

THOSE WHO PLAY WITH FIRE

**GENDER, FERTILITY AND TRANSFORMATION IN
EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA**

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CHAPTER 4

FIRST GENDER, WRONG SEX

CAMILLA POWER AND IAN WATTS

INTRODUCTION

Symbolic reversal of sex roles or characteristics has been a persistent theme in the literature on African initiation (e.g. Barley 1983: 64–5, 81; 1986: 51; Gluckman 1949; Richards 1956: 20, 73–5, 98–9, 154; Turner 1967: 96, 223, 253–4). Gluckman ascribed a cathartic function to these ‘rituals of rebellion’ (1963: 126). Women and girls at initiation or other ceremonial occasions would act ‘male’ to let off steam as release from their normal subordination. Stereotypical ritual behaviour involved sexual licence and predatory aggression by girls against men, often coupled with transvestism (e.g. Gluckman 1949; Lamp 1988; Turnbull 1988: 174).

Yet Gluckman’s explanation does not account for the corresponding recurrent ‘feminization’ of male initiates. This takes more or less explicit form: boys may be made to wear dress or ornaments of female relatives (e.g. Hollis 1905: 298; Raum 1940: 309), identified with names of female body parts (e.g. Stoll 1955: 159), or described as ‘having their periods’ (Calame-Griaule 1965: 158). Initiation ceremonies may focus on anthropomorphic imagery of specific androgynous creatures, or construct an implicit gendering through manipulation of symbolic and cosmological categories. Among the Dwayo ‘the passage from boy to man involves moving from wet to dry’ with uncircumcised boys occupying an intermediate position as male/females (Barley 1983: 81). Yet, to become ‘dry’ the Dwayo initiate must experience the extreme of wetness (femaleness), being circumcised in a riverside grove, kneeling in running water at the height of the rainy season.

In describing the liminal phase of *rites de passage*, Turner saw sacredness – the mystical ‘powers of the weak’ (Lewis 1963) – as

inherent in inversion of normal social order, or anti-structure (Turner 1969: 93, 95). At his installation, a novice Ndembu chief must undergo ritual reviling, including symbolic feminisation associated with taboo and sterility, to demonstrate his shared endurance of the suffering of his people. Only once subject to the authority of the whole community could he represent the undifferentiated *communitas* (1969: 82ff.). The representation of unity – the key feature of liminality – always entails paradox, contradiction, logical antitheses (Turner 1967: 99). Sacred things are impossibilities, monsters, creatures that cannot exist in the ‘real’ world; neophytes have at the same time no sex, and both sexes. Out-of-this-world monstrosities, by their very characteristic of combining elements that never can be combined in the real world, startle neophytes into contemplation of symbols, cosmologies and moral systems (Turner 1967: 105).

In focusing on rituals of inversion among the Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa, we will revisit Turner’s identity between sacred power, counter-dominance – that is, assertion of egalitarian relations – and counter-reality, a world of deliberate paradox. Gender among these hunter-gatherers and hunter-herders is constructed as an impossible unity, comprising attributes of both sexes. As the fundamental signal of both counter-dominance and counter-reality, gender ritual carries the entire community into the ‘other’ world.

IS SEX TO GENDER AS NATURE TO CULTURE?

Butler presents drag – performances of cross-dressing and cross-sex impersonation – as the arch-metaphor, the quintessential act of gender, which enacts and reveals gender’s imitative function (1990: viii, 137; also Morris 1995: 580). This single, dazzling image takes us to the heart of what gender is that sex is not. Animals do not play ‘pretend’ with their sex. At a stroke, Butler captures the parodic relationship between gender and sex that has eluded feminist research for the past twenty years. But discussion of that relationship entails problematizing the origin of culture itself – as Ortner originally recognized when focusing on nature *versus* culture as a gendered dichotomy (1974). How does gender arise as the ‘counter-reality’ to sex?

Despite the power of her own metaphor, Butler, a follower of Foucault in postmodern tradition, rejects any notion of sex as an

animal ‘reality’ which gender can counter. As a performative, gender constitutes its own identity, she argues; it does not refer to or express some underlying absolute truth or falsity of identity (1990: 25). She calls into question any formulation of gender as culture to sex as nature (1990: 7). Where gender is theorized as ‘radically independent of sex’, she claims it can break out of the constraints of binary structure, offering the possibility of a ‘multiple interpretation of sex’ (1990: 6). Yet if ‘gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence’ (1990: 24), surely this constrains the emergence of a multiplicity of genders. Drag artistes themselves rely on the underlying binary structure of sex to perpetrate subversive acts of symbolic reversal. If anybody can be any number of genders imaginable, what is being subverted? If collective expectations are not aroused, what is being imitated? Drag performance may differ in its mode of transgression from hypermasculine gay and hyperfeminine lesbian sexual identities (see e.g. Bell *et al.* 1994). But all these performances rest on extreme precision of mimicry to signal their identities. They are constrained by all such performances that have gone before.

In her attack on the ‘naturalness’ of the masculine/feminine opposition, Butler assumes that a binary gender structure is implicitly hierarchical, and must constrain gender within compulsory heterosexuality (1990: 6). In this view, counter-dominance can only emerge with multiplicity – the very opposite of Turner’s notion of *communitas*. Ortner had a similar presumption of binary structure as heterosexual hierarchy. She described ritual as a universal mechanism by which human societies signal the primacy of culture in regulating and ordering givens of nature (1974: 72). Culture, identified with ritual power in Ortner’s model, mapped onto the masculine gender category, and thence reductively onto biological males. Here, culture or ritual power offers no space for counter-dominance – again, a contention opposite to Turner’s.

But there is an alternative view. Suppose gender – and culture – *emerged in a performance of compulsory non-heterosexuality*. Retain the binary structure of sexuality, because we do in general retain male and female bodies. But suppose that gender, insofar as it is performance, is a function of *ritual, performative* power, not of biological sex. Gender oscillates through time as performance occurs or does not occur. Here gender is constrained by

binary structure; it maps onto a nature/culture divide such as that described by Ortner. But it does not embody sexual hierarchy, since either sex may 'perform' the same gender at any given time. Gender has a mutable relationship to sex, mimicking own sex at one time, opposite sex at another.

Such a model is the corollary of a recent theory on the origins of symbolic culture, the 'sex-strike' hypothesis. Knight (1991; Knight *et al.* 1995; and see Knight 1997) posits a model of symbolic cultural origins based in a female strategy of periodically refusing sex to all males except those who returned 'home' with meat. The symbolic domain emerges through collective female defiance expressed in ritual performance. The predicted signature of sex-strike is systematic reversal of the 'normal' signals of animal courtship (Knight *et al.* 1995: 84). Where mate recognition in the animal world involves signalling 'right species/right sex/right (i.e. fertile) time', sex-striking human females would deter male advances through ritual pantomime of '*wrong species/wrong sex/wrong (i.e. infertile) time*'. In the light of sex-strike theory, gender at origin is inseparable from ritual power, and from ontological ambiguity – humans metamorphose into non-humans, females into males. Gender signals both counter-dominance, mobilizing the 'powers of the weak', and counter-reality, forcing all participants and onlookers to engage with a symbolic, non-perceptual world.

Do gender performances embody counter-dominance and counter-reality, as Turner envisaged? And are such performances prerequisite for sacred or ritual power, in fact for the origins of symbolism? The three models of the relationship between sex and gender discussed here will be used in an investigation of Khoisan gender ritual, aiming to shed light on these questions (Ortner 1974; Butler 1990; Knight *et al.* 1995). Two of these models (Ortner 1974; Knight *et al.* 1995), though diametrically opposed, conceptualize gender and culture as emerging at a single point of origin, while Butler refutes the possibility of searching for origins of gender (1990: viii–ix). The main problem for Ortner's model, given its equation of culture with dominance hierarchy, is how it can generate or accommodate counter-reality. The other models both read gender as parody, hence intrinsically counter to reality, one in terms of 'drag' (Butler 1990), the other 'wrong sex' (Knight *et al.* 1995). But is counter-dominance promoted by licence to multiplicity or by extreme constraints on performance?

If gender is tightly constrained within a binary performative structure, with ritual power either 'on' or 'off' as sex-strike theory would argue, can we adequately account for a so-called 'third sex' or 'third gender' (cf. Herdt 1994)?

IDEOLOGICAL CONTINUITY AMONG THE KHOISAN

Despite considerable differences in their former subsistence pursuits, the Khoisan 'share a great number of common features of territorial organization, gender relations, kinship, ritual and cosmology' (Barnard 1992: 3). Khoisan linguistic and genetic diversity indicate great time-depth of shared cultural structure. Barnard (1992: 297) warns that the recent focus on the past 2,000 years of hunter-herder interaction (cf. Wilmsen 1989) has highlighted 'those aspects of culture which are most susceptible to outside influences – those related to production and trade'. These, he asserts, are the least 'structural' of cultural elements. Such an approach 'grants the Bushmen history, but it minimizes the uniqueness and resilience of their cultures' (1992: 298). To explain change, Barnard continues, 'we need to understand the basic structure of belief' (1992: 298).

Few have done more to elucidate this basic 'structure of belief' than Lewis-Williams, who has revolutionized rock art research through his decoding of Khoisan rock paintings in terms of trance experience. His fieldwork in the Kalahari with Bieseles (Lewis-Williams and Bieseles 1978) revealed significant correspondences between Ju/'hoan (!Kung)¹ initiation and the ritual practices of the extinct /Xam of the Cape Province. The /Xam ethnography gathered by W.H. Bleek and Lloyd (1911), in turn, compared closely to descriptions of certain Drakensberg rock paintings elicited by Orpen (1874) from a young Maluti Bushman. There are no reliable estimates of the age of Drakensberg paintings (Mazel 1993). However, Lewis-Williams found the art and the nineteenth century ethnography to be 'complementary expressions of a single belief system' (1981: 34). He demonstrated a coherence of structure and metaphor operating in menarcheal, first-kill and marriage ritual contexts, shamanic rainmaking and medicine dances. Ritual trance experience, in his view, was the prime ideological means – 'symbolic work' – for organizing relations of production and exchange, central to social harmony and healing (Lewis-Williams 1982). But, as Lewis-Williams himself

originally showed (1981), and Solomon (1992; 1994; 1996a) and Parkington *et al.* (forthcoming) have recently re-emphasized, initiation is also represented in Khoisan art, and clearly overlaps in its structure with trance.

KHOISAN RITUAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER: FEMALE INITIATION

The most renowned of Khoisan initiation practices is the Eland Bull Dance, the climax of a girl's first menstruation ceremony. Prevalent in the Kalahari, this dance or its close equivalent probably belonged to southern groups as well. A painting at Fulton's Rock in the Drakensberg Mountains has been interpreted as representing the dance (Lewis-Williams 1981: 41ff.; Solomon 1996b: 89).

A Ju/'hoan initiate lies under a cloak inside a seclusion hut. The 'new maiden' is 'created' a woman when the women of the band dance pretending to be eland (Lewis-Williams 1981: 62). Properly costumed for the dance, the women remove their rear aprons, tying strings of ostrich eggshell beads to hang down between their bare buttocks 'simulating the tail of the Eland' (England 1995: 274; also Lewis-Williams 1981: 44). Heinz (1966: 123) reports similar costume for the !Xõ. Such exposure is considered highly erotic, but men are generally banished to a distance to protect themselves and their hunting weapons (England 1995: 266). In typical Ju/'hoan or Nharo practice (Barnard 1980: 117–18), an older man, or possibly two, in the grand-relative category to the maiden may join the dance wearing horns as 'bulls'.

England describes the peculiar movements of the Eland Dance as 'heavier and more deliberate than any other' (1995: 271): The women's steps thud down flat-footed on the sand, 'all of the dancer's flesh sags toward the ground ... her body ornaments follow the motion downward, adding a small but clear clicking sound effect to the movement'. Timed with the step and designed to imitate the sound of eland hooves is a sharp clinking of adze-blades. The entire effect, says England, 'conjures a picture of the grandly muscular, fleshy eland, trotting along unhurriedly on the *veld*' (1995: 271).

The stick headdress of a 'bull' may be more or less elaborate (England 1995: 275), the tilting and bobbing motion of the horns enhancing the effect. As a 'bull' joins the dance he sidles up to one of the cows, tilting his horns at her and sniffing her rear,

until challenged by another 'bull'. Stepping fluidly, the Bulls 'weave smoothly in and out of the dance line while the women continue to dance determinedly forward' (1995: 276), tracking an ellipse or figure-of-eight around the hut. The whole clearly mimics rutting behaviour of eland, especially in the climax as noted by Lewis-Williams:

the dancing women ... move their buttocks violently from side to side, causing the 'tails' of ostrich eggshell beads to lash to and fro. My informants seemed to consider this to be the climax of the dance. The whole dance, they claimed, is so beautiful that the girl in the menstrual hut weeps, overcome by the wonder of it (1981: 45).

Men are dispensable to the ceremony. Ju/'hoan women sometimes dance without men (Lewis-Williams 1981: 45). Among the !Xõ, Heinz reports that he did not see men participating (1966: 124). Among the Kua, the name used by Valiente-Noailles for G/wi and G//ana groups, it is women who perform as Eland Bulls (1993: 95–6). Shedding their European clothes, the women dance 'adorned with very beautiful ornaments, their breasts nude and their body [sic] engaged in sensuous movements' (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 95). Two of them carry straight, pointed branches. According to the Kua, this is 'to make the dance more interesting and prick the men if they come too close and laugh'. These branches are used to imitate the horns of the antelope, while tails are again held to the buttocks (1993: 96).

The entire pantomime of the Eland Song and Dance – a fantasy of animal sex – may be performed on every day of the girl's menstrual flow (Heinz 1966: 119; England 1995: 266). Among the Kua it happens each day, all day for the full month of the girl's seclusion (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 95).

MALE ASPECTS OF THE MAIDEN: LIMINALITY AND COUNTER-REALITY

The menarcheal maiden, during her seclusion and on her emergence, possesses male attributes and potencies (Power and Watts 1997: 542–6). She plays the role of a hunter, and her performance promotes future successful hunting; yet, she is equated with the bull Eland, the most desirable prey. She has the dangerous, unpredictable powers of the male Moon and the male Rain –

powers that can only be contained through proper respect of ritual observance. The Eland, the Moon and the Rain themselves appear as conceptual equivalents in Khoisan cosmology, powerful and gender-ambivalent.

Beliefs about the danger of hunters and their weapons if they come into contact, even by sight, with a menstrual girl are widespread (see England 1995: 266; Solomon 1992: 313; Schmidt 1986: 331, 345). Roles are reversed: the Nama and Dama believe that a hunter who is 'unclean' through contact with women will be attacked by dangerous animals (Schmidt 1986: 331; and see Biesele 1993: 93). Yet, precisely in the context of initiation, the maiden herself performs as a hunter. A Ju/'hoan metaphor for first menstruation is 'She has shot an eland' (Lewis-Williams 1981: 51). Among the !Xõ, on the final day of seclusion, a gemsbok-skin shield is hung at the back of the menstrual hut, and the maiden is helped by the mistress of ceremonies to shoot it with arrows. This, comments Heinz, 'the only time a girl touches weapons, is done to bring these luck' (1966: 122).

Evidence in Drakensberg paintings (Figure 4.1) suggests that the Maluti Bushmen worked a similar drama into female initiation. Solomon (1992; 1996a) has identified a series of gender-anomalous figures holding bows and arrows as representing initiate girls. Responding to Humphreys' assumption (1996) that the figures must be male because they have male equipment, Solomon points to the problem of levels of reality. Khoisan women in daily life were forbidden from touching men's hunting equipment. However, notes Solomon:

to carry this over into interpretation of the art is highly problematic, since it contains an implicit assumption about what art 'is' and does. It assumes that art faithfully mirrors everyday realities, rather than always mediating, representing and, indeed, *creating* reality (1996a: 33).

Artistic representation of ritual departures from reality are performative, not to be assessed in terms of correspondence to the 'real' world (cf. Rappaport 1979: 198).

Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989: 173), in line with their shamanist theory of rock art, read the Willcox's Shelter image (Figure 4.1) as 'hallucinatory', deriving from the spirit world of trance experience. To counterpose 'trance' to 'initiation' in this



Figure 4.1 Double-sexed image, Willcox's Shelter, Drakensberg, Natal (from A. Solomon, "'Mythic women': a study in variability in San rock art and narrative' in T.A. Dowson and J.D. Lewis Williams (eds) *Contested Images: Diversity in Southern African Rock Art Research* (Artist: J. Wenman; originally published in Anne Solomon, "'Mythic women': a study in variability in San rock art and narrative', T.A. Dawson and J.D. Lewis-Williams (eds.), *Contested images: diversity in South African rock art research* (1994). Reproduced by permission of Anne Solomon and Witwatersrand University Press).

imagery is to miss the point about ritual action as performative. Khoisan representation of supernatural potency, it seems, conflates the world of trance with the body of the menarcheal maiden, appropriating the 'grammar' of counter-reality and liminality rooted in gender ritual (see also Huffman 1983: 52; Garlake 1995: 85ff.). A paradoxical unity of opposites (cf. Turner 1967: 99), the Willcox's Shelter figure displays a blood-red emblem of potency underneath the thighs. A hunter with bows and arrows, yet also an animal, she possesses *both* vulva and penis. The image signals ritual potency through the metaphor of the 'female' whose attributes are 'male' and animal.

The fatness and animality displayed in this image relate to liminal properties of the Eland, prime *animal de passage* of Khoisan initiation (Lewis-Williams 1981: 72). Like the Willcox's Shelter figure, the Eland unifies opposites, standing between 'male and female, availability and non-availability for marriage, this world and the spirit world' (Dowson, cited in Lewis-Williams 1990: 80). Alone among the antelopes hunted by the Ju/'hoan, the male eland is fatter than the female. !Kun/obe, an old Ju/'hoan woman, told Lewis-Williams:

The Eland Bull dance is danced because the eland is a good thing and has much fat. And the girl is also a good thing and she is all fat; therefore they are called the same thing (1981: 48).

This identity of the Ju/'hoan girl with the Eland Bull, marked by androgyny and fatness, is prescribed during seclusion through language use and taboo: her menstruation is 'eland sickness'; she must use special respect terms for eland; and she must not eat eland meat. On her emergence, the identity is ritually enacted: she is painted with an antelope mask and anointed with eland fat; as she comes out she must keep her eyes down, so that the eland will not see the stalking hunter (see Power and Watts 1997: 543 for refs.). Similar injunctions were placed on /Xam, !Xõ and Kua maidens. Merely by looking up, the /Xam girl could make the game 'wild' (Hewitt 1986: 285). This 'ancient analogy' between women and game was drawn by Nama and Dama hunters: women had to 'behave in the same way that the hunter wished the game to behave' (Schmidt 1986: 333).

The fat of the girl and the Bull embody the fat of the land. The Ju/'hoan girl receives the Eland Bull Dance, according to !Kun/

obe, 'so that she won't be thin ... she won't be very hungry ... all will go well with the land and the rain will fall' (Lewis-Williams 1981: 50). The Kua dance as eland 'because the Eland is the biggest antelope, and has a big croup, giving the idea of fertility and body development' (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 96). According to the Kua: 'it is a big animal, it has grown big and it increases the number of human beings'. In her dangerous condition of menstrual potency, if the initiate harmed her own body 'this could, in turn, harm others, the land, the plants, the animals, all that makes up the habitat and food of the Kua. It is for this reason that she cannot touch her body' (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 96). The girl is given special sticks for scratching herself during seclusion.

The desirable 'fatness' of the buttocks, associated with eland and emphatically signalled by women performers during the Eland Dance, carries connotations at the same time of eroticism and ritual respect and avoidance. Lewis-Williams (1981: 46-7) and Solomon (1992: 311-12) discuss examples in rock art of rear-end views of female eland in mating posture or female therianthropes - human females with large buttocks and eland heads. The /Xam respect word for eland is translated by Lewis-Williams as 'when it lashes its tail' (1981: 46). A probable equivalent of the respect word used by a Ju/'hoan girl during puberty ritual, it evokes the characteristic signal of the mating female eland, imitated by the women Eland dancers.

Eating or drinking fat is a Ju/'hoan euphemism for sex (Bieseles 1993: 86). Men, as carnivores, hunt and 'eat' women, as herbivores (cf. McCall 1970). Fat, as a liquid solid, stands as a mediator - 'the cool result of a union of hot and cold' (Bieseles 1993: 196). Consumption of fat, continues Bieseles 'is metaphoric of the sexual mediation between semen (hot) and menstrual blood (cold)' (1993: 196). Understood in this metaphor is an opposition between sexual availability and non-availability. The good hunter fears eating or sleeping with his wife in case his arrow poison cools. After a successful hunt, however, he would greet his wife 'with special fervour. He would "praise the meat" ... he would see her buttocks and her legs and would be happy "because the meat had fat and was fat"' (1993: 197). It is hard to tell, comments Bieseles, which meat - animal or woman - is being discussed: 'The metaphors tying women to the enchanted, hunted prey are so intricate as utterly to defy untangling' (1993: 197).

In the Eland Bull Dance, the symbols of blood and fat, hunting and sex work in dynamic interaction. The menarcheal maiden – as shown in the Willcox's Shelter image – is dangerous, potent, supremely unavailable; yet she is fat, a 'good thing', about to become available.

MAIDEN, MOON AND GAME

The Eland appears as an interchangeable symbol with the Moon in certain /Xam narratives (Hewitt 1986: 214ff.). Both were created by the gender-anomalous trickster /Kaggen from a shoe. In Nharo belief, the moon falls to the ground when it sets and 'turns into an eland' (Marshall 1986: 181). The moon's gender is mutable, turning, like the androgyny of the eland, on its fatness. The young, slender crescent moon is seen as male, a fat, full moon as female (Power and Watts 1997: 545; Solomon 1992: 302). This construction of gender reflects the widespread Khoisan ideal periodicity for hunting. Waxing moon is the phase that brings hunting luck; full moon is associated with satisfaction and repletion after a successful hunt (see Watts 1998 for references). A sexual tug-of-war underlies the lunar rhythm of the hunt depicted in this G/wi narrative:

The moon is regarded as male and is believed to hunt once a month, when he kills a hartebeest, feeds his family on the meat, and makes of the hide a cloak for himself. His wife, who has no cloak, gets cold and gradually pulls the cloak from her husband until, at full moon, he has none of it. Then the moon feels cold himself and starts to pull it back until he has all of it again. No sooner has he got his cloak back than his children who, after all, have had no meat for a month, come and complain that they are hungry and eat up the hide. . . ., so the moon has to go out hunting and get himself a new cloak' (Silberbauer 1965: 101).

For the Ju/'hoansi, coldness and fluidity connect women to the moon (Biesele 1993: 98, 196). In the cosmology of these Kalahari groups, the lunar cycle appears to frame a gendered oscillation between warmth and cold, sex and no sex, fat and no fat. For the /Xam of the northern Cape, the motif of the moon as jealous guardian of the game is recurrent:

Therefore, our mothers used to say to us about it, that we must not look at the moon when we had shot game; for, he would, if he did not swallow down the game's fat, he would not allow the game to die; for he would cool the mouth of the game's wound, that the game might recover, the game would not die . . . he would allow the poison to become as water (Lloyd n.d.: VI, 5206)

A man catches, the moon does not like it, want it, the moon is angry if a man shoots, you must not steal it says. The moon owns those things, his possessions . . . he made the things and refuses, the moon made them do not kill them for a time, do not kill them, he does not shoot, the moon is full, the moon is small, he shoots (Lloyd n.d.: V, 328–328 rev.)

The maiden's dangerous potency equated her with the male aspect of the new moon. Like the moon, she possessed the capricious power of cooling arrow poison, enabling the game to gallop away (Bleek and Lloyd 1911: 67, 77). The prohibition on hunters looking at the moon also refers to the terrible consequences for a man if the secluded girl should glance at him: he is turned into a tree or a stone (Hewitt 1986: 79). The identity of the girl with the waxing male moon is confirmed by scheduling of menarcheal rites among widespread Khoisan groups. The /Xam, the !Xū and the Kua (G/wi and G//ana) all released a menarcheal girl from seclusion at the appearance of the new moon (Lloyd n.d.: VI, 4001–2; D.F. Bleek 1928: 122; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 94–7; and see Viegas Guerreiro 1968: 227).

MAIDEN AND THE RAIN'S BLOOD

The blood red dots, dashes and stripes on the white body of the Willcox's Shelter figure may refer to the ritually charged relationship between the maiden and the Rain (cf. Solomon 1992: 315). This too revolved around a gender paradox. The /Xam distinguished between the desired, gentle 'female' rain, which fell softly; and the destructive 'male' rain (D.F. Bleek 1933: 309). The danger lay in the maiden's capacity to summon and unleash this 'male' power. Violation of menarcheal observances roused the wrath of the being !Khwa, manifested as a whirlwind, black pebbles, lightning or Rain Bull. This caused the utmost social

calamity. Culture itself unraveled – skin bags reverting to their ‘raw’ form as game animals – and the girl and her kin were transformed into frogs, the Rain’s creatures (Hewitt 1986: 77–9). Female rain was never mentioned in puberty lore (Hewitt 1986: 284). The word !Khwa stood for water, and also connoted menstrual blood (Hewitt 1986: 284). /Xam informants emphasized that !Khwa was attracted by ‘the odour of the girl’ (Hewitt 1986: 285). The girl’s contact with water was rigorously controlled during seclusion (1986: 279). Yet, on emergence, such contact was vitally necessary for *preserving* supplies. The maiden had to sprinkle the current water source with powdered haematite (Hewitt 1986: 281), otherwise !Khwa might cause the pool to dry. She painted the young men with haematite stripes ‘like a zebra’, to protect them from !Khwa’s lightning. ‘When she is a maiden, she has the rain’s magic power’ explained the /Xam informant Diä!kwain. She could snap her fingers to call the lightning and ‘make the rain kill us’ (D.F. Bleek 1933: 297).

In his analysis of Ju/’hoan music, England has discovered that the Rain Song and Eland songs, used in the Eland Dance, are composed in what he calls the Rain-Eland scale, comprising ‘the oldest layer of Bushman tonal material’ (1995: 264). The G/wi and !Xū (Marshall 1986: 202) enact a direct symbolic association between the menarcheal girl and rain or lightning. Among the G/wi, Silberbauer saw the initiate, on emergence, taken on a run through a ‘symbolic shower of rain’ by the young women and girls (1981: 152). For some time after emergence from her month of seclusion, a Kua (G/wi and G//ana) girl must cover herself if it rains ‘so that her body’s smell cannot reach the rain, lest the lightning might kill people’. (Valiente-Noailles 1993: 97). Among the !Xū, the male spirit, identified with the lightning (//gāūa), led the initiate’s dance. The girl was tattooed with marks in honour of //gāūa (D.F. Bleek 1928: 122–3).

The eland is readily identifiable as a rain animal. Schmidt argues that prior to the coming of pastoralism, the eland was the Rain Bull. The great antelope lay at the core of an ancient hunter-gatherer cultural complex which linked in a chain of symbols ‘trickster/moon/lightning/rain/fertility/life/eland/horns’ (Schmidt 1979: 219–20). In Ju/’hoan belief, people and certain large game animals possess a force called *n/ow* which influences the weather (Marshall 1957; Bieseles 1993: 87ff.). Ju/’hoan hunters burnt eland horns to manipulate these forces. Bieseles relates a

tale of the trickster G!ara calling down the lightning with eland horns to lay low his antagonists, the lions (1993: 103ff.). In a /Xam narrative, the Rain Bull smells out a young menstruating mother and abducts her; she averts the dangers to herself and her kin by lulling !Khwa to sleep with the aromatic herb *buchu*; the old women return from gathering and appease the Rain with the smell of burning horns (Bleek and Lloyd 1911: 199). Another /Xam story collected by Lloyd tells of a beautiful maiden to whom the hunters give their best meat; when they return unexpectedly once, she is discovered to have horns on her head, and to be ugly (Schmidt 1989: 248). The hunters’ aversion to the horned maiden connotes avoidance of menstrual fluid, and of looking at the moon, in case arrow poison cools. Possession of horns signals requirement of ritual respect. It is worth recalling the action of the Kua women who deploy their Eland horns ‘to prick the men if they come too close’.

In Ju/’hoan thought, the most powerful and determinant effects of *n/ow* occur when:

the *n/ow* of the hunter interacts with the *n/ow* of the antelope, the *n/ow* of the woman interacts with the *n/ow* of the child newly born ... when the blood of the antelope falls upon the ground as the antelope is killed, when the fluid of the womb falls upon the ground at the child’s birth, the interaction of *n/ows* takes place, and this brings a change in the weather (Thomas 1959: 162).

On the one hand we have the atmospheric effects of the shedding of women’s birth blood and the blood of the great game animals; on the other, potentially disastrous atmospheric effects of a menstrual woman in too close conjunction with !Khwa.

The ingredients of Ju/’hoan rain medicine were placed inside an antelope (duiker) horn (Marshall 1986: 197). These comprised ‘Rain’s teeth’ – lightning-fused sand which glittered like ‘bits of splintered glass’ – the red heartwood of *Acacia erioloba* and some moisture. The sun must not shine on this mixture (1986: 198). In her discussion of Bushman star lore, Marshall (1986: 196) argues that the Pleiades and their two horns (Canopus and Capella) are associated with rain. A Nama story of the !Khunuseti (Pleiades) and their hunter husband (Orion), titled *The Curse of the Women* (Hahn 1881: 74), has a close counterpart in Ju/’hoan lore

(Marshall 1986: 192). The women bid the husband to shoot 'those three zebras for us' (the stars of Orion's belt), but 'if thou dost not shoot, thou darest not come home'. The husband takes one arrow, and misses; because his wives cursed him, he cannot return but sits in the cold night, shivering and suffering, thirsty and hungry:

And the |Khunuseti said to the other men: 'Ye men, do you think that you can compare yourselves to us, and be our equals? There now, we defy our own husband to come home because he has not killed game.'

Comparable to this motif of shooting arrows at stars is a missionary's account, reported by Hahn, that Nama men might 'shoot their poisoned arrows at the lightning in order to arrest the destructive fluid' (1881: 51). Hahn also described how Nama initiate girls, emerging from seclusion, must 'run about in the first thunderstorm, but they must be quite naked, so that the rain which pours down washes the whole body'. This would ensure their fertility. He himself three times saw 'this running in the thunder-rain, when the roaring of the thunder was deafening and the whole sky appeared to be one continual flash of lightning' (1881: 87 n26). Of the ceremonial rain hymns collected by Hahn most remarkable is the *dance-song of the Lightning* (1881: 60). This is sung as a chorus by the members of a kraal one of whom 'was supposed to have been killed by the lightning', with a solo for the part of the lightning:

Chorus: Thou Thundercloud's daughter, daughter-in-law
of the Fire.

Thou who hast killed my brother!

Therefore thou liest now so nicely in a hole!

Solo: (Yes), indeed, I have killed thy brother so well!

Chorus: (Well) therefore thou liest (now) in a hole.

Thou who has painted thy body red, like =Goro!

Thou who dost not drop the 'menses'.

Thou wife of the Copper-bodied man!"

Here, the Lightning – which has just killed a man – is described as an initiate in seclusion. She lies 'in a hole'; she does not drop her menstrual blood, relating to the familiar injunction on a men-

strual girl not to let herself or her blood touch the earth; she paints herself red. Decoration with a ground red stone powder called *!naop* by the secluded girl and her visiting girl friends was Nama practice (Hoernlé 1985: 63, 65). Hahn notes the reports of Khoekhoe women painting themselves with red ochre in their 'worship' of the trickster god Heitsi-eibib, and in the recurrent festivities held for the new moon (1881: 37ff., 124).

Of the injunctions applied to a Khoisan initiate in seclusion the most general involved *keeping her out of the sun*; and not allowing her *to touch the earth*. Girls were wrapped in blankets or hide cloaks to keep the sun off, and had to wear special caps, sometimes for months afterwards (cf. Heinz 1966: 124 for the !Xö; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 97 for the Kua; Fourie 1928, cited by Schapera 1930: 120, for the Hai//om). Failure to wear the cap could prevent coming of the rains. All contact with the outside world was mediated through close kinswomen, and if the girl had to move outside the space of her seclusion hut she was carried on the back of a kinswoman (cf. Marshall 1976: 278; England 1995: 266 for the Ju/'hoansi; Heinz 1966: 117–18 for the !Xö; Hoernlé 1985: 63 for the Nama). The Nama lightning hymn quoted above refers to these ritual precautions. The initiate's hut formed a liminal space 'between heaven and earth'. A series of 'mythic women' in Zimbabwe rock art – fat female therianthropes with ceremonial sticks and large zig-zag or curving genital emissions stretching between heaven and earth – graphically depict this liminal state. Solomon (1994: 355–7) relates the imagery to Khoisan ideology of the weather-affecting forces of uterine fluids – birth and menstrual blood – while Garlake (1995: 87) construes the same images as metaphors of trance death and movement to the other world. Again, trance and gender ritual appear conflated. Lebzelter (1934: 53–4) records that a !Kung 'rain doctor' ascends to the sky by a thread and entreats 'the great captain' for rain by throwing him a red powder. This image of climbing threads to 'God's place' is used for trance generally (Katz 1982: 114).

The Nama rain ceremony (Hoernlé 1985: 75–6) involved the slaughter of pregnant cows or ewes by the banks of a stream, in time for the summer rains. The old men of the tribe 'who were good at prophesying would take the uteri, hold them over the fire and pierce them with sticks so that the uterine fluid would flow directly through the fire and down into the river'. Milk and fat would also be poured onto the fire to make great clouds of

smoke rise up to the sky. Compare this with the /Xam rainmaker's words, promising to 'cut a she-rain which has milk, I will milk her, then she will rain softly on the ground . . . I will cut her, by cutting her I will let the rain's blood flow out, so that it runs along the ground' (D.F. Bleek 1933: 309). Rain-making ritual among the =Au//eisi involved sprinkling the ground with 'red earth' (Kaufmann 1910: 158). The /Xam informant /Han≠kassō spoke of celebrations for the new rains in these terms: 'they do this when the rain falls, they come out, they run about. They are all red' (Lloyd n.d.: VIII, 17, 7463).

The colour red signals 'supernatural potency'. The redness of the rain can be understood as a deep structure of Khoisan cosmology, associated with the periodic bloodflow of women and of the great antelopes. The seasonal periodicity of the flowing of the rain's 'blood' was danced into step with the lunar periodicity of the initiate's bloodflow in the Rain Song and the Eland Songs, to the same ancient scale.

MALE INITIATION: PARALLELS WITH MENARCHEAL RITES

Among the /Xam, close parallels between menarcheal ritual and the boy's eland-kill ceremony have been noted by both Hewitt (1986) and Lewis-Williams (1981). Lewis-Williams has also revealed striking correspondences between /Xam and Ju/'hoan puberty and first-kill observances, as well as between the ceremonies for girls and those for boys within each culture (1981: 61; cf. Lewis-Williams and Biesele 1978).

Like the maiden, the young hunter is symbolically identified with the eland. Where the girl suffers 'eland sickness', the boy limps slowly as the wounded prey; both boy and girl keep their eyes down, so that the game will not look about; both boy and girl are marked with specific 'eland' designs, and smeared with eland fat in the course of initiation.

The young hunter is conceptually identified with the menstrual girl *from the moment he has shot the poisoned arrow into the antelope*. The /Xam explicitly likened the first-kill hunter to a menarcheal girl (Lloyd n.d.: VI, 4386). Counterpart to the super-destructive !Khwa, guardian of menarcheal observances, is /Kaggen, a gender-ambivalent trickster (Hewitt 1986: 153-4). Creator and protector of the game, /Kaggen tries to trick the hunter out of his prey. During the critical waiting period before

the poison has taken effect and the hunter can start tracking the prey down, /Kaggen provokes the hunter to break the tenuous link between himself and the animal by sudden or vigorous movements which would revive the game and counteract the poison. The hunter's slow limping mimics the desired effect of the poison on the prey.

Like the maiden, the boy is in an antithetical relation to hunting weapons – he cannot touch the shaft of the arrow (Hewitt 1986: 126; Lewis-Williams 1981: 58ff.). In both cases there are strictures concerning bloodshed and the cooling of arrow poison; if /Kaggen comes in the form of a louse and bites the boy, the boy cannot kill the louse because 'its blood will be on his hands with which he grasped the arrow and when he shot the eland, the blood will enter the arrow and cool the poison' (Diä!kwain's account, in D.F. Bleek 1932: 233-40). Where the boy limps painfully back to camp, a girl who starts menstruating in the veld cannot walk back, but must be carried. She must not draw attention to her condition but sit and wait silently for other women or girls to approach. A young /Xam or Ju/'hoan hunter remains silent and peripheral until approached.

Like the menstruant, the first-kill hunter is secluded and tended as if 'ill' (Lewis-Williams 1981: 58). The same ritual injunctions are placed on both boy and girl – food avoidances and rationing, keeping away from cooking fire, keeping out of the sun, not moving or not touching the earth. The /Xam took precautions over the dangerous 'scent' of both boy and girl.

Elements of ritual performance are structurally similar in Ju/'hoan female and male ceremonies. An 'Eland Medicine Dance' is held beside the freshly killed eland while the men are still in the veld. Performed 'in praise of the fat' with no women present, this may be seen as the male counterpart of the Eland Bull Dance (Lewis-Williams 1981: 60).

Heinz's close account of !Xō collective male initiation reveals point-by-point similarity in the treatment of initiate boys and the menarcheal girl (1966: 125ff.). The boys must not talk to each other, and must look at the ground. They have the same gemsbok mask painted on their faces as the maiden, and are sent a hat – just as the girl – to be worn until the rain breaks and to protect them from the sun (1966: 128). They too shoot at a gemsbok shield, to bring luck to the weapons (1966: 131). Other similarities in the boys' and the girls' rites include ritual tattooing;

'opening the eyes' of the candidate at the end of the ceremony; and the imposition of elaborate food taboos, which are lifted in a series of rituals subsequent to initiation. The dance parallel to the Eland Bull Dance is called *tsoma*, and may be danced in front of women on the men's return. Numerous sources on collective male initiation camps suggest that they lasted a month, beginning and ending with the waxing moon (e.g. Vedder 1938: 83-4; D.F. Bleek n.d.: 186, 300 rev., 314 rev., 417, 466 rev.; and see Watts 1998).

Among the Cape Khoekhoe, typical procedure included smearing the initiate with fat and soot, or ochre; urination on the boy by the elders (sometimes for three days in succession); washing the boy with animal blood and hanging fat or animal parts around his neck. Old sources on the Nama (cited in Schapera 1930: 279ff.) indicate lengthy seclusion, during which the boy subsists on cow's milk, followed by ritual scarring and tattooing. Ritual precautions surrounding contact with cold water were similar for both Nama boys and girls. Initiation practice among the Korana, recorded by Engelbrecht (1936: 157ff.), is noteworthy. The candidate endured a month of seclusion, and was explicitly 'feminized'. He was stripped and dressed in a 'small girl's hind-kaross'; brass rings were put on his arms, as women wore them; red ochre and fat were rubbed all over his body. He could eat meat, but only from the ends of sharp sticks, not from his hands.

Lewis-Williams comments on the symbolic androgyny of the eland in relation to Ju/'hoan initiates:

The neophytes are, *like the eland*, considered to be sexually ambivalent: the girl is spoken of as if she were a hunter who had shot an eland, while the boy is secluded and cared for as if he were menstruating – both are neither male nor female during the liminal period of the rites (1981: 72).

But it is just as valid to say that maiden and hunter take on the potency of *both male and female*, a potency symbolized by the eland representing a *unified* gender. Just as the Willcox's Shelter figure emphatically displays its double sex, initiates prior to emergence *gain* attributes of the opposite sex, rather than losing potency of their own. In his classic essay on liminality, Turner (1967: 98) reads both androgyny and sexlessness as characteristic

of the initiate, the combination expressing the contradiction of anti-structure. Such an anomalous state has been conceptualized as an intermediate 'third sex' or 'gender' category (Herdt 1994).

CONCLUSION

Nature, culture and counter-dominance

Solomon ascribes to a 'third gender category' (1992: 303) two of the most elaborated symbols and metaphors of Khoisan cosmology: the bull Eland and the trickster, both figures central to initiation. To these can be added the Moon. If an attempt is made to force these entities into a masculine/feminine gender hierarchy, in line with Ortner's model, their characteristics scatter between the two poles (see Solomon 1992: 299; Power and Watts 1997: 552-3). In other words, they embody contradiction within such a classification. Can we be satisfied with allowing contradiction and classification to co-exist (cf. Rapport 1997), or is Ortner's framework fundamentally flawed as a map of Khoisan gender conceptualisation?

In respect of a nature/culture dichotomy, the eland and the trickster reveal liminal, transformational properties. Narratives concerning eland depict a principle of oscillation between cultural artefact and natural raw state, as in the /Xam story of the eland's creation from an old leather shoe; or the danger, in case of breaches of menarcheal observance, of skin bags once more becoming game animals. During the Eland Dance, women perform as animals – mating animals – ostensibly mapping female to nature. Yet their performance establishes a ring of respect around the girl, marking the boundaries of sexual availability and taboo. Tricksters likewise act to enforce respect rules. These are taboos governing flesh consumption, whether of game animals, in the case of /Kaggen, or of menarcheal girls. //Gaūwa, the presiding deity of Nharo initiation (and trance), hovers around the menstrual hut in the role of jealous male guardian (Guenther 1989: 116-17).

Ortner's model locates women as intermediaries between nature and culture (1974: 83ff.). The liminal space of the menstrual hut can certainly be viewed as a confluence of nature and culture. The slightest failure in the performance surrounding the 'raw', 'wild' maiden would lead to the complete disintegration of

culture (see Hewitt 1986: 79–80; Lewis-Williams 1981: 52). But she is charged with the power of a violent *male* force of nature. Hence, female to male as nature to culture is confounded.

Recurrently, the maiden signals her 'masculine' identity, by this means asserting the primacy of culture. The equation of culture and 'masculine' dominance appears in conformity with Ortner's hierarchy. But can the maiden be considered 'dominant'? Her very mode of 'dominance' – she snaps her fingers to call down the lightning and kill a man – exemplifies a defiant countering of reality. The maiden is best described as 'counter-dominant', expressed by the fundamental motif of *denial of the male gaze*. The worst possible breach of the menarcheal ritual observance would be if a man caught sight of the maiden in her hut. At a glance, she could turn him into a tree or stone.

Ortner's model faces its greatest difficulty in accounting for the counter-dominance and counter-reality featuring in male initiation. The young hunter is identified with the wounded prey – just as the girl is – and is treated as a menstruant in seclusion. Far from being glorified as a 'dominant' male, he is forbidden even to kill a louse. He is placed in an identical liminal situation to the girl, between nature and culture, while possessing less dire potency. The worst result of failure to perform male gender ritual might be loss of a hunter's productive powers – not calamitous threat to the entire group.

Logically, Ortner's model predicts that gender performance at initiation should emphasize difference: masculine 'cultural' empowerment *versus* feminine 'natural' weakness. Why, then, should males assert themselves culturally by signalling 'female'? Khoisan gender ideology revels in such confusion of roles. The processes of production and reproduction are mystically intertwined. To menstruate is to shoot a poisoned arrow; to give birth is to kill a large game animal. Solomon (1992: 304) argues that the fat male eland provides a metaphor by which males can appropriate desirable female qualities, constructing themselves as nurturers. Male figures in rock art with fat, female/eland-like buttocks (Solomon 1992: 312), taken together with the androgynous 'pregnant' males of Zimbabwe art (Garlake 1995: 85) support her contention. Parkington *et al.* (forthcoming) interpret a group of cloaked male figures, merged to form the outline of an eland torso, as a representation of solidarity engendered in secret contexts of collective male initiation. While Ortner's gender

hierarchy model might allow ritually/culturally potent women to signal 'male', it is unclear why men should be compelled to display female 'natural' potencies. Instead of mapping onto reductive gender categories of masculine/feminine, Khoisan ritual potency is consistently expressed as counter-reality and counter-dominance.

Communitas: unity or multiplicity of experience?

Khoisan gender ritual can be conceptualized as constructing a *single* 'gender of power' in which both sexes equally participate (Power and Watts 1997). All initiates are treated in formally similar ways, each sex receiving attributes of the other sex. The experience of initiates, irrespective of biological sex, is unified through a series of constraints on their body and eye movements, position in space, consumption of foods, contact with water, exposure to the outside world, whether and how they talk. All this militates against 'multiplicity' in experience or performance.

Rather than permit proliferation of distinctions and categories, Khoisan gender ritual turns apparent opposites into conceptual equivalents. The maiden plays as hunter, the hunter as the hunted; images of female initiates stand for trance death. We see 'unification of disparate significata' in Turner's terms: natural and physiological phenomena blend in polysemic clusters, as water/blood/poison/illness or eland/dance/people/fat (cf. Barnard 1992: 94). The dialectical framework for these syntheses is the lunar cycle (Power and Watts 1997: 554). The gender-mutable moon, in its waxing, offers the fundamental metaphor for transformation from death to rebirth, cold to hot, wetness and blood to fire and fat. The major ritual preoccupation of the Khoisan, evident in both initiation and trance dance, lies in effecting these transformations. Ideological codings associated with the potency of a menstruant may be positive or negative, potentially multiple and negotiable. What stands beyond negotiation, allowing no licence to multiplicity, is the essentially similar ritual treatment of those who possess potency. To turn the dire blood potency of the male rain into soft, fruitful, female rain that produces fat of the land requires meticulous observance of menstrual ritual through the stages of seclusion and emergence. This is the performative force of initiation, compelling coherence.

For Turner, *communitas* is engendered through the 'stripping

and levelling' characteristic of liminality (1967: 98, 100; 1969: 92–4). Initiates endure unified experience of deprivation as all social, sexual or status differentials are eliminated. This release from normal structures of multiple and fragmented social relations into a stark, simplified unity opens up space for contemplation of the sacred (1967: 102–5). Neophytes may play with sacred articles of simple but impossible configuration, like masks which combine features of male and female, animal and human, or human and landscape. 'Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis,' Turner writes, 'where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence' (1967: 107). Here, unity of experience when deprived of normal structure generates counter-reality. This idea can be traced back to Durkheim's classic passage on ritual as the generator of collective representations (1915: 230–1). Only through precise homogeneity of movements can individual minds come into contact and communicate with each other, forming the group consciousness and enabling symbolization. Here, uniform ritual experience breaks down normal structures of individual cognition to promote a collective representation which has no necessary correspondence with individual perceptual representation.

Butler reads unity of gender experience as inevitably rooted in oppression:

Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender . . . and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality (1990: 22).

If commonality of gender is rooted in heterosexual polarity – women are one gender only in opposition to men as the other, more powerful gender – how can this structure of dominance be subverted? Butler's dilemma is that she yearns for multiplicity of gender experience to break down the binary heterosexual hierarchy, but acknowledges, paradoxically, that gender cannot in fact be 'a set of free-floating attributes' (1990: 6, 24). She is fully aware of the constraints on gender as performative, 'compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence'.

While Butler focuses on institutionalized reiterative process, in this chapter we have described the Khoisan Eland Bull Dance as a discrete ritual act constructing gender in defiance of sex. Commenting on Butler's formulation, Morris notes: 'the theory of gender performativity would probably eschew ethnographies in which a discrete ritual act or series of acts is seen as the source of sexual and gendered identity' (1995: 576). Theorists of *performativity*, in the sense of reiterative social process, as against spectacular *performance*, would see grand Durkheimian ritual as the 'antithesis of creativity' (Morris 1995: 576). If ritual is reiteration, asks Morris 'whence comes the new or non-normative act?' (Morris 1995: 576). In their bid to escape from hierarchical structures of social reproduction, performativity theorists reject any notion of founding or originating acts.

Does collective ritual performance inevitably crush human creativity in the name of oppressive social hierarchy? Morris counterposes Turner's thesis on liminality and anti-structure as an alternative possibility of creativity to Durkheim's tradition of undifferentiated collectivity. We emphasize the common ground between the two paradigms. For both Turner and Durkheim, highly constrained, unifying ritual experience of 'sacredness' permits access to counter-reality and enables abstract contemplation (Turner 1967: 105; Durkheim 1915: 228, 230–1, 235, 237). If ritual entails *communitas*, why locate its roots in oppression? We could equally conceptualize ritual constraints as imposed by a transgressive or rebellious 'counter-culture', periodically asserted and fundamentally at odds with norms of everyday life. It may even be that culture itself must be periodically renewed in the same manner as it was first established, through collective defiance. That would make each subsequent staging of 'high' ritual into a celebratory re-enactment of culture's mythic moment of origins (cf. Rappaport 1979: 174).

In Gellner's (1992) reading of Durkheim, ritual is the prime mechanism for compulsively constraining concepts, without which there exists no possibility of communicable abstract thought. Rappaport (1979: 194) describes ritual as the 'meta-performative' which makes all other performatives possible – the ground of all symbolic generativity including language. Bourdieu remonstrates with Austin, the founder of speech-act theory, for supposing that the force of performatives lies in the words themselves: 'The power of words is nothing other than the *delegated power* of the

spokesperson' (1991: 107). Ritual symbolism exerts power not autonomously, 'but only in so far as it *represents* ... the delegation' (1991: 115). Bourdieu states his position in classically Durkheimian terms:

The performative magic of ritual functions fully only as long as the religious official who is responsible for carrying it out in the name of the group acts as a kind of *medium* between the group and itself: it is the group which, through its intermediary, exercises on itself the magical efficacy contained in the performative utterance. (1991: 116)

The novice (chief or initiate) described by Turner who silently and submissively accepts the authority of the total community, becoming representative of that community, is such an intermediary 'between the group and itself'. The Khoisan maiden, silent and submissive to her community, embodies that community, acquiring the performative force and magical efficacy of the lightning that strikes down any transgressor.

Ritual performative force is lost as licence to multiplicity is gained. Rather than discard gender ritual as a 'founding act' in favour of reiterative process, we may adopt a stance akin to Rapport (1979: 174) on ritual as 'the basic social act'. Initiation acts as the meta-performative which makes all gender performatives possible.

Khoisan gender ritual, as a founding act, conforms closely to Butler's metaphor: gender *is* drag. Each sex plays pretend as the opposite sex when becoming ritually potent. Gender operates inside a binary framework, oscillating between ritual potency and relaxation of ritually imposed taboos. But, *contra* Butler and Ortner, this cannot be construed as heterosexual dominance hierarchy. Each sex accesses the 'gender of power' (Power and Watts 1997: 555–6) at the appropriate time through *unified* ritual experience, and relinquishes that gender as ritual power wanes. To be ritually potent is to display 'wrong sex'.

Gender and symbolic culture

In Butler's view, the subversive or doubly parodic force of drag lies, not in mimicking some 'natural' or 'original' state, but in parodying 'the very notion of an original' (1990: 138). The whole

thrust of Butler's work implies the domination of cultural constructs over any possibility of 'naturalness'. The Khoisan rites, like all initiation rites, can be interpreted as culture asserting itself over 'nature'. In line with Butler's theory, we agree fully that gender as performed by the Khoisan does not refer to any natural or original *sex*. However, we argue that it does in some sense re-enact an *original gender* – first gender.

Only through extreme precision of performative constraints – homogenization and synchrony of movements, experience and sensation – can a whole community be compelled to engage with concepts outside perceptible reality, such as those entailed in Khoisan gender construction. The entire symbolic domain rests on the constraints imposed by representation of counter-reality. Gender as the fundamental such representation is hence symbolism's 'founding act'. It provides the template for all other such ritual representations, including for the Khoisan trance death and rainmaking rites.

Turner's realm of *communitas* – unified, ritual, anti-structural experience – gives rise to sacred space and play with counter-reality. Classifications are confounded by the signals that break down normal social order – signals that counteract dominance, asserting egalitarian relations. The unclassifiable neophyte, outside normal structure, can juggle with 'out-of-this-world' abstractions. Rapport contests the opposition between contradiction and social order, calling for:

an appreciation of the simultaneity of classification *and* contradiction. Social order is predicated not upon the absence of contradiction but upon its co-presence: *the cognitive co-presence of the contradictory, of both/and, together with the classificatory order of either/or* (1997: 657–8).

Such a view fits the dialectical fluidity of Khoisan classification systems. On the one hand, we side with Turner in linking contradiction to counter-dominance, emerging in unified ritual experience. On the other, we join Rapport in asking for 'anthropological recognition that it is in cognitive contradiction that socio-cultural order is rooted' (1997: 658). But we remain resolutely Durkheimian: collective representation of contradiction, ritually performed, constitutes socio-cultural order. This implies that ritual display of counter-dominance – signalled by contradic-

tion of reality, deliberate play with paradox – creates cultural order.

In the Khoisan case, the crisis of cultural order is played out in the Eland Bull dance. The potential dominance of male hunters is countered by the glance of a girl and by the pantomime dance of her womenfolk who signal 'we are the wrong sex, and the wrong species'. Counter-reality arises directly from the signals needed to resist male dominance. In line with expectations of sex-strike theory (Power and Watts 1997: 555–7), assertion of culture's primacy over nature is constrained precisely by the normative periodicity of hunting and the lunar cycle, and by taboos placed on the flesh of bleeding women and bleeding game. To be ritually powerful is to play at 'wrong sex', is to be wounded and periodically bleed. First gender mobilizes the 'powers of the weak', countering dominance with signals that generate a shared domain of counter-reality. This act appears both necessary and sufficient to establish the symbolic domain.

NOTES

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1 Where older texts employ the term '!Kung', current ethnography favours use of Ju/'hoan (pl. Ju/'hoansi), which is the people's own name for themselves (see Biesele 1993: 203).

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CHAPTER 5

SAISEE TOROREITA

AN ANALYSIS OF COMPLEMENTARITY IN AKIE GENDER IDEOLOGY

BWIRE KAARE

The Akie are a hunter-gatherer community in northern Tanzania. They form part of a larger group of peoples known in the anthropological literature as the Dorobo. The term 'Dorobo' derives from the Maasai word *H-Torobo*, which means people of the forest, or poor people without cattle who live what Maasai consider to be the abominable beast-like lifestyle of hunting and gathering. The Akie, like other Dorobo groups, have had a long history of association with Maasai pastoralists and, until recently, the Dorobo were seen as an appendage of Maasai culture (see, for example, Van Zwanenberg 1976; Kenny 1981). However the Akie explain their relationship with their Maasai neighbours in terms of their own distinctive history and cosmological notions.

The Akie number around 5,000. Until approximately two decades ago they led a predominantly hunting and gathering way of life while at the same time maintaining close relations with their pastoral neighbours. They live in small groups whose size varies continually depending on hunting and honey-gathering movements and the seasons. Settlement is to a large extent dictated, though not entirely determined, by kin relations. People of common ancestry will in most cases live on their own clan land (*ilmot*). Settlement on clan land is vital since it is here that clan spirits live and clan rituals must be performed. The Akie are divided into eight patrilineal clans. Clans are important for the Akie because they form the basis for the participation in collective land rights, essential for the recognition of honey rights. Every clan member has the right to exploit honey on his own clan land