

WILL ROSCOE'S ARTICLE "The Zuñi Man-Woman," in the Summer 1988 issue of *OUT/LOOK* was an interesting cultural text. I was delighted to read that Will's "odyssey" into Pueblo Indian culture had been guided by my old friend Harry Hay. In 1978 I too met Harry Hay in Santa Fe. I was then a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin and had returned home to write on Pueblo-Spanish relations in New Mexico's history. Harry befriended me, shared his library, and revealed the secrets of the berdaches to me, probably much in the same way as he befriended Will. The conclusions I reached about berdaches after ten years of research on the Pueblo Indians are very different from those Will Roscoe comes to. I wish to share some of the fruits of my research and offer a perspective very different from that found in the voluminous literature on the sex of the berdaches.<sup>1</sup> On pondering this essay readers will have to judge for themselves whether the berdache status in general, the Zuñi Indian We'wha in particular, really offers moderns an exemplary "gay role."

**B**ERDACHE STATUS, that social arrangement whereby a man or group of men press another male into impersonating a female, forcing him to perform work generally associated with women, offering passive sexual service to men, and donning women's clothes, is widely reported historically throughout East Asia, in the Americas, in Islamic Africa, and is generally believed to have been diffused from these areas to Europe.<sup>2</sup> What we know about the Spanish American variant called *bradaje* (the Spanish word for male whore or prostitute) be it in New Mexico or Tierra del Fuego, comes largely from the narratives of the Spanish conquest and subsequent travelers' reports. Francisco Guerra recently collected all known references to *bradaje* in post-conquest sources in his book *The Pre-Columbian Mind*. The patterns of behavior which emerge from this compilation warrant our attention.



## Must We Deracinate Indians to Find Gay Roots?

by Ramón A. Gutiérrez

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

**R**ICHARD TREXLER proposes in his forthcoming book *Europe on Top: Male Homosexuality and the Conquests of America, 1400-1700*, that in the Old World and in the New, there was a rather universal gender representation of conquest: victors on vanquishing their enemies asserted their virility by transforming losers into effeminate. Enemies had to perform women's work and to wear women's clothes as a sign of vanquishment. We certainly know that heterosexual rape was a common habit of war. What we are only now starting to admit is that losing men were similarly treated and were forced to perform what were considered demeaning forms of sexual service. Thus, it does not matter much whether we examine male prisoners of war

among the Zuñi and the Arawaks, Aztec and Inca male temple slaves, or those figures on pre-Columbian Moche pottery jars from northern Peru depicting male slaves in women's clothes being passively penetrated in homosexual intercourse, to see the status inversion marked through gender symbols that were so frequently associated with defeated men.<sup>5</sup>

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

**T**O UNDERSTAND HOW these comparative ethnographic facts on berdache status square with Pueblo Indian culture, let us examine briefly the organization of space within pueblo life. Until quite recently, residential segregation by sex was the rule in every pueblo. Pedro de Castañeda, one of New Mexico's first explorers, observed in 1541 that the "young men live in the *estufas* [*kivas* or male ceremonial lodges]...it is punishable for the women to sleep in the *estufas* or to enter them for any other purpose than to bring food to their husbands or sons." Diego Pérez de Luxán reiterated this point in 1582, as did Fray Jerónimo Zárate de Salmerón when he wrote in 1623: "The women and young children sleep in [houses]; the men sleep in the *kiva*."<sup>7</sup>

Segregated from women in the *kiva*, men practiced the religious or political lore which kept the community at peace with itself and with its gods. Women's rituals, centered in the household, celebrated their powers over seed life and human reproduction. Their



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powers to bring forth life were immense and predictable. Men's magical powers over war, hunting, curing, and rain-making—the basic preoccupations of pueblo life—were always more unpredictable and precarious, and thus more elaborately ritualized. From men's perspective, women's capacity to produce, indeed to overproduce, was the problem that threatened to destroy the balance that existed in the cosmos between femininity and masculinity. Only by isolating themselves in ritual and placating the gods would men keep potent femininity from destroying everything. Women constantly sapped men of their energy—the men had to toil in fields that belonged to their mothers and wives, they had to protect the village from internal, external, natural, and supernatural enemies, and they constantly had to give semen to their voracious wives. Men got nothing in return from women in this agricultural society, for even if women bore children, until puberty those children belonged to their mothers.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

Several centuries later, in 1852, Dr. William A. Hammond, the US Surgeon Gen-

eral, observed that the berdaches (he called them *mujerado*, literally "made into a woman") he met at Laguna and Acoma Pueblos, not far from Zuñi, were essential persons in the saturnalia or orgies, in which these Indians, like the ancient Greeks, Egyptians and other nations, indulge. He is the chief passive agent in the pederastic ceremonies, which form so important a part in the performances. These take place in the Spring of every year.

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

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

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

In Pueblo life, unmarried bachelors and junior men spent most of their time in the *kinas*. Ostensibly this was so that they could

master religious lore, but in reality, also to minimize conflicts between juniors and seniors over claims to access to female sexuality which adult married men enjoyed. Sex with a berdache not only served a personal erotic need, but was also an assertion of power by these young men which served a religious (political) end. So long as bachelors were having sex with the berdaches, their village was not beset with conflicts between men over women. For as Hernando de Alarcón would note in 1540, berdaches "could not have carnal relations with women at all, but they themselves could be used by all marriageable youths." This may have been the reason why the Spaniards also called berdaches *putos* (male whores). European prostitutes initiated young men to sexuality and gave married men a sexual outlet without disrupting family, marriage or patrimony. Male prisoners of war pressed into prostitu-

tion in women's clothes were living testaments to their conqueror's virility and prowess. When berdaches were offered to guests as a gesture of generosity and hospitality, this too testified to the master's power. And like every slave historically, berdaches became economic assets when sold to other men—so that they could play out their fantasies of domination.<sup>11</sup>

**T**HE VIOLENT MASCULINE WORLD of Pueblo Indian warriors is the cultural context within which we must place We'wha and the other *la'mana* that were reported at Zuñi Pueblo between 1880 and 1930. But bear in mind that conquest and annexation by the United States Army had, by these dates, totally constrained the ability of Pueblo men to wage war. What was left were the memories and rituals of war. In Pueblo religion, all ritual roles which are performed during ceremonies are believed to have supernatural antecedents or sanction. Will Roscoe correctly points us to the Zuñi myth "Destruction of the Kia'nakwe, and Songs of Thanksgiving," as the mythic explanation for the *la'mana*. I quote the myth here because it so poignantly elucidates the origins of berdache status.

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

to implore the Council of the Gods to cause rainfall, that the A'shiwi bowstrings, which were made of yucca fiber, might be made strong, and the bowstrings of the enemy, made of deer sinew, might be weakened. The A'shiwi secured their arrows for the engagement with the Kia'nakwe on Ko'yemshi mountain. The prayers of the A'shiwi brought heavy rains on the third morning, and again they met the enemy. This time their forces were strengthened by the Kok'ko, present at the request of U'yuyewi and Matsai'lema, who were now the recognized Gods of War. Again Ku'yapalitsa, the Cha'kwena [Warrior Woman], walked in front of her army, shaking her rattle. She suc-



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ceeded in capturing four of the gods from Ko'thluwala'wa—Kor'kokshi, the first born of Si'wulutsiwa and Si'wulutsitsa; It'sepasha (game-maker), one of the nine last-born; a Sa'yathlia (blue horn, a warrior god); and a Sha'lako (one of the couriers to the u'wannami (rain-makers). These gods succeeded in making their escape, but all were captured except the Sha'lako, who ran so like a hare that he could not be caught. The Kia'nakwe had a dance in which the prisoner gods appeared in celebration of their capture. Kor'kokshi, the first-born, was so angry and unmanageable that Ku'yapalitsa had him dressed in female attire previous to the dance, saying to him: 'You will now perhaps be less angry.'<sup>12</sup>

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

We know from other ethnographic sources that the person who personified Kor'kokshi during ceremonials not only wore female clothes, but also had blood smeared between his thighs. Matilda Coxe Stevenson and Elsie C. Parsons, the two persons who first observed this fact, as women, were predisposed to assume that a man dressed as a woman with blood between his thighs signified menstruation. Pueblo men greatly feared menstruating women and believed that they had the power to pollute male ritual. It thus seems highly unlikely that men would have represented a menstruating women in their rites. Rather, since the Kia'nakwe dance is about the capture and vanquishment of enemies, the blood might be explained more adequately as coming from a torn anus due to homosexual rape or castration.<sup>13</sup>

If we place We'wha and the other Zuñi berdaches in a larger comparative context, and in the thick description of the culture

from which they were torn, does our understanding of them change? Matilda Coxe Stevenson described We'wha in 1904 as "the tallest person in Zuñi; certainly the strongest." During an 1890 fracas with American soldiers from Fort Wingate, We'wha was apprehended fighting alongside Zuñi's governor and members of the warrior society (the Bow priests). When Zuñi men staged their ceremonials, observed Elsie C. Parsons in 1916, the *la'mana* dressed like a woman, styled his hair like a woman, and then personified a woman in dance. Yet, when a *la'mana* died, the corpse was dressed like a woman except that "under the woman's skirt a pair of trousers are put on." *La'mana* were always buried among the men. Indeed, the Zuñi would say of We'wha and other *la'mana*, "she is a man." And while the berdaches may have performed women's work, and lived and dressed like women, their "behavior was not typical of Zuñi women," as Will Roscoe observes.<sup>14</sup>

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

ed. After the dance ended, Parsons' Cherokee hostess asked her: "Did you notice them laughing at her [U'k]?...She is a great joke to the people..."<sup>15</sup>

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

By all standards, We'wha was an important member of his community. Stevenson described him as "the strongest character and the most intelligent of the Zuñi tribe." The anthropologist Elsie Clew Parsons referred to him as "the celebrated *la'mana*."

The Pueblo Indians are well known for their aloofness toward outsiders, their general unwillingness to talk, and the secrecy with which they guard their esoteric knowledge and religion, even from their own young. We must thus ask why were berdaches like We'wha so eager to talk to American anthropologists in the 1890s? I suspect that as marginalized and low status individuals in the male political world, they were quite eager to tell their story to anyone willing to listen. Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Ruth Benedict and Elsie C. Parsons—all women who were themselves marginalized in the male academic world—listened to We'wha. As a result,

We'wha was elevated greatly in social status in the eyes of all those whites who subsequently read about him. He quickly acculturated, and as Will Roscoe tells us, "We'wha was one of the first Zuñis to earn cash. After Stevenson showed him the bene-





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fits of using soap to wash clothes, he went into business doing laundry for local whites." And eventually We'wha even went to Washington, DC to mimic those caricatures of Indians which whites had created in their own minds.

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

<sup>1</sup>Those interested in this literature should consult J. Katz, *Gay American History* (New York, 1976) and C. Callender and L. Kochems, "The North American Berdache," *Current Anthropology* 24 (1963), pp. 443-70.

<sup>2</sup>Though the berdache status is reported for men and women, the male variant is best known. Harriet Whitehead does examine female berdache status in "The bow and the burden strap: A New Look at Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native North America," in Ortner and Whitehead, eds., *Sexual Meanings* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 80-115.

<sup>3</sup>R. Trexler, *Europe on Top: Male Homosexuality and the Conquests of America, 1400-1700* (forthcoming, Polity Press); C. Callender and L. Kochems, "The North American Berdache," *Current Anthropology* 24 (1963), pp. 443-70.

<sup>4</sup>"Naufrachos de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," quoted in J. Katz, *Gay American History* (New York, 1976), p. 285.

<sup>5</sup>R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980).

<sup>6</sup>On berdaches as shamans see W. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston, 1986).

<sup>7</sup>G. Hammond and A. Rey, eds. and trans., *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition 1540-1542* (Albuquerque, 1940), pp. 254-55; G. Hammond and A. Rey, eds. and trans., *The Rediscovery of New Mexico 1580-1594* (Albuquerque, 1966), p. 178; Fray J. Zárate de Salméron, *Relación* (Albuquerque, 1967), paragraph 74.

<sup>8</sup>H. Haeberlin, *The Idea of Fertilization in the Culture of the Pueblo Indians* (New York, 1916); J. Collier, *Marriage in Classless Societies* (Stanford, 1988).

<sup>9</sup>Hammond and Rey, *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition*, p. 248.

<sup>10</sup>H. Hay, "The Hammond Report," *One Institute Quarterly* 6 (1963), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup>Hammond and Rey, *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition*, p. 147-48.

<sup>12</sup>M. Stevenson, *The Zuñi Indians* (Washington, D.C., 1904), pp. 36-37.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 36-37; E. Parsons, "The Zuñi La'mana," *American Anthropologist* 18 (1916), p. 525.

<sup>14</sup>Parsons, p. 529.

<sup>15</sup>Stevenson, *The Zuñi Indians*, p. 37; Parsons, pp. 526, 528.

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