Measurements of Civilisation:

Non-Western Female Sexuality and the Fin de Siècle Social Body

Within fin de siècle discourses of sex, issues of temporality, or the historical measurement of social development through analyses of sexual conduct, play a crucial role. The temporal dimension of the new socio-sexual discourses was based on complex nineteenth-century ideas about civilisation and degeneration, which sought to historicise the current condition in order to determine its future prospects. The temporal assessment of society was mapped out in relation to issues of spatiality, specifically seeking to identify and then to evaluate distinct national and cultural spaces according to their treatment of sex. Pamela K. Gilbert in her important recent study Mapping the Victorian Social Body has shown how in the nineteenth century ‘the social body was increasingly associated with spatial forms of knowledge, especially geographical distributions’. Gilbert examines a heteronormative range of Victorian geographies of epidemiology and public health, which charted the populaces of England and its Empire in terms of reproductive vigour, infectious contamination, and racial disorder. From around the 1880s, the discourses of the new scientia sexualis increasingly shifted attention onto specialised geographies of sexual deviancy, which conceptualised sexual conduct in historical as well as in spatial terms. Characteristic of these geographies of sexuality constructed in the early literature about the sexual is their broad distinction between Western and non-Western societies. Specifically the representation of sexual behaviour in non-Western societies established precarious temporal and spatial boundaries for analysing the changing Western condition subject to the exigencies of encroaching modernity. Within this discursive field, the treatment of women who have sexual relations with other women (rather than simply the women themselves) was of considerable interest

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for the Western observer. If in the nineteenth-century the specification of the homosexual produced what some critics have called a kind of sexual panic necessitating the reinforcement of normative heterosexual practices (including the coinage of the very term *heterosexual*, which, was, of course, coined after, in response to *homosexual*), then the treatment of women played a crucial part in the new inscriptions of racialised histories of sexuality. Within these texts, women functioned as a kind of historical metaphor, providing an emblematic link between ‘primitive’ and Western societies, between states of pre-modernity and modernity, and helping to reinforce the idea of the co-existence of races in different temporal stages of development. Here references to the treatment of non-Western female sexual practices forge intricate and prevailing links between sexual and racial bodies, informing the making of national, and meta-national ‘Western’ identity in a discourse that treated women emblematically as symptomatic indicators of civilisation.

This chapter explores the changing function of references to non-Western societies in sexual discourses from around the 1880s to the 1930s, particularly the role of women within these discourses. It begins with an investigation of the ambivalent engagements with the concept of civilisation within early sexological writings, focusing on Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *magnum opus Psychopathia Sexualis*, especially the ways in which the work is situated historically. It then examines sexology’s contribution to the degeneration debates of the 1880s and 1890s, which focus heavily on the notion of civilisation. Here the non-Western frame of reference of works such as *Psychopathia Sexualis* enabled a more affirmative engagement with the links between civilisation and degeneration than the doom-mongering inward-looking studies of degenerationists such as Arthur de Gobineau and Max Nordau. The chapter explores further the ways in which sexologists distinguished Western from

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non-Western contexts by examining the intricate role of religion in their racialised histories of sexuality. Finally, the discussion turns to the first English translation of the three-volume survey *Women: An Historical, Gynaecological and Anthropological Compendium* (1935) by Hermann Heinrich Ploss, Max Bartels and Paul Bartels, one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind, arguing that the work illustrates a discursive shift in the early twentieth century when questions of the legislation of female same-sex practices increasingly complicate the links between sexual, racial, and national bodies mapped out by fin de siècle sexologists.4

**Sexology, Degeneration and the History of Civilisation**

The influential nineteenth-century critic Matthew Arnold described civilisation as the process of ‘the humanisation of man in society’.5 Arnold’s definition indicates the Humanist connotations of a concept that was used partly to distinguished nature from culture, conceptualising the natural as a state of pre-industrial animalism which must be harnessed by the rules of reasonable society. The difficult distinction between nature and culture was a focal point for nineteenth-century discourses of the social, which often struggled to provide coherent explanations of the links between individual behaviour and the social order. For many sexologists, the notion of civilisation as a society-in-process was crucial to the ways in which they positioned their work historically. As with many of the other emerging sciences and pseudo-sciences focusing on the links between individual and society, writing a history was a common discursive strategy for sexologists seeking to justify their field of investigation. While earlier in the nineteenth century, anxieties over issues of temporality were largely related to the impact of new technologies on the body, towards the fin de siècle issues of temporality were increasingly tied in to questions of

history and the development of civilisation. This discourse was influenced in particular by a new anthropological frame of reference which generated the pervasive assumption that the nations and races of the nineteenth-century world co-existed in a range of different stages of development: a model of racial hierarchy outlined in Edward Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871), one of modern anthropology’s founding texts. The early sexological writings contributed to these debates about culture, race and development, typically framing their discussion in terms of a cultural history of sexuality, seeking to explain the relevance of the study of sex for understanding the development of civilisation while at the same time revealing anxieties about the Western condition.

Concerns over the implications of civilisation proliferated in the degeneration discourses of the late nineteenth-century, a period characterised by national upheaval within Europe. The publication of *Primitive Culture*, for instance, coincided with the formation of a unified German Empire and the power struggles of the colonial empires were played out in the so-called ‘scramble for Africa’ in the 1880s. Degeneration theory was a complex product of intersecting cultural, scientific and social politics. Loosely based on an idea of disintegration, degeneration was understood variously as a first indicator of social regeneration, as a desirable extreme experience for the decadent artist, and, more polemically, as a process of inevitable decline. While decadent writers such as J.-K. Huysmans, Arthur Symons and Oscar Wilde linked degeneration to the creative impulse, the notion was more commonly associated with the ambivalent experience of advancing modernity. The varied degeneration discourses had in common that they focused on the relation between the individual and society, scrutinizing what Morag Shiach calls ‘the experienced modernity’ of the fin-de-siècle subject. Shiach, who focuses on ideas of the self in

relation to changing economic conditions around the turn of the century, provides a compelling analysis of the links between fears of the failure of the individual body and broader socio-historical anxieties provoked by the strains of modern life. More specifically, however, these kinds of fears centred on the degenerative aspects of the sexual body, especially in its non-heteronormative form, as indicators of national and racial strength. While the concept of degeneration first appeared in Europe within the medico-scientific domain where it was used in the context of theories of regression, it was soon linked to ethical readings of the sexual body.\textsuperscript{10} This sexual body was historicised in terms of the perceived decline of Western society by social commentators such as Arthur de Gobineau who focused on what he considered the demise of the French people, Max Nordau who took issues with a cross-cultural group of ‘degenerate’ writers and artists, and Arthur James Balfour who was concerned with the British \textit{status quo}.\textsuperscript{11} The gist of their arguments was articulated by Balfour in a lecture to the women students of Newnham College, Cambridge. Balfour expressed his anxieties over degeneration which in his view attacks ‘great communities and historic civilizations; [and which] is to societies of men what senility is to man, and often, like senility, the precursor and the cause of final dissolution.’\textsuperscript{12} Balfour’s concerns, shared by fellow degenerationists, were based on an understanding of history as a process of elimination affecting the social body, even, and, especially, if it is in an advanced state of civilisation.

Sexology’s contribution to degeneration theory was distinct in that it focused on a much larger cultural frame of reference. While degenerationists like Gobineau, Nordau and Balfour were largely inward looking in their analyses, explicitly criticising their own cultural and national circumstance, many sexologists at least to some extent displaced these concerns onto non-Western societies. The work of Krafft-
Ebing exemplifies this kind of discursive strategy, attempting to examine the links between sexual and racial bodies in a way that affirmed rather than threatened the idea of Western superiority while acknowledging the troubled implications of civilisation. In his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, one of the key works of the new *scientia sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing expressed some misgivings over what he called ‘the functional signs of degeneration’ within his own cultural context. However, he also made reference to non-Western contexts, which enabled him to make larger claims for a progressive Western civilisation distinguished from what he perceived as inferior racial orders. Krafft-Ebing insisted that ‘it is of great psychological interest to follow up the gradual development of civilisation and the influence exerted by sexual life upon habits and morality’, before outlining his own kind of a history of sexuality, ranging roughly from what he called the ‘sodomitic idolatry […] of ancient Greece’ to the present day, and taking the treatment of women in different historical and contemporary societies as an indicator of progress. Krafft-Ebing’s discussion is informed by intricate ideas of cultural and racial hierarchy that reveal his understanding of the instability of what constitutes civilisation. He considers ‘anthropology’ in terms of sexual difference, claiming that ‘the higher the development of the race, the stronger [the] contrasts between men and women’. The seeming assuredness of this statement is undermined by the fact that Krafft-Ebing’s history is frequently disrupted by anxious references to the current condition where, he writes, ‘anomalies of the sexual functions are met with especially in civilised races’. For Krafft-Ebing, civilisation’s project of harnessing nature is fraught with anxieties over the impact of cultural influences on the natural body. Here the artifice of civilisation and its technologies are seen to interfere with the natural body, putting a strain on it, and hence weakening it, and threatening the future of the civilised race. In other words, while according to Krafft-
Ebing the sexual body can be read as an indicator of development, it has to be recognised that civilisation in turn potentially ‘anomalises’ the developed body. Krafft-Ebing’s contradictory argumentation indicates the ambivalence of Western observers towards civilisation, as the new histories of sexuality privilege the perceived higher degree of Western development while simultaneously revealing fears about the impact of civilisation.

The distinction between ‘modern’ and ‘primitive’, which underpins sexological engagements with ‘civilisation’, indicates that, alongside the distinct national contributions which have been so importantly traced by critics working on the histories of sexuality, European practitioners of the new scientia sexualis shared a broader discursive space. The emphasis on a common European context is reflected by the intertextual qualities of the sexological texts, amply illustrated by the many footnotes and references of Psychopathia Sexualis which indicate that the new discipline developed across Europe with main contributors based in Germany, France, Italy, and Britain. The implications of this cultural plurality are twofold, helping to explain how the distinct national sexologies contribute to a larger European sexological tradition. First, the necessary translations between languages and contexts produce different national readings of the sexual body, evident in the long tradition of stereotyping sexual behaviour in terms of nationality, or locality more broadly. A good example here is the emergence of the term ‘to oscar’ describing anal intercourse. According to the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld the term circulated in England in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde’s trial of 1895 when Wilde’s name became synonymous for a particular sexual body which in turn, as Nancy Erber in her analysis of the French reception of Wilde’s trial has pointed out, was associated with a particular national context. Similarly, national difference also leaves textual traces, as I have...
previously argued when scrutinizing the British translation of *Psychopathia Sexualis* where the translator’s national circumstance is visible in details such as the use of the word ‘race’ instead of Krafft-Ebing’s ‘nation’, and in omissions of national specifics such as Krafft-Ebing’s discussion of paragraph 175 of the new German penal code, which criminalised sex between men. Second, however, the national contributions were also part of a common meta-national Western context derived from Europe’s broader Humanist intellectual and scientific tradition. While the queer linguist Sally McConnell-Glinet develops the notion of a ‘shared discursive history’ specifically to explain the links between language and the production of meaning, the non-Western references within European sexology reveal the existence of a collective discursive context that goes beyond the linguistic level, enabling the emergence and translation of similar sexual paradigms within Europe. This framework helps to explain the function of the references to non-Western societies in sexological writings. It suggests that, despite anxieties over the impact of civilisation, evoking non-Western contexts enabled the interrogation of sex in relation to ideas of advancement and progress in a way that affirmed a fin de siècle Western social order pressurised by the conditions of modernity.

**Religion and the Civilised Body**

At the core of sexology lies the idea that the biological sexual *instinct* can be harnessed by appropriate social intervention. Religion forms a focal point of this debate, distinguishing civilised Western culture from perceived animalistic non-Western behaviour, and in particular contrasting Western Christianity with an overtly sexualised Islam. Here the links between individual and society are evaluated differently according to religious and racial context. Daniel Pick argues that...
Degeneration theory moved from identifications of individual degenerates to the labelling of entire groups as degenerate by the end of the nineteenth century. This development had a distinct racial dimension in discourses of the sexual, which conceptualised the Western degenerate as an individual aberration whereas the non-Western equivalent was seen as indicative of the degenerative state of ‘primitive’ society as a whole. For instance, while according to Krafft-Ebing ‘the gratification of sexual instincts [is] a primary motive in man as well as beast’, he claims that it is specifically in ‘inferior’ societies that

Sexual intercourse is done openly, and man and woman are not ashamed of their nakedness. The savage races, e.g. Australasians, Polynesians, Malays of the Philippines are still in this stage.

Elsewhere, in discussions about same-sex practices and other sexual deviancies, the question of the ‘naturalness’ of sex is key for determining whether or not a practice should be condemned and criminalised. Here Krafft-Ebing suggests that intercourse and nakedness, or the visibility of the sexual body reveal a lack of proper social control indicative of inferior society. He contrasts this with ‘a statute of the moral code and of the common law that civilised man satisfy his sexual instinct only within the barriers (established in the interests of the community) of modesty and morality’. While Krafft-Ebing in this context acknowledges that modern society ‘contains many marks of physical and psychical degeneration, especially in centres of culture and refinement’, he clearly conceptualises degeneration within civilisation as abnormal and atypical, emphasising that in civilised society what he terms ‘normal man’ is not degenerate. In contrast, ‘primitive’ society is deemed degenerate *per se*, indicating a conceptual distinction between ‘civilised’ and ‘primitive’ sexual behaviour, and its implications.

Having made the basic premise of the existence of a cultural and racial hierarchy, Krafft-Ebing shifts the focus specifically to the treatment of woman as an indicator of a society’s degree of civilisation. He claims that amongst savage races Woman is the common property of man, the spoil of the strongest and mightiest, who chooses the most winsome for his own, a sort of instinctive selection of the fittest. Woman is a ‘chattel’, an article of commerce, exchange or gift, a vessel for sensual gratification, an implement for toil.²⁸

This is a curious passage, alluding to some of the more radical feminist claims of the time. In particular, the notion of women as commodity which Gayle Rubin so memorably terms the ‘traffic in women’, echoes post-Enlightenment feminist discourses, including John Stuart Mill’s influential tract on the ‘Subjugation of Women’ published in 1869 and Olive Schreiner’s successful novel The Story of an African Farm published in 1883. Schreiner’s work ponders very similar questions of the commodification of women, focusing partly on African women to formulate a feminist stance. In a key scene in The Story of an African Farm, the female protagonist Lyndall meets a beautiful black man and predicts that he will abuse his wife once he gets home because ‘he has a right to; he bought her for two oxen.’²⁹ The novel links the abuse of black women to the subjugation of white women ‘cursed’ by their own social conditioning.³⁰ Schreiner’s proto-global-feminist position is out of tune with most contemporary voices on the subject who follow in the vein of Krafft-Ebing. His ostensible concern with women’s rights is restricted to a critique of the female condition within primitive society, which is considered as an indicator of savage inferiority. By implication, the role of women in Western society is deemed exemplary.
Krafft-Ebing is prone to broad idealisations of the position of Western women, which is in keeping with contemporary missionary and imperial politics where Islam is Christianity’s great rival in the conquest of Africa. As a monotheistic religion, Islam is classified on a higher evolutionary stage than primitive society because, as Krafft-Ebing explains

Mohammed strove to raise women from the position of the slave and the mere handmaid of enjoyment, to a higher social and matrimonial grade; yet she remained still far below man, who alone could obtain divorce, and that on the easiest terms.  

Curiously, given that Krafft-Ebing is not known for his involvement in marriage discourses, he picks out the issue of divorce as an indicator of Islam’s maltreatment of women. At first glance this seems to align the passage with more progressive voices in contemporary marriage debates that argued for greater female independence, including within the legal context. However, what is at stake for Krafft-Ebing is not the issue of women’s right to divorce, but a notion of sexual licentiousness suggested by the possibility of frequent exchange of sexual partners. He explicitly states that while ‘the Mohammedan women is simply a means for sensual gratification and the propagation of the species’, Western woman benefits from Christian culture where, according to Krafft-Ebing, ‘in the sunny balm of Christian doctrine’ ‘blossom forth [woman’s] divine virtues and her qualities of housewife, companion and mother’.

Krafft-Ebing’s comparison of the role of women in Christianity and Islam to some extent displaces the focus of debate away from contemporary sexual debates within Europe, which centred on issues of same-sex sexuality. While there existed an overall consensus in Christian Europe against perceived ‘unnatural’ sexual acts, the sexual subject was legislated differently across Catholic and Protestant states. The
debates around the formation of a unified German Empire in 1871 indicate the significance of the sexual body within discourses of the state. The Hanoverian homosexual rights activist and lawyer, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, was fiercely opposed to the increasing influence of Protestant Prussia over the independent German states precisely because he foresaw the replacement of Catholic Hanover’s relatively liberal Code Napoleon with the repressive Prussian law that introduced to the unified German Civil Code the infamous paragraph 175. Paragraph 175, which punished ‘unnatural and illicit behaviour’ with imprisonment plus the ‘optional revocation of the civil rights’, was opposed by members of the scientific and intellectual community, many of whom – including Krafft-Ebing – joined a campaign led by Hirschfeld to obtain its abolition. The paragraph’s wording reveals the close association of sexual behaviour with issues of the state. It links the civil rights of the subject to appropriate sexual practice, conceptualising inappropriate sexual behaviour as acts against both nature and nation.

While Krafft-Ebing belongs to the opponents of the new law, he himself partakes in what Foucault calls the project of ‘governmentality’, the formulation of knowledges utilised by the state to monitor the habits of its citizen. According to Foucault this development is part of the historical trajectory of the emergence of modern liberal government where the views of professionals, especially from the medical realm, are considered representative of the needs of a nation’s social body. For observers such as Krafft-Ebing, however, the national body is a fraught concept. He shifts the discussion of a nationally-specific social body onto a wider Western context, skirting around the arduous question of proper sexual citizenship.

Specifically framing his debate in terms of religion, the evocation of Islam helps Krafft-Ebing to affirm Western superiority. Yet Islamic success in converting
Africans, often in direct competition with Christian missionaries, also necessitates complex discursive twists. Krafft-Ebing partly explains Islam’s growth in Africa with its alleged sexual depravity which is seen to align Islam closer with ‘savage’ African customs, even sharing practices such as the much-frowned upon polygamy. Krafft-Ebing contrasts ‘pure’ Christianity which strives towards ‘a heaven of spiritual bliss absolutely free from carnal pleasure’ with Islam where according to Krafft-Ebing life after death is seen as ‘an eternal harem, a paradise among lovely houris’. He argues that ‘the Christian nations obtained a mental and material superiority over the polygamic races, and especially over Islam’, depicting perceived sexual voracity as a kind of failure of the national body to civilise its inherent carnality. Drawing on contemporary ideas about climate, geography and sexuality such as Richard Burton’s notion of the sexualised ‘Sotadic Zone’, Krafft-Ebing goes on to suggest that the hot African environment encourages Islam’s success there. Highly developed civilisation, in contrast, takes place in what he calls ‘the conditions of frigid climes which necessitate the protection of the whole body against the cold’. While Krafft-Ebing leaves unresolved the paradox that Christian missions in Africa appear no more successful than their Islam counterparts, the idea of a sexual body determined by the geographical condition of the race supports the notion of a natural racial order which privileges Northern races, helping to explain the perceived historic backwardness of ‘savage’ races in geographical terms.

References to women in non-Western societies in writing on sex towards the end of the nineteenth-century, then, first of all enable the construction of racial superiority on a spatial and temporal scale that privileges Western civilisation. This strategy allows for the displacement of anxieties over the state of civilisation of the Western social body. Here questions of proper sexual conduct prevail over explicit
reference to any particular sexual practices. However, in the more detailed engagements with sexual behaviour in the main part of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, including discussions of female same-sex behaviour among ‘civilised’ society, Krafft-Ebing makes no mention to non-Western contexts, thereby confirming the view that women and female sexuality play a mere emblematic role in his racialised history of sexuality.

**Colonialism and the Legislation of Female Same-Sex Practices**

In the early twentieth century sexual discourses shift from descriptions of relations between the sexes to descriptions of sexual practices. The more scattered references to non-Western societies of late nineteenth-century works found, for example, in *Psychopathia Sexualis* are replaced by detailed studies of sex in non-European contexts. Writings on sex, for instance by Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch and Bronislaw Malinowski, take an explicitly anthropological approach that focuses specifically on sex in different cultures. In these texts, non-Western sexual practices no longer function as mere discursive counterpoints designed to strengthen ideas of racial superiority but the non-Western contexts themselves become the focus of analysis. Accordingly, the references to women within these texts undergo some changes. No longer confined to Krafft-Ebing’s emblematic function as a measure of civilisation, women in non-Western contexts are the subject of discussions which focus increasingly on issues of female sexuality. Specifically, observations of same-sex practices among ‘primitive’ women necessitate the acknowledgement of a greater degree of female sexual agency. This poses a range of challenges to Western observers, often unwittingly collapsing the relatively straightforward sexual/racial hierarchies of sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing.
One of the most striking clashes between imperial, racial and sexual politics can be found in a three-volume study entitled *Woman: An Historical, Gynaeological and Anthropological Compendium* translated into English in the early 1930s from the work of three German colleagues, Ploss, Bartels and Bartels. *Woman* is the most comprehensive text dedicated entirely to female sexuality published at the time. It brings together a vast and varied amount of material attributed to societies from all continents throughout history, frequently basing the analysis on anecdotal sources. Similarly to *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the text conceptualises ‘woman’ as a kind of universal body with different culturally and geographically determined manifestations. However, unlike Krafft-Ebing who mainly focuses on women’s treatment in relation to a society’s racially regulated sexual instinct, Ploss, Bartels and Bartels are particularly interested in the specifics of the female sexual body, and how it is governed within different societies.

*Woman* does not set out to challenge long-established links between ideas of female sexual agency and sexual depravity, as a short chapter dedicated to ‘Masturbation, Tribadism and Bestiality’ plainly indicates. However, included in the chapter is a curious passage which criticises the punishment by their own society of South African women from the Hausa tribe who use dildos and strap-ons. The chapter illustrates the discursive challenges non-Western female same-sex practices pose to the colonial observer. Ploss, Bartels and Bartels write:

> Here may be mentioned the Mãdigo of the Hausa women, a contrivance made in imitation of the male organ, which women strap on in order to gratify other women, and which is employed especially in very large harems. Before England took possession of the country a woman found with such an
instrument was very severely punished: she was buried alive and her partner was sold into slavery.\textsuperscript{42}

Where for Krafft-Ebing society’s degree of civilisation is tied in to the treatment of woman in relation to man (as wife, as mother), it is now the punishment of transgression that comes under scrutiny. Hirschfeld, whose own view of the existence of a universal natural sexual body was exceptional, provides useful background information for understanding this case. In his study \textit{Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes} [Homosexuality of Men and Women], first published in 1914, he gives an overview of the legal status of same-sex sexuality in a selection of countries from all continents.\textsuperscript{43} While in Britain’s African colonies English law prevails, in British East Africa, for example, the sexual subjects are legally divided according to their racial status. This means that while Englishmen and women are subject to the English Criminal Code of 1892 (which criminalised homosexuality but not lesbianism), Africans were subject to their different tribal laws.\textsuperscript{44} The different laws for coloniser and colonised are not, however, indicative of some sort of African autonomy under British rule. The example from Ploss, Bartels and Bartels illustrates that the female African sexual body in particular remained tied in to a discourse of difference indicative of beliefs in ideas of civilisation and racial hierarchy.

In many ways, Ploss, Bartels and Bartels’ position on race and gender reiterates typical nineteenth-century views. Their suggestion that dildos are associated with women in harems reveals a common fascination with ideas of sexual voracity similar to Krafft-Ebing’s portrayal of sex in Islam. Women’s sexual instinct is depicted as uncontrollable and phallus-oriented where the use of a dildo serves a mere \textit{ersatz} function for the absence of men. However, more significant is the fact that the short observation collapses a strictly defined racial hierarchy. Specifically, the
boundaries between civilised and uncivilised sexual behaviour are blurred when Ploss, Bartels and Bartels mention England’s interference in the tribal punishment of female same-sex acts. Although within countries such as Germany and England the use of dildos was not illegal and lesbianism was not a legally recognised category in the early twentieth century, this does is not mean that sex between women was condoned. In England, the trial of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 and the surrounding public debates about lesbianism demonstrate all too clearly the strong anti-female same sex sentiments of the time.45 It might seem that according to Ploss, Bartels and Bartels, England’s interference in the regulation of sex amongst the Hausa produces a seemingly more affirmative stance towards female same-sex practices in the colonies than at home. But far from partaking in an emancipatory female same-sex discourse, the shift in focus from sexual practice to its punishment indicates that the real issue at stake here is not female sexual depravity but the justification of colonial power, which is configured as a benign and more advanced system of rule than the savage death penalty. While Krafft-Ebing utilises ‘women’ as an element for constructing his discourse of civilisation, Ploss, Bartels and Bartels use the treatment of female same-sex sexuality as a means for justifying colonial government. By implication, Western social order is deemed more advanced as it is subject to a more progressive form of legislation and the administration of state punishment.

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Across the range of European fin-de-siècle sexual discourses, the project of categorising sex is part of larger attempts to classify a rapidly-changing nineteenth-century social body.46 Here the notion of civilisation plays a crucial if complex role, linking the taxonomies of sexual behaviour developed within the *scientia sexualis* to
more specific assessments of the current Western social order, especially in relation to issues of national and racial strength. While civilisation was a problematic concept, understood both progressively as the highest degree of social, cultural and racial development, and reactively as the very condition of ‘perversion’ instigating social decline, the concept’s discursive trajectory is distinct, leading from the broader degeneration debates of the 1880s and 90s to more specific discourses of sexuality and the state in the early twentieth century. Sexologists and social commentators who approached the notion of civilisation with ambivalence were particularly preoccupied with the question of how to measure a society’s level of current development, which they thought revealed both its history and indicated its future. In these discussions non-Western contexts, specifically the treatment of women and issues of female sexuality, function as the measure of a society’s degree of civilisation. Tracing the changing links between sexual body and social body through references to the non-Western helps to explain the shared discursive ground of the different European sexologies in relation to their distinct national histories, revealing that the modern sexual subject was conceived in national as well as meta-national Western terms in a racialised discourse that used women as mere metaphors of development.

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The first edition of the work was published in German in 1884. It was substantially revised and enlarged before the eighth edition was translated into English.


15 Ibid., 6.

16 Ibid., 42.

17 Ibid., 48.


21 Heike Bauer, “‘Not a translation but a mutilation’: The Limits of Translation and the Discipline of Sexology’, *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16.2 (October 2003), 381-405.


23 Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*.


26 Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 70.

27 Ibid., 70-71.

28 Ibid., 2.


30 Ibid., 155.


40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 2.


44 Ibid., 858.