

# FEMINISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY



## THE STRUGGLE TO RESHAPE OUR THINKING ABOUT GENDER

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More than ten years have passed since women's studies programs like the one at Indiana University were founded. In anthropology, too, it has been more than a decade since the revival of interest in women was marked by the publication of *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974) and *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (Reiter, 1975). Anthropology has been known as a discipline which contained important women (Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict among the most famous) and as a field where women had been studied as well, (for example, in books by Phyllis Kayberry, 1930, 1952; Landes, 1938, 1947; Leith-Ross, 1965; Underhill, 1936; and Paulme, 1963). However, with these two collections, women scholars, many of whom identified as feminists, began to critique the androcentric bias in anthropology, to explore women's status in a wide variety of societies, and to theorize about women's position in new ways.

Since 1974 there has been a burgeoning interest within anthropology in the study of women, sex roles, and gender. This new "subfield" within anthropology has called into question many of our assumptions as well as the validity of the very categories that anthropologists use in their writing. In some respects this questioning within feminist anthropology parallels rethinking within the discipline as a whole. However, feminist work has yet to have much impact on the teaching of introductory courses and on anthropology as presented in textbooks or other subdisciplines. In order to understand both feminist anthropology and its impact on the field as a whole, it is important to first examine how this subfield has developed and been reshaped (often by the same women as they have grown and rethought the issues). Then an assessment of how this work has been re-

ceived by others, both nonfeminist anthropologists and feminists in other disciplines, can be undertaken.

### The First Phase: Creating a Framework and Defining an Issue

The essays in *Woman, Culture, and Society* emerged from a variety of sources. Jane Collier, Shelly Rosaldo, and a number of graduate students taught a course at Stanford University in the spring of 1971, and several of these same women participated in a symposium given at the American Anthropological Association in November 1971. When Shelly showed me the notes from the course, I felt there was enough material to make the beginnings of a collection of articles. We wrote to twenty-five anthropologists who presented papers at the 1971 American Anthropological Association meetings, which in the end resulted in contributions by Sanday, Hoffer, and Denich. We contacted others through our own personal networks. Shelly brought in a number of contributors from the Stanford community (Margery Wolf, Bridget O'Laughlin, Jane Collier, Lois Paul) as well as Nancy Tanner from nearby Santa Cruz. My contacts included a number of women I had known at Harvard and or met recently through colleagues at Brown (Joan Bamberger, Karen Sacks, Nancy Leis, and Carol Stack.) The theoretical focus of the book took shape through the interaction of Shelly and two of her close friends: Nancy Chodorow and Sherry Ortner.

In Shelly's overview and in the introduction we wrote, we were faced with building a framework where none existed. Margaret Mead's work on sex and temperament was not about women's status, but the quotation we used from her 1950 book, *Male and Female*, pointed to the universality of sexual asymmetry. "Men may cook, or weave, or dress dolls or hunt hummingbirds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations of men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less important." The pervasiveness of sexual asymmetry or the subordination made sense given the range of ethnographic data the Stanford anthropologists had examined in their course and our perusal of the literature. The task, as our quote from Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* suggested, was to develop an explanation.

The essays by Rosaldo, Ortner, and Chodorow offered an integrated set of explanations for sexual asymmetry, each at a different level, that is, in terms of social structure, culture, and socialization. All three note that in every society women bear and raise children and that women's socially and culturally defined role as mother provides the basis for subordination.

Rosaldo argued, for example, that motherhood and the "domestic orientation of women" sets up the opposition between a domestic and a political sphere.

Put quite simply, men have no single commitment as enduring, time-consuming, and emotionally compelling—as close to seeming necessary and natural—as the relation of a woman to her infant child; and so men are free to form those broader associations that we call "society," universalistic systems of order, meaning and commitment that link particular mother-child groups.

[Rosaldo, 1974, 24]

Women thus are involved in the "messiness" of daily life; they are always available for interruption by children. Men can be more distant and may actually have separate quarters (such as men's houses) away from women's activities. Men can thus "achieve" authority and create rank, hierarchy, and a political world away from women. The confinement of women to a domestic sphere and men's ability to create and dominate the political sphere thus accounts for men's ability to hold the greater share of power and authority in all known cultures and societies.

In emphasizing cultural evaluations rather than social structure, Ortner began her article with the Lévi-Straussian dichotomy between nature and culture, and argued that every culture sees itself as different from the world of animals, plants, and the natural environment. Ortner built a case that women are universally seen as closer to nature, while men are associated with culture. Since women are seen as closer to nature, they are in a middle status and ambiguous, hence seen as dangerous and polluting. In every culture, Ortner argued, one finds evidence that women's roles are *explicitly* devalued or seen as less prestigious, they are *implicitly* devalued through an ideology of pollution, or women are excluded from participation in some realm in which the highest powers of society are thought to reside. Beliefs that menstrual blood is polluting or the exclusion of women from an important ritual are thus indicators of women's inferior position in a culture, one that can be accounted for by their association with nature rather than culture. Finally, Chodorow showed how a woman's role as mother leads to the creation of different male and female gender personalities and the reproduction of subordination. In any given society, "feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does" (1974, 44). Women tend to identify more with daughters than sons and push little boys to assume a masculine identity separate and in opposition to them. The boy does this by "repressing whatever he takes to be feminine inside himself, and, importantly, by denigrating and devaluing what he takes to be feminine in the outside world," (1974, 50). Chodorow argued that middle-class women

often grow up without firm ego boundaries nor a clear sense of self. In other societies (particularly the Javanese, the Atjeh, and among working-class families in London) women's mothering in a different social context may be characterized by companionship and mutual cooperation and be positively valued rather than characterized by overwhelming guilt and responsibility.

The argument for universal sexual asymmetry followed in a long tradition in anthropology where scholars have sought to look for what is broadly "human" in all cultures. In addition to language, anthropologists have discussed the universality of the incest taboo, marriage, and the family. The notion that women might be universally subordinate to men, thus, made sense as a first attempt at theory building in this newly revived "subfield" within anthropology. Although these three articles argued for universal subordination, they were careful to make clear that there are important variations in women's roles in different cultures. And variation was the theme that was taken up in most of the rest of the articles in the collection. For example, Sanday and Sacks compared women's status in a number of different societies, while Leis examined the structural reasons why women's associations are strong in one Ijaw village in Nigeria, yet absent in another. Finally, in my own article I examined the differences in women's strategies within domestic groups in a number of societies which related to the relative integration or separation of domestic and political spheres.

In sum, *Woman, Culture, and Society* posed an issue, "universal sexual asymmetry," which anthropologists seemed well trained to answer, and the three lead essays provided a related set of explanations for this position. This theme held the volume together and gave it a focus that made it a best-selling collection. On the other hand, it provided a position that could be debated within anthropology, a debate that perhaps overshadowed the emphasis on variability and difference that characterizes the volume as a whole. Ironically, it is this emphasis on variation that, by 1987, at least, has come to be the pervasive theme within the subfield.

### Constructing a Counterargument

It is not surprising that others working on women's roles cross-culturally began to challenge the thesis of universal sexual asymmetry, almost simultaneously with the publication of *Woman, Culture, and Society*. In fact, several contributors to the collection, notably Sacks, Sanday, and Tanner, probably did not concur with the analysis of the introductory articles even

in 1974. The controversy emerged most sharply over how to characterize foraging or band-level societies, although several authors argued that tribal societies like the Tlingit, Iroquois, and Hopi were egalitarian and that women and men were even in a complementary but equal position in some peasant villages (see Susan Rogers, 1978).

The egalitarian thesis has been put forward by both Marxist and non-Marxist anthropologists. Some non-Marxists, like Jean Briggs (1975) and Alice Schlegel (1977), argued that although there is a sexual division of labor among the Eskimo and the Hopi, roles are "complementary but equal." Schlegel suggested that the Hopi are an egalitarian society, because, although there are two domains, males' power to control their persons, property, or activities may extend over a different sphere, but is not greater than women's control over their persons, property, and activities (Schlegel, 1974). The male sphere is the community and the female the household, but these spheres are interdependent and balanced (Schlegel, 1977). Likewise, Briggs characterized male and female Eskimo roles as interdependent. Men are first and foremost hunters, while women are responsible for the preparation of hides and meat, sewing, child care, and other household tasks. Women do envy men's ability to travel, hunt, and make political decisions, but they are aware that these activities require endurance and strength in harsh conditions. But women do not feel disadvantaged. In a culture where aggression is devalued and where decision-making is dispersed, their activities are as important and as valued as those of men (Briggs, 1975).

Working primarily from a Marxist perspective, Leacock, Sacks, and others have taken the argument a step further, arguing that colonialism and contact between Europeans and native peoples have transformed and undercut many native economies, in turn creating inequality between the sexes where autonomy had been the norm. Using material from the Naskapi, Leacock argued, for example, that women were autonomous in a society possessing a communal economy with no corporate control of economic resources, dispersed decision making, and interdependence of individuals (both men and women) (Leacock, 1981, 133-40). In the Iroquois case, she argued that women's autonomy became undermined with colonial contact, even as women's power became more formal (1981, 154). Sacks in her early article (1974) described the Mbuti as a communal economy where all production was of the same kind—"production for use." People worked for the communal household rather than for individuals. Decision making, both economic and political, involved the equal participation of all members, men and women. Both sexes were social producers and equal members of the group.

### Other Themes

This early period of feminist thinking in anthropology also brought new analyses of the kinds of societies anthropologists study. The most important example was the rethinking of how to examine hunter-gatherer or foraging societies begun with Sally Linton's article "Woman the Gatherer" (1975). Linton's article was passed among feminist anthropologists in the period 1972-74 (as a part of a bibliography by Sue-Ellen Jacobs) before it was reprinted in Reiter's collection. It critiqued the new synthesis posed by Richard B. Lee and Irven DeVore's book *Man the Hunter* and thus had implications for the study of foraging societies in our evolutionary past as well as for the study of contemporary peoples.

Linton challenged the *Man the Hunter* thesis that hunting played the most crucial role in our evolutionary past, that because of the role of hunting in tool-making, communication, and even complex cognitive skills, it played the "dominant role in transforming a bipedal ape into a tool-using and tool-making man" (Laughlin, 1968, 318). Linton stresses that women's gathering and child-care activities also demanded complex communication, cooperation, and tool-making (slings for carrying children, choppers, grinders, and other tools for gathering). Linton's work was extended by Nancy Tanner and Adrienne Zihlman (Tanner and Zihlman, 1976; Zihlman, 1978; and Tanner, 1981) to re-think gender roles in human evolution. Rather than supposing that hunting was a major activity during the period of *Australopithecus* (2-4 million years ago) or *Homo erectus* (500,000 to 1 million years ago), Tanner and Zihlman proposed a much more flexible model with foraging as the major economic strategy and mother-child units as the important social groups. Big game hunting thus did not emerge as an important strategy until much later in human evolution, after the emergence of *Homo sapiens* 100,000 to 200,000 years ago. In Europe, hunting with hafted projectile points and the celebration of hunting in upper paleolithic cave paintings dates to 30,000 B.C. Even so, other adaptations may have been important in other parts of the world and any hunting-gathering social organization could be presumed to be much more complex and less rigid than current models suggest, with women continuing to take an important role in foraging.

Leila Leibowitz did much to critique and reanalyze the use of data from modern primate populations (e.g., baboons, chimpanzees, gibbons, gorillas, etc.) in the reconstruction of our evolutionary past. Rather than using the model of the male-dominated savannah baboon troop as a prototype for human behavior during the past, Leibowitz argued for the flexibility of primate behavior and its sensitivity to environmental differences. The overall picture is one of a variety of different adaptations within and

between species, which leads one to be cautious in choosing one species rather than another as a model (Leibowitz, 1974, 1977).

Other work had the potential of helping us to rethink the traditional way in which other subfields of anthropology had characterized social relationships. Perhaps the best example is the implications of Jane Collier's work on "Women in Politics." Her use of the notion of strategies and her definition of women's activities even in the household as "political" had profound implications for the subfields of political anthropology and kinship and social structure. Political anthropology had tended to be the study of "public political processes," including the relationship between corporate groups and the analysis of male political leaders. By arguing that women had strategies as well as men, Collier was able to show that politics happened "at home" when a woman attempted to influence her husband, brother, or father. Such strategizing had serious implications for the formation and break-up of kin groups such as lineages. Kinship and social structural studies tended to analyze the composition and change within lineages through analysis of male inheritance and authority. Collier showed how continuity and conflict within these groups depended on women's actions as well as those of men. "Women are the worms within the apple of a patrilocal domestic group," she said (1974,92). Since they work to advance the fortunes of their husbands or sons they often create conflict that results in household or lineage fission. Collier's analysis, by placing women squarely at the center of the treatment of kinship and politics, shows how the traditional models needed to be reconceptualized.

The results of this initial period (from 1972-76) were to critique the male bias in anthropology and to reassert an interest in women's roles. The central problem and debate (universal sexual asymmetry) emerged out of an effort to explain women's position cross-culturally, an issue that seemed uniquely suited to the discipline. The positing of a universal was certainly congruent with a long history of analyzing human universals within anthropology. The focus on women opened up new possibilities for reworking and reanalyzing a number of the subfields in anthropology—particularly political anthropology and the study of kinship. It led to rethinking how we viewed hunting-gathering societies, though "bringing women to the fore" provided new analyses of tribal-level and state-level societies as well (see Reiter, 1975; Harding, 1975).

Nevertheless, the conceptual tools that feminists brought to their analyses were those from their traditional training in graduate school. The articles by Rosaldo, Collier, and myself focused on social structure and reflected the training we had received at Harvard in the early and mid-1960s. Ortner's work and its emphasis on cultural analysis and symbols had the stamp of her University of Chicago background, while it is

possible to see the Michigan emphasis on history and an emerging Marxism in the work of Rapp and Sacks. As a final example, Peggy Sanday brought the tools of cross-cultural analysis (pioneered by George Peter Murdock) to bear on the issue of women's status.

### The Second Phase: Building New Constructions

In a second phase, a number of authors took ideas they had formulated in the initial period and developed them into full-scale analyses that focused on a comparison of a number of societies. The two best examples are the books *Sisters and Wives* by Karen Sacks (1979) and *Female Power and Male Dominance* by Peggy Sanday (1981). Sacks expanded her analysis of four African societies and used notions of mode of production and the changing social relations of production to analyze the transition of women's status from sister to wife. Sanday, while still relying on cross-cultural methodology, examined origin myths and social structure in a large sample of societies to build a theory which accounted for female power in some societies and male dominance in others. Both were still engaged by the debate over universal sexual asymmetry and the possibility of egalitarian societies, a view that challenged the Rosaldo/Ortner/Chodorow thesis.

Other feminists embarked on specific studies of individual societies, bringing into print careful analyses of women in particular social contexts. This period also saw a spate of collections containing articles about women in different parts of the world: women in Africa (Hafkin and Bay, 1976), women in Asia (Wolf and Witke, 1975), women in Latin America (Nash and Safa, 1976), and women in the Middle East (Beck and Keddie, 1978; Fernea, 1977). These collections often included work by anthropologists, but also often included articles by women from the regions being studied. All these contributions were comparative and focused on the variability in women's roles, even if to claim, as Sacks and Sanday did, that such variability meant that in some societies men and women had equal statuses.

Toward the end of this phase, a number of new works had begun to focus on relationships between men and women, rather than on women and women's status alone. Turning away from questions of universality, these authors attempted to build frameworks for looking at diverse women's roles within a particular society and for comparing societies with one another in a more complex way. Three approaches were apparent: (1) Marxist approaches that cast relations between men and women in terms of a model of production and reproduction, (2) models that focused on marriage as the entering point of an analysis of gender relations, and (3) those that emphasized "Prestige Hierarchies" as a focal point for analysis.



One of the first important Marxist analyses of gender for American anthropologists was that of Bridget O'Laughlin (1974). In her article, "Mediation of Contradiction—Why Mbum Women Do Not Eat Chicken," she analyzes relations between men and women in terms of the technical relations of production (how work is organized by a sexual division of labor) and the social relations of production (the allocation of control over resources and products). She locates women's subordination in the contradiction between women's contributions to production and reproduction and their lack of control over their own offspring. Through the system of marriage and patrilocal residence, women are alienated from their own reproduction; they are responsible for the biological reproduction of labor and for socialization, but they have neither the moral nor political authority that this responsibility seems to imply. O'Laughlin sees these contradictions being mediated (or "pasted over") by ideology, particularly the taboo on women eating chicken or other meat (which is reserved for men); breaking the taboo consigns women to sterility. These restrictions are expressions of sexual difference and affirmations of male dominance.

O'Laughlin uses a Marxist model of gender relations to analyze how subordination works, while Janet Siskind uses a similar framework to question the universality of kinship and to suggest that asymmetry or lack of it may be grounded in a particular mode of production (1978). Thus she argues that kinship relations and mode of production are inextricably bound up with one another. Relations of production are actually kin relations in simple societies; it is through kin categories like those of husband and wife, father, mother, and sister or brother that tasks get divided, production gets organized, and one category of individuals is able to appropriate the products of others. Although she does not clearly argue for an egalitarian or hierarchical model, she does point to ways in which gender relations and the sexual division of labor can be analyzed so that one could argue for subordination or "exploitation."

Beginning with the notion that some societies are egalitarian, Karen Sacks's Marxist analysis of four African societies shows how focus on the changing relations of production can illuminate increasing gender inequality. She uses a Marxist model to explore the dynamics and change in relations between the sexes, rather than only the reproduction of gender asymmetry. She examines examples of a communal mode of production (the Pygmies), kin corporate modes of production (the Lovedu and Pondo), and state societies (the Baganda). She assumes that women do not have a single relation to the means of production and divides women into "sisters" and "wives." In the communal political economy sisters, wives, brothers, and husbands all have the same relation to productive means and resources and therefore equal power in relation to the whole. In "kin corporate"

systems sisters and wives have different productive relationships. Here sisters and brothers (as in the Lovedu case) hold equal rights in lineage property, but husbands dominate wives; women as sisters have political and economic power, but in their status as wives, they are subordinate. In state societies, not only are there class differences, but women are reduced to subordinate wives and the status of sister does not entail control over productive resources. In examining the transition between the kin corporate mode of production and the state, Sacks isolates the basic contradiction that develops between the forces of production and the relationships of production and creates the dynamic that allows one group of men to come to control the means of production, and reduces other men from clients to peasants from whom wealth is extracted. This process takes place along with the subordination of women through their confinement to a status of wives or wards of their husbands (1979, 117).

These analyses focus on the relationships between men and women using a Marxist model. They neither use dualisms nor assume that women's situation is ahistorical. They neither conflate various forms of reproduction (biological reproduction, the reproduction of labor, and social reproduction) nor do they assume that only women are engaged in reproduction. This tendency toward conflation and dualism was noted in Meillassoux's book, *Maidens, Meal, and Money* (e.g., Edholm et al., 1977) and may be implicit in other Marxist analyses (e.g., see Yanagisako and Collier's critique of Harris and Young, 1985). Marxist models, in some hands, can give interesting and complex interpretations of change and be sensitive to dialectics and history, thus getting us away from more uniform and static approaches.

In contrast, Shelly Rosaldo and Jane Collier begin with marriage, rather than production, as the starting point for their analysis of gender relationships. In their joint article (1981) and in a larger manuscript by Jane Collier (1987), they posit a contrast between bride-service and bridewealth societies. Again, assuming that women and men hold a variety of statuses in any particular society, they focus on the differences between unmarried men, unmarried women, and older men and women in "simple societies" with brideservice. In these societies, including most of the hunter-gatherer examples, marriage is an achievement for men, while it puts women in the position of providing food and shelter for a husband, rather than being relatively free to flirt or eat from someone else's provisions. Marriage establishes men as having something to achieve, e.g., a wife, leaving women without such a cultural goal. Young men, through providing meat for their in-laws, become equal adults, and older men, through egalitarian relations and generosity, become the repositories of wisdom and knowl-

edge. Politics gets focused around the issue of sexuality and around male/male relationships, which often erupt in conflict and violence. Man the Hunter is celebrated since this ideology gives men a vehicle for establishing their claims over wives in terms of their prowess as hunters or raiders. Women have no such special privileges to justify and hence the roles of Woman the Gatherer or even Woman the Mother do not emerge as cultural themes.

In equal bridewealth and unequal bridewealth societies, marriage relationships are structured in a much different way, so that gender relationships have a much different content, politics are more hierarchical, and ideology plays a different role (see Collier, 1987). Collier argues that such "systematic models" get beyond our own assumptions about males and females, assume that there are a variety of gender roles in any culture, and allow us to understand the complex relationships between cultural interpretations and social structure.

Finally, Ortner and Whitehead in their introduction to *Sexual Meanings* suggest that we examine gender relations in terms of "prestige structures." They, too, are interested in a model that can examine gender relationships in a complex way, with attention to different male and female roles in each case. They, too, wish to combine a cultural and social analysis, though they emphasize the cultural and symbolic more than the social structural. They argue that prestige structures are partially autonomous and not reducible to class relations or the social relations of production. Moreover, gender systems are themselves prestige structures and prestige structures tend toward symbolic consistency. Statuses such as warrior, statesman, Brahmin, or elder get defined as part of a male ranking system, while women get defined as wives and mothers. Thus, there is an elaborate male hierarchy and a kin-marriage hierarchy that includes both men and women. They go on to suggest that some kinship systems emphasize the sister roles, while others emphasize roles of women as wives or mothers. In some ways, this model owes much to Rosaldo and Collier, but in others it is a different attempt to pose models that are comparative, but more complex than earlier models based on universal dichotomies.

By the end of this phase (1981) we see little attention to the issue of universals. Instead feminists have given their attention to the creation of particular models to deal with a much smaller number of comparisons, as well as a number of carefully done monographic analyses. Though feminists often are taking their concepts from other theorists (e.g., Marxist definitions of production and reproduction, Weber's concept of prestige, or Lévi-Strauss's analysis of marriage), the models that result seem more complex because of the effort to include women as part of the model.

### The Third Phase: Critiquing Our Concepts

Almost simultaneously with the construction of new frameworks for comparing gender relations, has come a period of critical self-evaluation, one in which the conceptual tools used in early feminist analyses have come under attack. One line of argument came from those who proposed that dichotomies like domestic/public and nature/culture "didn't fit" the realities of other cultures. Thus, the domestic/public split failed to characterize Yoruba lineages where kin relations seemed to be both political and domestic at the same time. And, in Egypt, though there seemed to be a clear dichotomy between the private household and the public arena, women's activities in the domestic sphere had clear political implications (e.g., for marriage arrangements, for the status of men) and men were important actors in the household (Nelson, 1973, 551-64). Likewise, Marilyn Strathern argued that the Hagen conceptions of *romi* and *mbo* are not equivalent to notions of nature and culture and that the dichotomy of *nyim* (prestigious) and *korpa* (rubbish) are associated with male and female respectively. Some aspects of *romi* are associated with male and others with female. Hence, as the title of her article suggests, there is "no nature, no culture" in the Hagen case (Strathern, 1980).

A second line of argument has been to show how these dichotomies are really Western categories that have a specific historical development within our own tradition of thinking. Shelly Rosaldo, in an important critique of her own work, came to view the concepts domestic/public as a revised version of Fortes's notions of a domestic and juro-political domain. Fortes's ideas, in turn, seemed ultimately derived from Victorian notions of public and private spheres, a dichotomy that was rigidly drawn and ideologically one of the most important during the nineteenth century. Likewise, as essays by Jordanova (1980) and the Blochs (1980) show, the dichotomy of nature/culture is not just an analytic tool employed by Lévi-Strauss but a distinction that has historical roots in the Enlightenment. Notions of nature had a complex development during this period, and the association of women and the female body with either nature or civilization is often blurred or contradictory. For example, women were associated with moral virtue on the one hand and with darkness and evil on the other; in addition they were ruled by their emotions and passions, while men were the embodiment of reason and rationality.

Thus notions we initially used that were part of our anthropological "toolkit" in the 1960s turn out to be informed by our own history of gender relations. Where we once thought that to argue against concepts derived from theorists like Lévi-Strauss, Fortes, Evans-Pritchard, or Talcott Parsons was primarily a matter of theoretical preference, in the 1980s, these con-

cepts turn out to have a cultural bias that both informed and distorted our early analysis of gender. Here feminists have begun not just to criticize male anthropologists for androcentric bias or ignoring women, but have begun to question concepts and assumptions that have been at the center of the discipline, particularly in the study of politics, kinship, and social structure.

Perhaps the most extensive questioning of our own concepts and assumptions has come through the conference on "Feminism and Kinship Theory" organized by Jane Collier and Sylvia J. Yanagisako (and Shelly Rosaldo before her death) which was held at Bellagio, Italy in August, 1982. The organizers asked participants to rethink kinship theory in light of feminist analysis, including our assumptions about the domestic and politico-jural domains, descent theory, alliance theory, and property transactions at marriage. It turned out that most participants (who included a number of feminists as well as male and female theorists who were more identified with kinship studies than with feminism) were already engaged in research that was based on premises very different from those implicit in the more traditional kinship theory of the 1940s through 1960s (Yanagisako and Collier, 1985b). Most participants had rejected the notion, for example, that kinship systems are grounded in the assumption that women bear children, men have authority over wives, and the incest taboo prohibits the mating of brothers and sisters. All took a position that gender and kinship is socially created and not just added on to "natural biological facts." Although not all participants would perhaps take the position that Collier and Yanagisako have in their overview article (1987), most seem to have gone beyond notions of domestic and political or even conceptions of what constitutes "patrilineality," to particular analysis that are more historical or argue for the unique social construction of some aspect of kinship or gender from an individual case (see Tsing and Yanagisako, 1983, for a conference summary).

In the meantime, the debate over the universal subordination of women has reached a "dead end." Critiques of concepts like nature/culture and domestic/political (as well as other dichotomies, see Yanagisako and Collier, 1985) have made it clear that such dualisms are too simple to provide an analytical framework. And, we are now well aware that colonialism and Western contact have had a profound impact on women's roles, cautioning us not to compare cultures as if they were static entities untouched by world history.

A number of us see profound problems with the egalitarian hypothesis. First of all, since all early data come through the writing of Western male explorers, military men, or missionaries, it is extremely difficult to evaluate, especially with regard to women's status, and it is woefully incomplete. In

some sense, we really will never know what it was like to be an Iroquois woman in the sixteenth century or a Navajo woman in the eighteenth, nor exactly what political power these women had. Second, colonialism could have either enhanced women's roles or undermined them. On the one hand, nineteenth-century trade probably pushed the Tlingit toward a more stratified, male-oriented society, increasing the cultural emphasis on the potlatch. On the other hand, the impact of the fur trade on the Iroquois during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries probably strengthened women's position, their control over agriculture, and their input into political decision making.

Third, even in societies characterized as having "dispersed" decision making, it is my impression that women have input into decisions, but they are rarely the "articulators" of decisions that involve the entire band or community, such as a decision to move camp, engage in a communal hunt, etc. Usually this role falls to a male, though older women are not entirely excluded. The lack of recognition of this "male bias" in the way decisions are made, even in these dispersed decision-making systems, is, in my opinion, one of the critical deficiencies in the egalitarian thesis.

Finally, none of these analysts take the sexual division of labor as a serious component of inequality. Either the division of tasks is said to be complementary or both men and women are "owners" and producers, each contributing equally. This leaves the sexual division of labor unexplained but, more important, omits the possibility of discovering what the consequences are for status and power of women's focus on gathering and child care or men's control of hunting and ritual. For example, if meat is more widely distributed by men than gathered food is by women, perhaps some men (e.g., younger hunters or aging recipients of a son-in-law's meat) may translate that distribution into enhanced prestige, status, or "say-so" in group decisions. As Yanagisako and Collier point out, the division of labor constrains men and women to participate in certain kinds of activities; rather than being treated as "natural," this division itself needs to be explained (Yanagisako and Collier 1985, 20.)

All this discussion and debate has led us to call for more attention to individual cases, more attention to historical data so that particular cultural configurations can be analyzed as changing and not static, and more effort to construct complicated models that see men and women, not as opposed; unitary categories but as occupying a number of different roles in each society, which in turn have a complex set of interrelationships (see Yanagisako and Collier, 1985, for example). On the other hand, relatively few analysts have changed their minds. Though we are more sensitive to our own concepts, the impact of colonialism and the knotty problem of interpreting the data, most feminists still hold the position on the issue of sexual asymmetry that they did seven to ten years ago. Instead, we have

gone on to the more concrete, specific, and historically sensitive studies that we have called for.

### **The Impact of Feminism on Anthropology**

In the last ten years gender studies and feminist analysis has become an important subfield within anthropology. A large number of sessions at each annual American Anthropological Association are devoted to women's roles in education, health, development, and urban settings. The large number of books and monographs about women in other cultures has generated at least one course (if not more) on sex roles or gender in most anthropology departments. Anthropologists are important contributors to women's studies programs and women's research centers. Yet, this new scholarship has had limited impact on the field as a whole.

Perhaps the most clear-cut example is that the research and writing on *Woman the Gatherer* has failed to make an impact on textbook analyses of human evolution. Textbooks in the late 1960s and early 1970s (e.g., Howell, 1976) discussed human evolution in terms of "Man" (e.g., *Homo erectus: A True Man at Last*), used drawings of males to suggest the evolution of the species, and featured hunting as the main activity throughout human evolution. To his credit, John Pfeiffer changed the overall shape of his textbook between 1972 and 1978, replacing chapters on "The Rise of Big-Game Hunting and the Psychology of the Hunt" and "The Impact of Big-Game Hunting on Human Evolution" with a single chapter on "Food Quest and Big-Game Hunting." The tendency seems to be to quote Sally Linton and Tanner and Zihlman piecemeal rather than laying out a complex analysis of the potential role of gathering and female activities in human evolution. Hunting seems to be playing less of a role, since competing theories about scavenging and food sharing, proposed by male anthropologists, have been increasingly cited in texts. Typical is the new edition of *Humankind Evolving* (1982) which still stresses hunting (along with scavenging) and the increasing dependency of hominid young with increased mothering for *Australopithecus*, but focuses on *Homo erectus* as a full-fledged "Man the Hunter." Zihlman argues that the perspective put forward by those who write about females as active agents in prehistory (both in productive and reproductive roles, as gatherers and mothers) has been ignored, dismissed, and even co-opted (Zihlman, 1985a, 1985b). For example, Owen Lovejoy's theory (Lovejoy, 1981, 341-45) of the importance of food gathering rather than hunting in human prehistory basically posits that men gathered food to bring home to their immobile womenfolk, a sort of "Man the Gatherer" hypothesis.

Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector in their analysis of archaeology and

the study of gender (1984) discuss the deep-rooted androcentric bias in archaeology. They discuss the Man the Hunter model as a particularly good example of how feminist work has been ignored. They argue that "the homebase" or "food-sharing" hypotheses are more subtle versions of the previous emphasis on hunting because they involve underlying assumptions about the division of labor, allocating certain tasks to males or to females. They conclude that "the basic features of the Man the Hunter model persist in anthropology and the alternatives have been ignored or dismissed" (1984, 9). Often, in other archaeological studies, tools and activities are sexually assigned, male activities receive more attention, and passive rather than active verb forms are used to describe female activities. Like Yanagisako and Collier within social-cultural anthropology, Conkey and Spector argue that the division of labor needs to be explained rather than assumed.

On the other hand, there has been an outpouring of research on female primates and other mammals, much of it influenced by a reanalysis of Darwinian notions of sexual selection and concepts taken from sociobiology, particularly that of parental investment. (Fedigan, 1982, gives an overview of primate studies.) With new data from a much wider variety of primate species, these researchers examine female reproductive strategies, with an emphasis on female choice, female elicitation of male support, and variation in mothering styles and skills (Hrdy and Williams, 1983). Some of these data are being used to re-evaluate assumptions about female primates (such as presumed attachment to home range, lack of dominance hierarchies, and lack of sexual assertiveness) (Lancaster, 1984). At least in this literature, assumptions about females that are still found in books on hominids and human prehistory are not only under revision but are seen as clearly outmoded.

The impact of feminist theory and research is ambiguous at best in social/cultural anthropology, the largest subdivision within anthropology (one of the four major fields, the others being archaeology, physical anthropology, and linguistics). Gender studies is now a well-developed subfield within social/cultural anthropology, but its impact on other subfields such as political anthropology, economic anthropology, development studies, studies of kinship and social structure, and urban anthropology has been mixed. On the one hand, the increase in articles on women and gender roles in the major anthropology journals has been greater than in education, history, literature, or philosophy. Although anthropology had a tradition of publications on women before 1970, the large number of articles that have appeared since that time have kept the discipline ahead in terms of the overall percentage of articles published on women. Nevertheless, in the period between 1976 and 1980, this was only 8.48% of the total (Dubois 1985, 166-70). Moreover, a number of articles that could have benefitted



from the new scholarship on women either overlooked women as a category for analysis or failed to take a feminist perspective into account (Dubois, 1985, 186-88). In other words, feminist anthropologists can be proud of the fact that we have made more of an impact on the major publications in our field than is true of some other disciplines, but we still have a long way to go in terms of making women and analysis of women central to many of the major topics anthropologists study.

At a more basic level, it is also apparent that the feminist literature on women has not been incorporated in general anthropology courses, especially those at the introductory level, which are usually the undergraduate student's only exposure to human prehistory and cross-cultural diversity. In view of this situation, in 1985 a group of feminist anthropologists organized a "Women and the Anthropology Curriculum Project." At the 1985 annual meetings, the Board of Directors of the American Anthropological Association approved the goals of the project, appointed a board of directors for the project, and contributed \$500.00 to help raise funds for the curriculum development. Between 1986 and 1988 those working with the project hope to (1) produce a series of bibliographic essays and curriculum guides for incorporating gender studies in introductory anthropology courses, (2) collaborate with the authors of the major textbooks in anthropology in terms of revising the next edition of their texts, and (3) organize a number of special sessions at the annual meetings in 1986, 1987, and 1988, where gender issues unique to each of the world geographic areas and to the subdisciplines within anthropology can be discussed.

The work of the "Women in the Anthropology Curriculum" project may succeed in introducing the scholarship produced in the first two phases of feminist research to a wider audience. The potential impact of the self-questioning begun in the third phase is not yet clear. This phase is perhaps paralleled by a good deal of re-examination in the field as a whole. A good example is the work of David Schneider in kinship studies. His *Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984) calls into question anthropological studies of kinship that presume that sexual reproduction provides a universal genealogical grid through which kinship systems can be analyzed. Such a framework, Schneider argues, is really our own "folk theory" of kinship, which is based on notions of sexual intercourse, blood and relations "in-law" (Schneider, 1968). Yanagisako and Collier point out these parallels between their critique of gender studies and that of Schneider's vis-à-vis kinship studies. Anthropologists in both cases have implicitly assumed that there were a set of "natural facts" that could be the bedrock for the beginning of an analysis. Sexual reproduction or the difference between men and women could be presumed as universal, rather than the things that need to be explained and examined.

Thus feminism, on the one hand, cannot claim to be solely responsible

for the transformation of other subfields like kinship and politics. Nor can we safely say that the work of feminist anthropologists is finding its way into introductory textbooks or into the way in which general anthropology is taught. On the other hand, feminism has certainly transformed the thinking of a number of anthropologists (largely women), and gender studies is a thriving subfield within the discipline. There are now over ten years of evolving and changing theoretical writing on women, sex roles, and gender—scholarship that has expanded and transformed our thinking about human evolution, the uses of language, kinship, and politics, and even archaeological reconstructions of the past. Most recently, feminist theory has questioned our categories of analysis and undermined the very assumptions of earlier work on women.

### Conclusions

So where are we? Having undercut all of our conceptual frameworks, can feminists and anthropologists begin to build new models? The questioning and undercutting can easily lead to extreme cultural relativism, i.e., the notion that each culture has its own set of categories and must be understood on its own terms, essentially blocking comparison with any other culture. Or it can lead to extreme cultural constructionism—the notion that there are no biological “facts” or differences between men and women and that all is constructed in each cultural situation. Extreme relativism and extreme constructionism can be paralyzing.

On the other hand, anthropologists, in wrestling with these issues, are coming to terms with problems of interest to feminists in other fields. For example, feminists have become interested in developing a feminist epistemology, one that takes seriously a feminist, rather than a universalist, standpoint. The disadvantage of this view is that it comes to an epistemological relativism that most theorists want to avoid. Anthropologists, since Sapir and Whorf at least, have worried about a parallel problem, extreme cultural relativism or the impossibility of translating one culture into the terms of another (or even one language or world view into another). Yet, the anthropological project is just this—the “tacking back and forth” between one culture or social structure and our own, attempting to make sense of another way of life using our own language and concepts—but stretching them to better make the translation. Thus, the anthropological example has much to offer feminists who wish to build a more complex theory about women, not WOMAN. Often contemporary feminists may be reluctant to see any relevance in an analysis of male cults in New Guinea, or female exchange networks among the Navajo, yet the models an-

thropologists are now attempting to build are much more complex than our earlier ones.

Shelly Rosaldo warned us of the "abuses of anthropology," i.e., the tendency of feminists to wish that anthropology would help us to discover what women (including, and most particularly, ourselves) are really like. Now that feminist anthropologists have begun to question their own concepts and categories and to build models that are more historically sensitive and culture-specific, anthropology has much to offer feminism in suggesting that women are really different, not the same. It is attempting to understand and compare those differences that has become the project of feminist anthropology—a project that can perhaps enrich the work of feminists in other disciplines.

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