

**Sexotic. Workshop on Moral Economies, Body Techniques, Media and the Interplay between Sexuality and Exoticization**

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„Sexotic“ is an illustrative yet associatively open term. It points to intersectionality, thus refers to the intertwined formation of categories such as race, gender, class or age. The workshop at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development called participants to bring the catchy term to an analytic use. It explored how intertwined sexualizations and exoticizations defined the self and the other, and what discriminatory or emancipatory, normalizing or idealizing effects these dynamics had. The workshop addressed the sexotic in regulatory practices. For an instructive example, one can turn to a presentation given during the workshops' second day: Between the 1920s and the 1940s, René Guyon, a French law reformer in the Kingdom of Siam made a name for himself as a radical emancipatory sexologist. Guyon dismissed Christian morality, Victorian puritanism as well as the early women's movement and diagnosed a repressive European sexual dictatorship. In contrast, he held non-Westerners to be closer to nature, not corrupted by an artificial regulation of life. Guyon manufactured his dichotomous world from generalizations about Western crisis and eclectic, de-contextualized self-gathered data from Siam, India, China, Japan or Tahiti. During the workshop, TAMARA LOOS (Ithaca) introduced the educated traveller Guyon mapping the natural through the gaze of a male Western scientist. Guyon assembled the universal liberal human subject in what Joane Nagel has called „ethno-sexual encounters“.<sup>1</sup>

The workshop organizers conceptualized the sexotic as performative, relational and situational – often having unintended, ambiva-

lent effects. While scholars like Ann Stoler have pointed out the constitutive role of ethnicity in the history of sexuality some 20 years ago, there is still a surprising lack of empirical work that links post-colonial studies, discourse analysis and practice theory together.<sup>2</sup> By dedicating the five panels to tourism, migration, knowledge production, visual media and body techniques, the workshop investigated as well as re-addressed different habitualizations, disciplinations and materializations of the sexotic as constitutive to subject formation in very different historical settings. After introducing the main arguments of the individual papers, this report comments on the potential problems the term sexotic poses in re-introducing hierarchies it claims to analyse. It concludes with remarks on what historiography can gain from the term sexotic and how the concept can contribute to periodization.

In the first panel on tourism, CHIARA BECCALOSSO (Oxford) unfolded a trajectory between mobility, sexuality and the nation state. Focussing on male British travellers – mostly writers or artists, aristocrats or industrialists – she analysed various practices of same sex encounters in late 19th century Southern Italy. Beccalossi described local practices of cross-dressing, same-sex marriages and sexual intercourse not as biologically determined but as based on social roles. Temporary relationships with travellers produced an exotic imagery of places like Sicily and stabilized same-sex practices and identities on both sides – also with those who took the role of travellers away from their everyday normality, while they could still return to their „civilized“ masculine roles. To a certain extent „indigenous“ customs were acknowledged but colonized by the newly formed Italian nation state. The acceptance of same-sex practices provided polysemous references for the production of self-proclaimed modern Europe and its incorporated yet marginalized oriental South. Beccalossi demonstrated how sexotic encounters could be analysed as as-

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<sup>1</sup> See: Joane Nagel, *Sex, Race and Ethnicity, Intimate Intersections*, Forbidden Frontiers, New York / Oxford 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See: Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Durham 1995.

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signing agency to both sides involved, without neglecting hierarchies and inequalities.

In a turn to practices sexotizing Europe itself, COLIN R. JOHNSON (Bloomington) showed how the post-war continent was turned into an exotic, auspicious other by US-American sex tourists. Until the late 1970s, great numbers of young middle class Americans toured Europe due to US economic prosperity and cheap transportation. They composed a commodifiable sexotic experience of traveling a Wild East with traditional morality seemingly in ruins. This perceived sexual liberty elevated reconstruction Europe into a place for hopes of emancipation especially among American gay men.

While tourism and travelling were privileged movements, migration – focus of the second panel – produced very different sexotic constellations. Present-day xenophobia illustrates, how debates on mobility and belonging, ethnicity and desire identify especially Muslim migrants as holding obsolete and repressive sexual values. ANDREW SHIELDS (New York) scrutinized the ongoing sexotizations of migration in the 1960s and the 1970s in Denmark – a country known for its progressive gender equality legislation. Interestingly, Shields depicted labour migration and women's emancipation as co-constitutive processes. So-called guest workers supported equal gender relations around 1970, as they perceived them as genuine to a society they tried to integrate themselves into. CHRISTOPHER EWING's (New York) case study of West German gay press during the 1980s claimed, that their debate on AIDS generated an interest in non-Western gay communities and created a momentary alliance between white gay men and immigrant groups. While Shields' focus on the 1970s resonated with larger social transformations, Ewing emphasized smaller and less definite transitions in the 1980s and 1990s. Both presentations, though, pointed on the growing importance of emancipation in Western self-images as praise-worthy – denigrating imagined values of migrant communities as backwards.

The last three panels focused more on the interplay between production, commodification and sexotization of knowledge. HINNERK ONKEN (Cologne) analysed pho-

tographs taken by German ethnographers of indigenous South American women between 1880 and 1940. The arranged, sometimes even forced photographs carried multi-layered meanings beyond the „scientific“. These pictures constituted one of the few legal opportunities for the display of naked female bodies around 1900. The historic photographs registered the inscribed epistemic violence and their enforcement of racial and gendered hierarchies beyond their production also in their distribution in popular books or as postcards. JUDITH GROSSE (Zürich) described how the trope of the „noble savage“ and the exoticization of female bodies were exploited by marriage counselling in German Sex Reform periodicals during the Weimar period. The magazines' textual and visual strategies created an economy of knowledge and desire. Their sexualisation helped to produce and reconcile the dichotomies of nature and culture, femininity and masculinity.

MAJA FIGGE (Oldenburg) also addressed the selection, distribution and reception of imageries by investigating the assertion of whiteness and the racialization of sex in 1950s West-German films. In *Liane – Das Mädchen aus dem Urwald* (1956) ethnographic staging once again enabled the display of female nudity, while *Montpi* (1957) was critiqued for the unmorally sexually charged depiction of a love story, endangering a young audience. The allegations took issue with *Montpi*'s setting in the post-colonial metropolis of Paris, populated by black immigrants seemingly out of place. In contrast, the German foundling *Liane* met an expedition of young fellow countrymen somewhere in „untouched“ Africa. Against the background of German post-war concerns about a „clean and healthy“ personal development, nudity exposed in idealized nature was acceptable, while Paris stood for the harmful amalgamation of civilization and the exotic.

The workshop's emphasis on practice repeatedly drew attention to body knowledge and techniques – consciously as well as unconsciously learned movements and postures. YUMIN LI (Berlin) reflected on both, reception and production of body techniques. She elaborated on the „hypersexuality“ of the Chinese-American film actor Anna May

Wong, who – confined to her supposed „authentic“ racial self by the studios – starred as an exotic dancer in *variété* movies during the 1920s and 1930s. Li showed how self-training enabled Wong to perform a body whose gestures and movements secured recognition as erotic, yet also exotic and facilitated her career in Europe. Therefore, body knowledge was not only formed through repetitive mimicry but also distinction. Accordingly, the reception of medially exposed „exotic“ postures as well as their enabling the mocking repetition of gestures can analytically understood as modes of habituation.

During the workshop's discussions, conceptualizing the sexotic did not remain unchallenged. Some participants were concerned about the fact that stressing exoticization would put the West again as centre stage. Furthermore, the workshop's program focused on what Western male people did with others. Thus, historically analysing semantics and visual strategies runs the danger of reproducing gestures of oppression. To answer the objections, it was insightful to follow some of the discussion's suggestion to highlight translations, transfers, appropriations and agencies on both sides of the encounter. Future research should carefully navigate between acknowledging mutual productivity in the formation of subjectivity and accounting for the hierarchies shaping these dynamics as well as their normalization or essentialization.

Since sexotic constellations were historically specific, their investigation promises to contribute to broader debates on periodization. The workshop's presentations mostly dealt with the years between the 1870s and 1930s – the long turn of the century – and the long 1970s. Both periods have been associated with fundamental social, economic or technological transformations, as well as global movement of people, goods and ideas, of imperial formation and anticolonial upheaval. But the talks and discussions repeatedly stressed contradictory simultaneities. Despite well-founded critique of master narratives and established periodizations, the workshop did not manage to elaborate on the duration or the coming about of sexotic constellations. Implicitly, the workshop re-affirmed traditional notions and ceasures already in its

focus on the 19th and 20th century. All attempts at taking into account smaller changes in regulatory practices and their exclusionary or inclusionary effects remained preliminary. Furthermore, the specifics of bodies, objects, semantics, geographies or temporalities involved in and evoked by sexotic dynamics posed the unsolved question of scale, of the coexistence of and mediation between sets of practices and power.

The workshop could also have elaborated more on the very production of temporality in practice – a constructive potential for further elaboration of the term. Considering the material the participants presented, sexotic encounters did not just shape the spatial arrangements and the bodies that inhabited them, but also their times, their pasts and futures. Maja Figge, for example, read the 1950s movies as reworking the German past. The experience of Johnson's tourists, finally, had a future in which tourism became a form of emancipative politicization. Loos' and Grosse's Sex Reformers aimed at a future adjustment of nature and culture, not a return to a lost past. Becalossi's travellers did not live through emancipatory times at all, but instead organized elitist movements of self-fulfilment between distinct places that could not connect or develop in time. Yet, although most of the presentations depicted complicated processes of signifying non-linear and non-progressive temporalities, the workshop missed the opportunity to discuss these in more detail. How did sexotic regulatory practices co-produce time-spaces inhabited by certain historical selves?

In conclusion, the variety of concrete practices that sexualize and exoticize the other in the formation of the self can invite a critique of the term sexotic to be of little analytic value. Only if the term refers not to a classification of certain people and activities but rather discursive processes and their effects, it can unfold its potential. Even though the workshop assembled very disparate contributions, the variety of topics suited the discussion of the sexotic in this sense. In this vein, the workshop indicated how the sexotic can create awareness for the reproduction of generalizing dichotomies and enable following the contingent significations, the dif-

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ferent and altering meanings regulatory practices produced. The sexotic helps to understand how the „West“ was simultaneously produced and blurred thereby shedding light on the making of many linked, confused, mistakenly agreed upon Wests as well as their multiple orients, the many relational stabilizing and de-stabilizing selves and others.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Panel 1: Tourism*

Chiara Beccalossi (Oxford), Sex tourism in nineteenth-century Italy

Colin R. Johnson (Bloomington), The Not-So-Grand Tour: American Sex Tourism in Europe after World War II

##### *Panel 2: Migration*

Christopher Ewing (New York), „Immer mehr Türken als Sex-Täter“: Race, Pornography, and the AIDS Epidemic

Andrew Shields (New York), Immigrants' perceptions of the dramatic changes in sexual and gender relations transforming Europe in the 1960s-70s

##### *Panel 3: Sex Reform*

Judith Große (Zürich), 'Occidental' marriage in crisis. The popular discourse on marriage reform and its use of the racial 'other' in Germany, c. 1900-1930

Tamara Loos (Ithaca), Sextopia: Sex Radical René Guyon's Politics in Siam and Europe

##### *Panel 4: Visual Culture*

Maja Figge (Oldenburg), Coming to terms with the past through the „Sexotic“: The racialization of Sex in West-German Films of the 1950s

Hinnerk Onken (Cologne), Sexotic South America: Photographs and Postcards of Indigenous Women and Men in Germany, c. 1880-1930

##### *Panel 5: Techniques of the Body*

Yumin Li (Berlin), The Hypersexuality of Anna May Wong

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