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Monsters in the Closet: Biopolitics and Intersexuality

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Chapter 4
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Introduction

Hermaphrodites, Amazons, and lascivious cannibals beckon from the edges of the world, the most distant planets of the galaxy. (Cohen, 1996, p. 19)

Science fiction is replete with freakish creatures designed to haunt, intrigue and forewarn. Each night, parents console their children after a grim bedtime story or scary movie, assuring them that "monsters aren't real." The truth is, however, that many of our monsters are built on the bodies of "real" people. Each hypersexualized hermaphrodite, each homosexualized Amazon, each racialized cannibal that lurks in our history of horrors: all perform specific social functions. A careful look at history reveals that not only are monsters "real" in a sense, but they have existed among us for centuries, and indeed, continue to exist as the boundary-markers of society. They are the sexualized and racialized exceptions to the rule, the abject hybrids placed precariously in the transitory zone between order/disorder, black/white, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual. In the west, these figures marginalized through assimilation or extermination, have been policed the most rigorously, depending on the biopolitical strategy *du jour*.

In this paper, I focus predominantly on western treatments of the hermaphrodite (intersexual, in contemporary terms) and its relationship to other despised groups in history to show how biopolitics—"the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1978, p. 140)—creates and regulates populations of monsters in order to establish and sustain a particular structure in society. To extend this analysis, I will also consider scholarly work on Indian *hijras* (Bakshi, 2004; Patel, 1997), not in analogous terms, but as a way to put the western responses to intersexuality in a broader context. Particularly, I am interested in illustrating how the monster emerges within and in connection to a particular structure; one that is based on what Judith Butler (1990) has called the heterosexual matrix, which also includes racial and neo-liberal elements.

Biopolitics And Medical Science

Paraphrasing Foucault, Giorgio Agamben (1998) summarizes: "at the threshold of the modern era, natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms and calculations of state power, and politics turns into *biopolitics*" (p. 3). He adds, biopolitics is "the growing inclusion of man's natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power" (p. 119). This control of society becomes the most fundamental function of the state, which is in turn, mediated through various social institutions. From birth, each individual is born into a particular mode of living, one regulated by laws. These laws may take the shape of official legislation, but regulation is not limited to black and white prohibitions. Acceptable physical appearances are also regulated through social rules that involve equally, if not more, efficient methods of managing them. They are perhaps more efficient because they are less apparent than codified law. These rules

normalize physical appearance and behavior to the point at which they are regarded as the social norm. As Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price (1993) note, "it is taken for granted that sexual and racial difference are inherent qualities of the corporeal, and, moreover, that male and female bodies, black and white bodies, may each respectively fit a universal category" (p. 3). However, the authors are also astute to point out that, "In terms of sex, the actual occurrence of bodily forms that are not self-evidently of either sex is conveniently overlooked in the interests of establishing a set of powerful gendered norms to which all bodies are supposed to approximate without substantial variation" (*ibid*.). The intersex body highlights this discrepancy. These are bodies that medical authorities, from the nineteenth century[1] to more recent times,[2] have deemed "defective" as a result of the "abnormal development of the sexual organs" (Krahl & Kuhnle, 2002, p. 87).This approach was normativized in the west as a process to ensure a particular citizenship, one based on a heterosexual, white, able-bodied model.

In order to institutionalize this model, medical science played a crucial role. Achille Mbembe (2001) writes, "Colonialism was, to a large extent, a way of disciplining bodies with the aim of making better use of them, docility and productivity going hand in hand" (p. 113). One way this was done was through medical science and eugenic practices. By uncovering a person's genetic heredity, it was believed that "truths" about a particular population could be discovered, which would then provide the scientific seal of approval for government—and social—regulation of those bodies. Agamben observes, "in the biopolitical horizon that characterizes modernity, the physician and the scientist move in the no-man's-land into which at one point the sovereign alone could penetrate" (p. 159). In this quotation, the relationship between the sovereign and medical authorities comes together. With the rise of medical science came a belief in the possibility of discovering truth by rational methods. With the decline of religious authority, the state needed a new justification for the exertion of power. What better way to justify regulation than through indisputable "truth," one that was not adduced from metaphysics alone, but through rigorous scientific inquiry—in a word, Reason.

Biopolitics: The Exception And The Abject

This belief system relied primarily on what Agamben calls "the exception" and Julia Kristeva (1982) (among other theorists[3]) calls "the abject." Both concepts evoke and depend on similar principles and are foundational to biopolitics. The exception is described by Carl Schmitt in Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*: "The exception is that which cannot be subsumed; it defies general codification" (pp. 15-16). It is the body that inhabits the margins of the political order and cannot be circumscribed by law. In fact, the exception is precisely the suspension of law (p. 18). The abject similarly calls into question the rational order of things. It is defined, in sum, as ambiguity (Kristeva, p.9) and, like the exception, it disrupts law by suspending it. As Kristeva writes, "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (p. 15). This law may be the official codes issued by

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[1] Fausto-Sterling (2000) writes, "Nineteenth-century scientists developed a clear sense of the statistical aspects of natural variation, but along with such knowledge came the authority to declare that certain bodies were abnormal and in need of correction" (p.36).

[2] Scannell (2001) contends that "Modern-day medical opinion is now divided.The American Academy of Pediatrics' 2000 guidelines for evaluation and management of intersex infants with 'ambiguous genitalia' call for early surgeries" (p.1).

[3] See Butler (1990; 1993).

the sovereign, but it also can be the more naturalized social codes, such as the binary sex and gender system. In this latter case, "abjection tries to signal what is left outside of those binary oppositions" (Costera & Prins, 1998, p. 284). Either way, the abject and the exception exist on the borders of society as subversive forces. Their very existence disrupts the laws of society.

This disruption, in turn, becomes the justification for their overt regulation. Indeed, bodies on the border are policed with the most vigor. As Radhika Mohanram (1999) writes, "Within the structure of surveillance the one who sees is invisible, but the one who is seen, the colonized in this case, is always subject to scrutiny" (p. 67). The nation-state requires this relation, as it has an interest in maintaining a particular hetero-patriarchal, economic system.[4] Using this logic, medical science, in collusion with the state, renders bodies that neatly fit the mold invisible while the exception is made visible—and controllable as a result.

Managing Abject Bodies

This does not yet explain why these unions or gender ambiguity are abjected in the first place. More pointedly, the questions remain, how is the "norm" established? On what grounds are social and political laws based? Common to both, and indeed, central to all laws of society, is the fundamental premise of the heterosexual matrix. The heterosexual matrix is the theoretical concept that describes the linguistic and psychological system that reproduces itself through the creation of subjects that are either one of two sexes that will, with proper psychosocial development, desire the opposite sex (Edenheim, 2005, p. 1). However, Sara Edenheim has pointed out that the heterosexual matrix is not enough to explain the diverse biopolitical strategies employed across time and space in treatments of people who do not neatly fit into either category. In order to get a better understanding of management techniques, Edenheim designates the matrix as either conservative or liberal. At the same time, this will further clarify the difference between the bio-power that comes into existence in the modern era (as described earlier by Foucault) as opposed to earlier methods of bodily regulation.

To clarify the difference, Edenheim describes the illiberal heterosexual matrix as the context within which bodies that exist outside the matrix are dealt with by extermination (p. 7). In ancient Greece and Rome, for example, "intersexual babies were burned alive, or otherwise murdered. In recent centuries, intersexuals were ordered to pick one sex in which to live, and were killed if they changed their minds" (Feinberg, 1996, p. 104). Similarly, "When the Spaniards invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, 'they found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites, or homosexuals, they slew them.'"[5] This contrasts with the liberal version of the matrix that appears in the modern era. During this era, when children are born with genitalia that are not immediately recognizable as male or female, their "sexual ambiguity" is subjected to a program of medical "management." There are various methods used to regulate this "condition." The first method is inclusion, evidenced by the *male* or *female pseudo-hermaphrodite* (Edenheim, p. 7). These bodies are conceptualized as being *en route* to absolute maleness or femaleness and thus are included as potential heterosexual, male or female subjects. In a sense, they are absolved of their abject

[4] A more in-depth analysis of this relationship is explored in Agathangelou (2004).

[5] Cora Dubois in Green (1974, p.11).It should be noted that I am focusing here on how the imperial powers regulated gender transgression, and I am in no way suggesting how the natives themselves dealt with gender variance.For a historically-inspired account of native and other non-western treatments of intersexuality and other types of gender variance, see Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors*, cited above.Later on the essay, I will also be looking at one example of a non-western account, focusing on *hijra* communities in northern India.

condition. The second method of management is adaptation or assimilation through hormonal treatment and/or surgery (*ibid*.). Sally Haslanger (2000) observes, "the law protects individuals who are appropriately expressing their gendered/sexual nature, and it punishes those who are not; medicine is framed with the 'normal' packages in mind and undertakes to rebuild those who aren't normal in this sense" (p. 117). This is achieved through "an array of technologies that track bodies to their most intimate recesses" (Castronovo, 2001, p. 65). Technologies that modify and augment bodies, for example, are of utmost importance in this particular strategy. When people are born with what is deemed to be "ambiguous" genitalia—whether they are intersexual or not—they can be operated upon or given hormones in order to bring about the closest approximation to either pole of the socially constructed gender binary. In this category, the abjected body or exception is surgically altered and subsequently socialized into the dominant system, thereby erasing the conditions that rendered the body abject.

The third option is exclusion, which is exemplified by treatments of the *true hermaphrodite* (Edenheim, p. 7). This sub-division of intersexuality was originally coined in the 1830s (Fausto-Sterling, p. 37)—and continues today—to designate those bodies which possess mixed gonadal tissues. These bodies are conceptualized as "authentic" hybrids, and thus, excluded from the heterosexual matrix and treated as abject.However, while the first and second options operate primarily on assimilationist premises, the last option cannot rely so easily on social norms and surgical methods to assure compliance with the larger regime. This is the point at which the link between eugenic science and modern treatments becomes most apparent. Moreover, it is the point at which the difference between conservative and liberal strategies becomes less pronounced. Indeed, it speaks to Agamben's discussion of the lack of distinction between totalitarian and democratic regimes.[6] In brief, this theory draws a connection between the two regimes' biopolitical underpinnings and their equal potential to control and, in the extreme, annihilate life. While liberal techniques prefer assimilation, when that does not work, the abject body, or the exception in Agamben's terms, must be dealt with. In a totalitarian regime, for example, the intersex child is automatically subjected to the will of the state, and would be deemed unworthy of life. In a democratic society, the same conclusion might be reached, but the legitimacy of this conclusion is supported by "scientific proof." For example, modern science enables the parents to determine the chromosomal makeup of their child *in utero* through karotype testing. Such tests open the possibility that parents can abort unwanted fetuses.[7] The result is outlined by Sharon Preves (2003):

> The threat that intersex poses to gender binarism has given rise to discourse surrounding potential elimination of intersex ambiguity. In fact, with the rise in the authority of medicine in our culture and the advent of potent genetic technologies, such as the late-twentieth-century Human Genome Project and its implications for genetic testing and prenatal screening, intersexuality may be in danger of technological extinction (Preves, pp. 48-49).

This type of prenatal screening is not unrelated to the colonial legacies[8] which have paved the way for the reproductive management of various "degenerate" populations. In a disturbing

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[6] The "inner solidarity" between democracy and totalitarianism is introduced on page 10 of Agamben.

[7] A study was conducted over 19 months (March 1998 to September 1999) in England to collect data about how fetal karotype testing affected parents' decision to keep or terminate their pregnancy.The study found that in seventeen cases where fetal karotype tests discovered some form of sex chromosome "abnormality," the parents of six of the babies chose to abort (Abramsky et al., 2001, p. 464).

[8] Alexander & Mohanty (1997) employ a similar approach in*Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*: "We use the formulation 'colonial legacies' to evoke the imagery of an inheritance

correlation, the first map of the X chromosome in man emerged at the same time that genetic research was undertaken in Germany and employed by the Nazis to reveal "pathological dispositions" of various races (Agamben, p. 146). Those tests, in turn, were influenced by Victorian eugenic practices and beliefs. For example, Ann Stoler (1989) describes the racist discourse around interracial unions: "*Metissage* (interracial unions) generally, and concubinage in particular, represented the paramount danger to racial purity and cultural identity in all its forms" (p. 647). In the same vein, Angela Davis (2003) describes colonial scientists and complicit governments that "advocated birth control as well as compulsory sterilization as a means of eliminating the 'unfit' sectors of the population" (p. 355). Such unfit sectors included racialized populations, the poor, and any other segment that was deemed by the bourgeoisie to be morally degenerate. The overarching objective in such projects of reproductive control was to prevent degeneracy by positive eugenic selection or through elimination of the "unfit" (Stoler, p. 643). In other words, such programs determine and subsequently eliminate the "life that is unworthy to be lived" (Agamben, p. 123). While the examples listed here may seem disparate, they are unified in the colonial logic of "worthiness" that underpins these practices.

The Traits And Functions Of Monsters

Explained in terms of the exception, the life that is unworthy to be lived is banned from the established order. In fact, Agamben describes the ban as the "The original political relation" (p. 181) because the exception is both inside—the intersexual born inside the prevailing gender regime—and outside—the intersexual's "ambiguity" suspending the law of gender. For the regime to exist, there has to be the banished figure. This figure lends legitimacy to the norms or laws by creating a foil to those very norms or laws. As Kristeva writes, "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*" (p. 1). Butler (1993) expands on this relation to explain subject formation. She contends that the dominant subject "is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (p. 3). Just as the regime creates and sustains its parameters through the banishment of the exception, the dominant subject—the white, heterosexual, able-bodied subject—demarcates its parameters and legitimacy as the dominant subject through the repudiation of the abject. Thus, the dominant regime on the macrolevel and the dominant subject on the microlevel force certain groups to inhabit abject zones, but paradoxically, they are zones which society cannot live without (McClintock, 1995, p. 72). In other words, the ban is necessary to consolidate the power and subjectivity of the dominant regime and subject. Such regimes are historically established within a very specific heterosexual, capitalist and patriarchal framework. To reproduce this structure, specific subjectivities are required, which make tools like the "ban" necessary.

It is important to note that subjectivity does not merely refer to the mind or metaphysical aspect of the abject, but the actual physical embodiment as well. Agamben writes, "The medieval ban also presents analogous traits: the bandit could be killed (*bannire idem est quod dicere quilibet posit eum offendere*") (pp. 104-105). The abject life is placed outside the borders of the rational order. Perhaps more accurately, it can be said that there is no life outside the border. As the quotations from *Il bando* suggest, bodies on the margins are disposable. To return briefly to the discussion on the conservative/liberal heterosexual matrix and the management of life, this theory becomes increasingly apparent when one considers past and present usages of

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and to map continuities and discontinuities between contemporary and inherited practices within state and capital formulations" (p.xxi).

reproductive technologies and genetic testing. This act of violence against the fetus, in addition to the surgical violence and abuse incurred by intersexuals has the effect of destroying the abject's subjectivity. Elaine Scarry (1999) contends that "the infliction of extreme physical violence deconstructs and unmakes the world of the person in pain" (p. 319). The voice is taken away from the abject and through annihilation or assimilation, the abject becomes subject to the enslaver's subjectivity.

Unfortunately, overt violence is not the only method that strips the body of its subjectivity. Violence can be covert when it takes the shape of the normalizing discourse that renders the abject as the ambiguous, hybrid monster figure. When one parent gave birth to an intersex child, she lamented, "Did you even see such a thing, half boy and half girl? … This thing here, you call this a person? There is no such thing as a person who is half male half female" (Morland, 2001, p. 527). These types of questions and beliefs held by the mother are generated in various institutions of society, but as we have seen thus far, the medical establishment plays a particularly crucial role. Take for instance, the statement of John Money, one of the leading medical authorities in the modern treatment of intersex children. In 1977, he outlined his advice to the parents: "Explanations can be based on the premise that the child has been born sexually incomplete—an extremely useful term that has saved many patients and their parents from the humiliation of having to hear words such as 'half boy', 'half girl', 'sexless', and so on" (Money in Edenheim, p. 9). While "half boy" and "half girl" are cautioned against, the explanation that the child is "sexually incomplete" does nothing to change the overall message that the child is not a whole person.

The fear of giving birth to a "half girl" or "half boy" speaks to the fear of hybrid bodies.Agamben uses the werewolf figure to illustrate this fear. He argues that the werewolf "is precisely *neither man nor beast*," and it "dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither" (p. 105). In this understanding, the abject and the exception become typified by the monster figure. Agamben equates the exception to the werewolf figure:

> Pliny's legend of Antus also bears witness (Natural History, bk. 8), of the temporary character of the metamorphosis, which is tied to the possibility of setting aside and secretly putting on human clothes again. The transformation into a werewolf corresponds perfectly to the state of exception, during which (necessarily limited) time the city is dissolved and men enter into a zone in which they are no longer distinct from beasts (p. 107).

Similarly, Kristeva writes of the abject, "The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*" (Kristeva, p. 12). As a half human, the hybrid lacks full integrity because of its half animal status. At the root is the problem of coherence, borders, adherence to the law. The hybrid figure challenges these criteria in very crucial ways. The body is no longer coherently human; its half- animal status negates human law and its bodily demarcations are blurred.

The line between human and animal is not distinct; and neither is the monster's sphere of spatial existence. Agamben writes, "What had to remain in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf—is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city" (p. 105). As a result of the ban, the monster is homeless. It oscillates between the city—with the sociopolitical recognition that comes with it—and the forest, which represents lawlessness, chaos, bestiality. This relates to the fact that the monster exists as a kind of criminal, the banished "other" that refuses to conform.

In Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975 (2003), Foucault summarizes,

> The frame of reference of the human monster is, of course, law. The notion of the monster is essentially a legal notion, in a broad sense, of course, since what defines the monster is the fact that its existence and form is not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature … The monster combines the impossible and the forbidden. (55-56).

It is not the monster as anomaly that causes the greatest anxiety; but rather, its blatant non-conformity, its lack of adherence, to law. Thus, when Foucault writes that the monster embodies the "impossible" and the "forbidden," he speaks to those bodies that cannot be included in law and those bodies that stand to threaten its authority. As we will see, the hermaphrodite (mentioned directly in the above quotation from Foucault) has this potential, as do queer bodies and racialized bodies.

Throughout history, hermaphrodites[9] have been the subject of scrutiny and wonder. This fascination has not always been sympathetic. Indeed, probing into hermaphroditism often reveals larger discourses around sexuality, race and gender. During the Middle Ages, for example, Cohen highlights the link between hermaphrodites and sexuality:

> 'Deviant' sexual identity is similarly susceptible to monsterization. The great medieval encyclopedist Vincent de Beauvais describes the visit of a hermaphroditic cynocephalus to the French court in his *Speculum naturale*. Its male reproductive organ is said to be disproportionately large, but the monster could use either sex at its own discretion (p. 9).

In this quotation, the hermaphrodite is seen as hypersexual and potentially bisexual. As Foucault points out, "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul" (p. 43). Early sexologists believed homosexuality was caused by a blurring of one's "core" gender. Sexual desire, in this context, was intimately linked to one's gender expression or, in the case of the hermaphrodite, one's chromosomal sex. For example, in Jennifer Terry's (1999) *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*, she looks at a study conducted in New York in 1935 on "Sexual Variance" (p. 178). At first, I thought this study and the accompanying photographs were about intersexuality given the focus on "sexual variance"—I took it to mean variations of biological sex, male and female. However, what became clearer was that the focus of this study was homosexuals, their behavior and anatomy. It is not surprising that the medical and sexological researchers involved, like those who studied racial anatomies in earlier years, drew conclusions that male and female homosexuals had unusual genitals. Homosexual women were described as having unusually large clitorises and thereby predisposing them to hypersexuality (Somerville, 1996, pp. 246-247). This particular "affliction" was also chronicled throughout the early to mid-twentieth century in relation to other "unsavoury" classes, including native and African women, prostitutes and white working class women in the U.S. and Britain (Terry, p. 34).

In contemporary medical practice, sexuality continues to be a major concern. If a child is born whose genitals do not fit arbitrary measurements or aesthetics, they are either reduced or enhanced. An intersex child whose penis is less than 0.6 inches will be operated upon to "cut down" the organ to create female genitalia while an intersex child who has a clitoris that is deemed to be "too large" will be similarly modified.[10] Kuhnle and Krahl explain that the main

[9] In this section, I will use the term "hermaphrodite" as opposed to "intersex" because of the historical context.

[10] According to Fausto-Sterling (1995), newborns whose penis is less than 0.6 inches long raise medical concern (pp.130-131).

criteria for determining the sex to which the intersex child will be assigned depends on "functionality, future pubertal development, and fertility" (p. 88).

We also note the importance of genital size and the links with racism and homophobia. As Fausto-Sterling (1995) explains, in addition to the 0.6 inch requirement, "In childhood, all that is required is that he be able to pee in a standing position. In adulthood, he must engage in vaginal heterosexual intercourse" (pp. 130-131). This requirement of heterosexuality also contains within itself the implicit prohibition on homosexuality. For, if a child who is identified as a female "in development" has a clitoris that is too large, she may be able to penetrate another female. For a child who is born with a penis that is too small, the fear becomes not only that he will not be able to penetrate women but that he will become queer by default. It is unsurprising then, that our monsters have also been queered. As Puar and Rai contend, "monsters and abnormals have always also been sexual deviants" (p. 119). Take, for example, the vampire. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) write,

> Since Bram Stoker's Count Dracula landed in Victorian England, the vampire has been a threat to the social body and, in particular, to the social institution of the family. The threat of the vampire is, first of all, its excessive sexuality. Its desire for flesh is insatiable, and its erotic bite strikes men and women equally, undermining the order of heterosexual coupling (p.193).

Just like the hermaphroditic cynocephalus of the French court, vampires threaten heterosexuality through their bisexual potential. The link between the hermaphrodite and the monster, of course, highlights the relationship to the abject and the regulation of bodies. In other words, if the monster embodies abject qualities—which include bisexuality as the "ambiguous" sexuality, the general population will avoid such behavior because they will be associated with monstrosity. As a result, the monster then becomes a very effective tool of social control and management.

This type of sexual control, however, cannot be understood without a closer analysis of its connections with racialized bodies. Take, for example, the work of Ambroise Paré who writes, in 1573, a "scurrilous account of the monstrous sexual practices attributed to female hermaphrodites—living in far away places like Africa—who take advantage of their monstrosity by indulging in the filthiest of practices: same-sex sex" (Braidotti, 1999, p. 291). Taken with the "disproportionately large" reproductive organ described by de Beauvais, we see a strong connection between intersexuality, monstrosity and racism. Moreover, the heterosexual matrix is strongly stigmatized by the potential for same-sex sex. Like de Beauvais' monster who could oscillate between having male and female genitalia and thus engage in homosexual practices, the African female hermaphrodite could also perform homosexual (read: monstrous) sexual behavior. This fascination with the African female body dates back to the Victorian era, with the rise of eugenics and science's obsession with African female genitalia. Such women were believed to have unusually large clitorises—a trait they apparently shared with sexual inverts (lesbians) (Somerville, pp. 246-247).

As the example of the African hermaphrodite shows, the link between sexuality and race—as dictated by genitalia—is pervasive in constructs of the black body. Franz Fanon (1967) argues,

> We can now stake out a marker. For the majority of white men the Negro represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state). The Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions. The women among the whites, by a genuine process of induction, invariably view the Negro as the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations…. We have shown that reality destroys all these beliefs. But they all rest on the level of the imagined (p. 177).

In this passage, the black body represents excess, a "genital potency beyond all moralities." The key link to intersex here is the focus on the genitals as being the primary site of immorality. The body dictates the personhood, but more specifically, the gendered body dictates personhood. Thus, the biopolitical strategy for managing such bodies becomes focused on the genitals. For racial "deviants," the method of control can become, as Abdul Janmohamed (1992) notes, a literal or symbolic castration. He argues that this not only limits the black body's access to the phallus, but also becomes a way to cleanse the body of its offending parts (p. 107). The same colonial logic permeates the genital mutilation of intersex children. To illustrate this point, I surveyed images of hermaphroditism and intersexuality from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century in influential medical textbooks, journals and reports (Gregersen, 1982; Money, 1968; Money & Wolman, 1980; Overzier, 1963; Simpson, 1976; Warner, Wright & Yates, 1979; Wilson, 1988). Of the examples provided, very few works depicted non-white bodies. Considering the Victorian fascination with African bodies, specifically the genitals of African males and females, one potential answer could be that non-white bodies were already assumed to be abnormal. African genitals were "scientifically" found to be larger than the "norm," (Somerville, 1996; 2000) which further implies that white intersexuals—or any white person whose genitals are outside the arbitrary measurements or aesthetics—are particularly threatening because they break their racial bodily boundaries. Their "abnormal" genitals verge on non-white.[11]

Images, The Gaze And Monsters As Spectacles

This is not to suggest that there were no non-white people in the images I found. On the contrary, black bodies were present in many photographs, not necessarily as "intersex" or "hermaphrodites," but as "curios" in their own right. Franz Fanon speaks to this "freak show" or "body as spectacle" phenomenon in his description of his encounter with a white child. The little girl exclaims, "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" (p. 112) and "Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up" (p. 114). Fanon's example is not merely analogous to the testimony offered by the intersex person. Instead, they share a common relationship to the gaze. Their bodies both become part of a visual economy, which Jonathan Beller (2001) defines as

> the historical transformations of visual attention into a socially productive activity (sensual labor) realized by, and as shifts in, visual cultural technologies. In brief, the image during the twentieth century achieve an economic logic; today, it functions economically at a variety of levels including the extraction of biopower from spectators and the organization of their desire (pp. 333-334).

Beller limits his analysis of the visual economy to the twentieth century, but I would argue that it reaches back much further than that. After scanning "medical" photographs as well as several sketches of hermaphrodites (in earlier images) and intersexuals later on, it became clear that images are more than just one-dimensional, objective sources of data. Instead, bodies are transformed into commodities, "trafficked"[12] in medical texts in the name of modern notions of progress, truth, finding a cure, etc. They are exchanged through the visual economy, one that extracts biopower—the power invested in life itself—from the subjects in the image, and uses it to construct the subjectivity of the viewer as well as the viewed. As Beller notes, "we consume

[11] For a more in-depth discussion of the concept of "white but not quite," see Agathangelou (2004).
[12] See Rubin (1990, pp.74-113) for a more in depth discussion of how certain groups of people become commodified and exchanged in different cultural and historical contexts.

images in order to maintain ourselves as such" (p. 343). The image organizes desire by clearly demarcating life that has been framed as marginal, which is defined both as repulsive in its defiance of gender norms and attractive or desirable in its exoticness.[13] In so doing, it functions as a kind of immaterial or "sensual" labor, to use Beller's term, in the visual economy because, by marking the bodies in the images as deviant, they reproduce a particular gender order alongside the subjectivity of those involved in the process. Bodies, in a commodified form, become vital to social reproduction.

William Spanos (2000) elaborates on this point. He traces the origins of this type of relationship between the "seer and seen" back to the relationship between the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Specifically, he argues that the Romans

> reduced the originative peripatetic thinking of the pre-Socratics and even the classical Greek philosophers to a derivative, calculative, and institutionalized mode of thought. Despite the obvious historically specific variations, the Occident has been essentially imperial ever since the Romans *colonized* and *pacified* an errant, polyvalent, and differential thinking that, as such, was not amenable to their polyvalent imperial project (p. 5).

What this passage signifies is the point at which the dynamic, multi-faceted and *peripatetic*—philosophizing while walking—style of the Greeks was conquered and transformed into a stagnant, fixed mode of thought. This developed into the ontological foundations of Western metaphysics which relies on this relationship, one that defies free-flowing movement to one that is supervisory and fixes the object of study under its gaze. Indeed, "metaphysics" in Spanos' work is translated to "over-seeing" (p. 9). It is "inquiry beyond or over beings which aims to recover them as such as a whole *for our grasp*" (*ibid*.). This inquiry begins from a "privileged vantage point 'beyond' or 'above' them [the object of study], that is, from a distance" (*ibid*.). He goes on to argue that this gaze, then, has historically been a functional way of producing the "docile and useful body" (p. 11) that Foucault argued was the function of modern biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality*. Indeed, Spanos contends that increasingly, the "super-vision and re-formation of the amorphous multiplicity of 'deviants'—beggars, idlers, criminals, madmen, school children, and so on…haunted the bourgeois Norm" (p. 25). So what does this theory mean for a study of the medical visual economy of intersexuality?

First, this privileged position of vision creates a kind of violence because it privileges the viewer and demonizes the seen. Seeing is the first step to understanding, and to understand is to "master" or to "dominate." It is not coincidental that our language structure and mode of thought privileges vision when one considers common phrases about understanding. Spanos points to phrases like "seeing what another means" or "inspecting a body of knowledge," or, particularly relevant to the study of intersexuality, the notion of "demonstration"—all such concepts refer to the (con)quest for truth (p. 18). This latter word is relevant because, as Alice Dreger (2000) notes, "the practice of displaying voiceless, virtually identity-less patients to large numbers of other medical professionals will not change simply by the recognition that it may harm the patient. The word *monster* shares the root with *demonstrate*, the *monstrous* is that which portends" (p. 170). This relationship becomes painfully clear when looking at images of intersexuality, or hermaphroditism from around the seventeenth century and earlier; the hermaphrodite *is* a mythical monster.[14] While literally constructed as a monster in the past, even more contemporary images, in their "demonstration" of a culturally conceived anomaly, also contribute to a sort of monstrous reading of intersexuality.

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[13] For a psychoanalytically-inspired theorization of such responses of attraction and repulsion, see Kristeva.

[14] See images reproduced in Wilson (1988) and Reis (2005) as examples.

Many people, in hindsight, remember their experience of being photographed as in a manner that made them feel like a "freak." The very fact that they are photographed in the first place implies this freakishness, since many have argued that these medical illustrations do not necessarily benefit the person at all (Creighton et al., 2002). In fact, these photographs become a way to freeze the intersex person in time and space, reducing their subjectivity to a voiceless object of study or a specimen to be collected, studied, and understood or mastered. Kim, among other intersexuals, felt "like insects tacked to a board for study" (Dreger, p. 162). Under the supervision of the central eye (the physician), the intersex person in both life and particularly in the photograph is reduced to "a visible, self-present, and docile object in space set before the eye of the subject to be measured and managed" (Spanos, p. 18). This, of course, is the main thrust of Western metaphysics. Spanos describes this as "[t]he reductive ontological drive to settle or fix by simplifying what in essence is unsettlable, unfixable, and irreducible," which is, "the metaphysical prerequisite to transform that which defies naming into *manageable* and exploitable objects" (p. 19). The intersex body is seen as transitory, not fully developed into the fixed gendered positions. They blur the gender boundaries; they are bodies in motion. Thus, by capturing these bodies on film, their fluidity becomes stagnant, easily viewed "from above," through a lens, and rendered more manageable as a result.

Resistence To Biopolitics From "Above"

In *The Penal Colony*, Kafka (1976) writes, "You have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one's eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds" (p. 204). Each intersex person who has been subject to gender assignment surgery bears the wounds of the violation. Their gender transgression is written on the body, etched out between their legs. But the violence is not only made flesh; it cuts deeper into the psyche that has been scarred after a lifetime of social and medical manipulation and abuse.[15] Their abject status has rendered them vulnerable to the harshest wrath of the empire. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to remember that "when the social horizon is defined in biopolitical terms, we should not forget those early modern stories of monsters" (Hardt & Negri, 195).

But at the same time, this understanding need not doom the abjected body to eternal de-subjectification and violence. For it is also true that, by shattering the "codes of legitimacy," (Costera & Prins, p. 277) the abject body "also produces power that facilitates resistance, rebellion, evasions and disruptions" (Bakare-Yusuf, 1999, p. 313). Or as Shildrick and Price predict, "if the body itself is not a determinate given, then the political and social structures that take it as such are equally open to transformation" (pp. 7-8). This is precisely the point Hardt (2006) makes in "Affective Labor." In this article, Hardt considers biopolitics and shows how resistance is possible from within that system. Specifically, he underscores that while biopower is extracted from "above"—as we have seen in our study of intersexuality and medical science—biopower from "below" is also possible. What this means for us is that bodies that have been positioned as "abject" can harness that biopower and reroute the relationship. In other words, power is not only top-down. This is especially true if one considers that "safe spaces" and intersex activism[16] have increased in recent years, alongside a growing body of literature that is

[15] Cheryl Chase of the Intersex Society of North America observes, "The child is left genetically and emotionally mutilated, isolated and without access to information about what has happened to them.The burden of pain and shame is so great that virtually all intersexuals stay deep in the closet throughout their adult lives" (Feinberg, p. 104).

[16] Chase is an example of an early activist and is the director ofISNA, which offers support for intersexuals and advocates for rights and education.Apart from ISNA, there are also groups such as

critical of the medical practices outlined in this paper.[17] Indeed, through the work of these activists, the fallacy of the sexual dichotomy is revealed, while simultaneously thrusting into the spotlight related constructions of homosexuality and race. As a body on the border-line, intersexuality exposes the fragility of social laws as well as juridical laws that are premised on such false dichotomies. In doing so, they simultaneously force society to consider these alternatives while pushing for economic support, health care, and other changes.

Resistance Away From "Home"

In North America, intersex activists have been continuing the struggle against heteropatriarchal, capitalist and racist relations of power. Indeed, the focus of this paper so far has been on treatments of intersexuality in North America. This has been done on purpose, in an effort to turn the gaze inward, instead of focusing on the "foreign" monsters that "beckon from the edges of the world" (Cohen, p. 18). Stories of "African genital mutilation," for example, litter conversations on popular North American talk shows, stories that are often met with a gasp from fascinated audiences, horrified at the practices of "backward people" abroad. However, Patel urges us to examine the "home," (p. 19) constantly assessing how our very own kitchens are racialized, classed and gendered. This is an invitation I take seriously, which is why I have been interested in exploring colonial legacies that infuse western treatments of intersexuality.

However, in my effort to examine genital imperialism at home, I also do not want to reinforce the notion that the west is the primary source of such thinking , that these practices, rooted in colonial belief systems, have been monolithic or hegemonic in how other cultures have treated intersexuality or other forms of gender variance. Without claiming to speak authoritatively on the subject—indeed, an in-depth analysis would require more time and space than I have at my disposal—I will look at Indian *hijras* to offer an example of alternatives to Western modes of intersexual treatment. By looking at the works of Patel alongside an article by Bakshi, I will highlight some of the ways that the *hijras* complicate an analysis of gender transgression. In many ways, *hijras* have either subverted or completely side-stepped colonial influence on gender norms. However, in other ways, the monster phenomenon endures, as well as certain gender and class power imbalances. Not meant to be exhaustive, this analysis will hopefully open the discussion of other types of resistance that pre- and post-date colonialism, and how the experience of colonialism affected or left unchanged the gender relations in a specific Indian context.

As stated, *hijras* have pre-dated colonial occupation and persist in its wake, but their precise origins are unknown. In *hijra* songs, most references to origins stem from mythology (Bakshi, p. 214). Equally as elusive is the precise definition of *hijra*. Some anthropologists have described *hijras* as "eunuchs," or "hermaphrodites…with a physical defect, natural or acquired." Others equate *hijras* to male prostitutes, or "passive homosexuals" (p. 213). "Ultimately," however, Bakshi argues that "any working definition of hijras must take into account their subjective perception as 'neither man nor woman'" (*ibid*.). This latter concept, a subjectivity defined not in the affirmative, *what is*, but *what it is not*, is interesting. It implies a space in between or beyond, a hybrid identity that is not half-something-else but rests instead in a unique space outside of the binary. It is also interesting that the *hijra* in this article is associated with

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Hermaphrodites with Attitude and GenderPAC. There have also been coalitions between intersexuals and transsexual and transgendered activists.See Chase (1998).

[17] See works cited previously by Fausto-Sterling, Preves, Creighton et al., Feinberg. Also, see Wilchins (1997); Valentine & Wilchins (1997).

hermaphroditism, but Bakshi asserts that the actual occurrence of intersexuality at birth is rare. By contrast, the author says that most *hijra* are men who undergo "voluntary castration and penectomy while 'possessed' by the Goddess Bahuchara" (*ibid*.). This diverges from the experience of many intersexuals in the West who, operated upon as infants, do not have a choice in the matter. The doctors and parents make the decision at birth whether or not to perform surgery on the genitals of their children. While the element of "choice" involved in the *hijra* community about surgery is a progressive change from the way things have been done, and continue to be done, in the West, there are some other issues that the definitions raise. For example, in English translations, Bakshi asserts that

> hijras have been relegated to the categories of eunuchs and hermaphrodites, i.e., emasculated biological males and intersexed 'males' whose sexual organs are ambiguous at birth or who suffer from a genetical malformation…most hijras are born with normal male sexual organs and voluntarily undergo surgical castration to become a part of the hijra community (p. 215).

In his description, while he tries to create space for an autonomous *hijra* identity, he simultaneously forecloses or subordinates the space for intersex identities as such. He suggests that one is "relegated" to the status of hermaphrodite, that intersex individuals "suffer from a genetical malformation" in contrast to the "normal male sexual organs." Such framing reproduces intersexuality as an inferior, abject condition. This type of assessment appears in western medical textbooks as well, which raises the issue that perhaps post-colonial identifications may not have been able to extricate themselves completely from the influence of the west.

There are other aspects of *hijra* life that complicate such influences. For example, Bakshi notes that "The hijra community is an integrated and inseparable part of the Indian social fabric and is 'undoubtedly related to the variety and significance of alternative gender roles and gender transformations in Indian mythology and traditional culture'" (p. 212). He illustrates this point by suggesting that while North American drag queens, for example, present a spectacle within the context of a gay audience, the *hijras,* by contrast, perform at religious ceremonies within the mainstream culture (p.216). On the one hand, this integration seems like a pleasant departure from the abjected bodies produced in the west. However, on the other, this type of integration should not be accepted at face value. An analysis by Patel provides some insight into the conditions of this integration. First, Bakshi contends that the mainstream audience of *hijras* are men, women and children (*ibid*.). However, Patel's recollection of *hijras* at her aunt's wedding was quite different (p. 14). In her experience, the men in the audience negotiated with the *hijras* about the content of the show as well as the payment that would be due. Also, Patel notes that when the *hijras* entered the room, her mother panicked and made sure the female children left the room. This causes Patel to wonder why *hijras* have been hailed as the ultimate, queer hybrid figure while leaving the gendered relations between the *hijras* and the audience unclarified.[18]

Indeed, Patel also suggests that *hijras* are fully integrated into mainstream society by pointing out that, even as a child, she remembers knowing full well about the "shanty towns" (p. 10) where the *hijras* lived. This community was a upper class community, in relation to non-*hijra* bodies and also to spatial organization. Moreover, as Bakshi recognizes, the "hijras have few political rights" (p.214). Such differences, in terms of class, space and political access

[18] Patel writes, "Depicted in the semiotics of purity and primitivism, *hijras* appear in scholarly literature as authentic urban (though ruralized) savages whose celebrated gender inversion organizes itself around masculinity but slips into some intermediate embodiment. Absent from most of these portrayals is any explicit discussion of class, colonial subjugation, nationalism, or abjection (the allure of a fetishized utopian body newly minted from past anthropological coin having proved too lucrative)" (p. 9).

would inevitably present problems to a theorization of *hijras* as an unproblematic, fully integrated gender transgressor. Moreover, the adamant renunciation of associations with *zenanas*, or passive homosexual men, also warrants further exploration. At the end of the show, *hijras* lift up their skirts to show that they are "real" *hijras* and not "just effeminate men, zenanas, for whom the hijra community reserves disdain" (Bakshi, p. 219). For example, is the gesture merely to distinguish an independent identity or is there an integral homophobia that underlies the distinction? Patel suggests that this move is related to notions of "purity":

> The purification of hijras into authentic Hindus whose lineage stretches back across vast reaches of mythic Hindu time, is in consonance with their own repudiation of the Arabic term zenane. This discursive move colludes with a nationalist politics of religious, racialized abjection that seeks to eject Muslim 'infection' to ensure Hindu purity by recording hybrid practices to produce a lineage of authentic pure forms (p.12).

In this assessment, the rejection of homosexuality is related to a wider religious and nationalist project. In any case, the repudiation of homosexuality raises a simple question for us: Why? which, if answered, might reflect complex power relations.

Finally, closely associated with the western processes of demonization of "deviant others," is the childhood memory Patel conjures of the *hijra* as bogey-person (p.1). Underlying this figure, I would argue, is the same logic of difference and abjection that undergirds the bi-gendered, racialized, sexualized and classed monsters that have been produced in the west. There is a similar focus on the spectacle, the "freak," the "monster," one that sets the boundary markers of society. Patel writes,

> The secret spaces kids crawl into grew monstrous, inhabited by fears of snatching and deformation, displacement and homelessness, encoding abjection around loss of class. But fears that inhabit many children's lives took a different turn when it came to hijra-stories. Hijras, I thought then, in tales I have since seen catalogued by anthropologists, could lay claim to any child born with two sets of sex organs. They would ask for a child, and parents had no choice but to give the child over to live in communities shrouded in mystery. A hijra child could never come back to live with its family, its relationships truncated at or near birth (p. 16).

Indeed, this fear instilled in children at a young age was a biopolitical tool, one that was used to scare them. The effect would be, of course, to adhere to gender norms or other social codes for fear that the *hijras* would come and steal the children away from their families.

But, as Hardt suggests, biopower is not unidirectional. This fear contains power within itself. Patel remembers how *hijras* "haunted" her at night, but in the next paragraph, they inhabited her "fantasies" in which they would take her "away to dance and sing and beg" (*ibid*.). In this latter reverie, the *hijra* has emancipatory power. Or as Bakshi suggests, "For many hijras the quality of being half man and half woman is a source of infinite strength that endows on them the divine power to give a *shraap* (curse), just like Shiva cursed the earth" (p. 214). So while the *hijra* is deployed as a monster figure, the "shock" or "fear" the monster produces forces us to consider the "incongruity" of sexual and gendered identity.

Conclusion

Far from being the frightening monsters and bogey-persons that all these multi-faceted venues of power have created, the abjected bodies among us teach of limitless potential and possibility.

The most visible and violently regulated abjects, in short, show us that we are all abject in the sense that we can never fully fit the heterosexual matrix and the racial and gender prescriptions that the matrix entails. We are all subject to the biopolitical control of science and other authoritative disciplines to the extent that we continue to strive for acceptance in that matrix. But as intersexuality makes plainly obvious, such embodiments are restrictive and potentially traumatic. Thus, instead of looking for ways to minimize or eliminate the exceptions, let us push the closet doors wide open and look the monsters square in the face. We may see, in the end, that those are the faces not of monsters, but of human beings who have incurred the harshest wrath of biopolitical control. And after understanding how these bodies have been created and controlled, we can start to encourage a change in attitude. On the one level, we can put pressure on the medical community to rethink the strategies used to define and "normalize" intersex bodies. But more broadly, we must actively challenge our own constructions of binarisms, gender, race, homophobia, and any every other process we use to create abject or exceptional bodies—in a word, monsters. Only then will it even be possible to alter medical practices or even the bedtime stories we tell. For these sites of power do not evolve and reproduce in isolation. It is crucial to recognize, before we demand reforms from the "great institutions of science," how we are implicated in and subject to these methods of control. After such reflection and deconstruction, we will be in a better position to realize how life that suspends law can awaken "slumbering powers of emancipation" (McNally, 2001, p. 229).

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