Editor’s Note

Joseph Gelfer

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you the inaugural issue of Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality (JMMS). When I first speak to people about my research, a common question I’m asked is, “the whole history of religion and spirituality has been about and by men, so why does it need a separate treatment?” I can sympathize with this question, as history has indeed been a sad story of masculine domination; but to critique this one needs to engage with the study of men and masculinities. And of course, there are those manifestations of masculinity that do not conspire with domination.

I think some people worry that the study of men and masculinities, especially within a religious context, is somehow code for “reasserting masculine domination,” aligning it with unsavory manifestations of “the men’s movement” or “men’s rights” activists. The reality is quite different. The vast majority of those who study men and masculinities, far from engaging in a backlash against feminisms, are themselves feminist. Nearly all theory employed in the study of men and masculinities is feminist and/or queer. Exactly how the study of men and masculinities intersects with other disciplines such as women’s studies is a complex issue, but suffice to say over the past 20 years its study has gained significant momentum, complementing women’s studies in a fully-fledged gender studies, and allowing for hitherto unknown criticisms and celebrations of men’s lives.

The study of men and masculinities is divided by some scholars into two approaches: “critical studies of men” and “men’s studies.” The general perception is that the former is explicitly feminist, while the latter is rather politically ambiguous. I use these distinctions myself, and my natural tendency is towards critical studies of men, but I am not wholly convinced the two are mutually exclusive and feel there are lessons to be learnt from both approaches. JMMS welcomes all researchers and readers who seek a better understanding of men and masculinities.

Other than JMMS, two international journals currently serve the discipline: Men and Masculinities and Journal of Men’s Studies. Both are excellent in providing a general venue, but their generality make it difficult to fully explore any one area of specialty. There are many thousands of academic journals in the world, but not one that explores two of the most significant variables on the planet: men and religion. Hence the need for and birth of JMMS.

JMMS seeks to be as inclusive as possible in its area of enquiry. Papers address the full spectrum of masculinities and sexualities, particularly those which are seldom heard. Similarly, JMMS addresses not only monotheistic religions and spiritualities but also Eastern, indigenous, new religious movements and other spiritualities which resist
categorization. JMMS papers address historical and contemporary phenomena as well as speculative essays about future spiritualities.

This diversity is suggested by the contents of this first issue. Yvonne Maria Werner and Anna Prestjan introduce a large research project focused on constructions of Christian manliness in Northern Europe between 1850 and 1940. Frank A. Salamone shows how the Hausa people of Nigeria define ideal masculinity. Roland Boer employs Freud and Lacan to chart the intersection of God, circumcision and the built male body. David Shneer argues that queer Jews are at the forefront of Jewish Culture. Juan M. Marin discusses how a medieval Jesuit mystic’s melancholia was perceived as “feminine.” Rini Bhattacharyya Mehta identifies the role of masculinity and spirituality in the early life of Sri Aurobindo. An equally diverse range of papers is being gathered for the second issue, and a further special edition focused on youth masculinities and spirituality is being prepared. These papers establish what I hope will be a long and fruitful journey, enabling both new scholarly insights and perhaps even (at the risk of grandiosity) contributing towards more peaceful ways of being.

The creation of JMMS has only been possible with the help of numerous people. Chiefly I want to thank the editorial board for responding so positively to my requests for help in launching JMMS. In particular, Philip Culbertson has been repeatedly available with advice: his wise counsel is most appreciated. Thanks to Björn Krondorfer for taking on the book review section. Thanks to John Banister for donating the JMMS URL, web-space and many hours of website development. Thanks to the various people who have acted as anonymous peer reviewers, and also those who have assisted with editorial support. Thanks to Red James for providing the JMMS logo, the meaning of which has been the source of numerous interesting conversations.

Joseph Gelfer, Department of Religious Studies
Victoria University of Wellington/NEW ZEALAND
e: joseph@gelfer.net
Manliness and Catholic Mission in the Nordic Countries

Yvonne Maria Werner

An introduction to a research project based at Lund University, Christian Manliness, a Paradox of Modernity: Men and Religion in a Northern-European Context, 1840 to 1940. The author presents some initial findings regarding constructions of manliness in Catholic missions in the Nordic countries.

In a letter from July 1884 to a fellow religious in Rome, the Barnabite Father Paolo Fumagalli stated the importance of demonstrating “la supériorité en tout du prêtre catholique sur le ministre protestant” through “le prestige de notre savoir,” the superiority of the Catholic priest and his knowledge. Fumagalli, who was working as a missionary in the small Swedish town of Gävle together with two other Italian Barnabites, was traveling in central Sweden, giving lectures on Catholic faith and culture. He describes missionary work as a trial of strength between Catholic and Protestant culture, and in his view, the clergy was the keeper of this culture. In his letter, he also draws a picture of the ideal Catholic priest, who he describes as a man of prayer, a moral example, and as a learned, cultivated and energetic preacher of the Catholic faith. These priests were needed to dispel Protestant prejudices against Catholicism and to pave the way for their conversion to the Catholic Church.¹

Fumagalli was one of many foreign Catholic priests working as a missionary in Scandinavia. The breakthrough of the Ultramontane movement from the 1830s onwards led to an upswing of Catholic missionary work across the world. Catholic ecclesiology of the time laid great emphasis on the Catholic Church’s claim to be the only true church. Consequently, non-Catholic as well as non-Christian countries were regarded as mission fields and fell under the authority of the Roman Congregation of Mission, Propaganda Fide (K. J. Rivinius, 1994, pp. 251-265; J. Gadille & J.-F. Zorn, 1997, pp. 133-155, 162ff).² Hence, Catholic missionary activities were also aimed at the Nordic countries where, protected by the liberal religious laws passed in this period, they could build up a network of parishes and missions with schools, hospitals, and other social institutions. But these Catholic missionary activities faced a strong opposition in Nordic society, and for many Northerners, Catholicism appeared as an outright menace to their own culture and national integrity (Y. M. Werner, 2005, pp. 143-363).

Up to the Second Vatican Council, regulated religious life was an integral part of the comprehensive Catholic ideology that appeared in opposition against, and as an alternative to, the liberal social and political order that developed during the nineteenth century. Catholicism thus developed into a counterculture with obvious anti-modern traits. The religious were at the forefront of this Catholic system, and regulated religious
life was regarded as the most consummate expression of Catholic piety. It represented the Catholic counterculture in its most radical form, which explains why the harsh conflicts (Kulturkampf) between church and state that occurred in many countries at that time chiefly affected religious orders. In Protestant countries such as the Nordic, Catholicism appeared as a counterculture in a double sense. It not only represented an alternative worldview but also an unfamiliar belief system that many regarded as a threat to their Protestant-influenced national culture. Catholic religious orders and congregations were considered as particularly dangerous (Werner, 2002; E.-B. Nilsen, 2001).

Most of the Catholic missionaries working in Scandinavia were women religious, belonging to different orders and congregations. The clergy consisted partly of secular priests, most of them trained at the Collegium Urbanum, the priest seminary of Propaganda Fide, and partly by members of male religious institutes. The leading women religious and almost all the priests continuously sent letters and reports to Propaganda Fide, respectively to their superiors or fellow religious. This correspondence deals foremost with the missionary work, but it also gives a good picture of missionary strategies, feelings and opinions, and thus, in the same way as Fumagalli’s letter quoted above, reflects ideals, visions and identities. I use this kind of correspondence to study the construction of manliness and male ideals within Nordic Catholicism between 1850 and 1940. My study is part of the interdisciplinary project Christian Manliness – a Paradox of Modernity, which by focusing on Northern European conditions, intends to illuminate the link between Christianity and the construction of manliness in the period. I pay special attention to the relationship between Nordic and foreign Catholicism and Protestantism, and how these categorizations were loaded with manliness and womanliness respectively. So, what were these “Catholic” ideals of manliness? How were they related to ideas about manliness, evident within the established Nordic churches? I start out from the hypothesis that the ideological elements, clerical ideals, and liturgical aesthetics of Catholicism were important keystones in these “Catholic” constructions of manliness.

Many of the Catholic priests at work in the Nordic area were members of religious orders or congregations. In my project, I focus on three male religious orders working in Scandinavia: the Barnabites, the Jesuits, and the Dominicans. Italian Barnabites established themselves in Stockholm and in the Norwegian capital Christiania (Oslo) in the 1860s and were important in the initial phase of the Nordic Catholic mission. In the wake of the “cultural war” (Kulturkampf) in Germany in the 1870s, German Jesuits, who were the prime representatives of Ultramontane confessionalism, settled down in Copenhagen and Stockholm, and later in other Swedish and Danish cities. From a Nordic perspective, the Jesuits were by tradition viewed as the ultimate representatives of the “Catholic peril” and of all the evil that was customarily associated with Catholicism. It is therefore interesting to note that it was the self-same Jesuits who attracted most converts, and that the Jesuit boys’ school outside Copenhagen was attended by a large number of Protestant pupils (Werner, 2005, pp. 106-110, 139-141, 187-189).

The Dominicans, who established themselves in the Nordic countries during the 1920s, embodied an ascetic and learned tradition, while at the same time representing the French culture so cherished by the Scandinavian upper classes. In studying how clerical
manliness was construed, I analyze the correspondence between Catholic missionaries and their leadership in the Nordic area and Propaganda Fide. I pay particular attention to the underlying conflicts revealed in the correspondents’ complaints, and their defense of their actions, principally in reports where the parties argue their cases, while attacking their opponents. Here we see “types” and “counter-types” of clerical manliness and the pattern of the power relations between male and female missionaries.  

A starting point for my study are the two presumptions that the period in question is to be seen as a “second confessional age,” marked by church consolidation and conflicts between Christian denominations, and that religion played an important role for the construction of manliness. In liberal-bourgeois circles, religion was seen as a private matter connected to the home and the female sphere (I. Götz von Olenhusen, 1995). Middle class liberalism, however, accounted for only a minority of the population, while traditional Christianity in its different denominational forms, despite dwindling observance in many areas, continued to serve as the normative basis of society. Across Europe, religious revivals sprang up that contributed to the revitalization of Christianity. In Protestant countries, these revivals often originated in pietistic and low church movements, while the Ultramontane revival in the Catholic world drew its inspiration from Counter-Reformation confessionalism. This Catholic neo-confessionalism served as a basis for a religiously determined worldview, which stood in sharp contrast to the liberal ideology serving as the basis for the constitutional development of the modern state. Catholicism thus took the shape of a counterculture in modern society, characterized by its strict hierarchical order, broad popular footing and triumphalistic appearance (U. Altermatt, 1995, pp. 33-50; O. Blaschke, 2000, pp. 38-75 and 2002, pp. 13-70).

Another source of inspiration for my analysis is the gender theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Connell. According to these two theoretical models, it is primarily in the relationship between men and groups of men that manliness is constructed, while women play a passive role. Male dominance over women is asserted, as Bourdieu has formulated it, through a “symbolic violence” that is embedded in the social order, and that appears most clearly in the church sphere and in traditional forms of marriage (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 47-67; Connell, 1995; W. Schmale, 2003, pp. 153-154, 227-230). Here it is important to note the differences between Catholic and Protestant traditions in this field. In the Catholic tradition, celibacy and monastic life was seen as superior to marriage, while in the Protestant tradition the fecund marriage was regarded as the norm for Christian life. Prior to the reforms of Vatican II, it was common to speak of an “estate of perfection” and the monastic lifestyle served as a model also for lay piety. The normative position of celibate ideals within the Catholic Church also emerges in the liturgical structure, with its disciplinary regulations fixated on gender and purity in the meaning of sexual abstinence (M. Dortel-Claudot, 1994, pp. 654-706).

Here, I will present some first results of my work. In the first part of my article, I analyze the conflict around the so-called Arctic Apostolic Prefecture erected in the 1850s from a gender perspective, in the second the Nordic mission of the Italian Barnabites.
The North Pole Mission and the Ideals of Missionary Manliness

In the middle of the 1850s there were discussions in Rome regarding plans for a reorganization of Scandinavian mission. Sweden and Norway constituted a joint Apostolic Vicariate under the supervision of the Swiss-born Bishop Laurentius Studach, who was at the same time serving as aumônier for the Catholic Queen Josephine. Denmark was connected with the North-German missions under the supervision of the bishop of Osnabrück. In 1854 an Arctic Apostolic Prefecture was founded. The leadership of this transatlantic polar mission was given to the Russian Catholic convert and former Jesuit count Stephan Djunkowsky, who founded a missionary centre in the north of Norway, and his aim was to create a priestly fraternity, especially trained for this task. Priests of various nationalities, who were all of the same age as the prefect (in their thirties) joined this arctic mission. At the beginning, this missionary project was quite successful, especially in North Norway, where it succeeded in winning the sympathies of the inhabitants by connecting to medieval traditions and prevalent nationalistic feelings. However, when Djunkowsky tried to expand his jurisdiction to encompass the rest of Norway as well as Denmark, and to place the centre of the mission in Copenhagen, he was met with resistance from other missionaries in the area.11 The correspondence on this matter, that aimed to win the support of the Roman ecclesiastical authorities, gives information about what qualities and what kind of behavior was seen as appropriate for a priest and what was considered improper or dishonorable. In other words, here we may find reflected the discursive construction of priestly manliness as well as male missionary ideals.

In these letters and reports, the parties often level heavy criticism against each other by emphasizing behaviors, actions or rules of conduct, which in different ways conflicted with the ecclesiastical standards or on other grounds could be considered improper. At the same time, they tried to describe their own conduct as favorably as possible. In this way, Studach accused Djunkowsky of lack of judgment and indiscretion. He also blamed him for having harmed the good name of the Catholic Church in Sweden and Norway through his provocative conduct and heated polemics against Protestantism. Anton Bernhard, the Catholic vicar in Stockholm, characterized Djunkowsky as a rogue, living lavishly on the money of the faithful. He was also an alcoholic, and this bad habit had given him the nickname “Père Cognac.”12 The priests in Copenhagen and Christiania admitted that Djunkowsky had achieved a lot as a missionary. But his boastfulness, alcoholism and unclerical way of living had, as they saw it, caused offence and harmed the work of other missionaries, produced under so many bitter sacrifices. According to them, he was an adventurer and a swindler who lived well on the charity of the faithful and who brought dishonor on the Catholic clergy by his drinking habits.13

But Djunkowsky and his priests knew how to meet these accusations. In their numerous and often very lengthy reports, the North Pole missionaries describe in detail their adventurous and often dangerous mission travels in the polar region. These stories have many similarities with the masculinized rhetoric of contemporary Anglo-Saxon discourse, where missionaries are compared to explorers who brave all dangers and surmount all hindrances in their way. In his correspondence Djunkowsky brought into light “classical” missionary qualities, such as audacity, courage and endurance. He also called
attention to his own energy in raising money and organizing the extensive mission travels in the polar region. He also emphasized the strong feeling of community, which characterized the North Pole missionaries: they were reliable men and therefore could be given a great degree of freedom of action.\textsuperscript{14}

Another distinctive feature in Djunkowsky’s reports is that he describes himself as a guardian of law and order and a reliable Ultramontane who stood up for the rights of the Church, defended the Pope and safe-guarded the regulations of canon law. He repudiated the criticism from the priests in Copenhagen as groundless. According to Djunkowsky, these priests were inspired by nationalistic considerations and wanted to reserve the Danish mission for German missionaries. He refuted the accusation that he was wasteful with money by explaining how very tough and lonely missionary work was in remote regions, making necessary periods of recreation and communion with fellow priests in more pleasant parts of the world. To be a lonely priest on the fringes of civilization was exceedingly strenuous. He further stated that he was drinking alcohol upon the advice of his doctor, and never immoderately. According to Djunkowsky, the criticism from the other Catholic priests in the region, not least from vicar Bernhard, was to be seen as an expression of envy and deficiency. In letter after letter he accused Bernhard of trying to destroy his arctic missionary project by intriguing and spreading false accusations.\textsuperscript{15}

Until 1861 it appears that Propaganda Fide did not take much notice of all the complaints and negative opinions brought forward against Djunkowsky. The Roman curia even considered complying with Djunkowsky’s wish to extend the North Pole mission southwards, making Copenhagen its main quarter and raising himself to the rank of bishop (H. Tüchle, 1976, p. 146.) In that situation the other missionaries intensified their efforts to make the Roman curia dissociate from Djunkowsky. Most interesting here is the argumentation used by the bishop of Osnabrück, Paulus Melchers, in a report to Pope Pius IX, enumerating good and bad priestly qualities in a contradictory way. The good qualities were represented by the newly appointed vicar of Copenhagen, Hermann Grüder, whose reports and judgments the bishop referred to in his letters. Grüder was described as a very pious, intelligent and eager priest, with a sensitive conscience and an unusually sound judgment. Lies and defamatory words were very far from this conscientious priest. Djunkowsky, on the other hand, was characterized as an undiscerning and vain priest lacking sound judgment, delicacy, self-control and priestly dignity.\textsuperscript{16} Studach expressed a similar opinion and added that it would harm the reputation of the Holy See if Djunkowsky was allowed to continue his activity in Norway.\textsuperscript{17}

Djunkowsky left his position as prefect for the North Pole mission in October 1861. However, the reason for his resignation was not the criticism made by the other missionaries in the area. It was, instead, the fact that he married a young British lady. The wedding ceremony took place in Hamburg and was conducted by an Anglican priest, in the presence of the town’s British community. The news regarding Djunkowsky’s “fall” rapidly spread, and for his adversaries this was a definitive confirmation that he was a wretched person and that they had been right in their criticism.\textsuperscript{18} But in Rome the reaction was not at all as severe as could have been expected. Djunkowsky disclaimed his action, explaining it as a case of momentary mental disorder and turned in contrition to Pius IX, asking to be
released from the excommunication placed on him due to the irregular marriage. The pope, who had followed Djunkowsky’s foolhardy missionary project with interest, not only revoked the excommunication but also returned to him his priestly authorization, and invited him to come to Rome in order to talk matters over. But he was not, however, reinstated as prefect of the North Pole mission and was also forced to subject himself to a period of strict penance.19 It is interesting to note that Djunkowsky, in a pro memorial addressed to Pius IX in 1853, had presented a proposal for a church reform, suggesting that obligatory priestly celibacy should be abolished so that priests could marry (A. Palmqvist, 1958, p. 121). After his rehabilitation, Djunkowsky settled in South Germany, where he devoted himself to missiological studies. Economical problems made him return to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1866, thereby recuperating his estates in Russia. By that time, however, he was a broken and sick man, and he died four years later at the age of 49 (B. I. Eidsvig, 1993, p. 185).20

The North Pole mission was abolished in 1869. Denmark and Norway were made Apostolic Prefectures with Grüder and the Frenchman Bernard Bernard (the former cooperator and successor of Djunkowsky), as apostolic prefects (J. Metzler, 1919, pp. 245-254). This new order was preceded by a power struggle between Bernhard and Grüder, documented in an extensive correspondence. Here arguments concerning missionary strategies dominate, and none of the involved priests questioned each other’s honor, dignity or priestly virtues. The bishop of Osnabrück supported Grüder, whereas Bernard, who for some years resided in Copenhagen, received support from the Belgian bishops. Both were testified to be eminent linguists, intelligent and appreciated by their priestly colleagues. They represented, although in different ways, the Catholic priestly ideal of the time, with its emphasis on asceticism, spirit of self-sacrifice and hierarchical subordination. But at the same time, they were representative of two very different priestly types.21 Grüder had received his education at the Colégium Urbanum in Rome, but to the very last hoped to get a post in a Catholic region in his home country, Germany. He stayed in Denmark out of obedience and his opposition to the plans of Bernhard to incorporate the whole of Norway and Denmark into the North Pole mission. His reports and letters give us an image of a reserved, sensitive and ascetic man, with aesthetic interests, striving to live up to the Tridentine priestly ideals by which he had been educated (Werner, 2005, pp. 84-86). Bernard, on the other hand, who according to Studach had “une extérieure imposante,” was the born missionary, not taken aback by hardships and physical challenge. He had chosen to be a missionary. For him, the reorganization of the Nordic missions meant a real setback.22

However, it was not a matter of course that Rome should arrive at this solution. On many occasions there had been discussions concerning the possibility of delegating the responsibility of the Swedish-Norwegian mission to the Barnabites, who had established themselves there at the beginning of the 1860s. These plans were never realized, but the large correspondence around this question and the power struggle it reflects illustrate the construction of clerical ideals of manliness and their counterparts.
The Manliness Constructions of the Italian Barnabites.

The Barnabite order or Congregatio Clericorum Regularum S. Pauli was a mission-oriented priestly fraternity founded in the 1530s. The order settled in the convent of San Barnaba, from where the name Barnabites was taken. At the time here concerned, the Barnabite order comprised around 200 members, distributed on three provinces. The motherhouse was, and is, in Rome.23 In summer 1864, Barnabite priests established themselves in Stockholm and Christiania. Johan Daniel Stub, who was born in Norway, took over the post as Catholic vicar in Christiania, and Carlo Giovanni Moro and Cesare Tondini de Quarenghi were sent to Stockholm. A number of other Barnabites were active in Sweden and Norway, among them Gregorio Almerici, who replaced Studach as aûmonier of Queen Dowager Josephine. Moro also occupied this post for a while. The Barnabites established themselves in Gävle with Moro as vicar and Fumagalli as chaplain. In spring 1885, Fumagalli held a position as lecturer in French and Italian at Uppsala University, where Moro was also lecturing. But due to opposition from the Jesuits, who had recently taken over the pastoral responsibility for the Catholics in Stockholm with surroundings, they were forced to give up this academic apostolate. Also, the plans for a Barnabite mission in South Sweden had to be dropped, and in 1887 the Barnabites definitively left the Scandinavian mission.24

The Barnabites’ ability to gain a foothold in the Swedish-Norwegian Mission was for a great part due to the engagement of the St. Joseph Sisters, a French congregation with its motherhouse in Chambéry in the Savoy that had been working in Scandinavia since 1862. The Superior General, Marie-Félicité, pushed for the Barnabites to take responsibility both for the entire Swedish-Norwegian mission and for a co-operation between the congregations in the Nordic mission. The Barnabite general had similar aspirations.25 These two congregations came into conflict with the above-mentioned Catholic vicar of Stockholm, Bernhard, who for many years had administered the mission in all but name in place of the sickly Bishop Studach. If, however, we are to believe the Barnabites and the Sisters of St. Joseph, the real power lay with Bernhard’s housekeeper, the Spanish-born Caroline de Bogen. True, she had taken vows, and for a while had belonged to a religious congregation, but she and the vicar lived openly together in the vicarage as if they were married, which the Barnabites and the sisters naturally seized upon in their attacks. It was a scandal, they fumed, that a woman was allowed to exercise power in that manner, or as Tondini put it, “cosa humiliante per la dignità della nostra santa Religione,” that it was humilitating for their holy religion. In fact, Bogen in many respects held a position similar to that of a clergyman’s wife, which Moro also alludes to in some of his reports by calling her “La Pastorinna” (clergyman’s wife).26

The accounts of these conflicts shed an interesting light on gender relations, which at first glance seem to confirm the thesis of the feminization of religion. The women religious held a strong position in the mission and by appealing to Rome could protect their independence from the local hierarchy. For the clergy, particularly for the older generation, this was a challenge. On a transcript of Propaganda Fide’s regarding the prolongation of Moro’s faculties as aûmonier of the St. Joseph Sisters in Stockholm, Studach scribbled “Weiber-Regierung.” He was referring to the fact that the Chambéry
congregation had defied him by ensuring that Moro would continue to serve as a priest in the Swedish capital. However, if we look more closely, it transpires that the sisters did not have as independent a position as at first appears. If Caroline de Bogen wielded her influence by virtue of her position as Bernhard’s trusted housekeeper, it was by exploiting their network of male contacts within the upper echelons of the church hierarchy that the Sisters of St. Joseph managed to maintain their position in the Nordic mission.

The conflicts within the Catholic mission in Stockholm for a great part circled around Moro and his activities. Moro soon became very popular, both as a preacher and as a spiritual director, and he was a welcomed guest in the elegant parlors of the capital. When in 1868, and then in 1877, he was removed from Stockholm, this gave rise to a storm of protests, both among Catholics and Protestants. At the later occasion, a letter of protest with more than 250 signatures was sent to Propaganda Fide. The majority of the signers were Protestants. Queen Dowager Josephine also engaged in the debate. In a personal letter to Pope Pius IX she pointed out that Moro with his brilliant sermons, his high education and good example, more than anyone else had contributed to a more positive opinion of the Catholic Church in the country.

The secular priests, who for the greater part came from Germany, argued that the Barnabites were not fit to be missionaries in the Nordic countries, as their Mediterranean mentality was too foreign in a Nordic context. They admitted that the Barnabites’ refined and elegant manners were very much appreciated in the upper ranks of society, but in their eyes, this “parlor apostolate” was more harmful than useful for the Catholic mission. The Barnabites on their part, proud as they were of their “solido spirito di romanità” (solid Roman piety) and intellectual refinement, considered themselves as representing a superior kind of priestly manliness. In their letters they also emphasize the importance of the high dignity and sacral status of Catholic priesthood, demonstrating the cultural superiority of Catholicism. It should also be mentioned that they were highly influenced by the Italian philosopher and theologian Antonio Rosmini-Serbati, who advocated a more liberal form of Ultramontane Catholicism.

How were the good and the bad types of clerical manliness depicted in the reports regarding the Barnabite Mission in Scandinavia? When commending someone, both the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Barnabites refer to ideals such as simplicity, decency, piety (pietà), patience, and charity (tendre charité). In proposing Moro as apostolic vicar after Studach, his fellow religious stressed qualities such as humility and self-sacrificing obedience; they emphasized, in other words, the kind of “passive” virtues that within the liberal-bourgeois discourse were usually associated with women. Studach and Bernhard, for their part, accused Moro of a lax practice as confessor, lack of orthodoxy, intrigue, and defamation, as well as of a dissipated social life under the cover of mission. He avoided simple pastoral tasks such as teaching children catechism, but instead gathered a whole “battalion” of admiring, young Catholic women around him. These women refused to accept any other priest than Moro as their spiritual director and confessor.

For Moro these agonizing conflicts were a great suffering and he several times requested to be called back to Italy. He was deeply distressed by being ignored and by the unjust attacks to which he was subjected. During 1866 the situation was especially critical, and Moro declared that he could not continue with his work to “salvare le anime
"altrui" (save others’ soul) when risking to “perdere la sua propria” (lose his own). Such outbursts of feeling are very common in Moro’s correspondence with his superiors. Another characteristic feature is his emphasis on sacrifice, prayer and obedience. In a letter from spring 1867 he characterized the subordination under the will of his superiors as “la mia regula,” the commands of the general superior were for him equal to God’s will. Prayer was an instrument in the battle against willfulness. We find a similar way of thinking in Tondini’s correspondence with his superiors. The Roman decisions were for him a manifestation of God’s will and obedience was an “esercizio di fede.” The Barnabite general Alessandro Teppa underlined in a letter to Moro that religious sent out as missionaries were exempted from bodily asceticism and therefore had to take great pains in sacrificing their own will and patiently suffering the afflictions which God had in preparation for them. A life as missionary was a “vita di sacrificio,” a life full of sacrifices.

This obedience discourse was typical for regulated Catholic religious life at this time, but in the reports and letters from Barnabites working in Scandinavia, obedience is articulated not only as a self-evident virtue, but also as an existential problem. Moro sometimes described his situation as a “via cruces,” and Tondini compared his stay in Christiania as a visit to purgatory. Almerici considered that the effort to give up self-will in obedience (le sacrificio de moi-même) must have its limits. In his case, the matter at stake was the plan to send him to the small Norwegian town of Bergen. This would, he argued, mean that he was deprived of fraternal community life and at the same time forced to have contacts with the “world” (il mondo) he had renounced through his vows. The picture of the ideal man religious, of which we see a glimpse here, in many ways opposes the contemporary bourgeois manly ideal that strongly emphasized the fight for independence and autonomy, whereas virtues such as humility, self-sacrifice and subordination were associated with women. However, also within Protestantism these ideals were honored as Christian, gender-crossing virtues. But here obedience and subordination were associated with the worldly sphere – with military life, the household and the position as a soldier in relation to authority – and that the exercise of these virtues was not, as in the Catholic discourse, seen as a merit in a religious sense (C. Walter, 1984, pp. 148-157).

A common trait of the Barnabites’ Scandinavian mission project is that the religious sent to the Nordic countries would rather have refrained from this assignment. Fumagalli wrote in a letter to a fellow religious that he had accepted being sent to Sweden “sans aucun enthousiasme, obéissant presque machinalement au désir des Superieurs,” only as an act of obedience. Tondini, however, was enthusiastic at the beginning, but this was due to the fact that he saw the Nordic activity as a preparation for a future apostolate in Russia. As with the others, he accepted obedience, or as he put it: “paratus sum sine voluntate” (I am ready without wanting). One reason for this discomfort was the scarce success and conflicts with the secular priests in the region. But the principal reason seems to have been the difficulty of founding real communities. In the letters from the Barnabites in Scandinavia, there are constant complaints about the lack of brotherhood and regulated religious community life. Religious community life also included lay brothers who did all the practical work. In lacking this support, the Barnabites in the Nordic countries had to either ask the female congregation to help, or to employ maids.
this could lead to is revealed in a letter from Almerici from his time in Christiania. The maid that had been employed was such a poor cook that Moro had to take over the task. Almerici lifts out this fact as an inconvenience, not because cooking was considered something for women, but because housekeeping in a male community had to be done by lay brothers. The Barnabites were used to living in homosocial manly communities, where manliness was constructed within the framework of a hierarchical order in relation to other men.

In the conflict regarding the Barnabites’ Nordic mission, which coincided with the First Vatican Council and the fall of the Papal States, the Roman curia was quite manifestly on the side of the Barnabites. The Barnabite general superior had close contacts with the prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Alessandro Barnabò, who on many occasions inquired about the possibility of the Barnabites taking responsibility for the Swedish-Norwegian mission. However, in a decisive moment, the Barnabite general and his staff declined this offer, arguing that the order lacked sufficient personal and economical resources to fulfill this mission (S. Declercq, 1937, pp. 157-161). The fact that the Italian Barnabites evidently had difficulties in acclimatizing themselves in Scandinavia may also have played a role.

The Barnabites’ Nordic missionary project was in many ways a product of women’s ambitions and strivings. The extensive correspondence here analyzed often deals with women and their roles in the conflicts at stake. It is interesting to note the manner in which women were used in the argumentation. A common feature is that they were mostly mentioned in negative terms in connection with discussions about power and influence. In their letters, the Barnabites describe the influence of the vicar’s housekeeper Caroline de Bogen and the Daughters of Mary on the missionary work as an expression of decay and disorder. These women, Moro stated in a letter from spring 1865, did not strive for wisdom or sanctity but for power. Feminine power is here put in contradiction to sanctity. Studach and Bernhard expressed a similar view. In order to belittle the Catholic protests against Moros’ transfer to Christiania, they described it as an action organized by his female admirers. In a long report to Propaganda Fide, Bernhard expressed his indignation that Rome gave so much credit to the reports and complaints of women religious. According to him, the problems in the Swedish mission were mainly due to the female congregation’s strong influence in Rome.

This could be interpreted as contempt for women’s ability and competence, but at a closer look the issue at stake was the exercising of power without possessing formal authority. Similar accusations were also directed to men; the struggle over the North Pole mission gives many examples of this. Both Djunkowsky and his successor Bernard were accused of meddling in the affairs of the Swedish and Norwegian Danish missions. But there is also another important factor. The women who were accused of an unduly exercise of power were all women religious or, as in the case of Bogen, secular women living under vows. At this time women religious were more and more considered as the priests’ assistants, and as belonging to the clergy in a wider sense (J. A. K. McNamara, 1996, pp. 600-627; E. Sastre Santos, 1997, pp. 860-875). This is also reflected in the material here analyzed. Bernhard considered Bogen as his trusted co-operator. The Barnabites were prepared to work together with the St Joseph Sisters as equal partners,
and there is no evidence in the material that they regarded the women religious as subordinate to male religious. The belonging to religious orders, the “estate of perfection,” transcended the socially constructed gender differences. But this did not mean that these male religious accepted woman’s political emancipation. In one of his articles in the newspaper *Gefle-Posten*, Moro renounced the idea of equal political rights for men and women, arguing that this would threaten the moral standards of society. According to him, women’s vocation was to spread love and charity. In this sense women could and should exercise power in society (Moro, 1887, pp. 23-25).

After 1880, the influence of the woman religious waned considerably. The Barnabites left Scandinavia, abandoning the field to other male orders, particularly the Jesuits. With the establishment of the German Jesuits in Denmark and Sweden, no women religious were involved, and there was no question of a co-operation of the kind that had existed between the Barnabites and the St. Joseph Sisters. The Jesuits even hesitated to engage themselves with women, as they were troublesome “Nonnen-Seelensorge.” The conflicts that the Jesuits were drawn into centered on limiting competence in relation to the secular clergy. The reports on these issues as well as the correspondence dealing with internal problems reflect the discursive struggle regarding clerical manliness. The Jesuits’ letters are more temperate and to the point than the Barnabites’; pious expressions of emotion are less in evidence, and qualities such as discipline, asceticism, industry, and, last but not least, obedience were accorded great importance. Here, the more active parts of the Tridentine clerical ideals are brought to the fore. The more passive virtues, such as humility, are principally mentioned in connection with disciplinary measures against religious who had offended the Rules. But in the Jesuits’ private correspondence, the tone is rather different. An example is the correspondence between the Superior of the Jesuits in Stockholm, Friedrich Lieber, and his brother Ernst, the famous leader of the Catholic “Zentrum” party. In their letters, they let religious sentiment flow more freely, and there is much talk of prayer and confident trust in God.

With the arrival of the French Dominicans, who launched their mission to the Nordic area in the 1920s, a new situation arose. Alongside the fathers, female Dominican communities were established, first in Oslo, later in Stockholm and Lund. The Dominican fathers served as chaplains in the sisters’ convents, and there was a close cooperation between the two branches. Like the Barnabites before them, the Dominicans cultivated an intellectual mission, and their chapels soon evolved into intellectual centers.

References

Archives
Epistolario Generalizio, Archivio Storico dei Barnabiti, Roma (ASBR).
Archivio Storico della Congregazione per l’Evangelizzazione dei Popoli o “de Propaganda Fide” (ASPF).

Literature


Notes

2 The Nordic countries remained under the Congregation of Propaganda Fide until 1977, when the Nordic Catholic dioceses received the full status of local Churches.
4 The source material consists of official and private correspondence in Nordic Catholic diocesan archives, the archives of Propaganda Fide and of the Barnabites, the Jesuits and the Dominicans in Rome, the German Jesuits’ archives in Munich, and the archives of the Dominicans in Paris.
5 In all, fourteen researchers and two advisers (the historians Hugh McLeod of Birmingham, and Callum Brown of Dundee) are engaged in this research project, which is sponsored by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. We have also contact with research groups in the Netherlands and Belgium dealing with similar projects. See http://www.hist.lu.se/hist/forskning/kristen_manlighet.php.
8 There is no broader scholarly work published on the Dominican Fathers missionary work in Scandinavia.
11 This conflict is described by Eidsvig (1993, pp. 169-187) and Palmqvist (1958, pp. 121-124).
12 Letters to Barnabò from Studach 26 Oct. & 2 Dec. 1856, 30 March 1857 & 13 Nov. 1861, and from Bernhard 14 July 1859: Svezia vol. 4, ASPF.


Studach to Barnabò 13 Nov. 1861: Svezia vol. 4, ASPF.


For further details about the Barnabites, see A. M. Gentili (1967).

For an overview, see S. Declercq.


G. Scalese (1991, pp. 55-84). The “Rosminians” were later accused of being modernists, and in 1877 several statements by Rosmini were put on the index.

Letters to Caccia from Marie-Félicité 9 March, 5 & 21 July 1864, and from Anne de Jésus 13 March and 26 Sept. 1865 and from Tondini 10 June: Epist. Gen., ASBR. Marie-Félicité to Barnabò 4 July 1864: Svezia vol. 4, ASPF.

Bernhard to Barnabò 12 Feb. 1868 & 29 June 1869: Svezia vol. 4, ASPF. In a report to Teppa from 23 Oct. 1867 Moro is quoting a letter from Bernhard, where the latter had


36 Moro to Teppa 8 March 1866: Epist. Gen., ASBR.

37 Moro to Teppa 13 April 1867. More examples are found in letters from Moro to Teppa 7 Oct. 1866, 4 & 29 Aug. 1868: Epist. Gen., ASBR. Moro to Studach (copy) 2 April 1868: Svezia vol. 4, ASPF. This kind of terminology is present also in the letters of the other Barnabites, as in a letter from Stub to Caccia 18 Feb. 1865: Epist. Gen., ASBR.


39 Caccia to Moro 3 Mach 1869: Epistolario Caccia, ASBR.

40 Letters to Teppa from Moro 15 & 29 June and from Americi 4 Nov. 1868: Epist. Gen., ASBR. In a letter from 4 Oct. the same year, Almerici openly criticized Teppa for having accepted Moros’ replacement to Christiania. Tondini to Almerici 14 Nov. 1864: Carte Almerici, ASBR.


42 Almerici to Teppa 4 Nov. 1868: Epist. Gen., ASBR.

43 Moro to Caccia 30 Jan. 1865: Epist. Gen., ASBR.


45 There are a lot of letters about this from the 1870s and 1880s in Dania V 65, Archivum Provinciae Germaniae Septentrionalis (APGS) in Munich.

46 We find many examples of this in the APGS as well as in the Archivum Romanum (ARSI) in Rome.


Yvonne Maria Werner, Associate Professor
Department of History, Lund University, Box 117, S-221 00 Lund/SWEDEN
e: yvonne.werner@hist.lu.se
Christian Social Reform Work as Christian Masculinization? A Swedish Example

Anna Prestjan

“Our intention is not to discuss and theorize, but to march and take action.” These were the words of the Swedish Protestant pastor Eric E:son Hammar, characterizing the work of the Christian social reform project of which he was the leader and driving force, in the periodical Ny Mark (New Land) in 1909. In this article, I will present the results of a study of Ny Mark and its presentation of different masculinities. A hypothesis is that Eric E:son Hammar and his colonization project was a part of a Swedish project promoting "muscular" Christian manliness.

“Our intention is not to discuss and theorize, but to march and take action.” These were the words of the Swedish protestant pastor Eric E:son Hammar, characterizing the work of the Christian social reform project of which he was the leader and driving force, in the periodical Ny Mark (New Land) in 1909. The quotation summarizes Hammar’s idea of Christian social reform work: personal, practical action and resourcefulness before cautiousness and indirect contributions.

In this article, I will present the results of a study of Ny Mark, which was published between 1908 and 1926, and which was the official publication of a Christian social reform project led by Hammar. The article will start from the idea that Hammar and his colonization project can be seen as part of a contemporary Christian reaction to a presumed change in the societal position of Christianity and the Church. By way of introduction, I will discuss a connection between the construction of masculinity, Christendom and social reform work: that Christian social reform work can be seen as part of a Christian mobilization against what was understood as demasculinization and devitalization of the Church and Christianity. The question is: can Hammar’s Christian social reform project be related to Anglo-Saxon ideas of so-called Christian manliness?

Christian Manliness, Muscular Christianity and Social Christianity

What, then, is understood by Christian Manliness? The most well-known manifestation is the phenomenon of Muscular Christianity, which originated as a literary movement in England in the 1850s. The phrase Muscular Christianity first appeared in a review of the British parson and writer Charles Kingsley’s (1819-1875) novel Two Years Ago in 1857. Later,
it was also used to describe the novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1856) by Kingsley’s friend Thomas Hughes (1822-1896). According to Clifford Putney (2001), Muscular Christianity soon became the general label of not only Kingsley’s and Hughes’ writings, but of a whole genre of adventure novels about “manly Christian heroes” who combined high moral principles with recognition – and promotion – of the physical body. Kingsley and Hughes’ writings are to be seen in the light of their social criticism, and especially their criticism of the Anglican Church, which they found weakened and effeminate. In short, Muscular Christianity can be seen as a “campaign for more health and manliness in religion.”

In America, the ideas of Muscular Christianity did not establish a grip on society until after the Civil War. Then it found a breeding ground in a general occupation with manliness and health that was part of the critique of modernization and urbanization. Among American men who felt their manhood, health and social status threatened by impairing city life, weakening office jobs and “feminized” Protestantism, Muscular Christianity was embraced as “a strenuous religion for the strenuous life.” Muscular Christianity had its heyday in America from around 1880 to 1920. Movements such as the YMCA and the Men and Religion Forward Movement sought to make religion more manly and attractive to men. Muscular Christian ideals, however, lost their force after World War I (Putney, 2001).

The phenomena of Muscular Christianity has been studied by several scholars in the US and Great Britain (Vance, 1985; Hall, 1994; Robertson, 1994; Ladd and Mathisen, 1999; Bradstock, 2000; Putney, 2001). Their definitions are fairly uniform. Muscular Christianity was formulated in the 1850s and originated from changes in Victorian and, later, American society. The two central and intertwining motives were to counteract the separation of spiritual life from secular life on all levels, and to handle the synthesis of masculinity and Christianity. The feminization of religion, religiosity and church life had to be eliminated. Religiosity had to be changed into something more attractive to men by infusing it with notions of manliness. The churches had to be more relevant to society and worldlier in character and activity. To raise oneself above one’s own masculinity was not requisite in order to serve God, and Muscular Christianity advocates wished to promote an image of masculinity that embraced piety and chivalry as well as recognition of the male body with its needs, desires and possibilities. The true Christian man should not only be his own master, but the master of society that he could change for the better.

Scholars also connect the ideas of Muscular Christianity to the issue of Social Christianity, expressed through the Progressive movement (USA), the Christian Socialist movement (England) and the Social Gospel movement (USA), and to the more general ideologies of imperialism and nationalism. Putney (2001) traces the origins of American Muscular Christianity to the so-called Progressive movement at the end of the 1800s. The movement rose as a reaction to what was perceived as over-civilization and devitalization of society. It focused on the cult of the strenuous life, bodily vigor, action before reflection, experience before book learning and pragmatism before sentimentality. In this context, the church, as well as many other aspects of society, had demands on it to be more “masculine” and vigorous (Putney, 2001).

The Christian Socialist movement was started in London in 1848. Among the attendants at the first meeting were, not surprisingly, Kingsley and Hughes. The lead issue
The problem of the movement was how the church should handle the grievances of the working-class in order to prevent revolution. For the Christian Socialists, religion and politics were inseparable, which echoes Muscular Christian thought that the spiritual and the worldly should not be alienated from each other, in society or the individual. The church, the Christian Socialists claimed, should be engaged in social questions. The first active period of the movement lasted only a few years, until 1854 when disagreement among members ended its activities. In the 1880s, the movement saw a revival and new Christian Socialist groups were formed.¹

The Social Gospel movement of the USA had its heyday at the end of twentieth century and was, according to Putney (2001), a true Muscular Christianity movement. The movement’s main interests were to make the Protestant churches of America more contemporary and relevant to society, and to embrace a manly Christianity in contrast to religious “sentimentality” and “femininity.” The Social Gospellers performed practical social actions in urban societies, but, as Putney (2001) writes, they also were moralists who wished to spread Protestant virtues among the urban working-class (and to Catholic immigrants). The church as effeminate and the unmanliness of religion were of central concern to the Social Gospel movement. The solution to this problem was to bring more men into church by “having the churches coming to grips with physical reality.” This meant the solving of social problems, but also meant active interest in the body. The church had to accept sports and physical exercise. This was not, however, only a strategy to attract young men to the church; there was also the connection between a good body and health in service of higher purposes and the good of society (Putney, 2001, p. 39-44).

Muscular Christianity cannot be called a “movement,” as there was no organization or uniform program, but rather a current or collection of ideas. However, as we have seen, Muscular Christianity had connections with the more organized Social Christianity movements such as the Christian Socialist movement, and inspired and influenced later movements such as the Social Gospel. In this text, I will apply the phrase Christian Manliness to ideas held together by the problem of combining Christianity with what was seen as manliness – manifested in more diffuse complexes of ideas such as the Muscular Christianity tradition, or in more organized concepts of Social Christianity.²

**Church and Christianity Devitalized and Demasculinized?**

To the Anglo-Saxon Christian Manliness advocates, the solution to problems such as the demasculinization of Christianity and the alienation of the Church from the secular world was to reconnect Christianity to manliness. In Sweden, criticism of Church and Christianity has not been analyzed from such a gender perspective, but concern about the same secularizing problems can be traced.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the Lutheran Swedish State Church was criticized in a way that earlier had been unthinkable. The criticism was aimed at the Church as “official religious interpreter,” but also more generally as “religious institution” (Bexell, 2003, pp. 166-77). During the radicalism of the 1880s, critical voices increased from the intellectual-cultural elite, which dissociated itself from dogmatic religion and from the Church as institution, but embraced science as the principle of social order (Bexell, 2003, pp. 168-170; Rosenberg, 1948, pp. 87-144). Partially intertwined with this
cultural-intellectual denigration was also a socialist criticism. The socialists saw the Church and State as allied, and criticism of the upper-classes and the State therefore also meant criticism of the State Church. The Church, on its side, interpreted socialism as concentrated only on the material, with no respect for the spiritual. Christianity, on the other hand, was said to be the true unifying force of society through its “ethics, outlook on mankind, faith and order of things.” This opposition of Church and socialism has been taken as the explanation of the Church and clergy’s general indifference to social questions in Sweden (Bexell, 2003, pp. 170-172; Rosenberg, 1948, pp. 87-142, Christiansson, 2006, pp. 110-112). Irrespective of origin, the turn-of-the-century criticism of Church and Christianity in Sweden united in the view of Church and Christianity as alienated from secular society. The Church, it was asserted, was unworldly and therefore unwilling and insignificant in the struggle for a better society (Bexell, 2003, pp. 172-74).

Accordingly, by the turn of the century, the Church and religion in general were undergoing increasing pressure and questioning; their hegemonic social position wavered. Church and Christianity were confronted with the threat of devitalization, that is, decreasing power and strength in a social and cultural context. In the light of separation of the spiritual world from the secular, the Church from society, and religion from politics, this devitalization had connections to a supposed separation of Christendom from masculinity – a demasculinization. The connection between a demasculinization of Christendom and secularization emanates from an understanding of “secularization” as religion’s decreasing importance in public society, in the light of the bourgeois gendered division of society to private “feminine” and public “masculine” spheres. Separation of Church from State meant that religion increasingly came to be seen as a private matter with feminine connotations. The formal religious practice of men decreased while women’s engagement and participation increased, and this supported the opinion of religion as women’s concern.³

How, then, did the clergy handle this situation? Church historians have emphasized how the Church, in Sweden as well as in other countries, did not remain passive facing the changes in religion’s position. From the nineteenth century, there has been a noteworthy mobilization of “religious defense,” aiming at strengthening the positions of Church and Christianity (Jalert, 2003; Blaschke, 2000 and 2002; McLeod 2000a). This defense movement can, from a gender perspective, be interpreted as Christian men’s attempt to counteract the demasculinization. This is also the main hypothesis of the ongoing Swedish research project Christian Manliness – A Paradox of Modernity, of which the study of pastor Eric E:son Hammar and his Christian social reform project is a part.⁴ The hypothesis is, as we have seen, supported by Anglo-Saxon research on ideas and movements round the concepts of Christian manliness and Christian social activism in these countries at the turn of the century.

Eric E:son Hammar and The Floda Colonies

In 1906, the Swedish protestant pastor Eric E:son Hammar published a booklet, in which he presented an idea: he wanted to start a colonization project and help the less fortunate members of society to a better life. Sweden should be relieved from costs of welfare, and at the same time gain from the increase in cultivated land areas. The project was a social
reform project with its starting point in the raising up of the individual. The alcoholic and ex-convict should be raised to be a farmer, a good man and citizen: self-sufficient, hard-working, head of a family with both physical and mental strength. The end product of the colonization project was to be the happy, self-sufficient agricultural family.5

Hammar was ordained in 1901 in a diocese in northern Sweden (Norrland). Originally from the southern part of Sweden, Hammar was inspired by a contemporary romantic idealization of Norrland.6 In 1902-1916 he held a post as a parish pastor in the sparsely populated parish of Vemdalen, an isolated location surrounded by forests and mountains. The population was about 1000, the majority living in the church village of Vemdalen and the rest spread among smaller settlements. The main industries of the parish were agriculture and forestry. This brought about a lifestyle that was very unfamiliar to Hammar: in wintertime, the men lived separated from their families during weekdays, working in the forests. In summertime, many women left their homes to live with the cattle in the pasture fields (fåbodar). In addition, during autumn and winter, the area was invaded by hundreds of vagrant woodsmen, and on weekends these men visited the village to drink and enjoy the company of local youth.

During his last years as a student, Hammar became interested in social problems. In Vemdalen, he became concerned by drinking, immorality, and the non-observance of the Sabbath. The so-often separated families resulted in there being no parental authority over the young, he wrote in his official reports, and this in combination with the influence from the woodsmen was devastating. Hammar’s efforts to manage the problems were not very successful. The local customs were tenacious. But Hammar’s social ambitions were firm, and he soon found another way to channel them: the colonization project at the Floda moor.

Hammar took the initiative to an organization, Sällskapet för Kristen Social Nykterhetsverksamhet, later Föreningen Floda Kolonier (The Christian Social Temperance Society, later The Floda Colonies Society, FCS). His colonization ideas were realized in 1908, when he personally set to work at the bog land that was bought for the purpose. FCS, at the most, had about 3000 supporting members, although there were only a handful of active members. The society’s Christian character was clear, and not just because it was started by a pastor and most of the influential board members were also pastors. The society’s purpose was to carry on “Christian humanitarian work” and to “foster a Christian basis.” The meaning of the latter is unclear – in practice, the “fostering” of the alcoholic men was not aiming for conversion or religious revival, but soberness and usefulness. The colonists had to join daily prayers, but that was the only active religious element. More clearly, FCS wanted to highlight the project as a Christian social activity. In Ny Mark and other texts by Hammar, he is constantly emphasizing the Christian’s duty to be merciful and compassionate in a practical and active way, to “march and take action.”

FCS started three colonies in different parts of Sweden in 1908, 1914 and 1916. The Vemdalen colony (Floda I) was the only colony in a literal sense, while the functions of Floda II and Floda III were more like farm collectives from which suitable men with good future prospects of succeeding in becoming a sober, hard-working farmer, could be chosen for the Floda I colony. The man first had to prove himself capable and worthy, then he would be allowed to bring his family, if he had any, to Floda I, and eventually take
possibility of a “colonate,” a cottage and a plot. As a settler, the man was supposed to earn his own living and provide for his family.

Hammar’s vision was a network of tens of thousands of supporting members, a self-sufficient organization and a self-renewing body of educated employees. This vision never became reality. Due to economic reasons, FCS was forced to seek the state’s help and involvement, and Hammar had to see his lifetime achievement slip from his hands and be integrated in the developing state system of alcoholism treatment. In 1925, the original colony in Vemdalens was the last part of the project to be terminated.

What happened to Hammar? In 1916, Hammar left his official position as a pastor in the Swedish State Church. His time had for several years been shared between his duties as a parish pastor and the colonization project. His wishes were to have the bishop’s approval and blessing to perform his social reform work as part of his official position. But as the parish work was neglected (Hammar always tended to give priority to the colonization work) the bishop gave him an ultimatum: fulfill the parish duties as regulated or leave the post. So Hammar left, and he left Vemdalens as well.

Between 1916 and 1921, Hammar worked with alcoholism treatment and colonization, employed first by FCS and later as preacher and superintendent at the state’s first alcoholism treatment institution. In 1921, Hammar returned as Swedish State Church official and held a post as curate for two years until he eventually became a vicar in Säter in 1923. The work within the FCS continued until 1925. Hammar died in June 1943, shortly after having hoisted the flag in his garden.

**Masculinities in Ny Mark**

While the issue of this study is not the colonization project as such, but its “man-making” functions, a few things have to be said about it. The colonization project was the first of its kind in Sweden, but it can easily be connected to the critique of modernization in contemporary Sweden. Within the framework of this critical movement grew concern about secularization and gender issues, the idea of the natural and healthy countryside in contrast to the dangerous and devastating city, as well as the ideal of domesticity. There was also a growing interest in social problems and their solutions through scientific knowledge and rationalism, all reflected in Hammar’s Christian-social project (Sörlin, 1988; Edling, 1996; Hedin, 2002; Stolare, 2003). The project was also an expression for Hammar’s personal conviction that practical social work was a true task for the church and clergy. On a higher level it reflects his opinion of how, on one hand, activism and physical strength and, on the other, confidence in God and love of one’s neighbor could and should be combined in Man, with strong character the glue between them. Hammar’s direct inspiration was the working colonies for vagrant and alcoholic men in Germany, Netherlands and England, and especially the work of the German pastor von Bodelschwing, who opened his first working colony in the 1880s.

This study has focused upon the question of how masculinity was constructed in the Christian context of the colonization project. The colonization project was not a “man-making” project, and the texts of Ny Mark are not characterized by explicit statements about manliness and un-manliness. The goal of the colonization activities were, though, explicitly to change people from non-desirable to desirable, to foster them into men.
supposition is that there is an Ideal Man rising from the text, while the men who were to be transformed represent other types of masculinities, subordinated to the Ideal. But what were the characteristics of this Ideal Man, and what qualities distinguished the men who were to be transformed? Another question is if, and how, the Ideal Man was constructed in relation not only to other men, but also to women? Had woman a role in the re-birth of man?

Before presenting the study and its results, there are some things to be said about the material, *Ny Mark*. The periodical was published for the first time in 1908. It was planned to be a quarterly report, but in reality it was irregularly published. Some years, such as 1919, there was only one issue; other years, such as 1910, there were six issues. Altogether there were about 40 issues between 1908 and 1927.

*Ny Mark* was published by FCS’s constant secretary and “managing director,” Eric E:son Hammar himself, who was also the main writer and editor. The periodical was intended mainly for supporting members of the organization, but also for the general public. Its purpose was to provide information about and reports from the colonization work and to request support for the organization. The most common themes are, beside reports from the colonization activities: the dangerous city, domesticity and the family, and the importance of combining Christian love of one’s neighbor with practical work for social reform.

For this study, the periodical has been studied chronologically with focus on statements on men, women and family. The results of the study will be presented under the headings *The Masculinities of Ny Mark, A Woman’s Task, Home, Household and Family*, and discussed under the article’s last heading.9

**The Masculinities of Ny Mark**

As said before, the men who were to be changed through colonization should be “fostered into men.” Implicitly, those men were not real men, or maybe not men at all? They are most often referred to as “individuals,” “persons,” “human material” or “elements” — clearly differentiated from the category of *men*. What was it, then, that made these men unmanly or even non-manly?10

The activities of SFC were first and foremost intended for alcoholic, ex-convict and vagrant “individuals” — a category obviously regarded as problematic and, according to SFC, not noticed enough by the social welfare movement in Sweden.11 This may have been true. When SFC started their practice in 1908, there were in Sweden only two private, non-repressive institutions designed to treat alcoholics. None of these two “homes” had fulfilled their original ambition to receive clients from the lower classes. The clientele at the Floda colonies, however, differed noticeably from the clientele at the earlier homes. More than 50% of the registered men belonged to the category of “skilled or unskilled workers,” almost 70% of them had a history at different kinds of supporting or repressive institutions, and more than 40% were pre-convicts. Moreover, the majority of the pre-convicts were recidivists.12

Among the colonists was another problematic type of man, maybe not vagrant or criminal, but still alcoholic and living under irregular conditions. These were the “mummy’s boys” — weaklings, spoiled and strangers to “real” work.13 In likelihood, this
category ran predominately together with the middle- and upper-class part of the clientele. In *Ny Mark*, though, the class aspect is not conspicuous in the categorizing of the problematic “types.” If not a social problem of the same dignity, the weakling was as problematic as a *man* as the ruffian. The problem with both groups, and so what characterized the man who was no man, was that he did not work, had no “real” home or family and was not a real citizen (had no civil rights or did not fulfill his civil duties by working for his own living and for the profit of society). Another common characteristic was the loss of strength in one form or another – physical, mental or both. The lack of mental strength meant idleness, being without a will of one’s own and moral weakness. The physical weakness showed in illness or frailness – book-reading men with pale hands were among the men who were to be transformed.14

The hope was that the fostering activities at the colony should result in a healthy, strong man who was able to, and wanted to, work for his own living and support a family in a home of his own. *Competence* was the watchword, together with *worthy* and *respected member of society, a citizen*.15 The picture of the Ideal Man stands out in two poems published in *Ny Mark* 1910:

My song for those,
Who wear the weight and heat on harvest day,
Who can handle the scythe with strength
And swing it quickly with long, sweeping strokes
...
My song for those,
Who dig the ditches and break ground,
He is a man and first among men
Who fights the wasteland, brave and strong. (*My Song for Those*,
Karl-Erik Forsslund)16

If you break new ground, you break steel,
You iron-marrowed boy!
To clear new land is your goal, isn’t it?
Won’t your hand stand firm in encounter?
The arm is sinewy, if the ground is stony,
You powerful son of the mountains. (*The Youth Song*, Viktor
Myrén)17

The two poems point out the qualities of the Ideal Man: he is strong and sinewy, he sweats, he works hard and he enjoys it. The study of *Ny Mark* shows that the Ideal Man was physically strong, competent, strenuous, strong in character, a resident and a family provider. This stereotype of masculinity was superior in relation to two countertypes: the uncontrolled, irresponsible, vagrant man who was a burden to society, and the weak, frail, feeble and spoiled man. Bodily strength and competence is accentuated in a way that places the former man superior to the latter. A combination, as in the Ideal Man, was
preferable, of course, but to break ground and clear new land, muscles and endurance were more important than any inner quality.

*A Woman’s Task*

George L. Mosse (1996) and Claes Ekenstam (1998) claim that qualities ascribed to “woman” are qualities that “man” is supposed to have less of or to be without, or, if they existed in a man were effeminate. According to this, what is said about woman in *Ny Mark* certainly says something about man as well, which is why focusing on women in a study on men is both interesting and necessary.

So, how is the woman pictured in *Ny Mark*? Did she take part in the man-making of the colonization project? Woman is pictured in two ways. First, as the Ideal Woman, with specific qualities and tasks that differ from the Ideal Man. Second, woman is pictured out of her role in the transformation of the man.

Woman was important in the colonization project. She constituted a central part of the family, whose reunion was a goal for FCS, and had a central role in the home that was to be the family’s fundament. The woman/wife should keep the home clean, neat, nice and happy. In fact, the woman is described as the leading character of the colonist home, and her competence was decisive for the final results of the project.\(^{18}\)

That the woman had to be, or was to be, *competent*, is a constantly recurring theme. Around the years of 1913 and 1914, the writings about woman intensified. Hammar by this time formulated an idea of a woman’s home, where the male colonists’ wives or proposed wives should get their necessary education in the art of homecare and childcare. This education should, according to Hammar, be completed before man and woman could be allowed to join as a couple in a colonist home. He claimed that a man could be made sober and competent, but if he rejoined an incompetent woman, his transformation would be wasted:

> As woman is the soul of the home, it is of great importance, to make sure, that she is made qualified for her calling. To send a restored man to an incompetent wife ... and to a home, that is neglected and in decay, is to make him a recidivist and to have wasted work and money. And to reunite the man with such a wife at the colony is to lay the burden of a proletarian family on the FCS and to make the colony a poor house.\(^{19}\)

The competent woman was to be able to do all the daily chores in a small farm home: prepare cheap and nourishing meals, take care of children, look after pig and cow, keep the home neat and clean, sew and repair clothes and so on. Her tasks were not only practical, though. The competent woman should be the soul of the home, responsible for its comfort, financial strength and moral worth: this was her calling.\(^{20}\)

What is said about the woman in *Ny Mark* reflects the view that the Ideal Man, on his own, was not expected to be able to keep up domesticity. On the contrary, the good home, created and managed by the competent woman, was a requirement for the Ideal Man’s manliness. The tasks within the four walls of the home, the care and upbringing of
the children, were not duties of the Ideal Man. His duties were to work and support the family. Important, though, is that without a family, the Ideal Man’s mission in life could not be fulfilled.

Home, Household and Family

The true relation between parents and children, the good home, is a vital necessity for all people, that wish to remain free, happy, strong.  

The final goal for the colonization activities was not only the self-supporting, hard-working man, but man as part of the family and rooted in the home. The man as a family provider is constantly stressed in Ny Mark. Through training as a colonist, the man was to be made capable of assembling his scattered family around him, bringing them from the dangerous city to the safe countryside, and then to support them. The family was to be not only a unit, but one capable of surviving, that could serve Swedish society instead of relying upon it. The unmarried man could approach the ideal as well, even if the Ideal Man was married. In Ny Mark there is a story about a colonist that had been found sufficiently competent to get possession of a colonate: the man was keeping up good work and order in spite of his lack of a wife.

The ideals of the family, the work in the household and the relations between man and woman, as expressed in Ny Mark, can be summarized as a wish to defend the family as the fundamental unit of society. Man and woman should unite, or re-unite, in a family that should constitute a household in a home. The idealization of the good home was neither new nor unique, but an integral part of a more general contemporary idealization of the agrarian “home of one’s own” in the Swedish countryside. In turn, this “home-ideology” was part of the growing interest in social problems in combination with critique of modernization, civilization and the city (Sörlin, 1988; Edling, 1996; Stolare, 2003). In the context of Hammar’s colonization project, however, the home and the family had a direct function in the rehabilitation of man, and also constituted a unit of advantage to society and a base for good citizens.

What about the distribution of work within the household, as expressed in Ny Mark? As said above, the woman had her special tasks, separated from the man’s. She was not supposed to work outside the home. The woman’s bonding to the domestic sphere was strong, and there her position was strong as well. The woman was to be responsible – for the children, for the economy, for the good order, for the morality, for the food and for the animals – in short, she was responsible in all areas where the man was not supposed to be responsible. The man’s work was to be performed outside the household and apart from the home. According to Ny Mark, he had no domestic undertakings.

Conclusion

Several scholars of gender and masculinity have agreed upon the notion that there are not one, but many different representations of masculinity (for example Connell, 1995; Mosse,
This was not obvious in early gender studies, when for example the categories “woman” and “man” for a long time were discussed as if homogeneous. Other agreements among scholars are that masculinity is not constructed only in relation to the other sex, but also in relation to other men, and that the relationships between different representations of masculinity, or masculine “types” can be described in terms of dominance, subordination, power and control (see for example Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996; Mosse 1996). So, the Ideal Man is defined against the womanly, the unmanly and the non-manly.

The study of Ny Mark has resulted in knowledge of the conception of an Ideal Man, expressed by the pastor Eric E:son Hammar as a spokesperson for the Christian Floda Colonies Society between 1908 and 1926. It has been found that this Ideal Man was constructed in relation to other men, or more precisely the male clients of the colonization project, who were to be transformed. These men, as well as the types of men they represent were, not surprisingly, subordinated to the Ideal Man – in fact, they were not even spoken about as “men,” but as “elements,” “human materiel,” “individuals” and “persons.”

The foundation of the colonization project was the combination of Christian virtues and practical action. This combination was central in the Ideal Man of Ny Mark. He was physically strong, competent, strenuous, strong of character, a resident and family provider. In Ny Mark, the importance of physical strength, action and usefulness is emphasized – but at the same time, there are connections with other, more gentle masculine ideals such the Ideal Man’s role as a family man and the promotion of contentment and high morals.

This stereotype of masculinity was formed in contrast to two countertypes, represented among the alcoholic clientele that the colonization project was intended for: the uncontrolled, irresponsible, vagrant man who was a burden to society, and the weak, frail, feeble and spoiled man. The Ideal Man was, of course, superior to the unmanly or non-manly countertypes, but interestingly there was an order of precedence even among the countertypes. Even if a combination of inner and outer strength was the ideal, the outer strength is admired and accentuated in Ny Mark in a way that makes clear that the physically strong man was always seen as superior to the weak. So, the strong and solid, though immoral and of weak character, was valued higher or of equal value to the weak man, just or not.

Hammar and SFC attached great importance to physical strength and gave it equal value to inner strength. A presupposition is that this kind of “muscularity” in a pronounced Christian reform project was unconventional to parts of contemporary society, or to the common sense of religious ideals. “Our intention is not to discuss and theorize, but to march and take action,” Hammar declares in an early issue of Ny Mark. In this remark lies the implicit critique of the Christians who dissociate themselves from worldly matters. As with the Christian Manliness advocates in England and America, it seems the relationship between spiritual and worldly, on a societal as well as individual level, was of great concern to Hammar.

The idealization of the home and the family stands out as a main thread in Ny Mark. The home was the base for the good citizen as well as for masculinity, and the
woman’s domain. *Ny Mark* advocates a classic division of labor, where the man was supposed to work outside the home as family provider. But in the unit of the home and family, the complementary nature of man and woman was central and requisite. Even if the man was expected to provide for his family, the family seems more important to the man than he to the family. Central aspects of the Ideal Man’s masculinity were his relation to, and function in, the family and the household. The Ideal Man should be part of a family of which he should be the provider. The statements about the woman in *Ny Mark* are partly about womanly ideals, and partly about her functions in the metamorphosis of the man. As the things said about the Ideal Woman’s qualities and functions are so distinct and explicit, these statements reversed also say things about the Ideal Man. *Ny Mark* makes clear what is demanded of the Ideal Woman: domestic skills. The children, the cooking, the clothes, the household economy and the animals were her responsibilities, in short, the home-making. The Ideal Man wasn’t expected to run a home. As the Ideal Man, in contrast to woman, had no innate or natural domestic mission – he had instead to be *domesticated*. The Ideal Woman, as the requirement for the cohesion of the family and the good home, was by those means very important to the man’s transformation from irresponsible, ruffian or weakening, into the Ideal Man, and later, as a guarantor for the maintenance of the man’s new and better self. In short, woman had responsibility for the man’s masculinity.

The idealization of the home and the family can be connected to the Christian Manliness ideas as a branch of a more general critique of modernization, civilization and urban lifestyle. Hammar’s critique of the city and city life has not yet been examined, even if this study of the masculinities of *Ny Mark* shows that Hammar found city life devastating to a robust, vigorous, strenuous and true manliness. Scholars have also claimed that the family might have been the key in the formulation of a new Christian masculinity – this was the place where the separate ideals of the gentleman and the manly-man could both be justified (see for example Morgan, 2000; Jalert, 2003).

The SFC definitions of the Ideal man and the Ideal Woman are neither new nor unique, but it shows that in Sweden, as well as in the Anglo-Saxon countries, there was concern about Christianity and manliness. There were no formal connections between Eric E:son Hammar and the Anglo-Saxon manifestations striving for Christian Manliness. Yet, I would like to argue that the colonization project of Hammar and SFC did represent a Swedish counterpart: a Social Christianity project, led by pastors of the Swedish State Church, with an obvious commitment to masculinization and upholding the masculine ideal.

**References**


**Other Sources**

Von Koch, G. H. (1907). *Hem och anstalter för löödrifvare* [Homes and ssylums for vagrants].

*Ny Mark*, 1908-1926.

Hammar’s unpublished memoirs (Stiftsbiblioteket, Västerås stadsbibliotek, Västerås, Sweden).

Hammar’s official reports 1902, 1904, 1908, 119, 1915 (Vemdalens kyrkoarkiv, Landsarkivet Östersund, Östersund, Sweden).

The Floda-archives (Stiftsbiblioteket, Västerås stadsbibliotek, Västerås, Sweden).

**Notes**

1 [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REkingsley.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REkingsley.htm) accessed 20 April 2006.

2 This, in a way, poses a risk for confusion. For example, Norman Vance uses the term Christian Manliness to describe Muscular Christianity, as he finds the latter a trivializing term that draws attention to muscles rather than to the issue of Christianity. Christian Manliness, he writes, also was the term more commonly accepted among contemporary
clergy (Vance, 1985, p. 2). On the other hand, Donald E. Hall (1994) and his fellow writers chose to use the term Muscular Christianity, as they are of the opinion that “manliness” to the creators of the genre and its ideas was synonymous with strength and power, both physical and moral (Hall, 1994, p. 9). In any case, Muscular Christianity was a man-making project. Putney (2001) defines it as Christian commitment to health and manliness.


The information of the biographic part of this article derives from Montan (1950, pp. 25-36), Hammar’s unpublished memoirs (Stiftsbiblioteket, Västerås stadsbibliotek) and official reports for 1902, 1904, 1908, 1911 and 1915 (Landsarkivet Östersund, Vemdalen's kyrkoarkiv). The information about the Floda colonies derives from the Floda archives (Stiftsbiblioteket, Västerås stadsbibliotek). My PhD thesis (Prestjan, 2004), examined the Floda colonies as a part of the early Swedish private system for alcoholism treatment.

The idealization of Norrland was part of the contemporary Swedish critique of modern society and civilization. Several Swedish scholars have written about this, see for example Sörlin (1988).

In the research project Christian Manliness - A Paradox of Modernity? Men and Religion in a Northern-European Context, 1840 to 1940, I carry out a wider study with Hammar in focus. The information about Hammar referred to here are the results from this ongoing study. The Swedish social reformer G. H. von Koch reported upon von Bodelschwing’s (and others’) activities in the booklet Hem och anstalter för lösdrivare, 1907.

Ny Mark 1910:2c, p. 18.

The issues 1908:1, 1908:1b, 1909:2, 1909:2b are not included in the study.

The “unmanly man” is not-so-manly or less manly, while the “non-manly” is not a man at all.

For example Ny Mark 1910:1, p. 2.

Ny Mark 1912:1, pp. 6-7, 1913:1, pp. 1-2, 9-11, 1914:1-2, pp. 4-7; The Floda Archives: Statistics 1908-1918. The supporting and repressive institutions referred to are alcoholism treatment institutions, workhouses, poorhouses, prisons, reformatories and hospitals.


For example Ny Mark 1910:1, p. 3, 1910:1d, p. 7, 1910:2c, p.23, 1911:2-3, p. 6, 1921:3-4, p. 4. In Ny Mark, the not accepted types of masculinities, or the men who were not men but “elements” or “individuals,” are described in many ways. In the issue 1921:3-4, p. 4, are some real cases from the Floda colony I described as unmarried, vagrants, mentally inferior, morally indolent, without character, useless for society and spoiled. In another issue, 1910:3, pp. 18-20, is a critical comment on a group of harbor workers. The message is that this special group of workers was close to vagrancy, criminality and alcoholism and a good example of how a man should not be. The harbor workers lived apart from home.
and family, their work was irregular, they led a vagrant life, they drank and gambled and could not save their income.


16 *Ny Mark* 1910:2, p. 28. My translation.


18 *Ny Mark* 1909-1927.

19 *Ny Mark* 1916:4, pp. 4-5. See also *Ny Mark* 1915:4, p. 7, 1919:1-4, pp. 9, 52.


23 *Ny Mark* 1909:2, p. 7.

Anna Prestjan
Department of History, Örebro University, SE-701 82 Örebro/Sweden
E: anna.prestjan@hum.oru.se
Skin Gods: Circumcising the Built Male Body

Roland Boer

Is the body of the male bodybuilder a substitution for his penis, that one part he cannot enhance through weights? Conventional wisdom would have us believe that it is, but I am not so sure. In search of an answer I slide from body, then to penis, to foreskin and back again. On that search I make use of both Lacan and Freud. Lacan gives me a theoretical key with his idea of the ‘little object a’ (objet petit a), the item that simultaneously is excluded from the system in question and what keeps that whole system together. It would seem that the body-builder’s penis is precisely this objet petit a. However, Freud suggests to me that objet petit a is not so much the penis as the foreskin that is cut away in circumcision. The catch is that circumcision, the mark of the religion of Moses, also points to nothing less than the absence of God’s body. From that point I return to the built body to argue that the ideal body is in fact a circumcised body, but one that is ultimately as unattainable as God’s body.

A personal story, if I may. Writing and pumping, even preparing to write by pumping, I was sweating it out in the tiny corner in which I write. In my amateurish way I work through a regular routine with my collection of dumbbells and barbells, having heeded Arnold Schwarzenegger’s advice that all he ever worked with were free weights. As I labored away at the various pull-ups, rows, presses and curls, a recurrent pain in my left elbow asserted itself. The pain persisted, so I went to the doctor. An X-Ray ensued and a small protrusion on my radius that rubbed the tendon near my elbow showed up, causing an inflammation. The prescription: rest or a steroid injection...

My particular, somewhat self-indulgent reflection is on the male body in body-building, but I am going to play around with that body through the five sets of my argument, each time adding another few kilograms to either end of my barbell. I begin, then, with those big, round, and all too feminine built male bodies, only to move on to the next set of repetitions where I focus on what sticks out, or rather doesn’t, the penis. After considering the penis of the male builder I find that those who have thought about such things fall short, and so I turn, in my third set, to Lacan’s notion of objet petit a in order to make sense of that little thing that sticks out from the body-builder, his penis. But Lacan can only get me so far. For the next set I ask Freud to add a few more weights, and as he does so he mentions the idea of circumcision. It is not so much the penis that is the key, it seems to me, but the foreskin that is cut away. Yet, Freud also points out that circumcision signals the absent body of God, and this takes me to the final set where I return to the
built body. That ideal body turns out to be a circumcised body, as unreal and as unattainable as God’s own body.

I am accustomed to reading with the help of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, although I must admit I like to play with both rather than follow one or another orthodoxy (and there are plenty of those in scholarship on Freud and Lacan). Freud certainly loved his jokes, and collected them with zeal, telling them whenever he could. Lacan too was often given to playfulness, punning, teasing, laughing. Rather than engage in what we might call Lacanian or Freudian hagiography, I prefer to engage their more playful spirits.

**Posing**

Let me just say one thing, guys, it was as good as an erection. There I was, on stage in my posing oils and black trunks, and the crowd really loved me. I mean I moved ‘em with my posing exhibition. It was just my fuckin’ time. (‘Vinnie’ cited in Fussell, 1991, p. 135)

Nothing is more masculine than the built male body, all muscle and power and heterosexual aggression. Or is it? Is not that built body more like the female pin-up or the beauty pageant? Are not male bodybuilders there to be looked at, gazed upon and admired, especially by men. These bodies demand the gaze, for is not the whole purpose of body-building, with its posing routines and competitions, finally to have other men look at and assess the bodies on display? The skin – rippled, stripped and cling-wrap tight – is nothing but a screen upon which the bodybuilder is projected and looked at. This skin/screen is therefore an object of passivity: the beefcake has everything done to him. All he does is flex and pose. Yet, in order to be looked at and assessed, a jock sweats it out for two, four, six hours a day: an intense program of eating, vomiting, pumping and imbibing ‘the juice’ so that, in the end, he may be gazed upon by other men. And then in the posing routine itself, it is not so much the best body that wins, but the one who succeeds in best producing the emotive fantasy of muscle, power, grace and poise, especially in the final ‘pose down.’

Yet, if his being looked upon, his passivity, codes him as conventionally female, so also does the body shape. For bodybuilders seek immensely rounded body shapes. The curving shoulders, rippling backs, bulking upper and forearms, shapely thighs and watermelon calves – all of these give off a series of contradictory messages in relation to dominant conventions regarding body shape. For the rounded and curved shapes of male bodybuilders evoke the now older Western expectations of the curved female, with large breasts, rounded belly, fuller arms and thighs, and a small waist. Indeed, the desire for silicon implants in male pectorals mirrors the use of such implants in female breasts. To complicate matters a little further, in female body-building, but also in male gay body-building, the desire is not so much for rounded bulk, but for definition, for the ‘cut’ body, in which the angles are sharper and the lines more angular – older conventions for heterosexual males are now appropriated for women and gay men.

What then of the aggressive masculinity of these bodies, of the action figures dressed in combat fatigues, of Stallone as Rambo, of Schwarzenegger as Terminator,
Commando or Conan? Anyone who has been to a muscle show will attest to the overt heterosexuality that is obsessively foregrounded. Yet, I suggest that what lies beneath this chest-beating is a practice that is coded as feminine in Western culture – the presentation of curvaceous bodies to absorb a penetrating male gaze – and queer – the enjoyment of watching and desiring male bodies, and of being watched. Bodybuilders may then be said to protest too much: the overkill, in more than one sense, of aggressive masculinity nervously attempts to efface the underlying queerness of body-building. It is as though these men think that if they shout their heterosexuality loud enough, then the other codes will be effaced, forgetting that such efforts merely foreground the deviance of male body-building. They are heroes and sissies all at once.

Penis

You looked like a human fucking penis! Veins were poppin’ every which way! (‘Vinnie’ in Fussell, 1991, p. 235)

A good pump is better than coming, ... the best feeling you can have. (Arnold Schwarzenegger in Gaines, 1977, p. 48)

What, then, of the penis? Is that not supposed to be the anomaly, that which sticks out and abruptly halts the feminine slide of male bodybuilders? Concern with the builder’s penis comes rippling through Kenneth Dutton’s The Perfectible Body (1995), in which much space is given over to the question of the penis, from the small appendages on Greek statues and paintings, to its strategic covering in early beefcake shots to current discussions in psychoanalysis. The irony for the male builder is that it is precisely the penis that cannot be strengthened, enlarged or built up by lifting weights or working out on a machine. What happens, argues Dutton, is that the body replaces the penis: in being able to build its strength and potency, and thereby being able to exhibit masculinity, the body becomes a huge penis, as it were, the location of sexual power and exhibition. What the built body represents, then, is the builder’s penis, or at least the ideal penis the builder would like to have but cannot have.

For Rosalind Miles, the body, especially those of actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger,

becomes a public phallus, huge, rock-hard, gleaming and veined with blood. And as the phallus first stirred and came to life in the primeval swamps of the male imagination, so males above all are uniquely alert to its siren call and baleful power. Becoming an athlete, bodybuilder or ‘jock’ is therefore a clear and overt statement of manhood and male potency, and the clearest possible message to other men. (Miles, 1991, p. 111)

The usual sequence for such an argument begins with the suggestion that the penis is a symbol of male power. However, the inability to enlarge it through body-building creates a problem which is solved by displacing the penis with the whole body, which then becomes the site of displaced prowess and power. The particular penis makes way for a
universally suggestive phallic body, which is a much more appropriate signifier of universal power and potency. And here body-building comes into its own: the larger the body, the greater the power. Through its displaced representation of the penis, a male body is able to accrue power directly in proportion to body size. So in the end, all that a bulking body represents is its own penis.

**The Little Object**

Those who have seen professional bodybuilders naked will attest, not only to the unfoundedness of this assumption [the apparent tininess of the male organ hidden beneath the posing trunks], but also to the remarkable adaptability of the male sexual organs and compressive powers of Lycra. (Dutton, 1995, p. 308)

One of the striking characteristics about symbols is the discrepancy between the symbols and what penises are actually like. Male genitals are fragile, squishy, delicate things; even when erect, the penis is spongy, seldom straight, and rounded at the tip, while testicles are imperfect spheres, always vulnerable, never still. (Dyer, 1993, p. 112)

It is not as simple as it appears, not so directly correlative. The built male body does not represent the penis so purely and simply, and this is where arguments like those put forward by Dutton and Miles lack stamina. Rather, the penis is but a little thing that holds the whole regime of body-building together. In order to make that argument, I turn to Jacques Lacan, for it seems to me that body-building for males is a very Lacanian activity. In my local gym, dog-eared copies of Lacan lie on the small table near the door, there for the occasional jocks to peruse in between sets.

The key term is one that Lacan himself insisted should not be translated, namely objet petit a. He notoriously refuses to define it, letting the sense emerge from his continual references to it. But that is precisely what objet petit a is: it is ‘lost object’ (Lacan, 1994, p. 180) that one can never quite locate. In order to get a sense of it, let me use an example Lacan borrows from Freud, the famous fort-da game of Freud’s grandson (see Lacan, 1994, 239).³ Freud noticed that whenever his mother was away, he would throw objects away and cry a drawn-out ‘o-o-o-o’, which he interpreted as fort, ‘away.’ One day he did this with a cotton-reel out of his curtained cot, except that this time he pulled it back and said with great satisfaction ‘da’, ‘here’ (Freud, 2001, vol XVIII, pp. 14-15). Freud interprets the game as a compensation for the absence of his grandson’s mother, as revenge for her absence and as a desire to be an adult – all things that are out of the child’s reach. For Lacan, this little cotton reel is an excellent instance of objet petit a, that item that is expelled and excluded, and yet precisely because it is excluded, objet petit a is crucial for the system as a whole.

Objet petit a is, then, that which ‘sticks out,’ the item (thought, detail of a picture, word in a text) that cannot be incorporated within the whole picture, that cannot be explained in the usual way, and thereby becomes the focus of anxiety and repression. Yet
this thing that ‘sticks out,’ the inconsequential and unnecessary item, is in fact crucial for the structure of the whole (text, picture, pattern of thought etc.).

Let me give two examples of objet petit a: picture a well-heeled lawyer, for whom 14 hour days are traded off for some of the best accommodation in town, an expensive car, well-cut clothes from designer boutiques, and a sharp mind that enables her to rise quickly through the ranks of legal professionals. At the same time, she is a heroin addict, easily able to afford the cost yet unable to break the habit. In fact, her addiction threatens her whole career, and the few who know about it tell her so. If only she could break the habit, then that threat would disappear. However, another perspective – the one I follow here – suggests that it is precisely this heroin habit that holds her life together. It is the linchpin: without it everything would collapse – high life, sustained concentration, long work days, and so on. Or take the case of a mundane, suburban middle-class man, with a spouse, three children, home mortgage, two cars and a middle management job with the local branch of a multinational company. Each weekday he works regular hours, while on the weekends he watches his children play sport, mows the lawns, washes the cars and reads the newspapers. An ordinary, thoroughly boring and unexciting middle-class life, except that he has a liking for S/M, both as a personal experience and as an item of pornography. So he searches the Internet late at night, slips away for the occasional Sunday afternoon or weekend ‘conference.’ A foible that threatens to undo his calm life? Not so: rather, the very unexceptionality of his life is based upon his S/M; the bondage and discipline he so much enjoys ensure that he can maintain his boring, normal, life. These examples flip the usual perception around, suggesting that what is excluded is actually central and crucial; after that it is possible to notice the influence of what is excluded on everything else – the lawyer’s habit and the middle-class man’s foible.

So it is with body-building, which turns out to be a classic example of Lacan’s arguments concerning objet petit a. It is an inverse relationship: the more the body is built in order to compensate for the inability to build up the penis, the more the penis stays outside the body-building regime. The more the voluntary muscles of the rest of the body can be pumped with blood, the tighter the skin and more clearly defined the striated muscles and veins, the less the penis itself becomes.4 (Eugene Sandow, who seems to have set the agenda in so many ways for contemporary body-building, including the use of classical postures like those of Michelangelo’s David, used to pose for photographs with a fig leaf strategically placed over his genitals.) The phallic body is that which is hard, erect and firm, while the penis is squashed into ever smaller posing trunks, drawing ever nearer to that dreaded medical condition, micropenis (Gad et al., 1997).

Yet as it shrinks before the bulk of the built body, as it is compressed into the tightest Lycra, the more crucial the penis becomes. Without it the body-builder would not undergo all the pain, discipline and devotion to build his body in the first place. Like Freud’s grandson who desperately wanted to recover that little reel, so also the body-builder wants desperately to recover a potent penis. Indeed, most, if not all, men imagine that their penises are inadequate in some sense – too short, too narrow, too bent, and so on. So, they imagine some ideal penis that they would like to have – long, thick, straight and with an immense stamina, able to come all the time and satisfy the imaginary man or
woman or... What happens here is that their real penises, soft, impotent, short, thin and struggling to come, are wished away in favor of an ideal other.

So all the attitude, the anger required to lift and press massive weights, the posturing and modeling on other builders, the shouting and screaming at the weights, ‘the Walk,’ the aggression and ‘roid rages’ – the desire, in short, to be gods – turn out to be futile efforts to recover that little object, the penis, even in the gym to which builders escape to run through their sets.

Foreskin

I feared that complete exposure might reveal a lagging body part to the judges. (Fussell, 1991, p. 143)

Yet, I have a lingering doubt about all of this. Is the penis really objet petit a? Or rather, is it the only version of this little object that forever eludes the body-builder? I suspect not. Thus far I have slid down from the rounded, bulging, rock-hard body of the builder to that small, squashed object that cannot be built up, no matter what spam emails might promise. There is, however, one further slip to make, and that is to what is at the end of the penis, or rather, what was at the end of the penis: the foreskin.

The foreskin is that little flap that can be, and often is, sliced away. Is this not the proper objet petit a? Let me pick up a small hint from Lacan (in an untranslated seminar from 1963 called l’Angoisse) and then pick up Freud. Lacan suggests that circumcision is an excellent rendering of the work of objet petit a. Let me playfully suggest that what Lacan means is that the foreskin is really that little object. Yet, for a deeper sense of what this means, I need to let Freud come forward, especially his astonishing discussion of circumcision in Moses and Monotheism.

Moses intrigues Freud: circumcision is, he suggests, the clear mark of Moses’ monotheism, and yet it also indicates the nature of that belief. Circumcision is the sign of a religion that forbids representing God in any way. No image, statue, or any other representation of God may be made. In other words, circumcision marks the absent body, especially the absent body of God. Or, as I will rephrase it, the foreskin cut away in circumcision represents the absent body of God. That is why Moses’ God commands that it be cut away and discarded.

Let us take a moment to see how Freud gets to this point. For Freud circumcision is the direct link to the monotheism that the Egyptian Moses brought to the Israelites. It is, as he points out in Moses and Monotheism, the ‘key-fossil’ (Freud, 2001, vol 23, p. 39) that allows him to unlock his own hypothesis about Moses (that he was an Egyptian, that the Israelites killed him and elevated him to divine status, that he gave the Israelites a variation on the monotheism of Akhenaten although this did not emerge properly until later). Circumcision was a distinctly Egyptian practice that Moses bequeathed to the Israelites in their journey from Egypt into the wilderness. It is circumcision that links Moses to Egypt: practiced by the Levites, the core group from Egypt who first adopted the practice at Moses’ instigation, it was passed on to other groups that joined their ranks later.
The religion of Moses brought a ‘far grander conception of God, or, as we might put it more modestly, the conception of a grander God’ (Freud, 2001, vol 23, p. 112). Moses did this by banning any images of God. The ban on seeing, hearing or touching this God is crucial for Freud, for ‘it meant that a sensory perception was given to second place to what may be called an abstract idea – a triumph of intellectuality over sensuality or, strictly speaking, an instinctual renunciation, with all its necessary psychological consequences’ (Freud, 2001, vol 23, p. 113). Abstract and intellectual, such a notion of God led to a far higher feeling of self-worth, but it also checked ‘the brutality and tendency to violence which are apt to appear where the development of muscular strength is the popular ideal’ (Freud, 2001, vol 23, p. 115, italics mine).

Who is this God of whom no images are allowed? It is none other than Moses himself. Freud’s own myth is that in a rage of rebellious jealousy the Israelites killed Moses, and then, in order to assuage their guilt, elevated him to divine status. The sons kill the father and then make him a god. This father-god is then the one who may not be represented in any way; he is the one whose body is absent in order to overcome brutality, violence and orgiastic celebrations of the body. And the sign of the absent body of that father-god is none other than circumcision – a rite ordered by the father-god as a sign of holiness. God has no body, in fact cannot have one, and circumcision marks its removal. Cut away the flap of skin, discard it, and you throw away the possibility of representing God’s/Moses’ body.

**Body**

Thanks to my diet, my skin was thinner than airmail paper. And with my varnish, I was browner than a buried pharaoh. (Fussell, 1991, p. 197)

What is the useless piece of skin at the end of a penis? A man. (Anonymous)

I have slipped all the way, from built body, down into the posing trunks to search for the penis, and then out to the tip in a vain search for the foreskin that Freud’s Moses has already sliced off and discarded. And I have gone searching for that little object, *objet petit a*, the one that is excluded in some fashion only to be crucial. Thus, as the one muscle that cannot be built up, the penis looked for all the world like that little thing. Lagging behind, it refused to join the crown. But then, with a little help from Freud, it seems as though the foreskin might just be that *objet petit a*, for it really is outside the system. (Perhaps the ultimate foreskin outside the system is that of Christ, for it would not have been resurrected with him. That Christological anomaly has sent more than one person searching for his holy foreskin, albeit to no avail (see Shell, 1997).) Yet, Freud has delivered me an unexpected twist: he has taken me all the way back to the body, to God’s body. Or is that Moses’ body? Or...  

So, as a final step, we need to return to the strapping body of the builder. One might be forgiven for thinking that the ultimate aim of body-building is indeed to circumcise the body itself. For body-builders do all they can to minimize the skin. To begin with, the male bodies of builders are completely hairless, although it is a topic not openly
discussed in the magazines. Depilation is, after all, still largely a female affair, but what it does is remove a distinctive feature of the skin – its hair. Even more, before a posing session, bodybuilders will seek to produce a ‘shrink-wrap’ effect, reducing as far as possible subcutaneous fat and water so that the skin will cling as closely as possible to the muscles and veins that stand out on the muscle surface. This involves starvation dieting, avoiding sodium and calories in the weeks leading up to an event, and then, a little over a week before, loading up with protein before switching to a high carbohydrate load in the last few days. It also requires the reduction, if not complete stoppage, of steroid intake to avoid water retention. The desired result of such a carefully balanced program is ‘elasticized, parchment paper for skin’ (Fussell, 1991, p. 186). Further, in order to highlight under the harsh lights of competition the curves, dips, crevices and mounds of muscle beneath the skin, the tan is crucial, gained in tanning beds and with a host of specialty tanning products, clogging up the skin and staining everything the builder touches. The posing oil finishes off the effect, sealing the tan in place and making every bump and gully glisten.

Then there is the unending attention to the alteration of the shape and the size of the muscles ‘beneath’ the skin. (In fact, it is only the voluntary and striated muscles, not the smooth and involuntary muscles, that seem to be of interest.) The talk is always of muscle size and definition, and in body-building circles there is much interest in muscle anatomy – the lats and pecs and traps and so on. Whatever can be done by the bodybuilder will be done to make the muscles look how they should – steroids and endless chemicals, food cramming, muscle tearing, rectal bleeding, vomiting, ammonia fumes, inflammatories, extraordinary diets, tanning agents, oil and so on. Indeed, I would argue that the skin is pared down to the point where it marks its own absence. Tanned, paper thin, the body-builder desperately tries to circumcise himself.

Yet, there is one final question: for all the efforts to circumcise the built body, is this not a present body, in contrast to God’s absent body that circumcision signals? The answer is disarmingly simple. The ideal built body is ultimately unattainable. No matter how hard they train, how much they torture themselves, no matter how much pain, there is no gaining that ideal. In the same way that circumcision of the penis signals the absent body of God, so also the circumcision of the built body shows that it is always beyond reach, that it too, is a version of objet petit a. And what is that ideal body? If you happen to peruse muscle manuals in your vain search for the ideal body, then you will find, usually in the last pages in an appendix, a series of pictures of the muscles without skin, or rather whole human bodies with the skin cut away (e.g. Laura & Dutton, 1991, pp. 222-38). Of course, they are meant to show the muscles underneath, the ones that you should build up, the ones to which you should devote specific routines. But what we have is a grotesque, unattainable body, for it is a circumcised body, a ‘cut’ body. This would mean that the perfect, divine and unattainable body is skinless. And the perfect posing routine would have a group of men on stage, with only bare, bulging and bleeding striated muscle for us to gaze upon.
References

Notes
1 ‘He had achieved the look gained only by the most advanced builders. While my body was a mess of straight edges and right angles, his, so preposterously muscled, was a mass of curves, fleshy ellipses and ovals’ (Fussell, 1991, p. 50).
2 In the two versions of this paper presented at different conferences, my oral delivery is part of a larger performance piece, in which I strip down to gym jocks or G-string, throw a set of classic poses and juxtapose them with slides of vast bodybuilders in the same poses.
The audience is then asked to judge which bodies they prefer. Apart from the sheer narcissism of such an act, there is an immense pleasure in being watched and ogled.


4 So I worry about another of my great loves – long distance cycling – where ‘bicycler’s penis’ is a risk. In that crucial zone of the perineum, compression and damage to the nerves may lead to impotence (Andersen & Bovim, 1997; York, 1990).

5 ‘They swept their arms out to the side, as if the sheer massivity of their lat wings necessitated it. They burrowed their heads slightly into their shoulders to make their necks appear larger. They looked bowlegged, absurdly stiff, and infinitely menacing’ (Fussell, 1991, p. 55).

6 I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer of this essay for this point.

7 Elsewhere Freud speaks of circumcision as a symbol of castration (Freud, 2001, vol 23, p. 91). It is an act with other parallels such as knocking out a front tooth (Freud, 2001, vol 15, p. 165) or blinding (Freud, 2001, vol 23, p. 190). Alternatively, it is a ‘recognizable relic’ of the primeval castration visited by a jealous father on growing boys (Freud, 2001, vol 22, p. 86-7). He interprets it as a sign of submission to the father’s will – the one who carries out the symbolic castration. This is reinforced by the observation that in many primal societies circumcision takes place at puberty as a rite of initiation (Freud, 2001, vol 13, p 153).

8 This is also a distinctly masculine holiness. Rashkow, for instance, argues that circumcision, as that which asserts the possible threat of castration and its denial, allows the son to emulate the father while being dependent on the deity’s power. Circumcision ensures the chain of male connection, yet it also is a feminizing process, threatening to make the Israelite male female through bleeding and castration (Rashkow, 1993, p. 91-5).

Roland Boer, Associate Professor
Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University
Victoria 3800/AUSTRALIA
e: roland.boer@arts.monash.edu.au
Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and the ‘Yan Daudu

Frank A. Salamone

The Hausa category of ‘yan daudu offers a challenge to the simple dichotomy of male-female gender identities. These men are categorized as neither male nor female but as an ambiguous middle category. As such they challenge the rigid divisions of Hausa ideal culture between males and females. Examination offers insight into the categories of male-female and provides incentive for further research.

There has long been an argument between advocates of nature and nurture regarding the function each has shaping human behavior. Recently, sociobiologists like Napoleon Chagnon (1997, 1988), Edward O. Wilson (1975), and Robin Fox (1997) have had particular influence in shaping the argument regarding the inherent, or biological nature of masculinity. The significance of the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity and of gender roles in general has been relatively neglected in the elevation of biological theories in the social sciences and their employment to explain cultural issues. I am not denying the importance of biology, simply stressing the manner in which culture gives meaning to it in its social landscape. (For relevant works on sociobiology see Jerome H. Barkow, et. al., 1992 and Robert Boyd & Peter Richerson, 1994.)

Specifically, this article examines the manner in which the Hausa people of Nigeria define ideal masculinity. That definition has a role to play within the complex ethnic sociocultural framework of West Africa in which the Hausa operate. Much of what it is to be a Hausa, and, therefore the shape of Hausa interaction with their neighbors is inextricably bound within the Hausa concept of masculinity. Challenges to that concept, and reinforcements of it, come from men and “men who talk like women,” the ‘yan daudu.

Ideal masculine behavior and challenges to that behavior flow from a cultural definition of masculinity shaped to permit the Hausa to gain success as rulers and traders within their cultural landscape. Maintenance of ethnic identity toward other groups is essential in structuring daily interaction in the West African landscape. This maintenance of ethnic identity is particularly crucial at the borders of the area, where groups can and do switch ethnic identities to gain favorable positions. Therefore, although the Hausa are concerned with guarding their concept of masculinity throughout their territory, they are exceptionally careful in safeguarding their concept of the ideal masculine role at the borders, where new recruits to the Hausa identity are made.
The Hausa in the Context of West Africa

There are about 50 million Hausa speakers in West Africa, primarily in Northern Nigeria and Southern Niger. A common language masks immense variation from community to community, a variation made greater by the process of “becoming Hausa” in which minority groups change their ethnic identities to gain various privileges reserved to the ruling class.

The “Hausa” consist of the Hausa-speaking population of Northern Nigeria and those areas of Niger in which Hausa is spoken, plus those Hausa who have emigrated for trade or other purposes to other countries of West Africa, such as Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso. Additionally, in West Africa, people apply the label ‘Hausa’ to any stranger who speaks Hausa and practices Islam. This is a departure from the original use of the name to denote the Habe people’s language. The Habe established seven independent but related states in the area: Biram, Daura, Kano, Katsina, Gobir, Rano, and Zazzau or Zaria.

The Fulani conquered these states in the early 19th century, waging a jihad against them for not being Muslim enough. Under Shehu Usman dan Fodio they established the Sokoto Caliphate, incorporating 15 states headed by Fulani Emirs. The Habe set up states at Abuja and Maradi, successors to those of Zaria and Katsina. They also established a new state at Argungu. These states have preserved Habe customs, largely independent of Fulani ones.

At the same time the Fulani rulers of the conquered Hausa states increasingly incorporated the Habe customs of their conquered people, blending them with the Islamic Fulani customs they had brought with them. Intermarriage further complicated the picture, mixing peoples and customs. Thus "Hausa" now refers to the original Habe population and the mixed Hausa-Fulani population of rulers. Moreover, it is often extended to other people like the Kanuri, Taureg and other West African people who have assumed Hausa language and culture to gain some kind of political or economic advantage in their interactions with members of other ethnic groups.

The term Hausa is applied to pagan Hausa speakers scattered in the middle of the Hausa area. People in Nigeria call them Maguzawa (magicians) but also consider them to be part of the Hausa ethnic group. Many of the ‘yan daudu and shamanic practices that challenge Islamic hegemony and Hausa masculine concepts are rooted in Maguzawa religious practices.

The coming of British colonialism offered a further set of challenges to the ever-evolving mix of gender and political concepts. The relative gender equality of the Maguzawa and Habe was challenged by the more rigid male dominance of the Fulani and their eventual partners, the British. Christianity and Islam agreed on the appropriateness of male dominance, for the good of the weak female. Men had to shelter and protect women, while women tempted men from their duties. No matter what the orthodoxy, the older virtues kept emerging from the margins of society in the form of the alliance of women and ‘yan daudu with parishioners of the older religion, one more in tune with gender equality and options.
Gender relationships and concepts of masculinity must be understood within the context of Hausa history and ethnic relationships. The Hausa have been in the process of expansion for many centuries. Much of that expansion has been peaceful, based on their skill at statecraft and commerce, a great deal of which is built upon family relationships and negotiations. Patrilineal family ties are the strands that tie the web of relationships together.

Business is conducted with handshakes and one’s word. The system of markets, traders, and families binds together the various parts of the state and subsequently the state itself is bound to outside units. For example, village markets in rural areas meet periodically, on three- or four-day cycles. These markets are tied to those in larger settlements that have daily markets. In turn, the larger markets are bound to a still larger central market in the regional capital. Officials tied similarly to the central authority govern each of these markets.

Similarly, all Muslim Hausa social organization is stratified. Occupation, wealth, and patron-client relationships play a part in the system, but birth is at its root. Family is a key factor in the hierarchical ladder. Sons are expected to follow their father’s occupation and his wishes. Society, in theory, is held together by filial loyalty. The patron-client relationship is patterned on the father-son relationship and loyalty to the Sultan and emirs, indeed to all officials, is that of family members to one’s father.

Although less complex in social organization than Muslim Hausa, the Maguzawa are also organized along patrilineal lines. Their villages are composed of exogamous patrilineal kin. Both Muslim and “pagan” Hausa form their organizations around male figures. The Maguzawa, however, retain greater privileges for women who are freer to go out in public, usually exposing their breasts with no reproach. The Maguzawa do not hold to wife-seclusion in any circumstance. For the Muslim Hausa wife-seclusion is an ideal and put into practice by those who can afford it. It helps distinguish them from their neighbors and serves as an ethnic boundary marker. Moreover, patrilateral kinship provides the fulcrum on which marriage alliances are formed, with men generally seeking marriage with their patrilateral parallel cousins, further emphasizing the male tie.

Men serve as household heads and are responsible for agriculture, collecting activities, marketing, sewing, laundry, building repairs, and transportation. Women are responsible for cooking, house cleaning, childcare, and also follow craft specialties and carry on trade, often through young daughters. Women are expected to be modest and to stay within the household unless accompanied by male family members or older post-menopausal women.

Historically, the Hausa and Hausa-Fulani ruled over local tribes, appointing village heads. These local communities were held as fiefs to feudal lords. Again, this system emphasized male rule and a particular image of masculinity in which calmness and male solidarity were essential. The subject tribes often were not Muslim and their women were allowed greater freedoms. Therefore, control of Hausa women was essential in structuring ethnic relations and maintaining ethnic boundaries. Position within the social structure and the cultural landscape determined gender relationships and cultural definitions.
British colonial rule, beginning in the early 20th century, changed the system. In general, however, the British system of indirect rule simply strengthened the central authority while pretending to rule through local rulers. The British relied heavily on their Hausa-Fulani allies to maintain control of Northern Nigeria. In Niger, the French made no pretext of indirect rule and simply centralized the system openly. The result was a greater emphasis on male rule as personified in the dual mandate of colonial and native authorities.

Finally, the Hausa became more identified with Islam under colonial rule. The British found it necessary to strengthen Muslim leaders who were their allies against “pagans” who sought to resist the imposition of colonial rule or Hausa hegemony. The British perpetrated the fiction that Northern Nigeria was mainly Islamic. The truth was different in 1900. Allegiance to the West African Fulani Islamic ethos of male dominance helped unite Hausa and distinguish them from surrounding “pagan” peoples such as the Gungawa, Kamperi, and others (Michael Smith, 1955; Salamone, 1998).

**Hausa Islamic Practices**

Given the landscape in which the Hausa exist, the Islam of many Hausa groups is syncretic. Ralph Faulkingham (1975) notes that the Muslim and “pagan” Hausa in the southern Niger village he studied believed in the same spirits and in the same origin myth for these spirits as well. According to the myth, Allah called Adama (“the woman”) and Adamu (“the man”) to Him and bade them to bring all their children. They hid some of their children. Allah asked them where their children were. They said that they had brought all their children to Him. He then told them that the hidden children would belong to the spirit world.

The Hausa, therefore, share in the common Nigerian practice of maintaining systems of belief with ancient roots in the area alongside the universal religions of Islam or Christianity. These beliefs combine family spirits with relations to the primordial spirits of a particular site, providing supernatural sanction to the relationship between claims on resources. Indigenous theology links dead ancestors to the spirits of place in a union that protects claims and relationships to the land. Spirits of place include trees, rock outcroppings, a river, snakes, and other animals and objects. Rituals and prayers dedicated to the spirits of family and place reinforce loyalty to communal virtues and the authority of the elders in defending ancient beliefs and practices. In return, the spirits offer protection from misfortune, adjudication, and divination through seers, or shamans. Evil is appropriately punished, for shamans or diviners work with the spirits to ensure good and counteract evil.

The continuation of traditional religious rituals and beliefs among the Hausa is not incompatible with counting oneself as a Muslim, for among the Hausa, individual participation in Islam varies according to a number of variables, including wealth and power. The more wealth and power one has, the greater the strict adherence to Islam. Furthermore, traditional Hausa religion, which the Maguzawa (“pagan” or “traditional Hausa,” who are considered “people of magic”) continue to practice, attracts a number of Muslim Hausa at one time or another.

This religion is spirit-centered. Following Islamic Hausa hierarchical principles, the spirits form hierarchies of good and evil. Sacrificial offerings and spirit possession are
prominent characteristics of the worship. This family-centered religion has a number of diviners who serve as curers. Moreover, the majority of Muslim Hausa, who participate in the spirit possession cult, or Bori cult, are women and members of the lower classes.

Jacqueline Monfouga-Nicolas (1967) states that most members of the spirit possession cult are women and prostitutes. In other words, they are socially marginal people. Michael Onwuejeogwu (1969) argues that Bori cults have a homogeneity of organization and meaning throughout Hausaland. Moreover, they are, in his opinion, vestiges of Habe religion. Faulkingham (1975) disagrees with these findings, noting that there is more diversity in Hausaland than Monfouga-Nicolas and Onwuejeogwu grant. Muslims and arna (pagan) believe in the same spirits, but Muslims claim that they do not need to perform rituals to these spirits. However, many do perform them, depending on the occasion, and additionally they consult the Bori doctor for aid.

One finds the ‘yan daudu in these marginal areas of religion. In this system, men who are more or less exclusive homosexuals (not always, but often transvestite or at least effeminate males) have sexual relationships with men not culturally distinguished from other men. These “men who talk like women” form a link between the old non-Muslim Hausa and the Muslim Hausa, indicating where stress lines still exist between the old and new Hausa identities, for the coming of Islam to West African societies necessitated a rethinking of numerous cultural and social arrangements, not least of which were the relationship between men and women and the organization of family life.

Muslim Hausa social organization is highly stratified. Not only is stratification based on occupation, wealth, birth, and patron-client ties, it is also based on seniority and gender, even within the family. The system is one also marked by patronage. Wealth and power confer great prestige on men, who form patron-client ties. The stress on power and dominance permeates society, except in its marginal area. One’s status is also determined by the status of one's family, and within the family, males, at least theoretically, are dominant.

Both traditional and Muslim Hausa form patrilineal ties. The Muslim Hausa build their ties on a patriloclal extended family that occupies a compound. The head is a male who directs cooperative activities, and compound members cooperate in agriculture and share in its products. Occupational specialties are pursued on a more individual basis. There is a great deal of formal respect and prescribed avoidance behavior among Hausa. The mai gida (compound head) expects great deference. Women generally are secluded whenever finances allow.

The participation of women in the Bori cult among the Muslim Hausa, however, is not necessarily a sign of their lack of power. Zainab Kabir (1985) states that the status of women in early Hausa society was high. In his words, they were “not confined.” They interacted freely with men, marrying at a later age than is now common among the Muslim Hausa. They were able to own their own farms. They were also important members of the Bori cult. Furthermore, they had a significant role in domestic and clan religious rituals. Interestingly, some Hausa groups had matrilineal inheritance, and it was not uncommon for elite women to be queens or titleholders. The famous warrior queen Amina was but one of many famous Hausa queens. The Hausa even had a title for women in charge of the Bori, Bori Magadiya.
Diviners, or shamans, foretell the future and deal with personal problems. They fit into the scheme of religious specialists, one that includes priests and magicians. The boundary among the categories is a shifting one at best. Diviners continue to play an important part in determining the causes of luck, both good and bad fortune. This includes the nature and cause of disease. Among the Hausa it is necessary to point out that many of the Muslim holy men are themselves types of diviners who make amulets, which include decoctions of the ink in which pious texts have been written. They also manipulate sand patterns or use the stars to tell the future.

Significantly, there is some discussion of males who attend Bori rituals as being homosexuals. The Bori rituals among the Hausa appear to be rituals of inversion, and among the Hausa homosexuality is considered an inversion of appropriate male heterosexuality. The Bori cult is widely understood as being a refuge from the strongly patriarchal ideal of Hausa Islam. Thus both women and effeminate males find some respite there. Although ranked low in official Hausa hierarchies, Hausa males are not only strongly attached to their mothers and sisters, they also have a fear of the mysterious power of women, a fear found in many male-dominated societies.

Although the Bori cult may be a “survival” from pre-Islamic Hausa religion, it differs among the Muslim Hausa from that practiced among related peoples, such as the Gungawa, or among non-Muslim Hausa, such as the Maguzawa. It has a different meaning for these Hausa. Thus, when Fremont E. Besmer (1983) states that the spirit rides the possessed and that this is somehow a symbol of homosexuality, it does not mean that it has the same meaning for the Maguzawa, Gungawa, or other non-Muslim groups who have the Bori cult. Among the Muslim Hausa homosexual transvestites, or ‘yan daudu, play a prominent role. Dau du, a praise name for any Malidoma, or ranked title, here specifically refers to the Prince, a Bori spirit who is a handsome young man.

These ‘yan daudu sell various foods at ceremonies, mainly luxury foods such as fried chicken, and serve as pimps for prostitutes. Women who attend Hausa Bori rituals are deemed to be prostitutes. Renée Pittin (1983) lists three activities for ‘yan daudu: procuring, cooking, and prostitution. She argues that there is a close tie between prostitutes and ‘yan daudu. Moreover, in combining male and female roles, the ‘yan daudu mediate between men and women, occupying an ambiguous category. Living among the prostitutes further provides a disguise for men seeking homosexual activity. Protection and discretion are provided through this arrangement. The Bori cult provides a niche for marginal people of all kinds, not simply women or homosexuals. Butchers, night-soil workers, musicians, and poor farmers are welcome there. Mentally disturbed people of all classes similarly seek refuge among the Bori devotees.

**Muslim Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and Gender Relations**

Muslim envoys, originally merchants and wandering teachers (mallamai), and later government sponsored and trained teachers, believe that Islam is the proper religion for men. Islam, they teach, is compatible with the nature of man. It does not ask the impossible of converts. Human nature needs guidance, but it is not depraved.

Man by nature is concupiscent. Instead of condemning this concupiscence, Islamic teachers among the Hausa have stressed the wisdom of allowing four wives and as many
concubines as one can afford. In Nigeria, wife seclusion is an Islamic ideal but one not found except among the wealthy Hausa. Its idealization, however, as a goal, is an indication of the sex role specificity that Hausa Muslims cherish.

There is a cultural ideal of masculine superiority in which the maigida (household head) is the complete master of his home. Reinforcing this ideal is the cultural emphasis on wife-seclusion. Any type of seclusion, even the milder forms practiced among most Muslim Hausa, conflict with pre-Islamic custom and practice. Therefore, Barkow (1971, p. 60) argues that Hausa Muslim women frequently turn to courtesanship to escape the confines of married life, seeking to return to the more carefree period of their adolescence.

Hausa Muslim men look with disdain on the practice of other ethnic groups, which permit the relatively free mixing of men and women in public. They do not like to have women near men even when women have withdrawn to a nearby area to carry on their own activities. There is a great fear of being polluted by the too-close presence of women. Moreover, there is a fear that women will betray their husbands, given the opportunity. Since Hausa men expect to betray their wives, it is not difficult to see the origin of their concerns.

Hausa Muslim men have a strong double standard regarding non-marital sexual intercourse. It is legally impossible for a married man to commit adultery with an unmarried woman. If his wife catches him, he expects her to condemn and attack him, but she cannot divorce him. Indeed, she cannot divorce him if he has sexual relations with a married woman. On the other hand, a woman may have sexual relations only with her husband, but if she is still nursing a baby, she may not even have sexual relations with him.

A married man has the obligation to treat each of his wives equally. That restriction requires that he have sex with each of his wives in turn and in providing them with children. Only when a woman has a child is she fully an adult, and only when she has a grown son is she fully secure and protected. Thus, the pressure on men to perform sexually is great. It becomes even greater when one realizes that only wealthy men can have four wives and that wealth generally comes to a select few who tend to be advanced in years. These men tend to fear that their wives are liable to commit adultery if they do not satisfy them sexually and also provide a child, preferably a son, to them.

Thus, there is tremendous pressure on Hausa males to play a difficult masculine role, one that puts a great deal of pressure on them to provide quiet, calm, leadership while proving their sexual prowess daily. Their failures are “taken to the public” by their wives who harangue them in the loudest possible manner, throwing their sexual shortcoming in their faces for public amusement. Similarly, failure to provide a wife with a child can lead to further insults and public humiliation. It is a pressure from which many Hausa males seek escape in various ways.

Conclusion
Ayesha Iman (1994) has written that there is no single Islamic view of sexuality. She offers a cross-cultural view of Muslim practices over place and time. She writes that the “honor-shame” complex is rare in sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, in Hausaland 'honor' killings
are unknown, even as a bad joke. Men marry prostitutes eagerly and women may be known to be prostitutes by their families. It is not a favored profession, but women are not killed for it either, much less for suspicions of non- or extra-marital affairs (Imam, 1994).

She also notes that cliterodectomy is not found in all Islamic countries. It varies according to the customs of the area and the interpretation of Islam given in the region. Thus, although found in a number of areas, female genital mutilation in other countries with Muslim communities (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan, Singapore) is unknown or (as in Northern Nigeria) not common among Muslims and considered to be a pagan practice (Esther Dorkenoo & S. Ellsworth, 1992). By contrast, in Northern Nigeria a baby girl may be made to undergo hymenectomy to ensure she can be easily penetrated, although this is apparently a disappearing practice (Mairo Mandara, 1995).

Muslim discourses of sexuality vary not only by community, but also over time. For example, Northern Nigeria has been dominantly Muslim at least since the 18th century, some argue the 14th century. But, even in the last 60 or 70 years there have been changes in the discourse of sexuality such that tsarance (institutionalized premarital lovemaking or sexual play that stops short of actual penetration), which used to be a common and unremarkable practice up to the 1940s and 1950s (Mary F. Smith, 1981), is now considered to be un-Islamic and “rural.” At the other extreme, girls are frequently now not being allowed even to dance at the kalangu (drumming and dancing held each market day – Imam, 1994).

There is thus some legitimate dispute about what constitutes legitimate Islamic practice as opposed to local Muslim interpretation. Even in Nigeria among the Hausa Muslims there is a continual change in response to colonialism, outside fundamentalist pressure, and modernization. The pressures of Muslim Hausa masculinity, therefore, are increased by the confusion that change generates. There is a marginal area of doubt and old traditions. The ‘yan daudu occupy that marginal zone between old and new definitions of Hausa and male and female relations. They form a liminal category that subverts general views of Hausa masculinity and gender relationships. As Rudolf Gaudio (1994; 1995) notes, study of the ‘yan daudu sheds light on the manner in which masculine and feminine identity are constructed in Hausa society, and the ways people use language both to reproduce and to challenge those constructions. Susan O’ Brien’s “Pilgrimage, Power, and Identity: The Role of the Hajj in the Lives of Nigerian Hausa Bori Adept” (1999) suggests the position the ‘yan daudu inhabit is a category betwixt and between and therefore sacred. She notes “host populations have consistently attributed to them otherworldly powers that have marked them as different from the local Muslim populace” (p. 1). Bori practitioners, including the ‘yan daudu, have played a great part in promoting these otherworldly powers, emphasizing their sacred and dangerous position on the margins of Hausa society.

Given the Hausa position as a category on the margins, and since it unites so many disparate peoples and ideologies, it is to be expected that those in power seek to control its meaning. New recruits to the Hausa must prove their adherence to the identity. Within the landscape of West Africa in which the Hausa operate, the Hausa occupy a unique niche. Males must be able to predict what other males will do. Family determines
position, and men provide the means for identifying with family. Gender behavior is rigidly defined for the Hausa Muslim. Women and men who act like women, the ‘yan daudu, threaten the operation of the system and provide a source for instability.

The presence of the ‘yan daudu, neither men nor women, offers glimpses into possibilities of alternate realities, as anomalous categories are meant to do. Moreover, the ‘yan daudu have sexual relations not only with homosexuals but also with otherwise heterosexual men, offering a possibility for at least a temporary escape from the rigid demands of Hausa Muslim masculinity. Their presence, protected by traditional religion, offers a comment on the arbitrary nature of cultural definitions and the mutability of even rigid definitions.

References

Frank A. Salamone, Professor and Department Chair
Iona College, Department of Sociology, 715 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY 10801/USA
e: fsalamone@iona.edu
Queer is the New Pink: How Queer Jews Moved to the Forefront of Jewish Culture

David Shneer

While queers and Jews have always been part of the cultural landscape, queer Jews have tended to be rather ambivalent about being both queer and Jewish. However, in recent years this connection is being promoted in a more proactive fashion. This paper highlights three examples of queer Jews whose cultural performances rely on being both queer and Jewish, suggesting queer Jews are playing an increasingly significant role in Jewish culture.

“A little bit of irreverence is very good for battling irrelevance”
– Rebbetzin Hadassah Gross

Queers and Jews—they’ve been put on the same dance card since the early twentieth century. In recent conferences on Jewish culture, in new studies coming out about contemporary Jewish identity, there is a new recognition that queer Jews are at the forefront of change. Perhaps it was Freud’s interest in the Jewish and the sexual, perhaps it was the “invention of homosexuality” at the same time that Jews were experiencing their own intellectual revolutions like socialism, Zionism, urbanism, and mass migrations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These modern revolutions provoked a response from non-Jews and non-queers. Some saw queers and Jews as the bearers of modernity, and frequently the role that they played was put in a negative light. The Nazis targeted both groups, the McCarthy hearings often lumped Jews and queers together. And as Matti Bunzl (2004) showed in his historical anthropology of post-World War II Austria, queers and Jews were in the same social and cultural boat as Europe underwent its modern and then postmodern revolution. The twentieth century was, in the words of historian Yuri Slezkine (2004), the Jewish century in that Jews not only underwent their own revolution, but also revolutionized the world in the process. Queers seem to be picking up where Jews left off. Maybe the twenty-first century will be the queer century. (Think Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, the pop American television program that shows five upper-middle-class gay men saving straight men, and presumably therefore humanity, from fashion faux pas for their ever more demanding girlfriends and wives.)

Although conservative forces resisted the gift of modernity that Jews and queers seemed to be bringing through the twentieth century, other critics have celebrated the role these groups have played as the positive bearers of modernity. Richard Florida (2004) argues that contemporary urban economies that flourish are defined by a group he calls the “Creative Class,” and among those groups that make up this class are queers and Jews.
More famously, in her essay, “Notes on Camp,” Susan Sontag put queers and Jews together in a new way by arguing that these two voices from the margins were in fact the driving forces behind American culture. They each brought a particular sensibility to, and powerfully shaped, mid-century American culture. Sontag: “Jews and homosexuals are the outstanding creative minorities in contemporary urban culture. Creative, that is, in the truest sense: they are creators of sensibilities. The two pioneering forces of modern sensibility are Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony” (1966, note 51).

There is a level of cultural critique in her claim that queers and Jews are central, not marginal, to American culture. She argues that each group’s contribution to modern culture was in fact a path that allowed that group to integrate into mainstream urban culture. It was a queer and Jewish conspiracy to transform America to allow Jews and queers to assimilate. As Sontag states,

Every sensibility is self-serving to the group that promotes it. Jewish liberalism is a gesture of self-legitimization. So is Camp taste, which definitely has something propagandistic about it. Needless to say, the propaganda operates in exactly the opposite direction. The Jews pinned their hopes for integrating into modern society on promoting the moral sense. Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation and sponsors playfulness. (Sontag, 1966, note 51).

I suppose Sontag might argue that the opposite was true. If homosexual camp is apolitical and “dissolves morality” (which is certainly not true of all homosexual camp), Jewish moral sense leaves little room for aesthetics and play.

Ultimately, then, for Sontag queers (or as she refers to them homosexuals, and I think she is primarily referring to gay men here, because the lesbian separatist culture that appeared after Sontag wrote her Camp essay had a well-developed sense of moral outrage at patriarchy and avoided cultivating a camp sense) and Jews have made modern urban culture. And each did so from a different cultural position—queers from the perspective of playfulness, aesthetics, and camp; Jews from seriousness, morality and liberalism. Why Jews were some of the most important American comedians of the twentieth century Sontag does not address. What happens when the Jews are the queers and the queers are the Jews? Does Sontag’s thesis collapse when these two forces that she suggests oppose one another are embodied in one person?

The Ambivalence of Being a Queer Jew in Twentieth Century America

Although Sontag draws a stark divide between homosexuals and Jews, queer Jews themselves have worked at the cutting edge of American culture throughout the twentieth century. Think, for example, of Gertrude Stein and Allen Ginsberg. But neither of these queer Jews was particularly interested in advancing Jewish culture as an end in itself. After all Ginsberg helped found a Buddhist university in Colorado’ and during World War II Stein was saved by fascist collaborators (Janet Malcolm, 2003, p. 54). Since the 1980s, queer Jews have not only become visible in highbrow literary circles, but also have
become omnipresent in mainstream American culture. In these popular representations of queer Jewishness and Jewish queerness, queer aesthetics and Jewish morality create an ambivalent tension. Jyl Lynn Felman (2002) has shown that the many examples of queer Jewish men adorning stage and screen, like the characters in The Producers or Angels in America are all about these characters’ ambivalence toward their masculinity and towards their Jewishness. Put in Sontag’s language, queer Jewish male characters express ambivalence about the intersection between their “Jewish morality” and “queer aesthetics.”

Harvey Fierstein’s 1982 Tony Award winning play Torch Song Trilogy, about a gay (Jewish) drag performer and his relationship with his very Jewish mother, reflects an ambivalence about the place of queerness within Jewish culture and of Jewishness in his queer life. Angels in America reflects a similar ambivalence about queerness, Jewishness and sex in politically repressive Reaganite America. Louis Ironson, the lead Jewish character, spends the entire play anxious about the relationship between his Jewish and queer selves, a tension that comes out most visibly in the scene near the beginning of the play/film, showing him soliciting advice from a rabbi about what to do with his AIDS-stricken boyfriend. The most notorious character who projects an ambivalence about queerness and Jewishness is Roy Cohn, who attempts to dissolve and deny both identities, in a scene in which he proudly proclaims, “I am not a homosexual.” Later, on his death bed, the Communist hunter turned AIDS patient is haunted by none other than the woman he helped put to death for treason, the secular socialist Jew, Ethel Rosenberg. Both Fierstein and Kushner suggest that these two identities, queer and Jewish and masculinity more generally, fit together very ambivalently.

Other more popular shows and films present queer Jews, often women, in a less sophisticated light than either Fierstein or Kushner, making ambivalent queer Jews come across as caricatures, rather than as struggling characters. The 2001 film Kissing Jessica Stein depicts an overeducated Jewish woman from Riverdale “experimenting” with sexuality. She tries to date a non-Jewish lesbian (a double no-no) but fails, as she comes to the conclusion that, well, she’s probably just straight. She is the Jew as unwilling queer, and her mother, played by the too-Jewish Tovah Feldshuh, plays the perfect liberal Jew from New York, who loves her daughter no matter what she is, even if she would rather she were dating a nice male Jewish doctor from the Upper West Side. Like Angels, which opens at a Jewish funeral, Kissing Jessica Stein opens during High Holiday services, marking both of these broadly popular productions as obviously Jewish.

If we move to television, the new totem of queer culture, Queer as Folk, filmed in Toronto, puts queerness at the center, and use characters’ other identities to create ambivalence. The show presents the queer Jew in a less than flattering light. If Kissing Jessica Stein was a bit of a Woody-Allen-in-Manhattan stereotype, at least it was sweet and flattering. In Queer as Folk, the only Jewish character, Melanie Marcus, is a money-grubbing butch dyke attorney, who was, for the first two seasons, the only character with a profession requiring advanced education. She is also the only character with a deep sense of connection to her cultural heritage. The clash of queerish and Jewish comes out most clearly in an episode about whether or not to circumcise Melanie’s son, Gus. She is parenting with her partner, Lindsay, and nominally with the child’s sperm donor, the
studly Irish-goyish gay dad, Brian. The three of them spar over whether or not to circumcise the boy as part of his initiation into Jewish culture. The goys win out over the Jew, and the boy is not circumcised, but the effect of the storyline was to show Jewish tradition in tension with modern queer culture.

There are many more examples of highly visible queer Jews in the 1990s and 2000s mainstream media, a new development since the 1960s when Sontag was writing. Then, queers and Jews were the ever present absence. Now the queerness and the Jewishness of the characters is thematized on stage, screen, and television with funerals, services, and brises, on the one hand; and AIDS, bisexuality, and queer co-parenting on the other. But even though queers and Jews are “out”, all of the examples I’ve presented still operate in a model of ambivalence. It’s just that now the conversation about ambivalence is out in the open.

Is This the End of Ambivalence?

But if we look at culture makers from the past ten years working within Jewish culture, we find something new that moves beyond the ambivalence over questions of sexual and cultural assimilation that marked these cultures since Sontag suggested as much forty years ago. The assimilationist anxiety of the twentieth century is out, and cultural and sexual pride in the twenty-first is in, and this heady mixture has been very good for Jewish culture. The new post-assimilationist queer Jewish culture, a culture that Sontag did not really know, brings together politics and entertainment, morality and aesthetics in ways that put queer Jewish culture in the vanguard of Jewish culture more generally and, in some ways, put Jewish culture in the vanguard of American culture more broadly.

The role queer Jews are playing in the transformation of Jewish culture can be seen in everything from liturgy and ritual to language use and dress. As ritualwell—the online Jewish ritual database run by Rabbi Jill Hammer, herself a Jewish lesbian—shows, Jewish rituals of all kinds are being transformed by queers who want to reclaim tradition by transforming it, a process the authors of Queer Jews called transformative integration; schools at gay and lesbian synagogues are transforming what we understand to be the role of Jewish education, trends that have been picked up by progressive synagogues around the country (Sneer, 2002); and queer Israelis are transforming the use of Hebrew to make the gender regime of the language more flexible and playful (Andrea Jacobs, 2004).

Perhaps the most visible evidence of queer Jews transforming Jewish culture is in the overwhelming presence of queer Jews in the rabbinate. The book Lesbian Rabbis documented the rise of women and then lesbians into this profession that, for thousands of years, had been off limits both to women and to open queers (Rebecca Alpert, et. al., 2001). Anecdotal evidence from England suggests that the rabbinate of Liberal Judaism in England is made up of anywhere between 25 to 30 percent queer rabbis. The Reform Jewish movement’s seminary, Hebrew Union College, admitted its first transgender student a few years ago to much press coverage and fanfare. Even the Orthodox world has been feeling the effects of post-assimilationist queer Jewish culture. Sandy Simcha Dubowski’s film Trembling Before God which has created worldwide conversations about the presence of queer Jews in Orthodox Judaism, and more recently Keep Not Silent about
Jewish lesbians in Jerusalem, document the stories of queer Orthodox Jews, who are putting their voices and sometimes faces on camera and calling for change in Orthodox Judaism’s response to the queers in its midst (Dubowski, 2002).

In the 2000s, when queer Jews started to proudly engage their own culture, for an audience that is primarily Jewish, they brought together both queer aesthetics and Jewish moral criticism (and, perhaps most importantly, something that Sontag left out of the equation, feminist criticism) to create some of the most interesting edges of Jewish culture, precisely because they are queer and Jewish simultaneously. The examples of queer Jewish artists I will present are, like Gertrude Stein and Allen Ginsburg, inspired by a myriad of sources from Buddhism and African American folk music to avant-garde theater and European poetry. But unlike Stein and Ginsburg, they use these tools to create new edges of Jewish culture.

Case Study No. 1: Nerdy, Campy, Commie Girly

Charming Hostess, a group founded by Jewlia Eisenberg (note the spelling), has been creating new Jewish music since the late 1990s. Based in San Francisco, Charming Hostess brings together musical forms and lyrics based on diverse, but usually Jewish, texts to create a new sound that is unapologetically Jewish, queer, feminist, and political. In other words, Charming Hostess combines queer aesthetic sensibility with a Jewishly infused moral righteousness. Despite this edgy combination, the band has performed in major Jewish institutions like the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York and has appeared on mainstream public radio all over the country. The band has recorded with the Radical Jewish Music series and with Tsadik, two cutting edge music production labels in New York that have been promoting new forms of Jewish music for more than a decade.

In an interview with National Public Radio, Jewlia, who not only runs this avant-garde girl band but also doubles as a freelance synagogue ritual singer known as a cantor, noted that she changed the spelling of her name to be more “out” as a Jew, and because she thought it was fun. Her mom freaked out at Jewlia’s too Jewish name, because as Eisenberg recalls humorously, “terrorists will know to target you.” As if “Eisenberg” weren’t Jewish enough. But the difference in relationship to the name—Jewlia thought it was campy, her mom thought it was dangerous and too unambivalently Jewish—says a lot about the new queer Jewish culture in the forty years since Sontag. Unlike the previous generation of lefty queer Jewishness, which used aesthetics and ethics to be part of American leftist culture, the new queer Jewish culture uses aesthetics and ethics to critique and advance Jewish culture. Her very name is campy, fun, and unapologetically Jewish.

Jewlia describes her band as “Klezmer Funk, Balkan Punk,” and more recently as a “nerdy, campy, Commie, girly band.” She also describes her three-woman a capella group as “beat box,” in that it uses the body, more than instruments, to generate sounds. The themes of the music range from the Jewish to the universal, but even when the themes are broad, like genocide or eating disorders, the music is all Jewish, all the time. Her two most recent albums, the Trilectic Project and Sarajevo Blues, have used texts ranging from Walter Benjamin’s Moscow diaries, to Balkan Jewish ladino music. In fact, one of the
things that differentiates Charming Hostess from other beat box groups is the reliance on highly intellectual texts for the lyrics, something that Jewlia thinks makes the band very Jewish.

The original band was made up of three women and two men, but the men dressed in drag for performances, since this was, after all, an “all girl band.” The group now usually performs with just the three women, and the music has become even more engaged in contemporary international politics, like the history of Communism and, more recently, the Bosnian genocide.

A most obvious example of how Charming Hostess works at the intersections of queerness and Jewishness comes on the album *Punch*, which opens with the song, Ms. Lot. The lyrics are based on a poem by the Jewish lesbian writer Muriel Rukeyser about the daughter of the biblical character, Lot.

*Ms Lot*
Well if he treats me like a young girl still,
That father of mine, and here’s my sister
And we’re still traveling into the hills—
But everyone on the road knows he offered us
To the Strangers, when all they wanted was men
And the cloud of smoke still over the twin cities
And mother a salt lick the animals come to—
Who’s going to want me now?

Eisenberg chose this Rukeyser poem as a way of engaging Jewish traditional texts and contemporary sexual politics, and secondarily, as a way of bringing the politically radical poet Rukeyser into the canon of Jewish culture. And what kind of music does she set this poem to? Bulgarian folk music, of course. Eisenberg said that the lyrics of the band’s next album will be based on the texts on Babylonian incantation bowls, which as she tells it, are all about women’s empowerment. I use this as an example of how deeply embedded in Jewish culture Charming Hostess’ music is, and how deeply embedded in sexual and gender politics it is. Other songs discuss bulimia, rape, and other issues relating to women, and the Trilectic project album based on Walter Benjamin’s letters is, at heart, about his love affair with Asja Lacis.

Charming Hostess is pushing Jewish culture in many new directions. The band is making Ladino and Balkan Jewish music more visible by putting it on stage in a variety of large venues; it integrates issues of gender and Jewishness in its thematics as it uses Balkan, blues, and gospel music to tell these Jewish gender stories. Finally, and most importantly, it is at the same time unapologetically Jewish and resists the nationalistic tendencies of some of modern Jewish culture by emphasizing moments in Jewish history and culture when Jews were at their most cosmopolitan. Eisenberg chose to focus her most recent album on the city of Sarajevo, because it was the site of interethnic violence and, in her words, because “Sarajevo, like New York, is a salad.” Although the interviewer saw Sarajevo as a “melting pot,” Eisenberg clarifies that salads, like cosmopolitan cultures, “gain their flavors from the differences of all the ingredients.” And one of the most
important ingredients of Sarajevo’s salad was Balkan Jewish culture. This form of queer Jewish culture puts Jews front and center, and in the process, emphasizes Jewish diversity and Jewish engagement with the rest of the world. It is radically universalist and deeply Jewish, all at the same time.

Case Study No. 2: Lesbian Klezmer as Bar Mitzvah Entertainment

If Charming Hostess sheds new light on Sephardic Jewish tradition and relatively unfamiliar Jewish sounds, Eve Sicular’s less edgy all-female klezmer band Isle of Klezbos (pun intended) remakes traditional East European Jewish music which, in recent years, has become a mainstay of American Jewish culture. Isle of Klezbos, an outgrowth of Metropolitan Klezmer, one of the most popular klezmer bands in New York, has a higher degree of camp than Charming Hostess, whose lyrics are frequently dark. In fact, Isle of Klezbos rarely has lyrics, because it showcases a group of incredibly talented instrumentalists who are making new Jewish music.

The band follows a relatively new tradition in Jewish culture in which queer Jews turn to Yiddish culture as a route into and means of criticizing Jewish culture (see also Jeffrey Shandler, 2005, pp. 187-90). The trend began in the 1980s, especially after the popular klezmer band, the Klezmatics, put out Shvaygn=Toyt (or silence=death, in Yiddish). The title echoed the slogan of the very in-your-face queer activist group ACT UP, which believed that remaining silent (shvaygn in Yiddish) in the face of the AIDS epidemic that was decimating queer America would only lead to more death (toyt). (In fact some of the themes echo those of Angels in America.) The group fused queer politics and Jewish music, a potent mix that made klezmer the then trendy (although now slightly stale) Jewish art form that aroused the ears of young and old. Isle of Klezbos performs regularly at both suburban bar mitzvahs as well as the downtown club The Knitting Factory, showing how the queer cutting edge of Jewish culture is making its way out of Manhattan and into Long Island homes, and in the process loses some of its edge.

Case Study No. 3: Neo-Hasidic Jewish Kitsch

The last example I want to include is the Shabbos Queen, Rebbetzin Hadassah Gross, otherwise known as Amichai Lau-Lavie, founder of the Jewish cultural operation, Storahtelling. Storahtelling’s mission is to bring traditional Jewish texts to life through performance, translation and, at times, camp. Its productions run the gamut from more conventional Torah portion interpretations to very sexy Jewish performance art.

In an email exchange with Lau-Lavie as I was writing this article, he noted rather apologetically that the materials he was sending me for research purposes would be “very conservative” since they were “marketing materials for synagogues” and would not “include our more radical queer stuff, such as Hadassah Gross.” What I find so poignant about this comment is the willingness and desire of much of the new queer Jewish culture to engage mainstream North American Judaism and Jewish culture. These forms of Jewish culture do this to gently push American Jewry to new places and to raise funds from it. The group may perform inspiring Torah stories on Saturday morning, but Storahtelling also presents hardcore sexual drag on Friday night. The theater group presents shows such as “The Sabbath Queen,” a show in which, according to its marketing materials, “the queen
descends with a retinue of angels and pimps, bestowing the gift of sacred sabotage[.] Sabbath Queen reclaims Friday night with sex, soul and style, featuring a cast of radical Semites, semi-Semites and secret agents in her majesty’s service.” Whether or not it knew that pimps and sexy angels were also part of Storahtelling’s repertoire, the mainstream B’nai B’rith magazine recently named Storahtelling a “trailblazer of the Jewish World” (Karen Brunwasser, 2004). Rumors have it, however, that some of the mainstream supporters of Storahtelling are less than pleased that their money is going not just to make traditional Jewish texts more accessible, but also to support a sexy and sex-positive, camp, irreverent, leftist queer Jewish performance artist.

Lau-Lavie’s own biography says a lot about not only why queers are the ones moving Jewish culture forward, but also why this new trend is happening in North America. Lau-Lavie was raised in a traditional religious Israeli family in the Orthodox enclave of Bnei Brak, and, as several articles about him suggest, he then found his true queer self and moved to the big city, Tel Aviv, to “be queer.” In America Lau-Lavie managed to bring his Jewish “moral seriousness” and “queer camp sensibility” together to create Storahtelling. More than either Charming Hostess or Isle of Klezbos, Storahtelling, especially Hadassah Gross, who is known as the queen of neo-Hasidic Judeokitsch, uses queer camp to move Jewish culture in new directions. From the promo note about Gross, “Born in Budapest Hungary in the mid 1920s, Rebbetzin Gross is descended from an illustrious Hasidic dynasty and is the widow of six prominent rabbis. She has established herself in the Jewish community and beyond as a personal soul-trainer to the ultra-orthodox elite...Her personal philosophy purports that, ‘A little bit of irreverence is very good for battling irrelevance. Humor is very important to touch the soul.’”

The show has toured the country and, in many ways, is a rather traditional presentation of Jewish culture. In the performance that I saw for this paper, the rebbetzin appeared on a stage adorned like a traditional Friday night Sabbath table, with candles, hallah, and wine. She spent the next hour warmly telling the audience how beautiful the Sabbath was, how it was an important part of her life, and how each and every audience member should find ways to bring the Sabbath into their lives. In other words, she played the role of the orthodox rebbetzin perfectly. The thing that saves the show from being nostalgic is the fact that the rebbetzin on stage is, in fact, a man, whose very presence completely subverts the very Jewish traditions his persona, the rebbetzin, seeks to promulgate. It is an ingenious way of pushing Jewish culture forward by celebrating tradition and rupturing it at the same time.

Each of these queer Jewish performers is deeply knowledgeable about Jewish culture—each in her own way. Eisenberg knows Jewish musical tradition, twentieth century European Jewish culture, and serves as a cantor; Sicul writes about Yiddish culture and its theatrical tradition and served as an archivist at the Institute for Jewish Research in New York. From his Orthodox upbringing and his studies, Lau-Lavie knows traditional Jewish texts and has studied and written about the art of the “translator” or m’turgeman. And at the same time, each one has been deeply involved in feminist, queer politics.

Why are Isle of Klezbos, Shabbes Queen, and Charming Hostess so seemingly hip and so popular? Why is rejuvenating Jewish culture about punk queer Jewish music and a
gay Israeli man performing in drag as a platinum blond Hasidic Holocaust survivor? These culture makers finally bring together queer aesthetic and Jewish moral sensibilities that Sontag outlined in the 1960s, but unlike in the 1960s, not for the goal of assimilating. They lack the ambivalence that marked the first wave of culture created by queer and Jews that was still searching for a place in American culture. They are campy and political, particular and universal, and each celebrates and criticizes American Jewish culture, all at the same time. They are “irreverent” in order for Judaism not to become “irrelevant,” to quote the rebbetzin. It is the lack of ambiguity, the direct engagement with Jewish tradition and with the pillars of contemporary Jewish culture like the Torah, the Holocaust, Israel, and Jewish lifecycles, rather than the shying away from it, and the overt use of queer culture that puts these queer Jews at the forefront of Jewish culture in the queer century.

References

Notes
1 Naropa University.
Anecdotes usually do not qualify as evidence. This story was told to me by two different leaders of British Liberal Judaism at the World Congress for Progressive Judaism, Moscow 2005.


David Shneer, Director of the Center for Judaic Studies and Associate Professor of History
University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208/USA
e: dshneer@du.edu
A Jesuit Mystic’s Feminine Melancholia: 
Jean-Joseph Surin SJ (1600-1665)

Juan M. Marin

This essay on the mysticism of exorcist Jean-Joseph Surin suggests that the depression from which he suffered can be understood as a destabilization of the masculine identity he wished to uphold when his experience was dismissed as “feminine melancholia.” By incorporating the suffering of two women he is led into a fluid state in which his relation to the divine will become erotic. The inquiry concludes by juxtaposing feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva’s views on melancholia with those of Surin’s, bringing into a dialogue these two perspectives.

One day in 1645, French Jesuit priest Jean-Joseph Surin, who some years earlier became famous for delivering from demonic possession the nuns at the convent of Loudun, tried to kill himself by jumping out of a second floor window. The scene at the end of the film *The Exorcist* (1971), where the Jesuit priest defeats the devil by assenting to become possessed and then committing suicide by throwing himself out the window, down the stairs, is based on Surin’s life. The only difference is that Surin survived, only to fall victim to depression. The real aftermath of the story would not have made a captivating Hollywood ending.

The extraordinary events that led to Surin’s despair were popularized by Aldous Huxley in his *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) and by Ken Russell in the film, *The Devils* (1973). They focus on the lurid aspects of the story. Early modern France was rife with beliefs in demonic activity, so when the relationship between priest Urbain Grandier and the nuns at Loudun, especially the superior Jeanne des Anges, acquires erotic overtones, he is accused of bringing the devil into the convent. He is burned at the stake on charges of witchcraft, while chaos reigns among the nuns who behave erratically, acting out symptoms indicating possession such as rage and increased libido. Perhaps because of its sensationalist appropriations for popular consumption, these events reflecting an important element in the mindset of seventeenth century France have been little studied. The only scholarly study of the Grandier and des Anges case is Michel de Certeau’s *The Possession at Loudun* (2000).¹ While de Certeau exposes the fraudulent activities of those involved and the dangerous superstitions of spectators, he also claims that there is an ‘otherness’ element that cannot be approached with the historian’s tool or reduced to socio-cultural circumstances. As the modern editor of Surin’s works, de Certeau is also aware of the forgotten drama of the Jesuit’s life after the Loudun episode. Surin’s autobiography has not been studied in depth, so its riches remain unearthened.²
In his autobiography, *Triumph of Divine Love Over the Powers of Hell*, and in its more theological sequel *Experimental Science of Otherworldy Matters*, Surin narrates how he overcame his own demonic possession, which for twenty years led him to believe that he had lost the love of Christ and was damned for eternity. We learn that after he exorcised mother superior Jeanne des Anges, he was thrown into a despair that alternated with occasional moments of mystical consolation. In the books he defends himself against the accusation that his mystical experience is nothing but ‘feminine’ melancholia. We will see that Surin’s mystical melancholia indeed becomes feminized as understood at the time. Moreover, his own masculine identity mutates in a mystical relationship with the divine that surmounts preconceived notions of gender stability. Only then was he able to surmount his depression and attain the joy he longed for.

In this essay I will argue that Surin’s melancholia involves an incorporation of the suffering of two women. He assimilates the suffering of Jeanne des Anges, transforming it into an erotic and ecstatic joy, by identifying both Jeanne and himself with the longing and mystical ecstasy he found in the writings of Teresa of Avila. His relation with these two women shapes his own experience of demonic possession and affective mysticism, both of which were dismissed by many of his contemporaries as feminine disturbances. I will conclude by engaging Surin’s views on melancholia in dialogue with those of feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. Kristeva’s work will allow us to gain some insights into Surin’s melancholia. At the same time Surin’s text will offer us the possibility of extending Kristeva’s theory, escaping the temptation to reduce Surin’s lived experience to psychoanalytic phenomena. Suspending a final judgment on these issues will be a sign of respect for that ‘otherness’ that de Certeau encountered and which now the reader will confront.

***

It was in 1633, during the reign of Louis the Just, while Cardinal Richelieu was prime minister of France’s government and doing very illustrious things for the good of the Church and State that Our Lord allowed a terrible attack from Hell to happen at the town of Loudun. (Surin, 1990, p. 11)

Thus begins Surin’s recollection of the events at the convent of Loudun that led to his spiritual malaise. Here he frames his text within a specific historical context, so that future readers will not dismiss his terrifying narration as product of his own fantasy or that of addled women, and within a theological context, so that these events described will be seen as part of a divine plan.

Surin encases the episode within the ecclesiastical renewal and invigoration program that Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642) was leading. Church and throne were allied at this time, forming a bulwark against Protestant incursions. Religious orders flourished under regal support, so anything that happened at the convent of Loudun was a matter of state. Indeed, the events quickly became a national affair.³ On the other hand, Surin’s acknowledging the church and state is relegated to the introduction. His involvement in
the affair was not related to a desire for fame. His incursion was for him but a sign of his belief that his life was guided by divine providence.

Surin arrives on the scene as reinforcement in a battle in which several exorcists had failed to deliver the nuns from the evil beings that had taken control of them. Surin tells us that it was believed that the origin of the possession was some kind of sexual magic performed by corrupt priest Urban Grandier that led to “carnal love.” Surin wants to tell the whole story and say that demonic hatred was more at fault than any kind of “love.” His goal is to show how this hatred was counteracted by God’s love for these women. Writing in the third person, Surin says that “because of the misery of their condition, God gave him such a great love for them that, seeing them, he was not able to stop himself from shedding copious tears or from being moved by a strong desire to help them” (1990, p. 20). He discovers that the possession is centered on the convent’s superior, Jeanne des Anges. His desire to be of help to them will be linked to his intense desire for God; yet, these desires will also be accompanied by sexual desire, which, as we shall see, will be an element in the spiritual battle against the demonic forces. The struggle for Jeanne des Anges’ soul will foreshadow what will happen in his own for the next twenty years.

When Surin met Jeanne des Anges, she suffered symptoms that many at the time would have interpreted as those arising from melancholic humors, yet he ascribes them to a demonic attack. He tells us that that the devil threw her

through malignant operations, not only in a great spiritual loathing, but also in such bodily languidness that she seemed to be dying; her face became emaciated and diminished, her spirit dull-minded, her heart overwhelmed. She found everything insipid. Her will was entirely in God, but her powers were so blunted that she could barely pay attention to what she was told. (Surin, 1990, p. 106)

Since Surin was interested in demonology he probably knew from his readings in the subject that these symptoms did not necessarily arise from supernatural causes. He could have learned from influential demonologist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499) that an abundance of black bile “makes the spirits heavier and colder, afflicts the mind continually with weariness, dulls the sharpness of the intellect, and keeps the blood from leaping around the Arcadian’s [melancholic’s] heart” (quoted in Radden, 2000, p. 92). We can see all these signs in the description above. Another influential demonologist, Johann Weyer, in his Of Deceiving Demons (1562), claims that “many persons beset by melancholia are thought to be possessed, and vice versa … so there is need for careful judgment here, to distinguish between the two afflictions (which are often found together in many instances)” (quoted in Radden, 2000, p. 104).

Throughout his book, Weyer leans towards the view that melancholia is more often caused by imbalances in bodily humors that resulted in symptoms such as those of Jeanne des Anges above. Even in the case of demonic possession, the devil takes advantage of a natural imbalance instead of being the cause for it. This was often the case with women whose humors made them more susceptible to demonic activity:
that crafty schemer the Devil thus influences the female sex, that sex which by reason of temperament is inconstant, credulous, wicked, uncontrolled in spirit, and because of its feelings and affections, which it governs only with difficulty melancholic; he especially seduces stupid, worn-out, unstable old women. (Quoted in Radden, 2000, p. 98)

Weyer is here repeating common assumptions of the time. Surin knows from his ministerial relationship with Jeanne that these negative prejudices do not apply to her. His admiration for her is revealed throughout the text. “The natural disposition of this woman was excellent from the spiritual side, very strong; her temper was gentle, her judgment solid, yet she was very weak in health” (Surin, 1990, p. 23). Rather than describe des Anges as melancholic, Surin prefers to use the term acedia. He defines acedia as

a heaviness opposed to the spirit of fervor through which the Devil slips all the vices.... Its poison consists in a deadening that he leaks into the senses, making the soul desire repose, allowing itself to slip into a restive state, into a vague entrainment of thoughts, a blunted and sorrowful demeanor. (Surin, 1990, p. 94)

The early modern scholars above would have seen these symptoms described by Surin as a case of melancholia. Even today a psychoanalyst could make this interpretation. We will return to this but, briefly jumping ahead for the purpose of comparison, we find Kristeva defining melancholia as “the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternating more often than not with the so called manic phase of exaltation” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 9). We can see how Jeanne’s acedia fits the first half of this definition. Kristeva’s asymbolia shows up when Jeanne’s “powers” become “blunted” and she is lost in an entrainment of thoughts that she cannot communicate. She becomes inhibited, a “deadening” invading her mind, with the result that she cannot pay attention to what is spoken to her. Later, Surin will tell us that this behavior will alternate with moments of intense rage in which powerful demons take control of her. Kristeva’s “manic phase of exaltation” shows up here, making the argument for melancholia seem uncontestable. But for now let us stay with Surin’s approach, which I will later compare to Kristeva’s.

Surin’s diagnosis is that a demonic manifestation in the form of acedia needs to be confronted here through the ritual of exorcism. Surin’s main weapon is prayer. A favorite weapon of the devil is lust. A battle will ensue in which Surin believes that he vanquishes the demon, yet “the enemy returns and becomes sensible in the same shape of a serpent, coiling itself among the members and biting in order to take away repose and disturb purity” (Surin, 1990, p. 37). Surin finds himself tempted to sin against chastity, so he finds a remedy by “turning to the Holy Virgin and imagining her with the child Jesus as he had seen her in paintings” (Surin, 1990, p. 37). This last method was promoted by the Jesuits as a way of confronting the demon of lust. Surin’s honesty reveals the reliability of the text as a personal account, since from the beginning he wanted to distance the possession from being connected to “carnal love.” We do not know the object of his lust but it seems justified to assume that it was Jeanne des Anges. Love for the mother superior, showing
itself in its “spiritual” and “carnal” aspects, would become the basis for his later identification with her, as discussed below.

Surin and Jeanne together fight the demonic serpent. “She felt something come out from her head something that exhausted her, and saw in front of her a terrifying monster like a dragon ... she bravely strikes at it and suddenly it disappears, after which she found herself free” (Surin, 1990, p. 107). This successful battle against one of the demons strengthens them both to fight the Devil himself, who finally leaves her when, some time later, he receives the Eucharist from Surin. Thus ends Jeanne’s possession and, after a few days, Surin’s will begin.

Surin’s identification with the woman he loved enough to battle the Devil with her became so strong that after the exorcism he assimilated many of her symptoms. The price of delivering Jeanne des Anges from her suffering had been not only taking the suffering upon himself, but also inviting the demon to accept him as a hostage in exchange. He recalls that at one moment during the exorcism he felt carried by an ardor, wishing to “participate in all her temptations and miseries, even to the point of becoming possessed by the evil Spirit, provided that He gave him the freedom to enter her and devote himself to her soul” (Surin, 1990, p. 27). This wish to be one with Jeanne was granted to the extreme that the identification became complete. The signs of demonic possession did not take long to show up after the exorcism. He began to feel that he had become separated from God. Christ had abandoned and left him at the mercy of the Devil, his soul forever lost:

he lost the ability to communicate, becoming mute for seven months without being able to say Mass, read, or write. He was not able to dress or undress himself, or make any kind of movement. He fell into a malady unknown to doctors, their remedies having no effect. (Surin, 1990, p. 119)

Inhibition and asymbolia show up in Surin’s inability to act and in his mutism, which will occasionally be disrupted by exalted mystical moments in which he felt consoled by God:

At Loudun he began to receive, during the time of his obsession, communications from God that worked in his soul consoling it greatly with ardent spiritual fires. Every one of these days they would show themselves in such a way that he was not able to doubt that they came from God, surpassing all natural forces. (Surin, 1990, p. 170)

We can see in these two passages a new occurrence of melancholia. The claim that his malady was unknown to his doctors is Surin’s interpretation. Although in the passage above he is careful to mention that it surpassed all natural forces, midway through his text he admits that “most people, even the wisest, tended to say that it was nothing but a melancholic humor or devotional illusion, or fantasy” (Surin, 1990, p. 221). Although at the end of his narrative he will accept that melancholy is somehow involved, he will give his condition a supernatural origin. He believes this because “he had read many things from mystical writers about their inner sufferings” (Surin, 1990, p. 175) and saw how similar his
state was to theirs. He finds precedent for his despair and his consolations and “ardent spiritual fires” in these writers. But before he can describe his mysticism, he must address the charge that his experience is nothing but feminine melancholia.

Besides their autobiographical intention, Triumph and Science are part of a series of works in which Surin defends mystical theology from clerical colleagues who dismiss it as the fervid imagination of “little women” (femmelettes). One of the priests Surin writes against derides those “devout melancholics and mystics” who have their “castle in Spain” (de Certeau, 1963, p. 45). This last reference is an attack on the increasing influence of the writings of Teresa of Avila, specially her Life and the Interior Castle.\(^4\) Surin, as we will see, was strongly influenced by Teresa, and yet he felt the need to defend himself in Triumph against the feminization of mystical experiences.

These are not the sweetness gustos of “little women” (femmelettes). Many thinking and wise men have contempt for these [experiences] and compare them to the tears and sensibilities of some women. This is something else. These are spiritual experiences, real and efficacious, that hearten the soul, a demonstration of God and divine things. Truly they are much more than sweetleness. (Surin, 1990, p. 325)

Surin here defends mystical theology by turning not to its origin, as he does elsewhere, but to its fruits, such as consolation in the midst of despair and knowledge of the divine. Yet, as an attempt to avoid a feminization of mystical experience, Surin’s text is a failure. His mysticism arises out of identification with Jeanne des Anges, which will then be exchanged for identification with Teresa of Avila. Although he defends his arguments by turning to the authority of the Church fathers, he extracts from them the message that “a simple femmelette can love God more than the greatest doctor in the world” (Surin, 1990, p. 226). We will see that Surin not only defends these femmelettes but become one of them.

In other more systematic treatises, Surin refers to most of the fathers of the church; yet, except for Paul, the attention given to Teresa surpasses by far the energy he dedicates to patristic writers. So it is no surprise that in Triumph and Science, Teresa has an important role. During his melancholic phase, Surin’s identification became so extreme that his more intense attacks occurred during Teresa’s holy day:

sometimes I became a desperate soul, like the fifteenth of October, day of Saint Theresa. She is a saint for whom I have great affection. That day, as in every year on the day of her holy day, my disposition changes and I was brought down to the verge of death. (Surin, 1990, p. 233)

Surin felt himself this day at the “entrance of ancient darkness,” repeating a motif that appears throughout the text, his being found guilty and condemned to hell. The reference to the dark entrance recalls Teresa’s transport to a place in hell, which she believed was reserved for her as punishment for her sins. In this vision she found herself at the “entrance of a long and strait tunnel ending in a deep, dark, and narrow oven” (Teresa de
Avila, 1998, p. 299). In that place, “there was no light but only obscure darkness” (Teresa de Avila, 1998, p. 300). This episode is narrated after Teresa describes, in the previous chapter, her struggle with demons and despair. On Teresa’s holy day, Surin again attempts suicide by jumping out of the window, but is unable to do so because he had broken his leg during the earlier attempt.

On a later fifteenth of October he also experienced great anxiety, yet he was able to engage in ministry. In order to do this he availed himself of his desire for God to give him the strength to perform his preaching service. He was able to break his silence temporarily. He says, “the good words that came from my mouth emerged, despite the despair, from the deep desire that my heart had for God” (Surin, 1990, p. 234). The desire that strengthens him is linked later with the presence of Teresa:

His frailty was extreme, yet nevertheless he was as if elevated in spirit. He saw in front of him, written in the air with large letters, the words PURE LOVE. Beside them was written: TERESA OF JESUS. At that moment he thought that Saint Teresa was present, as if she had come from the heavens, which seemed to be opening, a clearing that forestalled the thunderstorm. (Surin, 1990, p. 271)

In the midst of his desperation he holds to the figure of Teresa. We can read the appearance of these words as representing his movement towards escaping the silence in which he had been submerged.

After this vision he had the desire to rest, so he returned to his chamber. As soon as he lay down a memory of Jeanne des Anges surfaced. He recalled how years earlier at Loudun, on a fifteenth of October, he had a vision of a suffering Christ. The same vision was happening now. Here then a transition occurs, initiated by memories of Teresa and Jeanne, from a damming Christ to identification with Christ’s suffering:

I had an impression of suffering Christ. I was fastened to my inner center, and found myself as if crucified for three hours. The first hour the agony was so extreme that I could not do anything. This mystery happened in my spirit and my body, as if I had just been nailed. (Surin, 1990, p. 330)

In the next two hours he shares Christ’s suffering. This was but one of several moments in which his body becomes the place where his desire for Christ is manifested. Christ becomes the divine “spouse.” His suffering is then transformed into joy in an erotic mystical encounter with the beloved:

when I was on my bed, I felt something descend over me. I was penetrated, as a sponge would be, by a liquid from heaven that infused everything and gave me an indescribable joy and sweetness. There was such a release of melancholy, about which nothing can be said. Then, in a short-lived moment, it seemed that my soul was in glory. (Surin, 1990, p. 271)
Here we find the final stage of Surin’s melancholy. What first began as the incorporation of Jeanne des Anges’ melancholia is then distilled until only desire remained. The suffering dissipates. Erotic desire is not denied but transformed into something divine. The sexual aspect of mysticism is not metaphorized by Surin but accepted:

there can be something of this sweetness among married couples, which regulated by nature’s order itself, and following God’s design, have such an intimate bond and closeness of heart that it cannot be better expressed than the relationship between God and the soul. (Surin, 1990, p. 331)

In the passage above, Surin attempts to re-inscribe the eroticism of his experiences within divinely inspired heterosexual social structures. But the description of his mystical encounters betrays the fact that the process of feminization which began with melancholia only accelerated when it became mystical. Had Surin been a woman, his mystical text may have been dismissed as another case of female hysteria. As a male who not only accepts the authors of this tradition of female mysticism as authoritative,⁵ but incorporates their spirituality into his own, Surin is subverting gender in a way that some ecclesiastical authorities found threatening. At least one of his texts will be found in inquisitors’ lists. Near the end of Surin’s lifetime his own superiors would censor his writings (Surin, 1990, p. 340). We can discern in Surin’s apologetical passages how hostile his environment was to female spirituality, so it is not surprising that his text was controversial. But by then Surin’s experience of the loss and regaining of Christ will make him immune to such a lesser loss as that of reputation. If it was God’s will, he was happy to “die in shame as did his Son” (Surin, 1990, p. 341). His identification with Jeanne and Teresa, and now with Christ, strengthened him to face any future loss.

***

It is tempting to reduce Surin’s experience to just another case of melancholia. If we return to Kristeva’s definition of melancholia, we can see that every one of its signs occurs in Surin’s case. Recalling Kristeva’s definition, melancholia can be described as “the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternating more often than not with the manic phase of exaltation” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 9). As we saw above, Surin identified Jeanne des Anges’ melancholic inhibition as an attack by the demon of acedia. With regard to his own inhibition, he admitted that melancholia was involved. This state, which became asymbolic when he lost the ability to speak, was broken only in those manic phases of exaltation he called mystical. Kristeva’s investigations about the causes of melancholia can therefore shed some light on Surin’s text. Yet, reading the latter only in the light of the former will give us a skewed perspective. Kristeva’s work does not arise from an objective as opposed to Surin’s subjective approach. Her text on melancholia, Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (1989), like Surin’s, was written after an experience of loss.⁶ Rather than
seeing psychoanalysis as the method and the mystic as the subject, I will engage both of them in a dialogue about the loss of an object of desire which can be both male and female.

Kristeva extends the definition of melancholia to include as essential a “mourning for the maternal object.” After birth, all human beings begin a process of separation from the mother that will establish a precedent for all subsequent experiences of loss. The maternal “object” is more like a “preobject.” The individual’s relationship with this preobject will determine how his or her future object relationships will develop, including what the reaction will be in the case of the loss of an object of love. In her work, Kristeva discusses texts written by melancholic mystics whose experiences of loss express, in her view, a longing for reunification with the mother. She will tell us that “those in despair are mystics – adhering to the preobject, not believing in Thou, but mute and steadfast devotees of their own inexpressible container” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 14). Like Surin, these mystics believed that the divine Thou was no longer present for them. What for Kristeva is longing for a return to the maternal container, the womb, is for these mystics a longing to return to the love of God. In Christianity the mystic’s loss has been represented as the loss of the figure of God in Christ. Surin would not agree with reducing this experience to loss of the mother. On the other hand, we can speculate that he may not completely dismiss Kristeva’s text. As he does in the following poem, written after the events discussed previously, he might identify the longing for a mother as longing for a maternal God who is none other than Christ the beloved.

The Soul, from a glorious fire saintly hurled, carries deeply within her thoughts the arrow of Love. She seeks from her God the gentle embrace that will assuage her pain and her banishment. At the point of approaching the royal chambers of the lamb that awaits her as a loyal bridegroom, she sings of deeds of love and of severe trials, of the evils that have made her sigh down here below. Yet, beloved Love, when she sets foot upon your path she wants to speak so that the world will listen:

When God emerged from the depths of his majesty his power saw herself pregnant. Water, earth, and sky, the whole vast sphere, were the unconstrained fruit of this Love. Then, when she pulled out the world from her side, she placed each thing in its appropriate space. Love insinuates himself everywhere in this great universe that he has designed through a secret instinct, forceful and benign. He joins every member together with its neighbor, desiring to join through strife
the highest with the lowest, the heavens with the earth, and making co-exist through enchanting attractions the opposed forces of diverse elements. (Surin, 1957, p. 61)

Surin recounts here again how the melancholia discharged when his banishment was revoked was assuaged by an encounter with the divine bridegroom. Adopting a female stance while awaiting the male Christ, the mystic tells of the soul’s sorrows. Yet, the soul’s pain is transformed into joy as she recalls the majesty of Love, who alternates between being male and female. The gender destabilization that Surin experienced during his trials is now attributed to a divine maternal figure, Love. Through the “strife” of the experience of suffering something new can be created. Love heals the rupture of an original loss that separated heaven from earth. Love reverses through attraction what has been divided into high and low, masculine and feminine. For Surin, love can attain what for Kristeva is impossible: a return to a both masculine and feminine mother in an erotic embrace.

Surin believed that he gained insights of God only through the experience of God’s absence. What Kristeva refers to as ‘mystic atheism’ can make sense within Surin’s worldview. For Kristeva the absence experienced in loss is not only absence of an object but absence of names to refer to that object:

Let me say that this sacred, this “thing without a name” may betray, beyond the depressive silences of our mystic, a suggestion of disbelief. In fact if the divine has no name, does it truly exist? One may believe in it, one may also doubt it. The latencies of a mystic atheism (perhaps the only one, which has nothing to do with the atheistic religion of the so-called materialist intellectuals I told you about last time), and, I think, of a subtle, specifically feminine atheism, take root, it seems to me, in that suspicion borne aloft on the powers of the Word, in that retreat to the unfathomable continent, concealed from the sensible body. (Clément and Kristeva, 2001, p. 37)

Kristeva refers here to doubts about a divine presence that would support the meaning of it all. This meaning is lost in the midst of depression, such as that which led Surin to admit that “although a profession of atheism is not an ordinary thing among Christians, nevertheless it is a temptation that can be conceived in the spirit” (Surin, 1990, p. 343). Kristeva would read Surin’s atheism as feminine because of Surin’s attraction towards those female aspects of erotic motherhood. This passage from Kristeva is a discussion of the experience of another mystic, Angela of Foligno, who suffered because of the distance between her and God. Surin’s atheism arises out of this distance he calls damnation, which he exemplifies by turning also to Angela. Kristeva sees Angela as a melancholic who is “suspicious” of the possibility of using language, the “powers of the Word” to bridge the divide between God’s presence and the soul. Surin finds in the authority of the “Blessed Angela” a refusal to fall into the temptation of depressive atheism by accepting the loss in damnation as part of the relationship with God. As he quotes her: “If he wishes to damn me, may he damn me immediately” (Surin, 1963, p. 306). Angela’s, and Surin’s, love for
God is so intense that they are willing to give up God and be damned for the sake of God. The pain of the absence of the object of desire is a price to pay for the joy brought about when that object was present.

Surin knew that love requires sacrifice, having to go through despair on behalf of another. He claims that in order to bridge the divine-human divide that Kristeva mentions, the soul must go through purgatory and hell before encountering the divine bridegroom in spiritual marriage (Surin, 1963, p. 297). Love of human beings can require just as much. In Surin’s life the loss of Christ followed immediately upon the threat of the loss of Jeanne des Anges’ soul. Her spiritual death was a possibility that he could not tolerate. Kristeva believes that it is such a threat that can lead to mystical ecstasy: “In the place of death and so as not to die of the other’s death, I bring forth – or at least I rate highly – an artifice, an ideal, a ‘beyond’ that my psyche produces in order to take up a position outside itself – ek-stasis” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 99). She proposes understanding the melancholic individual as creating a loved other, divine or imagined, in order to escape having to die of the despair caused by the loss of a loved one. But we saw that Surin extends Kristeva by pushing further the individual “I” into a relation with another, into a “we” that is not produced by the psyche. His relation with a damning Christ may have been an artifice created by the fear of loss; but the ecstasy of his subjective encounter with Christ becomes nevertheless real when it is directed towards inter-subjective relations with others, as he himself believed it did. Surin emphasizes: “It is necessary to point out again that all these forces that come to the soul from love, lead particularly to charity for the neighbor” (Surin, 1990, p. 291). This imperative does not cease during ecstasy since “during these operations of grace he felt a singular instinct of love for souls” (Surin, 1990, p.290). He was ready to “die of the other’s death.” He accepted with equanimity that he would have to go through hell for Jeanne des Anges. But after his damning experience the possibility of peace returning still remains. In his case melancholia disappeared and the ecstatic joy of love was his again.

References

Notes

1 For historical documents describing the events prior to Surin’s arrival see de Certeau (2000). After writing the article, my attention was drawn to a study of demonic possession in early modern France up to, but not including, the events at Loudun. See Ferber (2004).
2 Aside from de Certeau’s works, scholarship on Surin is scant. De Certeau’s main work on Surin, his doctoral thesis, has not been published. For a linguistic approach to some of the issues I am discussing here see de Certeau (1986, pp. 91-93, 101-15). I am aware of only two other studies, both Christian theological. See Breton (1985) and Myle (1979).
3 For more on the social and political aspects see de Certeau (2000).
4 For an account of her influence in seventeenth century France see de Certeau (1992).
5 In his texts, especially his Guide, Surin uses as authoritative sources not only patristic ones but also women’s mystical writings. Among the women most often mentioned, besides Teresa of Avila, we find Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Genoa, Gertrude of Helfta, and Magdalene de Pazzi.
6 As Kristeva tells us, “[my research] is very much based on my personal development, on my biography, and on the historical processes that I have lived through, whether these be intellectual movements...or my own experience of maternity” (quoted in Margaroni & Lechte, 2004, p.144). Discussing her own post-partum depression, Kristeva writes: “Discovering autonomy and authority allows you to work with your own suffering and to grant it a discourse – not in an autoerotic or self-enclosed way, but in a way that enables you to connect with other people” (1996, p.10).

Juan M. Marin
Harvard Divinity School, 45 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138/USA
e: jmarin@hds.harvard.edu

Rini Bhattacharya Mehta

This article examines the nationalist writings and agenda of the revolutionary turned monk Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), who consolidated the cult of the motherland with the politics of a virile masculine resistance to British colonialism. Aurobindo was the first significant political leader to formulate an agenda for direct political action on spiritual (Hindu) principles. The most portrayed and at times caricatured figure of the early twentieth century “Swadeshi” revolutionary was a young (upper-caste and middle-class) Hindu male who carries a pistol and a copy of the Bhagavadgita in his two pockets. And Aurobindo’s writings and speeches were the direct inspiration behind this figure. The extremists’ strong and addictive ideals of self-sacrifice (atmotsarga) and devotion towards nation (deshabhakti) retained their significance long after “armed struggle” declined in influence in the wake of Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent “satyagraha.”

“Our history is the sacred biography of the Mother. Our philosophies are the revelations of the Mother’s mind. ... Our religion is the organized expression of the soul of the Mother. The outsider knows her as India.” Bipin Chandra Pal

“Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed in which you will have to live. ... Have you realised that you are merely the instruments of God, that your bodies are not your own? ... If you have realized that, then alone you will be able to restore this great nation.” Aurobindo Ghose

This article explores the deployment of spirituality in Indian nationalist militancy in the first decade of the twentieth century. A strategic conflation of violence and spirituality took place in the figure of the “Indian Nationalist” at the turn of the twentieth century, and the Swadeshi movement in Bengal (1903-08) was the new formula’s first testing ground. The radical young “Swadeshi” leader was far removed from the self-scrutinizing
reformer, educator, and social activist of the nineteenth century; he (I use the pronoun consciously, as the leaders were almost exclusively male) had little interest in either social or economic reform. He was the prophet of a new religion: the worship and service of “motherland.” It was this new ideal that stormed and eventually overcame the Indian National Congress – established in 1885 and operating hitherto as a mirror to the British parliamentary process – and radicalized it into a fully functional and virile national party. The dramatic shift occurred in the (in)famous 1907 session of the Indian National Congress in Surat, when the incredibly Anglicized and “civil” proceedings headed by the elderly members of the Congress – including PherozeShah Mehta and Surendranath Bannerjee – was interrupted by a group of young radicals, and the Indian nationalist political stage was divided overnight into two camps: the “moderates” and the “extremists.” The extremists’ strong and addictive ideals of self-sacrifice (atmotsarga) and devotion towards nation (deshabhakti) retained their significance long after “armed struggle” declined in influence in the wake of Gandhi’s non-violent “satyagraha.” Focusing on the political writings and speeches of one of the pioneer “extremist” leaders – Aurobindo Ghose – I revisit the crucial turning point in Indian nationalism where the rhetoric of armed “revolution” and the requisite “self-sacrifice” began to be infused into the political language of the day, colored by the new religiosity of the motherland ideal. The Indian National Congress rebounded from its extremist zeal to “non-violence” under Gandhi’s leadership, and evolved past its short revolutionary phase into an organized mainstream political party capable of official bargain and campaign. In spite of this dramatic shift, the Congress retained the Swadeshi spiritual core of its political program, through its entire phase of civil disobedience. And besides the Congress, there were several noticeable parallel movements of active armed resistance, which were direct offshoots of the 1907 extremist movement. The most portrayed and at times caricatured figure of the early twentieth century “Swadeshi” revolutionary was a young (upper-caste and middle-class) Hindu male who carried a pistol and a copy of the Bhagavadgita in his two pockets.

Aurobindo Ghose’s writings and ideas played a key role in the radicalization of an entire gamut of nationalists, both “extremist” and “moderate.” In the sections that follow, I scrutinize the creative and intellectual processes in Aurobindo’s writings – in their historical context – that amalgamate a masculine spirituality, political action, and the imagination of a nation together into the new paradigm of pan-Indian nationalism. This paper does not present a comprehensive reading or critique of Aurobindo’s political philosophy; it introduces to the reader a crucial turning point in Indian political discourse in which Aurobindo played a significant role. The conflation of religiosity and political action continued to have a complex presence in Indian nationalist milieus throughout the twentieth century, and the resurgence of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s has asserted the scholarly imperative of re-examining the roots of the above conflation. This article is an attempt in that direction.

Two Voyages and India’s Spiritual Revolution
In 1893 Narendranath Datta (1863-1902), a Hindu Sannyasin (monk) – then newly ordained as Swami Vivekananda – left India for the first time to participate in the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. His legendary uninvited appearance in the Parliament changed
the reception of Hinduism in the West, and made him a celebrity. Between 1893 and 1902 (the year of his premature death) Vivekananda spent most of his time and energy speaking to and interacting with an increasingly interested Western audience. In the year of Vivekananda’s first voyage to the West, a twenty-one year old Indian named Aurobindo Acroyd Ghose, who had lived fourteen years in England, several of them as the houseguest and pupil of a Manchester clergyman, returned to India, never to leave again. Aurobindo Ghose had just prematurely opted out of the coveted Civil Services, and taken up employment with the Maharaja of Baroda, an independent state in Western India. From 1893 onwards until his official retirement from “politics” in 1910, Aurobindo integrated contemporary nationalist ideas into a movement; and along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipinchandra Pal among others, transformed the Indian National Congress from a discussion forum into a political party. Aurobindo became one of the key leaders who fused the diverse pockets of bhadralok dissent into a coherent resistance that would crystallize further into a national movement under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

I recall Vivekananda in this essay for a reason. In the history of early Indian nationalism, the two figures – Narendranath Datta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, and Aurobindo Ghose, later known as Sri Aurobindo – constitute an interesting complementary pair. While Vivekananda expanded spirituality out into a mission of selfless social service, Aurobindo withdrew from his public mission – after a stint at armed struggle – into a spiritual cocoon, never to emerge again. They both came from similar upper-caste upper-middle-class educated Calcutta families that thrived on the colonial bureaucratic structure. Narendranath, the son of a renowned Calcutta attorney, and Aurobindo, the son of a successful physician, faced none or very few of the hurdles and frustrating situations that, for instance, Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) faced in his bureaucratic career. Narendranath could comfortably thrive in the already established Calcutta culture of liberal college scholarship, engaging in explorations of both Western philosophy and Indian spirituality, both of which he was obsessed with, from an early age. Aurobindo’s childhood was especially distanced from the bhadralok struggles, as his father sent him to live with a cleric family in Manchester, England. His years away from India were significantly different from say, Mahatma Gandhi’s years in South Africa. Having grown up sheltered from the political and economic realities of the colonial Indian middle class, Aurobindo expressed, on his return to India, a version of nationalism that was more distilled, theoretical, and spiritual than most of his contemporaries.

Aurobindo emerged, even in his early writings, as a macro-political strategist and thinker. As early as 1893, he could dissociate India’s political future from its colonial present:

The simple truth of the matter is that we shall not get from the British Parliament anything better than nominal redress, or at the most a petty and tinkering legislation. ... If we are indeed to renovate our country, we must no longer hold out supplicating hands to the English Parliament, like an infant crying to its nurse for a toy, but must recognize the hard truth that every nation must bear out its own
path to salvation with pain and difficulty, and not rely on the tutelage of another. (Ghose, 1996, p. 8)

Earlier in the same article, he had pointed out the irreconcilability of England’s colonial interest with justice to India:

The English are not, as they are fond of representing themselves, a people panting to do justice to all whom they govern. They are not an incarnation of justice, neither are they an embodiment of morality; but of all nations they are the most sentimental: hence it is that they like to think of themselves, and to be thought by others, a just people and a moral people. It is true that in the dull comedy, which we call English politics, Truth and Justice – written in large letters – cover the whole of the poster, but in the actual enactment of the play these characters have very little indeed to do. It was certainly not by appealing to the English sense of justice that the Irish people have come within reach of obtaining some measure of redress for their grievances. (Ghose, 1996, p. 6)

The Irish example, which Aurobindo continued to discuss in the essay, was significant, for this was the period which saw some extraordinary ideological collaboration between the Irish and the Indian nationalists. But first we must examine Aurobindo’s militant nationalist agenda with specific focus on his characterization of India’s spiritual identity. The Indian past that Aurobindo invoked repeatedly in his writings and speeches was an integral part of that spiritual identity, and I will compare his readings of the past with that of Vivekananda and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (henceforth referred to as Bankim).4 As I have mentioned above, Aurobindo’s unusual childhood and adolescence (separated from his parents, native country, and native language) have to be taken into account in considering his entry into the Indian nationalist dialogue. In the last two years of his stay in England, Aurobindo chose to learn Sanskrit and Bengali – two languages he had never studied before. I will show how the idea of a “nation” that emerged in Aurobindo’s writings not only exhibited a refinement of Bankim’s pioneering concepts, in some sense it was also the product of a distancing effect, a view from top down, where the “signifiers” were so detached from their “signifieds” that they took on a life on their own. For example, the ease and force with which Aurobindo posited the mother-goddess-nation symbolism in his writings were remarkably absent from Bankim’s novel Anandamath. The political life of bhadraloks was changing rapidly in the last decade of the nineteenth century, with increasing glossing over of the complexities, conflicts, and differences within the nation. Aurobindo’s writings provide the most relevant case study for the above.

From Anandamath to Bhawani Mandir: Aurobindo's Deployment of the “Motherland Ideal”

In 1905, Aurobindo published a pamphlet named Bhawani Mandir that advanced the Anandamath idea of celibate muscular Hindus engaging in an armed struggle for the liberation of the motherland. The fact that Bhawani Mandir contains no direct reference to Bankim’s novel suggests that Aurobindo perhaps presupposed the reader’s familiarity
with the novel *Anandamath*. Bankim was the first thinker to collude – in the Bengali/Indian context – the concepts of mother-goddess and native land into “motherland,” and Aurobindo had hailed him as the seer and the first prophet of nationalism. Aurobindo adopted Bankim’s metaphor of the mother-goddess-land, and then sought to redefine and expand on the relationship between the mother-goddess and the motherland using classical Hindu motifs:

What is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of Tamas we have but to wake the Brahma within. (Ghose, 1996, p. 69)

While the power that Bankim’s ‘santans’ – motherland’s (male) ‘children,’ in *Anandamath* – derived from their worship of the ‘mother-goddess-land’ was a physical militancy, Aurobindo spoke here of the power of spiritual and political regeneration. Western materialism could be countered and even superseded by the right application of spirituality in the political life of a nation. The political rise of Japan as a non-Western power drew admiration and a discernable envy from both Aurobindo and Vivekananda:

There is no instance in history of a more marvelous and sudden up-surgering of strength in a nation than modern Japan. All sorts of theories had been started to account for the uprising, but now the intellectual Japanese are telling us what were the fountains of that mighty awakening, the sources of that inexhaustible strength. They were drawn from religion. It was the Vedantic teachings of Oyomei and the recovery of Shintoism with its worship of the national Shakti in Japan in the image and person of the Mikado that enabled the little island empire to wield the stupendous weapons of Western knowledge and science as lightly and invincibly as Arjun wielded the Gandiv. (Ghose, 1996, pp. 71-2)

The attitude of both Vivekananda and Aurobindo to Japan’s modern-day “progress” has to be examined in the colonial perspective. First, from the point of view of the *bhadralok* intellectual, the rise of a “non-Western” imperialist power somehow challenged the seemingly permanent hegemony of Western colonialism. Secondly, the distinctness of the spiritual/religious “identity” of Japan (non-Christian and hence removed from the colonialisist nexus) hinted at a possibility for other non-Christian spiritualities’ self-assertion. The Orientalist historiography of India could be readily used to re-affirm the immense spiritual strength inherent in India; all that was needed was a renewal of that strength. As Partha Chatterjee (1986) has so eloquently shown in his seminal work on nationalism, the inherent distinctness of the colonized was an integral part of the nascent
nationalist identity that kept it from being a simple derivative function of the European nationalisms. India’s political destiny, as it appeared to the author of Bhawani Mandir, was inextricably tied to its spiritual destiny:

All great awakenings in India, all her periods of mightiest and most varied vigour have drawn their vitality from the fountainheads of some deep religious awakening. Wherever the religious awakening has been complete and grand, the national energy it has created has been gigantic and puissant; wherever the religious movement has been narrow or incomplete, the national movement has been broken, imperfect or temporary. The persistence of this phenomenon is proof that it is ingrained in the temperament of the race. (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 72, emphasis mine)

The last sentence in the quoted section echoed the familiar lore of Indian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I explore this issue in greater detail in the next section, in conjunction with Aurobindo’s preoccupation with history. The awakening of India that the author of Bhawani Mandir felt was imminent was part of a global vision, mythologized in the familiar trope of high Hinduism:

Wherever we turn our gaze, huge masses of strength rise before our vision, tremendous, swift and inexorable forces, gigantic figures of energy, terrible sweeping columns of force. ... The Shakti of War, the Shakti of Wealth, the Shakti of Science are tenfold more mighty and colossal, a hundredfold more fierce, rapid and busy in their activity, a thousandfold more prolific in resources, weapons and instruments than ever before in recorded history. Everywhere the Mother is at work; from Her mighty and shaping hands enormous forms of Rakshasas, Asuras, Devas, are leaping forth into the arena of the world. We have seen the slow but mighty rise of the great empires of the West, we have seen the swift, irresistible and impetuous bounding into life of Japan. Some are Mlechcha Shaktis clouded in their strength, black or blood-crimson with Tamas or Rajas, others are Arya Shaktis, bathed in the pure flame of renunciation and utter self-sacrifice: but all are the Mother in Her new phase, remoulding, creating. She is pouring Her spirit into the old; she is whirling into life the new. (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 65-6)

The mother is not simply motherland per se; in segments like above she is History, performing a cosmic dance of revival. The metaphor of the “mother” shifts swiftly and confusingly throughout the text; and at times is so diffused that it seems like a parody of itself. I would like to point out in this context that the literary form of Bhawani Mandir is, as would be expected from such a text, that of a manifesto; it was probably, therefore, not meant to be analytical and logically coherent as much as it was meant to be persuasive and dogmatic. It is possible that Aurobindo intended to extend the metaphorical use of the mother-goddess deployed so effectively by Bankim in Anandamath. It is important to remember that while Bankim in Anandamath effectively crystallized the mother-goddess-land combine, he never rallied for a re-enactment of the santans’ rebellion in the
contemporary political scene. Aurobindo’s use of a literary motif to instigate a political arousal was therefore groundbreaking in its own way.

It is difficult to gauge the sincerity of belief in the “Shakti ideal” in both Bankim and Aurobindo’s writings. Did they merely wish to formulate a rhetoric that was distinct from the mimic Anglo-Indian political speech or the no less mimic political jargon of the Bengal Renaissance? The historical and political analyses that both Bankim and Aurobindo published in times of complex political turmoil were reasonably astute, deep, and epistemologically aligned with the nineteenth century liberal Western ideals of which they were intellectual products. Did they actually find, in the upsurge of Shakti-worship in Bengal a possibility for an organic point of identification that would be more powerful even than any secular symbolism? The Bengali upper-caste bhadraloks were either Shakta or Vaishnav, but Shakti-worship came to dominate the public religious sphere in nineteenth century Bengal, when Durga Puja (worship of goddess Durga) was gradually emerging as the single most important annual festival. It is worthwhile to recall the ways in which the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore read and critiqued the new fascination with mother-worship of a community in which real women were relegated more and more to the newly formed prisons of bourgeois domesticity. However, Tagore’s critique appears more complex in the light of the repeated and emphatic use of images of mother-worship in nationalistic songs, poems, and other writings by Tagore himself. The subject of Tagore’s attack – the bhadralok’s obsession with the mother-land ideal – was more complex than a simple nationalistic extension of the Shakta bent of mind. Even in Anandamath, Bankim had created a religious communion that was neither revivalist nor nativist, but tempered with nineteenth century modern European ideas of identity-formation. Shakta and Vaishnav ideals merged and shaped a nascent “Hindu” identity of Bankim’s “santans” in a mode that had not existed prior to the hegemonic establishment of the colonialist historiography of India. The vague boundaries of a “Hindu” community that Bankim drew in his novels, Anandamath, Debi Chaudhurani and Sitaram, nevertheless grew steadily in the bhadralok imagination towards the end of the nineteenth century as a new hegemon. When Aurobindo in Bhawani Mandir extended the vague boundaries of religious rhetoric to the field of political action, he embarked on a discourse within the realm of the familiar. He projected political action onto the three individual ideals as outlined in the Bhagavadgita: Bhakti, Karma, and Jnana. This is one of the numerous instances in the Indian nationalist dialogue that ideas and passages from the Bhagavadgita would be taken out of the context of the epic Mahabharata and re-written into the bourgeois political ethos.

A text of visible political intent like Bhawani Mandir is probably easier to read and interpret in retrospect. The presence of the now familiar nationalistic motifs of sacrifice, cultivation of strength, and an active contemplation of development of national power make the text an interesting piece in the study of the Swadeshi ideology. The significance of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, historians have pointed out, lay not on the success or failure of its immediate political promises or programs, but in the creation of the historical momentum that made nationalism the only viable political alternative for both Bengali and Indian intellectuals. What can still be read in Bhawani Mandir is a frozen picture of the historical moment. Even if Bhawani Mandir took its inspiration from
Bankim’s *Anandamath*, there was nothing of the political ambition and grandiloquence in Bankim’s poetic rendering that is comparable with the last section of Aurobindo’s pamphlet – titled “The Message of the Mother” – that has almost a biblical ring to it:

if you ask why we should erect a temple to Bhawani, the Mother, hear Her answer, “Because I have commanded it, and because by making a centre for the future religion you will be furthering the immediate will of the Eternal and storing up merit which will make you strong in this life and great in another. You will be helping to create a nation, to consolidate an age, to Aryanise a world. And that nation is your own, that age is the age of yourselves and your children, that world is no fragment of land bounded by seas and hills, but the whole earth with her teeming millions.” (Chatterjee, 1986, p.75)

While Bankim’s santans were unwilling participators in a violent struggle to liberate their homeland, Aurobindo’s prospective followers were invited to engage in pre-emptive aggression. In its overt sponsorship of violence sanctioned by religiosity, *Bhawani Mandir* anticipated the chauvinistic Hindu nationalism of the most virulent kind. Even if it is possible to narrow down the emphasis – from the reader’s point of view – on the poetic symbolism of a temple to the “mother” that dominates the first two-thirds of the text, it is impossible to ignore the more aggressively “Hindu nationalistic” suggestions and prescriptions of methods that form the Appendix. The Appendix has five short “work and rules” of the “new Order of Sannyasis”: General Rules, Work for the People, Work for the Middle Class, Work with the Wealthy Classes, and General Work for the Country. It is impossible not to note the special status granted to the wealthy, as connoted by the phrase “work with” used in its case, as opposed to “work for” in all the other cases. The Sannyasis of the new order are given three distinct sets of instructions to deal with the three broad economic classes of the society. For the people, the Sannyasis have to effect, among other things, “lectures and demonstrations suited to an uneducated intelligence.” The middle-class is accorded the least amount of attention: the Sannyasis are instructed to undertake “various works of public utility … connected especially with the education and religious life of the middle classes” (Chatterjee, 1986, p.77). A cautious conservatism marks the attitude towards the Wealthy Classes, as the Sannyasis are told to approach

the zamindars, landholders and rich men generally, and endeavour -

1. To promote sympathy between the zamindars and the peasants and heal all discords.
2. To create the link of a single and living religious spirit and a common passion for one great ideal between all classes.
3. To turn the minds of rich men to works of public beneficence and charity to those in their neighbourhood independent of the hope of reward and official distinction.

(Chatterjee, 1986, p.77)

The absolute refusal in this section on the author’s part to tamper with social inequality recalls and repeats Bankim’s desertion of the cause of the landless peasants in the latter’s
1872 essay “Bengal’s Peasantry.” It is of enormous political significance that the socio-economic stratification imposed and implemented by the colonial administration was sanctioned by Aurobindo, who within only two years of the publication of this text, would emerge as the revolutionary leader of a new generation of nationalists.

However, there are certain striking ideological and methodological distinctions between Bankim’s 1872 essay and Aurobindo’s 1905 manifesto. Bankim’s essay embodied first, the limitations of the European Enlightenment’s promise of social justice and secondly, the colonial bourgeoisie’s inherent incapability to disown the privileges granted by the colonial rule. Contained within the limits of colonial discourse as it was, the epistemological failure of Bankim’s essay was simple: it lay in the absence, in the text, of a viable political solution to the prevailing social injustice and inequities. Nationalism did not – or rather could not – appear as a political option in the time of Bankim’s argument. However, by the time Aurobindo wrote his manifesto, nationalism had already become a dominant political imperative. I contend that because of this overwhelming background presence of the “nation” in Aurobindo’s discourse, his political sanctions and omissions must be examined in conjunction with the nationalist ideology they accentuate. If, in accordance with Aurobindo’s program, the poor “people” continued to live with their “uneducated intelligence” and the “discord” between the “zamindars” and the peasants were hoped to be “healed” without breaking the relationship of exploitation between them, what exactly was the nature of the revolution that Aurobindo hoped to incite with his manifesto? What significant changes, if any, in the political, economic, and social lives of the three broad economic classes (the people, the middle class, and the wealthy) were being signaled by his call to arms? A careful reading of the text reveals that the political program propounded by Aurobindo served more the cause of a cultural nationalism than that of a political revolution. One of the instructions to the Sannyasis in their “work with” the wealthy classes was “to create the link of a single and living religious spirit and a common passion for one great ideal between all classes.” What would be the epistemological identity of the “religious spirit” that a group of Brahmachari Sannyasis at the service of “Bhawani” would create and propagate? What would be the position of the “people” with their “uneducated intelligence” and women or other religious communities – neither of whom even figure in the manifesto – in the new ideal? If, in a country as demographically diverse as India, the “one great ideal” that would unite all classes is nationalism, what “single” religious spirit would be designated to guide it? These questions remained unanswered, not merely in Aurobindo’s revolutionary manifesto, but in most nationalist discourses of the Swadeshi era and the following two decades.

The limits of the political application of the symbolically powerful mother-goddess-nation conglomerate would be pointed out at great detail by Tagore in his novel Ghare Baire (1916). In Tagore’s novel, the fiercely aggressive ideology of a Hindu upper-caste extremist leader (similar to Aurobindo, though Tagore himself denied the connection) and his total commitment to the cult of mother-goddess-land are criticized because of their incapability for universal social representation. But universality is exactly what nationalism claimed for itself, during the crucial formative junctures of most nations. That bourgeois Indian nationalism continually subsumed other ideologies to emerge as the definitive hegemon during the Swadeshi era was not an isolated or unique historical accident. It is
interesting to see how the particular version of nationalism that became hegemonic in colonial India played out in relationship with the active agency of the bhadralok intellectuals. The continual discursive privileging of the motherland ideal by the dominant advocates of nationalism – the bhadraloks – overshadowed any question regarding the legitimacy of their representation of the entire nation. This is the single most significant leap of faith that the Indian colonial bourgeoisie demanded from the Indian masses and the colonial rulers alike; India spoke through them. Rarely speaking of their own subject positions or their complicity in the colonial exploitation of the masses, the bhadraloks theorized a nationalism that was more invested in projecting India’s elusive past glory into an equally elusive future. The emphasis was on the historical inevitability of the nationalist future, not on the immediate or eventual resolution of the gross economic injustices that affected the greater population who had neither the leisure nor the opportunity to theorize their own positions. In the evocation of the glorious Hindu Indian pre-colonial past and in the anticipation of the moral supremacy of a future Indian nation, the rebellious landless peasants and the urban poor, the disenfranchised lower castes and the women could be safely bypassed, their problems seen as secondary to the more urgent task of nation-formation. Aurobindo was a practical political strategist; but even in his particular writings that were the most fraught with political urgency, history and all its symbolic trappings frequently dominated concrete plans for the present.

Nationalism and the Battleground of History

Bhawani Mandir was written and published before Aurobindo’s literal entrance into the Indian political scene. Arguably, the text propagated a strong essentialist sentiment that Aurobindo as a public orator and politico would stop harping on from 1907 onwards, the stormy year that marked his role in the definition of nationalism as the ultimate creed for the Indian National Congress. The Surat confrontation had left its indelible mark, even though a power struggle continued between the Moderates and the Extremists over the tactical and official control of the Congress (Sarkar, 1983, p. 150). The extremist nationalist movement was far from a political monolith; it was non-linear in its progression, especially during the First World War. Sumit Sarkar refers to the mixed messages the nationalists sent to the British Government during the First World War:

In 1918 Tilak and Gandhi would even go to the extent of trying to raise money and men for the British through village tours – but with the hope that the rulers would grant major political reforms in return for such loyalty. ‘Purchase war debentures, but look to them as title deeds of Home Rule,’ was Tilak’s plea in 1918. An objective basis thus emerged during the war years for a kind of joint platform of Moderates, Extremists, and the ‘Young Party’- controlled Muslim League around a programme of putting constitutional but still quite intense pressure on the beleaguered British Government in return for war support. (Sarkar, 1983, p. 150)

The First World War years also saw the rise of several Home Rule Leagues, most notably under Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whose activities “consisted in organizing discussion groups and reading-rooms in cities, mass scale pamphlets, and lecture tours –
no different in form from older Moderate politics, but significantly new so far as intensity and extent were concerned” (Sarkar, 1983, p. 151). The micropolitical concerns of the disparate groups were often different, but the hegemonic presence of the Indian nation in every political discourse was constant and unquestionable. And this is where I must refer to a key defining element in the imagination of the Indian nation: the presumed common Indian past. The future – that is, a postcolonial Indian nation – appeared vague and polymorphic even as early as the 1920s. Communalism – manifest in the Indian context in the form of Hindu-Muslim enmity – was becoming a political force in itself; and there were several organized ‘caste movements’ that vied with simplistic nationalism. To define British India as a prospective nation was difficult; but the other option – an admission of the impossibility of India as a nation – was politically inadmissible. Only a return to history could provide the wholeness that the checkered political landscape lacked. And hence Aurobindo’s writings, not unlike many of his contemporaries, emphasized the idea of the possibility of a future Indian greatness that would be a fulfillment of a great Indian past.

History has emerged repeatedly as “the theater of truth” in nationalist imaginings throughout the world, but especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when both conquest and resistance have acquired ideological significance. From scholarly musings like Ernest Renan’s early theorization of history as a collective memory of the people to Gandhi’s practical and strategic deployment of the mythical Ramrajya (reign of Rama, the hero of the epic Ramayana) as a historical imperative in his mass-mobilizations, history has formed the core of nationalist formulations of identity. History was central to the late-nineteenth century nationalist formulation of “India” as a political entity. History was the field of discourse where the colonizer and the colonized wielded their perceptions of self and the other. Interestingly, however, if identity in the realm of nationalism sought roots in history, it was only in reaction to the colonizer’s denial of any history and identity of the colonized. The pre-colonial past rarely figured in the colonial discourses as a legitimate collective memory of the people. In Mill’s monumental work History of British India, for example, the pre-colonial Indians’ mentality was shaped by their inability to write history. The superior intelligence that was required to write history, to carve out a sense of the self from the collective memory and perception of a community, was, according to the colonizer, absent from the colonized (or colonizable) mind. Within the limits of colonial discourse and polity, this misconception perpetuated by the colonizer could be countered by an affirmation of the colonized identity deeply rooted in history. Indian nationalist historiography was thus the logical extension of nascent Indian nationalism. By the time the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, there were already several forms of national history being circulated, in genres ranging from serious analyses and dogmatic textbooks to populist kitsch versions.

History as an ideological battleground was thus firmly established in Aurobindo’s literary-political milieu. The finer points, the micropolitical concerns, could all be postponed in the anticipation of a unified Indian glory. Projected into the future, India became an idea, as it was an idea of the past to be fulfilled not so much in the material but in the spiritual realm. This was an extension of the “reversal of the Orientalist problematic” – as Partha Chatterjee explained – that defined Bankim’s politics:
Bankim ... seeks a specific subjectivity for the nation, but within an essential
typology of cultures in which the specificity can never be truly historical. Within
the domain of thought thus defined, however, it seems a valid answer. The West
has a superior culture, but only partially; spiritually, the East is superior. What is
needed, now, is the creation of a cultural ideal in which the industries and the
sciences of the West can be learnt and emulated while retaining the spiritual
greatness of Eastern culture. This is the national-cultural project at its moment of
departure. (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 73)

I return to Bankim in this context to illustrate and emphasize the strong adherence and
commitment to a cultural nationalism that bind the otherwise very different writings of
Aurobindo and Bankim. The assertion that the inherent (spiritual) nature of the past
Indian civilization needed to be transported to the future Indian nation at all costs
recurring in nationalist discourse throughout the late nineteenth and the early twentieth
century. I have shown earlier in this paper how in Bhawani Mandir, Aurobindo intertwined
India’s political and spiritual destinies. Vivekananda’s pronouncement that it was India’s
destiny to lead the world spiritually was a reassertion of this as well. Tagore would
propound the idea in a different form, where he would valorize the heterogeneity of
India’s cultural tradition as a function of India’s inherent national temperament. In
contrast with Tagore’s, the writings of Aurobindo – along with Bankim, Vivekananda, and
many others – would project the Muslim “invasion” and rule as a disruption in the
“natural” flow of Indian history. A selectively macrocosmic view of India’s pre-Islamic
period is discernible in most Bengali cultural nationalists, but the most amount of
emphasis on a crystallized Indian/Hindu spiritual identity based on Vedantic components
is found prominently in Vivekananda and Aurobindo. The sweeping generalizations on
Indian history and spirituality evidenced in the section quoted above are a characteristic
feature of Aurobindo’s writings. This is removed, not so much in time as in the timeline of
nationalist development, from the meticulous historicity (however contrived) of Bankim’s
characterization of Krishna, for example.

Nationalist historiography (like any other historiography) bears the indelible mark
of the historiographer; and it has been the continued concern of the students of Indian
national history and polity to come to terms with the problem of the nineteenth century
bhadralok agency. It is difficult to define the boundaries of elitism that shaped nationalist
politics in late nineteenth century Bengal and India. It is important to remember that
Aurobindo was one of the pioneers of a revolutionary anti-colonial nationalism that
distinguished itself from the suppliant politics of the Indian National Congress. And
political elitism was the primary point of contention between the radical revolutionaries
and the pro-establishment Congress. As early as 1893, Aurobindo made the accusation
that “by not transgressing the middle-class pale the Congress has condemned itself, as a
saving power, to insignificance and ultimate sterility” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 24). The
Swadeshi movement in Bengal and the split that emerged during the Surat Congress
Session between “moderates” and “extremists” marked the creation of a definitive form
of Indian nationalism; the new nationalism was divorced almost completely from the
colonially sanctioned path of mimic parliamentary process. Aurobindo, being one of the
chief leaders of the new revolutionary movement, emphasized the need for a sea-change in the essential attitude of the nationalists:

It is urgently necessary ... that we should shake off the superstitious habit of praying for protection to the British authorities and look for help to the only true, political divinity, the national strength that is within ourselves. If we are to do this effectually, we must organise physical education all over the country and train up the rising generation not only in the moral strength and courage for which Swadeshism has given us the materials, but in physical strength and courage and the habit of rising immediately and boldly to the height of even the greatest emergency. ... It is high time we abandoned the fat and comfortable selfish middle-class training we give to our youth and make a nearer approach to the physical and moral education of our old Kshatriyas or the Japanese Samurai. (Ghose, 1996, pp. 116-7)

The above articulates the familiar doctrine of militant nationalism that marked the dominant political climate in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab through the late nationalist period. It is necessary to note the context of this particular call for “Kshatriya bravado.” The above section appeared in an article written after the infamous Comilla riots, which was one in a series of clashes that occurred between disparate Hindu and Muslim groups, with or without police intervention, in Bengal in 1906-07. The specific riot took place in Comilla in March 1907, following a visit by Nawab Salimullah, a co-founder of the Muslim League. Aurobindo’s anger was directed not so much at the Muslim leaders and their rioting followers as it was against the British administration and Anglo-Indian newspapers that blamed mostly the nationalists for destabilizing the social structures in the villages, thus facilitating communal disturbances. Aurobindo, being a prominent nationalist leader at this time, stood in the eye of the political storm in Bengal more than any other Bengali intellectual of his time. His direct political involvement makes his writings during this time more liable to retrospective scrutiny.

The conflict of interest between the Hindu and the Muslim population in Bengal became a dominant political issue to the nationalists beginning in 1903-4, and reached its climax with Viceroy George Curzon’s official announcement of a partition of Bengal in July 1905. The proposed partition into a East Bengal of Muslim majority population and a West Bengal consisting of a Hindu majority was symptomatic of the British “divide and rule” political strategy, as substantiated by contemporary government documents such as Home Secretary H. H. Risley’s note – “Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is perfectly true and is one of the merits of the scheme” (Sarkar, 1983, p. 107). In a clever political move, Curzon’s administration tried to win Muslim support for the Partition by presenting it as a step toward political empowerment of the erstwhile disenfranchised Muslim population. Sumit Sarkar quotes from a public speech at Dacca in February 1904 in which Curzon advertised the partition to the Muslims of East Bengal as the prospective initiator of a “unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman viceroys and kings” (Sarkar, 1983, p. 107). In the broader context of Indian nationalism, the proposed partition had a more immediate effect, as the
unity between the Hindus and the Muslims became a part of the political program, thus siphoning off political energy away from anti-colonial resistance.

Sumit Sarkar (1973) in his detailed study of the Swadeshi Movement remarks that the riots of 1906-7 were crucially important “in the evolution of nationalist thought and practice.” Sarkar describes the varied reaction of nationalists to the recurring incidents of violence: “Moderate efforts to meet the challenge through talks with Muslim upper-class leaders obviously ignored the deeper roots of the problem, while their appeals to the government for strict enforcement of law and order sounded insufferably mendicant to the radical youth” (p. 461).

A radical article written by Aurobindo in 1907 during the height of the communal riots shows how transparent the British “divide and rule” policy was to at least a section of the Indian nationalists. The proposed partition of Bengal, with its outward rhetoric of equal religious representation and the barely hidden strategies of sabotaging any nationalist mobilization, in retrospect comes across clearly as a typical function of colonial politics, geared towards the preservation of the colony at the cost of the colonized. But even as early as in 1907, Aurobindo decried the British “attempt to make capital of the religious diversities of Indian society” and read the situation as a complex political problem: “In the new Legislative Councils the Mahomedans are to have representation not as children of the soil, an integral portion of one Indian people, but as a politically distinct and hostile interest which will, it is hoped, outweigh or at least nullify the Hindus” (Ghose, 1996, p. 244).

Considered in isolation, the above comment may be read as a complex assessment of a political problem that is yet to be solved, 100 years later, in the geopolitical context of the Indian subcontinent – the problem of equal representation in a heterogeneous community. The title of the essay, however, was “Caste and Representation,” and Aurobindo’s outcry was against anyone or anything standing in the path of the attainment of Indian sovereignty. If the (upper-caste) Hindus were leading in the movement for Indian independence, it was because they were in a position to lead. The Muslims, instead of complaining, should simply follow the program. They could be used by the British in their self-serving politics because they were oblivious to the political reality:

The Hindus have become self-conscious, they have heard a voice that cries to them, “Arise from the dead, live and follow me,” and they are irresistibly growing into a living and powerful force. Unless the Mahomedans can be built up also into a self-conscious, living and powerful political force, their assistance to the rulers will be a mere handful of dust in the balance. But the moment they become a living and self-conscious power the doom of the bureaucracy will be sealed. (Ghose, 1996, p. 244)

The condescension – I emphasize – runs deep and clear in the section. The self-righteous rhetoric of the bhadralok radical surfaces in another article written during the same period – “The Awakening of Gujerat” – though it is couched in a more carefully worded assimilationalism:
Nationalism depends for its success on the awakening and organizing of the whole strength of the nation; it is therefore vitally important for Nationalism that the politically backward classes should be awakened and brought into the current of political life; the great mass of orthodox Hinduism which was hardly even touched by the Old Congress movement, the great slumbering mass of Islam which has remained politically inert throughout the last century, the shopkeepers, the artisan class, the immense body of illiterate and ignorant peasantry, the submerged classes, even the wild tribes and races still outside the pale of Hindu civilization, Nationalism can afford to neglect and omit none. (Ghose, 1996, p. 247)

Interestingly, Aurobindo’s radical co-revolutionaries and followers did little to follow up on their grand promise of unity. For all their political radicalism, Aurobindo and his fellow ideologues failed to come to terms with the basic conflict of interest between two groups that could not be more different. The Hindu zamindars, moneylenders, and upper-caste educated bhadraloks had prospered under the British, and had gathered, over time, enough political clout to think, write, and speak against British colonialism. But there was also the vast Muslim peasantry that paid taxes to the mostly Hindu middlemen, and it was fairly easy for this second group to fall victim to anti-Hindu propaganda that came from self-serving Maulavis who preached their religious fundamentalism in the garb of class struggle. Aurobindo and his group had accused the Indian National Congress of ignoring the reality of the socio-economic issues that mattered to the common masses, but when the time of active struggle arrived, the radical critics of the old Congress politics themselves chose not to question their subject positions in the act of imagining a single community out of an entire subcontinent. Instead of questioning his prescribed method, Aurobindo along with numerous other radical leaders chose to treat inter-community strife as an inconvenient distraction from the ultimate goal of nationhood. Sumit Sarkar has emphasized that Rabindranath Tagore was one of the few voices of political sanity at that time, one whose voice was lost in the jingoist nationalistic fervor:

Rabindranath offered a far more profound analysis of the riots, and the rethinking they induced in him led the poet to make a decisive and final break with the traditionalist ideas which had swayed him for some time. But his call for building a mahajati [great people/nation] on the basis of a repudiation of all sectarian barriers and prejudices, however sacrosanct, and his appeals for patient constructive work in villages to bridge the gulf between the bhadralok and the masses, found little response from among his contemporaries. Far more attractive seemed the message of the Bande Mataram and the Yugantar, with its militancy and romantic appeal, its promise of a heroic and yet essentially simple road to freedom, and its assumption – so conveniently attuned to bhadralok preconceptions – that the rioters were mere hired agents, no more than “hooligans.”... But “revolution” with the rural masses inert or hostile could mean in practice only action by an elite, and so extremism became transmuted into terrorism. (Sarkar, 1973, p. 461, emphasis mine)
The ‘essentially simple road to freedom’ and the acceptance of freedom as the panacea to all intra-national problems became the center of Aurobindo’s writings and speeches, especially following his 9-month prison term in 1908-9.

The Bhagavadgita, Pistol, and the Lone Bhadralok

Aurobindo’s first contact with revolutionary ideas occurred as early as 1890, when he was in Cambridge, studying the classics and preparing for the Civil Service Examination. A recent volume by Elleke Boehmer (2002) details the influence of Irish nationalism on his thought, which would later intensify with his friendship with Margaret Noble, the Irish political activist who later came to be known as Nivedita, after she became Swami Vivekananda’s disciple (pp. 34-124). Boehmer speaks of Aurobindo’s continued support of armed revolutionary tactics that continued at least until his arrest in 1908. A significant current biographer of Aurobindo – Peter Heehs – has pointed out the lack of solid evidence for Aurobindo’s involvement with terrorist groups, especially Maniktala Secret Society of which his brother Barin was the leader. However, Heehs concurs with Amales Tripathi in the view that Aurobindo’s silences on the subject of his involvement spoke more than his non-admissions (Heehs, 1998, p. 43). It is significant that the Maniktala Secret Society grew out of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti, an organization “founded in 1902 to promote physical, mental, and moral culture among Calcutta students” (Heehs, 1998, p. 18). The ideological blueprint for this society came from Aurobindo’s Bhawani Mandir, or Bankim’s Anandamath, or both. Aurobindo, however, did not admit to knowledge of or involvement in terrorist activities at his trial that followed a 12-month incarceration, and he was acquitted. A sea-change is discernible in his writings following his prison term and acquittal. His earlier speeches and writings, while replete with references to Hindu mythological figures and allegories, more often than not dealt with direct, immediate political issues and events. His post imprisonment writings are exceptionally vague and general in nature, the political astuteness of his earlier articles drowned here in spiritual overtones. In his first significant public appearance, he spoke of the epiphanies he had in prison, and ended his speech with a revision of a particularly poignant political point he had made a year and a half earlier. I will touch upon the relevant portions of the two speeches that speak clearly of the ideological shift that had taken place in the speaker’s political stance.

In a speech he delivered before his arrest, to the National Union in Bombay, Aurobindo had drawn applause from the crowd by championing nationalism as the singular plan of action that remained for the virtuous to follow:

There is a creed in India today which calls itself Nationalism, a creed which has come to you from Bengal. ... What is Nationalism? Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed in which you shall have to live. (Ghose, 1996, p. 251)

The use of religion in the above section comes across as strategic, and typical of Aurobindo’s fiery oratory style. The figure of Krishna as the visionary godhead partaking in
human affairs in the epic *Mahabharata* recurs in this speech, as in numerous other writings by Aurobindo.

I would digress a little to point towards the re-invention of the Krishna figure in Aurobindo’s writings, along with a renewed interest in the *Bhagavadgita*. The re-invention of Krishna in colonial India began notably with Bankim’s *Krishnacharitra*, a text that can be best described as a meticulous mixture of historical scholarship and literary criticism, coalesced with a revisionist sense of history and a nascent nationalism. Bankim found Krishna as capable of becoming the great unifying symbol for Indian culture and civilization, a flawless leading figure that could represent India in the sense that Christ represented Western civilization. But Krishna – as he was worshipped throughout India – was unacceptable to the revisionist nationalist historian whose role Bankim assumed for himself. Krishna had been, from at least the eleventh century onwards, a rustic figure approachable by the common populace through mystical devotion. Krishna was one of the few gods who became the focus of the Bhakti poets and saints who sang against the Brahminical control over the common people’s spiritual lives through their control of the temples and the Sanskrit language. This Krishna, the “beloved” of numerous Bhakti poets and saints all over India (many of whom were influenced by the teachings of Sufi mystics) was a rustic flute-playing cowherd, interested more in love than in war. The Krishna that would become Bankim’s “myth of praxis,” had to be purged of the rusticity and eroticism that had accumulated over the dark centuries of emasculated Hinduism. Bankim’s Krishna (the “original” Krishna, according to him) became a robust politico, a spiritual leader par excellence and most important – a mainstream Hindu god. The *Bhagavadgita* was rediscovered as a text that provided guidance in time of war; and the lonely figure of Arjuna who must fight the long arduous war for justice in spite of his reluctance to kill became the symbol for the *bhadralok* revolutionary who must participate in a violent struggle to forge a nation out of blood and sacrifice. The non-violent religious practices of Vaishnavs (who did not practice animal sacrifice, for example) could meet the violence associated with Shakta mother-worship (animal-worship was almost mandatory in Shakta festivals) under the aegis of a new Hindu “wartime” philosophy. The selfless action performed by Arjuna who was nothing but an instrument in the grand divine design of things (*nimitta*, as he is called by Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita*), was valorized *ad infinitum* by the nationalist leaders. The extremist leaders used the model for action strategically and mercilessly in their propaganda to draw ingenuous students who were trained for terrorist tasks. Even in his speech in 1907, Aurobindo used the rhetoric of the *Bhagavadgita* to sway his audience:

> Have you realised that you are merely instruments of God, that your bodies are not your own? You are merely instruments of God for the work of the Almighty. ...If you have realised that, then you are truly Nationalists; then alone will you be able to restore this great nation. ...and this great nation will rise again and become once more what it was in the days of its spiritual greatness. (Ghose, 1996, p. 252)

Here, Aurobindo used the celebrated discourse from *Bhagavadgita* on the immortality of the soul, the mortal fragility of the body and the ease with which the virtuous abandon
their bodies for a just cause – in short, the ideal speech for the recruitment of prospective martyrs for the cause of the nation:

Sri Krishna cannot grow to manhood unless he is called upon to work for others, unless the Asuric forces of the world are about him and work against him and make him feel his strength. Therefore in Bengal there came a time, after the first outbreak of the triumphant hope, when all the material forces that can be brought to bear against Nationalism were gradually brought into play, and the question was asked of Bengal, ‘Can you suffer? Can you survive?’ The young men of Bengal who had rushed forward in the frenzy of the moment, in the inspiration of the new gospel they had received, rushed forward in the frenzy of the moment, in the inspiration of the new-found strength and expecting to bear down all obstacles that came in their way, and were now called upon to suffer. They were called upon to bear the crown, not of victory, but of martyrdom. They had to learn the real nature of their new strength. It was not their own strength, but it was the force which was working through them, and they had to learn to be the instruments of that force. (Ghose, 1996, p. 258)

It is worthwhile to remember, at this point, at least one young man – Khudiram Bose, who was hanged in 1910 for his attempt to kill Judge Douglas Kingsford – who probably received the instructions for the operation from Aurobindo, via middlemen. Heehs refers to a number of accounts by Aurobindo’s co-revolutionaries that mention Aurobindo’s direct involvement in terrorist activities, including the assassination attempt on Kingsford, in Muzaffarpur: “Jadugopal Mukherjee and Arun Chandra Guha write of Aurobindo not only as the founder of the revolutionary party but also as a member of a Russian-style ‘revolutionary tribunal’ that sentenced an unpopular judge to death. One writer goes so far as to have Aurobindo literally give his blessing to the young men chosen to carry out this mission.”6 The files of the Home Department of the British Government also contained detailed reports on Aurobindo’s presence at the top of the chain of command in many terrorist operations (Heehs, 1998, p. 51). Incidentally, while Aurobindo was represented by the notable attorney C. R. Das in his trial and was acquitted, Khudiram was left to take his chances with the justice system. Tagore in Ghare Baire (1916) wrote apprehensively of the revolutionary leader Sandip fleeing the scene of unrest to save his own skin while his young disciple Amulya got killed in action. A parallel is evident, though Khudiram was not the only ‘soldier’ abandoned by his celebrity leaders and Aurobindo was not the only leader who did not take the fall for his subordinates, and Tagore denied any connection between his fictional character and Aurobindo.

Partha Chatterjee, in his seminal work on Indian nationalism, found the nationalist thought that originated in Bankim and was inherited culturally by Aurobindo’s generation was ideologically limited, as it was “born out of the encounter of a patriotic consciousness with the framework of knowledge imposed upon it by colonialism. It leads inevitably to an elitism of the intelligentsia, rooted in the vision of a radical regeneration of national culture”(Chatterjee, 1986, p. 79). Chatterjee had found it “not surprising that in the history of political movements in India, Bankim’s direct disciples were the ‘revolutionary
terrorists,’ the small group of armed activists drawn from the Hindu middle classes, wedded to secret underground organization and planned assassination.” Chatterjee and other Marxist historians of Indian nationalism have repeatedly pointed out the problems inherent in imposing a national idea on a vastly agrarian population, without interceding in the class relationships. Aurobindo had begun his political career by attacking the old guard of the Indian National Congress for their elitism and for their distance from the needs and condition of the “people.” As the commander of an army of bhadr alok revolutionaries, Aurobindo practiced a different form of elitism. And faced with physical persecution, he retreated, famously, into spirituality. The retreat began in his first celebrated public appearance, a lecture popularly known as the Uttapara Speech, in which Aurobindo emerged as a man of god. He spoke of the epiphanies he had inside the prison, his dialogues with Krishna (the god), and concluded with a complete reversal of his past ideas:

I spoke once before with this force in me and I said then that this movement is not a political movement and that Nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it in another way. I say no longer that Nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the sanatana dharma [Hinduism] which for us is Nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the sanatana dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows [sic]. Where the sanatana dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the sanatana dharma were capable of perishing, with the sanatana dharma it would perish. The sanatana dharma, that is Nationalism. This is the message that I have to speak to you. (Ghose, 1996, p. 376)

Aurobindo left Bengal in April 1910 to avoid further persecution by the British, to live in Pondicherry under French jurisdiction, where he became a recluse and wrote many philosophical and theosophical volumes. The references to “sanatana dharma” and the Bhagavadgita would return in Indian politics with the most successful leader – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi – who would manage to mobilize more sections of the common population than any leader who came before or after. The validity of Gandhi’s theories and the eventual success of his version of nationalism, however, are still being debated.

The birth of the sovereign nation of India in August 15, 1947, coincided with Aurobindo’s birthday. On the eve of the much awaited Independence Day, Aurobindo’s message to his countrymen was broadcast by All India Radio. August 15 belonged to the bloodiest period in the history of the subcontinent, as at least 500,000 people died in the “partition riots” and many millions became official refugees. Punjab and Bengal, the two regions that were divided to give birth to Pakistan, were devastated by unprecedented violence – murder, rape, and arson. M. K. Gandhi was in East Bengal, trying to quell the riots, far from the regality of the Independence Celebrations in New Delhi. Aurobindo foresaw, in the event of the much awaited independence, neither the insurmountable challenges that faced the new leaders of a nation more diverse and heterogeneous than the entire continent of Europe, nor the absence of any revolutionary spirit of the people.
Aurobindo spoke, in his address, of the absurdity of the partition of India, and then looked forward to a globalization of culture, with an Indian hegemony:

an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India’s spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice. (Ghose, 1996, pp. 538-9)

A similar hope for India’s spiritual leadership of the world was predominant in Vivekananda’s writings. But Aurobindo’s choice of words came during a subcontinent-wide bloodbath, which followed closely the worst famines caused by the British hauling grains from India to feed the commonwealth’s soldiers fighting World War II. His “prophesizing” – considering his political revolutionary past – makes us pause, and question the various ideologies of Indian nationalism that produced the “terrorist leader turned philosopher” Sri Aurobindo, and millions of dead and displaced subjects. Beyond the violence of the 1947 partition, the postcolonial nation-state of India has had a complex relationship with religious nationalism. A complex line-up of lenses stands between our mind’s eyes and Aurobindo’s cultural nationalism and philosophical optimism: Gandhi’s murder in the hands of a Hindu nationalist in 1948 and the subsequent marginalizing of Hindu nationalism, five decades of state sponsored secularism punctuated by oppression of minorities, caste-based mobilizations and sporadic violence, the return of Hindu nationalism with a vengeance in the 1990s, and the constant ongoing negotiations of neoliberal Hindu fundamentalism – both national and diasporic – with global capitalism, to mention a few. It would not be fair to consider Aurobindo complicit in the creation of an ideology by which more lives were destroyed than were built, but would it be fair to absolve him completely?

References


Notes

1 *Bhadralok* is a modern Bengali word, possibly meant for a Bengali equivalent of “gentleman.” Its meaning evolved during the late nineteenth century to denote the specific class of upper-caste, (Western-) educated Hindu Bengali men who separated themselves from the poor masses, the lower-caste Hindus, and the non-Hindus.

2 Quoted in Bose & Jalal (1997, p. 50).


4 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) was the first significant novelist and essayist in the Bengali language. In addition to his vast range of contribution to the creation of a Bengali colonial bhadralok culture, Bankim’s symbolic juxtaposition of the nation and the mother-goddess in his novel *Anandamath* (1882) created the image of “country as mother,” that influenced most Indian nationalist imaginings that followed. His novels also marked the early consolidation of the “feeble domesticated woman” with the “mythically powerful mother-goddess,” thus instituting both the gendered representation of the nation and the woman’s position within that nation. Aurobindo Ghose hailed Bankim as the Rshi (seer) of Indian nationalism.

5 Shamita Basu (2002) has used the phrase “the theater of truth” convincingly in her important work on Vivekananda.

6 Heehs (1996) mentions several other revolutionaries’ memoirs that refer to Aurobindo’s involvement: “M. N. Roy, who as Narendranath Bhattacharya was active in Bengal between 1906 and 1915, commented that Aurobindo was ‘the Supreme Commander of the Revolution.’ Surendra Mohan Ghose, active from around 1908 (at which time he saw Aurobindo in Mymensingh district) and later one of the leaders of the Jugantar Party, stressed in a talk of 1971 that Aurobindo was ‘the founder of the Indian revolutionary party.” Jadugopal Mukherjee, active from 1905 and from around 1913 one of the principal leaders of the Jugantar Party, wrote in his memoirs that he learned some time after joining the party that Aurobindo was “the actual founder and leader of the new [that is, the revolutionary] party.” He also noted in passing that there was a legend that Aurobindo and two others ordered that judge Douglas Kingsford should be killed. Arun Chandra
Guha, active from around 1908 and later an important member (and, still later, a historian) of the Jugantar Party, wrote that Jugantar was the “brain-child of Aurobindo.” Like Jadugopal he claimed that Aurobindo helped make the decision that Kingsford should be killed.

7 For a newly researched account of the partition, see Pandey (2002).

Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, Postdoctoral Research Associate Program For The Study of Religion, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 707 South Mathews, Urbana, Illinois 61801/USA e: rbhttchr@uiuc.edu
Stephenson’s main concern is that contemporary society does not offer adolescent boys appropriate initiation rituals to facilitate their journey into manhood. He adopts an “archetypal perspective” (p. 4) that relates to a commonality of experience among all boys and men, regardless of time or place. Anyone vaguely familiar with men’s movement literature will recognize these themes and will not be surprised to discover Stephenson refers to Robert Bly on seven separate occasions. He also opens one chapter with a quote from Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, who have been responsible for some problematic writing about initiation and archetypes. However, Stephenson thankfully manages to discuss these themes without any of the femiphobia and homophobia of his predecessors. Similarly, while “archetypal,” Stephenson refers only once to Jung and resists the typically one-dimensional behavioral models promoted by other archetypal treatments of masculinity.

The archetypal adolescent path Stephenson charts is: the search for identity; individuation and leave-taking; dealing with paradox and abstraction; egocentrism; idealism; a sense of pride; puberty; sexuality; seeking non-ordinary states of consciousness. Stephenson argues that if contemporary society does not provide an initiatory context for these unavoidable steps in a boy’s development, they manifest themselves in other, inevitably destructive ways. For example, inappropriately addressing sexuality may result in irresponsible sexual activity, or ignoring the need for non-ordinary states of consciousness may result in drug abuse. Stephenson’s years of working with adolescent boys enables him to deal with such themes without retreating into fear-based denial. Discussing his habit of handing out condoms to teens he writes, “abstinence is like anarchy and communism in that it looks great on paper but seems to fail the human test” (p. 30). Similarly, despite the current war on (some) drugs he notes, “it seems to be a universal human need to alter one’s perception of the real world occasionally” (p. 30).

Stephenson argues that initiation, as a rite of passage into manhood, requires two key ingredients: risk and community acceptance. Traditionally boys would be separated from their community, undertake a dangerous initiation of some description and return to their communities as men. Stephenson says we need to responsibly recreate such rites of passage, for example via rituals connected with wilderness vision quests, rock climbing or river rafting. Once boys have undertaken such rites they need to be treated differently, as men.
His call for initiation is, however, an incomplete argument. It rightly identifies certain problems in contemporary society, perceives such problems to be absent in tribal societies, and hooks on to initiation as the key variable. This may or may not be the case. But even if it is, there is the assumption that the new order initiation brings is better than the status quo. But this new order is never fully explored: We are simply asked to accept that more responsible behavior is the single, inevitable outcome. However, one could reasonably speculate that the sense of belonging that initiation brings to boys comes with a cost: conformity and hegemony. While initiation rituals in the West could help solve issues of destructive behavior, they may also quash self-determined identity and plurality within society and, instead, create an alternative specter: the tyranny of the majority.

The book’s subtitle, Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age, is not strictly representative: The majority of the book does not speak of spirituality. It is a common assumption that to describe something as archetypal is to invest it with some kind of spiritual meaning. While archetypal realities can be spiritual, they are not necessarily so, and much of what Stephenson talks about is arguably more psychic than spiritual, i.e. psychological traits that dwell solely within the individual rather than those traits which reach out beyond the person into a spiritual reality. It is only the penultimate chapter, “A Transpersonal Approach,” that can be described as spiritual.

Stephenson claims that “inherent in transpersonal psychology is a foundation in Eastern philosophy, and a belief in the value of native cultures and wisdom and the inclusion of Spirit” (p. 183). The transpersonal approach for creating rites of passage include creating a mythical/magical context, instilling locations with a sacred meaning, building small altars, and weaving prayer ties. This certainly appears to be moving from the psychic into the spiritual realm, but the reader is still left to draw her own conclusions about what “Spirit” actually means. Similarly, Stephenson liberally uses the word “sacred.” What, for example, makes a fire a “sacred fire” (p. 215)? No doubt he intends the spirituality of each individual to be brought to this meaning. However, in the same way the discussion of initiation focuses more on the means than the end, so too does the discussion of spirituality. Stephenson’s assumption that the spirit is self-evident results in the spirit having little meaning at all.

Readers who are attracted to archetypes, Jung and Joseph Campbell will find Stephenson a satisfying read. Readers who find such approaches outdated will doubtless stumble upon numerous problems, as will those who lament the terminological dilution of “spirituality.” However, Stephenson’s experience working with adolescent boys does come through, and the way he writes about them can be moving. Stephenson also does a reasonable job of avoiding the unsavory models of masculinity favored by his predecessors. In this respect the book is a step forward in reconciling archetypal masculinity with real masculinities.

Joseph Gelfer, Department of Religious Studies
Victoria University of Wellington/NEW ZEALAND
e: joseph@gelfer.net
For close to thirty years, theorists have speculated about the reality of a postmodern condition. Thought to be evident in the break from modern European aesthetics, the dissolution of the divide between neat spheres of social life, a crisis of authoritative knowledge, and the proliferation of commodification as a cultural form, the postmodern inspires writings about everything from religion to politics to economics. But underlying the postmodern debate is the suspicion that the very idea of the postmodern does not mark some new condition, but suggests a shift in our perspective on processes embedded in modernity itself. Shayne Lee should be praised for addressing the phenomenon that is T. D. Jakes as some semblance of our postmodern age. In *T. D. Jakes: America’s New Preacher*, Lee offers an impressive analysis of Jakes’ ascent to the pinnacle of popular religious culture. Using a vast array of data—including interviews with Jakes’ associates and Jakes’ various media goods, including digital recordings, books, and web information—Lee not only delineates Jakes’ place in American Protestantism, but illuminates what he terms the “postmodern” means by which Jakes has achieved his status. Even more, Lee uses his examination of Jakes as a postmodern religious phenomenon to sketch a “new form” of the “black church.”

In a series of chapters beginning with Jakes’ modest beginnings as a small town Pentecostal minister in Charleston, West Virginia, Lee traces Jakes’ unconventional rise to celebrity as founder of the multimillion-dollar not-for-profit institution, The Potter’s House in Dallas, Texas. Jakes’ experience with poverty and his keen intellectual interest in human psychology enabled him to develop a ministry without regard to doctrine or racial politics, but with an emphasis on the existential needs of his burgeoning congregation. Without the backing of a family name or a formal education, Jakes rose through the ranks of the neo-Pentecostal movement by strategically positioning himself and his ministry in the movement’s commercialized media industry of books and television programming. With keen sociological insight, Lee argues that Jakes’ relationship to a neo-Pentecostal media conglomerate, rather than his denominational location, pushed Jakes to the forefront of American Protestantism. What is particularly “American” about Jakes’ ministry is not only its theatricality, passion, creativity, and uses of commercial media, but his “word of faith” sermons that teach parishioners to view their financial support of the church as investments in divine blessings.

While Jakes reaps tremendous financial rewards from sharply commercializing “spiritual commodities” such as books, films, and recordings, he invites criticism from...
Christians who believe his association of religion and business is unethical. For Lee, this indicates one of many intriguing paradoxes of Jakes’ status as a postmodern, American preacher. But to make his case about Jakes’ postmodern ministry, Lee ironically frames African-American Protestant culture using insights from rational choice theory, a mode of thought that emerged as a critical response to the postmodern position on the supposed failure of rationality. While Lee sees Jakes as a creator of “spiritual commodities,” Lee turns to a rational choice paradigm to model Jakes’ ministry as offering consumers a tangible and appealing array of spiritual goods to satisfy their existential needs. Because Jakes’s ministry offers better goods, the logic goes, it threatens other ministries that remain wedded to anachronistic traditions in a spiritual marketplace. Lee sees Jakes as a metaphor of the postmodern, and a prism through which we can see the outline of a “new form” of the black church. This new form is identifiable in such trends as a greater acceptance of female pastors, sermons that emphasize subjective experience instead of doctrine, uses of contemporary secular music in neo-Pentecostal music not found in other denominations, and the growth of “celebrity preachers.”

Concluding his intriguing analysis of Jakes with commentary on a supposed “new black church” is curious given that Lee does not at any point discuss the marked cultural differences between black and white Protestantism, or the African-American roots of Pentecostalism. Nor are Lee’s prognostications of a new black church theoretically grounded in the vast tradition on the same subject, which includes Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson’s *The Negro Church*, E. Franklin Frazier’s *The Negro Church in America*, and C. Eric Lincoln’s vast body of work that gave us the original moniker and theoretical description of the black church. Why Lee makes these interpretive choices is unclear, but even in omitting the literature from African-American Studies and African-American religious studies to frame his subject, Lee has clearly sketched a different condition in the American Protestant and African-American religious landscapes. The question of its “newness” continues to bedevil us, but perhaps that is precisely what the postmodern is about.

James Bryant, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
College of the Holy Cross/USA
e: jbryant@holycross.edu
Friedman’s *A Mind of Its Own* traces Western man’s perception of the penis through different historical periods. In a scholarly manner coupled with a sense of humor, Friedman follows the penis’s odyssey through paganism, Judaism and Christianity. The book delves into the etymologies of various daily terms and attributes them to the penis and its peripherals. In “The Demon Rod,” the first chapter, Friedman provides an informative account of the cultural history of the penis grounded in myths, tales, legends, literature and language constructs. The reader learns, for instance, that the word “fascination” is derived from “fascinum,” a miniature erect penis worn around the neck by teenage Roman children to protect them from the sexual advances of adult males. The reader may be surprised to learn that during the First World War, the Italian prime minister, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, “wore a fascinum on a bracelet to ensure victory by the Allies” (p. 20).

After the first chapter, the book loses some of its initial immediacy as the focus of the narrative in the second chapter shifts from the penis to particular individuals associated with it. Though the aim is to trace the transformation of the penis from divine and demon rod to a mechanical device “colonized by anatomists” (p. 55), the chapter focuses more on the personal histories and achievements of figures such as da Vinci, Vaselius, Gabriello Fallopio, Regnier Graaf and Roberto Dandelerio. In the end, however, the narrative regains its immediacy and sense of humor as Friedman repositions the penis in Melville’s narratives and Whitman’s poetry.

“The Measuring Stick,” the third chapter, is devoted to penis size among white and black men. It ostensibly argues that the large black penis has shaken the white man’s ego and sense of manhood. As a result, the white man has demonized the black man’s penis, exacting vengeance upon the slightest provocation. The chapter is replete with reports about black men who suffered castration or other genital mutilation at the hands of angry white men.

In spite of the wordiness and repetitions of “The Cigar,” the fourth chapter provides insights into the signification of erection, flaccidity, masturbation and circumcision. Remarkably, the Freudian era psychoanalyzed the penis, with consequences to the perceptions of Jewish male genitalia. Based on his analysis of the white man’s fear of the black man’s potency, Friedman observes that the “racializing, criminalizing and, even on occasion, excising” (p. 125) of the Jewish penis happened on account of circumcision.
“The Battering Ram,” the fifth chapter, is more feminist in content. It demonstrates how the penis, in the words of commentators such as Marie Bonaparte, Anne Koedt, Kate Millet and Susan Brownmiller became politicized and turned against its owner. The penis was seen mainly as a tool of crime and rape. Bonaparte describes intercourse as “a beating by a man’s penis” (p. 157); Brownmiller sees the penis as a weapon of assault to “keep all women in a state of fear” (p. 165); and Koedt undermines the role of the penis in female orgasm. Friedman wittily remarks: “Man has suffered the ultimate humiliation. He has become expendable and his penis irrelevant, replaced by his ‘superior,’ the vibrator” (p. 161).

The final chapter places the male genitalia back into man’s hand and into the hands of the manufacturers of “erections.” The latter, Friedman writes, no longer see the penis as an entity with a “mind of its own” (p. 53), as did, for example, da Vinci. Viagra and similar drugs have turned the penis into an abject slave of his owner’s whims and desires. Unfortunately, this chapter often digresses into minute scientific details about medical and drug experimentation and penis surgery; these details can alienate a reader who is less interested in scientific terminology.

This reviewer believes that A Mind of Its Own would have become a stronger book if it considered the role of the penis in some major non-European cultures. Also, the book would have benefited from a more careful editorial work, condensing or deleting some of the extensive elaborations on the personal traits and histories of individuals as well as detailed scientific experiments associated with the penis.

Wisam Mansour, Department of English Literature
Fatih University, Istanbul/TURKEY
e: wmansour@fatih.edu.tr
The growing body of literature that focuses on masculinities is a necessary and pleasing development to those concerned with issues of gender and sexual dynamics. The study of masculinities in recent years has focused on examinations of manhood in North American and European contexts. However, scholarly research has until relatively recently neglected masculine identities beyond the so-called ‘western’ world. Indeed, as Lahoucine Ouzgane states in his introduction, whereas studies of women in other parts of the world, including women of the Islamic world, seem now to abound, the issue of ‘Islamic masculinity’ has escaped the same level of investigation. Published as part of the ‘Global Masculinities’ series, this work offers a much-awaited insight into constructions of masculinity in Islamic countries. It is a groundbreaking new study that will serve as a point of departure for anyone interested in gender identities, particularly masculine identities, in the Islamic world. The editor is currently Associate Professor of English and film studies at the University of Alberta, Canada; his other publications most notably include a sister edition entitled African Masculinities.

Through a collection of articles, this work introduces some of the key debates around Muslim men and masculinity by examining diverse aspects and themes of manhood in several different societies such as Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey and the Yemen amongst others. Accordingly, the essays originate from a range of disciplines ranging from sociological enquiries to the interpretation of literature and popular culture. Chapter six, for example, studies the film Urs bil Kalil (Wedding in Galilee) and examines the plot line and technical aspects of the screenplay. Chapter ten, on the other hand, draws on the historical and political context of Ba’thist Iraq whilst looking at media influences on gender roles of the period. The themes under scrutiny range from male infertility, sexuality and gendered life experiences to how regimes use gender for political and militaristic aims. In a global political climate that has thrust the subject of Islamic gender dynamics to the very forefront of attention, this book attempts to clarify a whole host of dangerous and misleading assumptions whilst at the same time keeping an admirable sense of objectivity and scholarly rigour. One of its principal objectives is to counter the trend of seeing gender studies in an Islamic context as being solely a study of women and women’s lives. It also represents a successful application of men’s studies to non-western cultures.

The contributors to the collection resist the temptation to overly attribute constructions of masculinity solely to the doctrine and teachings of Islam, whilst at the same time recognising and underlining its powerful influence. Islam, unlike other world
religions whose influence on gender and sexual dynamics has gradually weakened, continues to be the firm point of reference for all Muslims and the link between religion and culture remains very strong indeed. However, one of the principal arguments of the introduction and the volume as a whole, is that gender roles in Islamic cultures have developed from a complex mixture not only of the teachings of the Qur’an and the Hadith themselves, but also of cultural and sociological trends that pre-date Islam. Following on from this, the collection also succeeds in recognising the differences between notions of virility from country to country. From the outset, the editor underlines the ‘social constructionist’ approach of the book (p. 2) and argues that masculinity should be examined in its proper context, that is to say moulded by a wide variety of influences. This, of course, places Islam at the forefront, but also considers socio-economic, social, historical and cultural factors. Nevertheless, the strong grasp that Islam holds over culture is explored and its influences clearly outlined. The introductory passage of the edition also refers to the dangers of slipping back into ‘Orientalism’ (p. 2) and points to the importance of this issue when examining non-western cultures.

The methodology of these essays varies almost as much as the topics under consideration. Chapter one, for example, is a study of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism amongst young Pakistani men. Durre Ahmed draws on Jungian theory of the psychological role of religion for the individual in order to explore the increase of both ‘low’ and ‘high’ fundamentalism in Pakistan. He argues convincingly that the orthodox Islam imposed by the State has alienated other philosophical Islamic trends and has effectively oppressed the mystic side of Islam, resulting in a masculinity that ‘has less to do with the visions and teachings of Islam and more with literalism and the pursuit of patriarchal power agendas in the name of Islam’ (p.21). Thus, he effectively demonstrates how religion can be manipulated to mould hegemonic masculinity.

Chapters three and four assess how major, culturally influential figures of religion can be reconsidered. By examining the identity of the prophet Mohammed and the interpretation of his persona, lifestyle and teachings, Ruth Roded traces how views of Mohammed have diverged due to a cultural and religious heritage that is, at times, unbridgeable between Christendom and the Islamic world. She clearly demonstrates that Mohammed’s humanity was, and is, celebrated by Muslims and explores the different attitudes taken up by Muslims over the centuries to defend their prophet in face of Christian criticisms. Chapter four continues the theme of re-examining religious prophets by looking at the life of Abraham. This chapter highlights the numerous merits of attempts by authors such as Assia Djebar and Mahmoud Darwish to re-work these stories as they attempt to create a new space of understanding that eludes rigid, ritualised readings and gives voice to alternative interpretation(s). This process has potentially radical consequences for Islamic gender.

Through the Palestinian serial magazine story ‘My Wife is from the Jinn’, Celia Rothenberg looks at the experience of diaspora and return for Palestinian men and argues that the examination of popular literature and, in particular, the motif of the jinn, acts as a springboard for exploring the relationship with the Other (read Israel). Chapter seven focuses on the Palestinian city of Jaffa, a colonial ‘3rd space’ (p. 123). Daniel Monterescu carefully assesses the emergence of three apparent categories of masculinity in Jaffa;
namely Islamic, liberal-secular and situational masculinity. He argues successfully that the discursive fluidity of identities has become a coping mechanism for ‘postcolonial strangeness’ amongst Jaffan men (p. 138). The shifting nature of gender identities in a rapidly changing Morocco is the focus of chapter eight. Importantly, the danger of insisting on a view of polarised binary gender roles is emphasised and the complexity of power dynamics found in Moroccan gender relations is underlined. By using anthropological and sociological data collected on fieldwork trips, Don Conway-Long examines how women’s legal and work-related gains have resulted in a male population bemoaning their own perceived oppression. The approach of anthropological data-finding in the form of interviews is particularly effective here, enabling the reader to gain a real insight into the psychology of Moroccan men.

The disturbing reality of woman abuse in Yemen is the focus of another article. Arguing that concepts of masculinity and gender are key to understanding violence against women, Mohammed Baobaid demonstrates how socialisation leads to a ‘societal violence’ (p.165) which protects and reinforces fiercely patriarchal norms. Again, the issue of Islam as a point of reference for gender dynamics and how it is perceived as central to male identity is tackled head-on. In addition, the relationship between traditional Islamic society and imported western concepts is brought into question. Chapter eleven is another particularly interesting chapter and also relies on data collected from interviews, this time with homosexual Muslim men based in London. Asifa Siraj traces the dilemma of being Muslim and homosexual and the challenges this represents to individuals as well as the effects on their psychological health, family relations and their ability to fit into Muslim culture. Siraj explores how Muslim homosexuals attempt to negotiate a space in which they can forge a valid Muslim identity when Islamic doctrine has hitherto been interpreted in such a way as to promote only heteronormative genders to the condemnation all others. This article calls for the reassessment and re-evaluation of Islamic teachings in order to accommodate alternative sexualities. Its particular success is that it builds a convincing case for doing so whilst being firmly rooted in an Islamic religious heritage that is free from ideological (western) bias.

The choice of material in this collection is impressive on the whole, giving space to multiple facets of masculinity across various areas of Islamic civilisation. One possible criticism perhaps is the lack of reference made to masculine gender constructs in Islamic sub-Saharan countries and other Asian countries such as Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population of any country in the world. Another would be the rather obvious omission of any study relating to Iranian notions of manliness. The Islamic revolution of 1979, an event whose consequences reverberated around the Islamic world, was supposedly a return to pure Islamic values and ways of life. Since then, the Iranian State has fiercely tried to bring concepts of gender under its control and has used its particular brand of Islam to bolster these concepts. A study dealing with masculinity and how it has been transformed there in the past three decades would have been of huge interest. Furthermore, although the edition does include one chapter by Siraj on Muslim men outside a predominantly Islamic context, this chapter does not engage directly in discussions of multi-culturalism or clashes of ideology between cultural heritage(s) and limits itself largely to an enquiry of how homosexual men negotiate a space for
themselves within their own religion. To this end, perhaps a study of Muslim men as part of an ethnic minority in a western country would also have yielded useful conclusions, especially in light of recent world events.

Nevertheless, this volume is well researched, highly relevant and provides a valuable base on which to build further studies in the future. The contributors are culturally sensitive and their conclusions are grounded in solid and accurate knowledge of the cultural norms of the country of which they write.

Sophie Smith, French Department
University of Wales Swansea/WALES
e: scsmith1982@hotmail.com
In the culture wars of the United States, “family values” became the battle cry of conservatives who advocated a return to “the rule of the father” in the Christian household. This anthology of 16 essays by Protestant and Catholic pastoral theologians, Bible scholars, philosophers and ethicists questions this Christianization of male supremacy and extends the principles of democratic egalitarianism that govern public life into the private world of heterosexual love and marriage. *Mutuality Matters* is a revised and expanded Festschrift for Herbert Anderson, a long-time theological advocate of mutuality and justice in Christian family life.

Four loosely arranged sections move from a more theoretical analysis of love, mutuality and justice to an examination of the changes in expectations in heterosexual relationships, including the rise of domestic violence and conflicting expectations in bicultural families. The third section extends the meaning of mutuality in the context of rearing children and caring for elderly parents, while the fourth unit lays out the role of congregations in infusing and nurturing mutuality in family life.

All of the contributors struggle with the problem of applying principles such as justice, equality and mutuality into the complex, chaotic and often contradictory daily interactions in the most intimate of spaces, such as kitchens, bedrooms, living rooms and nurseries. The term “mutuality” provides a broad platform because it is a fuzzy or even “sloppy” notion (McLemore) that may or may not require egalitarian power arrangements. Several contributors attend to the problem of hierarchy in families. Osiek, a New Testament scholar, roundly rejects the Household Codes of the New Testament that enshrine the obedience of wives, slaves and children to husbands, masters and fathers and maintains that “the very notion of submission of one person to another only because of sex or legal status is simply unacceptable to the modern person” (p. 62). “The revelation given to us by culture” (p. 62), she argues, requires us to move beyond the hierarchies endorsed by the Household Codes. Samuel Lee, on the other hand, defends Korean American families who negotiate “the tension between Confucian hierarchical influence and the more individualistic egalitarian influence of North American culture” (p. 115). Bicultural families should not be forced to abandon their cultures’ emphasis on self-sacrifice and selfless submission in favor of Western calls for self-assertion and egalitarianism. Instead, bicultural families need to be validated and supported in their
daily navigation of such cultural contradictions and the construction of multicultural identity.

And what does mutuality mean in the context of raising children? Surely, children are not their parents’ equal, McLemore points out. She argues that mutuality “must be multivalent and responsible to constantly changing circumstances and personal development” (p. 126). Hence, there exist “transitional hierarchies” and “temporary inequities” where persons are put in positions of authority by virtue of their “expertise, responsibility or maturity,” in order to guide those who are in need of such leadership towards genuine mutuality (p. 127). Hence, the term mutuality is not co-terminus with equality but encompasses differential power arrangements at certain times.

The most radical questioning of the concept of family is done by Anthony Gittins in his quest for “goodenough families.” His experience as a member of a religious brotherhood (the Spiritans) with long-standing missionary histories in Africa and Latin America may have fostered the intellectual courage to move beyond heterosexual love as the exclusive building block of stable families. He compares three different emotional bonds as potential building blocks for families (the mother-child unit, the brother-sister relationship and the husband-wife association) and examines their ability to provide a stable, protective environment to raise children. Each of these bonds has been tested in different cultural and historical periods for their success in providing protection, as well as economic and emotional support in raising the next generation. While he does not advocate any one arrangement, he calls for an abandonment of “extensive definitions” (p. 177) and the courage to look at the “actual social arrangements” that would note “common characteristics such as adequate structure; the support, protection, dignity and fulfillment of members; the intention of stability and endurance; and the relationship to the wider world” (p. 178) and allow multiple domestic arrangements as “goodenough families.” In the midst of the tremendous stress on, if not dissolution of, heterosexual, monogamous families, his search for “goodenough families” is inspiring and encouraging. Gittins’ elasticity is rooted in a global perspective and draws on Catholic monastic models of community and mutual love. Such conceptual openness is often missing in the contemporary Western world, which is locked into the heterosexual, love-based, nuclear model of family, while at the same time lamenting its decline and break-down.

The significance of Gittins’ conceptual openness becomes apparent in dialogue with Homer Ashby’s essay on father absence in African American families. Ashby’s statistics present a bleak and depressing picture: 70% of African American children born in 1996 were born to single mothers (p. 185). The reality of single parent homes has reached epidemic proportions in the Black community. Ashby attributes the low marriage and high divorce rate in the African American community to a combination of factors: economic reasons, including male joblessness and high imprisonment rates, as well as the bitter legacy of slavery with its deliberate assault and calculated disruption of monogamous relationships. But he also notes a high rate of anger and frustration among Black women and men at each other.

Despite this gloomy picture Ashby remains wedded to the ideal of monogamous heterosexuality and he calls on the Black church to foster and sustain married life more actively. He points to the correlation between regular church attendance and marriage
rates, although that appears to be contradictory and inconclusive. For instance, he says that “church attendance by women doubles their chances of getting married, while it has no effect on men” and it also does not appear to change women’s divorce rates (p. 193). Hence, even a renewed campaign by the Black church (already mired in homophobia) may not succeed in preventing further decline. Gittins’ proposal to conceive of “goodenough families” beyond the confines of heterosexual monogamy, on the other hand, may be more fruitful in securing a male presence in the lives of Black children. If the fundamental objective of family life is to protect, provide for and nurture children, we may fare better drawing on uncles and male members of extended families rather than on married couples. Brothers may play a more stable and supportive role in the lives of single mothers than lovers and the fathers of their children.

Overall, *Mutuality Matters* is focused on heterosexual nuclear families and is dedicated to their democratic transformation. Whether this model is able to weather the manifold challenges by incorporating greater mutuality, or whether it will have to expand structurally in order to adjust to life in Western democratic capitalist societies will remain to be seen.

Katharina von Kellenbach, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
St. Mary’s College of Maryland/USA
e: kvonkellenbach@smcm.edu
Peter Lehman’s *Pornography: Film and Culture* is an edited collection of essays both new and old. Given his background in examinations of the representation of the penis in a wide variety of discourses and arts, it is probably particularly apt that he has edited such a book. After his introduction (“‘A Dirty Little Secret’ – Why Teach and Study Pornography?”), which makes an impassioned defense of the teaching and scholarly understanding of porn, the book is divided into two parts. The first section reprints classic essays by the likes of Lehman, Linda Williams, John Ellis, Paul Willemen, Constance Penley, and Laura Kipnis. The second segment, on the other hand, presents new essays that consider current trends in the field, such as pornography’s expansion into new technologies (Chuck Kleinhans), male-male desire in *Penthouse Letters* (Henry Jenkins), sex and the law (Marjorie Heins), comedy and porn (Nina K. Martin), porn and racism (Daniel Bernardi), Asian porn (José B. Capino), and what men see when they watch porn (Marty Klein).

Some of the essays are both entertaining and informative. I particularly enjoyed the discussions of Martin, Bernardi, Capino, and Klein. In her chapter (“Never Laugh at a Man with His Pants Down: The Affective Dynamics of Comedy and Porn”), Martin delves into the relationship between porn and comedy, particularly during its golden age of the 1970s and 1980s. At this point in porn’s history, she argues, films like *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1972) contained genuinely funny and well-written dialogue. Martin notes, however, that since the advent of home video and the change in where and why people consume porn, the comedic features of the genre have declined and are now reduced to amusing title parodies such as *Lawrence of a Labia*. Marty Klein (“Pornography: What Men See When They Watch”) develops some interesting ideas in his chapter about the democratic sexual possibilities of porn. Under the subheading of “Pornography’s Truths as Subversive,” he argues that porn’s “subtexts of abundance and validation” are possible avenues of contemporary cultural resistance (p. 253) which attract political opposition and resistance from the mainstream culture because “the revolutionary implications of empowering people sexually challenge the cultural status quo” (p. 254). Bernardi (“Interracial Joysticks: Pornography’s Web of Racist Attractions”) and Capino (“Asian College Girls and Oriental Men with Bamboo Poles: Reading Asian Pornography”) both examine the racial dynamics of porn but from different perspectives. While Capino focuses on the representation of Asians in porn, Bernardi takes a wider remit and looks at the coding of all (identifiable) races. It is here that I found some unconvincing statements
regarding the representation of African Americans in porn. Bernardi (presumably approvingly) quotes Alice Walker: “In pornography, the black man is portrayed as being capable of fucking anything...even a piece of shit. He is defined solely by the size, readiness and unselectivity of his cock” (p. 328). While I don’t dispute this argument, I do query its sole application to blacks; surely, in porn, especially in light of its polymorphous proliferation of subgenres, this applies to all men in heterosexual porn irrespective of their race and ethnicity?

Unfortunately, issues of religion and spirituality in relation to men are not explicitly fore-grounded within this text. Indeed, this is an area which the book, and other scholars, would do well to address. Many of those involved in pornography, on both sides of the camera, belong to faith groups such as Catholicism and Judaism, and the relationship (if any) between religion and porn would be a productive area to explore. The question could be asked of “how does porn consumption and/or production relate to matters of spirituality?” Furthermore, the book is almost completely devoted to audio-visual porn in an American context so the book might be a disappointment to those interested in other forms (print, aural, etc.), in non-straight-porn, and in other countries (particularly Europe).

Nonetheless, these criticisms aside, it was particularly invigorating to read analyses that broke out of the paradigm of discussing the legal implications of pornography, of whether it is right or wrong, or whether it does or does not lead to sexism and/or violence. Noting what I said above, possibly most relevant to readers of this journal will be those discussions of masculinity in reference to both consumption and production of porn, for example, Lehman’s brief discussion of the representation of the penis in porn, as well as Jenkins (“He’s in the Closet but He’s Not Gay’: Male-Male Desire in Penthouse Letters”) and Klein’s chapters respectively.

While those scholars familiar with the terrain of porn studies will have most likely read the first half of the book, the second half does contain new material. And this material certainly whetted my appetite in terms of looking forward to the new directions porn research will take in the future. I wait with interest, for example, for further discussion on the non-financial motivations behind why men and women produce porn and do the things they do on screen. Such research could be broken down into tighter groups segmented by class and ethnicity, as well as race and gender. Another interesting area of research might be to probe into the representation of religion in porn, particularly that which appeared after the revelations of the Abu Ghraib abuses or so-called “Christian porn.”

Peter Lehman’s book joins Williams’ existing edited collection Porn Studies (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), and will most clearly serve the undergraduate market, for which it seems designed, particularly those students who won’t want to read such a large anthology as Williams’. In this respect, it will serve as a very useful primer.

Nathan Abrams, Lecturer in Film Studies
University of Wales, Bangor/WALES
e: nathan.abrams@btinternet.com