

While I am finding plenty of evidence of secretive sex between masculine male friends on Rarotonga, I am frustrated at not being able to meet and interview a "le-le" berdache. Everyone I talk to knows about them, but they say they don't know of any that live nearby here in Arorangi. When I ask people to define what a "le-le" is, they commonly say "a pouf-ta." I think this is a British expression that they probably got from New Zealanders. When I ask what a pouf-ta is, they say "a boy who is like a girl, between a man and a woman." They clearly do not see the le-le as a sociological woman, but as a mixed-gender or between-the-genders alternative gender role. I have heard no condemnation of this role, but one teenager I talked with, when he found out I prefer sex with males, kept telling me I should find a girl to have sex with. I think he found it confusing that a gender-conformist man would not want to have sex with a woman. He did not seem to have a problem with the notion that I had sex with males, only that I did it exclusively. That is only for le-le.

Yesterday evening I took the bus into town to have dinner and do a bit of grocery shopping. As I was standing by the roadside with a bagfull of groceries, just as the bus was ready to come by for the last trip of the evening, right by me walked a very good looking obvious le-le with a woman friend. He was maybe 20 years old, wearing pants but with a feminine looking blouse, with his long hair loosely tied up in a kerchief, and with big earrings and painted fingernails. In the dark I did not recognize him as male until he was close by, and I smiled. He asked me, in a very forward way, "What are you standing there for." I was so shocked, in wanting to meet him, that I could think of nothing to say except "I'm waiting for the bus." He said "Oh," then walked on. I started to say something else, to get a conversation going, but he resumed talking with his female friend. I felt stupid that I had not at least gotten his name and where he lives, but the situation did not really allow it. I hesitated, and thought about following him, but then the bus came and I got on it to go home. If it had not been the last bus of the evening, and if he had been by himself, I think I would have pursued meeting him. I hope I can meet him again in the future; it is obvious I should have remained living in the town to better meet them. Out here in this isolated village there do not seem to be any. In town I have not once seen a le-le by himself; they seem always to be with people.

The other day when I was swimming at Black Rock, which is popular with the locals, I noticed what might (I'm not sure) be evidence of this kind of popularity of le-le with females. There were a number of teenage girls and boys swimming. Then a gentle-looking boy, maybe fifteen years old, walked up. The girls suddenly went crazy, repeatedly calling out his name and trying to get him to come join them. They did not react this way with the other boys present. At first I thought it might be that they were sexually attracted to him, but the longer this display went on the less sexual it seemed. There were in fact several very good-looking guys already present, but the girls ignored them in favor of this gentle looking boy. Now, I have never seen this boy before, and I do not know for sure if he is a proto-le-le, but I've never seen girls go so publically verbal over a boy. It was almost like a little version of the kind of excitement that adolescent girls evidence over androgynous male rock stars like Michael Jackson. They screamed out his name again and again. Is it because he seems non-threatening, or the fact that he shares their feminine interests, or what? Whatever the reason, adult women's closeness to adult le-le seem to indicate a fascination with androgynous males that I find quite notable.

Coming back on the bus, I sat next to a white woman tourist, perhaps about age 55, from Seattle. She was there with her female friends, and their husbands were sitting in the seats behind. She started talking with me, and eventually asked me if I was married. When I said "sort of, my boyfriend and I consider ourselves married," she immediately responded in a very positive way. She said, "Oh, don't you miss being away from him?" and I said yes, but we often talk on the phone and we have plans for him to join me in Hawaii whenever he can get off a few days from his job. Well, after this information came out, she and her friends just literally took me to their busoms, putting their arms around me and kissing me on the cheek before they left to get off at their hotel. I have seen no other women acting this way with a man they had just met on the bus, and it occurred to me that this fascination by heterosexual females about homosexual males has an amazing cross-cultural dimension which bears exploration.