

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 36
Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics


Good morning, dear friends and welcome to this week. In the previous week we had looked at Butler's philosophical approach to what is subjectivity and how performative resistance is limited at the individual level. Prompted by a turn to ethics of relationality, Butler now focuses on collective forms of resistance against oppressive norms.

Today we shall look at Butler's famous essay 'Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics'. Here she details how precarity or vulnerability plays a crucial part in establishing gender roles. The essay considers how precarity is connected to the concept of performativity and how it shapes contemporary sexual politics.


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"Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics" (2009)

- Butler published the essay "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics" in 2009 in the *AIBR Journal of Iberoamerican Anthropology*.
- The essay was born out of a lecture that she delivered at University of Madrid on June 8, 2009.
- In the essay, Butler re-examines the term performativity and completes it with the idea of precarity.
- She gives attention to people who are exposed to injury, violence and displacement, those who are at the risk of not being qualified as a subject of recognition.



Source: Academy of Global Humanities and Critical Theory



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This essay was published in 2009 and it was born out of a lecture that Butler had delivered at the University of Madrid in June 2009.

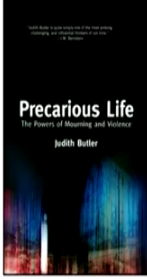
In this essay, Butler re-examines the term for performativity and completes it with the idea of precarity. She gives attention to people who are exposed to injury, violence and displacement, those who are at risk of not being qualified as a subject of recognition.

Butler had initially examined the concept of precarity in two of her critical works, that is 'Precarious Life' in 2004 and 'Frames of War' in 2009.

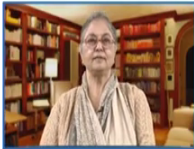
This essay is an extension of the arguments which Butler had presented in these two books, with specific focus on gender politics.

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- Precariousness refers to a generalized human condition that stems from the fact that all human beings are interdependent on each other and therefore all are vulnerable.
- She argues that the concept of precarity is a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks becoming differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (Butler, 2009).
- So, although human vulnerability is universal, certain populations, like gender minorities -- those who are exposed to injury, violence and displacement, those who are in risk of not being qualified as a subject of recognition -- are victims of politically induced precarity.



Source: Verso Publications



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Precariousness refers to a generalized human condition that stems from the fact that all human beings are interdependent on each other and therefore all are vulnerable. She argues that the concept of precarity is a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks becoming differently exposed to injury, violence, and death”.

So, although human vulnerability is universal, certain populations, like gender minorities - those who are exposed to injury, violence and displacement, those who are in risk of not being qualified as a subject of recognition - are victims of politically induced precarity”.

Homosexual minorities are sometimes deemed as unrecognizable, within the dominant scripts of acceptance. Those who do not live gender in currently intelligible ways are often placed at a heightened risk of violence and harassment.

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- Through this essay, Butler analyses issues which constantly arise in the nation-states, such as claiming a right or being forced to follow a certain norm.
- These issues at the social level are particularly relevant in the sexual policies that are shaped within the nation states.
- Butler begins the essay by attempting to explain how she moved from a focus on performativity to a more general concern with precarity.
- She says that, “performativity is an account of agency and precarity seems to focus on condition that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one’s control” (Butler, 2009, p. 1).



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Through this essay, Butler analyzes issues which constantly arise in the nation-states, such as claiming a right or being forced to follow a particular norm. These issues at the social level are particularly relevant in the sexual policies that are shaped within the nation states.

Butler begins this essay by attempting to explain how she moved from a focus on performativity to a more general concern with precarity. She says that, and I quote, “performativity is an account of agency and precarity seems to focus on conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one’s control” unquote. In her early work ‘Excitable Speech,’ Butler had analyzed how speech upon its utterance can take new meanings in different contexts.

In this essay here she is not limiting her focus to language, but tries to propound a wide-reaching ontology of human conditioning and existence.

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- She revisits both the terms -- precarity and performativity -- and defines them as per her evolved ethical stance on social issues.
- Gender performativity, for Butler, still remains “a certain kind of enactment” (Butler, 2009, p.2).
- The appearance of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth. Gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other, usually within a strictly binary frame.
- The reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power.




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The appearance of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth. Gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other, usually within a strictly binary frame. The reproduction of gender is, thus, always a negotiation with power. In other words, it can be said that in Butler’s opinion there is no gender without a reproduction of social norms.

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- Precarity, on the other hand, describes a few different conditions that pertain to living beings.
- Butler notes how “anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed” (Butler, 2009, p. 2).
- Political orders, including economic and social institutions, are designed to address this foundational vulnerability to ensure that populations have the means available by which life can be secured.
- When this vulnerability is exploited and used as a controlling tool, then marginalized populations are at an intensified risk of disease, poverty, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection.



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Butler notes how “anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed.” Political orders, including social and economic institutions, are designed to address this fundamental vulnerability to ensure that population have the means available by which life can be secured.

When this vulnerability is exploited and used as a controlling tool, then marginalized populations are at an intensified risk of disease, poverty, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection.

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- For Butler, precarity is directly linked with gender norms.
- Gender norms are closely connected to the possible ways through which we can appear in public space. They determine how the public and private spaces are distinguished.
- This distinction is instrumentalized through sexual politics, which has the capability even to criminalize the mere public appearance of certain individuals.
- Such vulnerable populations are often neither protected by the law/police, nor are they likely to possess a secure home/job.
- Their existence will be stigmatized and will be perceived as a foreign object of fascination.

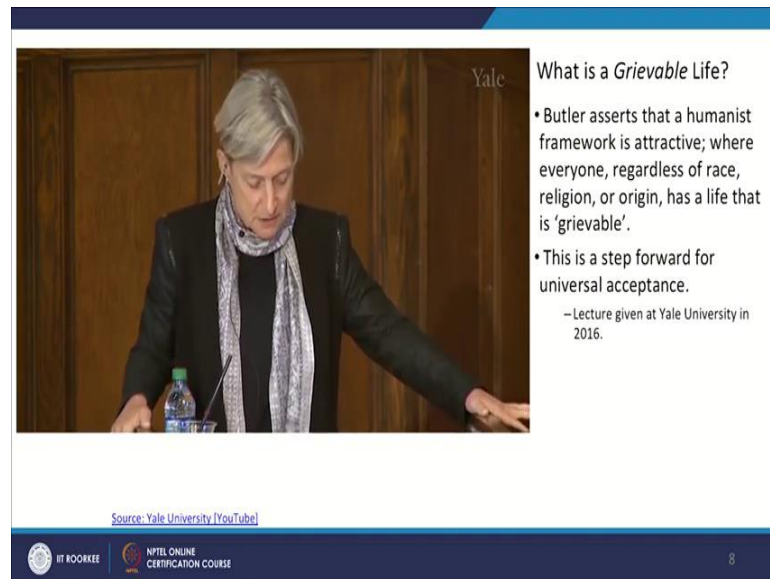


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So, precarity is directly linked with gender norms for Butler. Gender norms are closely connected to the possible ways through which we can appear in public space. They determine how the public and private spaces are distinguished. The distinction is instrumentalized through sexual politics, which has the capability even to criminalize the mere public appearance of certain individuals.

Such vulnerable populations are often neither protected by the law or police nor are they likely to possess a secure home environment or job etcetera. Their existence will be stigmatized and will be perceived as a foreign object of fascination. The primary reason for this lack of empathy is that such lives due to factors like homophobia are not deemed grievable, a term that Butler uses extensively.

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Yale

What is a *Grievable* Life?

- Butler asserts that a humanist framework is attractive; where everyone, regardless of race, religion, or origin, has a life that is 'grievable'.
- This is a step forward for universal acceptance.

– Lecture given at Yale University in 2016.

Source: Yale University YouTube

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So, what is a grievable life? Butler asserts that a humanist framework is attractive; as within it everyone, regardless of the differences of race, origin, religion etcetera may have a life that is 'grievable'. This is a step forward for universal acceptance. The video is from a lecture which Butler had delivered at Yale University in 2016.

“To say that a life is grievable is to claim that a life even before it is lost is or will be worthy of being grieved, that its loss would be and should be marked as a loss, that the prospect of a loss is to be feared and that an act of possession to prevent that loss should be cultivated.

If institutions were structured according to a principle of the radical equality of grievability, that would mean that every life conceived within those institutional terms would be worth preserving. That its loss would be marked and lamented and that this would be true not only of this or that life, but of every life.

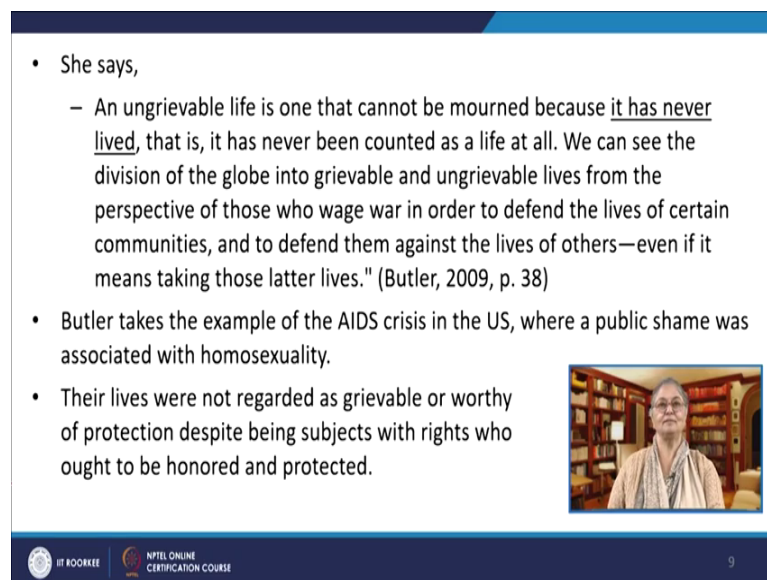
This would I suggest have implications for how we think about health care, imprisonment, war, occupation and citizenship all of which make distinctions between populations that are more and less grievable. But for now, I propose that the ethic I am articulating is bound up with a specific political imaginary, a way of experimenting with the conditional. Only lives that would be grieved if they were lost, qualify as grievable lives. And these are lives actively and structurally protected from violence and destruction.

This use of the grammatical form what I believe is the second conditional, is one way of experimenting with a potential, postulating, what would follow if all lives were regarded as grievable. It might let us see how a utopic horizon opens up in the midst of our consideration of whose lives matter and whose lives do not or whose lives are more likely to be preserved and whose lives are not.”

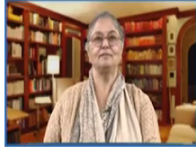
However, one has to concede that the belief that every life ought to be grievable is often perceived as an impossible ideal. We live in a world where radical inequalities are abundant. For Butler this is a world in which lives are not equally valued and it contains elements of racism, xenophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and the systematic disregard for the poor and the dispossessed.

Therefore, it is important to note whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned and whose lives are considered un-grievable. Only then can we reconstruct the terms of exclusion and inequality.

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- She says,
 - An un-grievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never been counted as a life at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and un-grievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others—even if it means taking those latter lives." (Butler, 2009, p. 38)
- Butler takes the example of the AIDS crisis in the US, where a public shame was associated with homosexuality.
- Their lives were not regarded as grievable or worthy of protection despite being subjects with rights who ought to be honored and protected.



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Butler has suggested that an un-grievable life cannot be mourned because it has never lived, the emphasis is mine, but Butler’s idea is amply clear. She says that “one can see the division of the globe into grievable and un-grievable lives from the perspectives of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others - even if it means taking those other lives.”


Butler takes the example of the AIDs crisis in the USA, where a public shame was associated with homosexuality. Their lives were not regarded as grievable or worthy of protection even though they were subjects with rights who ought to be honored and protected.

This lack of recognition and differential distribution of public grieving shape a political issue of major significance, this is particularly relevant in the sexual policies that are shaped within the nation state.

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Precarity and Recognition

- In the essay, Butler asks “what do we call those who do not and cannot appear as “subjects” within hegemonic discourse?” (Butler, 2009, p. 3).
- There are sexual and gender norms that in some ways condition what will be considered “legible”. Butler deconstructs this differential allocation of recognizability.
- There are several forms of gender which remain unrecognized because they are at the limits of established norms for embodiment and personhood.
- According to Butler, there can be forms of sexuality for which there is no accurate vocabulary.




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Butler is puzzled as, “what do we call those who do not and cannot appear as “subjects” within hegemonic discourse?” There are sexual and gender norms that in some ways condition what will be considered “legible”. Butler deconstructs this differential allocation of recognizability.

There are several forms of gender which remain unrecognized because they are at the limits of established norms for embodiment and personhood. According to Butler, there can be forms of sexuality for which there is no accurate vocabulary. Because of powerful logics that determine how we think about desire, orientation, sexual acts and pleasures do not admit of several modes of sexuality.

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- Performativity of gender is closely connected to the idea of the subject being 'recognizable'.
- Butler argues that a structuralist or psychoanalytic approach may dismiss certain forms of recognition as impossible.
- On the other hand, a poststructuralist approach can ask why some forms of sexual life are more possible than others and why some seem to embody the unthinkable.
- Since performativity of gender has everything to do with who counts as a life, she says "performativity [then] becomes linked with precarity" (p. 4).




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- To demonstrate how precarity is connected to performativity, Butler gives an example: In May 2006, 'illegal immigrants' in Los Angeles started to sing the national anthem of the US.
- They sang the American national anthem first in English and then in Spanish.
- This public performance of street singing as a form of protest had several functions. Their primary aim was to petition the government to allow them to become citizens.
- But through this demonstration, they were exercising the right of free assembly without having that right.



Protest against US Immigration Policies.
Source: BBC



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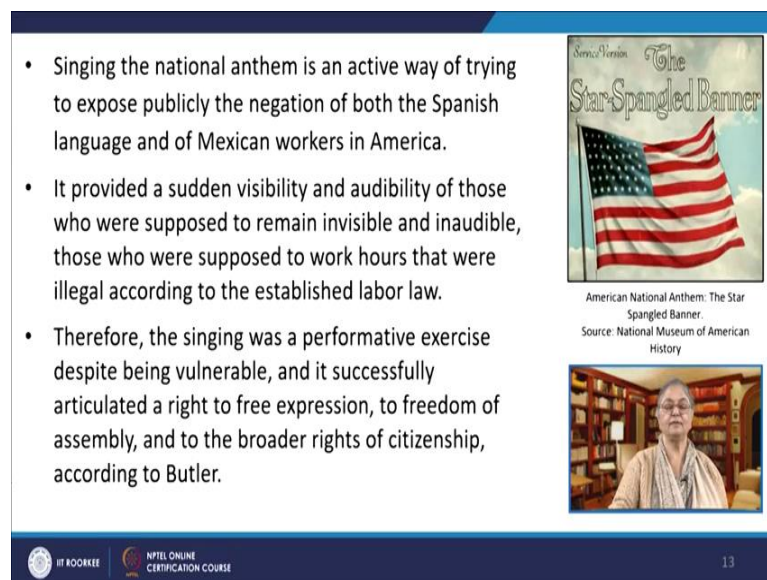
In order to demonstrate the idea of how precarity is connected to performativity, Butler has given the example of May 2006 happening in Los Angeles. In this incident, ‘illegal immigrants’ to the city had started to sing the national anthem of the USA. They sang the American national anthem first in English and then in Spanish.

This public performance of a street singing as a form of protest had several functions. Their primary aim was to petition the government to allow them to become citizens. But through the demonstration, they were exercising the right of free assembly without actually having been given that right.

Butler notes that illegal immigrants usually stay away from any situation in which they might be caught, imprisoned or deported, but in this instance they made themselves very public, exercising a right that originally belongs to citizens only.

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- Singing the national anthem is an active way of trying to expose publicly the negation of both the Spanish language and of Mexican workers in America.
- It provided a sudden visibility and audibility of those who were supposed to remain invisible and inaudible, those who were supposed to work hours that were illegal according to the established labor law.
- Therefore, the singing was a performative exercise despite being vulnerable, and it successfully articulated a right to free expression, to freedom of assembly, and to the broader rights of citizenship, according to Butler.



American National Anthem: The Star Spangled Banner.
Source: National Museum of American History

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- The singing in Spanish on the street gives voice and visibility to those populations that are regularly renounced as part of the nation and thus exposes the modes of rejection through which the nation constitutes itself.
 - In other words, “the singing exposes and opposes those modes of exclusion through which the nation imagines and enforces its own unity” (Butler, 2009, p. 6).
- Butler has extended the discussion on exercising of political rights in her work *Who Sings the Nation-State* (2007) that she co-authored with Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak.

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In other words, to quote Butler, “the singing exposes and opposes those modes of exclusion through which the nation imagines and enforces its own unity” unquote. Butler has extended the discussion on exercising the political rights in her work ‘Who Sings the Nation-State’ which was published in 2007 and was co-authored with Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak.


In this critical work Butler has turned her attention to Hannah Arendt a political philosopher, author and a holocaust survivor. Interestingly Hannah Arendt was considered as an antifeminist, she thought that women are not suitable for leadership positions. However, her ideas related with civic republicanism are considered to be of significant value now.

Butler draws on as well as critiques the ideas of Hannah Arendt to explain her concepts of performative politics.

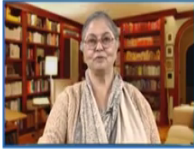
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Hannah Arendt

- Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) was one of the twentieth century's leading thinkers of political philosophy.
- She found the philosophical community of her time as a male-centric circle and therefore she objected to being called a 'philosopher'.
- She was forced to flee the Nazi persecution of intellectuals and then settled in the US. She is particularly known for her works *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958).
- She argued that totalitarian regimes have radically altered the social structure through their pursuit of raw political power and their neglect of utilitarian values.



Hannah Arendt
Source: Barbara Niggel
Radioff



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Even though Hannah Arendt was vocal about her opinion that women should not be given leadership roles, she still found the philosophical community of her time as a male centric circle. And therefore, she objected to being called a philosopher or a woman philosopher or a woman faculty.

She also argued that totalitarian regimes have radically altered the social structure through their pursuit of raw political power and their neglect of utilitarian values. Butler draws from Arendt's philosophy of political action and personal responsibility to elucidate her position. Though Butler's borrowing from Arendt has been criticized by some scholars, including Russell Berman of Stanford University.

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- Arendt shows that the true exercise of our freedom does not follow from our individual personhood, but rather from social conditions such as place and political belonging. Also, it is not that we first need a place or a mode of belonging, but that the rights we exercise are grounded in pre-legal rights to belonging and to place.
- Butler quotes Arendt in the essay: “the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself” (p. 6). Butler finds this statement itself to be a kind of performative exercise.
- Exercising the rights has to be public, it has to be an action with others. Only then it can enter the sphere of appearance. There is no freedom that is not its exercise; freedom is not a potential that waits for its exercise. It comes into being through its exercise



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Arendt has shown that the true exercise of our freedom does not follow from our individual personhood, but rather from social conditions such as place and political belonging. Also, it is not that we first need a place or a mode of belonging, but that the rights we exercise are grounded in pre-legal rights to belonging and to place.

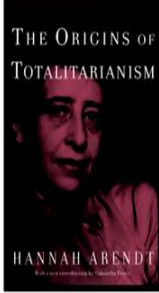
Butler quotes Arendt in the essay: I quote “the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself” unquote. Butler finds this statement itself to be a kind of performative exercise.

Exercising the rights has to be public, it has to be an action with others. Only then it can enter the sphere of appearance. There is no freedom that is not its exercise; freedom is not a potential that waits for its exercise. It comes into being through its exercise.


The quotation which Butler has used is taken from Arendt’s famous work ‘Origins of Totalitarianism’ which was published in 1966, she says that the rights that we exercise are grounded in pre-legal rights pertaining to freedom and belongingness.

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- Butler also agrees with Arendt's philosophy of equality. Arendt says:
 - Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man [sic] can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals. (Arendt, 1966, p. 301)
- Equality is here presumed as a precondition for making and changing the world.
- To be a participant in politics, to become part of a concerted and collective action, one needs to act within the terms of equality.



Source: Schocken Books



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Butler also agrees with Arendt's philosophy of equality. And she has also again referred to Arendt and I quote "our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world together with his equals and only with his equals", unquote.

Equality here is presumed as a precondition for making and changing the world. To be a participant in politics, to become part of a concerted and collective action, one needs to act within the terms of equality. According to Arendt, equality is a condition and character of political action.

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- In Arendt's philosophy of equality, Butler finds some shortcomings and responds by iterating Gayatri Spivak's take on nation states and cultural translation.
- Spivak gives the example of countries in Africa. When the colonialists left Africa, they left impossible partitions of about 48 new states, made of different ethno-cultural groups.
- Spivak is arguing that we cannot rest easily with the idea that the state represents a given nationality, which is monolithic and monolingual.



Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak
Source: Wellesley College



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In Arendt's philosophy of equality, Butler finds some shortcomings and responds by iterating Gayatri Spivak's take on nation states and cultural translation.

Spivak gives the example of countries in Africa. When the colonists left Africa, they left impossible partitions of about 48 new estates, made of different ethno-cultural groups. Spivak argues that we cannot rest easily with the idea that the state represents a given nationality, which is monolithic and monolingual. Therefore, striving for idle equality on all terms is problematic and limiting in its liberating potential.


In Spivak's view the act of cultural transgression is the way of bringing about a new understanding among varied communities.

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- The example from Africa shows that the borders of the state not only divide populations from one another, but also force those populations together who do not share linguistic or cultural ties.
- Since there is no return to the monolingual nation-state, the task of cultural translation is to produce an alliance rooted in difference.
- What Spivak promotes is not a simple form of multiculturalism, but a practice of translation as a condition of subject-formation.
- This form of a translation process, for Butler, is a performative exercise.



African Countries
Source: worldatlas.com



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The example from Africa shows that the borders of the state not only divide populations from one another, but also force these populations together who do not share linguistic or cultural ties.

Since there is no return to the monolingual nation-state, the task of cultural translation is to produce an alliance rooted in difference. What Spivak promotes is not a simple form of multiculturalism, but a practice of translation as a condition of subject-formation. This form of a translation process, for Butler, is a performative exercise.

Butler notes that when the US national anthem was sung in Spanish as part of a resistance, it was a similar instance of translation which resulted in an effective performative exercise of laying claim to denied rights.

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- What Butler deduces from her study of Arendt and Spivak is that a model for collectivity does not presuppose 'sameness'.
- Laying claim to public space and to rights require both translation and performative modes of expression.
- Performativity, here, does not merely refer to explicit speech acts, but also to the reproduction of norms and rules; as it is the norms that govern the intelligibility of the body in space and time.
- Therefore, the reproduction of gender norms within ordinary life is always a negotiation with forms of power that condition whose lives will be more livable.



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What Butler deduces from her study of Arendt and Spivak is that a model for collectivity does not presuppose 'sameness'. Laying claim to public space and to rights require both translation and performative modes of expression.

Performativity, here, does not merely refer to explicit speech acts, but also to the reproduction of norms and rules; as it is the norms that govern the intelligibility of the body in terms of time and space. Therefore, the reproduction of gender norms within ordinary life is always a negotiation with forms of power that condition whose lives will be more livable.

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Norms of Imitation

- In this section, Butler notes that social and political norms act on us, work upon us, and influence our everyday action - like gender performance, for instance.
- She says,
 - The theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act all. When we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us. (Butler, 2009, p. 11)
- For example, when a child is “gendered” with a male or a female name, the child receives demand or desire from the normative adult world to imitate and replicate.




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In this section of ‘Norms of Imitation,’ Butler notes that social and political norms act on us work upon us and influence our everyday action - like gender performance for instance. In order to illustrate this idea further she has given. An example of a child, when a child is “gendered” with a male or a female name, the child also receives demands or desires from the normative adult world to imitate and replicate.

Butler explains that the primary helplessness of the child is a profound confusion or disorientation about what is the meaning of gender norms or to which gender a particular desire belongs to. The subsequent gendered acts that the child assumes are not free individual choices, but are mediated by social norms and customs.

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- For Butler, gender performativity does not assume an always-acting subject or an incessantly repeating body.
- Instead, it establishes a complex convergence of social norms on the human psyche, and the process of repetition is structured by a complicated interplay of obligation and desire.
- She says that it is possible to try various strategies that might contest dominant gender norms and sexual politics. But it would be wrong to assume that we can remake or reconstruct our gender solely on the basis of a deliberate decision.



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For Butler, gender performativity does not assume an always-acting subject or an incessantly repeating body.

Instead, it establishes a complex convergence of social norms on the human psyche, and the process of repetition is structured by a complicated interplay of obligation and desire. She says that it is possible to try various strategies that might contest dominant gender norms in sexual politics. But it would be wrong to assume that we can remake or reconstruct our gender solely on the basis of a deliberate decision.

Even when one decides to change the gender or produce gender, it is on the basis of some very powerful desires. Desires which we do not precisely choose in isolation, we are transformed and acted upon prior to any action that we might take and though we can radically rework our genders, or even try to rework our sexualities, we are in the grip of norms even as we struggle against them.

In recent conferences held online, Butler attests to how her concept of precarity becomes all the more relevant after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Precarity and the Pandemic

- In a 2020 lecture given at Boston University on “The World After Coronavirus: The Future of Gender and Identity”, Butler reflects on the evolved meaning of the term precarity.

Judith Butler
Maxine Elliot Professor, University of California, Berkeley

Source: Boston University (YouTube)

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In a 2020 lecture, given online at Boston University on “The World After Coronavirus: The Future of Gender and Identity”, Butler reflects on the evolved meaning of the term precarity.

“The mandate to shelter in place has in many regions of the world locked women and children into households where violence is inflicted upon them. Usually not exclusively by the men in the home, and there is no place to go right you are mandated to be inside. It is harder to get access to social services, it is harder to move across the town or the country to be with another set of friends or relatives who could possibly offer a better shelter.

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Precarity and the Pandemic

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Source: Boston University (YouTube)

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I also think that trans and queer youths nongender conforming youth and this is not just in the US, but in many parts of the world are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. Many of them have been forced from their homes have been disowned by their parents, they do not have the same support.

So, for mobile populations and here I would also; obviously, include refugees and those who are seeking to flee from violent territories, the sheltering place has been a disaster or along the along the border as well.

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As health care has become monopolized by the state and more fully regulated by the state that has allowed some conservatives and reactionaries, homophobes to transphobic officials to gain power and to really press through legislation or executive decisions that deprive trans people of their rights, gay and lesbian people of their civil rights and also women of their reproductive rights.”

Butler opines that lockdown in many regions of the world had resulted in many people to remaining as captive in their households and there was a denial of access to social services family and friends and of the freedom of movement. It had placed gender minorities or the marginalized communities in vulnerable or precarious living conditions.

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- Butler, here, underlines the importance of having a shelter or a safe space both physically and mentally.
- In this lecture, she also reflects on how transgender and queer youth are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion.
- Several gender nonconforming youth have been disowned by their parents or outcasted from their homes. She compares their living status to that of refugees who are fleeing from territorial violence.

Butler here also undermines the importance of having a shelter or a safe place both physically and mentally.

She also reflects in this lecture on how transgender and queer youth are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. Several gender non-confirming youth have been disowned by their parents or outcasted from their homes. She compares their living status to that of refugees who are fleeing from territorial violence.

Furthermore, Butler argues that as the healthcare system is monopolized by the state in terms of regulation especially in the United States. It has allowed transphobic elements to enter the system in the form of officials or legislatures. For example, LGBTQI

communities are often denied the right to adopt children. This denies trans, gay and lesbian people of their civil rights guaranteed originally by the constitution and this is very similar to how women were denied their reproductive rights over their bodies.

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Rage and Resistance

- Social movements often come out of anger and the nature of injustice faced by precarious individuals.
- The sense of moral and political indignation that individuals have to face leads to different forms of rage.
- For Butler, demanding justice comes out of different 'affective' sources - which contends that this is a destruction that does not need to happen.




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Social movements often come out of anger and the type of injustice faced by precarious individuals. The sense of moral and political indignation that individuals have to face leads to different forms of rage. For Butler, demanding justice comes out of different 'affective' sources - which contends that this is a destruction that does not need to happen.

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- Hope arises, according to Butler, when people join together -- this eliminates the feeling of isolation or abandonment; and helps the individuals to confirm their sense of reality or their condition as morally unjust.
- It enables one to realize belongingness to larger communities with varied levels of familiarity.
- Butler believes that as the links of solidarity expand, we realize that our hope for a better world is morally and politically shared by others.
- This will also shape the foundations for non-violent forms of agitation and resistance.



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However, hope arises as Butler suggests when people join together - this joining together eliminates the feeling of isolation or abandonment; and helps the individuals to confirm their sense of reality or their condition as morally unjust. It enables one to realize belongingness to larger communities with varied levels of familiarity and intimacy.

Butler believes that as the links of solidarity expand, we realize that our hope for a better world is morally and politically shared by others. This will also shape the foundations for non-violent forms of agitation and resistance in her opinion.

This world-creating capacity is present in social movements to a degree that it creates an alternative vision of social relations. It also puts forward principles which have been hitherto considered unrealistic or impractical.

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- In her close analysis of precarity and human interdependence, Butler finds gender to be a “passionate comportment”, a way of living the body with and for others.
- Sexuality, for Butler, is not reducible to gender. It is crafted and mobilized by signifiers that none of us actually choose.
- Performativity is closely connected with “who” can become produced as a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth sheltering and whose life, when lost, would be worthy of mourning.
- ‘Precarious life’ for Butler characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable.



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‘Precarious life’ for Butler characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable.

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- The interdependent state of human existence suggests that performativity is a process which implies that being acted-on occurs in a way that we do not always fully understand, and instances of acting can have moral and social consequences.
- When we consider precarity as a form of marginalization or exclusion, then it can be designated as a rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender, the poor, and the stateless.
- The covid pandemic has shown how vulnerability will be dangerously extended in the absence of a shelter or a support group.
- Butler believes in non-violent forms of resistances as a starting point for a hope out of precarity.



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The interdependent state of human existence suggests that performativity is a process which implies that being acted-on occurs in a way that we do not always fully understand, and instances of acting can have moral as well as social consequences. When we consider precarity as a form of marginalization or exclusion, then it can be designated as a rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender, the poor, and the stateless.

The covid pandemic has shown how vulnerability will be dangerously extended in the absence of a shelter or a support group. Butler believes in a non-violent form of resistance as a starting point for a hope out of precarity.

So, today we have discussed Butler's important essay 'Precarity, Performativity and Sexual Politics' and her confirmation of the relevance of the topic even during the pandemic. She asserts that vulnerability plays a key role in the formation of assembly which becomes foundational to resistance against unjust gender norms.

In the next module, we shall look at how Butler devised a performative theory of assembly through her recent works.

Thank you.

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