

Third Sex, Third Gender
Beyond Sexual Dimorphism
in Culture and History

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CHAPTER SIX

Polynesian Gender Liminality
Through Time and Space

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This essay focuses on the “intermediate” gender categories of the islands of Polynesia, an aspect of Polynesian culture that has captivated Westerners’ curiosity since the beginning of sustained contact over two centuries ago. Conspicuously prevalent throughout the region, the adoption by certain individuals of attributes associated with a gender other than their own is deeply embedded in dynamics of Polynesian cultures and societies.¹ In this essay, I address the complex ways in which the phenomenon articulates with social and cultural processes, particularly the politics of sex, gender and sexual orientation, the meaning of power and prestige and the interface of structure and agency.

An underlying concern of this essay is the recognition that discourses of sex and gender are always saturated with morality in one or another of its manifestations. Morality becomes particularly central when these discourses penetrate the life of the Other in the context of intercultural contact. In the situation I focus on here, several discursive traditions can be identified. First are eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century European seafarers’ travelogues and missionaries’ journals, which reflect the specific agendas of that period concerning sexuality and gender. (Eventually, North American travelers and religious figures would join their ranks, but nothing will be said here of these latter-day commentators.) In the early part of the twentieth century, the voices of anthropologists entered the discussion, although more through omission than description. The latter part of the century witnessed the emergence of modern anthropological accounts, which

will form the core of this essay, along with results of my own field research. To these one must add journalistic and literary representations of a phenomenon that lends itself particularly well to cross-cultural sensationalism. Most recently, gender studies and lesbian and gay studies have added their voices to the chorus, basing themselves primarily on interpretations of the historical and ethnographic literature. In the course of the following discussion, I attempt to animate these various discourses and illustrate the moral agendas and specific priorities that underlie each one of them.

The phenomena on which this essay focuses raise particularly thorny categorical questions, and hence the choice of labels is problematic. Prefiguring the interpretation I will argue for here, I shy away from referring to the category under question as a "third gender." However, I will assert from the outset that the phenomenon is primarily an issue of *gender* rather than *sex*, because it is primarily defined in social and cultural terms. At the same time, I recognize that the distinction between gender and sex is anything but straightforward and will show that the category in question is also grounded in the problematics of sexuality.² Labeling is further complicated by the fact that words referring to the phenomenon differ across Polynesian languages. The best-known terms are the Tahitian and contemporary Hawaiian terms *māhū*,³ which have no known etymology, and the Samoan term *fa'afafine* (pl. *fa'afāfine*), literally, "in the fashion of a woman," cognates of which are found in several other Polynesian languages. In contemporary Tonga, the category is called *fakaleiti* – the root *leiti* is borrowed from the English "lady" – or *fakafefine* (it is unclear whether there is a difference between the two terms), while Tuvaluans normally use the Gilbertese borrowing *pinapinaaine*. In all of these languages, these terms can function as nouns to refer to a person, as verbs to refer to demeanor or action and often also as adverbs to specify the manner in which an action is being performed; such patterns of linguistic multifunctionality are not specific to these terms. Whenever possible, I will use untranslated Polynesian terms when referring to particular island groups, despite the fact that these terms can be and often are used derogatorily.

When speaking generally, I avoid the term "berdache," which is strongly identified with Native North America, and the labels "transvestite," "transsexual," "homosexual" and "gay," which at best capture only one aspect of the category and at worst are completely miscontextualized. Rather, I use the expressions "gender liminality" and "gender-liminal person," which turn out to be much more than conveniently neutral labels. As I will demonstrate, the notion of liminality, first theorized by Arnold van Gennep and later elaborated by Victor Turner, captures many attributes of intermediate-gender status in Polynesia.⁴ The three major characteristics of liminal events and persons that Turner identifies, namely, their "betwixt and between" locus, outsider status and social inferiority, will be shown to be relevant to Polynesian gender-liminal persons. Other common cross-cultural attributes of liminality, such as its affinity with performance and rituals of reversal, will also be discussed below.

This study has two limitations. First, it is impaired by the paucity of detailed treatments of gender liminality in specific Polynesian contexts. Reification and overgeneralization are thus real dangers in this enterprise, as they are in many works on related phenomena, like the berdache in Native North America.⁵ There is some evidence that gender liminalities across the various cultures of the region share many features. As more information becomes available on contemporary gender liminality in various parts of Polynesia, particularly Samoa,⁶ regional commonalities emerge, although significant differences also become evident, suggesting that the proliferation of descriptors across Polynesian languages is not just a linguistic phenomenon. However, the dearth of information on many island cultures suggests caution and leaves open the possibility that further research may reveal important and hitherto overlooked patterns of variation. Whenever possible, I will present ethnographic information about *particular* Polynesian settings, rather than pan-regional generalizations. Furthermore, as I will discuss, the characteristics of gender liminality are subject to much intracultural diversity across individuals and contexts. In the course of the following discussion, I will address the significance of this diversity, which I view

as a crucial facet of gender liminality rather than mere deviations from a prototype.

Second, this essay focuses on liminal men, namely, persons with male sexual attributes who adopt certain social attributes normally associated with women. But the mirror-image situation is not unknown: in contemporary Polynesian contexts, one does find women who dress like men, perform certain tasks for which men are traditionally responsible, are sexually aggressive with women and are given labels that mirror terms referring to liminal men (e.g., Tongan *fakatangata* and Samoan *fa'atama*, "in the fashion of a man"). Liminal women are considerably fewer and less noticeable than liminal men; similar asymmetries are very common with gender-crossing across the world.⁷ There is anecdotal evidence that female liminality may be of relatively recent origin, in contrast to historically well-established male liminality. What is clear is that liminal women embody a hidden discourse in both anthropological and local representations and that they are even more liminal than their male counterparts.⁸ To date, no analysis of the phenomenon has been conducted, and my silence here is but a reflection of this ethnographic vacuum. Yet the importance of questions that liminal women pose for our understanding of gender and sexuality in Polynesian societies cannot be overstated: What are the meanings of female liminality? How does the phenomenon contrast with liminal men? Why is it considerably less frequent and salient than male liminality? Echoing Evelyn Blackwood's critique of the common socio-scientific assumption that lesbianism is simply the "mirror image" of male homosexuality, I suggest that an exploration of female liminality in Polynesia will open up a host of questions that do not arise in the ethnographic inquiry of male liminality.⁹ Unfortunately, too little information is available at this time to warrant any coherent statement on the topic.

The Historical Construction of a Category

For Europeans of the Enlightenment and early Romantic era, Polynesia, one of the last frontiers of colonial expansionism, was the embodiment of a paradise that Westerners had left behind

in their quest for civilization. Early contacts between Western explorers and Tahitians or Hawaiians were perfectly timed with the rise of post-Enlightenment Romanticism in Europe. On the other side of the world, explorers found what they thought was humankind in its primeval state, unencumbered by the proscriptions of civilized mores. And, of course, one of the most prominent features of the harmonious marriage of humankind and nature was the apparent straightforwardness with which islanders approached sexual matters, particularly in Tahiti and Hawaii. Witness Bougainville's description of his first acquaintance with Tahiti, a now-classic passage in the annals of history:

As we came nearer the shore, the number of islanders surrounding our ships increased. The periaguas [i.e., canoes] were so numerous all about the ships, that we had much to do to warp in amidst the croud of boats and the noise. . . . The periaguas were full of females; who, for agreeable features, are not inferior to most European women; and who in point of beauty of the body might, with much reason, vie with them all. Most of these fair females were naked; for the men and the old women that accompanied them, had stripped them of the garments which they generally dress themselves in. The glances which they gave us from their periaguas, seemed to discover some degree of uneasiness, notwithstanding the innocent manner in which they were given; perhaps, because nature has every where embellished their sex with a natural timidity; or because even in those countries, where the ease of the golden age is still in use, women seem least to desire what they most wish for. The men, who were more plain, or rather more free, soon explained their meaning very clearly. They pressed us to choose a woman, and to come on shore with her: and their gestures, which were nothing less than equivocal, denoted in what manner we should form an acquaintance with her. It was very difficult, amidst such a sight, to keep at their work four hundred young French sailors, who had seen no women for six months. In spite of all our precautions, a young girl came on board, and placed herself upon the quarter-deck, near one of the hatchways, which was open, in order to give air to those who were heaving at the capstern below it. The girl carelessly dropt a cloth, which cov-

ered her, and appeared to the eyes of all beholders, such as Venus shewed herself to the Phrygian shepherd, having, indeed, the celestial form of that goddess. Both sailors and soldiers endeavoured to come to the hatch-way; and the capstern was never hove with more alacrity than on this occasion.¹⁰

With this description, Bougainville unwittingly heralded a new era for the Pacific, during which the politics of sex and gender would become inextricably interlocked with the politics of colonialism.¹¹

But soon enough, European perceptions of Polynesia changed course. Particularly as the London Missionary Society was being established in Tahiti, vanguarding massive missionary endeavors throughout Polynesia for years to come, the island turned, in the eyes of the foreigners, from the New Cythera (the name that Bougainville bestowed upon it) to "the filthy Sodom of the South Seas":

In these Islands all persons seem to think of scarcely anything but adultery and fornication. Little children hardly ever live to the age of seven ere they are deflowered. Children with children, often boys with boys. They are often on the mountains playing in wickedness together all the day long.¹²

As Neil Gunson aptly summarizes, "the Evangelical missionaries had little doubt that Satan, adversary of God and man, reigned as absolute sovereign over the South Sea islanders."¹³ In the contrast between explorers' and missionaries' discourses, one can read the full text of Europeans' attitudinal discords toward the "uncivilized" at the turn of the eighteenth century: free of the shackles of civilizations, yet inclined toward unspeakable practices, Tahitians and other Polynesians were in their eyes at once noble and ignoble savages.¹⁴

Besides infanticide, human sacrifice and adultery (as well as cannibalism next door in the Marquesas), one feature of Tahitian society particularly captured the missionaries' attention:

Something that was seen among the people today shews these heathens, like the heathens of old, are given up to vile affections; the men leaving the natural use of the woman, burn in their lusts towards another, men with men working that which is unseemly. Indeed it is said that Otoo [Tū, paramount chief of Tahiti, later King Pōmare I] never cohabits with his wife but has a number of boys with whom he satiates his passion.¹⁵

The Tahitians' "predilection" for "sodomy" had already been amply described in seafarers' journals, in only slightly less morally condemning terms. George Hamilton, surgeon on the British frigate *Pandora*, who spent three weeks on the island, had remarked in 1791 that young men were kept "for abominable purposes."¹⁶ In 1789, William Bligh described "a class of people common in Otaheite called Mahoo":

These people... are particularly selected when Boys and kept with the Women solely for the carnesses [*sic*] of the men.... The Women treat him as one of their Sex, and he observed evry restriction that they do, and is equally respected and esteemed.¹⁷

With these observations began the Western construction of Polynesian gender liminality that, in the next two centuries to come, would take many different forms.

Recurrent in early testimonies is the theme of the horny European sailor mistaking a Polynesian gender-liminal person for a woman. The vignette appears in 1789 in one of the earliest mentions of a Tahitian *māhū*:

I cannot help relating a very droll occurrence that happened in consequence of one of their nocturnal Heivas [i.e., dance performances]. Attracted by the sound of drums, and a great quantity of lights, I went on shore one night with two of our mates to one of these exhibitions. We seated ourselves among some of our friends, whom we found there; when one of the gentlemen who accompanied me on shore took it into his head to be very much smitten with a dancing girl, as he thought her; went up to her, made her a present of some

beads and other trifles, and rather interrupted the performance by his attentions; but what was his surprize when the performance was ended, and after he had been endeavouring to persuade her to go with him on board our ship, which she assented to, to find this supposed damsel, when stripped of her theatrical paraphanelia, a smart dapper lad. The Otaheiteans on their part enjoyed this mistake so much, that they followed us to the beach with shouts and repeated peals of laughter; and I dare say this event has served as a fine subject for one of their comedies.¹⁸

(The frequent association of gender liminality with dancing in historical records is significant, as will be discussed below.) A similar story surfaces in reference to New Zealand in a 1789 entry in the journal of a member of James Cook's crew on the *Endeavour*, one of the few (and not unequivocal) mentions of what may be gender liminality among the Maori at the time of contact:

One of our gentlemen came home to day abusing the Natives most heartily whom he said he had found to be given to the detestable Vice of Sodomy. He, he said, had been with a family of Indians and paid a price for leave to make his addresses to any one young woman they should pitch upon for him; one was chose as he thought who willingly retird with him but on examination provd to be a boy; that on his returning and complaining of this another was sent who turnd out to be a boy likewise; that on his second complaint he could get no redress but was laught at by the Indians. Far be it for me to attempt saying that Vice is not practisd here, this however I must say that in my humble opinion this story proves no more than that our gentleman was fairly trickd out of his cloth, which none of the young ladies chose to accept of on his terms, and the master of the family did not chuse to part with.¹⁹

The slapstick nature of these equivocations were obviously humorous not just to European bystanders but, more importantly, to Tahitian and Maori witnesses as well.²⁰ While one should resist reading too much into these passages, they are nevertheless suggestive in light of the striking associations of gender liminality

with satire and the burlesque in contemporary Polynesia.

British seamen and missionaries of the Georgian era evaluated the practices of which they caught glimpses in Tahiti through a specific framework of moral reference. In the late eighteenth century, "sodomy" had become the focus of particularly virulent revilement in England. As is well documented, sodomy was an "utterly confused category" into which fell many "unnatural practices," principally homosexual and heterosexual oral or anal intercourse and bestiality and which was closely affiliated in eighteenth-century thought with a broad panoply of nonsexual crimes.²¹ However, at the close of the century, the meaning of sodomy was becoming more specifically focused on homosexual intercourse, an evolution that went hand in hand with changes in gender relations and the gradual emergence of a homosexual protosubculture.²²

In England, these changes were accompanied by increasingly severe persecution in the decades during which contacts with Polynesian societies were becoming more sustained. Legal sanctions against sodomitic crimes were considerably more serious there than in any other European country: while capital punishment for sodomy is last documented in 1784 for the rest of Europe, death sentences for "unnatural crimes" in Britain lasted until the third decade of the nineteenth century.²³ Although successful legal prosecution was commonly hindered by the vagueness of the legal definition of sodomy, the importance that the crime had acquired in the legal and social consciousness of turn-of-the-century England gave rise to a virulently repressive climate.²⁴ The repression became particularly intense in times of war, during which sodomy would be perceived as a "foreign infection" and an instrument of mutiny, and its witch-hunt-like prosecution as a patriotic act.²⁵ The repression did not affect all social classes equally: "Whereas aristocratic males accused of sodomy were allowed to escape to the Continent, the artisans, soldiers and unskilled workers (the men most often arrested for sodomy in Georgian England) could look forward to the pillory, a punishment that usually resulted in death."²⁶ Nowhere was repression more virulent than in the British Navy, particularly in times of war,

where it targeted almost exclusively enlisted (hence working-class) men, in keeping with patterns of civilian prosecution. Court-martial records of the second half of the century indicate that sodomy was considered as serious as murder and mutiny; a whopping 31 percent of all executions resulted from sodomy convictions.²⁷ Ironically, it was the Royal Navy, the institution most fixated on sodomitic behavior, that reached the shores of Tahiti in the late 1700s.²⁸

In contrast to the copious early accounts of *māhū* in Tahiti and, more equivocally, of comparable categories in Hawaii, the Marquesas and New Zealand, no mention is made of the phenomenon in Western Polynesia, despite the fact that it is equally conspicuous in all regions today. Yet contact between Europeans and islanders was sustained, if not more so, in Western as in Eastern Polynesia. For example, in 1805, a young British sailor, Will Mariner, was taken captive in Vava'u, Tonga, and subsequently spent four years as the adopted son of paramount chief Finau 'Ulukālala, on which he based an ethnographic account following his return to England;²⁹ nowhere in Mariner's otherwise meticulously detailed work is there any mention of gender liminality. Even though nineteenth-century missionaries and travelers to Samoa did not shy away from describing in great detail "sinful" Samoan practices, as Jeannette Mageo points out, *fa'afāfine* are not mentioned at all in their accounts.³⁰ A curious and unexplainable contrast thus emerges between early Euro-American descriptions of Eastern Polynesia, especially Tahiti, and Western Polynesia.

However, skepticism must be exerted in drawing inferences on the organization of social life and culture in the Polynesian past from the historical record.³¹ The absence of historical documentation on gender liminality in Western Polynesia does not necessarily mean that it is a postcontact phenomenon. While the mention of a social category in the historical record is an indication that some form of it was present at the time of contact, little can be inferred from historical silence. Early cross-cultural contacts are complex events, and a multiplicity of factors can determine what one group will notice about the other.³² These historical differences only suggest that caution must be exerted

in generalizing about Polynesian gender liminality and that a reconstruction of the history of gender liminality in the region is not possible. If anything, fragments of historical representations like missionaries' and seafarers' journals, which remained highly peripheral to the events they purported to describe, should be read as texts of perhaps greater relevance to European social history than to early-contact Polynesian societies.

Contemporary Perspectives

The initial flurry of historical testimonies on Tahitian gender liminality in the early voyager and missionary literature was followed by a century and a half of relative silence on the subject. In particular, little was said about it in the large volume of ethnographic descriptions generated in the first decades of the century.³³ For example, Ernest and Pearl Beaglehole do not mention gender liminality in rural Tonga, while the numerous ethnographic reports published by Honolulu's Bishop Museum contain only passing references to the category, usually under rubrics entitled "sexual aberrations" or "perverted instincts," alongside "adultery," "prostitution," "celibacy" and "sterility."³⁴ The reasons for this near-silence are difficult to ascertain. Were Tongan and Marquesan villagers, by then intimately familiar with what Westerners disapproved of, careful to conceal from visitors' scrutiny what they knew should not be included in the "cover story" of their culture? Were *fakaleiti* simply absent in the Tonga of the late 1930s? Or were fieldworkers uneasy with the category and uncertain about its place in the procrustean ethnological checklists fashionable in those days? No simple scenario comes to mind. But its consequence for our purposes is that the historical record on sexuality and gender liminality in Polynesia is discontinuous.

Does discontinuity also characterize the historical evolution of the category itself? In light of the fundamental social and cultural transformations that Polynesia has experienced since the days of early contacts, prudence should be exerted in assuming a historical continuum between gender liminality as early European voyagers described it and its modern-day manifestations. Yet the overall resemblance between them is striking, suggesting at least

some degree of historical continuity. Today, gender liminality is very much alive, at least in regions of Polynesia that have not been subjected to intensive colonization (as Hawaii and New Zealand have) and, if anything, has become increasingly salient. This state of affairs is remarkable when compared to the fate of other forms of liminal gendering or sexuality in the face of colonialism and social change. For example, neither "ritualized" homosexuality in Melanesia nor the Native North American berdache has survived the moral onslaught of colonial authorities and missionaries.³⁵ Probably no single explanation can account for the contrast between the vitality of Polynesian gender liminality and the fate of comparable phenomena in other parts of the world.³⁶

The first detailed ethnographic investigation of Polynesian gender liminality was conducted by Robert Levy, who in the early 1960s focused on two Tahitian villages.³⁷ The composite description of Polynesian gender liminality provided in the rest of this section is based principally on Levy's Tahiti material, on descriptions of Samoan gender liminality and on my own field data from Tonga and Tuvalu.³⁸

Gender-liminal persons are most fundamentally distinguished by the nature of their labor contribution. In most rural Polynesian contexts, men are primarily in charge of "heavy" work, such as fishing, gardening and harvesting green coconuts, while "lighter" tasks like everyday cooking, house cleaning, gathering firewood, doing the laundry, weaving mats and making tapa cloth are commonly the responsibility of women. In urbanized areas of Polynesia, nonelite men typically become laborers, while nonelite women take on clerical jobs in the best of circumstances or occupy menial positions in the service industry, working as chambermaids in hotels and "housegirls" for expatriate Westerners, for example. In both rural and urban settings, the gender-liminal person gravitates toward women's work. Like the berdache in Native North American societies, the gender-liminal person in Polynesia is commonly thought to excel in women's tasks: his mats are said to be particularly symmetrical and regular in shape, his domestic chores singularly thorough, and he is more resilient to tedium than the average woman. In urban settings, liminal men are superb sec-

retaries and coveted domestic help. In this sense, liminal persons are more womanly than women, a theme that recurs elsewhere.

The Tahitian *māhū*'s presentation of self, like the Samoan *fa'afafine*'s and Tongan *fakaleiti*'s, typically includes some "feminine" characteristics. Some cross-dressing is evident, particularly in urban centers and on festive occasions like dances, although there is no report of any gender-liminal individual cross-dressing on a permanent basis anywhere in Polynesia. In Tonga, the typical *fakaleiti*'s demeanor includes a swishy gait and speech patterns and nonverbal communicative behavior normally associated with women, such as a fast tempo, verbosity and an animated face, which contrasts with men's generally laconic and impassive demeanor. Throughout Polynesia, liminal persons are coquettishly concerned with their physical appearance, as evidenced by a propensity to wear flowers, garlands and perfume and, in urban contexts, heavy makeup. (While both men and women commonly wear flowers and perfume in Polynesia, the practice is particularly associated with younger women, and only women use makeup where it is available.) Everywhere in the region, the gender-liminal person is principally associated with domestic social spheres, as are women. For example, the young *fakaleiti* in rural Tonga is noticeably less mobile than his nonliminal age-mates: at night, while the latter roam the village and "hang out" in the periphery of houses in which kava drinking is taking place, smoking, chatting in a blasé fashion and engaging in casual micro-displays of manly bravado, the *fakaleiti* confine themselves to well-lit domestic settings and to the company of women.

The friendship networks that younger gender-liminal persons partake in usually consist of their female age-mates, with whom they are commonly depicted as "walking arm-in-arm, . . . gossiping and visiting with them."³⁹ On Funafuti Atoll, Tuvalu, young women enjoy spending time with *pinapinaaine*, with whom they can nurture a friendship with someone other than another woman without the ever-present specter of sexual tension in interactions between unrelated women and men. They particularly savor their *pinapinaaine* friends' clownish performances at dances, where the latter make risqué comments on men's appearances and actions,

which the younger women themselves would hesitate to make. However, while the carefree figure that the younger gender-liminal person cuts finds an appreciative audience, his aging counterpart, whose women friends have all married and now have "serious" matters to attend to, acquires an element of pathos in the public eye. Older *fakaleiti* in Tongan society socialize with women of their age, although they are generally somewhat more isolated than both younger *fakaleiti* and male age-mates.

In the more stratified societies of Polynesia, gender-liminal persons are drawn from all social backgrounds. Historical records often described Tahitian *māhū* as members of chiefly entourages, in which they acted as the confidantes of high-ranking women and men and as providers of sexual services for male chiefs. In these accounts, it is unclear whether these *māhū* gained access to chiefly circles by virtue of their birth rank or through upward mobility and whether they were more frequent or salient around chiefs than among commoners (early European travelers were considerably more concerned with the former than the latter). In contemporary Polynesia, gender-liminal persons of different social rank have differing characteristics, although what these distinctions are is a complex and ill-understood question. It is clear that liminality itself does not increase the individual's rank, power or prestige; in fact, the opposite scenario is usually the case. However, I will show below that certain secondary characteristics of gender liminality sometimes provide the opportunity for upward mobility.

There is no compelling evidence that gender-liminal persons were or are associated with religious life anywhere in Polynesia. In this respect, Polynesian liminality differs from the phenomenon of the Native North American berdache, whose connection to shamanism is generally recognized.⁴⁰ Particular liminal individuals can be medical practitioners, the category which most resembles that of the shaman in contemporary Polynesia, but there is no particular link between gender liminality and curing knowledge. Gender liminals may have been thought to have access to certain shamanistic powers in some aboriginal Polynesian societies, although no unequivocal historical record of this associa-

tion exists. It is very unlikely that liminal persons ever had any close link to religious contexts associated with the maintenance of chiefly hegemony. The only possible exception to this generalization is contemporary Hawaii, where *māhū* are frequently represented as *kahuna*-like.⁴¹ There may be some historical basis for this representation, in that *māhū* are closely linked to *hula* performance, which has always had certain ritual functions. However, it must be understood in the context of the reconstruction of Hawaiian ethnicity. In their efforts to rebuild an ethnic identity, modern-day Hawaiians deliberately seek inspiration from American Indians, with whom they share an oppressor, much more than from other Polynesian groups. I surmise that many of the shamanistic connotations of contemporary Hawaiian *māhū* identity are borrowed from Native North America.

Gender Liminality and Sexuality

An important aspect of Polynesian gender liminality is homosexuality, the very attribute that earned the fascinated scorn of European observers of eighteenth-century Tahiti.⁴² In "traditional" Polynesian contexts, partaking in homosexual activities is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion for gender-liminal status. Engaging in same-sex erotic behavior does not brand one as a *fakaleiti* in Tonga, a *pinapinaaine* in Tuvalu, or a *fa'afafine* in Samoa: male adolescents and young adults are widely known and "expected" (in the "nonofficial" version of culture) to engage in mutual masturbation as part of sexual experimentation. In Tuvalu, where jail sentences are a liberally used method of controlling the behavior of men in their late teens and early twenties (there is a "boys will be boys" quality to being known as having spent a few months in prison), homosexual behavior is a well-known feature of prison life. In Fiji, homosexuality is also associated with British-style elite private schools. Adolescents and ex-prisoners are frequently chided about their homosexual encounters. In Tongan society, adolescents' homosexual play is viewed as less damaging to the social order than premarital heterosexual encounters; the latter always threatens an idealized brother-sister relationship and is overshadowed by the dreaded specter of a socially undesirable

face-saving marriage if pregnancy ensues. Nor does one's identification as a *fakaleiti* presuppose a history of or identifiable "preference" for homosexual encounters. Indeed, *fakaleiti* status in Tonga, as in Samoa and perhaps Tahiti, can be "assigned" early in life, much before the awakening of sexual desires of any type.⁴³ The evidence thus suggests the following important point: sexual relations with men are seen as an optional *consequence* of gender liminality, rather than its determiner, prerequisite or primary attribute (as Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems show, this pattern is cross-culturally widespread).⁴⁴ Thus, Polynesian gender liminality must be distinguished from lesbian and gay identity in Western societies, of which sexual orientation is the most important defining trait. The contrast is hardly surprising or new: as we know from Michel Foucault and others, lesbian and gay identities arose in the West, particularly among the middle classes, in the context of recent historical evolutions in the notion of personhood as a holistic and atomistic entity, a trend closely tied to the elaboration of individualism as a foundational value of capitalism.⁴⁵ Western-style lesbian and gay identities further differ from gender-liminal Polynesians in a fundamental way: if the latter engage in sexual relations, they always do so with nonliminal men, never with members of their own category.

Although sexuality is not deterministic of gender liminality, its centrality to the definition of gender liminality cannot be overlooked. Indeed, while not all gender-liminal individuals have sex with nonliminal men, they are always perceived as a possible sexual conquest by men in societies like Samoa and Tonga, in the same way that women who are not classificatory relatives always are the potential target of a man's sexual advances. Social relations between liminal and nonliminal men thus foreground potential sexuality in a way that cannot be ignored. In Tonga and to a lesser extent Tuvalu, the *fakaleiti* or *pinapinaaine* often sexually taunt nonliminal men in ways that resemble and often caricature the way that young women tease men, particularly when the *fakaleiti* or *pinapinaaine* is surrounded by young female friends; the performance is typically punctuated with squeals and giggles from

female audiences. But even when the *fakaleiti* does not flirt with men, he is frequently the target of harassment and physical violence, particularly from men in various states of inebriation.⁴⁶ The gender-liminal individual is viewed as potential sexual "fair game" in a much broader sense than women are, in that no brother-sister relationship shields him from the all-out sexual advances of nonliminal men. In stratified Polynesian contexts, low-ranking liminals are most vulnerable to violence, while high-ranking gender-liminal persons are somewhat shielded, but not completely protected, from the consequences of this perception by their social position. Thus, understanding liminality purely as a gender phenomenon and excluding sexuality from its characterization is misleading. Even if the importance of homosexuality in the definition of gender liminality is a relatively recent development, as some have argued, the fact that it has become important must be accounted for.⁴⁷

Little information is available on erotic aspects of gender liminality. Levy indicates that the Tahitian *māhū*'s sexual encounters consist in his performing fellatio on non-*māhū* men, who view the *māhū* as a convenient, pleasurable, relatively pressure-free alternative to women for the release of sexual tension.⁴⁸ In Tonga and Tuvalu, young men brag in private about anally penetrating gender-liminal men and having intercourse between their thighs. Sexual encounters in which a gender-liminal person plays the role of the inserter are commonly reported not to occur anywhere in Polynesia, although my own ethnographic data contradict this generalization. Throughout the region, no great stigma is associated with taking on the role of the inserter, although it has the potentially negative connotation of one not able to procure women for one's sexual gratification. This explains in part why sexual encounters with liminal persons are associated principally with younger men, who are thought to lack experience in obtaining female sexual partners. If a nonliminal man can secure ready access to a female sexual partner, through marriage for example, as commonly argued in Polynesia, there is no reason for him to seek out gender-liminal men. This reasoning is more than just an idealization: nowhere in the region does one witness men regu-

larly seeking liminal sexual partners after marriage, in contrast to patterns evident in Melanesia.⁴⁹

Generally speaking, intercourse with gender-liminal persons is patterned on heterosexual encounters, with the gender-liminal person taking on the sexual role of the woman. But sexual intercourse involving gender liminality differs in one significant way from idealized, socially sanctioned heterosexual contact: it is inherently viewed as promiscuous, transient and lacking in significance. For Tongan men, sex with a *fakaleiti* is akin to intercourse with a *fokisi*, "woman of loose virtue," although perhaps of slightly lower prestige.⁵⁰ It is a conquest with no implications beyond the encounter itself and of little consequence for the man other than as an opportunity to release sexual tension and an occasion to brag to one's peers. In addition to procuring sexual pleasure, intercourse with a *fakaleiti*, like intercourse with a *fokisi*, can increase one's prestige as a virile youth. Marriage or any other form of attachment bears no relevance to either situation, as it is reserved for high-prestige tokens of womanhood, namely, the exalted Western Polynesian virginal young woman of high rank and dignified demeanor (Tongan *tāupo'ou*, a less elaborated category than its Samoan cognate, the *tāupōu*). Unlike the *fokisi* or *fakaleiti*, the *tāupo'ou* only submits to sexual deflowering with reluctance and no signs of pleasure, and only within the bounds of socially sanctioned marriage. The gender-liminal sexual partner, like the woman of loose virtue, is an eminently discardable and exploitable object. In Fiji, the metaphorical term that was applied to gender-liminal men in the early 1980s was *wādua*, which refers literally to a simple, usually homemade string-band musical instrument whose hinged bow is moved to modify the tension of a single string. The basis for the metaphor was explained to me as follows: the gender-liminal person is akin to a musical instrument that can be easily manipulated to play any note its user desires. In Tonga again, sexual encounters with a *fakaleiti* are acts through which prestige is transferred like a commodity from the *fakaleiti* to his partner and in which the *fakaleiti*'s degraded social status is thereby foregrounded. The obligatory power asymmetry involved in sex with a *fakaleiti* is simply a manifestation of the

asymmetry that characterizes all "illicit" sexual encounters. It explains in part why sex between nonliminal adult men is inconceivable (other than in prison and similarly bracketed circumstances), since it would require one man to subject himself to degradation, which no man in his right mind would consent to.⁵¹

The gender-liminal person's experience of sexuality is socially defined as falling outside of the realm of what is locally sanctioned as erotic, not unlike women's heterosexual experience in many cultures. In Tahiti and Western Polynesia, the gender-liminal person is pervasively represented by nonliminal persons as lacking the sexual anatomy of a normal adult man: they are often described as having penes that are "too small" for heterosexual contact and that are uncircumcised or unsupercised, despite the fact that this is normally not the case.⁵² These perceptions, in their contemporary forms at least, are obvious naturalizations of the gender-liminal person's experience as extraneous to the erotic: like male children who have not reached the age of circumcision or supercision, they are deemed incapable of experiencing sexual desire, and, according to the received discourse, their contacts with nonliminal men are devoid of erotic meaning. The sole purpose of the encounter is to satisfy the sexual needs of the nonliminal man.

However, these representations are one side of a contested field of meaning. While little is known about the extent to which gender-liminal individuals' personal erotic experience diverges from the social definition of sexual desire, there is evidence that for liminal men sexual encounters are not devoid of erotic excitement, despite the society's denial of its existence.⁵³ Indeed, when boasting about their sexual conquests of *fakaleiti*, young Tongan men often provide graphic detail of the *fakaleiti*'s erotic excitement, which they ridicule mercilessly (this is also true of narratives of encounters with *fokisi*). In Samoa, many *fa'afāfine* bragged to the ethnographer Mageo about their sexual successes with men, thereby contesting the social boundary between legitimate and illegitimate sexual experiences.⁵⁴ Clearly, the hegemonic imposition of moral standards of legitimacy is subject to subversive opposition.

The contemporary situation in Polynesia is further complicated by the presence, particularly in the more acculturated areas of the region, of gay identities and perhaps communities that differ from "traditional" gender liminality and resemble patterns observable in Western contexts. This phenomenon is not new in areas where the Western colonial presence is well established, as in Hawaii and New Zealand.⁵⁵ In the early 1960s, Levy identified a Tahitian neologism, *raerae*, referring to "somebody who does not perform a female's village role and who dresses and acts like a man, but who indulges in exclusive or preferred sexual behavior with other men," and further noted some confusion among his informants over categories and their meaning.⁵⁶ In the early 1990s, Samoa is witnessing the emergence of individuals who understand themselves as having a gay identity in the Western sense of the term and position themselves in society differently from *fa'afāfine*.⁵⁷ How these patterns are related to older patterns and how society is responding to them are fascinating questions that deserve further scrutiny. While some headway has been made toward an understanding of the sociocultural value of gender liminality, much remains to be learned about its relationship to erotic life.

Liminality and Gender

As the above discussion makes clear, gender liminality in Polynesia must be understood within the broader context of the culture and politics of gender. However, how the phenomenon fits in this context is a complex question. Levy hypothesizes that liminal individuals in Tahiti function as negative images of gender identity: the *māhū* shows non-*māhū* men what not to be. Tahitian men need such negative images because their society offers little differentiation between women and men. For example, the Tahitian language lacks gender markers, personal names in Tahiti are gender neutral, labor is not clearly divided across gender lines and gender boundaries are frequently crossed for metaphorical purposes, as when men dance together if not enough women partners are available.⁵⁸ The resulting androgyny that Levy sees in Tahitian society fails to provide a strong mold in which men's gender iden-

tity can be shaped (it is unclear in Levy's account whether women are thought to be similarly handicapped). Thus Tahitian culture must offer institutions in which this identity can solidify. One is supercision, which marks passage into both adulthood and manhood; the other is the presence in every village of a *māhū*, who counterexemplifies male identity.

While suggestive when first advanced, Levy's functionalist account presents a number of problems, which become particularly glaring in light of the explosion of research in the anthropology of gender that postdates the publication of Levy's work. First, the depiction of Tahitian gender-blending is problematic. The linguistic evidence (lack of grammatical gender, neutrality of personal names, absence of gendered pronouns) is invalid: as sociolinguists have argued, grammatical gender is largely unrelated to social gender, and the presence or absence of the former says nothing about the nature of the latter.⁵⁹ A better argument could be made if linguistic praxis in Tahiti did not index gender identity as clearly as other aspects of social identity, such as rank, as Elinor Ochs suggests for Samoa;⁶⁰ however, even if this situation is true of Tahiti, its implication for the formation of a relatively "strong" or "weak" gender identity must be examined very critically.

Furthermore, the evidence that Tahitian society lacks a gender-based division of labor is equivocal at best, even if one assumes the relationship between social and psychological aspects of gender to be unproblematic. As an example of the lack of labor gendering, Levy invokes food preparation: "men take a leading part in festive and traditional cooking [while] women do most of the 'ordinary' non-festive cooking."⁶¹ But feasts and ordinary meals belong to different social spheres in Polynesia, and lumping them together into a single social activity is a mistake. The ethnographic literature on contemporary Tahiti suggests that many men's tasks are not accessible to women and vice versa: for example, only Tahitian men slaughter pigs, engage in physically demanding forms of fishing and do the heavy work in gardening, while the laundry, housekeeping and fruit gathering are exclusively women's work.⁶² Tahitians indeed have strong ideas about the gendering of certain forms of labor: even though most Tahitian

women are physically capable of cutting firewood, their doing so is seen as "inappropriate."⁶³ It is the case that men occasionally do women's work and vice versa, as when a spouse is unable to perform his or her tasks because of illness. But occasional forays into some of the work activities of the other gender are likely to be bounded by norms of appropriateness, and they hardly imply that women's and men's work are not well distinguished. On the contrary, they can affirm the division of labor across gender lines rather than erase it, particularly if the contexts in which this situation takes place are clearly bracketed: men doing the laundry in exceptional circumstances can be interpreted as a negative example of what men should not do. It should also be noted that the lack of a clear division of labor does not necessarily give rise to the blurring of gender identities. Among the Weyéwa of the Sunda Archipelago, women and men share all labor. Yet women and men are very clearly distinguished in other ways: for example, women do not have access to certain high-prestige cultural knowledge, such as competence in poetic forms that give men access to ancestral spirits.⁶⁴ Clearly, gender identity is constructed in many different social and cultural arenas, which often convey contradictory messages.⁶⁵

Second, Levy's characterization of the cultural function of the *māhū* rests on problematic presuppositions. The model assumes that the absence of clear gender differentiation is by definition a problem that needs to be "resolved." Even if it were, societies offer a wealth of possibilities for distinguishing between women and men, and indeed for creating asymmetries between gender groups, by restricting women's independent access to material resources and power, for example, or by institutionalizing kinship structures in which women are transacted entities while men act as the transactors.⁶⁶ It would be most surprising if a society like Tahiti needed to "invent" the *māhū* to provide what other cultures find so easy to provide through other, simpler means that can be justified as being already in place for other purposes.

Furthermore, the exact mechanisms through which the Tahitian *māhū* enacts a negative portrayal of masculinity are at best unclear. Indeed, the *māhū*'s role, behavior and identity are inter-

mediate between those of women and men. For example, George Biddle remarks that, in the early 1960s, the *māhū* distinguished themselves from all other Tahitian men (with the exception of a few missionaries) by letting their beards grow.⁶⁷ Thus, if anything, the *māhū* blurs gender categories rather than affirms them. Levy's argument would be stronger if, like the Samoan *fa'afafine*, to which I will return presently, the Tahitian *māhū* regularly flaunted his sexuality in a flagrant, outrageous and exaggerated manner, not unlike Western drag queens.⁶⁸ As many authors have demonstrated for various purposes, exaggerated caricatures are much more powerful indicators of what not to be than depictions that resemble reality too closely.⁶⁹

Third, Levy's account fares poorly when placed in historical and comparative perspective. As noted earlier, the presence of the *māhū* in early-contact Tahitian society is well documented. The extent to which history has altered the definition of the category is not known, but its persistence cannot be denied.⁷⁰ However, early-contact Tahitian culture offered a much clearer differentiation of gender than Levy's representation of contemporary Tahitian culture does, as he acknowledges.⁷¹ While the grammar of gender in ancient Tahiti was as complex as in the rest of Eastern Polynesia, its articulation with power dynamics through the mediation of an elaborate *tapu* system provided a framework that permeated all aspects of life (e.g., by forbidding women and men from eating together and eating the same types of food) and a matrix through which gender differentiation was very clear. Yet, despite the fact that there was no need to resolve an unclear gender dimorphism, ancient Tahiti had its *māhū*.⁷² What was then the meaning of the *māhū* in the eighteenth century?

Equally problematic is the presence of gender liminality in Polynesian societies in which gender boundaries are anything but blurred. For example, Bradd Shore analyzes Samoan culture as animated by an overarching system of oppositions in which the complementarity between maleness and femaleness figures prominently, particularly as manifested in the brother-sister relationship.⁷³ While the relationship between this system of complementarity and social praxis is very complicated, it is nev-

ertheless clear that Samoan culture offers a pervasive grid through which genders are differentiated.⁷⁴ Indeed, the androgyny that Levy observes in Tahiti cannot be easily applied to Samoa (nor, for that matter, to Tonga). Without necessarily implying that gender liminality should be accounted for in exactly the same terms across Polynesian societies, the extent to which Tahitian gender liminality resembles the phenomenon in other Polynesian contexts must somehow be explained. Levy's functionalism, being closely tied to the picture of Tahiti he depicts, provides little by way of an explanation for the regional prevalence of the phenomenon.

Despite the problems associated with it, Levy's account opens a potentially fruitful avenue, namely, understanding the gender-liminal person as a negative case. Mageo proposes that Samoan *fa'afāfine* are not representations of "femaleness" as a coherent and unitary category, but rather they align themselves with *specific instantiations* of womanhood in various contexts.⁷⁵ In some instances, the *fa'afāfine* is a representation of mature nonvirgin womanhood, namely, the category labeled *fāfine*, "mature woman"; in other contexts, he signifies the category labeled *teine*, "unmarried, and presumably virginal, girl," which he often parodies.⁷⁶ The highly visible parodic displays of female sexuality in public contexts that many (but not all) *fa'afāfine* engage in demonstrate how the ideal virginal young woman should *not* behave. Thus the *fa'afāfine* is not so much a negative model for men, as Levy argues for the Tahitian *māhū*, but rather for younger women. I will return to the implications of Mageo's compelling analysis below.

Is Gender Liminality "Institutionalized"?

Gender liminality in Polynesia is frequently represented as an institution. This is particularly so in the secondary literature, where the topic has acquired, by force of conjecture, the quality of a textbook case. Witness its depiction in an encyclopedic work: "In contemporary Tahiti, males who adopt [a] transgender role are accepted in their same-sex orientation and are even granted a semi-institutionalized position of esteem."⁷⁷ Another author states that the *māhū* is institutionalized, "in the way a chief

or a shaman is an institutionalized status with prescribed role requirements."⁷⁸ In these descriptions, the Polynesian gender-liminal individual is described as what Herdt calls an "it-entity," namely, an emically well defined and internally consistent category that fits in a sort of sociocultural niche prepared by the social order.⁷⁹

These characterizations call into question the exact nature of "institutionalization," a notion that George Devereux was the first to invoke with reference to "abnormal" sexual behavior.⁸⁰ In an analysis of the Native North American berdache, Whitehead demonstrates the difficulties of arriving at an exact definition of what an institution is, particularly when sexuality is involved.⁸¹ The degree to which a particular practice or identity is institutionalized depends on many disparate factors, none of which are sufficient or necessary: its internal consistency, its moral evaluation, its ritual elaboration, the extent to which it answers a structural need, its centrality or marginalization in the political and economic life of society and in kinship systems and so on. While the characterization of a practice as "institutionalized" may be too vague, one still needs a tool to distinguish, among others, berdache identity in Native American societies, lesbian and gay identity in middle-class Western contexts and the identity of the hijra, North India's "third-gender" category.⁸² In this section, I address some of the ways in which gender liminality in Polynesia can be thought of as "institutionalized" and evaluate the evidence accordingly.

A cursory glance at gender liminality in all Polynesian societies for which information is available quickly reveals that the category leaks at the seams. First, within each Polynesian context, who is and is not included in the category varies across contexts. Levy notes that in the Tahitian village where he conducted fieldwork several men were described as *huru māhū* or "*māhūish*" because they exhibited certain effeminate traits.⁸³ While these individuals differ from prototypical *māhū* because they do not engage in homosexual behavior, as Levy points out, the fact that not all prototypical *māhū* do so casts some doubt on the distinction. Elsewhere, one finds a great deal of fuzziness at the bound-

aries of gender-liminal categories. In Tonga, for example, a young man who displays womanlike interactional mannerisms (such as a wider range of facial expressions than those expected of men) can be disparaged as a *ki'i fakaleiti*, "little *fakaleiti*." Mothers and other caregivers often use comparable strategies in disciplining their male children, particularly when they fail to perform chores that are normally the responsibility of boys of their age. In other words, while some individuals consistently fall within the boundaries of gender liminality, every man or boy can be potentially qualified as gender liminal on the basis of personal features or behavior, even if metaphorically.

Second, the characteristics of gender-liminal persons vary greatly from one individual to the other. It is possible to describe, as I did earlier, a composite prototype for the referent of terms like *māhū*, *fa'afafine* and *fakaleiti*, which corresponds to the way that Polynesians themselves would describe these categories. Yet it is impossible to define a list of necessary and sufficient conditions, because one finds individuals in all societies who fail to conform to the prototype in one way or the other. It is useful to draw a comparison between Polynesian gender liminality and the hijra of North India. Like Polynesian liminals, hijras differ greatly from one another in self-presentation, role and identification with the hijra "ideals": some are primarily prostitutes, others are primarily religious gurus, while others emphasize their role as ritual performers.⁸⁴ Where the difference lies is in the fact that North Indian society has a clear normative notion of what hijra status consists of, the principal feature of which is ritualized emasculation. Indeed, many hijras have not subjected themselves to the operation, but the idealization of the hijra as emasculated is nevertheless a prominent "necessary" characteristic of hijra identity. Thus hijras who are not emasculated live under constant fear of "discovery" when they perform rituals expected of hijras, as when dancing in other people's households on the occasion of the birth of a male child. In contrast, no such ideological construct exists in Polynesia.

Third, one of the more puzzling aspects of Polynesian gender liminality is the fact that particular individuals may opt out of

the category in the course of their lifetime, and frequently do so. The usual way out of gender-liminal status is heterosexual marriage, through which the gender-liminal person can prove his manhood, as is the case of the Omani *xanith*, and hence his ability and willingness to answer the social expectations of a conventional man.⁸⁵ For example, in the early part of my Nukulaelae fieldwork, a man in his early twenties returned to the atoll for a brief holiday after studying overseas. While abroad, he had taken on the role of a *pinapinaaine*, particularly by cross-dressing, rumor of which had not taken long to reach the atoll. On his return, his family instructed him to put an end to his nonsensical behavior and to get married and have children, which he promptly did. The implications that such midlife changes have from the perspective of the individual is a complex question: heterosexual marriage does not erase liminality from one's biography, nor does it always ensure one's exit out of liminal status, as some individuals continue to be labeled as liminal men even after marriage. But midlife changes demonstrate that gender-liminal identity can be transient. It thus cannot be understood as solely located in the individual in the same fashion as lesbian and gay identity in middle-class Western societies, and it should not be thought of as an immanent social institution.

Arguably the most important parameter of intracultural variation is the fact that gender-liminal identity "blooms" in a particularly elaborated fashion in certain social contexts while it is subdued in others. For example, the gender-liminal features of the Samoan *fa'afafine* are most foregrounded in performances of various types, particularly when a comic and clownish component is involved.⁸⁶ "Traditional" dances, including fund-raising performances for church-related activities, and modern-day heirs of traditional forms, like Saturday-night floor shows at Pago Pago discotheques, are prime loci for the display of *fa'afafine* regalia and behavior. In many Polynesian societies, one encounters more or less formalized comedic genres, from clowning performances that arise spontaneously during dancing to culturally elaborated forms like the Samoan *fale aitu* (literally, "house of spirits"), theatrical events that are rehearsed and plot driven. The gender-

liminal person is particularly associated with spontaneous clowning in many Polynesian contexts. But even in more formal genres like the Samoan *fale aitu*, the male lead comedian apes gender liminality (e.g., effeminate demeanor, simulated sexual interest in other male actors) even though he is usually not otherwise identified as a *fa'afafine*.

A particularly telling feature of the association of gender liminality with performance on the one hand and comedy on the other is its resilience and adaptability to social change. In Nuku'alofa, Tonga's main urban center, the ultimate setting for the elaboration of *fakaleiti* identity is the *fakaleiti* beauty contest, a mirthful but important occasion held once a year in the city's best hotel. Notably, the cultural bond between performance and gender liminality is evident throughout Polynesia, from the most tradition-oriented island or village to the most acculturated areas. In very tradition-oriented societies like Nukulaelae atoll, the gender-liminal person is often the community's most accomplished and innovative composer and choreographer; at the other extreme, in a highly acculturated area like Hawaii, where chanting and *hula*-dancing feature prominently in efforts to reconstitute a Hawaiian heritage, both art forms are in large part controlled by *māhū*. But in Tonga, Samoa and probably elsewhere, the very individuals who don heavy makeup and outrageous costumes for performances commonly return to considerably less marked styles of self-presentation in everyday contexts. Thus, gender-liminal identity is foregrounded or backgrounded depending on the nature of the social context.

The problem of the interconnection of gender liminality, social context and individual identity is more complex and must be contextualized in Polynesian notions of personhood. Throughout Polynesia, personhood is viewed as lacking the consistent, atomistic and homogeneous character of Western middle-class notions of personhood but as capable of considerable malleability and adaptability to changing social contexts. For example, the person in Samoa is conceptualized as a complex system of more or less autonomous facets that are selectively foregrounded in different social contexts.⁸⁷ Each aspect of the person is related in

complex ways to particular emotional experiences, interactional dynamics and social roles. While there are significant differences from one Polynesian culture to the other, the same basic pattern recurs throughout the region.⁸⁸ Of course, the plasticity of the person does not preclude the recognition of interpersonal differences. For example, Nukulaelae Islanders recognize individualities, character traits and interpersonal variations, which they talk about a great deal. Individuality in these cultures is viewed as deriving from the individual's propensity to foreground particular facets of her or his personhood.

This brief and necessarily oversimplified excursus into Polynesian ethnopsychology provides the necessary framework for an understanding of gender liminality. Rather than being grounded in the individual in an essentialist fashion, it is more crucially a characteristic of the relationship between the individual and the social context. Of course, not all attributes of gender liminality are equally context bound, in that some, such as womanlike facial movements, are less subject to overt control than others, such as campy demeanor. However, it is those aspects of the category that are most consciously controlled and that depend most on context that are perceived as most central to liminal status. In certain contexts, certain men display and elaborate on behaviors and attributes associated with femininity and are more adept at doing so than other men. Mageo notes that any Samoan man can ape femininity in performance contexts for comic effect; "the *fa'afafine* is a boy that jokes as most Samoan boys do, but does so more consistently rather than intermittently and acquires accompanying paraphernalia."⁸⁹ This analysis suggests a new twist to the relationship between gender liminality, social context and personhood: while personhood molds itself to social context, the relationship between structure and agency is constitutive, and particular contexts can become the "specialty" of certain individuals. Further evidence from my own fieldwork on Nukulaelae supports this analysis. Certain individuals on Nukulaelae are thought of as particularly adept gossips. This is explained in two ways: these individuals seek out contexts appropriate to gossip (e.g., by frequenting cooking huts, a common setting for gossip)

in which the gossipy aspect of their personhood can be given full rein, but they are also constantly on the lookout to turn nongossip social interactions into gossip. In a similar fashion, the Nukulaelae *pinapinaaine* is a man who seeks out contexts in which he can perform his gender liminality (by socializing with young women, through active participation in dance performances, for example); in other social contexts, his slightly effeminate demeanor is a constant reminder of the possibility that the context may turn into one in which he can perform as a gender-liminal person, if the circumstances allow it. If the context is inappropriate for such a performance, as in the case of a formal meeting in which high-status individuals are present, he downplays his femininity.

The context boundedness of gender liminality has further implications. With the exception of modern-day Hawaii, where *māhū* status appears to be less closely connected to comedy, Polynesian societies view contexts in which displays of gender liminality are elaborated as antistructural, norm breaking and counterhegemonic, and the gender-liminal person plays a central role in bestowing these characteristics onto them. In Western Polynesia, gender liminality is closely associated with lack of restraint and decorum, as illustrated most strikingly by the gender-liminal person's association with a lack of sexual restraint. Recall the sexually charged jesting that Funafuti *pinapinaaine* delight their female companions with, the Samoan *fa'afafine's* association with nonvirginal womanhood in certain contexts and Tongan men's perception of the *fakaleiti* as sexual "fair game" unguarded by a brother's protection.

In contexts with less overtly sexual connotations, gender liminality also emerges as antistructural through its association with clowning, particularly in Samoa.⁹⁰ Its noticeable elaboration in performance contexts, which is a beautiful example of the general associations that Turner describes, is easy to explain.⁹¹ Performances in Polynesian cultures, particularly dancing, feature a strong antistructural component: in Samoa, traditional dance forms like the *pō ʻula* are based on a structural tension between *siva*, a graceful and dignified genre of dance movements, and *'aiuli*, namely, unrestrained and indecorous clowning.⁹² The opposi-

tion between restraint and lack of it in Samoan dancing is a structured enactment of conflictual oppositions at play in all aspects of Samoan culture and social order, as Shore masterfully demonstrates. Thus, rather than enact the triumph of order against nonorder, the dance displays, in a stylized manner, an unresolved but balanced tension between them. Even though these dualistic structures are most elaborated in Samoan culture, similar patterns are in evidence elsewhere in Polynesia. In Nukulaelae dance performances (*faatele*), an opposition exists between the row of young women (or sometimes men) who, facing the "official" audience, dance in a highly controlled style, and the singers and drummers who sit in a tightly knit concentric circle behind the young women. The singers and drummers become increasingly "out of control" as the tempo and loudness of the singing increases; some may gesticulate wildly to encourage further *matagi* "trancelike displays" in the chorus, while groups of two or three spontaneously get up to their feet and dance in the background, often in a clownish fashion.⁹³ Crucially, Nukulaelae's *pinapinaaine* plays a central role in gesturing, clowning and engendering structured chaos in the chorus (he is, however, constrained by a physical handicap).

Rather than equate decorum, gravity and norm making with social order and view clowning, parody and norm breaking as a threat to it, social order is better understood as achieved through a balance of opposing forces.⁹⁴ This characteristic of Polynesian societies lends support to semiotically informed models of society and culture as more or less controlled heterogeneity.⁹⁵ However, in many respects, clowning is not on an equal footing with decorum with respect to the politics of power and prestige. Clowning, lack of restraint and norm-breaking action are inherently antihegemonic and as such are inappropriate, antithetical and unbecoming to high-profile power brokering. For the gender-liminal person, this has several implications. First, gender-liminal features must be downplayed in contexts in which power is explicitly reproduced and transformed and in which counterhegemonic action is particularly risky. Thus it befalls the Samoan *fa'afafine* constantly to evaluate social situations for their recep-

tiveness to his antistructural femininity and to foreground and background his liminality accordingly. Second, gender liminality in its most overt forms is antithetical to sociopolitical ambition and is certainly not the most direct route to a socially "respectable" niche in society. The gender-liminal person may seek political power, but, as a precondition for his ambition to be taken seriously, he must shed his liminal status by entering in a heterosexual marriage and having children. In short, to hang on to one's gender liminality is to ensure that one remains outside of the race for political power and prestige in Polynesia. If there is a Polynesian equivalent of the Melanesian *rabisman* ("rubbish man"), the gender-liminal person is an excellent candidate.⁹⁶ (Indeed, among the Melanesian Hageners, the rubbish man is "like a woman," as Marilyn Strathern demonstrates.⁹⁷)

Serious doubt is thus shed on traditional representations of the social status of Polynesian gender liminality, in which it is typically depicted as "more than simply tolerated, [but] often highly respected."⁹⁸ It is not surprising that the social status of gender liminality in "non-Western" contexts is a central concern of recent cross-cultural literature stemming from gender studies and gay and lesbian studies. A common and more or less clearly articulated motivation in this corpus of work is to demonstrate that preindustrial societies are more "tolerant," "accepting," "approving" or "accommodating" of erotic diversity and gender variation than "the West."⁹⁹ While such moral and political agendas are perfectly understandable in the context of lesbians' and gays' struggle for a political voice in postindustrial societies, they result in gross oversimplifications of the issues and in reifications of such key categories as "non-Western societies," "acceptance" and social "tolerance." Furthermore, the very question of social tolerance (a term that Herdt aptly describes as "an invidious descriptor")¹⁰⁰ presupposes a highly specific model of structure and agency, according to which personhood is an essentially atomistic phenomenon rooted in the psychological biography of the individual, which varies little across time and social contexts. In this view, personhood and its characteristics, such as sexual orientation, are fundamental, unalterable and nature-given attri-

butes that society at large may accept or reject. But much anthropological work has shown that this ethnopsychological model is deeply rooted in the middle-class ideology of postindustrial societies and is not universally applicable.¹⁰¹ In addition, the golden mythology professed by Western gay scholarship on the fringe of anthropology clearly buys into a highly romanticized view of the "Other" comparable to those found in the multiculturalist movement, which bears only a remote relationship to the ethnographic evidence.¹⁰² Little is even mentioned of the fact that the gender-liminal person is frequently the target of harassment and physical violence in societies like Samoa and Tonga, as noted earlier. Clearly, the relationship of gender liminality to social structures and cultural processes is much more complex than traditionally represented.

To be sure, there are forms of prestige outside of mainstream, hegemonic and high-profile social contexts. For example, I have demonstrated elsewhere that being accused of sorcery can be extremely damaging to one's reputation and social status in Nukulaelae society. But sorcery accusations do not affect everyone equally. When they target a politically ambitious man who, in his mid-forties, is at an age and in a position where he is expected to partake in mainstream political life, rumors of sorcery can literally destroy his career.¹⁰³ In contrast, when directed at a twice-widowed woman of loose morals who is widely suspected to have instigated the death of both her husbands, gossip about sorcery can be overturned and used by its victim to increase the awe in which she is held because of the powers attributed to her.¹⁰⁴ In a similar fashion, gender-liminal persons may acquire certain forms of alternative prestige, the most obvious of which is recognition of their excellence in performance arts, the very contexts in which liminality can be most appropriately foregrounded. They can become esteemed repositories of artistic and cultural traditions, which in fact they frequently are throughout the Polynesian region. It is this association with the performance of culture that provides gender-liminal persons high visibility in tourism in many areas of Polynesia, to which many are also drawn by their frequent interest in innovation and change. In

the tourist industry, they frequently animate displays of (more or less invented) "cultural traditions" to outsiders, and often become mediators of the interface between island societies and foreigners. These roles sometimes open the door to upward mobility: well-known Tongan *fakaleiti* and Samoan *fa'afafine* have become hoteliers and entertainers and have tapped into important founts of monetary and symbolic capital. Thus, to state that the person who foregrounds his gender liminality is excluded from partaking in the race for power and prestige does not mean that the role is completely devoid of rewards. But while areas of social life in which the gender-liminal person excels, like dance performances and tourist-oriented displays of cultural heritage, are symbolically related to power structures, they can also be dismissed as mere symbols that pale in importance when compared to domains in which preexisting power structures are explicitly reproduced, maintained and enacted. Crucially, these are the domains from which the gender-liminal person is excluded.

The gender-liminal person's prestige does not result directly from his liminal status, because liminality in and of itself is anything but prestigious; but prestige and power may result from certain secondary associations of liminality. It is particularly befitting of Polynesian contexts that certain facets of an individual's identity may be valued, while others are held in low esteem, given Polynesian notions of personhood as a multifaceted entity. In certain contexts, such as artistic performance, the liminal individual is esteemed and admired, while in other contexts his lack of social standing may be centralized. This situation can be usefully contrasted with Erving Goffman's depiction of stigmatized individuals in mainstream North American society, whose persona may be "spoiled," in the eyes of society, by a single stigmatized trait (alcoholism, physical handicap, homosexuality, etc.).¹⁰⁵ In contrast, prestige, esteem and social approbation in Polynesian society are better understood as characteristics of the relationship between persons and social contexts rather than immutable features of persons.

Does Polynesian Gender Liminality Constitute a Third Gender?

The foregoing discussion naturally leads to the question of the status of liminal persons in the Polynesian culture of gender. Should liminality be considered as a third gender separate from women and men but on par with them with regard to their status as social and cultural categories, as many have argued?¹⁰⁶ In the following discussion, I argue that, while gender liminality is a particularly striking illustration of the permeability and permutability of gender categories in Polynesia, there is no compelling evidence that Polynesian cultures accord it separate gender status.

First, no reference whatsoever is made to gender liminality in the social principles on which all Polynesian cultures base the organization of society and culture, namely, the grammar of kinship.¹⁰⁷ As in all societies,¹⁰⁸ kinship in Polynesia is structured on the basis of a fundamental opposition and asymmetrical complementarity between male and female entities, which leaves no room for an "in-between" category. The praxis of kinship, through the structuration of the family, the organization of political power and the generation of symbolic structures, is related to the structure of kinship in a complex manner, in Polynesia as everywhere else; but neither does one find any overt reference to gender liminality in praxis, as evidenced by the absence of a brother's protection of his liminal brother's chastity.

Second, from a different perspective, there are fundamental qualitative differences between gender liminality as a category and the categories constituted by women on the one hand and men on the other. As I demonstrated earlier, gender liminality is multifarious in the extreme. Its boundaries are porous, insofar as different degrees of gender liminality can be identified that can vary in form and intensity across contexts. While there is some variation in how manhood and womanhood manifest themselves, this variation is considerably less dramatic than variations across liminal persons. Similarly, the fact that particular men may retreat out of gender liminality in the course of their lives finds no counterpart in the grammar of gender: no boundary crossing ever takes place between men and women.

Third, the context boundedness of liminality presents a striking contrast with gender. It is true that, in keeping with Polynesian understandings of personhood as a multifaceted entity, both women and men can foreground or background signs of femaleness or maleness, as when high-ranking Samoan chiefs assume in certain ceremonial situations the sitting position of a woman, with one leg astride his opposite thigh in contrast to the normatively male tailor-fashion cross-legged posture.¹⁰⁹ Other examples abound in both generalities and details of social life, particularly those aspects of society and culture in which the ambiguous role of Polynesian women as high-status sisters and low-status childbearers becomes important.¹¹⁰ But nowhere does one find in the structure of male and female genders the same degree of dependence on social context for the recognition of the category as one does with gender liminality. It is also significant that the domains in which gender liminality is most felicitously foregrounded, such as artistic performance, can also easily be dismissed as mere symbols of the more "serious" domains in which female and male identities are constituted, such as political and ceremonial domains.

In short, there is no compelling reason to treat gender liminality as a challenge to gender dimorphism. Of course, recognizing a dimorphism between women and men as social and cultural categories is not equivalent to dividing society into two watertight groups; as discussed earlier, female and male symbols are related to women's and men's identities in a complex manner in Polynesian societies. So characterizing gender liminality as something other than a third gender is not simply the result of the naturalization by Western ethnographers of gender as a uniquely dichotomous phenomenon, as is popularly maintained in many gender- and gay-studies circles.¹¹¹ Indeed, the insistence on viewing liminal individuals as forming a third-gender category can be equally criticized as a Western romantic construction of the "Other" as "different" from a reified "Western" view of sex and gender, which itself is in need of critical clarification. In the case of Polynesian gender liminality, all evidence suggests that gender liminality operates within the confines of this dimorphism. In the

conclusion, I will elaborate on several alternatives to the third-gender hypothesis and suggest an account of the place of liminality in the structure of gender.

Gender Liminality on Nukulaelae

Nukulaelae is a small, isolated atoll of the Tuvalu group, on the boundary between Polynesia and Micronesia, with a population of 350. Like many other Polynesian societies, Nukulaelae society includes gender-liminal individuals, of whom one is a permanent resident of the atoll. In the following, in an effort to provide ethnographic information on particular forms of Polynesian gender liminality, I briefly describe the special problems that the Nukulaelae case presents, stressing the tentative nature of my investigation of this aspect of Nukulaelae society. Until now, I have hesitated to write up these materials because of what I perceived to be the idiosyncratic character of the Nukulaelae case. However, I now believe that the gender-liminal "norm" as it has been presented in the literature has reified a category that is anything but unified. By presenting information on a case that appears to deviate from a reified "norm," I argue for a more particularistic approach to the study of Polynesian gender liminalities.

On Nukulaelae and elsewhere in the group, Tuvaluans view gender liminality as a borrowing from the Micronesian Gilbert Islands to the north, where many other "undesirable" traits of Tuvaluan culture, like sorcery, are also thought to have originated.¹¹² The term *pinapinaaine*, or *pina* for short, is a loan word from the Gilbertese language (the Tuvaluan word *fakafafine* is also used, although more rarely). Tuvaluans assert that liminal men and women abound in Gilbertese society, although the phenomenon is not mentioned at all in the ethnographic literature.

During my four-odd years of fieldwork on Nukulaelae between 1979 and 1991, the one permanent resident of the atoll labeled *pinapinaaine* was a man in his mid-forties, whom I will call Founuku. All other Nukulaelae liminals reside on Funafuti, the capital atoll of the country, or abroad, and visit the atoll for brief periods of time. This fact is significant: Nukulaelae people, particularly younger ones, view outmigration as generally desir-

able, but gender-liminal persons actively seek opportunities to live away from the atoll. The prospect of cash-earning employment, which presupposes some educational achievements (usually a secondary-school diploma over which there is an enormous amount of competition), provides these opportunities, and it is not incidental that *pinapinaaine* are overrepresented in governmental offices on Funafuti, the government furnishing most of the salaried employment available in the country. Salaried employment does give liminal individuals some claim to prestige in light of the fact that only the privileged are involved in the monetized economy, although this prestige remains for the most part marginal to life on Nukulaelae (the principal beneficiaries of this prestige are not the wage earner himself but the liminal individual's nonliminal older relatives in residence on the atoll whom the wage earner supports through remittances). At the same time, migration allows gender-liminal individuals to put some distance between themselves and the strictures of "tradition" and the concomitant Christian-based morality. Although religious discourse is largely silent on the topic, being considerably more concerned with issues like sorcery, adultery, conversions to other religions and liquor consumption, religious morality can nevertheless inhibit those who follow less-than-orthodox paths in life.¹¹³ In Founuku's case, however, migration is not an option because of a severe physical handicap, the result of an illness he contracted when he was a child. While he is mobile and even travels to Funafuti on occasion, negative Nukulaelae attitudes toward physical handicaps have severely curtailed his access to the regular range of opportunities in the course of his life.

The reasoning that Nukulaelae people consistently offer to account for Founuku's status as *pinapinaaine* is related to his handicap. Men, particularly younger men, are expected to make themselves "useful" (*aogaa*) to their kin groups and the community by "climbing [trees]" (*kake*); this activity functions as a synecdoche for men's role in food production, which also involves fishing, tending swamp-taro gardens and catching birds. But because Founuku is not physically capable of climbing trees, he displays his "usefulness" to the kin group and the community by excel-

ling at skills that his physical condition allows him to perform, namely, weaving, cooking and washing clothes, all of which fall squarely within women's domain.¹¹⁴ His industriousness and energy (*maalosi*) are widely recognized: his mats are particularly well executed, and he produces them with maximal efficiency. The appreciative recognition that Nukulaelae accord to Founuku's energy echoes the North American berdache's reputation as an "ultra-successful woman."¹¹⁵ However, there is no evidence that Founuku's strength and industry is linked to semen ingestion, as Louis Joseph Bouge states in reference to the Tahitian *maha* (but does not prove).¹¹⁶ The connection between semen ingestion and virile energy widely attested in Melanesia appears to be essentially absent in Polynesia.¹¹⁷ What is interesting about the causal link that Nukulaelae Islanders draw between Founuku's handicap and his liminality is that he is not the only handicapped man on the atoll, yet he is the only *pina*.

However, this is not perceived as a contradiction, in that other handicapped people are simply said to have "opted" to become "useful" to society in other ways. One man, for example, became an accomplished builder of canoes and tender of pigs, activities typically associated with male roles. Nukulaelae's highly sociocentric view of the person does not mean that biographies must conform to preset grooves over which the individual has no control. On the contrary, people are viewed as making rational choices in the face of different options and strategies.

Founuku also excels in at least two additional activities: singing and gossiping. While everyone sings and gossips, these activities, according to received assumptions, occupy a much more important role in women's lives than in men's. For example, men's gossip is defined as "chatting" (*sauttala*), and, even though it is as socially damaging of other people's reputations as women's talk, it is often contrasted with the latter, which is said to be more insidious, dramatic and socially disruptive than men's chatting. In contrast to men, Founuku speaks very fast, makes extensive use of pitch and volume contrasts for dramatic effect, has an animated nonverbal communicative style and can become quite excited in the narrative of a good scandal. In short, his gossiping style comes

very close to the prototype of woman's talk in Nukulaelae interactional ideology. Founuku is also an accomplished composer of dancing songs and an innovative choreographer, and these skills earn him some prestige in the eyes of a society for whom dancing and singing are almost an obsession. In the early 1980s, he was instrumental in establishing a dancing group, which half of the island community eventually joined and which came to have considerable prominence not just as entertainment troupe but as a forum for fund-raising activities for the atoll's development projects. Founuku authored an entire repertoire of songs and dances for the group, designed costumes of impeccable taste by Nukulaelae standards and ran the entire venture with great expertise and authority. Through his gossip, songwriting and choreography, Founuku's presence in the community is anything but subdued. His hut is a social center for younger people, mostly younger women but also adolescent men.

Founuku differs from other men of his age in a number of other respects. First, he is not married. Although there are a few other older bachelors in the community, they are generally pitied as having been unable to secure a spouse when they were younger and are judged to be slightly morally deficient for having failed their responsibility to the community to produce children. The moral connotations of Founuku's situation are somewhat mitigated by his handicap, which impairs him in providing for a family and hence from attracting a suitable spouse. For example, it is not said of him that he is *maa i faafine* ("shy or ashamed in front of women"), a common rationalization for the behavior of visiting *pinapinaaine*.

Second, Founuku is widely rumored to engage in surreptitious sexual encounters with young men, who sometimes boast of having had sex with him (as "inserters," as usual). But more morally damaging is the rumor that a few years back Founuku had tried to coax an eight-year-old boy to fellate him. The picture is thus considerably more confused than common depictions of liminal men in other Polynesian contexts lead one to understand. Third, and most important, Founuku is excluded from the political arena for all intents and purposes because he is not the head of a family. Again, he is not alone in this situation and falls squarely under

the social rubric of a low-prestige man with little political clout and aspiration. He does not partake in meetings of the Council of Elders, in contrast to most men of his age. However, he is very successful in claiming a strong covert voice in the affairs of the community through gossip.

In most consequential respects, Founuku is identified as a man. He does not cross-dress, he does not engage in overt, caricatured portrayals of femininity, he sits on the men's side in the gender-segregated church and is very much perceived as taking a male role in the micropolitics of kinship. If anything, his maleness in this respect is centralized: Nukulaelae people frequently refer to his *mafi* ("physical strength"), which he amply demonstrates when disciplining younger members of his kin group; and indeed he is a strapping fellow despite his handicap. He is particularly notorious for having ferociously beaten a twenty-year-old *tuaatina* ("classificatory sister's son") who had been behaving in an antisocial manner, thus fulfilling an eminently male duty.

The picture that this very brief sketch presents is therefore complex. In certain ways Founuku is identified with mature maleness, while in other ways he is associated with immaturity, lack of prestige and importance, and femininity. But Founuku does not behave in ways that are completely novel to the culture. There is indeed limited creativity in his presentation of self, and, far from devising a new identity that would lend support to a "third gender" analysis, his personal characteristics are well established in the community. It is equally important to stress that the Nukulaelae data are essentially based on a single member of the community. However, I question whether this fact should be viewed as a limitation. Indeed, Nukulaelae society in general, like other small atoll societies, is very much made up of "individual cases." As I have attempted to show elsewhere in my analyses of politics, gossip and sorcery on the atoll, an understanding of such categories as personhood, power and prestige must take into account the social biographies that each agent assembles through social action. For example, Nukulaelae lacks a clearly defined system of social stratification comparable to, say, neighboring Samoa's. Underlying the atoll's sociopolitical system, one finds conflicting yet coexisting

ideologies, each of which calls for very different organizational structures.¹¹⁸ It is not surprising that the political arena provides malleability, and the political structure in place at any given time can differ radically from structures in place at other times. Crucially, the exact nature of the political order at any given moment is shaped by the individuals in charge. Failing to recognize the particularism of political processes and attempting to arrive at faceless generalizations about life in small-scale communities like Nukulaelae miss a crucial facet of how life is locally understood and organized. Thus, while Founuku deviates in major ways from the "textbook" version of the Polynesian gender-liminal person, this brief case study suggests caution in identifying "textbook versions" of such multifarious categories.

Conclusion

This essay has analyzed the social and cultural context of gender liminality in various Polynesian settings and the relationship of the category to its context. I have described Polynesian gender liminality as a complex phenomenon grounded in several aspects of social life and symbolic structures, and its complexity derives in large part from its multifarious nature. Beginning with a review of historical representations of Polynesian gender liminality, I turned to functionalist accounts of the phenomenon, arguing that, while they do capture some of the cultural essence of gender liminality, they fail to account for its complexity. Through a more detailed inquiry into the relationship of gender liminality and sexuality, the culture and politics of gender and social inequality, I showed that a shift in focus from function to meaning provides a more fruitful stance from which the complexities of the phenomenon can be unraveled.

I then challenged common representations of gender liminality as a third-gender category by demonstrating that gender liminality operates within the confines of a dimorphic view of gender and its symbols. There are several alternatives to viewing Polynesian gender liminality as constituting a third gender. First, liminal persons can be thought of as "switching" gender identity, to become women who "happen" to be physiologically male. Many argu-

ments militate against this account: liminal persons always keep some masculine traits, even at the most cosmetic level; in Western Polynesia, they do not have access to an important aspect of womanhood, namely, the status of the exalted virgin, to which even "fallen" young women at least can stake a claim; and they always retain the potential of returning to full male identity if the social context requires it. A second alternative is to conceptualize liminality as only incidentally related to gender and more pivotally defined by issues of power and economic status. Such an analysis was proposed in reference to the *xanith* in Oman in the controversy that followed the publication of Unni Wikan's original analysis of the phenomenon.¹¹⁹ According to this account, the *xanith* acquires womanlike attributes because he is a prostitute, an occupation in which he engages because of economic necessity. In Polynesia, the gender-liminal person is associated with loose sexual conduct, but economic factors do not play a motivational role in this association, at least in the more traditionally oriented areas of the region.¹²⁰ Furthermore, while power and prestige certainly play a role in gender liminality, they do so in terms of the culture and politics of gender and not independently of them.

The last alternative, which in my view best captures the intricacies of the phenomenon, posits liminal individuals as men who borrow certain social and cultural attributes and symbols normatively associated with women. The nature and number of these attributes differ from one individual to the other; many can be foregrounded or backgrounded according to the social context; they can be shed if certain incompatible priorities emerge, such as the need or desire to partake in on-stage political processes. While liminality is best viewed as a borrowing process rather than as a role or identity, it does give rise secondarily to a rather loosely defined identity. Fundamentally counterhegemonic, it can be a means through which some individuals stake a claim on certain forms of prestige, but at some cost, as evidenced in the low status with which it is associated in the politics of sexual encounters, for example. This perspective on gender liminality provides a framework in which the variability of the category and its place in structures of power can be better accounted for than other models. It

also resonates well with our current understanding of Polynesian ethnopsychologies. Whatever its nature, gender liminality is the locus of a great deal of ambiguity, conflict and contestation in Polynesian societies. It is the site of conflicts between social demarcations of the boundaries of eroticism and person-based sexual desire, between social and personal understandings of gender and between the diverse definitions of morality, among others.

An important and related theme that has surfaced recurrently in this essay but which I have not addressed directly is the sensitivity of Polynesian gender liminality to social change. Mention was made of this sensitivity in reference to the development of Western-style gay identities in such societies as Samoa, whose relationship to more traditional patterns of gender liminality is still poorly documented. Social change was also represented as particularly problematic in highly acculturated areas like Hawaii and New Zealand: the association of shamanism with *māhū* identity in Hawaii, which I suggested to be a borrowing from Native North America, is a case in point. Gender-liminal individuals readily associate with tourists and other expatriates, as prostitutes, performers, or otherwise, and it is more than their dish-washing skills that give them privileged access to domestic positions in hotels and in the homes of Westerners. Questions raised by social change are especially important in light of the fact that Polynesian gender liminality is frequently represented as frozen in time,¹²¹ while at the same time many descriptions are composite portraits made up of vignettes from radically divergent time periods, in which the question of cultural continuity is never raised. These questions are also consequential in that gender-liminal individuals are often innovators and are thus particularly receptive and adaptive to change (the parallel with Western gay men as trend-setters in middle-class North America is both puzzling and compelling). Finally, much of the intra- and intercultural diversity that the category exhibits can be attributed directly to the complexities of emergent modernity in the Pacific Islands. Further discussion of gender liminality in Polynesia cannot take place without locating the category in a specific historical context and must address its relationship to modernization and change.

CHAPTER SEVEN

How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity

Will Roscoe

The men are strongly inclined to sodomy; but the boys that abandon themselves thus are excluded from the society of men and sent out to that of women as being effeminate. They are confused with the *Hermaphrodites* which they say are found in quantity in the country of the *Floridians*. I believe that these Hermaphrodites are none other than the effeminate boys, that in a sense truly are *Hermaphrodites*. Be that as it may, they employ them in all the diverse handiworks of women, in servile functions, and to carry the munitions and provisions of war. They are also distinguished from the men and the women by the color of the feathers that they put on their heads and for the scorn that they bring on to themselves.

— Francisco Coreal*

Introduction: The Problem of Translation

This was how the Spanish traveler Francisco Coreal, who visited Florida in 1669, described the social role that anthropologists now term *berdache*. The presence of berdaches had been well docu-

*Francisco Coreal, *Voyages de François Coreal aux Indes Occidentales*... vol. 1 (Amsterdam: J. Frederic Bernard, 1722), pp. 33–34 (my trans.). Concerning the authorship and reliability of this text, see Gabriel G. Jaramillo, "Francisco Coreal y su Viaje a las Indias Occidentales," *Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica de Colombia* 11.1 (1953), pp. 27–62.

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CHAPTER SIX: POLYNESIAN GENDER LIMINALITY
THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

1. This essay is based on fieldwork which was conducted in Vava'u, Tonga, in 1978-79 and 1981, and on Nukulaelae Atoll, Tuvalu, in 1980-82, 1985, 1990 and 1991. It was funded at various times by the National Science Foundation, the Harry F. Guggenheim Foundation, the Wenner Gren Foundation and the Fondation de la Vocation. A Rockefeller Fellowship at the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawaii in 1991-92 afforded me the time to think about the issues presented here in a stimulating environment, intellectually and otherwise. I thank Ian Condry, Tamar Gordon, Vili Hereniko, Alan Howard and Jeannette Mageo, whom I bullied into providing detailed criticisms on a draft of this essay at very short notice. I am particularly indebted to Hal Scheffler for his close reading of this piece, and for gently coaxing me away from facile conclusions on issues of gender and sex over the years.

Polynesia roughly includes all islands and island groups that fall within a triangle with New Zealand, Hawaii and Easter Island as its apexes. There are also isolated Polynesian communities scattered on the fringe of Melanesia and Micronesia, the so-called Polynesian Outliers, about which nothing will be said

in this essay. While the region displays a certain amount of cultural homogeneity, its western boundaries are fuzzy: the islands of Rotuma and Fiji, whose inhabitants do not speak Polynesian languages, resemble Polynesian societies in many respects. It is customary to divide Polynesia proper into Western Polynesia, which includes principally Tonga, Samoa and the smaller island groups in their vicinity, and Eastern Polynesia, made up of Hawaii, New Zealand and all island groups east of the Cook Islands. This division is based in part on very general cultural patterns that distinguish the two subregions.

2. See, e.g., Suzanne J. Kessler, "The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants," *Signs* 16 (1990); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); Judith Shapiro, "Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex," in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (eds.), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

3. Robert J. Morris, "Aikāne: Accounts of Hawaiian Same-Sex Relationships in the Journals of Captain Cook's Third Voyage (1776-80)," *Journal of Homosexuality* 19.4 (1990), proposes that, in Hawaii at the time of contact, a "homosexual" was referred to as *aikāne* (which in contemporary Hawaiian translates roughly as "friend") and that the word *māhū* was subsequently borrowed from Tahiti. But the argument rests on a rather uncritical reading of the already equivocal historical records and fails to make problematic the categories to which these terms refer. Raleigh Watts, "The Polynesian Mahu," in Stephen O. Murray (ed.), *Oceanic Homosexualities* (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 171, provides "to spring up, to grow" as a secondary meaning of the word *māhū*; however, this is the translation of an entirely different word, *mahu*, with no etymological connection to *māhū*.

4. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rights of Passage* (1909), trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

5. Compare Gilbert Herdt, "Representations of Homosexuality: An Essay on Cultural Ontology and Historical Comparison," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1991).

6. See Jeannette M. Mageo, "Male Transvestism and Cultural Change in Samoa," *American Ethnologist* 19 (1992); Kris Poasa, "The Samoan Fa'afafine: One Case Study and Discussion of Transsexualism," *Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality* 5.3 (1992); Bradd Shore, "Sexuality and Gender in Samoa: Conceptions and Missed Conceptions," in Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (eds.), *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

7. Shapiro, "Transsexualism," pp. 268-70.

8. Tamar Gordon, personal communication.

9. Evelyn Blackwood, "Breaking the Mirror: The Construction of Lesbianism and the Anthropological Discourse on Homosexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 11.3/4 (1986).

10. Louis Antoine de Bougainville, *A Voyage Round the World Performed by Order of His Most Christian Majesty in the Years 1766, 1767, 1768, and 1769*, trans. John R. Foster (London: Nourse & Davies, 1772), pp. 217-19.

11. Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Island Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), and *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

12. Orsmond, Journal, October 24, 1827, London Missionary Society Archives, cited in Douglas Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*, 3 vols. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1974).

13. Neil Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 195.

14. Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas* (Milton, Queensland: Jacaranda, 1980); Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980); T. Walter Herbert, Jr., *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

15. Jefferson, Journal, June 8, 1799, London Missionary Society Archives, cited in Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*.

16. Edward Edwards and George Hamilton, *Voyage of H.M.S. Pandora Despatched to Arrest the Mutineers of the 'Bounty' in the South Seas, 1790-91*, ed. Basil Thompson (London: Edwards, 1915), p. 113.

17. William Bligh, *The Log of the Bounty*, 2 vols., ed. Owen Rutter (London: Golden Cockerel, 1937), vol. 2, p. 17.

18. George Mortimer, *Observations and Remarks Made During a Voyage to*

the Islands of Teneriffe, Amsterdam, Maria's Islands near Van Diemen's Land; Otaheiti, Sandwich Islands; Owhyhee, the Fox Islands on the North West Coast of America, Tinian, and from Thence to Canton, in the Brig Mercury, Commanded by John Henry Cox, Esq. (London: Printed for the author, 1791), p. 47.

19. Quote in Anne Salmond, *Two Worlds: First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans, 1642-1772* (Auckland: Viking, 1991), pp. 251-52.

20. The situation obviously strikes an enduring chord in Western lore: for example, it is the central theme of a short story by contemporary New Zealand writer John Cranna in *Visitors* (Auckland: Reed, 1989).

21. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Viking, 1980); Arnold D. Harvey, "Prosecutions for Sodomy in England at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," *Historical Journal* 21 (1978); George Sebastian Rousseau, "The Pursuit of Homosexuality in the Eighteenth Century: 'Utterly Confused Category' and/or Rich Repository," in Robert P. Maccubbin (ed.), *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality During the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Randolph Trumbach, "Modern Prostitution and Gender in *Fanny Hill*: Libertine and Domesticated Fantasy," in Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds.), *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

22. See essay by Trumbach, this volume. See also Trumbach, "London's Sodomy: Homosexual Behavior and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Social History* 11 (1977), "Gender and the Homosexual Role in Modern Western Culture: The 18th and 19th Centuries Compared," in Dennis Altman et al., *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?* (Amsterdam and London: An Dekker/Schorer, GMP, 1989), "The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660-1750," in Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr. (eds.), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Meridian, 1989), and "Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2 (1991).

23. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981), p. 100.

24. Arthur Gilbert, "Sodomy and the Law in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Societas* 8 (1978).

25. Gilbert, "Sexual Deviance and Disaster During the Napoleonic Wars," *Albion* 9 (1977).

26. Robert J. Corber, "Representing the 'Unspeakable': William Godwin

and the Politics of Homophobia," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990), pp. 86-97.

27. Gilbert, "The *Africaine* Courts-Martial: A Study of Buggery and the Royal Navy," *Journal of Homosexuality* 1 (1974), and "Buggery and the British Navy, 1700-1861," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1976).

28. Edwin N. Ferdon, *Early Tahiti as the Explorers Saw It, 1767-1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981), proposes that "male homosexuality" in Tahiti was introduced by early European sailors and that "once [it] was accepted as a way of life for some Tahitian men, transvestism followed as a logical sequel" (p. 154). This unlikely scenario is founded on severe conceptual confusions and flawed logic.

29. John Martin, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean with the Original Grammar and Vocabulary of Their Language Compiled and Arranged from Extensive Communications of Mr William Mariner, Several Years Resident in Those Islands*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1817).

30. Mageo, "Male Transvestism."

31. Robert Borofsky and Alan Howard, "The Early Contact Period," in Borofsky and Howard (eds.), *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).

32. It is particularly suggestive that contemporary Samoans are notoriously concerned with presenting an idealized "official" depiction of their culture to outsiders, as we know from the Freeman-Mead noncontroversy of the early 1980s. Significantly, there is little room for *fa'afāfine* in this depiction.

33. More detailed (although frequently confused and uninformative) were semipopular accounts in the "sexual life in the South Seas" genre published at various times in the twentieth century, beginning of course with Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: Morrow, 1928) and including such works as George Biddle, *Tahitian Journal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), Bengt Danielsson, *Love in the South Seas* (New York: Reynal, 1956), Donald S. Marshall and Robert C. Suggs, *Human Sexual Behavior* (New York: Morrow, 1971), and Suggs, *Marquesan Sexual Behavior* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

34. Ernest Beaglehole and Pearl Beaglehole, *Pangai: A Village in Tonga* (Wellington: The Polynesian Society, 1941). On Tonga, see also Edward W. Gifford, *Tongan Society* (Honolulu, HI: Bishop Museum, 1929); on the Marquesas, see Edward S.C. Handy, *The Native Culture in the Marquesas* (Honolulu, HI: Bishop Museum, 1923); on Pukapuka, Beaglehole and Beaglehole, *Ethnology*

of Pukapuka (Honolulu, HI: Bishop Museum, 1938); see Howard and Borofsky, "Introduction," in Howard and Borofsky (eds.), *Developments*, for a description of the historical context of these works.

35. Herdt, "Representations," pp. 489 and 607; Jan Van Baal, "The Dialectics of Sex in Marind-anim Culture," in Herdt (ed.), *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 128. Berdaches are most cogently treated in Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems, "The North American Berdache," *Current Anthropology* 24 (1983); Robert Fulton and Steven W. Anderson, "The Amerindian 'Man-Woman': Gender, Liminality, and Cultural Continuity," *Current Anthropology* 33 (1992); Will Roscoe, *The Zuni Man-Woman* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), and essay in this volume; and Whitehead, "The Bow and the Burden Strap: A New Look at Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native North America," in Ortnier and Whitehead (eds.), *Sexual Meanings*; see also Roscoe, "Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles Among North American Indians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 14.3/4 (1987).

36. Several lines of argumentation are suggestive. In contrast with Native North America, Polynesian societies were generally not subjected to systematic annihilating efforts on the part of colonizing populations, with the possible exception of Hawaii and New Zealand. While North American berdache traditions died out with the contexts that supported them, the cultural setting in which Polynesian gender liminality is embedded never disappeared. The contrast with Melanesian "ritualized" homosexuality is more difficult to explain, although the central role that sexuality plays in the definition of the phenomenon and the particular virulence of modern-day missionary intrusion may be implicated in its disappearance.

37. Robert I. Levy, "The Community Function of Tahitian Male Transvestism: A Hypothesis," *Anthropological Quarterly* 44.1 (1971), and *Tahitians: Mind and Experience in the Society Islands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

38. Mageo, "Male Transvestism"; Shore, "Sexuality and Gender."

39. Levy, "Community Function," p. 14.

40. See Herdt, "Introduction," in this volume.

41. For journalistic accounts, see Walter L. Williams, "Sex and Shamanism: The Making of a Hawaiian Mahu," *The Advocate* 417 (1985); Carol E. Robertson, "Art Essay: The Māhū of Hawai'i," *Feminist Studies* 15 (1989).

42. I use the phrase "homosexual behavior" here to refer to encounters between biologically male entities in which at least one party experiences erotic

arousal of some kind. Even though sexual encounters with gender-liminal individuals bear some similarity to heterosexual encounters, they are decisively not the same. In particular, while liminal individuals acquire some of the sexual attributes of women, they do not *become* women in the eyes of society, nor do they cease to be men. The terms *homosexual* or *homoerotic* are thus relevant here.

43. On Samoa, see Mageo, "Male Transvestism," p. 450; on Tahiti, see Levy, *Tahitians*, p. 139.

44. Callender and Kochems, "Men and Not-Men: Male Gender-mixing Statuses and Homosexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 11.3/4 (1985).

45. Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Vol. 1*; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); on the individualist imperative and capitalism, see, e.g., Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

46. Gender liminality comes in full bloom in such contexts as dances and in urban Polynesia's bars and discotheques. These are precisely the contexts in which heavy drinking takes place among nonliminal men, and the image of the staggering young buck harassing the gender-liminal person is familiar throughout the Polynesian area.

47. Danielsson et al., "Polynesia's Third Sex," *Pacific Islands Monthly* 49.8 (1978). In Western Samoa, tensions between liminal and nonliminal men appear to be increasing as a non-*fa'afafine* homosexual identity emerges, at odds with "traditional" Samoan ways of understanding sexuality and personhood, and as Western-style gay activism trickles back from the Samoan immigrant community in New Zealand (Douglass St. Christian, personal communication). However, explaining violence against liminal individuals as the sole result of emergent modernity in the Pacific Islands presupposes a romanticized view of Polynesia that has no validity outside the Western imagination.

48. Levy, *Tahitians*.

49. Herdt, "Representations," pp. 619–20.

50. Compare Mageo, "Male Transvestism," p. 453.

51. An exception to this pattern is sexual encounters with male Western tourists, which Tongans (and Western Polynesians in general) do not hesitate to engage in. However, I surmise that in such encounters the Westerner is aligned with the *fakaleiti*. The political and economic contexts in which such encounters are embedded, which deserve further scrutiny, increasingly resemble the

heterosexual encounters between tourists and Palestinian men in Jerusalem's Old City described in Glenn Bowman, "Fucking Tourists: Sexual Relations and Tourism in Jerusalem's Old City," *Critique of Anthropology* 9 (1989).

52. Levy, *Tahitians*, p. 138. Gifford, *Tahitian Society*, p. 204, notes that his Tongan informant in the 1920s talked about the gender-liminal person as a hermaphrodite. Early travelers, like Bligh (*Log of the Bounty*, vol. 2, pp. 16–17), also tended to merge the two categories when speaking of the *māhū* in Tahiti, demonstrating that the eighteenth-century English naturalizations of gender resembled those of modern-day Polynesians.

53. Herdt, "Representations," p. 626.

54. Mageo, "Male Transvestism," p. 453.

55. Laurie K. Gluckman, "Lesbianism in the Maori," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 1 (1967), and "Transcultural Consideration of Homosexuality with Special Reference to the New Zealand Maori," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 8 (1974).

56. Levy, *Tahitians*, p. 140.

57. Mageo and St. Christian, personal communication.

58. Levy, *Tahitians*, pp. 232–39.

59. For a concise discussion of this problem see Sally McConnell-Ginet, "Language and Gender," in Frederick J. Newmeyer (ed.), *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vol. 4, pp. 76–77.

60. Elinor Ochs, "The Impact of Stratification and Socialization on Men's and Women's Speech in Western Samoa," in Susan U. Philips, Susan Steele and Christine Tanz (eds.), *Language, Gender, and Sex in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

61. Levy, *Tahitians*, p. 233.

62. Oliver, *Two Tahitian Villages: A Study in Comparison* (Laie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University, 1981), pp. 68–86; Biddle, *Tahitian Journal*, p. 63.

63. Oliver, *Two Tahitian Villages*, p. 146.

64. Joel C. Kuipers, "Talking about Troubles: Gender Differences in Weyéwa Ritual Speech Use," in Jane M. Atkinson and Shelly Errington (eds.), *Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

65. Anna Meigs, "Multiple Gender Ideologies and Statuses," in Peggy R. Sanday and Ruth G. Goodenough (eds.), *Beyond the Second Sex: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

1990); Alice Schlegel, "Gender Meanings: General and Specific," in Sanday and Goodenough (eds.), *Beyond the Second Sex*.

66. Micaela di Leonardo, "Introduction: Gender, Culture, and Political Economy: Feminist Anthropology in Historical Perspective," in di Leonardo (ed.), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Sandra Morgen, "Gender and Anthropology," in Morgen (ed.), *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching* (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1989); Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"; on Polynesia, Ortner, "Gender and Sexuality in Hierarchical Societies: The Case of Polynesia and Some Comparative Implications," in Ortner and Whitehead (eds.), *Sexual Meanings*.

67. Biddle, *Tahitian Journal*, p. 64.

68. Mageo, "Male Transvestism." Incidental reports suggest that parody is not an essential feature of *fa'afafine* identity in Samoa and that contemporary Tahitian *māhū* do engage in caricatural portrayals of femininity in some contexts.

69. See, e.g., Barbara A. Babcock-Abrahams, "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11 (1974), and "Too Many, Too Few: Ritual Modes of Signification," *Semiotica* 23 (1978); Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972); Bruce Jackson, "Deviance as Success: The Double Inversion of Stigmatized Roles," in Barbara A. Babcock (ed.), *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); James Peacock, "Symbolic Reversal and Social History: Transvestites and Clowns of Java," in Babcock (ed.), *Reversible World*; Turner, *Forest of Symbols*.

70. Levy, "Community Function," p. 20.

71. Levy, *Tahitians*, p. 234.

72. E. Allan Hanson and Louise Hanson, *Counterpoint in Maori Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Ortner, "Gender and Sexuality"; Shore, "Sexuality and Gender"; Valerio Valeri, *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); on culinary prohibitions, see Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*, pp. 224–27.

73. Shore, *Sala'ilua: A Samoan Mystery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), and "Sexuality and Gender."

74. See Penelope Schoeffel, "Gender, Status, and Power in Samoa," *Canberra Anthropology* 1 (1978), for a slightly divergent analysis.

75. Mageo, "Male Transvestism."

76. The play between different aspects of womanhood, particularly those that invoke oppositions between virginal and nonvirginal status, or virtue and promiscuity, is not the exclusive monopoly of Samoan gender liminals. It is a common theme in Western drag shows and also surfaces in such contexts as Madonna's music video "Like a Virgin," in which the performer sings the refrain while simulating sexual motions.

77. Warren J. Blumenfeld and Diane Raymond, *Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1988), p. 105.

78. Watts, "The Polynesian Mahu," p. 171; see also Murray, "Austronesian Gender-defined Homosexuality: Introduction," in Murray (ed.), *Oceanic Homosexualities*.

79. Herdt, "Representations."

80. George Devereux, "Institutionalized Homosexuality among the Mohave Indians," *Human Biology* 9 (1937); cf. Herdt, "Representations."

81. Whitehead, "The Bow and Burden Strap."

82. See Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990), and also her essay in this volume.

83. Levy, *Tahitians*, p. 133.

84. Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman*.

85. Unni Wikan, "Man Becomes Woman: Transsexualism in Oman as a Key to Gender Roles," *Man*, n.s., 12 (1977).

86. Mageo, "Male Transvestism."

87. Shore, *Sala'ilua*; Eleanor R. Gerber, "Rage and Obligation: Samoan Emotions in Conflict," in Geoffrey M. White and John Kirkpatrick (eds.), *Person, Self, and Experience: Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); Ochs, "The Impact of Stratification."

88. Niko Besnier, "Literacy and the Notion of the Person on Nukulaelae Atoll," *American Anthropologist* 93 (1991); Howard, "Ethnopsychology and the Prospects for a Cultural Psychology," in White and Kirkpatrick (eds.), *Person, Self, and Experience*; Karen L. Ito, "Affective Bonds: Hawaiian Interrelationships of Self," in White and Kirkpatrick (eds.), *Person, Self, and Experience*; Kirkpatrick, *The Marquesan Notion of the Person* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

89. Mageo, "Male Transvestism," p. 452.

90. Compare Peacock, "Symbolic Reversal," on transvestism and clowning in Java.

91. Victor Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, ed. Edith Turner (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

92. Shore, *Sala'ilua*, pp. 258–59.
93. Dieter Christensen and Gerd Koch, *Die Musik der Ellice-Inseln* (Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1964); Besnier, "Involvement in Linguistic Practice: An Ethnographic Appraisal," *Journal of Pragmatics* (in press).
94. Shore, "The Absurd Side of Power in Samoa," paper presented at the Conference on Leadership in Oceania: For Raymond Firth on the Occasion of his 90th Birthday, London, 1991.
95. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in Richard G. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991); Babcock-Abrahams, "A Tolerated Margin," and "Too Many, Too Few"; Turner, *Blazing the Trail*.
96. On *rabisman*, see Marie Reay, "The Politics of a Witch-Killing," *Oceania* 47 (1976).
97. Marilyn Strathern, "Self-Interest and the Social Good: Some Implications of Hagen Gender Imagery," in Ortner and Whitehead (eds.), *Sexual Meanings*, and "Domesticity and the Denigration of Women," in Denise O'Brien and Sharon W. Tiffany (eds.), *Rethinking Women's Roles: Perspectives from the Pacific* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1985).
98. David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 207.
99. The blanket characterization of certain "non-Western" societies as "nonhomophobic" common in this literature deflects attention from examining the nature of homophobia in any society. Walter W. Williams, "Benefits for Nonhomophobic Societies: An Anthropological Perspective," in Warren J. Blumenfeld (ed.), *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), is a good illustration of how problematic such reasoning can be.
100. Herdt, "Representations," p. 489.
101. For a review, see Geoffrey M. White, "Ethnopsychology," in Theodore Schwartz, White and Catherine A. Lutz (eds.), *New Directions in Psychological Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
102. See Richard J. Perry, "Why Do Multiculturalists Ignore Anthropologists?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 4, 1992, p. A-52.
103. Besnier, "The Demise of the Man Who Would Be King: Sorcery and Ambition on Nukulaeae," *Journal of Anthropological Research* (in press).
104. Besnier, "Heteroglossic Discourses on Nukulaeae Spirits," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, New Orleans, 1992.
105. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes in the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964).
106. Shore, "Sexuality and Gender."
107. Howard and Kirkpatrick, "Social Organization," in Howard and Borofsky (eds.), *Developments in Polynesian Ethnology*.
108. Harold W. Scheffler, "Sexism and Naturalism in the Study of Kinship," in di Leonardo (ed.), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).
109. George B. Milner, "Problems of the Structure of Concepts in Samoa: An Investigation of Vernacular Statement and Meaning," Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1968, pp. 185–86.
110. Howard and Kirkpatrick, "Social Organization"; Ortner, "Gender and Sexuality"; Sahlins, *Islands of History*; Shore, "Sexuality and Gender."
111. Pauline Paine, "Introduction: Sex and Gender in Oceania," *Nexus* 2.1 (1981); Robertson, "Art Essay."
112. Besnier, "Heteroglossic Discourses."
113. The literature on Polynesian gender liminality has yet to address the relationship between liminality and church-based morality. Yet Christianity in one form or another is the principal reference point for morality in virtually all contemporary Polynesian societies. Even if Christian discourse is silent on the topic everywhere in the region, this fact alone is interesting, given the contrast with Christianity's strident obsession with sexual and gender diversity in such societies as North America.
114. The logic underlying this account lends contemporary support for one of the explanations that Oliver puts forth for the presence of *māhū* in precontact Tahiti: "males unable or unwilling to play the physically demanding and often hazardous roles expected of Maohi [i.e., traditional Tahitian] men in climbing, canoeing, fighting, and so forth, were permitted and, perhaps, even encouraged or required to play female roles" (Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society*, p. 1112). I am much less enthusiastic about Oliver's other conjectures, to the effect that the elaboration of the *māhū* was the result of the numerical preponderance of men and of the sexual freedom that reigned in precontact Tahiti.
115. Whitehead, "The Bow and Burden Strap," p. 107.
116. Louis Joseph Bouge, "Un aspect du rôle rituel du 'Mahu' dans l'ancien Tahiti," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 11 (1955).
117. Herdt, *The Sambia: Ritual and Gender in New Guinea* (New York: Holt,

Rinehart & Winston, 1987); Herdt (ed.), *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in New Guinea* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); and Herdt (ed.), *Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

118. Besnier, "Authority and Egalitarianism: Discourses of Leadership on Nukulaelae Atoll," paper presented at the Conference on Leadership in Oceania: For Raymond Firth on the Occasion of his 90th Birthday, London, 1991.

119. Wikan, "Man Becomes Woman."

120. In urban centers, there are incidental reports of gender-liminal persons engaging in economically driven prostitution targeting principally Western tourists; see Danielsson et al., "Polynesia's Third Sex"; Deborah F. McFarlane, "Trans-sexual Prostitution in Polynesia," *Pacific Islands Monthly* 55.2 (1983), and "Trans-sexual Prostitution in New Zealand: Predominance of Persons of Maori Extraction," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 13 (1984). How the emergence of this phenomenon articulates with "traditional" concepts of gender liminality is an important question. But it is clear that the phenomenon is a development on preexisting patterns that involve no such economic dimension.

121. See also Herdt, "Representations," p. 487.