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→ *Eating/Nourishment, Environemtalism, Forest/Tree, Heaven/Sky, Landscape, Nature, Prestige, Salvation, Work*

Hemma Boneberg

Gender Stereotypes

1. Through prescriptions, myths, narratives and theologies, religions have a strong influence on imagined and real gender roles. 'Gender' is usually differentiated from 'sex' as denoting the social and cultural construction of the differences between male and female, while the latter refers to the biological differences. Images of the 'real man,' or of the 'feminine' or 'unfeminine' woman and her place in society, work, and family mark individual identities, social and political structures, and their changes (visible, for example, in the discussion in Islamic feminism of a culture-specific image of woman). Especially through the stereotyping of gender images—as also the reference to 'public' and 'private' space, and their various evaluation—women and men develop distinct, frequently subtle strategies to gain influence and to exercise power. Religious role images reproduce (partial aspects of) reality, and affect it, but are not identical with it.

Thematic Overview

2. There is often little to be learned about the reality of women's life in the writings of the monotheistic religions, addressed as these frequently are only to men by men (cf., e.g., the Commandment: "You will not covet your neighbor's wife"). The monotheistic religions are distinguished from other religions, whose gods have gender and biographies, by the conceptualization of a God above gender, who is nevertheless to be addressed as 'Lord' and 'Father.' Female figures with whom one might identify include the historical women of the Bible, and the wives and daughter of Muhammad (Khadiya, Aisha, Fatima). The image of the esteemed Greek *hetaire*, the 'temporary marriage' co-stipulated by the wife (possible spaces of self-determination), and counter-worlds such as the menacing ancient society of the → Amazons, are as absent as are the goddess figures of competing religions. Father and husband have legal power of determination over the daughter and wife. *Islamic law* excludes her from public life as too strong a seductress, but assigns her husband not only the right to her chastity, but the duty of her sexual satisfaction. *Jewish law* also provides within marriage for a sexuality lived in joy. Woman's role is reflected in the cliché, 'Jewish mother': highly respected, on the one hand, because she promises the existence of the people of Israel. (Both people and religious membership are transmitted by the mother). On the other side, her monopoly on influence in the home (child-rearing, and a management of the household that frees the husband to study the Torah) is criticized and caricatured. Depository of family piety, she is nonetheless present only passively in the synagogue, in a sequestered area; this has changed in the Reform Judaism of recent decades. The Hebrew tradition conveys the models of seductive Eve, of the imperious and demonic woman
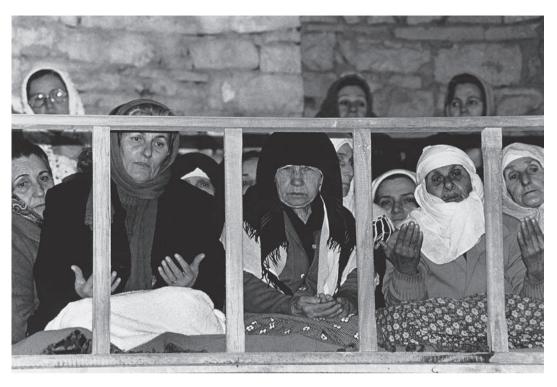
Images of Woman

tion of any symbolism. Meditation in the garden is possible in either of two ways: during a ritual sitting exercise (*zazen*), the monks can contemplate the garden from a terrace constructed of wood, or—as shown here—by daily gardening, by which weeds and leaves are eliminated and the gravel raked. (Hubert Mohr)
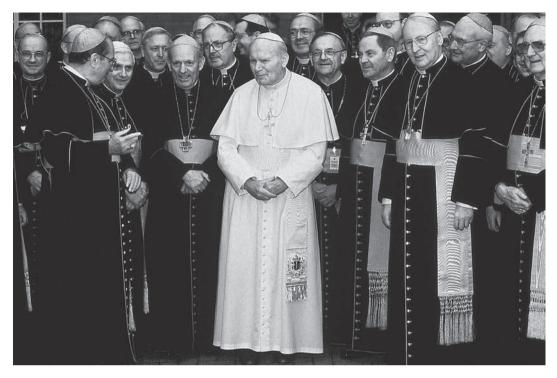
The enclosed prayer space, and the head coverings (→ Veil) of these praying Muslim women in Albania are, obviously, outward signs of religious sex discrimination. For the observer, as for the women themselves, the function and meaning of these signs can be most divergent. Although women make up a great portion of the number of believers, and thereby are vessels and vehicles of the religion on the level of decision-making they are not—or only by way of exception—visible in the public sphere.

(Lilith), of the companion and wise counselor (Esther, Abigail), of the hero (Judith), or of the woman whose active (Ruth) or forbidden (Lot's daughter, incest) sexuality ultimately contributes to the salvation history of Israel. A description of the 'ideal woman' is found in the biblical 'praise of woman' (Prov 31:10-31); male gender as a religious privilege is reflected in the daily morning prayer, in the form of the expression of gratitude for not having been born a woman (Menachot 43b).

The image of woman in *Christian tradition* is interpreted in a controversial manner today. In terms of cultural history, the division of female sexuality into Eve and Mary, witch and saint, mother and whore had most powerful effects. In the tradition of the Fathers of the Church, woman—as the Eve of the Fall—became identified with sexuality, with the body, and with evil. In salvation theory, she means danger, and man's deflection from his relationship to God—justification for her massive annihilation as witch; socially, she is the agent of procreation, and of necessary drive-satisfaction (1 Cor 7). The image of the passive female 'vessel' for the fruit of male seed has survived, from ancient ideas of procreation to the Christian view of the human being, and then to nineteenth-century medicine. Women's capacity for redemption is called into doubt theologically (has woman a soul?—is she 'created equal' to man?)—or she is connected in her world and life to the imitation or approximation to the life of the morally and corporeally unblemished Mother of God, → Mary.

Over against this, it is feminist theology especially that draws a direct line from the Jesuan tradition to socio-historical 'women's liberation.' Adduced:

—Jesus's interaction with women as underprivileged of society;

—creation of humanity in the image of God as man and woman (Gen 1:27), as over against Eve's second rank as 'image of the image' in her creation from the rib of Adam (Gen 2:21-25, 1 Tim 11:15);

—the large number of female disciples at the time of Christianity's inception;

—the establishment of monogamy, understood in terms of esteem for woman;

—the abolition of gender discrimination in Christian worship and community, initiating a nonsexual contact between women and men, and thus contributing to a modern ideal of partnership.

Biblically grounded feminism, usually concretized in a greater participation of woman in existing structures (women's ordination), forms the basis of new religious phenomena (e.g., equality of the sexes in American community groups of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and a considerable part of the women's movement. The 'new piety' of recent decades has expressed itself in the search for models of feminine spirituality. The interpretation of woman's images in foreign or past cultures as prototypes of a 'female identity' of today often overlooks the facts: even in tantric sexual practices, woman functions only as a means of men's salvation. New female ideals of 'motherliness' tend to maintain the Marian symbol of the moral superiority of the (religious) nurturer of the nineteenth-century middle-class family. In terms of the history of mentalities, woman's place in the body-soul schema has had its effects down to our own day. The sole model of woman as a spiritual being is the asexual nun, whose opportunity for salvation is seen in her 'masculinization': a concept of woman that endures as well in labor, politics, and science. Against this background the rediscovery

This picture of Pope John Paul II in the circle of German bishops at his 1996 visit in Paderborn represents, for one thing, the supreme hierarchical level of an institutionalized religion, and its public presentation, and for another, the male construction of this image (association of men). The seeming obviousness of male religious power—here supported by dress suggestive of gender neutrality—has been analyzed and criticized as a product of concerted power-strategies. The gender question has become today one of the key touchstones of traditional religious organizational forms.

Pop singer Madonna uses religious (Christian) stereotypes as a dramatic means to sacralize eroticism (e.g., in "Like a Prayer," 1989), and to eroticize the religious, as, here, the posture and attitude of prayer or in her fashioning as a 'Madonna' ("Like a Virgin," 1984). The various stagings of this figure are not for the purpose of establishing a new role image, but are playing with the stereotypes of saint and whore, mother and vamp, and thus produce a modern connection between emancipated sexual self-determination and passionate 'religious' dedication.

and positive interpretation of female role models (witch, priestess) is crucial for a modern 'female spirituality.' For example, the Wicca religion (→ Witch/Persecution of Witches) connects the female with a special knowledge of nature and the body and places emphasis on 'experience' in contrast to 'dogma.' In this respect the 'repression of femininity' is a pivotal pattern of religious criticism and new forms of spirituality as well.

3. A problem with the religious analysis of images of men is that, in most religions, the male experience is considered to be the norm for the human being across the board. The man who controls or overcomes his sexuality is the measure of the ideal human being, that operative subject of religious writing and, as active, creative principle, authentic representative of the 'human race.' Although such ideals fail to express the reality of individual men, the religious, political, and family power of men down the centuries goes without saying. That 'masculinity' nevertheless is a salable cultural product is shown in numberless religious rituals for the transition of the child to male adult. Few cultures look on masculinity as something that does not arise in extreme or brutal actions, and separation from the status of a being to be nurtured (Gilmore 1989). The averting from the feminine in the monotheistic religions goes along with the essentially superior evaluation of the man. The religious man defines himself by 'unfeminine' (that is, spiritual) activity, and by 'pure' (in the sense of legitimated) relations to women (matrimony), or he must be protected or separated from woman's seduction, as in celibacy.

Encouraged by the feminist criticism of the 1970s, (→ Women's Movement/Spiritual Feminism) men have recently confronted anew the relationship between maleness and religion, especially Christianity. Assessing their spiritual and emotional deficits, they now seek to sketch the image of a 'new man.' Here they frequently make reference to Jesus as the 'first new man' (F. Alt), or posit a fundamental 'wholeness': that is, 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics ought to be integrated. Another current, the 'mythopoetic men's movement,' endeavors to reawaken spiritual sources (myths, folktales, religious writings, archetype theory), in order to repair the sundered relationship of man to religion, and thereby counter the 'new disease of misandry' (Arnold 1994), and draft a male and religious identity. This movement offers the criticism of Christianity that it has 'wounded' man as well, repressing and scorning his once admired aggressiveness. But a responsible masculinity is deemed possible only through the rediscovery within man of the 'inner warrior,' and of the qualities of the 'ruler,' the 'pilgrim,' and the 'man wild and wise.' A third current, 'body theology' (Krondorfer 1996), takes up feminist criticism and the body concept of historical anthropology, and attempts a critical reconstruction of the union of religious conceptualizations and the male experience of body. The idealization of the phallus, of the spontaneous activity and creativity of the erect penis, is regarded as spiritualized in Christianity, and the ideal concepts of male potency are applied to asexual redemption. Thus, the idea of the spiritual conquest of nature, drive, and death as a male power concept of absolute autonomy becomes the fundamental characteristic of (a) the relation to woman: she can be grasped in this idea only as a threat of impotence, and in no case representative of the divine; eroticism is linked to dominance; (b) man's relation to his body: ideal phallic spirituality belies the reality of the body, and calls for its ascetical mortification, unfeeling hardening, and 'immaculateness'; (c) relation to men: through the phallic ideal and the exclusion of woman,

there arises an exclusive power community (union of men), which would be threatened by tenderness or eroticism. Sexuality, then, is relegated to the concept of a 'compelled heterosexuality.'

From this perspective, only the paradoxical veneration of the phallic ideal by way of asexuality opens the door to the feminine aspects of the interpretation of Jesus Christ, whose maleness is still central for the Church's understanding of symbol today. Hence, there is a connection between men's withdrawal from religion, which now oftentimes becomes a private and female affair, and the transition of the phallic power concept to the achievement community (politics, economics, science, the military), along with its ideal of body and sexuality.

Such a reconstruction of religious ideologization of not only the female body poses the open question: how can mind and spirituality be thought of as matching real experience of the body on the part of men and women?

4. Heterosexuality is the central model of sexuality in the dominant religions of European culture. Theoretically, if not practically, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity filter out homosexuality, bisexuality, or 'trans-' and 'intersexuality.' Only ancient mythology has positive images of non-heterosexual sexuality. To be sure, relations between men are part of the culturally coded masculine ideal of virtue, and the Platonic interpretation of the male-female hermaphrodite as the symbol of a primal, androgynous perfection stands in stark contradiction with the rejection of real 'effeminate' men. Other cultures have—or had, until they had been missionized—designations and roles for sexual variance. With the Sambia of Papua New Guinea, for example, persons whose sexuality is indistinguishable at birth (pseudo-hermaphroditism) have their own designation and special religious task (healing). Social interchange of gender roles is found, for example, in the cultic transvestism of the shamans (at worship, men assume a role actually proper to a woman, adopting female garb and behavior), or with the man-women or woman-men in Indian culture, who adopt transsexual roles, assuming, in dress, comportment, and sexual partnership the opposite role from their biological sex, and who are ascribed greater powers than univocally defined persons.

Religious models of changing sexes are—without idealization—challenging for the Western debate over gender and sex. In view of the different possible ways of living gender roles, it scarcely seems possible to realize the demand for a more just sexual relationship either through the idea of a 'holistic' and 'integral' sexual identity, or in the framework of the Pauline Christian understanding of 'equality' as the elimination of differences (Gal 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, . . . no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus").

Other Images

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→ *Body, Communication, Conflict/Violence, Family/Kinship/Genealogy, Homosexuality/ Homoeroticism, Identity, Matriarchy/Patriarchy, Sexuality, Women's Movement/Spiritual Feminism*

Alexandra Grieser

Genetic Engineering

The Concept

Genetic engineering encompasses all methods by which the genetic material (genome) of organisms is isolated, characterized, altered and/or recombined with foreign genetic material ('recombinant DNA'), in part across species boundaries. In nature, genetic transfer is only found in bacteria and other microorganisms; it is not possible, using classic breeding methods, to selectively transfer certain DNA sequences. Therefore the term 'genetic engineering' refers to direct intervention of human beings into the genetic material of living organisms. The term '*transgenic*' means 'altered by means of genetic engineering'. Transgenic organisms are plants, animals, and microorganisms whose genetic material has been stably altered using genetic engineering methods and whose altered genome is transmitted to its descendants. Such genetic alterations can even *cross species boundaries*. By means of targeted recombination of genes, in part across species boundaries, human beings attempt to create new performance profiles in order to achieve a certain desired effect and to utilize nature in this way. In so doing, the slow process of evolution is jumped over, which also means that the organisms that are constructed using this method have not stood the test of a long experiential process of evolution. Since the birth of the cloned sheep Dolly and other cloned mammals whose existence shows that it is possible to clone mammals using the method of somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), genetic engineering has posed increasingly profound scientific, ethical and legal challenges. The fact that it is now possible to clone mammals has sparked off a global prospective discussion, which addresses the ethical problems connected with human cloning.

In some areas, genetic engineering has become a common practice, for one in the area of *pharmaceutical* research, where numerous agents for medications are in the meantime produced using genetic engineering. Other applications for genetic engineering such as individual areas of *medicine* (e.g. somatic gene therapy) are still controversial, however, and some are rejected completely or even outlawed, as is the case with germ line therapy on human beings and human cloning, for example. Among the controversial areas of application are *agriculture* and *food production*.