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Introduction

Why Gender?

Jude Browne

WHY IS GENDER SO IMPORTANT FOR INTERPRETING the world in which we live? In this volume, sixteen world-famous scholars address this question from their respective fields: political theory, philosophy, medical anthropology, sociology, law, geography, Islamic studies, cultural studies, philosophy of science, literature, psychoanalysis, history of art, education and economics. Inevitably, questions of race and sexuality run through the volume as authors grapple with the consequences of gendered social orderings. The chapters cover an extraordinary array of contexts, ranging from rethinking trans* bodies, to traumatized tribal communities, to sexualized violence, to assisted reproductive technologies, through to epigenetics, post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, and yet they are all connected by their focus on the importance of gender as a category of analysis.

What better place to start than with a defence of the term 'gender' and of 'gender theory' against dissenters? In Chapter 1, *Gender in Translation: Beyond Monolingualism*, **Judith Butler** begins by focusing on two particular types of criticism. The first is demonstrated by public statements made by prominent political and religious leaders who see gender theory as challenging heteronormative and traditional family forms – what the Vatican has called for example 'a gradual process of denaturalization'. The second comes from those who claim that 'gender' is an imperialist term – a cultural export from the Anglophone first world – that ought to be substituted by local vernaculars. Butler's response is to question monolingualism – the

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singular interpretation of a term, its relationship to culture and its generalizing tendencies. Instead she asks us to think about the question of gender in translation. She argues that the fear of gender as a 'destructive cultural imposition' manifests in attempts to 'purify' language along nationalist lines and attendant cultural intolerances. Butler observes that gender complexity is with us whether we accommodate it linguistically or not. She therefore concludes that when the term gender is not used merely as a scapegoat for global anxieties or a placeholder for new challenges to family and religion, it remains a powerful category that raises fundamental questions about freedom and norms. Indeed, as all the authors in this book agree, without it we undermine the capacity to understand what is at stake in converging and conflicting legal and social frameworks for thinking about difference, power and embodiment.

A greater recognition of those who seek to live without stigma or threat of violence in virtue of their gender or sexuality, is also a central theme of Chapter 2, **Jack Halberstam**'s *Gender and the Queer/Trans* Undercommons*. Here, Halberstam argues that most discussion around trans* bodies has focused on making bodies and selves rather than the 'unmaking' of how we think about them. Akin to Butler and other authors in this volume, Halberstam suggests we ought to construct new forms of knowledge and different narrations of life that are not limited to fixing or stilling gender. Halberstam brings his argument to life through four examples: the poetry of June Jordan; a *New York Times* story relating to the death of a black gender queer body which defied identification and was lost to an undocumented trans* and queer history; the purposefully bewildering work of the artist, Kent Monkman; and the performance art of the trans* artist boychild. Through these examples, Halberstam illustrates how trans* bodies should not be thought of as reifying the normative body by comparison but rather be understood as 'fragmentary and internally contradictory bodies that remap gender and its relations to race, place, class and sexuality'. Halberstam ends with a call to unbuild the worlds in which bodies are wrong or right.

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In Chapter 3, *Gender and the End of Biological Determinism*, **John Dupré** continues with the theme of bodies and gendered orderings but this time in the context of scientific epistemology. Dupré argues that the biological determinist argument that gender is an expression of the dichotomous genetics of sex – what he calls the ‘Biological Big Picture’ – is no longer scientifically defensible in light of advances in biology over the last half-century. In examining the biological and ontological assumptions of the sex/gender distinction, Dupré explains that the ‘*exhaustive* division of people into two sexes’ is not a reflection of how things really are in the world but rather of a categorizing gender order: ‘We have been encouraged to think of the genome as something static and fixed, a programme or recipe that guides or directs the development of the organism. This is quite wrong.’ Dupré takes us through some key elements of the history and philosophy of science behind the relationship between sex and gender, and argues that sex must be understood developmentally. This does not mean merely a developmental process predetermined ‘in the genes’, but rather including epigenetic development as a process of interaction between the developing organism and its environment. Here, the profound implications of this perspective on sex and gender are explored and Dupré concludes, in line with both Butler and Halberstam albeit from a very different field, that diverse expressions of sexuality are ‘leading the way for our interpretations of sex’.

Like Dupré, **Sandra G. Harding** focuses on the importance of gender to new philosophies and histories of science. In Chapter 4, *Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Colonialism,* Harding challenges dominant international philosophies of science with the example of an alternative anti-colonial theorizing emanating from Latin America and focusing, in particular, on the Iberian colonizers of the late 1400s onwards. Harding argues that this example gives us a different interpretation of gendered and racialized colonial practices than the more common post-colonial theorizing associated mainly with British colonization of India and Africa approximately 300 years

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later. In so doing, Harding draws out some of the interwoven gender, sexuality and racial issues in these Latin American histories – asking what will philosophies of science look like that can recognize the present-day residues of these still oppressive histories, and can figure out how to move past them?' Central to this question is the colonial exploitation of racialized women and the infliction of hierarchical and rigid gender, sexual and racial categories on the Americas. These included, for example, the narrowing of sexual identities, the destruction of distinctive family forms and the de-humanization of the colonized. Such practices, argues Harding, were not only exported back to Europe but still serve to shape the world today. In response, Harding argues that philosophers of science ought to be inspired by the new work emanating from Latin America which interprets the world in such a way that is anti-racist, non-heterosexist and post-androcentric.

In continuing to explore forms of de-humanization and resistance to unjust hierarchies, **Rosi Braidotti** takes us to the very different context of post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism. In Chapter 5, *Posthuman Feminism and Gender Methodology*, she provides a cartographic account of 'meta-patterns in contemporary knowledge production processes, using gender as the navigational tool'. She begins by illustrating the feminist, post-colonial and critical race critique of the humanist tendency to construct an idealized 'Western Man' as the universal representative of humanity, citizenship, rational thought and culture: 'the measure of all things'. As Braidotti explains, humanism has deployed epistemic and social violence against those who were other to 'Man', and who consequently became 'disposable and unprotected [which raised] crucial issues of power, domination and exclusion'. Alongside these post-humanist insights, the rejection of species hierarchy and the environmental degradation associated with anthropocentrism requires a de-centring of the *bios* (the 'exclusively human life') as the ultimate priority of human action. Braidotti argues that as anthropocentrism inevitably declines,

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questions of social justice remain ever pertinent in the context of *zoe* (non-human life), *geo* (planetary and environmental) and *techno* (science-derived, non-living) forces. Gender-driven critical cartographies, intersectionally co-produced with anti-racist, environmental and disability theorizing, are well equipped to understand the post-humanist and post-anthropocentric condition from a situated and historical perspective of marginal subjects already excluded from full humanity, devoid of the benefits of new technological advances and subjected to the worst effects of environmental degradation. Such perspectives are what Braidotti describes as the 'embodied and embedded understandings of the knowing subjects'. In building on such a powerful critical-theory tradition, Braidotti, while acknowledging the challenges, calls on feminism to sharply focus on the emancipatory potential in both post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism for resisting the suppression of pluralistic human and non-human flourishing.

With a similar emphasis on transformation, and especially transformation through technology, in Chapter 6, *Gender, Sperm Troubles, and Assisted Reproductive Technologies,* **Marcia C. Inhorn** takes us to the transnational 'reprohub' of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Inhorn explains how rising numbers of infertile men and their partners from all over the world travel to Dubai to seek the assistance of *in vitro* reproductive technology, in particular intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), in the hope of becoming parents. In cases where sperm are low in number, immotile or unusually shaped, the ICSI technique enables a single sperm to be collected and injected directly into an egg, thereby taking on the function of fertilization and enabling growing numbers of infertile men to become biogenetic parents along with their partners. Central to what Inhorn describes as 'reprotravel' are the various cultural, religious and legal restrictions on assisted reproductive techniques in patients' home countries. Inhorn argues that men's role in reproduction has been neglected by gender scholars despite the fact that sperm-related infertility contributes to more than half of the world's cases of involuntary childlessness and that

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'sperm quality' is in decline globally. Based on in-depth ethnographic research, Inhorn explores the ICSI treatment quests of infertile men travelling to Dubai. Drawing on the case of Hsain, an infertile British-Moroccan man, Inhorn illustrates why ICSI is a particularly compelling technology for infertile Muslim men. Inhorn concludes by arguing for increased gender scholarship on men and reproduction as a key element of how we think about the future of society.

Linking biological reproduction to social reproduction, **Nancy Fraser** argues in Chapter 7, *Gender, Capital, and Care*, that a gendered crisis of care is intrinsic to capitalism. By 'social reproduction', Fraser means both affective and material labour, largely performed by women without pay. Social reproduction, she argues, is essential to the functioning of society: 'Without it there could be no culture, no economy, no political organization.' And yet, it is often overshadowed by a greater focus on other societal challenges such as the ecological. Fraser takes us through a history of the crisis in social reproduction generated by what she calls 'the social contradiction of capitalism', and ranging from the liberal competitive capitalism of the nineteenth century, through the state-managed capitalism of the twentieth century, to the present-day financialized, globalizing neoliberal form of capitalism. In this contemporary era, Fraser argues, feminism and other emancipatory movements have been folded in with marketization to undermine social protection. While espousing gender equality in the workplace for example, she argues that states simultaneously disinvest in public social services alongside the stagnation of wages even though the cost of living continually rises. The result is a frantic struggle to transfer carework to others or postpone it. As emblematic of the contemporary crisis in social reproduction, Fraser cites new practices such as assisted reproductive technologies, in particular the commercialization of egg freezing, not for the infertile, as Inhorn writes about in the previous chapter, but for the fertile who fear that the combination of parenthood and employment might not be feasible in the near future. What we are

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witnessing, argues Fraser, is a '*dualized* organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it [and] privatized for those who cannot'.

With a similar focus on crisis and social reproduction to that of Fraser's chapter, in Chapter 8, *Aspiration Management: Gender, Race, Class, and the Child as Waste*, **Cindi Katz** looks at the gendered and racialized politics of what she calls 'aspiration management' in increasingly privatized, commodified and financialized economies. By 'aspiration management' Katz means the 'anxious strivings and affective relationships . . . seen in the everyday practices of social reproduction', especially those of motherhood. She focuses on the ways in which aspirations for the future are defined, managed and reached through the family and children's education. Drawing on three examples – the best-selling book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, and the films *Waiting for Superman* and *Race to Nowhere* – Katz examines the ways in which middle-class and wealthier parents have been painstakingly (sometimes aggressively) crafting their children's education and life experiences in preparation for 'the imagined niche markets of the future' in which they will compete for the highest salaries and status networks. These children are set against a backdrop of others, the vast majority of children, who suffer the consequences of a disinvested public sphere, the rising costs of living and the stagnated social wages of their parents. These children, Katz argues, are treated as 'waste that must be managed and contained' much like, as Fraser also explains, the other waste products of contemporary capitalist societies. In the context of increasing economic precarity in which millions are faced with insecure employment, Katz concludes that the gendered and racialized social reproduction of the next generation is increasingly characterized by a growing human detritus of commodity production and marketization.

In Chapter 9, *Gender, Race and American National Identity: The First Black First Family*, **Patricia Hill Collins** continues with the theme of precarity and asks us to consider the central place that gender and notions of the family inhabit in racial politics and

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national identity at a time of increasing economic insecurity. In particular, she analyses how the first African American President, Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama, worked together in operationalizing the American Dream to underpin the public policy objectives of the Obama Administration (2009–2017): 'hard work, commitment to family, and fairness – can achieve an adequate standard of living and societal respect'. Hill Collins argues that Barack Obama consciously navigated a narrative course away from negative stereotypical accounts of black American families and instead, promoted responsible fatherhood as an ideal form of masculinity for men, and for women, a work–family balance centred in dynamic motherhood as epitomized by the First Lady. Accordingly, the Obamas not only perpetuated a highly traditional gendered account of national identity but one that was dependent on a 'colorblind ideology' which addressed racism by adopting 'wilful blindness' in a promoted culture of inclusion. Hill Collins demonstrates how Barack Obama used 'colorblind' gendered family rhetoric and the personal stories of his own childhood and that of Michelle Obama's to signal a successful route to economic security wrapped up in the American Dream. However, Hill Collins argues that because the idealized family is in fact a moral discourse operating in an increasingly precarious economic context for many, it 'misrecognizes the interdependence of macroeconomic and macro-political forces and family outcomes'. This, in turn, serves to cast families who live in poverty as '*causing* their own disadvantage by ostensibly rejecting dominant norms'. Through these observations, Hill Collins brings into focus the ways in which gender and racial inequality as well as economic insecurity are intricately intertwined in constructions of national identity.

In Chapter 10, *Gender and the Collective*, **Bina Agarwal** considers an alternative to the forms of marketization discussed by Fraser, Katz and Hill Collins, through an analysis of economic collectives and their impact on gender inequality. Here, Agarwal explores the power of women's presence in collectives not only in terms of

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More Information

enhancing social justice but also for improving economic and environmental outcomes. As Agarwal explains, collectives – groups of people united by a common purpose – are central to human society and come in many forms including political assemblies, village councils, trade unions, clubs and cooperatives. Agarwal's analysis of collectives moves beyond the usual questions of why women have historically been excluded and asks instead, what is the impact of women's inclusion? In addressing this question, Agarwal considers several others: how does the presence of women in collectives impact on families, communities, markets and the state? To be effective, how large a presence of women is needed to form a critical mass for change? How does the heterogeneity within collectives, class, caste and ethnicity impact on cooperation? Do the collectives need a gendered consciousness? Agarwal offers answers to these questions by drawing on her extensive empirical research of the many thousands of economic collectives in South Asia. In particular, Agarwal focuses on two types of collectives: community forestry collectives and farmers' collectives. The community forestry collectives, who work in partnership with governments, manage and conserve local forests which are vital to them for firewood, food and building materials. The farmers' collectives are constituted by rural women who pool land, labour and other resources to farm and share their costs and returns. Agarwal concludes that an understanding of the gendered dynamics of collectives is vital to capturing the potential they offer as a progressive, environmentally effective and economically productive alternative to the state–market dichotomy.

In **Sara Ahmed's** *Willfulness, Feminism, and the Gendering of Will*, Chapter 11, she, like Agarwal, explores the implications of resisting traditional gendered social orders. Ahmed explains gendering as a dynamic social process that is illustrated by a history of those who are willing to obstruct – a history of wilfulness. Drawing on a range of cultural materials such as the Grimm story of *The Willful Child* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Ahmed discusses the figure of the 'willful girl' whose wilfulness is judged as a character

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fault that must be corrected or quashed. These cautionary tales of moral instruction are designed to urge obedience and become part of the gendering of the will. Ahmed reflects on what the wilful girl who refuses to submit her will, might tell us about feminism. 'To be willful is, here, to be willing to announce your disagreement . . .. Feminism we might say is the creation of some rather disagreeable women.' These disagreeable women Ahmed calls 'feminist killjoys', those feminists who complain or who are 'willing not to go with the flow', those who go the wrong way, are understood as being *in* the way where it takes stamina to remain wilful, to resist. In this sense, Ahmed reclaims wilfulness as a form of political action. By connecting wilful subjects with feminist killjoys, Ahmed argues that feminists are understood as being wilful in their refusal to go along with a gendering social order. In so doing, she shows how gendering operates to cast 'female disobedience' as a problem to be solved and how the history of wilfulness helps us to make sense of the pathologizing of feminism.

In Chapter 12, *Gender and Emigré Political Thought*, **Seyla Benhabib** writes on two famously wilful women, Hannah Arendt and Judith Shklar. In particular, Benhabib considers why gender as a category of analysis is important for understanding the lives and work of these distinguished political theorists even though neither of them identified as feminists – despite the important place that sexuality and family held in their work. Benhabib explores the subtle ways in which the public and the private, the political and the personal are imbricated throughout the considerable contributions these two women have made to political theory. One of Benhabib's central observations is the curious shift in Shklar's assessment of Arendt's work from the wholly admiring piece 'Hannah Arendt's Triumph' (1975), to the deeply derisive 'Hannah Arendt as Pariah' (1983). Benhabib sets out to account for this turn of opinion and in so doing, tells us something of the biographies of two of the world's most formidable women theorists, and how their personal experiences and their work interlocked. It is a story of women scholars in exile, their

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