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Motives and Tradition

A woman who decided to don men's clothing and to follow a masculine profession for a long period of time, perhaps even for the rest of her life, made a very radical decision. The gender role change was not only very drastic but also very abrupt: the entire transformation had to be accomplished between one moment and the next. The motives for such a radical change of identity must have been weighty indeed, but, as we shall see, it is not always easy to ascertain what they were.

In many cases, the women themselves explained their motives, usually to a court of law, and in a few cases in autobiographical writings. But however interesting it is to hear what the women have to say, it is self-evident that they will have emphasised the motives which were to some degree justifiable, which were more or less socially acceptable, or which could be considered as arising from mitigating circumstances, such as entering military service out of patriotism or in order to follow a husband or lover.

But quite apart from the women's veracity, we doubt that they were themselves able to account for all the motives which impelled them to act as they did. The reasons they gave might very well have been rationalisations acceptable not only to the court and public opinion, but equally to the women themselves. We assume that for many of them, other, less outspoken, and possibly unconscious considerations played a role as well.

For a telling mixture of motives, self-justification and doubts as to whether what she did was right, we have a good example in Maria van Antwerpen, who both in her autobiography and before the court tried time and again to exculpate herself, clearly showing her own anxiety on this point. Maria van Antwerpen was a complicated case, as she also wooed and married other women, but she provides us with examples of nearly every conceivable motive.[1]

In the first place, she emphasised that God, Nature and Fate had predestined her cross-dressing. She should have been and was expected to be the seventh son of her parents, thus bringing the much-needed good fortune back to the family. 'Mother Nature has

treated me too hard, against my inclinations and passions'; 'I take this as a rule, that no one can escape his predetermined fate'; 'It is impossible to control one's first passions'; 'She said she was not like any other woman and therefore it was best to dress in men's clothing'; 'She said she was in appearance a woman, but in nature a man.' Twice she explicitly stated that she was sure that God was on her side: she had asked for her plan to be blessed by heaven, and her success proved she had received this blessing. When she met a girl who had become a prostitute out of poverty, she exclaimed: 'So I could determine that without the heavenly providence of taking up arms I would have fallen into the same state.'

God's blessing was important to her. She remained a devout Catholic, not renouncing her religion when she married a Protestant. She defended herself against the charge that by marrying another woman she would break holy laws, by protesting 'that she would take (her bride) only for a sister'. Her cross-dressing, in this defence, was predestined; and then, she argued, there were others who had encouraged her: for his amusement, one master had her serve at his table dressed as a manservant; another said that she had the manners of a dragoon and looked well in men's clothing. She was forced into her second cross-dressing by Cornelia Swartsenberg, who was pregnant and needed a husband. And in addition, she was driven to it both times by sheer poverty, the first time because she had just been dismissed as a servant in the middle of winter in a strange place. As she argued at that point in her life, what other ways were open for a destitute girl? She did not want to be a prostitute, so becoming a man was the only way to stay a pure and chaste virgin. And once a man, it was natural that she marry to avoid suspicion. The second time she became a soldier, she did so to escape poverty too, as, having married a pregnant woman, she had to earn money to maintain her family.

Moreover – she continued in her own defence – others had done so and had been rewarded for it. And who could remain passive now that the country was threatened by foreign troops? She had, she said, enlisted 'out of love, affection, and a pure passion for the fatherland'. She stressed the motive of patriotism in particular to the military court in 1751.

Not all cases were as complicated at Maria's. There were different varieties of cross-dressing and a range of intentions. Temporary masquerades for carnavalesque festivities were often

undertaken just for the fun of it and functioned as traditional escape from reality. During extended or dangerous journeys, it was an obvious solution to certain problems for a woman to clad herself in men's clothing. In this way they were better protected against troublesome men and were less obvious victims for thieves. For these reasons, it was to some extent considered acceptable for women to travel as men.[2] But wearing men's clothing while travelling offered women at the same time the opportunity to taste male freedom and privileges. Once having tasted that freedom, both literal and figurative, some women chose to prolong their disguise. Some may have chosen the male travelling clothes for the sake of freedom and adventures in the first place. Maria ter Meetelen, for example, travelling in Spain in men's clothing, ended by signing up there with a regiment of Frisian dragoons. The habit of dressing in men's clothing while travelling could easily lower the threshold to a more permanent cross-dressing.

The decision to start dressing as a man was never for one reason alone. The fact that female transvestism by women was a recognised phenomenon, and even had its own tradition, can be viewed as a precondition. Deeper underlying motives of a psychological and sexual nature will be treated separately in Chapter 4. First we will discuss the three kinds of personal motives that are most frequently mentioned by the women themselves: following family or lovers; defence of the fatherland; and poverty: the romantic, patriotic, and economic motives respectively.

ROMANTIC MOTIVES

The trip to the East Indies was a lengthy one, averaging six to nine months.[3] Men who signed on with the VOC knew that they would be leaving their homeland for one year at the very least, whereas many served longer terms as sailors or soldiers in the Indies themselves. People also knew that a substantial number of those who went to the Indies never returned, although contemporaries did not know the outcome of modern historical research, that this was the fate of two-thirds of them.[4] It is therefore not surprising that there were women who found it hard to be parted from their men. As a rule, the VOC did not transport women, and despite the fact that sometimes female stowaways were discovered,[5] passing as

sailors still offered the best chance for women from the common people to travel to the East.

The story and person of Maria Elisabeth Meening can hardly be called romantic, but it is certain that she, in the disguise of a sailor, earned her passage to the Indies by being the mistress of the captain. This is the only case we know, and even so upside down, which resembles the situation sketched in the most popular Dutch song about the subject, quoted in the introduction. But when Maria was discovered to be a woman, the captain had to give her up, and he freed himself of the responsibility for the woman by forcing one of his crew to marry her on the spot, in a ceremony 'before the mast' which he as captain could legally perform. Maria was sent home, managed to collect the inheritance of her new husband, and when he came back from his travels abducted him with the help of her friends before he could see anybody of his family. She held him captive in her house, battered him daily and squandered the goods he had brought from the Indies.

We know several cases in which women tried to sign on to the ships with which their husbands or lovers sailed. Perhaps such couples planned to jump ship at the Cape or in the Indies and to settle as immigrants; in such cases, economic incentives also played a role. In 1667 Engeltje Dirx was taken off a VOC ship; she had signed on as a seaman on the ship on which her husband served as chief cooper. An illustration of the desire not to be parted from a husband was an incident in 1712 on the ship *Arentsduin*, in which a woman stowaway was discovered while the ship was still in harbour. She wanted to go with her husband to the East. The ship's log records the fact that the captain 'caused two sentries to stand on the poop continually, by day and by night, and until they reached the sea, against the boarding of this woman and others who might wish to conceal herself'. But the same woman succeeded in boarding nonetheless, by being taken on in men's clothing as a seaman. This time she was only discovered once the ship was at sea, but we do not know whether or not she was allowed to remain on board until the ship reached Batavia.

The story of Maeyken Blomme, who in 1611 was equally unwilling to be parted from her beloved, certainly had a sad ending. After her discovery, she was taken from the ship, and, as she promptly went mad, she was shut up in prison in Middelburg. Her transport and maintenance costs were deducted from her lover's pay.

Female sailors or marines caught on their way to the Indies often gave as their motive the wish to join their husbands and families. Anna Spiesen said that she had no family left in Holland and therefore wanted to join her father in the Indies. One female sailor detected on the war fleet in the English Channel in 1666 also gave as her motivation her desire to join her husband in the Indies. The explanation for her evident misplacement may have been the fact that in the emergency of the Dutch–English Wars she was one of those who were pressed to go from the merchant to the war fleet.

Of course, the desire for reunion with husbands and parents sounded like a reasonable and acceptable motive, being the expression of a praiseworthy sentiment in women. Sometimes the authorities even relented. Jannetje de Ridder, for example, who was discovered before her ship reached the Cape, was given permission to continue her voyage as a woman in order to reach her family in East India, 'out of which love and to which end she had clad herself in men's attire'.

It occurred more frequently in the fleet than in the army that a woman was discovered who was following her husband or lover. During peacetime, soldiers in the army could live with their wives and children. The motive of following and seeking one's love in the army, however, was popular in eighteenth-century novels and we also find it frequently in late eighteenth- and in nineteenth-century songs. In our sources, we encountered this motive only in the case of Jaantje Martens, in 1839. This serving girl from Amsterdam fell in love with a fusilier, and because her employer opposed this relationship, Jaantje ran away. She then decided to cut off her hair and dress in men's clothing to join her lover. She was provisionally taken on as a soldier in Amsterdam, but she had to report to a barracks in Utrecht. Lacking money, she attempted petty theft along the way and was arrested. Her lawyer heavily emphasised the romantic background: despite the fact that her love for the fusilier was completely run out of hand, love remains for mankind 'a source of the most noble emotions', he said.

However, not only love, but also hatred could inspire a married woman to don men's clothing. Lumke Thoole left her husband whom she had married in Emden and went to work as a manservant in Amsterdam. Another woman, who lived on the Cape in 1675, was caught 'in sailor's clothing on the beach with suit and sack and arrested . . . as having maliciously wished to leave her husband to return to her homeland with one of the

returning ships'. Sometimes escape from a husband and following a lover were combined. In 1761 a lieutenant of the marines fell in love with Johanna Catharina van Cuijlenburg, a married woman. Johanna left her husband, and joined her lover, who had bought for her a man's outfit, consisting of 'a white French coat, trousers, a blue coat, another pair of trousers with gilded buttons, a sword and a white-plumed hat with a cockade'. So attired, she not only hid from her husband, but also from the authorities, who did not think lightly of adultery. But in two weeks the lovers were discovered anyway. In short, for the women whom we know to have been married, transvestism appears to have been either a means to remain with their husbands, or escape from them.

PATRIOTIC MOTIVES

Like romantic motives, enlisting as a soldier or seaman to help defend the homeland was to a certain degree a legitimate reason for a woman to dress in men's clothing. Indeed, in periods of war we usually find peaks in the numbers of women dressed as men. In the early phases of the Dutch Revolt against Spain (1568–1648) a number of women dressed as men also signed up with the army, and one of these, whom we know as Margarita, was depicted by contemporaries as a heroine. This Margarita, we read, even wrote a poem 'to rouse by her example the young daughters of the country to a love of war to protect the Fatherland'.

In the following two centuries, the Republic witnessed a number of wars at sea and at land. We often found warlike language from women who fought, dressed as men, during this period. For instance, two of the female sailors who were discovered on board ships during the First Dutch–English War before an encounter with the English fleet said that they were sorry that they had not been able to catch sight of the English. Maria van Spanjen defended her enlistment to a war ship during the Fourth Dutch–English War as having resulted from 'a great desire to serve the country as a sailor'.

The patriotic motive was certainly not always uncomplicated. The same Maria van Spanje weakened her defence considerably by enlisting more than once and thereby acquiring at least 75 guilders in earnest-money. War, or the threat of war, was of course a

favourable opportunity for, a suitable inducement to, or a last push toward, the transformation into a man. The social and economic dislocation, the streams of refugees, and, of course, the great demand for sailors and soldiers often reinforced the decision to resort to cross-dressing. These women could certainly have been caught up in the excitement of war, and in their patriotism itself have seen a justification for breaking through the barrier of sex. Doubts concerning patriotism as the sole motive can, however, be found among contemporaries, such as Jacobus van de Vivere, who wrote about the women who enlisted as men during the Dutch Revolt that they did so 'for the cherished fatherland, but most especially for their own honour'.[6]

During a crisis, normal rules may be set aside. If necessary, this may include that the usual barriers between the sexes are temporarily removed or at least less strictly observed.[7] When the survival of the community demands it, women are permitted to assume masculine tasks. This may not only be observed in traditional societies but also in modern, Western countries, for instance during the First and Second World Wars. In some instances, women are not only allowed to assume male roles on the home front, but even to participate in the fighting on the battlefield. The only period in Dutch history in which women participated as women in actual fighting was during the first years of the Dutch Revolt. During the siege of Haarlem and other cities, women fought actively alongside the men. Their methods included throwing boiling tar from the city walls on to the enemy soldiers. The well-known seventeenth-century lawyer and historian, Hugo de Groot, wrote that 'as soon as God, the Fatherland, and the sovereign were at stake, a passionate hatred caused (the women) to forget more than once the propriety and duties of their sex'.[8] Kenau Simons Hasselaar, citizen of Haarlem, became a national celebrity for doing so, and a 'kenau' has become an indication for a fiery woman in the Dutch language, although over the centuries this expression has acquired the more negative connotation of an imperious, sharp-tongued woman.[9]

Apparently such a crisis situation can also help to lower the psychological threshold encountered in the decision to begin cross-dressing. Other examples of this exist in addition to the Dutch cases. In the French army, for example, during the Revolution and under Napoleon, dozens of women dressed as men and enlisted in the army.[10] The German psychologist, Ralph Pettow, who in 1922

published a book about transvestism, added a chapter to the manuscript especially devoted to the phenomenon during the First World War; among his examples, he reported a woman who posed as a lieutenant of the German hussars.[11] Thus, even in our century, war makes it relatively easy to set aside the usual norms, including those concerned with gender roles.

ECONOMIC MOTIVES

When in 1653 the Amsterdam judges asked Anna Alders why she dressed in men's clothing, she answered simply, 'out of poverty'. Indeed, a motive more important than patriotism existed in pre-industrial Europe for enlisting in the army or signing onto the fleet: sheer poverty. A medieval proverb goes that for men who had become destitute, there were always two possibilities left: they could become monks or soldiers. After the Reformation, there was little demand for monks in the Netherlands, but as Holland began its ascendance as a great sea power at about the same time, the demand for seamen increased greatly. In the seventeenth century the Dutch Republic had also become a great political power with the largest standing army, proportionate to number of inhabitants, in Europe. A man could therefore always become a sailor or a soldier and was thereby assured of at least housing and food. Women, who were already at a disadvantage because of far fewer possibilities to work and far lower wages, had no such last resort. It is true that public charity helped women more readily than it did men, but this was not meant for young, able-bodied, childless women. The typical feminine alternative of prostitution involved far less security and much more contempt from society than entering the service of the military or the fleet did for men. In fact, prostitution was as marginal as begging and vagrancy, and was defined and persecuted as a crime in the Dutch Republic.

For a great many of our women, the combination of pure necessity and the knowledge that other women had been successful as cross-dressers before, must have been the primary reason – or at least the inducement – to decide to dress in men's clothing and enter service as a soldier or sailor. The suggestion to pursue this particular means of escape from hunger and poverty also came frequently from others. Maria van der Gijsse was begging at farms, when some peasants gave her men's clothes and told her to become

a soldier. Grietje Claas, a shrimps pedlar, found herself out of work when the season for shrimps was over. A chimney sweep then provided her with men's clothes.

Dressing as men also, in theory, opened up the possibility to pursue careers usually closed to women. Little use seemed to have been made of this opportunity, however. The disguised women were too poor, too isolated, and perhaps in most cases too old to be admitted to apprenticeships or schools. An exception to this was the case of Maritgen Jans. Before she was fifteen years old, she left the countryside of Zeeland to look for work in Amsterdam. At a silk-throwing workshop she earned five to six 'stuivers' a day, but that was barely sufficient for her subsistence. Before a court of justice, she later testified that she was not able to maintain herself as a woman, that she dared not return to her family, and that she had therefore sold her women's clothing and had transformed herself into 'David Jans'. She then tried to enlist as a soldier, but she was thought too young. Then she returned to her old profession, but as a man this time, and she immediately earned considerably more than she had as a girl, even achieving the position of foreman in a rather short time.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Holland was relatively prosperous: there were no famines and the standard of living was higher than elsewhere in Europe. The Dutch North Sea coast was an economically flourishing area, to which large streams of immigrants and migratory workers made their way. Nevertheless, at the bottom of society, there was much poverty. For those who could not get by in Holland, the wealth of the Indies beckoned.

To a limited degree, ship's crew members returning from the East were permitted to bring goods back for their own trade, and use – and misuse – was made of this profitable privilege on a large scale. This may also have tempted women, or it may have been used to tempt them, as the following folk song, in which a sailor speaks to a young girl, illustrates:

He who to the Indies sails (. . .)
May there of gold and goods avail.
Be guided by me, pretty maid,
As I garb thee for a seaman's trade'.[12]

There was little permanent migration to the Dutch overseas

territories. Only at the Cape were settlements established. Nevertheless, administrators, merchants, soldiers, craftsmen, and innkeepers were necessary everywhere, and among this population, white women were a scarce and much sought-after commodity. The notion that the East was a paradise for European women developed as a result. Potential marriage partners were in abundance, in contrast to the situation in Holland, where a surplus of women existed in the lower classes. But it was commonly believed that even an unmarried woman could have a prosperous and easy life there. And there was another advantage: no one demanded an irreprehensible past. Even the lowest white woman was considerably exalted above native women. Among the female VOC sailors, certainly some must have had an eye to this easy life.

Nicolaus de Graaff, who made five trips to the East as a surgeon in the seventeenth century, and wrote several books about the Indies, is the most eloquent of those who were struck by the differences in status between women in Holland and those in the East.[13] He was particularly offended by the rich and excessive life styles of the Dutch in the Indies, and especially that of the women. He wrote: 'These females . . . are mostly so ostentatious, so haughty, so wanton, and so luxurious, that from wantonness they scarcely know how to behave. They make exhibitions of themselves; they are waited upon like princesses and some have many slaves in their service.' Dutch women, according to De Graaff, were therefore eager to go to the Indies, but this was opposed by the VOC. Women rarely received permission from the VOC to sail with their ships. If the policy had been less strict, in De Graaff's opinion, '. . . there would be more females on ships than men. Even women from the lowest spheres of life are able to marry farmers on the Cape or to set up arak cafes for seamen in Batavia, and thereby improve their station', De Graaff had a very low opinion of these women. He called them 'a pack of prison whores, drunken street pigs, and thieves, who no longer dared remain in Holland or who frequently were in peril of prison or the scaffold, and therefore had stowed away on ships or had sailed to the Indies in men's clothing'.

De Graaff considered the women who had sailed to the East disguised as men to be common criminals, not only because of the deceit they had practised, but particularly because in his eyes they had already been among the refuse of society before their cross-

dressing. Or, as an English author, defending the English Mary Ann Talbot, puts it, 'It has been remarked that females who have assumed the male character have in general renounced with their sex the virtues which distinguish it, and, with the dress and manners of the other, have adopted only its vices. This censure, though in general well-founded, must not, however, be admitted without certain exceptions.'[14]

These judgements sound crude to modern ears, but we have found too many references to criminality to dismiss these opinions as mere prejudice. The relationship between transvestism and criminality certainly deserves further consideration.

CRIMINALITY

Short-term transvestism could, as we have seen, serve as a disguise which made certain forms of fraud possible, as, for example, in the cases of women who wanted only to collect earnest-money as soldiers or sailors, thereafter resuming life as women. For other women, men's clothing offered the opportunity to have a spree one evening or simply to loiter about on the streets, and they sometimes ended molesting passers-by and being arrested.[15]

We also found a far more serious form of criminal behaviour coupled with short-term transvestism: that of female members of bands of thieves who made the Netherlands unsafe during the eighteenth century. Female members of the infamous Bokkenrijders Band participated in raids dressed as men, and were no less cruel than the men. For example, around 1740, a woman dressed as a man tortured a victim during a raid by dripping hot oil from a burning lamp onto his face.[16] Such cases can still be considered temporary, but Anna Hilleghering continued to dress in men's clothing after she had joined a band in Leiden in 1724. Marytje van den Hove, who was a member of a band of violent thieves and vagrants, was a transvestite throughout her life. This relationship between transvestism and participation in a band of criminals also occurred elsewhere in Europe.[17]

Wearing men's clothing obviously was a very suitable disguise for women who embarked upon the path of criminality of their own, and we have many examples of female thieves who temporarily and incidentally dressed as men. But it often meant more

than simply a disguise: in several of these cases it is striking that with the clothes these women changed their criminal behaviour from female to male. Lysbeth Jacobs de Bruyn, a 22-year-old Amsterdam vegetable vendor, for example, was in men's clothes the leader of a gang of burglars, consisting of two men and two women.[18] Anna Marie Piernau, a wife of a thief and thief herself, dressed herself as a sailor to settle an account with another woman by cutting her face with a knife; a male act of revenge. Two cross-dressing thieves and prostitutes in 1714 crossed every border of female solidarity by attacking, robbing and maltreating a woman who was in a hurry to fetch a midwife.[19]

Some women occasionally dressed as men in order to commit crimes, others, like Francina Sloet and Jaantje Martens, only became thieves after their decision to dress as men for a longer period. But there were also those who donned men's clothing after having committed crimes as a woman, in order to evade the law. Elisabeth Sommuruell was to have dressed in men's clothing when she had to flee after killing a man who had tried to assault her. Stijntge Barents was accused in 1705 in Amsterdam of having poisoned both her parents. She fled, but nonetheless remained in the city, 'dressed as a sailor with an English cap on her head and a pipe in her mouth'. After some weeks she was caught and brought to trial. As she was six months pregnant, her cross-dressing had little chance of remaining undetected for long. She was sentenced, although not for murder, as no proof existed, but rather for theft and a lascivious life style. A last example is that of Janneke Jans, in 1658. She was a servant at an inn in Breda. When she was discharged, she burgled her former master's home to collect the wages she thought she was due, but stealing much more than their equivalent. She dressed in men's clothing and fled to Amsterdam, enlisting as a soldier, but she was discovered and arrested after a few days.

There were also cases of women pursuing more extended criminal careers as men, such as that of a woman unmasked in Alkmaar in 1747 when she had to bare her torso on the scaffold in order to receive a whipping. Anna Alders, who was arrested for cross-dressing in 1653, had already served a two-year sentence in the Amsterdam house of correction before. Catarijn Fiol, arrested for a series of thefts in 1691, was a member of the Amsterdam criminal scene. She said to the court that she dressed as a man to get rid of her lover. Also well documented is the story of Isabella

Geelvinck. This woman was born in Germany near the Bodensee around 1643. She left her parental home dressed in men's clothing at a very young age. After serving for five years as a trooper and ten years as a cook in the army, she left for the Netherlands and worked as a valet in Amersfoort. There she stole silver and linen from her employer, afterwards resuming her female identity as a disguise. Subsequently, she became a serving maid in Utrecht, but there as well she was caught stealing by her mistress. She was, however, permitted to fulfil her period of service. Previous to taking her final leave, she decided to strike one last blow, whereupon she set the house on fire. For this last crime, she was sentenced to death by strangulation.

Cornelia Margriete Croon forged life annuities in Groningen in 1671. After cashing them in, she made off, dressed in men's clothing. To catch her, the magistrate of Groningen had an advertisement placed in the country's largest newspaper, the *Haarlemmer Courant*, an honour she shared that year with three murderers. Her cross-dressing was not known, so she was not found. A few months later, a man, rumoured to be a woman in men's clothing, was arrested in Amsterdam for street robbery of children. After medical inspection and extensive interrogation, her identity was discovered. Cornelia was handed over to the court in Groningen, who sentenced her to death, a sentence converted to banishment for 90 years.

The criminal career of Trijn Jurriaens, born in Hamburg, Germany, reads like a picaresque novel – and it is therefore not surprising that her story became the subject of popular songs. She was an accomplished swindler and forger, sometimes working in women's, and sometimes in men's, clothing. In the latter persona and using the name of 'Hendrik Brughman', she courted another woman. She even exchanged marriage promises and slept in the same bed with this woman without her identity being discovered. Perhaps she wooed this woman to elicit money or presents, but whatever the case, after some time she wished to get rid of her fiancée. She pretended to have to return to her birthplace, and at the quay where the ships for Hamburg set sail, she took her leave of the girl. But as soon as her fiancée was out of sight, 'Hendrik' changed his clothes for women's attire, and walked back to the city.

Trijn Jurriaens' downfall was caused by her attempting a classic forgery ploy, reenacting a tale from Boccaccio's *Decamerone*. An

acquaintance, an old spinster, died in 1679 after bequeathing all her money to the church. Trijn and a female accomplice hid the body, after which Trijn took the place of the deceased woman in bed. Her friend then sent for a notary. A new will was dictated in which the two women were handsomely endowed. Unfortunately for Trijn, however, this fraud was discovered, and for this and other crimes, among them her frequent cross-dressing, she was sent to prison for two years, a sentence she had to serve in men's clothing. Shortly after her release from prison she was arrested again, for infringing her banishment and stealing a wicker basket full of linen.

Women such as Trijn Jurriaens could also be found in other countries. In England Mary Frith, alias Moll Cutpurse, was a well-known figure from the beginning of the seventeenth century. Abandoning domestic service, she donned men's attire and gained great notoriety as a bully, pickpocket, fortune teller, receiver, and forger. Her life provided the material for a biography and a popular play.[20]

As many of our cases were taken from judicial archives, it can be argued that finding criminal cross-dressers is what one should expect. A criminal sub-culture clearly developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Dutch cities, in which women played a prominent role.[21] Disguises, pseudonyms, aliases and nicknames were a regular aspect of the professional criminal culture. The use of the clothing of the opposite sex by swindlers is obviously one of the best disguises possible. However, one hardly ever finds men who dressed as women for the same purposes.

The relationship between transvestism and crime was evidently more than a distortion caused by our sources. A male disguise was not only a practical part of the repertoire of the female criminal; a more general relationship between cross-dressing and criminality also existed. Both forms of behaviour violate social rules and norms. For women who had already crossed one fundamental social boundary, that between men and women, it must have been relatively simple to set aside other norms. On the other hand, women who had already attempted criminal paths felt less intensely the social pressure which impelled individuals to behave in a way consistent with their sexes, and they must have found it relatively easy to make the decision to begin cross-dressing.

Finally, the relationship – or better said, the virtual absence of a

relationship – between cross-dressing and prostitution is striking. For many lower-class women, prostitution was a last resort.[22] This characteristic they shared with cross-dressing, and it is therefore at first sight rather surprising that our disguised women seem to have had little to do with it, or did so in a few incidental cases only, such as that of Eytje Hendriksz, mentioned above, and the Leiden prostitute, Johanna van der Meer, who regularly dressed as a hussar. Dressing as a boy by a prostitute apparently happened more often, but then only as an erotic masquerade. We therefore conclude that in view of the fact that prostitutes and female cross-dressers were very much alike in age, class, and background, the choice for cross-dressing when confronted with difficult circumstances implied a clear rejection of the alternative of prostitution. Simply and generally stated, those who became prostitutes followed the female, passive, sexual path, while those who 'became men' followed the male, active and sexless path, at the same time preserving their sexual honour.

THE EUROPEAN TRADITION OF FEMALE TRANSVESTISM

The individual life histories of the women who chose to live as men reveal that, whatever the nature of their personal motives, the final stimulus often was external. In many cases, the idea was suggested by another man or woman. Anna Alders told the Amsterdam court that she had been given men's clothes by farmers, a story similar to that told by Maria van der Gijsse. To Grietje Claes, a chimney-sweep suggested that a man's life might be a way out of poverty, and he also gave her her men's clothes. A man who recruited sailors advised Margareta Reijmers to enter the service of the VOC as, he told her, 'you will make a good fortune there'. Stijntje Barents' disguise as a man when fleeing from the police was the idea of a female friend. Francina Sloet, who, after being discharged as a maidservant in Paris, had to travel back to the Netherlands by herself, was advised to dress as a man by a female innkeeper. In folk songs, too, it was often suggested by another person. The frequent occurrence of female cross-dressing in popular songs was of course in itself both a proof and a means of the perpetuation of the tradition.

The knowledge that other women had preceded them also influenced women to take this step. Maria van Antwerpen, as we have seen, explicitly mentions this in her autobiography. She may well have thought of two women who had lived in her birthplace, Breda: Elisabeth Sommuruell and Mary Read. The former lived in the city for years on a pension earned as a soldier during the war with France in 1672–78. The latter was an Englishwoman, who after a career as a sailor, and before becoming the famous female pirate, ran, in women's clothing, an inn in Breda.[23] In a small garrison town like Breda stories about these women could very well have circulated. In a work from 1766, we read that the name of Elisabeth Sommuruell 'was still remembered by many of the citizens of Breda'.[24]

Knowledge of other women who lived as men provided also a legitimation of their actions. They were aware of being links in a long chain. We can therefore speak of a tradition of female transvestism. The more or less accepted temporary forms, such as that practised during travels, festivities, and carnivals, helped to keep this tradition alive.

This tradition of female cross-dressing was not exclusively Dutch. In England there was also a considerable number of these women in the same period. And we should not forget that a remarkably large number of the women on our list were immigrants from Germany, several of them having gone to the Netherlands dressed as men. Although systematic research into the phenomenon in other countries is lacking, we presume that this tradition was mainly confined to North-West Europe. The fact that in other countries in this part of Europe female transvestism was not incidental is confirmed in the proceedings of the trial of Catharina Lincken in Halberstadt, Germany, in 1721. When she was asked what her motives had been to go through life as a man, she simply replied, that '. . . other women had done this'.[25]

While this tradition was, therefore, widespread, it remained underground. Cross-dressing never became an accepted social practice which women could choose openly. In other words: it was not institutionalised. In this, Europe distinguished itself from other, non-European traditional societies, where institutionalised possibilities did, or still do, exist for those who wish to join the ranks of the opposite sex. An excursion into anthropology may therefore be helpful for a better understanding of the European phenomenon.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Institutionalised transvestism has been found in several American, African and Asian traditional cultures. In recent years the subjects of gender roles and transvestism has become increasingly popular with anthropologists, but the interpretations they have advanced differ greatly. Also, much more is known about men who take on female roles than the reverse, which seems to occur less frequently. Research has especially been devoted to forms of ritual cross-dressing and shamanism of priests, prophets and magicians.[26]

Approaching the phenonemon of transvestism among non-Western people, anthropologists introduced the concept of liminality. Liminality denotes the boundaries and categories people make to create order in their world view. All the fundamental boundaries people draw have a deeper meaning, whether these concern the boundary between life and death, child and adult, or the natural and the supernatural. Crossing such borderlines is not self-evident and can often be dangerous. Such boundary-crossing is therefore often coupled with all sorts of rituals and vows: rites of passage. People who find themselves confronted with such a borderline, or who have a function in rituals concerned with boundary-crossing have an exceptional status within a society – as, for example, priests and doctors. Those who occupy liminal positions in one area are often attributed an intermediate position in other areas as well. Those who have a permanent status 'betwixt and between' do not engender positive reactions only, but also, and even more often, negative reactions: because they do not conform to normal social categories, they are threatening. They disturb the natural order of things and cause disorderliness, chaos and filth.[27]

Much attention has been given to an institution found among American Indians, the 'berdache'.[28] Berdache, usually men but sometimes also women, voluntarily chose the role of the other sex. This role exchange was socially accepted, but it disappeared in the nineteenth century under the influence of modern civilisation. There were never more than a handful of these persons in any tribe. In the Middle East and India, only men can take on the role of the other gender. These men, who dress as women, are often prostitutes, and toleration of them is marginal.[29]

Institutions which explicitly allow women to take up masculine roles are much harder to find. The kings of Dahomey, on the West

coast of Africa, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had select regiments made up of female soldiers.[30] These women, who were often recruited against their wills, were placed outside normal social family life, and they were forbidden to have sexual contacts. They were a formidable military force which was all the more feared by opponents for the dark powers attributed to them. It was considered extremely humiliating to be beaten by them. Among another African people, the Nuer, a woman who can have no children of her own may officially marry another woman. She will then have the status of a man and be the 'father' of the children her wife may have from other men. Such a woman is usually the last of her line, and in this way she is able to perpetuate the family. Moreover, her infertility is considered sufficient proof that she is not a real woman.[31]

We know only one example of accepted female gender inversion with complete cross-dressing. In the Balkans, in North Albania and the bordering Yugoslavian districts of Kosovo and Montenegro, a mountainous and isolated area, a tribal society existed well into the twentieth century. This culture was characterised by blood feuds and a strict hierarchy between men and women. Within the clans, the women had few rights and were little more than the property of their fathers or husbands. There was, however, a way to escape this state: a woman who so wished could vow to remain unmarried and to live a chaste life. As 'sworn virgins', they shared virtually the same status as men.[32] They would dress in men's clothing and even carry weapons, the most esteemed male prerogative. In a family without male heirs, a daughter still in the cradle could be declared a son by parents or grandparents, and consequently be reared as a boy. An older girl could also swear an oath to take the place of a deceased father or brother as head of the family. Here, as with the Nuer, the patrilinear origin of the institute is clear. However, this was not its only function. Taking the status of a sworn virgin was the only accepted means by which a woman could avoid an arranged marriage. According to tradition, some sworn virgins even entered into marriage with other women. The oldest documented cases date from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The theme of female cross-dressing also turns up in many, sometimes ancient, folk songs.[33] Rooted out by modern governments, this practice has disappeared, but a few sworn virgins are still alive.

Perhaps we must even search deeper to anchor the European tradition of female cross-dressing in the popular culture. In going through Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*, it is striking how many variations there are to the theme of sex change and cross-dressing. Cross-dressing by men as well as women emerges regularly in fairy tales and legends from India to Ireland, and from North-America to Oceania. Men are changed into women as punishment for breaking a taboo. Cross-dressing serves as a strategem in war, or a trick to seduce women. Women don men's clothing to take the place of husbands killed in battle or to avenge their fathers. In an Indian tale, a woman disguises herself in men's clothing in order to escape an undesired lover, and in another Indian tale, a woman in men's clothing even becomes king.[34]

In Stith Thompson's work, the theme 'sex test' forms a separate category. These are tricks to determine whether one is in fact dealing with a transvestite. It is revealing that while there are only a few tricks listed to unmask men in women's clothing there are a great number to expose women in men's clothing. A few examples follow: place a spinning wheel nearby: the woman is interested, the man is not; throw a ball, a woman spreads her legs to catch it, the man does not; scatter peas on the ground: the man has a firm step, the woman falls. This last example comes from one of Grimm's tales, but we encounter it in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* as well, and this particular trick was even attributed to King Solomon.[35] In short, the notion that one must be more on the alert for disguised women than for disguised men was deeply rooted in many cultures.

Transvestism often has a ritual function among non-Western peoples and cross-dressers not only occupy an intermediate position between the genders, but also between the natural and the supernatural, as can be seen in the positions of shamans and berdaches. Marina Warner's inspired anthropological study of Joan of Arc demonstrates that in pre-industrial Europe as well, a link existed between transvestism and priestly functions.[36] Joan of Arc's insistence on wearing male clothes was related to her religious inspiration. The fact that she was seen as both witch and saint indicates that the reactions would be extremely negative as well as extremely positive.

We encountered this association with the supernatural only in a few cases. Around the middle of the eighteenth century, a fortune-

teller in Amsterdam, Zwarte Griet ('Black Margaret'), stated that she had sailed as a seaman in the past.[37] Perhaps something of the sort can be seen in the case of Maria van Antwerpen, who included among her professions a period as a healer of 'evil itch', probably a type of skin-disease. It is also certain that Maria saw her cross-dressing as God-given, as her destiny; she felt that she was really a 'seventh son' – someone born under a lucky star – and she believed in omens. The case of Kenau Simons Hasselaar is also worth mentioning. She was the woman who was a leader in the defence of Haarlem in 1573. Later she was accused of witchcraft by her fellow citizens. Although no source mentions that Kenau fought in men's clothing, she is later depicted in prints as a Dutch Joan of Arc.[38] Among the non-Dutch cases, there are also only a few indications pointing in this direction. The Englishwoman Mary Frith performed as a fortune-teller, and the quack activities of Mary Hamilton may perhaps be considered as operating on the same level.[39] However, one case, that of the German Isabe Bunkens is really spectacular. In 1701, she was tried for having taken up life as a man, for twice marrying a woman, and, worst of all, for having murdered her landlady to make a magic potion, a recipe for which the head of a murdered woman was needed.[40]

SAINTS AND VIRGINS

There are more aspects which could be considered from the viewpoint of this approach. Taking on a male role and being accepted as a man is linked to the maintenance of virginity, not only in the case of the Balkan sworn virgins, but also in the European tradition of tranvestism. We have already seen how the choice to dress as a man was sometimes made as an explicit act or rejection of a dishonourable life of prostitution and as a means of maintaining virginity. It was one of the reasons Maria van Antwerpen gave, and we find another example in Anna Maria Everts, who stated that she dressed in men's clothing out of fear of being seduced by a man. Another link between virginity and cross-dressing was expressed by the German Catharina Lincken. When her judges asked her if she did not know that cross-dressing was forbidden, she answered: 'Of course she knew that God had forbidden women to wear men's clothing, but this applied to married women only, not to maidens.'[41]

The relationship between a life of cross-dressing and a life as a virgin has aspects which are more than merely practical. Virginity in many cultures is not only a physical but in particular a social quality. It indicates a phase of social transition. A virgin, in this context, is a woman who is sexually mature, but for whom sexual relations are taboo in anticipation of marriage. The state of virginity thus implies a kind of sexlessness. This idea of virginity is still very strong in Balkan society, but it was also present in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By far the greater part of our women were unmarried, and cross-dressing served them as a means to maintain their virginal state, or in any case, to avoid having to marry.

In contemporary popular novels and plays in which female cross-dressing plays a role, much emphasis is laid on the motive of remaining a virgin. But this connection is clearest in medieval hagiographies of female saints who were able to escape a forced marriage via a miraculously acquired masculine appearance, or by disguising themselves as men. Dressing as, or even changing into, a man was a recurrent theme with female saints.[42] An early example is Saint Thecla, a woman who was so carried away by the teaching of Paul that she left her fiancé and followed the apostle. While travelling with his retinue she started to dress as a man. The transformation into a man was a very dominant theme with female saints from the fifth to the seventh centuries. Saint Margaret, for example, escaped on her wedding night in men's clothes. She became a monk under the name of Pelagius. A saint especially popular among the common people in Europe from the eleventh century on, not least in the Netherlands, was Saint Uncumber. She was a Portuguese princess who refused to be married to the heathen King of Sicily, and prayed to God to be saved from this fate. Her salvation was unusual: she suddenly grew a beard. Variations on this theme recur more often.

These female saints may all be viewed within a single pattern. They broke with their female past; they quarelled with their families; they refused to obey their parents; and they rejected their sexuality. These characteristics were not approved of in women, and cross-dressing is explicitly forbidden in the Bible. Therefore these saints pose a problem within hagiography, and the popularity of *vitae* like these has been attributed to the persistence of heathen mythology. As always, myth and reality interact, and several medieval women took these saints as their models.[43] The example

that comes first to mind here is Joan of Arc. She refused to marry the man her parents had chosen for her, later dressing in men's clothing and thus keeping her status as a virgin, which was also an essential component of her charisma.[44] A later case reminiscent of this is that of Antoinette Bourignon, born in 1616, who dressed as a monk and fled her parental home to escape from an arranged marriage. She was to acquire a reputation and following as a mystic and spiritual leader, attracting even people from the elite during her stay in Amsterdam.[45]

The tradition of female cross-dressing and the connotation with virginity certainly constituted the climate in which the idea to take up a man's life was conceivable. But, of course, the personal motives and circumstances were of crucial importance. For a substantial number, there were also motives of a psycho-sexual nature. These deserve a separate treatment, which follows in the next chapter.