

Gender and Postmodernism

By Mila D. Aguilar
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I absolutely cannot agree with postmodern definitions of gender, just as I cannot agree with Foucauldian suggestions on the manner by which resistance is supposed to be carried out against modern repressive structures.

Postmodernism, largely influenced by Foucault though harking back to Derridian deconstructions, carries with it a heavy Western bias; indeed, not just bias, but the greatest of Western fears. This fear has to do with the overwhelming nature of Western mechanisms for discipline, which have suffused not only structures external to the individual such as the police or the courts, but the individual soul itself. The power behind such mechanisms could only be explained by the historical growth of capitalism within the womb of a full-grown feudalism, a growth that has seen the full maturation of capitalism into imperialism and its present permutation into globalization – in other words, the globalization of the repressive mechanisms of imperialism. So pervasive, so awesome, is this mechanism in Western industrialized countries that a “recidivist” like Foucault could not but be absolutely cowed by it. And this is the whole archeology and genealogy behind **Discipline and Punish** and **The History of Sexuality**.

In such a situation, the urge to cut up categories rather than fight back frontally is very tempting. For the moment one fights back frontally, one is cut up, if not physically, at least politically, and if not politically, at least symbolically. In other words, one is apt to, at the very least, lose one’s academic standing; and at the most, one’s head. The more comfortable alternative is therefore to cut up categories, to foster veritable (or, in the language of information technology, virtual) anarchies, rather than meet the enemy head-on. When one cuts up, displaces and muddles the categories used by the enemy, one can always hope that one has “shaken” the establishment, and without losing one’s head, title or salary.

The problem is, when one merely cuts up categories, one is bound to fall into the enemy’s trap: for one does not weaken the enemy at all, but merely serves to strengthen it, in fact giving it the cannon fodder with which to blast one’s head, eventually.

Such is what happens to denials of the categories male/female, man/woman, heterosexual/bisexual/homosexual. In asserting that no such categories exist even biologically, postmodernists merely feed the fantasy of male domination, for male domination, for all that it is a culturally-engendered bias, actually does exist, and is based on both a biological (the visual, physical difference between a penis and a vagina) and a cultural construct. Now, how does one fight an anomaly like male domination when postmodernists would insist that maleness, even as a cultural construct, cannot possibly exist?

In fact, postmodern denials of sex and gender categories only serve to perpetuate cherished Western paradigms of male domination, just as postmodern denials of political and economic classes serve to maintain the status quo of Western empire. For wherever actual, existing categories are slurred over, there oppression, which always make good use of categories, can divide and rule.