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# OCEANIA

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## ONABASULU MALE HOMOSEXUALITY:

**Cosmology, Affect and Prescribed Male Homosexual Activity among  
the Onabasulu of the Great Papuan Plateau**

**Thomas M. Ernst**

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This paper examines what has been called 'ritualized homosexuality' in a single ethnic group in the Strickland-Bosavi region of Papua New Guinea. Prescribed male homosexual practices are examined in the context of cosmology and the context of affect in the 'everyday' rather than ritual life of the Onabasulu. The perspective is derived from a more general interest in the social construction of the 'world' in everyday social life.

### COSMOLOGY AND ORDINARY PRACTICE

Prescribed male homosexual activity is a feature of a number of Melanesian cultures and has been the focus of a great deal of anthropological attention over the past decade (see e.g. Creed 1985; Herdt 1984). On the main island of New Guinea it was practiced, among other places on the south coast between the mouth of the Fly River in the east to the Asmat region (and inland from it) in the west. In Papua New Guinea it was found in the hinterland of this region as far north as the Strickland — Bosavi area.

This paper is about prescribed male homosexual practices among one of the Strickland — Bosavi peoples, the Onabasulu, who inhabit the northeast part of the area.<sup>1</sup> I will attempt to place prescribed male homosexuality among the Onabasulu in the context of cosmology and affect in the 'everyday' rather than ritual life of the people. My tendency to interpret it in this way is broadly derived from the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz (e.g. Schutz 1967), and relates particularly to his long term interest in the social construction of the 'world' in everyday social life. What could be more personal and in many ways everyday or common than sexuality?

The Onabasulu are a small group of long house dwellers culturally and linguistically related to the others of the Papuan Plateau and the Strickland River plains, and more distantly to the cultures of the Trans-Fly region and those of the south coast of Irian Jaya. They are

organized into incompletely localized patrilineages, among which men attempt to arrange marriages by sister exchange. Marriages between cross-cousins are prohibited, but there is a preference for sister exchange between cross sex sibling pairs who are children of sons of male cross cousins. This means that there is a minimum of three lineages with which the men of a fourth attempt to arrange 'sister exchanges'. Exchange marriages, as opposed to marriages based on bridewealth, are associated with New Guinean societies which have or had prescribed male homosexuality (see Herdt 1984; Lindenbaum 1984). This association will be briefly discussed in the concluding section of this paper.

All of the groups so far mentioned of the Great Papuan Plateau and the adjoining Strickland River plains engage in the culturally required insemination of young males (see Kelly 1976, 1977; Knauff 1985, 1986; Schieffelin 1976, 1982; Shaw 1982; Sørum 1982, 1984; Wood 1982). In all cases it is associated with the growth and development of youths and is, or was until recently, an aspect of male initiation rites. Although insemination occurred in ritual contexts among the Onabasulu (and other Plateau groups), it is seriously misleading to call it 'ritualized homosexuality'. Male homosexuality in these groups was never confined to ritual contexts. It could be argued that every homosexual act is itself a ritual, especially given its rich cosmological associations. If this course is followed, though, all sexual acts, and indeed cooking, eating and gardening would equally have to be considered rituals. In cultures with 'cosmos' immanent in the everyday, each of these acts is also cosmologically rich (cf. Pannell 1989). Therefore, I cannot accept Herdt's phrase 'ritualised homosexuality' (though he recognises problems with it, Herdt 1984: 6ff). The removal from the mundane or everyday world implied in the modifier 'ritualized' is misleading, especially among the Onabasulu since 1965.

In addition to the fact that homosexuality was never contained within ritual, the Onabasulu, at least in the south, dispensed with any ritual context at all from 1964, when they abandoned male initiation rites. At that time, southern Onabasulu men were secluded in initiation houses when a group from the then Unevangelized Fields Mission (later the Asia Pacific Christian Mission, and now the Evangelical Church of Papua) arrived in adjacent Kaluli territory. They requested the aid of all able bodied men in the construction of an air strip. The southern Onabasulu men left seclusion to join in the building project (as did the Kaluli who were also in seclusion), cutting short initiation procedures. I was told that this marked the beginning of a new era, and that initiation rites were abandoned from then on. Apparently, mission personnel knew nothing of the seclusion and had not intentionally interfered with it (see also Schieffelin 1976:16-17 and 1982).

Why should these important rites, called *sone hagolu*, or 'the arm of the old men', have been so dramatically abandoned when they were such a high point in Onabasulu social life? It is of course, not possible to assert that the abandonment is permanent, although it seems likely that it is. I cannot state with certainty that seclusion huts were abandoned in the north in 1964 as well. I know of none built between 1964 and 1973, although during that period some northern Onabasulu youths were secluded in an Etoro house (Kelly, pers. comm.). Schieffelin has suggested that the sudden abandonment of the ceremonial aspects of initiation among the Kaluli was made possible by the absence, among other things, of age grading.

With virtually no enduring roots in the structure of society (such as initiation into an age grade or politically important cult group, or the gaining of politically important knowledge), there was no strong societally generated motivation for the *bau a* (Schieffelin 1982: 199).

Also, as Schieffelin notes, agreement about inviolability of the houses was impossible with the outsiders present. Inviolability was important, and the largest scale raid the Onabasulu remember ever having mounted against the Fasu followed a large scale raid by the Fasu on an Onabasulu seclusion hut.

Despite the abandonment of initiation ceremonies, the most important cultural tenet of male initiation was retained: that male youths must be inseminated for growth and maturation to occur. This contrasts with the situation reported by Mimica (1981) for the Angan speaking group, the Ikwaye. There, the initiation rites have been maintained, but male homosexuality has been abandoned. Among the Onabasulu, notions of the importance of insemination and the concomitant homosexual practices were maintained at least into the 1970s. Though it cannot accurately be called 'ritual homosexuality', yet it is firmly embedded in cultural understandings of cosmological significance, and was in the past appropriate for a ritual context. Male homosexuality is best understood as one mode of general sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

As in many Melanesian cultures, a conceptual complementary opposition between 'maleness' and 'femaleness' is a general aspect of Onabasulu world view. Numerous aspects of this opposition are experienced constantly, albeit in a fragmentary way, in the everyday lives of the Onabasulu. This provides the continuing power of these organizing principles. They are at once embodied in the people and experienced in ways which, when reflected upon, provide empirical evidence of the validity of the principles (see Rappaport 1979:97–144; Wagner 1972:38–54). People seldom if ever reflect upon 'cosmology' as a coherent totality. Rather, contradictions which might exist and possibilities of empirical disconfirmation are transcended in certain contexts such as important ceremonial exchanges (Ernst 1978). The experienced fragments indicate a logic which underlies a complexity of cosmological concepts and makes sense of other events even if there is no reflection on a cosmological 'totality'. All of these fragments, refracted constantly in daily experience, are also available as reference points to provide meaning for other events more or less systematically.

A brief example is a mother's spitting of a chewed aromatic ('hot') bark on an infant crying for no apparent reason. If asked why she does this, the mother's answer is almost always 'to stop her/his crying'. Upon seeing a snake which is called 'ground female' (a ground boa which lives in forest floor litter, many times in the roots of trees), a woman once remarked that the female ground spirit which dwells in it sometimes attacks the souls of children, trying to 'take them back'. The aromatic bark which is hot, and is found on the tree rather than the ground, protects the infant from attack, as it is antithetical to the cool, moist fertile and 'female' abode of the 'ground woman' spirit.

There was a woman in one long house community who was given to hysterical fits. On one occasion, she was highly agitated, although not hysterical, and running through the cleared area in front of the long house. While doing this she was pointing in several different directions. She was accompanied by her husband and several other men who were swinging axes wherever she pointed. She was able to see a witch (*hinane*), and was pointing to it as the men tried to injure or kill it. She was not a spirit medium, although she had the power to see things on this normally invisible plane of existence (the plane on which witches mundanely operate as invisible entities). Only males could be spirit mediums. They achieve their abilities after marrying a spirit woman who resides in a bird of paradise. This woman was possessed by *hele idele*, a spirit which possesses females and resides in ground boas on the forest floor.

Explicit reflection upon these contextually different but conceptually related events, suggests a spatial organization, along the dimension low to high, of the qualities of the female

and male as simultaneous categories of Onabasulu cosmology and society. Records of experiences such as these are commonplace in Melanesian ethnography. Mundane events and common information at hand can rapidly ramify through 'everyday' gender and into cosmology, with only a minimum of explicit reflection. In such systems, cosmology is truly immanent in the everyday.

Notions of the immanence of cosmology in the everyday, and involving gender, are important in any discussion of Onabasulu sexuality. The discussion points to the difficulty of maintaining cosmology as a 'finite province of meaning' somehow separate from the realm of the everyday (Schutz 1962). In fact, it would be an interesting project in the anthropology of knowledge to examine the usefulness of the notion of a finite province of meaning, and of multiple realities in a variety of cultural settings. Examples above also show that the possibility of an easy, almost casual, movement from event to cosmology does not necessarily belie the 'matter of fact' or 'everyday' nature of the event. The everyday world is not necessarily sacralized. Spitting bark on a baby is as routine for an Onabasulu woman as checking the temperature of a baby's bottle of formula is for a resident of a Sydney suburb.<sup>3</sup>

The close connection of sexuality, growth, and decay in the entire Strickland-Bosavi region, is well described and discussed by both Kelly (1976) and Sørum (1984), the latter dealing explicitly with Bedamini male homosexuality. Onabasulu beliefs concerning procreation and the development of a foetus are similar to those of the Etoro, although they are not generally expressed as specifically and precisely as they seem to be in the Etoro case. One difference is that men frequently say that the female substance involved in conception is vaginal secretion (*ido moya* = 'female semen') rather than (only) menstrual blood. Also, there is little mention of bones, or any other specific part of the anatomy, being exclusively produced from semen (*ino moya* = 'male semen'). Fittingly, there are also no patrilineal ossuary caves such as those among the Etoro.

#### ONABASULU MALE HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY

The need to inseminate young males is a cosmologically significant cultural imperative among the Onabasulu and across the eastern Papuan Plateau. It has a basis in conceptualizations of what males are, and how they become that. As in most New Guinean cultures with prescribed male homosexuality, it is believed that males cannot mature and reproduce without being inseminated by older males. Also, as I have observed, although insemination previously took place in male initiation rites, they were never the *only* context for insemination, even before they were discontinued. Male homosexual activity always exceeded the limits of ritual, and continued in the absence of ritual.

It was difficult, particularly at first, for me to get much information about homosexuality, even of a general sort. The Onabasulu were aware of the degree of disapproval of these practices by both the mission and various administration officers at that time. They would talk much more freely and in detail about former cannibal exploits than of homosexuality. Also, individual homosexual relations were of a personal nature. I never questioned people about the details of their sexual practices of any sort unless they felt comfortable in discussing them. Much of what I know of personal relationships comes from observing the styles of interaction of people and hearing conversations, rather than from direct questioning.

When people did speak generally about male homosexual practices, they evinced very strong feelings about their importance. A number of men told me that to have male children who were never inseminated would be like planting a garden and not cultivating it. They

were to a person adamant that whatever the previous fate of male initiation, insemination practices would continue.

These practices are uniquely Onabasulu, in that they differ from the practices of neighbouring groups, the Kaluli and the Etoro. The former inseminate youths by anal intercourse (Schieffelin 1978), and the latter by fellatio (Kelly 1977:16). The Onabasulu rub the semen on the skin of the youth after he has masturbated the inseminator. The knees, elbows, sides of the torso and the buttocks are the areas specifically anointed. Application to the skin — which is itself, as throughout Melanesia, an indicator of the degree of a person's well being — is a common Onabasulu method of applying medicines.

The application of semen to the skin occurs in a number of other New Guinean contexts. Van Baal (1966:548) mentions that a Marind-Anim man '... far from his village — afraid he may encounter a *hais* (spirit of the dead) ...' may masturbate and smear semen on his forehead for protection. He also points out that 'It [semen] is smeared on the bodies of the sick and the healthy so as to dispel sickness and fear ...' (1966:817). Neither of these practices is the equivalent of the insemination of youths to make them grow, however. The Onabasulu method of insemination is partially realized in mythic form among the distantly linguistically related Keraki. Williams reports a myth in which a boy is not growing well at all — he is described as pot-bellied and constipated (pregnant?).

He was the despair of his father until one day, ostensibly with the sole idea of promoting his growth he conceived the idea of sodomizing him. He took him apart from his mother during the night and put his idea into effect, rubbing semen over the child's body. The result was miraculous increase in growth (Williams 1936:308–9).

The Kimam, geographically and culturally close to the Marind-Anim, rub semen on the bodies of initiates (Serpenti 1984), but this is collected after intercourse with the initiate's bride to be, and is therefore more like the 'semen' collected after heterosexual intercourse by the Marind-Anim for ritual purposes (van Baal 1966). That is, I suspect that it may be 'empowered' heterosexually (Serpenti 1984:307 ff), possibly by mixture with vaginal secretions (explicitly called 'female semen' by the Onabasulu, and important in ideas concerning conception). For the Onabasulu, such a substance would be different from male semen, and its use would not constitute direct male insemination.

Thus the three neighbouring groups are similar in believing that insemination is important to the growth of males. But they differ in how male adulthood is achieved (Kelly 1977:16). Kelly notes the Etoro abhorrence of Kaluli insemination practices, perhaps because of the traditional enmity between these two groups (1977:16). The Onabasulu, who were not enemies of either of their neighbours, do not revile either of their practices. Some northern Onabasulu youths have gone through seclusion and initiation with Etoro (Kelly 1977: 16). This would, of course, mean insemination by the Etoro method. A southern Onabasulu man to whom I was close told me of an infamous and enthusiastic inseminator of young men in a neighbouring Kaluli long house. He was among many who were sodomized by this man, on the occasion of a visit, with three friends, to the man's long house. He felt victimized, he said, but not because he disapproved of the Kaluli method of insemination, but because he found the experience physically painful. He went out of his way to avoid this man on later visits. Onabasulu do not disapprove of their neighbours' customs. They say that semen thus obtained is beneficial. Any ill effects are felt by the inseminators, not the recipients. But all youths, to become Onabasulu, must receive much of their semen in Onabasulu fashion. However, the strict separation of tribal groups by insemination practices implied by Kelly is not actually the case, and the men thus 'produced' are not clearly or completely or

‘...preeminently different kinds of men, culturally distinct beings at the most fundamental level’ (Kelly 1977:16).

In many cases of homosexual activity, a special and long term relationship develops between an older man and a youth. The former becomes the primary, if not exclusive, inseminator of the youth. The relationship may last until the youth’s marriage, when he will inseminate someone else. The same regulatory rules which apply to heterosexual marriages apply to the homosexual relationships. This is interesting in that the homosexual relationships are not spoken of as marriages explicitly, and illicit heterosexual relationships do not, if rumour (and the boasting of young men) is even partially believable, necessarily follow rules of correct marriage partnerships. There is no explicit injunction to inseminate wife’s brother as is found among the Etoro (Kelly 1976:52, n.6). Such an explicit injunction might rob the Onabasulu relationships of much of their appeal and subtlety. Affinity is a factor, however. A young man may very likely be from a lineage into which the older man has married. Also, it may help chances of achieving a desired marriage to a second wife if a prior homosexual relationship is established with her ‘actual’ or close patrilineal classificatory brother. One relationship which I observed fairly closely from its inception could be seen in this light. The older man tried unsuccessfully to take a close lineage sister of the youth with whom he was in the homosexual relationship as a second wife. To apply this factor as the only, the major, or in some way most ‘real’ motive, however, does a disservice to the complexity of the relationship (and, as importantly, is bad anthropology, as it implies a strategic intention which cannot be verified without examining indigenous theories of motive). The marriage never eventuated, and from the beginning had little chance, but the relationship between the two males was a long and close one.

Homosexual partners among the Onabasulu court each other. The young man will act coquettishly and the older man will also flirt. They will exchange small gifts such as woven leg bands, seek each other’s company and engage in much casual body contact as preliminary to the full development of the relationship. Thus, the relationships are entered into in the way that most men would like to enter into marriage relationships with women. This dimension of the relationship, would not be possible if there were explicit prescription of partners, or even if considerations of established or future affinal relationships were primary. This is the sense in which an explicit injunction might rob the relationship of subtlety. Of course, because of the important social and political consequences of each marriage, men can only rarely establish relationships with wives in this way.<sup>4</sup>

I saw a relationship develop between two people with whom I was friendly. The youth was about 12–14 years old and the older married man about 21–23. The young man began to act coy and sometimes flirtatious around his potential partner. The older man acted indulgently and occasionally flirtatiously in return, indicating his interest. Actually in this case, as probably in most, it was difficult to decide who was the initiator. For the observer, such an attribution is always retrospective, for both parties are responding to each other by the time notice is taken. In the case at hand, the youth responded to and firmly established the special relationship by presenting gifts of woven leg bands to the married man. By the time he enters such a relationship, a youth has probably already had some homosexual experience.

It is interesting to speculate on the social consequences of these relationships. Creed (1984:165) suggests some ways in which ‘[i]nstitutionalized homosexuality is a mechanism of [social] control that operates to perpetuate a system of inequality based on sex and age’. Although there are some interesting possible implications in his paper, his ideas about the

ritual feminization of semen recipients, resulting in low status in sexually polarized communities, cannot do complete justice to the ethnography of at least the Strickland — Bosavi region.

The possibility of domination through institutionalized homosexual practices can be examined fruitfully not through simple functionalist notions of direct social control, but in the light of ideological possibilities of beliefs reified in part by homosexual practices.<sup>5</sup> Here, homosexuality becomes one evidential refraction of a set of gender beliefs which act as a politically engaged knowledge operating in the domination of women. By this, I mean that the engagement in such practices and reflection upon this engagement renders certain basic notions about gender somehow 'real'. These notions contain the possibility of being politically engaged and as such operating ideologically (see Zubrinich 1985 for a discussion of kinship terminologies on the Papuan Plateau in this perspective). Unlike other refractions, such as kinship terminology (see Ernst 1984, ch. 7) homosexuality is 'publicly' convincing only for males, that is, those who experience it and know of it. It can then, of course, be only a part of ideologically important reifying process — by the same argument which sees it as an important and evidential refraction of a cosmology in which gender opposition is important. Thompson argues that one of the

... way[s] in which ideology operates is by means of **reification**, that is, by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time (Thompson 1984:131).

Homosexual practices render real and natural the cultural constructs of gender, as I have argued in my discussion of their cosmological significance. When these cultural constructs operate as a part of systematically asymmetric relations of power, they are part of an ideology of domination.

The other possibilities for domination lie (as Creed indicates) in the notion of indebtedness, and rest in individual relationships. In a society in which reciprocity is an explicit principle in all relationships, it becomes impossible for a young man to 'repay' his inseminator. Reciprocity can be realized only at the lineage level, where the lineage of the inseminator may be given the reproductive powers of a female (in marriage), in return for the male reproductive power he has given them by inseminating one of their youths (at the expense of his own personal decline). In such a situation, both the male and female prerequisites of lineage reproduction are available only from outside — a sort of double exogamy in which sisters and semen may be exchanged. This is more likely consciously, if not structurally, realizable at the lineage level among the Etoro than among the Onabasulu, and Kelly (1976:52–3, n.6) briefly mentions the complex movement of life forces. Anyway, it is only repayable at the lineage, not the personal level. At the latter level it may be seen as a sort of generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1972:193–4), in the same category as the unrepayable general debts to parents, and, of course, some individual possibilities for personal domination exist here.

Homosexual relationships among Onabasulu males may last varying lengths of time. But they are usually ended by the time a youth marries, when he is supposedly mature and has begun losing semen in heterosexual intercourse. The friendships that are established in the relationships are usually permanent, even when not formalized in another context, e.g. by the two being brothers-in-law. The brother-in-law relationship is one of mutual support and with a heavy content of joking through sexual play. I recorded one case in which the relationship in its sexual aspect seemed exceptionally long term. The older man, a widower with few affines or close consanguines, took on some of the obligations of father or older



brother to his orphaned partner who had no close siblings. He was trying desperately to find a wife for his young lover, the only person to whom he was close. Others recognized his position as a difficult and perhaps tragic one, for if he was successful in finding a wife for his young partner, he would transform the nature of their long term relationship. This makes more obvious the parallels with a parent-child relationship (excluding the **explicit** sexuality in the former, however). These parallels both emphasise a nurturing element and indicate a contrast with a marriage relationship. Marriage relationship, unlike that of inseminator-inseminated, or parent-child, does not ideally (even if sadly) end, (or become transformed and attenuated) on the maturation of one party. The homosexual relationships, then, have some of the affective load of marital and parent-child relationships and could profitably be considered in any analysis of (male) incestuous affect.

The Onabasulu believe that (a) every ejaculation is one more step in male physical decline; (b) youths must, however, be inseminated if they are to mature properly; and (c) women must be impregnated if life is to continue. Against this background, close relationships are formed. Both male homosexual relationships and husband-wife relationships have a major sexual component. Such tenderness and warm affect as are found in these relationships, (and both kinds are often of this character), stem in great part from their sexual nature. Men speak far more frequently of the necessity to inseminate youths than of their own physical decline. The decline is something brought to mind when men age, as they become more easily short of breath, as they weary more easily. It is not directly experienced by younger men. Despite it, sexual relationships are highly prized aspects of a person's life.

Cosmology provides a very real basis for the insemination of youths and heterosexual reproduction, and a basis for understanding both in terms of growth and decay, life and death. Onabasulu males have a culturally imperative responsibility to inseminate male youths, but the homosexual relationships, once established, may take on careers of their own, as may all sexual relationships.

This is not to imply that there is a separation between 'desire and affect' (particularly perceived and acted upon desire and affect) on the one hand, and 'culture' on the other. Nor does it mean that there is dichotomy between those aspects of culture I have here called 'cosmology' and the feelings which are effective in close personal relationships. The connection is, however, not a simple and direct one devoid of conflict or contradiction. The intimate relationships in which sexuality is an important part frequently run counter to the specifications which are directly part of the cosmology. Of course, this is no reason to consider feelings, or for that matter, 'individual' eroticism, as somehow 'outside' culture. The distinction drawn between cosmology and affect is just that. Cosmology, codified understandings of the order of the universe, does **not** constitute culture in its entirety.

A personification of evil among the Onabasulu, as among the Etoro (Kelly 1976:49-50), is the person who takes semen for no social purpose. The young man who receives semen from his fellow youths is such a person. So is the woman who bears no children after repeated acts of sexual intercourse. Kelly shows that in Etoro culture, they are analogous to witches, consuming life force for only their own growth and vitality. The same analogy exists conceptually and structurally for the Onabasulu. Yet, among the Onabasulu, sexuality as an idiom of intimacy can be part of a relationship which is close and tender; a relationship which may in some small ways, for the individuals involved, transcend cultural images of evil. One of the closest and warmest relationships I observed among the Onabasulu was between a man and his wife who, over ten years of marriage, had borne no children. It is much less

problematic for a male homosexual relationship to become warm and intimate, despite (or perhaps to some degree because of) its embeddedness in the growth and decline of partners.

## CONCLUSIONS

Lindenbaum's (1984) ideas concerning the negative quality of male-female relations in societies with 'ritualized' male homosexual practices are not apt for the Onabasulu. Relations between brothers and sisters are warm, and frequently cordial to warm between husbands and wives. Males are not torn away from their mothers for radically defeminizing initiations, and the residential and social separation of the sexes is far less radical and complete than in many Papua New Guinean societies. That is, the radical and complete gender antagonism that she associates with societies 'metonymically' characterised by the combination of 'ritualized homosexuality' and 'sister exchange marriage' (see Knaft's discussion of this, 1990:188 ff) does not hold for the Onabasulu and possibly many Papuan Plateau and South Papuan societies. The contrast with the situations she describes, which appear to be accurate for Angan speaking groups of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, may be in part based on the Onabasulu comparability of 'male semen' and 'female semen' (vaginal secretions). This dimension of reproductive beliefs should be more closely examined among the groups speaking languages of the Central South New Guinea Stock. It may produce a less homogeneous view of cultures with 'sister exchange' and initiation rites involving male homosexuality.

Although Onabasulu practices are not 'ritualized' homosexuality, they are culturally imperative and a part of specific cosmological and social configurations. As such, they are interestingly comparable to male homosexual activity elsewhere in Melanesia. Aspects of cosmology are imbedded in intimate, personal, everyday life, and therefore are experienced and available for reflection. The growth of youths adds an empirical accent of reality to that cosmology (see Schutz 1964). But the cosmology need not be **totally** manifest in every act. The Onabasulu can preclude complex ramification while retaining the significance of these acts by giving a discursive and instrumental response to questions about practice, whether the anthropologist's or their own. They usually say they inseminate boys to make them grow, just as they say they chew an aromatic bark and spit it on an infant just to stop its crying. Finally, despite the cultural imperative to inseminate youths and its conceptual relationship to decay, the practice becomes more than 'duty'. The sexual intimacy established forms, partly in its own right, the basis for complex, affectively warm and tender relationships.

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## NOTES

1. The 'ethnographic present', when the observations reported in this paper were made, is between 1970 and 1973, and this description cannot be taken as necessarily representing present circumstances.
2. Sørum, in a recent paper on Bedamini homosexuality, finds it necessary to discuss it not in a ritual context, (although initiation rites were still practised by the Bedamini), but in the context of Bedamini sexuality generally (Sørum 1984).
3. I would not want to rule out the possible immanence of cosmology in such acts for Sydney suburbanites, but I do not think the rapid complex ramification is as much a part of it.
4. Compare here Knauff's (1986) interesting analysis of Gebusi erotic narrative texts in relation to sexual practice, where narratives are almost always concerned with heterosexual fantasy in a context of primarily homosexual activity for the younger segment of the male population. Unlike the Onabasulu, however, the Gebusi see homosexual practices explicitly as '...a stop-gap form of sexual release in the absence of a female partner' (1986: 268).
5. The nature of an adequate concept of ideology for analytic purposes is a difficult but important one, as is the whole problem of the relationship of notions of culture and ideology. See Ricoeur 1986 for a thoughtful discussion of the concept of ideology that is, I think, most useful for anthropology. The brief mention of ideological aspects of male homosexuality is not, of course, anything but a small indication of one (important) direction in which might proceed a consideration of cosmological knowledge as it is engaged in historical political circumstances.

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