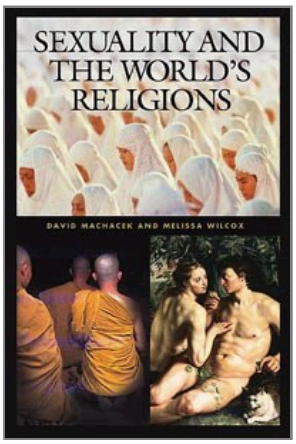

Sexuality and the World's Religions

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David W. Machacek and Melissa M. Wilcox, Editors

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To Jeff and Janet
With love

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Preface

The experience that inspired this text is one with which most scholars just beginning academic careers are familiar: I was asked to teach a course for which I was almost entirely unprepared. The class was entitled ''Religion and Sexuality,'' and because it was a more desirable subject than most classes that junior scholars are asked to teach, I eagerly accepted.

As a sociologist of religion, I was, of course, familiar with Bronislaw Malinowski's fascinating studies of sexuality and marriage among the Trobriand Islanders. Certainly, I thought, there would be an abundance of texts from which to choose that followed Malinowski's lead.

Indeed, the inviting subject of gender and sexuality in the world's various religious traditions has stimulated a large body of recent manuscripts. However, I was stunned to find that the only text that attempted to treat the subject in a comparative religions perspective was published long before any of this exciting new body of literature was produced. I refer, of course, to Geoffrey Parrinder's *Sexual Morality in the World's Religions.* Although it served the purpose of introducing students to the subject, the text was singularly unhelpful when it came to guiding them through the voluminous recent literature, much of which addresses issues that hardly receive mention in Parrinder's text: the feminist critique of religious traditions; changing gender roles as a result of cross-cultural contact and new patterns of migration; and debates over the place of homosexual, bisexual, and transgender persons in religion.

As I taught the course, familiarizing myself as much as possible with the more recent literature on sexuality in the world's religions, it became apparent that the time was ripe for a new text that dealt with gender and sexuality from a comparative religions perspective. It also became clear that this would be a task much too large for one person to accomplish alone, especially one as new as I was to the material.

These thoughts remained in my mind for about a year, as other, more immediately pressing projects took up most of my time. The idea came rushing to the fore, however, during a conversation with Richard Hecht one day in the spring of 2000. He was serving as an adviser on a set of books that ABC-CLIO was planning to produce on the world's religions. Most of the books would focus exclusively on individual religious traditions, but some would be topical, covering issues of contemporary interest such as religion and economics, religion and politics, and, of course, religion and sexuality. A proposal was on Todd Hallman's desk within the week, and he readily agreed to publish the book.

It remained clear to me that what I had proposed was a large task, especially for someone who could claim only a cursory knowledge of the literature and whose name would be virtually unrecognizable to those specialists in the subject who would be most qualified to write the respective chapters. It was my good fortune, therefore, to know Melissa Wilcox, recently graduated with a Ph.D. in religious studies from the University of California at Santa Barbara. She is a specialist in the topic of sexuality and religion who is recognizable as a promising new scholar to others in this field from her regular presentations at national conferences and from several publications in books and journals. She eagerly agreed to coedit the book and took the leading role in recruiting the outstanding lineup of scholars who contributed, for which I am most grateful.

Being something of a novice to the subject matter turned out to be an unexpected benefit because the contributors were superb educators. They each replied promptly, patiently, and clearly to my numerous requests for explanation, definition, or elaboration. Compiling and editing this book was, therefore, a rich educational experience, and the product is a book that is accessible, interesting, and useful.

Contrary to the popular image of the solitary scholar surrounded by dusty old books, academic writing is a collective undertaking. Thus, certain acknowledgments are in order. Foremost, we owe thanks to James Ciment, who took over as our editor after Todd Hallman left ABC-CLIO for greener pastures. His enthusiasm for the project and patience when some deadlines were pressing are most gratefully acknowledged.

A further debt of gratitude is owed to the faculty in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. We have had the good fortune of working on this project in the context of one of the most engaging and collegial faculties one could hope for in academia. In particular, we wish to thank Richard Hecht, who, as already

mentioned, first presented the opportunity to compile this book. Further thanks is extended to Phillip Hammond, whose influence is recognizable in Chapter 12 but who also endured innumerable lunch conversations about the progress of this text.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the patience, understanding, and loving support of my life partner, Jeff. This book is dedicated to him.

David W. Machacek

The topic of religion and human sexuality is a pressing and important one in the contemporary climate of change and diversity. Numerous religions are currently embroiled in national or international debates over many of the issues touched upon in this book: women's religious roles; the ethics of technology; the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people; women's bodies and sexuality; and the role of religious sexual ethics in society at large. Also interwoven with all of these issues are overwhelming dynamics of power, which interest me especially strongly given my focus on religion, oppression, and resistance.

Many of the political battles over the human body that rage today turn on religious issues, as David Machacek notes in the final chapter of this book. Religious activists populate both sides of the abortion debate and appear on the front lines of both pro- and anti-gay rights activism. Debates over the visibility of sexuality itself and the ways in which it is treated are especially fierce in religious settings and in areas where some wish to see religion play a central role. Religion is important in debates over what and when public schools should be teaching about sexuality and what resources schools should make available to students. And women's bodies, so often the center of attention in both secular and religious settings, have been fought over all the more voraciously in recent years—with men and women frequently relying on religious arguments to support *both* sides of women's rights issues, feminist theology, ordination debates, the religious significance of women's bodies, proper clothing (usually for women), and many other hotly contested issues. For all these reasons, this book is an important and necessary addition to the current literature on religion as well as that on human sexuality.

Thus, although my main research interests center around feminist, gender, and LGBT studies in religion, working on this book has been a fascinating and rewarding experience—as I hope reading it will be for

those who pick it up. Like David, I wish to thank the skilled and knowledgeable authors who generously contributed their time and expertise to the book's production. They have ensured that this volume is a readable, accurate, up-to-date, and informative resource for students, academics, and lay readers alike. Thanks also to Richard Hecht for putting David and myself in touch with Todd Hallman at ABC-CLIO, to Todd for helping us develop the proposal and the initial stages of the book, and to Jim Ciment for taking over the project when Todd left the Santa Barbara area. Finally, I am ever grateful to Janet Mallen for her partnership, caring, and support and for steadfastly believing in the importance of my work during these challenging times.

Melissa M. Wilcox

Introduction

Americans describe the sometimes dreaded task of teaching youngsters about human sexuality as telling them "the facts of life." That characterization is truly ironic because these "facts" usually include many culturally relative assumptions about gender, sex, and reproduction.

There is probably no better illustration of just how much culture influences human understandings of gender and sexuality than Bronislaw Malinowski's studies of marriage and sexuality among the Trobriand Islanders. Malinowski expressed some disbelief when his hosts explained to him that there was no connection between sexual intercourse and reproduction. Just as to Malinowski, it was perfectly evident that sex was very much a part of the process of reproduction, to the Trobriand Islanders, it was perfectly evident that the two had nothing to do with each other, and both were able to cite evidence to support their views.

Ultimately, the Trobriand Islanders took Malinowski into their confidence and explained the facts of life to him. Pregnancy occurs, they taught him, when a spirit comes in the night and sits on the head of a sleeping woman. The spirit is absorbed into the woman's head, which causes her to experience headaches and then descends slowly to her stomach, which causes morning sickness. It then descends further, causing her belly to swell, and finally emerges as a newborn child. To the Trobriand Islanders, then, sexual intercourse between men and women was enjoyable and fun and helped to promote positive feelings between husbands and wives but was of little significance otherwise. Male same-sex intercourse was also well known in this culture; it occurred in the ritual context of boys' initiation into manhood. Because the boys had absorbed so much of their mother's female essence—vaginal fluid and menstrual blood—from having been in her womb and from eating and sleeping with her from infancy, to become men they needed first to be

cleansed of any residual femininity and then to ingest, through oral and sometimes anal intercourse with adult males, as much male essence—semen—as they could. It was said that boys who were deprived of this ritual process grew into women or at least failed to develop the physical features of adult males. It is not clear whether the Trobriand Islanders considered ritual intercourse between men and boys to be "sexual" or whether girls had similar same-sex experiences. What is clear, however, is that the category of the ''homosexual"—someone with a lifelong preference for same-sex erotic encounters—did not exist for them and would probably have made little sense. Although all young boys were expected to have ritual contact with older men's semen, once having become a man through this ritual, each also was expected to marry a woman.

Malinowski also teaches us a second lesson about cross-cultural studies of religion and sexuality. Though his work was and still is highly respected by many as an example of early anthropology, diaries published after his death reveal a rather grim underbelly to this ostensibly respectable field of study. Like many Europeans of his era who visited cultures vastly different from their own, Malinowski took a dim view of the people with whom he was living. His diaries, at times, show little or no respect for their religious beliefs, intelligence, way of life, integrity, or even human rights. Suffering from what we now would term severe "culture shock," he often privately derides his hosts and their culture. Moreover, it is blatantly clear that he did not place Trobriand women and European women in the same class; his diaries record numerous instances in which he took liberties with the women who were his hosts that would have cost him his reputation and probably his personal freedom had his victims been European women rather than Pacific Islanders.

Clearly, it is impossible to understand a culture's beliefs, values, and practices with regard to sexuality and gender without considering their religious worldview. Moreover, in order truly to understand such worldviews, it is critical to approach each culture on its own terms and with a measure of self-critical awareness. However, as is made clear from the example above, learning about a culture's values, beliefs, and practices of gender and sexuality is also a very instructive way to learn about religion—especially given the central role of such practices in political, cultural, and theological debates across the contemporary world. This argument—stated explicitly here—is made implicitly throughout the chapters of this book.

Indeed, apart from the encounter with death, there is probably no human experience that so closely resembles certain religious experiences as sexuality. As in some religious experiences, sexuality can arouse feelings of both dread and fascination—*mysterium tremendum et fascinans,* as Rudolf Otto describes it—especially in the uninitiated. It is sometimes experienced as an encounter with the "wholly other"—both physical and emotional—particularly in the case of heterosexual intercourse. As in religion, sexuality involves a traversing of boundaries, of the material and spiritual realms in the case of religious experience and of the physical body and emotional self in the case of sexual experience. As in the religious experience, the sexual experience may involve a sense of losing oneself, which can lead to feelings of utter dependence. Few other aspects of human experience can arouse such intense emotional responses as sex and religion. And in fact, there have been instances in the history of many religions in which the similarities between sexuality and ecstatic religious experience have been acknowledged explicitly—religious practice has been likened to sex, contact with the divine has been described in sexual terms, and both homosexual and heterosexual eroticism have served as a source of spiritual enlightenment. In some religions the deities are explicitly sexual with one another, and in some their sexuality is occluded; others hold the divine to be strictly nonsexual. In all these cases, though, sexuality and the body—both human and divine—have been central topics of religious concern.

For these reasons, sexuality, again like matters of the spirit, is sometimes seen as being extremely powerful—both potently productive and potentially dangerous. All sorts of harm may befall the one who misuses it, and if it is not treated with great care, the result is chaos. It is no wonder, then, that most cultures have explicit rules for proper sexual conduct and feature elaborate—often religious—rituals of love, courtship, marriage, and sexual intercourse. This is not because human sexuality is seen as profane, as is often the perception in the West, but because it is deemed sacred.

Moreover, gender is a critical variable around the world in religious teachings about sexuality and the body, in part, simply because women's and men's bodies differ in ways that affect religious concerns: women bring life into the world, for instance, whereas men do not. Since religion frequently is involved in welcoming new life and determining each new person's role in the world, it must take this difference into account. Religions concerned with physiological changes, with bodily boundaries,

or with what goes into or comes out of the human body are also likely to differentiate between the female body and the male one, simply because women menstruate but men do not, men produce sperm but women do not, women give birth but men do not, and so on. Finally, the common intertwining of religion with cultural values and practices means that social gender roles and religious ones will be closely interrelated and that religions will have much to say—both positive and negative—about changes in gender roles and sexual practices.

This book functions, therefore, as a topical study in comparative religion. The first and longest section of the book focuses on nine major world religions or families of religions. Although we indicated a special interest in the currently high-profile topics of homosexuality and women's sexuality when we first contacted the contributors to this volume, we have asked each author in Part 1 first and foremost to discuss those aspects of human sexuality that are most relevant to each religion today. To locate the reader in the tradition at hand, the chapters in this section begin with a broad overview of the tradition itself before focusing on its beliefs, values, and practices with regard to gender and sexuality.

In many if not all cases, however, such traditional beliefs, values, and practices have been challenged by contemporary realities. Colonialism disrupted some of these traditions, and it must be kept in mind that much of the information currently available on such traditions may come from the distorted records of the invading colonists or from postcolonial attempts at reconstruction and revitalization. This is particularly true in the case of the African and Native American indigenous traditions covered in the first two chapters, although colonialism has had a heavy impact on Hinduism and Islam as well. Furthermore, new patterns of migration have brought many of these traditions into closer contact than ever before. Although immigrants usually attempt, in varying degrees, to maintain their religious traditions in new social contexts, they also inevitably transform those traditions as they adapt to new cultural and social settings. The chapters of Part 1, therefore, also address issues of sexuality and gender in diaspora religions, particularly as those traditions are understood and practiced in the United States.

Further challenges to traditional religions have come from feminists and from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, who have called upon religious leaders and members to rethink inherited assumptions and norms about gender and sexuality. These norms have prevented some people from full participation in their religions and, consequently,

from full participation in social life. In some cases, religious norms have prevented the recognition of certain people—based on gender, sexuality, race, religion, class, or other factors—as fully human beings. As Malinowski's experiences with the Trobriand Islanders—and theirs with him—should aptly demonstrate, rethinking traditional beliefs and values about gender and sexuality is no small task. Many of the chapters in Part 1 detail contemporary struggles over religious definitions of gender, sexuality, and personhood.

Those who read through all the chapters in Part 1 will notice that certain themes recur repeatedly, especially in the context of the contemporary United States. Several factors have shaped the current religious complexity in this country, and we have elected to include a final section that covers these issues thematically. Chapter 10 considers some of the changes recently wrought on the U.S. religious scene by feminism and the growth of new religious movements through a close examination of one key example: attempts by neopagans to reconsider gender and sexuality. Chapter 11 addresses the interactions of religious individualism, feminism, and the gay rights and queer movements in the United States as it explores the roles of religion and spirituality in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. Finally, Chapter 12 examines the influence of a constitutionally secular government on issues of gender and sexuality in the context of debates over the proper role of religion in U.S. civil society.

Although we (and here we speak on behalf of all the contributors) have attempted to treat these discourses fairly and objectively, our respective biases probably remain. We ask readers, therefore, to take these chapters in the spirit in which they are intended: as an introduction to gender and sexuality in the world's religions, rather than as the final say. Both primary and secondary resources abound in this fascinating area of study. Our own and our contributing authors' recommendations for further reading appear at the end of the book, and we hope that readers interested in this area will avail themselves of the opportunity to explore further the topics that interest them most.

Melissa M. Wilcox and David W. Machacek

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About the Contributors

Rebecca T. Alpert is the codirector of the Women's Studies Program and associate professor of religion and women's studies at Temple University. A rabbi and the former dean of students at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, she has taught and published extensively in the areas of women in religion, medical ethics, contemporary Judaism, and gay and lesbian studies. She is the coauthor (with Jacob Staub) of *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach* (1986; updated and expanded, 2000), author of *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition* (Columbia University Press, 1997), and editor of *Voices of the Religious Left: A Contemporary Sourcebook* (Temple University Press, 2000). Her most recent work is an edited anthology, *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation,* with Shirley Idelson and Sue Levi Elwell (Rutgers University Press, 2001).

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Randy P. Conner is the author of *Blossom of Bone: Reclaiming the Connections between Homoeroticism and the Sacred* (HarperSan Francisco, 1993); coauthor of the *Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit* (Cassell, 1996); and author of numerous articles on gender, sexuality, and the sacred. Having taught in the Literature Department at the University of Texas for many years, he is presently attending a doctoral program at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) and is completing his book *At the Crossroads of Desire: Same-Sex Intimacy and Gender Diversity in Santeria, Candomble, and Vodou.*

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Liz Wilson is associate professor in the Department of Comparative Religion and affiliate in the Women's Studies Program at Miami University, where she directs the graduate program in comparative religion. She is the author of *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). Her article, "Seeing through the Gendered 'I': The Self-Scrutiny and Self-Disclosure of Nuns in Post-Ashokan Buddhist Literature," was recognized by the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* with a Young Scholar's Award.

Melissa M. Wilcox teaches religious studies and women's studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Her research interests center on issues of religion, identity, oppression, and resistance. She is the author of *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community* (Indiana University Press, 2003) and is currently working on a study of religion and spirituality among lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women in Los Angeles.

Dr. Xinzhong Yao is professor of religion and ethics in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter, United Kingdom. He has taught Chinese religions and comparative philosophy in Wales since 1991 and has published widely in the areas of religion and ethics, both in English and in Chinese. His recent English publications include *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) and *Confucianism and Christianity* (Sussex Academic Press, 1996; Chinese translation by China Social Science Publishing House, 2002).

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PART 1
Gender and Sexuality in the World's Religions

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CHAPTER 1

Sexuality and Gender in African Spiritual Traditions

Randy P. Conner

Erotic fertility shrine wood carving. Yoruba people, Nigeria.
(Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY)

Given the variety of indigenous traditions present on the continent of Africa, it is impossible to make general statements about beliefs and practices of African "religions" without doing an injustice to some or even most. Moreover, practitioners of these "religions" frequently do not look upon their faiths as such because they perceive religion as completely interwoven with the entirety of their life experiences rather than as a demarcated arena of life experience. Furthermore, even among practitioners of Christianity and Islam, ancient spiritual practices continue to be carried out, albeit beneath the rubric of the more recently adopted faiths. Thus, in this chapter, I will generally refer to ''spiritual traditions'' rather than to "religions" to express this complex perspective regarding spiritual experience.

Although it is risky to generalize about African spiritual traditions, we can say that in many of them, a belief in the sacredness of nature is paramount; thus, these traditions are frequently described as "pantheistic." The source of divinity permeates the universe, often in the form of a mystical energy similar to the *élan vital* or what younger readers might envision as "the force," as popularized in *Star Wars;* among the Yoruba of Nigeria, for instance, this force or energy is named *ashé.* An allied belief imparts that the source of divinity may manifest in multiple—perhaps even infinite—ways; these expressions of divinity resemble archetypal forces or energies. Although the notion

of a single source of divinity may be associated with monotheism, or the worship of one god, multiple expressions of godhead in many of these traditions—often characterized as "lesser divinities"—may be linked to polytheism, or the reverence of many gods. Thus, many African spiritual traditions may be described as pantheistic, monotheistic, and polytheistic simultaneously.

As in many ancient religions, such as those of Egypt and Greece, deities in African spiritual traditions are associated with natural elements (including earth, air, fire, and water, as well as particular plants, animals, and stones), life experiences (such as birth, loving union, and death), occupations (spiritual leader, warrior, artist, and so on), and other matters, including gender and sexuality. Although many deities are perceived as being male or female, African spiritual traditions also embrace deities who transcend or transgress masculine and feminine gender categories. Moreover, although a majority of deities are associated with heterosexuality, a number of these traditions include deities who are associated with the expression of same-sex intimacy. As in ancient Egypt and Greece, the goddesses and gods of African spiritual traditions are envisioned as having their own life experiences and as playing active roles in the lives of humans. Beyond deities, ancestral spirits also play a central role in African spiritual experience.

Where spiritual practices are concerned, among the most significant is communication with the deity by way of prayer, offering and sacrifice, divination, and embodiment of the god or goddess (often referred to as "possession" in western texts). Spiritual healing and magic involving the aid of a deity also are considered important in African spiritual life, as are rituals marking life passages, such as those into adulthood, marriage, parenthood, and spiritual maturity (including becoming a priest or priestess). Frequently, these practices are linked to concerns with and expressions of gender and sexuality.

Indigenous African traditions generally permit both women and men to serve as spiritual leaders, teachers, or guides. Although one's gender might determine the specific spiritual role one plays, it rarely prevents one from assuming spiritual authority. Moreover, a number of African traditions—especially in the past, prior to the introduction of Christianity and Islam—have included priests and priestesses who might be described as "androgynous'' or "transgendered," as well as those whose sexual expression may have included same-sex intimacy.

Masculine and Feminine in the Realm of the Gods

In some African spiritual traditions, gender is not a marker of identity, so the terms "masculine" and "feminine" are viewed as meaningless. In others, "masculinity" and "femininity" possess traditional designations resonating rather remarkably with the yin-yang symbolism of Chinese Daoist cosmology. For instance, among some West African peoples, masculinity often corresponds to positive, right, air, fire, light, north, east, shea butter,[1] semen, chalk, and frankness; femininity corresponds to negative, left, earth, water, darkness, south, west, red palm oil, blood, (red) camwood paste,[2] and secrecy. Nevertheless, both masculinity and femininity are more complicated than this dichotomy would indicate. Indeed, these terms are used in this chapter primarily to assist the western reader.

For instance, the gender of Yoruban deities is so fluid that some scholars, such as Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí reject the idea that they have gender at all. One finds that the definition of masculinity changes depending upon which deity, or *òrìsà,* one is considering.[3] For instance, the masculinity of the creator-deity Obàtálá—who is perceived as both male and female—is associated with patience and compassion, whereas the masculinity of the warrior Ògún is linked to aggression and violence. That of the thunderbolt-wielding Sàngó (Shango) is linked to aggression but also to sensuality and elegance, whereas that of the intercessory-trickster Esù (Eshu, Elégbá[ra], Legba, Elleggúa)—who is, like Obàtálá, considered both male and female or beyond gender—is associated with excessive sexuality as well as prank playing, maliciousness, eloquence, and generosity.

Along the same lines, the femininity of Òsun (Oshun), goddess of love and the arts, is linked not only to beauty, grace, elegance, and charm (in the magical sense as well) but also linked to prosperity, independence, warriorhood, and rulership. In a praise song, she is described thus: ''She dances, and takes the crown / She dances without asking permission / She keeps her own counsel." Moreover, Òsun's femininity is linked to wisdom and healing: "She is the wisdom of the forest / she is the wisdom of the river. / Where the doctor failed / she cures with fresh water" (Gleason 1994, 177). Likewise, the femininity of Oya, goddess of the

tempest, is associated with both warriorhood and motherhood. Although "Oya" means "she tore," she is also known as the "mother of nine.''

A host of African religions and traditions speak of a time when a goddess or goddesses—Massassi of the Wahunga of Zimbabwe, Wagadu of the Soninke of the Sahel—held precedence over male deities or else coruled with them and a time when women ruled the earth or ruled equally with men. There followed, however, a period—extending into the present—of male domination and the supremacy of male deities. Such tales are linked to others that speak of women's attempt to regain control through witchcraft and men's consequential attempt to wrest the power of witchcraft from women or to eradicate witches.

Ethnographic research indicates that an ancient center of goddess reverence and a stronghold of women's authority existed at the Igbo town of Nnobi in Nigeria. Here, possibly for millennia, women and men have worshipped the goddess Idemili, naming the nearby river after her. The town Nnobi invokes another of her names, the "mother of Obi," her son. Although her worship was somewhat weakened, together with women's authority, at some as yet undetermined point in Igbo history when the patriarchally minded Nri Igbo began to wield influence over the people of Nnobi, the reverence of Idemili nevertheless continues into the present. Masai (primarily of Kenya and Tanzania) report that long ago, women were thought to be stronger than men and to make better warriors. Jealous of the women, the men accompanying them into battle stabbed them while they slept in order to create vaginas; previously, women warriors had possessed only very small orifices through which to urinate. Following this event, women no longer went to war but stayed at home, rearing children. Dominated by men, they eventually became weaker, whereas Masai men became renowned warriors.

Similarly, among the Dogon of Mali and Burkina Faso, a tale is told of a primordial earth goddess who was considered as having masculine characteristics, because she possessed a clitoris, which was imagined to be phallic. Chief among her possessions was a magical fiber skirt dyed red with blood. A mortal woman (perhaps a priestess of the goddess), by placing it on herself, established rule over men. Ultimately, the men stole it from her, claimed it as a royal garment, prohibited its use by women, and wore it during rituals.

This tale resonates with masked rituals among the Yaka of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that suggest that rites once performed by women were later transformed into occasions for mocking

women's sexuality. It also resonates with Yoruba tales of men's wresting magical power from women, which occur in the oracles, or *odùs,* named Ogúndáméjì, Osáméjì, and Ogúndáketè. In the last of these, the warrior *òrìsà* Ògún, infuriated by women's spiritual authority and particularly by their control of ceremonial masquerades invoking the ancestors, takes it upon himself to steal control from the women and offer it to men, who consequently take charge of the masked rites. Somewhat paradoxical is the present-day belief that the Gelede masquerade—which grants Ògún precedence and is chiefly performed by men—pays homage to the very women from whom it may have been appropriated.

Despite a legendary or actual loss of women's spiritual and social authority in African cultures, certain women living in our own time powerfully evoke a vision of a prepatriarchal—or perhaps postpatriarchal—culture. Among these is the South African Zulu rain queen Modjadji V, who is not allowed to marry men but who has more than thirty wives and is believed to possess rainmaking powers. Women's secret societies like Sande of the Mende of Sierra Leone, with its reverence of Sowo and Tingoi (the mermaid), goddesses or spirits of the waters, its complex initiation process, its masked rites, and its elaborate ethical and aesthetic codes, are likewise evocative of such a spiritual tradition and culture.

Sex Organs, Bodily Fluids, and Menstruation

It is not surprising that practitioners of African spiritual traditions have been somewhat reticent to share their views on sex and gender. Perhaps no other spiritual traditions have been—and continue to be—so exoticized, maligned, and demonized by outsiders. Nevertheless, these traditions offer illuminating insights into the intersection of sexuality, gender, and spiritual life.

Nude male and female figures often signify fertility and potency, as well as ancestral power, in African spiritual traditions. Exemplary are the figures molded into the *kargbee* spirit houses of the Senufo of the Côte d'Ivoire; these figures possess exaggerated sexual organs and are decorated with human hair. The Igbo number among those who regard such figures as imbued with spiritual energy or force. Especially in southern African rock art, nonhuman figures such as circles, crocodiles, snakes, and genet cats also signify fertility and potency.

In various African spiritual traditions, female genitalia are signified by or correspond to vegetables (the calabash), animals (the cow), technical objects (the anvil), colors (red and green), and abstract shapes (the circle and the triangle). So sacred and mysterious is the vagina that in numerous cultures, men are not permitted to touch it with their hands. Female breasts, sometimes compared to calabashes (which signify containment of the cosmos on a macrocosmic plane and containment of sacred beverages and foods on a microcosmic plane), profoundly connect women to female divinities, particularly those ruling the waters. Male genitalia are signified by or correspond to millet, the dog and the ram, the spear, yellow and white, and pillars of mud and stone. As with female organs, male genitalia connect men to phallic deities, such as the Yoruba *òrìsàs* Esù and Orìsà Oko.

Unsurprisingly, menstrual blood and semen are regarded as powerful, magical substances. Generally speaking, menstrual blood is greatly feared by males, who often refer to it in negative terms; it can also be dangerous to other women. The Dogon, for example, compare it to the use of vulgar language. For the Dogon, moreover, the origin of menstruation may be traced to either the punishment of a primordial goddess by a male deity disturbed by her possession of a clitoris (which was considered masculine) or to the rape of the goddess by one of her offspring, both acts resulting in a flow of "bad blood." In a majority of African cultures, menstruating women are secluded from their communities and are considered dangerous. The Dogon, Azande (Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic), and other peoples maintain that contact with a menstruating woman can bring about illness, pollution, and even death. It can render magic ineffective and transform order into chaos. Nevertheless, the Dogon, like the Zulu and Yoruba, also hold that menstrual blood can be a source of potent magic.

Although semen occasionally is thought to be a dangerous substance, as among the Suku of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is more often than not regarded as beneficial. The Yaka believe that semen contains a vital force called *mooyi* that nourishes the bones of offspring, promotes physical strength, and heals illness. The Koma of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zambia believe that semen nourishes the child growing in the womb, just as the mother's milk will nourish it upon birth; as a food, semen is referred to as *bayab,* or "porridge." The Tabwa of the Democratic Republic of the Congo associate semen with the revered culture-bringer Mbidi Kiluwe, and the Yoruba, who regard

semen as stimulating intellect, associate the substance with the creator-deity Obàtálá.

Among the Giriama (Kenya) and Dogon, architecture and interior design reflect religious and mythological concepts relating to sexuality. For the Giriama, phallic stones are viewed as "penetrating'' the feminine hearth. For the Dogon, the vestibule of the house signifies the male partner, ancestor, or deity and the front door his penis; the central room and storerooms signify the female partner, female ancestor, or goddess. The granary is perceived as a woman or female deity awaiting her male partner to engage in sexual intercourse, with the door of the granary signifying her vagina. One of the most unusual architectural constructions employed by the Dogon is referred to as the "Dogon Door," a carved door rich in symbols, sometimes including dancers and breasts, which announces that a woman inside is menstruating.

Initiation, Ceremonial Eroticism, Marriage, and Transgressions

For both males and females, initiation processes frequently commence with training in various fields, reach an apex with ceremonial circumcision or clitoridectomy, and culminate with wedding ceremonies. Although westerners, especially those of European heritage, might have a tendency to look upon these rites as secular, in African cultures, they are profoundly spiritual in nature. They typically involve periods of seclusion with members of the same sex and age group and with elders, often but not always of the same sex, who guide the young initiates through the initiatory process. Young women are trained in the domestic arts, occasionally in hunting, and in women's mysteries; young men are trained in hunting, warriorship, and in men's mysteries. Such initiation rites may be traced to the earliest periods of African prehistory, as is evidenced by southern African rock art. One panel discovered in South Africa, for instance, depicts an elder woman guiding a group of seven young women wearing wigs and jewelry and carrying hunting equipment in what appears to be an initiatory rite speaking to both hunting and menstruation, the latter signified by lines flowing between the women's legs.

As Dogon religion suggests, one of the primary reasons for both male and female circumcision may lie in the belief that infants, mirroring certain deities and ancestral spirits, are neither male nor female. For them to

fully participate in a culture that insists upon gender dichotomies and childbearing for the majority of its members, their gender ambiguity must be sacrificed. This sacrifice occurs when the physical correlate of the female's masculine energy—her clitoris—and the physical correlate of the male's feminine energy—his foreskin—are ritually severed. In this way, the children *become* male and female.

Female circumcision is related to the myth mentioned above concerning the forced impregnation of a primordial earth goddess. When the male deity Amma wished to have intercourse with her, her clitoris, symbolized by a termite mound and signifying her gynandrous nature—as opposed to her vagina, represented by an anthill—prevented him from satisfying his urge; thus, he destroyed the termite mound and metaphorically initiated the process of clitoridectomy. Since that time, according to the Dogon, men have dominated women. However, the severed clitoris is transformed into a scorpion, a lethal creature in Dogon spirituality. By comparison, when a male is circumcised, the foreskin or prepuce is transformed into either a feeble shadow or a lizard—a beneficial creature associated with the sun.

In the Yoruba religion, clitoridectomy and circumcision are primarily associated with the warrior *òrìsà* Ògún. Male circumcision is sometimes viewed as a sacrifice to the phallic *òrìsà* Esù. In Yoruba, "to circumcise" is *dako—da,* "to be acceptable as a sacrifice," and *oko,* "penis" or, in this context, "foreskin."

For the Taneka (Tânba) of Benin, the eight-month male initiation process culminates with circumcision. The man's age may vary from late adolescence to the early thirties. During this period, he is trained in men's pursuits and men's mysteries. His training is guided in part by tricksters named *kumpara,* whose antics include simulated same-sex eroticism employing large wooden penises, in which the initiate assumes the traditionally receptive role. Immediately prior to the ceremony of circumcision, a ritual dance is performed, and chickens are sacrificed. When the circumcision takes place, the young man is forbidden from showing signs of pain. His penis is wrapped in a banana leaf bound by a raffia cord and will remain so for three months. During this period, he must abstain from sexual relations.

It should be noted that in recent years many individuals and groups, among them women practitioners of African spiritual traditions, have struggled to end the practice of clitoridectomy, insisting that the physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering inflicted by the ceremony is irreparable.

To a somewhat lesser extent, a movement to end the practice of male circumcision in Africa and elsewhere has also emerged. Growing concern about human rights leads to contradictory impulses in this regard: On the one hand, there is a desire to respect religious and cultural differences and to avoid imposing western values on other cultures; on the other, there is concern about the human rights of individuals who must undergo these painful experiences.

During the initiation process, ritual dances emphasizing the wearing of ceremonial masks are common. Among the Yaka, for example, the *kholuka* mask traditionally portrays a man with an enormous phallus. In the past, participants chanted bawdy verses as the male dancer wearing the mask thrust his hips forward, exposing either a large wooden phallus or his own penis to the other participants. Female initiates—such as the Shai and Krobo of Ghana and the Swazi of Swaziland—often engage in sensuous ritual dances, sometimes while in seclusion and at other times in public, dressed in elegant and seductive attire, with the goals of displaying grace and beauty and attracting male partners. Among the Himba of northwestern Namibia, men assume the role of herders and women that of oxen in a courting dance called *ondjongo;* the female dancers end their individual performances by turning their backs to the men and flipping up their skirts to reveal their buttocks. Attracting female partners is one of the primary goals of extremely aggressive stick fights undertaken by Surma men from Ethiopia, as it is among Masai warriors celebrating the *eunoto.*

Despite the fact that in many African cultures marriages are arranged and romantic love is downplayed, erotic attraction plays a key role in establishing intimate relationships. Among the Yoruba, women's *kóló* tattoos, associated with the *òrìsà* Ògún, are designed to arouse men sexually, just as slitted eyes, swanlike necks, and elaborate coiffures, associated with the Mende goddess or spirit Sowo, are thought to attract men. Among the Wodaabe (or Bororo of Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Chad) at the time of the return of the rains, men who might mistakenly be perceived by many in the West as transvestites or drag queens participate in a ceremonial beauty pageant. Dressed in elegant attire with exquisite facial makeup, they dance the *yaake* together, making quivering gestures to charm female spectators.

The *nomdede,* undertaken by young Zulu women, is an elaborate ritual that speaks at once to initiation, ceremonial eroticism, marriage, and childbearing. This ritual honors Nomkhubulwana, a goddess or ancestral

female spirit, described as a beautiful woman dressed in white or in all the colors of the rainbow, who resides in the heavens. Participants pray to her for lovers, spouses, and children. With prayers and singing, the young women dress in men's clothes, drink beer (considered a masculine beverage), dance nude, and simulate sexual intercourse with bananas. Recently, Nomkhubulwana has become syncretized with the Virgin Mary, apparently so that young Christian women may continue to take part in the beneficial *nomdede* rites.

Ancient rock art in modern Algeria suggests that ritual eroticism in Africa emerged at least 8,000 years ago. In what may be a fertility rite, a central male figure is surrounded by a group of women and animals, including an antelope, while a key female figure lies on her back, apparently waiting to be impregnated. Another prehistoric rock painting found in present-day Botswana depicts a group of thirty-five women and men; the men have erect penises and wear antelope masks in what appears to be a fertility rite. One of the most intriguing works of this kind, found in the Akakus Mountains in Libya, shows two males, one wearing a dog or jackal mask, having sexual intercourse with two women. Above the couples, a feline entity with an enormous phallus seems to preside over the ceremony. This work may represent a fertility rite having the goal of bringing rain. In these and other instances, depictions of ritual eroticism seem to conjure a primordial epoch in which human and animal realms were less demarcated. Such depictions resonate with tales like that of the beautiful Adowi, who either was raped by or fell in love with a panther and gave birth to Agassou, a deity of the Vodun pantheon and the ancestor of the kings of Dahomey (Benin).

West African metal art of a much later period that depicts frontal as well as oral and anal intercourse among heterosexual couples—sometimes linked to animal figures such as crocodiles, which may represent deities—suggests that ritual eroticism may have continued throughout millennia and across numerous African cultures. Adding weight to this possibility is a carved wooden block fashioned by a Yoruba artist that portrays orgiastic heterosexual sex accompanied by music. Both female and male participants appear to be wearing feminine ''beehive'' hairdos and may be priests of a particular cult—possibly that of the phallic, androgynous trickster Esù, as suggested by use of the letter *x* and red paint.

Ritual eroticism does not only occur, it should be noted, within the context of initiation. For example, it also traditionally occurred at the

time of the hunt in Rwanda, when the ruler was expected to have public sexual intercourse with one of his wives. The rite was apparently extended to include a wider group of participants during the sorghum ritual. It also occurred during the construction of *mbari* spirit houses by the Owerri Igbo, who otherwise appear to have condemned ceremonial eroticism together with many other forms of sexual activity deemed deviant. During the Yoruba yam harvest festival, priestesses of Orìsà Oko—a phallic deity of agriculture—led carnivalesque processions and erotic ritual dances, possibly including expressions of same-sex intimacy.

If eroticism has been celebrated in African spiritual traditions, however, it has also been subjected to numerous prohibitions. Certain Igbo groups prohibit sexual intercourse during the daylight hours, particularly in the open air. The Beng (Côte d'Ivoire) believe that having sexual intercourse outside the village may bring about difficulties in childbearing, drought, and even death because no kapok tree has been ritually planted beyond the village's boundaries, and it is this ritual planting that sanctifies lovemaking. Moreover, numerous African spiritual traditions hold that individuals must abstain from sexual relations during the hunt and for brief periods of time preceding and following it. In other traditions, such as that of the Mandja (Central African Republic), potters are not permitted to have sexual relations during the lengthy process of making pottery because it is believed that the clash of two equally potent sacred activities might prove disastrous to both potters and their creations.

An exaggerated focus on "arranged" marriages seems to have led scholars of religion, anthropology, and folklore to neglect courtship as a stage in historical African life experience. We know, however, that courtship played an important role in intimate relationships. The Dahomean *amuxoda xogbe,* or "dew-on-hair" chants, describe lovers spending nights in the open and exchanging vows as dew collected on their hair. Mende trysts at the riverside, abode of the female divinity Sowo, also reveal the significance of courtship rituals.

In numerous African cultures, the ritual of marriage follows initiation and courtship and commences with either the families of the partners or a professional go-between—often a spiritual functionary—negotiating a marriage contract. This contract frequently involves a family's exchange of their daughter for prized possessions such as cattle; the exchange is often described as "bride-price" or "bride-wealth." Once negotiations are completed, the male partner pays a highly ritualized visit to the bride's family's home, at which time symbolic gifts are exchanged. Nearer the

time of the wedding, the bride is secluded from the community, except for certain family members and (typically) female attendants who prepare her for the wedding ceremony and for marriage.

Among the Himba, a culture profoundly influenced by reverence of female ancestral spirits, the mother adorns her secluded daughter's skin and hair with a ritually prepared unguent of butter fat, ochre, and aromatic herbs and bestows on her a ceremonial *ekori* headdress made of hide, which symbolizes her journey from her childhood home to her new husband's dwelling. In a similar manner, the Ndebele bride (South Africa, Zimbabwe) is secluded in a brightly painted women's compound. She is given a *nguba*—a red ceremonial blanket—and a beaded leather bridal apron to wear, as well as a parasol that functions like the *ekori* headdress, all of which signify her new life. The period of seclusion ends when the bride is called out from hiding by female attendants and guests.

Wedding ceremonies include prayers, chanting and singing, dancing, sacrifices, feasting, and the exchange of gifts. Prayers focus on the couple having a harmonious marriage and on their bearing healthy children. At Yoruba weddings, ancestors are invoked to bless the couple; as the participants taste sacred kola nuts, honey, and sugar cane they chant: "They will ripen, they will eat and not grow hungry, they will grow old. Their union will be sweet.'' Among the Igbo of Nnobi, the *dibia* priestess requests that the couple interlock fingers as they share a ceremonial meal of fish and palm nuts. Igbo women of another area sing to the bride: "Be you as beautiful as a mermaid; the beauty of a woman is to have a husband." Surrounding the new couple, the women celebrate the *upiti* mud dance, pouring palm wine on the earth, as the bride and groom dance in the center. The songs become increasingly bawdy, with the cry "Biam! Biam!" signifying both the rhythm of sexual intercourse and an infant's first sounds. As in most cultures, nuptial rites tend to culminate in lovemaking.

Once a couple has wed, other rituals help to ensure a harmonious marriage. In some cultures—the Woyo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Dagara of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso—ritual pots are fashioned for the new couple. These pots may contain talismans, sacred plants, and water and are perceived as imbued with vital forces that promote harmony and childbearing. Dagara couples renew their relationships periodically by creating a sacred circle with ash, invoking spirits and natural forces, having spiritual elders renew the blessing of their pots, and bathing ritually. Disharmony also may be expressed, however, by way of the pots. A Woyo wife who feels that her husband has

abused her may embarrass him when their friends dine with them by serving him a bowl of food covered with the lid of a pot bearing symbols speaking of respect within marriage; in a culturally accepted reversal of meaning, this act signifies his disregard for this principle.

Although polygyny (a husband having numerous wives) is accepted in numerous African cultures, its opposite—polyandry—is not. Adultery also meets with great disapproval. Yoruba traditions hold that adultery not only harms a couple but also offends the deities and ancestors who have sanctioned the marriage. When adultery is not punished by worldly authorities, deities or spirits may cause adulterers to fall ill, become infertile, or die. In certain cultures, a wife who so much as cooks a meal for a man other than her husband may be suspected of adultery. Among the Mossi of Burkina Faso and elsewhere in West Africa, the loyalty of the king's wives was ritually monitored by a eunuch who, employing the diviner's tool of a calabash filled with water and sacred leaves, was able to see the wife with her adulterous partner, if one existed. Women who are suspected of adultery, whether guilty or not, often address their prayers to female divinities like the Yoruba Òsun, who was herself accused of committing adultery by her husband Orúnmilà.[4]

African spiritual traditions strongly disapprove of prostitution. Owerri Igbo associate prostitution with insanity, evil, and foreigners and with Mgbeke, a negative *mbari* spirit. The Yoruba tell of Ere, who was punished for prostitution long ago by being trampled in a bog. The Gelede masquerade viciously mocks prostitutes (*asewó*). The oracular *odù* Obàrà' dí encourages prostitutes to relinquish their profession and reform themselves by making sacrifices, consuming medicinal soups, purifying their genitalia with shea butter, and taking ritual baths with sacred leaves.

Although rape and incest are condemned in most, if not all African traditions, tales of rape and incest by such revered male deities as the Yoruba *òrìsàs* Esù and Ògún abound. Esù, for example, is said to have raped and slain three women because they failed at divination by cowries. Perhaps the most well known Yoruba tale of rape concerns that of Yemoja by her son Aganjù, which resulted in the birth of numerous other *òrìsàs*.

Gender Diversity and Same-Sex Intimacy

Many African spiritual traditions acknowledge that at least in isolation, "masculinity" and "femininity" may not account for all divine or human

expressions of gender. Among the Yaka, the very essence of life, *mooyi,* is described as both male and female. Abrao, Aku, Awo, and Tano of the Akan (Guinea Coast), Faro of the Bambara (Mali), Mawu-Lisa and Nanan-Bouclou of the Dahomean/Fon, Mwari of the Shona (Zimbabwe), Esù, Loogun-Ede, Nana Burúkú, Obàtálá, Olókun, Òsanyin, and Osumare of the Yoruba, and myriad other African spiritual beings are frequently depicted as transcending, traversing, or transgressing traditional masculine and feminine boundaries. A number of them spend half of each year as a male and the other half as a female. For example, Loogun-Ede (or Logunedé) spends six months as a hunter in the forest, followed by six months as a river nymph. Others, such as Obàtálá, possess various aspects, one or more of which may be described as feminine, masculine, or a mixture of the two. Still others, like Esù, are portrayed as simultaneously possessing masculine and feminine attributes, such as a large phallus and a woman's coiffure.

Somewhat ironically, the union of the Dogon deity Amma and the earth goddess, which destroyed her gynandrous nature when Amma removed her clitoris, produced a pair of hermaphroditic twins called the Nummo. Unlike the earth goddess, the Nummo twins are not viewed negatively. Indeed, they are considered "perfect and complete.'' The Nummo are described as being half human and half serpent, with green or rainbow-hued skin and smooth, sleek bodies covered with short green hair. They are also said to have reddish eyes and forked tongues like serpents. Associated with the element of water, as well as with the chameleon, copper, and the rainbow, they dwell in the heavens and are enveloped by light. In another ironic twist, it is the Nummo who, together with Amma, determined that although divinities or spirits may be androgynous, transgendered, or hermaphroditic, mortal women and men (other than spiritual leaders, it would seem) may not. For this reason, they established the rites of circumcision and clitoridectomy.

"Supernatural" creatures are sometimes considered androgynous. The red water serpent with one male head and one female head of the Kikongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola) is associated with the rainbow and with magic. The catfish spirit of the *mbwoolu* healing cult of the Yaka nurtures initiates as they are "born again" from the maternal river bottom (the catfish is thought to be androgynous because the male nurtures the eggs). We have already encountered the Dogon belief that the scorpion is a masculine manifestation of the female clitoris and that the sun lizard is a feminine manifestation of the male foreskin.

Ancient African rock art found in the Drakensberg region of southern Africa indicates that gynandry once was celebrated in female initiation rites, with young women carrying bows and quivers. Among the Dagara, similar rites occur today in which women wearing artificial beards are led by the *purè* (the "female father") to honor their "masculine" energy. Ceremonial fluidity of both gender and sexuality is suggested by a performance of a masked rite among the Chokwe of central Africa, during which a male wearing the female mask of Mwana wa Pwo makes sexual advances to a female spectator.

Numerous African spiritual traditions have included androgynous or gender-diverse practitioners; among these, some also have engaged in same-sex or transgendered intimacy. One may count the *agule* of the Lugbara (Uganda), the priest(ess) of the Baganda deity Mukasa (Uganda), the *isanus* of the Xhosa (South Africa), and possibly the actual or legendary *adandara* ("wild cat'') lesbian witches of the Azande as female-to-male transgender or as lesbian or bisexual. Examples of androgynous male, male-to-female transgender, and possibly homosexual or bisexual include the *isangoma* of the Zulu (these spiritual leaders may also be female and heterosexual), *omasenge kimbanda* of the Ambo, *okule* of the Lugbara, *ashtime* of the Maale (Ethiopia), *mugawe* of the Meru (Kenya), *'yan daudu* of the Hausa *bori* cult (Nigeria), *jo apele* of the Lango (Uganda), and *mwaami* of the Ila (Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Unfortunately, a lack of specificity concerning practitioners has made it difficult to determine in many instances whether certain of these figures identify as members of their original anatomical sex or as members of the sex (or gender) into which they have transformed or that they have determined to be correct; in many cases, their sexuality also remains ambiguous. These practitioners frequently have served as diviners, healers, magicians, and ritual artists (especially musicians). Apparently, it is the resemblance between the gender ambiguity of these persons and the transgender or genderless nature of the gods that qualifies them as ritual specialists, who can transgress the boundaries of the mundane world.

The *omasenge kimbanda* is exemplary of this group of specialists. The *omasenge* serves as an intercessor between the Ambo people and the supreme being Kalunga, as well as performing sacrifices, healing with herbs, practicing divination and magic, and playing a sacred stringed instrument—the *omakola*—during rituals. He (or possibly "she," depending upon one's interpretation of his or her gender) is thought to be possessed by a female spirit, wears women's clothes, and may join in marriage with

a traditionally masculine male. Similarly, the *buyazi* of the Gisu (Uganda) do not complete rites of circumcision. They dress in women's clothes, adopt women's mannerisms, and perform women's ceremonial roles, such as playing drums at funerals and ritually mocking youths who are undergoing circumcision.

Also described as transgender or genderless are the *hogon* and *binukedine* priests of the Dogon. It appears that although gender fluidity is not permitted among "ordinary" women and men, who undergo clitoridectomy and circumcision to eradicate it, it is revered in spiritual leaders. The *hogon,* who serves as leader of the Lebe serpent cult and embodies the mystery of death and rebirth, is perceived as feminine and represents the maternal earth. The *binukedine,* who serves in a shamanlike capacity as a healer, diviner, sacrificer, and magician, is perceived as androgynous, and his ability to traverse boundaries is echoed in his ambiguous sexuality. These two spiritual leaders engage in a metaphoric sexual union as farmer (*binukedine,* masculine) and earth (*hogon,* feminine) in the *bulu* ritual celebrating the rebirth of the millet grain. Dagara elders Malidoma and Sobonfu Somé have suggested, somewhat controversially, that the "gatekeepers" (typically male) and "witches" (typically female), who play an essential role as facilitators of communication between the human and divine realms in the Dagara spiritual system, might be compared to present-day, spiritually grounded gay men and lesbians.

Although same-sex and transgendered intimacy are shunned in a number of African cultures and spiritual traditions, in others they are reserved for spiritual leaders, and in still others they are generally tolerated or accepted. In the Owerri Igbo *mbari* cult, these practices are associated with nightmares, goats (which are considered evil), insanity, foreigners, and the demonic phallic spirit Okpangu. The Dogon, however, seem to reserve these practices for spiritual leaders. In cultures such as the Azande, Nuer (southern Sudan), Nama(n) (Namibia), Korongo (Sudan), and Mesakin (Sudan), these practices were to some degree tolerated or even accepted, at least in the past. Among the Fanti of Ghana, an individual is thought to be attracted to men or women depending upon whether he or she is born with a "light soul" (attraction to women) or a ''heavy soul" (attraction to men); thus, sexuality is almost entirely divorced from gender.

In some cultures, male-male intimacy is believed to carry a sacred energy. Among the Fang peoples (Bene, Bulu, Yaunde, and Ntumu) of Cameroon, Guinea, and Gabon, male-male intimacy is thought to promote

prosperity. Among the Azande, male partners celebrate ceremonies of union that include gifts of spears and jewelry, and the partners address each other as *badiare,* "my lover." Nama(n) males, in union ceremonies called *sore' gamsa,* share coffee as a sacred beverage to strengthen their bond.

Similarly, young Buissi (Democratic Republic of the Congo) women believe that premarital lesbian relationships promote harmonious heterosexual marriages as well as fertility. Lovers are described as "those who mix their bloods and intermingle their shadows." When two Azande women wish to enter into a formal relationship, they hold a *bagburu* ceremony. This ceremony centers on a cob of red maize called *kaima,* which symbolizes blood. The women recite a love spell over the cob, after which it is planted. Their lovemaking includes the use of phalluses made of sweet potatoes, manioc root, and bananas (recalling the *nomdede* rite of Zulu women). Henceforth, the women call each other *bagburu.* In the same vein, Dagara women lovers form part of a larger women's circle that bonds them, the circle, and their ancestors for life.

Although mixed and complex attitudes concerning same-sex intimacy exist among the Yoruba, numerous priests and priestesses maintain that ''the gods do not discriminate—people do." Recently, one of the most respected leaders of the Ifá tradition, *babalawó* (chief priest-diviner) and Àwise Ni Àgbáyé (spokesperson for Ifá in the world) Wande Abimbola has stated, "A *babalawó* must not impose his life on anyone. Who are we to probe into the personal life of another person?" (Abimbola 1997, 28).

Intimacy and Childbearing in Prayer, Divination, Sacrifice, Healing, and Magic

Prayer in African spiritual traditions frequently focuses on matters pertaining to intimate relationships and childbearing. Those seeking love address their prayers to amorous deities and spirits, such as the Yoruba *òrìsà* Òsun. Prayers may also be offered to deities and spirits to support harmonious relationships. Yoruba couples might pray to the compassionate aspect of Obàtálá to nurture harmonious relationships. Or they might address such a prayer to Esù, who can bring about harmony or disharmony between intimate companions.

One cannot overemphasize the importance of childbearing in African cultures and spiritual traditions; giving birth to children is

revered as a sacred act. Even in those cultures in which women are not respected as equals, they are honored as mothers. Generally, infertility is regarded as a curse, and abortion is met with great disapproval, although the maternal Yoruba *òrìsà* Yemoja, in her porcupine aspect of Ika, may occasionally sanction abortions. Although menstruation is typically described among the Yoruba as a "hot" and "fiery" state of being, pregnancy (which is considered its opposite) is portrayed as "cool" and "calm.'' This "coolness" results in part from the male's contribution of semen—a "white" as opposed to a "red" body fluid—and in part from a "cooler" diet consisting of "white" foods, including snails. In other instances, white is associated with female divinities and ancestral spirits of water, and it is aquatic feminine energy that ushers in the "cool" state of pregnancy. Among the Dogon, although menstruation has been compared metaphorically to "bad words," pregnancy has been compared to "good words."

Women wishing to bear children habitually pray to divinities and spirits of the waters, such as the Igbo goddesses (or aspects of a "great goddess") Ogbuide, Uhammiri, Ava, and Nne Mmiri; Mami Wata of Togo and Benin; or the Yoruba *òrìsà* Yemoja, the "Mother of the Waters." Women may also offer prayers to divinities of the earth and agriculture, such as the Igbo goddess Ale (or Ala), the Baga goddess Nimba (of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone), and the Yoruba *òrìsàs* Onilé (the "Owner of the Earth") and Odùdúwà. Zulu women pray to the "heavenly princess" Nomkhubulwana to become mothers, asking especially for large breasts to better nourish their infants. These female divinities, it should be noted, not only promote fertility but also frequently hold the power to shape or alter destiny and to take away life.

Males who suffer from impotence may also offer prayers to deities, such as to the Yoruba *òrìsà* Esù, who controls potency. Yorubas also address prayers to Ògún to protect women from having miscarriages. Affirmation chants are linked to such prayers: "See a lot of children behind me, see a lot of children behind me."

Divination is among the most significant elements of African spiritual traditions. The Ifá oracle of the Yoruba—one of the richest African spiritual texts in terms of its insight, poetry, and complexity, comparable in scope to the *I Ching*—is associated with 256 divinatory signs, many of which signify courtship, marital relationships, fertility, and childbearing. *Odùs,* particular oracular signs with accompanying proverbs and tales, typically culminate with a strong suggestion to offer a particular sacrifice

if one wishes to see the negative aspects of one's life experience transformed. The Oséméjì suggests that those wishing to attract a lover or spouse should make sacrifices to Òsun, the patron of sensuous love. Occasionally, *odùs* aid in the selection of the best among potential partners, as with the *odù* Ogbèwónrí. *Odùs* such as Otúrá-àikú also warn against entering into potentially disastrous relationships. Sacrifices need to be made, OtúráKònràn reveals, to oust rivals. Ogúndá-Bàrà encourages husbands to make sacrifices so that their wives will not become bored and wish to leave them. Wives may make sacrifices, Ofún-Otúrúpòn suggests, if they wish to prevent their husbands from behaving violently toward them. Idí' bàrà, Otúrúpòn' Rosù, Otúrá-Irosù, Owónrín-Egúntán, and Ofún-Túrá recommend sacrifices in order to prevent arguments and enhance harmony between a couple.

The *odù* Oyèkúméjì cautions against polygyny, warning that jealousy among wives may lead to disaster. Ikáméjì cautions against adultery on the part of the wife, encouraging the husband to sacrifice two cobra heads and a rope in order to prevent this transgression; it seems that adultery may be linked to witchcraft in this *odù*. The *odùs* Oyèkú Wónrín and Owónrín Yèkú indicate that if individuals who have committed adultery do not confess and make sacrifices, they will die. Obàrà' dí, as mentioned above, encourages prostitutes to give up their profession and reform themselves.

Iká Yèkú, an *odù* addressing fertility and childbearing, lists the sacrifices that a husband must make and a ritual bath he must take in order to overcome sterility. Idíméjì and Irosùméjì suggest that a woman desperate to become a mother must sacrifice to the *òrìsà* Orúnmìlà, the deity of divination. Owòrì-Osé suggests that even an older woman who has ceased menstruating may transform her condition through sacrifice and medicines and thus bear a child or continue to bear children. Miscarriages and premature deaths of infants may be avoided, according to the *odùs* Iwòrì' túrúpòn, Owónrín-Otúrúpòn, and Obàràtúrúpòn, by way of sacrifices and a special fish and herbal soup.

Sacrifices aimed at finding a lover or spouse, aiding fertility, becoming pregnant, and bearing healthy offspring include cotton, cowries (sometimes tens of thousands of them), fish, goats (especially female ones), hens, pieces of cloth (especially knotted or white cloth), pigeons, rams, rats, shea butter, sheep, snails (it is said that "two snails never clash"), and yams. Occasionally, *odùs* prescribe medicines to aid fertility and childbearing, often in the form of beverages, soups, or baths, the

primary ingredients of which are sacred leaves, hen's blood, cloves, eggs, and—for baths—black soap.

Just as it is rather difficult to disentangle divination from sacrifice in African spiritual traditions, it is sometimes difficult to demarcate sharply the boundaries between sacrificial and magical operations in these traditions. Rather than emphasizing the placation of a divine being who might grant one's wishes, African magical practices generally involve an individual or group acting in accordance with or against the wishes of divinities or spirits to transform a situation. Moreover, magical operations are sometimes difficult to distinguish from operations described as medical. And as with divination and sacrifice, magical and medical operations often pertain to sexuality and reproduction.

Generally speaking, medical or magical operations undertaken by males are regarded with less suspicion than those undertaken by women because women practicing traditional medicine or magic are frequently suspected of being witches. Unlike contemporary Wiccans and neopagans and rather more like Laguna Puebloans and other indigenous peoples of the American Southwest, the practitioners of African spiritual traditions tend to view witchcraft primarily in negative terms, opposing it to "medicine." In recent years, however, some practitioners and scholars have suggested that the conception of women's witchcraft as evil may have arisen from the fear of women's spiritual power and from a more generalized awe of elder women. Although individuals do not as a rule admit to being witches, many practitioners of African spiritual traditions feel certain that witches exist. Many, such as the Yoruba, tend to believe that witches (*ajé*) possess supernatural powers, such as the ability to transform themselves into birds and fly about at night performing works of magic, unnoticed and far from their homes. It is thought that witches inherit their powers from certain divinities. Among the Yoruba, these include Esù, Yemoja, and Oya. Witchcraft arose, some believe, as a result of men's abuse of women. Some say that witches work magic with the menstrual blood and pubic hair of other women and that they may borrow a man's penis as he sleeps in order to enjoy sex with it or to use it for sex with another sleeping mortal, presumably another woman.

In many African cultures, in which childbearing is celebrated as one of a woman's greatest accomplishments, a woman's inability to bear children is regarded as a curse. In certain instances, barrenness signals that a woman is being punished by a deity or deities or by powerful ancestral spirits because she committed serious transgressions in a former lifetime. It also may signal

that she is being punished by practitioners of traditional medicine for transgressions in this life. In still other cases, barrenness may be attributed to negative witchcraft. (Ironically, infertile women also are frequently suspected of being witches.) Barrenness may be induced, for instance, by placing cursed salt inside a coconut and then placing the coconut in a tree haunted by witches, by placing an image of the woman in a haunted tree, and by casting an image of the woman or a piece of her clothing bound to "medicines" into the bush. Incidentally, pregnant women also are thought to be preyed upon by witches, as well as by the spirits of deceased children who wish to displace the spirit of the child growing in the womb.

In some instances, barrenness brought about by such means may be healed through the sacrifices suggested by divinatory consultations. The *odùs* Okanranmeji and Iwòrì' rosù suggest that rubbing ritually prepared camwood paste on a woman's belly or all over her body may nurture pregnancy and ease parturition. Later, the mother will be encouraged to rub camwood paste on her newborn's body to support his or her growth and health. Similarly, *oloiboni,* the Masai elder women acting as priestesses, prepare honey mead for women desiring children and smear honey on the bodies of pregnant women. To the Masai, honey possesses magical power linked not only to fertility but also to clairvoyance.

Childbearing also may be encouraged through the magical use of sacred dolls. In many African spiritual traditions—including those of the Ambo (Angola and Namibia), Asante (Ghana), Balante (Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Senegal), Bamana (Republic of Mali), Fali (Cameroon), Gcaleka (South Africa), Igbo, Landuma (Guinea-Bissau), Mossi, Ndebele, Sotho (Kingdom of Lesotho and elsewhere in southern Africa), Swazi, Tabwa, Tsonga (Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, South Africa), Turkana (Kenya and Sudan), Xhosa (South Africa), Zaramo (or Wazaramo, Tanzania), and Zulu—young women are given ritually prepared dolls, which they must regard as living entities prefiguring their future children. Called by names like *mwana hiti* (in Zaramo, "wooden child''), *wa udongo* (in Tabwa, "earthen children"), and *di kori* (in Landuma, "son of bone") and believed to possess spiritual force, these dolls are fed, bathed, dressed, given gifts (including money), and often carried on the woman's body until the birth of her child, after which they are kept in an honored place.

Among the Azande, men frequently practice traditional medicine, magic, and what some have described as witchcraft. Their actions often focus on sexuality and include enhancing sexual prowess, healing impotence, and taking vengeance on other males who might engage in

intercourse with their wives. To increase sexual drive and especially to achieve long-lasting erections, they tie *gbaga,* the fruit of the palm tree, to their waists and pray, "You are *gbaga.* May I be very potent sexually." To cure impotence, or *imazigba,* a man may rub his penis with a ritually prepared ointment, which is believed to transform magically into seminal fluid and restore potency. To punish an adulterer, after eating an antidote and surreptitiously having his wife do the same, a man might rub his penis with a substance made of *moti,* a purple-flowered plant believed to produce venereal disease, so that any man having sexual contact with his wife might become infected and perish. Deeply concerned with male beauty, Wodaabe men powder their faces with a mixture containing dried chameleon, which is thought to enhance attractiveness magically. For the same reason, they wear leather pouches around their necks containing seeds, roots, and barks deemed to exert magical influence.

One of the most intriguing tales of erotic attraction and love in African magic is told in the Yoruba *odù* Ofún-Egúntán. King Onibara fell madly in love with a mysterious woman who came from far away. Jealous of her beauty, many warned the king not to marry her because she was a prostitute. He paid no heed to their warnings, however. Shortly after they were married, the king's new wife explained that her diet consisted solely of meat. The king provided her with all the meat in the palace and then all of the meat from neighboring households. When, despite his position, his subjects had begun to call him a thief, he decided to take a potion that would enable him to transform into a tiger. Each night, in the tiger's form, he hunted meat for his beloved wife. One night while hunting, however, he was fatally wounded. The next morning, the king's body was found wrapped in a tiger's skin. The people then slew the queen, terminating this tale of magic, meat, and obsessive love.

Dream Lovers and Spiritual Unions

Erotic dreams of mortal lovers are as common among Africans as others, but their dreams may also include unions with deities and spirits. The Baule of the Côte d'Ivoire share intimate relationships not only with human partners but also with *blolo,* "otherworld" partners. Each person is thought to have either a *blolo bian,* an otherworldly male lover, or a *blolo bla,* an otherworldly female lover. These partners are ranked above one's mortal partners and are encountered primarily in dreams and by way of

statuettes called *waka sran.* These statuettes are fashioned in response to dream descriptions and divinatory consultations. Comparable in some respects to fertility dolls, *waka sran* are considered living entities. Once ritually seated in one's home, they must be saluted, fed, and caressed, as *blolo* lovers can bring prosperity or disaster, depending upon the respect and reverence they are given.

Many Africans participate not only in initiatory rites of passage but also in spiritual initiations into religions or cults. Spiritual initiations are frequently described in terms relating to intimacy, loving, and sexual relationships. Both female and male initiates may be called "brides" of the god(s) and the deity referred to as "husband and lord." As brides, initiates wear traditional women's attire. In the Sàngó cult of the Yoruba, prior to the male initiate's first public appearance as a member of the priesthood, he enters a dance in which the gestures and movements of other priests may include allusions to sexual intercourse. When a priest or priestess is possessed by the deity, he or she is described as being "mounted'' by the god.

Beyond this type of spiritual union exists another that may bear an even closer resemblance to erotic relationships: that between a worshipper and a god/dess. This type of union—which one finds especially in the Mami Wata cult of Togo and Benin and which has become increasingly central in the African-diasporic religion of Vodou—may even be formalized with an elaborate ceremony, complete with marriage contract. Included in this contract is an agreement that the worshipper must periodically abstain from sexual relations with his or her mortal partner to be ready to receive his divine partner. The worshipper typically creates a shrine in which this divine union may occur. As with Baule *blolo* dream lovers, these relationships must be taken very seriously, since they may engender prosperity or disaster.

Among the Ijo-speaking people of the Niger River Delta, women who experience problems with relationships, fertility, illness, finances, and other matters have traditionally wed one of the deities or spirits of the waters, such as the male spirit Anji. To him, the lover chants:

> Pulling riches from the sea, my waterspirit lover
> gently, gently drawing nearer to me
>
> Anji, we cannot resist you, you are too handsome
> We lust for you, lust for you, lust for you. (Gleason 1994, 184)

Conclusion

African spiritual traditions rely upon a cornucopia of symbols signifying gender and sexuality. Many of them are taken from nature, to celebrate the richness of existence in all its complexity. Expressions of the divine in many African spiritual traditions also reflect this complexity. Rites of passage, including marriage rites and initiations into spiritual life, enhance participants' awareness of the sacred dimensions and purposes of gender and sexuality. Prayer, divination, sacrifice, healing, and magic nurture human-divine interaction. A number of African traditions pay special homage to women—particularly as mothers—and accept diverse expressions of gender and sexuality as divinely sanctioned, in some cases granting special roles to persons we might today call "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," or "transgender." Of all intimate relationships in indigenous African spiritual life, however, it is perhaps the union with an otherworldly or divine companion that is most cherished.

Although Christianity has been practiced in Africa since the era of Roman occupation and Islam has been a significant presence since the ninth century C.E., African indigenous religions were not threatened with extinction until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which saw massive and tremendously violent efforts to convert Africans to these faiths. Beliefs and practices cherished by many Africans for thousands of years have since been denigrated and demonized. This process is especially evident where beliefs and practices regarding sexuality and gender are concerned. In Christianity and Islam, the divine is envisioned as masculine or—rarely—as a genderless being; feminine or androgynous/transgendered depictions of the divine have no place. Furthermore, gender diversity and same-sex intimacy are rarely tolerated by Muslims and Christians. As a result, the spiritual authority of women in African cultures has decreased dramatically and that of transgendered or same-sex-loving individuals has all but vanished. Divination and magic, which often pertain to matters of sexuality, loving relationships, childbearing, and (in the case of magic) women's mysteries, are condemned.

Despite the broad Christianization and Islamicization of Africa, however, many ancient beliefs and practices persist. Certain African spiritual traditions, such as those rooted in Yoruba and Fon cultures, have continued to thrive and might even be said to be experiencing a renaissance

today, not only in West Africa but also in Cuba (Santería, Regla de Ocha, Lucumí, Ifá), Brazil (Candomblé, Macumba, Umbanda), Haiti (Vodou), the United States (all of the aforementioned), and other parts of the world. Notably, these "New World'' expressions of African spiritual traditions grant women heightened spiritual authority and frequently embrace lesbian, gay, and bisexual practitioners.

Notes

1. A butterlike substance made from the kernels of an indigenous African tree, which is used in cooking, soap, and medicine.

2. A ritual concoction made from the bark of the *Baphia nitida,* also used in dyeing and cabinet making.

3. I should note that many of my examples will derive from the Yoruba, for several reasons. First, many informants speak English, and many texts concerning the Yoruba have been written in English. Additionally, because of slavery, the religion of the Yoruba was carried to the Americas and continues to be practiced today. Much of what is said about African religion in this chapter is based on my own research as a participant-observer in this spiritual tradition.

4. In Yoruba spiritual texts, they are not always considered husband and wife.

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CHAPTER 2

Gender, Sexuality, and the Balance of Power in Native American Worldviews

Julianne Cordero and Elizabeth Currans

Claudia Griggs is painted by her godfather, Roland White, during her Sunrise Dance in East Fork, Arizona, 2001. The painting ceremony marks the moment when she officially becomes a woman in the Apache tribe. Today, many Native American women and their families recognize a woman's time of power and practice the ceremonies observed by their nation.
(AP/Wide World Photos)

Imagine living in a world where respect for an individual's contributions to society is built into the society's worldview. Imagine living in a society in which this respect and acceptance is such a natural part of the social fabric that it is not necessary to have a category for "civil rights." Imagine being profoundly surprised to find out that there are societies whose worldviews are built on the domination and subordination of women; people of color; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed, and queer (LGBTIQ) people.

The physical and ideological collision between the indigenous peoples of the North American continent and Christian European colonists was a clash of historic proportions, one that continues to be deeply felt—and constantly reexperienced—in North America today. As indigenous people change and adopt new strategies for dealing with modernity, traditional Native American values and practices of respect for each other and for the natural world remain central parts of their worldviews. Also strongly expressed is the ongoing Native resistance to the colonial superstructures that continue to destroy Native homelands and systematically disrespect and disenfranchise Native people. The lands have been drastically altered; naturally, the people of these lands have also been severely affected, but nevertheless they have had a strong hand in creating change that will ensure indigenous survival in modern times.

Many modern Native Americans express a complex mix of traditional indigenous cultural beliefs and practices; western religions, education, and

consumer economics; intertribal cultural sharing; and respect for many of the peoples from around the world who have immigrated here. For most indigenous North American cultures, precontact traditions of respect for men, women, and two-spirit people (people believed to possess aspects of both genders or "spirits") are not the same as they once were, even though those cultures still observe ancestral traditions regarding the powerful roles played by women and two-spirit people in both precontact and contemporary indigenous settings.

This mixture of traditional with western belief systems has been enormously problematic for many indigenous peoples. One system represents, generally speaking, sophisticated understandings of the interconnectedness of all life, in which matter is constantly moving and changing according to a system of reciprocal checks and balances. The other system, speaking generally again, has its roots in the dualist, rationalist worldviews that developed in Europe during the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution and have since permeated the world's ideas of reality. It would be tempting to try to categorize the varying degrees to which Native American people have embodied ''traditional values" or "western values," but to do so would blind one to the fluidity of contemporary identity—both Native and non-Native—as expressed by women and two-spirit people.

Native American women and two-spirit people often operate under different conceptions of power, agency, and identity than those generally recognized in mainstream North American societies. Many traditionalist Native American women and two-spirit people look to the holistic inclusion of all genders that is instilled by traditional indigenous values. In order to discuss Native American women's power and the gender roles performed by indigenous women and two-spirit men and women, it is therefore necessary to include a discussion of the ways in which many traditional, indigenous male roles reciprocate female roles. Western ideas of sexuality tend to emphasize mainly who is having sex with whom and why, which can obscure the important place of gender in interpersonal relationships in traditional Native American societies. This procreation-based focus on sexuality is also considered an invasion of privacy by many contemporary Native American women and therefore is not discussed in this chapter.

Much of the previous scholarship on indigenous women's sexuality was produced under conditions of exploitation and gross misinterpretation

by mostly non-Native scholars. For this reason and for the reasons described above, in this chapter we will shift the focus slightly in order to provide an overview of existing scholarship on Native American conceptions of power, reciprocity, and balance in the roles performed by women and two-spirit people. These views form the basis for ideals of social harmony between the genders in traditional American Indian societies, ideals that are religious or spiritual in nature. In many indigenous traditions, as in Western society, cultural roles are informed by religious or spiritual beliefs. As mentioned above, the Protestant Reformation deeply informed changes in the scientific and economic foundations of the Western world. The dualist ideals that crystallized during this period created a social climate in which women, people of color, and nonheterosexuals were assigned statuses in opposition to the "norm," the white, Protestant, capitalist, heterosexual male. Describing this dualist worldview in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir wrote, "all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners'; Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes [*sic*] are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged" (Beauvoir 1961, xxiii). Women, in this modern European spin on reality, are designated not merely as half of humanity, but as the decidedly inferior half.

In most indigenous American Indian religious worldviews, women were and are seen as representations of the female aspect of the divine: not inferior or superior to but *in balance with* the male aspect. Socially, indigenous nations such as the Delaware of what is now Pennsylvania "*generically* referred to themselves as 'women,' considering the term to be supremely complementary" (Jaimes and Halsey 1992, 317). Although most Native North American nations did not use this particular linguistic designation, instead employing gender-neutral pronouns, the respect accorded women was exemplified in other significant ways:

> While patrilineal/patrilocal cultures did exist, most precontact North American civilizations functioned on the basis of matrilineage and matrilocality. Insofar as family structures centered upon the identities of wives rather than husbands—men joined women's families, not the other way around—and because men were usually expected to relocate to join the women they married, the context of Native social life was radically different from that which prevailed (and prevails) in European and Euro-derived cultures. (Jaimes and Halsey 1992, 138)

In many of these societies, people who possessed traits or ''spirits'' of both genders, although fairly rare, were seen as a natural part of the world and thus were accorded levels of status and respect in their respective nations.

Since 1492, the year Christopher Columbus first encountered the original peoples and lands of the Americas, European economic expansion fueled and justified by Christianity and the ideals of Manifest Destiny has permeated the social and economic climate of the world. The ability of indigenous nations to accord status and respect to their members has been severely compromised by the genocidal tides of Western colonization. In the wake of this ongoing destruction, Native Americans, who have been profoundly affected by the changes in the land and the murder of millions of indigenous people, not only have survived but continue to improvise new strategies for survival, including the recontextualization of traditional values. Much has been written on the self-conscious renewal and recreation of contemporary cultural practices by American Indian people. However, it has only been in the last decades of the twentieth century that researchers (particularly American Indian scholars) have attempted to present these sophisticated, nondual socioreligious worldviews in their full complexity. In this chapter we will present a brief overview of some of the traditional conceptions of power, respect, and balance in Native American understandings of gender and sexuality, in both precontact cultures and the adaptations of those traditions by modern indigenous peoples. We will also discuss briefly the loss of traditional values of respect and reciprocity in some contemporary Native American communities.

Explanation of Terms

In the course of this chapter, we use a number of specialized terms: worldview(s), gender identity, gender role, gender status, LGBTIQ, American Indian, Native American, indigenous North American, First Nations, and Native North American. A brief definition of each follows.

When discussing the beliefs, practices, and traditions of the numerous cultures that call the continent now known as North America their home, it is useful to use the term *worldview.* This word refers to an individual's or a group's general outlook on the world; it is useful when discussing Native American communities because they do not separate the spheres understood as "religious" and "secular" in contemporary Euro-American

terms. Because all aspects of life were and are understood by traditional Native Americans to be interrelated, it is difficult to identify what is meant when someone discusses Native American "religions." In this chapter, we use the term *worldview* to acknowledge the connection between all aspects of culture.

Three terms are useful in understanding how gender functions within a culture: *gender identity, gender role,* and *gender status*. Throughout this chapter, we use Sabine Lang's definitions of these terms: "gender identity [is] the subjective, felt perception of gender membership on the part of the individual; gender role [is] the outward expression of this perception; and gender status [is] the social position assigned to the individual by that person's culture" (Lang 1998, 50). In the latter part of the chapter, we examine gender-role crossing and gender-role change. Gender-role change refers to giving up the responsibilities and privileges of the gender role associated with one's biological sex in exchange for the responsibilities and privileges of the gender role associated with the other sex. Gender-role crossing, however, refers to the performance of some of the responsibilities and privileges of the gender role associated with the other sex without a complete role and status change.

LGBTIQ is an acronym that stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (people who undergo gender-role changes), intersexed (people born with both male and female genitalia), and queer." Because it is an umbrella term, it does obscure very important differences between communities, identities, and political agendas. However, since these differences and the political and cultural dynamics that underlie them are beyond the scope of this chapter, we use the umbrella term for convenience and brevity.

There has been considerable argument in recent years over the correct term to use when discussing the indigenous people of the North American continent. Many Native people, including indigenous scholars (and more than a few non-Native scholars) objected to the use of "American Indian." The latter word of that term has perhaps caused the most confusion because it resulted directly from the ignorance of Christopher Columbus, who, having arrived at the homeland of the Taino people—an area now known as Cuba—thought that he had found the western route to India. This term has become increasingly problematic as more and more American Indians and East Indians have become neighbors, friends, and colleagues—although most treat the confusion with some measure of ironic amusement. The word *America* comes from