Boy-Wives and Female Husbands

Studies of African Homosexualities

Edited by
Stephen O. Murray
and Will Roscoe

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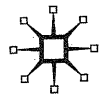

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PREFACE[1]

"ALL VERY CONFUSING"

AMONG THE MANY MYTHS EUROPEANS HAVE CREATED ABOUT AFRICA, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring. For Europeans, black Africans—of all the native peoples of the world—most epitomized "primitive man." Since primitive man was supposed to be close to nature, ruled by instinct, and culturally unsophisticated, he had to be heterosexual, his sexual energies and outlets devoted exclusively to their "natural" purpose: biological reproduction. If black Africans were the most primitive people in all humanity—if they were, indeed, human, which some debated—then they had to be the most heterosexual.

The figures of "natural" and "primitive man" have proven indispensable to Western projects of self-definition since the Greeks imagined non-Greeks as darker, hairier, cruder, and more profligate than themselves—as *barbaros*. The valuation of the primitive can and has varied. The sylvan "wild man" of medieval folk belief was a monster and widely feared. The noble savage of Rousseau and others was idealized—"natural" man was healthier, better adjusted, the bearer of wisdom. But in all cases the primitive serves the same function: to highlight that which distinguishes Western cultures by describing that which is not Western. Savagery proves indispensable to civilization, as does primitivism to progress, childhood to adulthood, deviancy to normalcy. Ultimately, every social difference that subdivides Western societies—ethnic, racial, national, and not the least sexual—has been mapped on to the ambidextrous figure of primitive man.

The sexualization of "primitive" Africans can be traced to Edward Gibbon's comments in the ninety-fourth chapter of his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. When it was published in 1781, hardly any Europeans had traveled more than a few miles into the African interior. Still, Gibbon wrote, "I believe, and hope, that the negroes, in their own country, were exempt from this moral pestilence [i.e., homosexual 'vice']" ([1781] 1925: 506). Belief and hope have been confounded in reports of African homosexuality ever since. A century later, Sir Richard Burton, who had observed homosexual practices firsthand in the Near East and South Asia, gave Gibbon's wishful speculation credence, reporting that "the negro race is mostly untainted by sodomy and tribalism" (1885: 246). The boundaries of his so-called sotadic zone, that region where homosexuality was presumably indigenous did not extend south of the Sahara in Africa.[2]

Yet others acknowledged that "sodomy" occurred in Africa but claimed that it was introduced by non-Africans—Arab slave-traders (Kagwa [1918] 1934: 98) or Europeans—or by another African group.[3] Eastern Bantu-speakers claimed that pederasty was imported by the Nubians (Schneider 1885: 295-96); the Sudanese blamed Turkish marauders (Weine 1848: 120). Although such beliefs (which have counterparts throughout the world) may tell us something about perceived ethnic boundaries, they cannot be relied on as evidence for the actual origins or transmission of cultural traits, especially those that are stigmatized.

Unfortunately, rather than dispel the myth of African sexual exceptionalism, anthropologists have often reinforced it by not seriously investigating same-sex patterns, failing to report what they do observe, and discounting what they report.[4] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, one of the most widely respected authorities on indigenous African cultures, said nothing about male homosexuality in his classic 1937 study, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Zande*. Nor did he mention homosexual relations among the Nuer of southern Sudan in his equally influential monograph on that people.[5] Decades passed from the time of his fieldwork until he finally reported what he had learned about male homosexuality among the once-fierce Azande of the northern Congo.[6] In 1957, in a relatively obscure journal, and then in more accessible venues in 1970 and 1971, he related how Azande warriors routinely married boys who functioned as temporary wives.

The practice was institutionalized to the extent that the warriors paid "brideprice" to the parents of the boys. This instance of age-stratified homosexuality, comparable in elaboration to the same-sex practices of ancient Crete or Sparta, had already lapsed by the time of Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork in the 1930s, although it was still remembered. The scope of these practices might be entirely unknown today had Evans-Pritchard not decided to finally write about them shortly before his death.

Other anthropologists, in Africa as elsewhere, have denied (or dismissed) the presence of homosexuality even when they observed it. Alan Merriam, for example, in one sentence stated that homosexual behavior was absent among Bala men and in the next reported native claims that the *kitesha*, a gender-defined social role, "is a homosexual" (1971: 93-94). When homosexuality is acknowledged, its meaning and cultural significance are discounted and minimized. By claiming that homosexual relations are solely due to a lack of women, for example, or are part of a short-lived adolescent phase, the possibility of homoerotic desire—that an individual may actually want and find pleasure in another of the same sex—is effectively denied. In the 1930s, Herskovits asserted that homosexuality among Dahomey youths was merely situational and opportunistic: "[When] the games between boys and girls are stopped, the boys no longer have the opportunity for companionship with the girls, and the sex drive finds satisfaction in close friendship between boys in the same group. . . . A boy may take the other 'as a woman' this being called *gaglgo*, homosexuality." Yet in the immediately following sentence he reported, "Sometimes an affair of this sort persists during the entire life of the pair" (1938: 289).

Ethnocentric attitudes are often all-too evident. In the 1930s, Geoffrey Gorer complained that among Dahomean royalty, "Sexual perversion and neurotic curiosity were developed to an almost European extent" ([1935] 1962: 141). Four decades later, Michael Gelfand employed the same judgments to claim the opposite for Zimbabwe: "The traditional Shona," he rhapsodized, "have none of the problems associated with homosexuality [so] obviously they must have a valuable method of bringing up children, especially with regards to normal sex relations, thus avoiding this anomaly so frequent in Western society" (1979: 201).

In fairness, the task of anthropologists, even the most conscientious, is daunting. Their research has always depended on the approval and material support of political authorities—originally those of the colonial powers, today those of both Western and African states. Indeed, as Sally Moore has pointed out, contemporary anthropologists are no less wary of offending the black governments under whose shadow they labor than earlier generations were of white colonial regimes (1994: 6). Given the overtly homophobic attitudes and policies of some African governments (see the discussion of events in Zimbabwe in Part IV), it is not surprising that few anthropologists have made African sexuality, let alone homosexuality, a focus of their research.

The close identification of anthropologists with political authorities also means that ethnographer-informant relations are often fraught with tension. In this context, inquiries about sexuality typically result in a cat-and-mouse game, as Kurt Falk discovered in the 1920s:

> To begin with, it is difficult to judge the truth of stories and answers to questions. Secondly, those questioned, under the suggestion of the asker, often guess and readily answer not only the questions in the desired way, but exaggerates further, hoping to make the researcher happy. And then as the questions mostly touch on the subject of sex, they are very reticent and tend more than otherwise to disavowals and denials. It is easier to learn about the subject by questioning a knowledgeable member of a foreign tribe that has lived among them. Here also, however, caution is suggested and control is always to be exercised. (Falk 1923: 42)

Consequently, native denials of homosexuality should be regarded skeptically, as Brian MacDermot learned while conducting field research among the Ethiopian Nuer in the 1960s. MacDermot's informants told him in no uncertain terms that sex between men simply did not occur in their society, and he believed them (MacDermot 1972: 99). Then, one day, he noticed "a crazy old man . . . accepted by everyone in the village . . . [who] either tended the cattle or at other times helped the women harvesting corn or carrying burdens." As the old man treaded off to join the women in their work, Doereding,

MacDermot's primary informant, began to tell a story "which completely contradicted all I [McDermot] had thought and learnt so far about Nuer homosexual relations":

> It had always been stressed by the tribesmen that homosexuality between men was impossible, for if discovered amongst them it could be punishable by death. Doereding now told me about a crazy man he had once known who lived near Nasir in the Sudan and who frequently dressed as a woman. This was different, Doereding explained, because "the man had actually become a woman"; the prophet of Deng had been consulted and had agreed to his change of status. The prophet had decided to call on the spirits and after consultation had declared that indeed the man was a woman. Therefore, he could dress in women's clothes and behave as a woman. From that time onward it was agreed that "he" should be called "she," and "she" was allowed to marry a husband.

"All very confusing," MacDermont concluded with a note of exasperation, "and so totally against what the Nuer had been telling me, that I questioned Doereding carefully, but he failed to produce further explanation" (MacDermot 1972: 119).

For individuals from a society in which homosexuality is defined as a unitary, predominantly sexual phenomenon with fixed internal psychological motivations—and who have judged that phenomenon so harshly that even its leading social engineers and intellectuals are afraid to study or discuss the subject—the diversity of African homosexualities is, indeed, "all very confusing." But as this volume shows, African homosexuality is neither random nor incidental—it is a consistent and logical feature of African societies and belief systems.

Today, especially where Western influences (notably Christianity and Marxism) have been strong, the belief that homosexuality is a decadent, bourgeois, Western import has become common. In the late 1970s, when the mother of South African Simon Nikoli discovered that he was gay, she said, "I knew I should not have sent you to that white school" (Bull 1990: 45).[7] Sensitized by missionaries and Western education, defensive in the face of stereotypes of black hypersexuality, and resentful of sexual exploitation in colonial institutions, the first generation of postcolonial Africans was extremely reluctant to

discuss the subject of homosexuality.[8] For most, the negotiation of African identity remained tied to European standards of morality. In seeking to replace a "genuinely perverse" with a "genuinely normal" Other, they drew on the same rhetoric employed in colonial discourse on native sexuality (Bleys 1995: 4-9; see also Dunton 1989). As the medical model of homosexuality was being abandoned in the West, it was widely adopted in the developing world.

In the African diaspora, as well, the subject of homosexuality has evoked denials and just-so stories attributing it to alien sources. In the United States, where Afrocentrism—the movement among Americans of African descent to construct and embrace African history, customs, and values—has become influential, questions of what "tradition" does and does not include are highly politicized. In 1990, a member of the rap group Public Enemy asserted, "There's not a word in any African language which describes homosexual. If you want to take me up on that, then you find me, in the original languages of Africa, a word for homosexual, lesbian, or prostitute. There are no such words. They didn't exist."[9] In a similar vein the Nigerian-English sociologist Ifi Amadiume denied the presence of lesbianism in what are otherwise described as marriages between women and decried Western black lesbians using "prejudiced interpretations of African situations to justify their choices of sexual alternatives" (1987: 7).

What began with denial has ended in a near taboo on the subject of African homosexualities—a taboo nonetheless based on European, not African, morality. The colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it—and systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it.[10] As the chapter by Marc Epprecht shows, however, these systems were not successful as long as the reaction of the colonized was simply to hide or deny such practices. Only when native people began to forget that same-sex patterns were ever a part of their culture did homosexuality become truly stigmatized.

Popular images of Africa—as the "dark" continent, the "cradle" of humanity, where distinctions between human and animal, civilized and savage, are tentative and easily reversed—continue to cloud Western views of the continent and its people (see Mudimbe 1988 and 1994). The anthropological literature also offers changing and varied constructions of Africa. In the early twentieth century, in response to the Victorian rhetoric of savagery and primitivism, anthropologists

embraced functionalism and emphasized the integration, morality, and coherence of African societies—thereby redeeming them from an image of anarchy for their Western readers. In the postcolonial period, "change" has replaced "custom" in anthropological writings, and images of stable, traditional, and conservative African societies have given way to depictions of social "breakdown" in the face of urbanization and modernization. Africans are portrayed as emerging from stable social systems into a state of cultural disruption no longer "African" nor fully European (Moore 1994: 57). Some anthropologists have suggested that the collapse of the tribal order is resulting in a new immorality (see, for example, the chapter by Tessman). Many nonanthropologists have taken the next step in such a line of argument by naming homosexuality as one of the "immoralities" to be blamed on the effects of colonialism. Today, Western rhetoric about "African sexuality," with its myths of super-virile men and lascivious women, has found new life in accounts of AIDS in Africa and seems to underlie research agendas (see Chirimuuta and Chirimuuta 1987; Schoepf 1995).

Understanding African homosexualities requires not only abandoning these myths but also suspending certain deeply held Western beliefs and values concerning sexuality, love, and personal relationships. Although the ideals of voluntary marriage based on mutual choice, sexual attraction, and monogamy are now almost universally embraced in Western societies (and in a growing number of other countries), it has only been in the past century and a half that a majority of individuals could hope to attain them. A major impetus for egalitarian relationships has come from feminism, both during its first wave, in the nineteenth century, and its more radical second wave, beginning in the 1960s. For a growing number of Western women, the key to voluntary and mutual relationships with men has become the attainment of economic and legal independence from them. As these ideals have been more widely adopted, attempts to police the borders between voluntary and involuntary sexuality have become increasingly fine-tuned. Relationships between individuals of unequal status (between a powerful man and a woman employee, for example, or an older man and teenaged boy) have become increasingly suspect.

But in non-Western (and in earlier Western) societies in which arranged marriages prevail and strict rules limit and predetermine marriage partners, very different expectations prevail regarding love,

sex, and free will. In their personal relationships, not only women and girls but also boys and men lack choices that are taken for granted in contemporary Western societies. Love (intimacy, companionship, care), while welcomed in a primary relationship, is not necessary or always expected. We should not be shocked, therefore, that in some African societies adolescent boys entered arranged relationships with older men without being asked if they were willing or what their sexual preference was (a concept that did not exist, in any case)—any more than the even more common practice of arranged marriages for adolescent girls with older men shocks us. We should also be prepared to find, as Epprecht shows, that such relationships had a range of meanings for their members—for some, being a boy-wife was almost a kind of slavery, for others a deep bond of love. Finally, it is important to remember that where there is power there is resistance. Lila Abdul-Lughod, for example, has shown how women subjected to rules of seclusion in highly patriarchal cultures (desert Bedouins) find ways to resist and undermine the power of men (1986). We cannot assume that African boys any more than girls and women were passive victims of social forces. Indeed, some young people of both sexes actively seek relations with older adults. The black South African activist Zackie Achmat entitled his 1995 memoir "My Childhood as an Adult Molester."

Instead of attempting to forge yet another mythical African unity—a single, consistent homosexuality across a culturally homogeneous continent—this book offers multiple Africas and diverse patterns of same-sex sexuality. While we do attempt to make generalizations about patterns in the Conclusion and Appendix II, the contributors to this volume focus on specific groups and places, offering, if not always "thick" descriptions in the sense of Clifford Geertz, at least detailed and specific case studies, and they separate the description of practices and beliefs from generalizations about them. Indeed, if nothing else, the diverse backgrounds of the contributors ensure that no unified image of Africa emerges. They include anthropologists, sociologists, historians, linguists, and journalists. Several have had extensive firsthand experience in Africa (or are African themselves), and an oral history provides a detailed account of one contemporary African's same-sex life. These recent studies are supplemented with earlier ethnographies, which are reprinted here because of their value as primary sources and their

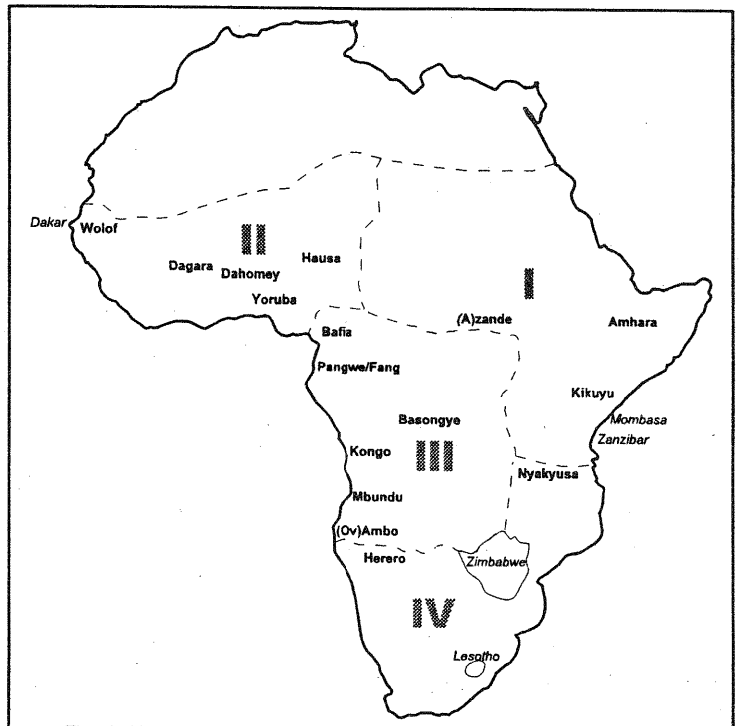

Fig. 1. Key groups and places (in italics) discussed. Roman numerals correspond to sections of the book.

inaccessibility. The authors of these reports include missionaries, colonial doctors, and anthropologists.

This book is organized geographically according to four broad regions of sub-Saharan Africa (see fig. 1): Part I covers the Horn of Africa, the Sudan, and East Africa; Part II, West Africa (including coastal West Africa and the interior sudanic region); Part III, Central Africa (from the tropical rainforests of the equatorial region to the Congo basin and east to present-day Tanzania); and Part IV, southern Africa (from Mozambique and Zambia to South Africa and Namibia).[11] Each of the four regional sections begins with a survey by the editors of historical and anthropological reports. The book concludes with a review of the literature on woman-woman marriages, a general

conclusion, and an appendix II in which correlations between same-sex patterns and other features of African societies are analyzed.

Although this collection offers a wealth of evidence and insightful analyses of African homosexualities, the study of this subject has only been seriously undertaken in the past decade and a half. This book therefore necessarily reflects the unevenness of the research to date. Some of the regions considered are better represented than others (for example, West Africa compared to Central Africa), and certain traditions are examined in some detail by more than one contributor (for example, the gender-defined homosexual roles of coastal East Africa), while others are barely covered (such as the mixed- and cross-gendered healers and spirit mediums among Bantu-speaking groups in Angola and Namibia).

In every region, female same-sex patterns are poorly documented and frequently misunderstood. Infrequently revealed to men, especially outsiders, female-female sexuality has rarely been described by anthropologists working in the African countryside and almost never mentioned by observers of postindependence African cities. Still, Audre Lorde was surely right when she argued that sexual contact "has existed for ages in most of the female compounds across the African continent" (1984: 50). With so many African men working away from their homes, it would be unusual for African women not to turn to each other, as indeed they do in the southern African "homelands." Unfortunately, no one has seriously looked for parallels to South African woman-woman relations elsewhere in the continent, and very little has been published on female homosexuality in the labor reserves of Central Africa. Only in recent years has a body of retrospective accounts by lesbians in South Africa begun to appear, which describe their experience of growing up invisible to themselves (but not always to others).[12] Some work has been done in documenting marriages between African women (see the final section of this book). While this practice has been reported for several African societies, it is poorly understood and the question of sexuality within these relationships hotly debated.

Balance in presentation and discussion of male and female patterns would be desirable, but no degree of commitment to that goal can produce evidence that doesn't exist. At the same time, the reports on woman-woman relationships in southern Africa by Kendall and

others suggests that a rich field for research does exist. It is our hope that the disappointment of various readers in the subjects not covered (or not covered well) in this collection will inspire the commitment on the part of researchers and institutions to undertake the work needed to correct its shortcomings.

Despite these limitations, the studies included here make an important contribution to anthropology, history, gender studies, and theories of sexuality (including the contentious field of "queer theory"). Taking their lead from sociologists and historians, and inspired by feminist critiques of sex roles and power, researchers have been asking provocative and productive questions about how sexuality, that seemingly most private of all human experience, is socially constructed. We are only beginning to ask the same questions about other cultures. Recent work by Gil Herdt on homosexuality in Melanesian initiations, Will Roscoe on the North American berdache, Stephen Murray and Annick Prieur on Mesoamerica, Kira Hall and Serena Nanda on the *hijras* of India, and Alison Murray and Saskia Wieringa on Indonesia reveal how productive the social constructionist paradigm is when applied to the analysis of non-Western homosexuality. At the same time, these studies have raised some important challenges to certain assumptions often made by social constructionist theorists. Although the homosexual patterns of Western and non-Western societies are distinct, this diversity is not infinite. It has become apparent that certain patterns tend to recur across cultures and historical periods. Anthropological research on homosexuality raises the question, exactly *what* social and historical factors explain both the occurrence of different same-sex patterns *and* the regularity within these patterns?

Consideration of evidence on African homosexualities can help offset the ethnocentrism of much recent research in sexuality and gender. Theorists like Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, and Michael Warner, for example, consider only Western societies and, in the main, only the recent past of their own countries. Occasionally, contemporary sexual identities are contrasted to those of "tribal" societies—usually those of native North America, whose berdache or alternative gender role has been well documented (see Roscoe 1998). A more fruitful comparison, however, would be between Euro-American sexual identities and same-sex patterns found in non-Western

urbanized, agrarian societies, of which Africa provides several examples. Such comparisons could be critical in substantiating or refuting claims about the uniqueness of modern homosexual identity, and we hope the evidence herein will be so used. As Gaudio argues in his chapter, "Gender theory, and the ultimate goal of widening the scope of human beings' options for self-expression and survival, thus stands to benefit from the consideration of practices that do not derive from the same political or philosophical framework as the theories themselves."

In a 1987 article surveying evidence on African sexuality, Daniel Hrdy reiterated Gibbon's assertions when he categorically stated that "homosexuality is not part of traditional societies in Africa" (1987: 1113). Such claims are not merely a matter of scholarly interpretation. They have genuine social consequences because they stigmatize those who engage in homosexual behavior and those who are grappling with gay identities. Their implications are particularly ominous when it comes to preventing HIV transmission, which remains an ongoing concern for nations throughout the continent. With the publication of this book, we hope such claims will be finally acknowledged for what they are—wishful, unfounded prejudices.

AFRICA AND AFRICAN HOMOSEXUALITIES: AN INTRODUCTION

"JUST BECAUSE THEY LIKE THEM"

IN LEADING THE EXPLORATION AND COLONIZATION OF AFRICA, the Portuguese became the first Europeans to realize that African sexuality and gender diverged in surprising and, to them, shocking ways from their own. In the early seventeenth century, their efforts to conquer the Ndongo kingdom of the Mbundu (Umbundu) were stymied by the inspired leadership of a warrior woman named Nzinga (c. 1581-1663). Nzinga had become *ngola,* or king, by succeeding her brother, which was not unusual in a matrilineal society like the Mbundu's. Less typical was the fact that she had ordered her nephew's death to prevent him from claiming his father's title. Nzinga proceeded to organize a guerilla army and personally led her warriors into battle. She successfully outmaneuvered the Portuguese for nearly four decades (Sweetman 1971, 1984: 39-47).

In the late 1640s, a Dutch military attaché observed firsthand what must have struck him as the strange organization of her court. As *ngola,* Nzinga was not "queen" but "king" of her people. She ruled dressed as a man, surrounded by a harem of young men who dressed as women and were her "wives." Wherever she appeared, her subjects fell to their knees and kissed the ground (Dapper 1670: 238). Nzinga managed to preserved Ndongo independence for a generation—

indeed, it was not until the early twentieth century that the Portuguese finally broke Mbundu resistance.

Other early reports from Angola, discussed in Part III, make it clear that Nzinga's behavior was not some personal idiosyncrasy but was based on beliefs that recognized gender as situational and symbolic as much as a personal, innate characteristic of the individual. A result of these beliefs was the presence of an alternative gender role among groups in the Kongo and Ndonga kingdoms. According to Andrew Battel, an English prisoner of the Portuguese in the 1580s, natives of the Dombe area were "beastly in their living, for they have men in women's apparell, whom they keep among their wives" (Purchas 1625, vol. 2, bk. VII, chap. 3, sec. 2, p. 973).

The reports from Angola set the tone for what followed. When natives like E. E. Evans-Pritchard's Zande informants told Europeans that men had sex with boys "just because they like them," Europeans were shocked, incredulous, and confused. They recorded but did not understand sexual and gender practices that epitomized for them how black Africans were different from (and inferior to) them. Although such reporting leaves much to be desired by way of objectivity and detail, European accounts document widespread same-sex patterns and roles throughout the continent. In the introductions to each regional section that follows, this literature will be reviewed for the evidence it offers on same-sex practices and social roles. The rest of this chapter provides an overview of African cultures and history, and introduces key terms and concepts used in this book.

THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

When the Portuguese made their first landfalls along the coasts of Africa, the continent was the home of racially and culturally diverse societies with ancient roots. In West Africa, the Songhay empire, centered in Mali; the Mossi and Ashanti (Asante) states to the south; the Hausa city-states to the west; and a series of kingdoms along the sudanic belt south of the Sahara were flourishing, as were the kingdom of Kongo near the southwest coast and a string of Bantu-speaking states in the interior. In southeastern Africa, the great stone city of

Zimbabwe was the capital of a trading empire with connections reaching to China. These black African states were typically ruled by divine kings and had complex political and legal systems. In yet other cases, large numbers of people were organized into societies without state institutions, on the basis of kinship groupings (the Tiv of Nigeria and the Nuer of Sudan, for example). At the same time, small bands, such as the Xun (!Kung or "Bushmen") and Mbuti ("Pygmies"), pursued lifestyles similar to those of the earliest human occupants of the continent—which is to say the earliest humans, since the species is believed to have evolved in eastern Africa some 3 million years ago.

The distribution and types of societies in Africa reflect a combination of ecological and historical factors. The continent, more than three times the size of the United States, is transected by a series of distinct climatic zones that mirror each other as one proceeds north and south from the equator. The central equatorial region, from coastal West Africa to the Congo basin, is an area of high rainfall and tropical forests suitable for the cultivation of root crops, such as yams and manoic. Surrounding this area to the north, east, and south is a crescent of grasslands and woodlands known as the sudanic zone, where cultivation of grain crops and herding are typical. North and south of this are deserts—the Sahara and the Kalahari. Finally, narrow zones of Mediterranean climate prevail along the northern and southern coasts.

Languages are also distributed in bands across the continent (see fig. 2). Arabic (and other Afro-Asiatic) languages are spoken along the coasts of the northern continent and in the Sahara, with large islands of Nilo-Saharan languages in the center of this area and along the Niger River. Below the sudanic belt, a broad swath of Niger-Congo languages, including numerous Bantu ones, extends from western Africa, across the Congo basin, to the East African coast. Finally, Khoisan languages are spoken by the hunter-gatherers in the southwest and by a few other isolated groups. The distribution of Bantu is believed to reflect prehistoric migrations beginning as long as three thousand years ago, when Bantu-speakers from the lower Niger River began to carry the technologies of digging-stick horticulture and, later, iron-working south to the Congo basin and east to the interlake region of Kenya and Tanzania, where cattle herding developed. Bantu-speakers continued to migrate southward down the east coast to the

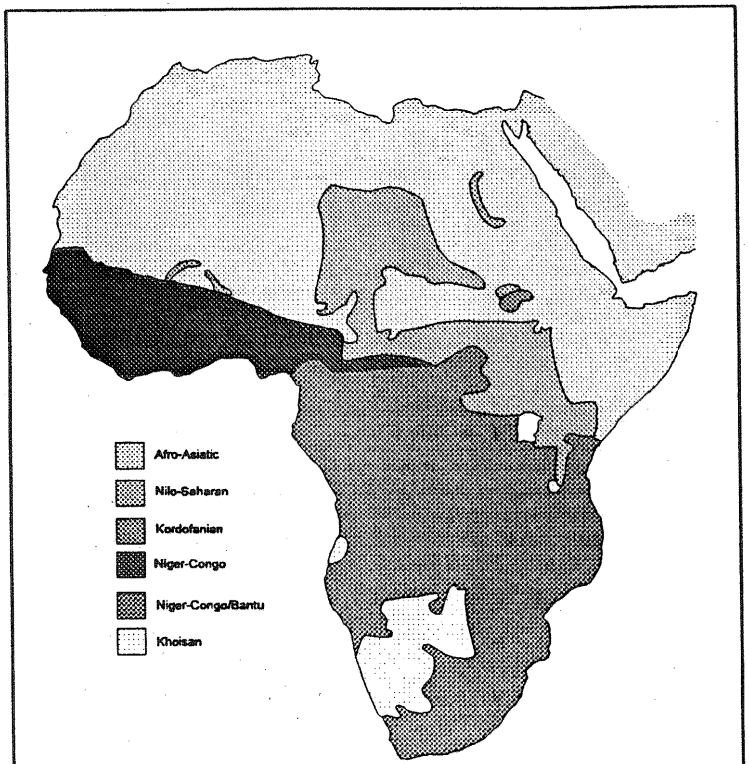

Fig. 2. Distribution of African languages ca. 1900

continent's southern tip. In all these areas, they are believed to have supplanted (or absorbed) older populations of hunter-gatherers.

By 1000 C.E., the transition to sedentary, digging-stick horticulture was complete in sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of African societies were engaged in the production of plant and/or animal food, and the surpluses produced by these economies supported the emergence of powerful states, beginning with the Mande-speaking Ghana empire in Mali, from the eighth to eleventh centuries. Indeed, while western Europe languished in the Middle Ages, devastated by plagues and interminable dynastic wars, black kingdoms were emerging throughout Africa, based on the combination of agriculture, herding, iron-working, and slavery.

Although African societies share economic, linguistic, and historic continuities, significant cultural diversity—and conflicts between both related and unrelated groups—exists as well. Most African societies traditionally depended on horticulture (that is, hoe-based agriculture) for most of their subsistence. The herding of cattle and other domesticated animals was also widespread, in areas outside of the equatorial region and the Congo basin, where disease spread by the tsetse fly made it impractical. Many societies in the southern sudanic belt, interlake region, and southeastern Africa combined horticulture and husbandry, while Saharan and sudanic societies depended primary on pastoralism. A few groups in coastal and riverine environments depended on fishing, and in isolated areas, mostly in the deserts of southern Africa, groups engaged in hunting and gathering.

Throughout Africa, unilineal descent groups or clans—groupings of individuals who recognize kinship on the basis of presumed descent from an originary ancestor (or totem)—are common. Often, descent groups are the basic units of political systems for very large populations. Approximately 31 percent of "traditional" African societies have patrilineal descent groups; 20 percent have matrilineal groups; and 43 percent have descent groups in both lines. (Five percent are bilateral, without descent groups in either line [Aberle 1961: 665]). Most patrilineal societies are also patrilocal and polygynous. The differences between societies in which descent is traced through the father, which are typically patrilocal and polygynous as well, and those who trace descent through the mother are significant. Women tend to be much less restricted in the latter, sexually or otherwise. Matriliny is most common in horticulture societies, where women do agricultural labor, and in savannah environments; patrilineal groups dominate in the tropical forests. A few matrilineal societies in Africa are based on mixed stock-raising and agriculture, but as David Aberle commented, "The cow is the enemy of matriliny, and the friend of patriliny" (1961: 680).

Other differences among African societies reflect their various histories of contact and cultural exchange with non-Africans. By the second millennium, trade and migration from Southeast Asia by way of Madagascar resulted in the introduction of bananas, taro, and yams, which subsequently became staple crops throughout equatorial Africa. Arab contact along the east coast began in the ninth century. In the century that followed it spread southward along the Nile and from port

cities on the Atlantic coast of Africa westward to the sudanic states. In these areas today, Islamic belief and practices and pre-Islamic African religions often co-exist and are sometimes syncretized. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is the home of Coptic Christians.

European contact was inaugurated by the Portuguese, who established a foothold in Angola and the lower Congo basin in the early sixteenth century. The Portuguese, followed by other European powers, began to trade with African kings for human slaves. Between 1450 and 1870, over ten million Africans were transported to the Americas. Initially taken from western Africa, the trade eventually spread to east Africa and Madagascar. As late as 1879, however, most of sub-Saharan Africa—with the exception of southern Africa, where first Dutch (after 1652) then British colonists (after 1795) made significant inroads into the interior—remained unknown to Europeans, and few areas were under direct European control. All that changed with remarkable rapidity. Within two decades the entire continent was claimed, fought over, annexed, and partitioned. Colonial rule did not end until around 1960 for Belgian, British, and French colonies, and until the 1970s for Portuguese.

The newly independent African nations inherited a wide range of European cultural and social institutions, ranging from language, to legal systems, forms of government, military organizations, and educational systems. The legacy of British and French presence in Africa is particularly strong.

SAME-SEX PATTERNS

Given the vastness of the continent and the diversity of its cultures and social forms, it comes as no surprise that same-sex patterns are diverse as well. Nonetheless, this diversity is not unlimited. In the past two decades, anthropologists and sociologists have shown that while homosexual behavior is probably universal, homosexual relationships, roles, and identities typically fall into three basic patterns, all of which are represented in Africa.[1]

The kind of identity and sexuality embraced by contemporary lesbian/gay Europeans and North Americans, for example, in which both partners are members of the same social gender and differences of

class, race, and age are *not* the formal basis for organizing the relationship (although such differences may exist), seem to be the most historically recent and least widespread pattern. Much older than the "gay" or "egalitarian" pattern of homosexuality are status-differentiated relations based on differences in either age or gender status. In age-based patterns, one partner is older (although the difference is usually not generational and, indeed, is often nominal). Typically, the older partner takes the inserting role in sex and the younger partner is penetrated, anally or orally. In some societies, the younger partner is also expected to be less masculine or even overtly feminine, but this is not always the case. Although examples of institutionalized age-defined homosexuality include the *erastes-eromenos* relations of classical Greece, the relations between samurai and pages in medieval Japan, and those between age classes in New Guinea initiation rites, the social meaning and attitudes toward such practices varies considerably.

Unlike age-stratified relations in which both partners are regarded as still belonging to the same (male) gender (and, in some cases, such as in Melanesia, the younger partner is regarded as being masculinized by ingesting semen), in gender-defined patterns sexually receptive males are categorized differently from other males. They are typically described as behaving, appearing, and working like women—or like stereotypes of women (which can have little to do with how women actually behave). The relative importance of sexuality, dress, and occupation in native definitions of these statuses varies. Outside observers—whether missionaries, anthropologists, travelers, or even natives other than those enacting these roles—rarely observe actual sexual behavior, whereas they are especially likely to notice a male dressing differently from other men or one who does what is regarded as "women's work."

Gender-based homosexuality is a widespread feature of Mediterranean and Latin American cultures. In this pattern, the "active" male in intercourse is not marked or regarded (especially not by himself) as "homosexual," while the penetrated male acquires a distinct identity, such as *ricchione* (southern Italy), *pasivo* (Spanish-speaking societies), or *bicha* (Brazil). In such patriarchal cultural contexts, individuals who are sexually penetrated (male or female), whether they enjoy penetration or are merely performing a sexual duty, are expected to conform to the behavior and social roles of women. Males identified as *pasivos* or

bichas, however, are best thought of as "womanlike" rather than as "socially women." Their behavior is often an exaggeration of that of women, and they fulfill some but not all the social roles of women (for example, women's productive work but not their reproductive roles). Members of their communities are usually aware of their actual biological sex, and the medical and cosmetic technologies necessary for actual sex change are unavailable. Their social status is in some ways lower than that of most women (and akin to that of prostitutes), while they still retain some male prerogatives (such as freedom of movement).

As the marker of an inferior, not-man status, sexual receptivity is a pleasure that men in patriarchal cultures must forbear. Nonetheless, Winkler has argued that classical Greeks were aware of such pleasure (1990: 67ff), and Leupp has shown that the pleasures of anal receptivity were celebrated in Tokugawa, Japan (1995: 179-82). Precisely the fear of enjoying penetration is cited by Muslim men as a reason for not trying it (Murray 1995a: 5; 1997c: 17-18). Indeed, members of Mediterranean and Mediterranean-influenced societies take for granted (that is, consider "natural") the fact that some males won't attain masculinity and, therefore, will be sexually receptive. Although families may accept that a male member does not marry and produce children, they often make major efforts to discourage public gender nonconformity on his part, efforts that often succeed, because unmarried children live in their natal homes indefinitely.

In less patriarchal cultures, roles and identities for nonmasculine males who do not marry women and produce children are sometimes well-accepted and even honored. In native North America, for example, alternative gender roles for both males and females have been widely documented. Known as *berdaches* in the anthropological literature (and, more recently, as two-spirits), the sexual and gender difference of these individuals was often sanctioned by religious beliefs. Indeed, male berdaches in some tribes fulfilled distinct religious roles and/or were believed to have special supernatural powers. Throughout North America, male berdaches specialized in certain work normally done by women (especially crafts) and were often said to do this work better than women (see W. Roscoe 1991, 1998). Comparable roles have been documented in Latin America, Oceania, Siberia, Southeast and South Asia (see Murray 1992, 1995a, 1999; Murray and Roscoe 1997), and, as this book will show, parts of Africa.

In some cases, the labeling and conceptualization of these roles constitutes them as third and even fourth genders.[2]

Numerous reports also indicate that in the highly sex-segregated societies of Africa, homosexual behavior and relationships were not uncommon among peers, both male and female, especially in the years before heterosexual marriage (which, for men, was often delayed long beyond puberty). These kind of relations were identified with specific terms and to varying degrees were institutionalized. Although the terminology of active/receptive, older/younger, and male/female was often used by those involved in such relationships and by others, in reality, sexual roles within same-sex peer relationships were often quite flexible and their adoption arbitrary.

In the chapters that follow, examples of all three patterns—age, gender, and egalitarian same-sex relations—are documented for both males and females. Although there are significantly fewer reports on woman-woman patterns, some detailed evidence is presented for societies in Sudan, Mombasa, and South Africa, and a chapter reviewing the literature on woman-woman marriages is included in PartV.

READING COLONIAL TEXTS ON AFRICAN SEXUALITIES

Most of what is known of "traditional" African cultures was written by individuals who were part of a colonial system that seriously disrupted those cultures (see Wolf 1982; J. Burton 1988). Given the absence of native writing systems before the late nineteenth century, there are few sources of evidence regarding African societies and cultures before European contact.[3] Because the overviews to each part of this book draw extensively from these accounts, some comments concerning their history and limitations are in order.

Father Antonio Cavazzi's reaction to the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda, the presiding priest of the Giagues (Imbangala), a group in the Congo region, typifies the European response to African sexual diversity. In his 1687 *Istorica de scrizione de' tre' regni Congo, Matamba, et Angola . . .*, Cavazzi described the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda as "a bare-faced, insolent, obscene, extremely villainous, disreputable scoundrel," who "committed the foulest crimes" with impunity. The funeral rites held for him were so indecent "that the paper dirtied with its description would

blush." According to Cavazzi, the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda routinely cross-dressed and was addressed as "grandmother." The element *chibanda* in his title is certainly related to other terms used by Bantu-speakers in the region for nonmasculine males who are often shamans and have sex with other men (for example, *chibadi, chibado, jimbandaa, kibamba,* and *quimbanda*—see Part III). In Cavazzi's account, however, the sexuality of the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda is ambiguous. Because he freely entered the precincts of secluded women, Cavazzi assumed that he indulged his "brutal passions" with them. But in most cases where males in alternative gender roles have been observed associating with women, the situation is the opposite of what Labat assumed: they enjoyed such access precisely because they lacked (or were assumed to lack) heterosexual desire (for example, the Omani *khanith,* the *mashoga* of Mombasa, and the Ila *mwaami* described in this volume).[4]

In any case, Cavazzi's denunciation did not hinge on the sexual object choice of the Ganga-Ya-Chibanda. Phrases like "foulest crimes" were part of what Guy Poirier has termed a Western "rhetoric of abomination" directed not at particular forms of sexuality but at sexuality in general (1993a: 223). Before the eighteenth century, European writings on sexuality were nearly always part of a moral discourse, in which sexual identities, roles, and acts were represented in the terms of a Judeo-Christian code. In this code, all forms of extramarital sexuality and certain forms of marital sexuality were to one degree or another sinful and defiling, and everyone was believed to be at risk for the temptation and lust that led to such acts. The code was uninterested in why some sinners lusted for the same sex and others for the opposite—both were "foulest crimes." Indeed, the very nature of lust was believed to cause a breakdown of moral consciousness and the ability to discriminate between proper and improper sexual objects. Hence, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, and other sexual acts were all viewed as transgressions that occurred when individuals no longer recognized distinctions of gender, kinship, age, race, and species—an "undifferentiated" state of consciousness that Europeans also attributed to people they considered "primitive."

Only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did interest develop in explaining same-sex desire as a special case. Even so, the influence of moral discourse remained—and remains—strong. Indeed, nearly all the texts that we might use to document and understand African same-sex patterns employ moral rhetoric—from late sixteenth-century Portuguese reports of "unnatural damnation" in Angola (Purchas 1625: 1558), to John Burckhardt's 1882 report of "detestable vices" in Nubia (364), an 1893 report of *copulation contre nature* in French Senegal (X 1893: 155-56), and the 1906 report of a German missionary who observed Herrero men forsaking the "natural use of women" (Irle 1906: 58-59). When one reads the more recent statements of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, in which she describes same-sex relations as "utter filth" and "alien to our culture," and an alleged homosexual as having "a very serious psychological problem," it becomes painfully apparent that discourse on African homosexualities has changed little since the time of Father Cavazzi—even though Africans now produce it.[5] The tropes of normal and abnormal, healthy and unhealthy, self and other (although the "other" is now reversed: a debauched West) reiterate a master trope of moral and immoral. European writings on African homosexualities have been eerily consistent over time and across nationality.

Accounts of North American sexual and gender diversity also employed moral rhetoric; however, these reached Europe much sooner and were often more detailed than those from Africa. They were repeatedly cited in European texts and eventually became part of discourses not limited to moral concerns. Will Roscoe has shown how such accounts became part of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debates on the historical origins of the American natives, eighteenth-century debates on the occurrence of prodigies in nature, and nineteenth-century discourses of medicine and psychiatry. The medicalization of homosexuality in particular multiplied terms. Up to that time, most European words for homosexuality were derived from mythical originators and precedents—*sodomy* from Sodom, *catamite* from Ganymede, *lesbian* from Lesbos. The new taxonomy—*Urning, homosexual, transvestite*—labeled people in terms of intrinsic psychic and physical traits they were believed to possess, which categorically distinguished them from others. Of course, natural scientists since the eighteenth century had been labeling plant and animal species on the basis of similar assumptions. In the nineteenth century, this taxonomic approach was applied to human racial groups as well. In *Geography of Perversion,* historian Rudi Bleys has persuasively argued that the construction of new sexual categories in the nineteenth century was

closely linked to the construction of essentialized categories of race and gender, which occurred in the same period.

These developments are also evident in writings on African homosexualities. The earliest accounts, like that of Father Cavazzi, linked same-sex patterns to a general definition of African "otherness," which contrasted European restraint to African lasciviousness. In this regard, as Bleys points out, "Africanist discourse hardly diverged from constructions of American and Asian identity, as it equally turned indigenous sexuality into a metaphor of cultural difference" (1995: 35).

However, the overall body of references to African same-sex patterns is much smaller. Bleys speculates that the demand for black slave labor fostered a discourse on black masculinity that excluded evidence of nonmasculinity and homosexuality or made such behaviors less visible to Europeans. In addition, many reporters arrived in Africa already influenced by the statements of Gibbon and others that Africa lacked same-sex patterns. Consequently, no sustained discussion of African same-sex patterns was published until the early twentieth century, and few reports ventured explanations for African same-sex patterns. Occasionally, one encounters a pseudo-historical etiology: for example, that same-sex relations were imported by Arabs or adopted due to their influence.[6] Ulterior motives for such assertions are usually obvious, however, whether it is Christian Europeans blaming homosexuality on Muslims, Frenchmen blaming it on Italians, or the member of one African society blaming it on another.

Because of the paucity of reports from Africa and their predominantly moralistic tone, the appearance of medical-psychiatric terminology is striking. Phrases like "morbid eroticism" in Corre's 1894 report on homosexuality in French Senegal and Guinea (59), and "contrary sex occurrences" in Haberlandt's 1899 article on Zanzibar are borrowed directly from the medical-psychiatric terminology of Karl Ulrichs, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Albert Moll, Magnus Hirschfeld, and other German authorities, beginning in the 1860s.[7] By the end of the century, familiarity with this terminology was widespread among German and French writers. It is evident in texts by Lasnet (1899), Haberlandt (1899), Kandt (1905: 150), Roux (1905), Hammer (1909), Bieber (1909), Falk (1923, 1925-26), and Tessman (1921). English writers, in contrast, were slower to adopt the new

terminology. Through the 1920s, texts in English (including those of anthropologists) continued to describe African same-sex patterns in terms of "pederasty" (Smith and Dale 1920), "unnatural rites" (Talbot 1926), and "pederastical practices" (Butt-Thompson 1929). In his contribution to this volume, however, Epprecht reports testimony in Zimbabwe courts in the 1920s that indicates that English colonial authorities were beginning to employ psychiatric language—and that natives were refuting it. Epprecht quotes one native as saying, in reference to his cross-dressing son, "I have never thought him mentally affected." Once Anglo-American anthropologists adopted sexological terminology, they were slow to abandon it. When Evans-Pritchard finally published his observations of Azande homosexuality in 1970, he did so under the rubric of *sexual inversion*—a term from pre-Freudian sexology.

Medical-psychiatric theories treated male homosexuality as an innate condition—one in which nonmasculinity was linked to same-sex desire. This determined that a central focus of the discourse on homosexuality would be arbitrating the discrepancies between the ideal type and specific instances, whose relations to the ideal were not always clear. Egalitarian and age-defined patterns involving noneffeminate men, for example, did not fit into the third-sex paradigm dominant in medical discourse until the 1920s. Still other concerns arose from disagreements as to whether homosexuality was inborn or acquired, genuine or situational, natural or unnatural, pathological or normal. Earlier ethnographic literature was cited in all these discussions, while new reports came increasingly to be framed in terms of these debates (see W. Roscoe 1995).

Haberlandt's 1899 article on Zanzibar, for example, is concerned with distinguishing inborn (*angeborne*) "contrariness" (a psychological condition rather than an act, like sodomy) from that which is "acquired" (*erworbene*). One of the preoccupations of medical-psychiatric discourse at this time was reconciling an older theory of homosexuality as acquired (through degeneracy, which was conceived simultaneously as a failure of morality and physiology, a favored nineteenth-century explanation for both group and individual behavior) and the newer theory of homosexuality as an inborn orientation. There is no evidence, however, that these distinctions were used by the natives of Zanzibar—Haberlandt does not quote natives on the sub-

ject, nor does he provide case histories that might elucidate how and why individuals came to be engaged in the behaviors he reports. Indeed, from the perspectives of the discourse Haberlandt relies on, "contrariness" is an essential psychic condition that can occur in any human population and is the same phenomenon in each case. Native understandings can only be misunderstandings in relation to the "facts" of Western "scientific" discourse.

Consequently, Haberlandt's statement that "the adolescent slaves that are selected [for use as "catamites"] are kept away from any work, well pampered, and systematically effeminized," reflects his reliance on the tropes of degeneracy theory, which require him to assume that effeminacy and homosexual desire *followed* social selection. He does not consider the possibility that such traits *preceded* selection and were the basis for it—a conclusion that can just as easily be supported by his data. The need to account for noncommercial homosexuality by individuals who are not slaves and therefore not "selected" for such relations, but willingly pursue them, requires Haberlandt's second theory—that of congenital homosexuality. Congenital "contraries," Haberlandt reports, are individuals who from youth have "no desire for women and only find pleasure in female occupations." He then makes a curious statement: "In outward appearance, inborn contrary men are not distinguishable from male prostitutes, but the natives make a sharp distinction between them: the professional catamites are despised, while the behavior of the inborn-contrary is tolerated as *amri ya muungu* (the will of God)." Here Harberlandt admits that his theoretical distinctions between inborn and acquired cannot be verified empirically, but then he claims that the native view agrees with his. What is apparent on close reading is that the distinction he attributes to the natives has nothing to do with beliefs about inborn or acquired homosexuality but, rather, with the difference between consciously chosen immoral behavior (prostitution) and that which is God's will. This is quite a different idea from that of congenitalism, and it implies a different moral outlook as well. In the West, it has been rarely claimed (until recently by lesbian and gay Christians) that God wills the existence of homosexuals.

German discussions of same-sex relations in Africa written in the 1910s and 1920s reflect the influence of a discourse paralleling that of the medical authorities, which sought to construct a nonstigmatized

identity for homosexuals. In fact, the medical-psychiatric construction of homosexuality as an essential, inborn disposition was first fostered by homosexuals, such as Ulrichs. Among other things, it allowed them to argue that, being inborn, homosexuality should not be subject to legal and moral persecution. However, when the medical and psychiatric establishment adopted the congenital model it insisted that such a condition was a disease. Thus, a debate over the status of congenital homosexuality developed—whether it was pathological or normal, diseased or natural, changeable or inherent.

Echoes of this debate are evident in Kurt Falk's articles about homosexuality in Angola and Southwest Africa, included herein. In a variation of Haberlandt's distinction between congenital and acquired homosexuality, Falk tries to distinguish "true" from "pseudo" (or "situational") homosexuality. While he acknowledged widespread homosexual behavior on the part of *Bisexuellen* and *Pseudohomosexuellen,* he considers this incidental to that of "true," congenital homosexuals, who, following the Ulrich-Hirschfeld model, represent an intermediate or third sex and were therefore nonmasculine.

This distinction between "true" and "pseudo" homosexuality had become important in debates over the German law banning homosexuality, Paragraph 175. The reformers who sought to repeal this law felt compelled to argue that not all homosexuality needed to be allowed. The behavior of those who engaged in homosexuality only because they lacked heterosexual outlets, or to obtain money, or out of libertinism, or to debauch minors should be punished. But allowance had to made for "true" homosexuals, whose desires were inborn and who therefore could not help themselves. To attempt to legislate against a congenital condition was pointless, and to deny such individuals the opportunity of sexual release and emotional relationships was not only cruel, it was psychologically and physically harmful. Falk's conclusions clearly reflect his involvement in this discourse: "Anyone who refutes inborn homosexuality should take a look at native people and he will soon change his mind."

Günther Tessman, himself a repressed homosexual (Klockmann 1985), argues similarly in his 1921 article (translated in Part III): The existence of widespread homosexual relationships among the Bafia of Cameroon, he suggests, supports the conclusion that "homosexual desires are firmly established in human nature." Both Falk and

Tessman drew on a well-established counter-discourse with roots in the Enlightenment that sought to criticize Western civilization by reversing the usual values attributed to "nature" and "civilization." What was "natural" and "primitive," rather than being inferior to the civilized, was portrayed as superior—simpler, healthier, and more democratic in comparison to civilization, which was artificial, stultified, and static. The "noble savage" was an implicit critique of the ruling nobility of Europe.

With this, discourse on homosexuality comes full circle—from the citation of African homosexualities in debates on the moral, cultural, and racial inferiority of Africans, to its citation in texts constructing homosexuality as an essential (albeit pathological) condition, and finally, its appearance in discourses constructing a nonpathological homosexual identity, in terms of the sexual politics of Western societies in the twentieth century.

Given the history of Western discourse on sexuality, using colonial and anthropological reports requires a strategy of double reading—first, to identify the tropes of the discourse in which the ethnographic data are represented and, second, to identify the ethnographic data. Of course, some might consider the project of disentangling "data" from the tropes of ethnographic writing impossible. Discourse, they might argue, constructs its data; there are no transcendental signifieds, let alone "hard facts," whose meaning will be transparent to all readers, regardless of the language used to describe them. What we are suggesting, however, is a more modest goal—that of seeking to *control* the effects of Western discursive regimes on what observers of African sexualities write.

Accomplishing this double reading requires familiarity with the history of European texts on sexuality, including their terminology, rhetoric, and the internal contradictions that generate (and constrain) their debates. This makes it possible to identify and control for discursive effects in the reporting of observations. Thus, if a writer states that "unnatural crimes are unknown" for a given group, we know that the terminology "unnatural crimes" is part of Judeo-Christian discourse. This alone, of course, does not warrant claiming that same-sex relations are present despite the writer's report, but it does require us to ask various questions about the original statement. If, for example, an observer uses a phrase like "unnatural crimes" in

questioning natives about their practices, and if the social group to which those individuals belong does not view same-sex relations as "unnatural crimes," then it is quite possible that they will respond, "No, we don't do that," when in fact homosexual patterns do occur.

Statements purporting to report native attitudes toward homosexuality must also be analyzed in this way. Same-sex behavior and relationships may indeed by disapproved of in some groups—but too often, Western reporters fail to determine the basis (or extent) of the disapproval and assume that it is derived from the same moral precepts that underlie Western disapproval (for example, that such behavior is a sin, a crime, or a sickness).

Having separated what can be attributed to discursive imperatives from what *might* be attributable to something actually seen or heard in Africa, it is then necessary to "test" the "data," to the extent possible. New fieldwork and reports from Africans themselves are, of course, highly desirable and can help verify and contextualize earlier reports. Contemporary reports, however, cannot always verify past practices and beliefs about them—and postcolonial writers, European and African, have been no less constrained by regimes of moral discourse than earlier writers. In any case, contemporary reports, if available, should be combined with a thorough review of all available literature on a given social group. The greater the familiarity of a reader with a culture, the better s/he is able to evaluate any given statement about it. A writer, for example, might state that "the X people believe that male homosexuality causes a disease." The reader well grounded in the history and culture of that group will know whether or not such a statement is plausible; whether it is consistent with beliefs about the body and sexuality, health, disease, and so forth; and what the group's attitude toward this belief is—its moral, social, and religious implications. Such a reader will know not to assume that any given African group's belief about disease and sex parallels the Western medical model of homosexuality as a disease, or that the association of same-sex practices with a disease necessarily implies a moral judgment.

In addition to ethnographic literature, a variety of primary source materials can also be used to reconstruct historical roles and practices. Marc Epprecht's chapter is an excellent example of how even such seemingly biased records as those of colonial courts can be used to

recover something of the practices and voices of native Africans who engaged in same-sex relations.

These are the procedures we have applied in reviewing the ethnographic literature in the introductions for each region. Explanatory schemes and rhetoric shape what is reportable, but careful reading often can extract valid data even from biased reporting. When we do relate the various theories and etiologies offered in the texts of the colonial era, it is not to lend them credence but merely to remind readers of the historical and discursive context from which the data are drawn.

I

Horn of Africa, Sudan, and East Africa

Overview

SOCIETIES THROUGHOUT THE HORN OF AFRICA and the sudanic belt combine agriculture and pastoralism. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, long-standing contact with the Near East accounts for the early presence of metallurgy and weaving, an extensive market system, and Christian and Islamic religions. Islamic influence is strong among the Bantu-speaking populations of coastal East Africa, especially in port cities, such as Mombasa and Zanzibar. Patrilineal Bantu-speakers also occupy the highland savannas of Kenya, where agricultural is the dominant subsistence pattern, and the grasslands of the great lakes region, where pastoralism and agriculture are combined. Amid these Bantu-speaking groups is a wedge of Nilotic pastoralists, speaking eastern sudanic languages, that extends from north of Lake Victoria in Uganda south through western Kenya and northern Tanzania. Several kingdoms flourished in this region.

HORN OF AFRICA

The Italian Paolo Ambrogetti, at the beginning of the twentieth century, reported age-based homosexual relations between Eritrean men and what he called *diavoletti* (little devils) (1900: 16). Regarded as being no more than a mild fault, these relationships were pursued quite openly and tolerated by the boys' fathers since it was a source of income. After puberty, the boys generally began to have relations with females, but *diavoletti* especially attached to their patrons might continue with them until they were twenty. An unusual case was a twenty-five-year-old married chief who continued to have receptive intercourse with men *senza lucro* (not for payment). Ambrogetti also

reported that many apparently effeminate Eritreans were not "sexual inverts" (16), echoing other writers of this period who argued that same-sex behavior among "nature peoples" was situational and that few, if any, were "real" or "constitutional" homosexuals (see Bleys 1995: 185-92).

A few years later, Friedrich Bieber described what he termed "Uranism" among the Islamic Harari, Semitic-speaking agriculturalists near the Ethiopian city of Harar (Harer). According to Bieber, "Sodomy is not foreign to the Harari" (1909: 404). Such relations appear not to have been organized in terms of age or gender status, however—"Uranism" occurred as often between adult men as between men and youths. He also reported similar practices among the Cushitic-speaking Galla, pastoralists in southern Ethiopia, and their neighbors, the Somali, "albeit not as commonly" (405). In addition, both sexes and all ages in all three groups (Harari, Galla, Somal) practiced mutual masturbation. More recently, Gamst reported homosexual relations among shepherd boys of the Cushitic-speaking Qemant (Kemant) of central Ethiopia (1969: 106).

In the 1950s, Simon Messing encountered males with alternative gender identities among the nearby Coptic Amhara peasants. Viewed as "god's mistakes," they were generally well accepted. Such *wändarwäräd* (literally, male-female), as they were termed, were believed to be physically defective (1957: 550). They "live as individuals, not forming a society of their own, for they are tolerated. Only their kinfolk are ashamed of them, so they to go live in another province. Women tolerate a transvestite 'like a brother'; men are not jealous of him even when he spends all his time with the womenfolk. Often the transvestite is an unusually sensitive person, quick to anger, but intense in his personal likings, sensitive to cultural diffusions from the outside world, especially those carried by Arab traders; and Muslim Arab traders are often the only male contacts he tolerates" (551). He also found "mannish women" (*wändawände*) suspected of attempting to abrogate male privileges (550), although he did not inquire into their sexual conduct.

C. R. Hallpike conducted fieldwork in the mid-1960s among the Cushitic-speaking Konso, agriculturalists living in walled cities on the southern edge of Ethiopia. He found a complex of beliefs concerning the danger to men of contact with women. Konso men believe that

"women have an emotionally as well as physically deleterious influence on men," and one told Hallpike, "Some girls' vaginas are so strong that they can snap off a man's penis" (1972: 153, 152). These beliefs are reflected in restrictions on when and how often marital intercourse can occur that are as severe as those of the Melanesian societies that have served in anthropological literature as the prototypes of sexually antagonistic cultures (see Herdt 1984).

The Konso have "two words each for penis, vagina, and sexual intercourse, but no less than four for 'effeminate man'" (Hallpike 1972: 150). One of these categories, *sagoda,* includes men who never marry, weak men, and men who wear skirts.

> Men who actually wear skirts are very few, and those who do are clearly incapable of acting as men. I knew one in Gaho, who earned his living curing skins, a female occupation. He was very effeminate in voice and manner. . . . I was told that *sagoda* liked to play the passive role in sodomy, and the description I was given of the manner in which a *sagoda* would induce a man to perform this upon him in the night was so detailed that it could not have been invented. The question is whether normal men only practice sodomy with *sagoda* or among themselves. I am strongly inclined to think it is not confined to relations with *sagoda.* (151)

Although Konso men "were generally very reluctant to talk about sexual matters," Hallpike heard "coarse remarks on occasion" that included jokes about taking a man reputed to be a *sagoda* into the fields and raping him. Hallpike concluded, "This sort of occasion, the conduct of transvestites, and the sexual strains put on men by society, lead one to suppose that they seek relief among themselves on occasion. But this is not to say it is approved of" (1972: 151).

Among the Maale of southern Ethiopia, Donald Donham observed that "a small minority [of men] crossed over to feminine roles. Called *ashtime,* these (biological) males dressed like women, performed female tasks, cared for their own houses, and apparently had sexual relations with men" (1990: 92). Donham interviewed an *ashtime,* who described his status in terms of a distinct gender conception: "The Divinity created me *wobo,* crooked. If I had been a man, I could have taken a wife and begotten children. If I had been a woman, I could

have married and borne children. But I am *wobo;* I can do neither." Although this individual was the only *ashtime* Donham knew, Maale men told him that more had existed in the nineteenth century: "Indeed, part of the Maale kin's traditional installation had consisted of a ritual ordination of an *ashtime.*" By 1975, however, the Maale considered *ashtime* "abnormal" (92).

Donham suggested that rather than discrete gender categories, the Maale recognize a continuous gradation of maleness from the ritual kings to subchiefs on down (112). The ritual king "was the male principle incarnate." Consequently, no woman of childbearing age could enter the king's compound. Domestic labor generally done by women was performed instead by *ashtime,* who in traditional times were gathered and protected by the kings. On nights before royal rituals, when the king was prohibited from having sexual relations with women, "lying with an *ashtime* was not interdicted." Thus, Donham concluded, *ashtime* constituted "part of the generativity of maleness in Maale" (113).

SUDAN

In his study of non-Islamic Nuban groups in Sudan who traditionally combined agriculture and cattle herding, Siegfried Nadel contrasted the sexuality of the Heiban and the Otoro. Among the former, he found "no expected corollary of homosexual acts" (that is, no role or social identity based on homosexuality), but among the latter, a recognized role for males who dressed and lived as women (1955: 677). In an earlier report, he also mentioned gender-differentiated homosexuality among the related Moro and Tira, and the Nubian Nyima to the north (1947: 242).[1] Nonmasculine males were called *londo* by Nuban Krongo (Korongo) and *tubele* by the Mesakin, and they could marry men (285).[2] Such marriages required a "brideprice" of one goat, and the generally young husband might also have female wives: "'Wife' and 'husband' lie together and keep a common household. The 'marriages' rarely last long: the 'husband' is as a rule a young man who will outgrow his homosexual learnings, or who had been induced to play this part by the promise of an easy life. He would soon tire of the unnatural life and abandon his male 'wife.' The fact that he had lived

in this homosexual union does not disqualify him for marriage in the eyes of the women. In fact, I heard of two Mesakin men who had each for a time lived with two 'wives,' one male and one female" (285).

Although Nadel did not specify whether *londo* and *tubele* were older than their husbands, his use of "young" suggests they were. According to Nadel, in these societies with "widespread homosexuality and transvestiticism," men feared heterosexual intercourse as sapping virility. Consequently, they were often reluctant to abandon the pleasures of all-male camp life for the fetters of permanent residence: "I have even met men of forty and fifty who spent most of their nights with the young folk in the cattle camps instead of at home in the village" (300).[3]

MacDermot's 1972 report of denials of homosexuality by the pastoralist Nuer of Sudan—despite the presence of a gender-defined role for males that could include marriage to men—was cited in the Preface. Although he found Nuer statements confusing, there was no contradiction from their point of view. The old man who did women's work had changed his gender, as far as they were concerned. Thus intercourse with him was not viewed as an encounter between two men.

In Khartoum, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban observed premarital peer homosexuality during fieldwork from 1970 to 1972. "If a man dares to gain some sexual experience before marriage," she noted "he must do it in the prostitutes' quarter or through temporary homosexual liaisons that are tolerated before marriage" (1977: 134). She did not indicate whether involvement in homosexual activity is temporary for both partners or what they do sexually.

Anthropologists also have documented gender-defined roles for males in contemporary Sudanese possession cults.[4] In the 1970s, among the Muslim riverine peoples of northern Sudan, Constantinides witnessed male participation in a healing cult called *zaar,* which is otherwise the domain of women: "Some men are regular participants at cult rituals, and a few become cult group leaders. Of this male minority some are overt homosexuals, while others may initially have symptoms, such as bleeding from the anus or penis, which tend symbolically to classify them with women" (1977: 63).[5] According to Constantinides, while "men who attend zaar rituals regularly are suspected by both men and women of being homosexual," there is also

suspicion that some men may "dishonourably [be] gaining access to women by feigning illness"(63). (Similar accusations are made regarding *'yan daudu* in the *bori* cult of the Hausa—see Part II.)

Zande

The (A)Zande are an Islamic-influenced forest people occupying a region where tsetse flies preclude stock-raising—in southwestern Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the northeastern Congo. Although they resemble other forest-clearing peoples in the importance of their secret associations, they are distinguished by having created a monarchical state (actually a loose confederation of chiefdoms) supported by a nobility. Zande society as a whole recognized patrilineal descent, although ruling families gave preference to the maternal line (Maquet 1972: 173-74).

There were already published references to Zande homosexuality at the time Evans-Pritchard undertook his fieldwork. In the 1920s, Larken had referred to the practice of chiefs' having sex with youths because they were presumably free of diseases (1926: 24), while Czekanowski rejected the claims of European residents that pederasty was an Arabic introduction and not an indigenous practice (1924: 56). Evans-Pritchard's data, although late in reaching publication, are more detailed. Describing traditional Zande culture as remembered by his informants, he wrote, "Homosexuality is indigenous. Zande do not regard it as at all improper, indeed as very sensible for a man to sleep with boys when women are not available or are taboo. . . . In the past this was a regular practice at court. Some princes may even have preferred boys to women, when both were available. This is not a question I can enter into further here beyond saying I was told that some princes sleep with boys before consulting poison oracles, women being then taboo, and also that they sometimes do so on other occasions, just because they like them" (1971: 183). His informant Kuagbiaru stated: "Men used to have sexual relations with boys as they did with wives. A man paid compensation to another if he had relations with his boy. People asked for the hand of a boy with a spear, just as they asked for the hand of a maiden of her parents. All those young warriors who were at court, all had boys" (1970: 1430).

Kuagbiaru also told Evans-Pritchard that when a "boy"—that is, any male between the ages of twelve and twenty—appealed to a prince, the prince would summon the boy as a page. Later, the prince "provided bridewealth for his pages when they grew up," although "when a prince dies they do not let his pages escape; they kill them after the prince is dead, for they have eaten the prince's oil. People call them 'the prince's old barkcloth,' for, because he used to summon them all the time, they are like his old barkcloth" (1971: 185). Institutionalized relationships with youths were not limited to princes and their pages, however:

> Many of the young warriors married boys, and a commander might have more than one boy-wife. When a warrior married a boy he paid spears [brideprice], though only a few, to the boy's parents, as he would have done had he married their daughter. The warrior in other ways acted towards the parents as though he had married their daughter. . . . He addressed the parents as *gbiore* and *negbiore*, "my father-in-law" and "my mother-in-law." He gave the boy himself pretty ornaments; and he and the boy addressed one another as *badiare*, "my love" and "my lover."[6] The boy fetched water for his husband, collected firewood and kindled his fire, bore his shield when traveling. . . .[7] The two slept together at nights, the husband satisfying his desires between the boy's thighs. When the boy grew up he joined the company and took a boy-wife in his turn. It was the duty of the husband to give his boy-wife a spear and a shield when he became a warrior. He then took a new boy-wife. Thus, Kuagbiaru, a member and later a commander of one of Prince Gangura's companies, married three boys in succession. (1971: 199-200)

Another commander, Ganga, told Evans-Pritchard that "there were some men who although they had female wives, still married boys. When a war broke out, they took their boys with them, although they were left in camp, as befitted their wifely status, not their future status as fellow warriors" (1970: 1431). The warrior paid bridewealth (five or more spears) to the parents of the boy and performed services for them as he would have done had he married their daughter. If another man had relations with the boy, the husband could sue the interloper for adultery (1429).

Evans-Pritchard maintained that "it was on account of the difficulties of getting satisfaction in heterosexual relationships that boy marriage was recognized." As evidence he pointed to the fact that, as marriage between men and women became easier and earlier, "boy-marriage has in post-European times entirely disappeared"—but so had the military companies and the royal court, which were its context. Despite these changes, Evans-Pritchard reported that "I have never heard anyone speak of sleeping with a boy with distaste" (1429).

Evans-Pritchard's account of Zande age-stratified homosexuality shows such relationships to be the product of both individual motivations (sexual and other) and a complex set of social expectations and practices. Earlier authors less credibly attributed it solely to situational factors, discounting the involvement (or possibility) of homosexual desire or preference. R. P. Graere, for example, blamed Zande homosexuality on the monopoly of women by rich and powerful men (1929: 362). Similarly, the French colonial administrator Adolphe Cureau attributed the origins of pederasty among the Sandeh (that is, Zande) to the Turks and the continuation of the practice to the monopolization of women in the vast harems (*bodimoh*) of Sandeh royalty. Vassals, soldiers, and servants had to make do with what the rulers left. Consequently, Cureau argued, boy *nsanga* (*servants d'armes*) took the place of women. Wearing their hair artfully parted, with arms and necks loaded with decorations, a woolen skirt around the hips, and their bodies oiled and glistening, the boys were at the disposal of soldiers. Called *ndongo-techi-la,* they followed their husbands on their marches, carrying their rifles and provisions. In the camps, they cooked and managed household finances (1904: 644-45).

Zande Woman-Woman Relations

Among the Zande, the Seligmans reported that sisters who married brothers "have a reputation for lesbian practices" (1932: 515). According to Evans-Pritchard:

> All Azande I have known well enough to discuss this matter have asserted that female homosexuality was practiced in polygamous homes in the past and still [ca. 1930] is sometimes. . . . One of the many wives of a prince or of an important commoner in the past might not have shared her husband's bed for a month or two, whereas some of the dozens, even hundreds, of wives of a king must have been almost totally deprived of the sex life normal in smaller homes. Adulterous intercourse was very difficult for a wife in such large polygamous families, for the wives were kept in seclusion and carefully watched. . . . Wives would cut a sweet potato or manioc root in the shape of the male organ, or use a banana for the purpose. Two of them would shut themselves in a hut and one would lie on the bed and play the female role while the other, with the artificial organ tied around her stomach, played the male role. They then reversed roles. (1970: 1429, 1431-32)

In the same article, Evans-Pritchard reproduced texts from two male informants about special friendships between women that mimicked male blood brotherhood relations. Two women would break a cob of blood-red corn (*kaima*) and utter a spell over it: "After this they should not call each other by their proper names, but they call each other *bagburu.* The one who is the wife cooks porridge and a fowl and brings them to the one who is the husband. They do this between them many times. They have sexual intercourse between them with sweet potatoes carved in the shape of a circumcised penis, with carved manioc also, and also with bananas" (1432). This relationship was not approved by Zande men. Evans-Pritchard asserted that "it is a further indication of male dominance that what was encouraged among males was condemned among females. Zande men, princes especially, have a horror of lesbianism, and they regard it as highly dangerous" (1432).

Closer to the time of his fieldwork, Evans-Pritchard reported the Azande belief that women had sex with *adandara,* a species of wild cat considered female and unlucky: "Both are female actions which may cause the death of any man who witnesses them" (1937: 56). Without offering much insight into how the women involved understood the practices, he noted:

> Zande women, especially in the homesteads of princes, indulge in homosexual relations by means of a phallus fashioned from roots. It is said that in the past a prince did not hesitate to execute a wife whose homosexual activities were discovered, and even today I have known a prince to expel wives form his household for the same

> reason. Among lesser folk, if a man discovers that his wife has Lesbian relations with other women he flogs her and there is a scandal. The husband's anger is due to his fear of the unlucky consequences that may ensue from such practices. Azande therefore speak of them as evil in the same way as they speak of witchcraft and cats as evil, and they say, moreover, that homosexual women are the sort who may well give birth to cats and be witches also. In giving birth to cats and in Lesbianism the evil is associated with the sexual functions of women, and it is to be noted that any unusual action of the female genitalia is considered unlucky. (56)[8]

COASTAL EAST AFRICA

The Swahili-speakers on the Kenyan coast provide an instance where reports of same-sex patterns are not only detailed but also have some historical depth. A vigorous debate has developed over the exact interpretation of this evidence, which appears to document gender-defined roles as well as age-differentiated and even egalitarian homosexuality. These reports come primarily from the port cities and surrounding regions of Zanzibar and Mombasa. The indigenous population of these areas speak Bantu languages, but as Muslim domination of Indian Ocean trade—and cultural and political influence—increased after 1000, they became Muslim city-states with close ties to Arabia, especially the sultanate of Oman. The integration of African and Islamic culture in these cities is extensive, as evidenced by the large number of Arabic words in Swahili, a Bantu language that was long used for African-Arabic trade.

European reports of homosexuality in Mombasa and Zanzibar date to the nineteenth century. The first Swahili-English dictionary, published in 1882, included the term *mumémke* (*mume*=man, *mke*=woman) along with *hánithi,* defined as "catamite," which is clearly related to *khanith,* the term for an alternative gender status in Oman (Krapf 1882: 891).[9] The latter also has been transcribed as *hanisi* and defined as "effeminate" (Madan 1902: 92).[10] At the beginning of the twentieth century, Haberlandt reported that on Zanzibar, "Homosexuals of both sexes are designated in the Swahili language as *mke-si-mume* ('woman, not man'). However, the expressions *mzebe* and the Arabian-derived *hanisi,* which actually mean an impotent person, also apply" (1899: 670). (See the translation of Haberlandt's report that follows.) According to Haberlandt, such males were prominent in Ngambo, especially at dances, although their dress and deportment was variable—some cross-dressing, some distinguishing themselves by headdress alone, yet others dressing as men. They derived their income from prostitution.

A half century later, Godfrey Wilson described an occasion in Lamu, a Swahili town north of Mombasa, when boys dressed as women performed a striptease and then paired off with older men from the audience (1957: 1; cited by Shepherd 1987: 269, n. 9).

Based on observations during her 1970s field research in the Comorian community (individuals from or descended from the Comoros Islands), Gill Shepherd has published two reports on Mombasan same-sex patterns—and sparked a lively debate over their interpretation. In her first report, she described male homosexuality as largely a matter of prostitution: "Mombasa's *mashoga* [sing. *shoga*] are passive male homosexuals offering their persons for money. They advertise themselves in bright tight *male* attire in public places, usually, but may, when mingling with women at weddings, don women's *leso* cloths, make-up and jasmine posies. *Mashoga* have all the liberties of men and are also welcome in many contexts otherwise exclusive to women" (1978a: 133). She concluded that although "there are long-lasting relationships between homosexuals in Mombasa, most homosexual acts are fleeting, paid for in cash" (1978b: 644).

In a subsequent report, Shepherd modified this description somewhat:

> The Swahili [word] for a male homosexual is *shoga,* a word also used between women to mean "friend." Homosexual relations in Mombasa are almost without exception between a younger, poorer partner and an older, richer one, whether their connection is for a brief act of prostitution or a more lengthy relationship. In the former case, there are fixed rates of payment, and in the latter, presents and perhaps full financial support for a while. But financial considerations are always involved and it is generally only the person who is paid who is called *shoga.* The older partner may have been a *shoga*

> himself in his youth, but is very likely to be successfully married to a woman as well as maintaining an interest in boys. Only if he is not married and has an apparently exclusive interest in homosexual contacts will he perhaps still be referred to as a *shoga.* The paid partner usually takes the passive role during intercourse, but I think it is true to say that his inferiority derives from the fact that he is paid to provide what is asked for, rather than for the [specific sexual] role he adopts. . . . The paying partner is usually known as the *basha* [pl. *mabasha*]—the Pasha, the local term for the king in packs of playing cards. (1987: 250)[11]

According to Shepherd, "both male and female homosexuality is relatively common among Muslims, involving perhaps one in twenty-five adults" (1978a: 133). Without explanation, she subsequently raised the estimate to one in ten (1987: 240).

Shepherd's consistent thesis is that rank is more important than gender in the Mombasan construction of homosexuality. Indeed, she has argued that trading sexual compliance (that is, being penetrated) for money or aid is simply a case of "patron-client relations given a sexual dimension" (1987: 255). The emphasis on wealth is apparent in the passage just quoted. However, it is immediately followed by a description of the Mombasan belief that some boys become homosexual because they are nonmasculine (that is, "pretty"): "People say that they can predict who will be a homosexual, even with boys as young as 5 or 6 years old at times. They seem to base their prediction upon prettiness and family circumstances; boys reared in all-female households by a divorced mother and several sisters are likely to become homosexuals, they say, and the prediction is self-fulfilling since these are the boys whom men are certain to approach. 'If he's not a homosexual yet, he will be,' say women of teenage boys from such households" (250-51). Shepherd may be correct that economic status is the primary means of differentiating *basha* from *shoga,* but clearly more than economics is involved.

Although Shepherd (1978a,b) strenuously objected to Unni Wikan's (1977) suggestion that *mashoga* represent a transsexual or third gender conception, she acknowledged some gender variance in their dress, if not as part of an attempt to pass as women.[12] Rather, *shoga* "tend to employ the gait and voice which are the international signals of homosexuality" (1987: 259-60). (Exactly what these signals are she does not say.) Her point is that "these seem to be imitated from other homosexuals, not from women, and the modest and quietness of ideal Swahili womanhood are quite absent in homosexual behaviour."[13] Consequently, *shoga* are not classified as women. They do not do women's tasks, "but are rather used as junior male kin are" (253). In fact, their participation with women in weddings is not typical of everyday interaction (1978b: 664). On most occasions, "when the mood is less playful—at a prayer-time, for instance, or at a funeral—the *shoga* must attend with men or not attend at all." Shepherd concludes, "It would be quite wrong to suggest that homosexuals ought always to be in the company of women in situations where there is formal segregation" (1987: 253).

Mary Porter conducted research in Mombasa in the late 1980s. Like Shepherd, her primary research focus was not on *mashoga;* however, she did work in the Swahili community. Porter is admirably clear that what she has described are "discourses on homosexuality," not the self-understandings of Kenyans involved in same-sex sexual relations. According to Porter, in addition to *(ma)shoga* and *hanithi,* both of which have Arabic roots, and *(ma)basha,* which is derived from Persian, two other terms are used: *msagaliwa,* which has a Bantu root and "refers literally to men who grind *liwa,* an aromatic wood," to produce a cosmetic paste and *rambuza,* a seemingly Bantu-based word for effeminate males (Porter 1995: 142). She saw *mashoga* in women's dances at wedding celebrations, playing *pembe* (a female musical instrument), and doing *chagkacha,* a "woman's dance form that entails hip rotation in an exclusively female way" (141). They sat with women at funerals and took flamboyant parts, sometimes wigged and dressed in women's clothes, in religious celebrations. They were "said to engage in women's domestic tasks such as cooking and sewing" (141). And contrary to the ready acceptance Shepherd presented, Porter observed that at least by the late 1980s, *mashoga* were targets of verbal and physical violence and that some people's animus for them was so great that they would not attend weddings at which they performed (142).

Deborah Amory's chapter, based on actual research and interviews with *mashoga,* is a significant contribution to this debate. As she shows, the role of *shoga* serves to mark the boundaries of conventional

behavior for men and women. At the same time, individuals who assume *shoga* identity express a variety of traits, behaviors, and interpretations of the role.

Having absorbed Arabic and Muslim influence in the past, coastal East Africa is now responding to influences from the West, including the influence of Western gay sexual patterns. Amory found that the English terms *gay, boyfriend,* and *girlfriend* are frequently employed by coastal East Africans today.[14]

"Grinders"

In arguing against a third sex or gender conception in Oman or Mombasa, Shepherd noted that "lesbians [in Mombasa] are known as *wasaga* (grinders). . . . The dominant partner . . . is not seen as a man" (1978a: 133). However, she reported that "there is almost always a dominant and subordinate economic relationship between them" (134). She later revised her transcription: "The word in Swahili glossed as 'lesbian' is *msagaji* (plural *wasagaji*)—'a grinder.'"[15] The verb *kusaga* (to grind) is commonly used for the grinding of grain between two millstones. . . The upper and lower millstones are known as *mwana* and *mama* respectively: child and mother" (1987: 254). In this relationship one woman is typically older and wealther than the other. Whether these distinctions affect sexual behavior inside the relationship, however, Shepherd did not indicate.

According to her later account, "Lesbians dress entirely as women. Their wealth enables them to dress in a rich and feminine way, and though dominant lesbians are more assertive in manner and conversation than most other women, they make no attempt to look like men. When they go out they wear the veil (*buibui*) like all other coastal women. . . . Dependent lesbian women are expected to behave like ordinary women. Dominant lesbian women display energetic personalities very similar to those of active, intelligent non-lesbian women" (1987: 259-60). However, Shepherd also claimed, "Women who are dominant lesbians do not obey strict seclusion rules. As household heads they welcome male visitors to the house and sit with them in the reception room, and they frequently go out of the house" (260). In short, her analyses of homosexuality among women, as among men, are contradicted by the behavior she reports.[16] *Msagaji* seem to be

bidding for some male privilege beyond that of having sex with submissive women. That is, they do not entirely conform to Mombasa conceptions of how women should look and act.

As in the case of *mashoga,* gender variance is more salient than sexual behavior for labeling women *misago/wasagaji.* According to Porter, women resisting marriage and interested in education and careers are labeled "*misago* regardless of the erotic preferences of the women. They are being condemned for behaving in ways that are inconsistent with being a woman and for challenging the gender/status system" (1995: 144).[17] She also heard the derogatory term *lezzies* used, which she interpreted as a diffusion of the Western view of close female-female relations as pathological and evidence of continuing colonial consciousness among Kenyas (144). More systematic data is needed to settle the question of whether gender or sexuality is primary in Swahili conceptions of lesbianism—especially among any self-identified *misago.*

THE INTERLAKE REGION

Nilotes (Eastern Sudanic Languages)

According to Jean Buxton, the Mandari (Mondari, Mundar), an Islamic society of southern Sudan, connected witchcraft and homosexuality: "Homosexuality is viewed as a ludicrous and non-productive act. Thus while all perverts are not necessarily thought witches, since the latter know the aberrant or harmful nature of those habits, they exploit them designedly, in accordance with their wish to obstruct normal development" (1963: 103; also see Buxton 1973: 209). Although folk fear of witches is widespread in Islamic cultures, this particular association has not been reported elsewhere.

In what was regarded in early twentieth-century English social anthropology as an exemplary ethnography, Jack Driberg uncritically passed on the folk explanation of the Nilotic Lango, agriculturalists north of Lake Kwania in Uganda, that impotence is the basis for assuming the alternative gender status of *mudoko dako.*[18] Such males were treated as women and could marry men. Although Driberg thought that they were rare (estimating 50 out of 17,000 people), his Lango informants told him that their behavior was very common

among groups to the east—specifically the pastoralist Iteso (Teso) and the Karamojan (Karamojong) of northwestern Kenya and Uganda (Driberg 1923: 210). (Similarly, in southwestern Uganda, Nkole informants told Mushanga that the Bahima [but not themselves] practiced homosexuality [1973: 181].)

In fact, in the 1950s, Jeremy Laurance asserted that among the Iteso, "People of hermaphroditic instincts are very numerous. . . . The men are impotent and have the instincts of women and become women to all intents and purposes; their voices are feminine and their manner of walking and of speech is feminine. They shave their heads like a woman and wear women's ornaments and clothing. They do women's work and take women's names" (1957: 107). He wrote, "I myself know of no cases in which they live with men as a 'wife,'" but added that in Serere prison one was kept with the women because "the male prisoners would assault him were he imprisoned in the men's cell." He also published a song with the title "The Fellow Who Pinches a Hermaphrodite is a Fool" (160-61). Group masturbation by young Iteso males also has been reported but with no information on its frequency (Karp and Karp 1973: 392).

Cross-dressing is not always part of an ongoing social identity. In the mountains of western Kenya, Hollis observed circumcision festivals among the agriculturalist Nandi in which boys wore women's clothes for about eight weeks (1909: 52-56). He also published Massai texts that describe initiates, called Sipolio, who "like to appear as women and wear the *surutya* earrings and garments reaching to the ground. They also paint their faces with chalk. When they have all recovered they are shaved again and . . . discard the long garments and wear warrior's skins and ornaments" (1905: 298). However, homosexual relations in this region were not limited to those between normatively masculine and nonmasculine males. Felix Bryk referred to "homoerotic bachelors" among the Nandi and nearby Bantu-speaking Maragoli, and he described the case of a Nandi boy whose affair with a white farmer continued even after the boy married, so that he "shared his bed between wife and master" ([1928] 1939: 151 = 1964: 228; 1933: 152). He also reported that some adult Nandi women "satisfied each other alternately" using wooden dildoes ([1928] 1939: 149; 1964: 227).

Bantu Groups

There is evidence of both gender-defined and peer homosexuality among Bantu groups of the interlake region, most of whom combined agriculture and pastoralism (or were agriculturalists in symbiotic relationships with Nilotic pastoralists). Rodney Needham noted a religious leadership role among the agriculturalist Meru of the Kenyan highlands called *mugawe*. *Mugawe* wore women's clothes and hairstyles and sometimes married men (1973a: 116). Among the related Kikuyu, men who took the active role in sex with other men were called *onek*. (See the oral history of Kamau that follows.)

In the late nineteenth century, Haberlandt reported a nonmasculine member of the Wganda (Waganda, Ganda, Baganda) in southern Uganda who was "totally given to passive pederasty" (1899: 668). Bryk wrote that "in Uganda I saw two boys, a Mgisho and a Baganda, lying in bed together, whereupon another boy sneered at them with the words, 'They love each other like husband and wife.' When one of the embarrassed boys objected, the boys deriding them answered quite rightly, 'A man does not sleep with another boy in broad daylight'" ([1928] 1939: 151).[19] More recently, Southwold noted that Baganda acknowledged homosexuality but attributed its introduction to Arabs and tended "to regard it primarily as foolish: why fool around with a man when women are freely available?" (1973: 170).

In western Kenya and Tanzania, Bryk claimed that among the Bagishu (Bagish or Gisu), so-called hermaphrodites "are quite numerous and are called *inzili* [pl.]; among the Maragoli [Margole] *kiziri*. A seventeen year old boy told me, without being at all embarrassed, that he had such a *mzili* in the posterior. The passive fellow called him and gave him ten shillings for this. While he was with him, the pederast had his flabby penis tied to his stomach" (Bryk [1928] 1939: 151). The boy claimed to have received (and rejected) many such offers from other *inzili*.

Two decades later, Jean La Fontaine found that the Gisu "scorned but did not regard with revulsion transvestite *buyazi*." However, "It is said that today transvestism is associated with homosexuality, whereas formerly it was not." La Fontaine observed three men and one women who cross-dressed and reported that they

were "not mentally disordered" nor were they believed to have special magical powers (1959: 60-61).

In contrast, Needham suggested that in the culture of the Nyoro, a Bantu group led by divine kings east of Lake Albert, a relationship exists between "sexual reversal (by homosexuality, feminine accoutrements, putative child-bearing, or by other less dramatic means)" and the power of diviners (*embandwa;* the root *nda* being a term for womb) (1973b: 316). According to Needham, "At the ceremony of initiation into the Cwezi cult the novice is given to believe that he must demonstrate his genuine possession by the spirits by becoming a woman." (Although Brian Taylor [1962] did not mention homosexuality in his sketchy account of Bantu cults in the interlake region, the resemblances of the Toro *mbandwa,* Tkiga *mandwa,* and Haya *Baharambwa* ceremonies to the Hausa *bori* cult—and all these, in turn, to Afro-Caribbean possession cults [see Fry in Murray 1995a: 193-220]—are noteworthy.)

In a chapter based on observation of a Ugandan prison, Ralph Tanner wrote that the "majority could understand but not tolerate homosexuality in others, and they constantly referred to the practice in admonitory terms" (within earshot of colonialists) (1969: 301): "A few made quasi-normal adjustments by adopting homosexual practices while in prison in order to get material advantages. A few entered the prison with homosexual traits already in existence and provided service for the previous group; they were mainly Arabs or Somali. They were not usually identifiable by ways of dressing or mannerisms. The majority of all fights were over what prisoners call their 'wives'" (1969: 302).

Age-structured and gender-based homosexuality also existed in various royal courts. According to John Faupel, the Ugandan king Mwanga's persecution of Christian pages in 1886 was largely motivated by their rejection of his sexual advances (1962: 9-10, 68, 82-83). He found it increasingly difficult to staff his harem of pages and supposedly was especially enraged when Mwafu, his favorite, refused any longer to submit to anal penetration.[20] In the early 1960s, male homosexuality was described as common among Hutu (Bantu agriculturalists) and Tutsi (Nilotic pastoralists) in the kingdom of Rwanda, especially among young Tutsi being trained at court, who were sexually available to court guests (Maquet 1961: 77-78). More

recently, Cary Johnson reported a conversation with a young Tutsi: "Mutabaruka, a 19-year-old college student, told me that, traditionally, in his tribe there was an extended period during which boys lived apart from the rest of the village while they are training to be warriors, during which very emotional, and often sexual, relationships were struck up. . . . 'Sometimes these relationships lasted beyond adolescence into adulthood,' he told me. Watusi still have a reputation for bisexuality in the cities of East Africa" (1986: 29).

An early twentieth-century dictionary includes the Rundi terms *umuswezi* and *umukonotsi,* translated as "sodomite," and at least five Rundi words for male-male sexuality (*kuswerana nk'imbwa, kunonoka, kwitomba, kuranana inyuma, ku'nyo*). The dictionary also appears to document gender-mixing priests among the Mirundi (Hutu and Tutsi), called *ikihindu* and *ikimaze* (translated as "hermaphrodite," a very imprecise label at that time) (Burgt 1904: 20, 107).

One of the few reports of woman-woman relations in this region comes from Thomas Beidelman, whose male informants among the Bantu-speaking Kaguru of central Tanzania told him, "Some Kaguru women practise lesbian activities during female initiation, women taking both the roles of men and of women in demonstrating sexual congress to initiates. Women were unwilling to discuss this in detail with me, but conceded that women did demonstrate with one another how to have proper sexual congress" (Beidelman 1973: 266). Geigy and Höltker (1951) also mentioned sexual education in the three-year-long seclusion of young women following menarche in the Ulanga district.

Lesbianism in a Kenyan Novel

An African novel in which female-female passion is represented, albeit very negatively, is Rebeka Njau's *Ripples in the Pool,* originally published in 1975. Set in post-independence Kenya, it has two urban villains: a corrupt member of parliament and an educated woman, Selina, who follows her earnest husband Gikere back to his natal village, where she is not accepted by his mother (who holds title to the land). After Gikere beats her, Selina wants to have no further dealings with him and focuses her passions on a young sister-in-law, Gaciru, who keeps house for her. Njau represents Selina's passion for her

young sister-in-law as deeply pathological. Proper women produce children. A woman who turns away from her husband (even if she keeps her affection inside his family) is a menace to herself and others in Njau's representation, and the passionate relationship between females is "shameful to talk about" (Njau 1975: 64)[21]. What he sees of the relationship between his wife and his younger sister disgusts Gikere, though he does not know how to stop their relationship: "Whenever Gaciru appeared, Selina would run towards her, embrace her tightly, and kiss her all over the face, her heart beating wildly. It was a nightmare for Gikere to watch her. He could not understand that kind of passion. It worried him to see a young girl drawn into an emotional kind of love that was strange for human beings" (64).

Selina, who had had extensive heterosexual experience in the city, tries to argue, "It's not a crime to love her [Gaciru]. She gives me joy. Peace," and claims that the demons in her are afraid of Gaciru (65). Njau does not buy such an argument, stressing innocent youth in contrast to corrupt homoeroticism, and serving up some stereotypical homosexual fretting over aging by having Selina fear that Gaciru is growing tired of her (103). Selina warns Gaciru not to marry: "Men are beasts. All they want is to ruin you, especially if they discover you have a brain" (111), but Njau seems to side with patriarchy, to have little sympathy for Selina's pains (psychological or physical), and none for what she characterizes as "Selina's mad grip" on Gaciru, from which Gaciru finds it difficult to disentangle herself (118).

Karuga, Selina's closest relative, who has come to help Gikere build a clinic, falls in love with Gaciru. Gikere tells Karuga that Selina has ruined Gaciru—"How can a girl like that go on living with a mad woman and remain normal?" (118)—and warns Karuga that Selina "is a jealous woman. She wants to keep her [Gaciru] only to herself. Her passion is sickening. It is not the normal type of love" (118).

When she recognized that Gaciru and Karuga love each other, Selina (in a frenzy, not in cold, calculation) strangles Gaciru and, after retreating to the bush, eventually kills Karuga as well. Both of the young lovers are victims of "abnormal love" lashing out at "normal love," destroying a beloved in preference to losing her (even to a kinsman—whom she does not set out to slay, but does when he hunts her down). The view from Njau's novel is that female-female passion is possible but is not only wrong, it is also very dangerous.

II

West Africa

Overview

West Africa includes portions of both the sudanic belt and the equatorial rain forest. In the savannah areas, cattle herding is widespread and grains and other foodstuffs are grown as well. Most of the societies based on herding are nomadic or migratory. Although many groups are Muslim, others, such as the Mossi and the Tallensi, have retained traditional religions, and some Islamic groups, such as the Hausa, have flourishing non-Islamic possession cults. Sudanic societies are typically patrilineal, ranging in scale from small, independent units to kingdoms and empires.

Coastal West Africa (the Guinea Coast) has a similar climate, although rainfall is concentrated in the months from June to November, followed by a dry season. Societies in this area are primarily based on the production of root crops and, for a few, fishing. The region is characterized by a wide range of social and political forms. Patrilineal descent groups are common. Some societies, such as the Yoruba, the Dahomey, and the Asante, formed large political states (prior to European colonialization), while others, such as the Kru and the Ibo, were organized on a smaller scale.

Sudanic West Africa

Relationships organized by both age and gender (even more so than those of the Zande) were observed in the Mossi (Moose) royal court in what is now Burkina Faso in the early twentieth century. *Soronés,* or pages, were chosen from among the most beautiful boys aged seven to fifteen. They dressed as women and assumed other feminine attributes, including women's sexual role with the chiefs, especially on

Fridays, when sexual intercourse with women was prohibited (Tauxier 1912: 569-70).[1] The *soronés* who proved their discretion were entrusted with state secrets. However, they had to undergo annual tests to determine that they had not been sexually intimate with women. After a boy reached maturity, the chief gave him a wife. The firstborn of such couples belonged to the chief. If a boy, he would follow his father in becoming a *soroné;* if a girl, she would be given in marriage by the chief (as her mother had).

Not far from the Mossi, between the lower Senegal and Niger rivers in contemporary Mali, are the Bambara millet farmers. A report from the 1890s refers to a pair of young Bambara archers who took turns with each other while they were enslaved and even after being freed (until they were able to share a wife of an absent fellow archer) (X 1893: 258 = 1898, 2: 165-66).

RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS IN WEST AFRICA

Among the few contemporary Africans to comment on the subject of homosexuality in traditional culture is Malidoma Somé, a member of the agricultural Dagara society of southern Burkina Faso. Somé reports that many individuals who filled spiritual roles in his society are "gay," and he credits this to their capacity to mediate based on the ability to bridge gender roles:

> gender has very little to do with anatomy. . . . The Earth is looked at, from my tribal perspective, as a very, very delicate machine or consciousness, with high vibrational points, which certain people must be guardians of in order for the tribe to keep its continuity with the gods and with the spirits that dwell there—spirits of this world and spirits of the other world. Any person who is this link between this world and the other world experiences a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different, from the one that a normal person would experience. This is what makes a gay person gay. This kind of function is not one that society votes for certain people to fulfill. It is one that people are said to decide on prior to being born. You decide that you will be a gatekeeper before you are born. And it is that decision that provides you with the equipment that you bring into this world. So when you arrive here, you begin to vibrate in a way that Elders can detect as meaning that you are connected with a gateway somewhere.[2]

In Dagara belief, Somé explains, the survival of the cosmos depends on such gatekeepers: "Unless there is somebody who constantly monitors the mechanism that opens the door from this world to the Otherworld, what happens is that something can happen to one of the doors and it closes up. When all the doors are closed, this Earth runs out of its own orbit and the solar system collapses into itself. And because this system is linked to other systems, they too start to fall into a whirlpool" (1993: 8).

Somé's 1994 book, *Of Water and the Spirit,* relates some of his own experiences during (a belated) initiation. After years of study in the West (earning doctorates from the Sorbonne and from Brandeis), he returned to his village. He began to wonder about Dagara "who feel the way that certain people feel in this culture that has led to them being referred to as 'gay.'" When he asked one of them, "who had taken me to the threshold of the Otherworld [one of the elders supervising his initiation cohort], whether he feels sexual attraction towards another man, he jumped back and said, 'How do you know that?' He said, 'This is our business as gatekeepers'" (1993: 7).[3] As a result of such beliefs, Somé reports that "the gay person is very well integrated into the community" (8). (The particular gatekeeper he spoke to had a wife and children.)

Somé also reports that among the related Dogon of Mali, "a tribe that knows astrology like no other tribe that I have encountered, the great astrologers . . . are gay," and he argues that, with the exception of Christendom, "Everywhere else in the world gay people are a blessing" (8).[4]

Unfortunately, other reports of West African homosexuality come from much less sympathetic chroniclers, namely Christian Europeans. One early-twentieth-century observer, for example, described a ceremony performed by a secret society variously called Obukele, Obukere, and Oweu among the Ibo and Abuan peoples of Nigeria whenever the Niger and adjoining rivers were at their crest. It included "unnatural rites performed during the ceremonies and sympathetic magic practiced in order to secure fruitfulness for human beings, animals and

fishes" (Talbot 1926, 3: 766). Yet another colonial-era author, in discussing phallic signs "in Oro, Egbo, Nimm, Katahwiriba, Orisha, and other societies" in Sierra Leone and West Africa, obliquely mentioned "pictures in some of the council houses of old pederastical practices" (Butt-Thompson 1929: 175).

Hausa

The once-fortified Muslim city-states of the Hausa represent the westernmost extension of Chadic-speakers, who reached their present location some five hundred years ago (Newman 1995: 199). Although substantially converted to Islam by the sixteenth century, many Hausa today participate in a possession religion—the *bori* cult—that some believe to be a survival of pre-Islamic religion.[5] Gender-marked homosexual men are prominent in this cult, which is strikingly similar to possession cults in Brazil and the Caribbean founded by descendents of West Africans.

As in the Haitian voudou(n) cult, the Hausa speak of those who are possessed as being horses "ridden" by the spirit. Homosexual participants are called *'yan daudu* (son of Daudu). Fremont Besmer explains that Daudu is a praise name for any Galadima (i.e., a ranked title). It specifically refers to the *bori* spirit Dan Galadima (literally, son of Galadima; the Prince), who is said to be "a handsome young man, popular with women, a spendthrift, and a gambler" (Besmer 1983: 30, n. 4).

In fact, according to Besmer, *'yan daudu* are not actually possessed by Dan Galadima or any other spirits (1983: 18). Rather, their role is to make "luxury snacks"—such as fried chicken—which are sold at cult events (Pittin 1983: 297).[6] They also serve as intermediaries between female prostitutes and prospective clients.

Pittin offers some additional observations of this role: "The economic enterprises of the *'yan daudu* are centered on three related activities: procuring, cooking, and prostitution. . . . Procuring, the mobilisation of women for illicit sexual purposes, clearly demands close ties between the procurer and the women. The *'dan daudu* [sing.], in his combination of male and female roles, can and does mediate between men and women in this context" (1983: 296-97). In fact, living among women in the strangers' quarters of Hausa towns

provides "a cover for men seeking homosexual services. The *'dan daudu* and his sexual partners can carry out their assignations with greater discretion than would be possible if the *'yan daudu* lived together, or on their own outside the *gidan mata*" (297).

In patriarchal Hausa society, the *bori* cult provides a niche for various low-status persons. As Besmer notes, "Women provide the bulk of membership for the cult and are stereotyped as prostitutes," while "jurally-deprived categories of men, including both deviants (homosexuals) and despised or lowly-ranked categories (butchers, night-soil workers, poor farmers, and musicians) constitute the central group of possessed or participating males." In addition, the cult attracts "an element of psychologically disturbed individuals which cuts across social distinctions" (1983: 18-19; see also Mary Smith 1954: 64; Hill 1967: 233).[7] Besmer explains the decision to join the *bori* cult in terms of labeling theory, as an instance of "secondary deviance":

> One whose status identity is somewhat ambiguous, arising from some personal characteristic . . . , specific social condition, or regularly recurring condition associated with the life cycle, can seek either to have his social identity changed or his social status regularized and defined through participation in bori rituals. Marked by "abnormality" and accepted as a candidate for membership in the cult through an identification of iskoki as the cause of the problem, a person's behavior becomes explainable, and simultaneously earns a degree of acceptability, after the completion of the bori initiation. Symbolic transformation from a suffering outsider—outside both the society and the cult—to one whose status includes the description, horse of the gods is achieved. (122-23)

In other words, the *bori* cult provides its members with a social niche and an alternative source of prestige. Even so, the cult remains marginal. According to Besmer, "Status ambiguity is not completely eliminated through involvement in the bori cult. While an initiated individual achieves a specific, formal status within the cult since possession is institutionalized, it is not possible for him to escape the general social assessment of his behavior as deviant" (21). Besmer did not determine, however, if members of the cult accepted this devalua-

tion. His account provides some indications of "tertiary deviance," that is, rejection of stigma (18).

In the end, Besmer fails to explain how and why certain Hausa come to define themselves or others as different, let alone as homosexual. Research by Salisu Abdullahi in the early 1980s provides some insight into this question. He interviewed 140 *'yan daudu* and reported that 56 percent cited economic reasons to explain why they became a *'dan daudu,* while 22 percent cited the influence of friends and associates, and only 7 percent attributed their role to "nature."[8]

These findings led Kleis and Abdullahi, researchers at Bayero University in Kano, Nigeria, to conclude that economic rewards are "sufficient to account for recruitment without assuming a personality predisposition" to dress and behave like a woman (1983: 52). In their view, prostitutes provide a "safety valve" in Hausa society, in which female seclusion has been increasing since the nineteenth century. *'Yan daudu,* rather than being prostitutes themselves (like the Omani *khanith),* function as procurers, recruiting runaway women, "socializing them in the seductive arts," and then "soliciting suitors, arranging contacts, extolling and advertising her charms, and managing relations with the authorities." The intermediary role of *'yan daudu* is crucial, because female prostitutes live and work outside the walled city core. For these services, the *'dan daudu* is paid both by the prostitutes and by their customers. According to Kleis and Abdullahi, these commissions constitute "the bulk of his daily income" (45).

Kleis and Abdullahi treat the *'dan daudu* as a wholly secular role, an economic niche for poor emigrants (not all of whom are Hausa) from the countryside, not as a refuge for males seeking sex with males.[9] Following a long line of anthropologists and others who discount the possibility of homosexual desire in the occurrence of homosexual acts (yet never raise the same question about heterosexual desire), Kleis and Abdullahi assert, "Many 'yan daudu are assumed also to be homosexuals, although this does not seem to be the major feature of their social status, which hinges more on their self-identification as females" (1983: 44). For them, the nonmasculine behavior and dress of *'yan daudu* are products of purely practical considerations: "A male with masculine gender identity and pronounced heterosexual interests would be less suitable as a broker because he might well find it difficult to separate his personal and professional involvements with the prostitute and would risk becoming a rival of her customers" (46). (Apparently, it did not occur to them that a homosexual *'dan daudu* could also have conflicts, since he could be a rival for the female prostitutes' *customers.* They do not report who the sexual partners of *'yan daudu* are.)

Kelis and Abdullahi note that there is no Hausa or Omani role for women who live or act like men, and they stress that both the Hausa *'dan daudu* and the Omani *khanith* are conceived as a type of male. Indeed, "They occupy these positions precisely because they are anatomical males."[10] Further, like the *khanith, 'yan daudu* "can temporarily, alternately, or permanently switch back and take up conventional male roles—a course definitely unavailable to anatomical females" (49).

In his chapter, Rudolph Gaudio reports on his research in the 1990s in the "gay male community" of the predominantly Hausa city of Kano. Although he follows Kleis and Abdullahi in de-emphasizing the connection between *'yan dauda* and possession cults, his view of the Hausa sexual landscape is more nuanced. In addition to the gender-defined role of nonmasculine 'yan daudu, Gaudio describes *k'wazo*—older, well-to-do men, generally masculine in behavior—and their younger partners, called *baja,* who are generally sexually receptive (that is, penetrated) and receive presents as would female lovers. Although the labels for these roles are grammatically gendered, the actual behavior of individuals in such relationships is variable. Age, wealth, and temperament are not always neatly bundled. Indeed, Gaudio heard of nonmasculine males having sex with each other, which was considered to be a form of *kifi,* or "lesbianism" (1996b: 132). Even sex between two masculine males was viewed as *kifi.* As Gaudio notes, such labeling reveals the belief that valid sexual encounters involving "real" men normally entail a distinct power asymmetry. At the same time, while sex between *'yan daudu* is derided, sex between two masculine-identified men is not condemned. In other words, in Hausa terms, valid sex requires at least one masculine partner—but not necessarily a female or feminine partner.

Gaudio believes that there has been little if any non-African influence on Hausa same-sex patterns. In 1994, when a local Muslim newspaper characterized homosexual marriages as a Western practice alien to Hausa Muslim culture, Gaudio heard members of "Kano's gay

male community" speak of "homosexuality and homosexual marriage as practices that are indigenous to Hausa Muslim culture [even] as they are marginal within it" (1996a abstract).

The Hausa men that Gaudio describes significantly differ from most contemporary North American and European gay men in that they do not see homosexuality as incompatible with or excluding heterosexuality, including marriage and parenthood. This observation is key for understanding African patterns of sexuality. The assumptions behind modern Western forms of voluntary or "choice" marriage, in which the partners freely choose each other based on personal desires and criteria, have led many to imagine that marriage everywhere "naturally" flows from heterosexual desire. But in societies in which marriage is required and viewed as a fundamental obligation of kinship and citizenship, whether or not the partners are attracted to each other—or to each other's sex in general—is irrelevant.

Arranged or mandatory marriage does not require heterosexual orientation or desire, and consequently heterosexuality is not fetishized in traditional societies as "normal" or "natural" or even a necessary (or recognized) state of being. Traditional societies do not need "heterosexuality"—the idea, the word, the symbol, the ideology—to ensure the union of men and women and the production of new generations. Familial intervention and kinship obligations guarantee that marriage will happen. Consequently, such societies do not need to suppress homosexuality, as long as it does not threaten the directive to marry and reproduce (specifically, in patrilineal societies, sons). The freedom for men to pursue extramarital heterosexual or homosexual relations can be quite extensive, provided such affairs remain secondary and socially invisible. Homosexuality must never exclude heterosexuality (see, for example, Khan on contemporary Pakistan [1997]).

As Gaudio found, Hausa "gay" men regard their homosexual desires as real and as intrinsic to their nature, but they also regard their reproductive obligations as real and, ultimately, more important than their homosexual affairs, which they considered merely *wasa,* play. Not surprisingly, Gaudio did not encounter any *'yan daudu* who expressed an interest in surgical sex reassignment. In Muslim belief, removing one's genitalia would not only make it impossible to fulfill the role of parent, it would be a kind of sacrilege to one's God-given body. In this regard, even the most effeminate *'dan daudu* is understood by all Hausas to be male.

Yoruba

In the early 1960s, a psychiatric team surveyed villagers around Abeokuta, Nigeria—the region of the Yoruba, non-Islamic savannah agriculturalists who have long been intensely hostile to the Hausa—to identify symptoms thought by the Yoruba to indicate or constitute mental and emotional illness. "Homosexuality was not mentioned; and when we asked about it, we were told it was extremely rare, probably found only in changing parts of urban centers" (Leighton et al. 1963: 111). However, the failure of Yorubans to mention homosexuality when questioned about illness is not the firmest basis for drawing conclusions about its presence. Such responses could just as easily suggest that rural Yoruba did not consider homosexuality an "illness."[11]

As among many other African peoples, Yoruba spirit possession (*òrìsà gìgún*) is primarily associated with women. Most Sango priests are female, and those who are not dress in women's clothing, cosmetics, and jewelry and sport women's coiffures when they are going to be possessed (Matory 1994: 6-7, also see 183-215; H. Baumann 1955: 33-35; Matory 1986: 51).

The Yoruba verb for possession *gun* (to mount) "often implies suddenness, violence, and utter loss of self-control. . . . Sango will 'mount' the initiand bride, an act whose sexual implications are clear. Not only do gods 'mount' priests, but male animals 'mount' females in the sex act. . . . It does not normally apply to human beings. Applied to human beings it suggests rape. Hence, its application suggests metaphorically the violence and absolute domination implicit in Sango's command" (1994: 175, 198, 270 n., 16). Initiates of both sexes are referred to as a "bride" (*iyawo*) of the god (179).

For the Yoruba—in marked contrast to their religious and political antagonists, the Hausa (and Yoruba emulators in the Bahian possession cults of Brazil and many other peoples)—the priests who are mounted by gods are not assumed to be mounted by men as well.

Of the *elegun* Matory wrote, "They regularly have multiple wives and children, and no one seems to wonder if they engage in sex with other men" (1994: 208). Matory actually broached the subject of homosexuality with Yorubans—so that in this instance lack of evidence cannot be blamed on lack of inquiry. In his research on Afro-Brazilian possession religion, Matory observed that

> there is an extensive public discourse suggesting that males who are possessed by spirits tend also to be the *type* of men (i.e., *bichas*) who habitually get penetrated sexually by other men. By contrast, my point about the Nigerian possession religions is that they and their [non-believing] neighbors present no *public discourse* suggesting this link. To me the absence of such a discourse does not by itself mean that no Sango priest is penetrated by other men. It just means that few people, if any at all, in this socio-cultural context recognize penetrated men as a type of social personality and that sexual penetration is not the aspect of the sacred marriage that Oyo-Yoruba royalists highlight in the construction of god-priest relations or, incredible as it may sound, husband-wife relations. . . . I do not mean to infer that these men never have sex with other men [although] I doubt that they do, based upon my limited but deliberate investigation of the possibility. (personal communication to S.O.M., April 12, 1996)

In short, there does not appear to be a Yoruba role in which homosexuality is an expected feature.[12] It does appear, however, that Yorubas contrast their own sexuality (both Christian and "traditional") to the "corrupt" sexuality of the Islamic Hausa in the same way that highland Kenyan Kikuyu (who are mostly Christian) contrast their sexual mores to the perceived acceptance of gender-defined homosexuality in Islamicized coastal areas. These alleged differences have over time increasingly become a "marker" in ethnic-religious conflicts in colonial and post-colonial multiethnic states. However, while noting the contrast between the Hausa's ready acknowledgment of (and gossip about) the involvement of leading men in homosexuality and Yoruban denials of any corresponding practices, Gaudio "categorically reject[s] the idea that there is no homosexual self-identity in contemporary Yoruba communities":

> I met at least two Yoruba self-identified "gay" men in Kano, neither of whom had ever lived abroad, who told me about the many other "gays" they knew in such cities as Ilorin, Ibadan, and, of course, Lagos where there is a "Gentleman's Alliance" with pan-Southern membership. My Kano Yoruba contacts told me that GA members have private parties at each other's homes, and that there is a division of Yoruba gay male social circles into "kings" and "queens.". . . When I asked one of these Yoruba "queens" whether there was any Yoruba equivalent to the Hausa *'yan daudu,* he said that no, Yoruba queens had more "respect" than the *'yan daudu,* insofar as Yoruba queens keep their outrageous, feminine behaviors a secret from other people. (personal communication to S.O.M., March 13, 1997)[13]

Tade Akin Aina, a sociologist at the University of Lagos, has written about male concubines and male prostitutes (many of whom double as pimps for female prostitutes) in contemporary cities such as Lagos and Kano. Patrons often "operate plural relationships with a retinue of young men," who may use the resources they derive from their homosexual liaisons to pursue heterosexual sex: "They are often identifiable as big spenders and playboy socialites" (1991: 88). The male prostitutes that he interviewed in Kano and Lagos

> still believe that there are magical and witchcraft effects associated with male homosexual intercourse. They also believe that if the dominant partner is a businessman, such associations confer spiritual benefits to his business. This, they state, affects the price they place on their services. Also it is felt that homosexuality conveys some unique advantages on its practitioners; for instance, they feel that homosexuals tend to be rich and successful men. . . . [They] feel that they are at risk of becoming impotent (the "eunuch effect") or permanently incapable of conventional heterosexual relations once any of their clients exploit the relationship for ritual or witchcraft purposes. . . . Among the Nigerian prostitutes spoken to, modern risks such as AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases did not carry weight as sources of fear. (88)

As Gaudio reports below, there are Hausa lesbians, some of whom know of and use the terms for male homosexual roles, and Hausa gay men claim that lesbians engage in the same types of relationships they do—that is, they exchange gifts and assume active/receptive sexual roles. In 1942, Nadel made passing mention of Nupe lesbian behavior in Nigeria (152; see also 1954: 179).

COASTAL WEST AFRICA

Eunuchs, Amazons, and a Sometimes Lifelong "Adolescent Phase" in Dahomey

Historical reports refer to same-sex patterns in the royal court of the Dahomey kingdom (in present-day Benin), which emerged in the eighteenth century. In the 1780s, Norris saw castrated men during his journey through the region (1789: 422). A century later, Richard Burton ([1865] 1924: 123) reported that "it is difficult to obtain information in Dahome concerning eunuchs, who are special slaves of the king, and bear the dignified title of royal wives." About the same time, a privileged role for nonmasculine males was observed in the Dahomey court at Ouidah (Whydah) (Langle 1876: 243). Called *lagredis*, they were chosen from among the sons of the country's best families. In their youth, they were forced to drink potions that stifled their passions. Reportedly, they had unlimited powers, and their headman played an important part at court and in the king's council. Two *lagredi* accompanied any emissary of the king's, monitored his negotiations, and reported what they observed directly back to the king. All this is reminescent of the role of eunuchs in the courts of the Near East, and the practice may, indeed, have been adopted as a result of Islamic influence. Earlier observers, however, speculated that pederasty among the Dahomean royalty was inevitable given the king's monopolization of women (Bastian 1879, 3: 305; Gorer [1935] 1962: 141).

Another unique feature of the Dahomean state system was the presence of military troops of women. In his account of his 1863-64 mission, Burton devoted a chapter to "the so-called Amazon" troops of King Gelele (1864, 2: 63-85). In Burton's view, "the origin of the somewhat exceptional organisation" of the women troops, which he estimated to number about 2,500, was "the masculine physique of the women, enabling them to compete with men in enduring toil, hardship and privations" (64). He also offered an historical explanation—the female troops were organized after the early eighteenth-century King Agaja depleted the ranks of male soldiers (65).

Ellis, noting that Dahomean women "endured all the toil and performed all the hard labour," elaborated on the historical evolution of the Amazon institution:

> The female corps, to use the common expression, the Amazons, was raised about the year 1729, when a body of women who had been armed and furnished with banners, merely as a stratagem to make the attacking forces appear larger, behaved with such unexpected gallantry as to lead to a permanent corps of women being embodied [by King Trudo]. Up to the reign of Gezo, who came to the stool in 1811, the Amazon force was composed chiefly of criminals, that is criminals in the Dahomi sense of the word. Wives detected in adultery, and termagants and scolds were drafted into its ranks; and the great majority of the women "given to the king" by the provincial chiefs, that is, sent to him as being worthy of death for misdemeanours or crimes, were, instead of being sacrificed at the Annual Custom, made women soldiers. Gezo, who largely made use of the Amazons to keep his own subjects in check and to promote military rivalry, increased and improved the force. He directed every head of a family to send his daughters to Agbomi for inspection; the most suitable were enlisted, and the corps thus placed on a new footing. This course was also followed by Gelele, his successor, who had every girl brought to him before marriage, and enrolled those who pleased him. ([1890] 1965: 183)

Burton reported nothing, and Ellis next to nothing, about the sexuality of these "Amazons." They were distinguished from the king's numerous wives, and "two-thirds are said to be maidens" (R. Burton 1864: 64, 68). In his "Terminal Essay" to his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, Burton wrote, "In the Empire of Dahomey I noted a corps of prostitutes kept for the use of the Amazon-soldieresses" (1885: 247). In his 1864 account he merely noted, "All the passions are sisters. I

believe that bloodshed causes these women to remember, not to forget LOVE" (2: 73).

Commander Frederick Forbes's journals of his 1849-50 missions to King Gezo of Dahomey (published in 1851) also fail to describe the sexual behavior of the "Amazons," but they are clearer than Burton about the "Amazons'" masculine gender identification:

> The amazons are not supposed to marry, and, by their own statement, they have changed their sex. "We are men," say they, "not women." All dress alike, diet alike, and male and female emulate each other: what the males do, the amazons will endeavour to surpass. They all take great care of their arms, polish the barrels, and, except when on duty, keep them in covers. There is no duty at the palace except when the king is in public, then a guard of amazons protects the royal person, and, on review, he is guarded by the males. . . . The amazons are in barracks within the palace enclosure, and under the care of eunuchs and the camboodee or treasurer. (1851, 1: 123-24)[14]

Indeed, in a parade on July 13, 1850, amazon troops sang about the effeminacy of the male soldiers they had defeated:

> We marched against Attahpahms as against men,
> We came and found them women.
> What we catch in the bush we never divide. (2: 108)

Some 2,400 amazons joined the parade, pledging to conquer Abeahkeutah (a British ally in Sierra Leone) or to die trying. An amazon chief then began a speech by referring to their gender transformation: "As the blacksmith takes an iron bar and by fire changes its fashion, so we have changed our nature. We are no longer women, we are men" (2: 119).

In the twentieth century, the Fon, the predominant people in Dahomey, were studied by the anthropologist Melville Herskovits. According to Herskovits, the Fon considered homosexuality an adolescent phase: "[When] the games between boys and girls are stopped, the boys no longer have the opportunity for companionship with the girls, and the sex drive finds satisfaction in close friendship between boys in the same group. . . . A boy may take the other 'as a woman' this being called *gaglgo*, homosexuality. Sometimes an affair of this sort persists during the entire life of the pair" (1938: 289). The last statement shows the insufficiency of either the native model or of Herskovits's understanding of it. As the need to carefully conceal homosexual relationships that continue beyond adolescence demonstrates, the Fon model is prescriptive rather than descriptive.

Herskovits also reported that "homosexuality is found among women as well as men; by some it is claimed that it exists among women to a greater extent" (1938: 289). Male suspicion of what women are up to among themselves, on the one hand, and women's formation of emotionally intense relationships as shelters from men, on the other, are common patterns in West African cultures.

Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia

Froelich's mention of a separate (and longer) initiation rite, called *kpankpankwondi*, for Moba girls in northern Togo who refuse to marry the husbands selected for them is especially tantalizing (1949: 115-18). Among the Fanti of Ghana, Christensen observed gender-mixing roles for both males and females, which were based on the belief that those with heavy souls, whatever their biological sex, will desire women, while those with light souls will desire men (1954: 92-93, 143). Greenberg has related Eva Meyerowitz's (unconfirmed) report, based on her fieldwork in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), that "Lesbian affairs were virtually universal among unmarried Akan women, sometimes continuing after marriage. Whenever possible, the women purchased extra-large beds to accommodate group sex sessions involving perhaps half-a-dozen women" (Greenberg 1988: 66).[15]

The Ashanti, another matrilineal Akan people who reside in present-day Ivory Coast, created a powerful state in the eighteenth century. According to a nineteenth-century report, they used male slaves as concubines, treating them like female lovers. Male concubines wore pearl necklaces with gold pendants. When their masters died, they were also killed (Hutchinson 1861: 129-30). Meyerowitz, who observed the Ashanti and other Akan peoples from the 1920s to

the 1940s, recalled that "at that time men who dressed as women and engaged in homosexual relations with other men were not stigmatized, but accepted." She believed that there were good reasons for men to become women, since among the matrilineal Akan the status of women was particularly high (a situation that she believes has changed due to missionary activity).[16]

More recently, Anyi informants in the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), members of another Akan people, told Paul Parin that "in every village there are some men who, for neurotic reasons, do not have sexual relations with women. A number of them are known to practice occasional reciprocal masturbation with boys" (Parin et al. 1980: 204). Parin asserted that bisexuality was even more common among women, and he published a case study in which the approaches of a gift-giving sorcerer to another man are ambivalently recounted (289-95).

In the early 1970s, Italo Signorini described age-stratified homosexuality among the Nzema (Nzima), traditionally an agricultural and fishing people living near the mouth of the Tano River in Ghana. Nzema same-sex couples speak frankly about their attraction to the physical beauty, character, and oratorical skills of their partners. They "fall in love," contract relationships, and share beds. The husband pays bridewealth to the male wife's parents, as he would for a female bride, and celebrates with a wedding banquet. The same incest taboos that restrict availability of women apply, and divorce requirements for male couples are the same as for male-female ones. The male wives are younger than their husbands, but usually the difference is not generational—for example, a thirty-year-old marrying a twenty-year-old (Signorini 1971). Vinigi Grottanelli also has noted the role of age differences. *Agyale,* or "friendship marriages," were "usually between a man and a male teenager, more rarely between two women." In either case, "preliminaries similar to those of real marriage are performed, partners cohabit for short periods, exchange presents, and share the same bed or mat" (Grottanelli 1988: 210). However, Signorini reports that Nzema men acquired same-sex partners for "social, not sexual consumption" and that they persistently denied practicing "sodomy."[17]

Wilhelm Hammer noted that homosexual relations were not rare among Liberian Kru youths (1909: 198), whose domestic services to men of other tribes included being sodomized, according to Hellwald

(1886, 4: 591). In the 1930s, Wilfred Hambly noted that "homosexuality is reported" (without specifying by whom) in the Grand Porro in Liberia and Sierra Leone (1937: 500).

Gender-Defined Homosexuality in and around Senegal

In Senegal in the 1890s, Corre encountered black men with feminine dress and demeanor, who, he was told, made their living from prostitution; in Boké, Guinea, he saw a prince's dancer miming a sexually receptive role (1894: 80, n. 1). In the 1930s, Gorer reported that among the Wolof in Senegal, "Pathics are a common sight. They are called in Wolof men-women, *gor-digen,* and do their best to deserve the epithet by their mannerisms, their dress and their make-up; some even dress their hair like women. They do not suffer in any way socially, though the Mohammedans refuse them religious burial" ([1935] 1962: 36).

Twenty-five years later, Michael Crowder saw young males waiting to be picked up in the Place Prôtet, the main square in Dakar (since renamed Place de l'Indépendence), and he reported that the Wolof word for homosexual was "*Gor-Digen.*" "The elders and faithful Muslims condemn men for this," he noted, "but it is typical of African tolerance that they are left very much alone by the rest of the people" (1959: 68). Another observer in the same period asserted that homosexuality was rare in the countryside but well established in large towns (Gamble 1957: 80). In 1958, Michael Davidson observed in a Dakar bar a cross-dressing male prostitute who was well accepted (see "Dakar Boy Brothels").

In the early 1970s, a nonrandom survey of Senegalese found that 17.6 percent of the males and 44.4 percent of the females reported having homosexual experiences (Schenkel 1971: 343). The visibility of homosexuality in Dakar was also noted (379).

More recently, Gerben Potman and Huub Ruijgrok referred to "militant transvestites and other uninhibited types in bigger cities" in Senegal and Burkina Faso. They reported that "one of us took part in a ceremony where two male couples married in front of their friends. Each of the friends delivered a speech and rings were exchanged. The married couples, however, did not have the means to live together in the same

house. Only a few rich urban men have the opportunity to live together" (1993: 169).[18] They also noted that there are men who "will never consider or identify themselves as homosexuals, even if they have sex with other men regularly" and others who "clearly prefer homosexual contacts" but "will never label themselves publicly as homosexual because of the consequences. They therefore hide both their identity and activities."[19] Within their relationships, "traditional male/female casting plays an important part. Partners characterize themselves as 'the man' or 'the woman'; this choice of social role is reflected also in sexual intercourse, with an active and a passive partner" (169).

In 1990, Neils Teunis observed similar role dichotomization in a Dakar bar. The men he met referred to themselves as *homosexuèles* in French and *gordjiguène* in Wolof (cf. *gor-digen*), which Teunis translates as "manwoman" (1996: 161). However, the term was applied to both sexual insertors (*yauss*) and insertees (*oubi*, literally "open"). According to one informant, "When two men have sex, the one who acts as insertor is the one who pays money or gives gifts to the other." Sometimes, however, one *oubi* may "play" sexually with another *oubi*—perhaps because *oubi* "were able to support themselves and were often wealthier . . . [and therefore] not economically dependent on the *yauss*." Such "play" was distinguished from "sex" (that is, anal penetration), although Teunis did not learn how roles or sexual acts between *oubi* are negotiated (161).

Teunis claims that physical appearance is the sole basis for assigning a male to the role of *yauss* or *oubi*. His evidence for this is tenuous, however. He describes a big, strong *yauss*, whom he calls Babacar, who told him of "his desire for lightskinned (not white) men with big chests and huge muscles, like Rambo" (164). (Although Teunis assumed that Babacar desired such a man to take the insertive role in sex with him, he could just as easily have desired to be the penetrator.) Babacar's sexual partners were boys around the age of seventeen who were not part of the bar subculture and who were paid by him to be sexually receptive. Thus, his visible gender and sexual behavior were consistent.

Teunis's other reason for concluding that role assignment by others is immediate and permanent is that he himself was typed as an *oubi* by the hustler/pimp who led him to the bar and by its denizens. (It would have been interesting if he had tested this judgment by

claiming that he was a *yauss*, or that he was a European gay man and therefore neither or both, which he could have done while still maintaining his chastity.) Given that some of Babacar's boys offered to be anally penetrated by him, he was apparently seen by some Senegalese insertees as a possible insertor (164).[20]

III

Central Africa

Overview

CENTRAL AFRICA HAS THE CONTINENT'S DENSEST FORESTS and a climate of high temperatures and heavy rainfall. The prevalence of the tstetse fly precludes economies based on stock-raising, and consequently most groups are agriculturalists, an exception being the Mbuti (Pygmy) hunter-gatherers. Typically, men clear the forests and women undertake the cultivation of various root crops. Bantu-speaking groups of the equatorial regions are patrilineal, patrilocal, and polygynous. They are largely egalitarian societies without elaborate political structures. In contrast, the Central Bantu in the savannah zone to the south, while pursuing a similar subsistence pattern, have matrilineal descent systems and created powerful kingdoms such as the Kongo and the Ndongo. They are part of a band of matrilineal Bantu societies extending across the continent from the Atlantic coast, through the Congo basin, to Tanzania and Mozambique. In Angola, where Nzinga's Mbundu kingdom flourished, matrilineal Bantu groups combined agriculture and cattle herding.

EQUATORIAL REGION AND THE CONGO BASIN

According to the early twentieth-century German ethnographer Günther Tessman, homosexuality among male adolescents was accepted in the Cameroon town of Bafia, a region occupied by patrilineal Bantu-speakers (the Fia or Bafia) (and believed to be the original homeland of the Bantu-speaking peoples) (1921: 124-28). Older boys penetrated younger boys, or they engaged in reciprocal anal intercourse (*jigele ketön*). Tessman reported that this was com-

mon among boys too young to have intercourse with females. Once they reached the *ntu* age-grade and could have sex with females, however, they were expected to give up homosexual relations—and certainly to do so by the time they became fathers (the *mbang* age-grade). Tessman believed that not all did, but he did not know of any specific instances. A somewhat earlier report indicated that young Dualla (Duala) men in the Cameroons practiced mutual masturbation (Hammer 1909: 198).

Elsewhere, Tessman reported some unusual beliefs regarding homosexuality among the Bantu-speaking Fang (Pahouin, Pangwe)[1] —slash-and-burn farmers in the rainforests north of the Congo River (present-day Gabon and Cameroon). These groups believed that same-sex intercourse was a medicine for wealth, transmitted *from* the receptive partner *to* the penetrating partner by anal intercourse (1904: 23). At the same time, the disease yaws was believed to be the supernatural punishment for committing these acts. Nonetheless, according to Tessman, same-sex relations among peers and between adults and youths were fairly common: "It is frequently 'heard of' that young [Pangwe] people carry on homosexual relations with each other and even of older people who take boys, who as is well known 'have neither understanding nor shame' and readily console them by saying *biabo pfia'nga* (we are having fun, playing a game). . . . Adults are excused with the corresponding assertion: *a bele nnem e bango* = 'he has the heart (that is, the aspirations) of boys.' Such men were said to have a heart for boys: *bian nku'ma*" (1904: 131, HRAF translation). (Tessman's 1921 article and a Pangwe tale recorded by him follows.) Tessman also reported the Pangwe claim that the Central Bantu Loango were major poisoners and pederasts. He personally observed how Loango male favorites were excused from carrying burdens when even the chief carried loads.

Especially interesting is Gustave Hulstaert's report that among the Nkundo (a patrilineal group of the Mongo nation in the curve of the Congo River), the younger partner penetrated the older one, a pattern contrary to the usual roles assumed in age-stratified homosexual relationships (1938a: 86-87). He also described how "the game of *gembankango* in which boys, imitating monkeys chase each other through the trees and creepers can—and does—result in reprehensible scenes" (73).

In the early twentieth century, Emil Torday and Thomas Joyce noted "sterile" men, called *mokobo* and *tongo* among the Bambala (Mbala), a Central Bantu group in the Kwango River basin (1905: 420, 424). The same authors reported mutual masturbation among young men of the neighboring Bayaka (Yaka) agriculturalists (1906: 48). Somewhat earlier, Herman Soyaux reported sexual relations between men and boys among the matrilineal Bangala (Mbangala) in Angola, which occurred on lengthy business trips when men were unaccompanied by their wives (1879, 2: 59).[2] Weeks also reported that mutual masturbation was frequently practiced by Bangala men and that sodomy was "very common, and is regarded with little or no shame. It generally takes place when men are visiting strange towns or during the time they are fishing at camps away from their women" (1909: 448-49).

In west-central Angola, missionary David Livingstone observed individuals that he termed *dandies* among the Temba (Tamba/Matamba). These men adorned their bodies with decorations and used so much grease in their hair that it drenched their shoulders (1857: 452). Livingstone did not hazard any comments about their sexual behavior, however.

In his extensive description of the Mukanda, or boys' circumcision rites, of the Ndembu in what is now northwestern Zambia, Victor Turner (1967) related that initiates mimed copulation with a senior male's penis. The rationale for the practice is reminiscent of those underlying actual same-sex contact between men and youth in Melanesian initiations: it was considered a way to strengthen the novice's penis. Similarly, among neighboring Central Bantu groups (the Luvale/Balovale, Chokwe, Luchazi, Lucho, and Lunda), boys remained nude throughout the first phase of initiation while they recovered from their circumcision. At this time, they played with the penises of the *vilombola* (keeper of the initiation lodge) and *tulombolachika* (initiated assistants of the *vilombola*). According to one report, "This is considered to hasten healing; the novices also hope that by so doing, their own penes will grow large and strong. The same is done to visitors to the lodge" (White 1953: 49).

In the early 1980s, Karla Poewe described kinship terminology with cross-gender implications among the Central Bantu of the Luapula province in northwestern Zambia: "Dual sexuality, if such a

designation is appropriate, refers to the fact that a person who is anatomically male, can play a female role. For example, a person's maternal uncle, specifically 'his/her maternal uncle,' is *nalume. Na* means mother of, *lume* means masculine gender" (1982: 172). Poewe did not indicate, however, whether such practices resulted in a social role based on "dual sexuality" or in any particular sexual practices. Forms of sexuality other than heterosexuality, on the rare occasions that they were mentioned, "call forth hilarity" (172).[3]

The anthropological popularizer Colin Turnbull wrote that male homosexuality was rare and regarded derisively by Mbuti hunting bands of the Ituri forest (1965: 122; 1986: 118). He later added "that when men sleep huddled together, sometimes one ejaculates, but he then ridicules himself for this 'accident'" and the "Mbuti do not reject homosexuality so much as they favor procreation" (Greenberg 1988: 87).[4]

The Kitesha Role among the Basongye

North of the Central Bantu, in the present nation of Congo (formerly Zaire), are groups of the Luba nation, patrilineal societies that betray traces of former matrilineality. They include the Basongye (Basonge/Bala) of the Kasai Oriental Province, where Alan Merriam found that an alternative gender role, called *kitesha,* existed for both males and females . Although his account is somewhat confusing, the role, when occupied by males, clearly entailed systematic departures from men's conventional behavior (particularly in terms of dress and work), along with expectations of unconventional sexual behavior. Merriam's informants (two men and one *kitesha*) agreed that *bitesha* (pl.) did not like to work and, improperly for men, went about bare-chested (1971: 97), but they did not agree on what sexual behavior typified the role—whether homosexuality, exhibitionistic heterosexuality, or asexuality.

The one self-acknowledged *kitesha* at the time of Merriam's research, Mulenda, was "married and says that he likes his wife and likes to have intercourse with her." He told Merriam, "I like women; I don't want to be without them" (95). While he denied that *kitesha* committed homosexual acts or that anyone suspected them of doing so, he also denied that it was shameful for him to be a *kitesha,* although he acknowledged that other men thought so (97). Merriam added that

"others in the village swear to having been eyewitnesses" of Mulendas having intercourse with a female *kitesha* (96-97).

Similarly, a non-*kitesha* informant stated, "*Bitesha* like to expose their genitals in public, but they do not have homosexual relationships. They are not interested in women, and as for masturbation, who can tell? In a desperate situation, a *kitesha* may have public intercourse with a female *kitesha.* This is terribly shameful: no one would ever look at such a thing on purpose, but people cannot help seeing. Then they know he is a *kitesha* and they leave him alone. He does not have to work in the fields" (94-95). Although this indicates social tolerance for gender nonconformity, the nature of *kitesha* involvement in heterosexual relations is unclear—and one is left to wonder what female *kitesha* do other than have sex with male *kitesha.*

Yet another of Merriam's informants was "at no loss" to speak of "males who act like women" and reeled off a list of distinctive traits: "He doesn't want to work. He doesn't want to be with other men. He doesn't even have a concubine. He eats everywhere except at his own house. He doesn't do the things other men do. He never keeps a job. He has good luck. He acts like a woman, that is, rushes about hither and yon and wiggles his hips when he walks. He wears women's clothing, but not kerchiefs" (94). This last detail underscores the unique nature of the *kitesha* role. Although native descriptions of male *bitesha* emphasize their nonmasculine and womanlike traits and behaviors, their incomplete cross-dressing (women's clothes but not kerchiefs) ensures that they are not taken for women, while other traits attributed to them (laziness, good luck) appear to be unique to the *kitesha* role.

Merriam repeated much of this in his 1974 book on the Bala, with some additional details regarding female *bitesha.* According to Mulenda, "Female *bitesha* do not like men, prefer the company of women, but most of all wish to be with male *bitesha.* They like to have sexual relations with men, particularly male *bitesha,* and they do not like to wear men's clothing. They do not like to cook or to do other female tasks save to gather wood 'because that is the easiest work'" (321). Merriam did not encounter any female *bitesha,* so this statement could again reflect Mulenda's desire to assert his own heterosexuality against the view of *bitesha* as homosexual.

A possible reconciliation of the contradictory views reported by Merriam (that there is no homosexual behavior among Bala men, on

the one hand, and that *bitesha* are homosexuals, on the other) is that, because *bitesha* occupied a gender status distinct from that of both men and women, sex with them was simply not viewed as homosexual, that is, as involving two men.[5]

SOUTHERN CONGO AND ANGOLA

The lower reaches of the Congo River and adjacent coastal areas were home to the Kongo kingdom, comprised of matrilineal Central Bantu groups. According to the Italian Missionary Giovanni Cavazzi, one of the supervising priests of the Giagues (Jagas) was a male who wore women's clothes and was referred to as "Grandmother" (see the chapter "Ganga-Ya-Chibanda," which follows) (Labat: 1732: 195-99).[6] Additional evidence is provided by testimony collected from a slave in Brazil originally from the Congo region, which was recorded in the Inquisition's *Denunciations of Bahia, 1591-1593:*

> Francisco Manicongo, a cobbler's apprentice known among the slaves as a sodomite for "performing the duty of a female" and for "refusing to wear the men's clothes which the master gave him." Francisco's accuser added that "in Angola and the Congo in which he had wandered much and of which he had much experience, it is customary among the pagan negros to wear a loincloth with the ends in front which leaves an opening in the rear . . . this custom being adopted by those sodomitic negros who serve as passive women in the abominable sin. These passives are called *jimbandaa* in the language of Angola and the Congo, which means passive sodomite. The accuser claimed to have seen Francisco Manicongo "wearing a loincloth such as passive sodomites wear in his land of the Congo and immediately rebuked him." (quoted by Trevisan 1986: 55; his ellipses)

Reports of an alternative gender status in Angola date back to the comments of the Englishman Andrew Battel, cited earlier, first published by Samuel Purchas in his 1625 collection of travel accounts. Purchas also published an account from the Portuguese Jesuit João dos Santos from the area of Luanda, within Queen Nzinga's kingdom. Dos

Santos described "certayne *Chibadi,* which are Men attyred like Women, and behave themselves womanly, ashamed to be called men; are also married to men, and esteeme that unnatural damnation an honor" (Purchas 1625, vol. 2, bk. IX, chap. 12, sec. 5, p. 1558). The priests Gaspar Azevereduc and Antonius Sequerius also encountered men called *chibados,* who dressed, sat, and spoke like women, and who married men "to unite in wrongful male lust with them." Even more shocking to them was the fact that these marriages were honored and prized (Jarric 1616: 482).

Similarly, in 1680, Cardonega noted: "Sodomy is rampant among the people of Angola. They pursue their impudent and filthy practices dressed as women. Their own name for those [of the same sex] who have carnal relations with each other is *quimbanda.* Some *quimbandas* are powerful wizards, who are much esteemed by most Angolans" (1680: 86, translation—S.O.M). Clearly, *chibadi, chibanda, chibados, jimbandaa, kibamba,* and *quimbanda* are related terms. Given the participation of such individuals in the religious rites of the Kongo kingdom, it may be that the term (and the role) diffused with the expansion of that state.

More recent ethnographic reports indicate that the social status observed by the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries survived into the twentieth century. In the 1930s, Wilfred Hambly learned of gender-mixing medicine men among the (Ovi)Mbundu and a case of a boy who persisted in dressing in women's clothes and beating corn (women's work), despite punishment. His informant, Ngonga, explained, "There are men who want men, and women who want women. . . . A woman has been known to make an artificial penis for use with another woman" (1937: 426; 1934a: 181). Lack of approval did not prevent visibly gender-mixing homosexuals of either sex.

A gender-mixing religious role for males among the Ondonga, one of the Bantu-speaking Ambo groups in southern Angola and northern Namibia, was mentioned in the early twentieth century by the Finnish missionary M. Rautanen.[7] According to Rautanen, both pederasts and men presenting themselves as women (*eshenga*) existed among the Ondonga and were detested by them. Most *eshenga* were also shamans (*oonganga*) (1903: 333-34).

This role was described in more detail by Carlos Estermann in the 1970s. According to Estermann, Ambo diviners are called *kimbanda.*

The highest order, the *ovatikili,* are "recruited exclusively among men [who] are few and feared and their activity is surrounded by profound mystery" (1976: 197). Although Estermann did not say that all *ovatkili* are possessed by female spirits, he notes that a large number of the owners of a certain musical instrument called *omakola* (big gourd) were males called *omasenge,* who dressed as women, did women's work, and contracted marriage with other men (who might also have female wives). "In a general way," he suggests, "this aberration is to be interpreted by the spiritism or spiritist belief of these people. An *esenge* [sing. of *omasenge*] is essentially a man who has been possessed since childhood by a spirit of female sex, which has been drawing out of him, little by little, the taste for everything that is masculine and virile."

More recently, Wolfram Hartmann, a historian at the University of Namibia, has reported that in the (Oshiw)Ambo language of the (Ov)Ambo, anally receptive males are called *eshengi* (pl. *ovashengi*), "he who is approached from behind." He also noted, "The *ovashengi* of the Unkwambi [Ukuambi], a subgroup of the Ovambo, are respected as healers, or *onganga.* Among another Ovambo subgroup, the Oukwanyama [Ovakuanyama], the *ovashengi* are not treated as well; however, they are the only Oukwanyama members entitled to play the *ekola,* a special music instrument" (in Jones 1996: 41).

Woman-Woman Patterns

In the 1930s, Hulstaert described relationships between Nkundó women in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire), "Nkundó girls play at 'husband and wife' and even adult married women engage in this vice. According to my informants, the causes are as follows: first, an intense and very intimate love between two women, second and above all, the fact that wives of polygamists find it difficult to satisfy their passions in a natural way. Often they engage in this practice with co-wives of the same man" (1938a: 95-96). He added that "in establishments where girls are too securely kept away from the opposite sex, there has been an increase" in sexual relationships between girls. "The latter often engage in sex with co-wives. A woman who presses against another woman is called *yaikya bonsángo*" (96).

IV

Southern Africa

Overview

With the exception of the Kalahari desert, the ancient home of hunter-gatherers such as the Xan and Khoisan, much of southern Africa is characterized by a climate that mirrors that of the sudanic zone in the north—high temperatures year round and a distinct rainy season from May to December. Most societies in this region are based on a combination of cattle herding and the cultivation of grain crops. In southeast Africa, extensive population shifts have occurred over the past fifteen hundred years, as patrilineal Bantu pastoralists and farmers pushed southward from the Congo and East Africa. States such as that of the Bemba in Zambia and the Tswana of South Africa absorbed surrounding peoples. The matrilineal Central Bantu belt extends across the northern part of this region.

THE KALAHARI DESERT

As early as 1719, Peter Kolb (1719: 362) mentioned Khoi-Khoin males, called *koetsire,* who were sexually receptive with other males. In the 1920s, Falk reported that homosexuality among Khoisan speakers was fairly common, especially among young married women. He described a practice among the Naman (Hottentots) whereby two individuals, either of the same or of opposite sex, enter into a specially intimate bond of friendship called *soregus* (see the translation that follows and Schapera 1930: 242-43; Schultze 1907: 319; Karsch-Haack 1911: 132-33). As a rule, the relationship implies deep friendship and mutual assistance, especially in economic matters but, according to Falk, was also used as a means of establishing a homosexual relationship, especially by boys, who jealously watch over each other.

According to Falk, the usual homosexual practice for both men and women was mutual masturbation. Anal intercourse between men and the use of an artificial penis between women also occurred, but more rarely. Falk mentioned three cases known to him of men who were confirmed sexual "inverts." However, he reported no concrete data regarding the public attitude toward such men or toward homosexual relations in general. As far as can be gathered from his brief account, they were regarded as routine.

Among the Herero—matrilineal Bantu agriculturalists and pastoralists—Falk noted that special friendships (*oupanga*) included anal sex (*okutunduka vanena*), as well as mutual masturbation (1925-26: 205-6). Some years earlier, the missionary Johann Irle, in denouncing Herero morality, cited Romans 1:18-31 (about men forsaking the natural use of women and burning with desire for each other) to indicate their sexual transgressions (1906: 58-59). When he challenged their sexual practices, the Herero blithely replied that they had grown from childhood in their own natural way.

SOUTHEASTERN AFRICA

Monica Wilson's 1951 book, based on her fieldwork in the 1930s among the Bantu-speaking Nyakyusa, agriculturalists northwest of Lake Nyasa (in present-day Tanzania), is a fascinating description of a society in which age-grading is the central organizing principle. The inhabitants of each village contained only one generation of males, spanning five to eight years (1951: 32).[1] Of course, for unmarried male contemporaries to dwell together in temporary villages or in mens' houses (especially during initiation) was common in "traditional" Africa. But as Wilson observed,

> The peculiarity of the Nyakyusa consists in the fact that contemporaries live together permanently through life, not merely as bachelors. . . . The Nyakusa themselves associate living in age-villages with decency in sex life—the separation of the sex activities of successive generations, and the avoidance of incest. . . . The emphasis on the separation of parents and children is matched by the value laid on good fellowship (*ukwangala*) between contemporaries. . . . The value of good fellowship with equals is constantly talked about by the Nyakyusa, and it is dinned into boys from childhood that enjoyment and morality alike consist in eating and drinking, in talking and learning, in the company of contemporaries. (159, 162-63)

Despite this extreme gender segregation, an "exceptionally reliable informant" told Wilson that a man "never dreams of making love to another man" and that "not many cases of grown men having intercourse together come to light, but only of boys together or of a man and a boy."

> When a boy sleeps with his friend they sleep together; it is not forbidden. Everyone thinks it all right. Sometimes when boys sleep together each may have an emission on the other (*bitundanila*). If they are great friends there is no wrong done. . . . Boys sometimes agree to dance together (*ukukina*) and work their evil together and that also is no wrong.[2]. . . Boys do this when they are out herding; then they begin to dance together and to have intercourse together. . . . To force a fellow this is witchcraft (*bo bulosi*); he is not a woman. But when they have agreed and dance together, then even if people find them, they say it is adolescence (*lukulilo*), all children are like that. And they say that sleeping together and dancing is also adolescence. (196)

According to this informant, interfemoral intercourse was "what boys mostly do," but anal and oral sex also occurred. He was aware of and disapproving of "some, during intercourse, work[ing] in the mouth of their friend, and hav[ing] an orgasm. . . . [Intercourse] of the mouth people do very rarely when they dance together" (196).

Egalitarian/reciprocal sex between adolescent friends seems to have been most common, although some age-stratification also occurred: "When out herding, some of the older boys do evil with the young ones, the older persuade the little one to lie down with them and to do what is forbidden with them between the legs. Sometimes two older boys who are friends do it together, one gets on top of his fellow, then he gets off and the other one mounts" (196-97). Two other informants agreed that homosexuality occurred frequently in boys' villages: "A boy has intercourse with his fellow, but a grown

man? No, never, we've never heard of it it. They always want women; only when a man cannot get a women he does this, only in youth. A few men do not marry but they are half-wits who have no kind of intercourse at all" (197). Wilson was also told that "to force a fellow to have homosexual intercourse against his will was a serious offence, comparable to witchcraft" (88, 196).

Wilson also reported that "lesbian practices are said to exist, but we have no certain evidence of this" (1951: 88). She speculated that such relations were "much more likely to be among the older wives of chiefs and other polygynists than among the girls, who have so much attention from young men." This reflects her logic, however, not an actual report by the Nyakyusa. She also mentioned that "a case was also quoted of a doctor in Tukuyu who 'is a woman; she has borne children, now her body has grown the sexual organs of a man and her feelings have changed also; but she keeps it very secret, she is spoken of as a woman'" (ibid.: 197). Whether the new male organs were used sexually, and with whom, Wilson did not indicate.

In southern Zambia, along the border with Zimbabwe, live the Ila, an agricultural, matrilineal Bantu-speaking group. In the early twentieth century, Smith and Dale observed an Ila-speaking man who dressed as a woman, did women's work, and lived and slept with, but did not have sex with, women (1920, 2: 74). The Ila called such individuals, *mwaami,* translated as "prophet." They also claimed that "pederasty was not rare" but was considered dangerous because the boy might become pregnant (2: 436).

In what is now southwestern Zimbabwe, Livingstone speculated that the monopolization of women by elderly chiefs was responsible for the "immorality" of younger men (1865: 284).

The southernmost Bantu-speaking groups in Africa are patrilineal societies that combined sedentary agriculture and pastoralism and were organized into complex states. Among the Zulu, there appears to have been occasional substitution of boys for women in establishing the potency of men seeking recognition as adult warriors (E. Krige 1965: 276-77; Morris 1965: 36, 52).[3] Gender-crossing diviners also have been documented, although not all men-women engaged in spirit mediumship. According to Vilakazi such males were called *inkosi ygbatfazi,* chief of the women (1962: 204).

Morris has suggested that the great warrior Shaka, who forged a kingdom in southern Africa prior to European incursions, was homosexual (1965: 46; 1975: 86-87). He had no wives, sired no children, and preferred the company of the uFasimba, a regiment of the youngest bachelors (Morris 1965: 36). His soldiers, he declared, "must not be enervated by matrimony and softened by family ties," until "the advance of years which, while unfitting him for soldiering, won him permission to marry" (Ferguson 1917: 206).[4]

The case of Shaka was not unique. In the 1890s, a time of violent dislocation of black South Africans, a Zulu refugee named "Nongoloza" Mathebula (who took the name Jan Note) became leader of a group of rebel-bandits operating south of Johannesburg. Called "King of Nineveh" by the whites, he ordered his troops (mostly non-Zulus) to abstain from physical contact with females: "Instead, the older men of marriageable status within the regiment—the *ikhela*—were to take younger male initiates—the *abafana*—and keep them as *izinkotshane,* 'boy wives'" (van Onselen 1984: 15). In 1900, Nongoloza was captured, but his organization extended from townships to mining camps to prisons, in all of which the sex ratio was very skewed and men were concerned about venereal disease among the few available women. Nongoloza testified that homosexuality among warriors (*hlabonga*) "has always existed. Even when we were free on the hills south of Johannesburg some of us had women and others had young men for sexual purposes" (Director of Prisons Report, quoted by Achmat 1993: 99). As South African activist Zackie Achmat argues in castigating social historians (van Onselen in particular) for elliding local understandings, "Nongoloza did not apologise for the fact that some of the Nineveites 'had young boys for sexual purposes.' He did not try to justify its existence by referring to venereal disease or tradition. Instead, he justified it in terms of sexual desire" (1993: 100).[5]

In modern Zimbabwe, the official history is that male homosexuality diffused from South Africa during the 1950s. Nonetheless, Epprecht has found court cases involving homosexuality from the beginning of the colonial period. As he reports in his chapter below, the balance of black and white defendants was proportional to that of the population as a whole, although whites convicted of sodomy or indecent assault generally received more severe sentences. Of course,

as Epprecht notes, what came to the attention of the courts was far from a random sample of sexual behavior in the colony: most consensual relations in private did not provoke the attention of colonial authorities.

"Wives of the Mines" in South Africa

Same-sex relations among peers and among men of different ages were common in many southern African societies. In 1883, the Basotho chief Moshesh testified that there were no punishments under customary law for "unnatural crimes" (which he also claimed were rare; Botha and Cameron 1997: 13). While the European colonialists ostensibly sought to repress and criminalize such relations, some of the conditions they introduced actually fostered them. This occurred among migratory workers in South Africa, especially miners. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the English had become aware of widespread homosexuality in gender-segregated work settings. According to the 1907 Taberer Report:

> It appears to have become a well-recognized custom among the mine natives recruited from the East Coast to select from the youths and younger men what are termed *amankotshane* or *izinkotshane*. An *inkotshane* may be described as a fag and is utilised for satisfying the passions. Any objections on the part of the youth to becoming an *inkotshane* are apparently without very much difficulty overcome by lavishing money and presents upon him. . . . An *inkotshane*'s duty appears to be to fetch water, cook food and do any odd work or run messages for his master and at night time to be available as bedfellow. In return for these services the *inkotshane* is well fed and paid; presents and luxuries are lavished upon him. (p. 2, quoted in Moodie et al. 1988: 234)

An old Mpondo added that *tinkonkana* "were boys who looked like women—fat and attractive" (Moodie et al. 1988: 232).

In 1927, the Swiss Presbyterian missionary Henri Junod described elaborately organized homosexual relationships among miners from the Tsonga (Thonga) of southern Mozambique. The *nkhonsthana,* or boy-wife,[6] was "used to satisfy the lust" of the *nima,* husband.[7] He

received a wedding feast, and his elder brother received brideprice. Junod mentioned that some of the "boys" were older than twenty, and he described a dance in which the *nkhontshana* donned wooden or cloth breasts, which they removed when paid to do so by their *nima* ([1912] 1927: 492-93, 294).

An aged Tsonga named Philemon related to Sibuyi how the "wives" of the mine (*tinkonkana*) were expected to perform domestic chores for their "husbands": "Each of these *xibonda* [room representatives] would propose a boy for himself, not only for the sake of washing his dishes, because in the evening the boy would have to go and join the *xibonda* on his bed. In that way he had become a wife. The husband . . . would make love with him. The husband would penetrate his manhood between the boy's thighs" (Sibuyi [1987] 1993: 53). Fidelity was expected and jealousy on occasion led to violence. Philemon was very explicit that "some men enoyed 'penetrating the thighs' more than they did the real thing [that is, vaginas]" (54). Moreover, agency was not always a monopoly of the older partner. Philemon mentioned the consequences of "when a boy decided to fall in love with a man" (54) and related how male couples "would quarrel just as husbands and wives do. Some quarrels would also lead to divorce" (58). When Sibuyi asked Philemon whether the boy *wishes* to become someone's wife, he replied, "Yes: for the sake of security, for the acquisition of property and for the fun itself" (ibid.: 62). Grateful husbands bought presents for their wives, including clothes, blankets, and bicycles.

The elderly Pondo miner Themba, whom Vivienne Ndatshe interviewed in 1982, told her that "most of the miners agreed to be 'girls of the mines.' Some wanted to pay *lobola* [bridewealth—for the boys] once they had returned to their homes," and he stressed the domestic duties of cooking, washing, and cleaning that went with the role. According to Themba, the boys would say, "Why should we worry since we can't get pregnant." Themba himself had evaded "a boss boy [who] was after him because he was young and fat." He also recalled "men dressed like women," most of whom were clerks, and how "miners proposed love to them" (Ndatshe 1993: 49, 51).

During the 1950s, in "Mkumbani," a black settlement adjacent to Durban, male-male weddings occurred at the rate of about one a month. According to Ronald Louw (1996), each celebration lasted a

whole weekend. Some "brides" wore Zulu dress; some wore Western bridal white and had bridesmaids in attendance. The pair might live together, with the "wife" doing domestic work, or live separately (as did many male-female couples). Some of the men involved in these relationships already had female wives, who treated the new bride as an ideal junior wife—one who would not produce children that might rival her own. Louw suggested that the term for the female-gendered homosexual men, *skesana,* might be a cognate to *zenana*—a Hindu term for cross-dressing male prostitutes.[8] Their masculine partners were called *iqgenge.*

In the Bantu-speaking groups of South Africa, intracrural intercourse "is typical of a form of sexual play among adolescent Nguni [Ngoni] boys and girls called *metsha* among Xhosa-speakers and *hlobongo* by the Zulu. These young 'boys' of the miners are not merely sexual partners, but are also 'wives' in other ways, providing domestic services for their 'husbands' in exchange for substantial remuneration." According to Moodie, homosexual dyads occurred "almost exclusively between senior men (men with power in the mine structure) and young boys. There is in fact an entire set of rules, an *mteto,* governing these types of relationships, whose parameters are well-known and enforced by black mine authorities" (Moodie et al. 1988: 231).

As Philemon explained, proper "wifely" behavior did not include ejaculation by the youth or any kind of sexual reciprocity:

> The boys would never make the mistake of "breathing out" [ejaculating] into the hubby. It was taboo. Only the hubby could "breathe out" into the boy's legs. . . . [Another] thing that a *nkonkana* had to do was either to cover his beard with cloth, or cut it completely off. He was now so-and-so's wife. How would it sound if a couple looked identical? There had to be differences, and for a *nkonkana* to stay clean-shaven was one of them. Once the *nkonkana* became a "grown-up," he could then keep his beard to indicate his maturity, which would be demonstrated by him acquiring a boy. . . . When the boy thought he was old enough he would tell the husband that he also wished to get himself a wife, and that would be the end. Therefore the husband would have to get himself another boy. (Sibuyi 1993: 58, 57, 55)

Sources do not discuss (because observers apparently did not ask) whether the same asymmetry of roles occurred among boys involved in sex play with each other in the home villages, or whether certain individuals specialized in sexual receptivity and were regarded as effeminate.

Despite the terminology, cross-dressing does not appear to have been a requisite of the wife role. As in ancient Greece, however, appearance of leg and facial hair indicated that a boy had become a man and was no longer an appropriate sex object for other men, but was now a competitor for boys.

Junod vacillated between attributing homosexuality among Tsonga laborers to the unavailability of women or to a pre-existing, indigenous homosexual preference ([1912] 1927: 492-93, 294). Moodie interpreted the institution partly as a resistance to proletarianization—one young man in 1940 consented to be a *tinkonkana* because he wanted to accumulate money to meet traditional brideprice requirements back home. Thus, in some cases "men became 'wives' in the mines in order to become husbands and therefore full 'men' more rapidly at home" (Moodie et al. 1988: 240). Those playing the wife role could accumulate money (bridewealth and gifts)—while the husbands not only received domestic and sexual service but also spent less than they would have in dance halls with women prostitutes: "Although these relationships for the Mpondo seldom extended beyond one contract and were never brought home, and although men preferred to conceal these liaisons from their home fellows, everyone knew that such affairs existed and joked with each other about them. . . . According to Philemon, among the Tsonga 'mine marriages' were accepted, indeed taken for granted by women (including wives) and elders at home, and relationships might extend beyond a single [work] contract" (233). Thus, according to Philemon, when one partner finished his contract before the other the husband might go to their boy-wives' homes or boy-wives might go to their husband's homes. They would be "warmly welcomed," everyone knowing "that once a man was on the mines, he had a boy or was turned into a wife himself" (Sibuyi [1987] 1993: 56, 57).

Neither Moodie nor Charles van Onselen (1976) appear to have considered that some of the older men who continued to return to the mines may have preferred young male "wives."[9] Preoccupied with the

economic aspects of these relationships, most observers have been unwilling to take seriously statements such as, "We loved them better [than our girlfriends]" (Moodie et al. 1989: 410). Similarly, although the "wife of the miner" role developed under conditions of migration to capitalist enterprises owned and operated by white Europeans, there is no evidence of such relationships being imposed or suggested by white Europeans.[10] (Although some, attempting to claim local purity, have contended that homosexuality was introduced by "foreign" Shangaan workers from Mozambique, who were reputed to be the most frequent and enthusiastic participants in *bukhontxana* [=*inkoshana*] [Harries 1990: 327].)[11] As an adaptation to the conditions of prolonged sex segregation these practices drew on conceptions of what a Tsonga wife should be and on sexual acts (intracrural intercourse) within the repertoire of rural adolescents. The available sources do not discuss whether the same asymmetry of roles occurred among boys involved in sex play with each other in the home villages, or whether certain individuals specialized in sexual receptivity and were regarded as effeminate.

In recent years, migrant labor has become less common, and the "wife of the mine" role has declined, if not disappeared. With the breakdown of rural society, wives accompany or follow their husbands and live as squatters near the work sites. Moodie concluded, "It is precisely because mine marriages were isomorphic with marriages at home that they are breaking down as the home system collapses. . . . The old arrangements represented accommodations to migration and at the same time resistance to proletarianisation. . . . The contemporary turn to 'town women' and squatter families represents accommodation to the exigencies of stable wage-earning" (Moodie et al. 1989: 255).

WOMAN-WOMAN PATTERNS

Unfortunately, Kidd was not specific about the "indecencies," "degradations," and "obscenities" involved in Southern Bantu female initiations, which, he claimed, demoralized their womanhood forever (1904: 209).[12] Falk, however, reported that same-sex relations were common among Hottenot (Nama) young married women (1925-26: 209-10). To the east, Tswana women formed homosexual relationships

while their husbands were away working in mines. According to Schapera, "Lesbian practices are apparently fairly common among the older girls and young women, without being regarded in any way reprehensible" (1938: 278). Colson (1958: 139-40) mentioned a possible "man-woman" and a possible "woman-man" among the Tsonga of what is now Zimbabwe.

Judith Gay has offered a more detailed account of institutionalized friendships among the women in Lesotho, who remain in their villages while men migrate to South Africa to work. According to Gay, "Young girls in the modern schools develop close relationships, called 'mummy-baby' with slightly older girls. Sexual intimacy is an important part of these relationships. Mummy-baby relationships not only provide emotional support prior to marriage, but also a network of support for married and unmarried women in new towns or schools, either replacing or accompanying heterosexual bonds" (1985: 97). These relationships "are always initiated voluntarily by one girl who takes a liking to another and simply asks her to be her mummy or her baby, depending on their relative age" (1985: 102). Gay adds, "The most frequently given reason for initiating a particular relationship was that one girl felt attracted to the other by her looks, her clothes, or her actions." A "mummy" might have more than one "baby," but according to Gay the "baby" can only have one "mummy"—although one woman might be a both "baby" and a "mummy" in simultaneous relationships (108). All three of Gay's cases, however, involved, over time, more than one "mummy." When the women marry their same-sex relationships are "transformed, but do not cease altogether" (110).

Gay argues that the use of English-language terms ("mummy" and "baby") indicates that such relationships developed since the 1950s (100). (She does not, however, consider the possibility that while the terms may be recent, the practices might be traditional.) In fact, the patrilineal, patrilocal Lovedu of Lesotho were unusual in being ruled by queens who had wives, indeed, a harem (see Krige and Krige [1943] 1947: 165-75). These queens were assisted in their role by "the mothers of the kingdom." The prestige of the nineteenth-century queen Mujaji I seems to have legitimated queens in the neighboring Bantu groups of Khaha, Mamaila, Letswalo (Narene), and Mahlo (Krige and Krige [1943] 1947: 310-11; Krige 1938).

Gay interprets mummy-baby relations alternately as preparations for "the dynamics of heterosexual relations"—even "explicit opportunities for initiation into heterosexual relations"—and as substitutes for relations in the absence of men who are working in South African mines (1985: 109). Marriage resistance may be another motive: Gay contrasts the autonomy of "mummies" with the constraints on Sesotho wives (107, 109, 110).

Although traditional Sesotho initiation for girls is no longer practiced in lowland villages, where half the nation's population lives, girls continue to lengthen their own or each other's labia minora in the belief that it will later enhance sexual pleasure (99). The procedure is done alone or in small groups. Gay states that "the process is said to heighten *mocheso* (heat) and appears to provide opportunities for auto-eroticism and mutual stimulation between girls" (101). These contacts are not regarded as emotionally significant, "whereas falling in love with a girl and simply caressing her is" (112).

In the 1970s, Martha Mueller described similar relationships in two Lesotho villages (1977), and some years earlier Blacking reported fictive kinship relationships among Venda and Zulu schoolgirls (1959, 1978). All this is strong evidence that "age-stratified" is a pattern of female as well as male homosexuality. Age differences need not be great, however. In the eleven instances in which Gay specified the age of both, the mean difference was 4.8 years and the median difference was 5. (The range was from 1 to 12.) Those playing the "baby" role ranged in age from eight to twenty-four, and "mummies" from fifteen to thirty-five (1985: 114-15).

According to Deborah Green, an African-American medical student who formed a relationship with a white woman in the Shangaa homeland town of Gazankulu in the northern Transvaal: "There are some stories from Venda (a nearby tribe) about lesbian-type people—I mean, women that lived together and raised families together. But the Shangaan had no concept of a lesbian relationship, no preconception about it. They just know that I came along and started living with Tessa, and then Tessa was much happier. So they thought it was a good thing" (Hartman 1992: 16).

Among Cape Bantu, "Forms of overt homosexual behavior between women are described by female *isanuses* [chief diviners]." Moreover, homosexuality is widely ascribed to women who are in the process of becoming *isanuses* (Laubscher 1937: 31). Use of artificial penises has been reported among Ila and Naman women of South Africa (Smith and Dale 1920: 181; Schapera 1930: 243).

WOMAN-WOMAN MARRIAGE IN AFRICA[1]

JOSEPH M. CARRIER
STEPHEN O. MURRAY

WOMAN-WOMAN MARRIAGE—in which one woman pays brideprice to acquire a husband's rights to another woman—has been documented in more than thirty African populations (O'Brien 1977: 109), including at least nine Bantu-speaking groups in present-day southern Africa and Botswana—Sotho, Koni, Tawana, Hurutshe, Pedi, Venda, Lovedu, Phalaborwa, Narene, and Zulu. In these groups, female political leaders are also common. These women chiefs rarely have male husbands (whether or not they had wives). Indeed, among the Lovedu, the queen was prohibited from having a male husband and was required instead to have a wife (Krige 1974). (Murdock referred to Lovedu monarchs as *female kings* rather than *queens,* "because they very consciously play a male role" [1959: 389].)

In East Africa, female husbands have been mentioned among the Kuria, Iregi, Kenye, Suba, Simbiti, Ngoreme, Gusii, Kipsigis, Nandi, Kikuyu, and Luo. In Sudan, they occurred among the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluk; in West Africa (particularly Nigeria), they existed among the Dahomean Fon, as well as the Yoruba, Ibo, Ekiti, Bunu, Akoko, Yagba, Nupe, Ijaw (O'Brien 1977: 110; Seligman and Seligman 1932: 164-65), the Nzema (Grottanelli 1988: 210), and the Ganagana/Dibo (Meek 1925, 1: 204-10). In her survey of Kenya and South Africa,

Denise O'Brien verified the continued existence of such roles among the Kuria, Kikuyu, Kipsigis, Nandi, and other southern Bantu populations, including the Venda. Eileen Krige and Sandra Barnes, respectively, told her that such marriages continue to exist among the Lovedu and the Yoruba (O'Brien 1977: 122).[2]

Evans-Pritchard described woman-woman marriages among the Nuer in some detail:

> What seems to us, but not at all to Nuer, a somewhat strange union is that in which a woman marries another woman and counts as the pater of the children born of the wife. Such marriages are by no means uncommon in Nuerland, and they must be regarded as a form of simple legal marriage, for the woman-husband marries her wife in exactly the same way as a man marries a woman. When the marriage rites have been completed the husband gets a male kinsman or friend or neighbour, sometimes a poor Dinka, to beget children by her wife and to assist, regularly or when assistance is particularly required, in those tasks of the home for the carrying out of which a man is necessary. When the daughters of the marriage are married he will received for each a "cow of the begetting" and more beasts if he has played any considerable part in the maintenance of the home. (1951: 108)

Similarly, Gluckman reported:

> As among the Nuer, a rich and important Zulu woman can marry another woman by giving marriage-cattle for her, and she is the pater of her wife's children begotten by some male kinsman of the female husband. They belong to the latter's agnatic lineage as if she were a man. If a man dies leaving only daughters and no son, the eldest daughter should take his cattle and marry wives for her father to produce sons for him. This and the preceding forms of marriage [including ghost marriage] are weighty customs enforced by ancestral wrath, and they arise from the importance of continuing the agnatic line. (1950: 184)

Huntingford described comparable practices among the Kenyan Nandi:

> A Nandi widow who had no children but possessed cattle could marry a young woman and become her *manong'otiot* ("husband") by paying the current rate of bridewealth, whereupon the young woman became her "wife." This gave both women the legal and social status of husband and wife respectively. There was no lesbianism involved here, for the female husband could have her own men friends and the wife could have intercourse with any man of whom her "husband" approved. If she had children, not the man, but the female "husband" of the young man was the sociological father. (Huntingford 1973: 412)

Kershaw similarly described Kikuyu woman-woman marriages as a way for a childless woman to acquire offspring by the Kikuyu as well. These children were considered the female father's because her descent group provided the bridewealth for her "wife" (Kershaw 1973: 55). In South Africa, Venda women who had male husbands could acquire their own wives by paying brideprice (*lobola,* a term borrowed from the Zulu) in cattle, just as men did. According to Hugh Stayt:

> Women in a position of authority, such as petty chiefs or witch-doctors, who have been able to accumulate the necessary wealth, often obtain wives in this way, even though they may be themselves married in the ordinary way. A woman may bring three wives to live with her at her own home. . . . These women are really in the position of servants and are obliged to do all the menial work; they may be given to different men for the purpose of obtaining children, but these men, not having paid the *lobola* for them, have no legal rights over them or their children. (1931: 143-44)

Inheritance of the female father's goods are the same as they would be for a male father's (170-71).

O'Brien also interprets female husbands as "social males" (1977). In the Sudan, "a Shilluk princess may become a husband (Farran 1963), or she may take lovers, but she should not give birth" (O'Brien 1977: 120)—that is, while she can have sex with men she herself must be a geneological dead end. Shilluk female shamans (*ajuago*) could also have lovers but not marry (123, n. 4, citing Seligman and Seligman 1932).

THE GENDER OF THE FEMALE HUSBAND

In her survey of the status of women, Niara Sudarkasa argues that there is a general de-emphasis on gender in "traditional" African societies and a corresponding emphasis on status ("personal standing"), which is usually, but not always, determined by wealth (Sudarkasa 1986: 97). Robertson also argues that age and lineage override gender in traditional African societies (1987: 111), while Matory distinguishes "gender" from "sex" and stresses (in reference to the Yoruba) that "far stronger than the ideology of male superiority to the female is the ideology of senior's superiority to junior" (1994: 108). In the title of her 1980 article on woman-woman marriage among the Nandi, Oboler poses the question, "Is the female husband a man?" Evans-Pritchard (some years earlier) had already answered the question in the affirmative:

> A woman who marries in this way [i.e., takes a wife] is generally barren, and for this reason counts in some respects as a man. She acquires cattle through the marriage of kinswomen, including some of those due to uncles on the marriage of a niece, or by inheritance, since she counts as a man in these matters. A barren woman also often practices as a magician or diviner and thereby acquires further cattle; and if she is rich she may marry several wives. She is their legal husband and can demand damages if they have relations with men without her consent. She is also the pater of their children and on marriages of their daughters she receives "the cattle of the father," and her brothers and sisters receive the other cattle which go to the father's side in the distribution of brideswealth. Her children are called after her, as though she were a man, and I was told they address her as "father." She administers her home and herd as a man would do, being treated by her wives and children with the deference they would show a male husband and father. (1951: 108-9)

Rivière adds: "It is clear that one finds in numerous societies women acting out male roles, including that of taking a wife" (1971: 68). Thus, an Efik-Ibibio (Nigerian) woman who grew up during the nineteenth century (and whose husband had eleven other wives) recalled: "I had a woman friend to whom I revealed my secrets. She was very fond of keeping secrets to herself. We acted as husband and wife. We always moved hand in glove and my husband and hers knew about our relationship. The village nicknamed us twin sister" (in Andreski 1970: 131). In other words, African marriages are between individuals in male and female *roles*, not necessarily between biological males and females.

The very possibility of a formal status for female husbands reflects the divergence between gender and sex in African societies. The exact nature of this status, however, is still the subject of debate.[3] Krige, for example, argues that Lovedu female husbands are neuter, neither masculine nor feminine within the terms of a binary gender system (1974: 32-33). At the same time, she offers no evidence that this status amounted to an intermediate or distinct third gender role, involving special dress, social roles, or religious functions. The view of the societies she considers (southern Bantu groups) appears to be that the female husband becomes a "social male" within a system of binary genders—which are, however, not homologous with biological sex.

In Nigeria, John McCall interviewed an elderly Ohagia Igbo *dike-nwami* (brave-woman) named Nne Uko. Early on, she told McCall, she "was interested in manly activities" and felt that she "was meant to be a man"[4] and so "went as my nature was given to me—to behave as a man" (McCall 1996: 129).[5] She was initiated as a woman but after being married for a time and producing no children, she was divorced. She subsequently farmed and hunted while dressed as a man, was initiated into various men's societies (including the most exclusive one), and took two wives of her own. She did not, however, take her wives to bed (130).[6] Her wives' children (who were sired by her brother) referred to her as "grandmother." She was no longer active in men's societies at the time she was interviewed, having "risen to a position as a priestess of her matrilineage's *ududu* shrine, offering sacrifices to the ancestresses in her maternal line" (131). Upon her death, she will join those ancestresses to whom sacrifices are made in the *ududu* shrine by those seeking good crops and children. In other words, despite her departures as an *adike-nwami* from the conventional role for women, she remained a woman in the view of the Ohagia Igbo. As McCall concludes, "Throughout her life Nne Uko was recognized in her community as a woman, socially and otherwise" (131).

Oboler argues that among the Nandi of Kenya, "The key to the question of the female husband's gender lies in her relationship to the property that is transmitted through her to the sons of her wife." The Nandi believe that the most significant property and primary means of production should be held and managed exclusively by men. Thus, a female husband is categorized as a man—"promoted" to male status (*kagotogosta komostab murenik,* literally "she has gone up to the side of the men") (Oboler 1985: 131). According to Oboler, this "frequently reiterated public dogma" is "unanimous." Her informants insisted "that a woman who takes a wife becomes a man and (except for the absence of sexual intercourse with her wife) behaves in all social contexts exactly as would any ordinary man" (1980: 69, 70).

Nonetheless, Oboler found that such women do not easily or automatically assume male roles in all spheres. The female husband, at least in the past, adopted the dress and adornments of men "to some extent"—which suggests that gender-mixing rather than gender-crossing was the actual pattern. Similarly, although female husbands ceased doing "women's work," being old, they did not undertake a lot of heavy male work, either. "Informants make it a point to argue that female husbands are doing the work of men when they are in fact doing work that is equally appropriate to men or women" (1980: 84). They attend male initiations and have the right to "participate in public meetings and political discussions but admit they have never done so" (85). Finally, while female husbands say they converse with men rather then women, Oboler's observations did not confirm this (84-85).

The sexuality of the female husband does not appear to have been a factor in defining her role. Female husbands were expected to discontinue sex with men and, indeed, abstain from sexual intercourse with either gender, because if "she should conceive, both the issue of inheritance and the dogma that she is a man would be too thoroughly confounded to be withstood" (85). Female husbands' most strenuous attempts to conform to male behavior occurs "in contexts that are closely connected with the management of the heirship to the family estate" (86).

Oboler characterizes the Nandi female husband as "a woman of advanced age who has failed to bear a son" (69). Since the purpose of the union is to provide a male heir, the wife of the female husband has

a male consort whose sole function in the relationship is to serve as the progenitor. Oboler suggests several motivations for females marrying female husbands: (1) the somewhat higher bridewealth paid by female husbands; (2) greater and more casual companionship; (3) somewhat greater participation in household decisions; (4) sexual autonomy; (5) less quarreling with and physical violence than with male husbands; (6) and a dislike of men (76, 78).

In her 1980 article, Oboler concluded that the Nandi wives are under the control of their female husbands and are not promiscuous. In her 1985 book (based on the same 1976-77 fieldwork), however, she wrote that the wife of a female husband "is free to engage in sexual liaisons with men of her own choosing" and suggested that this represented a change from earlier practice: "Formerly, it is said, it was the right of the female husband to arrange a regular consort for her wife. . . . Today, sexual freedom is cited as one of the advantages of marriage to a female husband" (132; see also 1980: 76). On the other hand, some women were reluctant to become female husbands, since they were expected to forgo sexual intercourse. However, Oboler does not report any data about the actual sexual conduct of Nandi females, and she acknowledges that at least some Nandi claims regarding their sexual restraint reflect ideal rather than actual behavior.[7] In any case, the institution is still flourishing—10 of the 286 households in the community she studied in the 1970s had female husbands. However, Oboler anticipates that Christian disapproval and the spread of bilateral inheritance will eventually undermine the institution.

Although the coding of the female husband as a man is widespread, not all woman-woman relationships in Africa are conceptualized as those of a husband and wife. Huber has reported that among the Simiti (a Bantu-speaking group on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria), "Neither in the view of the people, nor in the terminology, nor in the wedding ritual itself is there any suggestion that a woman assumes the role of a husband in relation to another woman. Rather, the two main persons concerned are related as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law." Huber translates the usual expression for the relationship, *okoteta mokamona wa nyumba ntobu,* as "to give cattle for a daughter-in-law on behalf of a poor house"—a "poor house" being one that has produced no male offspring (or none that reached child-producing age) (Huber 1968: 746).

MARRIAGE WITHOUT SEX?

Anthropologists and Africans alike have been almost unanimous in denying the possibility that woman-woman marriages include sex or even emotional attachment. (See, for example, the comments of Ifi Amadiume [1987: 7] quoted by Kendall earlier in this volume.) Krige (1974), Obbo (1976), Sudarkasa (1986: 97), and others have all warned against assuming that women who married each other, even when they slept together, had sex. Few of these denials, however, are based on actual inquiries with or observations of the individuals involved—and certainly not observations of sexual behavior.[8] (Most ethnographic accounts do not even report where or with whom the partners usually slept.)

O'Brien, for example, argues that "a female husband does not engage in sexual interaction with her wife; indeed, nowhere do the African data suggest any homosexual connotation in such marriages." Her rationale, however, is that "if homosexual behavior were a regular component of female-husband marriages, the association would have been noted in the ethnographic record" (1977: 109, 123, n. 1). Such an assumption attributes more acuity to anthropologists on sexual matters than is warranted, overlooks the fact that sexual behavior is generally invisible to outsiders (especially hostile ones), and ignores the history of enforced silence on homosexuality in Western discourse.[9]

Even ethnographers not hostile to the phenomenon may overlook it. Robert Brain, for example, spent two years doing fieldwork among the Bangwa of Cameroon (1976: 31). His "best woman friend in Bangwa was Mafwa, the chief's titled sister," with whom he often traveled to distant rites and with whom he spent many happy hours drinking and talking (55). Nonetheless, "it was not until some months after I first knew Mafwa that I found out that my rather androgynous princess had her own wife" (56). In fact, she had inherited two wives when her father died. Aside from accumulating bridewealth when her (wives') daughters married, Brain concluded that Mafwa had become a female husband "to have her own compound, with a wife to cook for her and her own children around, without the overbearing or annoying presence of a husband" (57). Once he became aware of the relationship between Mafwa and her co-resident wife (whose daughter called Mafwa "father"), Brain observed "their obvious satisfaction in each other's company." He took this as "evidence of a perfect alliance between two mature women who felt no need of the presence of a male husband" (58).

Brain correctly notes that cross-culturally the "rights of sexual access and domestic companionship are only some of the aspects involved in marriage. . . . 'Husband and wife' are joined in marriage for many purposes—not merely to enjoy sexual intercourse, companionship, or even have children" (58). The latter two are clearly part of the Bangwe "bundle of marital rights" in marriages between men and women as well as woman-woman marriages.

Some have questioned ethnographic reports that indicate (or simply allow the possibility of) a sexual dimension to woman-woman marriages. Feminist anthropologists Eileen Krige and Christine Obbo, for example, criticized Herskovits, whose 1937 and 1938 reports on "woman marriage" in Dahomey suggested that homosexuality might be involved. Krige complained that "Herskovits (1938) imputed to it sexual overtones that are foreign to the institution when, after stating quite definitely that such marriage did not imply a homosexual relationship, he went on to add 'although it is not to be doubted that occasionally homosexual women who have inherited wealth . . . utilize this relationship to the women they marry to satisfy themselves' (1937b: 338). He made no attempt to substantiate his statement" (Krige 1974: 11).

Obbo echoes Krige's criticisms:

> She [Krige] questions Herskovits' unexplained, unelaborated assumption that such a marriage was a homosexual relationship. Krige asserts that homosexuality is foreign to the marriage as practiced among the Lovedu today. . . . Herskovits seems to imply that mutual masturbation is necessarily homosexuality (1938: 289) and that there was no doubt that prosperous female "husbands" utilize the relationship in which they stand to the women they marry to satisfy themselves (1937b: 338). His passing remarks cannot be taken as conclusive evidence, and therefore we cannot know whether the Dahomean women who practiced woman-to-woman marriage were lesbians or whether it was a slip of Herskovits' pen. (Obbo 1976: 372)

In a note to this passage, Obbo adds, "While no one can categorically dismiss the possibility that a woman-to-woman marriage may involve a homosexual relationship, there is no excuse for assuming it" (385, n. 4). She does not explain, however, what might be "heterosexual" in female-female mutual masturbation, a practice that does not seem to involve gendered roles.

A careful reading of Herskovits, however, shows that Krige, O'Brien, and Obbo exaggerate his remarks. (Moreover, Obbo misrepresents Krige, as well as Herskovits, in her criticisms.) Herskovits carefully outlined aspects of the institution of woman-woman marriage, explicitly noting it does not necessarily imply a homosexual relationship between the "husband" and the "wife," and concluded: "The motivating drive behind it—the desire for prestige and economic power—reflects the dominant Dahomean patterns of thought and the fundamental forces that underly Dahomean patterns of thought and behavior in all aspects of life" (1937b: 340).

In his 1938 work on the Dahomeans, Herskovits presented a detailed discussion of the sex education and sex experience of females (and males) (1938: 277-90). He reported that between the time of puberty and marriage, when the young girls have been withdrawn from the boys of their age, "Homosexuality is found among women as well as men; by some it is claimed that it exists among women to a greater extent" (289). He also noted that prior to the onset of puberty, because of the value attached to thickened vaginal lips in that society, "girls between the ages of 9 and 11 are assembled by compounds in groups of eight or more . . . and these engage in the practice known as *axoti*, which consists of massaging and enlarging the lips of the vagina" (282). An older woman, "whose most desired qualification is an age not too far removed from that of the girls so that she will not have forgotten her own experiences when undergoing this regimen," assists in the task, which Herskovits described as follows:

> With a shaped piece of wood, this woman manipulates the lips of the vagina of each girl, pulling at them, stretching them, and lightly puncturing the vaginal tissues in several places. This she does eight or nine times for each of her charges during the first year of instruction, and during the next year the girls do this for each other. . . . For two years at the very least this is continued, and in addition there is the outer massaging of these "lips" to cause thickening and muscular development, for "thin-lipped" women are considered lacking in comeliness. (282)

The end product of this practice is the "enhancement of pleasure in sex play . . . the roughened surface of the inner vagina lips heightens pleasure during coitus, since the scarifications are not unlike the body cicatrizations" (282-83).

One final bit of information provided by Herskovits on the sex experience of Dahomean girls is of interest. When the sex education of the girls begins, "They no longer go about the compound naked but are given small cloths to wear" (283). They are also warned to avoid hidden play with boys and told not to allow the boys to approach them sexually. Herskovits noted that at this stage, "When the girls find themselves with others who have been given small cloths to wear, and with those older than themselves, they compare sex organs, each boasting of the size of the lips of her own. When none of the older people are about, the girls may indulge in mutual masturbation" (285). Males may also be involved in long-term homosexual relationships:

> One situation which arises in the sex life of the boys during middle adolescence deserves some consideration, for it is at this time of life, when the young girls have been withdrawn from the boys of their age, that any tendencies to homosexuality develop; when, indeed, according to one account, homosexuality, which is ordinarily looked upon by the Dahomeans with distaste, is recognized as normal. Once the games between boys and girls are stopped, the boys no longer have the opportunity for companionship with the girls, and the sex drive finds satisfaction in close friendships between boys of the same group. (289)

Given the broader context of Dahomean sexual behavior, no great leap of the imagination is required to suggest, as did Herskovits, that some of the females involved in woman-woman marriage in Dahomey might also use the relationship as a means of obtaining sexual satisfaction.

Which touches are "sexual" and which are not varies from person to person, and "sex" (as an activity) is not a clearly bounded domain with

universally agreed-upon criteria even in one society, let alone cross-culturally. Our assumption is that people who sleep together tend to touch each other, and that touches that are experienced by some as erotic are not experienced as erotic by others. Of course, there are economic bases and economic motivations for woman-woman marriages as there are for man-woman marriages in Africa—and elsewhere. Yet no one questions whether men and women in mandatory, arranged marriages have or desire sex with each other or, indeed, even "prefer" the opposite sex in general. The practice of mandatory marriage does not require it. At the same time, alliances that are arranged, as well as alliances contracted for reasons other than love and sexual attraction, may eventually result in erotic attraction and sex. This would seem to be especially likely for those not having sex with other partners. And this is a category that is shaped at least to some degree by individual desires.

Gender Diversity

Crosscultural Variations

Serena Nanda
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

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Cover Photograph: Kathoey, or transgendered males, are featured performers in transvestite revues. (Photograph by Ravinder Nanda.)

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Contents

Chapter One

Multiple Genders among North American Indians

The early encounters between Europeans and Indian societies in the New World, in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, brought together cultures with very different sex/gender systems. The Spanish explorers, coming from a society where sodomy was a heinous crime, were filled with contempt and outrage when they recorded the presence of men in American Indian societies who performed the work of women, dressed like women, and had sexual relations with men (Lang 1996; Roscoe in 1995).

Europeans labelled these men "berdache," a term originally derived from an Arabic word meaning male prostitute. As such, this term is inappropriate and insulting, and I use it here only to indicate the history of European (mis)understanding of American Indian sex/gender diversity. The term berdache focused attention on the sexuality associated with mixed gender roles, which the Europeans identified, incorrectly, with the "unnatural" and sinful practice of sodomy in their own societies. In their ethnocentrism, the early European explorers and colonists were unable to see beyond their own sex/gender systems and thus did not understand the multiple sex/gender systems they encountered in the Americas. They also largely overlooked the specialized and spiritual functions of many of these alternative sex/gender roles and the positive value attached to them in many American Indian societies.

By the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, some anthropologists included accounts of North American Indian sex/gender diversity in their ethnographies. They attempted to explain the berdache from various functional perspectives, that is, in terms of the contributions these sex/gender roles made to social structure or culture. These accounts, though less contemptuous than earlier ones, nevertheless

largely retained the emphasis on berdache sexuality. The berdache was defined as a form of "institutionalized homosexuality," which served as a social niche for individuals whose personality and sexual orientation did not match the definition of masculinity in their societies, or as a "way out" of the masculine or warrior role for "cowardly" or "failed" men (see Callender and Kochems 1983).

Anthropological accounts increasingly paid more attention, however, to the association of the berdache with shamanism and spiritual powers and also noted that mixed gender roles were often central and highly valued in American Indian cultures, rather than marginal and deviant. These accounts were, nevertheless, also ethnocentric in misidentifying indigenous gender diversity with European concepts of homosexuality, transvestism, or hermaphroditism, which continued to distort their indigenous meanings.

In American Indian societies, the European homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy was not culturally relevant and the European labeling of the berdache as homosexuals resulted from their own cultural emphasis on sexuality as a central, even defining, aspect of gender and on sodomy as an abnormal practice and/or a sin. While berdache in many American Indian societies did engage in sexual relations and even married persons of the same sex, this was not central to their alternative gender role. Another overemphasis resulting from European ethnocentrism was the identification of berdache as ***transvestites***. Although berdache often cross-dressed, transvestism was not consistent within or across societies. European descriptions of berdache as ***hermaphrodites*** were also inaccurate.

Considering the variation in alternative sex/gender roles in native North America, a working definition may be useful: the berdache in the anthropological literature refers to people who partly or completely take on aspects of the culturally defined role of the other sex and who are classified neither as women nor men, but as genders of their own (see Callender and Kochems 1983:443). It is important to note here that berdache thus refers to variant gender roles, rather than a complete crossing over to an opposite gender role.

In the past twenty-five years there have been important shifts in perspectives on sex/gender diversity among American Indians and anthropologists, both Indian and non-Indian (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997:Introduction). Most current research rejects institutionalized homosexuality as an adequate explanation of American Indian gender diversity, emphasizing the importance of occupation rather than sexuality as its central feature. Contemporary ethnography views multiple sex/gender roles as a normative part of American Indian sex/gender systems, rather than as a marginal or deviant part (Albers 1989:134; Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998). A new emphasis on the variety of alternative sex/gender roles in North America undercuts the earlier treatment of the berdache as a unitary phenomenon across North (and South) America (Callender and Kochems 1983; Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998; Roscoe 1998). Current research also emphasizes the integrated and often highly valued position of gender variant persons and the association of sex/gender diversity with spiritual power (Roscoe 1996; Williams 1992).

A change in terminology has also taken place. Berdache generally has been rejected, but there is no unanimous agreement on what should replace it. One widely accepted suggestion is the term ***two-spirit*** (Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998), a term coined in 1990 by urban American Indian gays and lesbians. Two-spirit has the advantage of conveying the spiritual nature of gender variance as viewed by gay, lesbian, and transgendered American Indians and also the spirituality associated with traditional American Indian gender variance, but the cultural continuity suggested by two-spirit is in fact a subject of debate. Another problem is that two-spirit emphasizes the Euro-American gender construction of only two genders. Thus, I use the more culturally neutral term, variant genders (or gender variants) and specific indigenous terms wherever possible.

DISTRIBUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF VARIANT SEX/GENDER ROLES

Multiple sex/gender systems were found in many, though not all, American Indian societies. Male gender variant roles (variant gender roles assumed by biological males) are documented for 110 to 150 societies. These roles occurred most frequently in the region extending from California to the Mississippi Valley and upper-Great Lakes, the Plains and the Prairies, the Southwest, and to a lesser extent along the Northwest Coast tribes. With few exceptions, gender variance is not historically documented for eastern North America, though it may have existed prior to European invasion and disappeared before it could be recorded historically (Callender and Kochems 1983; Fulton and Anderson 1992).

There were many variations in North American Indian gender diversity. American Indian cultures included three or four genders: men, women, male variants, and female variants (biological females who by engaging in male activities were reclassified as to gender). Gender variant roles differed in the criteria by which they were defined; the degree of their integration into the society; the norms governing their behavior; the way the role was acknowledged publicly or sanctioned; how others were expected to behave toward gender variant persons; the degree to which a gender changer was expected to adopt the role of the opposite sex or was limited in doing so; the power, sacred or secular, that was attributed to them; and the path to recruitment.

Berdache, by Joe Lawrence Lembo, 1987. (Tempera on paper, 18x24.)

In spite of this variety, however, there were also some common or widespread features: transvestism, cross-gender occupation, same sex (but different gender) sexuality, some culturally normative and acknowledged process for recruitment to the role, special language and ritual roles, and associations with spiritual power.

TRANSVESTISM

The degree to which male and female gender variants were permitted to wear the clothing of the other sex varied. Transvestism was often associated with gender variance but was not equally important in all

societies. Male gender variants frequently adopted women's dress and hairstyles partially or completely, and female gender variants partially adopted the clothing of men; sometimes, however, transvestism was prohibited. The choice of clothing was sometimes an individual matter and gender variants might mix their clothing and their accoutrements. For example, a female gender variant might wear a woman's dress but carry (male) weapons. Dress was also sometimes situationally determined: a male gender variant would have to wear men's clothing while engaging in warfare but might wear women's clothes at other times. Similarly, female gender variants might wear women's clothing when gathering (women's work), but male clothing when hunting (men's work) (Callender and Kochems 1983:447). Among the Navajo, a male gender variant, ***nádleeh***, would adopt almost all aspects of a woman's dress, work, language and behavior; the Mohave male gender variant, called ***alyha***, was at the extreme end of the cross-gender continuum in imitating female physiology as well as transvestism (the transvestite ceremony is discussed later in this chapter). Repression of visible forms of gender diversity, and ultimately the almost total decline of transvestism, were a direct result of American prohibitions against it.

OCCUPATION

Contemporary analysis emphasizes occupational aspects of American Indian gender variance as a central feature. Most frequently a boy's interest in the implements and activities of women and a girl's interest in the tools of male occupations signaled an individual's wish to undertake a gender variant role (Callender and Kochems 1983:447; Whitehead 1981). In hunting societies, for example, female gender variance was signaled by a girl rejecting the domestic activities associated with women and participating in playing and hunting with boys. In the arctic and subarctic, particularly, this was sometimes encouraged by a girl's parents if there were not enough boys to provide the family with food (Lang 1998). Male gender variants were frequently considered especially skilled and industrious in women's crafts and domestic work (though not in agriculture, where this was a man's task) (Roscoe 1991; 1996). Female gender crossers sometimes won reputations as superior hunters and warriors.

Male gender variants' households were often more prosperous than others, sometimes because they were hired by whites. In their own societies the excellence of male gender variants' craftwork was sometimes ascribed to a supernatural sanction for their gender transformation (Callender and Kochems 1983:448). Female gender variants opted out of motherhood, so were not encumbered by caring for children, which may explain their success as hunters or warriors. In some societies, gender

Finds Them and Kills Them, a Crow Indian gender variant, widely known as a superior warrior (National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, photo no. 88-135.)

variants could engage in both men's and women's work, and this, too, accounted for their increased wealth. Another source of income was payment for the special social activities of gender variants due to their intermediate gender status, such as acting as go-betweens in marriage. Through their diverse occupations, then, gender variants were often central rather than marginal in their societies.

Early anthropological explanations of male gender variant roles as a niche for a "failed" or cowardly man who wished to avoid warfare or other aspects of the masculine role are no longer widely accepted. To begin with, masculinity was not associated with warrior status in all American Indian cultures. In some societies, male gender variants were warriors and in many others, males who rejected the warrior role did not become gender variants. Sometimes male gender variants did not go to war because of cultural prohibitions against their using symbols of maleness, for example, the prohibition against their using the bow among the Illinois. Where male gender variants did not fight, they sometimes had other important roles in warfare, like treating the wounded, carrying supplies for the war party, or directing postbattle ceremonials (Callender and Kochems 1983:449). In a few societies male gender variants became outstanding warriors, such as Finds Them and Kills Them, a Crow Indian who performed daring feats of bravery while fighting with the United States Army against the Crow's traditional enemies, the Lakota Sioux (Roscoe 1998:23).

GENDER VARIANCE AND SEXUALITY

Generally, sexuality was not central in defining gender status among American Indians. But in any case, the assumption by European observers that gender variants were homosexuals meant they did not take much trouble to investigate or record information on this topic. In some American Indian societies same-sex sexual desire/practice did figure significantly in the definition of gender variant roles; in others it did not (Callender and Kochems 1983:449). Some early reports noted specifically that male gender variants lived with and/or had sexual relations with women as well as men; in other societies they were reported as having sexual relations only with men, and in still other societies, of having no sexual relationships at all (Lang 1998:189–95).

The bisexual orientation of some gender variant persons may have been a culturally accepted expression of their gender variance. It may have resulted from an individual's life experiences, such as the age at which he or she entered the gender variant role, and/or it may have been one aspect of the general freedom of sexual expression in many American Indian societies. While male and female gender variants most frequently had sexual relations with, or married, persons of the same biological sex as themselves, these relationships were not considered homosexual in the contemporary Western understanding of that term. In a multiple gender system the partners would be of the same sex but different genders, and homogender, rather than homosexual, practices bore the brunt of negative cultural sanctions. The sexual partners of gender variants were never considered gender variants themselves.

The Navajo are a good example (Thomas 1997). The Navajo have four genders; in addition to man and woman there are two gender variants: masculine female-bodied nádleeh and feminine male-bodied nádleeh. A sexual relationship between a female nádleeh and a woman or a sexual relationship between a male-bodied nádleeh and a man were not stigmatized because these persons were of different genders, although of the same biological sex. However, a sexual relationship between two women, two men, two female-bodied nádleeh or two male-bodied nádleeh, was considered homosexual, and even incestual, and was strongly disapproved of.

The relation of sexuality to variant sex/gender roles across North America suggests that sexual relations between gender variants and persons of the same biological sex were a result rather than a cause of gender variance. Sexual relationships between a man and a male gender variant were accepted in most American Indian societies, though not in all, and appear to have been negatively sanctioned only when it interfered with child-producing heterosexual marriages. Gender variants' sexual relationships varied from casual and wide-ranging (Europeans used the term promiscuous), to stable, and sometimes even involved life-long marriages. In some societies, however, male gender variants were not permitted to engage in long-term relationships with men, either in or out of wedlock. In many cases, gender variants were reported as living alone.

There are some practical reasons why a man might desire sexual relations with a (male) gender variant: in some societies taboos on sexual relations with menstruating or pregnant women restricted opportunities for sexual intercourse; in other societies, sexual relations with a gender variant person were exempt from punishment for extramarital affairs; in still other societies, for example, among the Navajo, some gender variants were considered especially lucky and a man might hope to vicariously partake of this quality by having sexual relations with them (Lang 1998:349).

BIOLOGICAL SEX AND GENDER TRANSFORMATIONS

European observers often confused gender variants with hermaphrodites. Some American Indian societies explicitly distinguished hermaphrodites from gender variants and treated them differently; others assigned gender variant persons and hermaphrodites to the same alternative gender status. With the exception of the Navajo, in most American Indian societies biological sex (or the intersexedness of the hermaphrodite) was not the criterion for a gender variant role, nor were the individuals who occupied gender variant roles anatomically abnormal. The Navajo distinguished between the intersexed and the alternatively gendered, but treated them similarly, though not exactly the same (Thomas 1997; Hill 1935).

And even as the traditional Navajo sex/gender system had biological sex as its starting point, it was only a starting point, and Navajo nádleeh were distinguished by sex-linked behaviors, such as body language, clothing, ceremonial roles, speech style, and work. Feminine, male bodied nádleeh might engage in women's activities such as cooking, weaving, household tasks, and making pottery. Masculine, female-bodied nádleeh, unlike other female-bodied persons, avoided childbirth;

today they are associated with male occupational roles such as construction or firefighting (although ordinary women also sometimes engage in these occupations). Traditionally, female-bodied nádleeh had specific roles in Navajo ceremonials (Thomas 1997).

Thus, even where hermaphrodites occupied a special gender variant role, American Indian gender variance was defined more by cultural than biological criteria. In one recorded case of an interview with and physical examination of a gender variant male, the previously mentioned Finds Them and Kills Them, his genitals were found to be completely normal (Roscoe 1998).

If American Indian gender variants were not generally hermaphrodites, or conceptualized as such, neither were they conceptualized as transsexuals. Gender transformations among gender variants were recognized as only a partial transformation, and the gender variant was not thought of as having become a person of the opposite sex/gender. Rather, gender variant roles were autonomous gender roles that combined the characteristics of men and women and had some unique features of their own. This was sometimes symbolically recognized: among the Zuni a male gender variant was buried in women's dress but men's trousers on the men's side of the graveyard (Parsons quoted in Callender and Kochems 1983:454; Roscoe 1991:124, 145). Male gender variants were neither men—by virtue of their chosen occupations, dress, demeanor, and possibly sexuality—nor women, because of their anatomy and their inability to bear children. Only among the Mohave do we find the extreme imitation of women's physiological processes related to reproduction and the claims to have female sexual organs—both of which were ridiculed within Mohave society. But even here, where informants reported that female gender variants did not menstruate, this did not make them culturally men. Rather it was the mixed quality of gender variant status that was culturally elaborated in native North America, and this was the source of supernatural powers sometimes attributed to them.

SACRED POWER

The association between the spiritual power and gender variance occurred in most, if not all, Native American societies. Even where, as previously noted, recruitment to the role was occasioned by a child's interest in occupational activities of the opposite sex, supernatural sanction, frequently appearing in visions or dreams, was also involved. Where this occurred, as it did mainly in the Prairie and Plains societies, the visions involved female supernatural figures, often the moon. Among the Omaha, for example, the moon appeared in a dream holding a burden strap—a symbol of female work—in one hand, and a bow—a symbol

of male work—in the other. When the male dreamer reached for the bow, the moon forced him to take the burden strap (Whitehead 1981). Among the Mohave, a child's choice of male or female implements heralding gender variant status was sometimes prefigured by a dream that was believed to come to an embryo in the womb (Devereux 1937).

Sometimes, by virtue of the power associated with their gender ambiguity, gender variants were ritual adepts and curers, or had special ritual functions (Callender and Kochems 1983:453, Lang 1998). Gender variants did not always have important sacred roles in native North America, however. Where feminine qualities were associated with these roles, male gender variants might become spiritual leaders or healers, but where these roles were associated with male qualities they were not entered into by male gender variants. Among the Plains Indians, with their emphasis on the vision as a source of supernatural power, male gender variants were regarded as holy persons, but in California Indian societies, this was not the case and in some American Indian societies gender variants were specifically excluded from religious roles (Lang 1998:167). Sometimes it was the individual personality of the gender variant rather than his/her gender variance itself, that resulted in occupying sacred roles (see Commentary following Callender and Kochems 1983). Nevertheless, the importance of sacred power was so widely associated with sex/gender diversity in native North America that it is generally agreed to be an important explanation of the frequency of gender diversity in this region of the world.

In spite of cultural differences, some significant similarities among American Indian societies are particularly consistent with multigender systems and the positive value placed on sex/gender diversity (Lang 1996). One of these similarities is a cosmology (system of religious beliefs and way of seeing the world) in which transformation and ambiguity are recurring themes. Thus a person who contains both masculine and feminine qualities or one who is transformed from the sex/gender assigned at birth into a different gender in later life manifests some of the many kinds of transformations and ambiguities that are possible, not only for humans, but for animals and objects in the natural environment. Indeed, in many American Indian cultures, sex/gender ambiguity, lack of sexual differentiation, and sex/gender transformations play an important part in the story of creation (Lang 1996:187). American Indian cosmology may not be "the cause" of sex/gender diversity but it certainly (as in India) provides a hospitable context for it.

THE ALYHA: A MALE GENDER VARIANT ROLE AMONG THE MOHAVE

One of the most complete classic anthropological descriptions of a gender variant role is from the Mohave, a society that lives in the southwest desert area of the Nevada/California border. The following description, based on interviews by anthropologist George Devereux (1937) with some old informants who remembered the transvestite ceremony and had heard stories about gender variant individuals from their elders, indicates some of the ways in which gender variance functioned in native North America.

The Mohave had two gender variant roles: a male role called alyha and a female role called ***hwame.*** In this society, pregnant women had dreams forecasting the anatomic sex of their children. Mothers of a future alyha dreamt of male characteristics, such as arrow feathers, indicating the birth of a boy, but their dreams also included hints of their child's future gender variant status. A boy indicated he might become an alyha by "acting strangely" around the age of 10 or 11, before he had participated in the boys' puberty ceremonies. At this age, young people began to engage seriously in the activities that would characterize their adult lives as men and women; boys, for example, learned to hunt, ride horses, make bows and arrows, and they developed sexual feelings for girls. The future alyha avoided these masculine activities. Instead he played with dolls, imitated the domestic work of women, tried to participate in the women's gambling games, and demanded to wear the female bark skirt rather than the male breechclout.

The alyha's parents and relatives were ambivalent about this behavior. At first his parents would try to dissuade him, but if the behavior persisted his relatives would resign themselves and begin preparations for the transvestite ceremony. The ceremony was meant to take the boy by surprise; it was considered both a test of his inclination and an initiation. Word was sent out to various settlements so that people could watch the ceremony and get accustomed to the boy in female clothing. At the ceremony, the boy was led into a circle of onlookers by two women, and the crowd began singing the transvestite songs. If the boy began to dance as women did, he was confirmed as an alyha. He was then taken to the river to bathe and given a girl's skirt to wear. This initiation ceremony confirmed his changed gender status, which was considered permanent.

After this ceremony the alyha assumed a female name (though he did not take the lineage name that all females assumed) and would resent being called by his former, male name. In the frequent and bawdy sexual joking characteristic of Mohave culture, an alyha resented male nomenclature being applied to his genitals. He insisted that his penis be

called a clitoris, his testes, labia majora, and anus a vagina. Alyha were also particularly sensitive to sexual joking, and if they were teased in the same way as women they responded with assaults on those who teased them. Because they were very strong, people usually avoided angering them.

Alyha were considered highly industrious and much better housewives than were young girls. It is partly for this reason that they had no difficulty finding spouses, and alyha generally had husbands. Alyha were not courted like ordinary girls, however (where the prospective husband would sleep chastely beside the girl for several nights and then lead her out of her parents' house), but rather courted like widows, divorcees, or "wanton" women. Intercourse with an alyha was surrounded by special etiquette. Like Mohave heterosexual couples, the alyha and her husband practiced both anal and oral intercourse, with the alyha taking the female role. Alyha were reported to be embarrassed by an erection and would not allow their sexual partners to touch or even comment on their erect penis.

When an alyha found a husband, she would begin to imitate menstruation by scratching herself between the legs with a stick until blood appeared. The alyha then submitted to puberty observations as a girl would, and her husband also observed the requirements of the husband of a girl who menstruated for the first time. Alyha also imitated pregnancy, particularly if their husbands threatened them with divorce on the grounds of barrenness. At this time they would cease faking menstruation and follow the pregnancy taboos, with even more attention than ordinary women, except that they publicly proclaimed their pregnancy, which ordinary Mohave women never did. In imitating pregnancy, an alyha would stuff rags in her skirts, and near the time of the birth, drank a decoction to cause constipation. After a day or two of stomach pains, she would go into the bushes and sit over a hole, defecating in the position of childbirth. The feces would be treated as a stillbirth and buried, and the alyha would weep and wail as a woman does for a stillborn child. The alyha and her husband would then clip their hair as in mourning.

Alyha were said to be generally peaceful persons, except when teased, and were also considered to be cowards. They did not have to participate in the frequent and harsh military raids of Mohave men. Alyha did participate in the welcoming home feast for the warriors, where, like old women, they might make a bark penis and go through the crowd poking the men who had stayed home, saying, "You are not a man, but an alyha."

In general, alyha were not teased or ridiculed for being alyha (though their husbands were teased for marrying them), because it was believed that they could not help it and that a child's inclinations in this direction could not be resisted. It was believed that a future alyha's

desire for a gender change was such that he could not resist dancing the women's dance at the initiation ceremony. Once his desires were demonstrated in this manner, people would not thwart him. It was partly the belief that becoming an alyha was a result of a "temperamental compulsion" or predestined (as forecast in his mother's pregnancy dream) that inhibited ordinary Mohave from ridiculing alyha. In addition, alyha were considered powerful healers, especially effective in curing sexually transmitted diseases (also called alyha) like syphilis.

The alyha demonstrates some of the ways in which gender variant roles were constructed as autonomous genders in North America. In many ways the alyha crossed genders, but the role had a distinct, alternative status to that of both man and woman (as did the hwame). Although the alyha imitated many aspects of a woman's role—dress, sexual behavior, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and domestic occupations—they were also recognized as being different from women. Alyha did not take women's lineage names; they were not courted like ordinary women; they publicly proclaimed their pregnancies; and they were considered more industrious than other women in women's domestic tasks.

In spite of the alyha's sexual relations with men, the alyha was not considered primarily a homosexual (in Western terms). In fact, among ordinary Mohave, if a person dreamed of having homosexual relationships, that person would be expected to die soon, but this was not true of the alyha. Most significantly, the alyha were believed to have special supernatural powers, which they used in curing illness.

FEMALE GENDER VARIANTS

Female gender variants probably occurred more frequently among American Indians than in other cultures, although this has been largely overlooked in the historic and ethnographic record (But see Blackwood 1984; Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998; Medicine 1983).

Although the generally egalitarian social structures of many American Indian societies provided a hospitable context for female gender variance, it occurred in perhaps only one-quarter to one-half of the societies with male variant roles (Callender and Kochems 1983:446; see also Lang 1998:262–65). This may be explained partly by the fact that in many American Indian societies women could—and did—adopt aspects of the male gender role, such as warfare or hunting, and sometimes dressed in male clothing, without being reclassified into a different gender (Blackwood 1984; Lang 1998:261ff; Medicine 1983).

As with males, the primary criteria of changed gender status for females was an affinity for the occupations of the other gender. While this inclination for male occupations was often displayed in childhood, female

gender variants entered these roles later in life than did males (Lang 1998:303). Among some Inuit, "men pretenders" would refuse to learn women's tasks and were taught male occupations when they were children, by their fathers. They played with boys and participated in the hunt. Among the Kaska, a family who had only daughters might select one to "be like a man"; by engaging in the male activity of hunting, she would help provide the family with food. Among the Mohave, too, hwame refused to learn women's work, played with boys, and were considered excellent providers, as well as particularly efficient healers (Blackwood 1984:30; Lang 1998:286). Among the Cheyenne, the *hetaneman* (defined as a hermaphrodite having more of the female element) were great female warriors who accompanied the male warrior societies into battle. In all other groups, however, even outstanding women warriors were not recast into a different gender role (Roscoe 1998:75). Female gender variants also sometimes entered specialized occupations, becoming traders, guides for whites, or healers. The female preference for male occupations might be motivated by a female's desire to be independent, or might be initiated or encouraged by a child's parents, and in some societies was sanctioned through supernatural omens or in dreams.

In addition to occupation, female gender variants might assume other characteristics of men. Cocopa *warrhameh* wore a masculine hairstyle and had their noses pierced, like boys (Lang 1998:283). Among the Maidu, the female *suku* also had her nose pierced on the occasion of her initiation into the men's secret society. Mohave hwame were tattooed like men instead of women. Transvestism was commonly though not universally practiced: it occurred, for example, among the Kaska, Paiute, Ute, and Mohave.

Like male gender variants, female gender variants exhibited a wide range of sexual relationships. Some had relationships with other females, who were generally regarded as ordinary women. Only rarely, as among a southern Apache group, was the female gender variant (like her male counterpart) defined in terms of her sexual desire for women. Mohave hwame engaged in sexual and marriage relationships with women, although they courted them in a special way, different from heterosexual courtships. If a hwame married a pregnant woman, she could claim paternity of the child, although the child belonged to the descent group of its biological father (Devereux 1937:514). Like an alyha's husband, a hwame's wife was often teased, and hwame marriages were generally unstable. Masahai Amatkwisai, the most well known hwame, married women three times and was also known to have sexual relationships with many men. Masahai's wives were all aggressively teased by male Mohave who viewed "real" sexual relations only in terms of penetration by a penis. At dances Masahai sat with the men, described her wife's genitals, and flirted with girls, all typical male behavior. Masahai's

masculine behavior was ridiculed, and the men gravely insulted her (though never to her face), by referring to her by an obscene nickname meaning the female genitals. The harassment of Masahai's wives apparently led to the eventual breakup of her marriages.

Sexual relationships between women in American Indian societies were rarely historically documented, but in any case, were generally downplayed in female gender variant roles, even when this involved marriage. One female gender variant, for example, Woman Chief, a famous Crow warrior and hunter, took four wives, but this appeared to be primarily an economic strategy: processing animal hides among the Crow was women's work, so that Woman Chief's polygyny (multiple spouses) complemented her hunting skills.

While most often American Indian women who crossed genders occupationally, such as Woman Chief, were not reclassified into a gender variant role, several isolated cases of female gender transformations have been documented historically. One of these is Ququnak Patke, a "manlike woman" from the Kutenai (Schaeffer 1965). Ququnak Patke had married a white fur trader and when she returned to her tribe, claimed that her husband had transformed her into a man. She wore men's clothes, lived as a man, married a woman and claimed supernatural sanction for her role change and her supernatural powers. Although whites often mistook her for a man in her various roles as warrior, explorer's guide, and trader, such transformations were not considered a possibility among the Kutenai, and many thought Ququnak Patke was mad. She died attempting to mediate a quarrel between two hostile Indian groups.

It is difficult to know how far we can generalize about the relation of sexuality to female gender variance in precontact American Indian cultures from the lives of the few documented female gender variants. These descriptions (and those for males, as well) are mainly based on ethnographic accounts that relied on twentieth-century informants whose memories were already shaped by white hostility toward gender diversity and same-sex sexuality. Nevertheless, it seems clear that although American Indian female gender variants clearly had sexual relationships with women, sexual object choice was not their defining characteristic. In some cases, female gender variants were described "as women who never marry," which does not say anything definitive about their sexuality; it may well be that the sexuality of female gender variants was more variable than that of men.

Occasionally, as with Masahai and Ququnak Patke, and also for some male gender variants, contact with whites opened up opportunities for gender divergent individuals (see Roscoe 1988; 1991). On the whole, however, as a result of Euro-American repression and the growing assimilation of Euro-American sex/gender ideologies, both female and

male gender variant roles among American Indians largely disappeared by the 1930s, as the reservation system was well under way. And yet, its echoes may remain. The current academic interest in American Indian multigender roles, and particularly the testimony of contemporary two-spirits, remind us that alternatives are possible and that understanding American Indian sex/gender diversity in the past and present makes a significant contribution to understandings of sex/gender diversity in the larger society.

Chapter Two

Hijra and Sādhin

Neither Man nor Woman in India

As in native North America, gender diversity in Hindu India is mainly set within a religious context. Unlike North America, however, gender diversity in India is set within a basically binary sex/gender system that is hierarchical and patriarchal rather than one that is egalitarian.

In Hindu India, male and female/man and woman are viewed as natural categories in complementary opposition. This binary construction incorporates—and conflates—biological qualities (sex) and cultural qualities (gender). Males and females are born with different sexual characteristics and reproductive organs, have different sexual natures, and take different and complementary roles in marriage, sexual behavior, and reproduction. The biological or "essential" nature of the differences between male and female, man and woman, is amply demonstrated in the medical and ritual texts of classical Hinduism, in which body fluids and sexual organs are presented as both the major sources of the sex/gender dichotomy and its major symbols (O'Flaherty 1980).

In Hinduism, in contrast to Western culture, the female principle is the more active, animating the male principle, which is more inert and latent. This active female principle has an erotic, creative, life-giving aspect and a destructive, life-destroying aspect. The erotic aspect of female power is dangerous unless it is controlled by the male principle. Powerful women, whether deities or humans, must be restrained by male authority. Thus, the Hindu Mother Goddess is kind and helpful when subordinated to her male consort, but when dominant, the goddess is aggressive, devouring, and destructive. The view that unrestrained female sexuality is dangerous characterizes a more down-to-earth sexual ideology as well. In India, both in Hinduism and in Islam, women are

believed to be more sexually voracious than men; in order to prevent their sexual appetites from causing social chaos and distracting men from their higher spiritual duties, women must be controlled.

THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF GENDER DIVERSITY

The most important context for understanding sex/gender diversity in Indian society is Hindu religious concepts (Nanda 1999). In Hinduism, in spite of the importance of the basic complementary opposition of male and female, many sex/gender variants and transformations are also acknowledged. Unlike Western cultures and religions, which try to resolve, repress, or dismiss sexual contradictions and ambiguities as jokes or trivia, Hinduism has a great capacity to allow opposites to confront each other without necessarily resolving the opposition, "celebrating the idea that the universe is boundlessly various, and . . . that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other" (O'Flaherty 1973:318). The presence of alternative genders and gender transformations in Hinduism gives positive meaning to the lives of many individuals with a variety of alternative gender identifications, physical conditions, and erotic preferences. Despite the criminalization of many kinds of transgender behavior under British rule and even by the Indian government after independence, Indian society has not yet permitted cultural anxiety about transgenderism to express itself in culturally institutionalized phobias and repressions.

Ancient Hindu origin myths often feature androgynous or hermaphroditic ancestors. The Rg Veda (a classical Hindu religious text), for example, says that before creation the world lacked all distinctions, including those of sex and gender. Ancient poets often expressed this concept with androgynous or hermaphroditic images, such as a male with a womb, a male deity with breasts, or a pregnant male (Zwilling and Sweet 2000:101). In Hinduism, then, multiple sexes and genders are acknowledged as possibilities, albeit ambivalently regarded possibilities, both among humans and deities. Individuals who do not fit into society's major sex/gender categories may be stigmatized but may also find, within Hinduism, meaningful and valued gender identifications.

Hinduism has been characterized as having a "propensity towards androgynous thinking" (Zwilling and Sweet 2000:100). Within the Hindu sex/gender system, the interchange of male and female qualities, transformations of sex and gender, the incorporation of male and female within one person, and alternative sex and gender roles among deities and humans are meaningful and positive themes in mythology, ritual and art. Among the many kinds of male and female sex/gender variants, the most visible and culturally institutionalized are the ***hijras***.

Hijras are culturally defined as "neither man nor woman." They are born as males and through a ritual surgical transformation become an alternative, third sex/gender category (Nanda 1999). Hijras worship Bahuchara Mata, a form of the Hindu Mother Goddess particularly associated with transgenderism. Their traditional employment is to perform at marriages and after a child (especially a son) has been born. They sing and dance and bless the child and the family for increased fertility and prosperity in the name of the goddess. They then receive traditional payments of money, sweets, and cloth in return.

HIJRAS AS NOT-MEN . . .

The recognition of more than two sex/genders is recorded in India as early as the eighth century BCE; like the hijras, alternative or third sex/gendered persons were primarily considered to be defective males. The core of their deficiency centered on their sexual impotence, or inability to procreate (Zwilling and Sweet 1996:361). In India today, the term hijra is most commonly translated as "eunuch" or intersexed, and emphasizes sexual impotence. Hijras are culturally defined as persons who are born as males but who adopt the clothing, behavior and occupations of women, and who are neither male nor female, neither man nor woman.

Hijra sexual impotence is popularly understood as a *physical* defect impairing the male sexual function in intercourse (in the inserter role) and in reproduction. This is the major way in which hijras are "not-men." Hijras attribute their impotence to a defective male sexual organ. A child who at birth is classified as male but whose genitals are subsequently noticed to be ambiguous, culturally would be defined as a hijra, or as potentially a hijra (though in fact not all such individuals become hijras).

Like their counterparts in native North America, hijras (as receptors) frequently have sexual relationships with men. While hijras are not defined by their sexual practices, they often define themselves as "men who have no desire for women." Linguistically and culturally, hijras are distinguished from other men who take the receptor role in sex and are identified by their same-sex sexual orientation (Cohen 1995). It is the hijras' sexual impotence and in-between sex/gender status that is at the core of their cultural definition. A male who is not biologically intersexed who wishes to become a hijra must transform his sex/gender through the emasculation operation (discussed later in this chapter).

Although all hijras explain their deficient masculinity by saying, "I was born this way," this statement is not factually true. Rather, it expresses the Hindu view that qualities of both sex and gender are

inborn, and is also consistent with the Hindu view that fate is important in shaping one's life chances and experiences.

HIJRAS AS WOMEN AND NOT-WOMEN

While hijras are "man minus man," they are also "man plus woman." Hijras adopt many aspects of the feminine gender role. They wear women's dress, hairstyle, and accessories; they imitate women's walk, gestures, voice, facial expressions and language; they have only male sexual partners and they experience themselves positively as sexual objects of men's desires. Hijras take feminine names as part of their gender transformation and use female kinship terms for many of their relationships with each other, such as sister, aunty, and grandmother (Hall 1995). They request "ladies only" seating in public transportation and they periodically demand to be counted as women (rather than men) in the census. Being a hijra means not only divesting oneself of one's masculine identity, but also taking on a feminine one.

Although hijras are "like" women, they are also "not-women." Their feminine dress and manners are often exaggerations and their aggressive female sexuality contrasts strongly with the normatively submissive demeanor of ordinary women. Hijra performances do not attempt a realistic imitation of women but rather a burlesque, and the very act of dancing in public violates norms of feminine behavior. Hijras also use coarse and abusive speech, both among themselves and to their audiences, which is also deviant for Indian women. Hijras' use of verbal insult is an important component in the construction of their gender variance, as noted by early European observers and the contemporary Indian media (Hall 1997).

Because hijras are defined as neither men nor women they were sometimes prohibited from wearing women's clothing exclusively: some Indian rulers in the eighteenth century required that hijras distinguish themselves by wearing a man's turban with their female clothing. A century later, hijras were reported as wearing "a medley of male and female clothing," with a female sari under a male coat-like, outer garment (Preston 1987:373). This seems similar to North American gender variant transvestism, though hijras today for the most part do not wear gender-mixed clothing.

The major reason why hijras are considered—by themselves and others—as not-woman is that they do not have female reproductive organs and therefore cannot have children. The hijras tell a story about a hijra who prayed to god to bear a child. God granted her wish, but since she had not specifically prayed for the child to be born, she could not give birth. She remained pregnant until she could not stand the weight any more and slit her stomach open to deliver the baby. Both the hijra and the baby died. This story illustrates that it is against the nature of hijras to reproduce like women do, thereby denying them full identification as women.

RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATIONS

An important sex/gender identification of hijras is with Arjun, hero of the great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata. In one episode Arjun is exiled and lives for a year in the disguise of a eunuch-transvestite, wearing women's dress and bracelets, braiding his hair like a woman, and teaching singing and dancing to the women of the king's court. In this role he also participates in weddings and childbirths, a clear point of identification with the hijras (Hiltelbeitel 1980).

The hijras' identification with Arjun is visually reinforced by Arjun's representation in popular drama as a vertically divided half-man/half-woman. In this form Arjun is identified with the sexually ambivalent deity, Shiva, who is also frequently represented as a vertically divided half-man/half-woman, symbolizing his union with his female energy.

Shiva is particularly associated with the concept of creative asceticism, which is the core of hijra identity and power. In Hinduism, sexual impotence can be transformed into procreative power through the practice of asceticism, or the renunciation of sex. The power that results from sexual abstinence (called *tapas)* paradoxically becomes an essential feature in the process of creation.

In one Hindu creation myth, Shiva was asked to create the world, but took so long to do so that the power of creation was given to another deity, Brahma (The Creator). When Shiva was finally ready to begin creation he saw that the universe was already created and got so angry, he broke off his phallus saying "there is no use for this," and threw it into the earth. Paradoxically, as soon as Shiva's phallus ceased to be a source of individual fertility, it became a source of universal fertility (O'Flaherty 1973). This paradox expresses the power of the hijras who as emasculated men are individually impotent but nevertheless are able to confer blessings for fertility on others. As creative ascetics hijras are considered auspicious and powerful, and this underlies their ritual performances at marriages and childbirth.

While at one level the hijras' claim to power is through Shiva's ritual sacrifice of the phallus, at a more conscious and culturally elaborated level, the power of the hijras is based on their identification with the Mother Goddess. In Hindu India, salvation and success are equated with submission, particularly in regard to the Mother Goddess. The Mother

Goddess must offer help when confronted with complete surrender of the devotee, but those who deny her wishes put themselves in danger. Thus, underlying the surrender is fear. The protective and destructive aspects of the Mother Goddess, expressed in myth and ritual, represent the ambivalence toward the real mother that is perhaps universal. But the Hindu Mother Goddess is singularly intense in her destructive aspects, which, nevertheless, contain the seeds of salvation (for a comparison of female goddesses with eunuch priests, see Roller 1999). Popular Hindu mythology (and its hijra versions) abounds in images of the aggressive Mother Goddess as she devours, beheads, and castrates—destructive acts that nevertheless contain the possibility of rebirth, as in the hijra emasculation ritual. This dual nature of the goddess provides the powerful symbolic and psychological context in which the hijras become culturally meaningful as an alternative sex/gender.

Bahuchara Mata, a version of the Mother Goddess, is the special object of devotion for the hijras. (Photograph by Serena Nanda.)

Deficient masculinity by itself does not make a hijra. Hijras are deficient men who receive a call from their goddess—which they ignore at the peril of being born impotent for seven future rebirths—to undergo a sex and gender change, wear their hair long, and dress in women's clothes. The sex change, which involves surgical removal of the genitals, is called "the operation" (even by hijras who do not otherwise speak English). For hijras, the operation is a form of rebirth and it contains many of the symbolic elements of childbirth. Only after the operation do hijras become vehicles of the power of the Mother Goddess whose blessings they bestow at weddings and childbirth. For hijras not born intersexed, the operation transforms an impotent, "useless" male into a hijra, and a vehicle of the procreative power of the Mother Goddess.

The operation is explicitly identified with the hijras' devotion to Bahuchara Mata, who is particularly associated with male transvestism and transgenderism. Several hijras are always present at Bahuchara's temple, near Ahmedabad, in Gujerat, to bless visitors and tell them about the power of the goddess.

The surgery is (ideally) performed by a hijra, called a "midwife." The client is seated in front of a picture of the goddess and repeats Bahuchara's name over and over, which induces a trancelike state. The midwife then severs all or part of the genitals (penis and testicles) from the body with two diagonal cuts with a sharp knife. The blood from the operation, which is considered part of the male identity, is allowed to flow freely; this rids the person of their maleness. The resulting wound is healed by traditional medical practices and a small hole is left open for urination. After the operation the new hijra is subject to many of the same restrictions as a woman after childbirth and is supervised and taken care of by hijra elders. In the final stage of the ritual, the hijra is dressed as a bride, signifying the active sexuality potential in marriage, and is taken through the streets in procession. This completes the ritual and the sex/gender transformation. Although emasculation is prohibited by Indian law, hijras continue to practice it secretly (Ranade 1983).

HIJRAS AS ASCETICS

In India, gender is an important part of being a full social person. Through marriage, men and women are expected to produce children, especially sons, in order to continue the family line. An individual who dies without being married, an impotent man, or a woman who does not menstruate is considered an incomplete person. However, the individual who is not capable of reproduction, as either a man or a woman, or who does not wish to marry, is not necessarily excluded from society (see female gender variants later in this chapter). In India, a meaningful role

that transcends the categories of (married) man and (married) woman is that of the ascetic, or renouncer, a person both outside society yet also part of it. In identifying with the ascetic role, individuals who are sexually "betwixt and between" for any number of biological reasons or personal choices are able to transform an incomplete personhood into a transcendent one. Within the Hindu religion, the life path of an ascetic is one of the many diverse paths that an individual may take to achieve salvation.

Hijras identify themselves as ascetics in their renunciation of sexual desire, in abandoning their family and kinship ties, and in their dependence on alms (religiously inspired charity) for their livelihood. As ascetics, hijras transcend the stigma of their sex/gender deficiencies.

An important Hindu belief, called ***dharma***, is that every individual has a life path of his/her own that he/she must follow, because every individual has different innate essences, moral qualities, and special abilities. This leads to an acceptance of many different occupations, behaviors, and personal styles as legitimate life paths. This is particularly so when the behavior is sanctified by tradition, formalized in ritual, and practiced within a group (Kakar 1982:163). Hinduism thus affords the individual personality wide latitude in behavior, including that which Euro-American cultures might label criminal or pathological and attempt to punish or cure. This Hindu concept of the legitimacy of many different life paths applies to hijras and to other sex/gender variants as well.

RITUAL ROLES AND SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

In India, the birth of a son is viewed as a major purpose of marriage. As auspicious and powerful ritual figures, on this occasion hijras bless the child and the family and provide entertainment for friends, relatives, and neighbors. These hijra performances, which include folk and current film songs and dances, also have comic aspects. These mainly derive from the hijras' burlesque of women's behavior, especially aggressive sexuality, and mimicking the pains of pregnancy at each month.

At some point in the performance, one hijra inspects the genitals of the newborn to ascertain its sex. Hijras claim that any baby born intersexed belongs to their community and it is widely believed in India that this claim cannot be resisted. The hijras then confer the power of the Mother Goddess to bless the child for what they themselves do not possess—the power of creating new life, of having many sons, and of carrying on the continuity of a family line. When the performance is completed, the hijras claim their traditional payment.

As part of their traditional ritual performance role when a son is born, hijras examine the baby's genitals to confirm his sex. (Photograph by Serena Nanda.)

Hijras also perform after a marriage, when the new bride has come to her husband's home (traditionally, and even today ideally, the couple lives with the groom's parents). The hijras bless the couple so that they will have many sons, which is not only the desire of the family, but also means more work for the hijras. These performances contain flamboyant sexual displays and references to sexuality, which break all the rules of normal social intercourse in gender-mixed company and on this occasion are a source of humor. The hijras' skits and songs refer to potentially conflicting relationships in Indian marriages, for example between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, or between sisters-in-law. As outsiders to the social structure because of their ambiguous sex/gender status, the hijras are uniquely able to expose the points of tension in a culture where sex, gender, and reproduction are involved. In humorously expressing this tension, the hijras defuse it, yet at the same time, their very ambiguity of sex and gender keep the tension surrounding sex, gender, and fertility alive.

Hijras are generally regarded with ambivalence; social attitudes include a combination of mockery, fear, respect, contempt, and even compassion. Fear of the hijras is related to the "virility complex" in India, which has an ancient history and which is also part of contemporary culture. This complex identifies manhood with semen and sexual potency, both of central concern in India's patriarchal culture (Zwilling and Sweet n.d.:6). Hijras have the power to curse as well as to bless, and if they are not paid their due, they will insult a family publicly and curse it with a loss of virility. The ultimate weapon of a hijra is to raise her skirt and display her mutilated genitals; this is both a source of shame and a contamination of the family's reproductive potential.

Hijras are also feared for another reason. Having renounced normal family life, hijras are outside the social roles and relationships of caste and kinship, which define the social person in Hindu culture and which are the main sources of social control of an individual (Ostor, Fruzzetti, and Barnett 1982). Hijras (and other ascetics) are thus an implicit threat to the social order (Lannoy 1975; O'Flaherty 1973). The hijras use their sexual and social marginality to manipulate and exploit the public to their own advantage. Hijras themselves say that because they are marginal to the social rules that govern the behavior of men and women, they are a people without "shame" (Hall 1995; 1997:445). Hijra audiences know this and feel vulnerable to economic extortion, as they weigh the financial cost of giving in to the hijras' coercive demands for payment against the likelihood that if they do not pay, they will be publicly abused, humiliated, and cursed.

Nevertheless, if hijras challenge their audiences, their audiences also challenge the hijras. Sometimes a member of the hijras' audience will challenge the performers' authenticity by lifting their skirts to see whether they are emasculated and thus "real" hijras or "fake" hijras, men who have male genitals and are thus only impersonating hijras. If hijra performers are found to be "fakes" they are insulted and chased away without payment.

HIJRA SEXUALITY

Part of the ambivalence surrounding hijras focuses on their sexuality. Sexuality is also a source of conflict within the hijra community. As noted above, the term hijra translates as eunuch not homosexual; the power of the hijra role resides in their renunciation of sexuality and the transformation of sexual desire into sacred power. In reality, however, many hijras do engage in sexual activities, exclusively in the receptor role with men and frequently as prostitutes. This is an "open secret" in Indian cities, although known to a different degree among different sections of the population. Sometimes, as in Bombay, hijra prostitutes work out of houses of prostitution located in "red light" districts; in smaller cities and towns they may simply use their own homes to carry on prostitution discretely.

In addition to the exchange of money for sex with a variety of male clients, hijras also have long-term sexual relationships with men they call their "husbands." These relationships may be one-sided and exploitative, as when the "husband" lives off his hijra "wife," but they may also be affectionate and involve some economic reciprocity. Most hijras prefer having a husband to prostitution and many speak of their husbands in very loving terms, as indeed husbands sometimes do of their hijra wives. For many hijras, joining the hijra community provides an opportunity to engage in sexual relations with men in a safer, more organized and orderly environment than is afforded by street prostitution.

Hijra sexual relationships cause conflict within the hijra community, however. Because active sexuality runs counter to the cultural definition of hijras as ascetics, knowledge of hijra prostitution and sexuality undermines their respect in society. In cities where the hijra population is large, hijra prostitutes are not permitted to live with hijra ritual performers. Hijra elders are often jealous of the attachment of individual hijras to their husbands, as this undercuts the economic contribution of a hijra to her household. Some hijras complain that prostitution has increased because the opportunities for ritual performances have declined. In fact, prostitution has been associated with the hijras for hundreds of years, an association that hijras vehemently deny and attribute to those who imitate their effeminacy but who are not "real" hijras.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE HIJRA COMMUNITY

Indian social structure is built on castes, which are ethnically distinct corporate social units associated with occupational exclusivity, control over their members, and a hierarchically based group allocation of rights and privileges. The Indian caste system includes many different kinds of groups, such as Muslims and tribal peoples, who, though originally outside the Hindu system, were incorporated into it as caste-like groups.

Hijra communities have many caste-like features, which, along with their kinship networks, contribute to their social reproduction (Nanda 1999). Like a caste, the hijra community claims a monopoly over their occupation as ritual performers; exercises control over its members, with outcasting as the ultimate sanction; and rests its legitimacy on origin myths associated with high-status legendary figures like Arjun or deities like Ram or Shiva.

The census of India does not count hijras separately, so estimates of their numbers are unreliable; a common "guesstimate" is 50,000 nationwide. Hijras predominantly live in the cities of northern India, where they find the greatest opportunity to perform their traditional ritual roles, but small groups of hijras are found all over India, in the south as well as the north, and in rural areas and small towns as well as in big cities.

Hijras are highly organized and participate in a special subculture that extends throughout the nation, with some regional variations. Hijras normally live in households containing between five and twenty members with one elder as a "manager." Each hijra contributes to the running of the household, either with money or by performing domestic tasks. Household composition is flexible, and individuals commonly move from one household to another in a different part of a city or in a different city or region, out of boredom, dissatisfaction, or as the result of a dispute.

The nationwide hijra community is composed of "houses," or named subgroups; houses are not domestic units, but are similar to lineages or clans. Each house recognizes a common "ancestor" and has its own history and special rules. Any particular household contains members of several houses. Each house (not household) has a leader, called a *naik* (chief), and within the major cities, the naiks of the different houses form a kind of executive council, making policy and resolving disputes.

Below the level of the naiks are the gurus. The most significant relationship among hijras is that of *guru* (master, teacher) and *chela* (disciple). An individual is formally initiated into the hijra community under the sponsorship of a guru, who bestows a new female name and pays the initiation fee. The new chela vows to obey her guru and the rules of the house and the community. The guru presents the new chela with some gifts and records her name in the guru's record book. This guru-chela relationship, which replicates the ideals of an extended family, is ideally a lifelong bond of reciprocity in which the guru is obligated to "take care of" and help the chela, while the chela is obligated to be loyal and obedient to the guru. The chela must also give her guru a portion of whatever she earns.

Through the extension of guru-chela relationships, hijras all over India are related by (fictive) kinship (Hall 1995). "Daughters" of one "mother" consider themselves "sisters," and elders are regarded as "grandmothers" or as "mother's sister" (aunt). These relationships involve warm and reciprocal regard and are sometimes formalized by the exchange of small amounts of money, clothing, jewelry, and sweets. In addition to the constant movement of hijras who visit their gurus and fictive kin in different cities, religious and secular annual gatherings also bring together thousands of hijras from all over India.

Hijras come from all castes and from Hindu, Muslim and Christian families. Most hijras seem to be from the lower, though not unclean (formerly, untouchable), castes. Within the hijra community, however, all caste affiliations are disregarded and there are no distinctions of purity and pollution. Like other ascetics, hijra identity transcends caste and kinship affiliation.

In pre-independent India, the caste-like status of the hijras was recognized in the princely states, where one hijra in each district was granted hereditary rights to a parcel of land and the right to collect food and small sums of money from each agricultural household in a stipulated area. These rights were protected against other hijras and legitimately inherited within the community. This granting of rights was consistent with the Indian concept of the king's duty to ensure the ancient rights of his subjects (Preston 1987:380). Even today, although in a vague and somewhat confused way, hijras refer back to these rights as part of their claims to legitimacy.

Under British rule in India the hijras lost some of their traditional legitimacy when the British government refused to lend its legal support to the hijras' "right of begging or extorting money, whether authorized by former governments or not." The British thereby hoped to discourage what they found to be "the abominable practices of the wretches." Through a law disallowing any land grant or entitlement from the state to any group that "breach[ed] the laws of public decency," the British finally removed state protection from the hijras (Preston 1987:382). In some British-controlled areas, laws criminalizing emasculation, aimed specifically at the hijras, were enacted. These laws were later incorporated into the criminal code of independent India.

Though emasculation continues, criminalization undercuts social respect for the hijras, particularly when criminal cases are sensationalized in the media. This is also true about the association of hijras with AIDS, though in fact, the spread of AIDS in India is primarily through heterosexual prostitution. In addition, as a result of increasing Westernization of Indian values and culture, at least at a surface level, the role of many traditional ritual performers like the hijras is becoming less compelling. Traditional life-cycle ceremonies are shorter, and expensive and nonessential ritual features are dropping off. In an attempt to compensate for lost earnings, hijras have tried to broaden the definition of occasions on which they claim their performances are necessary, for example, at the birth of a girl as well as a boy or at the opening of a public building or business.

The hijra role incorporates many kinds of contradictions. Hijras are both men and women, yet neither men nor women; their ideal identity is that of chaste ascetics, yet they widely engage in sexual relationships; they are granted the power of the goddess and perform rituals in her

name, but they are held in low esteem and are socially marginal. Yet, with all its contradictions and ambiguities, the hijra role continues to be sustained by a culture in which religion still gives positive meaning to gender variance and even accords it a measure of power.

THE SĀDHIN: A FEMALE GENDER VARIANT

Although female gender variants are mentioned in ancient Hindu texts, none are as widespread, visible, or prominent as the hijras. One female gender variant role is the ***sādhin*** or female ascetic. This role becomes meaningful within the context of Hindu values and culture, particularly regarding the position of women in India (see Humes 1996) and the concept of the ascetic.

As noted above, marriage and reproduction are essential to recognition as a social person in Hindu India, and "spinsters" rarely exist in rural areas. Among the Gaddis, a numerically small pastoral people of the Himalayan foothills, a female gender variant role called sādhin emerged in the late-nineteenth century. Sādhins renounce marriage (and thus, sexuality), though they otherwise live in the material world. They are committed to celibacy for life. Sādhins do not wear women's clothing, but rather the everyday clothing of men, and they wear their hair close cropped (Phillimore 1991).

A girl voluntarily decides to become a sādhin. She usually makes this decision around puberty, before her menarche, though in one reported case, the parents of a six-year-old girl interpreted her preference to dress in boy's clothing and cut her hair like a boy, as an indication of her choice to be a sādhin. For most sādhins, this role choice, which is considered irreversible, is related to their determined rejection of marriage. A sādhin must be a virgin; she is viewed, however, not just as a celibate woman but as a female asexual. Although the transition from presexual child to an asexual sādhin denies a girl's sexual identity, the girl is not considered to have changed her gender, so much as transcended it.

Entering the sādhin role is not marked by ritual, but it is publicly acknowledged when the sādhin adopts men's clothing and has her hair cut in a tonsure, like a boy for his initiation rite into adulthood. Despite her male appearance, however, a sādhin remains socially a woman in many ways, and she retains the female name given to her when she was a child. Sādhins may (but are not obliged to) engage in masculine productive tasks from which women are normally excluded, for example, ploughing, sowing crops, sheep herding, and processing wool. They also, however, do women's work. On gender-segregated ceremonial occasions, adult sādhins may sit with the men as well as smoke the water pipe and

cigarettes, definitely masculine behaviors. Yet sādhins do not generally attend funerals, a specifically male prerogative.

Ethnographer Peter Phillimore characterizes the role of the sādhin as an "as if" male (1991:337). A sādhin's gender is not in question, but she can nevertheless operate in many social contexts "like a man." A sādhin can, for example, make the necessary offerings for her father's spirit and the ancestors, a ceremony otherwise performed only by a son. Unlike hijras, though, sādhins have no special ritual or performance roles in society, nor are they considered to have any special sacred powers. Sādhins, like hijras, are ascetics in their renunciation of sexuality, although sādhins are only ambiguous ascetics because they do not renounce other aspects of the material world.

Hindu asceticism is primarily identified with males so that female ascetics behave in significant respects like men; this maleness makes visible and legitimates female asceticism, though it is different from male asceticism in important ways (Humes 1996; Phillimore 1991:341). Unlike male ascetics, who transcend sex/gender classification and who can renounce the world at any age or stage of life, the sādhin's asceticism must begin before puberty and her lifelong chastity, or purity, is essential to the public acceptance of her status. These differences suggest that within orthodox Hinduism, the sādhin role is a way of controlling female sexuality and providing a social niche for the woman who rejects the only legitimate female roles in traditional Hindu India, those of wife and mother.

Because of the importance of women in the subsistence economy, Gaddi society was substantially more gender egalitarian than orthodox Hindus. When Gaddi migration in the late-nineteenth century brought them into contact with more orthodox Hindus, Gaddis came under increasing cultural pressure to curtail the relative equality and freedom of their women. However, because a woman's decision to reject marriage is an unacceptable challenge to gender conventions among the orthodox Hindus, the sādhin role, defined as an asexual female gender variant, acts as a constraint on the potential, unacceptable, sexuality of unmarried women. The definition of the sādhin as asexual transforms "the negative associations of spinsterhood" into the "positive associations of sādhin-hood" (Phillimore 1991:347).

The sādhin role provides one kind of response to the cultural challenge of adult female virginity in a society where marriage and motherhood are the dominant feminine ideals, while the hijra role, despite its many contradictions, gives meaning and even power to male sex/gender ambiguity in a highly patriarchal culture. While all cultures must deal with those whose anatomy or behavior leaves them outside the classification of male and female, man and woman, it is the genius of Hinduism that allows for so many different ways of being human.

Chapter Three

Men and Not-Men
Sexuality and Gender in Brazil

In Brazil sex/gender diversity is associated with the alternative sex/gender roles of ***travesti***, viado, and bicha, most centrally defined by their sexuality, a theme that characterizes most of Latin America (Murray 1995). Underlying cultural variations in the sex/gender ideologies of Latin America is a shared understanding, based on common roots in Spanish and Portuguese culture, of men and women as totally opposed in every way, with males clearly superior (Brandes 1981; Gilmore 1996). This pattern has been central throughout Brazilian history, though today it is one of several sex/gender ideologies that coexist in contradictory, complex and overlapping ways in Brazil.

Brazil's traditional sex/gender system flowered in the early colonial period (sixteenth century) when a plantation slave economy dominated by a class of wealthy landowners was the predominent economic and cultural feature. Plantation landowner patriarchs exercised absolute authority over their dominions, resulting in a rigid social hierarchy of master over (African) slave and men over women. This intersecting class/race/gender hierarchy was sanctioned by official Catholic Church teachings and enforced, when necessary, through violence. Thus, the association of power, domination, and the use or threat of violence became central to Brazilian masculine identity and its system of sexual classification (Parker 1991:31). This traditional sex/gender ideology dominated Brazil throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and still retains much of its power today.

The foundation of this system is the dichotomy between man and woman (or rather, as discussed later in this chapter, between man and not-man), masculine and feminine, which are opposed in every way. This opposition is viewed as a natural result of the biological sex differences between males and females. It encompasses many differences—bodies

and genitalia, social position, rights and responsibilities, psychological characteristics, sexual desires and capacities, and appropriate spatial and social domains. Men dominate the more important public spheres of political activity and the workplace, while women are acknowledged as superior only in realms regarded as inferior, such as domestic life (Hayes 1996:9).

Power is invested entirely in the hands of men, who are characterized by their superiority, strength, virility, activity, potential for violence, and legitimate use of force. Masculine virility is manifested in aggressive sexuality and having many children, and also by the ability to control the sexuality of women, that is, daughters and wives.

Women are defined as inferior and weak, yet also beautiful and desirable, and subject always to control by men—fathers and brothers and, after marriage, husbands. A persistent underlying threat to masculinity is the loss of control over women. Inherent in the beauty and seductiveness of women is the constant threat of their sexual betrayal, a view that has deep roots in the Christian ideology of women as either virgins, mothers, or whores (Gregg 1997; Parker 1991:49). Virginity is a sign of a woman's innocence and, more importantly, is a demonstration of her proper domination by male authority. Both the prostitute and the unfaithful wife are a deeply felt threat to the system because each in her own way escapes the control of legitimate male authority (Hayes 1996:22). Any betrayal of male control is an insult to male honor; given the constant threat of betrayal, demonstrations of masculinity through a virile sexuality form an essential element in competitive displays between men (Gilmore 1996). The marked differentiation of the sexes justifies a double standard of morality. Men are given the freedom of carnal love independent of reproduction, while for women, sexual relations are joined to the obligation to conceive, give birth, and raise children within marriage.

Unlike the northern version of modern Euro-American culture, in which biological sex is the basis of gender classification crosscut by the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy, in Brazil, the core gender opposition is based on sexuality, that is, the position taken in sexual intercourse. Brazilian gender ideology is based on the distinction between those who penetrate—the active (*atividade*), defined as masculine—and those who are penetrated—the passive (*passividade*), defined as feminine.

This ideology shapes the meanings of sexual relations between males and females and also between individuals of the same sex. The act of penetration of the female body by the male in sexual intercourse is the powerful act—in a concrete and metaphorical sense—that proclaims male superiority, linking male and female bodies in a relation of (male) dominance and (female) submission. Penetration symbolically expresses

the hierarchical power relations at the heart of the patriarchal gender system. It is the central symbol of sexual relations and indeed, symbolically, all gender differences. Whether penetration actually occurs or is merely implied, it is key to the sex/gender system of Brazil.

The emphasis of the Brazilian sex/gender system is reflected—and reinforced—by the language with which Brazilians speak about the body and its practices and about sexuality and gender (Parker 1995:243). In common usage, position in sexual intercourse is expressed by the verbs "to eat" (*comer*) and "to give" (*dar*). Comer describes the male's active penetration and domination of the female and is used in different contexts as a synonym for the verbs "to possess" (*possuir*) or "to conquer" (*vencer*).

Dar is used to describe the female's passive submission to her male partner in her role of being penetrated during intercourse. Just as comer is used to describe various forms of domination through reference to the relations of gender, dar is also used to imply submission, subjugation, and passivity in varied contexts, from politics to sports, in which victors are said to have "eaten" their opponents. Thus, even the simplest verbal exchanges in Brazil reinforce the association of sexual atividade and passividade with relations of power and domination between men and women.

Through the act of eating, the active partner metaphorically consumes the passive, while through the act of giving, the passive partner offers herself/himself up to be possessed. The act of penetration thus also defines categories of persons: husbands are associated with those who "eat," wives with those who "give."

GENDER DIVERSITY: TRAVESTÍS, BICHAS, AND VIADOS

This model of the relationship between males and females is central to Brazilian understandings of gender diversity, which focus on the effeminate passive male homosexual, who, depending on the region of Brazil and the social situation, is variously called bicha (literally bug, pest, or female animal), viado (literally, deer), or travestí (from the verb to cross-dress). Although these gender variants readily self-identify as homosexual, in the traditional sex/gender system, the term homosexual was not applied to the male-acting and penetrating partner in a same-sex sexual relationship. Thus, bichas, viados, and travesitís are "produced" through the application of the distinction between atividad and passividade to sexual relations between individuals of the same sex, not soley by virtue of their sexual orientation.

Because the most important criterion of the Brazilian sex/gender ideology is the sexual and social roles people play, not their sexual orien-

tation, or even their biological sex (Fry 1986; Parker 1991), a male who enters into a sexual relationship with another male does not necessarily sacrifice his masculinity, so long as he performs the penetrating, active, masculine role during sexual intercourse and conducts himself as a male within society. The active male in same-sex sexual relations is an unmarked male—he falls into no special category of gender nonconformity. He does not regard himself as a homosexual and is not regarded as one by society. Same-sex sexual practices are reported as a common introduction to sexual activity for many Brazilian men during adolescence, and those in the active role are not stigmatized. Indeed, as part of the drive to dominate sexually, penetrating another male is sometimes claimed as an indication of a supervirile masculine identity (Parker 1995:245).

A male is a man (*homem* or *macho*) until he is accused of or proved to have given, in which case he becomes a bicha (or viado). If a male accepts that social role, he becomes a "real bicha." Taking on this role publicly is called *solta plumas*, literally "releases feathers" (from the importance of feathers in Carnaval, the annual pre-Lenten period of revelry, similar to the American Mardi Gras), which is particularly associated with bichas because of the Carnaval theme of inversion. A real bicha is assumed to be sexually a pasivo.

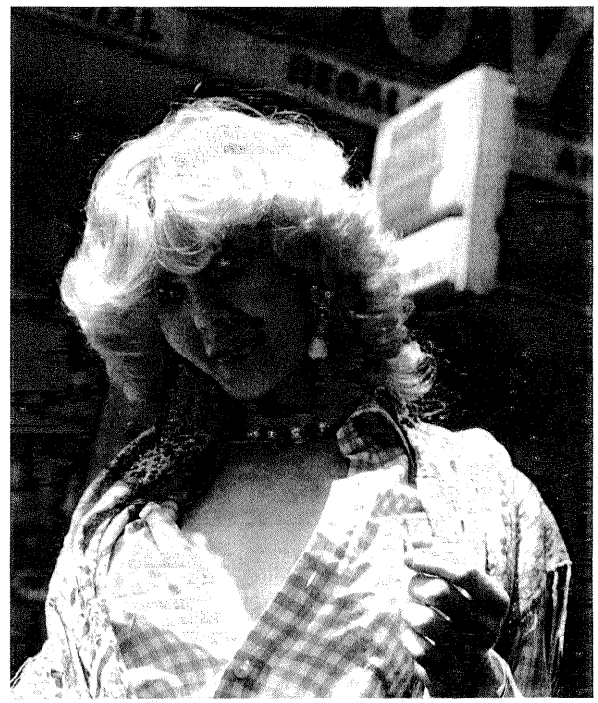
In Brazil, as in other "gender organized" systems of same-sex sexual relationships, the sexually receptive partner is expected to enact other aspects of the feminine gender role: to behave and/or sound and/or dress in ways appropriate to women. Once this role is imputed to an individual, it seriously damages his *masculinidade,* unalterably transforming and degrading him, as he becomes a symbolic female through his sexual role.

But bichas, viados, and travestís do not merely dress and act like women; they also transform their bodies (Kulick 1997; 1998). Boys who self-identify as travestís may begin ingesting or injecting female hormones as early as age 10 or 12, in order to develop breasts and give their bodies feminine contours. These hormones, which are either medications for combating estrogen deficiency in women or oral contraceptives, are cheap and available in Brazil. Travestís also use (most frequently industrial plastic) silicone for implants in order to create the fleshy thighs, expansive hips, and prominent buttocks that are the focus of the Brazilian ideal of feminine beauty (for a variety of aesthetic, practical, and medical reasons, silicone is not used for breast implants [Kulick 1997:576]).

In spite of their bodily modifications, however, travestís believe that a travestí is not a woman and can never be one, because "God created them male and their sex can never be changed" (Kulick 1998:193ff). This is a significant contrast to Western transsexuals and also to the hijras, whom travestís resemble in other ways. Unlike hijras, travestís

do not want to get rid of their penises; they believe that sex-change operations do not produce women, but only castrated homosexuals. Furthermore, travestís believe that without a penis semen cannot leave the body and the trapped semen will eventually travel to the brain and cause madness. Thus, in a seeming paradox, simultaneously with their determined desire for a feminine body, travestís value their male genitals and "gasp in horror" at the thought of an amputation, which would mean the loss of an ability to have an erection or an orgasm (Kulick 1997:577). In yet another seeming paradox, travestís keep their penises hidden, that is, "imprisoned" between their legs, which is an important bodily practice in their daily public appearances, in their work as prostitutes, and in deference to their boyfriends' (*maridos*) masculine identities.

Unlike Western transsexuals, travestís modify their bodies not because they feel themselves to be women, but because they feel themselves to be "like women"—in their behavior, appearance, and particularly, in their relationships with men (Kulick 1997:577). A common—and crucial—theme in travestís' identities is that they experience themselves as travestís in connection with their sexual attraction to men, specifically in their desire for, and participation in, anal penetration. This attraction motivates their feminized bodily modifications and is central



Brazilian travestís often spend time in Europe working as prostitutes in order to earn more money than they can in Brazil. (Photograph by David Schrier.)

to their occupation as prostitutes and to their intimate relations with their maridos. Unlike modern Euro-American culture, travestí relations with men are not characterized as homosexual; rather they are viewed as "heterogenderal," because the relationship is culturally defined by the social/sexual differences in gender, not by the sameness of (male) bodies and sexual orientation.

Travestís' maridos (like some hijras' husbands) are typically attractive, muscular, tattoed young men with little education or income. They are not pimps, although they are supported by the travestí; rather, they move in with the travestí for "passion" and are kicked out on the same basis. Maridos regard themselves, and are regarded by their travestí girlfriends, as men. Since one of the defining characteristics of a "man" is that he will not be interested in another male's penis, the marido keeps his manhood by penetrating the travestí. Although some travestís express pleasure in taking the active sexual role, they also claim that this role would then cause them to lose respect for the marido, who would be transformed into a viado, or a "bicha incubada" (incubating bicha) in their eyes (Kulick 1998:96ff; Fry 1995:205). When a bicha or travestí learns that her man "gives" and has thus become a bicha, the humiliation is intense; no self-respecting bicha would admit to being penetrated by another bicha. The occasional "anything goes" sexual relationship in which no clear line is drawn between the male who "eats" and the male who "gives" is looked down upon. It is jokingly—and derogatorily—called lesbianism, referring to the bichas' view that lesbians don't really have (proper) sex (Fry 1995:204). Thus, within the bicha/travestí subculture, the norms of the heterosexual world are replicated; masculinity is associated with penetration and those who do not adhere to the active/passive distinction are stigmatized.

The verbalized commitment to this heterogender sexual norm sometimes contrasts, however, with actual behavior. On the streets travestís know they are valued for their possession of a penis; clients will often request to see or feel it before payment, and clients frequently request anal penetration. But even as travestís comply, they consider it an inversion of their normal practice and charge a higher price (Cornwall 1994:120).

MEN AND NOT-MEN: THE BRAZILIAN BINARY

Sex/gender diversity becomes meaningful only within each culture's distinctive sex/gender system. Thus, while travestís are not-men (or "failed men") they are not, like the hijra, considered an in-between or third gender, though they are sometimes described this way in the popular media. Nor are travestís considered as a kind of a woman, either by

themselves or by others, although as prostitutes they are symbolically and socially "fallen" women and as such are doubly victimized.

Anthropologist Don Kulick (1997:579) explains travestís in terms of a Brazilian sex/gender system based on a dichotomy whose opposing categories are not men and women but rather men and not-men. The travestís are the example *par excellence* that the Brazilian sex/gender dichotomy is based on sexuality, rather than anatomy.

While biological differences are hardly ignored in Brazil, the definition of gender depends not merely on the possession of genitals, but on what they are used for. Travestís reiterate the Brazilian view that the locus of gender difference is the act of penetration. If one *only* penetrates, one is a man, but if one gets penetrated *one is not a man*; one is either a woman or a bicha/viado (Kulick 1997:580). The enjoyment of being penetrated classifies travestís with women: because they already share a gender with women (although they make no claims to be women), they do not need to change their sex. Losing their penises would add nothing and would be a loss of both pleasure and income.

Since travestís are classified with (not as) women, they are expected to share all the qualities of women, particularly the desire to attract and be attractive to persons of the opposite gender (men). An important part of this attraction—for women as for travestís—is as a subject for the male gaze: in Brazil, female bodies are extraordinarily looked at, and men do the looking. This emphasis on the importance of a bodily aesthetic in sexual relations and definitions of gender leads travestís to make extravagent attempts to incorporate Brazilian cultural ideals of beauty in their bodies, drawing them not to resistance, but to reinforcement, of the dominant patriarchal and hierarchical sex/gender system of which they are a part.

ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER DIVERSITY

Attitudes toward gender diversity in Brazil are best described as complex, sometimes contradictory, and ambivalent. On the one hand, gender diversity is central to Carnaval, itself a positive icon of Brazilian culture both to Brazilians themselves and to the outside world. In Carnaval cross-dressing and gender inversion are prominent, not only for travestís, but also for gender-conforming men. Travestís often appear in Brazilian television soap operas, and Brazilians' open attitudes toward sexuality are reflected in the apparently universal willingness of men in Brazil to publicly admire the travestí, Roberta Close (who subsequently became a transsexual), as the most beautiful woman in Brazil (Kottack 1990:31).

At the same time that some travestís may be cultural icons, however, most travestís are actually treated very badly. In upsetting the culturally prescribed fit between biological sex and social gender, bichas, viados, and travestís are perceived as failed men, not as women. Thus they are viewed and severely stigmatized as a failure on both social and biological counts: unable to realize their biological potential as men because of inappropriate sexual behavior, they are equally unable to cross the boundaries of gender due to their inability to reproduce.

Travestís and bichas tend to be ostracized in mainstream society and find employment only in highly marginal lines of work or in jobs traditionally reserved for women. In some parts of Brazil they are called *marginais*, a term whose meaning of "marginal" is much stronger than its English translation. They are associated not only with sexually deviant behavior but with criminality and have been noted by several anthropologists as being among the most marginalized, feared, and despised groups in Brazil (Cornwall 1994; Kulick 1996:4; 1998). Travestís are regularly victims of police brutality and even murder, and until recently, many would not come out of doors during the day and were confined to the worst areas of cities. Most come from very poor backgrounds, and many have severe health and drug abuse problems. Travestís do engage in criminal acts, mainly their well-known practice of robbing their customers, and their association with homosexuality, prostitution, and now AIDS increases the stigma and censure they experience. In the streets often they are addressed mockingly as "Mister," a contemptuous way of refusing to acknowledge their gender.

The harshest scorn is reserved for unattractive travestís. Anthropologist Don Kulick (1998) suggests that perhaps the harassment on the street, which takes the form of verbally mocking travestís' gender as "not-men," is less a reaction to them as gender-crossers than a reaction against unattractiveness in people (women and other not-men) whose job it is to make themselves attractive to men. Travestís like Roberta Close and others who meet or even exceed Brazilian ideals of feminine beauty are not mocked, and ordinary men even seem willing to acknowledge them as legitimate sexual objects (Kottack 1990). Thus, in yet another permutation in the Brazilian sex/gender system, some of the hostility against travestís may be a reaction against them as failed women, not failed men.

AFRO-BRAZILIAN RELIGION

Gender diversity in Brazil is associated with Afro-Brazilian religions. While pasivos are generally stigmatized in Latin America, women and pasivos dominate the leadership in Afro-Brazilian religions. These religions, focused on possession trance and oriented toward providing

spiritual help and protection for their followers, are found predominantly in the north and northeast regions of Brazil, areas that contain a majority of African-Brazilians and the poor, and where gender relationships are generally more rigid than in the industrialized, more highly educated, and more socially mobile urbanized south.

The most familiar Afro-Brazilian religions are called ***Candomble*** (or Macumba) (see Fry 1995; Wafer 1991). Their main spirits are *orixas* of West African, primarily Yoruba, origin, who are also identified with saints of the Roman Catholic Church. This syncretism developed during the colonial period in Brazil, when the slaves concealed their African gods behind the masks of Christian saints. Under the leadership of the major orixas are a host of lesser spirits essential to day-to-day ritual activity. Candomble is organized into houses called *terreiros,* which are hierarchically structured around a female or male leader called mother or father of the saint. Each terreiro is autonomous and competes against other terreiros for followers, clients, and resources.

Candomble practitioners or followers are called sons- or daughters-of-saints and owe their allegiance to the particular mother- or father-of-saint of their chosen terreiro. Thus the terreiro operates as a hierarchically organized extended family with allegiance and obligation being the duty of the followers and guidance and spiritual care the responsibility of the leader. Within the terreiro women as well as men may assume the role of patriarchal family head, and the father- or mother-of-saints maintains control over the followers. The modeling of the terreiro on the kin-

Women and male gender variants occupy important roles in Yoruba possession religions, which spread to the New World. (Photograph by Serena Nanda.)

ship structure of a family proscribes sexual relations among the followers and between the followers and the terreiro leaders.

Candomble religious life is expressed in public dances and festivals, ritual offerings, divinatory sessions, and initiation rituals, all of which involve the participation of diverse spirits. Various rituals and services are also provided for nonpracticing believers, who approach the religion as clients in search of spiritual assistance. The most significant ritual event is initiation, which centers around possession trance. Once initiated, a follower is obligated to his/her possessing spirits and patron deities who are called upon to guarantee good fortune, health, success, and survival. The member's obligation to the orixas requires regular offerings, but most importantly, the follower must "receive" (*receber*) the orixas in regular ritual seances, which take the form of possession trances (Hayes 1996:15).

Possession trance or "receiving the spirits" establishes contact between the human realm and the divine and transforms initiates into followers of the saints, distinguishing them from clients and spectators. Other, noninitiated tereirro members act as ritual assistants, drummers, or perform the animal sacrifices that are a source of the sacrificial blood necessary to nourish the gods. Spirits ritually inhabit the body of a follower in possession trance, as well as inhabiting their special "altar," a collection of symbolic representations of the spirit that contain the spirit's power. The medium dances while possessed and also speaks with clients, giving advice and ritual protection. Theatricality is an important aspect of the performance, and terreiros are elaborately decorated with statues of spirits, paper flags and streamers, flashing lights, and so forth. Mediums are expected to dress well, and terreiro members pride themselves in their singing and dancing skills. The ritual ends with the departure of the spirits, although mediums may remain possessed for hours or even days afterward (Hayes 1996).

LINKS BETWEEN CANDOMBLE AND GENDER DIVERSITY

Early descriptions of Afro-Brazilian religions noted the predominance of women as religious leaders, emphasizing the warm and nurturing qualities of women as central to the spiritual services that the cults offered (Landes 1946). After the 1940s, however, Candomble leaders were increasingly effeminate pasivos. Although some observers criticized this shift as a corruption of traditional Yoruba "matriarchy," Candomble's association with gender diversity appears to be consistent with the sexual ambiguity that characterizes Yoruba religion in its homeland (Matory 1996). Among the Yoruba, transvestism, feminine gestures, and feminine occupations are marked among male possession priests (Matory 1994:170ff). During and soon after initiation, Yoruba possession priests are called brides of the god and don women's clothing during initiation. Both male and female priests wear feminine hairstyles and feminine cosmetics and jewelry.

The view that the pasivo presence in Candomble continues rather than disrupts Yoruba tradition complements earlier functionalist explanations of the association between pasivos and Afro-Brazilian possession religions. Several of these explanations focus on marginality. Although even upper-class Brazilians seek the magical services of Candomble, Afro-Brazilian religions are considered deviant in the dominant Brazilian culture (in the past, these religions were outlawed by the Brazilian government; this has changed as the government now views the Afro-Brazilian religions as an important tourist attraction). The negative association of Candomble with the poor and the "superstitiousness" of African religions, as well as with haunts of immorality and crime, make them socially and spatially marginal in Brazilian society. Terreiros, for example, are most often located on the outskirts of cities and are difficult to find.

Thus, one widespread explanation for the association of Candomble with pasivos, and indeed, more widely with "deviant" sexuality as well as with women, suggests the cults provide a cultural space where women and pasivos, stigmatized and oppressed in the larger society, can exercise spiritual powers from which they receive otherwise unavailable financial and social rewards (Fry 1986). Another functional explanation for the association of gender nonconformists with Afro-Brazilian religions is that in the terreiro and its activities, pasivos may give rein to their "femininity" through association with the predominantly female membership of the religions and through possession by female spirits (Fry 1986). Additionally, once the religious leadership becomes associated in the popular imagination with pasivos for whatever reasons, other men will not want to risk their masculinity by being associated with them (Fry 1995:201).

Anthropologist Peter Fry also suggests that since both pasivos and possession trance religions are defined as deviant in relation to dominant Brazilian values, marginal individuals would find a congenial role in them. More particularly, he notes, the very deviance of the pasivos enhances their ability to be religious leaders: to be defined by society as defiling and dangerous may be an advantage to those in a role in which they exercise magical power. In this sense, Fry views pasivos as having an advantage over both women and men as Candomble leaders (Fry 1995:195). The enhanced magical power of pasivos comes from being associated with the potential destructiveness, yet also with the power of "disorder" that occurs in the meeting of the secular and the divine. As

with hijras and American Indian gender variants, the relation of magical power to the margins of society is easily associated with those defined as sexually ambiguous.

Other explanations of pasivo success in Candomble emphasize that it is the *combination* of the masculine and the feminine that gives them an advantage (Fry 1995:207). J. Lorand Matory notes that in Afro-Brazilian religions, despite the important presence of women priestesses, the gender of the divine agency defining the priestess's authority is often male. Pasivos enjoy some of the unique ritual prerogatives of men in Candomble and also are not subject to the prohibitions placed on the participation of menstruating women (Matory 1996:23). While both men and women must cleanse themselves from the pollution of sexual relations before and during ritual activity, pasivos are subject only to the lesser defilement of males and are more easily cleansed than women. Yet, at the same time, pasivos, as women, are exempt from the taboos on males engaging in cooking and embroidery, both of which are important to the success of the terreiro. In addition, pasivos do not have the obligations of marriage and kinship and can thus devote all their earnings to the terreiro, increasing its material display and thus enhancing confidence in its efficacy and winning larger numbers of committed followers. Pasivos are also considered more artistic than either men or women and are therefore perceived as better equipped to organize and participate in ritual. Pasivos thus are not merely a "pale imitation of a woman," but rather combine certain key aspects of the "normal" male and female roles, which they can manipulate to their own advantage.

PENETRATION, POSSESSION TRANCE, AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN CANDOMBLE

Symbolic explanations for pasivo predominance in Candomble are also relevant. The meanings of penetration and possession in Candomble both reinforce and resist the dominant norms of gendered relationships in Brazil and help explain the association of Candomble with women and pasivos (Hayes 1996). In Candomble the relationship between the spirits and humans—between the gods and the followers who incorporate them—is analogically associated with that of male-to-females through the metaphor of penetration. Thus the term describing possession is *dar santo* ("to give saint"): the role of the human being (whether man or woman) possessed by the spirit in trance is identified with the female who gives herself over to sexual pentration by the male. The Candomble priests who are possessed are called "horses" or "mounts" of the gods, who "ride" them, again recalling the submissive or passive role of women in

sexual relations. During possession, the god "mounts" the priest, as a rider does a horse or as a male does his female sexual partner. The role of metaphorical male in this relation between humans and spirits is occupied by the spirits, who *penetrate*, who ride their mounts (*cavalos*: horses) in order to express their desires, chastise their followers, advise, or merely to "play." This makes sense of the fact that women—and pasivos—are more appropriate for the role of *filho-de-santos* ("followers-of-the-saints") than men.

For if women, who receive the gods in trance, thus mimic the normative male-female relations in which penetration (spiritual or sexual) defines them as female, it follows that men who are ridden by the gods are deemed pasivo, for they assume the female role of being penetrated as opposed to the normative male role of penetration. Thus, spiritual penetration by the (male) gods for a male is equivalent to becoming a pasivo: it involves a renunciation of masculine atividade in favor of the most passive role, that of *dando santo* ("giving saint"). As anthropologist Jim Wafer describes it (1991:18), humans are "female" in relation to all the spirits when they go into trance. Humans "give" offerings so that the spirits may "eat."

In the religious context of possession trance, then, normative gender relationships are reiterated and reinforced. But even as trance reiterates normative gender classifications, it reinterprets and reevaluates them (Hayes 1996). Within the religious context, being penetrated is empowering rather than subordinating, and it is prestigious rather than degraded (if only because of the high status of the gods in relation to humans). This helps explain the attraction of women and pasivos to the Afro-Brazilian possession religions. In this respect, possession trance is similar to other religious situations (such as the power of the hijras), which have long been associated with alternative interpretations and revaluations of social reality, creating situations in which normative systems of classification may be questioned, transgressed, manipulated, or reversed and in which those who are marginal in the real world become central in religious ritual (see Turner 1969).

CHANGING SEX/GENDER IDEOLOGIES

In Brazil, as increasingly in many contemporary cultures, several sex/gender ideologies coexist. Along with the traditional emphasis on sexual practice as determinative of gender identity, a modern Euro-American "medical" model of sex/gender relations entered Brazil in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This model emphasized same-sex sexual relations as detrimental to the health of society (Parker 1999). This model continues to be relevant but in the last three decades

has been challenged by a (postmodern) gay ideology, in which both partners in a same-sex sexual relationship are viewed equally in terms of their sexual orientation. This model, which continues the homosexual/heterosexual divide of the medical model, but without its pejorative connotions, is gaining a foothold in the more highly industrialized urban centers of the south (Rio and Sao Paulo) as well as among the more wealthy and educated classes throughout Brazil. The traditional pattern continues to dominate in the north and northeast among the rural, less educated and poorer classes. Brazil, then, like Thailand and the Philippines, described in chapter 5, is most accurately characterized as having not one, but several sex/gender ideologies, related to each other in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

Chapter Four

Liminal Gender Roles in Polynesia

In this chapter we encounter sex/gender diversity in Polynesia, the "many islands" of the Pacific. The Pacific islands are commonly divided into Melanesia and Polynesia. Although individuals of "in-between" sex/gender are acknowledged and linguistically marked in Melanesia (see Herdt 1996b), sex/gender diversity is not as culturally elaborated there as it is in Polynesia. In Melanesian cultures, male homosexuality is an age-defined, often mandatory, and transitory role, frequently associated with elaborate male initiation and part of a cult of masculinity in which ingesting semen was considered essential for the growth of boys into men (Herdt 1981). It is not associated with sex/gender diversity. In Polynesia, on the other hand, in spite of significant cultural variation, there are also some important shared cultural patterns that provide a common context for long-standing and deep-rooted traditions of gender diversity.

The local economies of Polynesia primarily depend on horticulture and exploiting products of the sea, though a cash economy is now also important almost everywhere. The more complex Polynesian societies are characterized by social ranking systems consisting of chiefs, nobles, and commoners. Rank is determined by position—birth order and genealogical closeness to the chief—and kinship is thus an essential source of political, economic, and social power. Competition for power and prestige is a central cultural preoccupation for men, although women, too, have informal avenues of influence. Traditionally, elaborate systems of taboos restricted interaction between different social categories, including men and women, and these rules influence behavior even today.

Gender relations in Polynesia are complementary, with men and women having their own spheres of work, sociality, and behavioral norms, though the intensity of gender role differentiation varies among

the islands. Two important widespread gender norms in Polynesia are respect relationships between brothers and sisters (or those classified as such, i.e., males and females of the same generation) and the division of women's roles into the more positively valued virginal "girl," and the less valued, mature wife, who has had at least one child (Mageo 1992; Shore 1981).

Although Polynesia has, since its discovery by Europeans, figured in the Western imagination as a place of unrestricted and casual sexuality, including a "tolerance" of gender diversity, Polynesian expression of sexuality is, as in all societies, culturally shaped and constrained. Sexual expression, gender relations, and attitudes toward gender diversity are all grounded in the Polynesian cultural emphasis (also important in Thailand) on the contrast between socially controlled and uncontrolled aspects of human existence. "Good" behavior is that which conforms to social roles and is characterized by respect and restraint of personal impulses. "Bad," "disgusting," and "selfish" behavior is that motivated by personal desire, impulsiveness, and self-gratification (Shore 1981:195). Sexuality, in particular, is associated with personal desire. The values of social role and emotional and behavioral restraint are exemplified in many aspects of Polynesian sexuality and gender relations: the idealization of virginity; a distinction between women as wives and women as sisters; and the importance of kinship relations, particularly those between brother and sister, as the basis for appropriate, and restrained, social and sexual interaction. Gender diversity in Polynesia needs to be understood within the context of these (and other) cultural patterns, which are discussed below.

GENDER LIMINAL MALE ROLES

The main cultural feature of gender diversity in Polynesia involves males who appropriate certain feminine characteristics. The practice of some male individuals adopting attributes associated with women is traditional and deeply embedded in much of Polynesia. These gender variant roles have different names in different places, reflecting Polynesian cultural variation (Besnier 1996). In Tahiti and contemporary Hawaii, the role is called ***māhū***. (Although there is little historical documentation of female māhūs in Tahiti, these roles may also be available to women [Elliston 1999]). In Samoa, male gender variants are called *fa'afafine*, which literally means "like a woman"; in Tonga, the term is *fakaleitī*, whose root, *leitī*, is borrowed from the English word "lady"; and in Tuva in the Gilbertese islands, the term is *pinapinaaine*.

In spite of the time-depth of gender diversity in Polynesia, it appears to be less institutionalized than in some other cultures—thus it

Hermaphrodite figures, combining male and female anatomy, play an important role in creation stories all over the Pacific islands. (Photograph by Ravinder Nanda.)

can be termed liminal. Unlike India, native North America, and Brazil, for example, in Polynesia there is no consistently articulated ideology associated with gender variants, no uniformly consistent role with which they are identified, and the boundaries of the role are "porous": a man can move into the role and then move out of it in later life. In Polynesian social life, behavior and identity are generally a matter of appropriate situational context, and this is also true for the enactment of gender diversity. Thus, there is substantial variability among gender variant individuals, and also within an individual's behavior in different situations and over a lifetime (Besnier 1996). At the same time, in some places, for example Tahiti, social acceptance of gender variant roles is significantly legitimated by an individual's long-term participation in these roles, frequently manifested since childhood (Elliston 1999:236).

Because of cultural and individual variation, defining Polynesian gender diversity is problematical. Although māhū is translated in Tahiti as "half-man, half-woman," the māhū is not a well-defined third gender like the hijras in India or the gender variants among American Indians. Elliston (1999:236) defines the māhū in Tahiti "as a gender category for persons who deploy and participate in complex combinations of masculine and feminine gender signs and practices," with the dominant gender role being that opposite to the individual's anatomy.

Regarding male gender diversity in Polynesia generally, the most important of these "gender signs and practices" appears to be engaging in women's work. Other important feminine gender markers adopted by males are feminine dress, speech tones and nonverbal gestures, and dance styles. Also noteworthy is the association of gender-nonconforming males with girls and young women in friendship groups, which, given the importance of sex-segregated social gatherings in Polynesia, is significant.

Mature men have the most important ritual roles throughout the Pacific Islands, roles from which male gender liminals are excluded. (Photograph by Raymond Kennedy.)

Although sexuality (sexual orientation or sexual practices) does not define Polynesian gender diversity, gender variant sexuality is assumed to be consistent with the adopted gender, with males taking male sexual partners and females taking female lovers. Gender variant males are associated with certain sexual practices, and these play an important part in their personal identities and economic strategies, as well as being an important factor in social attitudes towards them.

In contrast to India, native North America, and to a lesser extent, Brazil, Polynesian gender diversity is not associated with religion nor does it have sacred meanings. It is, however, associated with "rituals of reversal," that is, secular cultural performances that involve spontaneous, clowning, and uninhibited behavior that is normally disparaged and repressed. Gender diversity therefore is functionally integrated into some Polynesian societies.

Given the high variability in gender variant roles, the marginality of gender variant persons in Polynesian societies, their association with "rituals of reversal," and the limited contexts in which gender diversity is enacted, ethnographer Niko Besnier suggests that the term "gender liminal" is more accurate than third gender. In addition to not being highly institutionalized, gender variants in Polynesia mainly derive their meanings from the normative Polynesian binary gender system of man and woman, rather than any distinctive features or an independent status of their own. As in Brazil (but in contrast to the Western transsexual), the Polynesian gender liminal individual crosses genders in acting "like a woman" but is not viewed as having become a woman. He is, then, suspended between man and woman, being neither, and at the same time having elements of both.

Since kinship in Polynesia is structured on the basis of a fundamental opposition and hierarchical complementarity between male and female roles, there is no room for an autonomous, institutionalized in-between gender. What best seems to fit the Polynesian situation, according to Besnier, is that gender liminal individuals are men who *borrow* certain social and cultural attributes and symbols normatively associated with women. These attributes may differ in kind and number and may be foregrounded or backgrounded in different contexts, even occasionally shed if needed. This borrowing is the process that gives rise to a loosely defined, gender liminal identity.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The degree to which contemporary gender liminality is the same as that in precontact Polynesia is uncertain. While the earliest Europeans in Polynesia in the late-eighteenth century commented on gender diver-

sity, missionaries in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by and large did not. European colonial regimes differed in Polynesia but in most cases attempted to suppress what gender diversity they found. Anthropologists in the early-twentieth century hardly mentioned the subject. As with other aspects of Polynesian sexuality, the social "acceptance" of gender diversity tended to be romanticized in some anthropological accounts in the mid-1950s, as well as in later accounts by gay observers. Only in the 1970s did some relatively detailed ethnography on Polynesian gender diversity begin to make its appearance. Thus, one of the unanswered questions in Polynesia is the extent to which contemporary gender liminality represents a continuity with gender liminality in the past, or a break and new cultural construction.

As in native North America, when Europeans first encountered Polynesia, they immediately noticed the presence of gender diversity and associated it with their own notions of homosexual sodomy. An eighteenth-century account suggests some of the features of this role in Tahiti (note the comparison the writer makes with the eunuchs—possibly he means hijras here—of India, who were already well known and much commented on by European travelers):

> "[The māhū] are like the Eunichs [sic] in India but they are not castrated. They never cohabit with women but live as they do. They pick their beards out and dress as women, dance and sing with them and are as effeminate in their voice. They do women's employment and excell [sic] in some crafts. It is said that they converse with men as familiar as women do." (Morrison, in Levy 1973:130)

Captain Bligh, commander of the *Bounty*, infamous because of the mutiny of its crew, also noted the behavior of the māhū, observing that they participated in the same ceremonies as women and ate as women did. The māhū's effeminate speech led Bligh to believe they were castrated, but he later found out that they were not, noting, however, that "things equally disgusting were committed" (referring to their sexual relations with men). Bligh was told that the māhū were selected when they were boys and kept with the women solely for "the caresses of the men." When, in order to learn more about them, Bligh had one māhū remove his loin cloth, he noted that

> "He had the appearance of a woman, his yard [penis] and testicles being so drawn in under him, having the art from custom of keeping them in this position . . . [His genitals] are very small and the testicles remarkably so, being not larger than a boy's five or six years old, and very soft as in a state of decay or a total incapacity of being larger, so that . . . he appeared . . . a Eunuch [as much as if] his stones were away. The women treat him as one of their sex and he observed every restriction that they do, and is equally respected and esteemed." (Bligh, in Levy 1973:130–31)

Bligh goes on to report that the men who had sexual relations with a māhū "have their beastly pleasures gratified between his thighs" but they denied practicing sodomy. A nineteenth-century account declared that the māhū fellated the man he had relations with, swallowing the semen, which was believed to give them strength (Levy 1973:135). Contemporary accounts note similar behavior, and some Tahitian men talk of the exceptional strength of the māhū.

APPROPRIATIONS OF THE FEMININE

The defining criterion for the māhū is that he *publicly* engages in the occupations and activities of women. Speaking of the māhū in one Tahitian rural district, ethnographer Robert Levy says: "His feminine role taking is demonstrated for the villagers because he performs women's household activities, cleans the house, takes care of babies, braids coconut palm leaves into thatching plaits" (1973:140). The māhū in another district associates with the adolescent girls of the village and walks with his arm interlocked with theirs, "a behavior otherwise seen only among people of the same sex."

In Polynesia women and men are associated with different economic roles. In Samoa, for example, males do the "heavy" and instrumental work of directly providing food, whether from gardening or from the sea, while women are linked with "light" work that is largely decorative and associated with the household and the village, such as keeping the village clean and weaving the fine mats that are used in Polynesian rituals of exchange (Mead 1971; Shore 1981:203). Gender nonconforming males do the light work of women and, as among American Indians, are thought to excel in women's occupations. In urban areas of Polynesia, gender nonconformists are considered excellent secretaries and are coveted domestic help (Besnier 1997).

Polynesian gender distinctions of dress may seem small to Westerners but are important gender markers. In Samoa, for example, gendered dress styles are well defined, particularly in the way the *lavalava* (sarong) is tied (Shore 1981:206). Although men and women may use the same material and colors, men leave a large end of their lavalava flopping in the front. Women, in contrast, do not let the end hang out, but rather tuck the ends inside the waist. This difference is remarked upon; a man can convey a gender transformation by consistently tying his lavalava in a feminine style. Although gender variants are often referred to as "transvestites" in the anthropological accounts of Polynesia, they generally do not cross-dress on a permanent basis, though transvestism does provide a vehicle of self-identification and social presentation for gender variant males (and females). In Tahiti, Elliston reports (1999:236) that

most male māhūs wear a *pareu*, a garment worn mainly by women, but in other parts of Polynesia much of the gender variant males' transvestism occurs within the context of stage performances.

The speech differences associated with men and women in Polynesian societies also provide a vehicle for gender variation. Male gender variants adopt women's speech patterns and their "high pitched" tone of voice. Like women, male gender variants are also more "coquettishly" concerned with their physical appearance and often wear flowers, garlands, perfume, and heavy makeup—accessories generally associated with young women. Other "feminine" characteristics include a feminine manner of walking and feminine gestures.

Perhaps because of the emphasis on role playing as a central and valued part of Polynesian life, gender variance also has aspects of a role that is being played and, indeed, is largely played on stage. This aspect of Polynesian culture underlines the view that gender variant statuses there are not necessarily permanent. For example, although Tahitians generally claim that changing one's sex is not possible, it is possible to stop being a māhū, "as one can discontinue being a chief." Anthropologist Robert Levy noted that in the village he studied, one man in his early adolescence had dressed from time to time in girls' clothes and was thus considered a māhū but in his early twenties "cast off" the role. It was assumed in the village that this was the end of it and that the person was now leading an ordinary masculine life (Levy, 1973:133). At the same time, the māhū is generally described as "natural" and thought to "have been born that way," in contrast to "homosexuals" who are believed to choose their roles when they are adults.

SEXUALITY AND GENDER LIMINALITY

Although it was the sexual behavior of the māhū in Tahiti that drew immediate and disapproving attention from Europeans, it is clear from both historical and contemporary accounts that the māhū role involved, and involves today, more than same-sex sexual practices (Besnier 1996; Elliston 1999; Shore 1981). Same-sex sexual relations alone do not define the liminal gender category in Polynesia; as Deborah Elliston (1999:236) notes, the māhū is consistently associated with gender and his sexuality is consistently put in the background. As is true in many cultures, men who have sexual relations with the māhū are not considered in any way to be gender variants themselves. Nevertheless, Polynesian gender diversity *is* associated with a particular sexuality, however backgrounded. The māhū, fakaleitī, or pinapinaaine is the fellator and, as such, is seen as a substitute for a woman. While no stigma or shame is attached to their sexual partners, there is a potentially negative connotation that a person who seeks the māhū or his equivalent for a sexual partner does so because he could not obtain a woman.

All ethnographers confirm that Polynesian liminal genders are not the same as Western homosexuals. In contemporary Tahiti, homosexuality, called *raerae*, is considered a foreign (French) import and is differentiated from sexual relations with a māhū. Raerae refers to a person "who does not perform a female's village role and who dresses and acts like a man, but who indulges in exclusive or preferred sexual behavior with other men." Though there is some confusion over terms and categories, raerae seems to mean "sex-role reversal" and/or "sodomy"; it is also applied to a reversed role in sexual relations between a man and a woman (Levy 1973:140). While effeminate men may be described as māhūish, such an individual is assumed to be an ordinary man, involved in standard male activity, and engaged in normal heterosexual practices. In Samoa, there is no word for homosexual, and in any case, same-sex sexual play is viewed as part of a normal growing-up process for most boys (Mead 1971; Shore 1981).

The gender liminal role in Polynesia is not in any way imposed on men perceived as effeminate (in Polynesian terms), and it is unclear whether a physical anomaly is involved in recruitment to these roles. In Tahiti, one of Levy's māhū informants said that the māhū are not supercised (a traditional coming-of-age ceremony for boys that involves incisions made on the shaft of the penis) because a māhū's penis is too small, an observation made in the early contact period. On the other hand, based on one observation, Levy expressed the view that diminuitive genital size is not necessarily a physical correlate for the māhū role and that a boy might be "coached" into the role by his elders, perhaps just for their amusement, by dressing him in girls' clothes. If a male child seems determined to wear girls' clothes, adults will not stand in his way, and a child's insistence in some cases is felt to be "irresistible" (Levy, 1973:140).

In Samoa, also, gender nonconformity might well begin in childhood, and a family with few girls may even bring up a boy child as a girl, though most gender variant boys adopt transvestism voluntarily (Mageo 1992:450). Contrary to the benign image presented by Levy for Tahiti, in Samoa a boy's male relatives may beat him for wearing girls' clothes, though potential fa'afafine may receive support from their mothers who, as supervisors of the household, are more likely than men to notice—and condone—the young boy's preference for women's domestic chores.

In traditional Polynesia, a preference for same-sex sexual intimacy was not considered either a necessary or sufficient criterion for gender liminal status. Intimate and erotic same-sex sexual behavior by itself does not "brand" one as a gender variant. In fact it is expected to, and frequently does, occur in other contexts such as boarding schools or prisons, and sexual experimentation among teenaged boys appears to be a nor-

mal part of Polynesian development. Gender liminal adult males are not presupposed to have a history of or an identifiable preference for same-sex sexual relationships; indeed, the "assignment" of gender liminal status frequently takes place in childhood, before the awakening of sexual desires. Rather, in common with North American Indian gender variants, in Polynesia, sexual relations with men seems to be a possible *consequence* of a nonconforming male gender status, rather than its cause, prerequisite, or primary attribute (Besnier 1996; Elliston 1999).

There is little evidence on actual sexual behavior associated with gender liminality in Polynesia. Levy noted that māhūs perform fellatio on non-māhūs, who view the māhū as a convenient, pleasurable, relatively pressure-free alternative to women for the release of sexual tension. In Tonga and Tuvalu, Besnier reports that young men brag in private about anally penetrating the gender divergent male and engaging in sex between his thighs; although Besnier notes that māhūs take the "female" role in sexual relations "as recipient rather than inserter" (1997:9), he reports elsewhere that male gender nonconformists do sometimes act as inserters. A Polynesian male (as in India and Brazil) who takes the inserter position with another male is not linguistically distinguished or socially marginalized; because this practice is somewhat stigmatized as conveying an inability to find a woman, however, it is mainly associated with younger men. Married men are assumed to have sex only with women. And, similar to India, Brazil, Thailand and the Philippines, but in contrast to the West, gender nonconformists do not have sex with each other.

SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL STATUS

In spite of the "respect" that early Europeans attributed to gender liminal roles in traditional Polynesian societies, and in spite of their acceptance as "natural," today these roles do carry some social stigma, and the terms that define them can be, and often are, used derogatorily. This stigma, as well as the harassment and even the violence sometimes directed at gender variant individuals in some Polynesian societies, for example Tonga, is closely associated with their sexuality (Besnier 1997). Although sexuality cannot be viewed as the cause of male gender variance, it is today central to its contemporary definition, as perhaps it was in the past.

Gender liminals are almost always perceived as possible subjects of sexual conquest by men in Polynesia, although paradoxically, in Tonga, for example, fakaleitī are also seen as sexual predators (though some ethnographic observation suggests otherwise). In addition, while men must repay sexual favors from women with material goods, it is the fakaleitī who must spend money on his boyfriends for liquor, entertainment, and high-prestige consumer items (Besnier 1997:16). In Samoa and Tahiti the fa'afafine or the māhū may tease men in the same flirtatious way that women do, but even when not initiating a flirtation, they frequently will be the target of harassment and even physical violence, particularly from men in various states of inebriation (Besnier 1997). Gender liminal males are viewed as potential sexual "fair game" in a broader sense than women, who are to some extent protected by the classificatory brother-sister relationships so important in Polynesian social structure. This is particularly true for low-ranking gender liminal males; in Polynesian cultures, where social ranking is central to social structure, higher-ranking gender liminal males are somewhat protected by their social position.

The derogation of the gender liminal male is related to his feminine role in sexual relations. While sexual position (inserter or insertee) is not reported as a critical marker of female inferiority in Polynesia, as it is in Brazil, outside of special circumstances, such as in prison, a gender-conforming male would not take an insertee role, because it would mean that he would be subordinating himself to another, which "no man in his right mind would consent to." Male gender liminality is stigmatized on another basis in Polynesia: it is viewed as inherently promiscuous, transient, and lacking in significance. As Besnier so poignantly notes, "the gender liminal sexual partner, like the woman of loose virtue, is considered an eminently discardable and exploitable object" (1996:303). In Fiji, the gender liminal male as a sexual partner is analogized to a local, one-stringed musical instrument, whose tune is easily manipulated.

Besnier develops this theme by noting that in Polynesia, gender liminals' experience of sexuality, unlike that of women, is socially defined as falling outside the erotic. One expression of this is that they are consistently represented by others as "lacking the sexual anatomy of a normal adult man," with genitals "too small for circumcision," though this has not been demonstrated and does not appear to be true. Besnier views this inaccurate perception as a way of excluding gender liminals from adult erotic possibilities. They are, like children, held to be incapable of experiencing sexual desire, and the popular, though inaccurate, view is that the "sole purpose of the encounter" for gender liminal males is to satisfy the sexual needs of their partners.

Gender liminal male sexuality in Polynesia, then, contains some contradictions: gender liminals are significantly defined by their sexuality yet also traditionally are known by their feminine occupations; they are considered as both falling outside the range of normal adult male eroticism yet also are considered sexual predators; and they are like women in their sexual practices but are unlike women in that they pay for sexual favors. These contradictions are explained partly by Polyne-

sian cultural variability, partly by the Polynesian concept of the person (discussed later), and partly, as in several other cultures discussed in this book, by the ambivalence of social attitudes toward them.

PERFORMING GENDER DIVERSITY

Gender liminal roles in Polynesia are particularly closely associated with secular performances and entertainment, the forms and functions of which are rooted in the culture, social structure, and gender relations of these societies. This seems true for both traditional performances, where male gender diversity is associated with spontaneous clowning and comic exaggerations, and contemporary contexts, where it is associated with cultural performances for tourists, beauty contests (to be further discussed for the Philippines), nightclub floor shows, and all-female gatherings, such as bridal showers (Mageo 1992).

There is a close association in Polynesia between performance, gender liminality, and reversals of the social order (reminiscent of the role hijras play in marriages where their performances expose the structural oppositions and conflicts between the bride's family and the groom's family). Performances in Polynesia, particularly dancing, have a strong antistructural component. Different elements in the dances mirror some of the oppositional elements and tensions in society, including those between male and female, and between females as virginal "girls" and as mature, sexually active, wives and mothers (Mageo 1992; Shore 1981).

In many places in Polynesia, dancing is an opportunity for clowning behavior, which alludes to points of tension in social structure. Here, Fijian women perform this role, which is often also performed by gender variants. (Photo by Andrew Arno. Reprinted with the permission of Ablex Publishing Corporation © 1993. All rights reserved.)

As noted, Polynesian cultures are characterized by an emphasis on decorum, emotional restraint, and respect behavior, especially where brothers and sisters are present. These norms particularly apply to discussing or expressing sexual matters in gender-mixed company. Gender liminality in Polynesia is associated, in contrast, with a lack of restraint and decorum, particularly regarding sexuality, and this makes gender liminal individuals particularly suitable for secular entertainments. Indeed, the sexually suggestive performances of, for example, the fa'afafine in contemporary Samoa suggest one explanation of their role: where the virgin girl is still the cultural ideal, the "outrageous" behavior of the fa'afafine provides a negative role model of how girls should not behave. In traditional Samoa, these antistructural performances were in fact performed by girls in the particular context of visiting villages other than their own, where the males would not fall into the categories of brothers. With the advent of Christianity, which is now thoroughly embedded as a source of Polynesian morality, these traditional elements of culture for the most part have been suppressed, and the norm-breaking nature of dance performances has to a large extent been taken over by the fa'afafine (Mageo 1992).

If the gender liminal person has a significant cultural function in contemporary Polynesia, as indicated above, the entertainments in which he performs are also functional from his own, subjective perspective: they are particularly appropriate venues for the expression and display of his femininity through parodic behavior; transvestism; feminine accessorizing, such as wearing makeup, flowers, and perfume; creativity in composing songs; and dancing (Besnier 1996:297). In addition, cultural performances provide an important avenue of prestige and economic reward for gender liminal males, who are seriously marginalized in Polynesian society (as in India, Thailand, and the Philippines) by their failure to play the central male roles of husband and father of many children. This failure puts them outside the serious arenas of politics and ceremonial activities around which prestige in Polynesia is centered (Besnier 1996). Only if the gender liminal abandons his gender nonconformity by marrying and becoming a household head can he participate as a meaningful male member of Polynesian society.

GENDER LIMINALITY AND THE POLYNESIAN CONCEPT OF THE PERSON

Given the absence of any strongly institutionalized role for gender diversity in Polynesia, one of the significant factors that may explain its widespread (and indeed, increasing) presence is the Polynesian concept of the person. This concept focuses, as previously noted, on the importance of the social role rather than on the individual as a holistic and atomistic entity, so central to modern Euro-American culture. In Polynesia, persons are made up of different aspects, including male and female, which are foregrounded in different social contexts. Thus, gender liminality, like other aspects of a person, is highly context dependent, viewed not as indicating a kind of person but rather as a relationship between an individual and a social context. This means (as we shall see also in Thailand) that there is a gap between the social importance given to what people do in public contexts and what they do in private. Additionally, a person may be derided for some aspects of his or her character in some contexts, while praised for other aspects of his or her character or behavior in other contexts. Thus, unlike American society, where an individual's total persona may be spoiled by one stigma (Goffman 1963), in Polynesia the "person" is a multifaceted identity, and occupying a gender liminal status is not the basis of a totalizing characterization.

In contrast with gender variance among American Indians, and the ritualized homosexuality of some parts of neighboring Melanesia, neither of which "survived the moral onslaught of colonial authorities and missionaries," in Polynesia today gender diversity appears to be increasing (Besnier 1997). Whatever the traditional reasons for the emergence and maintenance of gender liminality in Polynesia, in contemporary Polynesian societies gender diversity is being realized in the contexts of the modification of traditional cultural patterns, such as the performances of fa'afafine at bridal showers, and also in entirely new patterns, such as the association of gender liminal men with foreigners in urban Polynesian bars for the purpose of sexual relations. As Besnier notes, one of the striking aspects of gender liminal persons in Polynesia is their association with innovation, their willingness to adapt, and their role in social change, an association also true of gender variants in the Philippines. In Polynesia, the gender liminal person has more than usual contact with foreigners and is frequently found in urban centers, engaged in occupations that involve him in a cash or even a global economy and in a new discourse of gender and sexuality. In this, as in other ways, he has much in common with the subjects of the next chapter, the *kathoey* of Thailand and the *bakla* of the Philippines.

Chapter Five

Transgendered Males in Thailand and the Philippines

Thailand and the Philippines share important themes regarding gender diversity. In both societies today gender diversity primarily refers to transgendered males who, by preference, take the receptor role in same-sex sexual relations and who appropriate feminine attributes and engage in feminine behavior, particularly transvestism. The ***kathoey*** of Thailand and the ***bayot/bantut/bakla*** (regionally variant names, which I use interchangeably) in the Philippines are sometimes referred to as a "third sex," but they are more widely understood to be effeminate homosexuals who are like women but also are not women. The definition of gender diversity as transgendered homosexuality in both these cultures has an important effect on social attitudes toward the kathoey and the bakla.

Both Thailand and the Philippines are characterized by multiple sex/gender discourses (Garcia 1996; Jackson 1997a; Johnson 1997; Manalansan IV 1997; Morris 1994). Both cultures have been influenced significantly by Western sex/gender ideologies, particularly the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, which exists alongside older and more traditional concepts. As in Brazil, in traditional Thai and Filipino cultures, sexual orientation and sexual practices were not the basis of a personal or social identity, and the modern Western opposition of homosexual/heterosexual as types of persons did not exist. Since midcentury, however, Western biomedical concepts of homosexuality and, more recently, Western concepts of "gay" identity have become part of both Thai and Filipino culture, though in different ways.

In Thailand and the Philippines, sex/gender diversity is significantly associated with beauty and entertainment. If gender is a performance, as modern gender theorists claim (Butler 1990), Thai and Filipino gender variants have dual gender performances: one in their everyday activities and another on the stage, which in a literal sense is an important site of the creation and enactment of sex/gender transformations.

Much Western writing about sex/gender diversity in Thailand and the Philippines portrays these societies as approving or tolerating sex/gender diversity, partly because it is highly visible. In fact, because of the overlay of Western culture, and/or the absence or bias of historical records, traditional attitudes toward sex/gender diversity are not easily reconstructed, particularly in the Philippines. In both societies, however, it is clear that historically transvestite, transgender, "third sexes," and other forms of sex/gender diversity were more accommodated than is the case today. In indigenous pre-Spanish Philippine cultures, homoeroticism was unmarked and in Thailand it was not a matter for surveillance either by the Buddhist religion or state law.

Currently in Thailand and the Philippines, however, attitudes toward gender diversity are complex and ambivalent and include hostility and ridicule. Legally, the energetic state regulation of sexuality in the West contrasts to the absence of such legislation in either Thailand or the Philippines. Socially, however, gender diversity is accepted or tolerated mainly at the margins of society, with the exception of the entertainment and beauty industries. In both cultures, the diffusion of Western biomedical models of homosexuality as inversion has negatively affected social attitudes (Garcia 1996; Jackson 1997b), though, at the same time, the Western-inspired "gay" identity has put a more favorable gloss on gender nonconformity (Manalansan IV 1997; Sullivan and Leong 1995).

THE KATHOEY OF THAILAND

Thailand's culture is closely associated with Theravada Buddhism, and much of what is known about Thai sex/gender diversity historically is based on Buddhist records. In Thai culture, biological sex, culturally ascribed gender, and sexuality are not clearly distinguished, and all three concepts are rendered by the Thai term *phet*. Historically, the Thai sex/gender pattern included an intermediate category, the kathoey, which was available to both males and females and existed alongside normative masculine and feminine identities (Jackson 1997a; 1997b).

Until the 1970s, males and females, (biological) hermaphrodites, and cross-dressing men and women could all come under the umbrella term, kathoey. Subsequently, however, the term kathoey was dropped for

cross-dressing masculine females who are now universally referred to as *tom*, derived from the English "tomboy." The feminine lesbian partners of the tom, previously not distinguished from gender-normative females, are called *dee* (from the last syllable of lady). (For a feminist interpretation of the shift in meaning of kathoey to apply only to males, see Morris 1994). As a result of shifts in meaning, the term kathoey today is most commonly understood as a male transgender category, which in different contexts can refer to transvestites (cross-dressers), hermaphrodites, transsexuals, and effeminate homosexuals (Jackson 1997b:60).

The kathoey has a long history in Thailand. Buddhist origin myths describe three original human sex/genders—male, female, and biological hermaphrodite or kathoey. The kathoey was *not* defined merely as a variant of male or female, but as an independently existing third sex, though perhaps with a secondary meaning of a male who acts like a woman. This system of three human sexes, with the kathoey as the third sex, remained prevalent in Thailand until the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1950s, a Western "scientific" or biomedical discourse on sex and gender was introduced into Thailand. In its Thai version, this discourse emphasized the difference between homosexuals, who were

Traditionally, kathoey referred to biological hermaphrodites, but it now refers mainly to transgendered males. (Photograph by Ravinder Nanda.)

viewed as psychological "inverts," and kathoeys, who were viewed as biological hermaphrodites (Jackson 1997b:61). The biomedical approach implicitly continued older, Buddhist views that kathoeys were natural phenomena, whose condition was a result of karmic fate, preordained from birth and thus beyond their capacity to alter. This view is still commonly held in Thailand both by ordinary people and by kathoeys. This identification of the biomedical with the Buddhist position preserved—indeed, was developed in part to preserve—the traditional Thai ethical position regarding kathoeys: people who are different or disabled because of their karma should be pitied rather than ridiculed. The biomedical view also reinforced the Buddhist-based Thai belief that kathoeys are not sinful because their behavior is beyond their control.

HOMOEROTICISM IN THAI CULTURE

Same-sex sexual activity between masculine-identified men, called "playing with a friend" (and applied to lesbians as well), has historically been distinguished in Thailand from sex between a man and a (feminine) kathoey, whose homoeroticism was seen as rooted in biological hermaphroditism. The biomedical and the Buddhist views reinforce the popular Thai belief that cross-gender sexual relations (that is, between a kathoey and a man) are less stigmatizing than same-gender sexuality (between two masculine appearing males), because men, unlike kathoeys, are not fated to engage in this type of activity. Same-sex/gender eroticism (what would be called homosexuality in the modern West) was considered inauspicious, resulting in natural disasters, such as droughts, being struck dead by lightning, or becoming crazy. These consequences do not appear to have been directed at (heterogender) man/kathoey relationships (Jackson 1997b:63–64).

In traditional Thai sex/gender discourse, male (and female) homoeroticism was understood as sex/gender inversion or "psychological hermaphroditism," that is, having a woman's mind in a man's body. Though homoeroticism has long been recognized in Thailand, Thai culture and language did not recognize distinctive homosexual or heterosexual identities for those homoerotic males and females who in other respects adhered to normative masculine or feminine gender roles. Thus, traditionally, sexuality (same-sex sexual activity) was not central in defining the gender identities of man, woman, or kathoey. However, this has now changed.

In the last several decades, with the spread of the biomedical definition of homosexuality as inversion, homosexuality has become central in the cultural construction of the kathoey, who is now primarily considered a transgendered homosexual rather than a biological hermaphrodite (Jackson 1997a:172). Echoing a discourse about the hijras, "genuine" hermaphroditic kathoeys are distinguished from "false" or "artificial" kathoeys, who are transgendered homosexuals. This distinction continues to emphasize that the genuine kathoey has both male and female genitals. Although the older definition of kathoey as a distinctive intermediate or third sex/gender category (with no reference to sexuality) is still sometimes used in the popular media, the dominant popular stereotype of the kathoey today is that of a male who dresses and acts like a woman and who sexually relates exclusively to other males (in the receptor role) (Morris 1994; Jackson 1997a:312, fn 6).

TRANSFORMATIONS IN TRADITIONAL SEX/GENDER IDEOLOGY

In the 1970s, with the introduction of the term "gay" in Thailand, the meanings of homoeroticism changed. This resulted in a change in the meaning of the kathoey and in the structure of the Thai sex/gender system. In traditional Thailand male homoeroticism was largely ignored if it remained private. As in Brazil, insertive anal sex by a masculine appearing man did not damage his masculine identity; indeed, it might be viewed as an enjoyment of sexual variety that even enhanced masculine identity. "Feminine" sexual practices, however, specifically, taking the receptor role in anal sex, were stigmatized and if publicly known, defined a man as socially deficient and ranked him even lower than a kathoey.

When the English term gay entered Thai culture, it referred mainly to a cross-dressing or effeminate homosexual male; by the 1990s, however, the Thai image of gay became increasingly masculinized (as also occurred in Euro-American culture by the 1960s). The gay man in Thailand today is identified with gym-enlarged biceps and pectoral muscles and with accentuated body and facial hair. As newspaper and magazine personal columns demonstrate, the Thai gay confidently proclaims his identity as a man (Jackson 1995).

Self-identified gay men in Thailand are equally or even more concerned with their masculine identity than heterosexual men and model themselves on the dominant masculine image except for their sexual orientation. This masculinized gay identity, which strongly disassociates itself from the imputed feminine gender status of the kathoey, is now well established among educated and middle-class Thai male homosexuals and appears to be filtering down to the lower and working classes. Gay identity offers Thai homosexual men a new subjectivity; it now

exists alongside the category of kathoey, and both categories appear to be growing.

The emerging gay identity in Thailand has blurred the earlier opposition between "masculine" and "feminine" roles in same-sex erotic practices. Traditionally, in man/kathoey sexual relations, the man penetrated the kathoey, never the reverse. In the new Thai construct of gay identity, insertive and receptive anal sex are no longer defining markers of gender identity, but rather are viewed as mere personal preferences. Gay identity in Thailand is thus identified with homoerotic preference (sexual orientation), *not* (as in Brazil) with any particular sexual practice (i.e., active vs. passive sex role). The gay in Thailand today represents the emergence of a third term added to the earlier structure of Thai male sex/gender categories in which kathoey and man were positioned as polar opposites.

Gay identity may be new in contemporary Thailand, but it refers to an earlier, implicit, subcategory of masculine status: a man who is gender normative in all but his homoerotic preferences. Gay identity is thus consistent with the traditional Thai concept of "man" as a sex/gender category that accommodated homoerotic preferences as simply a variation of masculine sexuality in men who otherwise were gender normative.

In Thai popular culture today, the categories of man (which includes gays and heterosexual men) and kathoey are viewed as polar opposites: each category represents a constellation of sexual norms and gender characteristics regarded as mutually exclusive. A Thai man regards himself as either a man or a kathoey. In the modern Thai sex/gender system the kathoey becomes the negative "other" against which the masculine identities of both gays and men are defined (Jackson 1997a:172). The Thai gay man defines himself as a man and not as a kathoey, rejecting all the kathoey's feminine attributes except his exclusive homosexual orientation. Together, gays, men, and kathoeys form structurally related components of an emerging Thai sex/gender system: each component defines and supports the construction of the other. With the emergence of "the gay" (normally used as a noun in Thailand) as a masculine identity, the kathoey's transgendered behavior and his feminine gender identity, along with his inverted (homo)sexuality, becomes structurally significant, distinguishing him(her) from other males.

The sex/gender system in contemporary Thailand, then, comprises two discrete and parallel sets of discourses. A borrowed Western system of four sexualities, in which the homosexual/heterosexual binary crosses the man/woman binary (see Morris 1994), has been imposed on the indigenous system of three sex/genders—the kathoey, woman, and man. The older system has been transformed and adjusted by the diffusion of the newer, Western, model.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE KATHOEY

As in other patriarchal cultures, like the Philippines, in Thailand the less-valued status of women stigmatizes effeminate or transgendered men. This stigma attached to the kathoey today is reinforced by the contemporary denigration of transgendered homosexuality by self-identified gay males and the larger society. This suggests that it is not same-sex sexuality per se that is stigmatizing, but rather the associated mark of femininity. Both traditionally and currently, a Thai male who dresses, talks, and acts like a Thai man and who fulfills his social obligations by marrying and fathering a family is honored by being considered a man, even if his preferred sexual partner is a male.

Unlike the West, in Thailand homoeroticism traditionally was neither condemned as sinful nor criminalized. Thai society is generally noninterventionist in sexual matters, and Thai culture (like Polynesian culture) puts a greater premium for everyone on the conventionality of one's public acts, rather than on the nonconformity of one's private emotions or behavior. Therefore, a homosexuality that does not breach other masculine gender norms need not be—and is not viewed as—a source of confrontation with society or a matter of social condemnation.

In Thailand, how one acts is more important than how one feels, and the public expression of one's "true self" is not valued as it is in the West (Morris 1994). Thus, "coming out" as a gay or a kathoey brings a "loss of face" without the compensating value of "being oneself," which is part of modern Euro-American culture. Against this Thai cultural pattern, the visibility of the kathoey becomes less rather than more valued.

On the other hand, traditionally and also in some contemporary contexts, kathoeys are "accepted." They are highly visible and found in all social strata (except at the highest levels of Thai nobility). Kathoeys live and work openly in cities, rural towns, and villages. Many perform in transvestite revues at gay bars and theaters and also participate in transvestite beauty contests, which are very popular and attended by local dignitaries, politicians, the public at large, and tourists. Thai men and women exhibit an open fascination with kathoeys; they are viewed as entertaining and humorous, and also (in contrast to the Indian attitude toward hijras, but similar to the attitude in the Philippines), associated with feminine grace, elegance, and beauty (Jackson 1997b:71).

Nevertheless, (again like in the Philippines), among upper-middle-class urbanites, kathoeys are criticized for being loud, lewd, and vulgar, particularly un-Thai-like behavior. Although many kathoeys work at ordinary jobs and also run their own businesses, they have the reputation of being sexual libertines and prostitutes, which contributes to their generally derided social position. In the past this sexual license was

accepted in Thailand, possibly because the kathoey provided a "safe" sexual outlet for unmarried youth, whose sexual initiations might otherwise sully the reputation of young unmarried women (Jackson 1997a:173), a role similar to that played by transgendered males in the Philippines (Whitam 1992).

With the emergence of the gay as a masculine male, and the changing meaning of kathoey from biological hermaphrodite to transgendered homosexual, however, kathoeys face increasing social and sexual stigmatization, and even physical violence (Jackson 1997a:171). The kathoey's cross-gender persona, with its assumed permanent sexual subordination in the receptor role, now makes him a kind of "deficient male," not an independent sex/gender category. The kathoey is also derided because of his rejection of the strongly sanctioned expectation that all Thai men other than Buddhist monks should marry and become fathers.

Finally, the kathoey is increasingly derided because of his homosexuality, as this concept has been influenced by mid-twentieth-century American psychiatry. In this view, which has spread to Thai scientific/academic discourse and the Thai upper-middle, educated classes, homosexuality is an abnormal, unnatural, category of "inversion" and of perversion.

By the 1970s and 1980s, transvestites and transsexuals were also distinguished from (biological) hermaphrodites and viewed as "false" kathoeys, who, like homosexual men, were considered to suffer from a psychological disorder. Homosexuality and male transgenderism are now considered "social problems" by Thai academics and the upper-middle classes. Attempts to "root out" these "perversions" have become part of official rhetoric, which at the same time, however, urges compassion toward homosexuals and transgenderists as individuals.

The complex and multiple discourses of the Thai sex/gender ideology, along with other Thai cultural values, challenge any oversimplified characterizations of Thai "acceptance" of sex/gender diversity. Nevertheless, sex/gender diversity has a long history in Thailand, with roots in a traditional religious culture. As in the Philippines, these echoes of a more humane and flexible past continue to influence contemporary attitudes.

SEX/GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Island Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, has a long tradition of highly valued male transvestite and transgendered roles (Errington 1990; Garcia 1996). Gender roles in indigenous, pre-Euro-American contact populations were generally complementary and egalitarian, and one's anatomic sex or sexual practices had little bearing on one's identity or social position. Ritual and healing roles were associated with

feminine attributes and were occupied by females or transvestite males, called *babyalan*, who dressed and acted like women in order to perform their powerful and prestigious roles (Errington 1990; Garcia 1996:125ff). The same-sex sexual relationships of these men may well have followed their feminine role taking. Same-sex sexual practices were, in any case, not culturally marked and apparently irrelevant to transgendering for ritual purposes. As among American Indians, the male sexual partner of the babyalan was an ordinary man, whose same-sex sexual relations gave him no special status.

In the complex state societies of island Southeast Asia, transgendered and cross-dressed males were associated with sacred personages, were guardians of state regalia and ritual healers, and were accomplished singers and dancers who performed at various celebrations and rites of passage. In the holistic cultures of Southeast Asia (influenced by Hinduism), where the union of opposites is a central religious and political theme, transvestites and transgendered figures were metaphors for cosmic unity. As such they embodied ancestral continuity and potency, mediating between a divine world and the mundane world of human beings (Johnson 1997:12, 25). Historically, then, gender diversity in the Philippines was not relegated to the margins of society, but rather was symbolically central.

Unlike the relative continuity of Thai culture up to the present, however, the Philippines has a history of foreign domination, first by Muslim Arabs, later by Spain (from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries), and still later by the United States, which acquired the Philippines in 1898 as a result of the Spanish American war. An important effect of these external cultural patterns was a "sexualizing" and masculinizing of Filipino culture. From an indigenous tradition where same-sex sexual practices were unmarked and where anatomic sex was not a major determinant of prestige, the sex/gender binary of male and female acquired hierarchical dimensions. Cultural influences included an Islamic ethic emphasizing male potency and women as the embodiment of the pure and the traditional (Johnson 1997); a Catholic Spanish culture in which same-sex sexual relations, labeled sodomy, became marked and denigrated, along with the denigration of the feminine and of male transgendering; and an American scientific discourse defining homosexuality as a pathological inversion (similar to what occurred in Thailand) (Garcia 1996). More recently, as in Thailand, although with different meanings, a new, Western gay sensibility, identity, and political activism have also emerged (Manalansan IV 1995). These external cultural impositions dominate Filipino concepts of sex/gender diversity today, though older traditions have not been completely eliminated and, indeed, are being revitalized.

CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER DIVERSITY: TRANSGENDERED MALE HOMOSEXUALITY

Contemporary gender diversity in the Philippines centers on male transgendering: these gender variant roles are called bakla, bantut, or bayot, depending on the region. These roles conflate effeminacy in appearance and mannerisms, transvestism, psychic inversion, and same-sex sexual relations. Bakla are males with a feminine "heart" or spirit, who cross-dress and who are assumed to take the feminine (receptor) role in sex. As with Thai and many other cultures, Filipino sex/gender ideology traditionally does not include a homosexual/heterosexual distinction in which "homosexual" refers to both partners in a same-sex sexual relationship: only the transgendered bakla is labelled homosexual. In the general stereotype, bakla are thought of as "pseudo-women" (Manalansan IV 1995:197).

The term bakla has negative connotations of indecisive, weak, or cowardly; the common stereotype also includes vulgarity and low-class status—the screaming drag queen of the 1960s Stonewall rebellion (Manalansan IV 1997). The term bantut has even stronger negative connotations in Muslim areas of the Philippines, where it denotes male impotence and a "joke of a woman," or more seriously, a defiled woman (in opposition to the purity of traditional women). Bantut are neither men nor women, and their receptor role in same-sex sexual relations is considered an abomination in Muslim culture (Johnson 1997).

Similar to the opposition of man and kathoey in Thailand, in the Philippines a "real man" is "one who is not bakla." A real man is defined as "brave" and "level headed" and by his ability to have children and sustain a family (Garcia 1996:55). Bakla also sometimes refers to a state of anatomic confusion, that is, a hermaphrodite or a physically deficient male, though there is no evidence that bakla are in fact anatomically different from other men. Because of the negative connotations of local terms for gender diversity, many bakla prefer to self-identify as gay, a term, however, that does not apply to their masculine partners and thus conveys a different meaning from that of Euro-American culture (and of Thailand as well).

A WOMAN'S HEART IN A MAN'S BODY

The bakla's core gender identity or "heart" is feminine. This identification is based on the Filipino cultural concepts of "inside" (*loob*) and "outside" (*labas*), a neat convergence with the Western mind/body dichotomy. The loob/labas distinction emphasizes that the identity of all persons—man, woman, or other—is largely based on an inner, subjective reality (the loob), which guides, affirms, or countervails external appearance (the labas). In one part of the Philippines, for example, the term bayot literally translates as "a woman with a penis," an expression that privileges the inner reality of femininity against the outward appearance as a genital (anatomic) male (Garcia 1998, citing Hart, p. 55).

For the bakla themselves, their inversion consists of a woman's heart, spirit, or psyche in a male body, a concept consistent with the Western inversion model of homosexuality in which the individual's psychological being is opposite to his/her anatomy. Unlike the Filipino opposition of loob/labas, however, which privileges the spirit, the Western concept of inversion privileges the body as the standard against which the psychic opposition becomes "abnormal."

BAKLA SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

While same-sex sexual relations of the bakla is only one factor (and perhaps not even the most important) in his social construction, the bakla's sexuality is important in his subjective identity and also affects social attitudes toward him. The Western categorical and sexual separation of homosexuals from heterosexuals contrasts with the high degree of sexual interaction between bakla and non-bakla in the Philippines. It is very common in the Philippines for adolescent boys and young adults, who will later marry heterosexually and fully engage in maintaining families, to have sex for money with bakla (in some cities this involves perhaps 75 percent of young, working-class males [Whitam 1992]). These males, referred to as "callboys," like the maridos of Brazilian travestís, are not marked as homosexuals by society and do not experience themselves as such. The Filipino view that only the "feminine" partner in the sexual relationship is a homosexual reinforces the emphasis on the feminine loob as the core of bakla identity.

Masculine-appearing men, who are assumed to take the inserter sexual position, are also assumed to have a masculine loob; they are thus real men even as they have sexual relations with bakla. In spite of the fact that callboys or male partners of the bakla acknowledge sexual satisfaction as well as monetary benefits from their bakla relationships, the masculine-appearing partner stoutly denies any deep affection or emotional impact in the relationship. The social stereotype holds that only the feminine bakla is deeply emotionally affected by these sexual relationships.

Inversion theory (in both its Filipino and Western biomedical versions) presumes that only one partner in a same-sex sexual relation is an invert; thus in both Thailand and the Philippines, it is the transgendered male, who is assumed also to play the "feminine" or receptor role in sex, who has become "the homosexual." Like Brazilian travestís, Filipino bakla say that to penetrate a man transforms the penetrated man into a woman. They explicitly reject the possibility that they could accept a man who wishes to be penetrated by them as their boyfriend. Among the bakla, then, as in the society at large, a man who desires penetration loses his masculine identity.

Bakla conform to the "heterogender" nature of sexual relationships dominant in the Philippines: they explicitly state that sexual relations between two bakla do not occur and is repulsive. In some regions of the Philippines, two bayot having sex with each other is considered "incest" or "eating their own flesh" (Garcia 1996:97). Bakla sexual relationships across the genders means that for many bakla, their feminine identity centers on their exclusive sexual and romantic interests in "real" men. More specifically, many bakla define themselves as women in terms of their wish to be penetrated by a "real" man (Johnson 1997:90). This is consistent with the cultural understanding of the bakla's femininity as a marker of their "inverted" sexuality. Many bakla say that their first experience of anal penetration, however violently imposed, confirmed their transgendered identity in their own eyes (Johnson 1997), a self-characterization also expressed by Brazilian travestí (Kulick 1998).

Bakla typically express their desire for a real man as deep longing; they experience themselves as having the "weaker" emotions of women, an image based on sexual desire as shaped by the gender hierarchy and the view that women, like the Virgin Mary (a powerful image in Catholic Filipino culture), were meant to suffer for men. It is this imitation of the stereotypical female in a patriarchal culture that is at the core of the bakla role (Manalansan IV 1995:197). Bakla acknowledge that however sexually desirable they are, the mutuality of their relationships with real men are limited because they cannot bear children. Thus, they feel doomed to suffer in their love relationships no matter how feminine and subservient they are (Cannell 1995:241).

Yet, paradoxically, bakla, like hijras, travestís, and Polynesian gender variants, also are viewed as sexual aggressors. In addition, as pointed out by Don Kulick (1998) for the travestí, the material benefits the bakla confer on their partners also gives them a certain leverage and source of control in these relationships (Manalansan IV, personal communication 1999). Thus, bakla, like travestís, hijras, and māhūs, are by no means merely victims in unequal sexual relationships.

THE ASSOCIATION OF TRANSGENDERED MALES WITH BEAUTY

Beauty in the Philippines is associated with successful performance, which includes, in a very central way, the ability to transform oneself successfully from one's ordinary role. The aim is less to "pass" as what one is not than to act convincingly in a role temporarily, through dress and other appropriations. The bakla, as males who display a highly successful ability to present themselves as women within certain contexts, are therefore closely associated with the concept of beauty in their own eyes and in the eyes of society (Cannell 1995:242; 1999). This transformative ability is expressed in their specialized occupations in fashion, entertainment, hairstyling and beauty salons and particularly in their participation in beauty contests.

Bakla identity, formed around the "inside/outside structure" of the loob and the labas, calls for the loob—the inside, immaterial female spirit—to be "exposed" by inscribing feminine beauty on the body, the most concrete site of the expression of the loob (Johnson 1997:90). Bakla beauty is understood as bodily practices aimed at style, glamour, and femininity. In defining themselves as feminine, bakla/bantut emphasize the care they give their bodies, their concern with cleanliness and beauty, their use of facial creams and body lotion to "soften" their bodies, their wearing makeup, jewelry, and perfume, and their cross-dressing (Johnson 1997). The importance of beauty to transgendered identities emerges in bantut life-histories, particularly in the notion of "exposure" (Johnson 1997:124). For many bantut, "coming out," which usually occurs in high school or college, is expressed as "exposing my beauty." Bantut commonly greet each other by asking, "How is your beauty?" instead of "How are you?" This emphasis on bodily appearance is consistent with the Philippine cultural understanding of the body as an important site for self-transformation. Thus, the bantut are not merely imitating women but are "capturing" the power of femininity through beautifying their bodies and through their gender transformations.

TRANSVESTITE BEAUTY CONTESTS

In the Philippines, transformations of various kinds are associated with power (Cannell 1995; 1999). Positive social attitudes toward bakla are largely based on their ability to transform themselves into glamourous and stylish women. In transvestite beauty contests, bakla transform themselves by conveying a highly valued, global, and cosmopolitan

image of glamour and style identified with the West, particularly America, and in the Philippines associated with the upper-class, educated elite and celebrities, themselves shaped by Western culture.

The most visible and compelling sites for the presentation of transgendered beauty are transvestite beauty contests, which are a growing phenomenon in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Cohen et al. 1996). The audiences include bakla and straight people, and the contests are considered perfectly suitable family affairs. Local dignitaries, village businesspeople, members of local leader families, and men, women and children all attend.

Beauty contests give status and pleasure to the bakla, some of whom have an obsession with participating as a way of "exposing" their beauty. Most of the contests are organized around international themes, illustrated by names like Miss Gay World or Miss Gay International, which emphasize bakla identification with the powerful global "otherness" of America (Cannell 1995). The contests may even be a re-emergence of traditional ritual transvestite roles as mediating figures, though today instead of mediating between the divine and the mundane, the bakla mediate between the local and global culture (Cannell 1999; Johnson 1996:90; Peacock 1987).

Points in the beauty contests are awarded for beauty, such as "Best in Evening Gown" and "Miss Photogenic," but more than half the points are based on "intelligence," exemplified in the question-and-answer portion of the contest. The questions, which are asked and must be answered in English, relate to topics like politics and careers (Johnson 1996), again emphasizing a cosmopolitan, Western source of prestige. Though the material rewards of winning the contest are small, contestants take the contests very seriously. There is also an underlying comic tension; the audience applauds genuine intelligence and beauty, but there are also catcalls and glee when the "beauty" becomes unglued, as in a broken heel or a slippage of costume. Most contestants wear very tight underwear and full length stockings. They tape or tie their genitals between their thighs, and there is always anticipation that the male will emerge accidentally from the female, an occasion for laughter that is not always compassionate.

The Americanized images of beauty in the contests are closely linked to the early-twentieth-century American colonial regime. The American mandate emphasized American-style education aimed particularly at transforming Filipinos into participating citizens of a modern, democratic state. Today schools and educators are among the predominant sponsors not only of the beauty contests (which are mostly organized by bakla) but of the many other contests and performances (such as talent shows and sports contests) that are part of American civic culture, which emphasizes discipline, self-development, and self-respect. As

the question-and-answer portion of the beauty contests most clearly demonstrates, beauty is significantly about education, mastery of English, good citizenship, a professional career orientation, and democratic fair play, as well as glamour. In short, "beauty" is articulated by and associated with those institutions identified with the "knowledge power" of the Americans, and beauty is a primary idiom within which this "global other" is identified.

Although the association of bakla with the creation and presentation of this international concept of beauty is a source of power, it is also a source of ambivalence, particularly in the Muslim areas of the south. In these areas bantut identification with the global "other" generates ambivalence. The Muslims continually and actively resisted both Spanish and American domination. Within this context, the Muslim masculine ideal became closely associated with aggressive militarism and the feminine ideal with maintaining purity—both sexual and cultural—in opposition to external domination. Thus, in Muslim-dominated areas, bantuts are not only gender "deviants"—as neither men nor women—but ethnic deviants as well. To the extent that the West (and its affiliation with the Christian Filipino state) is perceived as a threat to local Muslim culture, power, and identity, bantuts' identification with this external culture lowers their status. The positively valued "exposure" of bantut beauty turns into negatively valued "overexposure" (to the West) and undermines bantut acceptance in local communities (Johnson 1997).

During the 1970s, bakla unsuccessfully attempted to improve their social position by identifying themselves as a "third" sex/gender (*sward*), in an attempt (like the one in Europe in the late-nineteenth century) to "naturalize" their sex/gender nonconformity and thus make it "equal" to the sex/gender of males and females, men and women (Garcia 1996:197). But because in the Philippines, same-sex sexual behavior is transformed through the concept of inversion into heterogender behavior and modeled on it, the "thirdness" of the bakla had little impact on their social status. Although the bakla and their sex/gender transformations are the "stars" of spectacular performances, these performances perhaps do more to contain gender diversity than promote it. Like the Euro-American transsexual, bakla transgendering may do more to confirm a binary sex/gender system than to undermine it, reinforcing rather than mitigating their marginality in society.