

From the ‘Polymorphous Perverse’ to Intersexualization: Intersections in Cross-Cultural Ethnographies

Lena Eckert

In this article I analyze the anthropological quest for what can be deemed male, female or intersex. I show that this pursuit is based upon theories which have been developed at the turn of the nineteenth century. The same theories are still present in current ethnographical research into sex, gender and sexuality. I specifically trace the origins of the psychoanalytical concept of the ‘polymorphous perverse’ in discourses of sexology and evolutionary theory and interrogate the application of the same concept in twentieth century anthropological research in Papua New Guinea. The use of this concept in ethnographic research is part of the process of what I call cross-cultural intersexualization. By lining out historical accounts of sexualization and racialization, I show how the use of the ‘polymorphous perverse’ refers to narratives of development that are intrinsically bound up with heteronormative and colonialist discourses originating in the 19th century. I analyze how a sexualized and racialized ‘Other’ has been created that is still present in current anthropological research. Cross-cultural intersexualization, as I argue, is based upon this two-fold othering process.*

Keywords: Intersexualization, racialization, gender, anthropology, sexology

Introduction

Anthropologists have already problematized ethnography as the method of anthropology. James Clifford argued that ethnographic representations are always ‘partial truths’; yet, these partial truths are also ‘positioned truths’ (Abu-Lughod 1991, 142). Ethnographers (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973) are, according to Elspeth Probyn, still ‘united in their use of ethnography as a means of con-

structing a fundamental similarity of the world’s cultures which is firmly based in the referent of the West’ (Probyn 1993, 78). Here, the ‘referent of the West’ is at stake, together with its diverse modes of re-installing itself as the center, the ‘other’ as ‘lacking’ (relative to the West). In the anthropological account I want to focus on in this paper, ‘the referent of the West’ is reiterated through the use of some of the most powerful discourses of the West—psychoa-

analysis, sexuality and evolution.

The anthropologist Gilbert Herdt is a well-known academic in his field, and a pioneer in introducing the issue of sexuality to his discipline. Herdt, famous for his research in Papua New Guinea, created the concept of ritualized homosexuality (1984) and also became interested in intersexuality (Herdt and Stoller 1985; Herdt 1990, 1994).¹ Herdt's own extensive research on sexuality, and on tropes such as the sexualized/gendered 'Third' (discussed in Herdt 1994), occupies a crucial space in anthropological research on sexuality in general, and intersexuality in particular. It is this anthropological account of intersexuality that I interrogate in this article: it has had major implications for future research into intersexuality and is tied up in specific discourses which are still present in cross-cultural research into sexuality.

In this article, I map out, and draw together, the different discursive preconditions upon which Western anthropology, here represented by the ethnographer Gilbert Herdt, bases its truth claims about 'the Other'.² My aim in this article is to identify the narratives and modes of representation in ethnographic work on gender and sexuality. As such, I interrogate the language that is applied to formulate these claims, and pose questions about the translatability of the cultural and symbolic systems of 'other' cultures. I focus on the issue of intersexuality in questioning

how and when Herdt has decided to speak about intersexuality in 'the Others'. By interrogating the interconnected workings of anthropology, sexology, psychoanalysis and bio-medicine in Herdt's work, I also reflect on the historical origins of these disciplines themselves.

Here, I wish to critically engage with the use of psychoanalytical concepts in cross-cultural research, particularly in my readings of the notion of development. I will focus on the concept of the 'polymorphous perverse' in Herdt's work, which he used to describe the sexuality of 'the Other'. I map psychoanalytical and sexological discourses, and their intrinsic evolutionary framework. By examining how nineteenth-century sexology construed the homosexual and/or the hermaphrodite as an abnormal 'invert' (with regard to sexual dimorphism as the achievement of civilization), I show how this construction is analogous to racialized discourses that position non-Western cultures as primitive and less developed. I trace the heritage of these discourses in anthropology, and how they merge into what I call 'cross-cultural intersexualization' at the end of the twentieth century. I see the process of intersexualization as the quest for a scientifically verifiable distinction between men and women. Intersexualization is, therefore, at the core of the process of the construction of a dichotomously sexualized/gendered society. Historically, the category of inter-

sexuality has been, and continues to be, formulated as a distinction between male and female and masculinity and femininity (e.g. Holmes 2000; Kessler 1998; Fausto-Sterling 2000), and as a distinction between homo- and heterosexuality (e.g. Adkins 1999; Foucault 1980; Butler 1990). Yet, in the case of cross-cultural intersexualization, we find another distinction mediated through gender and sexuality – the distinction between the civilized and the primitive. As I will argue, in what I call cross-cultural intersexualization, the ‘immaturity’ of the intersexualized body – the other to the two sexes/genders – stands for the ‘immaturity’ of the ‘other’ culture. The terms applied in this twofold othering process vary, yet the notion of development and maturity (concerning the psyche, the culture and the body) is ingrained in the discourses that produce cross-cultural intersexualization.

The Third and its Analogies

Harriet Lyons and Andrew Lyons describe Herdt’s *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (1994) as an ‘extremely influential volume’ (Lyons and Lyons 2004, 297), in which Herdt brings together various accounts of so-called ‘Thirds’ through time and space. The ‘Third’ (sex or gender) has to be understood as the addition to the first and second sex that is men and women (even if we do not use Simone de Beauvoir’s

notion of the ‘second sex’, the ‘Third’ is the addition to the dualism). The title of this edited book can be read as symptomatic of recent developments in ethnological/ethnographical cross-cultural approaches to sex-gender-sexuality-systems. The volume contains a variety of accounts of sexualized and gendered identities, in different historical periods and across different geographical sites: analysis ranges from the Byzantine period, to sexology at end of the twentieth century, and from the Balkans to India and Polynesia. Moreover, this volume is unquestionably an ‘excellent stimulus to further work along this path’ (Conway-Long 1995, 711). Kath Weston and Morgan Holmes both praise the collection for avoiding the traps in Western notions of what sex this so-called Third ‘really’ is (Weston 1993, 349; Holmes 2004, 4).

There is no doubt that the initial motives of ethnologists to interrogate so-called third sexes and third genders incorporated the desire to depict ‘other’ cultures adequately, and that they were searching for accurate terms to describe their findings. However, the question remains whether this is possible at all. Morgan Holmes, in her article ‘Locating Third Sexes’, has noted that ‘caution is necessary when culturally specific symbolic orders are employed to prove a(ny) point about Western sex/gender systems; the notion of learning from “other”

cultures raises serious problems' (Holmes 2004, 5). Holmes states that ethnological research into third sexes/genders is likely to fall into the trap of idealizing cultures which are thought of as representing a version of a symbolic order, to be seen as superior to the limited Western dichotomous conceptualization of sex and gender (Holmes 2004, 2). Furthermore, Holmes criticizes Herdt's collection for 'lumping all the erotic and symbolic elements of these cultures together under one rubric of "third sex and gender" categories' (Holmes 2004, 5). She sees this as a sign that many anthropologists still think 'along a dimorphic axis, permitting the occasional disruption to be entertained,' but fail to consider that the so-called 'third' might be a 'first' or even 'one of any of a multiplicity of possible sex categories' (Holmes 2004, 5). The two dimensions, which Holmes criticizes in Herdt's accounts are, firstly, the hierarchical connotation the third takes on in relation to the first and second sex, and secondly, the limitation of the multiplicity of categories through the construction of the third. To this, I wish to add a third dimension: the implicit construction of the 'other' culture as childlike and uncivilized, thereby permitting a third sex/gender. In Western discourse, this third sex/gender, i.e. intersexuality, is constructed as the result of 'arrested development', and refers to an 'unfinished' embodiment. Yet, anthropological research into inter-

sexuality situates it as cross-cultural, and combines two othering processes – sexual othering and racial/ethnic othering, as I will show.

In the preface to his *Third Sex, Third Gender* collection, Herdt states that 'the hermaphrodite, for instance, may become a symbol of boundary blurring: of the anomalous, the unclean, the tainted, the morally inept or corrupt, indeed, the "monsters" of the cultural imagination of modern Americans' (Herdt 1994, 17). Yet, as I argue, in 'Mistaken Sex', Herdt's own chapter in the collection, he works against this characterization of the hermaphrodite as a 'symbol of boundary blurring', repeating a common manoeuvre by explaining cultural and individual expressions through the framework of psychosexual development. As such, Herdt engages in an othering process, both at the level of the subject and the culture. This move towards cross-cultural intersexualization entails the biological essentializing of tri-morphic sexual difference. This complex frame of reference presents another dichotomous component: the construction of ethnicized and racialized psychosexual difference.

The distinction between sex and gender does not solely rest on the binary between man/male and woman/female, but rather, as Sally Markowitz writes, on 'a scale of racially coded degrees' which causes sex/gender difference to culminate 'in the manly European man and

the feminine European woman' (Markowitz 2001, 391). The history of the construction of these racially coded degrees in the coordinate system of the 'manly European man and the feminine European woman' has already been interrogated by a number of feminist researchers (Markowitz 2001; Stepan 1993, 1986; Traub 1999; Young 1995). These constructed and coded degrees rely on analogies, and interacting metaphors that only work when they are congruent with cultural expectations. One could say that these analogies only work when they suggest new hypotheses; new systems of implications; and therefore new observations (see Stepan 1986). Stepan elaborates on this process:

Because a metaphor or analogy does not directly present a pre-existing nature but instead helps construct that nature, the metaphor generates data that conform to it, and accommodates data that are in apparent contradiction to it, so that nature is seen via the metaphor and the metaphor becomes part of the logic of science itself (Stepan 1986, 274).

The similarity evoked in these analogies is not something that can be discovered, but rather, is something that has to be established. Scientific texts, as Linda Birke puts it, are like any other text: they draw upon 'narratives [that] are culturally

available; powerful metaphors and gendered fables' are to be expected (Birke 1999, 10).³

The 'Polymorphous Perverse'

Herdt (1994) introduces a 'powerful metaphor' in his description of the Sambian culture in his chapter in *Third Sex, Third Gender*. In his attempt to describe the events in which the *kwolu-aatmwol4* could emerge as, what Herdt calls, a third sex and/or gender, he searches for the preconditions that could make such a cultural position possible. Herdt is curious about the circumstances under which the *kwolu-aatmwol* achieves his/her⁵ meaning in the Sambian culture; he asks how the Sambian culture could make 'androgyny' a significant motif in cultural representation. Herdt answers his own question, with the help of the Freudian 'polymorphous perverse'. He states that:

polymorphous cultures such as those of the Sambia of Papua New Guinea, by contrast, define persons as more fluid and as relatively male or female, according to social and development characteristics such as lifespan stage, socioeconomic status, and body ritual (Herdt 1994, 425).

Herdt applies the psychoanalytic term 'polymorphous perverse' to this 'otherness' he detects in the social construction of the Sambian culture, and he states that their

permissiveness can be characterized by this Freudian concept (Herdt 1994, 425). The concept of the 'polymorphous perverse' in Freudian terms describes a state of being, in an early stage of development, before the infant enters into culture or the symbolic order. The resolution of the Oedipus complex guarantees that the child becomes a sexualized/gendered being and therefore intelligible. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1961 [1927]), Freud describes the painful process in which civilization chooses certain body parts and makes them represent so-called sexual difference, as well as the use of those parts to justify the only permitted sort of love and bodily unions and pleasure which is 'heterosexual genital love'. Interestingly, in this account, women become more prone to sexual sensitivity since they have two 'sex/gender zones' that can give them pleasure. Man supposedly, however, has only one 'sex/gender organ' which makes him more unisexed/-gendered.⁶ Therefore, women have a greater tendency towards the 'polymorphous perverse'. Freud talks about the child and 'das unkultivierte Durchschnittsweib' which is translated as the 'average uncultivated woman', which implies that class and race play here a big role in suppressing the 'polymorphous perverse' (Freud 1961 [1927], 97). Every woman has the potential to become a prostitute and therefore 'polymorphous perverse'

if not properly cultured into patriarchal, misogynist, heteronormative society. In the 'polymorphous perverse' there is undifferentiated possibilities of pleasures (and embodiment) which the subject learns to contain and control according to societal, and I want to add, political censure, rules and requirements. In this sense, everything that remains 'polymorphous perverse' is aberrant and deviant in terms of sexuality, race and class – be it women or children.

Therefore, in the cross-cultural context of the anthropological realm I analyze here, the 'polymorphous perverse' takes on a problematic position. First of all, Herdt ignores the fact that the Euro-American world also includes intersexualized people, who are regarded as differently sexed. What is more, some people claim an intersexualized or transgendered identity, and live in subcultures where they are perceived as such: in other words, there are spaces in the West which are also 'permissive' to sexual variance. However, in contrasting these two cultures that are supposedly so different, Herdt homogenizes not just the 'other', but also his own Western culture. Secondly, while Herdt deploys the Freudian metaphor, he fails to explain why the Melanesian society is supposedly 'polymorphous perverse' – is it due to their bodies, their desire, their gender system, or their 'otherness'? I suggest that in cross-cultural inter-

sexualization, in the case of Herdt's work, all these combine in the process of othering and produce a sexually and racial 'Other'. Instead, as I argue, these othering processes are dependent on each other and join forces in the case of cross-cultural intersexualization.

By referring to the term 'polymorphous perverse' which clearly denotes a state of child development (regarded as prior to 'civilization'), Herdt describes the socio-cultural system of the 'other' *in relation* to civilization. He constructs the 'other' culture (as a whole) in a developmental psychoanalytical framework, and understands it through a cross-cultural analysis. Herdt, I argue, falls into the trap of one of the most common racializing/ethnicizing analogies; that of positioning 'the Other' at a stage that is less developed, more childlike and primitive, in relation to the civilized, sophisticated and developed Western civilization. This evokes common themes of the West as superior, and of 'the Other' as defined by lack. Following Neville Hoad, I would argue that the theories of intersexuality – the processes of intersexualization – are not understandable without looking at the imperial and neo-imperial contexts of such theoretical productions (Hoad 2000). The processes of cross-cultural intersexualization are comparable to Hoad's emphasis on the emergence of the homosexual through a 'hierarchical staging of human difference under the his-

torical period of imperialism and globalization and the attendant logics of evolution and development respectively' (Hoad 2000, 133). This notion combines theories of the body with theories of the mind to jointly constitute this 'one signifier' by 'progress through its various others, which are then posited as vestigial, arrested, anachronistic or degenerate' (Hoad 2000, 134).

Even though the Sambian culture Herdt discusses does not organize itself in the same manner as Freudian nineteenth-century bourgeois Vienna, and does not share this history, he uses the concept of the 'polymorphous perverse' to describe the psychological processes, and the organization of sexuality, of the 'other' culture. Herdt's representation of the Sambian culture as permissive, and therefore actually progressive, with regards to sexual variation, invokes psychoanalysis as a universal discourse. However, the connotation of this concept works against the argument Herdt wants to make, since the 'polymorphous perverse' implies lack (of sexual differentiation) with regards to civilization *and* sexuality, and therefore forecloses the perception of the culture as progressive perception.

Psychoanalysis as a Colonial-Evolutionary Discourse

Sigmund Freud's theories, developed in *Totem and Taboo*, relied, as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks notes, 'on the parallels between primitives

and neurotics' (Seshadri-Crooks 1994, 190). Freud conceptualized so-called primitive cultures' minds as fundamentally different to the thinking of the logocentric West. To him, the 'primitive mind' does not differentiate the mystical from reality; rather, it uses 'mystical participation' to interpret and manipulate the world. As such, Freud invests in imperialist and colonial discourses, which were present in his time; the mind of the 'savage' had a specific function in anthropological discourses at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939), a philosopher and 'armchair anthropologist', published various texts on the 'primitive mind' and the 'essential difference between the primitive mentality and ours' (Lévy-Bruhl 1975, 4). Seshadri-Crooks notes that 'the difference between the savage and the civilized man is expressed on a diachronic axis, as a temporal difference in "our past" and is not subject to an interchangeability of the actors' (Seshadri-Crooks 1994, 195).

In her analysis, Ranjana Khanna goes further, examining the embeddedness of psychoanalysis in geopolitical and historical coordinates. In her book *Dark Continents*, she understands psychoanalysis as a colonial discipline, which allows her 'to see how nation-statehood for the former colonies of Europe encrypts the violence of European nations in its colonial manifestations' (Khanna 2003, 6). Her arguments

conceptualize psychoanalysis as an ethnography of nation-statehood, and examine the impossibility of adequately understanding psychoanalysis 'without considering how it was constituted as a colonial discipline through the economic, political, cultural, and epistemic strife in the transition from earth into world' (Khanna 2003, 9). Khanna argues for a provincializing, politicizing and historicizing of psychoanalysis, to counter the intrinsic universalizing motions derived from its geo-political and historical origins. This is needed not only for anthropological psychoanalysis, but also for a re-examination of some basic texts by Freud, such as *Totem and Taboo* and *Culture and its Discontents*, which rely heavily on the distinction between the civilized world, the Western capitalist nation-states and the so-called 'savage' societies. For example, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud borrows from a theory of homology that assumes that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: this means that the individual repeats the stages of the development, or the evolutionary stages of the species. According to Khanna, psychoanalysis cannot be considered without inclusion of the 'evolutionary logic that informs Freud's sense of the growths of repression in civilization' (Khanna 2003, 11).

Not only is this notion of repression enabling civilization problematic, but so too are the evolutionary tropes found in Freud's theories

on psychosexual development. In 1939, Freud admitted that 'I must, however, in all modesty confess that (...) I cannot do without this fact in biological evolution' (Freud 1939, 100). Indeed, Freud heavily relied on Lamarckian theories to support his claims about so-called psychosexual development. Freud also depended on Charles Darwin's theories about the arrangement of early human societies, thus locating the beginnings of the Oedipus complex in the origins of human society.⁷ Examining the Freudian concept of psychosexual development, the resolution of the Oedipus complex appears to be the stage in which the child, and culture, leaves the childlike and generic form of an uncivilized being behind, and emerges into a 'mature' organization between self and others. Freud enveloped the psychic and social in an evolutionary rhetoric. By referring to Johannes Fabian's classic *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1983), Neville Hoad states that the social evolutionists 'discarded Time altogether'. Moreover, 'the temporal discourse of anthropology as it was formed decisively under the paradigm of evolutionism rested on a conception of Time that was not only secularized and naturalized but also thoroughly spatialized' (Fabian 1983 quoted in Hoad 2000, 135). Here, the paradox regarding the uses of Time demonstrates the construction of development as highly geo-politi-

cal. Underlying this construction are evolutionary theories that date back to the nineteenth century. As the child of colonialism, anthropology is immersed in these theories, and as such, has significantly contributed to a hierarchical ordering of the world. The notion of development is crucial in this process. By temporalizing space, contemporaneous non-European cultures become understood as the representatives of Europe's past. Through this model, the possibility of understanding cultural difference is precluded, since it insistently implies that the 'civilized' Western culture has already been the 'primitive', the non-Western (Hoad 2000, 142).

Steven Angelides states that the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 'effectively canonized evolutionary thinking, leaving few spheres of Western thought untouched' (Angelides 2001, 29).⁸ The origins of psychoanalysis and of anthropology, especially anthropology concerned with sex, gender and sexuality, indeed demonstrate traits of evolutionism. The simultaneous development of the two basic, but rival theories of diffusionism and evolutionism in the nineteenth century created debates about the differing underlying theoretical frameworks. Jack Stauder describes the anthropological tradition around the turn of the twentieth century as being 'dominated by controversies between diffusionists and evolutionists who held in common,

however, an historical and often speculative approach that was primarily concerned with reconstructing the past of mankind' (Stauder 1993, 409). While the diffusionists were interested in tracing wildly dissimilar societies back to commonly shared cultural origins and connections, the evolutionists relied on a theory of linear and separate development of societies. This notion of a linear but separate development was based on Darwinian narratives of evolution. Applied to the development of human societies, this produced narratives about the evolution of humankind, ranging from 'savagery' and 'barbarism' to 'civilization', on an evolutionary continuum that can be seen across different cultures. The conclusion drawn in the imperialist era at the end of the nineteenth century was that 'advanced' societies have the responsibility of civilizing 'primitive' societies. I argue that the anthropological power/knowledge complex crystallizes in its most material form when linking the 'past of mankind' with the evolutionist explanatory framework concerning sexuality.⁹

Anne McClintock elaborately describes this 'vital analogy' of (arrested) development and 'other' cultures in evolutionary theory. According to her, we can assume that if the 'white child was an atavistic throwback to a more primitive adult ancestor', this child 'could be scientifically compared with other living races and groups to rank their level of evolu-

tionary inferiority' (McClintock 1995, 50). The adults of inferior groups ('savage cultures', 'non-sophisticated' societies, etc) must be like the children of superior groups (industrialized societies); in this analogy, the child represents a primitive adult ancestor who is thought of as being in the same stage of mental development as the adult of the so-called savage society (McClintock 1995, 50). Stephen Gould relates this to racialization, stating that 'if adult blacks and women are like white male children, then they are living representatives of an ancestral stage in the evolution of white males' (Gould 1981, 115). He concludes that 'an anatomical theory of ranking races – based on entire bodies had been found' (Gould 1981, 115). Gayatri Spivak, questioning the entire foundation of scientific knowledge production, states that 'in fact, if the analogy between primitive peoples and children were not scientific, the fundament of the science would be blown away' (Spivak 1993, 20). I suggest that Herdt's use of the metaphor of the 'polymorphous perverse' is the foundation for his claim about the permissiveness of 'the Other' towards sexual variation intelligible to his Western audience. However, as I argue, the use of this metaphor is further consolidated when intersexualization is at work in the same maneuver.

The influence of Darwinist ideas on categorizations of sex, gender and sexuality has already been wide-

ly discussed (e.g. Somerville 1994; Hoad 2000). Siobhan Somerville notes that one of the basic hypotheses within Darwinian thinking was that organisms evolve through a process of natural selection and, therefore, also show 'greater signs of differentiation between the (two) sexes' (Somerville 1994, 255). The notion of sexual dimorphism as the pride of evolution, and therefore civilization, is central to intersexualization. In this evolutionary narrative, racialization features even before Darwinism gained influence. Imperialism and colonialism existed before the end of the nineteenth century, and already needed justification through the construction of the 'inferior other' who can be exploited/extinguished without further explanation; the inferiority of 'the Other' made any explanations redundant. Moreover, the trafficking between cultures and continents endangered the purity of the civilized white 'race'; miscegenation was a trope that began to cause anxiety. The notion of 'mixed-breeds', so-called hybrid products of a marriage between a 'white' and a 'non-white' person, is deeply intertwined with nineteenth-century eugenicist and scientific-racist discourse (Young 1995; Mitchell 1997; Werbner 1997).

Therefore, in the nineteenth century, sex and race increasingly came to define social value. Anatomists from this period studied sex and race, and according to Londa Schiebinger, positioned the

European white male as the 'standard of excellence' (Schiebinger 1989, 212). The analogy between sex and race, as Schiebinger suggests, has drawn on a variety of reference points, at different points in time, since the eighteenth century. The early framework of the production of racial differences was rooted in anatomy, which molded differences into muscles, nerves, and veins. Like sex, race, Schiebinger concludes, came to penetrate the 'entire life of the organism' (Schiebinger 1989, 211). According to Markowitz, with the beginnings of sexology, the focus shifted to measurements of the pelvis (Markowitz 2001), which was thought to be equally important for understanding the physical and moral development of the 'races'. Schiebinger states that 'with pelvis size, sexual (though not racial) hierarchy was reversed. Here the European female represented the fully developed human type, outranking the European male' (Schiebinger 1989, 212). However, this did not mean that European women became the superior 'species'; they just became, in a eugenic framework, the best choice for the white man for procreation, reaffirming 'blonde heterosexuality' (Markowitz 2001, 404).

The sexologist Havelock Ellis suggested, echoing the Darwinist tradition, that 'since the beginnings of industrialization, more marked sexual differences in physical development seem (we cannot speak

definitely) to have developed than are usually to be found in savage societies' (Ellis 1911, 13). Angelides quotes Carl Vogt, who stated that 'it is a remarkable circumstance, that the difference between the sexes, as regards cranial cavity, increases with the development of the race, so that the male European excels much more the female, than the negro the negress' (cited in Angelides 2001, 34). In *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (1907), Iwan Bloch stated that, with the progress of civilization, the contrast between the sexes becomes 'continually sharper and more individualized' (58). In relation to 'civilization', Bloch positions the 'other', not just in 'primitive conditions', but also 'in the present day among agricultural laborers and the proletariat' where, according to him, sexual difference 'is less sharp and to some extent even obliterated' (Bloch 1907, 58). Thus, the achievement of sexual difference as a sharp contrast between the sexes is implied to be contrasted between the white middle-class, Western lady and gentleman of the 'civilized' world. This contrast, however, needs to be literally mediated by a figure which lies 'in-between' the two parameters of sexual difference and racialized/ethnicized – here 'class' is also at stake – to make these two continua intelligible.

In his monograph *The Intermediate Sex* (1896 [1921]), Edward Carpenter served these two continua with the principle of 'the

third'. He disputed Xavier Mayne's¹⁰ direct analogy between biracial people and the 'in-between' body of the intersexualized, which Mayne positioned as a necessary principle within the natural order. However, in his attempt to resist the association between homosexuality and degeneration, which was common in his times, Carpenter also occasionally appropriated the trope of 'racial mixing'. In *The Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter attempted to free homosexuality from the discourse of pathology and abnormality. He used the term 'intermediate sex' to refer to homosexuality, and suggested that 'intermediary types' existed on a continuum 'in-between' the poles of the exclusively heterosexual male and female. Carpenter offered notions of 'shades' of sexes and sexual 'half-breeds' to assign homosexuality a place in the natural order. He drew on scientific vocabulary, which was dominant in the discourse of racialization. Therefore, the analogy between the 'sexual invert' and the 'mixed racial body' was employed in contradictory ways. On the one hand, this analogy was used to assign the homosexual a legitimate place within the natural order; on the other, it was used to evidence degeneration (Somerville 2000, 33). Yet, this contradiction becomes the central feature of the continuum of the natural order, in which the 'pure' bodies of white heterosexual men and women are positioned at the far end of civilization, by reference to

the 'natural' developmental stages of 'in-between'. Carpenter stated that 'anatomically and mentally we find all shades existing from the pure genus man to the pure genus woman' (Carpenter 1921, 133).

In their highly influential and widely read 1889 publication, *The Evolution of Sex*, Patrick Geddes and Arthur Thomson state that 'hermaphroditism is primitive; the unisexual state is a subsequent differentiation' (Geddes and Thomson 1889, 80). The notion of natural selection made it possible to view hermaphroditic/intersexualized bodies as anomalous evolutionary 'throwbacks'.¹¹ Referring to this history, Ulrike Klöppel states that hermaphrodites were therefore regarded as 'atavistic monstrosities' (Klöppel 2002, 161). Foucault demonstrates that during the nineteenth century, the hermaphrodite was placed in the category of a 'monster' that disrupted the whole intelligible order and rationalizing apparatus (Foucault 2003). The assignment of meaning to certain identities, or the construction of these identities in the first place, cannot be detached from the subsequent assignment of a place in the order of beings for these newly-created identities. This order is hierarchically configured, and derives its parameters from the discourses that explain what 'human nature' or the human species is supposed to be – who can be included and who cannot. The othering processes we find in this literature are already

two-fold; they need each other to be made intelligible.

In these accounts we find the 'polymorphous perverse' hidden, yet emerging through underlying concepts such as development (cultural or sexual). In several instances, the psychological, sexological, and the evolutionary discourses interlink and produce the Freudian notion of the 'polymorphous perverse' which will be transformed into the sexual *and* racial 'other' in Herdt's work nearly a century later. However, the etymology of gender and genus, as well as the interconnected epistemologies of bisexuality and intersexuality demonstrate even more thoroughly the conceptual origins of cross-cultural intersexualization.

Genus and Gender

Thus, the hermaphrodite came to be seen as atavistic, and as unfinished in its development. The term, degeneration, as related to evolutionism, also entered the debate. Havelock Ellis noted that conflating the homosexual and the hermaphrodite in one term was common for sexologists, stating that 'strictly speaking, the invert is degenerate' (Dreger 1998, 138). Alice Dreger claims that Ellis disliked the term, and made it clear that he only used it in the 'most scientific sense,' which meant that the hermaphrodite 'has fallen away from the genus' (Dreger 1998, 138). 'Genus', a Latin term, means 'race' or 'kind'. 'Degeneration' derives from the

Latin word 'generare', which means to procreate or breed, but also to generate, to foster and to produce. It implies deterioration from the norm, in terms of being the type of human being considered to be the norm, and being a (re)productive member of society. Therefore, to degenerate, or to be degenerate, means to not belong to the human race, but also to not be generative or productive. Degeneration is inexorably linked to development and maturity.

The notion of the hermaphrodite as having 'fallen away from the genus' means that intersexualization functions through an exclusion from the norm of the human species, and from its subdivision 'genus=gender'. In the sexological discourse of Ellis' time, this implies that the 'invert' (here, standing for the homosexual and the hermaphrodite) could not, or rather should not, reproduce; not only because of the invert's negation of reproduction made consistent through the heterosexual matrix, but also because degeneration is inheritable and is also intrinsically linked to eugenics (Barnett 2006). In 1968, the psychoanalyst Robert Stoller argued that intersexualized people do not really belong to the human race (Stoller 1968, 34). Thus, since gender is constructed as so fundamental for the intelligibility of the human being (Butler 1993), in the case of intersexuality gender becomes genus, meaning the human species. Here, the term 'genus' is used in relation to a biological classification, which

is ranked below the term species that refers here to 'human being'. Yet, it is a term that is charged with cultural and socio-political meaning. McClintock describes degeneration as a social figure, rather than a biological concept, that is linked to the idea of contagion and fears concerning 'fallibility of white male and imperial potency' (McClintock 1995, 47).¹² According to Angelides, who works on the trope of bisexuality – the epistemological sibling of intersexuality – a multiplicity of different disciplinary theories such as atavism, degeneration, and arrested development were unified. In their unification, they reaffirmed the evolutionary logic of the political differentiation between civilized and primitive evolutionary entities (Angelides 2001).

Sander Gilman argues that sexuality is the most salient marker of otherness, organically representing racial difference (1985; 1993). I argue that intersexuality serves to organically represent racial/ethnic difference. The interconnection of the tropes of degeneration and the 'human race' is made comprehensible in terms of a continuum of sexual dimorphism and racial/cultural difference. This continuum combines the discourses of racialization/ethnicization in intersexualization. Ellis, Bloch, Carpenter and Vogt were not the first ones to draw on this interconnection to make their sexological theories intelligible to their contemporaries. The categories of race,

class and sex/gender, as well as sexuality are not structurally equivalent; however, through analogy and metaphor, they are co-constructs in scientific discourses. Their historical heritage feeds into current conceptualizations of cultural and ethnic difference, and informs interpretations and explanations of the body, desire and difference.¹³ The interconnection and/or analogies which Ellis and his contemporaries built on are based on a tradition that dates back to the Enlightenment and the beginnings of imperialism (and, therefore, anthropology as a discipline) (Stepan 1996; Schiebinger 1993). Not only did the material body have to bear theories of inferiority and degeneracy, but the categories of 'morality' and 'social worth' also informed and underpinned these theories, mainly through craniology. This branch of science is only intelligible if social categories are added to theories about the differences between racialized and sexualized bodies and identities. Hoad has called this process the 'reinscription of biological evolutionism into the sphere of the psychic' (Hoad 2000, 141). In cross-cultural intersexualization this two-fold process is mediated by the notion of development.

Infantile Sexuality

A powerful association between sexual development and 'maturity' emerged from the early theories on psychosexual development and sexuality (and later, on gender iden-

tity); Freud emphatically stated in 1905, 'every pathological disorder of sexual life is rightly to be regarded as an inhibition in development' (Freud 1905, 208).¹⁴ Jerome Neu notes that 'perverse sexuality is, ultimately, infantile sexuality' (Neu 1991, 185). In this Freudian sense, infantile sexuality must be understood as a space of non-genital forms of pleasure. Myra Hird states that 'perversions are now associated with "regressed" and/or "fixated" pleasures rather than mature genital love (Hird 2003, 1075). Further, Neu reads in Freud the collapse of 'the individual's experienced concern for genital pleasure together with the biological function of reproduction, so that the development and maturation criterion for perversion reduces to the question of the suitability of a particular activity for reproduction' (Neu 1991, 187). Neu also refers to the 'ideal of maturation', which, according to him, 'gives a central role to that function [reproduction] and makes all earlier sexuality necessarily perverse. The infant's multiple sources of sexual pleasure make it polymorphous perverse' (Neu 1991, 187). Freud moved from conceptualizing homosexuality as a variant of sexual function, to inscribing it as 'arrested sexual development'. Psychoanalysis, even after Freud, draws heavily on most of the evolutionary vocabulary. The notion of 'normal sexuality' became tightly bound to notions of adulthood and 'healthy and mature' development,

also with regard to cultural differences. This tying of the concept of sexuality to the notion of development relies on analogies and metaphors, which appear in constructions of cultural (or racial) difference, as well as in constructions of sexualized/gendered difference. Hoad states that 'the difference between the perverse and the normal can only be understood in terms of development' (Hoad 2000, 145). Concerning intersexualization, this statement about homosexuality has to be extended to physical 'abnormality'. I argue that, in intersexualization, the discourses of psychological and physiological 'abnormality' merge when the terms of development are concerned. Moreover, 'abnormality' is construed in evolutionary terms, with cross-cultural reference, in order to create a notion of the normal, mature and civilized white, Western, binary, hetero-relational matrix comprised of two distinct sexes/genders. The distinctions which are mediated in cross-cultural intersexualization are racial *and* gendered/sexualized boundaries.

Bisexuality and Hermaphroditism/Intersexuality

While Steven Angelides' work demonstrates the place that the concept of 'bisexuality' took in the theories described above, my focus rests on intersexuality. Both categories have, at times, been interchangeably applied or separated. Bisexuality, as Angelides historiciz-

es it, can be regarded as 'not unlike the evolutionist's "missing bisexual link"', which, just as the hermaphrodite, 'served as the dialectical link between the two forces structuring Freud's work: the biological and the psychological' (Angelides 2001, 53). Angelides states that biological or innate bisexuality, which is hermaphroditism in Freud's understanding, 'was Freud's link to the natural sciences' and 'epistemologically bisexuality was figured not only as the "other" to sexual ontology itself, but as the liminal figure through which, and against which, racial, gender, and sexual identities were invented as distinctly separate species of humankind' (Angelides 2001, 24). Angelides traces this back to the theoretical developments and sums it up as follows:

The universal starting point for all human development, and thus human differentiation, was embryological bisexuality. As children, men passed through physical and psychical stages of bisexuality until maturity, until *(hu)manhood*. *Women and blacks, on the other hand, remained children, undeveloped men; or in Irigaray's terms, sexes which were not ones. This meant that each of them was therefore a (hu)man that was not one. For it was in the evolutionary process of becoming (hu)man that one was to transcend the physical and psychical animal ancestry of primordial bisexuality. In*

the Darwinian chain of being, this was an upward movement out of the domain of nature and into that of culture; an evolutionary progression from sexual ambiguity to sexual distinction (Angelides 2001, 33 [emphasis in original]).

Thus, biological bisexuality – that is, in this account, intersexuality – held a specific place in the ordering of human nature, not just with regard to sex, but also to race/ethnicity. From this time onwards, the tropes of ‘maturity’, ‘arrested development’, ‘development’ and the definition of ‘human nature’ were intrinsically connected. Innate bisexuality was the pivotal epistemic tool, instrumentalized to keep the crisis of white masculinity of the late nineteenth century at bay. Sexologists worked with tropes used by anthropologists, and anthropologists founded a discursive culture based on sexological terminologies. In the processes of cross-cultural intersexualization, these different strands merge and produce a twofold othering process.

Conclusion

Anthropological research and discourse is colored by evolutionary discourses and notions which date back to the nineteenth century, and have provided the foundations for the work of anthropologists. A similar evolutionary discourse is found in theories about intersexuality, in terms of biological and psychologi-

cal theories. The interdisciplinary agendas of medical and psychological anthropology, particularly when it comes to sex-gender-sexuality-systems, are saturated with new concepts and categories that are invented to apprehend ‘the Other’. The set of ideas discussed here shaped sexology at the turn of the twentieth century, and continued to inform research into sex, gender and sexuality as it developed throughout the twentieth century. At the end of the nineteenth century, the acceptance of Darwinism was total; human beings were conceptually connected with the smallest entity¹⁵ and the idea of evolution with Man on top was established – that is to say, anthropocentrism in its most explicit form. Every being was considered to have a place in the evolutionary process of creation: progress was perceived in those species that exhibited the greatest degree of sexual difference, and where heterosexuality was organized around procreation. The notion of development is deeply ingrained in Western research into non-Western societies, where one’s own culture and gender regime is set as the highest possible form of development and ‘civilization’. The model of development is intrinsically interwoven into the very history of psychoanalysis/psychology, sexology and anthropology, and therefore in cross-cultural intersexualization.

Lyons and Lyons identify two motivations for anthropological accounts of homosexuality: one, to

make available information that has previously been distorted, and two, addressing contemporary gay political issues. However, they state these motivations are 'by no means exclusive but are often merged' (Lyons and Lyons 2004, 295). Lyons and Lyons assert that some 'anthropologists are not so much studying the "sexuality of the Other" as implicitly diagnosing "otherness" on the basis of sexuality, even though they have, in many cases, been attracted to their field subjects because of a "sameness" of sexual orientation' (Lyons and Lyons 2004, 305). In this regard, the study of homosexuality is very similar to the anthropological study of intersexuality, at least in accounts by Herdt (Herdt and Stoller 1985; Herdt and Davidson 1987; Herdt 1990, 1994). With regards to cross-cultural intersexualization, Herdt's quest to argue for less restrictive and more flexible sex-gender-sexuality-systems produces the 'other' culture as 'other' because of their 'permissiveness'. Applying the metaphor of polymorphous perversity to the representation of the 'other culture' entails positioning it at the stage of immaturity. To cross-culturally intersexualize as Herdt does, is to solidify this claim to invoke the notion of the 'incomplete' intersexualized, and construct it as emblematic for the incomplete, or even childlike, primitivism of the 'other' culture. In cross-cultural intersexualization, the immaturity of the intersexualized body stands

for the immaturity of the culture in which the intersexualized body can exist as such.

For Herdt, the call for acceptance of sexual (biological) variation is made with reference to psychological terminology. By applying the term 'polymorphous perverse', Herdt evokes the coordinates of arrested development/maturity and savage/civilized. The implicit supposition of non-maturity, in terms of a socially restrictive interpretation of sex-gender-sexuality-systems – and the positioning of the hermaphrodite in this immature organization – produces, as I suggest, 'the Other' as doubly othered. The permissiveness of 'the Other' in the example by Herdt which I interrogated, and an openness to the polymorphous multiplicity of existence, are othered through the trope of intersexuality; subsequently, the system that enables this is also othered. Mutual metaphorical affirmations of the two processes of sexual and ethnic othering work towards cross-cultural intersexualization. The pathological characteristic of 'the Others' – their psychosexual non-maturity – is reproduced in the singular 'intersexualized' body and in the collectivity of the 'other' culture.

Endnotes

¹ Herdt was not the first one to interrogate hermaphroditism (which is the historically older term) or intersexuality in other cultures. One of the most famous examples is Robert Edgerton who conducted research in East Africa (Edgerton 1964).

- ² The concept of 'the Other' is derived from the works of Luce Irigaray (e.g. 1995) and Stuart Hall (e.g. 1997). Irigaray writes, from a feminist perspective, on the 'fundamental model of the human' which is 'one, singular, solitary, historically masculine, the paradigmatic Western adult male, rational, capable. [...] The model of the subject thus remained singular and the "others" represented less ideal examples hierarchized with respect to the singular subject' (Irigaray 1995, 7). Stuart Hall shifts this perspective slightly, describing a form of racialized knowledge of 'the Other' with reference to Edward Said and Franz Fanon (1986) who, using the concept of 'Orientalism', have shown how the hegemonic construction of the white subject is always based on the construction of another non-white model: 'the Other'.
- ³ Rudi Bleys writes that 'historically, the European construction of sexuality coincides with the epoch of imperialism and the two inter-connect' (Bleys 1995, 106). What lies at the heart of an anthropological configuration of the power/knowledge complex is the 'pervasive understanding within anthropology (...) that the human body generates a host of potent metaphorical constructions for ordering the world' (Sharp 2000, 315). But 'the metaphors are inappropriate for translating the concepts of the particular culture: they assimilate alien cultural forms "too easily" to European [i.e. Western] categories and conceptions' (Street 1990, 242). The assumption that the 'other' culture under investigation uses the same metaphors or signifiers to designate their peoples' 'sex' and 'gender' is intrinsically colonizing.
- ⁴ Over the course of his research, Herdt has given different translations of the word *kwolu-aatmwol*. In 1981, he explains that the Sambia 'identify' with two sexes male (*aatmwul*) and female (*aambelu*). In 1988, he states that beside this 'sexual dimorphism', Sambia recognize the *kwolu-aatmwol*. The term, he states here, is a compound morpheme referring to 'male-like-thing' (*kwolu*) and an 'adult person, masculine' (*aatmwul*). This emphasizes the *transformational quality of changing* from a 'male-like thing into masculinity' (Herdt and Davidson 1988, 38). In 1990, Herdt states that *kwolu-aatmwol* indexes 'male thing-transforming-into-female-thing' (Herdt 1990, 439). In 1994, Herdt translates it simply as 'changing into a male thing' (Herdt 1990, 432). Apparently, Herdt was not able to find an accurate translation of the term *kwolu-aatmwol*. However, I suggest that the change of translation in Herdt's course of research denotes the impossibility of adequately capturing what *kwolu-aatmwol* might possibly mean. The semantics of the term elude Herdt's attempt to translate the word and thereby the (im)possibility of translating the symbolic meaning.
- ⁵ I use the underscore between his and her to demarcate the space between the two genders. This underscore has been introduced into the German language by Kitty Herrmann in 2003; it is called Gender_Gap and opens up written language (as well as spoken language) for people who do not identify as either man or woman, or they identify as both or as something that is not to be found on a so-called continuum of gender. In Germany this style of writing has by now found quite some resonance and is often used in academic publications.
- ⁶ Freud obviously did not know anything about the prostate, which can be described as a second male sexual organ. The prostate produces part of the semen and is located between the bladder and the rectum. In Western discourse this organ has not been regarded as a sexual erotogenous zone. For thousands of years the prostate is known as a male sexual organ in traditional Chinese medicine or the Tantra.
- ⁷ Frantz Fanon, for example, famously disempowered the Oedipus complex as

a universally adaptive psychoanalytical structure. Fanon denied the existence of the Oedipus for Martinique, mainly because no black father exists to mirror as The Father and, therefore, no struggle for the mother can take place. He argues that the father is always the White Father, the Colonizing Father – a structural father and not a personal one (Fanon 1986).

⁸ Charles Darwin actually returned from his voyages unconvinced that species had emerged through a naturalistic and mechanistic process of evolution. It was not until Darwin read Thomas Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) that he found a theoretical construction he could use to frame evolutionary processes in nature. Malthus' political views of the necessity of a 'capitalistic defense of middle class accumulation, expansion and domination' as well as the male control of reproduction, found their way into Darwin's theory of evolution (Gross and Averill 1983, 75).

⁹ The so-called 'father of anthropology', E. B. Tylor was a crucial figure in establishing evolutionist notions of the development of civilization. He published *Primitive Culture* in 1871 (1958) and *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* in 1865 (1964). Tylor relied heavily on Darwin's theories and often likened 'primitive' cultures to children. To describe the relation between 'savage intelligence' and 'civilized mental culture', Tylor used tropes from evolutionary theory. He also reasoned that 'throughout all the manifestations of the human intellect, facts will be found to fall into their place on the same general lines of evolution' (Tylor cited in Leopold 1980, 31). The analogy of human evolution and the difference between cultures at the level of the individual and the 'species' became a fashionable rhetorical maneuver in anthropology. Tylor often relied on the standard Enlightenment classifications of societies as 'savage' and 'childlike' or 'civilized' (Leopold 1980).

¹⁰ Xavier Mayne was the pseudonym cho-

sen by Edward Stevenson to advocate for homosexual rights in America. He wrote *The Intersexes. A Study of Semisexualism as a Problem in Social Life* in 1908.

¹¹ Geddes and Thomson discuss Darwin's theory of sexual selection at length in the first chapter of their book (1889, 3–31).

¹² McClintock explains the social power of the image of degeneration by referring to the description of social classes or groups as 'races', 'foreign groups', or 'nonindigenous bodies', which 'could thus be cordoned off as biological and "contagious," rather than as social groups' (McClintock 1995, 48). McClintock concludes that the usefulness of the quasi-biological metaphors of 'type', 'species', 'genus' and 'race' was that they gave 'full expression to anxieties about class and gender insurgence without betraying the social and political nature of these distinctions. As Condorcet put it, such metaphors made nature herself an accomplice in the crime of political inequality' (McClintock 1995, 48).

¹³ Anne McClintock argues that history is not produced around one single privileged social category and that racial and class differences cannot be 'understood as sequentially derivative of sexual difference, or vice versa' (McClintock 1995, 61). To her, the determining categories of imperialism come into being only in their historical relationship to each other and emerge, in this relationship, in a 'dynamic, shifting, and intimate interdependence' (McClintock 1995, 61).

¹⁴ The rhetorical gymnastics used to justify surgical intervention in intersex-identified newborns also draws on this notion of development. The parents are not told of the physician's diagnosis, as it is imagined as being too difficult to cope with. This relies on the notion that their child is not fully developed yet, and that physicians must operate in order to secure full sexual differentiation.

¹⁵ Over the years and centuries, this small-

est entity has become smaller and smaller; now we have reached the level of hormones, chromosomes and genes. For a critical analysis of genetics, see Joan Fujimura 2006; on endocrinology, see Nelly Oudshoorn 2001.

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