Women's Studies Int. Quart., 1978, Vol. 1, pp. 55–65. Pergamon Press. Printed in Great Britain

MAN-CULTURE AND WOMAN-NATURE?[1]

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(*Received and accepted November* 1977)

Marx says of the 'fetishism of commodities' that:

> 'A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 76).

If one replaces 'a commodity' by 'sex'[2] one gets quite close to the state on thinking of the sexes in the social sciences. The 'trivial and fetishistic' character of sex lies in its biological 'obviousness'. The sexes *as social product of social relations* seem scarcely to have been made the object of question to date. I have tried to show this in a preliminary analysis of social science writings (principally those of sociology: Mathieu, 1971), where it is very clear that the *difference* of treatment applied to the two sex categories shows a methodological impasse which we shall encounter again in an article by Edwin Ardener.

It appears, in fact, that it is only one of the sexes which always poses the problem—as is evidenced in Ardener's title: 'Belief and the Problem of Women'.[3] This article deserves attention because it has the (rare) merit of acknowledging that 'something is wrong' with the treatment of the sexes in anthropological literature, and because—by the very measure of its interest and the numerous intuitions which it reveals—it furnishes us with a good example of the difficulty of getting beyond the traditional, essentialist, conception of sex.

The author starts from a proposition with which we can agree provisionally:

> 'The methods of social anthropology as generally illustrated in the classical monographs of the last forty years have purported to "crack the code" of a vast range of societies, without any direct reference to the female group. At the level of "observation" in field-work, the behaviour of women has, of course, like that of men, been exhaustively plotted[4]: their marriages, their economic activity, their rites, and the rest' (p. 136).

But the study of women is on a level with that of ducks or birds—'a mere bird-watching'. Women certainly give voice, but in an inexplicable fashion. They 'speak' rarely in social anthropology; and when one moves from the level of observation in the field to 'that second

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[1] This article first appeared in *L'Homme*, 1973, XIII (3).

[2] We won't dwell here on the well-established analogy between one of the sexes and commodities, goods—which are exchanged or bought. . . .

[3] Ardener's article was first read in a University College, London seminar in 1969. It was published in La Fontaine, J. S. ed. *The Interpretation of Ritual.* Tavistock Publ., London. 1972 and again in Ardener, S. ed. *Perceiving Women*, Malaby Press, London. 1975. The latter also contains a reply to Mathieu's article by Ardener, E.

[4] The Problem Revisited. The page numbers for Ardener's quotations refer to the 1972 edition of his article (translators note).

or "meta" level of fieldwork', the body of debate necessary for interpretation, 'we are, for practical purposes, in a male world'.

FROM UNWARRANTED GENERALIZATIONS TO THE BIOLOGICALLY 'OBVIOUS'

How does Ardener interpret this lack which he points out in the anthropological literature?

He swiftly reviews the technical arguments generally advanced on the subject of the difficulty of communicating with women in the field.[5] He certainly does not see these as decisive, but he does not dispute that there is a problem: in fact he admits that women do not talk ('they giggle (. . .) reject the question . . .'). Thus 'it is the very inarticulateness of women that is the technical part of the problem they present'.[6] Eventually this problem of the 'non-verbalization' of women—which, he adds, faces the male members of the societies in question as much as anthropologists—leads Ardener to the following interpretation: if the men of these societies appear articulate to anthropologists (men and women), it is because 'like (is) speaking to like'; it is because the men tend to supply 'bounded models of society' of the kind anthropologists like. In contrast the models which the women could supply are not acceptable at first sight to the anthropologist nor to the men of the societies in question because 'unlike either of these sets of professionals, (women) do not so readily see society bounded from nature. They lack the meta-language for its discussion' (p. 139).

Without wishing to delay, it is nevertheless important to come back straight away on the assertion by Ardener that women 'do not speak', or refuse to speak, in the field. There is no lack of examples contradicting this. It is very possible that it is true of the Bakweri of the Cameroons (patrilineal, patrilocal, extremely male dominated according to his description). But the question is: *in which society(ies)* and in which social system(s) do women not speak? There exists a gradation of 'not speaking'. One thinks, for example, of the account given by Fortune (1932):

> '. . . the women were jealous of the fact that the men were my informants, and that the male sex only profited from my inquiries. One night and one night only, the women in a body induced the men to get out, and my hut was filled with women all anxious to give information and acquire tobacco (1963 edn., p. 235).'

Men's 'sexual jealousy' is a (too) well known explanation for the difficulties a male anthropologist has in communicating with women. The interesting point is that in the society studied by Fortune the women had the social possibility of storming the masculine barricade. In other words, the question is to find out in which societies the men have the power to prevent women from speaking (a power that ranges from manifest constraint on their part to alienated consent from that of the women); and in which societies is there no notable difference in the anthropologist's communication with the two sexes.

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[5] E.g., due to their political dominance, men are more open to the exterior, one finds male interpreters more easily, men are more apt to enter into a situation of 'feed-back' with the anthropologists, etc.; while women, because of their domestic work and care of children, have less time in which to give the anthropologist models of society, etc.

[6] Here Mathieu faced the problem of translating 'inarticulateness' in French. To be 'articulate' is to possess an articulate distinct language, and also to have a good capacity for putting things into words (verbalization). She felt one could translate 'Ardener's inarticulateness' by 'non-verbalization' or even 'non-formalization' because he uses the term to refer both to the problem of verbal communication with women and to a peculiarity of conceptualization on the part of women (translator's note).

Let us look at another significant example, drawn from Margaret Mead (1930):

'Young men who have been away to work for the white man return to their villages and teach (pidgin English to) the younger boys, who in turn teach the very small boys. There is a class feeling about pidgin which prevents the women, who do not go away to work, from learning it (. . .) .The girls are often present at these lessons: they hear the men speak pidgin to the boys. The men when they are angry speak in pidgin to the girls and women, but with two exceptions no pidgin passes feminine lips. Women in delirium will speak excellent pidgin which the natives explain in terms of possession of the woman's mouth by the spirit of a former work-boy. The other exception is even more significant—the cases where small girls, imitating their brothers teach smaller children the language which they usually refuse to speak or to understand. The desire to imitate the formal teaching situation is stronger than the convention against betraying a knowledge of pidgin. Both of these examples are interesting as cases of learning with an almost complete lack of audible practice' (1942 edn, pp. 28–29).

Ardener's second assertion, that women do not give models of society such as anthropologists are attracted to, and do not possess the meta-language, also cannot stand. Without wanting to pile up examples, one can again cite an extract from Margaret Mead (1930) establishing that, among the Manus (a society which one could never suspect of 'matriarchy'), the little girls are much better informants on a number of questions of major interest to anthropology:

'It is the small girls who become conscious earliest of the social organisation, and who knew all the engagements in the group (. . .). This type of running social comment is never volunteered by boys, and usually they do not have the necessary information to make the simplest comments on the social organisation' (p. 93).

And, further on, regarding the view of the village:

'The records of girls are given in both cases. It will be understood that boys give little of this type of comment; spending less time with the women they know less of what is going on' (p. 191 footnote).

We have thus been given excessive generalizations. Admittedly, from time to time Ardener deems it useful to mitigate his statements by saying 'in most societies', or even: of course, I am exaggerating to make things clearer. But it is this type of generalization based on 'statistics'—and elementary statistics at that—which perpetuates the confusion. If there are social facts on which no one seems to hesitate to issue swift generalizations, such as anthropologists would abjure anywhere else, it is certainly those which refer to the sexes.[7] Here one is committed to finding a 'general' sociological phenomenon, no matter which, no matter what, which coincides with the universal biological dichotomy.

Let us return to the sex of the anthropologist. From the start of the article we have our attention drawn to the fact that women anthropologists themselves have not been able to overcome 'the problem of women'. But why should we expect women anthropologists to be better able to overcome this problem than their male colleagues[8]—unless we are letting

[7] In this respect the best homage which Ardener can render to Professor Evans-Pritchard would be to pass over in silence his article on 'The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Our Own'.

[8] At the end of the account, it is again only women (anthropologists) that Ardener asks to 'split apart the very framework in which they conduct their studies'.

ourselves be guided by a biological, hence fixed, definition of the sexes? What is implied is that a woman is always a woman, whatever the society to which she belongs.

In a recent discussion of the problems of fieldwork in relationship to sex membership[9] one could readily see that it was not enough to be a woman to have full communication with the women (just as it is not enough to be a man to know all about the men)! But then the first question—strange as it may appear—is to know what is a man and what is a woman in the society in which the anthropologist is situated. In Fortune's experience, and even keeping to the purely sexual aspects,[10] it is interesting to note that for the Dobuans a man is not male/virile without love magic. Can one conclude that, in so far as no one had given him the secret composition of the philtres (and in fact Fortune obtained very few of them), the male anthropologist was in the position to be a woman? Likewise, evidence from women anthropologists makes it clear that the image that women and men have of the female anthropologist's sex status ('on the men's side' or 'on the women's side'), as well as her acceptance or rejection by the women vary considerably, not only from one society to another, but also *within* each society in the different *aspects* of social life (in everyday life or in the sphere of the sacred, by type of ritual, etc.).[11]

If, instead of regarding categories of sex and likewise anthropologists and anthropologized as separate entities, one were to consider that they define themselves *by and in* their relationships, one could see that

(1) in the relation between anthropologist and anthropologized, women anthropologists, like men, are—by their position as Europeans—in a relationship of dominance (or sometimes simply of strangeness) which surpasses their biological sex[12];

(2) in the relation between men and women inside a society where the women 'don't talk', one must refer to the eventual power relationship between the men and the women. One can thus understand that the men of such a society share with anthropologists of both sexes the claimed difficulty of communication with the women. The 'like speaking to like' is a dominant talking to a dominant.

To put it another way, when Ardener presents as an 'analysis' of the problem the affirmation that men in the societies studied and anthropologists of both sexes are equally *articulate*, he is really only making a formalized description. But, given this, how are we to reconcile the idea (certainly implicit) that a woman should be better able to understand women, with that which says that women anthropologists have the same mode of formalization as *all the men*? Are the latter women not completely women? Will there not finally be for the author a 'problem of women anthropologists'? Should a problem arise, its solution should not, in our opinion, be sought in either the notion of 'woman *per se*' or a peculiarity of the anthropologized women, but rather, as we shall see, in our own society, and it will not only be a problem of 'women' anthropologists.

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[9] Leadby A. Deluz within the E.P.H.E.—Collège de France seminars of C. Lévi-Strauss, March 1973.

[10] Which do not 'explain' the respective behaviour of the two sexes, but must on the contrary be referred to the whole of the social relations and the thought structures.

[11] Personal communications from A. Deluz, M. Dupire, F. Héritier-Izard and A. Laurentin-Retel.

[12] It should not be concluded from this—as it all too often is—that it is not interesting to follow up the effect of their respective sexes on the interrelationships of anthropologists and anthropologized. There is every reason (and other than sexual) why the sex of the anthropologist, like all the qualities he/she possesses in people's eyes (white skin, money, obtrusiveness of his/her arrival, forms of politeness, etc.), may reveal or confirm certain aspects of the social system. One should look and see, e.g., by the manner in which titles are given to him/her, whether this stranger is (or not) included in the kinship system, religious system, etc.

But the question is not so formulated by the author, because—and it is one of the most striking aspects of the article—though he questions the theoretical discourse of anthropology, as failing to give voice to the women, he does not replace it in the society *which produced it*. From the outset he bases the distortion of the anthropological account on a supposed *truth about the societies studied*—viz. inarticulateness of women/articulateness of men. Are we then to take it that what appears in the anthropological literature is a mere reflection of native 'reality'? There is an all-too quick refusal of self-criticism, and a dismissing of the question by throwing it onto the shoulders of women as these 'others' whose peculiarity consists in hardly distinguishing between society and nature.

FROM THE BIOLOGICALLY 'OBVIOUS' TO THE METHODOLOGICAL CONTRADICTION

To think of sex more or less implicitly as reified categories, complete in themselves, and to refuse to see that in each instance they are defined in a system of social relations, leads, first, to conferring on the sexes general *attributes* (articulateness, inarticulateness) and to speaking in terms of contents—models, representations, symbolism *peculiar to* each. It also leads to these attributes and contents becoming set *differences*, or even opposites, between the sexes. The reification is based on the model of *biological differences*: men and women have 'naturally' different behaviour, reasoning, and views of themselves and of the world.

This reduction of sex categories to their biological definition—which we uncovered at the level of implicit discourse—is confirmed on the level of manifest discourse, since Ardener, in his desire to explain the variation he asserts in the view of the world of men and women, explicitly founds it on biology. That is, he attributes it to that to which, 'in the final analysis', one always attributes all differences, even those recognized as social, when the sexes are concerned. Thus the logic of the system is disclosed as the idea of biological *causality*. The merit—if you will—of his article is to say it explicitly.

But a contradiction soon appears for, by failing to define the sexes in relational terms, Ardener is lead to root the female view of the world in the biological, and the masculine in the sociological; i.e. to resort to two systems of explanation for the two terms of the same phenomenon.

The 'ability' of men to furnish models of their society is attributed by Ardener to their political dominance, which leads them to be aware of other cultures and to 'bound themselves-and-their-women from other-men-and-their-women'. The women as a category are excluded from the political order, and, according to Ardener, do not make, but 'take over men's models'.[13] Here one encounters the idea, which is very widespread in anthropology, of the universality of men's political dominance (albeit, again, it is no more than a statistical generality). It allows a very general evasion of actual observation and analysis. The 'political dominance' of men is conceived as a fixed characteristic of a fixed biological category: politics are to a man as soporific virtues are to a poppy, a property.[14] It is also worth noting

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[13] But the political order is not summed up in political 'dominance'. Those who do not have power find themselves none the less in a political situation, if one understands the political in its true sense of 'concerning the city', the society. This seems exactly the case of Bakweri women who (in contrast to the men) work outside the enclosed village (symbol of society) in the formerly Bakweri areas, now divided up by the settlement of immigrant, stranger populations.

[14] To 'virtue' one could easily add the sense of 'moral virtue', and to 'property' the inscription 'private hunting ground' (*chasse gardée*).

in passing that, in the snare of biological fetishism, the author (jokingly or not) cannot avoid expressing his sociological reasons in biological terms: 'thus all such ways of bounding society against society (. . .) may have an inherent maleness' (p. 142). Basically, man is biologically cultural.

Woman on the contrary is biologically natural. Not only, it seems, are women not able by themselves to conceptualize the individuality of the society to which they belong, but also —and this time for 'natural' not political reasons—they are not capable of opposing the state of society and the state of nature:

> 'they will not necessarily provide a model for society as a unit that will contain both men and themselves. They may indeed provide a model in which women and nature are outside men and society' (p. 139). In fact 'men have to bound themselves in relation both to women and to nature. *Since women are biologically not men*, it would be surprising if they bounded themselves against nature in the same way as men do' (p. 142, our emphasis).

In short, what is characteristic of women is that they 'persist in overlapping into nature again' (p. 143); the nature which men clearly separate from society. Although Ardener notes men's tendency to make the women marginal when defining 'the wild'—which he says is comprehensible given that female reproductive power is not under masculine control—he adds

> 'Since these powers are for women far from being marginal but are of their essence as women, it would seem that a woman's model of the world would also treat them as central' (pp. 143–144).

Apparently the (alleged) difference between the male and female models resides for him in the fact that the women dissociate society and nature less—and this, one must understand, is because they are closer to nature. They alone have an 'essential' rapport with it. In some way both sexes are biological, but one is more 'natural' than the other. This would seem to forget rather fast that 'reproductive power', the expression of natural forces, concerns not only women. Fecundity in many societies is also a male matter.

Indeed, why search in a biological difference related to the reproduction of life for a causal explanation of possible differences of behaviour and ritual characterizing the two sexes? Other 'natural' phenomena—e.g., death—put the two sexes into strictly identical biological conditions, and yet such phenomena can also give rise to different representations and rites for the two sexes. That many societies use the sexual difference in the reproductive order as a basis for creating differences in the social order should not lead us to think that the cause is *in* the biological difference.

Finally, recourse to biological explanation can be criticized on two counts: in principle and for its unilateral character. Moreover, is it in fact the case that women *do* 'equate themselves with the wild'? Even to assume with Ardener that the fundamental question for humanity should be to adjust the two oppositions—of culture to nature and of men to women—the second (man/woman) should nevertheless be subsumed under the first term of the first opposition (culture). When claiming not simply to be describing one particular culture but to be putting forward universal interpretations, can the anthropologist not attain the wisdom of the Bororo?

> 'If the Bororos' thought—like that of the anthropologist—is dominated by the fundamental opposition between nature and culture, it follows that they go beyond even

Durkheim and Comte and consider that human life should itself be regarded as a department of culture' (Lévi-Strauss, 1961, p. 219).

The actual description of the water spirits' rites among Bakweri women which we are given in the article is not necessarily in line with the proposition that women, whilst delimiting their world, *include* the wild in it. The rites clearly show a desire to 'socialize' the wild (and not the other way about), to reintegrate women in crisis into society in crisis. One of the most significant moments in the ritual is when the woman comes back to life on hearing herself *called* by a woman who is already *liengu*, i.e. initiated into the secret language.[15] This ritual, like many others, 'deals with' the wild. That Bakweri women, when they return in the evening after having worked all day outside the compound in the forest, constantly repeat the word 'bush' in their recriminations with their husbands, or that the Bakweri men themselves equate women with the wild, does not mean to say that a rite is thought of by the *entire class of people*[16] who practise it as an equation of themselves to the wild. Parallel with this, it is not without irony to see the author, *à propos* of the water spirits (male this time) of the Duala, saying that 'they symbolize men's *domination* of the deep' (p. 156, footnote 7; our emphasis).

TO BE RESTORED TO SPEECH, BUT SPEECH ABOUT WHAT?

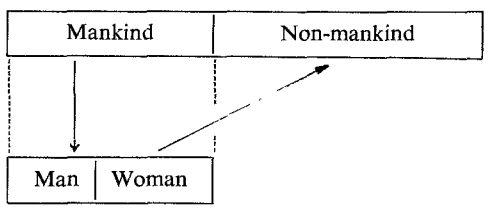
One of the most significant aspects of the article in question is that finally—despite (or because of) his desire to restore women to speech—Ardener fails to establish women as subjects, because he leaves them drifting on the borders of society, where, as he himself never ceases saying, men tend to drive them.

The very form in which the author defines his problem—what is the 'properly feminine view' of the world?—gives one the presentiment that this world is going to close round women and women only. The unique object of thought which he recognizes for women is . . . themselves: where do they place themselves? A little in the men's world? A lot in the men's 'wild'? However, in the concrete details he gives and in his résumé of the *liengu* rites (where he stresses the oppositions to the masculine symbols) one can uncover that Bakweri women have a very definite notion of men's place in society *in relation to themselves*. But Ardener eliminates this from his generalizations.

He writes:

'because (men's) model for *mankind* is based on that for *man*, their opposites, *woman* and *non-mankind* (the wild), tend to be ambiguously placed (. . .) Women accept the implied symbolic content by equating womankind with the men's wild' (p. 154).

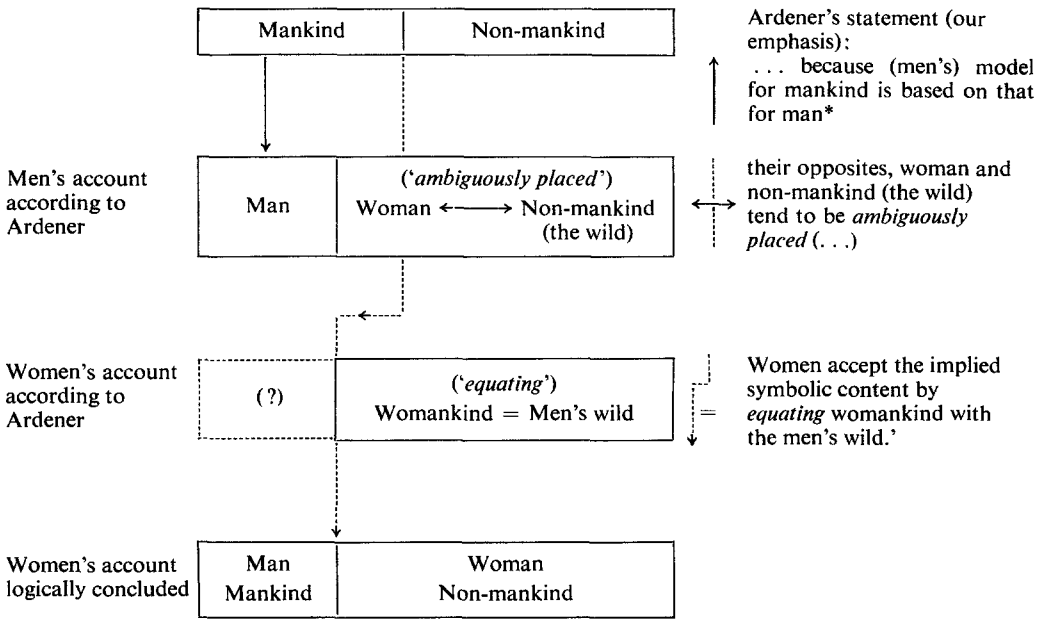
He sets this out in the following diagram:



[15] Ardener sees in the integration of the woman among her *liengu* companions 'the female significance of the rites'. Might it not be also, and simply, the *social* significance?

[16] In fact it does not concern one or two 'particular' persons in the society. And, even in the case of 'sorcerers', should one speak of anything other than of *mediation* between society and nature?

However, to follow his own terms strictly—i.e. making evident the difference of meaning between the part of the phrase concerning the men and that relating to women—one ends up with a more complex and more revealing diagram:



* Note that the direction of the arrow between 'mankind' and 'man' (which we have left in our diagram as shown by the author in his) should be inverted to be precisely true to his statement and to indicate that it is male praxis which projects itself onto the concept of mankind, and not mankind which incarnates itself in man. The drawing of the arrow is a revealing slip, showing essentialist thought.

The 'equation' *by the women themselves* of the female world with the wild world requires that they be denied any properly cultural definition (as shown by the deflection to the left of the line of demarcation between mankind and non-mankind). Further, when Ardener says that the models wrought by the women for themselves are not included in the models wrought by the men to define mankind, one certainly can believe him. According to him, the women go further than the men (for whom society remains, after all, 'themselves-and-their-women', even though they push the latter somewhat towards the wild): not only are women supposed agilely to cross over the border, equating themselves squarely with the wild, but also one cannot fail to comment on the empty box (indicated by a question mark in our diagram) showing the absence of men from the alleged female description of the world. Women have in fact been refused any global view of society which includes at the same time both themselves and men: thus men would retain in women's thought the eminently human status which they accord themselves.

It is only right at the end of his article that Ardener makes a short allusion to this question:

> 'Women, *of course*, have a "problem of men", who may *indeed* live in a part of the wild that women bound off from themselves' (p. 154, our emphasis).

But soon after, there is a significant reversal. Given the preceding phrase, the wild seems to be the wild defined *by women for men*—whither they could possibly push men(symmetrical

with the wild defined by the men whither they push women: the 'men's wild' of the diagram). Actually, what is then described is the wild defined *by the men for themselves.*[17] This 'problem of men' for women is still something whose definition escapes women.

Thus Ardener's attempt at new lines of thought fails to establish women as social subjects because, in fact, his analysis stems from the same location of the female category in 'nature' as he attributes to those he is studying. Seeing woman as 'natural' has, more or less explicitly, fascinated the Western world—which produces anthropology. As final proof of this we need look no further than the extraordinary comment by Ardener on a suggestion made to him by La Fontaine the editor of the book (1972). She proposes seeing the opposition:

men + wild = death, destruction; women + wild = agriculture, fertility.

Ardener replies:

> 'She, a woman, thus expresses that faith in the female civilizing mission shared by so many reflective members of her sex!' (p. 157, footnote 9).

But is it not he, a man and a reflective member of his sex, who refuses to accept that the symbols of destruction, of non-civilization, of non-society could be associated with masculinity? This denial—no, men cannot be non-cultural—is hidden by a positive, inverted but ironical affirmation: look how women think they are civilizers! The denial of a 'natural side' to men is symmetrical with the denial of a 'cultural side' to women. But the latter is artfully put across by making it be thought by the women *themselves.*

Refusal to accord the 'female world view' a total picture of society including both sexes, is added to the refusal to accord women the capacity to elaborate a vision of society as bounded against other societies: they are supposed merely to 'take over men's models' (p. 142).[18]

Even supposing that global models of society may be better (or more often) expressed by men, and even supposing that they have been elaborated by men, due to their 'political dominance', it is still important to know whether or not, depending on the society, women *share* them, and not necessarily 'take them over'. If they share, then the model expressed is that of the society in its entirety, and it does not seem necessary (unless we think that femininity determines thought) to suppose that women have another, different, model 'to be discovered' in 'deeper levels' of symbolism. There is then no autonomous 'female' view. There is not a women's vision and a men's vision: there is only that of the society as a whole.

SPEECH AND DISCOURSE

For Ardener, the transmitter of speech is a physical being, reified in his biological singularity. To say 'we are in a male world' means for him: we get the speech, the representations, and the models of men, and not those of women. It seems to us more enlightening to say: the discourse is masculine, the referent of the discourse is man. That women are able to

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[17] The wild which we learn (let us note in passing) that men 'dominate' (and not to which they assimilate), notably by their participation in an elephant society and by the annual dance in the course of which they claim responsibility for the devastation by this animal of the women's cultivated lands.

[18] Noting elsewhere (p. 138) that it is certainly possible that an anthropologist sometimes gets the same model of society from women as from men, Ardener does not consider the point interesting because, he says, this provides only confirmation of the men's models!

take part fully in this general discourse is not really so surprising if one is willing to define this referent sociologically: it concerns a category which, in a *concrete* sociological *relationship*, holds power; hence, in a power-based society, holds speech. It is man socially and not biologically defined. This speech, being *the* speech, is not necessarily thought by the members of the society as being sexuated, it is thought of by all as being the truth; doubtless naked, but without apparent sex.

This reasoning is perhaps applicable to Bakweri society, certainly not to all societies, but very probably to ours. It is in this sense that there is for us no 'problem of women anthropologists', but a problem of general social discourse (in which anthropology participates as does sociology) and of the organization of the society which produces it. Such a perspective would perhaps ensure that Ardener did not evade questioning the society putting forward the anthropological account, and that he did not explain the recognized distortion of an account applied to a certain object (here, anthropological accounts of societies) by those characteristics which are supposed to be particular to this object: men and women of these societies—categories objectivized as 'universal'.

To speak of 'men' and 'women' as if that would suffice often, in fact, produces distortions in the very description of facts. Certain sub-categories of sex which do not fit easily into a dichotomous description are either forgotten or 'forced' to fit. On the other hand, analysis which retains the dichotomy where it exists but does not hold to a rigid, biologically-based split, allows us to perceive similarities of position in *social relations* between certain categories or sub-categories of sex and other social categories or sub-categories (e.g. women and younger men do not have decision-making power).

Ardener in one sense comes close to this idea because he alludes to 'inarticulate classes of men' and likewise to the young and children. Does this mean that all men are not 'articulate'? Does this mean that 'articulateness' is not a matter of masculinity? Does it mean that inarticulateness is not a matter of femininity? Does it mean that biology is scarcely of interest in this phenomenon?

If so it means we should not cloud our thought with sexual dichotomy based on biology. It is imperative that we study the social system of the sexes just as we study the economic, religious or political system. This should allow us to escape from the misleading light of the 'obvious'. It should equally allow us to ask, if we want to place ourselves with Ardener on the ideological level, in which society, in which structures, in which social relations can we or can we not speak of 'the male view' and 'the female view'. Then, let us hope, we will substitute dialectical for essentialistic thinking. This is why wanting to resolve the problem of the 'non-verbalization' of women and to 'restore them to speech' by the study of symbolism and belief alone seems to us particularly dangerous. To want to restore the inarticulate classes to speech by searching 'in the deepest levels' of symbolism for what (like schizophrenics) they are endeavouring to express, presents the same danger in anthropology as does an organicist explanation of schizophrenia in psychiatry. Indeed it presents an immediate danger since when one talks of the sexes, only women are usually meant; this in turn produces an immediate reference to biology which leads to a closing of the debate before it has even been opened.

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