

ld's being awkward—she
 an whom I met while I
 it who went on to pursue
 gallantries dated women
 sixth year, at which point
 sively. She's now married
 omen as like living in
 e in America," she says
 and miss London. It's
 " Anyone reading this
 r own inventory of her
 aragraph just as full of
 ked both ways."

roines of *Lysistrata* and
 nco concert aren't just
 is to confront our op-
 also about crazy, over-
 ove. "Perhaps it is time
 ial to fall in love with a
 Barbara Ehrenreich in

Gate C22
 Ellen Bass (2007)

ort
 at kissed
 County.
 d. Long after
 handles of their
 t-term parking,
 pped around
 at at Ellis Island,
 m ICU, snapped
 cer, made it down

from Annapurna in only the clothes she was wearing.
 Neither of them was young. His beard was gray.
 She carried a few extra pounds you could imagine
 her saying she had to lose. But they kissed lavish
 kisses like the ocean in the early morning,
 the way it gathers and swells, sucking
 each rock under, swallowing it
 again and again. We were all watching—
 passengers waiting for the delayed flight
 to San Jose, the stewardesses, the pilots,

sunglasses. We couldn't look away. We could
 taste the kisses crushed in our mouths.
 But the best part was his face. When he drew back
 and looked at her, his smile soft with wonder, almost
 as though he were a mother still open from
 giving birth,
 as your mother must have looked at you, no matter

A World of Difference

Lella J. Rupp (2009)

**LOVE AND DESIRE WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS
 OF COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY**

In Lesotho, a small poor country in southern Africa
 where men tend to migrate to South Africa for em-
 ployment, young women at school routinely form in-
 timate and sexual bonds. Similar relationships exist
 among schoolgirls in Kenya and among Venda and
 Zulu schoolgirls in South Africa.¹ Slightly younger
 girls take on the role of "babies" to older girls' "mum-
 mies."² In a context in which bonds between men and
 women are fragile because of lengthy male absences
 and in which there is a taboo on discussion of sexual-
 ity between a woman who has borne a child and one
 who has not, mummy-baby relationships provide so-
 cialization into adult roles of domesticity, intimacy,
 and sexuality. The roles have roots in traditional cul-
 tural forms, including initiation ceremonies for girls
 and the practice of labia lengthening alone or in small
 groups, which provides an opportunity for autoerotic
 or mutual stimulation. But, as suggested by the use of
 the English words *mummy* and *baby* and the impor-
 tance of schools in the formation of these relation-
 ships, they are also connected to the rise of a modern
 educational system. Some women maintain their re-
 lationships after school when they go to work in
 towns, and some young married women form new
 intimate ties after their marriages.

...
 And it is not only schoolgirls who continue to
 love one another in sex-segregated spaces. Women
 in prison, women sex workers, and nuns, among
 others, have found love and sexual satisfaction in
 institutions designed for entirely other purposes.
 In examples from China, a scholar writes of meet-
 ing a woman in 1985 who had been repeatedly
 jailed in Shanghai for heterosexual delinquency.
 During one sentence, her cellmate, charged with
 lesbian behavior, "treated Za as her lover, touching
 her, petting her, and opening up to her the possibil-
 ities of sex between women."³ Two prostitutes in
 Guangzhou, hired to engage in a threesome with a
 male client, enjoyed it so much that they became
 lovers. And two nuns in a Buddhist convent, de-
 nounced to the authorities for their relationship,
 confessed that the older nuns had introduced them
 to love between women. In all these ways, love and
 sex in sex-segregated spaces continues.

...
 An Indian woman who takes the pseudonym
 Supriya, at sixteen the second wife of an alcoholic
 husband whose first wife, Lakshmi, could bear no
 children, writes of the loving relationship that de-
 veloped between the two women. Lakshmi had
 suggested that her husband take another wife, and
 Lakshmi took care of Supriya's children while their

not yet wiped off, and someone gazed at you
 as if you were the first sunrise seen from the Earth.
 The whole wing of the airport hushed,
 all of us trying to slip into that woman's
 middle-aged body,
 her plaid Bermuda shorts, sleeveless blouse, glasses,
 little gold hoop earrings, tilting our heads up.

mother worked as a servant to support the family. She also protected Supriya from their husband's advances, since he had sex with prostitutes and Supriya was afraid of contracting a venereal disease. The two women slept together near the children, who considered both women their mothers, and their loving friendship became sexual as well.⁴ Another Indian woman, interviewed when she was almost seventy, told of her relationship with her co-wife: "Gradually a friendship between us started to flourish. Inside the four walls of the home, we would rub each other's back and look at each other's bodies. We slept in the same bed with our feet locked together."⁵

An Indian lesbian living in the United States reports that when she was first involved with another girl as a teenager in India, she suggested to the other girl, "we should find a pair of brothers to marry so that we could live in the same house and continue our relationship. It seemed the closest thing to what we viewed as normal."⁶ In a case reported in the Indian press in 1997, police arrested a young man and woman whom they suspected of having eloped under age, only to find that the young man was a woman. This was not the first time they had run off together, so their parents did not want them to come home. The families had already suggested that the girls marry two brothers, "which would ensure that they live in the same house."⁷ And a documentary film made in New Delhi in 2003 tells the story of two women, one of them masculine, who announce that if they have to marry, they want to marry brothers so they can live together.⁸

Whether or not such negotiations go on in other societies with polygynous marriage or joint-family households—and there are suggestions that they do in the Islamic Arab world as well—it is clear that some women continue to make space for their love within the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality.⁹

MARRYING WOMEN

In 1996, the press in Malaysia reported that Azizah Abdul Rahman, a Malay woman, presented herself

boy" and wearing "a chocolate-colored pair of slacks and a purple t-shirt." Although it was Rohana's father who exposed Azizah, and Azizah claimed that they married only when Rohana threatened to end their relationship, Rohana told the press, "I did not marry Azizah because I am a lesbian." Although they had had intercourse, Rohana denied knowing that Azizah had a female body. While in prison for a *zina*, a sex-related crime, Azizah, according to the press, returned "to womanhood." She claimed that she had married Rohana out of love and to prevent her from "slipping through her hands into somebody else's."¹⁰

A Thai woman in her late seventies recalled a female couple who married in her rural village in the 1980s. "They got married formally. They married like a man and a woman." Although the Thai government encourages people to register marriages, not everyone does so. And since weddings are not regulated by Buddhism either, same-sex marriages do occur. In this case, villagers helped with and attended the wedding between what they called "the woman" and "the woman who was a man." "The woman" was very beautiful. Both of their parents had the "woman who was a man" move into the woman's family house" (as is customary for ethnic Thais). "Nobody said anything negative or mean to them."¹¹

In the 1990s in a very poor rural region of India, Geeta, a woman from a *dalit*, or "untouchable," family who was married to an abusive husband, met Manju, an older woman whose masculinity had won her a great deal of respect and power in her village. They became friends at a residential school run by a women's organization devoted to equality and empowerment, and then they fell in love. As Geeta put it, "I do not know what happened to me when I met Manju but I forgot my man. I forgot that I had been married. We were attracted to each other that we immediately felt like husband and wife. . . . After that, we did not leave each other. . . . I knew I could lose my job. But I also knew it was impossible for me to stop. . . . I was in grip of magic."¹² Geeta accepted Manju as her husband at a Shiva temple, Manju's family welcomed Geeta as daughter-in-law, and Manju became both a second mother and a father to

STILL CROSSING THE GENDER LINE

We have already encountered female-bodied women who secretly dressed as men and married women. But it is important to add that, even in societies in which a lesbian life in public became possible, some women continued to cross the gender line and marry women. In 1945 in New Zealand Mr. X, as the newspapers called him, was arrested for marrying a woman, and unlike in the earlier twentieth-century case of Percy Carcol Redwood, the question of sexual deviance came into play.¹³ Mr. X told reporters that life as a woman had been difficult because of his masculinity and that he had successfully passed and worked as a man for twelve years, even having his breasts removed and registering for the armed forces during the Second World War. Since he felt and acted like a man, the relationship with his wife seemed normal, and both were happy with the situation. The media focused on his masculinity, not just in appearance—"tall, robust, broad-shouldered and husky-looking, with a mop of unruly black hair and a virile mien"—but also in behavior. His conversation was "frank and fearless," his room was messy, and he worked as a laborer and enjoyed male sports, including boxing.¹⁴ Yet both Mr. X and his wife admitted to the police during the investigation that they were "of the lesbian type."¹⁵ Although Mr. X insisted that his feelings and actions were "natural and normal," the legal system and the media thought differently.¹⁶ A Methodist minister proclaimed that Mr. X's "sexual maladjustment" demanded "some form of skilled psychological treatment" and the judge denounced the marriage as "an extraordinary perversion."¹⁷ The couple was ordered to separate and seek psychiatric treatment.

In the twenty-first century, in at least some places in the world, it is possible, if not safe, to be openly transgendered. Manel is a biologically female transman from Sri Lanka who dresses, works, behaves, and identifies himself as a man. Manel described his family's reaction to him as he was growing up as a masculine girl: "My family is confounded by my behavior. My sisters could not bring me into our village society as a girl because of my manner of speech

explored the possibility for him, and although the doctors, he sees the family's part. Manel of Women's Support Group and transgender organization "I only realized that how when I came here [to the United States] because of this, the me and wanting operations alone anymore." Although Manel is in the Women's Support Group, she said that he could not live as sexual. I don't know how don't understand it. I can have my own unique me suits the pleasures of my

In contrast, Shanthi Lanka, dressed and behaved her attraction to girls—sex-reassignment surgery identity. "I was told that constructing a penis from I was told that it would do not construct testicle mentally troublesome wouldn't be able to enjoyed myself to my taught us to do."²⁰ The training she developed body fat, and her relationship perceives her as a woman identity. "I will live as a lesbian as my partner."²² sent different possibilities bodied persons in the community.

The transgender movement makes clear how complex between gender identity oneself as male or female whether one identifies as heterosexual. Oscar, a genderqueer person from the San Francisco Bay Area, explained the difference

... a few years, a number of the to, necessarily, identify as identity is not based on the involved with sexually or since he has not, like many s, had "bottom surgery," e vagina). So neither dating penis-in-vagina sex n heterosexual.

ITY CONTINUED

ig" rather than just the find a whole range of ex- ity in the contemporary nce of lesbian feminism ' in the 1970s and 1980s pposedly androgynous ration of female values female masculinity re- l feature of many of the women.

ightclub, for example, ing men's pants and a e undershirt, explained rom the English word e a boy and even knew hen an old girlfriend n went back to Kot, the thoez, a term meaning nother joked that since h, he should give it to from the English word friends. With Kot, she wanted it and the way st how women are.

oys) go with "TBGs" B originated in girls' ith crushes on other of the social scene.

earlier decades. The use of TB avoided negative terms in circulation and could be used in public without alerting others to its meaning. TBs cut their hair short, wear men's clothes, and take care of their girlfriends in ways they perceive as masculine. In lesbian pubs, they drink beer and sing karaoke, choosing male pop songs. As Yin-shing, a TB, put it, "A TB must take care of her girlfriend; otherwise what's the point for her to keep a masculine appearance? ... A masculine appearance means nothing if this TB does not take care of her girlfriend and cannot afford her girlfriend's daily expenses."²⁵ And in Hong Kong there is also the identity of "pure," which means "pure lesbian" and not TB or TBG. Hong Kong's integration into global society means that the Western notion of a non-gender-differentiated lesbian identity coexists with the gendered identities of TB and TBG.

... In Japan, male-identified female-born *onabe* serve as sex workers in bars where they service heterosexual identified women. Featured in a documentary film, *Shinjuku Boys*, an *onabe* named Gai described his/her sense of self: "I cannot make myself more feminine. I don't want to be a real man. If people think I'm in between, that's OK with me. I don't feel like a woman in my mind. ... I've always been like this, it is natural to me." They dress and behave as men, some taking hormones to grow a beard and lower their voices. They make love to clients, keeping their clothes on. Said Tatsu, another *onabe* in the film, "I have heard lesbians take their clothes off, but we *onabe*, we hate that."²⁶

... And consider the story of Phakamile and Cora, Black South African lesbians.²⁷ Phakamile is a working-class butch woman who lives in a small room attached to her parents' house in Soweto. She considers herself very masculine, despite her small size. She plays soccer and smokes tobacco and marijuana, all expressions of masculinity. Most lesbians in Soweto are butches who have relationships with women who identify as straight. Phakamile is in love with Cora, a middle-class woman who lives with her family in a house that has running water and electricity. Cora identifies as a "lesbian woman" but is

enough that her mother confronted them about being lovers yet has accepted Phakamile as a family member. Cora is unusual in criticizing the butch-fem dynamic, a contentious issue between them. Phakamile says she proposed to Cora at a soccer game, where she was one of the star players, but Cora laughingly disagrees: "You know what ... Phakamile, as butch as she is, I proposed to her. Really, really. Well, could see that ... she was interested and she was afraid, and so I thought let me make things easier for her, you know and propose."²⁸

As all these examples suggest, there are both similarities and differences between *tois* and *dees* or TBs and TBGs, on the one hand, and butches and fems in Western culture, on the other. Although dominant Western notions of lesbian identities have spread through the Internet, transnational gatherings, and personal contact through travel, local concepts of gender and sexual identities have by no means been erased by processes of globalization. Rather, local ideas of what it means to love and desire someone with a biologically alike body intertwine with Western concepts, and the product becomes local, in a metaphor developed by Tom Boellstorff, like a dubbed film.²⁹ The dynamic of female masculinity runs through all these stories, but how it operates in each case is shaped by the particular historical and social circumstances. These possibilities put contemporary U.S. notions of "lipstick lesbians," "bois," drag kings, transmen, and "gender-queer" in a broader transnational perspective.

FRIENDS IN LOVE

Of the women who loved women whom we have encountered across time and place, some did not differentiate themselves as masculine and feminine. Co-wives, female monastics, romantic friends, and sometimes schoolgirls seem instead to have eroticized sameness, not difference. We find the phenomenon of falling in love with someone just like oneself in lesbian feminism as it emerged in the United States, in Canada, in England, in parts of Europe, and elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s.

... themselves marginalized or invisible, began to form their own groups and alternative institutions, such as bookstores, publishing and recording companies, support groups, and coffeehouses and restaurants.³⁰ Lesbian feminists claimed a heritage going back to Sappho and the Amazons, as indicated by the prominence of Sappho's name in book and magazine titles and by the double-bladed Amazon ax that became a prominent lesbian feminist symbol.

... Within lesbian feminism, sexual desire for women and resistance to male domination almost equally defined what it meant to be a "woman-identified woman." Women who did not want to have sex with women but identified with the lesbian feminist community came to be known as "Political lesbians," described by an English group called the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists as "a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women."³¹ In Mexico, too, as women involved in the movement explained, "there were also lesbians who said 'I have come to be a lesbian through a political decision,' textbook lesbians."³² Women came to lesbian feminism in different ways, sometimes out of their sexual desires and sometimes out of politics, which then led to new desires and a new identity.

... Ara Jones, an African American woman who grew up working class in the South, saw her lesbianism as "a changeable thing."³³ Her first woman lover was a white woman with whom she fell "madly in love."³⁴ She began to identify both as a lesbian and as a feminist, but not as a lesbian feminist, because she saw that world as mostly white. Bisexual in behavior if not identity, she liked the sex she had with men better but had deeper emotional commitments to women, so she defined lesbianism as "a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other."³⁵ Yet sexual passion with women was important to her. After marrying and divorcing a man, she fell in love with a woman again. She saw herself as choosing lesbianism but also said, "I'm not straight," meaning she could choose to deny her desire for women but did not.³⁶

STILL OTHER WAYS OF LOVING WOMEN

And all the preceding examples are just some of the ways that women or female-bodied individuals continue to love women.

Working-class Creole (Afro-Surinamese) women in Paramaribo, Suriname, form sexual relationships with other women while maintaining ties with men, sometimes husbands. This is called “*mati* work,” meaning that it is not an identity but a form of activity. The relationship involves emotional and financial support, as well as sexual obligation. A thirty-seven-year-old mother of five, married to the father of two of her children, explained *mati* this way: “love between two women is stronger than between a man and a woman. . . . With a woman, you know what you like sexually and so does she.”³⁷ Such relationships are accepted within the community without their having any special significance for women’s sexual identities or intimate relationships with men.

In Carriacou, the Caribbean island made famous by Audre Lorde’s autobiographical *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, women who love and have sex with other women are called *madivine* or *zami*, the word Lorde adopted. Lorde wrote, “How Carriacou women love each other is legend in Grenada, and so is their strength and their beauty.”³⁸

Throughout our journey, we have seen many and various ways that women love other women. Some find spaces in which their love can flourish, some cross the gender line to marry their lovers, some form intimate friendships or marriage-like relationships, some embrace gender blurring, some embrace femininity, some express their love in passionate language, some simply make love to one another with hands, objects, tongues, or vulvas.

In all these spaces, indigenous practices and understandings merge in a variety of ways with globalized concepts of what it means to be “gay” or “lesbian” or “bisexual” or “transgendered.” Processes of development that open up the possibility of economic independence for women, increased access to education, urbanization and social mobility, loosening

women and the possibilities for women’s lives. And the result is a world of difference.

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