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## Understanding Sex, Gender, Race and Capitalism in Queer Theologies

We live in a globalised world where terms do not mean the same for everyone due to culture, language and context. This chapter will aim to produce a common language from which to build the following chapters.

### But What of Language?

Language is not without its baggage as it underpins the formation of consciousness yet is also a powerful tool in resistance to the formation of certain assumptions in society and religion. Language structures our reality and should not be seen as separate from other material conditions that embody our existence. How we use language and how it is used about us is a strong influence in how we see the world. In using language we participate in a consensus often unwittingly. While we continue to use the language that is common parlance around us, we do not disagree with the world view it carries. Our judgements and perceptions are directed by the values embedded in our language and in this way set limits on what we might imagine. Feminists pointed out that the concept woman is not a reflection of the lives of women in general but rather what counts as normal female behaviour.

The words homosexual, lesbian, gay, queer all fall into the same patterns; they tell us little to nothing about the people they are said to describe but a great deal about the behaviours attributed to those words. They also carry societal, cultural and contextual positioning. The spread of English as the universal language, in the opinion of the authors, has spread colonial, masculinist, white privilege through the use of language. We know that missionaries wrote down and categorised indigenous languages and infected native language with colonial concepts such as masculine deities replacing the wide range of genders on display in many indigenous religions. They also replaced the notion of sharing with ownership, a concept that was alien to many indigenous peoples. Colonisers also in many cases, as in Wales, beat the native language out of the indigenous inhabitants making it painful and even shameful to use. Language is powerful—please be careful how you use it! Indeed, be creative and follow in the footsteps of feminists and queer activists who have attempted to use language differently in order to create a new and more inclusive world. See for an example of different use of language and different ways of expressing the book, *Websters' First Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, conjured by Mary Daly in cahoots with Jane Caputi (Beacon Press, 1987).

While it may seem unnecessary we believe a basic grasp of what is meant by religion may be of help. Sometimes we take it for granted that religion is automatically a part of human life and that much that is said cannot be changed in any way. This of course is not true. Further, some scholars in the past gave the impression that religions developed along an ever-increasing trajectory of getting better, truer and more enlightened. This has led to prejudice and at times discrimination and even torture and murder. It certainly had a part to play in the colonial projects of past centuries when the brutality of conquest was overlaid with the notion that the West was civilising the parts of the world it overran and exploited. The same mindset was in play up to the 1970s in the Christian schools that took First Nations children in Canada from their families, removed their native names and forced them into a school system that was often brutal and never really gave them the education it promised but ‘civilised’ the children.

**Edward Said (1935–2003).** Born in Jerusalem he was a Palestinian American scholar and was amongst the founders of postcolonial studies. He wrote a number of books including *Orientalism* (Pantheon Press, 1978) which examined Western attitudes to the east and in *Culture and Imperialism* (Knopf, 1993).

*‘none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and canons but is also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.’ Edward Said (1993: 7).*

## So What Is Religion?

The word ‘religion’ has become an academically contested ground (2008). What it means and what constitutes religion is by no means decided upon. Further, it is of course entirely possible that what was understood as religion has changed dramatically down the thousands of years of human evolution. And most importantly how we gain access to the long ago past and what we make of it is a tricky issue. This issue has become complicated by our own rapid development in terms of cultural change which as Eric Hobsbawm noted was threatening to cut us loose from our past altogether. In order to address this legitimate point of view some scholars have concentrated on what they term biological history, that is evolution which takes the human story all the way back and breaks with acknowledged conventions that history only begins approx. 5,000 years ago with texts. All the way back means for them back to the Big Bang; it also involves a rejection of distinctions such as prehistory and history—all is the human story (2008). We may have noticed that stating that all is the human story before there are actually any humans on earth is a radical thing to do—and will certainly have implications for how we might understand the evolution of religion in human history.

*Clifford Geertz defines religion as a system of symbols that when enacted establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations that make sense in terms of the general order of existence. He reflects that ritual is a way of creating another world since it is not just a belief but a set of actions that can place the actor in another sphere. The world as lived and the world as imagined fuse*

*Emile Durkheim ‘Religion is a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unite those that adhere to them in a moral community.’ (1995).*

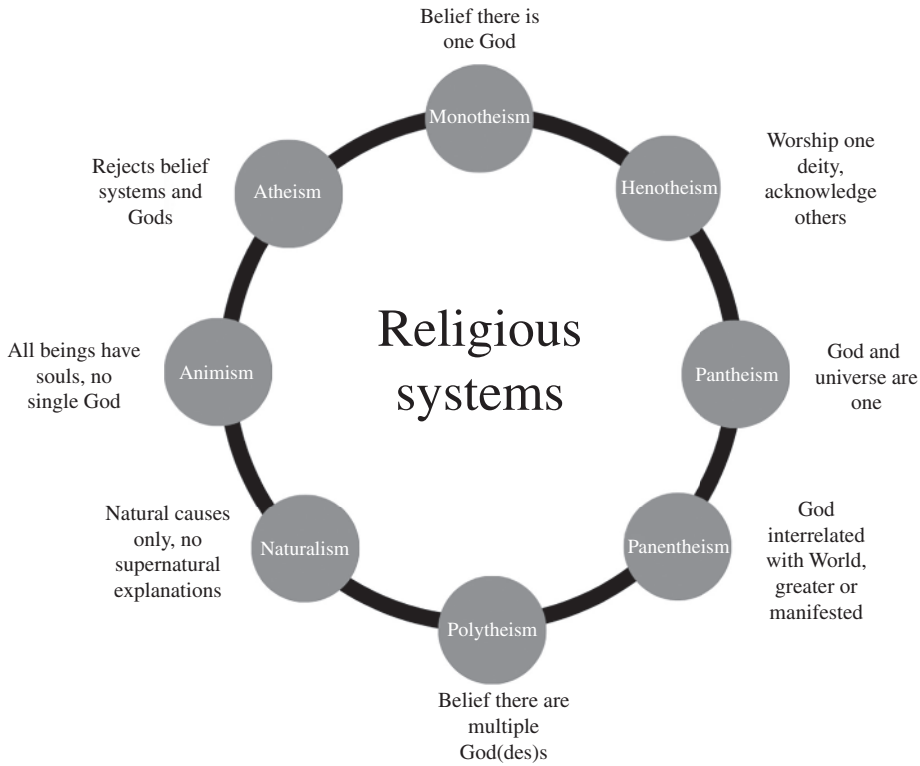
There is no easy explanation of what religion is, but it does seem to have at its heart the idea that there is more to things than meets the eye. The German writer Rudolf Otto (1923) called this the idea of the *Numinous* which suggests that people feel that they can sense something bigger than themselves, but they still feel part of it. This in many cases leads not just to religious doctrine but also views of the world and the cosmos, for example, the Vatican took until 1951 to accept the notion that evolution is an innate part of the cosmos and the Big Bang as the beginning—this was because the Bible in the form of Genesis suggests that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The Roman Catholic Church was not quite as literalist in this as many fundamentalist Protestant churches but still held the principle that God created the world and so still struggles, as many churches do, with the unfolding which is innate in the Big Bang Theory versus a once-and-for-all creation by a divine being.

Accepting a new world view comes slowly to many religions since their whole belief system is based on ‘original ideas’ of God(s) and the universe. It is often the case that theology, that is the academic study of notions of the divine, moves somewhat quicker than the established forms of religions themselves. This book sets out how based on the lived experience of people making sense of their lives and love queer theologies from around the globe demonstrates this very movement.

Religion of course comes in many different guises and has at its heart many different notions of God(s). So we suggest that you get to grips with the following definitions as they will come into play as the book unfolds:

- Monotheism is the belief that there is only one God. This is a belief held by Christianity, Judaism and Islam, although Islam challenges Christianity over the notion of Trinity which many Muslims suggest points to more than one God.
- Henotheism refers to a religious belief system where a person worships one specific deity while acknowledging the existence of other deities.
- Pantheism is the belief that the universe and God are identical and therefore that God is immanent in the world. This underpins the notion that everything in the world is alive with the divine.
- Panentheism considers God and the world to be interrelated, but some panentheists hold that God is greater than the universe and others suggest that the world is a manifestation of God.
- Polytheism is the belief in many gods who appear to have different functions in the world.
- Animism focuses on individual spirits and does not believe there is simply one god. Animists believe every being (human and non-human) has a soul which is connected with the spirit world.
- Atheism is not a religion but rather the rejection of any system of belief and the idea of a god or gods.
- Naturalism is a belief system that asserts that everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.

At this time in history, just like the concept of religion, sex and gender have become very contested terms, and there is confusion in the general public about the distinctions.



**Graphic 1.1** Religious Systems

## Sex

Sex has traditionally been connected to biology and hormones. When the midwife declares, ‘Congratulations! It’s a boy!’ this is based purely on external genitalia, but there is more to it than that. An organism’s reproductive cells are called gametes, and these have been used to define sex. A male produces smaller gametes, while a female produces relatively larger gametes for the purpose of reproduction. Should something like illness interfere with their production it does not mean that people are no longer defined as male and female. Added to this picture is the so-called chromosome account. The Y chromosome in a seven-week-old human child triggers gamete production. The human male has a Y chromosome, and so a standard distribution of chromosomes is XY for males and XX for females. There are rare disorders of sexual development which can cause this distribution to go astray, but it is the presence of a Y chromosome that is counted as defining the two groups as either male or female. While in the majority of humans this essentialist description is clear, in some people it is not so clear. One example is a person with XY chromosomes who also has Androgen Insensitivity Disorder which results in them having testicles which may be partially or fully descended and are male according to gametes and chromosomes. However, they are unable to respond to testosterone, so they develop a feminised body with breasts, vulva and clitoris. Some grow up thinking of themselves as female but are not according to their gametes and chromosomes. This is also true for those born XX who have a condition known as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia which results in a masculine appearance and even an enlarged clitoris and the appearance of an empty scrotum.

A further theory that has been proposed is the Homeostatic Property Cluster to account for sex in which sex was decided by possession of sufficient characteristics such as genitalia, facial characteristics, skeletal structure, muscle and fat distribution. For many this seems a good rule of thumb, but of course some people exhibit differences in sexual development. Anne Fausto-Sterling promotes the view that sex is not binary but rather lies across an infinitely malleable continuum. She is credited with introducing the term intersex, but her article claiming five sexes has been disputed from a chromosomal point of view. Even her definition of hermaphrodite (a person having both sets of characteristics and genitalia) has been discredited on the grounds that she seems to believe that people need to hold perfect balances of gametes, chromosomes, gonads and hormones in order to fit one category. It seems this is rarely the case.

In 1990 Thomas Lacquer published *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* in which he argues that almost all claims about the differences between the sexes are culturally and historically relative. He says that before the eighteenth century most people had a one-sex model not two, and females were viewed as imperfect males where the differences were understood as in degree not kind. Thomas Aquinas believed that females were conceived if the east wind was blowing during sex!

## Gender

Gender comes into play in most societies. Symbols identifying gender originated in alchemy and astrology where Mars came to symbolise male and Venus, female. In the present day these symbols have increased as we now acknowledge more than two genders and so many ways of situating oneself within gender categories.

In most societies gender acts to imprint 'appropriate' ways of acting on the young body, boys don't cry, girls are sugar and spice and all things nice. It is this imprinting that many societies consider to be crucial to the way they continue, while other societies feel more relaxed about the baby growing into itself.

Research has shown that in the Western world people play more roughly with boy babies, throwing them in the air and so on. They also speak louder and more directly to boys. Whereas for girls play is gentler they are spoken to in 'baby language' for longer and of course wear soft colours, pink being still the most chosen colour. Boys wear blue!

There are two terms that are still in use when people think of gender. They are 'essentialism' versus 'constructionism'. It is necessary to understand how these terms influence debates around gender.



## Essentialism

The discussion about how one understands identities is complex in queer theory. The term 'essentialism' is a term that comes from philosophy, where it denotes either the possibility to know the 'essence' of something or the possibility to 'capture' that 'essence'

through descriptions or definitions. There is an assumption that human beings, objects or texts possess underlying essences that define their ‘true nature’. An ‘essence’ is fixed and unchanging, but has a double existence: as both the inherent or innate property of an individual object or being, and the abstract, external essence governing the type to which all examples conform.

In terms of sexual identity politics, this has been the traditional understanding of how queer folks ‘are’, implying a fixed, unchanging state, as Jagose states: ‘[...] [E]ssentialists regard identity as natural, fixed and innate. (...) Essentialists assume that homosexuality exists across time as a universal phenomenon which has a marginalised but continuous and coherent history of its own’ (1996: 8–9).

Some theorists argue that gay and lesbian identity politics was built upon this concept in the 1970s and 1980s, which was challenged by queer theory from the 1990s.

### Constructionism

It is the notion that culture is a human creation and that what we ‘are’ and ‘do’ is impacted by ‘social influences’. This notion was taken by some feminists and philosophical theories about gender in order to explain the be/coming of human beings. Jagose suggests that:

‘Constructionists assume identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself. (...) [They] assume that because same-sex sex acts have different cultural meaning in different historical contexts, they are not identical across time and space’ (1996: 8–9).

As such, ‘constructionism’ opposes ‘essentialism’ in order to show that identity is fluid and that it can be modified or influenced by external forces, while at the same time people can re-enact that identity constantly.

Gender theory is the study of male, female and queer behaviour in any community or society.

In 1955 the controversial sexologist John Mooney introduced the term *gender* to describe human characteristics related to men and women. This opened up a new field in sexology and led to what we have today, an idea of gender theory. There are four major theories relating to gender development which are social learning theory, neurophysiological theory, cognitive development theory and gender schema theory. Gender theories

open up new ways in which to understand people in their different contexts. Judith Butler entered the debate and declared that gender is not in any way fixed to material identity but is purely a social construction that we learn to perform in order to support society and its patriarchal underpinnings. We can then unlearn and actually perform gender in any way we please, even from one day to the next, there is nothing fixed about it. Her theories have been taken up by other queer theorists to deconstruct the harshest understandings of queer sexuality and gender. Some feminist theorists are less enthusiastic about this level of flexibility believing that gender may play a significant role in how men and women see themselves and consequently how they view social reality which is believed to be crucial if society, as we have it, is to be refigured as more equal and relational.

Foucault said of gender theory that it is concerned with interrupting sexist systems and stereotypes in order to explore more fully new ways to be human in relation to any **gendered** performance of the self.

**Michel Foucault (1926–1984)** was a philosopher whose main idea was that we live under a codification of power relations across the whole social body. He wrote numerous works including *'The History of Sexuality'* Penguin Modern Classics, 2020, but first published in 1976. It is a four-volume examination of sexuality in the Western world.

Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble* (2006), argued that gender is a performance, that is to say each society expects a set of behaviours from people who have been identified as male or female at birth. She argues that this has to be taught as it is not in any way natural since humans have a vast array of ways in which to sit in their bodies which may or may not fit with societal demands. In her most recent book *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024) she examines why societies find the flexibility of gender so alarming. Unsurprisingly, she concludes that this is because so much is placed on the role play associated with gender. People must know their place in society, and so much of that place relies on knowing and keeping within one's assigned gender roles. She systematically unpicks the claims by mostly right-wing thinkers that gender flexibility leads to child abuse and the general break down of family, society and of course church.

**Judith Butler (1956–).** Her groundbreaking book was *'Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity'*, 1990, London, Routledge.

So what is gender identity? This is a controversial question as you can see from the above. It depends whether you feel gender is a fundamental part of yourself, stable and integral to your personality. The medical model would give more credibility to this view since it suggests that gender identity is relatively permanent. Under this model many clinicians view a misaligned gender identity as a mental illness. As we have noted Judith Butler suggests that gender is nothing more than a performance coming from social constructionism and stereotypes around sex. The British sociologist Stuart

Hall (1997) puts forward the so-called identification model of gender identity. Like Butler he argues that cultural identities, in which he included gender, are processes of active identification rather than stable facts about the self. This model involves a person consciously or subconsciously modelling themselves on another. This can range from wanting to be the other person or taking on the goals of the other right through the range of emotions to already seeing oneself in another. He suggests that recognition and the sense of belonging that accompanies it play a large part in this model. So according to Hall's theory a male who has 'misaligned gender identity' would strongly psychologically identify with one particular woman or with femaleness in general, while the reverse would be the case for a female. Hall's theory is based on the idea that representation is the process of using language to produce meaning, and that meanings are not fixed or real. He also argues that media texts often do not accurately represent people, places, events or history, because there is no single true meaning.

*Gender performance in action is its **ritualized repetition in the day-to-day**. This repetition gives gender its illusion of stability; the repeated performance of gender in accordance with the social norms of a given society.*

It has been argued that misaligned gender identity understood as identification fits well with the American medical model which acknowledges that some individuals have frequent and persistent feelings that they are really the opposite sex. The identification model also fits with gender dysphoria in which people say they are in a battle to make their external being fit with their internal feelings. These feelings can arise from strict stereotypes being imposed in family, church, society; one may not feel masculine enough or feminine enough according to these codes. Dysphoria and gender identity can be linked, and they may indeed trigger each other. The identification model does not posit that some absolute gender identity lies behind the feelings and convictions of similarity. In short then this model suggests that identifications may change throughout life. Importantly, this model does not suggest any form of mental illness involved in this process. It states that people are free to explore and express identification with the opposite sex or androgyny. The key being not to fix the identity realising it could change many times during a life time.

As we move to discussing race it is important to point out that gender and race are not unrelated topics. For example, within a Western Christian frame people who identify as transgendered are seen as part of the LGBTIQ+ community, whereas in Chile in the Mapoche people they are simply called third gender. Mapoche people do not work within a two-gendered world view based on sex assignment at birth as either male or female. This is because within that society gender identity is not based on sexual identity but rather on gender and spirituality. So within those societies a third gender person is within their gender/sex norm and so are not named as gay, bi, trans or queer – just simply third gendered. This ties in with their world view which is about balance embedded in a dualist understanding which blends opposing and complementary concepts such as earth/sky, masculine/feminine, good/evil. This is quite at odds with a Western mindset that views dualism as consisting of opposing views that may not be reconciled. As we shall see in Chapter 12 these third-gender individuals are considered to be spiritual leaders and healers within their communities.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) demonstrates how religious symbols, colonialism and gender intersect when she writes of the serpent-feathered goddess in Mexico, Coatlicue. This was a powerful, sexual female goddess, extremely fearsome and representing the dark earthy energy of creativity and life. Mexican women wore her on their skirts and called on her energy and creative power. Anzaldua says that the colonisers needed to reduce the power of women in society, and she shows how this vibrant goddess was changed into the virgin of Guadalupe. For her reclaiming indigenous religion is important as part of a journey of political becoming into multiple selves or the one-in-multiple as she calls it. Her work shows very clearly how coloniality sanctions a gendered and racialised world view through which power relations and social identities are constructed.

María Lugones (2008) agrees with Anzaldua and for her the production of social identities and the control of production and resources involve the biopolitical axis of sex and gender. Coloniality, she says, is an all-permeating system of signification and control of social relations. For many it is the liminal status of indigenous women who are marginalised because of race and often religion that makes them central in the multiple struggles of decolonisation. Sylvia Marcos (2006) finds the duality of the cosmovision in Mesoamerican women's religion a valuable resource. The Nahuatl have the understanding of duality as oppressed to dualism which points to a non-rigid reality characterised by plasticity and dynamism indicating a strong resistance to the modern Christian worldview imposed by Europe. This is a relational cosmovision declaring the immanence nature of the sacred and importantly declaring that the experiences of the body originate from the universe itself which is understood as the feminine divine. It also of course declares race to be an entirely manufactured concept.

## Race

### History

*Race* is a pseudoscientific construct developed in nineteenth-century Europe to justify the racist categorisation of human beings, with white being the pinnacle. Who gets to be seen as white has been rather fluid over time, but wherever the marker falls race still acts as a definitive social divider in many societies leading to the oppressions of those deemed to be non-white. Race is then a social, political and economic system in which whites have predominantly controlled power and material resources. The 'ideology of race' has a history.

Franz Fanon (1963) is an important thinker in the area of race, colonial politics and decolonial revolution. For Fanon the world view, based on a strict racial hierarchy, was not based on philosophical thinking alone. For Fanon this system stemmed from the Western world's metaphysical understanding. He observed that colonial governance cannot be administered by coercion only, although that is a powerful tool. Rather, it also requires a theological worldview that makes the colonised accept who they are and where they belong in the hierarchy. He also concludes that this theology needs a Manichean dualism which dictates the colonial reality and its values. That is to say one in which the white colonisers embody good, while the black colonised embody absolute evil. Further the native is understood to be impervious to ethics and only represents the negation of values (1963: 6). Fanon's work sheds light on what blackness came to signify under this worldview which of course was all the negative values of the colonising society. He makes an important point that colonial management of colonised people needed a sustained Manichean theology/theodicy.

Fanon presents Christian theology with a large problem as the duality inherent in so much of it has very negative consequences in the world. Sylvia Wynter (2003) develops Fanon's thought into a full-fledged critique of colonial political theology. She says that the figure of Man is based on the project of the modern secular-rational subject. Whereas the invention of the inferior race requires the transfer of the theological notion of Original Sin onto them so that they represent ontological lack.

*Manichaeism is a form of religion that breaks everything down into good and evil. It has duality at its heart which means that everything is seen as black or white.*

When Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492, not only did people from the other side of the ocean disembark with him, but they also brought with them ideas, conceptions of the world and of each other. One of these conceptions was how to understand themselves and others in racial terms. During the process of the unification of Spain, by the crowns of Castile and Aragon, the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula took place. This was part of a long process of compulsory conversion that took place between 1391 and 1415 CE, and then in the years leading up to 1492 CE. This ethnic cleansing was carried out based on the ideology of *limpieza de sangre* [cleansing of blood], also called *pureza de raza* [purity of race]. Basically, this ideology prevented Jewish and Muslim converts from accessing certain social spaces (Torres & Sebastián, 2003).

However, we owe its concretisation as an institutionalised ideology to the Archbishop of Toledo, Juan Martínez Silíceo, who clearly defined it in 1547 in what was called the 'statute of Toledo'. This document formed the basis for the subsequent 'statutes of purity of blood' that governed the public and religious institutions of the time (Torres & Sebastián, 2003).

The conquest of the Americas and the ideology of ‘blood cleansing’ permeated the relationship between conquerors and conquered. The Spanish conquistadors not only brought oppression in terms of political domination and slavery, but also imposed new categories for understanding the world and examining issues that were understood differently before Columbus’ arrival in the Americas in 1492 (Dussel, 1994). Unlike their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors generally married or procreated with people from the conquered native peoples, as well as from the African peoples who were subsequently enslaved. The descendants of these marriages were grouped under the category of *mestizxs*, in Spanish, or *mestiçxs*, in Portuguese. With the European conquest also came subordination to male power, often through violence, a factor that is evident in the multiple forced relationships (Vidart, 2000). Throughout the continent, the heritage of racial ideologies developed in European countries after 1400 was present in these relationships, with their own local characteristics. Thus, the emerging countries of the Spanish colonies have a strong imprint rejecting racial diversity (Vidart, 1968). This stems from the racial categories implanted in the Spanish colonies to form the racial stratification of the empire, which were even the motifs of what is known as *pinturas de casta* [caste paintings], that depicted daily life activities for different families and detailed the racial labels that every person would bear due to their ancestry (Carrera, 2003; Katzew, 2004).

The story did not end there. In 1758, the Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus published his work *Systema Naturae*, thus establishing modern taxonomy on human races, which he characterised as follows:

- Americanus: ‘reddish, choleric, upright posture, dark skin and black hair, straight and thick, with thick lips, large nose, chin almost without a beard, stubborn, content with his luck, lover of freedom, body painted with red lines combined in different ways’ (Bitlooch, 1996).
- Europaeus: ‘white, sanguine, muscular, light and abundant hair, inconsistent, inventive, completely covered with clothes, governed by laws’ (Bitlooch, 1996).
- Asiaticus: ‘yellow, melancholic, strict, black hair, brown eyes, severe, ostentatious, dressed in long tunics, governed by opinion’ (Bitlooch, 1996).
- Afer: ‘black, phlegmatic, with curly hair, wide nose, cunning, lazy, body rubbed with oil or grease, governed by arbitrary wills’ (Bitlooch, 1996).

Linnaeus’ studies adopted a predominantly geographical approach, aiming to contextualise peoples based on their places of residence. When he categorised humanity into these four groups, his intention was not to make judgements about the moral character of different peoples. Instead, he sought to describe his observations of how people lived and behaved across the known continents. While this does not negate the presence of Linnaeus’s own prejudices, it underscores his aim to portray the world as he perceived it.

However, one of his disciples, Friedrich Blumenbach, coined and originated the term ‘white race’, which has significantly shaped racial relations in the Western world throughout modern and contemporary times. In 1795, Blumenbach introduced a different concept, no longer based on geography but on subjective valuations. By making this slight change, he laid the groundwork for the modern notions of race and racism. We believe it is important to understand how the white race became a category and occupied its place within the racial dynamics in the West. Blumenbach defined five racial categories:

- Caucasian or white.
- Mongoloid or yellow.

- American or red (Native American).
- Malayan or brown (from Southeast Asia).
- Ethiopian or black.

On top of the list was the 'White race'. The reason Blumenbach designated the Caucasian category was that, in his understanding, humans from this group possessed a 'superior beauty' compared to other inhabitants of the planet. In this manner, Blumenbach paved the way for other scientists to reinforce racial ideas of European superiority over the rest of the world, not based on scientific concepts, but on Blumenbach's subjective evaluation.

### Critical Race Theory

Given that history, Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, pioneered by Derrick A. Bell (1970, 1976) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988). Bell, a prominent civil rights attorney and scholar, critiqued the limitations of traditional civil rights strategies in addressing systemic inequality. He argued that racism is deeply ingrained in American society, beyond individual prejudice, and must be understood as a structural and enduring phenomenon (Bell, 1992). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) introduced the concept of intersectionality, emphasising how overlapping identities, such as race, gender and class, create unique experiences of oppression, particularly for women of colour.

CRT is a movement of scholars who try to understand the relationship between race, racism and power and through their analysis to dismantle the way race plays out in every society (Crenshaw, 2011). As explained earlier, race is a construction; there is no biological truth to the ideology of races except for the cooptation of phenotypes. A phenotype encompasses an individual's observable characteristics, including height, eye colour and blood type. The hereditary component influencing the phenotype is termed the genotype. While certain traits are predominantly influenced by the genotype, others are primarily shaped by environmental factors, highlighting the intricate interplay between genetics and the environment in determining an individual's observable traits (Smedley, 1998).

CRT challenges liberal approaches to racial equality, such as colour blindness and incrementalism, asserting that these frameworks fail to address the root causes of systemic racism (Williams, 1998). Instead, CRT seeks to uncover how laws, policies and institutions perpetuate racial inequalities, even under the guise of neutrality or fairness. Central to this critique is the concept of structural racism, which examines how historical and systemic factors maintain racial disparities (Khan, 2016).

In contemporary contexts, CRT has expanded beyond law into education and social justice activism. In education, CRT scholars analyse curricula, disciplinary practices and policies that sustain inequities for students of colour (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). This framework inspires culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist teaching practices. CRT also influences social justice movements like Black Lives Matter, providing language to address systemic injustice and strategies for challenging oppressive structures (Dixon, 2018).

Although CRT has gained traction, it faces resistance, especially in political and educational spheres. Critics often mischaracterise CRT as divisive, while proponents argue that its insights are essential for dismantling inequities (Crewe, 2021). By linking theory to practice, CRT continues to evolve, shaping discussions on race, power and justice across diverse fields. Its focus on the lived experiences of marginalised communities ensures that their voices remain central in the fight for equity and systemic transformation.

## Capitalism

The term ‘capitalist’, meaning an owner of capital, appears earlier than the term ‘capitalism’ and dates to the mid-seventeenth century. ‘Capitalism’ is derived from capital, which evolved from *capitale*, a late Latin word based on *caput*, meaning ‘head’, which is also the origin of ‘chattel’ and ‘cattle’ in the sense of movable property, only much later to refer only to livestock (Merrill, 2014). *Capitale* emerged in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries to refer to funds, stock of merchandise, sum of money or money carrying interest.

Capitalism is driven by the desire for profit making and so constantly increases the productive capacity of everything from the earth’s resources to human labour. In contrast pre-capitalist societies produced for the sake of satisfying the concrete needs of that society. With the domination of a capitalist system a world market is developed which requires transport systems, technologies and credit systems as well as developing artificial appetites in consumers. Critics argue that unchecked capitalism can lead to income inequality, environmental degradation and exploitation of labour (Brenner, 1991). Balancing the pursuit of profit with social responsibility remains a central challenge for capitalist societies. Additionally, globalisation has been a significant outcome of capitalism, intertwining economies and cultures across the globe, creating both opportunities and challenges for nations worldwide. The balance between humans and nature is altered beyond recognition with the result that capitalism is no longer productive but destructive and begins to threaten human existence (Meszaros, 1970).

The global reach of capitalism means it is always able to find new resources and new markets and shift the most negative consequences of its activities away from the Global North. In this way the Global South becomes the dumping ground for the waste capitalism produces and so suffers more than it should. Rosa Luxemburg (2015) developed the theory of the unequal relationship between capitalist centres of the world and those on the periphery. She criticised the destructive impact of capitalist development on non-capitalist societies and argued that capitalism from its inception was dependent on unequal exchange that provides cheap and often free labour and natural resources for the centre. This labour comes from the slaves, the indigenous, immigrants and women who are all viewed as a free gift to capitalism. Luxemburg notes that capitalism is the first form of economics that is propagandist, it needs to expand and eradicate all other forms of economic exchange, to be a universal system, but she noted it cannot be while it is dependent on non-capitalist systems. She was writing in 1913, and the situation today is very different with the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the spread of capitalism to larger parts of the world there are few non-capitalist systems left to challenge it. Capitalism faces a problem in the present since its exploitation of natural resources has brought the earth to the point where it can give no more, the externality as a precondition for capital accumulation is exhausted; however, it still continues to exploit people.

*‘We’re here, we’re queer,  
we’re not going shopping’  
(Queer nation)*

## Why Is It Important to Understand the Interrelation Among Sex, Gender, Race and Capitalism in Queer Theologies?

Pellegrini (2002) argues that capitalism drives people into cis-heterosexual relations and attempts to keep them there but, on the other hand, capitalism undermines the family. The rise of wage labour transformed the structure of the family, the ideology of the family and the meaning of cis-heterosexual relations. As wage labour spread sexuality was released from the

need to produce more and more children to help the economic status of the family. There was of course a diverse impact across class, gender, race, ethnicity and religion. While both men and women could work outside the home for wages, usually middle-class women stopped work once they married. Wage labour and the twentieth-century transformation of the sexual division of labour meant women had some independence from men, and this impacted queer women in a positive way. Throughout the twentieth century the family shifted from the site of production to the site of consumption. The nuclear family suits capitalism well as the products are created outside the home but belong to the owners of private property.

**Ann Pellegrini (1964–).** In 1998, she founded the Sexual Cultures book series at NYU Press with Jose Munoz.

Pellegrini (2002: 137) asserts that gay identity exists within the contradictions inherent to the cis-heterosexual family structure. While wage labour offered a means to distance oneself from the heterosexual family dynamic, queer individuals often encountered discrimination in the workplace. This discrimination forced many to weigh the decision of revealing their sexuality against the risk of limiting their job opportunities. Over time, however, there has been notable progress. Some companies now extend benefits to same-sex partners, signalling a positive shift towards greater inclusivity and acceptance within the corporate world. Despite these advancements, challenges persist, highlighting the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in the workplace.

There are major marketing campaigns targeting gay and to a lesser extent lesbian consumers. The emphasis on dual-income gay and lesbian homes is not without its problems, firstly that not all gay and lesbian people are in an income bracket to benefit from the consumables offered. Secondly and more importantly the willingness to chase the 'pink pound' or gay dollar does not signal that tolerance has won the day. Therefore inequality is not even an issue that crosses the mind of these corporations. Rather, corporations have calculated whether they would lose a conservative 'shopping base' if they reach for the pink pound. Evidence seems to suggest that this is more financially harmful in the United States than in the United Kingdom.

Corporations have also discovered that it is possible to sell a gay lifestyle, thus turning gay men particularly into capitalist consumers in a big way. Some theorists see this as the end of queer politics, but Pellegrini acknowledges that the queer community has never been free of capitalism and may still make a stand against the worst excesses of it. The contradictions persist and while this is the case the politicising of sex will also continue.

## Theology

The word theology is made up of two parts *Theos* (God) and *logos* (word) which means that theology traditionally has been words about God. Too often it has been words *from* God and has dictated how the Christian Church and society should conduct themselves. These words have been conveyed through theology written almost exclusively by men for the best part of Christian history. We do not know a great deal about the sexual orientation of many of these men, but at fear of death they would have kept quiet about it, also not believing that who they were in their bodies could impact theology. Theology then has been a very top-down enterprise. With the twentieth century and the development of feminist and liberation theologies the emphasis on how theology should be conducted shifted considerably.

The question became ‘What kind of world/society does this top-down, male-dominated mainly European theology produce?’ This simple question, which questioned the power dynamics and gave voice to a wider group of people, has enabled the sexism, misogyny, heterosexism, racism and elitism of much Christian theology to be exposed. Queer theology is another step in this exposure demonstrating how certain groups of people have not simply been excluded but actively persecuted at times in Christian history. In addition to exposing discrimination in theology a number of theologians have claimed that the Christian faith has always been queer at its very heart which will be examined later in the book.

## For Further Discussion

- 1 How does the evolving understanding of ‘religion’ challenge traditional historical and academic perspectives, especially when considering the entirety of human evolution and its impact on our interpretation of religious history?
- 2 In what ways has your religion or lack of it affected your understanding of sex and gender?
- 3 How does CRT challenge traditional understandings of race and its interplay with power and society?
- 4 Have you ever thought that capitalism is not a natural or inevitable system for global economics?
- 5 How has the development of feminist, liberation and queer theologies challenged traditional top-down, male-dominated Christian theology and its impact on society?
- 6 In what ways do you think Christianity is queer in its very nature?

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