselves to be something “contingent,” because “the effect of a force cannot be specified in general but only in a particular context” (pg. 94).

In fact, where one study found that transgender brain activity differed from that of cisgender men *and* cisgender women (Flint et al, 2020, Biological sex classification with structural MRI data shows increased misclassification in transgender women), another study found that brain activity of trans individuals “more closely resembles the typical activation patterns of their desired gender” (Baker, et. al 2018, European Society of Endocrinology).

These studies, are conflicting in their results for many reasons, including the possibility that “applying binary classifiers contrary to the notion that a mere binary classification may be insufficient to capture interactions between biological sex and gender identity” (Kurth, et al. 2022, Brain Sex in Transgender Women Is Shifted towards Gender Identity). Binary classifications are untenable because, ultimately, even for the cisgender control group in brain research, “modern neuroscientists have identified no decisive, category-defining differences between the brains of men and women” according to Lise Eliot (2019, “Bad Science and the Unisex Brain”). *The frame of reference is already unstable.*

Some of the literature, for both trans and cis brain activity, might then turn to hormonal causes, particularly those centering on perturbations during pregnancy while a fetus is developing in the womb. Even then, as a consequence of developmental contingency, Lewontin and Levins argue that “ontogeny is not a linear array of stages, one leading always to a particular next stage, but a branched set of pathways,” and that most developmental processes fall somewhere “in between” the most extreme expressions of these general principles” (pg. 96).

It is from here that these authors argue that “the organism, irrespective of the internal and external forces that influenced it, enters directly into the determination of its own future,” as far as its transition to a given state based on the state it was in at the time of transition. The fact that “gendered” playtime behaviors during early childhood is *often the reference point* for inquiry into natal hormone exposure is a case in point. The child’s behavioral entrance within social norms is what occasions the onto-epistemic inclination to enumerate the development of embodiment that exists “in between” a sex-associated dipole, although the pathways are not at all linear (also, why do they never come to our attention when the child is gender conforming?).

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Shifting to a phylogenetic focus, we’ve demonstrated that the driver of evolutionary change is not ad hoc problems posed by the external world which “select” from the survival and reproduction strategies of “those whose morphological, physiological, and behavioral traits represent the best solutions to the problem” (pg. 97). Another way of saying this is that evolutionary does not ad hoc ensure “that the organism is molded and shaped to fit into a preexistent niche” (pg. 98).

Socially, this means the superficially bimodal distribution of sex-associated traits does not cumulate, additively to “convergent homologues” of gender binaries in every society. Just as, biologically, one cannot ad hoc assume that appendages of land-based animals, flying species, and aquatic species are automatically “fine tuned” convergently by their environment. In principle, according to Lewontin and Levins, *a niche doesn’t exist a priori* of the “life activity” of the organism under consideration. The hunter-gatherer theory from EO Wilson is flawed, then.

On principle, the example Lewontin and Levins use here is how scientists might elucidate the ecological niche of a bird, which must be defined in practice by: what it consumes, “where it builds its nest, how much time it spends foraging in different parts of the trees or ground, what its courtship pattern is, and so on” in their words. It is thus that *organisms will “determine” what is relevant about their niche* (pg. 99) and that organisms will *alter the environment as they are interacting with it*. In the Agta example, we saw that there was clearly self-definition of what about the external and internal environment was relevant to the organization of the forager practice being analyzed.

On principle, Lewontin and Levins lay out a series of conclusions drawn from examinations of how thrushes and woodpeckers relate to their environment *and* food sources; different ways that (micro)climates and leaves, insects, land organisms and ectoparasites *interact at the level of gene, habitat and metabolism*; and how plant roots alter soil chemistry and composition, how beavers may actually *recreate the landscape itself*, how living organisms are *both regulated by but also regulating of atmospheric gas composition*.

Furthermore, the authors highlight ways “organisms transduce the signals that reach them from the outside world,” (pg. 100). The pair looks at the *species specific manner by which mammals, ants, and bees, will or will not experience biophysical responses to external signals*. The inner organs of a *mammal* detect *temperature change* not as a thermal change, for example, but rather as a *chemical* one; an *ant* will experience prolonged exposure to *sunshine as hunger*; the *light and sound waves* associated with a rattlesnake rattling its tail will “fall” on the eyes and ears of a mammal who has the capacity to hear or see and be “transformed by the neurosecretory system



into chemical signals of fear” (pg. 101); and *bees* can see in the *ultraviolet range*, which helps them find food sources, although for *humans*, exposure to *UV radiation can become harmful*.

Physical signals become significant in different ways for new species, they suggest. To that point, a human person may either see or hear a rattlesnake and the transduction of those signals at the neurochemical and physical level will also be accompanied by (and even defined or regulated behaviorally by) those sociogenic questions such as the *culture specific interpretation of what a rattlesnake noise or rattlesnake’s presence may or may not be associated with spiritually or in one’s personal life/memories*.

Sociogeny is therefore an essential register to consider here (alongside phylogeny/ontogeny): that the regulatory system alters sugar and hormone concentration in the blood as a response to temperature fluctuations might be *differentially experienced* across human populations based on geography, access to cooling technologies, or the manner by which colonialism-imperialism and racial capitalism have disproportionately and unevenly *exacerbated heat exposure risks in various parts of the Third World*. The likelihood of detrimental prolonged exposure to UV radiation for human skin cells is similarly *raised* by the equally detrimental *effects of a human mode of production* on the presence of an *ozone layer* in the atmosphere, an economic system kept in place partly by a profit incentive *rationalized in the dominant episteme as “Man’s” evolutionary advantage* or Divinely ordained right protected by the State.

Sociogenesis exhibits valency in other ways. As Lewontin and Levins write: “organisms transform the statistical pattern of variation in the external world” (pg. 101). External fluctuations can be transformed by, or even magnified by biological processes within the organism, *or behavioral changes by populations of organisms*. This, they say, can be as small as fat or carbohydrate storage vis-a-vis fluctuations in resource availability, the storage of sunlight by plant seeds for *later use* and the “conversion” of the “plant storage mechanism” when it is brought into the biological rhythms *of animals that consume and store seeds*, and even shifts in food sourcing and reproduction strategies, or the conversion of a “frequency of external fluctuations to a cycle of a different frequency” (the example used here is cicada hatching *cycles*). The “third level” at which this principle can be applied, the text suggests, is in how humans “*engage in planned production that responds to fluctuations in demand*” (emphasis added by me).

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Planned production is a question of modes of material provisioning, patterns of ownership, relations of production and the level of productive forces, and *thus must also involve sociogeny* – in its embodied configuration of life-activity at the nexus of substructure and superstructure. This is how modes of material provisioning, patterns of ownership, relations of production may become anchored around Seniority as a Nexus in various domains for those societies where that is the pattern, or around Gender in various domains for those societies where that is the pattern. Or, organized production might “overlap” around Matriliney in some respects, and Patriliney in other respects (and the interaction between the two nexuses may overlap at some point in certain social domains and diverge at others). Decision making power and information flow “overlaps” with matters of product around these “nexuses” as well.

A useful case study is mentioned by Sundjata in *Black Against Profit, pt IV: Timbuktu to Babylon*. According to comrade Sundjata, a 13<sup>th</sup> century blacksmith named Souamoro Kante led an iron-working Caste from among the Sosso people to control of Kaniaga. This caste or, perhaps

more accurately, guild (as ‘caste’ in the African context can be hard to pin down, since their organization is not always hereditary, but rather voluntary, depending on context), conquered Kumbi-Saleh as the medieval Ghana empire was weakening.

We mentioned before that the Ghana empire was originally the epicenter of mineral wealth (especially gold production) in coastal West Africa and the interior Sudanic region, as well as the dominant force in Trans-Saharan commerce. But, the Ghana empire had been steadily plundered by Almoravids since the 1000s, who sought to overcome power wielded by the taxes the ancient Ghanaian state imposed on foreign trade. Souamoro Kante’s blacksmithing Guild/caste used their skills in weapons manufacture to compete with the nearby Mandinka people for control in the wake of the Ghana empire. Still, it was a hunter Caste/guild among the latter that successfully established dominance from Mali.

The *nexus of Caste/guildship* in West African tradition is an important social form to understand the “overlapping” of production and information flow as well as decision making power, as much as Seniority and Gender and Lineality. As an extension of niche-determination, environmental alteration, responses to stimuli as well as fluctuations in demand as well as patterns of variation, “nexuses” of substructural and superstructural relations are key to organizing of human life-activity. In fact, much information about the Mali empire is still transmitted through the *djeliw* caste, who are in the West spoken of as “griot.” These are court-employed/royal history bearers and storytellers.

The Bamana people from the empire of Segou had composed the Sundiata epic that spoke of old Mali’s greatness well in the 1600s, through the practice of the *djeliw*. The rise of the Segou empire was *itself* facilitated by the taking captive of prisoners during warfare, turning them into slave-warriors for the State using a Caste that was called *jonton*.

When we examine the evolution between what old Mali looked like when it was first founded in the 1300s versus when the Bamana *djeliw* composed an epic about its founding after their rise in Segou, we end up detecting another “nexus” at which material and power relations “overlap” (imbricate). Because, during that long stretch of time, Islamization, including ethnic conflicts over the refusal or acceptance of Islam, was facilitated at the *nexus of Cephalicity* (social headship).

Some local cephalas (leaders) took the syncretic approach, according to Sundjata’s reading, which combined elements of the Muslim faith with pre-Islamic traditional West African religion. But others, he argues, put an emphasis on ‘reform’ Islam — opposing syncretization with traditional African belief systems and practices. Per Sundjata’s read of the historian Michael Gomez, the reform approach was attractive to Mansa Musa, a ruler of old Mali, because in the wake of Sundiata Keita, the empire’s founder, the hunter caste/guild (called ‘*donson ton*’) we mentioned before, who had defeated the blacksmithing guild/caste, *anchored a more democratic and meritocratic approach to Cephalicity (headship) of the state*. But, Islamization would displace the more local traditions of the caste-nexus in place of a vision of Cephalicity rooted in a universalizing religion that put the *seat of power in a ruling dynasty/bloodline*.

This Islamization process, Sundjata stresses, *indigenized* the faith, rather than merely adopting patterns from nonblack Muslims (whose antiblackness was felt viscerally during this period due in part to slave trading, even as the Malian elites themselves participated in and benefitted from such trading). Additionally, it seems per Sundjata’s reading of the Epic of Sundiata Keita, that in the long process between old Mali’s founding and the composition of the epic by Bamana *djeliw*, the consolidation of the empire visavis Islamized cephalicity also *displaced preceding gender relations*. So, the myths concerning Sundiata Keita’s mother (painted as murderous and enraged

at the loss of her inheritance) express “[f]or Gomez... the declining position of women in Manden society by the 13<sup>th</sup> century” (Black Against Profit, pt IV: Timbuktu to Babylon). Hence, we see Patriarchal imbrication.

It is thus we factor in another “nexus” whereby economic relations and other relations are “overlapping” in their social organization: for those myths about Sundiata Keita’s mother have as their *point of reference* the form of matrilineality known in Manden culture as ‘badenya’ (mother-childness). *Badenya* organized kinship in a *dyadic* manner alongside ‘fadenya’ (father-childness), although it was patrilineality that primarily organized the “overlap” of inheritance customs. The *Badenya* nexus organized a set of obligations and responsibilities toward cohesion between siblings of the same mother however. Its valency is spoken of as a *conflict-resolving force* in the face of possible tensions around inheritance that *fadenya* might organize. Its dyadic interpenetration with *fadenya* was disimbricated, however, by patriarchal statecraft imposed by Islamicized cephalicity (social headship), whilst rulership by caste was also being displaced.

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The major point of mine is that whether Lineality, Seniority, Caste, Cephalicity, Gender, etc the “nexuses” whereby substructure and superstructure “overlap” exhibit a valency that *combines certain aspects of metabolic life activity and sociogenic embodiment together while displacing others*. This valency is ultimately how we find we find that “*aspects of phenotype are constantly joining together and coming apart to create and destroy “traits”*” (102, emphasis mine).

The valency of a substructural/superstructural nexus is why, for example, reproductive anatomy may in some cultures like the Yoruba of Oyèwùmí’s study, take importance *only situationally*. The valency of a substructural/superstructural nexus is how, in others, such as bourgeois modernity and its coloniality of gender (a la Lugones), reproductive traits take *central stage* and in a specifically racialized, atomistic manner. Malidoma Patrice Somé’s famous comments on biological “sex” in Dagara culture is illustrative of valency as exhibited by substructural/superstructural nexuses. In the interview *Gays: Guardians of the Gates* between Malidoma Patrice Somé and H Hoff, Somé reports:

“among the Dagara people, gender has very little to do with anatomy. It is purely energetic. In that context, a male who is physically male can vibrate female energy, and vice versa. That is where the real gender is. Anatomic differences are simply there to determine who contributes what for the continuity of the tribe. It does not mean, necessarily, that there is a kind of line that divides people on that basis. And this is something that also touches on what has become known here as the “gay” or “homosexual” issue.”

According to Somé, and similar to Oyèwùmí’s reports about the Yoruba, Dagara society exhibits nothing like the “body-reasoning” of the West. Anatomical distinctions only hold relevance in direct matters of reproduction (“continuity of the tribe”), not in terms of gender or sexuality. This is so much so the case that, according to Malidoma Patrice Somé, the notion of being “gay” itself goes unspoken in Dagara culture, or is *not necessarily legible at first*. There is no social/material reason for so-called queer attractions to be singled out (isolated) as such. *Valency has not organized and indexed such traits within relations of production and reproduction*. As Somé puts it:

“The whole notion of “gay” does not exist in the indigenous world. That does not mean that there are not people there who feel the way that certain people feel in this culture, that has led to them being referred to as “gay.” The reason why I’m saying there are no such people is because the gay person is very well integrated into the community, with the functions that delete this whole sexual differentiation of him or her. The gay person is looked at primarily as a “gatekeeper.””

We see that so-called homosexual ‘traits’ are configured sociogenically in a manner quite distinct from what occurs in a Western context. The organized material demands in the Dagara world *do not convert observed “sexual” variation into a differentiation*, although the same cannot be said of the Eurocentric world, especially in bourgeois societies. The “nexus” at work here is that of Initiatory customs, which organize social embodiments with reference to spiritual ‘energy’ as a concept. Malidoma Patrice Somé states:

“The Earth is looked at, from my tribal perspective, as a very, very delicate machine or consciousness, with high vibrational points, which certain people must be guardians of in order for the tribe to keep its continuity with the gods and with the spirits that dwell there – spirits of this world and spirits of the other world. Any person who is this link between this world and the other world experiences a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different, from the one that a normal person would experience. This is what makes a gay person gay. This kind of function is not one that society votes for certain people to fulfill. It is one that people are said to decide on prior to being born. You decide that you will be a gatekeeper before you are born. And it is that decision that provides you with the equipment that you bring into this world. So when you arrive here, you begin to vibrate in a way that Elders can detect as meaning that you are connected with a gateway somewhere.”

Somé emphasizes the role of agency/choice in the experience of Gatekeepers in the Dagara context. The traits of their embodiment would not undergo the coercive relegations forced on non-cisheteronormative populations in the West. In some ways, his framing is functionalist, in that sees non-dualist embodiment as somehow adapted to indigenous ecological sustainability. But even such a pronouncement can be seen as “*pointing*” to a *contrasting pathway* beyond the Christian worldview, which orders responses to observed sexual variation into physiological and neurochemical experience of fear (in behavior-regulatory reinforcement of particular productive demands). Which is to say, the valency in Somé’s frame of reference is really a context-specific *subset* of the various *pathways of niche-determination that may be elaborated (non-adaptively) visavis observed patterns of fluctuation*.

The constraints which potentiate those pathways in the Dagara context have analogues in other substructure substructural/superstructural contexts as well, even if the ‘nexus’ at work are different. So, we see some individuals and groupings come to be “gender expansive,” or come to alter their physiology with herbs or hormonal therapy, come to change their names or pronouns or identification, or come to step into a so-called “third gender” spiritual role, come to change their “gendered” appearance and behaviors in other ways across societies. These “transitions” are in dialectic (at the nexus of substructure and superstructure) with fluctuations in the external world, including those magnified by and transformed by the interpenetration of an

organism's presence and internal realities (that respond to external fluctuations just the same). Lastly, the register of sociogeny within which these "transitions" occur is also where the laws of "artificial selection" (repurposing Lewontin and Levins' terms) are detected:

"the selectors define the traits. Any arbitrary combination of measurements may be defined as a trait. If the price of soybean cake is favorable, the dry weight of soybeans may be the defined "yield" and thus be a trait for selection. With a change in the market, "yield" may become oil per hectare. Or an experimenter may find that some laboratory rats, when picked up by their tails, bite the technician. The experimenter might define the frequency of biting the technician as "aggressivity" and report that he has selected for increased or diminished "aggression" in rats, ***even if the causal pathway is that the rats with more sensitive tails bite more.***" (Emphasis added by me)

There is "selection" of *other species'* traits that is "artificial" then, because of sociogeny, thus conforming to the same principle as the "mutability" Oyèwùmí speaks of for human biology. Artificial selection for "yield" in agriculture or animal "aggressivity" in the laboratory setting cannot be assigned to the "invisible hand" of market incentives or the "objectivity" of the scientific enterprise. It is an emergent and contingent phenomenon that is anthropogenic (human-caused), albeit in consequence of definite circumstances (including the non-adaptive constraints of a "overlapping" modes of production and relations of power). This does not mean the "traits" are irrelevant, for we know that good science (such as understanding sickle cell trait not as racial but as an antimalarial trait) can save lives and accommodate access needs; and we know that good agricultural techniques can revitalize soil (this is something George Washington Carver endeavored to figure out, as evidence by the 1905 bulletin *How to Build Up Worn Out Soils*, since plantation crops had drained southern land of its health).

But it does mean that "*features*" are co-constructed in dialectic, even if only imaginatively or as metaphor at times (for example, the genome isn't *actually* homologous with computing). That is why the '*indexing*' of an embodied frame of reference is always going to be at play in both our evaluation and configurations of "traits." Embodiment prefigures consciousness, as York and Mancus say via Marx's view of representation and thinking (131, "Critical Human Ecoogy: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws"), but also consciousness "points" to and implements neurochemical regulations on embodiment all the same, because the *organization of our corporeality and metabolic life-activity emerges visavis a nature-nurture imbrication*, one that undergoes selective pressures to some extent, but is constrained more often than not by non-adaptive or selectively neutral pressures.

## Concluding remarks: “Through Sociogeny We Find Ecogeny”

When the Promotion of Human Rights and Family Values bill was passed in Ghana earlier this year, it came in the wake of a push that correlates to the so-called “Year of Return.” As the Ghanaian state fuels a tourism economy that appeals to the Diaspora middle classes, the patriarchal underground and patriarchal above ground have tightened their grip on the lives of marginalized gender Ghanaians. The hashtag “Queer Lives Matter” has appeared in Ghanaian struggle, and attempts to situate non-dualist gender embodiment in Ghanaian cultures is an ongoing part of the battle – since the national bourgeoisie, with the help of the church, insists that such “lifestyles” are “Western” or “unAfrican.”

The connection between Ghana and the Black Lives Matter movement is apparent both in online discourse (the choice of hashtag) as well as in the character of the struggle. The same World Council of Families that has used the Human Rights frameworks’ protections against genocide to enforce cisheteronormativity in Ghana through religious propaganda – has ties to US based religious institutions. These cannot use the rhetoric of “unAfrican” to enforce gender dualism, but they can convince American citizens that queerness/transness is part of some conspiracy to corrupt their youth. They have outposts of this kind of rhetoric in Nigeria, where the hashtag “Queer Lives Matter” has also appeared within struggles against police brutality, much like it was with the US anti-police/anti-prison struggle.

Kenya, Uganda, far too many African countries are going down this road, and passing laws in favor of FGM, among other things. It is all patriarchal imbrication. The response has been to insist on the cultural basis for expansive marital, gender, and sexual patterns in Africa, because of the accusations that such spandrels of embodiment are foreign. The Black struggle in the US had had to do the same: all through the 2010s and even in 2020, a connection between traditional African religion and queerness/transness was identified in the anti-carceral struggle (Liza Vandenboom touches on this in the article “The Faith of the Black Lives Matter Movement,” religionunplugged dot com). Long before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the 1980s, as Joseph Padillioni Jr writes:

“The Adodi Fellowship formed as a space to “bring black men together to do some mourning rituals.” This tribute to the ancestors has grown into the highlight ceremony of their annual retreat. The men of Adodi wear all white as they march in procession and chant to the orishas and the egungun (the dead). One participant described the intimate work of this ritual as “dealing with the pain of still living.” The ethos of the concept adodi imbues the fellowship’s “Six Principles” that serve as guideposts for building a community based on “love, mutuality, and deep abiding respect.” The slave ships that made the harrowing Middle Passage carried in their hulls African peoples with vibrant cosmologies of the world and its workings that presented models for taking ethical action on the material plane.” (*Cosmological Queerness Across the Yoruba Diaspora*)

The name this fellowship chose for themselves, in response to the era's homophobia and serophobia, was a pluralization of the word *ado*, reportedly a Yoruba term for men-who-love-men. Reaching to African language and mythology to understand ourselves in the Diaspora, the organizing of Black qtgnc folks demonstrates an expression of what Cedric Robinson would consider resistance to racial capitalism, according to Robin DG Kelley:

“Robinson traces the roots of Black radical thought to a shared epistemology among diverse African people, arguing that the first waves of African New World revolts were governed not by a critique rooted in Western conceptions of freedom but by a total rejection of enslavement and racism as it was experienced. Behind these revolts were not charismatic men but, more often than not, women. In fact, the female and queer-led horizontal formations that are currently at the forefront of resisting state violence and racial capitalism are more in line with the Black radical tradition than traditional civil rights organizations.” (*Why Black Marxism, Why Now?* 2021, Boston Review)

Per Kelley's reading of Cedric Robinson, there is a non-Western frame of reference for historical experience, an African onto-epistemic starting “point” that has inflected New World African struggles from past to present. And the forms of rebellious activity organized vis-a-vis this alternative consciousness has continuously challenged both State power and Patriarchy, alongside slavery. In Cedric Robinson's own words, though, the Marxist movement could not accommodate the contingency of national consciousness among people of African descent:

“...The dismissal of culture, that is, a transmitted historical consciousness, as an aspect of class consciousness, did not equip the Marxian movement for the political forces that would not only erupt in Europe and the Third World but within the movement itself. For many Marxists it would be left to the new ideological and political order instituted by the Bolshevik triumph in the Russian Revolution, and not received theory, to sort out a Marxist orthodoxy on the national question. Ultimately the resolution was a political one clothed only partially by theory.” (*Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*)

Touching upon the contributions of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Cedric Robinson examines the *political exigencies* that governed the particularly class reductive way that the *cultural basis* for national liberation gets considered in European radical traditions. Robinson's perspective is not an absolute dismissal here, only that there were oversimplifications and misapprehensions of the “primary world-historical significance” (pg. 64) on part of various Marxists regarding the contingency that was the national self-determination struggle. One would come away from Robinson's treatment with the impression that Marxist positions on nationalism could hardly be deemed “scientific” if they require sacrificing theoretical clarity around how, in Robinson's words:

“the social and political reactions to capitalism... have failed to conform to the political economic code emergent from capitalist societies.” (*Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*)

This “code,” Robinson insists, is the ad hoc and false universalized presupposition about “rationality.” We could say that it is a sociogenic inflection of humanness correlated to a *bourgeois*

*frame of reference*, à la Sylvia Wynter. Alternative sociogenic “codes” are at work, however, in the distinct organized responses to the perturbations of capitalism that Marx’s heuristic could hardly understand about the “metaphysics” of national struggle. For Robinson, the subversive activities correlated to these two *different* reference points, that of the secular-scientific political ideology in the West whose epistemic “limit” was being stretched by Marxism and then that of the cultural consciousness in African and Third World struggles manifest in national self-determination, were both constrained in their own ways by the particulars of premodern trajectories of historical development:

“Just as the expansion of capitalism has resulted in the preservation of certain aspects of non- (“pre-”) capitalist modes of production, there is also evidence that nationalism in many places has assumed forms largely organized through ideational systems indigenous to those peoples exploited by the world market.” (*Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, pg. 65)

In my view, what Robinson does here is put attention to how a system of knowledge inflects different historical contestations of the prevailing material conditions, in a manner that unites them through absorbing pre-existing social and ideative forms. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can clearly see that the tensions Robinson outlines are relevant to the gender/sexual self-determination; the turn to indigenous “world-sense” as an index of more expansive reckonings of social being, defies the secular-scientific political and ideological programmes of the modern state form, as much as challenging the reproductive mandates of bourgeois society.

But, feminism, in this case, relates to queer/trans liberation in the ways Marxism does for decolonization as per Robinson’s critique. Feminism leans on political ease, rather than robust theory, to resolve the tensions brought up both internal to Europe and in the Third World by the gender/sexual self-determination struggle. The possibility of either a fascist upsurge, or some kind of “counter-hegemony” from outside the West are looked to as the source of answers on the matter. In either case, the secular-scientific “code” would position queer/trans consciousness as almost resoundingly *irrealis*, and not *realis*, a variation on the rhetoric of pathology.

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And hence, the argument thus far has been that the language of gender contains an ideological deixis. This means that regardless of what semantic meanings about gendered terms are fixed in a certain language or dialect, the words or phrases or slogans or discourses “point” to bodies and research and flows of information as well as an overall frame of reference for particular historical conditions.

These data points and the Origo that anchors their evaluation are elaborated from neurochemical behavior regulatory mechanisms that artificially constrain aspects of phenotype, thus taking assemblages of real and imagined ‘traits’ and ‘features’ to construct and regulate gendered social being. That social construction is a nonadaptive consequence of developments at the nexus of substructure and superstructure, which organize corporeality and metabolic life activity into sociogenic embodiments, visavis potential subsets of patterned responses to fluctuations in the environment. In this way, gender ends up not being a universal construction, but rather emerging as one of *several* distinct possibilities for configurations of a mutable body within material/power relations.



The emergence of these configurations is specifically potentiated by pathways of transduction of signals amidst organisms' co-construction of their niche, which *is* a universal (including more-than-human) phenomenon that expresses a range of responses to and even transformation of patterns of variation in the world. The hegemonic expression, however, consists of an "anthropogenic" environmental impact that constructs an ecological niche via systems of exploitation and domination, oppression and hierarchy, the onto-epistemic faculties of which require that social being is resoundly dualist in its configuration.

This dualism reduces phenotypical varieties to so-called anatomical sex, in a way that is very often rife with ableist pathologization through ethno-religious or ethno-racialist frames of reference and bodies of literature. The "point" through which such rhetoric is evaluated is a spandrel of embodiment, however, although this is not mutually exclusive with abstract elaborations. The *realis* basis for the Origo situates it as a phenomenon that isn't spatio-temporally invariant nor inevitable, purely natural, divinely-willed, etc although its indexes broach the *irrealis*, trapping us in the "here" yet "not here," and "there" yet "not there" of representation. A similar problem may occur with non-hegemonic expressions, visavis the niches, onto-epistemic faculties, configurations of social being, frames of reference, communicative apparatuses, spandrels of embodiment, and abstract elaborations correlated to them.

This is all a way of saying that critical theories about gender and even "non-gendered" experience are not irrelevant to dialectics or to science at all. The urgency of an analysis such as this is precisely because we now live in a world where the abstract configuration of electrical signals/information that came of a shift from analogous to digital technologies has been elaborated as a metaphor concerning the genetic "code." The "hacking" of one's biology or brain can only make sense in such a context, for a carceral technoculture, birthed in the military industrial complex amidst the exigencies of the Cold War, has regimented thought and opinion within virtual representations. Surveillance and accumulation of biodata is key. The predictive algorithms for human behavior is key. The growth of a consumer base, and equally important, unradicalized civilian populace is most pertinent. The technology sector can serve to benefit from all these things as much as the State while the bourgeois seeks to reconcile its pursuit of profit and resources against the threat of climate crisis and another nuclear catastrophe.

We will soon see how relevant the "gestalt phenomenon" of ideological deixis in gender discourses is to the ways "quantification and formalization do not inherently involve imposition upon the world or a departure from the world so much as... abstraction *in the world*" (emphasis in original, 130, "Critical Human Ecology: Historical Materialism and Natural Laws"). Thus, contrary to the assertions of some self-described 'materialists,' the prevalence of 'idealist' critical tradition within and in the wake of the aforementioned circumstances is not uniquely suited to nor 1:1 with such developments. The assigning of 'poststructuralism' and 'postmodernism' squarely to the CIA, the misrepresentation of Western Marxism or Marxist-humanism as anti-communist, and the callousness with which 'postcolonial,' and 'decolonial' thought, as well as 'identitarian' schools (namely, feminism, but also queer/trans theory, disability studies, animal studies, environmentalism, etc) are treated and debated and discussed is quite ironically an *undialectical* posture to take among those who pride themselves on such a method. A more dialectical takeaway is to understand 'idealist' critical traditions as possessing some 'kernel of truth' from which to transect the very set of affairs to which they have been historically correlated.

Feminism will fail if it refuses to grapple with this. The making of a 'complementarian' subject in reactionary movements via "trans exclusionary" radical feminism is a sign of the dangers

present. But, it cannot be understated how the fact that ‘gender ideology’ and ‘wokeness’ alike are being maligned by fascists yet utilized for neocolonial interests in reaction to a decade of ‘hashtag activism’ is precisely because the latter’s association with post-9/11 attacks on the police state in the US (and connections to queer-led struggles in Africa) have some kind of objective relevance to the revolutionary struggle. For feminism to be truly liberating in this moment, its deictic center must be expanded, not simply because of the various permutations of ‘lives’ that ‘matter,’ but because through such an expansive frame of reference, we might just be able to “point” to and evaluate past and present conditions in a way that gets us to understand what is about to come upon us.

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Author's note: a straight-through read would make 200+ minutes. Please take your time with such a hefty work. Breaks are encouraged. If you are Black, trans/queer, and *operating in good faith*, feel free to highlight passages you would like to learn more about. Medium allows authors to interact with their readers. I might be able to provide clarification if I have spoons.

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