WILL ROSCOE'S ARTICLE "The Zuñi Man-Woman," in the Summer 1988 issue of OUTLOOK was an interesting cultural text. I was delighted to read that Will's "odyssey" into Pueblo Indian culture had been guided by my old friend Harry Hay. In 1978 I too met Harry Hay in Santa Fe. I was then a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin and had returned home to write on Pueblo-Spanish relations in New Mexico's history. Harry befriended me, shared his library, and revealed the secrets of the berdaches to me, probably much in the same way as he befriended Will. The conclusions I reached about berdaches after ten years of research on the Pueblo Indians are very different from those Will Roscoe comes to. I wish to share some of the fruits of my research and offer a perspective very different from that found in the voluminous literature on the sex of the berdaches. On pondering this essay readers will have to judge for themselves whether the berdache status in general, the Zuñi Indian We'wha in particular, really offers moderns an exemplary "gay role."

BERDACHE STATUS, that social arrangement whereby a man or group of men press another male into impersonating a female, forcing him to perform work generally associated with women, offering passive sexual service to men, and donning women's clothes, is widely reported historically throughout East Asia, in the Americas, in Islamic Africa, and is generally believed to have been diffused from these areas to Europe. What we know about the Spanish American variant called bradaje (the Spanish word for male whore or prostitute) be it in New Mexico or Tierra del Fuego, comes largely from the narratives of the Spanish conquest and subsequent travelers' reports. Francisco Guerra recently collected all known references to bradaje in post-conquest sources in his book The Pre-Columbian Mind. The patterns of behavior which emerge from this compilation warrant our attention.

Must We Deracinate Indians to Find Gay Roots?

by Ramón A. Gutiérrez
In every North and South American Indian group in which berdaches were reported after 1492, their numbers were always small; often only between one and six, and rarely more than twenty. Berdache status was one principally ascribed to defeated enemies. Among the insults and humiliations inflicted on prisoners of war were homosexual rape, castration, the wearing of women's clothes, and performing women's work.\(^3\) Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca said as much during his 1523-33 trek across New Mexico: “I saw one man married to another, and these are impotent, effeminate men and they go about dressed as women, and do women's tasks, and shoot with a bow, and carry great burdens...and they are huskier than the other men and taller.”\(^4\) That the berdaches were generally described as men who wielded instruments of war, who were stronger and taller than most, and who were forced to carry burdens, should lead us to warfare to explain their status. Wearing clothes, particularly women's clothing, among naked warriors, is another clue. When Cabeza de Vaca wrote the words cited above, he himself was naked and spoke of the nakedness of the Indian men. Why were the berdaches dressed when none of the other men were? To mark their status and humiliation among men.

Richard Trenler proposes in his forthcoming book Europe on Top: Male Homosexuality and the Conquests of America, 1400-1700, that in the Old World and in the New, there was a rather universal gender representation of conquest: victors on vanquishing their enemies asserted their virility by transforming losers into effeminates. Enemies had to perform women’s work and to wear women’s clothes as a sign of vanquishment. We certainly know that heterosexual rape was a common habit of war. What we are only now starting to admit is that losing men were similarly treated and were forced to perform what were considered demeaning forms of sexual service. Thus, it does not matter much whether we examine male prisoners of war among the Zuñi and the Arawaks, Aztec and Inca male temple slaves, or those figures on pre-Columbian Moche pottery jugs from northern Peru depicting male slaves in women’s clothes being passively penetrated in homosexual intercourse, to see the status inversion marked through gender symbols that were so frequently associated with defeated men.\(^5\)

Conquest narratives, travelers’ accounts and ethnographies also indicate that the social status of the berdaches had meaning primarily in the socio-political world of men. Berdaches were reported as being under male ownership. They were frequently found in male social spaces performing activities associated with females during male rituals: fellating powerful men or being anally mounted by them. Through the long historical evolution of the berdache status, it appears that they gradually came to be regarded as temple experts or as shamans who fulfilled magical and cosmological functions.\(^6\)

To understand how these comparative ethnographic facts on berdache status square with Pueblo Indian culture, let us examine briefly the organization of space within pueblo life. Until quite recently, residential segregation by sex was the rule in every pueblo. Pedro de Castañeda, one of New Mexico’s first explorers, observed in 1541 that the “young men live in the estufas [kiñas or male ceremonial lodges]...it is punishable for the women to sleep in the estufas or to enter them for any other purpose than to bring food to their husbands or sons.” Diego Pérez de Luxán reiterated this point in 1582, as did Fray Jerónimo Zárate de Salmerón when he wrote in 1623: “The women and young children sleep in [houses]; the men sleep in the kiña.”\(^7\)

Segregated from women in the kiña, men practiced the religious or political lore which kept the community at peace with itself and with its gods. Women’s rituals, centered in the household, celebrated their powers over seed life and human reproduction. Their
powers to bring forth life were immense and predictable. Men’s magical powers over war, hunting, curing, and rain-making—the basic preoccupations of Pueblo life—were always more unpredictable and precarious, and thus more elaborately ritualized. From men’s perspective, women’s capacity to produce, indeed to overproduce, was the problem that threatened to destroy the balance that existed in the cosmos between femininity and masculinity. Only by isolating themselves in ritual and placating the gods would men keep potent femininity from destroying everything. Women constantly sapped men of their energy—the men had to till in fields that belonged to their mothers and wives, they had to protect the village from internal, external, natural, and supernatural enemies, and they constantly had to give semen to their voracious wives. Men got nothing in return from women in this agricultural society, for even if women bore children, until puberty those children belonged to their mothers.8

IT IS IN THIS isolated and fragile world of masculine political ritual that we must place berdaches or the la’mana, as they are known at Zuni Pueblo. Male ritual was highly stratified. Men who became war chiefs, hunt chiefs or medicine men were persons with enormous political power by virtue of their physical strength, their knowledge of animal behavior, or their psychological acumen. It should thus not surprise us that the men who were pressed into berdache status were there primarily to service and delight the chiefs. Pedro de Castañeda, who observed a 1540 berdache initiation in New Mexico, noted that after the berdache had been cloaked in female garb,

the dignitaries came in to make use of her one at a time, and after them all the others who cared to. From then on she was not to deny herself to any one, as she was paid a certain established amount for the service. And even though she might take a husband later on, she was not thereby free to deny herself to any one who offered her pay.9

Several centuries later, in 1852, Dr. William A. Hammond, the US Surgeon General, observed that the berdaches (he called them mujerado, literally “made into a woman”) he met at Laguna and Acoma Pueblos, not far from Zufi, were essential persons in the saturnalia or orgies, in which these Indians, like the ancient Greeks, Egyptians and other nations, indulge. He is the chief passive agent in the pederastic ceremonies, which form so important a part in the performances. These take place in the Spring of every year.

Hammond added that when a man was transformed into a berdache,

if he is a man occupying a prominent place in the councils of the pueblo, he is at once relieved of all power and responsibility, and his influence is at an end. If he is married, his wife and children pass from under his control, whether, however, through his wish or theirs, or by the orders of the council, I could not ascertain.

When Hammond asked if he could perform a physical exam on the Acoma berdache, it was Acoma’s town chief who brought the berdache to Hammond and remained there throughout the examination. What these observations point to is the close association between Pueblo strong men or chiefs and the berdaches who offered sexual service. More important still is the status degeneration associated with these effeminate—they lost their social standing and family and were at the whim of any man who cared to use them.10

In Pueblo life, unmarried bachelors and junior men spent most of their time in the kivas. Ostensibly this was so that they could
master religious lore, but in reality, also to minimize conflicts between juniors and seniors over claims to access to female sexuality which adult married men enjoyed. Sex with a berdache not only served a personal erotic need, but was also an assertion of power by these young men which served a religious (political) end. So long as bachelors were having sex with the berdaches, their village was not beset with conflicts between men over women. For as Hernando de Alarcón would note in 1540, berdaches “could not have carnal relations with women at all, but they themselves could be used by all marriageable youths.” This may have been the reason why the Spaniards also called berdaches putos (male whores). European prostitutes initiated young men to sexuality and gave married men a sexual outlet without disrupting family, marriage or patrimony. Male prisoners of war pressed into prostitution in women’s clothes were living testaments to their conqueror’s virility and prowess. When berdaches were offered to guests as a gesture of generosity and hospitality, this too testified to the master’s power. And like every slave historically, berdaches became economic assets when sold to other men—so that they could play out their fantasies of domination.2

THE VIOLENT MASCULINE WORLD of Pueblo Indian warriors is the cultural context within which we must place We’wha and the other la’mana that were reported at Zuni Pueblo between 1880 and 1930. But bear in mind that conquest and annexation by the United States Army had, by these dates, totally constrained the ability of Pueblo men to wage war. What was left were the memories and rituals of war. In Pueblo religion, all ritual roles which are performed during ceremonials are believed to have supernatural antecedents or sanction. Will Roscoe correctly points us to the Zuni myth “Destruction of the Kia’nakwe, and Songs of Thanksgiving,” as the mythic explanation for the la’mana. I quote the myth here because it so poignantly elucidates the origins of berdache status.

The myth tells of war between the Zuni gods and a group known as the Kia’nakwe. On the second night of what would be four days of fighting, the Zuni Twin War Gods, U’uyewi and Matsai’lema, were dispatched to Ko’thluwala’wa:

to implore the Council of the Gods to cause rainfall, that the A’shiwi bowstrings, which were made of yucca fiber, might be made strong, and the bowstrings of the enemy, made of deer sinew, might be weakened. The A’shiwi secured their arrows for the engagement with the Kia’nakwe on Ko’yemshi mountain. The prayers of the A’shiwi brought heavy rains on the third morning, and again they met the enemy. This time their forces were strengthened by the Kok’ko, present at the request of U’uyewi and Matsai’lema, who were now the recognized Gods of War. Again Ku’yapalitsa, the Cha’kwena [Warrior Woman], walked in front of her army, shaking her rattle. She suc-
ceeding in capturing four of the gods from Ko’tluwa’-wa—Kor’kokshi, the first born of Si’wulutsa and Si’wulutsitse; H’tsepa-
ingsha (game-maker), one of the nine last-born; a Sa’yathia (blue horn, a warrior god); and a Sha’lako (one of the couriers to the u’wanna-
i (rain-makers). These gods succeeded in making their escape, but all were captured except the Sha’lako, who ran so like a hare 
that he could not be caught. The Kia’nakwe had a dance in which the prisoner gods appeared in celebration of their capture. 
Kor’kokshi, the first-born, was so angry and unmanageable that Ku’yapalita had him dressed in female attire previous to the 
dance, saying to him: ‘You will now perhaps be less angry.’

Matilda Coxe Stevenson, the anthropologist who transcribed this tale, explained in a 
marginal note that “in the Zuñi dramatization of the Kia’nakwe dance of thanksgiving for 
the capture of the gods the one personating the Kor’kokshi wears woman’s dress and is 
referred to as the Ko’thlama, meaning a man who has permanently adopted female attire.” 
Elsie C. Parsons, another anthropologist, was 
told in 1916 that the reason the la’mana 
performed in the Kia’nakwe dance was “because 
together with other ko’ko [gods] he [the 
la’mana] was taken prisoner by the Kia’nakwe.”

We know from other ethnographic sources that the person who personified 
Kor’kokshi during ceremonies not only wore 
female clothes, but also had blood smeared 
between his thighs. Matilda Coxe Stevenson 
and Elsie C. Parsons, the two persons who 
first observed this fact, as women, were pre-
disposed to assume that a man dressed as a 
woman with blood between his thighs signi-
fied menstruation. Pueblo men greatly feared 
mestruating women and believed that they 
had the power to pollute male ritual. It thus 
seems highly unlikely that men would have 
represented a menstruating women in their 
rites. Rather, since the Kia’nakwe dance is 
about the capture and vanquishment of en-
emies, the blood might be explained more ade-
quately as coming from a torn anus due to 
homosexual rape or castration.

If we place We’waha and the other Zuñi 
berdaches in a larger comparative context, 
and in the thick description of the culture 
from which they were torn, does our under-
standing of them change? Matilda Coxe 
Stevenson described We’waha in 1904 as “the 
tallest person in Zuñi; certainly the 
strongest.” During an 1890 fracas with Ameri-
can soldiers from Fort Wingate, We’waha was 
apprehended fighting alongside Zuñi’s gov-
ernor and members of the warrior society (the 
Bow priests). When Zuñi men staged their 
ceremonials, observed Elsie C. Parsons in 
1916, the la’mana dressed like a woman, 
styled his hair like a woman, and then per-
sonified a woman in dance. Yet, when a 
la’mana died, the corpse was dressed like a 
woman except that “under the woman’s skirt 
a pair of trousers are put on.” La’mana were 
always buried among the men. Indeed, the 
Zuñi would say of We’waha and other la’mana, 
“she is a man.” And while the berdaches may 
have performed women’s work, and lived and 
dressed like women, their “behavior was not typical of Zuñi women,” as Wil Roscoe 
oberves.

Gay scholars have been all too eager to 
cast the berdache as a gender role to which 
someone is socialized rather than as a social 
status a person was pressed into or assumed. 
American anthropologists on the other hand have been content to see the berdaches in the 
context of the Apollonian orderliness, peace-
fulness, and consensus that was once mistaken-
imputed to Pueblo society. As for the 
issue of gender role or social status, let us 
squeeze the ethnographies a little harder. In 
1904, Matilda Coxe Stevenson observed that 
“the men of the family...not only discourage 
men from unsexing [that is, becoming ber-
daches]...but ridicule them.” Elsie C. Parsons 
 wrote of Zuñi’s la’mana in 1916, “in general a 
family would be somewhat ashamed of hav-
ing a la’mana among its members.” Of a Zuñi 
berdache named U’k, Parsons stated, “U’k 
was teased...by the children.” During one of the shu’iko dances Parsons saw at Zuñi, the 
audience “grinned and even chuckled” at 
U’k; “a very infrequent display of amusement 
during these shu’iko dances,” Parsons confid-

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ed. After the dance ended, Parsons’ Cherokee hostess asked her: “Did you notice them laughing at her [Uk]?...She is a great joke to the people...”\textsuperscript{15}

How do we reconcile the ridicule and low status the berdaches had in Zuñi society with the high status and praise others lavish on them? For example, Roscoe writes:

By all standards, We’wha was an important member of his community. Stevenson described him as “the strongest character and the most intelligent of the Zuñi tribe.” The anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons referred to him as “the celebrated ia’ma.”

The Pueblo Indians are well known for their aloofness toward outsiders, their general unwillingness to talk, and the secrecy with which they guard their esoteric knowledge and religion, even from their own young. We must thus ask why were berdaches like We’wha so eager to talk to American anthropologists in the 1890s? I suspect that as marginalized and low status individuals in the male political world, they were quite eager to tell their story to anyone willing to listen. Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Ruth Benedict and Elsie C. Parsons—all women who were themselves marginalized in the male academic world—listened to We’wha. As a result, We’wha was elevated greatly in social status in the eyes of all those whites who subsequently read about him. He quickly acculturated, and as Will Roscoe tells us, “We’wha was one of the first Zuñis to earn cash. After Stevenson showed him the bene-
fits of using soap to wash clothes, he went into business doing laundry for local whites."
And eventually We'wah even went to Washington, DC to mimic those caricatures of Indians which whites had created in their own minds.

In thinking about the meaning of berdache status among American Indians, we can profit by comparing it in different societies. It is equally important that when we pluck out an individual from his or her culture (be it We'wah, U'k or the countless other berdaches that once lived) that we place them in the context of those societies' hierarchies of gender. As for gays who seek a less rigid gender hierarchy in which to grow and prosper, the berdache status as a gender representation of power in war is probably not the place to find it. By finding gay models where they do not exist, let us not perpetrate on We'wah or U'k yet another level of humiliation with our pens. For then, the "conspiracy of silence" about the berdaches which Harry Hay had hoped to shatter will only be shrouded once again in romantic obfuscations. ▼

How do we reconcile the ridicule and low status the berdaches had in Zuñi society with the high status and praise others lavish on them?


7Hammond and Rey, Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, p. 248.


9Hammond and Rey, Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, p. 147-48.


12Parsons, p. 529.

13Stevenson, The Zuñi Indians, p. 37; Parsons, pp. 526, 528.

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ON MALE INITIATION AND DUAL ORGANISATION IN NEW GUINEA

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A consideration of social organisation, culture and evolution in New Guinea suggests that male initiation rites which express sexual symmetry are not, as psychoanalytic interpretations maintain, based on unconscious relations of envy of female procreative powers but rather on perceived relations of analogy. They constitute a subset of possible magical acts designed to induce male growth. This subset is correlated with social structures based on dual organisation, or derived from it, and the entire set is congruent with a general type of social structure characteristic of New Guinea – one defined by a big man complex.

As a part of his psychoanalytic analysis of the bullroarer complex, Dundes (1976) interprets ritual homosexuality in initiation as an unconscious expression of male envy of female procreative powers. The New Guinea societies adduced as examples are Marind (van Baal 1966) and Keraki (Williams 1936). Bettelheim (1962) in similar fashion interprets genital mutilation in imitation of menstruation among the Arapesh (Mead 1940; 1963) and Wogeo (Hogbin 1970)—so that there is anal eroticism on the south coast and urethral eroticism on the north coast. Not mentioned by either author is the displaced urethral eroticism, nose-bleeding in imitation of menstruation, in the Highlands, e.g., Gahuku-Gama (Read 1952). Similar interpretations of these types of initiation rites have been made by Roheim (1949), Ashley Montagu (1937), Hiat (1971) and Mead (1975). Sympathetic critics, such as Spiro (1955) and Aberle (1955), have pointed out that such arguments fail to explain the context in which these rites occur, while others, including Leach (1958) and Douglas (1966), have flatly rejected equations between primitive rites and neurotic behaviour. Dundes maintains that the ‘ultimate test of [the] argument is not a matter of doctrinaire acceptance or rejection of Freud but rather how well or how poorly it succeeds in explaining the patterning of ethnographic facts’ (Dundes 1976: 236). For New Guinea, and perhaps more generally, there is a simpler explanation based on morphological, cultural and historical-evolutionary considerations which accounts for both the context and the motives of rites based on forms of sexual symmetry. The purpose of this article is not to provide a general survey in the manner of Allen (1969) but to suggest a structural approach which tries to discern aspects of the logic underlying notions of gender and other cultural beliefs and social relations in New Guinea. The analysis here, and in a subsequent article by Hage and Harary (in press), attempts to combine features of the semiological and contextual treatments of

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