

Conceptualising Sexual Diversity of Pegu and Makassar in Anglophone Discourse, c. 1585–1670

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Introduction

This essay focuses on concepts and ideas about Southeast Asian sexual diversity in the early modern period, as constructed in anglophone discourse between c. 1585 and 1640. It does not aim to provide a study of Southeast Asian sexual practices through the use of foreign sources. It uses the anachronistic term ‘Southeast Asia’ itself for convenience, as the concept did not exist in the early modern period. Instead, it focuses on anglophone discourse for its own sake, offering an innovative and transcultural method of queering the past. Contemporary scholars would not use the word ‘homosexuality’ to describe early modern sexual models.¹ ‘Sexual diversity’ has been selected as the most neutral and all-encompassing term, which is applicable to both early modern anglophone concepts of non-heteronormative sexual activities and various modes of thinking about gender and sexuality prevalent in the regions under investigation. To sharpen the vagueness of the term, it is supplemented by ‘male-to-male sexual activity’ or ‘desire’, as sex between ‘males’ is the main focus of this study. It is important to be aware of the gender-normativity of this term, which assumes exclusively ‘male’ desire and, indeed, ‘maleness’ as a category. This issue arises when societies in question have more complex ways of thinking about gender: for instance, *bissu* of South Sulawesi, although most often born with male genitalia, would not be conceptualised as ‘male’ in their native culture, as *bissu* was a type of gender distinct from both ‘male’ and ‘female’.² Thus, ‘sexual diversity’ is used to take these nuances into account, but the main focus of this study is ‘male-to-male’ sex as opposed to all types of sexual diversity.³ This study gets beyond these issues in an important way, by looking at the vocabularies used by early modern writers themselves to describe these concepts.

This study focuses on drawing key themes from the sources available, most notably, the concept of nature and the subject of rulers’ authority, to be used as lenses through which to approach mentions of ‘deviant’ Southeast Asian sexual diversity in anglophone sources. The main purpose of this study is to show that anglophone observers interpreted the practices they encountered within the framework of their own worldview. That process was markedly different from ‘orientalisation’ or ‘exoticisation’ of non-European bodies – the ways in which anglophone authors translated cultural and sexual norms of the societies they encountered

¹ Katherine Crawford, *European sexualities, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 8.

² See Leonard Y. Andaya, ‘The Bissu: Study of a Third Gender in Indonesia’ in *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Barbara Watson Andaya (Honolulu, 2000), pp. 27–47.

³ For a critique of the concept of ‘Third Gender’, see Even B. Towle and Lynn M. Morgan, ‘Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the use of the ‘Third Gender’ Concept’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8:14, 2002, pp. 469–97.

heavily relied on the wider discourse on the nature of sexual activities in the anglophone sphere rather than on either a directed or subconscious attempt to simply present a picture of a savage ‘Other’. Moreover, when presented with several ways of interpreting a certain practice, anglophone authors tended to interpret the customs in a favourable rather than condemning way, be it through ignoring certain phenomena, such as *bissu* of South Sulawesi, or interpreting genital modifications of Pegu as measures of preventing sodomy rather than just a sign of social stratification.

Historiography

There is a rich and ever developing historiography of gender and sexuality in pre-modern Southeast Asia, which often deploys European, including anglophone, sources for the study of local concepts, identities and practices. The works of Barbara Watson Andaya, Caroline Brewer, Michael G. Peletz and many others paint a complex picture of sexual identities and practices across such a diverse region over several centuries.⁴ These studies certainly inform the background of this essay, but, as this work has fundamentally different aims, it does not engage with the analysis of Southeast Asian sexuality per se. The main historiographical debates this essay engages with focus on queering European, specifically anglophone, past in a transcultural perspective.

The overlap between studies of past sexualities and the expansion of world history historiographically can be examined in two major ways. Normative sexuality, the notion of exoticising bodies and the so-called ‘Western gaze’ have been explored in a number of works of postcolonialism. The main argument of these studies, from Rana Kabbani’s *Europe’s Myths of Orient* and Richard Bernstein’s *The East, The West and Sex: A History of Erotic Encounters* to Benjamin Schmidt’s *Inventing Exoticism* are concerned with the ways in which Europeans exoticised and objectified the bodies of the peoples they encountered.⁵ In the context of the European encounter with the Middle East specifically, a high number of studies focused on Western attitudes to the harem, both in the context of over-sexualising it and representing it as repressive towards women. The other way in which postcolonialism influenced studies of sexuality is the expansion of studies of sexual and gender models around the world.

A global dimension, however marginalised initially, was present in the historiography of studies of male-to-male sex ‘before homosexuality’ from the very beginning. Randolph Trumbach’s 1977 pioneering study of ‘London’s Sodomites’ outlined a thesis of non-European worlds as tolerant of various forms of sexuality before contact with Europe, which imposed a strict binary Christian perception of gender and sexuality on those societies.⁶ This

⁴ Some of the key works on the subject include Michael G. Peletz, ‘Transgenderism and Gender Pluralism in Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times’, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2006): pp. 309–340; Barbara Watson Andaya, *The flaming womb: repositioning women in early modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 2006); Carolyn Brewer, *Holy confrontation: religion, gender and sexuality in the Philippines, 1521–1685* (Manila, 2001).

⁵ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial fictions: Europe’s myths of Orient* (London, 1986); Richard Bernstein, *The East, the West, and sex: a history of erotic encounters* (New York, 2009); Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing exoticism: geography, globalism, and Europe’s early modern world* (Philadelphia, 2015).

⁶ Randolph Trumbach, ‘London’s Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the 18th Century’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1977, pp. 1–33.

notion, paralleled in discussions of heterosexual relationships in the works of Barbara Watson Andaya, has been challenged by historians such as Raquel A. G. Reyes, Timon Screech, William G. Clarence-Smith and Peter Boomgaard.⁷ In a series of regional studies they demonstrate that the indigenous situation was more complicated than simply idyllic ‘acceptance’ of various forms of sexuality, and that factors such as age, social position and the practice of the sexual act itself played an enormous role, differentiating the criminal from socially acceptable (and anything on a scale in between). The political argument behind this line of historical explanation is connected to postcolonialism and the idea of imposition of European heteronormativity on sexually diverse societies by colonial powers. Today, LGBT+ rights are seen by some groups within the now more socially conservative countries, such as India, as a form of contemporary cultural imperialism in itself, although the sexual morality those movements are trying to combat is viewed to have been initially promoted and often legally solidified by the same European powers in the 1800s.

The most succinct definition of ‘queer reading’ is provided by Gary Ferguson in his study of ‘queer’ Renaissance France. He points out two major avenues of ‘queering’: to ‘acknowledge [...] textual moments that will appear queer to the modern reader, that is, representations of various kinds that seem strange or sexually ambiguous, or that challenge contemporary heteronormative ideas and perceptions’ and to ‘examine, through a process of historical contextualisation, whether what appears queer to the modern reader was likely to produce a similar reaction in the past and to seek to understand to what extent and why this was or was not the case’.⁸ Identifying specific words and concepts relating to ‘unnatural’ sexual activity, such as sodomy/sodomite/Sodom does allow a less speculative queering of the past. A shift away from close readings of narratives towards a focus on specific words and concepts also helps to situate ‘queer study of the past’ firmly within the discipline of history. Most queer studies of the past are produced by queer and cultural studies scholars, and as such, they primarily focus on literary sources and use narrative analysis as their prime methodology. The aim of this study is to connect methods of queering the past more firmly with the discipline of history.

This essay proposes to do that by using keyword method, developed by the Early Modern Research Group.⁹ In short, the approach focuses on identifying certain words and tracing the development of their usage. There are a number of clear benefits of this approach. It is an effective tool for the study of history of ideas. It is especially effective for the study of the early modern period, due to widespread dissemination of dictionaries, vocabulary and language books – sources which provide a succinct contemporary definition of a word, which can then be both contextualised and conceptualised. This approach is also very useful within the emerging discipline of digital humanities, as it allows producing quantitative data of an essentially qualitative subject and explore sources more efficiently. Most importantly, this approach is very effective for the study of discourse contained in different genres of texts available to the same audience. It provides a clear point of contact between texts as different

⁷ See, *Sexual diversity in Asia, c. 600–1950*, eds. Raquel A. G. Reyes and William G. Clarence Smith (Abingdon, 2012).

⁸ Gary Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings in the French Renaissance: Homosexuality, Gender, Culture* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 51–2.

⁹ Mark Knights, ‘Towards a Social and Cultural History of Keywords and Concepts by the Early Modern Research Group’, *History of Political Thought*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2010): pp. 427–48, 433.

as travel writing, cosmographies, religious, legal and medical texts, which make it invaluable for as contextual a project as this. One of the advantages of a keyword approach to queering the past is the potential for expansion of the source base involved and a shift towards a more contextualised historical understanding of queer pasts.

This study moves beyond contemporary queer studies, which are too embedded in literary sources, or more traditional studies of ‘homosexuality’, focusing on trials or, less often, medical sources. Deployment of a broader range of sources, in this case, travel accounts and cosmographies, is enabled through a rigorous application of the keyword method to a strictly defined monolingual discourse.

Discourse

This study adopts a primarily discourse-driven approach for several reasons. It identifies a monolingual body of sources, which, although influenced by sources in other languages, is still distinctive and can be regarded as a contained discourse. The study also argues that in the period under question (c.1585–1640), one of the most striking criticisms of a discourse driven analysis is less applicable, due to a more homogenous readership of the sources in question. The strongest argument in favour of a discourse-driven as opposed to response-driven approach when applied to the body of sources in question (travel accounts, cosmographies and other travel narratives) is the conscious, often pan-European effort to structure the ways in which these sources were constructed – in the words of Joan-Pau Rubiés, ‘teaching the eye to see’. Such an approach presents a set of unique challenges. The biggest one of them is defining the limits of the body of sources in question. One way of doing it is linguistic – focusing on sources printed and disseminated in a particular language.

The anglophone case

This study focuses on anglophone sources due to the position of English as a spoken and scholarly language in early modern Europe. Latin and other vernacular sources influenced anglophone ones. Anglophone sources in turn were unlikely to influence other European discourses. Peter Burke argues that in early modern Europe ‘English language is seen as the most mixed and the most corrupt’ and ‘English was spoken almost exclusively by English people’.¹⁰ Anglophone discourse was open to influences from the continent, as continental travel accounts were disseminated in England. However, this process was largely receptive, rather than a part of an exchange of knowledge. As Burke states, ‘the continental men of letters who could read English were so rare, at least before 1700 or so, that they can virtually be listed in a paragraph’.¹¹ The position of the English language amongst the early modern ‘language communities’ of Europe allows for an argument in favour of a monolingual study.

¹⁰ Peter Burke, *Languages and communities in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 120–21 and pp. 115–6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Teaching the eye to see

Another key argument in favour of a discourse driven approach is the formation of travel writing as a genre. There was a rich body of instructions for travellers, Latin and vernacular sources on methods of travel and travel writing, a certain way of ‘teaching the eye to see’, in early modern Europe.¹² Joan-Pau Rubiés argues that ‘methods were not just techniques, ways of doing things, but also a specific and explicit part of the educational and scientific project, one concerned with proper rationality and its practical applications (in a characteristic definition from a late sixteenth century manual of logic, method was ‘an art which demonstrates how every discipline can be reduced to an art and fixed procedure). Methods for travellers were in fact a genre through which a new intellectual elite sought to teach Europeans how to see the world’.¹³

The foundational influence of two compilations, Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* and Purchas’s *Hakluyt Posthumus*, contributes to limitations of the response-driven approach. By definition, Hakluyt’s and Purchas’s collections are collaborative projects under the curatorship of their editors – an arrangement in which it is easy to lose sight of individual responses. On the other hand, first hand experience is not necessarily needed to analyse sources individually and assess their authors’ position and contribution. For example, John Bulwer never left England and his *Anthropometamorphosis* (1650) is the result of accumulation of second and third hand knowledge from available travel accounts and cosmographies. Yet, the book is highly original in its approach and is consistent in treating its subject matter, bodily alterations around the world. Finally, the process of exchange of knowledge and the influence key texts had on other texts, which can be traced through shared ideas and direct references, was an integral part of the cultures of anglophone knowledge of the outside world – turning anglophone conceptualisation of anything into an essentially collaborative project. All these factors limit the possibility of the efficiency of analysing individual responses. Moreover, a discourse analysis does not presume a unity of the discourse in question – different texts can still tackle issues in very different, often contradictory ways. Discourse is the method, not the outcome.

Sources

This study concentrates on anglophone sources, originally written in English or translated into it, which were printed between the publication of Richard Hakluyt’s *The Principal Navigations* and the supposed period of ‘exotic geography’, identified by Benjamin Schmidt to have started around the 1670s. The main sources which will be used are the accounts of Ralph Fitch and Francis Pretty in the 1598 edition of *The Principal Navigations*, Jan van Linschoten’s *Itinerario*, translated and published by Hakluyt in 1598, and Thomas Herbert’s *A relation of some yeares travaile*, first published in 1634 and then revised by the author throughout the 1630s and 1640s. Fitch (1550?–1611) was the first Englishman to write an account of an extensive journey through India and Southeast Asia. He travelled through

¹² For an in-depth analysis of the theory of early modern travel writing, see Justin Stagl, *A history of curiosity: the theory of travel, 1550–1800*, (London, 1995).

¹³ Joan-Pau Rubiés, ‘Instructions for travellers: Teaching the eye to see’, *History and Anthropology*, vol. 9 (2–3) (1998): pp. 139–90, 140.

Southeast Asia in the mid to late 1580s and later recollected his journey at the behest of Hakluyt. Francis Pretty was the author of the account of Thomas Cavendish's journey of the late 1580s, published in the *Principal Navigations*. Sir Thomas Herbert, who was later known as a Parliamentarian and Charles I's Gentleman of the Bedchamber during the king's confinement, travelled in Asia in the 1620s and published the first account of his travels in 1634.¹⁴ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's text is an example of a translated account establishing itself in anglophone discourse. Linschoten was a Dutch merchant who resided at Goa at the service of the local Archbishop. His religious affiliation is unclear, but his account was hailed as a Dutch Protestant endeavour and his place in the legacy of Dutch travel writing is comparable with that of Hakluyt in England.¹⁵ Hakluyt published his account in England in 1598. The bulk of these sources come from the same period. Sources from the 1590s were the first anglophone accounts, which framed the discourse on Southeast Asian sexual practices. They influenced later accounts, were referenced in cosmologies, and were reprinted in various forms throughout the seventeenth century.

Keywords

What did sodomy mean in early modern England? Thomas Blount's 1656 dictionary, *Glossographia*, defines 'Sodomy' as 'buggery, so called from the City Sodom in Judea, which for that detestable sin was destroyed with fire from heaven. *Gen. 19*'.¹⁶ Moreover, the text uses the term to define other words, revealing more about its place in the wider discourse. The 1661 edition defines 'Ganymede' as 'the name of a Trojan Boy, whom Jupiter so loved (say the Poets) as he took him up to Heaven, and made him his Cup-bearer. Hence any Boy, loved for carnal abuse, or hired to be used contrary to Nature, to commit the detestable sin of Sodomy, is called a Ganymede, or Ingle'.¹⁷ Edward Phillips' *The World of Worlds* (1678) does not contain the word sodomy itself, but it does define 'Sodomitical' as 'belonging to *Sodomy*, i.e. buggery, or unnatural lust'.¹⁸ Although there was a clear classical context for male-to-male sexual activity, as expressed in Blount's definition of Ganymede, the religious theme and the concept of sodomy being 'unnatural' were the most common framework of reference for the term. 'Sodomy', rather than 'buggery' or 'catamite', has been selected as a key term for this study because sources, which focus on Southeast Asia and Japan only use the former term. Both buggery and catamites were invoked in descriptions of the Ottoman Empire, but much less extensively than sodomy. Moreover, although the term 'sodomy' encompassed a range of practices from anal sex with a woman to bestiality, in travel accounts (especially those dealing with the regions discussed here) it referred almost exclusively to male-to-male sexual activities.

¹⁴ Ronald H. Fritze, 'Herbert, Sir Thomas, first baronet (1606–1682)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13049>, accessed 31 May 2015].

¹⁵ Arun Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography: Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario* and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594–1602', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 101, issue 1 (2011): pp. 149–77, 155.

¹⁶ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia, or, A dictionary interpreting all such hard words of whatsoever language now used in our refined English tongue* (London, 1661).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Edward Phillips, *The World of Worlds* (London, 1678).

Hermaphroditism was sometimes associated with sodomy, although its position in relation to the concept of nature was more complex. A hermaphrodite, according to *The new world of English words* (1658), is ‘a word compounded of Hermes, i. Mercury and Aphrodite, i. Venus, and signifieth one of both Sexes, Man and Woman’.¹⁹ This definition places hermaphroditism even more firmly than sodomy in a classical frame of reference. But whereas the actual word does indeed refer to a Greek myth, most discussions of hermaphrodites in seventeenth-century anglophone sources focused on the supposed monstrosity of their bodies. Sometimes the terms ‘sodomy’ and ‘hermaphrodite’ were used interchangeably. The 1637 English translation of Jacob Rueff’s *The expert midwife* discusses several ‘monstrous births’. Although the term ‘hermaphrodite’ and its clear association with monstrosity was known in the 1630s England, the translator still chose to relate hermaphroditism explicitly to sodomy. Rueff explained two ‘monstrous’ births with reference to sodomy: describing a child born in Krakow in 1547, he argued that ‘[t]he cause of this mishapen Monster, wee ascribe to God alone; yet not withstanding through the insight of our reason, we may perceive also the detestable sinne of Sodomie in this Monster’. Another child, child allegedly born in 1512 was described as ‘of both sex, to signifie filthy Sodomy’.²⁰ This clearly shows the overlap between the terms *sodomy* and *hermaphroditism* in anglophone discourse. Moreover, as will be shown below, these two terms were most commonly used to refer to sexual diversity in anglophone texts about global encounters. These were key terms in early modern discussions of sexual diversity – although there were more complex ways of referring to sexual acts deemed to be outside of the norm, concentrating on these two words opens up a way to make direct connections between various forms of medical, legal and travel discourses in the seventeenth-century anglophone world.

Conceptualising the ‘sodomites’ of Pegu

In early modern anglophone discourse, sodomy was conceptualised as something contrary to nature. How does that fit with ideas about the universality of human nature? The concept of nature and its relation to the sexual are crucial to the discourse on contact as it offered a way into the issue of universality versus particularity of human experience. Marco Polo’s and John Mandeville’s writings had a significant amount of influence on the development of travel writing as a genre in Western Europe. Both of them were still in circulation in printed anglophone discourse throughout the early modern period. Joan-Pau Rubiés argues that ‘the key issue’ of the concept of nature in Marco Polo’s writings ‘was the recognition that the natural world, and man within it, had an autonomous rationality – not one necessarily opposed to the Christian revelation, but rather one which was accessible outside it.’ Mandeville’s *Book* went even further in its ‘use of natural law to praise virtuous gentiles’, as ‘far from a unique occurrence, [it] is symptomatic of the Book’s more general desire to find a common moral ground with alternative religious traditions, an attitude clearly inspired by a liberal interpretation of Christian universalism’. Sexual experiences play a significant role in Mandeville’s argument. In his description of Sumatra he discusses local sexual freedom. Rubiés argues that in Mandeville’s view ‘not only is sex not a sin, it is even sinful not to be

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jakob Rüff, *The expert midwife* (London, 1637), pp. 157–9.

promiscuous, following the scriptural command to ‘grow and multiply’. Rubiés describes this position as ‘not a complete ignorance of religion by savages, but rather, a reversal of values in the name of a natural religion of Adamic origins’. It would be very interesting to see how these principles would apply to other forms of sexual diversity, something referred to by authors as ‘unnatural’. Out of the two, only Polo mentions ‘unnatural intercourse’, and it is referred to as something the Chinese ‘disapprove of’. However, later early modern accounts did refer to sodomy and other forms of ‘unnatural’ sexual activity – how are those concepts related to ‘universalist’ principles which underpin European ability to recognise the validity of societies around the world and the bases of early ‘ethnography’?

Early mentions of penile inserts

The most common context in which sexual diversity was mentioned in anglophone discourse on Southeast Asia in the period was in discussions of local practices of genital modification.²¹ Various forms of genital piercings were a prominent feature of Southeast Asian societies recorded by foreign observers. The most prominent of them were penis bells, often associated with Pegu and Siam (roughly matching modern-day Burma and Thailand). They were interpreted by anglophone sources as being a measure for the prevention of sodomy. The first travel account, which mentioned these bells was made by Ma Huan, a Chinese Muslim voyager who accompanied Admiral Zheng He in his expeditions in ‘Western Oceans’. He saw the ‘tin beads’ of Siam as a status symbol. The first European reference to the practices was made by a contemporary of Ma Huan, Niccolò Conti, who travelled in the region in the 1420s. Unlike Ma Huan, he explained the bells as a tool for enhancing female sexual pleasure. In the 1510s Portuguese observers, such as Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa, explained the practice as a method of social stratification.

Mentions of the bells became a part of Portuguese discourse on Pegu and Siam. Seventeenth-century anglophone discourse was relatively unaffected by these notions, preferring to connect the bells clearly to the prevention of sodomy. Pires and Duarte were not published in English in the period in question and the mention of the bells was excluded from the first English edition of Conti’s work in 1579. Thus, there was no established discourse on penis bells as a means of social differentiation and the anglophone sources from the later sixteenth century could construct an independent narrative, which was firmly connected with prevention of sodomy.²²

²¹ See Donald E. Brown, James W. Edwards, and Ruth P. Moore, *Penis Inserts of Southeast Asia: An Annotated Bibliography with an Overview & Comparative Perspectives* (Berkeley, 1988) and B. Teensma, ‘Literaire, filologische en moralistische bespiegelingen over de Siamese penisbel’, *BKI* 147, 1 (1991): pp. 128–39, for reference on penile insert practices. See also Sun Laichen, ‘Burmese bells and Chinese eroticism: Southeast Asia’s cultural influence on China’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38 (02) (2007), pp. 247–73, for an overview of the spread of the practice in China.

²² Two early 17th century unpublished accounts, by Francesco Carletti and Jacques de Courte, give detailed descriptions of the practice and mention the bells in connection to prevention of sodomy. As they did not form a part of Anglophone discourse under consideration in this study, they will be referred to when necessary in the footnotes. See Jacques de Courte, *The memoirs and memorials of Jacques de Coutre: security, trade and society in 16th- and 17th-century Southeast Asia*, ed. Peter Borschberg, trans. Roopanjali Roy (Singapore, 2014), pp. 137–8, and Francesco Carletti, *My voyage around the world*, ed. and trans. Herbert Weinstock (London, 1965), pp. 181–3.

The matter of the matter

anglophone descriptions of penis bells pay close attention to the materiality of those objects. The materials the bells were made of were stressed to represent the role of the bells as a means of signifying the owner's social status, and in that respect anglophone discourse follows earlier Catholic accounts. Ralph Fitch provided the most detailed descriptions of the bells:

The least be as big as a litle walnut, and very round: the greatest are as big as a litle hennes egge: some are of brasse and some of silver: but those of silver be for the King and his noble men. There are some made of leade, which they call Selwy because they ring but litle: and these be of lesser price for the poorer sort.²³

The authors of the accounts expected the mentions of the bells to be received with curiosity. Most of those who encountered the bells appealed to the senses of hearing and touch as the prime means of interaction with the bells. The sound which bells made was stressed in most accounts; Linschoten wrote that the bells had 'a very sweet sounde'.²⁴

This information was disseminated in wider discourse: a later cosmography claimed that 'the men much please themselves to heare the sound of them as they go, these *Venus-Morris-Dancers* frisking often to the tune of their own Codpiece-musique'.²⁵ The sense of touch was invoked to confirm the credibility of accounts. Francis Pretty wrote that 'for the truth thereof, we our selues haue taken one of these nayles from a Sonne of one of the Kings'.²⁶ Similarly, Linschoten stressed that he had himself touched one of the bells and sent it to Europe to stress the credibility of his account: 'of the like Belles Paludanus can shew you one, which I brought out of India, and gaue it him'.²⁷ Here Linschoten appeals to the authority of a well-known European collector of curiosities, Bernardus Paludanus. The widely travelled Paludanus was an associate of Linschoten's, who helped him to write and publish his account. His album amicorum, signed mostly by people who visited his collection, contains around 1900 contributions.²⁸ Linschoten was appealing to Paludanus' authority as a collector but also as someone at the centre of a network of knowledge. By relying on that authority in print, Linschoten reinforced his credibility, which was under question when he was talking about Siam, as he had never left Goa.²⁹ Later on in the text he

²³ Hakluyt, *The principal navigations*, 262.

²⁴ Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *John Huighen van Linschoten. his discours of voyages into the Easte & West Indies Devided into foure bookes* (London, 1598), p. 29.

²⁵ John Bulwer, *A View of the People of the World* (London, 1654), p. 347.

²⁶ Hakluyt, *The principal navigations*, 819.

²⁷ Linschoten, *John Huighen van Linschoten. his discours*, 29.

²⁸ More information about Paludanus' Album Amicorum can be found on the website of the National Library of the Netherlands, <https://www.kb.nl/themas/vriendenboeken-liederen-en-brieven/hoogetpunten-uit-vriendenboeken/album-amicorum-van-bernardus-paludanus> .

²⁹ Similar notions can be found in Carletti (referring to earlier accounts, invoking touch as a means of credibility – a further indication of the fact he might have been influenced by Linschoten in compositing of his account, especially given their similar circumstances – they did not visit Pegu and Siam themselves), see Carletti, *My voyages*, pp. 182–3.

added eyewitness accounts in order to further emphasise his credibility:

Men would judge all these thinges to be fables, yet they are most true, for I doe not onely knowe it by the dayly trafficking of the Portingalles out of India thether, but also by the Peguans themselues, whereof many dwell in India, some of them being Christians, which tell it and confesse it for a truth, as also the neerenesse of place and neighbourhood maketh it sufficiently knowne.³⁰

In this passage Linschoten appeals to the Christian religion of his eyewitnesses in order to cement their credibility. References to other sources of authority were present elsewhere in anglophone discourse on bells. In this description, for example, Fitch appeals to the authority of a previous traveller, António Galvão, who described the bells in an earlier account.³¹ By invoking a wider framework of authority these authors place their accounts into the wider network of circulation of knowledge and reception of travel writing in Europe. The attention paid to the materiality of the bells shows that they were at least partly conceptualised as objects of curiosity that would spark interest among European readers of accounts of Pegu and Siam.³² That interest might have inspired the attention paid explaining their purpose.

The purpose of the bells: the nature of the sin and the sin of nature

Penis bells were most commonly understood in anglophone discourse as a measure for the prevention of sodomy. Ralph Fitch wrote that ‘they were invented because they should not abuse the male sexe’, and Linschoten argued that ‘this custome of wearing Belles was ordained by them, because the Peguans in time past were great Sodomites, and using this custome of belles, it would be a meane to let them from the same’.³³ That assessment of bells prevailed at least up until the 1630s, when Thomas Herbert claimed that ‘if they demand why tis answered them for deterring them the hatefull sinne of Sodomy’.³⁴ The concept of genital surgery being used to prevent a supposedly moral sin was previously absent in anglophone discourse and became a source of fascination for some authors who never left England. Discussing the sexuality of non-European peoples arguably gave European authors the space to talk about sodomy in a more analytical manner than the prevalent religious discourse would allow. Discussions of penis bells in non-primary accounts of non-European societies, including cosmographies, offer a fascinating insight into the process of translation of knowledge about seemingly exotic societies and the purposes that knowledge could serve in European debates about sin and nature.

John Bulwer’s *Anthropometamorphosis* discusses practices of genital modification

³⁰ Linschoten, *John Huighen van Linschoten. his discours*, 29.

³¹ Michael Smithies, ‘Body ornamentation and penile implants in Siam and Pegu’, *Journal of the Siam Society* vol. 82, pt. 1 (1994): pp. 81–8, 83.

³² For more information on collecting, see O. Impey, and A. MacGregor, *The origins of museums: The cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe* (Oxford, 1985), Deanna MacDonald, ‘Collecting a New World: The Ethnographic Collections of Margaret of Austria’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, 3 (2002): pp. 649–64.

³³ Linschoten, *John Huighen van Linschoten. his discours*, p. 29.

³⁴ Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares* (London, 1634), p. 195.

from around the world in great detail. Bulwer was a medical practitioner, an early Baconian natural philosopher, and a writer on deafness and gesture.³⁵ He published four volumes exploring the theme of the human body as a medium of communication, including *Anthropometamorphosis, or, The Artificiall Changeling*. First published in 1650, a second edition appeared in 1653 and a third (now renamed *A View of the People of the Whole World*) in 1654. Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphosis* discusses the ways in which various people around the world modified their bodies. It contains a whole chapter exploring 'Strange inventive Contradictions against Nature, practically maintained by divers Nations in the ordering of their Privy-parts'. Penis bells, especially in the context of understanding them as measures of preventing the 'unnatural sin' of sodomy, provide an interesting dichotomy: on the one hand, penis inserts of any kind are *a priori* presented by Bulwer as 'unnatural'; on the other, they are used to prevent an 'unnatural' (in his own words) sin. Bulwer combines most of the anglophone mentions of the bells into a single testimony.³⁶ He uses that testimony to convey a judgement on the purpose of the bells, as no actual author of the primary accounts pursued the following argument:

Among all the Inventions that he ere found out, this would appeare most mad and filthy if it had been meerly for Ornament, Musique, or Delight; but my zeale for the honesty of Nature is somewhat tempered with patience, when I find that the originall of this contrivance was, because they should not abuse the Male Sex, for, in times past all the Country was so given to that villany, that they were scarce of people.³⁷

Bulwer places penis inserts into a list of 'unnatural' genital alterations, including both male and female castration and circumcision, the relative value placed on the hymen in different societies, and various types of hermaphroditism. However, instead of simply condemning non-European or even non-English societies, he assesses each practice based on what he perceives to be its rationality.³⁸ For example, he finishes his discussion of circumcision in Madagascar with the following passage:

It were done out of meere necessity, as a Morall Law for the preservation of their lives and healths, and so found out by their precedent Ancestors, and by strict observations laid peremptorily upon them, wherein I shall submit my selfe in the account I could give to more able judgements.³⁹

It is unclear from the text whether this is Bulwer's own conclusion or that of his source on the practice, Richard Jobson.⁴⁰ However, as the case of penis bells of Pegu shows, Bulwer tended

³⁵ Graham Richards, 'Bulwer, John (bap. 1606, d. 1656)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3934>, accessed 31 May 2015].

³⁶ J. B. [John Bulwer], *Anthropometamorphosis: = man transform'd: or, the artificiall changling historically presented* (London, 1653), p. 350.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 352.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴⁰ For more information about Jobson, see, *Race in early modern England: a documentary companion*, eds. Jonathan Burton and Ania Loomba (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 204–6.

to interpret his sources through his own judgement rather than cite them word for word. Therefore, the fact that he chose to publish this passage shows that he endorsed its sentiment to some extent.

A full analysis of Bulwer's works has yet to be written and one recent writer refers to him as 'obscure'.⁴¹ He is better known for his work on gesture than for his work on bodily modification. Bulwer saw gesture as 'the Tongue and general language of Human Nature'.⁴² Justin E. H. Smith argues that Bulwer divided all customs into 'natural', intrinsic to human nature, and 'native', which were a result of the cultural environment of particular peoples. He explains Bulwer's quest for a universal language of gesture through his overarching strive for identifying universal, or 'natural', features.⁴³ However, Smith still calls Bulwer 'xenophobic'. Bulwer did not brand 'unnatural' genital modification as features of 'native' savagery. His assessment of the rationale behind them reveals a more nuanced Bulwer, who was trying to provide the reasoning behind most practices he mentioned.

Female Sexuality

Southeast Asian genital piercings were closely connected to various aspects of female sexuality both in primary accounts and in modern scholarly discussions of them. There are two distinct ways in which this connection can be made. The first is the notion that bells and other genital piercings were supposed to enhance female sexual pleasure. The second one is the supposed use of female nakedness to allure men from sodomy, employed alongside penis bells in Pegu and Siam, which was looked upon negatively in anglophone discourse. Early modern European writings on these themes have been interpreted as Europeans presenting local people as savages. Christina Skott referred to discussions of genital piercings as a way to represent local people as more licentious and thus of a 'weaker nature'.⁴⁴ However, references to enhancing female sexual pleasure were most often made towards the *palang*, a practice from Borneo and the Philippines, which was referred to by Catholic authors but was largely absent from anglophone discourse.⁴⁵ Although Fitch mentioned that the bells were popular in Pegu 'for they say the women doe desire them', neither he nor other anglophone authors conceptualised the practice primarily in those terms or go into the graphic sexual detail which Antonio Pigafetta included in his account of Magellan's journey.⁴⁶ However, most if not all of the anglophone authors did emphasise the nakedness of the local women.

⁴¹ Justin E. H. Smith, 'A corporall philosophy: language and "body-making" in the work of John Bulwer (1606–1656)', in *The body as object and instrument of knowledge: embodied empiricism in early modern science*, eds. Charles T. Wolfe, Ofer Gal, (Dordrecht, 2010), pp. 169–83, 169.

⁴² John Bulwer, *Chirologia: or the naturall language of the hand*. (London, 1644), pp. 3–4.

⁴³ Smith, 'A corporall philosophy', pp. 172–3.

⁴⁴ Maria Christina Granroth, 'European knowledge of Southeast Asia: travel and scholarship in the early modern era', (PhD Diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), p. 145.

⁴⁵ Tom Harrisson, 'The Palang, its history and proto-history in west Borneo and the Philippines', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37(2) (1964): pp. 162–74; Carletti's narrative firmly connects the bells, originally made to 'rule out and render impossible the practice of venery in illicit parts of the body even with men', as subsequently used to enhance female pleasure. This notion was not widespread in Anglophone discourse. See Carletti, *My voyages*, p. 181.

⁴⁶ Antonio Pigafetta, *The first voyage around the world, 1519–1522: an account of Magellan's expedition*, ed. Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (Toronto, 2007), p. 54.

Fitch wrote that ‘it was also ordained that the women should not haue past three cubits of cloth in their nether clothes’ and Linschoten argued that

the women go altogether naked, onely with a cloth before their privie members, which (as they go) openeth & uncovereth, shewing all they have, which is by them ordained, to the ende that by such meanes it should tempt men to lust after women, and to avoid that most abhominable & accursed sinne of Sodomie.⁴⁷

In his *Moral Map of Asia*, Ernst van den Boogaart argues that the illustrations to Linschoten’s *Itinerario* created a hierarchy of local people based on the amount of clothing they wore, and that less clothing signified lower levels of civilization in European eyes.⁴⁸ However, there were different ways of conceptualising this. John Bulwer put modesty rather than nakedness in itself at the centre of his analysis of Southeast Asian women. In his discussion of penis bells, Bulwer presents female nakedness as something unacceptable, identifying female genitalia as ‘those parts which every modest eye most scornes, each honest thought most hates to see and thinke upon.’⁴⁹ However, his opinion on nakedness does not translate into identifying nakedness, as opposed to a greater amount of clothes, as a trait of civilization. In his discussion of the Kingdom of Benni, which follows the section on Pegu, he argues that a lack of modesty rather than nakedness on its own is the greater sin:

And we detest the Heresie, which violating the Law of Nature (not in this point sufficiently observed by our *Adamites*) endeavours to bring in this shamefull Custome. Yet we are neverthelesse to be condemned for condemning them for going naked, since we offend in the contrary, with too much decking our bodies; And would we could regard more modesty and necessity of habits, and use them rather for honesty than to pride and vanitie, which is more hurtfull than their nakednesse.⁵⁰

This example shows that local customs were translated into anglophone moral frameworks by readers of travel accounts rather than straightforwardly understood and used as a tool of morally discrediting local societies. This is especially the case when it comes to sodomy – anglophone concepts and anxieties shaped the ways in which the supposed sodomy of Southeast Asia was conceptualised.

Authority

The chief way of conceptualising penis bells was a means of preventing sodomy, sanctioned by the local authorities. Both Fitch and Linschoten stated that the custom was ‘ordained’, and Francis Pretty elaborated, saying that ‘this custome was granted at the request of the women of the Countrey, who finding their men to be given to the foule sinne of Sodomie, desired

⁴⁷ Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *John Huighen van Linschoten. his discours*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Ernst van den Boogaart, *Jan Huygen van Linschoten and the moral map of Asia: the plates and text of the Itinerario and Icones, habitus gestusque Indorum ac Lusitanorum per Indiam viventium* (London, 1999), pp. 169–71.

⁴⁹ Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*, p. 350.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

some remedie against that mischiefe, and obtained this before named of the Magistrates'.⁵¹ A later account by Thomas Herbert explained that 'they have beene (in foregoing times) wicked *Sodomites*; which filthy sinne was since corrected by a Queene Rectrix', who, 'upon paine of death', commanded her subjects to wear the bells.⁵² These accounts share the idea that some form of legislation was implemented by local authorities and rulers to prevent sodomy, and that it was effective, rather than state that Southeast Asian people were simply 'sodomites' and thus somehow inferior. Elsewhere in European discourse such legislation was associated with 'civilization'. As Richard C. Trexler argues, Garcilaso de la Vega and Antonio de Calancha presented the Incas as a civilizing imperial force, which stamped out previously prevalent sodomy in the Andes.⁵³

By representing a local authority as opposed to sodomy, Europeans could emphasise both that the role of civilization is to eradicate vice and that eradicating vice validated a society's claim to be civilized. A similar process was happening in the descriptions of Southeast Asia. There are no known indigenous sources that confirm the story of 'Queen Rectrix', or any other authority for the role of bells as measures for preventing sodomy, so it is problematic to attempt to determine whether anglophone authors were trying to translate local sexualities into their own terms or simply provide a rationale behind an unfamiliar practice. The only direct reference to a European observer being told about the practice by the natives comes from Jacques de Courte, a Belgian Catholic resident in Goa from the late 1590s to 1620s. He states that 'they told me later that the person who had invented them was a queen of Pegu, because during her lifetime the inhabitants of that kingdom were very inclined towards sodomy'.⁵⁴ However, earlier in the same paragraph he states that he attended the procedure of the removal of a bell, which subsequently prompted a discussion of them, 'along with five portuguese'. It is unclear from the text whether the 'they' who told him the story of the queen were the natives or the Portuguese. Moreover, the manuscript was prepared for publication by Jacques son Esteban after his father's death – it is likely to have been influenced by other writings on the region, especially Linschoten. Carmen Nocentelli suggests the latter, arguing that 'increasingly invested with metaphoric significance, Asian practices of genital modification came to be seen as stigmata of identity [...] practices of genital modification thus came to play a twofold function, serving as both markers of difference and indexes of allegedly universal norms'.⁵⁵

The emphasis on the role of authority in eradicating sodomy, rather than on sodomy itself, is significant. It is a way of presenting the society in question as not overtly 'barbaric'. As the earlier discussion of Bulwer shows, a different explanation behind the practice, such as presenting it as a marker of social identity, would have been more damaging to Pegu in anglophone eyes. Prevention of sodomy allowed anglophone authors to rationalise the practice in a way that was less moralising towards the local people.

⁵¹ Hakluyt, *The principal navigations*, p. 819.

⁵² Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares* (London, 1634), p. 195.

⁵³ Richard C. Trexler, *Sex and conquest: gendered violence, political order, and the European conquest of the Americas* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 149–50. De la Vega was translated into English in 1688.

⁵⁴ Jacques de Courte *The memoirs*, p. 137; see *ibid.*, p. 31 for the discussion of the manuscript and its possible intended publication.

⁵⁵ Nocentelli, *Empires of love*, p. 36.

Questions of gender were central to the discourse around sodomy: in anglophone discourse on the nature of politics, female rule and sodomy were closely linked. In the 1598 edition of *Aristotle's politiques, or Discourses of Government*, it was argued that female rule is against the natural order of things and causes effeminacy and sodomy among the male population of such a polity:

The libertie which was given unto women, is hurtfull and incommodious [...] that necessarily riches are honoured and esteemed in such a Commonwealth, especially where men are in subjection to women [...] for all such kind of people are given either to Sodomie against nature.⁵⁶

Here, being prone to sodomy is clearly connected to the amount of power women hold in society, which is considered to be a reverse of the natural order of things. In the case of Southeast Asia, the amount of power held by women both in sexual matters and in wider society might have spurred the attention paid to local male sexual diversity.⁵⁷ However, women were not cast as responsible for local 'sodomy'. On the contrary, and in contradiction of the Aristotelian position, they and the amount of power they exercised were represented as positive influences which prevented sodomy from spreading.

In the case of Pegu, both Pretty and Herbert stressed the role of women and their authority in bringing forward the order to wear penis bells. Anglophone discourse had a mental framework in which societies with high levels of female authority could be presented as inferior. It would have been very easy to make the connection between sodomy in Pegu and the high position of women in that society, and to present it as barbaric. If that were problematic in the 1590s, when Hakluyt's collection and Linschoten account were published and Elizabeth was still on the throne, it would have been much easier for Thomas Herbert in the 1630s. However, no anglophone author established that connection. Herbert is the only published anglophone author who discussed the story of 'Queen Rectrix', a wise female ruler who prevented vice in her kingdom. A possible point of reference for the story is the Queen of Sheba, who was discussed by Bulwer in the context of genital modification:

Munster [...] shewes the originall of this invention, attributing it to the *Queen of Sheba*, [...] who ordained that women should be circumcised, led to it by this reason, that as men have a Prepuce, so women also after the same manner have a glandulous flesh in their Genitals.⁵⁸

The current scholarship on the European reception of penile inserts is limited. B. N. Teesma argues that 'the Christian world of the authors obviously meant that most of them completely condemned the phenomenon [...] the sober ethnographic reasons were overshadowed by moralising explanations.'⁵⁹ The analysis of the sources presented in the current article shows

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Aristotles politiques, or Discourses of government* (London, 1598), pp. 111–12.

⁵⁷ For more context on the role of women in Southeast Asian societies, see Barbara Watson Andaya, *The flaming womb*.

⁵⁸ Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*, p. 381.

⁵⁹ 'De Christelijke wereldbeschouwing van die auteurs zorgde er natuurlijk voor dat de meesten hunner her verschijnsel volstrekt afkeurden [...] werden de nuchtere ethnologische redenen al gauw door moralistische

a much more complicated picture, which is far away from ‘moralistic explanations’ and ‘complete condemnation’. Placing sodomy in the past and attributing its disappearance to the local ruler helped anglophone authors to represent Pegu in a more positive light; moreover, they had a series of tools which could have been employed to present the very same society in a more negative light, and which they did not use.⁶⁰

***Bissu*: A study of silence**

Friar Domingo Fernández Navarrete wrote that ‘nothing so much astonish’d me in this world as this’ during his stay in Makassar in 1657.⁶¹ He was talking about *bissu* of South Sulawesi, members of a ‘third gender’ in Indonesia.⁶² *Bissu*, who used to be prominent at the South Sulawesi court as keepers of royal regalia, continue to be a part of society in Makassar to this day.⁶³ The East India Company had a factory at Makassar between 1613 and 1667 and Makassar (or Celebes, the name which it was also known) featured in a number of published English travel accounts.⁶⁴ None of the records of the factory at Makassar mention the sexuality or unusual gender models of the locals and none of the anglophone published accounts, whether written by English or non-English authors, discuss the subject.⁶⁵ What exactly did a Dominican missionary find to be so astonishing about *bissu* and how can the silence of the anglophone discourse be accounted for?

There are no indigenous sources on *bissu* from the 16th or the 17th centuries.⁶⁶ The two Catholic sources that mention them both describe and conceptualise the identity in similar terms. The first mention comes from António de Paiva, who wrote a private report of his trip for the Portuguese Crown in 1544.⁶⁷ The second is Domingo Navarrete’s account, published in 1676.⁶⁸ Both of them conceptualised *bissu* primarily in terms of gender. De Paiva wrote that ‘they grow no hair in their beards, dress in a womanly fashion, and grow their hair long and braided; they imitate [women’s] speech because they adopt all of the female gestures and

verklaringen overwoekerd’; B. Teensma, ‘Literaire, filologische en moralistische bespiegelingen over de Siamese penisbel’, pp. 129–30. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Liesbeth Corens for providing this translation.

⁶⁰ Compare this with, for example, much less ambiguously negative representations of Ottoman ‘sodomy’ in early modern Anglophone discourse.

⁶¹ Domingo Fernández Navarrete, *The travels and controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete, 1618–1686*, ed. J. S. Cummins, (Cambridge, 1962), p. 109.

⁶² Andaya, ‘The Bissu’, p 27; more information on Southeast Asian gender diversity can be found in Kevin Purday, ‘Shamanic gender liminality with special reference to the NatKadaw of Myanmar and the Bissu of Sulawesi’, (MA Diss., University of Wales, 2013).

⁶³ Sharyn Graham Davies, *Gender diversity in Indonesia: sexuality, Islam and queer selves* (London, 2010).

⁶⁴ D. K. Bassett, ‘English Trade in Celebes, 1613–1667’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 31, no. 1 (181) (1958): pp. 1–39.

⁶⁵ This is based on a reading of the papers of the Factory at Makassar, see ‘Factory Records: Celebes’ in British Library: Asian and African Studies (previously Oriental and India Office Library), IOR/G/10.

⁶⁶ Andaya, ‘The Bissu’, 38.

⁶⁷ Brett Baker, ‘South Sulawesi in 1544: A Portuguese Letter’, *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 1, (2005): pp. 63–85, <<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=254041337347464;res=IELIND>>. [cited 30 Oct 15].

⁶⁸ Domingo Fernández Navarrete, *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la monarquía de China* (Madrid, 1676).

inclinations'.⁶⁹ Navarrete called them 'hellish Monsters of men in Women's Clothes'.⁷⁰ However, the question of sexual activity of the *bissu* figured in both accounts and was intertwined with the issue of gender. Both authors were particularly appalled at the notion of *bissu* being biological males who married other males. De Paiva wrote that 'they marry and are received, according to the custom of the land, with other common men, and they live indoors, uniting carnally in their secret places with the men, whom they have for husbands.'⁷¹ Navarrete relied on secondary information to confirm similar notions a hundred years later: 'Here', the Portuguese told us, 'some men would rather marry those Brutes than Women'. He stated two reasons for that: 'that they took great care to make much of their husbands' and 'that they were very rich and full of Business for they had the Monopoly of the Office of Goldsmith in those Parts.'⁷² Although neither of the authors refers to *bissu* as sodomites, a connection with sodomy is apparent in de Paiva's account: 'I went with this very sober thought, amazed [that] Our Lord would destroy those three cities of Sodom for the same sin and considering how a destruction had not come over such a wanton people as these in such a long time.'⁷³

Anglophone discourse accounts written in English and translated into it show that anglophone observers were capable of grasping the concepts of alternative gender models and translating it into their own notions of gender.⁷⁴ Early modern anglophone discourse used several tools to account for alternative gender models. The notion of a hermaphrodite was actively employed in anglophone discourse to describe native peoples of various genders in North America. Most of those mentions are either made by or refer to the writings of René de Laudonnière. In Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations*, Laudonnière writes that 'There are in all this Countrey many Hermaphrodites', with the following note in the margins: 'Many Hermaphrodites which have the nature of both sexes. which take all the greatest paine, and beare the victuals when they goe to warre.'⁷⁵

This information transcended primary accounts of the continent and was transferred into the wider image of North America. For example, N.N., the author of *America: or An exact description of the West-Indies*, wrote in 1655 that 'One thing, they say, there is peculiar to this Country of Florida, viz. that it breeds abundance of Hermaphrodites, more than any other part of the world beside.'⁷⁶ Gender and sexual activity were closely connected in those accounts. In some cases, Laudonnière's vocabulary was changed. In *America*, John Ogilby's 1671 cosmography, the author mentioned Laudonnière's travels in Florida, but wrote the following of the local people: 'Sodomy and defiling of young Children is accounted no sin:

⁶⁹ Baker, 'South Sulawesi in 1544: A Portuguese Letter', p. 68.

⁷⁰ Navarrete, *The travels and controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete*, p. 109.

⁷¹ Baker, 'South Sulawesi in 1544: A Portuguese Letter', p. 68.

⁷² Navarrete, *The travels and controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete*, p. 109.

⁷³ Brett Baker, 'South Sulawesi in 1544: A Portuguese Letter', p. 66.

⁷⁴ For more information on 'alternative' gender in early modern Europe, see Rudolf Dekker, *The tradition of female transvestism in early modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 1989).

⁷⁵ Richard Hakluyt, *The principal navigations, voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation*, (London, 1599–1600), p. 306.

⁷⁶ N. N., *America: or An exact description of the West-Indies* (London, 1655).

Yet though they are much inclin'd to Women, they attain to a great Age.'⁷⁷

Anglophone discourse in the seventeenth century had both the tool of the term *hermaphrodite* to describe alternative gender models and a way to substitute the notions of gender through sexual activity by replacing *hermaphrodite* with *sodomy*. However, neither of these things occurred in anglophone descriptions of South Sulawesi: the existence of *Bissu* seems to have been ignored by all English-speaking observers. This provides a curious contrast with Catholic accounts, both of which seem to have been disgusted with the practice. In the context of the strong condemnation of sodomy in wider anglophone discourse we might assume that English writers and texts translated into English would provide a similar moral judgement of South Sulawesi. One of the possible explanations of the silence of anglophone sources on *bissu* is the predominantly commercial nature of both English and Dutch involvement in the region. The records of the East India Company at Makassar reflect the focus on commerce and the desire to keep peaceful relations with the local rulers, who are only referred to when they grant certain privileges to the Company.⁷⁸ There was no incentive for the East India Company's merchants to present the natives as sodomites: it could have been harmful to the image of Makassar and the trade with it in the eyes of the English public. Thus, although anglophone discourse had an established keyword for encompassing alternative gender identities around the world, it was not employed in all instances of contact with sexually diverse societies worldwide.⁷⁹

Conclusion

This study adds substantially to existing scholarship on Southeast Asian sexual practices by shifting the focus from using European sources to uncover indigenous practices to studying them for their own sake in the context of European (in this case, specifically anglophone) notions of the gendered and the sexual. Instead of simply listing the sources in an attempt to find out more about the *bissu* or penis inserts, the methodology proposed in this article allows us to look at the sources more critically and employ them as tools for the study of contact and encounter.⁸⁰ This work is as much an exercise in an innovative methodology as it is a thesis on its subject matter. This method can be effectively used for the study of discourse on encounter with any area of the world, from the Americas (which are briefly touched upon in this study) to China, Japan, Africa or the Muslim world, where my current research on anglophone concepts of Ottoman sexual models lies.

⁷⁷ John Ogilby, *America: being the latest, and most accurate description of the new world* (London, 1671), p. 221.

⁷⁸ 'Factory Records: Celebes' in British Library: Asian and African Studies (previously Oriental and India Office Library), IOR/G/10.

⁷⁹ An alternative view, that the English at Makassar simply did not come into contact with *bissu*, figures of the royal court, is unlikely, as it does not explain why Catholic sources mention them (were Catholics more likely to be present at court ceremonies?). Besides, the factory at Makassar existed for a long enough time, most of the 17th century, for the English to be completely unaware of something that, as the example of penis bells shows, was likely to spark their curiosity.

⁸⁰ For the example of the former see Sun Laichen, 'Burmese bells and Chinese eroticism' – the author uses European sources, including Carletti and Fitch and quotes their mentions of sodomy, but completely ignores those in his own analysis – there's isn't even a comment on whether European accusations of sodomy had any grounding in indigenous sexual cultures.

The key issues of nature both as a part of abstract natural law and physical human bodies can be examined in a unique way in the context of contact, when the questions of similarities and differences were forced to the forefront of anglophone thinking about the world and their place in it. Combining the history of contact with that of the body is fruitful for both these areas of study, and it is an area that begs for future development.