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## **A Sexuality to Civilize**

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On the twelfth June 2016 in Orlando (Florida, United States), a man opened the fire in a LGBT club highly frequented by Latino people killing 49 people and hurting about fifty. Short before he had sworn his allegiance to ISIS, which after claimed the crime in return. Victims of a terrorist act, like this the LGBT enter on the geopolitical scene. Something that was already true since some years, but after Orlando becomes difficult to deny.

The acronym LGBT is mostly used to describe homosexualities, trans identities and bisexualities. Other gender or sexual identities are often added: I like Intersex, Q like queer, P like pansexual and so on. This acronym gathers different kind of realities, gaps, alliances and conflicts which make its understanding far from easy. Without going into details, it is possible to say that in the last years trans people declare they are excluded from the LGBT movement or not taken enough into consideration. In the 1980s and the 1990s, and still partly true, lesbians couldn't work politically and socialize with gay men. Part of them/us, made the choice to organize within the feminist movements and criticized the so called LGBT community. From the beginning of the 90's, queer movements (transpédégouines in French) criticized the conventional and assimilationist politics of the LGBT and took their distances. Within the last ten years people of colour ask themselves if they do have space within the LGBT community or if there is none for them because of its racism and homonationalism... These examples show how imprecise is what the acronym LGBT refers to : it gathers some issues, that might be called sexuality concerns, but these concerns produce split and divisions, within its own group. No need to look for homogeneity or uniformity, there are none.

To get round these dissensions as a researcher in social and human sciences more than an anarcha-feminist dyke tending to act as a radical lesbian, I prefer to speak about sexual minorities than use the vague term LGBT. Sexual minorities refers to a social category, a social subdivision making sense within power relationships and not in itself as a essential particularity of desire or as the radical opposite of heterosexuality. Sexual minorities are here considered sociopolitical

categories and not identities. It is important to understand like Colette Guillaumin proposed: minorities do not lack quantity, but they do lack power, they describe groups who can't access to all the privileges of the hegemony, at an economical, political, juridical, symbolical levels... If you followed this definition you might understand how women can be a social minority even though they are as numerous as men in the world.

For some years, a commonplace of the homosexualities and their politics, was the coming out, the coming out of the closet. We/the homosexuals were finally in the fresh air after a removal from society. I assume the coming out of the closet should be questioned and reformulated. Jacques Fortin, a French homosexual activist, argues in his book *homosexualities, a farewell to the norms*, to give up the metaphor of the closet for another one: to sit our ass down of the chest of drawers. With this provocative sentence he expresses a need to claim a non normative point of view, a call to go over our limitations, to move forward and pay attention to stay part of the furnitures, to question oneself. This is my stance giving this presentation.

In this communication called *a sexuality to civilize*, I intend to answer a contemporary question, updated by the mass shooting in Orlando: how is it possible that sexual minorities, women, lesbians, gays, trans and so on, became strategically important in this early twenty first century?

I would like to show this can be explained by an increased importance of the notion of civilization and the intrinsic link existing between sexuality matters and civilization. Civilization should be understood with two meanings : a set of characteristics in a given society and, an imperialism, the civilization of the civilizing mission. I will start with a genealogy of sexuality and its categories.

## **1. Genealogy of sexuality and its categories:**

What is sexuality? Did sexuality exist since ever and everywhere? This question is not obvious, I would like to answer yes, no and some more.

First of all, yes, it did, as a practice. Humans do have diverse sexual practices, different exchanges in between bodies differently codified depending on the time and the space. Sociologists like Marcel Mauss talked about body technics considering walking, swimming, eating. Everyone around the world does it, but not exactly the same way, it is the same with sexuality. I would like to refer to these

sexual practices as *physical sexual practices*.

Did sexuality exist since ever and everywhere? This time I would say no. I would like to show that sexuality is a modern scientific production from Western Europe at the end of the 19th century. There is a lot to say, I will take the terms one after the other one.

**Sexuality is a scientific production.** Many European scientists worked on sexuality in the 19th century, unfolding the science of sexuality. These are other kind of practices, not physically sexual, but scientifically sexual. This science of sexuality has been developed to explore mental, physical and social ramifications of sexuality. Different scientific domains and different institutions took part in the development of the science of sexuality: psychiatry, medicine, forensic medicine, judicial field, criminology, sociology, philosophy, travel stories, journalism (especially serial the equivalent of our nowadays TV series), any kind of fictions, poetry, novels, biology, entomology, and economy. Some scientists were at the intersection with several disciplines. This is a common fact since the second part of the 19th century was an era of restructuring sciences, production of new methodologies and revision of scientific disciplines.

I would like to talk more specifically about the work of Doctor Krafft-Ebing, because it is a collection, summary and a principle of organization of this broad and pluridisciplinary corpus of document.

Born in Germany (1840), he lived and worked as a doctor and a forensic doctor, in Graz and Vienna (Austria). In 1875, his first scientific article on the sexual drive and the risk of inversion was published. In 1886, the first edition of his piece of work the *psychopathia sexualis* was released. Twelve editions were published until his death in 1902. The book was translated in many languages during the 20th century, the last German edition in 2010. The *psychopathia sexualis*, can be translated as the soul movements agitated by sexuality. It is a classification of sexual perversions, a system of classification and production of sexuality, that is to say a text that produces a scientific sexuality.

**Sexuality is a modern scientific production.** I would like now to come back to this polysemous term “modern”. Modernity does have different definitions depending on the academic disciplines. In my work, following authors like Ramon

Grosfoguel, when I use this term I refer to an historical period and to a regime of power. Modernity starts with the colonial expansion process of Europe, still called “Great discovery” in the French schools, and especially the start of the colonial conquest of America, 1492. This era ends in 1989, that means it goes on for over five centuries, of course with ups and downs, but with a continual feature: the European expansion outside its territory almost in the whole world. More than a history and a geography, modernity is a regime of power. It builds itself with the colonial conquests, the industrial and scientific developments. The modern power is a power which classifies, which orders, classes, and ranks places and people. Modernity is the era of a great division, a really special connexion to the binary. One main binary opposition within the modernity is the one between object and subject. Some people might be subjects, they would produce the “theory” while some others would be objects to observe, bound to their empirical lives and practices. European male scientists think and structure the world from a neutralized point of view. After sorting and ranking animals and plants, scientists structured the human and elaborated racial classifications. There is no time here to develop, but the point to remember is that European scientists (white men from the bourgeoisie or the nobility) put themselves on top of all the hierarchies they produced. They produced at the same time the frame of thought and the inferiority of the “others”. To summarize modernity produces the others and ranks them.

### **Sexuality is a modern scientific production from Western Europe.**

European scientists are “curious” : they try to understand and to structure the world which surrounds them with the arrogance of their superiority, ignoring the heterogeneity of spaces and times. This “curiosity” is not selfless and has to be understood in a geopolitical context. I will be short. The “Old Continent” moved on all continents for economic, ethnologic, anthropologic purposes. The “old continent” was a slave trader, carrying slaves, criminals and the ones who were supposed to be exploited and controlled. In the second part of the 19th century the “old continent”, in its different national declinations broadly started its colonial process<sup>1</sup> : *« Ce siècle a vu l'apogée de l' "ascension de l'Occident" : sa force a permis aux métropoles impériales d'accumuler des territoires et des sujets à une échelle véritablement stupéfiante. En 1800, les puissances occidentales revendiquaient 55% de la surface*

1 For example and almost as a symbol, the Berlin conference (1884-85) was organized by Bismarck government to divide Africa in between European countries. Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy, Holland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Turkey and United States took part.

*de la terre, mais en détenaient en fait à peu près 35%. En 1878, elles en possédaient 67% : leur taux d'expansion avait donc été de 210 000 kilomètres carrés par an. En 1914, ce taux de croissance avait atteint le chiffre ahurissant de 620 000 kilomètres carrés par an, et l'Europe détenait une superficie globale grandiose, environ 85% de la surface de la terre, en colonies, protectorats, pays dépendants, dominions et commonwealth. » (Said, 2000, p. 42)*

The expansions of the 19th century were military conquests, control taken over lands, but were also ideological conquests. A complex scientific imperialism conceptualized within different sciences (biology, medicine, ethnology...) serves as a justification for the european conquests. This knowledge partly based on observations conducted during travels or missions served to justify the conquests as well as the establishment of an important european population. Under the French name of "civilizing mission" an administrative frame was applied, a classification of populations within the colonies and, in return, within the metropoles. The theory of degeneration played an important role in the intertwined scientific production of sexuality applied to colonies and metropoles. The French Bénédict Auguste Morel developed the theory of degeneration in a book, first issued in 1854. According to his theory some individuals might degenerate, that is to say they might be born with the degenerative defects transmitted by preceding generations, or their behaviors might lead the next generation to get more defects. The defects tend to worsen with time. The defects are visible within bodies (some kind of social stigma), particular pathologies and moral behaviors described as degenerative. The people at the top of the racial hierarchy, that is mostly the one's living in Western Europe are particularly aimed at by this theory. The European degenerates become the people within the metropoles become the ones at the bottom according to the human scale of values.

The degeneration theory links straight the racial theories in the colonial realm to the treatment of the disturbing deviants within european societies. When in the colonies, all the population should be considered inferior peoples, in metropoles degenerative "exceptions" create a risk for the "perpetuation of the race" (Krafft-Ebing, 1895).

White people, at the top of the racial scale have to have power within industrial and colonial societies. Poor white people are put at a distance, racialized by the theory of degeneration. This theory concerned the international framework as

well as the framework of the family, after the inferior human races come the degenerate families of the nation.

The risk of degeneration justified a medico-scientific surveillance of the families past present and future stories. Family tends to be a hierarchic division in a global world. The theory of degeneration sets and justifies a new system of social values, organizes people and puts their behaviors into a hierarchy : some behaviors are highlighted, some are thought “natural”, some are charged with bad, called atavism or defect, proof of the degeneration of the race. This imperialist discourse reimports colonial mechanisms of population management. We understand, the theory of degeneration has been a powerful technic to set social norms, of course mobilized in the production of scientific sexuality particularly by Krafft-Ebing.

I would like us to go a bit further in the understanding of this scientific sexuality especially the production of its perverts and its norms.

## **2. Sexuality, its hegemony and minorities:**

Why scientists worked so much on sexuality? Why Krafft-Ebing reprinted his text so many times? He justified himself his work in the first pages of his book, he started this researches on sexuality for the “*thrive of the human race*”<sup>2</sup>. Thrive and not propagation. Common sense might consider sexuality was linked with reproduction and after birth control became linked to pleasure. This idea doesn't exist in the science of sexuality. Krafft-Ebing did not consider sexuality in its reproductive dimension, he has not written about eugenics of his time. Reproduction did not interest the new science of sexuality, its focus was the production of physical and interpersonal norms, a production of an individual and collective subjectivity.

The first edition of *psychopathia sexualis* starts with vague remarks on sexuality, followed by patients' observations which are reported by the author and sorted out in sexual categories he comes up with/ “invents”. By the reissues, the main structure of the book doesn't change except that the author gathered more and more observations. They were gathered by his colleagues, in his medical practice, in Graz in his private office, in the Viennese psychiatric hospital or at the court where he was called as forensic doctor. Krafft-Ebing also talked with concerned people, from the second edition on, he invited the “perverts” to write

<sup>2</sup> « Even though nature should claim merely the law of propagation, a community (family or state) cannot subsist without the guarantee that the offspring thrive physically, morally and intellectually. » p. 45. 12th edition (1903).

down their own experiences and they really did.

The observations are not neutral, Krafft-Ebing can observe only within his framework and his scientific research policy. Based on these observations (more than 400 in the last editions of PS) he built up four categories of perversion : sexual inversion, masochism, sadism and fetishism. These four categories are not strictly separated from one another, they can overlap or intertwine.

We do not use the expression sexual inversion anymore, it used to mean what we call now homosexuality and trans identities. Krafft-Ebing uses this perversion to describe inconsistent sexual identities/orientations, inverted ones, reversed ones : a woman soul in a male body should explain the love a man has for another man. A woman could not be one if she has too many masculine features...

I do not have the time here to describe one after the other the sexual perversions, what is important to understand here is that the description of each perversion does not only give more importance to each perversion but does also produce sexual norms. Even though homosexuality and trans identities nowadays don't have the same social position as masochism, sadism and fetishism within our societies, I believe it is important to hold them together in order to understand scientific production of sexuality and its social deployment until today. Krafft-Ebing did not intend to give social importance to sexual minorities, he wanted to give consistency to hegemonic sexuality, to develop a sexual direction. The sexual direction has to be understood in its thickness and its movement. The produced sexuality codifies bodies, interpersonal relationships and becomes unavoidable in the understanding of subjectivities.

Wide hips on a man become the proof of his sexual inversion (reminder : biological bases of sex differences we use nowadays were not formalized at the time Krafft-Ebing wrote, genetics came later), a woman who does not have compassion for animals is obviously sadistic, a man who doesn't want to practice his superiority on women is a masochist and might be an invert...

Tiny details of the bodies, intimacies, lives of the people are linked to sexuality and turned into clues or evidences of the degree of civilization.

Krafft-Ebing's perverses became the cornerstones of european sexual hegemony by their exclusion, partly no fault of their own. I say partly, because sexual perverses, started right at the beginning of the 20th century, to claim rights, at first in Germany but then in the rest of Europe. When they did so, they reuse the

framework Krafft-Ebing built up, themselves they put into circulation the science of sexuality in order to reach a better social position. They contributed to set a regime of truth concerning sexuality. All along the 20th century, sexual minorities repeated hegemonic truth applied to minorities. The science of sexuality became a sociability, spread its norms and developed its minorities.

**3.** I argued all this to show the inherently built up link in between sexuality matters and civilization. To conclude, I would like to come back on the question I raised at the beginning of this presentation: **how is it possible that sexual minorities, women, lesbians, gays, trans and so on, became strategically important in this early twenty first century? Strategically important because characteristic of a particular society and imperialist vector.**

Answering this question is not easy, the answer can only be a map, it does not have a center and/or poles but it redistributes a territory and its drainage divides.

Firstly, the production of sexuality and its pervers should be better historicized and known, then we should learn something from it. Until now the map of sexuality drawn by the european scientists is roughly the same: a neutralized, an invisibilized and an essentialized/naturalized sexual hegemony in which operate more or less tolerance towards sexual minorities only thought as exceptions. Two problematic facets of the science of sexuality are going on: the hierarchization of people and the negation/invisibilization of sexual minorities in our/their bodies and in our/their politics.

### **Let's speak about hierarchization, first:**

In the last decades, at the global and local levels, feminisms or sexual minorities are used in geopolitical concerns, as a proof of civilization (this also explains why we became a symbol to overcome). You might remember maybe, the US and their allies started the war in Afghanistan using as an argument to “rescue the women” from patriarchal violences. We know it, it is common sense and until now history shows it too, bombings, military boots on the ground, destabilization of the political regime, control over the economy of a country, are not steps forward for women in terms of daily life as well as on the legal level (“women rights”). Women and sexual minorities lives are not independent of the ones men live, they need to be thought globally and not particularly. After 2001, some and others, with

diametrically opposed reasoning, try to prove that sexuality matters, feminisms, sexual minorities rights are western cultural characteristics.

We should talk what means western, the West, according to me it is important to refuse to let these fights and these political concerns become cultural characteristics of Europe and the US, especially if these arguments are used to set oneself above the others.

Since the end of the 20th century, after homosexuality was decriminalized and recognized on the legal level in European countries and in the international institutions like World Health Organization (with european and US directions, “the international” is also a eurocentric notion), we now have a situation where solidarity actions aimed at the Souths became the main focus of sexual minorities located in the North/West. This causes problems on two grounds.

On the one hand, these focuses suggest our political agenda here is done, and on the other hand, it implies we force our past, present and future political agenda in contexts we don't know or don't know much about. This posture reproduces a framework which is European<sup>3</sup>.

When we do so we are not proposing affinities but are rather forcing a hegemonic heterosexuality and its evidences. We reproduce norms, which were a way in Europe to build sexual minorities groups. Since we can't empower the others without them, when we pretend we do we tend to hide a movement of subjecting them. It seems difficult to envision to build transnational networks without denouncing and fighting this hierarchization processes.

The science of sexuality keeps on acting on a second level, **the denial and the invisibilisation of the politics of sexuality**:

Nevertheless, when one wants to undo the sexual norms, here, there is quite some work to do in which other practics from the Souths could inspire us<sup>4</sup>. As we have almost obtained all the rights heterosexuality gives access to, how to talk socially and politically about sexuality? Despite the principle of such an opening-up in a country like France, we can only observe the political invisibility of sexual

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3 Like some Palestinians activists denounce the state of Israël for its “pinkwashing”, in their books Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist assemblages: homonationalism in queer times* (Duke University Press, 2007), or Sarah Bracke in her movie, *Pink Camouflage*, solidarity in between feminists and sexual minorities in the Souths cannot be done without paying attention to the local contexts. It can't be done universally on the same criteria. It is impossible to blindly be in support with sexual minorities suffering from the war, under embargoes without paying attention to the imperialism that can be contained within the actions.

4 Precise examples.

minorities concerns. Feminists and sexual minorities claims are not seriously considered, they are only understood as specific, particular claims: women rights, fight against homo/lesbo/transphobia... In a strong heterosexist and patriarchal context, hiding its christian bases, constantly readjusting to the new social situations, resisting is difficult especially if one takes back the hegemonic issues. What is at stake is not to bring back our sexual practices on the chest of drawers (*Best are queer parties!* ), this might be funny but also limited, what is at stake is to bring our affinities on the chest of drawers. Affinities described by Donna Haraway as: "*Affinity: related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity.*"<sup>5</sup> A call to work for sexuality to be understood on a political level and not as a relevant part of the private sphere only. How do we develop friendship? Who we fall for? How do we touch our bodies? How do we organize our emotional and material bases?

Western sexual identities are just one way to address the politics of sexuality. It is needed to distinct practices and identities. I believe everywhere exist some sexual minorities in the sense, everywhere are some people building up affinities apart from the majority of the people. In order to develop these alliances and theses resistances, it seems important not to forget the conditions of our production, the reality of our lives, that is to say understand how we are used, how we collaborated or are still collaborating to the exclusion of others, refuse to build a civilization against others.

Thank you for your attention.

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5 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.