

# IX.

## Gender, Ritual, and Religion

In many nonwestern societies women's ritual roles are central and indispensable to community cohesion and well-being. In contrast, in Anglo-European cultures women's religious activities tend to be secondary and marginal because of the preeminence of men in both organizational hierarchies and doctrine. Anthropological research has long recognized that religious systems reflect, support, and carry forward patterns of social organization and central values of a society. What has not been sufficiently recognized is the interrelationships of men and women in the perpetuation of social life through religious activities.

The study of the ritual activities of women has often been embedded in analyses of life cycle events, such as the Nkang'a girl's puberty ritual among the Ndembu of Central Africa (Turner 1968:198) or pregnancy and childbirth rituals in Asia (Jacobson 1989; Laderman 1983). With the exception of this area of research, the study of women and religion has often been neglected, despite the fact that women are prominent in re-

ligious activities. As a result of a renewed interest in gender in various cultures, scholars have begun to explore how the religious experience of women is different from that of men, whether and how women become ritual specialists, what religious functions they perform and the degree to which these are private or public, and, finally, what implications these ritual activities have for female prestige and status.

This has led, in some cultural contexts, to an attempt to formulate a more complete ethnographic picture. For example, in the literature on Australian aborigines, where there is a good deal of debate about gender roles, a number of ethnologists have asserted that the dominance of senior men is sustained by their control of sacred knowledge and that their position is recognized by both men and women in the culture (Warner 1937; White 1975; Bern 1979). This viewpoint has been challenged by Diane Bell (1981), who notes that male anthropologists have underestimated and under-reported the religious life of Australian aboriginal women.

She argues that "both men and women have rituals that are closed to the other, both men and women allow the other limited attendance at certain of their rituals, and, finally, there are ceremonies in which both men and women exchange knowledge and together celebrate their membership in one society and their duty to maintain the law of their ancestors" (1981:319).

Bell focuses in particular on the love rituals of women, rituals that originally were viewed by ethnologists as magic and therefore deviant, unimportant, and marginal to the central decision-making realm of men. In contrast, Bell suggests that in the celebration of these rituals, used by women to establish and maintain marriages of their own choosing, "women clearly perceived themselves as independent operators in a domain where they exercised power and autonomy based on their dreaming affiliations with certain tracts of lands. These rights are recognized and respected by the whole society" (1981:322). The love rituals of Australian aboriginal women are, in short, by no means peripheral to the society. They are underwritten by Dreamtime Law and feared by men who are often unaware that they are being performed and unable to negate their power. Through their rituals some Australian aboriginal women have, as Hamilton (1981) suggests, a mechanism with which to challenge the ideology of male superiority that is expressed in male ritual.

Mathews (in this book) provides us with another example of an important arena of religious activity—the civil-religious hierarchy or cargo system in Mesoamerica—that has long been considered a public and exclusively male arena. If women were mentioned at all in studies of the cargo system, it was for their peripheral roles in food preparation. Based on her research in the state of Oaxaca in Mexico, Mathews begins by pointing out that an application of the domestic-public model (see Part III) to an understanding of these religious ceremonies obscures the significant ritual roles of women because it places the cargo in the public sphere of activity and fails to acknowledge the importance of the household unit. Rather than oppose men and women within a rigid domestic-public model, Mathews emphasizes the parallel and interdependent roles of men and women in the execution of

cargo. Male cargo holders (*mayordomos*) organize and coordinate the activities of men, and female cargo holders (*mayordomas*) organize and coordinate the activities of women. Both share in the prestige gained from service at the end of their year of responsibility.

If Oaxacan women have an important and prestige-conferring role within the religious sphere of cargo activity, similar opportunities are denied them within the civil sphere. Thus Mathews explores the impact of the penetration of the state (see Part VII) on the lives of women. A sexual divide-and-rule state policy, she argues, makes men into social adults and women into domestic wards whose dealings with the public sphere becomes restricted. Prestige in local institutions is undermined by its absence in extracommunity institutions, and as civil offices assume increasing importance at the expense of cargo offices, the position of women is eroded.

In contrast with the underestimation of women's religious roles in the literature on Australian aborigines and the Mesoamerican cargo system, studies of sub-Saharan Africa have long recognized that the ritual life of women is both significant and highly elaborated. In this region, women are involved in complex ceremonies of initiation; they are engaged in witchcraft and divination (Mendonsa 1979; Ngubane 1977); they act as spirit mediums and healers (Green 1989; Sargent 1989); they lead and participate in possession cults (Berger 1976); and they form their own secret societies (MacCormack 1979).

In Africa, and elsewhere around the world, female religious practitioners are often conceived of as women apart. They frequently transcend local cultural definitions of womanhood and are recognized as having extraordinary characteristics. Kendall (in this book) notes that Korean women who become shamans (*mansin*) stand above the social and economic constraints generally imposed on a proper Korean wife and mother. The *mansin* occupies an ambiguous status similar to that of other "glamorous but morally dubious female marginals, the actress, the female entertainer, and the prostitute." Though not always accorded respect, the *mansin* wears the costumes and speaks with the authority of the gods. *Mansin* and their rituals are, in Kendall's view, "integral components of Korean

family and village religion. Within this religious system, women and shamans perform essential ritual tasks that complement men's ritual tasks" (1985:25).

Women in other cultural contexts use spirit possession and trance as an outlet for the stress that derives from their social and material deprivation and subordination (Broch 1985; Hamer and Hamer 1966; Lewis 1966, 1969; Morsy 1979; Pressel 1973). As Danforth (1989:99) argues with regard to Firewalking (Anastenaria) in northern Greece, "through these rituals women seek to address the discrepancies that characterize the relationship between an official ideology of male dominance and a social reality in which women actually exercise a significant degree of power. Spirit possession . . . provides a context for the resolution of conflict often associated with gender roles and gender identity." However, in Korea, rather than serving as an outlet for stress, possession is the vehicle whereby a *mansin*, as a recognized ritual practitioner, ministers to the needs of other women who are in turn the ritual representatives of their families.

Korean housewives come to the *mansin* for therapeutic answers to a range of personal and household problems, for divinations about the future and prospects for the coming year, and for female solidarity and a "venting of the spleen" (Kendall 1985:25). Women's rituals in Korea, like those in some other parts of the world, are both practical and expressive. As Mernissi (1978) suggests, based on her research in Morocco, female devotional societies provide a tightly knit community of supporters and advisers. The Christian Science movement founded in America by Mary Baker Eddy in the late nineteenth century was a healing religion that also offered middle-class women a "socially acceptable alternative to the stifling Victorian stereotypes then current" (Fox 1989:98).

Mama Lola, the Vodou priestess (*manbo*) described by Brown (in this book) is also a ritual specialist, diviner, and healer working in New York who, when she is possessed, "acts out the social and psychological forces that define and often contain the lives of contemporary Haitian woman." Through ritual, Mama Lola empowers her clients. This phenomenon of psychological empowerment is characteristic of other religious

systems; it is described by Danforth (1989) in his discussion of the New Age Firewalking cult in the United States and by Wadley (1989) in her analysis of the active control over their lives that north Indian village women gain through their ritual activities.

Mama Lola maintains a very personal relationship with two female spirits. To one she stands in the role of child to a spiritual mother and thereby metaphorically expresses an important bond within Haitian culture and society that is manifested in her own relationship with her daughter Maggie. This ritually embedded mother-child metaphor can be found in other parts of the world where women healers meet the physical and emotional needs of their patients just as mothers meet the needs of their children (Wedenoja 1989; Kerewsky-Halpern 1989). If one of Mama Lola's female spirits represents the nurturing side of women in relation to their children, the other represents the romantic side in relation to men.

In Haitian Vodou the diverse roles of women are projected into the religious sphere. This is equally true of other religious traditions. In Catholic cultures values about ideal womanhood are sanctified by the image of the Virgin Mary, who represents submission, humility, serenity, and long suffering (Stevens 1973). In Mexico, for example, Eve and the Virgin Mary are contrasting images that "encode the cycle of reproduction within the domestic group. When a woman is nursing and sexually continent she resembles the Virgin. When she submits to sex, she is more like Eve" (Ingham 1986:76). Hindu goddesses are also multifaceted; they are mothers, mediators, and protectresses.

According to Preston (1985:13), there is a connection "between the role of women in Indian life and the special position of female deities in the Hindu pantheon. Though Indian women are supposed to be absolutely devoted to their husbands who are respected as embodiments of the deity, women may also reign supreme in their own domains as mothers of their children." In Dinaan Hinduism the Great Goddess takes several forms, some good and some evil. Babb (1975:226) suggests that these two aspects reflect an opposition in male and female principles: "When female dominates male, the

pair is sinister; when male dominates female the pair is benign."

Of importance, then, to some students of the relationship between gender and religion is the question of how women are portrayed in religious symbolism and doctrine. One of the most intriguing representations of women in religious thought is the Shaker conception of a female God. The Shakers were a millenarian Christian group who arrived on the shores of America in the late eighteenth century. As Procter-Smith (in this book) points out, long before recent feminists began to refer to God as "she," the Shakers believed in God the mother to complement God the father and conceived of their leader, Ann Lee, as a manifestation of the second coming of Christ in female form.

This millennial thinking empowered women and permitted the eradication of women's subordination. Shaker men and women shared spiritual authority and the leadership roles that were specified by this authority. Long before Engels (see Part VII), the Shakers appear to have recognized that property, marriage, and sexuality may undermine the status of women, and they therefore worked to eliminate these phenomena both ideologically and practically from their way of life. They upheld celibacy and the communal ownership of property. Procter-Smith observes, however, that the Shakers were not fully successful in their efforts. A patriarchal and hierarchical model persisted, as did a division of labor that followed broader societal patterns for what men and women do. To this Setta (1989:231) has added the observation that Shaker theology was dominated by men while women were the spirit mediums, a distinction in her view that parallels a frequent human division "between men as scholars and thinkers and women as vehicles for religious experience."

Shakerism in its original form had much in common with some of the female-oriented religious cults described by anthropologists working in other parts of the world. It too was based in spirit possession and other forms of ecstatic behavior. It too was organized around the metaphor of mother who gives birth to, nurtures, and protects her child believers. It too provided an outlet for women who were otherwise constrained by the social institutions of late eigh-

teenth- and nineteenth-century American society.

We have taken the approach in this book that what it means to be male and female (i.e., gender) is learned and shaped within a cultural context. Religious symbols are a powerful mechanism by which culturally appropriate gender messages are transmitted. As Bynum observes, "It is no longer possible to study religious practice or religious symbols without taking gender—that is, the cultural experience of being male or female—into account" (1986:1–2). In addition, through participation and leadership in ritual, women may enhance their social position. Involvement in religious activities may also generate a sense of female or community solidarity through membership in a congregation or participation in ritual functions.

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## "We Are Mayordomo": A Reinterpretation of Women's Roles in the Mexican Cargo System

Holly F. Mathews

Nearly two decades have passed since the feminist movement inspired a resurgence of interest in the study of gender roles. Much of the initial research during this period was directed towards overcoming a generation of male bias in anthropological studies by filling in the missing portion of the ethnographic record on women. To analyze this new information on gender, feminist anthropologists formulated a theory of social roles which emphasized a split between the public sphere of male activity and the domestic sphere of female activity. The domestic/public theory as first articulated by Chodorow (1974), Lamphere (1974), Rosaldo (1974), and others holds that (1) familial and extrafamilial realms constitute separate domains cross-culturally; (2) women are universally associated with the family or domestic sphere while men universally control the public or political sphere; (3) and, as a result, women's roles and activities are always subordinate to, or are accorded less value than, the roles and activities of men.

A number of anthropologists (for example, Pearlman 1980; Rosaldo 1980; Sacks 1979) have pointed out the ethnocentric assumptions that underlie the domestic/public model and acknowledged the limitations involved in applying it cross-culturally. As Sacks writes, the domestic/public model projects:

what is a fairly recent bifurcation of family and society into a universal and natural human con-

dition. In this anthropology has ethnocentrically adopted a basic premise of industrial capitalism [1979:61].

Anthropologists who start with such an ethnocentric premise tend to emphasize the separation between male and female roles and seldom investigate the ways in which such roles interrelate and function within specific sociocultural contexts. Consequently, many anthropological studies fail to capture a sense of the complexity and diversity characteristic of gender roles cross-culturally. Yet without a basic understanding of role diversity, anthropologists cannot begin to assess the differential implications of socioeconomic change for men and women in particular societies. Although some anthropologists (e.g., Collier and Rosaldo 1981; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Sanday 1981; Sacks 1979) are currently using new models to study gender roles, the empirical consequences of *not* using the domestic/public theory have yet to be explored. Data on the religious ceremonial system known as the *cargo* in the Mexican community of San Miguel are used to illustrate some of these consequences.

Specifically I argue that the use of a domestic/public model led many anthropologists to view cargo service as an exclusively public and hence male domain of activity. A detailed examination of the way in which male and female cargo roles interrelate reveals, however, that cargo service is undertaken not by individual men but by household units on the basis of wealth. Male and female household heads assume parallel roles and responsibili-

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ties for ritual, and the participation of each sex is crucial for successful service.

In the newly emerging sphere of civil service, however, male and female roles articulate in a fundamentally different way. Modern civil offices, instituted by the Mexican national government, are held increasingly by individuals elected on the basis of personal skills such as literacy in the Spanish language and experience in interacting with Ladino elites. Women, for reasons outlined in the following sections, usually lack such skills and hence civil offices are dominated by men.

This analysis of role relationships in the religious and civil spheres provides a basis for predicting the likely outcome of socioeconomic changes occurring in San Miguel. To the degree that the ritual cargo system is breaking down, and separate civil offices assuming importance in the administration of community affairs, women are being deprived of opportunities to hold community posts.

#### THE TRADITIONAL CARGO SYSTEM

Mexico contains hundreds of autonomous Indian communities largely responsible for regulating their own internal affairs. In the past the civil-religious hierarchy or cargo system, instituted in Mexico by Spanish colonial authorities, was the characteristic administrative organization found in these communities. Cancian describes the cargo as "a system in which adult males serve in a series of hierarchically arranged offices devoted to both political and ceremonial aspects of community life" (1967:283).

These offices are ranked in terms of levels of service and authority. An individual begins service in a low-level office before being eligible to serve in a higher ranked one. In the past individuals alternated between civil and religious offices in the course of lifetime service. Since there are more offices at the bottom than at the top, those individuals who complete service at all levels are called elders or *principales*, and community members accord them great respect and prestige (Carrasco 1961:484).

Tenure in cargo offices rotates annually and individuals serve without payment. Elders generally appoint people to cargos, and service involves the officeholders in considerable expense since they must sponsor festivals and banqueting in conjunction with the saints' days and religious holidays celebrated by the Catholic Church. In return for service individuals earn prestige and respect, which sometimes translate into political influence as well.

#### ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE CARGO ROLES

The anthropological literature on the cargo system in Mexico is extensive. Descriptions of the system are varied and often reflect intercommunity variation in cargo organization. In addition, ethnographic reports span a 50-year period during which the cargo system in many communities was undergoing rapid change in response to outside pressures. Consequently, it is often difficult to distinguish differences in cargo interpretation arising from the use of particular theoretical models from those arising out of intercommunity variation and historical change. Nonetheless, certain general trends in the description and analysis of male and female roles can be traced through the various stages of cargo research.

The earliest Mesoamerican ethnographies to include descriptions of the cargo system were produced by a generation of anthropologists (both male and female) who were trained to assume that a description of the male world was an adequate description of the society at large (see Rogers 1978:131). Regarded as the main political and religious actors, men were widely reported to be the only significant participants in cargo service, and cargos were said to rank individual men in terms of relative prestige (Beals 1945; De La Fuente 1949; Foster 1967; Hinton 1964; Lewis 1960; Parsons 1936; Vogt 1969). Few anthropologists of this generation mentioned women's involvement in cargo service, and when they did, women were described as pe-

ripheral participants involved primarily in the preparation of food for ritual (Cancian 1965).

These ethnographers did note, however, that a man's chance for a successful cargo career often depended on his ability to raise resources from his kin network. Presumably women, as members of these networks, were important in supporting male cargo careers. This point, however, is often overlooked in many early studies. Cancian (1965), for example, analyzed the importance of labor for cargo service in Zinacantan, Mexico but assumed that only the aid given by brothers and sons was useful to the cargo holder. Consequently, he asked informants to list the reasons why brothers and sons were helpful in cargo service but neglected to ask the corresponding question about sisters and daughters. Cancian's statistical analysis is designed to test if men with more brothers and sons participate to a greater degree in the system than those with fewer. Although his prediction that they would was only weakly confirmed, Cancian made no corresponding attempt to test the effects of greater and lesser numbers of female kin on such participation (1965:103-106).

In summary, although these early ethnographers sometimes acknowledged the ritual roles played by the wives of cargo holders, for the most part they did not see female participation as significant in terms of the larger system.<sup>1</sup> A subsequent generation of anthropologists influenced by the feminist movement began to rectify this situation by focusing more attention on women's cargo roles. Iwanska (1966), for example, found that Mazahua Indians in Mexico did not see men as dominant in the religious system. Rather, the Mazahua referred to husband and wife as joint officeholders saying, "we are *mayordomo*," or "they are *mayordomo*" (1966:78). Such parallel titles to office were extended to men in situations where the women held formal title. As Iwanska writes:

I was told on one occasion, for instance, that such and such a man was elected to the office of *La Señora* [the lady]—which simply meant in the language of the Mazahua from El Nopal

that his wife was elected to a political-religious group called *Las Señoras* [1966:178-179].

Similarly, Chinas (1973) documents the active role of women in the religious activities of the Isthmus Zapotecs of Oaxaca, Mexico. Chinas found that households were involved in religious participation, and that husbands and wives held joint title to cargo offices. If a single head of household was appointed to a religious office, he or she had to choose a partner of the opposite sex to assist in preparations. Even when the original *mayordoma* was a woman, the prestige accrued for service went to her household and not to the man chosen to assist her (1973:71).

While these feminist-oriented anthropologists succeeded in documenting women's cargo activities, they still tended to conclude that men's cargo roles were more public, formal, and important than women's. Chinas, for example, wrote in her analysis that "where formalized roles occur in complementary pairs by sex, the male role of the pair is normally accorded higher status than the female role" (1973:96).

She later adds: "An examination of the formalized roles in the Isthmus Zapotec public domain makes it clear that men and male roles carry higher status than women and female roles" (1973:99).

Yet apart from the presumed segregation of male and female roles into public and private spheres, Chinas gives no evidence to support this status differential. Her analysis illustrates one of the problems inherent in the use of a domestic/public framework—the framework itself predisposes researchers to view male and female roles as separate and somehow different in kind. The usual interpretation arising from such a view is that female activities, being by definition private and informal, must somehow be less important and prestigious than male activities which are, by definition, public and formal. In reading such accounts, however, it is difficult to determine if community members themselves agree with such an interpretation, or if the interpretation is, instead, an artifact of the theoretical model.

In an update (1983) to her research, Chi-

nas acknowledges this very problem and writes:

Today I would qualify my former statement regarding the higher status of men's formalized public roles. Although fewer women hold formalized public roles than men, when they do so their status and the respect accorded them seems to be equal to men's [1983:116].

This quotation, however, highlights a second and enduring difficulty that stems from the use of the domestic/public framework. The model assumes that male and female roles can be divided into discrete categories which can then be opposed and compared across all domains of social life. This line of reasoning fails to recognize the variation likely to occur in role relationships across domains of activity.

In this paper I argue that a major consequence of *not* using the domestic/public model is the opportunity to move beyond static, oppositional analyses to look, instead, at the ways in which male and female roles interrelate and function in specific contexts. Such an analysis paves the way for a more sophisticated understanding of the social and cultural factors affecting gender role organization and enables us to assess the potential impact of socioeconomic change on male and female roles in different contexts.

In the following sections of this paper I explore the consequences of moving beyond a domestic/public model in analyzing gender roles in the Mexican community of San Miguel. I use statistical data to demonstrate that religious cargos in San Miguel are held not by individual men but by those household units that possess sufficient economic and labor resources to meet the obligations of service. Qualitative data show that male and female household heads are considered to hold joint title to cargo offices and have parallel roles and duties. The prestige earned in service, moreover, accrues not to individual officeholders but to the household.

I also present statistical data that demonstrate a shift away from household-based service in the newly evolving civil sphere. Political offices were once dominated by individ-

uals from households that had successfully completed service in the religious cargo system. Today, however, this pattern is changing, and individuals are now being elected on the basis of specific skills such as fluency in the Spanish language and experience interacting with outsiders regardless of household wealth. Because women in San Miguel often have difficulty acquiring these specific skills, they are seldom elected to office. Consequently, as the civil sphere assumes increasing importance over the religious in regulating community affairs, women are being deprived of opportunities to hold community posts.

### THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

San Miguel is a community of 2000 people located in the central valley of the state of Oaxaca, Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Inhabitants of the community are of mixed Zapotec and Mixtec descent who now label themselves ethnically as mestizos. The community economy is based on mixed cash and subsistence farming primarily of maize, beans, vegetables, and tobacco. Men and women also engage in a variety of other activities designed to provide supplemental cash income for the household (see Mathews 1982).

The basic social unit in San Miguel is the domestic group or household which consists of co-resident individuals, usually kin, who cooperate in the production and consumption of resources. There are 354 households in San Miguel of which 322, or 91 percent, are headed by men and 32, or 9 percent, are headed by women. Kinship is traced bilaterally and the preferred postmarital residence pattern is patrilocal. In theory the eldest son assumes the headship of the household upon the death of his father. Daughters marry out and go to live in the compounds of their husbands. In practice, however, actual household composition varies as the units move through a developmental cycle and respond to changing economic and social conditions.

When the eldest son marries and brings his wife home the extended network begins as father and son cooperate in farming lands held

by individual household members. Over time other sons may marry and bring wives into the compound. After the parents die, the residential groups usually consist of either a single man, his wife and children or a group of brothers, their wives and children. As the children marry, the cycle begins again. If a family has no sons, daughters may bring in husbands to live and work on family lands. Unmarried and widowed daughters are also assured residence in the natal compound and may add to the size of the household unit.

In recent years the increasing birth rate, combined with the limited supply of arable land in San Miguel, has acted to alter slightly the typical pattern of household composition. Many young men have migrated out of the community leading to an increase in the number of unmarried young women remaining at home along with a decrease in the numbers of households consisting of co-resident brothers. Generally it is the eldest son who remains in the community residing with his parents in the household compound.

In San Miguel the majority of households (62 percent) consist of some variant of the extended family described above. Yet a large number of co-resident kin does not necessarily guarantee a household economic success. Household wealth is limited by the amount and quality of land available to household members; access to supplies of irrigation water; ownership of, or access to, plow oxen and agricultural equipment; and the amount of supplemental cash income brought in by household residents.

### The Religious Cargo System

The religious cargo system in San Miguel consists of two distinct sets of religious offices known as *cofradías* (sodalities) and *hermandades* (brotherhoods) dedicated to the care of different saints in the Catholic hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> *Cofradía* and *hermandad* officeholders, known as *mayordomos*, are chosen each year and must organize and carry out all the rituals and festivities associated with the particular saints in their charge. Cargo service is costly and it often takes household members 10 to 15 years to pay off the debts incurred during

their tenure in office. Although the *mayordomo's* household bears the brunt of the expense associated with cargo service, much assistance is rendered through the institution of *guelagueta*, which is a system of reciprocal economic exchange involving both resources and labor.

Because of the time and expense involved, community members once regarded cargo service as a burden, and in the past they often had to be coerced to serve. The town judge or *alcalde* appointed officeholders, and those who refused to serve could be jailed. On a more indirect level community members would use gossip, ridicule, and even ostracism against the members of households that consistently refused to participate in the system.

Over the past 20 years, however, major demographic and economic changes within San Miguel have acted to alter this pattern of participation. An overall increase in population combined with the introduction of cash cropping has created a situation where the demand for service exceeds the number of offices available in the religious sphere. Community members have adopted a "waiting-list" solution similar to the one described by Cancian (1965:174-194) for Zinacantan. Community members now volunteer for religious service, and many offices have long waiting lists. The waiting time currently varies between three and ten years with those offices perceived as more prestigious having longer waiting lists (Mathews 1982:56).

When the civil-religious hierarchy was first instituted in Mexico, Spanish colonial authorities tended to recognize men as official heads of household and often decreed that only men could hold formal title to official civil and religious posts (Nash 1980; Silverblatt 1980). Perhaps, as a consequence, male household heads in San Miguel have been listed traditionally on official cargo rolls as festival sponsors or *mayordomos*. Community members, however, persist in recognizing male/female couples as joint titleholders to religious office. If the official household head is a man, then he must select a woman (usually but not necessarily his wife) to serve with him as the co-officeholder or *mayordoma*. She not only assumes the companion title but

is also charged with the responsibility for administering women's activities during the cargo festival. In the absence of a male household head, the senior woman from a household eligible for service will be officially listed as the officeholder. She, in turn, must select a man, usually a relative, to fulfill the companion obligations of service. In San Miguel no religious office is held by any individual of either sex who cannot provide an appropriate partner of the opposite sex. Thus while community cargo rolls usually list men as "official" mayordomos, service is viewed by community members as a household responsibility, and parallel titles are conferred on male and female representatives of the household.

As a pair, the mayordomos plan the festivities and make decisions about the personnel to be invited to perform important ritual duties. During the festival, the male mayordomo organizes and coordinates the activities of men which may include the preparation and decoration of altars, the arrangement of materials to be used in the rituals, the making of candles and fireworks displays, the roundup and slaughter of animals for feasts, and the performance of music and recitations during ritual. The female mayordoma organizes and coordinates the activities of women, which may include the preparation and cleaning of costumes and adornments for ritual, the making of decorative displays for altars, the preparation of food for feasts, and the performance of songs and recitations during ritual.

Both mayordomos greet guests, record contributions, and receive civil officials, and both are publicly acknowledged as the sponsors of the festival. Upon completion of the religious festivities, the mayordomos share in the prestige accrued for service. Praise for success as well as blame for failure is attributed to the couple, and those men and women who have completed a number of religious cargos are treated with respect by the community as a whole. They are invited as guests, not laborers, to other religious functions and upon arrival are seated first; served ritual drinks and food ahead of others; and are often asked to advise the current mayordomos on ritual procedures.

As one informant who had himself been listed "officially" as the sponsor of five cargos explained it:

To complete service you need a lot of assistance. The mayordomo has to recruit male helpers and organize their work for the festival. His partner [*compañera*] must recruit female helpers and organize their work for the festival. Without both—a mayordomo and a mayordoma—you could not have a festival. They work together and without one or the other it would be too much; it would be impossible to complete the obligation. So if there is no man in the home, a woman must look for a kinsman to help her—maybe her brother or her brother-in-law. They work together because they are a pair.

In general, the expense of sponsoring a cargo, both in terms of resources and labor, is so great that only one couple in a household will be active in the religious system. Consequently, in extended family households in San Miguel, the elder generation must make a decision to "retire" or end a career of religious service before a younger couple is free to begin festival sponsorship.

During my three-year study in San Miguel I made a count of all religious posts available and kept records of the individuals officially listed as officeholders on cargo rolls. There are a total of 61 religious offices that must be filled on an annual basis. Of these 61 posts, 25 are filled by people sponsoring religious festivals. Another 36 positions involve people serving as the officers of the religious brotherhoods. In theory tenure in all of these positions rotates annually. In actuality, however, some individuals continued to occupy the same offices throughout the three-year study period. Consequently, over the study period a total of 138 offices were filled by appointment of which 129 were listed on official records as held by men and 9 by women.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Civil Administration

The civil administration in San Miguel is concerned with public works, the administration of justice, and the maintenance of relations

with the outside world. Officers are elected by community members and serve three-year terms. The *presidente municipal* or mayor is the principal authority in the community, and his major responsibility is to handle dealings with the larger governmental system outside the community. The *sindico* or vice-mayor assists the mayor and also handles public works and issues related to social welfare including the recording of births and deaths in the community. There are seven councilmen or *regidores* who are responsible for opening and maintaining the municipal building during the week and who act as heads of municipal committees.

In addition to these elected officials, the presidente also appoints a secretary, a treasurer, and four police chiefs, one for each administrative section of the community. Finally, there is an *alcalde* or judge and his substitute who are appointed by the presidente to one-year terms of service. The *alcalde* acts as a justice of the peace and listens to disputes brought before the municipal authorities. The *alcalde* is empowered to render decisions, assess fines of compensation, and jail those guilty of major offenses.

There are also several permanent committees in San Miguel whose members are appointed by the presidente. These include the committee of the dominant political party in Mexico—the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), the Committee of the Parents of Schoolchildren, the Health Committee, and the Committee for the Celebration of Mexican Independence day. Other temporary committees are formed as needed.

A number of scholars hypothesize that in the cargo system, as first instituted in Mexico, civil officeholding remained dependent upon the successful completion of prior service in the religious sphere. Religious service, in turn, entailed the support and cooperation of household members. This intertwined system of civil and religious service began to change in 1917, however, when the Mexican Constitution decreed that local communities had to elect councils of civil officials who would report directly to state officials (Perez 1968:21). Only men could serve on these councils, since

women in Mexico could not legally vote or hold elective office until 1953 (Elmendorf 1977:158).

The duties of civil officials also changed dramatically as the new system became established. Where officials once had relative autonomy in regulating internal community affairs, they subsequently had to report directly to Ladino elites serving as political officials at the district and state levels (Greenberg 1978; Perez 1968). It became important, therefore, for local officials to be well versed in the dominant Spanish language and have experience in interacting with outsiders. Officials lacking in such skills often had difficulty transacting community business with Ladinos and securing the goods and services needed by their communities. Consequently, over time, good literacy and interactional skills became valued attributes in civil servants, and men possessing these skills began to be elected to office without regard to household wealth or past participation in the religious sphere. The town mayor or presidente summarized it this way:

The way of doing things has changed since we were young. Before, my father was only a hired worker. He did not have the standing to ask for a mayordomia and his family was too poor to endure the expense. Now, I am still poor, but people respect me. I worked hard. I went to school here and after here I went to the city to learn more. Then I went as a *bracero* to the United States and there I learned what the world is like and how to act. When I came back, people had respect for me, and they asked my advice. I began to work for the town, and the people saw that I worked well with the district officials. And so they elected me presidente.

Just as civil officeholding in San Miguel is no longer dependent on prior religious service, so too the assistance of wives and the availability of household labor is not a prerequisite for service. Men, on the average, spend between eight and ten hours a week in executing the duties of office, and the majority reported no difficulty in reconciling such efforts with the demands of agricultural work. In no instance did any civil official surveyed report

the need to call upon the assistance of friends or relatives in discharging the obligations of office.

During my three-year study in San Miguel, I made a count of civil posts in the community and kept lists of the individuals occupying each. There are a total of 31 political offices in San Miguel. Of these, 14 include civil officials elected every three years while the remaining 17 posts are held by individuals appointed on an annual basis by the presidente. Over the study period a total of 61 offices were held by 58 men and 2 women.<sup>5</sup>

#### DETERMINANTS OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In contrast to previous studies emphasizing the role of individual men in the cargo, I argue that religious service in San Miguel involves competition between household units. Those households with sufficient resources (here defined to include both wealth and labor) compete for prestige and recognition by volunteering for cargo service. Those households with surplus resources who evince a lack of interest in religious service are often pressured to volunteer by community members in general and family members and friends in particular (see also Walter 1981). In the civil sphere, on the other hand, household wealth is no longer an absolute prerequisite for service. Rather, the basis for service is shifting to emphasize, instead, the possession of certain individual skills, and wealthy, high-status households no longer dominate in the political sphere as they do in the religious.

To measure the extent and nature of household participation in civil and religious offices, I employed two rating scales adapted from the stratification studies of Warner et al. (1960). The Evaluated Participation Scale is used to uncover empirically emic social categories. Informants divided the households of San Miguel into three major social strata and two substrata. I then used an Index of Status Characteristics to obtain a more objective measure of socioeconomic status which I correlated with the assignment of households to

strata by informants. The result was an overall socioeconomic ranking for the 354 households in San Miguel. For ease of presentation, I have collapsed the two substrata into the three larger categories and compared rates of political and civil participation for households in each of these categories (see Table 1).<sup>6</sup>

#### Religious Service

In the religious sphere cargo rolls listed 129 men and 9 women from 138 different households as the official holders of the religious posts filled during the three-year study period. The data presented in Table 1 show the distribution of participating households by category of socioeconomic status. Of the 92 households in the highest stratum, 68, or 74 percent, are active participants in the religious sphere. Similarly, of the 84 households in the middle stratum, 60, or 71 percent, are active participants. Since membership in these two strata is dependent upon the possession of economic resources, these households would be expected to participate to a significantly greater degree than those in the lowest stratum. This is, in fact, the case since only 10, or 6 percent, of the 178 low-stratum households are active in the religious domain.

If religious service is dependent on socioeconomic status, then a higher percentage of low-status households can be expected not to undertake religious service. The data in

TABLE 1. Frequency Distribution of Active and Inactive Households in the Religious Cargo System According to Socioeconomic Status

Stratum	Total		Active		Inactive	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
High	92	26	68	74	24	26
Medium	84	24	60	71	24	29
Low	178	50	10	6	168	94
Total	354	100				

$\chi^2 = 165$   
 $p < .001$

Table 1 show that of the 178 households in the lowest stratum, 168, or 94 percent, were inactive in the religious sphere. Conversely, of the 92 households in the highest stratum, 24, or 26 percent, were inactive, and of the 84 households in the middle stratum, 24, or 29 percent, were inactive. The numbers of inactive households in the two top strata are surprisingly close and seem somewhat higher than might be expected if religious service was completely dependent upon the possession of financial resources.

A closer examination of the circumstances of the 48 inactive households in the upper and middle strata show that in 14 cases households had held religious posts during the ten-year period immediately preceding this study. Since households must "rest" after completing religious service in order to pay off debts and accumulate the resources necessary for future participation, these 14 households can be considered "involved" in religious service although none was currently holding a religious office. An additional 13 of the 48 inactive households were registered on official waiting lists for future religious posts and consequently could also be considered "involved" although not currently active in the religious sphere.

Individuals in an additional 9 of the 48 inactive households were holding civil posts during the study period. When interviewed, those individuals unanimously agreed that the requirements of civil service did not allow them to take on additional obligations in the religious domain. Thus, although they may have had the resources necessary for religious service, these individuals were reluctant to assume dual commitments.

This leaves 12 of the 48 inactive, high-status households to be considered. When interviewed, members in 3 of these 12 households indicated some interest in future religious service. The remaining nine, however, did not participate and indicated no desire to do so. One reason for the inactivity of these households, lack of available labor, will be discussed below.

The data presented thus far suggest that religious service is dominated by households

of higher socioeconomic standing in the community. A Chi Square test, moreover, indicates that the level of participation of high-status households is statistically significant (see Table 1). Community members, however, suggest another factor that may be crucial for the successful completion of religious service—the ability to mobilize adult laborers of both sexes. As one informant states:

To have the *cofradía* is much work—it is work for a year before with all the visits and planning; then it is work during the year having all the fiestas and making sure everything is right. I could not do it without *Micaela* [mother-in-law] to help cook the meals and watch the children while I am gone. I could also not have done it without my father-in-law because he has helped a lot with the farm work and seeing that the sharecroppers did not cheat us this year.

That the labor of both sexes is vital is further explained by this informant because:

The *cofradías* are divided—there is the work of women and the work of men. You cannot have a festival without rituals. The men, they do the heavy work of building the altar and collecting the plants. They decorate the Church and the house and prepare for ritual. The women get the food ready. They dress the animals, toast the chilies, and cook the meals. They also get the clothes ready for the Saints and repair the costumes and decorations. Then they make sure everything runs smoothly on the day of the festival when the men are drinking. Everybody has their job to do. Women are not good at men's jobs and men do not know anything about food. But all must eat and all must have an altar to pray under. So I direct the men in their activities, and my wife, she has charge of the women.

I investigated the importance of labor resources in religious participation by comparing the numbers of adults (both male and female) present in the households of San Miguel with rates of religious participation. The number of adults in active households averaged 2.9 while the number of adults in inactive households averaged 2.0. A finer breakdown of activity rates relative to the

number of adults present in the household is presented in Table 2. The data demonstrate that rates of religious participation increase in accordance with the number of adults present in the household. A statistical test indicates, moreover, that the association between activity level and number of adults is such that those households with three or more adult laborers are significantly more likely to be active in the system than those with two or fewer.

A subsequent comparison of religious activity according to the sex composition of households in San Miguel is recorded in Table 3. The households of San Miguel are grouped into five categories. "Equal" households are those having equal numbers of male and female adult members. This category is subdivided in the table according to whether the members number one male and one female or more than one male and more than one female. The "male predominant" households are those with more male than female adult members. Conversely, the "female predominant" households have more female than male adult members. Finally, the "single-sex" households have only a single male or a single female adult member.

The data show significant differences in activity levels by sex composition of the household. Those "equal" households with two or more male and female members and the "female predominant" households participate more than would be expected if sex composi-

**TABLE 2.** A Comparison of Religious Activity in Terms of Numbers of Adult Members Present in the Household

Number of Adult Members	Number of Active Households	Number of Inactive Households
0-2	7	97
3-5	115	116
6-8	16	3
Total	138	216

$\chi^2 = 75$   
p < .001

tion made no difference in religious service. It appears that an adequate number of adult members of both sexes are necessary for festival sponsorship, and that those households with two or more adult members of both sexes are significantly more likely to participate than those with fewer. Hence, those households having only one adult member of each sex, and those households with only one adult member of either sex, are significantly less likely to participate in religious service than would be expected if the sex and number of adult members present made no difference in religious participation.

The extent to which labor availability acts as a mitigating factor affecting the participation of wealthy households can be explored by returning to a consideration of the 12 higher status households whose lack of religious activity remained unexplained in the preceding section. Of these 12 households, 8 have only 2 adult members available while the remaining 3 households have only 3 adult members. This finding corresponds to the median number of 2.5 adults found in inactive households in San Miguel and contrasts with the median number of 4 adults found in active ones. These findings suggest that the availability of adult labor is an important factor in cargo service that may militate against participation in households that have sufficient wealth but lack personnel.

#### Civil Service

I suggest that the pattern of high-status household participation characteristic of religious service is beginning to shift, in the civil sphere, to one based on the possession of individual skills. If this hypothesis is valid, then rates of civil participation should be distributed more evenly across households in all three social strata. The figures in Table 4 show that of the 92 households in the highest stratum, only 17, or 18 percent, are active in the civil sphere. Similarly, 23, or 27 percent, of the 84 middle-stratum households are active, and 21, or 12 percent, of the 178 low-status households are active.

**TABLE 3.** Frequency Distribution of Rates of Religious Activity According to Sex Composition of Households

	Equal		Female Predominant	Male Predominant	Single Sex	Total
	1 Male 1 Female	> 1 Male > 1 Female				
Active	5	61	25	44	3	138
Inactive	81	30	59	27	19	216
						354

$\chi^2 = 88.77$   
p < .001

A comparison of the rates of religious and civil participation for households in each stratum (see Tables 1 and 4) shows some clear differences. While 74 percent of the high-stratum households and 71 percent of the middle-stratum households are religious participants, only 17 and 27 percent of the households in these strata are active in the civil sphere. Conversely, 6 percent of the low-stratum households are religious participants while double that percentage are active in the civil sphere. Rates of civil participation by strata are still not what would be expected if wealth had no influence on officeholding. I suggest, however, that these figures point toward a trend for the increasing participation of low-status households in civil service and indicate that wealth is no longer an absolute prerequisite for civil officeholding.

#### CHANGING PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The data presented thus far indicate that socioeconomic status is the single overwhelming determinant of religious participation in San Miguel. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that households with surplus resources participate in religious activity regardless of the sex of the head of household. The use of a domestic/public model emphasizing the separation between public and private spheres tends to obscure the fact that in religious cargo service, the domestic unit is the unit involved in public service. The two spheres are, in this case, one and the same. Households, not individual men, compete for prestige through service involving the expenditure of

**TABLE 4.** Frequency Distribution of Active and Inactive Households in the Civil System According to Socio-economic Status

Stratum	Total		Active		Inactive	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
High	92	26	17	18	75	82
Medium	84	24	23	27	61	73
Low	178	50	21	12	157	88
Total	354	100				

$\chi^2 = 8.74$   
p < .05



surplus resources. The labor of both male and female household members is vital in accomplishing this goal, and the prestige earned through service is shared equally by the members of the household unit.

Women, as integral members of such units, served and continue to serve in all aspects of the religious system. They contribute labor needed in accumulating surplus resources and in discharging the obligations of office. Consequently, when male heads of household hold official title to office, they must appoint a female partner as co-sponsor of the cargo and vice versa. The two mayordomos share responsibilities for discharging the ritual obligations of office with each having parallel duties to perform. In the religious sphere both female and male members of wealthy, high-status households are able to participate on a parallel basis in cargo service.

Women, however, do not have similar opportunities for participation in the civil sphere in San Miguel. During the study period, women held only 2 of the 61 civil posts available and both were appointive, as no woman in San Miguel has ever been elected to civil office. I suggest that women's exclusion from civil office is tied directly to the changing bases for service in San Miguel. Election to office is no longer absolutely dependent on past success in the religious system. Rather, individual skills including literacy in the Spanish language and the ability to interact with outsiders have become valued attributes in civil officeholders. Men in San Miguel possess these kinds of skills to a greater degree than do women because traditionally they traveled more widely and made more contacts with outside officials. In addition, men in San Miguel had, and continue to have, greater access to formal schooling than women and hence have been better able to improve their Spanish literacy skills.

Bossen (1975) and Boserup (1970) suggest that the greater development of interactional and literacy skills on the part of men is an established pattern in modernizing nations. Men are often recruited by the state to serve in the armed forces or provide labor in areas far distant from their homes. As men travel,

they are exposed to outside people and customs leading to the development of these skills. In Guatemala, for example, Bossen (1975) found that Indian men were frequently recruited to labor on lowland coffee plantations and conscripted to serve in the national armed forces. These Indian men traveled more extensively than women who had to remain behind to care for households in the highlands. As a result of their experiences, these Indian men learned the dominant Spanish language, often acquired formal schooling, and gained valuable experience interacting with Ladinos.

The situation described by Bossen for Guatemala parallels that occurring in San Miguel today. As official heads of households, men in San Miguel have always been responsible for regulating interaction between the household and outside authorities. In recent years, moreover, large numbers of men have left the community to work stints as agricultural laborers in the U.S. and to serve in the Mexican military to earn additional cash. In the process, men's literacy skills in Spanish improved as did their ability to interact with outsiders. Today, as parents in San Miguel perceive the importance of education for improving the quality of life, young men are often sent to secondary school in Oaxaca City where these skills are further developed.

Even though women now have the legal right to hold civil posts in San Miguel, they seldom achieve them because they often lack the particular skills valued in officeholders. The only two women to hold civil posts in San Miguel are ones who, through a combination of unusual circumstances, did have the opportunity to acquire some of these valued skills. The circumstances of their cases illustrate the processes now at work in the assumption of civil offices.

One woman, Hermelinda, was appointed as a member of the local committee of the dominant political party in Mexico (PRI). Another woman, Elena, is currently serving in the civil system as a member of the Committee of the Parents of Schoolchildren. Both women are single heads of household in the upper socioeconomic stratum designated in

Table 1. Interviews with Hermelinda and Elena reveal that in each instance the appointment to political office was predicated on somewhat unusual circumstances.

Hermelinda, for example, first got involved with civil officials after her husband murdered a fellow townsman in a drunken brawl. She hid her husband at a neighbor's house and later smuggled him out to Mexico City. He has not returned to San Miguel since, although it is rumored that he sometimes visits Hermelinda in secrecy. After her husband fled, Hermelinda was questioned at great length by civil authorities who pressed her to reveal his whereabouts. She refused to answer their questions and began, instead, to ask town officials about what would happen to her husband and about why he was being held responsible for a crime of passion committed in a drunken state. The local officials became annoyed and refused to answer her questions. Consequently, Hermelinda pursued these issues with civil officials in the district capital. These officials promised to look into her husband's case and even hinted to Hermelinda that her husband might be the innocent victim of persecution by an unscrupulous official in San Miguel. Hermelinda was grateful for the assistance of the district officials and invited them to stop for beer at her store any time they visited San Miguel. Thus even though the district officials never helped solve her husband's case, Hermelinda did make and maintain valuable political contacts.

About five years ago, according to Hermelinda, the state branch of the PRI party issued a directive encouraging districts to appoint women to local PRI committees. One of the district officials, who had met Hermelinda, convinced her to serve on the committee by suggesting that in so doing she might meet people who could assist in solving her husband's case.

The other woman to hold office in San Miguel, Elena, is one of three members of the Committee of the Parents of Schoolchildren. Committee members are responsible for handling the money raised by the school cooperative and negotiate requests for repairs and

services made by the teachers. Twice a year the committee meets with all the parents to announce projects for the school and discuss problems arising between parents and teachers.

The presidente municipal appoints the members of the committee who have, in the past, been men. Women are active, however, in auxiliary roles relating to fundraising, planning school festivals, and maintaining school facilities. In addition, as parents of schoolchildren, women have always attended the twice annual meetings held by the committee. Elena's appointment to office stemmed from her public protest at one of these meetings. The protest occurred because the teachers had convinced committee members that mothers should work two days a year at the school cleaning the bathrooms and sweeping the floors. Mothers who refused to work, they argued, should be fined. The plan was protested vociferously, and Elena took the floor to argue this point with the presidente of the committee. She said:

If we have the money, then why do you not use it to pay a girl to come to the school in the mornings to clean up? There are many young girls who need the money. Why do you expect the mothers to spend their time cleaning up like servants? We have to care for our own homes and children first.

Other women shouted their agreement, and the president said he would consider the idea. In the meantime, Elena canvassed the community and urged mothers not to go to the school when it was their turn to clean. Many of the women Elena visited in turn convinced their husbands that the work being asked of them was demeaning. As a result both men and women started to oppose the plan. The presidente of the committee had to call another meeting and at that time suggested that Elena join the committee to devise a plan for cleaning the school. The parents agreed, and Elena set up a plan whereby all the parents came to the school collectively twice a year in alternating groups to do a general cleaning of the facility. For the remainder of the year

Elena hired two local girls to clean on a daily basis. The plan satisfied everyone, and Elena continues to serve on the committee.

These two cases represent very different but equally unusual paths to civil service. Even though women can legally hold civil posts in San Miguel they find it difficult to do so since they often lack the skills valued in civil servants. The only two women to hold civil office in San Miguel are women who, through a combination of unusual circumstances, did acquire some of these valued skills.

Yet, because women are active participants in the religious system we cannot assume that their exclusion from civil service represents a lack of interest or ability, nor can we assume it results from confinement to a domestic sphere. Rather, women's exclusion from civil service is the complex outcome of a number of specific political and historical developments both within and outside the community. Spanish colonial authorities and later the Mexican national government created an administrative domain where men were favored for service. Additional socioeconomic changes led to conditions favoring men's travel outside the community and promoted their greater access to formal educational systems. As these skills obtained by men became increasingly important for election to civil office, they began to dominate in these posts. From a community-wide perspective, the implication for women is apparent. To the extent that the civil sphere is assuming increasing importance over the religious in regulating community affairs, women are being deprived of opportunities to hold community posts.

## CONCLUSION

The data presented in this paper indicate that what appears on the surface to be a division in San Miguel between the domestic roles of women and the public roles of men is, instead, a manifestation of a more complex division emerging between the community-oriented religious sphere and the ex-

tracommunity-oriented political sphere. Because men dominate in the extra-community sphere, it often seems they control all the public roles of importance in San Miguel. Yet obviously they do not. I would argue that many ethnographic descriptions of a domestic/public division in postcontact societies may actually depict this more complex split in orientation between community and extracommunity institutions brought about by the penetration of state-level systems into formerly autonomous or semi-autonomous areas.

The penetration of the state, as anthropologists like Reiter (1975) and Sacks (1974, 1976, 1979) document, is accompanied by major political and economic transformations within local communities. State officials usually recruit men for public works projects and military service because of their greater mobility and physical strength, and because they are more easily exploited than women who must care for children. In the absence of men, the duties of domestic work and local subsistence fall to women. This division between women's production for family use, and men's corresponding involvement in social production, provides the basis for a sexual divide-and-rule policy in state-level systems (Sacks 1974:221). The effect of this policy, according to Sacks, has been to convert the productive role differences between men and women into a system of differential worth such that men become social adults while women are seen as domestic wards (Sacks 1974:221). As domestic wards, women's dealings with the public sphere are necessarily restricted, and they must depend on men to mediate for them with the larger extradomestic system of authority. Thus, although women in many state-level systems may exercise considerable amounts of power within the community, states are still prone to deny women's authority by excluding them from formal positions of importance in dealing with extracommunity officials. While the policies of the state have acted in general to promote the ties between men and state officials, this pattern of participation is by no means universal. Klein's (1980) work with the

Tlingit of Alaska shows how specific historical conditions act, in some situations, to provide women with the opportunities to accrue the skills and positions necessary for extra-community service.

The tendency of many anthropologists to assume that differential patterns of male and female participation necessarily reflect a domestic/public division is misplaced. Such reasoning fails to recognize the amount of variation that exists in the roles associated with both local and extracommunity institutions. Only by moving beyond the domestic/public model can researchers begin to focus on role relationships in order to specify both the determinants behind, and consequences of, particular patterns of sexual participation.

## NOTES

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1. See the work of Reina (1966) on the religious system in a Guatemalan community for an exception to this general trend.
2. The research community is located in the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico. In accordance with anthropological precedent, the name of the community has been changed to protect informant confidentiality. Similarly, informant names have been changed in order to guarantee their anonymity.
3. The religious cargo system in San Miguel today conforms in structure to what De Walt

(1975) labels the "faded" type and what Smith (1977) labels the "truncated" type. A more detailed description of cargo organization can be found in Mathews (1982).

4. Theoretically, all these 61 religious posts are filled annually, which would lead to a total of 183 offices over the three-year study period. In actuality, however, 38 were filled annually while another 24 were only filled once over the course of the study. Consequently, there were 138 religious posts filled over the three-year period.
5. In the civil sphere, 14 offices were filled only once, by election, during the three-year study period. Another 15 were filled three separate times by annual appointment. In two additional cases, the offices were not appointed annually, but rather the same two individuals held these posts throughout the three-year study period. Thus the total number of posts to be filled over three years was 61.
6. I used two rating scales, the Evaluated Participation Scale (EP) and the Index of Status Characteristics (ISC), to assess the socioeconomic status of households in San Miguel. The methodology is adapted from Warner et al. (1960). The goal of the EP technique is the empirical discovery of what people mean by the descriptive terms they use when talking about different social strata (Warner et al. 1960:35). I used open-ended interviews with 20 informants to elicit relevant terms and phrases for social class. Community members talked about three major strata and two sub-strata based on household standing in the community or *categoría*. In the interview context, informants often cited households as examples for each of the social categories. After constructing a model of the social system, I asked a panel of five informants to sort index cards with the names of all community households into the relevant categories. I tested this model with data from an identical task done by a separate panel of five informants. After completing this work, I next constructed an Index of Status Characteristics designed to yield an objective assessment of socioeconomic status that enables the analyst to determine what is meant in socioeconomic terms by community-derived categories of status. I used four status characteristics including occupation of household head, household landholdings, house type, and location of household. I had a panel of informants rate each household in the community on each

characteristic, using a scale from an excellent rating of 1 to a poor rating of 7. Each score was then weighted to reflect the relative importance of each characteristic in the determination of status by community members. The composite rating score was then matched to the previous placements of households into emically derived status categories by informants to produce an overall picture of socioeconomic status in the community (see Mathews 1982 for a more detailed account of methodology).

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## Divine Connections: The Mansin and Her Clients

Laurel Kendall

This order is recruited from among hysterical and silly girls as well as from women who go into it for a livelihood or for baser reasons.

—H. N. Allen, *Some Korean Customs*

Excerpted with permission from Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 54-85.

The magistrate said, "Alas! I thought *mutangs* were a brood of liars, but now I know that there are true *mutangs* as well as false." He gave her rich rewards, sent her away in safety, recalled his order against witches, and refrained from any matters pertaining to them for ever after.

—Im Bang, from "The Honest Witch"

The *mansin's* house is much like any other country residence. She hangs no sign outside.

Women seek out the *mansin's* house by word of mouth or on the recommendation of kinswomen or neighbors. Once inside, a client makes herself comfortable, sitting on the heated floor. She should feel at home in the *mansin's* inner room, for the place resembles her own. The room where Yongsu's Mother divines could be the main room of any prosperous village home, crammed with the stuff of everyday life. Here are cabinets full of clothes and dishes, a dressing table with a neatly arranged collection of bottled cosmetics, an electric rice warmer, and a television set decorated with an assortment of rubber dolls and pink furry puppies.

### THE GODS AND THEIR SHRINE

Yongsu's Mother's shrine, tucked away behind the sliding doors of the one spare room, resembles a rural temple. Gilt-plaster Buddha statues sit on the front altar. Bright printed portraits of Yongsu's Mother's gods hang on the walls. Incense burners, brass candleholders, aluminum fruit plates, water bowls, and stemmed offering vessels clutter the main and side altars. Each utensil and the three brass bells above the altar all bear the engraved phrase "Grant the wish of," followed by the name of the client. These are clients' gifts. The *mansin* advises a client to secure a particular god's good offices with appropriate tribute. One incense burner and water bowl bear my name. Yongsu's Mother told me, with some embarrassment, that the Buddhist Sage and the Mountain God requested gifts since I was doing my research through their will. She told a soldier's wife worried about her husband's fidelity and a young wife worried about her husband's job prospects to dedicate brass bells. She told another young wife to dedicate a water bowl because the Mountain God has helped her husband. Other clients gave the *mansin* her drum and battle trident, her cymbals and knives, her robes and hats, all the equipment she uses to perform *kut* [the most elaborate Shaman ritual]. She stores this equipment out of sight under the altar. Like the shrine fittings, each

of these accoutrements bears a client's name. A shrine littered with bells, water vessels, and incense pots advertises a successful *mansin*. In the early morning the *mansin* burns incense, lights candles, and offers cold water inside the shrine. Clients leave incense and candles, and the *mansin* echoes their requests in her own prayers.

A *mansin's* shrine is called a god hall (*sindang*) or hall of the law (*pöptang*), a Buddhist term. In casual conversation Yongsu's Mother calls her shrine the grandfather's room (*haraböjüi pang*). When I first visited her, I mistook the unmarked plural and thought she was renting a spare room to an older man. "Grandmother" and "grandfather" are honorific, but not excessively formal, terms. In Korea all old men and all old women, by virtue of the status white hair confers, are politely addressed as grandfather and grandmother. Gods also carry a faint connotation of kinship. Although both power and position set gods (*silyöng*) above ancestors (*chosang*), some gods, like the Chöns' Great Spirit Grandmother, are also known ancestors. They are grandfathers and grandmothers writ large. Whether venerable distant kin or generalized venerable elders, Yongsu's Mother owes her gods respect and good treatment. Her gods are not distant, awesome beings; with a common term of address, she brings them close. She dreads their anger and anticipates their will, but she also expects them to help her, as a Korean child looks to a grandparent for small indulgences.

Standing before the gods in her shrine, Yongsu's Mother assumes the self-consciously comic pose of a young child, head slightly bowed, eyes wide with pleading. Speaking in a high, soft voice, she says, "Grandfather, please give me some money. I'm going to the market." She takes a bill from the altar and stuffs it into her coin purse. "I'll be right back," and she brings her hands together and nods her head in a quick bow.

Yongsu's Mother originally kept her gods in a narrow storage alcove off the porch and rented her spare room. She began to suspect that the gods disliked the alcove when she, her son, and her roomers' child were all sick

at the same time in the middle of winter. One night her dead husband appeared in a dream. He boldly marched into the spare room while its occupants were in Seoul. Yongsu's Mother yelled at him, "You can't go in there when people are away. They'll think you're going to take something." Her husband answered, "This is my room. I'll give you the rent money." Yongsu's Mother continued to quarrel with her husband until she woke up.

The very next day, her roomers announced that they were moving to Seoul. Someone else wanted to rent the room immediately, but Yongsu's Mother said that she would have to think about it. That night she dreamed that all of the grandmothers and grandfathers in her shrine left the alcove and followed Yongsu's Father into the spare room, calling as they passed, "We'll give you the rent money, we'll give you the rent money."

She told her dream to the Chatterbox *Mansin* who agreed that Yongsu's Mother must make the spare room into a shrine. Thereafter, she prospered as a *mansin*. Her grandmothers and grandfathers gave her the rent money.

This incident is typical of Yongsu's Mother's ongoing tug-of-war with her grandmothers and grandfathers. Her gods do well by her, but they are even more demanding than her clients' gods. She intended to give a *kut* every three years for their pleasure, but after a prosperous early spring, they made her ill to let her know that they wanted an annual *kut*. The next year, in the fall, she gave the grandmothers and grandfathers special feast food (*yöt'am*) before her stepdaughter's wedding. The gods were angry because she hit the hourglass drum and roused them but did not give them a *kut*. Her luck was bad for several months. She purchased fabric to make new robes for the General and the Warrior, and gave another *kut* the following spring.

Like many children from Enduring Pine Village, her son Yongsu goes to the private Christian middle school in Righteous Town. The fees at the school are minimal and admissions relatively open, but pressure to convert

is high. The gods in the shrine do not like Yongsu's daily brush with Christianity. They make his thoughts wander in school. He says he feels an urge to rush home. Yongsu's Mother told the principal that Yongsu's family had "honored Buddha from long ago," and asked him to understand that Yongsu cannot become a Christian. Then she went to her shrine, hit the cymbals, and implored her grandmothers and grandfathers: "Please understand, please forgive. Yongsu has to get an education. Let him go to that place until he's gotten his education."

### THE DESCENT OF THE GODS

A *mansin* engages in a battle of wills with the gods from the very beginning of her career. A woman is expected to resist her calling and struggle against the inevitable, but village women say that those who resist the will of the gods to the very end die raving lunatics. Strange, wild behavior marks a destined *mansin*. Yongsu's Mother describes the struggle:

They don't know what they're doing. They yell, "Let's go, let's go!" and go running out somewhere. They snatch food from the kitchen and run out into the road with it. God-descended people swipe things and run away. They strike at people and shout insults.

If I were a god-descended person and my husband were hitting me and calling me crazy woman, I'd shout back at him, "You bastard! Don't you know who I am, you bastard?" That's what the Clear Spring *Mansin* did. Then she sat beside the road talking to the chickens. So funny!

The destined *mansin*, or god-descended person (*naerin saram*), can experience a variety of symptoms. According to Yongsu's Mother,

It's very difficult for them. They're sick and they stay sick, even though they take medicine. And there are people who get better even without taking medicine. There are some who can't eat the least bit of food; they just go hungry. There are some who sleep with their eyes open, and

some who can't sleep at all. They're very weak but they get well as soon as the gods descend in the initiation *Kut*. For some people the gods descend gently, but for others the gods don't descend gently at all. So they run around like crazy women.

Although the destined *mansin* acts like a "crazy woman," Yongsu's Mother makes a distinction between the god-descended person (*naerin saram*) and someone struck temporarily insane (*mich'ida*) by angry household gods or ancestors. "You just have to see them to tell the difference. Insane people look like they're in pain somewhere. The god-descended person wanders here and there singing out, 'I'm this god, I'm that god.'" The *mansin* exorcise insane people as swiftly as possible in a healing *kut* for fear that the possessing spirits will torment their victims to death. The *mansin* flourish knives and flaming torches, threatening, cajoling, and pleading with the offending spirits, urging them to depart (Kendall 1977a). In the initiation *kut* for a god-descended person (*naerin kut*), the initiating *mansin* invites the gods to complete their descent and allow their chosen one to dance and sing as a *mansin*.

A woman often endures considerable anguish before her initiation. The Chatterbox Mansin's story is typical. She was a young matron when the gods descended, a first son's wife living with her mother-in-law. She had already produced two healthy sons. Her husband was away in the air force when she began to exhibit bizarre behavior. She would wander about, talking in a distracted fashion. Worried, her mother-in-law sent for Chatterbox's sister, but when the sister arrived, Chatterbox was sitting in the main room, calmly sewing. She said that every night an old woman—a grandmother—came and asked her to go wandering about with her.

Her sister thought that if Chatterbox was normal enough in the daytime and only behaved strangely at night, she would be all right soon enough. But a few days later, Chatterbox came back to her natal home, clapping her hands together and shrieking like a lunatic. She looked like a beggar woman in

torn clothes. Her hair was a tangled mass down her back and her face was filthy. When her mother-in-law came to take her back home, she just sat on the porch and screamed. They tried to pull her up, but her legs stuck fast to the wooden boards of the porch. She asked for some water and poured it all over her body. That night she wandered away. She went into a house and stole a Buddha statue. When her family asked her why she did this, she said, "I was told to do it." For two weeks she went about clapping her hands and pilfering small objects. Then she disappeared completely.

Her family thought she was dead. Much later they heard that she had become the apprentice spirit daughter of the Boil-face Mansin, a great shaman (*k'un mudang*) in the next county. The Boil-face Mansin had taken her in, initiated her, and was training her to perform *kut*. Over the years she learned chants, dances, and ritual lore.

During Chatterbox's distracted wanderings her mother-in-law began divorce proceedings. The woman never lived with her husband again and was forbidden to see her children. But when sorrow overwhelmed her, she would go to the school and, from a safe distance, watch her sons playing in the school yard. A quarrel with his stepmother prompted the oldest son to search out Chatterbox in the countryside. After the boy's flight her sons visited her every summer.

Chatterbox prospered as a *mansin* and built up her own clientele. She broke with her spirit mother after a bitter fight, claiming the shaman overworked and underpaid her. Today, some twenty years after the gods' initial descent, no trace of the haunted young matron remains. Well dressed in Western-style clothing, Chatterbox walks through the streets of the county seat where she has just purchased a new house. Today people in the area consider her a "great shaman" and her own spirit daughter accuses her of stinginess.

By her own admission, Yongsu's Mother had an easy experience as a god-descended person. Widowed after only two years of marriage, she was left with two stepchildren and her own small son. She worked as a peddler,

one of a limited number of occupations open to a woman who must support a family. At the end of the mourning period, she went to a *kut* at Chatterbox's shrine.

During an interlude in the *kut*, women danced the *mugam* in the Chatterbox Mansin's costumes to amuse their personal guardian gods and bring luck to their families. The Chatterbox Mansin told Yongsu's Mother to use the *mugam* and dance for success in her precarious business ventures. As Yongsu's Mother remembers it,

I said, "What do you mean 'use the *mugam*?' It's shameful for me to dance like that." But the Chatterbox Mansin kept saying, "It'll give you luck. You'll be lucky if you dance." So I put on the clothes and right away began to dance wildly. I ran into the shrine, still dancing, and grabbed the Spirit Warrior's flags. I started shouting, "I'm the Spirit Warrior of the Five Directions," and demanded money. All of the women gave me money. I ran all the way home. My heart was thumping wildly. I just wanted to die like a crazy woman. We talked about it this way and that way and decided there was no way out. So the next year I was initiated as a *mansin*.

Although Yongsu's Mother's possession was sudden and unique in its relative painlessness, there had been suggestions throughout her life that she would become a *mansin*.<sup>1</sup> In her early teens during the Korean War, she was fingered as a member of a right-wing youth organization and arrested by North Korean soldiers just before their retreat. Taken on the march north, she made a bold escape on the same night that the Mountain God appeared to her in a dream and said, "It's already getting late."

In late adolescence she had frightening hallucinations. The little Buddha statue a friend brought her from Japan burst into flames in the middle of the room. She watched her mother's face turn into a tiger's face. She wandered about at night, drawn to the stone Buddha near a neighborhood temple. Her mother held a healing *kut*. During the *kut* the girl fell asleep. A white-haired couple appeared and gave her a bowl of medicinal water to drink. When she woke up, she

told her dream to the *mansin*, who was pleased. The *mansin* asked her to become her spirit daughter and be initiated as a *mansin*, but she and her mother refused.

Years later, on her wedding night, her sister-in-law dreamed that the new bride was sitting in the inner room hitting a drum. Overhead, on a rope line, hung all of the gods' clothes, as if a *kut* were in progress. Later, when her husband was fatally ill, Yongsu's Mother went to a *mansin*'s shrine for an exorcism. She set out her offerings and the *mansin* began to chant, but when Yongsu's Mother went to raise her arms over her head and bow to ground, her arms stuck to her sides as if someone were holding them down. She could not budge them. It was destined that her husband would die and she would become a *mansin*. There was nothing she could do about it.

Yongsu's Mother was a young widow awash in economic difficulties when the gods descended. The Chatterbox Mansin was separated from her husband but living with her mother-in-law, the woman who would later insist on divorce. I am reluctant to speculate on the two initiates' subconscious motivations, but Harvey (1979, 1980) suggests that severe role stress propels women like the Chatterbox Mansin and Yongsu's Mother into god-descended behavior. It is true that, as *mansin*, such women stand above the social and economic constraints imposed on a proper Korean wife, and as *mansin*, they wear the gods' costumes and speak with the gods' authority. But whatever personal and economic gratification she enjoys, the *mansin* and her family pay a price. Shamans were listed, under the occupational classification system of the Yi dynasty, among the despised "mean people" (*ch'onmin*) along with butchers, fortune-tellers, roving players, monks, and female entertainers. According to one early missionary, "Sometimes the daughter of a genteel family may become a Mootang, though this is rare, as her people would rather kill her than have her madness take this form" (Allen 1896, 164).

Like the female entertainer, the *kisaeng*, the shaman engages in public display, singing

and dancing. An element of ambiguous sexuality wafts about the *mansin's* performance. In folklore and literature *mudang* are portrayed as "lewd women," and so they are often perceived (Wilson 1983). The *mansin* Cho Yōng-ja told Ch'oe and Chang that the county chief had come to her home on the pretext of having his fortune told and had then insisted on sleeping with her. Disgusted, she contrived an escape. Thereafter all was coldness between the *mansin* and the county chief (Ch'oe and Chang 1967, 32-33).

The *mansin* play to their female audience, but when the supernatural Official sells "lucky wine," the costumed *mansin* roams through the house seeking male customers. The men have been drinking by themselves in a corner of the house, as far removed from the *kut* as possible. Now they emerge, red faced, and the bolder of their company dance a few steps on the porch. Men buy the Official's wine and tease the *mansin*, flourishing their bills in front of her face before securing the money in her chestband. An audacious man may try to tweak the *mansin's* breast as he secures his bill.

The *mansin* is caught at cross purposes. By her coy, flirtatious performance, she encourages the men to spend more money on wine. But as a woman alone, she must defend herself from harassment and protect her reputation. Yongsu's Mother was resourceful.

It doesn't happen so much anymore, but when I first started going to *kut*, men would bother me. We were doing a *kut* at a house way out in the country, and I was going around selling the Official's wine. Some son-of-a-bitch grabbed my breast. I put out my hand so the drummer would go faster, then brought my arms up quick to start dancing. I knocked that guy against the wall. Afterwards, he asked me, "What did you mean by that?" I said, "Oh, that wasn't me, it was the honorable Official who did that." Other times, I'd be drumming and some guy would say, "Auntie, where is Uncle? What is Uncle doing now?" and go on like that. I'd reach out to beat the drum faster and slap the guy with the drumstick.

At the *kut* for the dead, performed outside the house gate, men gather off to the side. They gaze at the *mansin* garbed like a princess

who sings the long ballad tale of Princess Pari, rapping the drum with elegant flicks of her wrist. My landlady told me of a famous *mansin*, now aged, who was once a beauty. "When she did the *kut* for the dead, it would take forever. This one would carry her off on his back, and that one would embrace her."

To the exemplar of Confucian virtue, the *mansin* offends simply because she dances in public. When an officer from the district police station tried to stop a *kut* in Enduring Pine Village, he threatened to arrest the *mansin* because "they were dancing to drum music and students were watching." The moral education of the young was thereby imperiled. An envelope of "cigarette money" finally silenced this paragon.

It would be a distortion to paint the *mansin* I knew in northern Kyōnggi Province as social pariahs. Since she has no husband, Yongsu's Mother's house is a favorite gathering place for village women. In their leisure moments they drop by to chat about the latest school fee, the inept village watch system, the new neighborhood loan association, or simply to gossip. Even the wife of the progressive village chief, though she disdains "superstition," seeks out the company of the articulate, loquacious *mansin*. Yongsu's Mother is a favorite guest at birthday parties. She gets the singing started and makes people laugh. She can sometimes be persuaded to bring her drum so the women can dance.

But Yongsu's Mother lives under the shadow of potential insult. Village people say, "Not so many years ago, even a child could use blunt speech [*panmal*] to a shaman.<sup>2</sup> Although this is no longer true, when tempers flare Yongsu's Mother's occupation is still flung in her face. Yongsu's Mother and the widowed Mr. Yun were great friends. Village gossips expected them to marry. Mr. Yun's daughter-in-law rankled at the possibility. She finally exploded in a fit of rage, shrieking at Yongsu's Mother, "Don't come into my house! I don't want a shaman to come into my house! It's bad luck if a shaman comes into your house." Pride wounded to the quick, Yongsu's Mother avoided the Yun family and there was no more talk of marriage.

After her stepdaughter's marriage Yong-

su's Mother was anxious lest the groom discover her occupation. She did only one hasty New Year Rite for a client on the second day of the New Year since she expected a visit from the newlyweds on that day. She dreaded the thought of them walking in and catching her banging her cymbals in the shrine.

The Chatterbox *Mansin's* sister-in-law found her own children dancing in time to the drum rhythm during a *kut*. She slapped them soundly, then howled at her miserable fortune to have married into a shaman's house. Since this was all in the family, and the Chatterbox *mansin* is never at a loss for words, whatever the circumstance, she snapped back, "Well then, you knew this was a shaman's house. You didn't have to marry my brother and come to live here."

The *mansin* shares in the ambiguous status of other glamorous but morally dubious female marginals, the actress, the female entertainer, and the prostitute. Like the others, she makes a living, often a comfortable living, by public performance in a society where so-called good women stay home. But the *mansin* is neither an actress nor a courtesan. She is the ritual specialist of housewives. The good women who stay home need her. She came from their midst, lives like them, and speaks to their anxieties and hopes.

The gods who have claimed a woman as a *mansin* leave her one lingering shred of respectability. It is well known that only by virtue of divine calling is she a shaman, and that is a compulsion fatal to resist.<sup>3</sup> Her neighbors assume that she did not want to become a *mansin*. She tells her story to clients, describes how she resisted the call with the last ounce of her strength and succumbed only after considerable suffering and in fear for her very life. . . .

#### WOMEN WHO COME TO THE MANSIN'S HOUSE

A shaman's divination (*mugōri*) is the first step in any ritual therapy. Women like Grandmother Chōn come to the *mansin's* house when they suspect that malevolent forces lurk behind a sudden or persistent illness or do-

mestic strife. In Yongsu's Mother's shrine I heard reports of inflamed lungs, an infected leg, fits of possession "craziness," alcoholism, and dreamy, wandering states of mind. One woman, afflicted with this last complaint, feared that she was god-descended, but Yongsu's Mother laughed off her worries and divined more commonplace godly displeasure as the source of her problems. Other women who came to the shrine worried about their husbands' or sons' career prospects, or about sudden financial reverses. Should the husband switch jobs? Would the son receive his security clearance to work in Saudi Arabia? Thieves had broken into the family rice shop, what did that presage? Other women were anxious that adulterous husbands might abandon them. Some had only the vaguest suspicion that their spouses had "smoked the wind," but one young woman was certain that her husband took the grain his mother sent up from the country and shared it with his mistress. One woman, caught in a compromising position by her enraged spouse, had fled to the *mansin* in fear of life and limb. And still other women asked about wayward children, stepchildren, or grandchildren whose transgressions ranged from mild rebelliousness to Christian zealotry, petty theft, and delinquency. A mother-in-law asked how she should deal with a runaway daughter-in-law. A daughter-in-law who had fled home asked if she should divorce her husband. An older woman wondered if she should join a married son's household. . . .

The *mansin* chats with the women before fetching the divination tray. Sometimes the women begin to discuss their anxieties before the actual divination, but these are usually long-standing clients. Clients who come to the *mansin* for the first time tend to hold back and see how much the *mansin* can uncover in the divination.

The *mansin* brings in the divination tray, an ordinary low tray of the sort used for meals in any Korean home. The tray bears a mound or rice grains, a handful of brass coins (imitations of old Chinese money), and the brass bell rattle a *mansin* uses to summon up her visions.

"Well now, let's see," says the *mansin*, set-

ting down to a kneeling posture behind her tray. The client places a bill under the pile of grain on the tray. At Yongsu's Mother's shrine in 1977 and 1978, this fee was usually five-hundred or a thousand won. Now the *mansin* shakes the brass bells beside her own ear and chants, asking the gods to send "the correct message." She receives a message for each member of the client's family, beginning with the client's husband if he is alive. She announces each subject's name and age to the gods, tosses her coins on the tray, and spills handfuls of rice grains until the Great Spirit Grandmother speaks and sends visions.

Coin and rice configurations hint at the client's concerns. A broad spread of coins bespeaks quarrels between husband and wife or parent and child, or betrays financial loss. A long line of coins broken by one or two solitary coins at the end tells of someone leaving home, a change of employment, a death, or the inauspicious influence of an ancestor who died far from home. A few grains spilled on the floor caution financial prudence; the client should postpone switching jobs or buying a house.

The *mansin* describes a situation and asks for confirmation. "Your husband has a cold or something, is that it?" "Your thirteen-year-old daughter doesn't get along with her father, is that right?" The *mansin* develops the theme, weaving her visions together with her client's information. With more tosses of coins and grain, the Great Spirit Grandmother sends more specific visions. "I see a steep embankment. Is there something like that near your house?" The woman and her neighbor nod affirmation. "Be careful of that place." To another woman, "Your daughter has two suitors. One is quite handsome. The other is extremely clever but also very meticulous. Since your daughter isn't especially clever herself, she'll have a better life if she marries the second suitor, but she must watch her step and scrupulously manage her house."

Sometimes she sights the discontented gods and ancestors of her clients' households. "Is there a distant grandfather in your family who carried a sword and served inside the palace?" "Did someone in your family die far

from home and dripping blood?" She circles in on the supernatural source of her client's problems and suggests an appropriate ritual to mollify a greedy god's demands or send a miserable and consequently dangerous soul "away to a good place."

For a housewife to evaluate the skill of an individual *mansin* and trust her diagnosis, she must know the supernatural history of her husband's family and of her own kin. And if the *mansin* is convinced that there was "a grandmother who worshiped Buddha," or "a bride who died in childbirth," she tells her client, "Go home and ask the old people, they know about these things. . . ."

### SEEING THE YEAR'S LUCK

During the first two weeks of the lunar year, women crowd the *mansin's* house to "see the year's luck" (*illyön sinsurül poda*). The New Year marks a fresh, auspicious start for each household. A woman therefore gets a prognosis on each member of her family. If noxious influences threaten someone in her charge, she can "make them clean" by performing simple rituals under the first full moon.

This is the peasants' winter slack season and the women are in a holiday mood when they come to the *mansin's* house. Most arrive in groups. Waiting their turn, they bunch together in the hot-floor inner room. If the wait is long, they play cards, doze, or listen to other divinations. They sigh sympathetically for the woman whose divination reveals an adulterous husband, unruly child, or pitiable ghost. They coach the young matron who does not yet know the vocabulary of women's rituals. Not for them, the confidential atmosphere of the Western doctor's or analyst's office. The confessional's anonymity is missing here. The women enjoy each other's stories and accept each other's sympathy.

A woman, as a matter of course, receives divinations for her husband, herself, living parents-in-law, sons, unmarried daughters, sons' wives, and sons' children. Many women, however, pay an extra hundred or two hun-

dred won for the fortunes of those whose ties stretch outside the woman's "family," the family she enters at marriage and represents in the *mansin's* shrine. Some women ask about a married daughter, her husband, and their children, or about other natal kin. During New Year divinations in 1978, one woman asked about her own mother, brother, and brother's wife, another about her own elder sister. Yongsu's Mother teased, "What do you want to know about them for?" but provided the divinations. Women acknowledge their concern for mothers, married daughters, and siblings, but it costs more, an extra coin or two.

In the New Year divination the *mansin* predicts dangerous and advantageous months, warns against potentially dangerous activities, and suggests preventive ritual action. The following condensation of Yongsu's Mothers New Year divination for a seventy-year-old widow is an example.

My seventy-year-old lady, you shouldn't go on long trips; you must be careful now. Your children will receive succor; someone will come with aid in the seventh or eighth month. You will have some good news in the third or fourth month.

Your thirty-nine-year-old son should not visit anyone who is sick [since in this horoscope year, he is vulnerable to noxious influences]. His thirty-five-year-old wife should be heedful of things other people say about her. Their twelve-year-old son should be exorcised with five-grain rice left at the crossroads and by casting out a scarecrow stuffed with his name [because he has acquired an accretion of noxious influences and his year fate is bad]. The eight-year-old daughter will be lucky but you should burn a string of pine nuts, one for each year of her life, and address the moon on the night of the first full moon.

Your thirty-five-year-old son is troubled with sorrow and regret, but his luck is changing. There is no trouble between husband and wife, nothing to worry about there. Their seven-year-old child has a cold or something. This is a dangerous time for him so they must guard him carefully. Your unmarried thirty-year-old son doesn't even have a girl friend, but next year his prospects will improve. He should marry when he's thirty-two. He'll succeed in life when he's thirty-five or thirty-seven.

The scarecrow, five-grain rice left at the crossroads, and pine nuts burned under the moon are minor rituals performed on the fifteenth day of the lunar year. The first full moon marks the end of the New Year holidays, a time when women immunize a threatened family member, usually a child, against noxious influences lurking in the year's fortune. When the *mansin's* visions reveal a swarm of noxious influences on the road, a growing splotch of red, she tells the child's mother or grandmother to leave five-grain rice at a crossroads, then wave it over the child's head and cast it out. A mother must warn her child to be especially mindful of traffic. When the *mansin* sees swimming fish, she tells the woman to write the child's name, age, and birthdate on a slip of paper and wrap the paper around a lump of breakfast rice on the morning of the fifteenth. The woman throws the packet into a well or stream saying, "Take it, fish!" She substitutes the rice for a child with a drowning fate.

The *mansin* also cautions that children should not swim, go fishing, or climb mountains in certain months. Here the women sigh, "How can I do that?" The *mansin* tells the housewife which family members, according to the particular vulnerability of their year horoscope, must disdain funerals, feasts, or visits to sick friends. She advises switching a sixty-first birthday celebration to a more auspicious month. She predicts the compatibility of a son's or daughter's lover or a matchmaker's candidate. She determines when "the ancestors are hungry and the gods want to play," and advises these families to hold *kut* early in the new year. The early spring is a busy season for the *mansin*. . . .

A woman goes to the *mansin* with some ambivalence. She assumes the *mansin* will discern a supernatural problem and suggest ritual action. Rituals, be it an inexpensive exorcism or an elaborate *kut*, require cash. Hangil's Mother told me, "I don't go to the *mansin's* house anymore. They always tell you to do things that cost money, and I can't afford to do that. I'm just like a Christian now, only I don't believe in Jesus." Though some women are cynical, Hangil's Mother is not. She ad-

vised me on the rituals I should perform for my own spirits and was almost invariably among the women watching a *kut* in Yongsu's Mother's shrine. A divination is the essential first step in a *mansin's* treatment, but the whole process may stop here. Whenever Yongsu's Mother counseled a woman to dedicate a brass bell or sponsor a ritual, the client would almost always say, "I'll have to talk it over with my husband," or "I'll have to see what the old people say." At home she weighs the potential benefits against the household budget. A woman told me, "They say we ought to do a *kut* because a grandmother of this house was a great shaman, but it takes too much money." Some women decide to wait and see if their problems will improve over time. There was, for example, the woman who said,

Years ago, I went to a *mansin* in Righteous Town. Someone told me she was good, so I went to her by myself. My husband was losing money and I felt uneasy. The *mansin* said, "Do a *kut*," but I didn't.

Others are satisfied with the *mansin's* actions on their behalf:

I was sick last year. I felt exhausted and my whole body ached. I went to the hospital for treatment and that took a lot of money. . . . After the exorcism I got better.

or:

We did a *kut* two years ago for my eldest son. He drank too much and had pains in his chest. He took Western medicine, but that didn't work. The Brass Mirror *Mansin* did a *kut* and he got better, so he didn't have to go to the hospital.

Some of the women were reluctant to attribute a successful cure directly and exclusively to the *mansin's* efforts. "The *mansin* did an exorcism and my daughter took medicine; she recovered." There are also clients who claim total dissatisfaction with the *mansin's* cure. Everyone in the Song family's immediate neighborhood knew that the entire household of the minor line became Christian when their

healing *kut* did not cure the son's acute headaches. He recovered slowly over the next few months. Another woman said that she stopped believing when she learned that she had cancer of the womb. On the other side of the ledger was a young woman who, years ago, had prayed to the Christian god to spare her ailing parents. They died and she stopped believing. Now she was sponsoring a *kut*. Other women wonder if the *kut* the *mansin* advised might have saved an afflicted family member:

Three years ago, I went to a *mansin* I'd heard was good. I went for my husband who was paralyzed. The *mansin* did an exorcism and told us to do a *kut*. We didn't do the *kut*, and my husband died.

or:

My son died when he was sixteen years old. We should have gone to a *mansin*, but we didn't. There was something wrong with his thigh. It seemed fine from the outside. We couldn't see anything wrong and neither did the hospital. We went to the Western hospital and the hospital for Chinese medicine. . . .

#### HOUSEHOLD TRADITIONS AND WOMEN'S WORK

Women go to *mansin's* shrines and to Buddhist temples as the ritual representatives of their families and households. They sponsor *kut* in the shrine and in their own homes, but never in other houses. Other houses have their own house gods. A bond like an electrical connection links the *mansin's* house to the housewife's own dwelling. When clients leave after making offerings in the shrine or sponsoring a *kut* there, they give no farewell salutation. The *mansin* carefully reminds new clients of this necessary breach of etiquette, and tells the women to go straight home. A woman brings blessings from the shrine directly to her own house lest they be lost along the way. The woman leaves the shrine without a farewell and enters her own home without a

greeting. Salutations mark boundaries and transitions; they are inappropriate here.

Any woman, old or young, married or single, can visit the *mansin's* house and receive a divination, but the *tan'gol* [regular customer] who make seasonal offerings in the shrine and sponsor *kut* are female househeads, the senior women in their households. Commensurate with their temporal responsibilities, they come to the shrine on behalf of husbands, children, and retired parents-in-law. Some *tan'gol* are young matrons, but others are grandmothers whose concerns stretch beyond their own households to their married sons' households. They pray on behalf of sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. Sometimes a worried mother brings her own daughter to the *mansin*. Occasionally mothers press their married daughters to hold a *kut* or perform a clandestine conception ritual, and mothers often pay an extra fee to include a married daughter's household in their divinations. A mother's concern for her own daughter might suggest pity for the suffering shared by all women, but it also suggests a mother's assumed ability to aid all of her children, even those who have left the ritual family she represents in the shrine. . . .

In the ideal flow of tradition, a daughter-in-law continues her mother-in-law's relationship with a particular *mansin*. The *mansin's* spirit daughter inherits the shrine and the old *mansin's* clients or her clients' daughters-in-law. In practice, the relationship is far more flexible. The daughter-in-law sometimes favors a *mansin* close to her own age over the white-haired *mansin* her mother-in-law patronized. A spirit daughter may not enjoy the rapport her spirit mother had with clients. Some women switch *mansin* when they are dissatisfied with a diagnosis and cure. Other clients, like the Songs who converted to Christianity, stop visiting *mansin* altogether out of disappointment or because of diminishing returns. Other women said they stopped going to the *mansin's* shrine because their present lives were "free of anxiety" (*uhwani ǒptta*). Yongsu's Mother said, "When things are fine, people don't do anything. When someone is sick, when they lose money, or when there's

trouble with the police, then they do things like exorcisms and *kut*."

Yongsu's Mother acknowledges her role as a specialist. The women who seek her services share with her a rich lore of belief and practice aimed at securing the health, harmony, and prosperity of households. At the new year or in time of crisis, she helps them order their world. Across her divination table, ordinary women's concerns and stories mingle with the painful tales of a shaman's destiny.

#### NOTES

1. Pyongyang-*mansin*, one of Harvey's informants, reports a similar experience (Harvey 1979:109).
2. Like the Japanese language, spoken Korean sentence endings are shorter or longer depending on the relative status of the speaker and the addressee. Adults use blunt endings, *panmal*, when addressing children, and children use them when addressing dogs.
3. There are hereditary *mundang* families in the southernmost provinces. Whether by birth or divine will, the point is the same: The female religious practitioner does not voluntarily assume her role.

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## Mama Lola and the Ezilis: Themes of Mothering and Loving in Haitian Vodou

Karen McCarthy Brown

Mama Lola is a Haitian woman in her mid-fifties who lives in Brooklyn, where she works as a Vodou priestess. This essay concerns her relationship with two female *lwa*, Vodou spirits whom she "serves." By means of trance states, these spirits periodically speak and act through her during community ceremonies and private healing sessions. Mama Lola's story will serve as a case study of how the Vodou spirits closely reflect the lives of those who honor them. While women and men routinely and meaningfully serve both male and female spirits in Vodou, I will focus here on only one strand of the complex web of relations between the "living" and the Vodou spirits, the strand that connects women and female spirits. Specifically I will demonstrate how female spirits, in their iconography and possession-performance, mirror the lives of contemporary Haitian women with remarkable specificity. Some general discussion of Haiti and of Vodou is necessary before moving to the specifics of Mama Lola's story.

Vodou is the religion of 80% of the population of Haiti. It arose during the eighteenth century on the giant sugar plantations of the French colony of Saint Domingue, then known as the Pearl of the Antilles. The latter name was earned through the colony's veneration of French culture, the renowned beauty of its Creole women, and most of all, the productivity of its huge slave plantations. Haiti is

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now a different place (it is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere) and Vodou, undoubtedly, a different religion from the one or ones practiced by the predominantly Dahomean, Yoruba, and Kongo slaves originally brought there. The only shared language among these different groups of slaves was French Creole, yet they managed before the end of the eighteenth century to band together (most likely through religious means) to launch the only successful slave revolution during this immoral epoch. As contemporary Haitian history has made amply clear, a successful revolution did not lead to a free and humane life for the Haitian people. Slave masters were quickly replaced by a succession of dictators from both the mulatto and black populations.

Haitians started coming to the United States in large numbers after François Duvalier took control of the country in the late 1950s. The first wave of immigrants was made up of educated, professional people. These were followed by the urban poor and, most recently, the rural poor. All were fleeing dead-end lives in a society drenched in corruption, violence, poverty, and disease. There are now well over one-half million Haitians living in the U.S.

Alourdes, the name by which I usually address Mama Lola, came to New York in 1963 from Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti and a city of squalor and hopelessness where she had at times resorted to prostitution to feed three small children. Today, twenty-five years later, Alourdes owns her own home, a three-story rowhouse in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn. There she and her daughter Mag-

gie run a complex and lively household that varies in size from six people (the core family, consisting of Alourdes, Maggie, and both their children) to as many as a dozen. The final tally depends on how many others are living with them at any given time. These may be recent arrivals from Haiti, down-on-their-luck friends and members of the extended family, or clients and members of the extended family, or clients of Alourdes's Vodou healing practice.

Maggie, now in her thirties, has been in the United States since early adolescence and consequently is much more Americanized than her mother. She is the adult in the family who deals with the outside world. Maggie does the paperwork which life in New York requires and negotiates with teachers, plumbers, electricians, and an array of creditors. She has a degree from a community college and currently works as a nurse's aide at a New York hospital.

Most of the time Alourdes stays at home where she cares for the small children and carries on her practice as a *manbo*, a Vodou priestess. Many Haitians and a few others such as Trinidadians, Jamaicans, and Dominicans come to her with work, health, family, and love problems. For diagnostic purposes, Alourdes first "reads the cards." Then she carries out healing "work" appropriate to the nature and severity of the problem. This may include: counseling the client, a process in which she calls on her own life experience and the shared values of the Haitian community as well as intuitive skills bordering on extrasensory perception; administering baths and other herbal treatments; manufacturing talismans; and summoning the Vodou spirits to "ride" her through trance-possession in order that spiritual insight and wisdom may be brought to bear on the problem.

Vodou spirits (Haitians never call them gods or goddesses) are quite different from deities, or even saints, in the way that we in North America usually use those terms. They are not moral exemplars, nor are their stories characterized by deeds of cosmic or even heroic proportion. Their scale (what makes them larger than life though not other than

it) comes, on the one hand, from the key existential paradoxes they contain and, on the other, from the caricature-like clarity with which they portray those pressure points in life. The *lwa* are full-blown personalities who preside over some particular social arena, and the roles they exemplify contain, as they do for the living who must fill them, both positive and negative possibilities.

Trance-possession within Vodou is somewhat like improvisational theater.<sup>1</sup> It is a delicate balancing act between traditional words and gestures which make the spirits recognizable and innovations which make them relevant. In other words, while the character types of the *lwa* are ancient and familiar, the specific things they say or do in a Vodou ritual unfold in response to the people who call them. Because the Vodou spirits are so flexible and responsive, the same spirit will manifest in different ways in the north and in the south of Haiti, in the countryside and in the cities, in Haiti and among the immigrants in New York. There are even significant differences from family to family. Here we are considering two female spirits as they manifest through a heterosexual Haitian woman who has lived in an urban context all her life and who has resided outside of Haiti for a quarter of a century. While most of what is said about these spirits would apply wherever Vodou is practiced, some of the emphases and details are peculiar to this woman and her location.

Vodou is a combination of several distinct African religious traditions. Also, from the beginning, the slaves included Catholicism in the religious blend they used to cope with their difficult lives. Among the most obvious borrowings were the identifications of African spirits with Catholic saints. The reasons why African slaves took on Catholicism are complex. On one level it was a matter of habit. The African cultures from which the slaves were drawn had traditionally been open to the religious systems they encountered through trade and war and had routinely borrowed from them. On another level it was a matter of strategy. A Catholic veneer placed over their own religious practices was a convenient cover for the perpetuation of these fre-

quently outlawed rites. Yet this often cited and too often politicized explanation points to only one level of the strategic value of Catholicism. There was something deep in the slaves' religious traditions that very likely shaped their response to Catholicism. The Africans in Haiti took on the religion of the slave master, brought it into their holy places, incorporated its rites into theirs, adopted the images of Catholic saints as pictures of their own traditional spirits and the Catholic calendar as descriptive of the year's holy rhythms, and in general practiced a kind of cultural judo with Catholicism. They did this because, in the African ethos, imitation is not the sincerest form of flattery but the most efficient and direct way to gain understanding and leverage.

This epistemological style, exercised also on secular colonial culture, was clearly illustrated when I attended Vodou secret society<sup>2</sup> ceremonies in the interior of Haiti during the 1983 Christmas season. A long night of thoroughly African drumming and dancing included a surprising episode in which the drums went silent, home-made fiddles and brass instruments emerged, and a male and female dancer in eighteenth-century costume performed a slow and fastidious *contradans*. So eighteenth-century slaves in well-hidden places on the vast sugar plantations must have incorporated mimicry of their masters into their traditional worship as a way of appropriating the masters' power.

I want to suggest that this impulse toward imitation lies behind the adoption of Catholicism by African slaves. Yet I do not want to reduce sacred imitation to a political maneuver. On a broader canvas this way of getting to know the powers that be by imitating them is a pervasive and general characteristic of all the African-based religions in the New World. Grasping this important aspect of the way Vodou relates to the world will provide a key for understanding the nature of the relationship between Alourdes and her female spirits. When possessed by her woman spirits, Alourdes acts out the social and psychological forces that define, and often confine, the lives of contemporary Haitian women. She appro-

priates these forces through imitation. In the drama of possession-performance, she clarifies the lives of women and thereby empowers them to make the best of the choices and roles available to them.

Sacred imitation is a technique drawn from the African homeland, but the kinds of powers subject to imitation shifted as a result of the experience of slavery. The African religions that fed into Haitian Vodou addressed a full array of cosmic, natural, and social forces. Among the African spirits were those primarily defined by association with natural phenomena such as wind, lightning, and thunder. As a result of the shock of slavery, the lens of African religious wisdom narrowed to focus in exquisite detail on the crucial arena of social interaction. Thunder and lightning, drought and pestilence became pale, second-order threats compared with those posed by human beings. During the nearly 200 years since their liberation from slavery, circumstances in Haiti have forced Haitians to stay focused on the social arena. As a result, the Vodou spirits have also retained the strong social emphasis gained during the colonial period. Keeping these points in view, I now turn to Alourdes and two female Vodou spirits she serves. They both go by the name Ezili.

The Haitian Ezili's African roots are multiple.<sup>3</sup> Among them is Mammy Water, a powerful mother of the waters whose shrines are found throughout West Africa. Like moving water, Ezili can be sudden, fickle, and violent, but she is also deep, beautiful, moving, creative, nurturing, and powerful. In Haiti Ezili was recognized in images of the Virgin Mary and subsequently conflated with her. The various manifestations of the Virgin pictured in the inexpensive and colorful lithographs available throughout the Catholic world eventually provided receptacles for several different Ezilis as the spirit subdivided in the New World in order to articulate the different directions in which women's power flowed.

Alourdes, like all Vodou priests or priestesses, has a small number of spirits who manifest routinely through her. This spiritual coterie, which differs from person to person, both defines the character of the healer and

sets the tone of his or her "temple." Ezili Dantor is Alourdes's major female spirit, and she is conflated with Mater Salvatoris, a black Virgin pictured holding the Christ child. The child that Dantor holds (Haitians usually identify it as a daughter!) is her most important iconographic detail, for Ezili Dantor is above all else the woman who bears children, the mother par excellence.

Haitians say that Ezili Dantor fought fiercely beside her "children" in the slave revolution. She was wounded, they say, and they point to the parallel scars that appear on the right cheek of the Mater Salvatoris image as evidence for this. Details of Ezili Dantor's possession-performance extend the story. Ezili Dantor also lost her tongue during the revolution. Thus Dantor does not speak when she possesses someone. The only sound the spirit can utter is a uniform "de-de-de." In a Vodou ceremony, Dantor's mute "de-de-de" becomes articulate only through her body language and the interpretive efforts of the gathered community. Her appearances are thus reminiscent of a somber game of charades. Ezili Dantor's fighting spirit is reinforced by her identification as a member of the Petro pantheon of Vodou spirits, and as such she is associated with what is hot, fiery, and strong. As a Petro spirit Dantor is handled with care. Fear and caution are always somewhere in the mix of attitudes that people hold toward the various Petro spirits.

Those, such as Alourdes, who serve Ezili Dantor become her children and, like children in the traditional Haitian family, they owe their mother high respect and unflinching loyalty. In return, this spiritual mother, like the ideal human mother, will exhaust her strength and resources to care for her children. It is important to note here that the sacrifice of a mother for her children will never be seen by Haitians in purely sentimental or altruistic terms. For Haitian women, even for those now living in New York, children represent the main hope for an economically viable household and the closest thing there is to a guarantee of care in old age. The mother-child relationship among Haitians is thus strong, essential, and in a not unrelated way,

potentially volatile. In the countryside, children's labor is necessary for family survival. Children begin to work at an early age, and physical punishment is often swift and severe if they are irresponsible or disrespectful. Although in the cities children stay in school longer and begin to contribute to the welfare of the family at a later age, similar attitudes toward childrearing prevail.

In woman-headed households, the bond between mother and daughter is the most charged and the most enduring. Women and their children form three- and sometimes four-generation networks in which gifts and services circulate according to the needs and abilities of each. These tight family relationships create a safety net in a society where hunger is a common experience for the majority of people. The strength of the mother-daughter bond explains why Haitians identify the child in Ezili Dantor's arms as a daughter. And the importance and precariousness of that bond explain Dantor's fighting spirit and fiery temper.

In possession-performance, Ezili Dantor explores the full range of possibilities inherent in the mother-child bond. Should Dantor's "children" betray her or trifle with her dignity, the spirit's anger can be sudden, fierce, and uncompromising. In such situations her characteristic "de-de-de" becomes a powerful rendering of women's mute but devastating rage. A gentle rainfall during the festivities at Saut d'Eau, a mountainous pilgrimage site for Dantor, is readily interpreted as a sign of her presence but so is a sudden deluge resulting in mudslides and traffic accidents. Ezili's African water roots thus flow into the most essential of social bonds, that between mother and child, where they carve out a web of channels through which can flow a mother's rage as well as her love.

Alourdes, like Ezili Dantor, is a proud and hard-working woman who will not tolerate disrespect or indolence in her children. While her anger is never directed at Maggie, who is now an adult and Alourdes' partner in running the household, it can sometimes sweep the smaller children off their feet. I have never seen Alourdes strike a child, but her

wrath can be sudden and the punishments meted out severe. Although the suffering is different in kind, there is a good measure of it in both Haiti and New York, and the lessons have carried from one to the other. Once, after Alourdes disciplined her ten-year-old, she turned to me and said: "The world is evil. . . . You got to make them tough!"

Ezili Dantor is not only Alourdes's main female spirit, she is also the spirit who first called Alourdes to her role as priestess. One of the central functions of Vodou in Haiti, and among Haitian emigrants, is that of reinforcing social bonds. Because obligations to the Vodou spirits are inherited within families, Alourdes's decision to take on the heavy responsibility of serving the spirits was also a decision to opt for her extended family (and her Haitian identity) as her main survival strategy.

It was not always clear that this was the decision she would make. Before Alourdes came to the United States, she had shown little interest in her mother's religious practice, even though an appearance by Ezili Dantor at a family ceremony had marked her for the priesthood when she was only five or six years old. By the time Alourdes left Haiti she was in her late twenties and the memory of that message from Dantor had either disappeared or ceased to feel relevant. When Alourdes left Haiti, she felt she was leaving the spirits behind along with a life marked by struggle and suffering. But the spirits sought her out in New York. Messages from Ezili and other spirits came in the form of a debilitating illness that prevented her from working. It was only after she returned to Haiti for initiation into the priesthood and thus acknowledged the spirits' claim on her that Alourdes's life in the U.S. began to run smoothly.

Over the ten years I have known this family, I have watched a similar process at work with her daughter Maggie. Choosing the life of a Vodou priestess in New York is much more difficult for Maggie than it was for her mother. To this day, I have yet to see Maggie move all the way into a trance state. Possession threatens and Maggie struggles mightily; her body falls to the floor as if paralyzed, but

she fights off the descending darkness that marks the onset of trance. Afterwards, she is angry and afraid. Yet these feelings finally did not prohibit Maggie from making a commitment to the *manbo's* role. She was initiated to the priesthood in the summer of 1982 in a small temple on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Alourdes presided at these rituals. Maggie's commitment to Vodou came after disturbing dreams and a mysterious illness not unlike the one that plagued Alourdes shortly after she came to the United States. The accelerated harassment of the spirits also started around the time when a love affair brought Maggie face to face with the choice of living with someone other than her mother. Within a short period of time, the love affair ended, the illness arrived, and Maggie had a portentous dream in which the spirits threatened to block her life path until she promised to undergo initiation. Now it is widely acknowledged that Maggie is the heir to Alourdes's successful healing practice.

Yet this spiritual bond between Alourdes and Maggie cannot be separated from the social, economic, and emotional forces that hold them together. It is clear that Alourdes and Maggie depend on one another in myriad ways. Without the child care Alourdes provides, Maggie could not work. Without the check Maggie brings in every week, Alourdes would have only the modest and erratic income she brings in from her healing work. These practical issues were also at stake in Maggie's decision about the Vodou priesthood, for a decision to become a *manbo* was also a decision to cast her lot with her mother. This should not be interpreted to mean that Alourdes uses religion to hold Maggie against her will. The affection between them is genuine and strong. Alourdes and Maggie are each other's best friend and most trusted ally. In Maggie's own words: "We have a beautiful relationship . . . it's more than a twin, it's like a Siamese twin. . . . She is my soul." And in Alourdes's: "If she not near me, I feel something inside me disconnected."

Maggie reports that when she has problems, Ezili Dantor often appears to her in dreams. Once, shortly after her arrival in the

United States, Maggie had a waking vision of Dantor. The spirit, clearly recognizable in her gold-edged blue veil, drifted into her bedroom window. Her new classmates were cruelly teasing her, and the twelve-year-old Maggie was in despair. Dantor gave her a maternal backrub and drifted out the window, where the spirit's glow was soon lost in that of a corner streetlamp. These days, when she is in trouble and Dantor does not appear of her own accord, Maggie goes seeking the spirit. "She don't have to talk to me in my dream. Sometime I go inside the altar, just look at her statue . . . she says a few things to me." The image with which Maggie converses is, of course, Mater Salvatoris, the black virgin, holding in her arms her favored girl child, Anaise.

It is not only in her relationship with her daughter that Alourdes finds her life mirrored in the image of Ezili Dantor. Ezili Dantor is also the mother raising children on her own, the woman who will take lovers but will not marry. In many ways, it is this aspect of Dantor's story that most clearly mirrors and maps the lives of Haitian women.

In former days (and still in some rural areas) the patriarchal, multigenerational extended family held sway in Haiti. In these families men could form unions with more than one woman. Each woman had her own household in which she bore and raised the children from that union. The men moved from household to household, often continuing to rely on their mothers as well as their women to feed and lodge them. When the big extended families began to break up under the combined pressures of depleted soil, overpopulation, and corrupt politics, large numbers of rural people moved to the cities.

Generally speaking, Haitian women fared better than men in the shift from rural to urban life. In the cities the family shrank to the size of the individual household unit, an arena in which women had traditionally been in charge. Furthermore, their skill at small-scale commerce, an aptitude passed on through generations of rural market women, allowed them to adapt to life in urban Haiti, where the income of a household must often

be patched together from several small and sporadic sources. Urban women sell bread, candy, and herbal teas which they make themselves. They also buy and re-sell food, clothing, and household goods. Often their entire inventory is balanced on their heads or spread on outstretched arms as they roam through the streets seeking customers. When desperate enough, women also sell sex. They jokingly refer to their genitals as their "land." The employment situation in urban Haiti, meager though it is, also favors women. Foreign companies tend to prefer them for the piecework that accounts for a large percentage of the jobs available to the poor urban majority.

By contrast, unemployment among young urban males may well be as high as 80%. Many men in the city circulate among the households of their girlfriends and mothers. In this way they are usually fed, enjoy some intimacy, and get their laundry done. But life is hard and resources scarce. With the land gone, it is no longer so clear that men are essential to the survival of women and children. As a result, relationships between urban men and women have become brittle and often violent. And this is so in spite of a romantic ideology not found in the countryside. Men are caught in a double bind. They are still reared to expect to have power and to exercise authority, and yet they have few resources to do so. Consequently, when their expectations run up against a wall of social impossibility, they often veer off in unproductive directions. The least harmful of these is manifest in a national preoccupation with soccer; the most damaging is the military, the domestic police force of Haiti, which provides the one open road toward upward social mobility for poor young men. Somewhere in the middle of this spectrum lie the drinking and gambling engaged in by large numbers of poor men.

Ezili Dantor's lover is Ogou, a soldier spirit sometimes pictured as a hero, a breathtakingly handsome and dedicated soldier. But just as often Ogou is portrayed as vain and swaggering, untrustworthy and self-destructive. In one of his manifestations Ogou is a drunk. This is the man Ezili Dantor will take

into her bed but would never depend on. Their relationship thus takes up and comments on much of the actual life experience of poor urban women.

Ezili Dantor also mirrors many of the specifics of Alourdes's own life. Gran Philo, Alourdes's mother, was the first of her family to live in the city. She worked there as a *manbo*. Although she bore four children, she never formed a long-term union with a man. She lived in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, for the first years of her adult life. There she had her first two babies. But her lover proved irrational, jealous, and possessive. Since she was working as hard or harder than he, Philo soon decided to leave him. Back in Port-au-Prince, she had two more children, but in neither case did the father participate in the rearing of the children. Alourdes, who is the youngest, did not know who her father was until she was grown. And when she found out, it still took time for him to acknowledge paternity.

In her late teens, Alourdes's fine singing voice won her a coveted position with the Troupe Folklorique, a song and dance group that drew much of its repertoire from Vodou. During that period Alourdes attracted the attention of an older man who had a secure job with the Bureau of Taxation. During their brief marriage Alourdes lived a life that was the dream of most poor Haitian women. She had a house and two servants. She did not have to work. But this husband, like the first man in Philo's life, needed to control her every move. His jealousy was so great that Alourdes was not even allowed to visit her mother without supervision. (The man should have known better than to threaten that vital bond!) Alourdes and her husband fought often and, after less than two years, she left. In the years that followed, there were times when Alourdes had no food and times when she could not pay her modest rent but, with pride like Ezili Dantor's, Alourdes never returned to her husband and never asked him for money. During one especially difficult period Alourdes began to operate as a Marie-Jacques, a prostitute, although not the kind who hawk their wares on the street. Each day

she would dress up and go from business to business in downtown Port-au-Prince looking for someone who would ask her for a "date." When the date was over she would take what these men offered (everyone knew the rules), but she never asked for money. Alourdes had three children in Haiti, by three different men. She fed them and provided shelter by juggling several income sources. Her mother helped when she could. So did friends when they heard she was in need. For a while, Alourdes held a job as a tobacco inspector for the government. And she also dressed up and went out looking for dates.

Maggie, like Alourdes, was married once. Her husband drank too much and one evening, he hit her. Once was enough. Maggie packed up her infant son and returned to her mother's house. She never looked back. When Maggie talks about this marriage, now over for nearly a decade, she says he was a good man but alcohol changed him. "When he drink, forget it!" She would not take the chance that he might hit her again or, worse, take his anger and frustration out on their son.

Ezili Dantor is the mother—fierce, proud, hard-working, and independent. As a religious figure, Dantor's honest portrayal of the ambivalent emotions a woman can feel toward her lovers and a mother can feel toward her children stands in striking contrast to the idealized attitude of calm, nurture, and acceptance represented by more standard interpretations of the Holy Mother Mary, a woman for whom rage would be unthinkable. Through her iconography and possession-performances, Ezili Dantor works in subtle ways with the concrete life circumstances of Haitian women such as Alourdes and Maggie. She takes up their lives, clarifies the issues at stake in them, and gives them permission to follow the sanest and most humane paths. Both Alourdes and Maggie refer to Ezili Dantor as "my mother."

Vodou is a religion born of slavery, of wrenching change and deep pain. Its genius can be traced to long experience in using the first (change) to deal with the second (pain). Vodou is a religion in motion, one without

canon, creed, or pope. In Vodou the ancient African wisdom is preserved by undergoing constant transformation in response to specific life circumstances. One of the things which keeps Vodou agile is its plethora of spirits. Each person who serves the spirits has his or her own coterie of favorites. And no single spirit within that group can take over and lay down the law for the one who serves. There are always other spirits to consult, other spirit energies to take into account. Along with Ezili Dantor, Alourdes also serves her sister, Ezili Freda.

Ezili Freda is a white spirit from the Rada pantheon, a group characterized by sweetness and even tempers. Where Dantor acts out women's sexuality in its childbearing mode, Freda, the flirt, concerns herself with love and romance. Like the famous Creole mistresses who lent charm and glamour to colonial Haiti, Ezili Freda takes her identity and worth from her relationship with men. Like the mulatto elite in contemporary Haiti who are the heirs of those Creole women, Freda loves fine clothes and jewelry. In her possession-performances, Freda is decked out in satin and lace. She is given powder and perfume, sweet smelling soaps and rich creams. The one possessed by her moves through the gathered community, embracing one and then another and then another. Something in her searches and is never satisfied. Her visits often end in tears and frustration.<sup>4</sup>

Different stories are told about Freda and children. Some say she is barren. Others say she has a child but wishes to hide that fact in order to appear fresher, younger, and more desirable to men. Those who hold the latter view are fond of pointing out the portrait of a young boy that is tucked behind the left elbow of the crowned Virgin in the image of Maria Dolorosa with whom Freda is conflated. In this intimate biographical detail, Freda picks up a fragment from Alourdes's life that hints at larger connections between the two. When Alourdes was married she already had two children by two different men. She wanted a church wedding and a respectable life, so she hid the children from her prospective in-laws. It was only at the wedding itself, when they

asked about the little boy and girl seated in the front row, that they found out the woman standing before the altar with their son already had children.

Alourdes does not have her life all sewn up in neat packages. She does not have all the questions answered and all the tensions resolved. Most of the time when she tells the story of her marriage, Alourdes says flatly: "He too jealous. That man crazy!" But on at least one occasion she said: "I was too young. If I was with Antoine now, I never going to leave him!" When Alourdes married Antoine Lovinsky she was a poor teenager living in Port-au-Prince, a city where less than 10% of the people are not alarmingly poor. Women of the elite class nevertheless structure the dreams of poor young women. These are the light-skinned women, who marry in white dresses in big Catholic churches and return to homes that have bedroom sets and dining room furniture and servants. These are the women who never have to work. They spend their days resting and visiting with friends and emerge at night on the arms of their men dressed like elegant peacocks and affecting an air of haughty boredom. Although Alourdes's tax collector could not be said to be a member of the elite, he provided her with a facsimile of the dream. It stifled her and confined her, but she has still not entirely let go of the fantasy. She still loves jewelry and clothes and, in her home, manages to create the impression, if not the fact, of wealth by piling together satin furniture, velvet paintings, and endless bric-a-brac.

Alourdes also has times when she is very lonely and she longs for male companionship. She gets tired of living at the edge of poverty and being the one in charge of such a big and ungainly household. She feels the pull of the images of domesticity and nuclear family life that she sees everyday on the television in New York. Twice since I have known her, Alourdes has fallen in love. She is a deeply sensual woman and this comes strongly to the fore during these times. She dresses up, becomes coquettish, and caters to her man. Yet when describing his lovable traits, she always says first: "He help me so

much. Every month, he pay the electric bill," and so forth. Once again the practical and the emotional issues cannot be separated. In a way, this is just another version of the poor woman selling her "land." And in another way it is not, for here the finances of love are wound round and round with longing and dreams.

Poor Haitian women, Alourdes included, are a delight to listen to when their ironic wit turns on what we would label as the racism, sexism, and colonial pretense of the upper-class women Freda mirrors. Yet these are the values with power behind them both in Haiti and in New York, and poor women are not immune to the attraction of such a vision. Ezili Freda is thus an image poor Haitian women live toward. She picks up their dreams and gives them shape, but these women are mostly too experienced to think they can live on or in dreams. Alourdes is not atypical. She serves Freda but much less frequently than Dantor. Ezili Dantor is the one for whom she lights a candle every day; she is the one Alourdes turns to when there is real trouble. She is, in Alourdes' words, "my mother." Yet I think it is fair to say that it is the tension between Dantor and Freda that keeps both relevant to the lives of Haitian women.

There is a story about conflict between the two Ezilis. Most people, most of the time, will say that the scars on Ezili Dantor's cheek come from war wounds, but there is an alternative explanation. Sometimes it is said that because Dantor was sleeping with her man, Maria Dolorosa took the sword from her heart and slashed the cheek of her rival.

A flesh and blood woman, living in the real world, cannot make a final choice between Ezili Dantor and Ezili Freda. It is only when reality is spiced with dreams, when survival skills are larded with sensuality and play, that life moves forward. Dreams and play alone lead to endless and fruitless searching. And a whole life geared toward survival becomes brittle and threatened by inner rage. Alourdes lives at the nexus of several spirit energies. Freda and Dantor are only two of them, the two who help her most to see herself clearly as a woman.

*To summarize the above discussion:* The Vodou spirits are not idealized beings removed from the complexity and particularity of life. On the contrary, the responsive and flexible nature of Vodou allows the spirits to change over space and time in order to mirror people's life circumstances in considerable detail. Vodou spirits are transparent to their African origins and yet they are other than African spirits. Ancient nature connections have been buried deep in their iconographies while social domains have risen to the top, where they have developed in direct response to the history and social circumstances of the Haitian people. The Vodou spirits make sense of the powers that shape and control life by imitating them. They act out both the dangers and the possibilities inherent in problematic life situations. Thus, the moral pull of Vodou comes from clarification. The Vodou spirits do not tell the people what should be; they illustrate what is.

Perhaps Vodou has these qualities because it is a religion of an oppressed people. Whether or not that is true, it seems to be a type of spirituality with some advantages for women. The openness and flexibility of the religion, the multiplicity of its spirits, and the detail in which those spirits mirror the lives of the faithful makes women's lives visible in ways they are not in the so-called great religious traditions. This visibility can give women a way of working realistically and creatively with the forces that define and confine them.

#### NOTES

1. I use terms such as possession-performance and theater analogies in order to point to certain aspects of the spirits' self-presentation and interaction with devotees. The terms should not be taken as indicating that priestesses and priests simply pretend to be spirits during Vodou ceremonies. The trance states they enter are genuine, and they themselves will condemn the occasional imposter among them.
2. In an otherwise flawed book, E. Wade Davis does a very good job of uncovering and de-

scribing the nature and function of the Vodou secret societies. See *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

3. Robert Farris Thompson traces Ezili to a Dahomean "goddess of lovers." *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 191.
4. Maya Deren has drawn a powerful portrait of this aspect of Ezili Freda in *The Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New Paltz, N.Y.: Documentext, McPherson and Co., 1983), pp. 137-45.

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## Blessed Mother Ann, Holy Mother Wisdom: Gender and Divinity in Shaker Life and Belief

Marjorie Procter-Smith

Can Christians speak of God the Creator and God the Savior in any terms but male? "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord." "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost." These phrases, recited or sung by generations of Christians, make it clear that the traditional Christian emphasis rests on a male God and

his divine male son. Centuries of Christian doctrine, ritual, prayer, and song have repeated and developed the Father-Son imagery so thoroughly that it is difficult for many to imagine Christianity using any other language. When some contemporary feminists propose calling God Mother or imagining a woman Christ, they are often ridiculed or accused of abandoning the Christian tradition.

But in fact 200 years ago a Christian sect known as the Shakers spoke of God as Mother

Original material prepared for this text.

and believed that their founder, Ann Lee, was the second coming of Christ in female form. This essay discusses who the Shakers were, why they used female language for God, and how that language related to the roles and lives of women in the community.

### WHO ARE THE SHAKERS?

In 1774, nine English passengers disembarked at New York harbor after a seventy-nine-day voyage from Liverpool. The passengers were Ann Lee, a prophetess and religious leader from Manchester in England, and her eight followers (six men and two women). These voyagers had been members of a group known in England as "Shaking Quakers." One of many small sects who prophesied the imminent end of the world and return of Christ to earth, the Shaking Quakers were chiefly known in England for disrupting church services with their ecstatic speech, singing, and prophesying.

When Ann Lee joined the group, they were guided by a charismatic woman, Jane Wardley. However, sometime around 1770, Ann Lee had an extraordinary religious experience, which propelled her into prominence among them. She later described this experience in language borrowed from her own experience of childbirth:

Thus I labored, in strong cries and groans to God, day and night, till my flesh wasted away, and I became like a skeleton, and a kind of down came upon my skin, until my soul broke forth to God; which I felt as sensibly as ever a woman did a child, when she was delivered of it.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this experience of new birth, Lee was favored with ecstatic visions of God and Jesus, Heaven and Hell. In the course of these visions, it was revealed to Lee by Jesus Christ that the "sin which is the root of all evil" is sexual intercourse, even within lawful marriage. Ann Lee's witness against "the doleful works of the flesh," an insistence on absolute celibacy, became one of the central tenets of

Shaker faith and a foundation for the development of Shaker community life.

Armed with these powerful heavenly visions, Lee claimed authority as leader of the group and convinced her followers of the necessity of resettling in America, where new missionary fields lay open to them. Once in America, Ann Lee and her small group settled in the wilderness of New York state in a village called Niskeyuna (now Watervliet, New York, near Albany) and began to gather new believers in Lee's message.

Lee taught that perfection was possible in this life, provided one "took up a full cross," which meant, practically speaking, willingness to confess all known sins to a Shaker leader (either Mother Ann or someone designated by her); to accept a celibate life, regardless of marital status; and to live a sinless life after the manner of Christ.

The term "Shaker" was a derisive one, given by non-Shakers who observed the ecstatic religious behavior of Ann Lee and her followers. Typical Shaker worship included shouting, leaping, dancing, whirling about, singing in unknown tongues, and falling into trances. Prophetic announcements and gestures were common, and Shaker worshippers thereby gained access to the spiritual world.

Lee's visions, however, were exceptional. To the observer, she appeared strange, otherworldly, and perhaps a bit frightening. One early follower remembered seeing Lee

sit in her chair, from early in the morning, until afternoon, under great operations and power of God. She sung in unknown tongues, the whole of the time; and seemed to be wholly divested of any attraction to material things. All her sensations appeared to be engaged in the spiritual world.<sup>2</sup>

Lee reported that her visions during such periods included face-to-face conversations with God and with Jesus, visions of Heaven and the saints, and harrowing views of the suffering of the damned in Hell. In particular she described her relationship with Jesus as especially intimate:

I have been walking in fine valleys with Christ, as with a lover. . . . Christ is ever with me, both in sitting down and rising up; in going out and coming in. If I walk in groves and valleys, there he is, with me; and I converse with him as one friend converses with another, face to face.<sup>3</sup>

She also referred to Christ as her husband, her "Lord and Head," who preempts the authority of any human man. Lee's earthly husband, who had accompanied her to America, had not found Shaker doctrine and life satisfactory and apparently left the group early on.

At first Lee and the other leaders of the group advised new converts to return to their families and live in peace and holiness with them, an evangelical strategy that often seemed to work, because many of the first converts to Shakerism in America were members of a few large New England families. However, by 1782 or so necessity was conspiring with religious disposition to encourage the development of communal living, at least in a rather informal way. Clusters of Believers (as Shakers preferred to call themselves) began pooling their financial resources to provide support for poorer families and to provide food and lodging for traveling Shaker missionaries and visitors who gathered to hear the Shaker message.

When Ann Lee died in 1784 the remaining leaders recognized that for their movement to survive they needed to establish a more formal order and structure for living the Shaker life. Lee's successor, James Whittaker, began the process of organizing Believers into communities on the basis of common ownership of property and goods, or "joint interest." This process of "gathering into order" was continued by Whittaker's successor, Joseph Meacham, and his associate and successor, Lucy Wright.

Shaker communities, organized into units called "families," were constructed in part to replace the natural families that celibate Shakers were required to give up. All members were called "brother" or "sister," with those in leadership designated as "elders" and "eldresses." Each family had two elders

and two eldresses who held spiritual authority over the brothers and sisters; two deacons and two deaconesses who were responsible for the material well-being of the family (providing for food, clothing, upkeep of buildings and grounds, and so forth); and several trustees, who handled all business dealings with the "World," as non-Shakers were called.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, there have been eighteen major Shaker communities and several smaller and short-lived ones. During the middle of the nineteenth century the Shakers reached their peak membership of perhaps as many as 6,000.<sup>5</sup> Membership began to decline soon after this, however, and now only a very few individuals remain.<sup>6</sup>

### SHAKER RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Shakerism grew in a religious environment in which many Christians believed in the imminent return of Jesus Christ to earth. This millennialism, as it is called, predisposed people to expect miraculous signs of various kinds. For example, on May 19, 1780, settlers clearing land in New England burned off brush and trees, and the resulting smoke hid the sun, making the day as dark as night. Terrified New Englanders, seeing birds and farm animals go to sleep as if it were night and remembering apocalyptic Biblical prophecy about the sun becoming "black as sackcloth," cried, "The day of judgment is come!" During Ann Lee's missionary journey through New England between 1781 and 1783 she and some of her followers saw a particularly spectacular display of the Northern Lights. One commented that the lights were "a sign of the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven." Although Ann Lee rejected this interpretation, clearly Shakers shared the general disposition of people to look for "signs and portents."

Likewise, millennialist expectations predisposed people to look for prophets and visionists. In such a milieu, then, Ann Lee's extraordinary visions and prophecies, her singing in unknown tongues, and astonishing messages about sin and perfection aroused

intense interest. The extravagant singing and dancing in Shaker gatherings and the charismatic presence of Ann Lee combined to convince many New Englanders that the Second Coming was upon them.

In this religious context, believers concluded that Ann Lee had been the instrument of initiating the millennial church and had opened to the world the possibility of a life of Gospel perfection. The official name of the Shakers was the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, also sometimes called the Millennial Church.

Some of the earliest Shaker theological works are explicit that Ann Lee herself is the one "in whom Christ did visibly make his second appearance."<sup>7</sup> Ann Lee and Jesus Christ are described in parallel terms as embodiments of the Christ-Spirit:

The man who was called Jesus and the woman who was called Ann, are verily the two foundation pillars of the Church of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Fundamental to this interpretation of Ann Lee as parallel to Jesus is Lee's own claim to have been married to Christ.

Another important element in the development of Shaker religious language is the title by which most Believers addressed Ann Lee during her life and remembered her after her death: "Mother" Ann. Perhaps because Lee was older than many of her American converts and because of the emotional attachment Believers felt for Ann Lee, the title of "Mother" became synonymous with Ann Lee, and Shaker documents routinely assume that the reader will know that any reference to "Mother" is a reference to Ann Lee.

Although Lee is often remembered as a rather stern mother who chastised her errant children and spoke sharply to them, she is represented predominantly as a loving mother who gave birth to her children in the faith, who labored over them and for them, and who guided them in the faith. A Shaker hymn expresses this idea:

Born by our Mother, we were led,  
By her our infant souls were fed;

And by her sufferings and her toils  
She brought salvation to our souls.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Jesus and Mother Ann were Believers' "Gospel Parents," as described in this hymn:

Our Father and our Mother  
Have borne us in the birth,  
Their union is together,  
Redeemed from the earth:  
We children born, are not forlorn,  
But like our Parents dear,  
We've overcome the wicked one,  
And reign in Zion here.<sup>10</sup>

Having worked out the theological significance of Ann Lee as Mother and as Second appearing of Christ, Shakers turned their thoughts to the question of God. Unlike the theological development of an understanding of Ann Lee, which was based on personal experience of her as their spiritual mother, the Shaker doctrine of God was largely based on intellectual conviction.

The reasoning went something like this: If Ann Lee is our Mother and she is the female embodiment of the Christ-Spirit, then she holds a parallel position to Jesus as the first and male embodiment of the Christ-Spirit. If Jesus as the Christ reveals God the Father to humankind, then Mother Ann must also reveal God, and the God she reveals must necessarily be God the Mother. A major Shaker theological work puts it this way:

The first appearing of Christ, in the simplest terms of language, is the Revelation of the Father, and the second appearing of Christ is the Revelation of the Mother; but for the subject under consideration we have preferred the title, "The Revelation of the Holy Ghost," as the most forcible and striking of all other scripture terms.<sup>11</sup>

This Mother-Holy Ghost God whom Ann Lee was said to reveal was later called Holy Mother Wisdom, who was said to reign with God the Father in heaven, as described in this hymn:

Long ere this fleeting world began  
Or dust was fashioned into man,  
There *Power* and *Wisdom* we can view,  
Names of the *Everlasting Two*.

The Father's high eternal throne  
Was never fill'd by one alone:  
There *Wisdom* holds the Mother's seat  
And is the Father's helper-meet.<sup>12</sup>

Shaker theologians regarded their dual Father-Mother God as logically superior to the trinitarian God of more traditional Christian theology. "As every individual on the world sprang from a father and a mother, the conclusion is self-evident, that the whole sprang from one joint parentage," argued Shaker theologian Benjamin Seth Youngs in 1808. It makes more sense, he reasoned, to talk about a God who is male and female than a God who is all male. Ridiculing "defective" trinitarian doctrine, Youngs wrote:

First the Father, second the Son, and third the Holy Ghost; He proceeding from Father and Son . . . without the attribute of either Mother or Daughter . . . and [they] finally look for the mystery of God to be finished in the odd number of three males. . . . Where then is the correspondent cause of the woman's existence?<sup>13</sup>

The cause of woman's existence, Shakers believed, had been revealed by Mother Ann, a Mother God, who shared God the Father's throne and represented "wisdom" to God the Father's "power."

Beginning in the 1830s a period of intense internal revival affected all the Shaker communities and brought the image of God the Mother into prominence in Shaker experience. Beginning with trance-like experiences similar to the ecstatic worship of the earliest days of Shakerism, the revival swept through all of the communities and lasted for more than ten years. Believers once again sang heavenly songs in unknown tongues, leaped and whirled about uncontrollably, and fell into trances in which they saw and spoke to long-dead Shaker leaders, including Mother Ann, Father William Lee (Ann Lee's brother),

Father Joseph (Meacham), and others. This period became known as "Mother Ann's Work," because it was believed that Mother Ann, seeing the loss of vitality in the faith of her children, had sent them this revival.

Most notably, certain Believers claimed to have been chosen as "instruments" of various heavenly beings, usually angels, who delivered messages from Mother Ann and other heavenly denizens to Believers. For the most part these claims were accepted by the leadership and by the members, and their messages were received with great respect and awe.<sup>14</sup> A disproportionate number of these instruments were women.

During the height of the revival, between 1840 and 1843, Holy Mother Wisdom made a series of visits to the communities in the person of a female instrument. Sometimes the visits lasted several days and included individual interviews by Holy Mother Wisdom of each member of the community. These visits were carefully prepared for by periods of fasting, prayer, confessions of sin, and intensive cleaning of the grounds and buildings. The visit normally concluded with Holy Mother Wisdom bestowing her "mark" on the forehead of each Believer or granting them some similar spiritual blessing. One contemporary observer remembered Holy Mother Wisdom concluding the visit with these words: "Around thy head I place a golden band. On it is written the name of me, Holy Mother Wisdom! the Great Jehovah! the Eternal God! Touch not mine anointed!"<sup>15</sup>

## SHAKER WOMEN

Shaker women had before them the example of Ann Lee. On the one hand, she was extraordinarily gifted: prophetess, visionary, bride, and companion of Christ; teacher; judge; and loving but strict spiritual mother. On the other hand she shared the experiences of many of the women who were drawn to Shakerism: She was poor and illiterate; she had been married to a man she described as "very kind, according to nature," and had given birth to four children and had seen

them all die in infancy; she had suffered persecution for her religious beliefs; and she had struggled to make a living and survive in a new land. Lee's exceptional ability to infuse with religious meaning her own struggles and sufferings as a woman provided a rich resource to her female followers who shared many of her experiences.

Later theological speculation interpreted Ann Lee as the Second Christ, an object not only of loving memory but also a figure of cosmic significance: one of the two "foundation pillars" of the Church, the Daughter of God, the Mother of All Living, the Revelation of God the Mother. Shaker women had not only the memory of a spiritually powerful woman who was like them in many ways, but they also had access to a positive, powerful female Christ and a loving Mother God.

The loving Mother God came to be known as Holy Mother Wisdom and was presented to them materially in the form of a woman visionist. During the visitations of Holy Mother Wisdom each woman and man in the community received at the hands of a woman a gift directly from God, the mark of Holy Mother Wisdom, and heard from the mouth of a woman words of judgment or blessing. Although female instruments did not always speak only in the name of Holy Mother Wisdom or Mother Ann, the strength of the communities' belief in these figures legitimated women's exercise of their prophetic gifts in general.

Shaker women's more temporal gifts were also legitimated by Shaker community structures. The development of a centralized and tightly structured leadership after the "gathering into order" might have excluded women, after the pattern of many other religious movements founded by women. Indeed leadership did not automatically pass to other women on Ann Lee's death. On the contrary Lee was succeeded by two men before a pattern of female leadership was established with the appointment by Joseph Meacham of Lucy Wright as "Mother" of the entire sect alongside himself as "Father."

At first there was considerable resistance to Mother Lucy's leadership from male Shakers who were offended by the idea of a woman in

a position of religious authority over them, and many people left the community in protest. However, the pattern of dual male and female leadership was established and remained the norm for all Shaker communities. This requirement gave Shaker women greater access to positions of religious leadership than women in most other Christian groups. Appointment to eldress of a community meant the opportunity to exercise temporal and spiritual leadership, greater responsibility, and chances to travel to other communities.

At the same time along with the advantages of the Shaker theological and communal system for woman came some disadvantages. The theological interpretation of Holy Mother Wisdom, for example, depended a great deal on popular nineteenth-century views of "women's sphere" and the "cult of True Womanhood."<sup>16</sup> Holy Mother Wisdom was described by one Shaker writer as "endless love, truth, meekness, long forbearance, and loving kindness . . . the Mother of all Godliness, meekness, purity, peace, sincerity, virtue, and chastity."<sup>17</sup> Although in theory such virtues were to apply to all Shakers, in fact they were associated with women primarily, even divine women.

The Shaker communal system provided opportunities for leadership for women, but it did so in the context of a strictly hierarchical system in which leaders were not elected but appointed by their superiors, and virtually absolute obedience to the leaders was expected. Work in the communities was rigidly divided, with women largely confined to traditional "women's work": food preparation, clothing manufacture and maintenance, and household maintenance. This pragmatic division of labor was interpreted as being of divine origin, and Shaker women were advised that true freedom for them lay in remaining within "woman's sphere."

### CONCLUSIONS

It is striking how many contemporary feminist religious issues are found in the history of Shakerism. Contemporary feminists have

challenged mainstream religious groups to expand women's opportunities for religious leadership, to reconsider the use of exclusively male language about God and Christ, and to develop religious language that draws on women's experience. From an examination of Shaker history we may see a Christian group that struggled to preserve women's religious leadership, that worshipped God as Mother as well as Father, and that drew some of its central religious terms from women's traditional childbearing and household work.

Most radical of the Shakers' ideas about women and religion, and most startlingly contemporary, is their grasp of the connection between an exclusively male representation of God and a male-dominated society. Antoinette Doolittle, editor of the Shaker journal *Shaker and Shakeress* from 1873 to 1875, observed, "As long as we have all male Gods in the heavens we shall have all male rulers on the earth."<sup>18</sup> They also insisted that the recognition of the female in deity was essential to women's social and religious emancipation, and they were unflinching in their criticism of male-centered theology and church.

However, their answer to their critique of male-centered religion was a highly dualistic system based on the fundamental difference between men and women. In this oppositional system women's "sphere" was diametrically opposed to that of men, and it left women in the same place reserved for them by conventional wisdom. Although redeemed Shaker women were spiritually superior to all unredeemed women and men, women by nature were understood to be more sinful than men. Indeed, this greater sinfulness of women necessitated, in part, the Second Coming of Christ in female form. A Shaker hymn says,

As disobedience first began  
In Eve, the second part of man  
The second trumpet could not sound  
Til second Eve her Lord had found.<sup>19</sup>

"Second Eve" here refers to Ann Lee, whose Lord is Christ.

The questions these limitations of the Shaker system raise are several and are now being dealt with in contemporary feminist critiques of religion. First, there is the question of valorizing women's traditional experience. Such valorization recognizes that the work women have done for eons—care of children, care of households, concern for maintenance of human relationships—is the work of world-construction and world-maintenance, and as such it is religious work. The risk of such valorization, as the Shaker history shows, is that it reinforces the cultural notion that such work is women's sole work and that it is solely women's work. Such a view restricts women's access to other kinds of work and suggests that men need not concern themselves with such work, a bifurcation that feminism has taken some pains to correct.

Second, the Shaker story raises questions about essentialism. Is there some essential female character or virtue? Some Shaker theologians assumed that there was such a thing and that they knew what it was. Both arguments that female character is essentially flawed or sinful and that female character is essentially nurturant, loving, and caring claim such knowledge, and both views can be found not only in Shakerism but in other religions as well. Some contemporary feminists have challenged such claims about women, insisting instead that while women share some oppressions in common as women, women's experiences are diverse and complex and cannot be simplified into claims of innate evil or innate goodness.

Third, the Shakers demonstrate both the difficulties of preserving and perpetuating strong female leadership and the value of having the example of a female founder as a living memory in the community's life. The Shaker's most effective method of ensuring the continuation of female leadership, however, was their ideological system, which demanded equal leadership by men and women and recruited and developed strong women for leadership positions. Without such structural demands even the memory of Ann Lee would not have sufficed to preserve women's religious leadership.



## NOTES

1. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders With Her* (Hancock, MA: J. Talcott and J. Deming, Junrs., 1816), p. 47.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
4. For further information on the Shakers' business dealings, see Edward Deming Andrews, *The Community Industries of the Shakers* (University of the State of New York, 1933; New York State Museum Handbook No. 15).
5. The actual peak population of Shaker communities is disputed. Compare Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), p. 224; Priscilla J. Brewer, *Shaker Communities, Shaker Lives* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), p. 156; and William Sims Bainbridge, "Shaker Demographics 1840-1900: An Example of the Use of U.S. Census Enumeration Schedule," *Journal For the Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (1982), p. 355.
6. At present the Shaker communities of Sabbathday Lake, Maine, and Canterbury, New Hampshire, are the only occupied communities.
7. *Testimonies* (1816), p. 2.
8. Benjamin Seth Youngs, *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing* (Albany: The United Society, 1810, Second Edition), p. 440.
9. Seth Y. Wells, compiler, *Millennial Praises* (Hancock, MA: Josiah Talcott, 1813), p. 105.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
11. Youngs, p. 537.
12. Wells, p. 1.
13. Youngs, p. 454.
14. Shaker manuscript collections such as those found at the Western Reserve Historical Society, the Shaker Museum at Old Chatham, New York, and the Archives and Manuscript

Division of the New York Public Library have large numbers of recorded gift drawings and messages from this period, most of them by women.

15. David R. Lamson, *Two Years' Experience Among the Shakers* (West Boylston, MA: Published by the Author, 1848), p. 95.
16. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966), pp. 151-174.
17. Paulina Bates, *The Divine Book of Holy Wisdom* (Canterbury, NH: n.p., 1849), p. 661.
18. "Address of Antoinette Doolittle, Troy, NY, March 24, 1872," *The Shaker* 2.6 (June 1872), p. 43.
19. Wells, p. 250.

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# X.

## Gender, Politics, and Reproduction

All human reproductive behavior is culturally patterned. This cultural patterning includes menstrual beliefs and practices; restrictions on the circumstances in which sexual activity may occur; beliefs and practices surrounding pregnancy, labor, and the postpartum period; understandings and treatment of infertility; and the significance of the menopause. While research on human biological reproduction has been dominated by medical concerns such as normal and abnormal physiological processes, an increasing anthropological literature addresses reproduction as a sociocultural process. Biological reproduction refers to the production of human beings, but this process is always a social activity, leading to the perpetuation of social systems and social relations. The ways in which societies structure human reproductive behavior reflect core social values and principles, informed by changing political and economic conditions (Browner and Sargent 1990:215).

Much of the available anthropological data on reproduction prior to 1970 is to be found

within ethnographies devoted to other subjects. For example, Montagu analyzed concepts of conception and fetal development among Australian aborigines, and Malinowski wrote about reproductive concepts and practices among the Trobriand Islanders (Montagu 1949; Malinowski 1932). Several surveys of ethnographic data on reproduction were compiled, such as Ford's (1964) study of customs surrounding the reproductive cycle or Spencer's (1949-1950) list of reproductive practices around the world.

In the past twenty years anthropologists have sought to use cross-cultural data from pre-industrial societies to help resolve women's health problems in the industrialized world (Oakley 1977; Jordan 1978). For example, comparative research on birth practices has raised questions regarding the medicalization of childbirth in the United States. Anthropologists have also involved themselves in international public health efforts to improve maternal and child health around the world. In addition, anthropological research has helped to clarify the