

HIEROS GAMOS: Sacred Sexuality Ancient and Modern

How is sacred sexuality manifesting in a current western milieu and what is the emerging role of the modern day Sacred Prostitute?

by

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the re-emerging interest in modern western society with the practice of sacred sexuality, what it is, who are the practitioners, and what services are being offered. Historical research of Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage rituals that occurred in the Goddess religions of the past and elsewhere, provide the basis from which I compare and contrast what influence those practices had (if any) on attitudes, values and behaviours of contemporary practitioners of sacred sexuality. Using an ethnographic study of five women who I deem to be modern day sacred prostitutes I explore their personal stories, discussing the services they provide, their attitudes and relationship to sacred sex in a contemporary milieu

Statement of Sources

“The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief original, except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.”

Signed:

.....
Kerri Ryan
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This research investigates the topic of sacred sexuality which in broad terms describes the use of sexual energy as a tool for achieving transcendent spiritual states. The roots of these practices can be found in the Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage rituals of ancient religions that worshipped the Goddess as well as numerous other pre-Christian cultures. The rituals and practices of the ancient past are being repackaged and westernized for a contemporary market where an experience of the sacred is again being offered through sex.

A main focus of this study is the role of the priestess as she existed in the ancient temples of the Goddess, offering her body as a sacrament to those seeking spiritual union with the divine. Often referred to by historians as sacred prostitute, these highly educated holy women, represent an archetype from an era where sexual energy was revered. Through the ritual act of sex, one could experience the divinity of the Goddess herself, through the living embodiment of the priestess.

Many ancient Eastern religious traditions embraced sexuality as can be found in the tantric teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. Sacred sexuality was also employed by the Greeks and Romans in their mystery religions and the power of sexual energy has long been utilised in Pagan, Wiccan and magic rituals. What appears to have been common in the pre-Christian world as a means of accessing the numinous, is re-emerging into 21st century western consciousness.

As I investigate a contemporary expression of sacred sexuality and the women who are offering their services, my contention is that the modern Australian practitioner is drawing on a reimagining of ancient rites and practices of various cultural traditions, and is finding an affinity with the archetype of the sacred prostitute and succor in the burgeoning new religious movement (NRM) known as feminist or Goddess spirituality.

Using the ceremonies associated with Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage that occurred in the ancient Goddess temples and other pre-Christian cultures, I will compare and contrast what

influence those practices have on the rituals, symbols and values of the modern day sacred prostitute and what affiliations they claim to an ancient lineage (if any).

In providing an ethnographic examination of five women who are currently practising as modern day sacred prostitutes, I aim to identify their relationship to the sacred, their affiliations with the feminist or Goddess spirituality movement, and their reasons and desire to work with sacred sexuality.

My journey into the past has been vital to understanding and appreciating modern western society's current resurgence of interest into sacred sexual practices. By investigating both the ancient and the modern, this research will explore the question: "How is sacred sexuality manifesting in the current western milieu and what is the emerging role of the modern day sacred prostitute?"

Hieros gamos

It was in researching the Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage rituals performed in the ancient Goddess temples that initiated my desire to locate the modern day women (and men)¹ who call themselves sacred prostitutes or who engage in offering sacred sexual services. The term "Hieros Gamos" comes from the Greek whose etymology translates as "hieros" – holy and "gamos" – marriage or coupling. The Concise Encyclopedia Britannica (accessed online) gives this definition:

Sexual relations of fertility deities enacted in myths and rituals, characteristic of societies based on cereal agriculture (e.g., Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, and Canaan). At least once a year, people dressed as gods engaged in sexual intercourse to guarantee the fertility of the land. The festival began with a procession to the marriage celebration, which was followed by an exchange of gifts, a purification rite, the wedding feast, preparation of the wedding chamber, and a secret nocturnal act of intercourse.

In ancient Mesopotamia, the lands known as Sumeria, Assyria and Babylon, from the 4th millennium BCE, the people worshiped the great Goddess Innana, Queen of the Heavens and the Earth. Here, the High Priestess of Inanna would unite with or marry the King of the land who represented the young, virile vegetation God, in a public sexual ceremony that not only

¹ While there are definitely men involved in modern day practices of sacred sexuality, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus my research and interviews solely on women practitioners.

celebrated the fertile renewal of the land but was also a ritual act of creation. This important festival would last for many days and occur around the time of the autumn equinox. The celebrations would include the ritual sacrifice of grains and fruits, the first offspring of livestock and even the first child. So important was this celebration of renewal that only the most precious objects would be sacrificed. Even libations of blood would be offered to increase the fertility of the union which was the culmination of these ritual celebrations (Qualls-Corbett 1988).

This ritual has been historically reconstructed mainly from Sumerian poetry which describes the love between the Goddess Inanna and the God Dumuzi, but similar rituals were common in the ancient Near East including Syria, Canaan and the southern Levant (Nissinen and Uro 2008). Within the ritual sacred marriage, the High Priestess of the temple became the earthly embodiment of the Goddess herself, joining with the masculine in the form of the King. This represented the joining of the elements of earth and spirit to create a holy sacred union. Here, sexuality was experienced as a pathway to the divine.

The priestesses who performed these rituals have been called sacred prostitutes because within ritual space, they offered their bodies to men who wished to experience the sacred feminine aspects of the Goddess. In contemporary writings of their time, these holy women, known as Hierodule, Qadishtu or Heterae (Stone 1976) were held in the highest esteem. Whether in the temples of Aphrodite, Astarte, Ishtar or Inanna, men could find an experience of the Goddess in the body of a highly trained priestess and offer a payment for the privilege.

The Sacred Prostitute

The temples of the Goddess have been home to the sacred prostitute for more millennium than history records. The story of the legendary King Gilgamesh dates back to 7000BCE (Starbird 2005) and explains how the sacred prostitute tamed the hairy beast who was sent to rob the King, turning him into a civilized companion through the act of sex. The Greek historian Herodotus writes in the 3rd century BCE of the Babylonian custom that compels every woman of the land once in her life to sit in the temple of the Goddess of love and have intercourse with a stranger who must provide a payment for the temple. The practice is recorded to have taken place in Egypt, Lebanon, Greece and Rome and the commonly known vestal virgin was not a virgin at all, but rather she devoted her life to becoming a “bride” in the sacred marriage rituals in the temples

of Hestia or Vesta (Starbird 2005). A virgin was considered to be a woman who never married, not one who never had sex. Rather than belonging to a man, she had ownership of her own body. Carol Christ (1992:62) describes virginity reflected in the persona of the Goddess Aphrodite:

Fully and joyously sexual, Aphrodite remains virgin in that her sexuality is unbridled, untamed and her own. Though married, she is neither submissive nor faithful... Though she is a mother, her child Eros is but a reflection of her sexuality.

What Christ is elaborating on is that Aphrodite, as Goddess of love and sexuality, is owned by no man. She may be married but her archetype represents ownership of her own body, her own choices and her own sexuality.

The term sacred prostitute is a mistranslation of Qadishtu or Hierodule which means holy woman and “is compelling because it evokes a clash of images – sacred and profane, spiritual and sexual all at once” (Hutchins 1998:2). Whilst we know the role played by the sacred prostitute, evidenced historically in the Hieros Gamos rituals of ancient Sumer, we have little detail of the training undergone and the full extent of the role embodied by a priestess who engaged in sacred sexual rituals. Was she a healer, teacher, therapist and spiritual guide? We can’t know, but Stubbs (1994) uses those qualities when he describes the modern day sacred prostitute who he sees using her body in the role of sexual teacher, healer and initiator of transcendent sexual experiences. Stubbs (1994:17) writes:

They are teachers of the heart, visionaries who step outside of constrictive, traditional beliefs, using their bodies as their temples to which they invite others. Their purpose is to support a deeper discovery of the spiritual flame that burns within us all. Sexual energy, in a broad sense, is this flame.

While Stubbs speaks of the women who are drawn to the healing and teaching aspects of this work, Gilmore’s research (1998) investigates sex workers who see themselves as contemporary sacred prostitutes, emerging at the crossroad of a movement of womens’ spirituality and sex workers’ rights, who find spiritual empowerment through relating to the temple priestesses of the past. Gilmore (1998) states that in the U.S. and elsewhere, there are a growing number of Goddess worshippers within the sex industry who are attempting to heal the split between the profane and the sacred. They have created an identity by relating to the ancient mythology of the temple priestesses who made love to men as a holy rite and spiritual service. She sees these

women as part of a larger movement who experience and describe themselves as sacred prostitutes and sexual healers who find liberation in the recontextualisation of prostitution as a valid, fulfilling and skilled occupation.

I now explore what is defined by the term sacred sex and examine the background and manifold traditions that contribute to its current manifestation.

Sacred sexuality past and present

Sacred sexuality crosses many cultural boundaries and has existed not only in ancient societies but occurred within Greek and Roman polytheistic cultures, in Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism. It can even be found in Christianity in the sacred marriage ritual of the bridal chamber where Christ as Spirit kisses Mary as Matter so as to unify the material and the spiritual worlds as one. Aspects of ancient fertility rituals are being re-enacted even today in the form of Beltane or May Day celebrations. Here Morris Dancers perform while young ribbon toting women conduct a fertility dance around a symbolic phallic pole, representing the joining of the masculine with the feminine and celebrating the fecundity and regeneration of the coming summer season.

In attempting to define the term sacred sex in a modern western context, we are faced with a variety of different practices, sourced from a diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds. Sacred sex has gained considerable attention in the west over the last two decades as a catch-all phrase encompassing practices and disciplines from western and eastern traditions and philosophies that draw on teachings of Tantra, Taoism, yoga, Goddess spirituality, Neo-Pagan, Wicca and shamanism (Albury 2001). Hutchins (1998:1) describes the US sacred sexuality traditions as “having influences ranging from Eastern to Native American, from European earth-based and occultist forms to Afro-Caribbean”.

Hutchins (1998:1) provides a definition of sacred sex, describing it as “a set of beliefs and practices which seek to heal the split between the mind and body, the erotic and the religious, and to bring them together through daily practices and ritual experiences”. Rabbi Schachter-Schalomi (2001) sees sacred sex as:

...an experience of ecstasy and love ...an overwhelming reverence for all embodied life on whatever level of existence... recovering our authentic being, which knows bliss

beyond mere pleasurable sensations... a form of communion which fills us with awe and stillness.

Berger (1974:2) says “it is embodied in sub-cultural religious movements and sects, most of oriental inspiration, diffused through upper-middle-class culture, which has become the ideology of the sexual revolution.”

Many of the modern sacred sexual practices employ aspects of Tantra in their teachings. My research has shown that Tantra is a term often bandied around by advertisers who use it to describe multiple practices that have no connection with the religious Tantric teachings of Hinduism or Buddhism. Traditional Tantra refers to a specific set of beliefs and practices such as meditation and breathing exercises intended to develop enlightened spiritual qualities and to awaken pathways to the divine by arousing and harnessing energy within the body. It is unique among religious beliefs and esoteric or spiritual practices in that it does not repress or ignore the sexual nature, but fully embraces it. Tantra honours sexual energy and the sacred union of male and female as a pathway to the divine, but its focus has nothing to do with intercourse. Modern western Tantra takes aspects of these ancient teachings and uses them to aid couples or singles to enhance their sexuality and lovemaking skills, and to heal relationship issues.

Whilst Albury (2001) speaks of the Tantric traditions which are generally recognized as influencing modern sacred sexual practices, she explains that what many teachers or practitioners utilise, are techniques that broadly aim to accumulate, store and focus sexual energy. What is sexual energy? We all have sexual energy. It is simply our life force, found as easily as taking in a breath. In eastern traditions this life force is known as prana, chi or ki. Prana is the Indian terminology, Chi is the Chinese, and the Japanese use Ki. All refer to the same vital life force energy that enters the body through the breath and circulates as an electrical energy or current. Sexual energy, also known as kundalini in the Hindu tradition, is perceived of as laying dormant and wrapped around the base of the spine like a coiled serpent. When harnessed through meditation, yoga, dance or visualization practices, the kundalini can be transformed into high potency chi or prana which not only energetically enhances the body, but can also cultivate higher spiritual experiences. Albury (2001:208) explains that in sacred sexual practices, this life force energy can be used in:

...conscious breathing, meditation, 'kegelling' or pelvic floor exercises, strip-tease, dance and movement, costume and role-play, masturbation techniques, genital and/or anal massage and concentrated eye-gazing with a partner. Many exercises are designed to enhance and extend orgasmic pleasure.

Many of the practices used to enhance and manipulate life force energy into achieving an enlightened sexual experience, are focused on what Chia and Chia (in Albury 1996:41) describe as:

...having an inward orgasm where the orgasm actually travels through all the organs, glands and nervous system, thrilling and revitalizing them with the life-force of sexual, creative and regenerative energy.

Having defined what sacred sex is from its roots in multiple cultural and religious traditions, through to how modern western practitioners are interpreting that information, I now turn to the market place and explore how advertisers present their services to contemporary consumers.

Sacred sex for sale

As described above, the 21st century western experience of sacred sexuality can take many forms and sacred sexual practitioners today are more likely to be seen as teachers, healers, therapists or tantrikas (teachers of Tantra). Sacred sex does not necessarily require a physical sexual exchange between two or more people either. In the modern context, sacred sex becomes a catch all term that can incorporate aspects of dance, massage, Tantra, sex magic, Wiccan or shamanic rituals, workshops, ritual drug taking, therapy, surrogates and indeed prostitutes. This is borne out in the array of advertisements currently to be found in new age or spiritual magazines.

Three spiritual magazines I viewed in the month of June 2008 (Inner Self, Nova and Insight magazine), all contained articles or advertisements on sexuality. *Inner Self* devoted a full page to articles on "The Healing Power of Sex" and "Keeping Sexual Desire Alive" together with a quarter page ad for "Tantric Blossoming" – workshops for individuals and couples to transform their sexual experience. *Insight* carried a three page article on "Sacred Sex – Tantra in the Modern Age," with *Nova* offering six different advertisements for tantric and sacred sexual workshops, massages, dance, CDs, books and teacher training. Following links to the Oztantra

website,² I found information on tantra weekend workshops, couples retreats, personal one-on-one consultations as well as articles, products, recommendations and profiles on the teachers. The Tantra Goddess directory³ site is more explicit and lists profiles of tantric goddesses in various areas of Australia and explains in detail the cost, practices and exercises employed in a session with a tantric goddess, together with photo images of your particular goddess.

My own experience and background is relevant to this exploration and I outline my personal involvement and interest in the subject matter below.

My personal journey

The Goddess Spirituality movement (which I will explore more fully) has interested me from the sidelines for up to fifteen years. My disenchantment with patriarchal religions in which I found scant reference to the feminine, has seen me seek alternative expressions of the divine, immersing myself in the manifold expressions of the new age movement throughout the 1990s.

For me, that involves finding meaning in a relationship with the sacred as it manifests in nature, in other individuals and in God, Goddess, All That Is, rather than in doctrine or dogmatic belief systems as set down by any one distinct religious practice. It also allows me to find the divinity inherent within myself and heal the separation between body and spirit.

My own search for meaning saw me become a massage therapist, Reiki Master, cranio sacral practitioner and indulger in numerous other healing therapies, but the Goddess remained an underlying theme throughout, representing the divine feminine principle that had been missing in my conventional Christian upbringing. It was in 2006, in conjunction with my Masters studies that I joined an Order of Goddess women called the Pomegranate Grove. There I underwent the teachings of Goddess Lore to become an initiated priestess of the Order on the Summer Solstice, December 2007. I am now studying for my second level initiation and have become active within the Order, dedicating myself to journey with the Goddess Inanna this year, and as the Promotions Officer, am editor of the organisation's newsletter.

² <http://www.oztantra.com/> (accessed 27.06.09)

³ <http://www.tantragoddessdirectory.com/index.htm> (accessed 13.08.09)

In 2005 I underwent training to become a Kundalini dance facilitator with a teacher in Byron Bay. This intensely physical and practical training was aimed at opening the energetic centres of the body known as chakras, to facilitate the awakening of the kundalini serpent energy within the body. Eastern religious practices and philosophies have for millennia cultivated the sexual energy inherent within the body known as kundalini, and it is this very energy that tantric practitioners utilise to awaken transcendent experiences of union with the divine. It was through awakened kundalini energy that I did achieve transcendent spiritual states.

Soon after completion of my training I travelled to India, spending time in an Ashram cultivating meditation techniques and working with kundalini energy. On returning to Australia, I have taught kundalini dance workshops for three years, and have a theoretical, practical and personal understanding of this powerful sexual energy and the transcendent spiritual states able to be reached when employing techniques that raise this energy.

As a priestess of Goddess, kundalini dance facilitator and spiritual journeyer for more than 15 years, my background informs this work and provides an insider understanding to the research I undertake and the women I interview.

The next chapter looks at the evidence of matriarchal societies which worshipped the Goddess and discusses the way sexuality was viewed as evidenced through the archaeological discoveries of Goddess imagery. It examines how the patriarchy which superseded worship of the Goddess, created a schism between women, their bodies and sexuality as sacred.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s witnessed a social and cultural upheaval from which was birthed the new religious movement known as the “new age”. This was later to give rise to the feminist spirituality or Goddess Spiritual movement which itself was influenced by the rise of interest in Witchcraft and Pagan practices.

CHAPTER 2

Evidence of Goddess based societies

I now turn to examine the research of scholars and evidence of archeological discoveries that support the view of the ancient world as being female centred and Goddess worshipping.

In the beginning, people prayed to the Creatress of Life. At the very dawn of religion, god was a woman. Do you remember?

Merlin Stone (cited in Christ 1997:50)

As more scholarly research is compiled and more interest given to the view that our primitive societies were female centred, the rediscovery of the Goddess has provoked a new reconsideration of the roles of women in the origin and history of the earliest religions. The oldest images of the Goddess come to us from the Old Stone Age (c. 32,000 -10,000 BCE), small carved female statues and reliefs, full of figure and usually unclothed including the Goddess of Willendorf, Lespugue and Laussel (Christ 1997). Feminist scholarship has challenged the popular view of early man as a savage club toting, hunter gatherer. Christ (1997) suggests that women probably contributed to 80% of the food supply, playing a primary role in all cultural activities. The small statues found from this period were round and hand held and probably represented the status of women as birth givers, food providers and the essential religious element of creation.

Cynthia Eller (1993) in *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* proffers the view that human society from our earliest archaeological records to the rise of patriarchy in circa 3000 BCE was matriarchal or Goddess worshipping. She claims these matristic, matrifocal or gynocentric cultures emphasize the central role as female, reflecting a predominance of feminine values with women responsible for the invention of agriculture, language, mathematics, medicine etc, with the central deity worshipped being the Goddess in her myriad forms.

Stone (1979) in her work *When God was a Woman* examined numerous Goddess worshipping cultures and cited the works of various academics such as James Frazer, Saggs and Seltman who all formed the opinion that the dominant culture of the period always worshipped a deity of their

own sex and hence the predominance of female art and statuary. Archaeological evidence showed that women worked outside the home with records evidencing that the majority of commercial transactions occurred in women's names, all pointing to a female dominant society.

While modern western society is familiar with the depiction of God as a white male, it would be incorrect to imagine Goddess as a direct feminine reinterpretation of God. It is more correct to understand Goddess as alluding to a pantheon of different names and images, and the Goddess could just as easily be a mountain or a river. In this multiplicity of representations of the Goddess, Mantin (2004) offers the view that predating patriarchy, the Great Mother Goddess was seen as the sacred made imminent in the natural world, expressed in the diversity of all forms of life and death, in alignment with the cycles and seasons of the earth – that her body *is* nature. Likewise, Goodison (1992) does not view these societies as being the inverse of patriarchy with a monotheistic *Mother Goddess* at the helm reigning over men, rather she sees a concurrence that did not split the sexes, but rather men and women living harmoniously.

Here Eisler (1996) in *Sacred Pleasure* supports Goodison's views that Goddess worshipping settlements produced a lack of archeological evidence of fortifications or weaponry with no scenes of men killing each other in heroic battle. Eisler (citing Gimbutas 1982) writes that from burial artifacts it appears that while women held more important religious roles, there is no evidence that women played the oppressor role over men. Instead, what Gimbutas (1982) adds is that the archaeological evidence supports or seems to support the theory that these prehistoric societies were based on matrilineal kinship lines which suggests a female focused society as opposed to a male dominated society.

It is important to note that what Graham Harvey (1996) in *Contemporary Paganisms* refers to as "gylany" an egalitarian, woman respecting society, imaged and perceived to be female, with an absence of war and male dominance, can easily become a romanticized version of a golden age or utopian civilization that bears no resemblance to fact. So while the evidence points to the existence of matriarchal societies, we have no knowledge of societal relations within them nor that they represented some idealized version of feminine authority.

Indeed, while the historical evidence for the existence of such societies is primarily archaeological and mythological with an abundance of huge breasted and hipped figurines of

apparent religious significance found in temples and at grave sites throughout Paleolithic and Neolithic societies worldwide, Hutton (1999:36) adds that “it must be noted that there is no factual verification that the statues and evidence found, do indeed indicate matriarchal earth based religions”. Rosemary Ruether (1980) also argues that although there may be evidence for worship of the divine as female within Goddess societies, it does not necessarily imply significant social power for women nor that they avoided suffering oppression at the hands of men.

So whilst there is debate about the exact nature of the Neolithic and prehistoric societies who left behind artifacts of the female image across many cultures and eras, numerous scholars do believe these finds show evidence of worship of a female deity, a Goddess based society that revered the feminine, and where women held at least an equal balance of power. It is to this evidence of Goddess based societies that I now turn, to examine the female body as it was depicted erotically and spiritually and to trace how the physical body, so revered by the Goddess, became an object of derision by the Gods.

The sacred feminine – the eternal archetype

In Goddess based societies, sexuality expressed in the naked female form was honoured and revered, not only within the erotic sexual act, but in the female body as a symbol for both reproduction and creation. She is the Goddess, the divine represented as female as opposed to male. At once, both imminent and transcendent. The Hieros Gamos rituals invoked the transcendent qualities of the Goddess through the ritual act of sex, allowing access to the sacred feminine through the physical body of a woman. Viewing sex then as a sacrament through which the divine is accessed, aids in understanding how vastly different the attitudes were towards sex and sexuality in our ancient past as compared to patriarchal religious ideology.



Fig 1 Venus of Willendorf

Images of the sacred have been expressed through the sexual female body in the form of rock art and sculpture since the Old Stone Age (Eisler 1996).

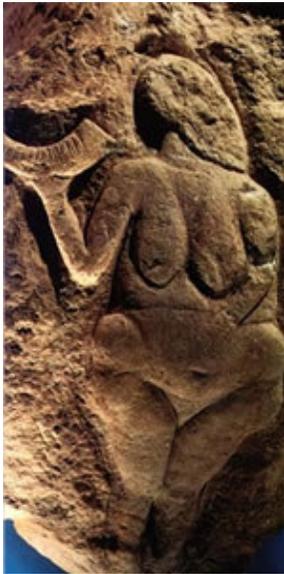


Fig 2 Goddess of Laussel

The prehistoric figurines of the Venus of Willendorf (Fig 1⁴) and Goddess of Laussel (Fig 2⁵) are 25,000 year old Paleolithic representations of the Goddess' gifts of fertility, love and sexual pleasure (Eisler 1996:). Their huge breasted and hipped bodies with pronounced vulva speak not only of their fertility but their erotic sexuality.

Whether made from bone or shell, stone or pottery, the figures may be depicted naked or wearing a skirt, could be pregnant, highly stylized or basically round, but common to most is the clear portrayal of their sex and reproductive function. Sometimes the slit or hole of the vagina is clearly defined and sometimes the inverted pubic triangle is dominant (Goodison 1992). Often huge breasts and belly dominate the figure

hiding arms and legs which seem unimportant by contrast. What is unmistakable though is the emphasis placed on the sexuality and fertility of these female figures.

These images very strongly indicate that the original creative source of life on earth was seen not as a divine father, but as a divine mother. From her body sprung forth new life. In Goddess worshipping societies, the creative sexual power resident in the body of woman was revered because it could be seen and experienced, just as her menstrual cycles in alignment with that of the moon, sun and seasons were all seen as wondrous manifestations of the creative and life-giving powers of the universe. The male body didn't behave in the same way and its capacity to be seen as fertile and life-giving didn't hold the same sacred value.

Goodison (1992:295) asks the question "But are these figures actually representations of a Goddess" and does it evidence a Goddess religion and matriarchal society? She answers by stating that some historians discount these figures in various ways, either treating the objects as *secular* or *primitive* engaged in superstitious practices, or that they are cultic expressions of fertility and nature worship, but hold no religious significance.

⁴ Figure 1 at http://www.edu.pe.ca/rural/class_webs/art/image_file.htm

⁵ Figure 2 at <http://www.aztriad.com/laussel.html>

Stone (1976) is of the opinion that much of the archaeological evidence of Goddess societies was misinterpreted by male scholars in relation to depictions of sexuality. Raised as they were in patriarchal societies and male-oriented religions of Judaism or Christianity. Stone (1976:xviii) cites Harrison a male academic who in 1971 described Goddess societies thus: “One of its most prominent features was the lewd, depraved, orgiastic character of its cultic procedures.” Albright (in Stone 1976) a leading professor of archaeology in Palestine wrote of the orgiastic nature worshipping of Goddess religions, with sensuous nudity. As Christ (1997) explains, naked images of the Goddess stand in stark contrast to the views Christian society holds of God as an old, white bearded man who legitimates power as male, holding female power depicted in the naked form of Eve as wicked and shameful. Christian and Judaic beliefs hold female will as the source of all evil in the universe and the naked female body is to blame. It is no wonder, when viewed from this perspective that Abrahamic male scholars would have difficulty in seeing divinity in such blatantly sexualized female images.

Whilst Stone (1976) explains the difficulty for male scholars in the past to identify with widespread matriarchal societies pre-Christianity, Eisler (1996) comments, that these images are representations of the Goddess’ gifts of fertility, love and sexual pleasure. Here the female body and her sexuality are worshipped as sacred, which is in blatant contrast to patriarchy which would supersede her authority in the coming Bronze Age.

Embodying the sacred

Within patriarchal religions, we find divinity vested in a masculine God. That God is also transcendent, meaning he has no physical body to worship, his sacrality lives in an idea, a concept of the mind. With all power, authority and divinity afforded to the masculine, many women are finding a direct link between the feminine, the earth, their bodies and a refiguration of the sacred as espoused in Goddess spirituality (Mantin 2004). Saiving (1992:25) explains that we are left with a patriarchal legacy of the masculine God of Judaism and Christianity, who sees the irrelevance of the body, sexuality and even the planet itself as an expression of dominance and control over the natural world. She explains:

In a creation myth with a self-fulfilling God who acts alone, he creates a world-destroying rather than GAIA-sustaining ethos that sees us dis-creating ourselves.

What Saiving is referring to is that the patriarchal religions don't value sexuality or the physical body (and in this case, extending to the planet itself) because power is achieved in transcending the physical and having power over it. On the other hand, Goddess religions are seated in the physical, the body, in fertility and reproduction, thus GAIA sustaining refers to ecologically sound practices that honour the planet.

Radford Ruether (1992) describes patriarchal religions as world-negating religions that alienate the mind from the body, with domination and rejection of nature by spirit. She sees the following equation:

MAN	=	Intellect, transcendent spirit, autonomous will, no body
-v-		
WOMAN	=	Physical / body, sensuality, subjugation

Plaskow and Christ (1989) explain that Christians (and other patriarchal religions) have traditionally been taught that God created the universe out of nothing, and residing in heaven, rules over the earth as a masculine King. By associating God with transcendence this describes his spiritual state of non-body as unable to be corrupted by physical humanity and nature. The mind is said to rule over the passions of the body and humans to rule over *brutish* nature. As described earlier, woman and their bodies are then viewed as the source of sin, (as depicted in the creation myth of Adam and Eve) with her sexuality tempting man away from God as higher mind and spirit, into the passions of his lower physical sexual nature.

Likewise, Radford Ruether (1992) associates the beliefs of Christianity with the views of Platonism which explains the ascendancy of the intellect (masculine) over the physical body. Here, she describes salvation as only being achieved in a purely spiritual realm. Body only sullies the purity of spiritual intellectualism. This mind-body dualism which supports the idea of mind as superior to body and masculine as superior to feminine, has not only oppressed women because of their identification with body and sexuality, but has fostered a philosophy that denigrates physical existence itself and supports abuse of the planet, its flora and fauna (Goldenberg 1989).

With religious, social and philosophical views that have denied the body and especially the female body, Saiving (1992) now sees the role of women as a resacralising agent for earth, body and spirit, where the community is reformed as a social ethic based on rules of non-hierarchy and non-competition. Here the divine feminine recognises a new social, economic, political and organic of harmony of spirit, nature and people. Collins (1992) adds that since monotheistic religions have rejected the body (feminine) as a vehicle for the sacred, women today are recovering or rediscovering their connection with a matriarchal worldview that invokes a deep empathy for their bodies, their sexuality and the organic world that embodies the sacred.

This recontextualising of the female body as sacred is what I refer to as the *divine feminine* – women’s bodies revered as a vessel to embody the essence of the Goddess, as she has manifested eternally through nature, body, spirit. It is this intrinsic link between body, sexuality and the sacred that informs this research.

Sexual Revolution

Whilst this research does not chart the changing attitudes towards sexuality that have evolved since the decline of the sacred feminine through the rise of patriarchy, the 20th century did see radical social change occur across western culture in Europe and the United States bringing with it vastly more liberal attitudes towards sex .

The sexual revolution of the 1960s was significant in that it emerged out of a legacy of the Victorian era of prudery in Great Britain of the late 1800s which saw repressiveness and imbalanced gender roles that judged any sexual relations outside of marriage as sinful or pornographic. These attitudes were largely attributed to the puritanical Protestant religion which dominated Great Britain throughout much of the nineteenth century (Moore 2008). Foucault (1990 1:4) comments on that era, saying the only places where non-procreative models of sexuality were even *tolerated* were the brothels, and the madhouse. From this heritage of austerity, a sexual revolution emerged, that would forever change the western world’s behaviour and attitudes towards sex.

The invention of “the pill” was a huge contributing factor to the sexual revolution of the 1960a which turned into a much larger social revolt against the conservatism of the period. This wider

protest movement targeted racism, the Vietnam War, colonialism, and middle class respectability (Garton 2004:210). Shulamith Firestone, a feminist activist of the 1960s and 1970s saw the pill as an opportunity to: “Free women from the tyranny of biology, end the nuclear family, return to polymorphously perverse sexuality and allow women and children to do whatever they wished” (cited in Garton (2004:212).

Underpinning the radical changes in sexual attitudes that accompanied the arrival of the pill, was the sexual research conducted in the first half of the 20th century by academics such as Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud and Alfred Kinsey (Weeks, Holland & Waites 2003). 1948 saw the delivery of the Kinsey Report, a nine year study of human sexuality which opened the public's minds to the diversity of sexual behaviour. Homosexuality became a much discussed topic, with results from the Kinsey report indicating that 10% of the population was gay. Masters and Johnsons clinical studies of the human sexual response opened the way for discussion on vaginal orgasms and pre-come (Garton 2004), and Shere Hite (somewhat later in the 1970s) delivered her Hite Report being a study on the female sexual response. But the single most sexually liberating discovery for women became the contraceptive pill. This, together with other forms of birth control like the IUD and spermicidal creams, allowed women to have sex without concern of pregnancy, forever liberating attitudes and behaviour towards sex.

In late modern western culture, where contemporary society has a preoccupation with sexual practices, identities and values, new forms of sexual experience such as online pornography and phone sex are constantly emerging. The apparent breakdown of rules and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay has created an era where sex and access to it, plays an ever increasing role in the lives of individuals (Attwood 2006 citing Plummer 1995). Attwood comments on how sexual discourse is changing and how values and practices in the 21st century are characterized by more permissive attitudes to sex despite the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. A huge increase in commercial sex services are available, from escort agencies to lap dancing clubs and overseas sex tours, promoting a recreational model of sexual behaviour that offers the erotic as a highly individualized form of hedonism through episodic and uncommitted encounters. It seems that while sex is increasingly available to a consumer market, there is a distinct lack of need to form intimate or traditional relationships and no love or emotional input is required in the exchange. For many individuals, where sexuality has customarily gone hand in

hand with relationship, commitment, sensuality and caring, they are finding purely physical sexual encounters to be void of any meaning.

As a backlash to the commodification of sex, there is an identified trend that people are experiencing stress surrounding performance and point to an increase in media depictions of sexual violence as the cause. Hutchins (1998) in response to this trend comments “The current interest in sacred sexuality represents a great hunger in our culture, part of a larger effort towards mind/body healing” Adherents of contemporary sacred sex like to emphasise practices which include whole-body sensuality, gentle prolonged touching, deep breathing and visualizing oneself and one’s lover as divine. From an investigation of matriarchal societies where I posit that sexuality and the body were held in high religious significance, we are experiencing modern western 21st century culture where sexuality is devoid of any spiritual context and indeed embraces the profane.

I now turn to discuss the New Age Movement and the Feminist / Goddess spirituality movement both which emerged from the social upheaval of the 1960s, challenging conservative views on religion and sexuality, and both important in laying the groundwork for the re-emergence of sacred sexuality and its manifestation in the current western milieu.

Birth of a new religious movement

New Age Movement

The term “New Age Movement” derives from the 1970s and describes a spiritual revolution associated with the Age of Aquarius and the legacy of the 1960s where societal attitudes and norms were all challenged (Possamai 2005). Comprised of widely diverse individual beliefs and practices, often drawn from eastern philosophy, the term has come to describe those who are committed to an inner spiritual quest and a search for meaning (Heelas 1996). While Heelas argues that the new age and new religious movements do not represent a rejection of modernity, they do represent a powerful affirmation of the individual’s right to free will, individualism and a celebration of the self and rather, a sacralisation of modernity.

Hanegraaff (cited in Urban 2006) suggests that the new age represents a transformation of traditional forms of western thought, revolutionized for a modern consumer through the context of science, technology, evolutionary theory and psychology. In an increasingly secularized, industrial and technological world there is a distinct lack of the numinous in our daily lives. Proponents of the new age are seeking to re-sacralize their search for meaning and are attempting to find a *spiritual* rather than *religious* relationship. The feminist / Goddess spirituality movement likewise seeks to access the spiritual rather than the religious, but here the sacred is embodied in the female form.

Feminist / Goddess spirituality movement

Not only did the 1960's birth a sexual revolution that aided in the revisioning of many societal constructs, it was also an era that changed the way women viewed their power, their bodies and sexuality. A new era of feminism emerged, embellishing the hard won gains of the suffragette movement of the late 19th century and growing into the Womens' Liberation Movement. As women experienced a new found independence with their bodies, they also discovered a new spirituality, one which sourced divinity in a female God.

In tracing the roots of Feminist / Goddess spirituality, feminist scholars see this movement as an off-shoot of the wider Womens' Liberation Movement of North America and Western Europe, where women had become disenfranchised and alienated with what they perceived as an absence of the feminine within Judeo-Christian religious discourse (Christ & Plaskow 1979, Radford Reuther 1971). Wanting to reclaim their lost female cultural and religious agency, women sought to discover evidence of a lost matriarchy or Goddess worshiping society, which was largely made possible by the growing availability of information on the subject (Dufresne 2004). These works were then reinterpreted by western feminists as evidence of a matrifocal, gynocentric culture espousing life-loving, peaceful and gender equal qualities (Dufresne 2004, Stone 1979, Eller 1991).

Griffin (1995) speaks of the early roots of the Goddess movement recalling in 1972 in Los Angeles, the first coven of feminist witches that practised Witchcraft as a religion, meeting under the tutelage of Zsuzsanna Budapest. Within a few years, several hundred women were gathering to celebrate their revisioning of female divinity through ritual practise. Griffin's research

revealed that the participants in Goddess rituals use symbols and images to create a framework of meaning that encapsulates Goddess spirituality as defining a new ethos. That philosophy was intended to redefine power, authority, sexuality and social relations between the spiritual and the physical. In the Goddess movement, the physical is firmly anchored in the female body, an element common to all manifestations of this movement.

Influence of Witchcraft, Paganism and Magic

Whilst the Womens' Liberation Movement influenced Goddess spirituality by revisioning womens' power, bodies and sexuality, Witchcraft, Paganism and magic gained popularity by offering women an alternative spiritual practice, one which referenced nature and the feminine and which viewed sexuality as sacred. The rebirth of interest in Wicca, Paganism and magic grew out of the occult revival that occurred in England and Europe in the late nineteenth century. The occult revival was an eclectic fusion of esoteric and eastern spiritual wisdom that witnessed women like Madam Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society in 1890, bringing eastern knowledge of the Tibetan spiritual masters to the west. Max Muller a German philologist, translated for the first time, the Indian Rig-Vedas (Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans) and a number of new religious sects such as Mormonism, Christian Science and Theosophy began to find popularity. In California, channelling the spirit world became de rigeur, with a proliferation of mediums bringing through messages from the departed, accompanied by table tilting and ectoplasmic manifestations (Drury 1999). The Order of the Golden Dawn, a High Magical secret society was also founded that believed spiritual inspiration could be activated by invocation and ritual focused acts of imagination (Drury 1999).

Two figures which emerge into the first half of the twentieth century which had a profound effect on modern magic and the practice of Witchcraft are the occultist Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) and Gerald Gardner (1884 1964). Crowley is more commonly known for his interests in ritual sex magic and gained the title of "the most wicked man in the world", often called the Beast. Gardner claimed to have been initiated into a witches' coven in the 1930s and is thought to be responsible for the revival of what we know today as the modern practice of Wicca or Neo-Paganism. He claims to have been initiated by a witch known as "Old Dorothy" who represented a lineage of authentic witches who could trace their roots back to pre-Christianity (Urban 2006).

Urban (2006) cites Ronald Hutton(1999) who believes that serious historians find it implausible that Gardner's Witchcraft could have any connection to Pagan traditions that existed prior to Christianity and that it is believed that much of his writings and rituals were borrowed from Aleister Crowley. Still Gardner is credited with the rebirth of the powerful religious movement known today as Wicca or Neo-Paganism.

Whilst the British public up to the 1950s were not quick to accept the concepts of Wiccan Paganism with its inherent references to a Christianised concept of devil worship, by the 1960s many covens had been established across England and a proliferation of scholarly texts investigating the craft's teachings and principles had begun to do much to "de-demonize" the movement (Hutton 1999). Amongst these, was the works of Robert Graves and his "White Goddess" (1948) whose particular writings examined Goddess mythology as a prototype religion, analyzing it largely from literary evidence, in myth and poetry.

It was the United States in the 1970s that became the centre for modern Paganism and Witchcraft, which energy became channeled into a different phenomenon - the rise of the women's spirituality movement (Hutton 1999). As a witch was seen as a modern representation of independent female power, this image was adopted in the United States to become the main source of modern feminist thought and power. Two feminist writers of that era, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English who published *Witches, Midwives and Nurses in 1972*, put forward that some nine million women were killed in the witch trials across Europe and America from the 14th to 17th centuries, contending that these women had been the healers, midwives and holders of knowledge pertaining to natural medicine and earth wisdom. They believe their destruction had been a desecration of female power and knowledge. (These figures of 9 million deaths are said to have been wildly inflated and contemporary research now suggests figures more like 60,000 witches died [Jones 2002]). Daly (1973) added that the over-throw of prehistoric women-centre cultures had been the beginning of all the world's ills, calling all women to rediscover their true self in the image of the Goddess. By 1978 the first battle of the feminist revolution had begun with its inherent belief in the supremacy of a female Goddess and that Witchcraft was the vessel which had preserved the remnants of Goddess-centred religion with the sacred status of women in tact (Hutton 1999). After all, Witchcraft in essence is an earth-based or nature religion and the Great Goddess is its principal deity (Drury 1999).

Starhawk (1979:6) at the centre of this burgeoning movement in Los Angeles, wrote that feminist spirituality, Paganism and Witchcraft all overlap but are not identical. Pagans, and even witches may not be feminists. She says:

Many individuals are drawn to earth-based spiritual traditions, to the celebration of the seasonal cycles and the awakening of broader dimensions of consciousness, without an analysis of the interplay of power and gender. But the feminist Craft has grown enormously, including many men as well as women who are participating in many areas of social and political struggle.

Hutton (1999) explains that Starhawk and Zsuzsanna Budapest were the significant proponents of feminist Witchcraft throughout the 1980s with the Goddess spirituality movement fully taking root in the 1990s. This term became an umbrella that included the search for a prehistoric Great Goddess who administered to ancient woman-centred cultures. It also came to represent a movement aimed at recovering female spirituality, and by the late 1990s it signified the spiritual power within women, whether they believed in actual deities or not. Goddess spirituality had formed an identity that was greater than just Paganism or Witchcraft alone, it was a composite that revered the feminine in all its manifestations and in all ages and parts of the world (Hutton 1999).

This next chapter investigates evidence of Hieros Gamos in Goddess worshipping cultures that revered the sacred prostitute both in the ancient past and in a more modern context.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter investigates the sacred marriage ritual of Hieros Gamos and how it existed in different forms in different cultures of the ancient past as well as its more modern manifestations in Wiccan and Pagan rituals. Here the sacred prostitute is depicted as the high priestess as she becomes the physical conduit through which the spiritual is accessed.

The Ancient

Inanna, Queen of Heaven, ancient Sumer

The great and powerful civilization that once flourished in Mesopotamia around 4,000 to 2,000 BCE, now known as modern day Iraq, included the kingdoms of Sumeria, Akkadia, Assyria and Babylonia. Samuel Noel Kramer (1983) the celebrated Sumeriologist, explains that Sumer was the first great urban centre to emerge, and with it, the cuneiform or wedge shaped system of writing on clay tablets that was Sumer's greatest gift to modern civilisation.

The archaeological evidence of some 10,000 unearthed clay tablets brings to life the public rites and rituals that dominated Sumerian religious practices. Central to this matriarchal religious cult was the highly venerated Goddess Inanna/Ishtar, lunar Goddess of life and love, heaven and earth, with her temple of attendant priestesses and priests, singers, musicians, castrates and Hierodules (High priestesses) (Kramer 1983).

The New Year was the focus and centrepiece for the sacred sexual rite of Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage which took place between the ruling King who married the Goddess Inanna/Ishtar amidst great celebration and feasting. Mann and Lyle (1995) explain that this rite took place annually for thousands of years and had a profound influence on numerous later civilizations.

The New Year marriage celebrations took place at the time of the autumn equinox and heralded the return of life when sexual reunion with the female deity made the fields and meadows blossom once again. The King of the land would assume the mortal role of the dead vegetation

god awaiting resurrection through union with the High priestess of the Goddess Inanna who represented the invocation of both physical and spiritual love and procreation.

This Hieros Gamos ritual was such an important aspect of life that much was written in song and hymn to attest to the greatness of the Goddess Inanna and her wealth of fecundity. It seems here that the Goddess did hold the dominant authority over the masculine gender. Indeed emphasis is placed on the greatness of the Goddess's regenerative powers with the King playing a secondary role as consort to his Queen. Leick (1994:97) reviews one of the transcribed hymns to the Goddess Inanna and makes reference to the status of the King which shows his secondary authority:

She (Inanna) chooses the *husband*, continues her independence and has the greater divine status. In fact, in most texts that refer to the relationship between King and Goddess in marital terms, the King is said to be *her* consort, or her *beloved husband*, *husband chosen by Inanna's heart*, *the selected husband* and *husband, ornament of the holy loins of Inanna*.

Whilst stated earlier by various authors that there is no evidence to suggest that matriarchal societies demonstrated significant social power of women over men, there is documented evidence in Sumer that the female divinity did in fact hold authority over the male King.

There are numerous Sumerian texts that dwell on Inanna's love-life. They are collectively known as the Bridal Songs and some feature Inanna preparing for her wedding. Some speak of the King as her lover and others speak of Inanna as a professional lover. Below Leick (1994:91) quotes one set of texts, in which Inanna rejoices in her vulva. She expresses her longing to be in the presence of her beloved:

For me, open my vulva – for me!
For me, the maiden, who is its ploughman?
My vulva, a wet place, for me –
For me the lady, who will provide the bull?

Reply:

Oh, lady, the king will plough it for you,

She responds

plough my vulva, man of my heart.

The metaphor of 'ploughing' is more than a general euphemism for sexual intercourse, and more specifically refers to virgin penetration where the woman is compared to a field waiting to be rendered fertile by the plough (i.e. the penis) driven by the bull (i.e. the man). The context here is marital intercourse with the male sexual role defined as the provider of fertility and the woman participates by declaring her readiness to be ploughed (Leick 1994).

These are quite explicit texts referring to the sex act itself and below is one of the most quoted texts of the bridal songs, where Inanna calls out to her lover the shepherd King Dumuzi: (Wolkstein & Kramer 1983:37)

My vulva, the horn,
The Boat of Heaven,
Is full of eagerness like the young moon.
My untilled land lies fallow.

As for me, Inanna,
Who will plow my vulva?
Who will plow my high field?
Who will plow my wet ground?

As for me, the young woman,
Who will plow my vulva?
Who will station the ox there?
Who will plow my vulva?

These texts attest to the openness of sexuality expressed in the literature of the Goddess of the time and paint a picture of how sexuality was viewed. The vulva is variously described in stages of sexual excitement. The narrow curve of the new moon will be opened "like a boat with its mooring ropes". Inanna's vulva is often called the "holy lap" and is used as an adjective that is applied to numerous other deities, temples, places and artefacts and is usually translated as "pure" or "holy". The genitals are also associated with power and used apotropaically in magic rituals. Inanna was said to have used her vulva and the power associated with it, to further the prestige and divine status of her city. This attests to the countless figurines and terracotta models of female nudes and vulva-shaped votive offerings have been found all over the ancient near East representing the holy power of sexuality (Leick 1994).

But it was the priestesses themselves who enacted the holy sexual rituals in the name of Inanna. The Sumerian and Babylonian temple records indicate that the Qadishtu who served in the temples of Inanna/Ishtar were often from wealthy families. They owned properties and land and engaged in extensive business activities. Matrilineal kinship customs also indicate that children born to Qadishtu would inherit title, names and property from their mothers with daughters having access to attain the status of Qadishtu themselves (Stone 1979). Stone further explains that although the title of Qadishtu translates literally as “sacred woman” or “the undefiled”, academic translations have nearly always used the term “prostitute” to describe these women and the term “temple prostitution” to depict the sacred acts of worship that occurred.

In a similar era within another culture, teachings that recognized the power of sexual energy as a universal creation theme were developed within the Hindu Vedas. Here all the elements common to Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage are found in an entirely different culture.

The Mystical Teaching of Tantra

Tantric yoga is said to have emerged in India around the middle of the eleventh century, although the Vedic teachings appeared in the Indus valley civilizations as far back as 3000BCE (Fielder & King 2004). These mystical teachings revered the union of the male and female principles with the emphasis placed on female sexuality or shakti, which far from being passive, is the energizing force of the universe (Eisler 1996). Feuerstein (cited in Eisler 1996) explains that Tantrism grew out of the lower castes at the bottom of the social order in India. Whilst the Hindu Vedic teachings offered to those of higher castes focused on transcendence of the earthly realm, the lower castes were offered a teaching of rites and practices surrounding Goddess-worship and sexuality. The feminine shakti power was depicted in the Hindu pantheon of Goddesses in the form of Kali, Durga, Parvati, Sita and hundreds of other female deities which reinstated the human body and sexuality as a means



Figure 3: Yogini with kundalini serpent energy coming from her vulva (South India c1800). Energy many patriarchs fear.

to achieve spiritual bliss through sacred sexual union as demonstrated in the sacred marriage ritual of God (Shiva) and Goddess (Shakti) (Eisler 1996).

The central rite of the Tantric traditions is to create sexual union or *maithuna* to awaken the kundalini or divine Shakti. The ancient Tantric texts that have survived place the emphasis on the male, explaining that a man achieves union with the creative power of the Great Mother through a woman's body. By her sexual arousal and pleasure through non-ejaculation by the man, prolonged and exquisite arousal of the kundalini generates a spiritual experience of ecstasy for both (Eisler 1996). Tantric sex is intentionally designed for sexual pleasure and union, not for procreation, with specific practices employed that allow the man to orgasm whilst retaining his semen.

Ancient Tantric teachings were about awakening and raising kundalini energy to achieve spiritual states of ecstasy either with a partner or solo. Whilst practitioners would often devote a lifetime to these spiritual practices, modern western Tantra offers a hybrid of teachings often aimed at having a better sexual experience rather than reaching nirvana. I will explore this topic further in the next section.

The Devadasis

The term *Devadasi* originally described a Hindu religious practice in which girls were *married* to a deity. Sir James Frazer (cited in Chakraborty 2000) claims that this form of sacred prostitution had origins in worshipping “a great Mother Goddess” who personified all the reproductive energies of nature. The union of the divine mother performed in a sexual rite with human agents, ensured the continued propagation of plants and animals and is another example of Hieros Gamos. It is thought the practice came into existence around the second century CE (Zaidi 2001).

Devadasis were a presence in traditional South India from the village to the major temples and royal courts, which maintained large numbers of musicians and performers (dance is really too restrictive a category). Not every *Devadasi* performed all of the arts, but taken together their dancing, performing, singing, and playing of instrumental music ranged from temple ritual and strict devotion, to seductive *nautch* dances, and satirical, comic numbers, even feats of gymnastic

dexterity. The period between the ninth and twelfth century saw the height of the *Devadasi* institution in Southern India. The income earned from prostitution defrayed the costs of running the temple to which they were attached and the famous temple of Somanath in the year 1026CE was said to have housed five hundred women (Chakraborty 2000). The *Devadasi* were the courtesans of their time, the sacred prostitute, the link between the sacred and sexuality.

The early 1800s saw the British enjoying the social entertainment and sexual services provided by the *Devadasi* but by 1890 a fully fledged anti *nautch* (seductive dance) movement sprang up fueled by the moralizing Christians and Indian reformers who targeted what they saw as corrupt practices of prostitution and child marriages. An internal Indian reform movement that sided with the British for a secularized state, began to expel the *Devadasis* from the temples into the streets effectively making them beggars (Vijaisri 2005). As holy women, they were unable to marry, and the arts for which they were famed were forgotten beside their new identity as prostitutes.

By the 1920s and 1930s the South Indian social reform movement was unable to resist British colonial intrusion and the issue of sacred prostitution became linked to India's efforts for national revitalisation. In 1934 the *Devadasis Security Act* was passed, banning the practice (Zaidi 2001).

Zoya Zaidi (2001) comments today of the banned practice that still flourishes in the poorer castes of the untouchable (Dalit class) women, mainly in southern India. She calls it forced institutionalised prostitution for women who have no rights. In one area of Southern India she cites over 250,000 women who because of their Dalit caste, are forced into temple prostitution by their uneducated families who dedicate their daughters in a religious act of appeasing the gods. The sad case is that because of their dalit caste as untouchable, their options for employment as labourers and even marriage are slim, and without begging and prostitution they are faced with starvation.

While the young *Devadasi* were married to the temple in rites of Hieros Gamos from 2000CE, the Hieros Gamos rituals performed in the Eleusinian Mysteries of the ancient Greeks occurred from as early as 1700BCE.

Eleusinian Mysteries

In Ancient Greece the Eleusinian Mysteries were held at Eleusis in ancient Greece every year as initiation ceremonies for the grain Goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone (Kore). These Mysteries and what occurred are still very much a mystery today, with the initiate threatened with death if found to have breached the enforced silence. The Mysteries began approximately 1700BCE and lasted for two thousand years, where they later spread to Rome (Ouvoroff 2004). Whilst there is much conjecture regarding what actually occurred within these rites, scholars have pieced together fragments of information from the many paintings and pieces of pottery that depict various aspects of the Mysteries. One belief about the Mysteries was that the initiation was believed to unite the worshipper with the Gods, bestowing divine power and gaining rewards in the afterlife. Another belief is that the Mysteries were intended "to elevate man above the human sphere into the divine and to assure his redemption by making him a god and so conferring immortality upon him" (Nilsen 1947:42).

From what is understood of Hieros Gamos rituals, the sacred marriage is performed between a mortal and a God or Goddess to confer sovereignty upon a King or Queen in order to ensure the fertility of the land. Harline (2006) explains that Demeter was a grain-mother Goddess and her daughter was stolen and raped by the God Hades who took her to become Queen of his underworld. The myth explains the search by Demeter for her daughter who let the surface of the earth die while she mourned her loss. Demeter petitioned Zeus to return her daughter to the surface of the world, on the guarantee that she would once again bring life back to the land. Zeus agreed and for six months Persephone would return to the surface, and the land would flourish and for the other six months it would die. Here the elements of marriage by a mortal to a deity are evident with the attendant outcome of fertility to the land ensured. If the Eleusinian Mysteries included acts of sacred marriage, then the myth of Demeter and Persephone provides all the symbolism necessary to accommodate this.

As Harline (2006) points out, what is actually known about the Eleusinian Mysteries comes from a handful of quotes, mostly hostile Christian sources. Only the Greek poet Mesomedes could be deemed friendly to Eleusis. Harline (2006) quotes Mesomedes who lists the various elements that indicate an act of *sacred marriage* – “‘marriage underground’, the ‘birth of plants’, ‘the

desire of Aphrodite, the birth of the little child, the perfect, unspeakable fire”’. Another Christian commentator Asterius wrote:

Is there not the descent into darkness and the holy congress of the hierophant and the priestess, of him alone and her alone? ...Are not the torches extinguished and does not the vast assemblage believe that in what is done by the two in the darkness is their salvation?

The Mysteries performed in the name of Dionysus, the Greek God of wine, fertility, madness and ecstasy, show the clearest form of sacred marriage – that of the God to the ritual Queen of Athens at the festival of Anthesteria: The feast of flowering, feast of the opening of the wine jars Harline (2006). Here the union of Queen and God took place just after sun down. Images from a vase painting show the Queen in a bygone act of sacred marriage to a bull, reminiscent of Minoan Crete.

There are numerous works of art that point to acts of sacred marriage occurring within the mystery rituals, and while there is no definitive evidence, there is much conjecture that ritual Hieros Gamos was performed in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Sacred Marriage in other cultures

James Frazer (1997) in his classic work the *Golden Bough* which was first published in 1922, makes much of the *sacred marriage* ritual not only as it occurred in ancient Greece and Rome, but in numerous other cultures. He makes reference to a ritual in Thebes, Egypt where the Queen of Egypt marries the God Ammon who according to Egyptian law, must bears the monarchs (children) who are begotten through union with the God.

Outside of the Mysteries, prostitution was common in ancient Greece and Rome and in many instances little difference was drawn between the sacred and the profane sex act. Johnson and Ryan (2005:63) relate that the Greek historian Strabo writes in the first century BCE of the temple of Aphrodite at Eryx in Sicily:

The lofty hill of Eryx is also populated. It has a temple of Aphrodite that is particularly revered and was, in earlier times, inhabited by female temple slaves who had been dedicated in fulfillment of vows, not only by the Sicilian but by foreigners.

And the famous temple of Aphrodite at Corinth:

The temple of Aphrodite was so affluent that it housed more than one thousand temple-slaves, *hetairai* (sexual priestesses) who had been set up as votive gifts to the Goddess, by both men and women. It was actually on account of these women that the city was crowded and became wealthy, for the commanders of ships spent their money recklessly, and herein lies the anecdote: 'Not for all men is the journey to Corinth.'

While these quotes from Strabo provide historic evidence of the temples of Aphrodite with their attendant priestesses, nothing sacred is inferred in his reference to them as temple slaves. While he may have reflected popular beliefs of the period, like the Mysteries themselves it is difficult to know what actually took place and to what extent the sexual acts performed reflected any sanctity. Carol Christ (1987:177) comments on just this topic when she speaks of the temples of Aphrodite:

Like Ishtar and Astarte, she (Aphrodite) was served by priestesses who engaged in sacred sexual rituals, which degenerated into sacred prostitution as the status of women declined under patriarchy.

James Frazer (1999) explains that acts of *sacred marriage* were widespread among the nations of antiquity and lists their occurrence amongst the peoples of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, England, Russia, Peruvian Indians, North American Indians, Bengali Indians, various African tribes, the Maldives, Japan, Scotland and Scandinavia. It is reasonable to believe then that in one form or another, many cultures revered and worshipped an agricultural or fertility God or Goddess and enacted rituals that saw the procreative act of sex as a metaphor for the continued fecundity of the land.

I now turn to contemporary western culture, that of North America, Western Europe and Australia to examine evidence of Hieros Gamos and sacred marriage. Whilst the emphasis has changed from being an act that is a metaphor for continued fertility or the legitimizing of sovereignty performed by sacred prostitutes, the focus has shifted to the invocation of a deity into the sexual union, now with the intention of achieving transformation and union with higher states of consciousness.

The Modern

My research has shown me that in a modern context, Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage rituals are to be sourced in earth based religions that still worship the Goddess. As outlined previously, the modern practice of Witchcraft and Paganism can in large, be attributed to Gerald Gardner and a resurgence of interest that occurred in Witchcraft in the first half of the 20th century. This section discusses the Great Rite which is another form of the Hieros Gamos ritual.

The Goddess and the Great Rite

At the Great Sabbath the living body of a priestess does form the altar. We worship the divine spirit of Creation, which is the Life-spring of the world... Are we so abominable? To us it is the most sacred and holy mystery, proof of the God in us whose command is: Go forth and multiply.

Gerald Gardner
Book of Shadows
(cited in Urban 2006:186)

Neopaganism and Neopagan Witchcraft are new religious movements with beliefs reconstructed or revived from indigenous and historic sources, that hold widely ranging views about the sacred as it is found in nature, and worship a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses. Adherents believe that the Great Rite of sexual intercourse pays homage to the male/female polarity that exists in all things within the universe? It expresses the physical, mental, spiritual and astral union between man and woman as well as the God and Goddess aspects of the Divine Force. Guiley (1989) uses the term *Neowitchcraft* to describe a fertility religion, which is a modern western reconstruction of ancient Pagan rites and beliefs, which include the ritual of sexual intercourse. Ritual sex was and is considered a sacred rite.

The Great Rite can be interpreted as another form of the Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage ritual, which in this case exemplifies union of the physical with a deity or god(dess)head. It is believed that in Neopagan Witchcraft that the Great Rite releases enormous power, which may be directed to achieve magical outcomes. It is one of the "Eightfold Paths" to magical power in the Craft (Guiley 1989). Urban (2006:175) elaborates on the importance of this sexual union, referencing Gardner's *Book of Shadows* (originally compiled sometime before 1950) where it explains that the great Rite holds such important status because it embodies the three basic principles of Witchcraft:

First that the basis of all magical or creative working is polarity, the interaction of complementary systems. Second, that humans are of the nature of the Gods and a fully realized man or woman is a channel for that divinity, a manifestation of the Gods and the Goddess. And third, that all the levels from the physical to the spiritual are equally holy.

Here the human body becomes a sacred vessel for the manifestation of divine or incorporeal energy and that is what occurs within the Great Rite when the priest and priestess become God and Goddess joining sexually to experience powerfully heightened states.

The Great Rite is performed within sacred space at some sabbats and initiations, depending on the tradition of the coven. Ideally, it is performed by a high priest and high priestess who are sexually intimate as spouses or lovers. The rite is not always performed in actuality, but may be performed symbolically, where the high priest plunges the athame, or ritual knife (the male symbol), into a cup or chalice (the female symbol) held by the high priestess and which is filled with wine. Some believe that when this rite is performed symbolically, it should also be performed in actuality in private by the high priest and high priestess (Guiley 1989).

Gerald Gardner made the Great Rite the centerpiece of his third and final degree of initiation into the Craft. A naturist himself with extremely positive views of the naked human body, Gardner believed in the importance of practising communal nakedness during the performance of rituals as a means of awakening and utilizing the power generated by the human body (Urban 2006).

Wilhelm Reich was another who researched the power generated by the human body with his discovery of a biological and cosmic energy that he called “orgone energy”. This is the same energy generated by the human body in ritual sex acts such as those spoken about by Gardner (Brahinsky 1995). Reich identified this life force which he called “orgone” as free-flowing, vertically streaming energy, also confirming what the ancient Hindus had identified as kundalini energy (Silver 1998). Reich reasoned that it was natural for human beings to experience pleasure. Flowing, sexually charged energy accompanies love. Pleasurable, loving energy expands and radiates outward from the heart through the arms and hands, stimulating the body to the point of orgasmic release (Silver 1998).

The next chapters explores the methods employed in compiling this research.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This thesis comprises a research component together with an ethnographic study of contemporary western women who identify themselves as sacred prostitute but who also name themselves priestess due to the direct affinity they have with the Goddess and the temple rites and practices that underscore the services they offer. My involvement in the Goddess Spirituality movement has shown me that the ancient temple practices utilized specific rituals, symbol and language to express this aspect of the sacred. My search then involved finding the links between the ancient practices and their manifestation in a modern world and how the women who practise, embrace the past in the present.

This chapter outlines the methodology of narrative enquiry employed to investigate five Australian women who offer sacred sexual services in the name of Goddess.

Narrative Inquiry benefits and limitations

The methodology of narrative inquiry requires the collecting, analyzing and re-presenting of individual's stories as told by them (Etherington 2004). This approach is based upon epistemologies that see knowledge and reality as socially constructed and situated within cultural and historical beliefs and practices. (Burr 1995; Crossley 2000; Gergen 1994).

As a priestess of Goddess my 'insider knowledge' has led me to various practitioners, some within the Goddess movement, who provided an entrée into a world where a snowball sampling of interviews was conducted with five women. This method relies upon referrals from the network of the initial subjects to generate additional contacts who are involved in similar practices (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). Interviews were semistructured and recorded, with a set of specific questions being addressed by all. The remainder of the interview was left open and conversational in order to develop greater perspective of the subject and allow the women to express their background, ideas, identity, relationships and beliefs (Grills 1998). A reflexive method to the interview process was adopted whereby I shared personal experience and views on specific topics and engaged conversationally with the subject (Ellis & Berger 2003). This

engendered a sense of intimacy, trust and shared camaraderie that allowed for the free-flow exchange of information.

In order to write the ethnographic accounts of the interview subjects, it is their voice, their “lived experience” which conveys their world, their experiences and truths and not mine (Grills 1998). Whilst I retain my own views, beliefs and theories, to understand point of view from my subject, I must see as they do, and then with critical reflexivity, interpret their truth, their understanding and views on the subject matter. Reflexivity engenders self-awareness where we have the ability to notice our personal responses and be able to make choices about how to use them (Etherington 2004). Whilst striving for a personal level of engagement and enquiry, Hutton (2004) reminds us that the reflexive approach requires an open awareness of how personal prejudices, traits and preoccupations with the subject matter can influence the outcomes of a study. Indeed reflexive self-monitoring is necessary, but it must not be made an excuse for lack of analytical assessment of the subject. In reflexively understanding the practices, motivations and ideas of the self and how they are mediated through wider social and symbolic structures, it can provide critical insights into the construction of identity and ideology of the other (Weeks, Holland, Waites 2003).

Feminist Method

A feminist methodology seeks to create alternative traditions which acknowledge the religious experience of women and men that provide a more inclusive voice for women and a revisioning of the language and symbols that no longer marginalize women in theological discourse (Ruether 2002). Within the academic arena, the study of human behaviour and specifically the study of religion has most often meant the study of men, not women. Since the 1960s it has become widely recognized that a significant feature of the collected religious data was predominantly androcentric, that is, dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests or a masculine point of view. Women’s studies have grown out of this recognition in an attempt to redress the balance by recovering or reconstructing information as it pertains to women (Sharma 2002). Feminist theology then examines the androcentric bias that arises within religious systems where sociological origins, world views and symbols reflect a primarily male elite experience (Ruether (2002).

Using the doctrine of feminist theology, a methodology that identifies with that ideology enhances the enquiry and supports a revisioning of existing data and an emancipation of women's voices. Fiorenza (2002) explains feminist methodology is still often associated with prejudice and unscientific bias and that being a woman is not sufficient for generating feminist knowledge. She stresses the need for feminist enquiry to adopt a critical theoretical framework that not only seeks to understand "but to change and transform women's situation of religious-theological silencing, marginalization and oppression"(208).

The feminist orientation of this research necessitates the employment of a methodological approach that is grounded in women's experiences of themselves, so that their beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and voices can be recorded. It addresses issues of women within the Goddess Spirituality movement, a contemporary movement that itself investigates issues of the sacred prostitute and the ramifications for individuals as they explore issues of their own sexual identity within that context. That is borne out by Fiorenza (2002) who reinforces the importance of adopting a critical theoretical hermeneutic that stresses the agency and authority of women as religious subjects with the intention not to just understand, but to change and transform the marginalization and oppression into emancipation and liberation.

Taking Fiorenza's hermeneutic from the broader context of religion, and focusing on the Goddess Spirituality movement in particular, Griffin (1995) explores the use of mythopoeic images within ritual. Mythopoeia describes how imitating and including real-world mythology, can add credibility and depth to fictional worlds. In this case using the traditional icon of the mother portrayed as the triple Goddess of maiden, mother and crone, played out within a ritual context, can assist women to revision a new ethos of power, authority, sexuality and social relations. A new relationship is being created within the Goddess movement which redefines the relationship between spiritual and the material and which is firmly rooted in the female body, where the body itself becomes a transformative symbol for the Goddess.

Situating myself

I come to this research on sacred sexuality as a "priestess of Goddess" initiated within an Order located in the Gold Coast hinterland. As a researcher I am also a priestess and recognize that I share belief systems, practices and to a great extent am a proponent of the work I am researching.

So how do I maintain the divide between practitioner and researcher? Salomonsen (2004:49) argues that the insider-outsider dualism and practice of scholarly detachment serves only to reinforce an illusion of objectivity. She states that “This post-modernist argument is not raised out of empirical concerns or in an attempt to improve the research process, but rather on the philosophical and epistemological premise that scientific objectivity is a fallacy.” Some of my research has involved my participation in workshops and this ‘insider’ position has taken me to a first hand, experiential level of understanding the work, much more so than narrative research or dialoguing with the practitioner.

And it is this personal involvement that aids and weaves the relationship and respect building required to investigate this most intimate of subject matter. When interviewing sex workers who offer their bodies for money, in ways either sacred or profane, trust is an essential element in breaking down barriers and obtaining in-depth and accurate data. Taking a partisan approach by identifying with the goals and views of the subject (Shaw 2004), allows me to gather their stories, to probe their past and understand the journey they have travelled to bring them to this point in time in their roles as modern day sacred prostitutes.

One interview subject who teaches Temple Dance, impressed upon me that for her, the sacred, which can be defined as that which is worthy of veneration or worship, lives within embodiment of energy. She explains that to dance, to physically move, to open the centres of the body, to activate and receive the energy, informs her experience of sacredness. Because I share the physical experience of awakened sacred life force energy in my body, I can identify with this “practitioner” or “insider” research which enables greater awareness of the issues than some other methodologies. It enhances my understanding and expression of my interview subject’s truth and experience (Blain, Ezzy & Harvey 2004). The sacred is not something I know from observing; an experience of the sacred or the divine is just that, experiential.

The participants

Through my connections within the Goddess Association, snowball sampling provided me with the names of five women who I contacted and asked to interview about their work as providers of sacred sexual services. Of these individuals only one directly identifies herself as a sacred prostitute and she is a sex worker. Of the other four, one is a temple dancer, and the other three

call themselves Tantrika, Tantra instructor and Tantric healer. Their ages range between 31 and 65 and all are Australian born.

Table 1 – Interview Subjects

Age	Name	Work Title	Country of Birth	Religion	Children
38	Shelly	Sacred Prostitute	Australia	Spiritual	0
34	Sienna	Temple dancer	Australia	Love	2
37	Tanishka	Tantrika	Australia	Non-denominational spiritual	1
65	Susie	Tantric Healer	Australia	Great white spirit	2
31	Amy	Tantra Instructor	Australia	No religion	1

Whilst I have attended performance and workshops of one of the women and read their publications and articles, observation in a work environment was not possible in three instances. Interviewing then, was the preferred means of information gathering and in a face-to-face informal situation I interviewed four of the women and one session was conducted over the phone. These interviews lasted anywhere between one hour and two and were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

For these interviews to be open and honest, it required me to be transparent about my own intentions, beliefs and religious affiliations as priestess. Harding (1987:9) opines that “the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for or against the claims advanced in the results of the research”. Being a participant, practitioner, advocate and author myself on the subject material, requires me to mediate a multiplicity of viewpoints which must be reflected in my presentation of the information (Clifford 1986).

In engaging the interview subjects, awareness of the methodology of emic and etic viewpoints: emic being from the viewpoint of someone living in that culture (the subjective), and the etic arising from the viewpoint of the distanced observer using the filters of discipline (the objective) must be held (Rosaldo 1986). In this task as an insider, I am taking on the outsider’s role and whilst I have nothing but my own subjective understanding of the experiences I am privy to,

mediating my understanding in a self-reflexive mode is my intention in recounting these womens' stories. As their voice, I benefit from shared experience, knowledge base and affinity for the work these women do which aids in bringing to light the deeply held truths that underscore the reasons why they are drawn to this work.

CHAPTER 4

The modern day sacred prostitute

This chapter investigates the lives of five women who have chosen to work with sexual energy in ways which I deem validates them as modern day sacred prostitutes. I explore how they came to this work and ask what motivated them to become involved. I ask them to explain their connection (if any) to the Goddess of the ancient temples, and what rituals they employ in their work. Lastly I ask them if they see themselves as creating social change and what is their vision for the future of this work.

While not all of the five women I interviewed are involved directly in offering sexual services, one practises as a prostitute within the auspices of the sex industry, and the rest all work with and teach the use of sexual energy. All five women also claim a distinct calling to do this type of work. They come from varied backgrounds and age groups but have been drawn to work with sexual energy either early in their lives like 31 year old Amy who is a tantric instructor or 65 year old Suzie who has lived through a lifetime of judgments about sexuality before she realized that it was her destiny to work with sexual energy for her own healing and others.

Introduction

As a massage therapist and yoga teacher for 16 years, Suzie says that *spirit* has pushed her into this work by bringing her clients who challenged her programming and judgments about any kind of erotic touch within massage. She realized that in her massage work, there is a whole part of the body that is neglected. Her belief is that every cell contains an intelligence and a memory and if someone has had some sexual wounding on a deeper level, then every time the body is touched, there is a massive part that is not touched. The cells say “what about me, what about me?” She believes that individuals are perpetuating more of the wounding when they go into denial about using any erotic touching of the body. Suzie now sees herself as a sacred body worker and admits that only six years ago, she had no concept of “the sacred” in the work that she was eventually drawn to do. She felt like she had jumped into the deep end, trying to unravel

all her own judgments and guilt as she was increasingly sent clients who would ask her to go further and work deeper in their bodies in areas that for a massage therapist are strictly *no go*.

Shelly on the other hand is a sex worker who sees herself offering a service to men that is as ancient as the Goddess herself. She works from home in an environment where she entertains her clients and welcomes them into her beautiful private space. She says:

I am proud to say that I serve the Goddess of Love - Aphrodite, as well as men and humanity in what I enjoy doing. To admit that we *serve* is a powerful concept, not a subservient attitude whatsoever.

Linking herself and her work to that of sacred prostitutes of the past, Shelly sees the services she offers as healing, emotionally nurturing and compassionate as well as sexual.

Sienna is a dancer – a temple dancer. While she is a professionally trained dancer and teacher, she deeply connects to the archetype of the devadasis, the Indian sacred prostitute who would dance the sexual energy that rises through the body, riding the snaking kundalini as it expresses in the art form of movement. A very beautiful and serene woman, Sienna says she has been divinely connected to the spirit world since childhood. She believes all energy is sexual energy and the way she demonstrates and teaches sacred communion to the women who attend her classes, is through dance.

Tanishka is a priestess who runs the Star of Ishtar Mystery School and who sees herself as an agent for the Magdalane. She has dedicated herself as a priestess in service of the Goddess who at 37, has been teaching women's groups for over 12 years how to awaken their inner sexual gifts through love arts training. Her journey to the sacred prostitute, began says Tanishka, when she found herself in the unenviable financial position of having to choose between selling Amway or stripping and thankfully says, she found stripping to be less of a prostitution.

With a background as a House Captain and School Prefect, this “little Miss Good Girl” quickly found herself in the strip clubs of Melbourne. Believing she was a good dancer and that her acting skills could pull this off, Tanishka said it came as quite a shock to realize the degree to which she had entered the sex industry. At that time in her life, stripping was about making money and part of that was hustling for lap dances in the clubs. Being a natural Tantrika, Tanishka would tell her clients she would have energetic sex with them. She explains:

“With all my clients I used to explain that I work tantrically and I’m going to have energetic sex with you, and I would. And they would see me come, do you know what I mean? And what I’d do in a lap dance, is literally sit on top of them and visualize their vajra (tantric term for male energy or penis) as light coming in and out of me and so a lot of the hardened career girls could not understand why I made such good money...”

These five women share the commonality of having found a path that leads them to work with sexual energy in a sacred context. Whether that is in sharing their bodies in a physical sense, or in teaching others how to access their sexuality themselves, they all agree that they either remember past lives as the sacred prostitute in the temple, or feel the Goddess has called them to journey this path in this lifetime. Much of my instigation to do this research was to find the links from the past that filter through and influence what I see as a modern day resurgence of the arts of the sacred prostitute. The women now tell me how they felt called to do this work.

A sacred calling from the past

Amy started out being drawn to community service work, raising money for disabled children, and their families. Unashamed of her sexuality, she found it a boon to her fund raising activities where a low cut top and tight skirt on a building site would quickly raise funds to purchase a wheelchair. Questioning how she could utilise her sexuality, she received an epiphany which told her to learn Tantra. Not knowing very much about it, she started to investigate and soon underwent training. Now only after about a year of practising as a Tantra instructor, Amy’s voracious quest to gain knowledge on the sacred prostitute has seen her grow in her understanding of the temple practices and rituals, many of which she employs in her work.

Amy has direct memories of a past life as a Venetian courtesan and as I talked to her about her motivation to do this work, she shares her remembering of being an ancient healer working with crystals in Atlantis. She utilizes the energy of the Goddess in her work, invoking not so much particular deities such as Aphrodite, but the female creative force. She then channels this energy through her body, in a session with a client, becoming the vehicle through which that Goddess is made present.

Sienna is a fully open sacred channel for the energies she brings through in her dance. After some performances she needs to ask if her dancing was okay because she has moved into golden ecstatic trance states channeling what she calls *sacred life force*. She says “I pull energy up from

the earth and pull it down from the sky and give as much love as I possibly can through my entire being to whoever is there.” Sienna has past life memories from different cultures where she was the devadasis, the Indian temple dancer. She expresses it as “Women moving their bodies in a very sexual way, very loving way in a very dark and mysterious and beautiful way. Directly channeling the love and sacredness of union of woman and divinity and just giving it directly through”. She also remembers lifetimes in the ancient Babylonian temples. She explains:

“The temples were set up with rooms with people coming and going with very specific practices. It was always for healing. Like for example the soldiers would come back from a terrible war. They come to the temples. They’re not allowed back into the community until they’re full of love again. And they’ll be healed in whatever way they need by those priestesses and those priestesses are taken care of by the community. They are gifted women, talented women who will perhaps dance for them, perhaps massage their bodies, perhaps have sex with them.”

Tanishka says she can remember when she was nine years of age, mesmerizing the guest choreographer from a Sydney Dance Company with her overtly sexual rendition of the Pink Panther. She believes that even at that age, tantric energy would enter and *ride* her body. Like Sienna, she has always been a channel for sacred sexual energy to express itself through movement and dance. I observed Tanishka perform as Aphrodite at the Goddess Conference in 2007. She did the dance of the seven veils and in a sacred space in front of a hundred women, performed what can only be described as a sacred ritual, sensually removing her veils one by one to reveal herself gloriously naked. She says back stage that very night getting dressed, she had a flash back to Babylon, to a time when she performed the dance in a previous life and time. She explains:

“I realized that it was a great honour for the High Priestess to perform the dance of the seven veils on the day of the great rite for the King and people. So to perform the dance (at the conference) and feel so much love, I was a waterfall. ...because you are bearing your essence, you are not just bearing your flesh and so to be truly seen, which is Aphrodite’s deepest need, that she is truly seen, because when as women we feel truly seen, we feel truly loved. So to have bared my essence and to be truly seen by people who were capable of seeing me, because they had met that aspect in themselves, was such a deep healing.”

Suzie, like the other women speaks in specific terms of being a channel for the sexual energy which she uses in her body work. It is channeled through her hands and through her heart and she describes it as intensely sacred and healing as well as sexual. In that aspect the women all

speak of the same qualities. Energy that is sacred and healing is inherently sexual - they are one and the same. When I asked Susie about her connections to the ancient temple practices of sexual healing, she comments that:

I know that I have worked in many temples in the past doing scribing, doing body work, doing this sacred work, being a healer. But I work with a Goddess. I haven't physically seen it, but other people have really picked it up. It's a very strong, tantric energy from a temple Goddess. Energy from the temple. I very strongly feel the Egyptian and Greek.

While the women speak of remembrance of past lifetimes that inform their calling to offer this sacred work today, I wanted to enquire how that manifests in the rituals and the symbols of the services they offer. Is this knowledge vested within their psyches or is it learnt from books?

Sacred sex rituals

The services these women offer that were at one time associated with the temples of the Goddess and the priestesses who offered their bodies, find the divine feminine essence was made manifest through sacred ritual. I now ask about the use of ritual in their work and what methods they employ to invoke the sacred feminine. Most of the women I spoke to had a clear understanding of how to create a space that was sacred for the Goddess to enter into their work.

When I made an appointment to meet with Amy, I entered her place of work, which was candle lit and beautifully decorated with soft furnishings. There was incense burning and she had an altar set up with her precious objects. The space was beautifully relaxing and comfortable but most importantly the aspects employed such as candle light and incense to cleanse, invoke the sacredness that reflects the spiritual aspects of this work. These exact techniques, from what we know, were employed in the temples of the Goddess.

Interviewing Susie in her home, she describes how she prepares for a client and what she does to create a sanctuary for the session. From the explanation below about her preparation of both herself and her space, you can sense the sanctity with which she approaches this work and how she enters into the ritual of Hieros Gamos, becoming the divinity of the Goddess, joining with the masculine:

“Everything is quiet and I put on music and candles and I invoke my guides and helpers. When a client arrives, they will sit here with me for a couple of minutes and I get a gauge

of how they are feeling. I explain to them what I am going to do and then I ask them to get on the massage table and then I connect. The first thing I do is connect with my spiritual self, their guides and my guides. I'll either hold their feet, or put my hand on the back of their heart, one hand on their sacrum and then I go into a very prayerful state. Then I get this surge... I always get a surge of feeling that this is absolutely sacred work and in my heart I can feel everything pull through my hands and my heart is just so open."

Having invoked the healing energy, Susie comments on how she experiences the sacredness of what she does.

"So knowing how the sexual energy runs in the body, I do a massage which for me, feels like poetry... sometimes it feels like creating a composition of Bach or Beethoven on the body. It's a series of light touch, firmer touch, sensual oils, warm oil, hot towels. It's like going to every part of the body and waking it up with a prayerful touch."

Sienna, like Tanishka speaks of tantric energy that has been with her always. Neither of these women have had any formal tantric training, and it is not something they have had to learn how to invoke or use - it is part of who they are.

Sienna has done much ceremonial ritual work with one shamanic partner and they would together hold space for up to 30 people. Holding space refers to the intentions set and the energy levels held by those in charge of a ceremony who work with spirit to create a safe and open environment where the people within the ritual can open their own energy fields to release blockages, allow healing to occur and experience transcendent states. Using the analogy of a Wiccan ritual, the priestess would cast a circle and call in the four directions, then she would sanctify the space within as being safe from any negative energies. What Sienna does within the ceremonial context to raise energy is to dance, her body becoming the conduit through which high vibrational love energy can be transmitted to those present.

"I'm dancing and I'm praying and I'm offering whatever I'm feeling for the highest good, all for love. All these people that are totally open are sitting in ceremony and that's what I'd do. I'd just pour with my hands this full tantric experience that I'm feeling in my body and that I experience in the in-between realms and I would just pour it like golden light into as far as I can see into every world I can possibly travel into, over all this world and through all the galaxies to every person in the space and that come into my vision."

Suzie most openly and courageously shared with me what takes place within a session with one of her clients. In speaking to me, she affirmed that her intentions are to clear the judgments that exist around sexual touch and to bring to light how damaged most men and women are within

their sexuality. She explains that most men know very little about the use of their own sexual energy and for most it is located solely in the genital region. In her work she unblocks the sexual energy that is mostly trapped around the base of the spine by what she calls “turning on the switches”. She tells her clients that their body is like an electricity station, where you’ve got seven main switches (or chakras), and at the moment, you’ve only got the bottom two turned on. She then works on the energy meridians, the chakras and governing channel up the spine with massage and rocking movements to free up the flow of sexual energy. The aim in all of this work is to bring sexual energy up to the heart where the density becomes transmuted into a higher frequency and experienced as divine, spiritual energy. Susie says:

“For me, sexual energy is spiritual energy. We are wefting and weaving two beautiful energies – they are one and the same thing. Sexual energy is what we are born out of, it’s our creative divine spark and our life force.”

Suzie explains that once she is able to free up the blocked energy and raise it to a client’s heart, she can see the amazement on their faces. Soft feminine qualities are revealed in an ecstatic experience they have never felt before. She believes a very deep healing occurs that connects the person back to their soul. The sacredness attached to doing this work validates her own doubts and judgments about the calling she has to continue to work within what some would call the ‘sex industry’ but what others would consider to be the work of the priestess.

While Suzie does not have physical sex with her clients, she offers them the option of hand relief if they request it, but many clients have had a deeply profound experience with the raising of their sexual energy to their heart that dissipates the desire for a physical release.

I wanted to gauge how each of the women saw themselves in terms of the work they offered and whether they were out to change attitudes and elicit social reform. I also talked to them about their vision for this work and how they saw their futures in relation to the work they are doing. This next section looks to the future and explores their vision.

More than a calling

Tanishka has great fire and passion about her journey as a sexual priestess continually unfolding in her life. From her beginnings as a stripper and lap dancer, sexual energy has been an intrinsic

part of her essence. Being a Women's Mysteries facilitator and priestess has been the vehicle through which she has transformed her own life and that of countless others.

Tanishka as priestess is a sacred channel for the Goddess and receives downloads of information that come through her, giving guidance and direction. While not knowing exact outcomes, Tanishka works spiritually with the Goddess, bringing through information as and when required, operating in love and trust, mediating her life as a priestess. What she is clear about is that while women have been working on healing their lives around their damaged sexuality, it is time for men to understand the sacredness of their own sexual energy and to open to a new level of relationship with women, with themselves and with spirit.

Sienna couldn't deny her calling to this work even if she tried. She understands that she is here to be of service and that dancing is not just her gift, she sees it as her devotion. She says "If you've got a gift then you're meant to share it." Sienna is a global priestess in that she offers the high level vibrational energy that channels through her body as healing to the individual and to the planet. While the temple dance workshops are offered to women as a means of healing, she recognizes that with her male partner she sees the work evolving so that it can include men.

At the time of interviewing Amy, the majority of her clients were men, with only the occasional woman. She now offers her services to women as individuals or in group workshops as well as to couples wanting to learn how to enhance their love making skills. In her work Amy does not have sex with her clients and discounts the inference that she is a prostitute receiving money for sex. She sees herself as a teacher, a counselor and therapist, helping her clients to work within the tenets of Tantra to "manifest both the divine feminine and the sacred masculine within one's being to achieve unity or bliss."

For some time now Shelly has been active in promoting change surrounding attitudes towards prostitution and the sacred prostitute. She says she is very pro-family and pro-marriage and believes that society in general is conditioned to view prostitution negatively. She sees the services she offers as helping families stay together by providing men who love their wives, with an alternative to divorce, when they are no longer sexually compatible. She has for some time now been promoting different attitudes towards prostitution, informing women they have other options in their lives.

Shelly is in the throes of writing her book entitled “You Don’t Own My Sexuality” and her vision is to promote this book and run workshops informing women about the choices they can make surrounding their sexuality and that the prostitute has a societal role of saving marriages, reducing rape, incest and domestic violence. As the sacred prostitute, Shelly knows that historically these women were honoured and held a respected role in society. She wants to change attitudes and judgments about prostitution and to that end has held workshops and continues to speak out against the societal prejudices around prostitution. Like the research of Gilmore presented earlier, Shelly sees herself as a sex worker who is recontextualising prostitution as a valid, fulfilling and skilled occupation.

Like the others, Suzie thinks that speaking out and gaining more awareness through the media is necessary for changes in attitudes to take place. Suzie has written articles that try to address some of the lack of information Australian men have around their sexuality. With media coverage that bombards us with sexual imagery and messages, Suzie referred to a survey that said:

“Australian men are some of the worst lovers in the world. 35% of Australian women are frustrated and the average length of intercourse by the time a man enters a woman is four minutes and then he ejaculates. When we’ve got the most powerful, beautiful, sacred energy in the world, we’d rather sit in front of the tele and watch footy and waste it.”

As a healer working with sacred sexual energy, Suzie becomes an educator that teaches men about their own bodies and their own sexual energy. She understands the dismissive attitudes many women take with Australian men who have grown up with no role models showing them how to nurture or awaken a woman’s sexuality, or how to create true intimacy within a relationship. She wants to let Aussie blokes off the hook and asks women to get involved in teaching men about what they want and how to share this most sacred of energies.

Summary

Having now chronicled the lives of five contemporary Australian women who work with sacred sexual energy, the next chapter examines the links between the practice of Hieros Gamos and the temple priestesses of the past with their modern day counterparts. Not surprisingly, there is very

little written around women who have found a calling to work with sexual energy in a sacred context and who reference the Goddess in their rituals to do so.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis

Introduction

After presenting the ethnographic studies of five women who are currently practicing as modern day sacred prostitutes, I now turn to examine the links between the ancient and the modern. Does Hieros Gamos or the sacred marriage have any relevance to a contemporary expression of sacred sexuality? How does the contemporary practitioner compare to the temple priestesses of the ancient past through the use of ritual and altered states of consciousness? I examine these questions and discover the links that aid in defining the emerging role of the modern day sacred prostitute.

Hieros Gamos

What we know of Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage is that it has manifested in numerous different expressions throughout a vast array of different cultures and time periods. Whilst one of its most typical expressions is found in the form of a fertility ritual where the male monarch marries the transcendent fertility goddess, legitimizing sovereign rule and ensuring continued fertility for the community, this is but one illustration. The Eleusinian mysteries see a mortal marry a God or Goddess in order to confer divine power and gain rewards in the afterlife (Nilsen 1947) and the Mesopotamian temple priestesses initiated men through erotic rites of pleasure in order to raise consciousness and experience the divine aspects of the Goddess (Eisler 1996). A 20th century expression of Hieros Gamos is found in Neopagan Witchcraft in the Great Rite, where the invocation of a deity into the sexual union, is done with the intention of creating power and achieving transformation and union with higher states of consciousness (Guiley 1989).

Looking at the stories and lives of the women interviewed in the context of modern day sacred prostitutes, there are definitely elements of the Hieros Gamos or sacred marriage rituals evident in their work. In a modern context, Hieros Gamos is no longer about ensuring fertility or vesting sovereignty, it is about invoking transcendental states of union with a spiritual entity. The sacred marriage has always carried the explicit intention of marrying the physical with the spiritual whether that be metaphorical (as in the ritual of the Great Rite), or factual as in the physical act of

sex. One overarching theme is the relationship that the interviewed women have to Goddess. They identify themselves with the sacred aspect of the feminine that is imminent within their own selves, that they make available to their clients, as a conduit through which deity can be accessed. Understanding the power of sexual energy, they use erotic sexual practices as in tantric massage or they teach how to harness one's own sexual energy as in dance, to raise consciousness in order to invoke an experience of union with the Divine. These women use their bodies, as did the temple priestesses of antiquity as a sacred vessel from which the transcendent can be accessed.

Prostitute or priestess

Just as the temple priestesses of Biblical times were called sacred prostitutes, the term prostitute used today invokes the same negative attitudes towards sexuality as it did then. As discussed earlier in this thesis, patriarchy views sexuality and the physical body as spiritually unworthy and that engaging in sexual acts further separates *man* from transcendent spiritual states. In this research, what has been revealed is quite the opposite. Sex can actually be a gateway through which spirit is accessed. Ken Wilbur (cited in Wade 2004: xi) adds:

As the simplest, most accessible, most here-and-now transcendent experience that anybody can have, it is the most common doorway to the Divine, the most ordinary (in the best sense of the word) altered state that accelerates the stages of spiritual realization.

That the sacred holy women known as Qadishtu and Hierodule were debased by being named prostitute, speaks of an era when matriarchal based societies with their connection to body and nature were waning and the new patriarchal order brought with it an ideology of power over body and nature. The women of the temple who initiated men through erotic rites of pleasure in order to raise consciousness and experience the divine aspects of the Goddess were far from prostitutes. So too, the women who have shared their stories for this research. All of these women in their work, to a greater or lesser degree, operate as priestesses, teachers that mediate between the realms of matter and spirit, offering an experience of sex as something sacred rather than profane, which engenders desecration and abuse.

To name these women sacred prostitutes, is as much a misnomer now, as it was then. While Tanishka names herself priestess, the four other women who may not openly claim that title, all operate within the auspices of the priestess and bring the sacredness of the temple to their work.

I now draw together elements from the interview process and discuss my findings below.

The importance of ritual

Whether ritually creating sacred space prior to a client arriving, or dancing to raise energy in a ceremonial ritual, these women, as priestesses, understand the essential elements that ritual invokes when working with sacred sexual energy. Eller (1993:84) when speaking about ritual in the practices of Goddess spirituality, explains that:

Ritual is a tool for many things - worship, supplication, celebration, personal transformation, ecstatic experience and management of both psychic and material reality.

Starhawk (1989:326) explains that a ritual is “a patterned movement of energy used to accomplish a purpose”, while Harman (1992:7) adds that “often ritual acts or procedures are performed with the awareness of the presence or existence of supernatural beings, usually deities”.

When I interviewed Tanishka, we met in the sacred space of a Goddess temple, and like a true priestess, she smudged⁶ us both and said a prayer of invocation which voiced our intention that the Goddess oversee the communication. A candle was lit and an incense stick burned. These small symbols of ritual sanctified the space we were in and invoked the presence of Goddess.

As stated by Starhawk above, one aspect of ritual is about manipulating energy to achieve certain outcomes. It was in the ritual state invoked above that Tanishka channelled a higher level of consciousness.

Altered states of consciousness

Several times during the interview with Tanishka, she became a channel for words to be spoken through her, which offered wisdom that touched me very deeply. Whilst I am familiar with this manifestation of spirit and have witnessed it personally in numerous individuals, authenticating

⁶ Smudging uses a bundle of dried herbs such as sage and lavender bound together and lit, which resultant smoke is then passed through the auric field of an individual or a space to cleanse stuck or negative energies. This is a practice used by North American Indians and even the Australian Aborigines who use the smoke to cleanse a space and free it from bad spirits.

the experience is more difficult. I turn to the phenomena of glossolalia or speaking in tongues by way of comparison and offer the following definition by May (1956:58):

The Glossolalist speaks in tongues while in a state of ecstasy or emotional exaltation and shows symptoms, depending upon the individual and his social environment, associated with one or more of the following: somnambulism, hypnotism, catalepsy or hysteria.

The term glossolalia derives from the Pentacostal Christians where the individual expresses unintelligible sounds in a religious ecstatic trance state with no awareness of the experience afterwards. Samarin (1972) (cited in Castelein (1984)) revealed that linguistic studies found glossolalia to be neither supernatural nor a language, but a phenomena that served to symbolise the presence of God for the believer. Whilst this phenomena is widely reported to have occurred both in religious communities and shamanic cultures, in comparing this to Tanishka, the only commonality would be the light trance state we had both entered into. If anything, Tanishka's verbal communications became enhanced and she was in full control of her faculties.

Investigating further the trance state entered into by Tanishka, analysis of the ergotropic and trophotropic systems may offer an enhanced explanation for the occurrence of channelling spoken communication. Ergotropic refers to the excitation of the body and mind whereas trophotropic refers to the slowing and stillness of the body and mind. It is the interplay of these two states that researchers have looked into in relation to experience of altered states of consciousness and mystical or religious experiences. Gellhorn and Kiely (1972) observed that the physiological changes that occur (via EEG results) in meditation are due to a shift from the ergotropic state into the trophotropic. Whilst the move into a trophotropic state does not lead to sleep, Gellhorn and Kiely suggest there is a partial activation of the ergotropic system as well and it is the balance between the two that leads to experiences of ecstasy and bliss. Fischer (1971) examined the ecstatic rapture experienced by a Zen master when moving between extreme ergotropic and trophotropic states which produced an experience of *self*, characterized by a oneness with the universe and perception beyond the confines of the physical time-space world. Is this not the altered state that could makes communing orally with higher states of consciousness possible?

Whilst there is a paucity of writing on the topic of channelling, I bring it up here, because the subject is covered by four of the women I interviewed. Whilst Amy spoke about channelling the healing energy of the Goddess through her hands when working with a client, Sienna becomes

the channel through which high vibration love energy enters, as she moves into golden ecstatic trance states. Suzie likewise channels the sexual healing energy of the Goddess in her work and Tanishka claims to be clairvoyant ('clear sight' strong inner vision), clairaudient ('clear hearing' able to *hear* spirit) and clairsentient ('holding touching' sensing energies).

Bonheim (1997) comments on channelling saying that while many women working with sacred energy have experienced ecstatic states of transcendence and opened to channelling high vibrational energies, it is not available to be put under the spotlight and often can't be explained. Bonheim (1997:299) comments on an interview subject (Naomi) who channelled what she describes as the primordial archetype of Goddess sexuality in a bodywork session:

Naomi's story highlights the difficulty of embodying the priestess outside of temple space. Priestesses have always invoked and embodied divine energies. They have always served as channels through which the goddess might appear to bless the community. The worship of the divine presence within us always occurs in a ceremonial and ritualized context and does not encourage ego inflation. Because our religious traditions discourage identification with the divine, we have no experience in relating to a person through whom a deity speaks and acts.

History records the visions of three well-known Christian Nuns of the Middle Ages, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila, who could be likened to the priestesses referenced above, and all of who experienced mystical visions and profound wisdoms visited upon them from God. In an era when only men were vested with the authority of communicating with God, these women were plagued with illness and suffered much condemnation from Church hierarchy before acceptance of their abilities. Having experienced many visions throughout her life, it was not until her fortieth year that Hildegard felt compelled to share her experiences. Marvally (2005:142) writes:

Hildegard was keen to stress that her insights were nothing to do with dreams or hallucinations or trance – her experience was viewed with her inner eye whilst she remained perfectly lucid throughout.

Whilst it is impossible to know the states under which these visions occurred, for Hildegard at least, it appears that full consciousness and clarity was maintained in what appears to have been instances of channelling mystical visions.

I offer these examples as I draw analogies between the research on altered states of consciousness and the statements made by the women interviewed who claim to channel aspects of deity, higher vibrational energies and transcendent wisdoms. These types of experiences have been recorded as occurring historically throughout all cultures. That they regularly occur within the auspices of ritual which, as stated earlier is intended to invoke such experiences, then some validity must be afforded to their occurrence.

I now turn to dance which is employed by both Tanishka and Sienna as another means of achieving an altered state of consciousness.

Dance as transcendence: Dance as healing

Both Sienna and Tanishka experience the awakened sexual energy that tantrically flows throughout their whole bodies, opening them to higher ecstatic states of transcendence. As Sienna explains, she often dances into golden energetic trance states where she loses conscious awareness. When Tanishka dances the dance of the seven veils, she becomes Aphrodite, channelling her energies, allowing her movements and expressions to be directed by that force.

Dance has long been known as a sacred agent to assist with healing or entry into states of trance. Serlin (1993:64) explains:

Originally, there seems to have been no split between sacred and profane movement. Once, dance expressed the human relationship to creation and to the Gods, it was already mythological.

Serlin describes the earliest styles of dance as echoing the patterns of all sacred forms, the celestial bodies, the mysteries of creation, birth, death, breath and sexuality were all thought to be sacred channels for power to enter the body. The movement itself would reconnect the person back to a sacred understanding, healing any schism.

Within a shamanic context, dance becomes the sacred gateway through which trance states are achieved and healing can be activated. Katz (1976) has studied the !Kung Bushmen who are a band of traditional tribesmen who live in the Nyae Nyae Kalahari region of South West Africa. A major part of the !Kung cultural practice involves a ritual known as the *curing rite* where the medicine men or shaman dance themselves into trance over a period of the whole night, and

perform healing on all members of the tribe. Katz refers to the transcendent states experienced by the dancers as one in which they report extraordinary abilities to cure, handle and walk on fire and see over great distances using X-ray vision. The energy utilized in the curing rite is known as *n/um*. The *n/um* resides in the pit of the stomach and with continued dancing heats and begins to move up the spine, eventually rising to the base of the skull where it becomes so hot it boils. It is at this point that the shaman is able to perform healing.

The analogy can be drawn between rising *n/um* of the !Kung bushman and awakened kundalini referred to in eastern philosophies, as activated energies utilized to achieved transcendent states of consciousness and healing. As a teacher of Kundalini Dance, I have experienced altered states of consciousness accessed through awakened kundalini, that is achieved through extended periods of dance. This energy is inherently sexual, tantric energy, rising as it does from the genital region through the lower physical centres or chakras of the body and becoming transmuted as it reaches the head or crown chakra into ecstatic states of bliss.

The spirit possession cultures of Vodou, Yoruba, Santeria and Candomble also use dance to enter into trance states which allow the spirits of ancestors to *ride* their bodies. Daniel (2005) calls these spirits “divinities”, the gods and Goddesses of their religion who enter into the bodies of the dancers so that they may ritually commune with their worshippers. Tanishka references this type of trance state occurring as the Goddess Aphrodite enters and *rides* her body in the dance of the seven veils.

As priestess, Sienna working in a ceremonial ritual with up to 30 people sitting in sacred space, uses dance firstly to raise energy within the group and then she becomes the channel through which healing for herself and the group occurs. She explains that in this environment, a very tangible tantric (sexual) energy is exuded through her body, through her arms and directed to the group. Often she will receive an awareness that an individual in the group requires specific healing, and while she says this is not a mental understanding or thought process, the healing energy is channelled directly from her body to that person. This is the same practice that is reported to occur with the !Kung bushmen. Through dance, an optimum level of energy is raised and trance state achieved, that facilitates healing properties to be invoked and used.

Those that have spoken with Sienna after the ceremony have expressed their experiences, and while Sienna says she is in a high vibrational trance state, many have interpreted this to be the Goddess or the sacred feminine represented in her form. Others report seeing her energy as angelic or having received intense healing. Sienna stresses that each individual's perception of the energy she channels is different and becomes a personal experience.

What happens to Sienna as she becomes the vessel for sacred energy to enter her body, has been happening to dancers forever. Whatever culture, ancient or modern, dance opens the body and allows for the raising of sexual energy to create a conduit through which transcendence occurs. However it is named, kundalini, tantra or n/um, it is the powerful life force of sexual energy, that when raised through the body, can transcend the physical and open the consciousness to expanded states of awareness, and as Suzie explains, has the power to reconnect us back to our souls, creating the most intense healing.

Summary

This chapter has examined the contemporary expression of Hieros Gamos and found that it does indeed exist in the form of the sacred marriage which uses sexual energy to unite the physical with the transcendent. Performed by the modern day sacred prostitute in a ritual context, she enters into trance, raising her sexual energy to become the conduit through which ecstatic transcendent states are accessed. Teacher, healer, facilitator or sacred prostitute, these women reference the Goddess as did the temple priestesses of old, using their sexual energy to mediate between the realms of matter and spirit in a contemporary expression of Hieros Gamos.

Conclusion

This aim of this thesis is to explore contemporary expressions of sacred sexuality as they are manifesting in the current western milieu. Using the ritual of Hieros Gamos as an investigatory tool, I have compared ancient and modern models of the sacred marriage, prefacing the role of the sacred prostitute as she appeared in the ancient Goddess temples as an archetype from which to draw analogies to her modern day counterparts.

My own convictions as a priestess and personal experiences of transcendent states achieved through activated sexual energy have instigated this research and provided the impetus to explore the journeys of contemporary women who, like myself, feel drawn to work with sacred sexual energy. Undergoing this investigation has helped me draw conclusions on a number of issues and I discuss these below.

So how is sacred sexuality manifesting in our modern western culture? Generally speaking, to those individuals who are involved in traditional patriarchal religions, I would imagine it does not register on their radar – yet! For those seekers who are exploring alternative spiritualities as described by the new religious movement known as the New Age, then how could they miss it? The media aimed at this group is absolutely filled with advertisements and articles that promote enhanced sexual relations as a means to greater fulfillment and joy in life. Sex sells! It always has. Sacred sex sounds great, but the catch is the uninformed individual often enters this realm unaware of the physical growth and deep work required to clear personal issues such as sexual abuse and incest, that is necessary if they wish to work with sexual energy. That there is an awareness of how sexually damaged many individuals are, means this work is greatly needed and the women who I interviewed step into the roles of teacher, healer and facilitator of this work. I conclude that this is a growth area that will continue to change attitudes towards sexuality. Altering views that reconnect the body, let alone sexuality, back to the sacred, move us towards a more holistic perception of ourselves that engenders greater healing.

In comparing the women I interviewed to the Qadishtu or Hierodule of the ancient Goddess temples, then I do find many commonalities. Knowing as little as we do regarding the actual role of priestesses who used sexual energy to commune between the physical and spirit, and the

numerous manifestations of sacred sexuality and Hieros Gamos across different cultures and eras, then all we really have to compare is the archetype of the sacred prostitute. We know these women were holy or sacred women, most well educated, wealthy, and of high social standing. In traditional acts of Hieros Gamos, they were the High Priestesses who became the Goddess' representative in the earthly realm and they used their bodies and sexual energy to embody the essence of Goddess, the divine feminine made manifest in the physical. How they actually achieved this, we don't know for sure. One belief is that they *channelled* the Goddess, entering into transcendent trance states raising their sexual energy to high vibratory levels. The men who had sexual relations with them were not merely joining with a physical being, they were accessing the ecstatic divinity of the Goddess, the absolute sacred feminine.

The sacred sexual practitioners who I interviewed all speak of lifetimes that they remember being priestesses in the temples, working with sacred sexual energy. They speak of the irresistible calling that compels them to do this work. This has no proof in evidence to suggest any links to past lives, nor can the fact that four of them speak of channelling the Goddess in their work be proven. We are dealing with trance and altered states of consciousness and transcendent religious experiences. Validating, measuring and quantifying are most difficult. That they all use their bodies and sexual energy to help others have an experience of the sacred, that they all work with the divine feminine energy of the Goddess as a healing agent absolutely aligns them with the archetype of the priestess. They are modern day sacred prostitutes assisting in changing attitudes around sexuality, assisting to heal the split between body and spirit.

Whilst being drawn to the new religious movement known as Feminist or Goddess Spirituality, I had no intrinsic understanding of its roots in the Womens' Liberation Movement that grew out of the late 1960s nor that it has only solidified into a recognized movement since the early 1990s. That I am adherent of its tenets, without having any knowledge of its formalized structure, stands true for all the women I interviewed. That women are reclaiming agency over their bodies and finding divinity vested in a female god speaks of increasing disenfranchisement with patriarchal religion and authority in general and a return to more nature based awareness with ideals of community and non-competition as a pervading preference for continued growth. I conclude that this movement will find greater popularity amongst women, who, whilst unaware of its formalized existence, will be in support of its ideology.

One area that all the women interviewed spoke of, is their desire to see the elements of sacred sexuality that are currently being expressed in the feminine, find their counterpart in the sacred masculine. They all believe that men are ready to open to an expanded experience of their own sexual energy which will in turn engender a new level of relationship with women, with themselves, with spirit and the planet. Each woman also saw the work they are doing as providing healing around sexual dysfunction, as well as challenging ingrained negative social attitudes towards sexuality.

As stated before, it has been my personal interest in this topic that has fuelled my research and now at the end of the project I appreciate all the background material I have gathered in relation to Hieros Gamos and the research done into matriarchal societies, but I would have included less historical research and focused more on the contemporary practitioners and their work with sacred sexuality. I have found their personal stories and work practices to be of more relevance to my investigation of the contemporary sacred prostitute than the historic, and could I have chosen again, would have widened my ethnographic study to include increased numbers of interview subjects, and also include the men I found working in this field.

One area of academic enquiry that I find difficult to appease is the quantification of trance states inducing instances of channelling that I encountered in research subjects and elsewhere. Whilst this manifestation of spirit is a valid experience for myself and many women I know involved in Goddess Spirituality, its existence is difficult to prove. Speaking with Tanishka on this very subject, she summarises the views of many spiritual practitioners who dismiss academic enquiry in favour of just getting on with it in the real world. Whilst reporting her “lived experience” which conveys her views and truths, Hutton (2004) reminds me of the reflexive approach I must take to ensure I don’t lack analytical assessment of the subject matter. Whilst finding research that does support trance inducing channelling states to verify this phenomena, I believe that more acceptance of this altered state of consciousness would assist discourse in this area in the future as a means for explaining how the transcendent can be made imminent. After all, I conjecture, that was the role of the sacred prostitute.

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