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Homeland Security: what we need to know that politicians and pundits will never say (IX)

Part 9

By Stan Goff

When I was working as a [technical adviser on a film](#), we'd end each day by sitting around with food (and alcohol) and watching the day's film takes. It was always kind of flat somehow, even when others were raving about how well this or that take had gone. Then I realized... there was no music, no background sound patched in. Now when I watch films, I pay attention to the background music, because I realize that it is the vehicle for my *appropriate* emotional response. We are being told how to feel about what is happening in the film, quite explicitly, and we don't even realize it.

That's how the [social system of gender](#) — males on top, so to speak — works in all those situations that are not explicitly articulated as gendered. But like that background music, it is there always, and it is explaining to us in a powerful non-verbal medium exactly how we are to feel about every situation we encounter. We learned this background music and its meanings — without the slightest separation between what we call [cognitive and emotional](#) in our (male, dualistic) dissection of experience — as early as we learned to recognize our first caretakers... usually a mother. We take it for granted; and so gender appears to us — until the contradictions of later life expose it with power, pain, and confusion — to be absolutely “natural,” an irreducible and inescapable aspect of our very existence, like the need for oxygen or food.

There is such a thing as sexual dimorphism; and human beings are sexually dimorphic primates. The occasional exceptions do not disprove the rule. We are a species that reproduces sexually — an evolutionary trick that was reinforced by the advantages conferred by nature on variability.

We are also very brainy, literally. Our brains are so big that we have to be born earlier in our development than fellow primates, because if we get any bigger inside the womb, there is [no longer adequate pelvic space for successful birth](#); and our brains continue to grow for a good while after we are born. Consequently, we spend a lot longer in a state of post-birth dependency, during which time nurture substantially takes over from nature in the developmental process. This socialized development is extremely plastic, reflecting the [plasticity of the human brain's operations](#).

Our sexual dimorphism is manifested as physical differences between males and females. Even in cultures (or subcultures) where these differences are not intentionally accentuated and embellished by dress, adornment, and socialized performance, we can see that men have externalized genitalia and women are tucked neatly inside, that men are more hirsute as a rule and larger, that women are comparatively stronger in their lower bodies than their upper, that the male and female pelvis is constructed differently, that our relative balance of “sexual” hormones differs on average in two forms of homeostasis, that women menstruate and can bear children, and so on.

Our braininess not only extends the dependency period of post-partum development, it is an aspect of our peculiar nature in which rote instinct has been overwhelmingly displaced by the capacity for open-ended, non-hereditary learning (that “plasticity” we talked about earlier).

We are — to use a current metaphor — programmable (as well as self-programmable to some extent) as individuals. Sociability and social dependency are aspects of this, and most of our learning takes place in a social context. In what seems an evolutionary paradox, [Homo sapiens sapiens](#) is biologically determined to be non-biologically-determined.

This is not somehow an escape or negation of our biology. The separation and opposition of the Nature versus Nurture controversy (even though we used it as a familiar reference above) is a [false dichotomy](#). In reality, these are not two separable influences. Opposing Nature to Nurture is an aspect of [dualism](#), a culturally-conditioned habit of understanding reality as dual-oppositions. We also then tend to take actual dualisms (secular dimorphism, *e.g.*) and impose hierarchies of value on them.

My point is that men and women are different. Difference is not the same as hierarchy. My life-partner and I are biologically different; but one of us does not predominate over the other in the decisions about our lives.

As men achieved social power over women in post-hunter-gatherer societies, that *biological* difference came to serve as a fallacious justification for the imposition and maintenance of *social* hierarchy. That fallacy was literally given force because men systemically threatened and abused women, driving women into the protection of one man against all other men... either as plain property, or in the modern era in what Carole Pateman called [the "sexual contract"](#): an exchange of obedience for protection. Which is how a protection racket works.

In the political reaction against this sexual-political hierarchy (*i.e.*, feminism), an intellectual error was committed.

Since the justification for men's collective power over women was *ideologically* based on "difference," those opposing this power have sometimes sought to *deny difference* in the mistaken belief that denial of the difference would undermine the hierarchy. In other words, they tacitly accepted the premise that difference automatically corresponds to hierarchy.

In fact, what this denial of difference did was discredit claimants in the day-to-day realm and drive this denial (implicitly of sexual dimorphism) into a place where the intellectual has been carefully separated — as far as possible — from the practical: into institutions of higher (note the higher-archy in this term) learning... universities. This is how we arrived at the postmodern assertion that sex is a *pure* social construction (this means *social-as-opposed-to-biological*... a dualism, no?).

It is not a coincidence that the postmodern paralysis is a condition that mainly afflicts academics, for it is at a distance that human meanings assume the appearance of "constructions."

(Hornborg, p. 53)

The hierarchies of social value and power imposed on biological women by biological men — like all power in social systems — is elaborated and expressed ideologically and behaviorally.

Remember, ideology is a system of thought that *simultaneously reproduces and conceals power*, usually with the claim that existing power gradients are ordained by Nature or God. We behave in accordance with beliefs, then that behavior reinforces the beliefs. This recursive-reinforcement cycle maintains the stability of power and ensures that power's integration into all aspects of our existence. The inheritance of that power through generations further consolidates that power and its appearance of natural inevitability, to the point where women even accept responsibility for the socialization of male children to be aggressive and domineering and female children to be passive and obedient.

The fact that women are preparing their children for acceptance or even survival into a real system with real power gradients further complicates this critique, and leaves women holding the bag regardless... damned if they do, and damned if they don't.

There have been countless volumes written that speculate on the origins of male social power *over* women. The fact is, we can't be sure how or when it started, which makes the debate about the origins a convenient distraction in debates about men's power over women now. Any of us who have engaged those debates about existing male power are tediously familiar with arguments that cite everything from chimps to chickens and usually end up as some version of Man-the-Hunter (or Warrior) as an origin myth.

With that forewarning, it is also true that the employment of speculation about gendered power's origins as an argumentative fallacy does not mean that these speculations are themselves unworthy or off-limits.

Over time, the social construction of power that was imposed on biological women has created culturally specific *sets* of expectations for both sexes. These expectations are behavioral, culturally and epochally specific, and they accentuate and expand differences between men and women. They create artificial differences between men and women. They police these differences. So where we might not see cultural prejudice and hostility against homosexual behavior in males as directed against males-not-females, what homophobia actually accomplishes is the delegitimation and devaluation of males who behave "like women." Homophobia polices a larger, bi-polar gender hierarchy that is first and foremost imposed on biological women.

To understand how profoundly gender impacts on the issues of finance, war, and security, we will need to look more closely at gender from its (partly speculative) historical evolution, as well as examine its relation to science and law.

Given that we are all exposed to deep indoctrination about the connection between objectivity, science, and knowledge, the feminist critique of scientific objectivity seems a good place to start. As with the earlier theses here on money, the ideas we will present on gender are not widely familiar and fly in the face of ideas that are broadly accepted as “common sense.” To apprehend these unorthodox ideas, we have to first make an intentional effort to release our mental grip on what may be some very basic assumptions.

Science is largely seen — based on its own successful public relations campaign — to be a hermetically-sealed, independent, value-neutral practice.

What feminists have been pointing out for some time now is that science is a philosophic *position*, a belief system, of which a fatally-flawed “objectivity” is the defining article of faith.

This critique of science does *not* imply some wholesale rejection of science as philosophy or practice, or of the ability of the “scientific method” to validate and invalidate certain hypotheses.

The feminist critique of science notes that science — which is a human *activity* — is *not* value-neutral, and the denied values that operate behind this smokescreen of objectivity are highly gendered in both conceptualization and actualization. **Science has always appealed for its social legitimacy to extra-scientific values** — values that are firmly rooted in gender as a systematic expression of men’s power over women.

In her book, [*The Flight to Objectivity - Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*](#) (SUNY Press, 1987), Susan Bordo writes:

The founders of modern science consciously and explicitly proclaimed the “masculinity” of science as inaugurating a new era. And they associated that masculinity with a cleaner, purer, more objective and more disciplined epistemological relation to the world.

(p. 105)

I have often quoted the film *Jurassic Park*, since it is widely known, especially the comments about science in the mouth of the chaos-theorist character, Dr. Ian Malcolm. Here is the extended comment from Malcolm in [the original novel](#), by Michael Crichton:

I’ll tell you the problem with engineers and scientists. Scientists have an elaborate line of bullshit about how they are seeking to know the truth about nature. Which is true, but that’s not what drives them. Nobody is driven by abstractions like ‘seeking truth.’

Scientists are actually preoccupied with accomplishment. So they are focused on whether they can do something. They never stop to ask if they should do something. They conveniently define such considerations as pointless. If they don’t do it, someone else will. Discovery, they believe, is inevitable. So they just try to do it first. That’s the game in science. Even pure scientific discovery is an aggressive penetrative act. It takes big equipment, and it literally changes the world afterward. Particle accelerators scar the land, and leave radioactive byproducts. Astronauts leave trash on the moon. There is always some proof that scientists were there, making their discoveries. Discovery is always a rape of the natural world. Always.

The scientists want it that way. They have to stick their instruments in. They have to leave their mark. They can’t just watch. They can’t just appreciate. They can’t just fit into the natural order. They have to make something unnatural happen. That is the scientist’s job, and now we have whole societies that try to be scientific.

I insert that caustic commentary from a fictional character because it describes the masculinity of scientific practice so well, without ever identifying it as masculinity. The most interesting word he uses, from this perspective, is “rape.”

“Pure scientific discovery is an **aggressive penetrative** act.”

“They have to stick their instruments in.”

The so-called father of modern science, Francis Bacon, said of his own enterprise:

For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able when you like to lead and drive her afterward to the same place again... Neither ought a man to make a scruple of entering and penetrating into those holes and corners when the inquisition of truth is the whole subject.

There is the feminization of Nature, referred to as *her*.

There is a stalking metaphor: “hound [her] in her wanderings.”

There is a control-domination metaphor: “be able when you like to lead and drive her afterward to the same place again.”

There is a rape metaphor (which is roundly denied, in spite of its obviousness, by Bacon apologists): “Neither ought a man to make a scruple of entering and penetrating into those holes and corners.”

And there is a masculine claim to truth, arrived at through objectification, using a strangely religious-sounding torture metaphor: inquisition.

Scientist and philosopher Sandra Harding points out that, while there is such a thing as The Objective — things being as they are regardless of perception to the contrary — science has clung to a male myth of objectivity, a pretension of objectivity that naturalizes social power.

The mainstream traditions in science have always avoided dealing with the meanings of science. They have not liked dealing with the meanings of science, the meanings of scientific terms. They have wanted to restrict their concerns to the references of science. They count as “not science” the meanings of science, the institutions, the technologies, the applications, and a whole range of aspects of science as culture and practice.

Coming out of that tradition, it’s not just philosophers and scientists but the general public that believes this also.

And yet, one important part of the feminist critiques of science has been of the meanings of science, of gender symbolizing. Where we learned to talk about that is through psychoanalysis and literary texts. For example, both Susan Bordo in *The Flight to Objectivity* and Evelyn Keller use psychoanalysis in very sophisticated ways to talk about the psychic drives that function in doing science and in gathering social resources for the advancement of science at different historical moments. They’re not putting scientists on the couch; they’re putting the age on the couch and looking at, say, what “mechanism” meant to people in the fifteenth to seventeenth century. One can do it without psychoanalysis. For example, Carolyn Merchant in [The Death of Nature](#) doesn’t draw on psychoanalytic theory at all but talks about the meanings that [the shift from organicism to mechanism](#) had for people and how gender symbolization was part of that. So, the rhetoric of science and the rhetoric of philosophy of science are among the objects that feminist critiques have been concerned with:

How is it that resources are gathered? In what ways is science presented to people? How do scientists talk to each other? How do they talk to the public? Initially, there was puzzlement about why all this “sex talk” was going on in a field that supposedly is only concerned with the abstract laws of nature, rigorous mathematical quantifications, and so forth.

(from [an interview](#))

One of the peculiar notions developed within science is that of Natural Law. Given that scientists have taken it upon themselves to assign a juridical category — one seen as both directive and proscriptive, *law* — to describe their own generalizations (and give them men’s names, Ohm’s Law, Maxwell’s Law, etc.), what can we say about law, and how it articulates with science and gender? How did science come to see itself as discovering a legal code in nature; and what does that tell us about law and science?

Conquest and control

It is more than interesting that law is about control, that the scientific method cannot validate without control and that women, even since the dawn of science, have been identified with Nature and both women and Nature have been identified with chaos.

Maria Mies' groundbreaking book, [*Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale - Women in the International Division of Labor*](#) (Zed Books, 1988, 1998), has a particularly telling [section on witch trials](#), which debunks the notion that they were based principally on Medieval superstition, and fixes them firmly in the emerging epoch of scientific modernism.

The Reason-Emotion dichotomy of the European feudal epoch were mapped onto the "modern" epoch, with male identified as reasonable and female with chaotic and sensual. But the fundamental definition of Reason had changed from a scholastic and embodied one in the Middle Ages (familiarity with Christian orthodoxy equating to Reason, but with Man fixed firmly inside the "known" universe) to the methodological and dualistic Reason (and masculinity) of the Age of Reason — Man using his *instruments* to dominate a psychologically-externalized (feminized and "othered") Nature.

The development of arms and transport technology [remember machines and time-space appropriation?] has been a driving force for technological innovation in all patriarchal societies, but particularly in the modern capitalist European one which has conquered and subjected the whole world since the fifteenth century. The concept of 'progress' which emerged in this particular patriarchal civilization is historically unthinkable without the one-sided development of the technology of war and conquest. All subsistence technology (for conservation, production of food, clothes and shelter, etc.) henceforth appears to be 'backward' in comparison to the 'wonders' of the modern technology of warfare and conquest (navigation, the compass, gunpowder, etc.).

The predatory patriarchal division of labour is based, from the outset, on a structural separation and subordination of human beings; men are separated from women, whom they have subordinated, the 'own' people are separated from the 'foreigners' or 'heathens'. Whereas in the old patriarchies this separation could never be total, in the modern 'western' patriarchy this separation has been extended to a separation between MAN and NATURE. In the old patriarchies (China, India, Arabia), men could not conceive of themselves as totally independent from Mother Earth. Even the conquered and subjected peoples, slaves, pariahs, etc., were still visibly present and were not thought of as lying outside the [oikos](#) or the 'economy' (the hierarchically structured social universe which was seen as a living organism (cf. Merchant, 1983)...

...With the rise of capitalism as a world-system, based on large-scale [here again, the question of scale and time-space appropriation are central -SG] conquest and colonial plunder, and the emergence of the world market, it becomes possible to externalize or extraterritorialize those whom the new patriarchs wanted to exploit. The colonies were no longer seen as part of the economy or society, they were lying outside 'civilized society.' In the same measure as European conquerers and invaders 'penetrated' those 'virgin lands', these lands and their inhabitants were 'naturalized', declared as wild, savage nature, waiting to be exploited and tamed by the male civilizers...

...As Carolyn Merchant has convincingly shown, the rise of modern science and technology was based on the violent attack and rape of Mother Earth — hitherto conceived as a living organism. Francis Bacon the father of modern science, was one of those who advocated the same violent means to rob Mother Nature of her secrets — namely, torture and inquisition — as were used by Church and State to get at the secrets of the witches... ...The rise of modern science, a mechanistic and physical world-view. was based on the killing of nature as a living organism and its transformation into a huge reservoir of 'natural resources' or 'matter', which could be analysed and synthesized by Man into his new machines by which he could make himself independent of Mother Nature...

(Mies, pp. 74-5) [a powerful echo of psychoanalytical accounts of masculine personality formation — separation from the mother -SG]

Now to a chilling excerpt from Mies' book regarding witch trials:

The persecution and burning of the midwives as witches was directly connected with the emergence of modern society: the professionalization of medicine, the rise of medicine as a 'natural science', the rise of science and of modern economy. The torture chambers of the witch-hunters were the laboratories where the texture, the anatomy, the resistance of the human body — mainly the female body — was studied. One may say that modern medicine and the male hegemony over this vital field were established on the base of millions of crushed, maimed, torn, disfigured and finally burnt, female bodies.

There was a calculated division of labour between Church and State in organizing the massacres and terror against the witches. Whereas the church representatives identified witches, gave theological justification and led the interrogations, the 'secular arm' of the state was used to carry out the tortures and finally execute the witches on the pyre.

The persecution of the witches was a manifestation of the rising modern society and not, as usually believed, a remnant of the irrational 'dark' Middle Ages. This was most clearly shown by Jean Bodin, the French theoretician of the new mercantilist economic doctrine. Jean Bodin was the founder of the quantitative theory of money, of the modern concept of sovereignty and of [mercantilist](#) populationism. He was a staunch defender of modern rationalism, and was at the same time one of the most vocal proponents of state-ordained tortures and massacres of witches. He held the view that, for the development of new wealth after the medieval agrarian crisis, the modern state had to be invested with absolute sovereignty. This state had, moreover, the duty to provide for enough workers for the new economy. In order to do so, he demanded a strong police which would fight against midwives and witches who, according to him, were responsible for so many abortions, the infertility of couples, or sexual intercourse without conception. Anyone who prevented the conception or the birth of children he considered a murderer, who should be persecuted by the state. Bodin worked as a consultant of the French government in the persecution of the witches, and advocated torture and the pyre to eradicate the witches... This combination of modern rationality, the propagation of the new state and a direct violent attack on the witches we also find in another great master of the new era of European civilization, namely Francis Bacon.

Similarly, there is a direct connection between the witch pogroms and the emergence of the professionalization of the law...

The reason why the sons of the rising urban class were flocking to the law faculties was the following: 'In our times jurisprudence smiles at everybody, so that everyone wants to become a doctor in law. Most are attracted to this field of studies out of greed for money and ambition'.

And so the theme of the "othered" (psychologically-externalized) woman (part of chaotic Nature requiring Man's firm hand to hold her in check) is then elaborated into the General Theory of Conquest and Colonization that still pervades our (implicitly male) discourse about Reason vs Emotion, Civilized vs Primitive, Man vs Nature, and the articulation of the practices this discourse rationalizes into male-control over female bodies and reproduction, subjugation of women into the protection racket of [the sexual contract](#), urbanization and the modern (nation)-state, and the male-elite professionalization of medicine and law.

How far afield is the 16th Century discourse from our own? We are now living in the Hyper-state, engaged in wars against "uncivilized" others to retain control over *natural resources* required to maintain a capital-expansive urban existence, ruled by a man who was re-invented for election as a masculine imperial-expansionist icon (the cowboy), and assisted by his lawyers (until recently, Alberto Gonzales) to claim justification for torture and killing in order to maintain control over the colonies.

Law

Like science, the law — particularly modern liberal law — lays claim to objectivity. Just as I relied on Mies to explain how the control-colonization theme developed gender into a General Theory, I will rely on law professor Catharine MacKinnon's exemplary deconstruction of (male) liberal law to expose just what is this juridical objectivity.

The liberal state is an institution of power, but it is not the sole source of power. It can send police to your door to arrest you if you violate the law, and they are legally entitled to use all necessary force, up to and including killing you, to ensure your compliance. It can send the armed forces to Iraq to occupy it, or order the bombing

of an aspirin factory in Sudan, or sign allegedly-binding treaties with other states.

It makes the laws that we are then bound to follow, and even has courts to interpret the laws – because as we have seen these laws can never anticipate the complexity of real life nor the kinds of social pressures that emerge during the constant evolution of society – and this interpretive process in the courts is designed to ensure the stability of the state.

This judicial motivation is an important point.

But there are obviously many other systems of power operating in society that are not state power. The power a boss exercises over an employee, the power a parent exercises over a child, the power (social and economic) that many men exercise over many women. (I already anticipated the argument that women actually exercise power over men, but that is adaptive, defensive, and negotiated power that is not borne out by or reflected in any empirical indices of actual social, economic, or political power.) The question of what the state is and does can not be answered without figuring out how the liberal state relates to these other forms of power.

MacKinnon writes that “Gender is a social system that divides power.” Other social systems do the same thing — economic class, international relations, colonialism, *et al*, but gender is a division of power most fundamentally between men and women... a *sexual* division of power.

This is absolutely basic to understanding the law, and how it is gendered.

Gender is a social system of power division that has the notion of difference at its core. Men and women are different, and the law acknowledges this difference in various ways.

Here is a subtlety.

In many societies, the state still puts this gender difference at the center of its legal edifice, but in ours, where the struggle by women for legal equality has gone on for some time, this question of difference has been challenged – not with absolute success, but with some significant changes – by the notion of *equality in the abstract* for all people, including women, who are now assumed by the liberal state in many cases, to be the same as men... in fact, an abstract person, genderless in the eyes of the law.

So the Liberal State (the US, in fact), through law, both acknowledges difference and sameness. When and how it acknowledges each, then, is a prerequisite to understanding how the law is gendered.

The law of the abstractly equal person does not recognize a pre-existing history of material social inequality.

The old Anatole France quote that puts this in bold relief is, “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich as well as poor from sleeping under bridges, begging in the streets, and stealing bread.”

So we are left, regarding gender, with legal abstract equality that refuses to see this historically-evolved social inequality it overlays, and which existed “prior to operation of the law.” This is the “equality” that allows people nowadays to sue women’s institutions for excluding males, for example. If men’s institutions can be compelled by law to admit women, then it is only fair, this line goes, that women-only activities be opened to men.

The law is saying that the deep history and incontestable fact of *actual* social inequality is rendered irrelevant before a “principle” of fictional (abstract) equality.

Women in the US were regarded as chattel in the 19th Century, prevented from full control over themselves and their property by marriage [coverture](#) well into the 20th Century, denied the right to vote until after World War I, didn’t achieve legal control over their own reproductive capacity until the 1960s (this is now under attack again), and tried for ten years to get [a simple equality amendment](#) for women into the Constitution for ten years, finally failing ratification in 1982.

On average, women still make only three quarters of what men do in the US. (These numbers become dramatically more stratified when race is introduced into the calculations.)

My point is, without running out ten pages of statistics that consistently demonstrate inequality of social power

between men and women, the social reality of power-difference and material inequality is reflected inaccurately by the liberal state's legal assumption (in selective instances) of abstract sameness and equality. As in all forms of Jeffersonian liberalism, including libertarianism, it is ahistorical.

This is, in fact, a characteristic of the American liberal state since its inception. The US Constitution is written in such a way that *it reflected existing conditions — like slavery and coverture — as natural*, and largely described the systems of power in which the state was prohibited to intervene. Male power was assumed. White power was assumed. Propertied power was assumed.

Every incursion against those power systems by the state itself was propelled not from within the state, but from without, by social movements.

MackKinnon calls this the neutral, or negative, state.

Unlike the ways in which men systematically enslave, violate, dehumanize, and exterminate other men, men's forms of dominance over women have been accomplished socially as well as economically prior to the operation of law, without express state acts, often in intimate contexts, as everyday life.

Since state power is erected upon pre-existing ("prior to the law") social power, just as we can call the US liberal state a capitalist state, we can call it white and male. Hegemonic power resides with white, male capitalists prior the operation of the law — *de facto* — and the law's position of abstract equality, far from creating a remedy, denies this power.

The 'neutral' state professes neutrality, **objectivity**. This common claim between scientific rationalism and liberal law is not an accident.

"Objectivity" claims to be a neutral arbiter of abstract equality, and thus sidesteps the issue of concrete inequality — assuming it out of existence. The negative state is the liberal state that says what the state shall not do — no laws shall be made abridging this freedom or that freedom — which can then only meaningfully apply to those who already have the material means to exercise these freedoms.

The liberal state's legal [episteme](#) is neutral in its reflection of actual inequality, reflecting that concrete inequality back into society and renaming it abstract equality.

This is the genius of liberal law, and the way it gathers popular acceptance and forecloses critique. In a society accustomed by centuries of rationalist philosophical hegemony, this trumping of real inequality by abstract equality seems to "make sense." We are thoroughly habituated to thinking this way, and thinking outside this paradigm requires an effort of will.

If the liberal state is prohibited from intervention in affairs declared *private* (the basis for tacit state support for domestic abuse until well into the 20th Century — "a man's home is his castle," etc.), and if the private, or civil sphere is the sphere in which male power is most directly exercised, then the state simply forecloses a political solution to that system of unequal power, and therein supports it.

This is the contradiction in the liberal state and the liberal conception of law that allows white men to sue for "reverse discrimination," and that equates corporate campaign spending during elections with "free speech." Actually existing power inequality is assumed away by the state as a background, as part of nature, in which it can not, will not, interfere.

Law in the liberal American state is also precedential, based on precedent... that which *preceded* it. In this way, it explicitly reflects existing conditions, then naturalizes them.

The institutionally same Supreme Court can render the Dred Scott decision in 1857, then turn around and render *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. In each case, the court reflected the social realities of shifting power, as they were at the moment. Civilian law in the United States is interpreted by precedent... in effect, by the status quo. And *the interpretive motivation for the judiciary is not transcendent truth, but stability of the state*.

The paradox for women has been that feminists...

...caught between giving more power to the state in each attempt to claim it for women [have left] unchecked power in the society to men," because the liberal state resists intervention into social power structures, like gender, and reflects those same structures, pretending now that this is an exercise of juridical 'objectivity,' in precedent. Just as in other cases of power struggle, the shift created outside the law by social movements has preceded (the root word of precedent) the juridical reflection of these changes in law...

Those who have freedoms like equality, liberty, privacy, and speech socially and economically keep them legally, free of government intrusion. No one who does not already have them socially or economically is granted them legally." In fact, a demand for them legally will generate a reaction that the disempowered group is seeing "special rights," the claim deployed against gay rights advocates.

"Philosophically, this posture is expressed in the repeated constitutional invocation of the superiority of 'negative' freedom – staying out, letting be – over positive legal affirmations. Negative liberty gives one the right to be 'left to do what [he] is able to do or be, without interference from other persons.' The state that pursues this value promotes freedom when it does not intervene in the status quo... For women, this has meant that civil society, the domain in which women are distinctively subordinated and deprived of power, has been placed beyond the reach of legal guarantees. Women are oppressed socially, prior to the law, without express state acts, often in intimate contexts. The negative state cannot address their situation in any but an equal society – the one in which it is needed least.

(MacKinnon, Catharine, "Toward a Feminist Theory of the State," Howard University Press, 1991)

The Law's intentional blindness to existing inequality is what allows liberal law to make the audacious claim that it is "objective." It begins with the supposition that nothing exists until it is established within the probative juridical framework of the state... except the status quo, which is tacitly presumed to be natural and therefore beyond intervention.

When we trace the easy association between Church and State connection back to Bodin and the witch-hunts, it is easier to apprehend that the law "is the manifestation of custom and precedent, and it has a deeply religious character – complete with church-like courtrooms designed to inspire awe and obedience, oye-oye incantations to ritualize its activity, and even priestly robes for the presiding judges."

It's objectivity, like that of patriarchal bourgeois science, is a brash bluff.

State power, embodied in law, exists throughout society as male power at the same time as the power of men over women throughout society is organized as the power of the state.

(MacKinnon, p. 170)

Most of the time, defence of the patriarchal order does not require and explicit masculinity politics. Given that heterosexual men socially selected for hegemonic masculinity run the corporations and the state, the routine maintenance of these institutions will normally do the job.

(Connell, Robert, *Masculinities*, University of California Press, 1995)

No one knows how male supremacy started, and the conjecture about that question is often used to obfuscate the issue of the precise form in which male power observably exists now. Man-the-hunter stories and other such fantasies are still invoked to justify the power of metropolitan men who would quickly perish in the absence of grocery stores, cars, and blood pressure medications.

One thing we can conclude with certainty is that one form of creativity — gestation — has been biologically set aside as a woman-only province. Nursing extends the maternal-dependency period of infants in non-industrial society (99.9% of human history, and the current majority of human society). It seems a fair conclusion that this fact could lead to some gendered divisions of labor in prehistoric communities; but not automatically to men and women being differently valued as individuals or assets to the community.

As male power emerged, whether that was from male familiarity with weapons from hunting bands, or pastoral notions of owning "livestock" transferred to women by force, or in a contest for the social construction

“property”... there are many conjectures... that power was accompanied by its rationalizations.

The generative force of women — the ability to give birth — has remained not only necessary to the propagation of our species, it is awe-inspiring. Men’s role in this process — at least in the realm of biological necessity — is brief and effortless, and finds its botanical analog in pollination.

As men sought to consolidate their power over women, it became necessary to both compensate for what men could not do (give birth, nurse), and to shift the power of generation ideologically from women to men.

Many feminist theorists speculate that men’s fascination with tools, and the female-tool taboos that developed (including a weapons taboo), are symptomatic of a male preoccupation with power... and that the social valorization of “tool-work” outside the home above and beyond “women’s work” (including generation and maternity) is a defense of that power.

Other theorists note — using a linguistic analysis to support their argument — that men have ripped off the power of generation with the idea that generative power is male. That’s how we get terms like “potent” and “seminal” (from the root word, semen) to mean powerful and original, how we have women “carrying” and-or “bearing” (some male’s) children like a vessel, and so forth. This relates directly to the “imperial phallus” described by Jessica Benjamin in her damning critique of patriarchally-constructed sexual desire.

When the sexual self is represented by the sensual capacities of the whole body, when the totality of space between, outside, and within our bodies becomes the site of pleasure, then desire escapes the borders of the imperial phallus and resides on the shores of endless worlds.

(Benjamin, Jessica, “Bonds of Love - Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination,” Pantheon Books, 1988)

Which leads me to my final point before returning to the issue of “homeland security” and how gender relates to all this. Desire.

There is a very useful word that is not often employed that I want to introduce here: **imbricate**. It generally is used as medical descriptive terminology (describing certain tissue structures), but it comes from the word “brick.” To be emplaced like a brick, that is in overlapping rows, where the stability of the whole is created by the overlaps. I like it as a way to describe many social phenomena, because no single phenomenon exists independent of context, and none gains its relevance (stability) as a social phenomenon except in its relation to the rest of the phenomena (bricks).

One way ideology (ideas that simultaneously conceal and reproduce existing power) functions in our epoch is to never examine a brick as it relates to the wall. Remove the context, the mutually-supporting structures that make the whole of which the brick is a part, and only describe the single brick.

We do that with sexual desire, and it is a source of immense confusion, a confusion that is instrumental in reproducing and concealing men’s power. We treat it as an individual, private matter; and we have even created a kind of liberal taboo against too close an examination of desire (calling it a “violation of privacy”). It has been separated for description from the rest of the wall that is male power; yet a moment’s thought will tell us that desire is completely *imbricated* in the larger system of sexualized power.

When this ideological dis-imbrication — the decontextualizing of desire — is challenged, those of us who say that desire can not be placed beyond critique are even baited as the allies of the religious Right. Let me say right up front that this is a dodge, a cheap and intellectually lazy one, and nothing could be further from the truth. Desire is as socially-constructed as any other aspect of human interaction, and that construction includes its *imbrication* with the structures and cultures of power.

Not only is desire imbricated with social power, the exercise of social power — including the use of violence — is eroticized. We use sexual terminology to describe violence, and we use violent terminology to routinely describe sexuality. This is so common it doesn’t even require examples here.

As to eroticized violence, including rape, MacKinnon put to rest the ridiculous claim that “rape is not sex” in her typically direct fashion:

Men often rape women, it turns out, because they want to and enjoy it. The act, including the

dominance, is sexually arousing, sexually affirming, and supportive of the perpetrator's masculinity.

Many women really do find certain macho-male types to be sexually stimulating. Most men do find infantilized, immobilized, silenced, and self-objectifying women to be *objects* of their sexual desire. Given how early relentlessly, and thoroughly we are indoctrinated about how to desire, the exceptions to these rules are what are most surprising. Because desire is experienced as being physical, the old social-biological dichotomy kicks in and tells us that what is physical is biological, and what is biological is biologically (the opposite of socially) determined. This leads us to conclude that desire is some deep biological mystery wired into our DNA. But we don't then ask why the images of the not so distant past erotically valorized — as one example — women who would be called "overweight" (note the *implicit norm*) by today's beauty standards. If desire is bound by biology, how did certain bodily representations of desire come to change so dramatically in so short a period of time?

The answer, of course, is that desire, like other human behaviors is learned... and therefore taught. Once taught, given how reinforced desire is, *imbricated* as it is with gender-identity and systemic power, it is difficult (though not impossible) to unlearn.

Sado-masochistic role play in sex, for example, may shock conservatives (like shocking our parents). But the combination of sex with sadism is hardly original. It's central to the generally accepted character of male desire. S&M might seem "transgressive" when it is flaunted at post-Victorians, and it is certainly inflected with real physical desire. But it is hardly original given the long history of male sexual sadism that, to this day, goes well beyond playacting. In our critique of desire as it relates to male power, the central question is *not* the liberal one of whether people should be able to do what they want or not. We can defend people's right to freedom from state interference without placing the critique of all forms of sexuality off limits. Feminism — at its best — has always looked at sex as a political question... the power under review being that of men-as-men.

Gender identity for men, those generally in power, is a reference point for action and a delimiting source of unrecognized anxiety. The impact of masculinity on politics — in particular on questions of "security" — is incalculable.

A critical examination of gender and (in)security only just begins with the observation that both violence and the ostensible prevention of violence is understood and practiced as a male domain. How much of what now passes for foreign policy as well as domestic politics is rhetorically framed as masculinity. Stay tough. Don't compromise (message: or you'll be punked). Never back down.

It's the ethos of the masculinized school yard. Political [phallocentrism](#).

The phallocentrism of our *most* commonly-accepted ideas about sex are invisible precisely because they are trained at an early age, internalized, and accepted as natural. One of the more easily recognized notions of phallocentric thought is the general acceptance that sexual union ends with the male orgasm. Think, first, about how heterosex as a norm is implicit in this notion.

Now, let's think for a moment about Adrienne Rich called [compulsory heterosexuality](#), that is heterosexuality as the norm, with *complimentary and unequal* roles assigned to each sex inhering in that norm. This is the binary that is policed in culture and early socialization; and it is explicitly about public male agency and private female submission.

The forms of that male agency (and its feminine compliment) change with the evolution of society, without seriously disrupting the fact of male dominance. This has been particularly true of late modernism (or industrialism) as an epoch, where rapid changes have continually disrupted the forms of masculinity-femininity.

As Kenneth Boulding said, "We make our tools, and then they shape us."

And as Jessica Benjamin said, "The deep structure of gender complementarity has persisted despite the increased flexibility of contemporary sex roles."

The identification of manhood with tools, and of male agency with the ability to use tools to alter (in modern parlance, subdue) nature, has extremely deep historical roots. This is another aspect of masculinity that is associated with but not synonymous with masculinity defined as aggression. In our current period, given the

emphasis we will put on technology and machines in our critique of “security,” the forms of metropolitan masculinity specifically associated with late imperialism are essential to recognize and deconstruct.

Robert Connell, in *Masculinities*, writes:

A familiar theme in patriarchal ideology is that men are rational while women are emotional. This is a deep-seated assumption in European philosophy. It is one of the leading ideas in sex role theory, in the form of the instrumental/expressive dichotomy, and it is widespread in popular culture too. Science and technology, seen by the dominant ideology as the motors of progress, are culturally defined as a masculine realm. Hegemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus represents the interests of the whole society; it is a mistake to identify hegemonic masculinity purely with physical aggression... patriarchal culture emphasizes the mind/body split, and the way masculine authority is connected with disembodied reason...

...Advanced capitalism meant increased rationalization not only of business, but of culture as a whole — increasingly dominated by technical reason, that is, reason focused on the efficiency about means rather than ultimate ends. (The television industry in the United States [Connell is from Australia. -SG] is a striking example, with stunning technical virtuosity and enormous resources devoted to broadcasting junk.)

[Men’s domination of women is now legitimated by the technical organization of production, rather than legitimated by religion or force. As boys grow up, their masculinity is shaped to fit the needs of corporate work. Masculinity as a whole is reshaped to fit the corporate economy and its tamed culture.

Connell then cites a paper by Michael Winter and Ellen Robert, who say that “it is technical reason itself that constitutes the major form of repression in contemporary society.”

Connell both agrees with and disputes this claim on the grounds that it is overgeneralized.

Historically there has been an important division between forms of masculinity organized around direct combination (e.g., corporate management, military command) and forms organized around technical knowledge (e.g., professions, science). The latter have challenged the former for hegemony in the gender order of advanced capitalist societies, without complete success.

There are specific settings where masculinities organized around technical knowledge predominate, particularly in the occupational world of the ‘new middle class’ — or the new class, intellectually trained workers, technostucture, or petty bourgeoisie, in rival theories.

In fact, the more direct-domination species of masculinity associated with militarism and aggressive overt misogyny is always held in reserve, so to speak, not only as the final arbiter of power — as we see in our ever more fascistic epoch — but as the last word in men’s power over women.

This is the source of the popularity of superman spectacles like theatrical wrestling and male-revenge-fantasy films. A more interesting manifestation of this is among the technically-conformed men of the petty bourgeoisie who now spend immense sums of money and extended periods of time, on their computers, engaged in their two predominant forms of private entertainment: combat games and pornography. In the disembodied universe of technical discipline, men seek out their vicarious re-embodiment by pretending to kill people, and by masturbating to images of controlled and humiliated women and girls who have been reduced to sexual objects in production and sexual commodities in distribution.

When this middle-class is destabilized — a process that is in progress now — the reaction to that destabilization will include destabilization of male gender identity and the extremely dangerous male anxieties that accompany it. Introduce some 9-11 style provocation, and the male identity [will become openly fascistic.... as well as politically so.](#)

We believe that inattention to this particular demographic — white, suburban middle-class — is a colossal error. It is too large, too politically significant, and too potentially explosive to ignore. But seeing the latent danger of this “middle class” as essentially having an economic character may be the most dangerous oversight of all. Fascism is a middle-class phenomenon, true enough. But more than that, it is a male

phenomenon... even when it is buttressed by support from middle-class women.

The question of security is both internal and external. Further along, we will explain why we believe both aspects of this question are substantially addressed by a related social movement and design philosophy: relocalization and permaculture. But without an emphasis on gender, we will fail to accomplish the deep structural changes that will assure our security into the distant future.

The emphasis given by Insurgent American to relocalization and permaculture is a strategic emphasis that breaks with the strategic orthodoxies of the past, especially but not exclusively of the Left. This emphasis is related to the concrete reality of dependency in a generalized money-energy-economy that is facing an unprecedented impasse. Relocalization as a strategy does *not* somehow automatically eschew broad social movements.

We believe that this broad social movement must be **feminism**.

The trade union movement, for example, did not lose its ability to effectively struggle simply based on scale. The rentier phase of late imperialism, with the hyper-financialization of the economy and huge metropolitan household debt loads, were the *structural* changes that left the trade union movement behind.

There are broad social movements that still make a tremendous difference — the antiwar movement being the latest example.

The Left's failures, aside from being structurally out-manuevered by the system, have been related to its orthodoxies, both theoretical and organizational. Financialization broke the back of the working-class by end-running the class-awareness of workers with their own dependency, expressed as debt. Democratic centralism introduced an inevitable bureaucratism and loss of tactical agility by stifling individual initiative and making a fetish of collectivity as a means of enforcing ideological conformity.

It is this conformity, with its refusal to accept disruptive new information, in conjunction with the deep imbrication of patriarchy even on the Left, that has blinded the Left to the one broad social movement with the deepest revolutionary potential: feminism. If the entire organized Left were to begin today with an organizational and tactical emphasis on a radical feminist project — by that I mean a real struggle against male-as-male power, and not the depoliticized crap spinning out of the heads of postmodern academics — they would find a great deal more traction than they now have trying to resuscitate the old CIO.

A militant, revitalized, genuinely feminist movement in the United States — this time not as an afterthought of the other social movements, but in the forefront — would more effectively call into question the ideological assumptions reinforcing and reproducing late imperial patriarchy, have a larger potentially mobilizable base, and bring about a sharper social polarization than any movement that has been seen since antislavery.

The relationship between broad social movements of a national-international scale and locally networked efforts has often been tenuous and theoretically tangential. The extremely personal nature of questions related to gender-as-a-system-of-social-power can transcend the micro-macro dichotomy in ways that take the revolution from the streets into our bedrooms and back.

Moreover, the feminist critique of science, law, and history is in many ways almost indistinguishable from the critiques flowing out of the deep-ecology emphasis of relocalization politics and the permaculture design philosophy. A deeply feminist perspective on relocalization as political strategy serves as an essential antidote to the phallogocentric survivalism that discredits and endangers relocalization as practice and strategic orientation.

As this series continues, we will show the relationship between relocalization as strategic orientation and the question of security. For now, we ask readers henceforth to think about the gendered dynamics of history and politics, as we build our historical case. You will be rewarded with deeper insight, and over time the ubiquity of gender will lose its “naturalness” and we will understand it as the radioactive fallout that it is.

AUTHORS NOTE (SEPTEMBER 8, 2007): In the next part of this series, I was going to explore the relationship between actual politics, security-as-our preoccupation since 9-11, and gender. As it happens, the news today is full of the most recent video release from Osama bin Laden.

The commentary on this event will be predictably obtuse; and bin Laden will again emerge as a complete

caricature of evil. Democrats will predictably point out that the Bush administration hasn't "got him" yet. Republicans will rejoice, because (1) this takes some of the heat off of them from the Larry Craig's sex solicitation scandal (no gender there... duh), and (2) every time the bogeyman shows up, it triggers a paranoid section of the public to seek the protection of "real man" saber-rattlers... a carefully crafted Republican archetype.

This only supports the thesis — once one studies the actual bin Laden, a well-educated, calculating Saudi political actor who aims to topple the House of Saud — that bin Laden himself is delighted with the war in Iraq and the concurrent debacle in Afghanistan, not to mention the US belligerence against his other arch-enemy, the Iranian government. Bin Laden reasonably assumes that his own intervention *as the bogeyman*, will reinforce support for the ill-defined Global War on Terror that has been such a godsend in support of his own political objectives: to isolate and break the power of the House of Saud in his home country, by exacerbating the dilemmas of the House of Saud's guarantor of power, the USA.

As it turns out, the gender aspect of this was something I treated in a piece I wrote for Sanders Research Associates more than two years ago. So, in lieu of using the upcoming Part 10 of this series to explain the gender-security connection, I am linking the article "[Phallic Judo](#)."

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