

Amanda Lock Swarr



ENVISIONING AFRICAN INTERSEX

Challenging Colonial and Racist Legacies
in South African Medicine

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Introduction. Pathologizing Gender Binaries:
Intersex Images and Citational Chains • 1

Part I. Uncovering: Colonial and Apartheid Legacies

- 1 Colonial Observations and Fallacies: “Hermaphroditism”
in Histories of South Africa • 23
- 2 “Intersex in Four South African Racial Groups in Durban”:
Visualizing Scientific Racism and Gendered Medicine • 49

Part II. Recovering: Decolonial Intersex Interventions

- 3 Defying Medical Violence and Social Death: Sally Gross
and the Inception of South African Intersex Activism • 73
 - 4 #HandsOffCaster: Caster Semenya’s Refusals
and the Decolonization of Gender Testing • 102
 - 5 Toward an “African Intersex Reference of Intelligence”:
Directions in Intersex Organizing • 132
- Epilogue. Reframing Visions of South African Intersex • 156

Appendix One: Compilation of Works by and Featuring
Sally Gross • 161

Appendix Two: Cited Twitter Posts Referencing
Caster Semenya • 163

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UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Appendix Th ee: African Intersex Movement
Priorities (2017, 2019, 2020) • 165
Acknowledgments • 167
Notes • 171
References • 207
Index • 000

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viii • CONTENTS

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Introduction: *Pathologizing Gender Binaries:
Intersex Images and Citational Chains*

In 2009, South African Caster Semenya won the 800-meter event at the World Athletics Championship in track and field. But instead of celebrating her victory, Semenya faced accusations that her body was “too masculine” for her to compete in women’s sport. Sporting authorities, doctors, and media claimed that Semenya was intersex. Over the following decade, she was subjected to international scrutiny: her body was photographed, she endured explorations of her reproductive organs, and her chromosomes and hormones were evaluated to determine her eligibility to compete in women’s sport. Decisions about the “truth” of her gender changed again and again over the following decade, as supposed experts fought over the parameters of womanhood and the course of her life.

Now with two Olympic gold medals to her name, Semenya continues to contest regulations that currently bar her from her sport. The latest decisions of the International Olympic Organizing Committee prohibit Semenya from competing in the 800 meter unless she undertakes surgery or pharmaceutically alters her natural testosterone levels (an intervention that previously made her physically ill). Recent headlines indicate the global importance of these conversations,

declaring “Caster Semenya Case among ‘Most Pivotal’ Ever Heard” and “A Sports Arbitration Court Must Determine the Definition of a Woman,” and Semenya was named one of *Time* magazine’s 100 most influential people.

But while Semenya’s treatment is significant, and continuing international debates over her body are hailed as deciding who counts as a woman or a man, it is far from isolated. This book exposes how scientists and doctors have scrutinized innumerable South Africans’ bodies over the past four centuries to try to prove that intersex is more common among black people than white people. Countless studies in medical journals and books, film and television representations, and media discussions repeat the same claim. I debunk this erroneous claim and replaces it with a new assertion. In *Envisioning African Intersex*, I argue that colonial histories and scientific racism—a contrived comparison of bodies to justify white supremacy—form the basis for all intersex medicine. I foreground the work of African intersex activists who expose the material effects of such medicine and challenge their own pathologization.

Writing this book has taken me more than twenty years. In 1997, while researching trans and intersex medical literature as a graduate student, I came across several articles that all made the same unbelievable claim about the frequency of black intersex in South Africa. Well aware of racist histories of science and medicine, I began tracing the origins and repetitions of this assertion, growing a bibliography of publications focused on race and “intersex.” I never had the chance to explore this claim fully in my previous work, but I continued to query the wide acceptance of this problematic assertion, turning it over in my head and in conversations with activists and scholars. As the years went by, the implications of associating intersex with blackness across the Global South have made a deeper exploration of these histories urgent. This book thus explores why physicians and scientists continue to assert disproportionate black intersex frequency and the repercussions of the uncritical acceptance of this assertion.

Scientific definitions of intersex are pathologizing and taxonomic, encompassing up to sixty diagnoses affecting genitals, reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, and more. The term *intersex* has its etymological roots in the early 1800s and was widely taken up by medical professionals in the 1950s.¹ Since the 1990s, intersex has also been reclaimed as a term of self-identification, a reclamation that I will explore. Most contemporary discussions about intersex begin with questions about its frequency. As Iain Morland points out, both scholarly and popular considerations of intersex start with citations of statistics about the prevalence of intersex conditions. This gives false impressions that the “truth” of bodies can be separated from discourse and that maleness and femaleness

are actually unambiguous most of the time. Morland refuses to define intersex and rehearse figures because, as he puts it, “both are in dispute” (2011, 147). Instead, he suggests, “Let us suspend the assumption that we can know what intersex is, to explore how and why knowledge about intersex is produced” (147). Keguro Macharia mounts a related critique of research and statistics in queer African studies in which archival creation and collecting data to gain ngo funding or state support have “tended to produce work where numbers matter more than names and lives. The African queer, the focus of so much attention, has disappeared into a mass of acronyms and percentages” (2015, 145). I follow Morland and Macharia’s cautions about quantification and terminologies. Instead of providing numbers and definitions, this book sifts through these concepts and histories as inherently fraught.

Historians explain the *longue durée* of an idea as a shift that occurs imperceptibly over an extended period. This book demonstrates that the *longue durée* of racialized intersex takes place through efforts to create proof, especially visual proof, of gendered difference focused on bodies of people of color in the Global South. I argue that this slow imposition of ideas of raced gender “abnormality” as innate has materialized in two ways: through citational chains and objectifying scrutiny.

Assumptions of gender binarism enmeshed with race have become so commonplace that they function as quotidian, as invisible and part of the everyday. They seep into public consciousness through what I refer to as *citational chains*. Citational chains are references that build on each other to create truth claims despite fundamentally flawed foundations of the original works cited. These chains can include bibliographical citations of publications or citations of ideas that become repeated norms.² They create fictions that are repeated so often and circulated so widely that their origins are masked. Erroneous observations by colonial explorers and scientists’ troubled claims about Africans’ bodies are replicated in citational chains that span decades and centuries. Their scholarship positions “hermaphroditism” and intersex as always already connected to blackness, and it garners wide acceptance through insidious reach in academia, popular culture, journalism, and social media.³

Objectifying scrutiny, leering, and what it means to “see” are also integral to fusing race and intersex. Intersex medicine relies on doctors’ and scientists’ diagnoses with their eyes; they observe what they view as difference on the body, and then they test the body and invade it to try to see more.⁴ They document what they want to see through medical photography to provide visual data and evidence to each other. They rely on medical imaging—a wide range of technologies such as X-rays that create visual representations of the body for analysis—to

reveal internal structures of the body and justify medical treatment. Images are also manipulated to convince readers and viewers of raced gender binaries in texts and media, while fetishizing scrutiny ranges from colonial travel postcards to visual surveillance by the state.

Despite the deep roots of repeated and spectacularized depictions of intersex, these representations have always been challenged. In individual refusals that span centuries and collective actions that began in the 1990s, intersex South Africans have confronted medical violence, secrecy, and stigma by speaking openly. Reclaiming visual representations and creating their own media, those self-defined as intersex refuse exploitative imaging. African intersex activists share their theories and images through photography, film, and video, especially on social media, intervening in views of their lives not just for casual observers but for other intersex people in solidarity and mutual affirmation. The illusion that man/woman divides are unassailable and timeless requires constant surveillance, and because this illusion is always failing, institutionalized violence has enforced rigid gender binaries. But South African activists are creating new literal and figurative visions, refusing pathologizing histories, and decolonizing intersex.

Decolonial Visions of South African Intersex

African feminist scholars have pointed to the damage caused by the colonial imposition of gender dimorphism for many decades. Ifi Amadiume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987) contends that in precolonial times, the association of gendered roles with bodies was not present among the Igbo. Her analyses of a "flexible gender system" center local ideologies and disrupt universalizations about gender.⁵ Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí (1997) also famously argues that the category of "woman" did not predate colonialism in Yorùbáland; there were many ways to classify and interpret human bodies, and concepts of power were unconnected to genital anatomy. Oyèwùmí contends that colonial science and what she terms a "bio-logic" imposed dualistic gender as an unquestionable understanding of the social world. She thus asserts that the gendering and denigration of "women" (designated as "anafemales" in her ungendered assessment) were crucial to colonization.⁶ Macharia discusses Oyèwùmí's insights, recognizing their archival limits but asking, "If we take African gendering practices as theoretically significant, what might become possible in thinking through African and Afro-diasporic queer and trans politics?" (2019, 26). I share these insights not to generalize over regions and times nor to romanticize a precolonial past but to emphasize that African feminists have

long unsettled the presumptions of the gendered body in ways that are often overlooked by those in the Global North.⁷ These kinds of critiques—at the core of decolonial feminist approaches adopted by African feminists today—form the grounding for what I describe as intersex decoloniality.⁸

Intersex decoloniality is a way of articulating the inseparability of colonialism, race, and gender binarism. I conceptualize it in two parts: (1) an uncovering of colonial representations of “hermaphroditism” and intersex and their continued impact, and (2) a decolonial reconceptualization of gender centered in intersex self-determination and solidarity. African feminist decolonial approaches are integral to this thinking. In *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*, Sylvia Tamale articulates that while Africa is burdened by deep and irreversible histories that pervade every aspect of life, decolonial feminist work undermines “the structural, institutional and psychological linkages that still link Africa to Western neocolonial interests and exploitation” (2020, 18).⁹ Olajumoke Jacob-Haliso (2021) also describes the importance of dismantling colonial hierarchies and the white gaze. She asserts the need to recenter Africa as a way to rewrite problematic theories and histories.¹⁰

For Tamale, “The prefix ‘de-’ in the terms ‘decolonization’ and ‘decoloniality’ connotes an active action of undoing or reversal” (2020, 20). There are many approaches to this undoing among African feminists. Yvette Abrahams explains how decolonization takes place in everyday actions. She unlearns the effects of colonization by undoing them, and “Centimetre by centimetre my body begins to feel decolonised, brain cell by brain cell I begin to appreciate how deeply I have been colonised” (2021, 277). The deeply personal work of African intersex activists discussed in this book likewise both revises colonial scripts and reverses the violence of gender enforcement that they have experienced. I center arguments about such undoing and redoing in this text, merging decolonial feminist with critical intersex approaches to challenge the coloniality and racist science of gender binaries.¹¹

Envisioning African Intersex is conceptualized in two parts that reflect this decolonial framing. The first part of this book seeks to expose and rupture colonial legacies of gendered bodies. Racialized, capitalist, and gender oppression constitute what María Lugones calls the “coloniality of gender,” and, as in Tamale’s view, she suggests that decolonial feminism offers strategies for overcoming this oppression. Although much has been written on masculinity and femininity as produced by colonialism, widespread assumptions that material bodies (or “sex”) are innately dualistic require deeper examination. Lugones’s theorizations that colonized people could not fit categories of man/woman by design inform a decolonial intersex critique. As she puts it, “Only the civilized are men or

women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild” (2010, 743). This animalization of those who were colonized was integrally connected to their representations as “hermaphroditic” or “without gender” (Lugones 2007, 203). Lugones argues that colonizers imagined indigenous people of the Americas as “hermaphrodites or intersexed, with large penises and breasts with flowing milk” (195).¹²

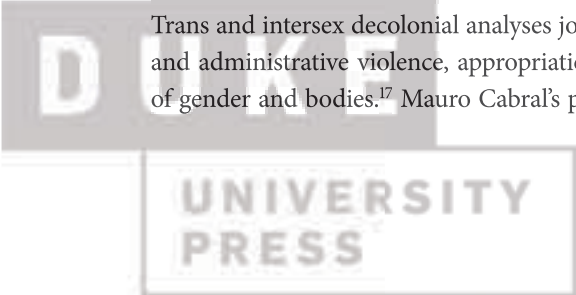
In different but related ways, the ascription of “hermaphroditic” bodies can be found throughout African colonial and diasporic histories. Hortense Spillers famously refers to US enslavement as producing “flesh ungendered,” in which Black bodies are “a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific” (1987, 67).¹³ Forcible ungendering, to draw on Spillers’s useful language, unsettles the innateness of gender binaries. The racist and colonial imposition of gender binarism further relied on what Sylvia Wynter describes as the long association of white people with “true” man/woman and Others as “untrue” (quoted in Scott 2000, 174). These parameters of truth marked African and African diasporic Others as “defective humans,” stripped of personhood (Wynter 2000, 25). Taken together, thinkers including Lugones, Spillers, and Wynter critically assess how certain people are construed outside binary gender and as primitive, defective, and animalistic. In the space of ungendering that *Envisioning African Intersex* follows to the present, there is a condemnation of those whose bodies are judged as ambiguous or “hermaphroditic.” I expose and trace histories of these colonial associations, especially in southern Africa, in chapters 1 and 2.

If objectifying colonial gazes see so-called hermaphrodites as “primitive” and rigidly differentiated gendered bodies as “civilized,” where does this leave those who are diagnosed or self-identify as intersex? C. Riley Snorton usefully interprets how Spillers’s conception of flesh ungendered manifests in Black trans history. He writes that if, as Spillers explains, “the capacity for gender differentiation was lost in the outcome of the New World, ordered by the violent theft of body and land, it would stand to reason that gender indeterminateness would become a critical modality of political and cultural maneuvering within figurations of blackness” (2017, 56). *Envisioning African Intersex* thinks Snorton’s “gender indeterminateness” with intersex decoloniality to explore spaces of political and cultural maneuvering and reconceptualizing.

Of course decoloniality must do more than remind us of the enduring legacies of colonialism (Rao 2020). The second part of this book thus consists of decolonizing intersex interventions that seek to reconceptualize colonial ideas of gender in three distinct chapters. Violence that targets intersex people

has always been met with resistance. Intersex activists have worked together against such violence across national borders since the 1990s, perhaps most strikingly in the African Intersex Movement (aim) initiative formed in 2017 by organizers from seven countries.¹⁴ Solidarity in African decolonial activism is grounded in common values and “shared and endured legacies of enslavement, colonialism, racism and neoliberalism” (Tamale 2020, 11).¹⁵ While Africa is a diverse continent, the violent mistreatment of those diagnosed as intersex has had striking commonalities that span geographical contexts. The three chapters in the second part of this book highlight different African activists’ approaches to challenging the silence and lies of colonially based science and medicine.

In addition to engaging African decolonial feminisms, this book equally relies on the insights of critical intersex studies. To date, the field has had what philosopher Hil Malatino smartly describes as two emphases: documenting histories and reforming medicine. Early work in intersex studies had importantly practical intent. But new work like Malatino’s eschews academic convention and construes “intersexuality as something other than the product of a positivist pathology whose roots must be discovered and clarified in order for treatment to be reconsidered and reformed” (2019, 3). Critical intersex studies rather follows intersex “to see where it goes, how it works, what arguments, assertions, and understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality it enables and disables” (3). In so doing, Malatino and other thinkers in the field create space to disrupt pathologization, looking at how gender is shaped by power and working toward a kind of undoing and reversal that dovetails with African feminist decoloniality. Morland follows a similar agenda in critical intersex studies, rejecting the fetishization that accounts of intersex often obligate. Morland refuses to spectacularize intersex in his work. He explains, “I will tell you about particular anatomies by telling you about the ethics and politics of medical and critical discourse, which is where anatomies are typically located anyway, together with the surgeries performed on them” (2011, 47).

Malatino and Morland’s work converges with other important recent scholarship that analyzes, for instance, how colonial science racially and geographically coded difference in intersex bodies (Eckert 2017) and explores how this science is challenged by contemporary intersex activists working transnationally (Rubin 2017). Critical intersex studies has also been closely intertwined with trans studies, where overt discussions of decoloniality have proliferated for over a decade.¹⁶ Trans and intersex decolonial analyses jointly call for interrogations of medical and administrative violence, appropriation, and homogenized understandings of gender and bodies.¹⁷ Mauro Cabral’s positionality as “an intersex and trans*


guy from a Latin American country (Argentina),” trained as a historian and philosopher and working full-time directing an international trans* organization, informs his analyses. For Cabral, decolonizing means addressing complicated relationships to both colonial and gendered language; challenging “the production of trans* and intersex people as ‘proper objects,’ ‘privileged examples,’ and, in general, valuable goods in the theoretical primitive accumulation of flesh”; and analyzing scientific and medical classification through the logics of international capitalism (quoted in Boellstorff et al. 2014, 422–23). These thinkers and areas of inquiry deeply inform the framing of this book. *Envisioning African Intersex* refuses to objectify intersex subjects, instead turning the gaze on institutions and practitioners. This book theorizes the creation of gender binarisms through the critical interventions of intersex theorists and activists.

Intersex Imaginaries and Images in the Global South

Anthropology and biomedicine have jointly shaped conceptions of intersex, and one of the most prominent efforts to classify gender in transnational contexts occurred in historical research on those labeled as *third gender*. The concept of “third gender” has been used to describe gender expressions outside man/woman binaries across time and geography, often in the Global South. The use of the numeric word “third” throughout scholarship focused on intersex and trans people already reinscribes a dual gender system (plus one). These identified as “third gender” are represented as foreign or primitive, their lives denigrated as evidence of Euro-American superiority or romanticized as transcending gender. Evan B. Towle and Lynn M. Morgan (2002, 484) were among the first authors to critique this idea: “The ‘third gender’ concept is by nature flawed because it subsumes all non-Western, nonbinary identities, practice, terminologies, and histories. Thus it becomes as junk drawer into which a great non-Western miscellany is carelessly dumped. Ethnographic examples can come from distinct societies located in Thailand, Polynesia, Melanesia, Native America, India, western Africa, and elsewhere and from any point in history, from ancient Greece to sixteenth-century Brazil to nineteenth-century England to contemporary North America.” “Third gender” designations turn on judgment of gender ambiguity as timeless—both primordial and predated—and reductionist, as these global generalizations group varied cultures and expressions together under one category. This kind of cross-cultural appropriation marks such gender expressions as generic, representative of a paradox of both inferiority and an “idealized existence in a utopian time and place” (477) in both academic and activist accounts. Some contemporary discussions of intersex similarly generalize and

romanticize those in the Global South as having escaped medical intervention and/or being linked to mythological historical and literary figures of “hermaphroditism.” Such efforts, while often well intentioned, are appropriative. As Towle and Morgan put it, “We do not believe that the goal of dismantling gender oppression and the binary gender system should seek legitimacy in narrow or sanctified appropriations of non-Western cultural histories or practices, although this method is used in anthropology and in the popular literature” (471). In short, “third gender” and other cross-cultural generalizations have promoted homogenization and appropriation at the expense of intersex people in the Global South.

Research intended to “discover” intersex communities and collect “evidence” demonstrates the disturbing reach of dominant imaginings embedded in ideas like “third gender.” Three locations—in Africa (broadly construed), the Dominican Republic, and Papua New Guinea—have been referenced as exemplars of exoticism for the past fifty years. Building on colonial histories, academic studies that drew attention to these locales all originated in the 1970s. Since that time, these three sites have continued to govern scholarly and public imaginations. Research in South Africa, the Dominican Republic, and Papua New Guinea collectively illustrates concerns at the core of decolonial intersex analysis.

The first of these sites is the animating force behind this book. Researchers assert that black people in Africa are more likely to be intersex than those in the rest of the world. The colonial roots of this claim, addressed in chapter 1, focus on black people’s bodies, and especially on genitals, as not clearly male nor female, and South Africa is the dominant location for this claim. The racist science and medicine of comparative anatomy has long been codified in scholarly literature across the African continent. Architects of colonialism and apartheid—a system of white supremacy manifested in policies of political, economic, and social separateness—violently controlled South Africans’ relationships, movements, and access to services. Policing gender binaries was integral to this power and control. Further, from the 1970s onward, published medical studies reinforced ideas of disproportionate intersex in black bodies. Scientists’ and doctors’ arguments primarily rested on visual data, especially physical exams of bodies and medical photography, as contrived evidence of their claims. In the chapters to come, this imaging is contrasted with self-representations and efforts of activists such as Sally Gross—one of the first openly intersex activists in Africa, who initiated globally pioneering intersex legislation—and the growing chorus of intersex South African activists mobilizing social media and changing policy.¹⁸

The second site brought under scrutiny is the Dominican Republic, initiated by the work of epidemiologist Julianne Imperato-McGinley in the 1970s.

In the town of Salinas, children locally referred to as Guevedoces (interpreted to mean “penis at twelve”) are raised as girls until puberty, when they develop anatomical traits often thought of as masculine. Imperato-McGinley’s scholarship pathologizes them as having a genetic condition—5 α -reductase deficiency—and residents of Salinas have come to be seen as representative of intersex physical difference. Beginning with her first publication in 1974, Imperato-McGinley’s work evoked global fascination and objectification, continued through ongoing academic research, pharmaceutical investigations, tv/film explorations, and hundreds of international news reports. The bodies of those scrutinized are represented as rare and exotic, and their community is described with words such as “remote,” “primitive,” and “mysterious.” Even pharmaceutical giant Merck has capitalized on this community, conducting research to develop what has become the best-selling drug flutamide (Propecia/Proscar), a drug that mimics 5 α -reductase deficiency to block testosterone production and treat prostate issues and baldness.¹⁹ Imperato-McGinley’s scholarship and the varied scientific and popular accounts that have followed it reflect a fear of sudden intersex “afflictions,” and these accounts compare 5 α -reductase deficiency to a debilitating illness that can strike suddenly and unexpectedly. Academic and popular representations alike consistently express stunned disbelief at locals’ reported acceptance of Guevedoces in contrast to their own biases.

While most analyses to date focus on dissecting the bodies of Dominicans as a source of scientific data, I reverse this gaze to those examine doing the scrutinizing. Why has this community remained a focus of fascination and become representative of the Global South for more than fifty years? One answer to this question rests on visual depictions of those in Salinas that begin with disturbing photographs in Imperato-McGinley’s research (e.g., Peterson et al. 1977). In the tradition of intersex medical photography that I interrogate in chapter 2, the eyes of Dominicans are obscured with a white bar. But this bar does little to disguise the physical and emotional distress of those facing the camera’s gaze.

In Imperato-McGinley’s research, exploratory surgeries and photographic documentation are justified in the name of science but without benefit to community members who became unwitting patients. One image represents a crying eighteen-month-old baby reaching for someone just outside the photographic frame. Viewers see pain in the face of a twelve-year-old posed nude (except for socks) with large postsurgical bandages on their abdomen. Another photograph shows three relatives together against a Lamprey grid—a backdrop of measured squares invented in the late 1800s and popularized in anthropometric photography as a means to measure indigenous bodies and quantify their inferiority. They are pictured shirtless, and captions compare their musculature and hair.²⁰

There is no discussion of individual patients pictured, most of whom are not seeking care for illness but who are experimented on for the sake of research itself. In numerous unsettling photos, children's genitals are portrayed with unidentified white fingers spreading labia for the camera. The captions of all these photographs boldly describe them as universally representative of disorder and aged development.

While these photographs from the 1970s were first published in medical journals, they have continued to be reprinted and to represent 5 α -reductase deficiency and intersex in the Global South. The current website for the Urological Sciences Research Foundation (2022) includes black and white photographs from Imperato-McGinley's co-authored 1977 publication. Their framing invites voyeurism: the eyes of those pictured are covered with a white bar while viewers gaze at their nude bodies. The photos are positioned next to a map showing the location of the Dominican Republic and a short description of "The 'Guevedoces' of the Dominican Republic." Speaking for the Urological Sciences Research Foundation, the unnamed author explains 5 α -reductase deficiency with bizarrely inaccurate and unscientific language: "These children appeared to be girls at birth, but at puberty these 'girls' sprout muscles, testes, and a penis" (Urological Sciences Research Foundation 2022). These representation positions those in Salinas as primitive and of the past, while also depicting photographs from fifty years ago as if they were in the present moment.

Innumerable film and television representations mirror this website's content, tone, and presentism. A Science Channel television program (*Through the Wormhole*) includes the black and white photos in a segment on embryonic gender development narrated by Morgan Freeman (Acutt 2016), and a documentary by the BBC as part of a program called *Countdown to Life* uses the images similarly (Austin and Johnson 2015). A tweet from the Science Channel advertising *Through the Wormhole* (September 13, 2016) consists of Imperato-McGinley's photograph of three shirtless people against a Lamprey grid with white bars over their eyes and the text "A person's apparent sex can change during puberty."²¹ *The Third Sex* (Roberts 2004), a film aired on television in the United States and Europe and then distributed via video, goes as far as staging an enactment of actors exploring a set intended to look like a remote village. Film footage is altered to look like grainy black and white, accompanied by spooky music, while a narrator describes Imperato-McGinley's work at length for general viewers.²² The imagined creation of this scene is one of colonial anthropological discovery.

These same images are reproduced in contexts that do not even feign scientific agendas. My Google image searches documented their repeated inclusion

on pornographic websites. Journalists have also consistently used the images; old and new images together accompany dozens of headlines that exclaim, for example, “Inside the Baffling Caribbean Village where Little Girls Turn into Boys at the Age of 12 . . . and Even Suddenly Grow Penises” (Godden 2017), “The Mysterious Caribbean Village Where Young Girls Morph into Boys” (Petkar 2017), and “There’s a Village in the Caribbean Where ‘Girls’ Grow Penises at Age 12” (*Pink News* 2017). The “mysterious” descriptions of the intrigue of residents who “transform,” “morph” or “grow penises” follow familiar colonial tropes of exotic rarity. In these varied accounts, Dominicans are reified for gender pathologies based on contrived research conducted at the expense of people in Salinas.

Attention to the third site in the Global South was incited by the influential research of anthropologist Gilbert Herdt on “hermaphrodites” among the pseudonymic Sambia in Papua New Guinea.²³ Herdt’s research began, like Imperato-McGinley’s, in 1974.²⁴ This scholarship presents another unsettling representation that eschews ethics in problematic efforts to expose and discover unknown and titillating gendered secrets. Herdt engaged in decades of research on sexuality and gender in Papua New Guinea, including well-known studies of ritualized homosexuality and semen transfer among men (e.g., Herdt 1987). He collaborated at different times with psychiatrist Robert Stoller and later with endocrinologist Julian Davidson on what, of particular note here, Herdt labels “clinical ethnography” (1985, 15) in the region.

Herdt and Stoller focus their attention on a reportedly intersex shaman named Sakulambei, and their research exemplifies the inherent problems of research on intersex in the Global South. In a 1979 interview, Herdt and Stoller persuade the reluctant Sakulambei to discuss his body by convincing him of their interest in his shamanic activities and knowledge (Herdt and Stoller 1985). But their real goal, as they state in their writing, is to gain Sakulambei’s trust to learn about his body. In a conversation between Herdt and Stoller that took place in front of Sakulambei but was not translated for him, they explain their decision to lie.²⁵

Herdt: I’m going to do something that’s not quite ethical, but I’m going to leave the language vague enough so that he may suspect that you are . . . you may have some hermaphroditic qualities . . . [pause].

Stoller: Good. [I do, in the sense that I can work with hermaphroditic patients in such a way that a few thought I was a hermaphrodite. That is why I said “good” and felt that it was not unethical.]

FOOTNOTE 27, HERDT: I’d forgotten I’d done this until translating the tapes in 1981–1982. It amounts to a lie: I as much as said [Stoller] was a

hermaphrodite. I don't think it was harmful; the circumstances of the interview were extraordinary. I never lie with informants, but fudged in this instance. I think it helped; but readers may disagree with this tack. [S: One should never, in doing research, lie in order to get information. Supervision corrects such mistakes.] (Herdt and Stoller 1985, 135, bracket insertions in original)

Admitted deceptions include falsely leading Sakulambei to believe that Stoller is intersex ("fudging"), which he admits he is not, and promising to keep secrets about Sakulambei's body that are later exposed as the subject of their multiple publications. They observe in this same publication that Sakulambei is "a good liar" (1985, 136) and does not trust them, but with good reason. It is Herdt and Stoller who continue to seek a "truth" of his body using dishonesty.²⁶

As in South Africa and the Dominican Republic, Herdt's research on intersex in Papua New Guinea hinges on visual scrutiny as an indicator of truth and pathology. In Herdt and Stoller's discussions with Sakulambei, they learn of a German businessman named Gronemann who visited Papua New Guinea around 1960. Sakulambei explains to them that at ten years old, he was undressed and photographed by Gronemann, and he remained extremely upset that he was never paid for this privilege. Two years after this interview, Herdt also learned that Gronemann had had sex with the young Sakulambei before taking these photos, raising unanswered questions of sexual exploitation and pornography (Herdt and Stoller 1985, 142). Herdt and Stoller believe that the photo being taken at all is evidence that Sakulambei's body is visibly hermaphroditic. Lena Eckert's careful analysis of this situation suggests that the authors believe Gronemann's photography "testifies to the existence of something that needs to be displayed as exceptional" (2017, 147). Even though they do not reprint the businessman's photographs, they invoke their existence as proof of intersex, relying on the businessman's gaze as trustworthy and authentic. The use of images is what Eckert refers to as the myth of photographic truth and its invocation of realism.²⁷ In the exploitation of Sakulambei, as in other colonial travel and research, photography was considered positivist evidence and even more accurate than the eye (Pinney 2011).

Images have the power to create meaning, boundaries, and realities, rather than just reflecting and observing them. Those deemed intersex in all three of these contexts are similarly subjected to documentation of their bodies. All photographs are stenciled off the real, like a footprint, rather than an unsalable representation of reality, and photographs of people deemed intersex are inherently interpretive, dwelling in the "usually shady commerce between

art and truth” (Sontag 1977, 6). From the inception of the camera in 1839, the coupling of evidence and photography positioned some bodies as superior to others. Photography has been critical to state and scientific practices such as surveillance and record keeping of gendered and racialized differences.²⁸ Recorded images were crucial to burgeoning racial science, in Anne McClintock’s words, as a source of “mechanical and therefore objectively sound ‘factual’ knowledge about racial ‘types,’ ‘specimens,’ and ‘tribes’” (1995, 124) and to endorse eugenic control. As scientifically justified means to create illusions of some people as civilized and others as primitive, “photography became the servant of imperial progress” (125), and violence enacted with cameras captured moments that then transcended time.²⁹ With increasing reproduction and distribution, photographs widely established a fallacy of realism in the service of institutional power.

Taken together, representations of these locales in the Global South serve as critical contexts for “seeing” in the science of raced gender. There is no better tool than photographs to create a sense of truth and, as Sontag puts it, to “help people take possession of the space in which they are insecure” (1977, 9). Reproduced images of intersex and race are traced throughout this book. But rather than accepting the realities such images seek to create, *Envisioning African Intersex* turns the scrutinizing gaze back to the photographers, critiques the reach of their photos, and centers the perspectives of photographic subjects. Throughout these chapters, images are shown to be sites of violence in their creation and reproduction, codifying false realities of intersex in South Africa and the Global South more broadly. But these same images are reclaimed and reframed by activists seeking to create new decolonial realities.

Unsettling Approaches to Intersex

Envisioning African Intersex grew out of my relationship with South African intersex activist Sally Gross, which began in 2000, and it is grounded in my research and activism in South Africa over the past two decades. Queer African scholarship is integral to my methodology (my approach to this book) and my choices of methods (what I did to write it). Central to this work are critiques of who sets the parameters of knowledge and challenges to understandings of who counts as a theorist and what counts as theory. With these ideas in mind, this book not only unsettles claims of scientists and doctors but asks questions, including, What does it mean to position Gross, the activist who started the first intersex organization on the African continent, as a gender theorist? Can social media like Twitter be read as sites for Semenya’s views on gender testing in

sport? How do videos on YouTube articulate the visions of South African activists refusing and reframing intersex stigmatization? My effort to answer these questions is centered in insights from African scholars and activists, methodologically challenging generalizations about gender and sexuality based in the Global North that do not travel and translate well.

Much work in queer and transgender studies transnationally has been invested in the recuperative project of finding and creating archives and genealogies. But scholars including Zethu Matebeni (2014a, 2021), Keguro Macharia (2015), and Anjali Arondekar (2009) urge us to interrogate colonial archives of sexuality and gender as subjects of inquiry, rather than sources of them.³⁰ Extractive methodologies of “mining” archives for evidence of contemporary sexual and gender identifications recall South Africa’s destructive past of unethical research, as well as literal mining of the earth for diamonds and gold. I instead aim to trace alternate histories, refusing the discovery of intersex patients and the fetishization at the center of medico-science, reading South African histories to expose doctors’ and scientists’ racialized practices of gendering under colonialism and apartheid.

These methodologies compelled me to seek sources outside conventional archives and publications. This book thus draws on a complex of materials—colonial archival documents, a wide range of African scientific and medical literature spanning a century, popular publications on gender binaries in the Global South, films on intersex in various African contexts, personal materials and interviews from the global Queer Archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, life histories and interviews I conducted from 1997 to the present, participant observation in South African lgbtqi organizations, decades of media by and about African intersex people, and online sources, including websites of organizations, YouTube videos, and social media posts.³¹ Recognizing the impossibility of a comprehensive genealogy necessitated embracing partiality and anecdotal accounts as an antidote to positivist analyses of intersex.

Many of my methodological decisions have been similarly driven by decisions about what not to do. I write extensively about and describe photographs, especially in medical contexts, but I do not feel comfortable reproducing photography that was so often taken under duress and with questionable consent. I have chosen not to seek out intersex folks in the public eye for interviews; instead, I represent their opinions through writings and online postings where they have chosen to express themselves. Cross-culturally, many scholars who have written about intersex have been secretive in conducting their research and exploitative in their decisions to reveal others’ secrets. I have been privy to secrets and conducted interviews with those who have cautiously revealed themselves

to be intersex since 1997, but I chose not to discuss these experiences rather than to betray trust or risk lives.

In researching medical and popular histories of intersex, many of my efforts to search for relevant materials evoked confused terminology of the past or yielded minimal results. Historically, the term *hermaphrodite* has been deployed in various ways and expressed in contexts ranging from Greek mythology to derogatory slurs. In this book, I leave the archaic descriptor *hermaphrodite* in the past, except when historically indicated or reclaimed by activists. As mentioned earlier, *intersex* can refer to a vast range of gendered bodily formations or can be a term of self-identification and varies widely over time and place.³² While highly contested since its adoption in 2005, disorders of sex development (dSD) is another phrase used medically.³³ I rely on the more widely used term *intersex* in accordance with activists' conventions and concerns about dSD referring to some bodies as "disordered."³⁴ Gross put it this way: "I do not use the recent label 'dSD' because, as introduced, the first 'D' stands for 'disorders' and I deny that intersex is pathological or a disorder" (2013).

Direct recommendations, such as this one made by a collaboration of South African intersex activists, further guide my decisions about language; they state, "Use the term intersex. Stigmatising language leads to poor mental health, marginalisation, and exclusion from human rights and social institutions. The term intersex promotes equality and human rights for people born with atypical sex characteristics" (*National Dialogue* 2018, 30). I follow these activists' directives and their urgings to "uncomplicate" the term *intersex* as a means of increasing conversations that are "understandable across educational and classed backgrounds" (*National Dialogue* 2018, 32). I also use the concept *intersex medicine* to signify a range of theories and protocols used to pathologize and treat people under this rubric. Rather than beginning this book with a description of medical conditions and their histories, I reserve these discussions for chapters where I trace said nuances and genealogies.

Some reading this book may wonder about my thinking behind use of the words *gender* and *race*. One of the earliest interventions of feminist studies was to distinguish between *sex* as the body—male/female—and *gender* as social roles and obligations—masculine/feminine. But following the work of feminist and queer theorists over the past thirty years, I instead refer to the entirety of the man/woman binary as *gender*. As this book discusses in many different ways, distinctions between male/female bodies (as sex) are not natural nor consistent, and bodies are historically and geographically produced. Let me put it plainly: I think the distinction between sex and gender is artificial and replicates problematic scientific notions of the gendered body. For these rea-

sons, I do not find the word *sex* very useful, and I choose not to use it in order to highlight the production of gender and its assumptions about the body.

Race also presents an ungrounded shifting invention that I engage and question throughout this book. Efforts to fabricate empirical evidence to justify colonial hierarchies created taxonomies and pathologies, including slippery “scientific” concepts such as tribe, nation, ethnicity, language, and population. In South Africa such concepts were intended to produce “racial purity” and to guide colonial and apartheid policies (Braun and Hammonds 2014). Analyzing the use of this overlapping and changing terminology points to its emptiness while recognizing the violent strength of its imposition. I also follow many South African scholars’ preference not to capitalize racial terms, including *black*, following historical discussions about race and enforced capitalization under colonialism and apartheid.³⁵ Scholars such as Asanda Ngoasheng (2021) refuse capitalization as a reminder that race is socially constituted and to push back on lexicons imposed by the Global North.³⁶ In thinking about both gender and race, I find it more useful to analyze the concepts themselves and the questions they raise than to evaluate the skewed evidence they attempt to produce.

Tamale exhorts, “It is extremely important for Africa’s decolonization/decolonial project that Europe’s manipulation of history and the imperialist intellectual deceit is uncovered” (2020, 17). In the chapters to come, I work to uncover the historical deceit that imposed fallacies about raced and gendered bodies and denigrated intersex people. The first two chapters of this book focus on colonization and apartheid in South Africa, exposing gendered deceptions perpetuated through citational chains and visual exploitation. Chapter 1 traces current ideas back to their historical roots to theorize colonial representations of “hermaphroditism” and four centuries of unsubstantiated claims. This chapter disproves three historical fictions of Africans’ bodies as inferior and disproportionately “hermaphroditic.” First, I demonstrate that the racist fantasy of the “Hottentot apron” is meritless. Second, I parallel South African histories with the emergence of medical notions of “true hermaphroditism” in colonial Europe. I consider why and how this diagnosis eventually excluded Europeans and instead could only be “discovered” in the colonies, especially in Africa. Following this genealogy to the 1900s and then to the inception of apartheid in 1948, I explore how the problematic invention of Bantu Gynaecology—a field that claimed African women were physically different from and inferior to European women—and theories of race and gender plasticity popularized in the 1950s converge in the new field of intersex medicine in South Africa.

Chapter 2 investigates the claim popularized by H. J. Grace’s influential 1970 master’s thesis at the University of KwaZulu-Natal that “intersexuality on the

whole is more common in the Bantu than in other races” (3–4). The intention of Grace’s thesis was to prove inordinate commonality of intersex among black South Africans, but he was unable to do so. Nevertheless, as this chapter explains, since this time, his work has been cited by scientists worldwide as definitive proof of racialized claims about intersex. Though a close reading of this thesis and a review of related medical publications, I follow a citational chain of literature that continued to parrot its erroneous assertions over the following fifty years. This pathological creation of intersex difference relies on visual representations, especially exploitative medical photography, to create a sense of truth. In this chapter, I establish how a set of interrelated strategies—definition, scrutiny, repetition, and justification—codified claims about disproportionate intersex and blackness with lasting transnational influence.

The second part of this book continues to dismantle colonial and apartheid gendered fallacies by centering South African activists’ strategies. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 each foreground decolonizing intersex praxis, retaining a focus on South Africa while also including collaborations that span the continent. In chapter 3, I analyze the inception of intersex activism in Africa. In 1999, anti-apartheid activist Sally Gross established the first intersex organization on the African continent—Intersex South Africa—and she was the driving force behind a host of legal transformations with global significance until her untimely death in 2014. Chapter 3 explores Gross’s interventions into issues as complex as the contentious implementation of discredited medical protocols in South Africa, class-based complications of whiteness and intersex in South Africa, and the intersection of intersex with environmental racism and debt. Throughout her life, Gross mounted strong critiques of teratology, the colonial science of monstrosity, and of prominent scientists such as John Money to detail damage caused by theories and protocols imposed from the Global North. My conversations with Gross and her diverse writing and film work elucidate how she shifted public opinion about intersex science and its colonial roots.

Chapter 4 analyzes gender regulations and medically unnecessary procedures—including clitoridectomy and gonadectomy—forced on Caster Semenya and other athletes by sporting authorities with neocolonial agendas. These procedures rely on the same colonial citations and claims about disproportionate intersex frequency problematized in chapters 1 and 2. In this chapter, I challenge histories of race and geopolitics in gender testing and the racially biased agendas of the orchestrators of gendered policies. But this chapter also demonstrates that Semenya and other athletes refuse to acquiesce to the leaders of global sport, who reiterate colonial rhetoric and falsely claim disproportionate rates of intersex in the Global South. Social media campaigns #HandsOffCaster

and #IAAFMustFall, as well as Semenya's declarations on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, have created new dialogues that challenge colonial claims and redefine what it means to be a woman. Chapter 4 exposes racist sport science and foregrounds Semenya, her contemporaries, and her supporters' decolonizing interventions into the shifting parameters of gender.

How do contemporary intersex activists in Africa decolonize and retheorize gender through their self-representations? The fifth and final chapter of this book explores the priorities of the African Intersex Movement and the establishment of what they term an "African intersex reference of intelligence" (aim 2017, 2020). Since 2017, activists from seven countries have worked together under the auspices of aim to issue a set of unified demands, including ending nonconsensual surgeries and establishing new legal policies. In this chapter, the visual exploitations that began this book are rejected. Instead, contemporary activists interrogate medical protocols and navigate challenges of visibility through campaigns that use videos and photographs in new ways. Activists' self-representations on social media and film starkly contrast the anonymity and violence that characterize histories of intersex medicine. Their critiques of medical protocols and their policy demands expand understandings of gender, as they model new decolonial understandings of gender and call for accountability and retribution.

Envisioning African Intersex demonstrates the impact of colonial ideologies that codified racialized gender distinctions and how their false claims became canonical. I show how images, film, and video enforce the dominant narrative of disproportionate African intersex, circulating far beyond medico-scientific contexts and beyond national borders. Activists who are disrupting these images and creating new representations provide important historical correctives with quotidian impact. Contemporary African intersex activists envision fresh understandings of gender, offering new, decolonial ways of seeing.

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introduction

- 1 Most contemporary published sources cite Richard Goldschmidt (1917) as the earliest author to deploy the term *intersexual*, but dozens of citations throughout the nineteenth century use this language as a way to describe bodies, sexual attraction, communication styles, and even marriage arrangements. In 1866, the *Oxford English Dictionary* first defined *intersexual* as “existing between sexes, pertaining to both sexes.” German geneticist and biologist Goldschmidt then used the word *intersex* to refer to sex determination and a continuum of gender in moths in a precursor to its accepted uses today (Stern 1967). Even when the word gained widespread acceptance in the 1950s, its meanings continued to differ over geographic and temporal contexts.
- 2 I rely on Judith Butler’s conception of “citationality” (via Derrida and Lacan) in this formulation. In her discussion of gender and performativity, she explains cited reiterated norms as those that “precede, constrain, and exceed the performer” (1993, 234). I expand on the meaning and power of citationality in the chapters to come, especially in chapter 2.
- 3 I use the phrase “always already,” following conventions in critical theory and coined by Martin Heidegger, to refer to assumed actions without definable beginnings. It describes what is “always” present and “already” preexisting in common thought. This concept works in concert with the quotidian to explain black intersex frequency, especially in the Global South, as seemingly unremarkable because it forms part of daily life.
- 4 I appreciate Iain Morland’s explanation of these diagnostic processes: “Intersex is often popularly conflated with ambiguous genitalia—external sexual anatomy that cannot be easily described as entirely female or male, such as a larger-than-typical clitoris. However, for clinicians, an intersex diagnosis can refer also to attributes that are not apparent on the body’s surface, including xxy sex chromosome or indifference to the hormones that produce effects connotative of masculinity” (2014, 111).
- 5 Amadiume’s influence is immense and recently inspired a thirty-year retrospective in the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* (Magadla, Magoqwana, and Motsemme 2021). In this special issue, Zethu Matebeni (2021) smartly articulates

the dominance of colonial understandings of gender and their implications for present-day considerations.

- 6 Oyèwùmí's work has been critiqued as imagining an ungendered precolonial community without adequate empirical data (Mama 2001) or as giving too much agency to Euro-American colonizers (Thomas 2007). Nevertheless, the bones of her intervention have inspired related research for decades.
- 7 I agree with Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon's arguments about the importance of foregrounding African feminisms and "feminist knowledge produced on the continent *in conversation with, in response to, and as part of* a broader conceptualisation of black feminism than what is commonly known" and follow their directive here (2021, 4).
- 8 Decolonial, postcolonial, and anticolonial feminisms emerge from multiple locations and periods but commonly critique the ubiquity of raced and colonial histories and amplify the political importance of challenging their legacies (Asher and Ramamurthy 2020).
- 9 Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon point out that the recent revival of interest in African feminism in South Africa today has been a response to widespread calls for decolonization and the importance of feminisms to these efforts (2021, 6).
- 10 I am drawing on Olajumoke Jacob-Haliso's presentation, "Decolonisation and Disputations in African Women's Studies," for the Centre for Social Change at the University of Johannesburg, where she shared ideas from her then-forthcoming volume, edited with Toyin Falola, *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies* (Jacob-Haliso and Falola 2021).
- 11 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's discussion of the appropriation of decolonialization—and their pointed assertion of what it is not—is relevant here; "It is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; is it not a philanthropic process of 'helping' the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes" (2012, 21).
- 12 I especially appreciate P. J. DiPietro and colleagues' detailed analysis of this element of Lugones's thinking, borne of the authors' close collaborations with her: "For Lugones, gender does not signify the binary categories of either male or female, or even a spectrum of genders between these poles, but a system of relations with light and dark sides. The light side of the colonial/modern gender system . . . is based on the ideas of biological dimorphism and heterosexuality between men and women, opposing an ideal of the weak, passive, domestically bound, and sexually pure woman to that of a strong, active, self-governing, and sexually aggressive man. The light side is hegemonic in that it establishes the modern meanings of 'woman' and 'man,' and thus of 'human'—those who are civilized and evolved enough to warrant the labels 'woman' and 'man.' By contrast, the dark side of the colonial/modern gender system does not organize gender in these terms; colonized/nonwhite females were 'understood as animals in the deep sense of "without gender," sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity' [Lugones 2007, 202–3]. . . . Most important, the light side of the colonial/modern gender system is maintained by perpetuating the dark side: the more people of color are dehumanized, the more womanly and manly white bourgeois people become" (DiPietro, McWeeny, and Roshanrava 2019, 15).

- 13 At the end of this chapter I discuss my reasoning for capitalizing *Black* when referring to those in the US out of respect for political preferences in this context and also following many South African scholars' decisions not to capitalize *black* as a refusal of lexicons imposed by those in the Global North.
- 14 The seven countries represented are Burundi, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.
- 15 National and regional distinctions have been artificially imposed, and feminists including Jacob-Haliso (2021) argue that collective African protest is itself decolonization.
- 16 Important discussions on this subject include Aizura (2018), Gill-Peterson (2018a), and Driskill (2016), just to mention a few; see also Wolff, Rubin, and Swarr (2022).
- 17 Joseli Maria Silva and Marcio Jose Ornat articulate a trans decolonialist approach as a "strategy with which to overcome the notion of the primacy of scientific knowledge over those who suffer the effects of epistemic violence" (2016, 220).
- 18 The other pioneering intersex activist of whom I am aware is Julius Kaggwa from Uganda, who wrote an amazing autobiography presciently published in 1997.
- 19 Cary Gabriel Costello points out the eugenic components of preventing gender "abnormalities," including the warning on the label of Propecia that cautions, "Women who are pregnant must not use propecia and should not handle crushed or broken propecia tablets because the active ingredient may cause abnormalities of a male baby's sex organs." As Costello goes on to articulate, "intermediate genitalia are framed as abnormal and as triggering a medical emergency" (2016, 86). I was recently prescribed a medication with finasteride in it, and a pharmacist personally called me to issue a required extra warning about possible "abnormalities to male genitals" that could occur during my pregnancy though I am physically unable to become pregnant. Controversies about this drug continue to the present. Merck is currently being sued in a class action suit brought by men in the Global North who took finasteride and faced side effects of post-finasteride syndrome, ranging from impotence to suicide. Further, illegal use of finasteride to mask steroid abuse has led to athletes being banned from global athletic competitions.
- 20 For more on the Lamprey grid and its development and use as a tool of scientific racism, see Landau (2002) and Pinney (2011).
- 21 Science Channel (@ScienceChannel), Twitter, September 13, 2016, 10:00 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ScienceChannel/status/77589976768086018>.
- 22 I explore this film's comparative medical claims and discussions of black intersex in South Africa at length in chapter 2.
- 23 Sambia is Herdt's pseudonym for the region under his consideration.
- 24 Interestingly, years after Herdt and Davidson's research began, they suggested that Imperato-McGinley conduct research in Papua New Guinea herself (e.g., Imperato-McGinley et al. 1991), and Herdt and Stoller also reference her work collectively (e.g., 1985), further indicating interdisciplinary and transnational collusions.
- 25 Herdt and Stoller published their own transcription of their conversation and inserted their later thoughts in brackets.
- 26 In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the questionable ethics of Herdt's work more broadly came to the fore when representatives of the Sambia took court action

- and forced him to face public scrutiny, as reported in US-based publications such as *Anthropology Today* and *Anthropology News*. They contested the ethics of his work, lack of compensation, and failure to share his publications in public library repositories in Papua New Guinea. For discussion of this court action and public statements by Herdt and his accusers, see “Media” (1998); Dariawo et al. (1999); Herdt (1999); *Anthropology Today* (2000); see also Eckert (2017).
- 27 Gronemann’s publication apparently includes an unclothed picture of Sakulambei with his eyes blacked out, purportedly for anonymity (Eckert 2017, 129–30); I analyze similar photographs and conventions of photographic dehumanization in chapter 2.
 - 28 For instance, Foucault’s ([1963] 1994) analysis of the dominance of the clinical gaze troubles gendered categorical violence and surveillance, disrupting ideas considered diagnostic and definitive.
 - 29 Authors including Donna Haraway (1989) and Paul Landau (2002) juxtapose cameras and guns, discussing how colonial hunting with a camera allows photographers to ultimately control time, nature, consumption, and possession.
 - 30 Rahul Rao’s (2020) analysis of the neoliberal spaces of Uganda, India, and Britain is another text that navigates these tensions of exploring the queer archival past, asking if there are ethical ways to explore the “past-in-present” and “future-in-present.”
 - 31 The *Queer Archive* (<https://gala.co.za/>) was founded in 1997.
 - 32 There are also a range of new, similar terms in use; for instance, the Organisation Intersex International prefers *intersexuation* as a term “to approach sexuation—known as a set of biological and symbolical phenomena leading a person to recognize him/herself as belonging to one sex or the other—and not sexuality” (Montañola and Olivési 2016, 2). Eckert (2017) suggests *intersexualization* as a way to describe the process through which intersex diagnoses and labels are imposed.
 - 33 *dsd* is an inconsistent acronym that can include the words disorders/differences, sex/sexual, development/differentiation, and so on, depending on authors’ preferences.
 - 34 Dissatisfaction about *dsd* is not uniform but extends globally; as David Rubin notes, “The proponents of the shift from intersex to *dsd* adopt medicalized language in an effort to generate improved treatment outcomes, but the *dsd* nomenclature has generated significant opposition from some intersex activist groups, such as Organisation Intersex International, whose members argue that the *dsd* nomenclature has discriminatory social and political implications” (2017, 131; see also Curtis 2007).
 - 35 My thinking on this benefits from discussions on social media initiated by Shireen Hassim, who alerted me to Asanda Ngoasheng’s publication. I capitalize Black only when referring to the United States, in deference to Black scholars and activists who explain this decision as a claim to power in the face of histories of enslavement (Appiah 2020).
 - 36 Ngoasheng writes the following about her use of lowercase letters: “It is about rejecting linguistic disciplining, because languages are one of the tools used to oppress, erase and challenge black people. The use of small letters is jarring and should be jarring linguistically, because it is done to force the reader to pause and

think—why is ‘black’ or ‘white’ not capitalized, and what is the author trying to tell me by not capitalising it?” (2021, H7–48n2).

chapter one: colonial observations and fallacies

- 1 *Bantu Gynaecology* defines Bantu to include “Negroid peoples” of southern Africa who speak one or more of two thousand dialects of the Bantu language and share a set of similar phenotypic characteristics deemed inferior (Heyns 1956, 1–2). Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Bantu, a word for “people,” was used to refer to speakers of a group of languages in Africa. It was deployed under apartheid to describe Africans as physically inferior and to politically justify violent genocidal policies. The word was later largely replaced with African or black in demographic descriptions by those in power. I elaborate on the 1950s origins and development of the field of Bantu Gynaecology later in this chapter. *Bantu Gynaecology* is the most influential publication of Godfrey Phillips Charlewood (1909–2003), a South African-born obstetric/gynecological surgeon who was trained at the University of Cape Town and in England. Charlewood served Britain’s Indian Medical Service for over a decade. He returned to South Africa in 1947 and worked at Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto and then in private practice in Johannesburg. Charlewood was very influential in training physicians and founded the College of Medicine of South Africa in 1954, as well as serving as president of the Southern Transvaal branch of the South African Medical Association (Van Dongen 2003).
- 2 I later found that these pages pictured a nude person with the caption “A ‘true’ hermaphrodite with female breasts, rudimentary vagina, uterus, penis and ovotestis” (Charlewood 1956, 13–14).
- 3 Library censorship and theft of medical and sexology texts like Havelock Ellis’s *On the Psychology of Sex* for pornographic purposes provide important points of comparison (e.g., Bright and Crowley 2014).
- 4 European travel to southern Africa began in the 1500s, with the first recorded ships docking at the Cape of Good Hope from France in 1530, England in 1579, and the Netherlands in 1595 (Mlambo and Parsons 2019, 62). Now part of contemporary South Africa, the Cape of Good Hope was colonized by the Netherlands’ West India Company and Dutch settlers in 1652 as a stopping point for those traveling around the southernmost point in Africa and to enslave the region’s indigenous people.
- 5 Gordon (1992) provides a string of citations from the 1700s to the 1900s that all made the assertion that Khoi people were the connecting link between humans and “the brute creation,” in part reliant on this categorization of their genitals as hermaphroditic. The term *eunuch* is as complicated as *hermaphrodite*; it was sometimes used synonymously and at other times indicated castration.
- 6 The work of A. Marius Wilson (1911) provides another example of this hierarchical thinking.
- 7 Anatomy was not privileged as a way to distinguish between male and female bodies until the nineteenth century, and in Europe the primary genital distinction during this time was “heat”—“the heat which causes the female vagina to ‘pop out’ into the morphologically identical penis” (Jones and Stallybrass 1991, 81).