

## Gender and Ethnicity in Eupolis' *Poleis*

Although only fragments, the *Poleis* of Eupolis offers a glimpse into the way sex, gender, and imperialism could be conflated in the last quarter of the fifth century BCE. In one fragment of this Athenian comedy, two actors compare Chios to “a horse that does not need a whip,” since she is so obedient and prompt in sending men and warships for Athens (frag. 246). In another fragment, the actors notice Kyzikos “full of money”; one of them immediately recalls the time he was on guard duty at Kyzikos and had sex with “a woman, a boy, and an old man, all for a penny” (frag. 247). One might have expected Eupolis to take the comic opportunity for a creative transgression of gendered norms (Zeitlin 1996). Instead, Eupolis seems to affirm Athenian imperialistic policies through a theatrical display of domination over other Greek city-states (Rosen 1997; Storey 2003). But why was sexuality (and feminization) the political metaphor of choice?

This paper employs feminist epistemology to explore further why Eupolis eroticizes the Greek subject allies of Athens and emphasizes their alterity (Butler 1993; 2004). I argue that gender was an important metaphor in the discourse of Athenian imperialism and that this comedy, in particular, can help us uncover with our students the complicated nexus of Athenian imperialism and gendered discourse.

As Chandra Mohanty recently pointed out, “racialized gender is still an unmarked category” in feminist discourses on modern globalization (Mohanty 2003). This fragmentary comedy reveals the ethnic dimension to gender boundaries in ancient democratic Athens and its example may help us better critique today’s gendered narratives of boundaries and borders.

## Works Cited

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