



**QUEER
DIVINE**

©Carlo Bevilacqua
parallelozero



India, Tamil Nadu. Procession carrying the head of Lord Aravan during the Koovagam Festival. In India the existence of a "third gender" has been recognized by religion since the Vedic times. Every year in the village of Koovagam there's a religious festival dedicated to Lord Aravan, the protector of Indian transgenders, during which Indian transgenders can be themselves without feeling the need to hide their identity.

Gender fluidity and the relationship with divinity

- ▶ The “fluid third gender” is a much wider concept in comparison to the inflexible binary gender division found in Western societies.
- ▶ It exists within many cultures, which have recognised different genders and accepted “polygender” customs ever since ancient times.
- ▶ The mixed male-female disposition is often associated with divinity and in certain religions these people are assigned a sacred, spiritual role.
- ▶ From the “muxe” in Mexico to the Omeggid from the San Blas Islands, and to the Native North American two-spirits, the “third gender” is respected and integrated in many societies.
- ▶ The “fluid gender” is the central figure in many traditional festivals and religious ceremonies, as is the case for the Aravani in India and the “femminielli” in Naples.

#GENERALNEWS #GENDER #RELIGION #LBGTQRIGHTS #ANTHROPOLOGY



Victor, a "muxe", in his house wearing traditional clothes. State of Oaxaca, Mexico.



Mexico. A traditional skirt in Irlanda's workshop. Irlanda is a "muxe" and a seamstress, she makes wonderful traditional dresses as well as wedding dresses.



India. Backstage during the Miss Koovagam transgender beauty contest. Today the transgender community is changing and, along with traditional events taking place, new awareness and behaviours are spreading throughout the communities. There are those who dedicate themselves to social and political activism, those who make ritual dancing or music their profession, those who take care of the less fortunate and those who dream of trading fashion and entertainment catwalks.



Tamil Nadu, India. The Temple of Koovagam during the religious festival for Lord Aravan, taking place on the night of the first full moon in the Tamil month of Chithirai (April-May). The small village of Koovagam is invaded by devotees from across southern India to celebrate Aravan's marriage to Mohini and his subsequent heroic death.

They call it the “fluid third gender”. Indeed, western neologisms such as “gay” or “transgender” don’t fully encapsulate the complexity of a subject – gender diversity – that can’t really be reduced to a rigid binary structure. Many cultures continue to recognise different genders, accepting “polygender” customs that are often linked to ancient traditions and are sometimes even associated with the gods.

This fluidity can be found in Hinduism, where those who are born with a mixed male-female disposition are considered to be “blessed by the gods” (indeed, many Hindu deities possess androgynous identities or are intersex). Another example are the Zapotecs from the state of Oaxaca in Mexico, for whom homophobia practically doesn’t exist and a third gender – the “muxe”, neither male nor female, born with male genitalia but whom society considers as women – is also recognised by the local church. In Naples, the so called “femminiello” has always brought good luck: according to tradition they possess the wisdom of knowing both worlds, male and female, thus enabling them to enjoy being in a privileged position.

Within the Guna people from the archipelago of San Blas in Panama, Omeggid homosexuals and transsexuals hold what are generally to be considered women’s jobs (weaving, sewing, nannying children), and often have relationships with men from the community. “two-spirit” people still exist amongst the Native peoples of North America: they are neither men nor women, but an alternative third gender which is recognised within the community as having a sacred, spiritual role. It has always been believed that this dual identity is the result of a supernatural intervention: hence why in many tribes the two-spirits fulfil important roles, such as healers, shamans or ceremonial leaders.



Britany in her home that she decorated and designed. Britany is a "muxe" and creates beautiful embroidered fabrics that will be used to create traditional colourful clothes. State of Oaxaca, Mexico.



India. Aliya is from Kerala but she lives in Chennai. She is educated and sophisticated. She worked for many years on the front desk of a large corporation. She speaks fluent English and her dream is to grace the international catwalks. She adopted a girl. Her biggest regret is that, like so many Indian transgenders, she hasn't been accepted by her parents for what she is. Aliya is now happy about what she is and how she lives her life.



San Blas Islands, Panama. Emy, 30, and Lusi, 18, in Masagandub. They gave up their studies. Their dream is to get married to a man and live their own family life.



Randy and Manuel in a hotel room in Juchitán, Mexico. They have come from a nearby city to participate in the Vela de las Autenticas Buscadoras de Peligro.



Italy. Tarantina, 83 years old, is the oldest “femminiella” in Naples. She was born in Avetrana (Taranto), about ten years ago she started showing signs of homosexuality. Ostracized from her family, she fled to Naples and never saw her parents again. In Naples she found a new family, then moved to Rome and began her “Dolce Vita”. She returned to Naples four years later where she’s been living ever since.



USA. Aodhàn Crawford is an FTM (Female to Male) artist and craftsman. He lives in Boise, Idaho. Aodhàn is Native American by blood, he was adopted and raised as a Lakota Native American and identifies as Native American, Scottish and Metis. Aodhàn has been making traditional Native American crafts since he was very young and his work reflects that.



An Aravani in one of Koovagam's various temples. Tamil Nadu, India.



Estrella was recently photographed for the cover of Vogue Mexico. State of Oaxaca, Mexico.



Outdoor portrait of a transgender couple in the Koovagam countryside, ready for the Lord Aravan celebration. Tamil Nadu, India.



San Blas Islands, Panama. Lisa Harris, 55, is the archipelago's most famous transgender. She lives with her sister and sister-in-law. She looks after her little nephew. She makes and sells *molas* - a hand-made textile that forms part of the traditional women's clothing - considered to be the most beautiful on the entire San Blas archipelago. She also works as a guide for tourists.



Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico. Naomi is an activist and she's studying law. She would like to devote herself to politics after completing her studies.



Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico. Mitzary in the bedroom of a rural house.



San Blas Islands, Panama. Adriana and Cherly in the courtyard of a house in Rio Sidra. Omeggid can be found throughout the archipelago. Young Omeggid learn how to embroider *molos* - a hand-made textile that forms part of the traditional women's clothing - from their mothers and they also work as tourist guides. They are a part of Guna tradition and do not suffer any discrimination within the communities.



Juchitán, Mexico. Amitai is the queen of the Muxe community for 2019/2020. In Juchitán, a muxe organization called Las Autenticas Intrepidas Buscadoras de Peligro organizes a big party every year called the "Vela", which begins with a religious mass in honour of the muxe because the church also recognizes their importance in the community. After the mass there is a muxe parade through the city and then, as part of a big party that goes into the night, the queen of the festival is crowned.



USA. Travis "Buffalo Barbie" is a Navajo. She identifies as being both sexes and uses female pronouns. She works in the construction industry but she also makes costume jewellery. When she was nine years old she understood that she is a two-spirit. She is the fourth of nine siblings. Her grandmother helped her to become aware of her gender. Her family is a traditional Navajo family and has accepted her sexuality without problem.



San Blas Islands, Panama. Lisa Harris, 55, with her sister. She is the archipelago's most famous transgender. She lives with her sister and sister-in-law. She looks after her little nephew. She makes and sells molas - a hand-made textile that forms part of the traditional women's clothing - considered to be the most beautiful on the entire San Blas archipelago. She also works as a guide for tourists.



Italy. **Ciro Cascina** is a theatrical author and actor and is one of the leading figures in the LGBTQ art scene in Naples. He has established an original form of theatre of social commitment that draws on street theatre and the oral tradition of Neapolitan "femminielli". He founded AFAN - Association of Old Neapolitan Femminielli - with the aim of handing down and preserving the history of the femminielli before they disappear, by collecting photographs, letters, and documents.



Sherry stands beside a small temple ready for the celebrations dedicated to Lord Aravan in the village of Koovagam, Tamil Nadu, India.



parallel zero

via Donatello 19/A Milan - info@parallelzero.com - www.parallelzero.com - +39 02 89281630