FROM "SEXUAL ANTAGONISM" TO "DOMINATION":
THE DISCOURSE OF GENDER IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By

Pelly R. E. Shaw

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1976

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Anthropology and Sociology)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
September 1991
© Pelly Shaw, 1991
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the evolution of the anthropological understandings of gender relations and the social and political positions of women in several New Guinea societies. Since the 1950's the question of sexual inequality and the domination of women has permeated the discourse of gender in the ethnography of Papua New Guinea, particularly the Highlands.

Key pieces of ethnographic literature produced from the 1950's to the present were examined, beginning with the "sexual antagonism" model of the 50's and 60's (Read, Meggitt, Langness), followed by the "women as persons" model of the 1970's (Faithorn, Feil, Strathern), the model of "sexual complementarity" proposed by Lowlands ethnographers (Weiner, Errington and Gewertz), the symbolic "deconstruction" of domination (Strathern, Lederman, Biersack), and the recent neo-marxist "reconstruction" of domination (Josephides, Godelier).

All the studies examined deal in some measure with the degree to which women may be said to be dominated by men. Thus, women's exclusion from or participation in political affairs, the nature and degree of women's access to "male" political power or their possession of other sorts of powers, their state of personhood and the question of whether or not they may be dominated are central themes in the discussion.

The ethnographers who judged that women were not dominated, perceived, in several instances, female participation in apparently male activities (Faithorn, Feil), and in another instance, female
autonomy deriving from women's ability to circumvent male political advantage and denigrating gender ideology (Strathern). The Lowlands ethnographers identified a male-female complementarity produced by equal but different gendered interests and powers (Weiner, Errington and Gewertz).

More recently, ethnographers (e.g., Strathern) have adopted a highly culturally relativist perspective, invoking indigenous meanings and symbolisms, and bypassing the evidence of what appears to anthropologists as "domination" (e.g., the existence of denigrating ideology, women's lack of political and property rights, violence perpetrated by men against women). These interpretations suggest that "domination" is a cultural construction dependent on the definition of person. In addition, gender ideology is considered to be a symbolic code that serves as a moral evaluation of social behaviours. Thus, the devaluation of "femaleness", while passing judgement on certain forms of social action, does not enact the denigration or the domination of women.

In contrast, neo-marxist ethnographers in the 1980's (Josephides, Godelier) rely on Western-based definitions of person and domination, and imply that these and the concept of appropriation (of property or products of labour and of the qualities of persons) are cross-culturally applicable. They argue that Highland women were indeed dominated and that this domination was an independent and observable reality.

Both recent views of the status of Highland women (symbolic and neo-marxist) are limited. While the symbolic studies suggest an
indigenous model of culture as mental structure, the neo-marxist studies suggest an anthropological model of power, control and domination. In the conclusion of the thesis I suggest that anthropologists must devote less attention to apparently permanent ideological or material structures and states of inequality or fixed status, and greater attention to the processes of domination and of women's contestation, taking women's own perspectives into account.
# Table of Contents

## Abstract

## Introduction

### Chapter 1: Sexual Antagonism

- **Introduction**
- **Defining the Sexual Antagonism Model**
- **Lchers and Prudes: A Sexual Antagonism Typology**
- **Sexual Antagonism in the Eastern Highlands**
- **Critique of Sexual Antagonism**
- **Conclusion**

### Chapter 2: Women as Persons

- **Introduction**
- **Melpa Women: Domestic Persons**
- **Kafe Women: Political Persons**
- **Enga Women's Role in the *Tee* Exchange**
- **Critique: Inclusion and Exclusion**
- **Conclusion**

### Chapter 3: Gendered Domains and Sexual Complementarity

- **Introduction**
- **Trobriand Women's Socio-cosmic Power**
- **Male-Female Complementarity in Chambri Society**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complementarity and Personhood</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: DECONSTRUCTING DOMINATION:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSON AND GENDER AS IDEOLOGY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melanesian and Western Persons</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Misuse of a Western Concept of Person</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects, Objects, Women and Property</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender as a Symbolic Code</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melpa Gender Symbolism</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paiela and Mendi Gender Ideologies</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Melanesian Aesthetic</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: RECONSTRUCTING DOMINATION: NEO-MARXIST PERSPECTIVES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Domination and Material Appropriation</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kewa</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Appropriation of Women's Products</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Political Position of Kewa Women</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kewa Gender Ideology</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of Josephides</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ideological Appropriation of Reproduction</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Baruya</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Political Position of Baruya Women 234
Initiation: a Mechanism of Male Domination 237
The Ideological Justification of Male Domination 239
Critique of Godelier 243
Conclusion 255

CONCLUSION 259

BIBLIOGRAPHY 278
The Cultural Construction of Gender

Margaret Mead's early studies of women and gender roles across a range of New Guinea societies made a significant contribution to anthropology's inquiry into cultural differences, human behaviour and social relations. Mead's data has not escaped critical re-examination and her naive authority and ahistorical approach have been criticized (see Clifford 1988:230-3, Errington and Gewertz 1987, Freeman 1983, Gewertz 1981, 1984). However, her perspective on the sexes and the underlying premise of Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (1935), that is, that male and female behaviour and gender relations are largely socio-cultural constructions, has endured.

Supported by many recent analyses more sophisticated than Mead's, this premise has become a powerful analytical tool with which to examine how men and women in particular societies constitute themselves and their beliefs about the sexes. The idea that "gender" is constructed within a particular set of cultural coordinates and historical circumstances (see Ortner and Whitehead 1981, Strathern 1981a) has provided a grounded basis for examining the social positions of women and men, their roles and inter-relations. In Melanesian ethnography, it has also provided
a new perspective for examining these in relation to production, exchange, forms of social and political action, notions of power, concepts of personhood, gender ideologies and symbols, and ideas of male domination and sexual inequality.

In this thesis I examine the discourse of sex and gender in Melanesian ethnography with a view to illuminating anthropological understandings of gender relations and the social and political positions of women in several New Guinea societies. I evaluate the anthropological discourse of gender relations and explore ethnographers' adjudications of women's status, attending particularly to notions of power, the question of women's domination and the absence of women's perspectives. In the chapters of this thesis, I examine a series of models of gender relations and women's status. Before proceeding to an overview of these models, I briefly review the problematic ideological bases of anthropological constructions of gender.

Androcentrism and the Construction of Gender

... there is a profound reluctance on the part of the discipline to come to terms with the social contribution of women to their society and to develop theories which accommodate women as social actors in their own right ... we know too little of the female half of society to argue for
male dominance as an enduring, timeless reality (Bell 1983:246).

In the course of this century of modern anthropology, both prior to and subsequent to Mead's seminal work in the 1930's, social scientific perspectives on the sexes and their relations have been strongly moulded by Western beliefs. Nineteenth century social theory and post-Victorian concerns with sexuality, "natural" sexual polarity, the domestic/public dichotomy, the definition of the family and ideas of appropriate social roles for the sexes have all held sway over the anthropological reading of gender (see Coward 1983, Rosaldo 1980). To date, there has been very little in the way of feminist-informed descriptions of entire societies, and the anthropological discourse on women and gender has long harboured an androcentric bias. Recent feminist scholars have criticized Western-biased and androcentric anthropology and have clarified the extent to which gender relations and women's lives have been neglected, undervalued and misrepresented by the social and theoretical concerns of male-dominated social science (see, for example, Bell 1983, Dahlberg 1981, Leacock 1981, Sacks 1979, Sanday 1981, Tiffany 1982, 1984, Tiffany and O'Brien 1984, Weiner 1976).

Anthropological attempts to assess the status of women in "male-dominated" societies, and indeed, the concept of
domination, have been notoriously problematic. Anthropologists have tended to emphasize clan organization and the ambiguity of women's positions in patrilineal societies, depicting women's lives largely in terms of the structural constraints imposed upon them by an "exterior" (male) society (see Rubin 1975). Women have also been invisible in anthropological studies of politics, seen either as non-political or politically insignificant (Tiffany 1987). This view of women, in part a legacy of the Victorian idea of public society and political action as male, has also been the object of feminist attention (e.g., De Beauvoir 1952, Sacks 1979, Tiffany 1987, Tiffany and Adams 1985).


The "universal subordination" debate highlighted the difficulty that Western social science has had in
conceptualizing difference in a non-hierarchical way. Generalizations about women's status and social roles have been framed mainly in terms of reproductive constraints (see Quinn 1977, Mukhopadhyay and Higgins 1988); that is, ethnographers tended to see women as "limited" by their reproductivity to "lower" orders of activity, individualistic and domestic pursuits. This logic rests on two culturally specific constructions that strongly influenced the New Guinea literature from the 1950's to the 1970's. These are: (a) the dichotomization of social life into a domestic sphere and a more highly valued public sphere, and (b) the perception of women as primarily reproducers.

In addition to these prevailing androcentric perspectives on social forms, the absence of formal political structures in Highland New Guinea societies led early ethnographers to characterize these societies as egalitarian, at the same time as they characterized Highland women as domestic, reproductive and oppressed. In the tradition of liberal notions of "social equality" or "equality of opportunity" the "equal" individual is, in fact, a male individual (see Jolly 1987). Thus, the ethnographically famed Melanesian "egalitarianism" was, as Jolly notes, "typically about equal opportunities between men" (1987:170). Forge (1972) also pointed to the unexamined or gender-neutral use of the term "egalitarian" and has suggested that its invocation inadvertently obscured the facts
of inequality between men and women, and among men. Moreover, few ethnographers addressed the question of inequalities among women, perpetuating the perception of women as a uniform group and objective analytical category.¹

The Purpose of the Thesis

The major purpose of this thesis, as I have already indicated, is to examine a variety of ways in which ethnographers have understood gender relations and the social and political status of women in New Guinea, primarily the Highlands, where, notions of male egalitarianism aside, the question of the domination of women and sexual inequality has long permeated the discourse. I consider a few key pieces of ethnographic literature produced during the forty-year period from the 1950's to the present, taking the "sexual antagonism" model of the 1950's (e.g., Read 1954) as a point of departure, and the recent work of Strathern (1988) and some of her contemporaries (e.g., Errington and Gewertz 1987, Godelier 1986, Josephides 1985) as an endpoint. In order to examine the premises behind the discourse of gender in a manageable fashion for the purposes of this thesis, I direct my discussion to five themes that reflect that changing

¹ I return to the question of inequalities among women in my discussion of Godelier (1986) in Chapter 5, and in the Conclusion.
discourse. In Chapters 1 through 5, I address each of these themes in turn.

Five Gender Themes in the Ethnography of New Guinea


(2) In the 1970's ethnographers introduced the concept of women as persons in their own right. Some scholars argue that women participated in and wielded power in male spheres of action (Faithorn 1976, Feil 1978a, 1978b). Strathern (1972) argues that Melpa women were political minors, but full persons in the domestic domain. Both versions of "women as persons" are part of a generalized feminist correction of the androcentric biases of "sexual antagonism".

(3) Two explicitly feminist studies, both dealing with Lowland New Guinea societies, produced a decade apart, posit complementary gender relations and sexual equality. The ethnographers suggest that the sexes pursued different but complementary interests, exercised different but complementary powers, and functioned as persons in distinct but equal domains of activity. They suggest that "power", "person" and
"domination" are culturally determined and may not be considered independent analytical categories (Weiner 1976, Errington and Gewertz 1987).

(4) Recent ethnographers, in a move towards even greater cultural relativism, invoke indigenous ideologies of person and gender, distinguishing these from social practices and producing a deconstruction of the male domination of women. Person, subject, property and ownership are considered to be Western concepts and therefore not applicable to Melanesian relations (Strathern 1984a, 1984b). Gender ideology is considered a symbolic code and social idiom whose imagery does not merely reflect what men and women "are", but structures other values and serves as a moral evaluation of social behaviours and actions (Battaglia 1983, Biersack 1984, Kahn 1986, Lederman 1980, 1986, Strathern 1978, 1980, 1981b, 1988). Thus, these ethnographers argue that Melanesian persons may not be dominated in the Western sense of the term, and that ideologies denigrating female qualities do not constrain women's lives.

(5) In the 1980's neo-marxists have argued that Highland women were indeed dominated and that this domination was an independent and observable reality. These ethnographers re-open the subjects of political power and ideological control, casting them as prevailing social realities, and suggesting that anthropologists may indeed make critical assessments

Because these themes are complexly inter-related, their elaboration in the Melanesian literature has perforce not occurred in distinct and successive stages. However, these themes do represent an evolution of different theoretical and political interests. They represent shifts in thinking that are significant for their radical differences in underlying assumptions, overall perspective and choice of object of analysis (see also, Mead 1935 vs. Errington and Gewertz 1987, Gewertz 1981, 1984 on the Chambri; Wedgwood 1937a, 1937b vs. Luktehaus 1982 on the Manam Islanders).

The Problem of Domination

The subjects of Chapters 4 and 5 indicate differences in analytical assumptions that ultimately revolve around the legitimacy of adjudications of domination. In these chapters, I examine two disparate and incompatible approaches to understanding domination which provide the ammunition for a debate about how the status of Highland women is to be understood. Those ethnographers who adopt a culturally relativist perspective and invoke indigenous meanings and symbolisms, particularly Strathern, dismantle the evidence of what appears to anthropologists as domination. "Domination"
and "inequality", the argument states, are themselves cultural constructions and must be considered in relation to a set of cultural premises about persons and action. In contrast, neo-marxist ethnographers identify the production of inequality through social practices, and the creation of structures of domination. Josephides (1985), for example, views the relationship between production and exchange as a mechanism producing an objectively verifiable economic domination. Power, person, domination and how these are to be defined dominate the discussion of gender in the 1980's and challenge anthropological frames of reference.

A Note About Ethnographic Variation

In attempting to make comparisons and contrasts of the anthropological interpretations of the political position of women in New Guinea societies, ethnographic variation must, of course, be taken into account. This discussion focuses almost entirely on Highlands societies, in which the socio-cultural similarities largely outweigh the differences. The exceptions in this discussion are the Lowlands societies, the Trobriand Islands (Weiner 1976) and Chambri (Errington and Gewertz 1987). It is significant that it is in these societies that ethnographers have detected complementary gender relations and sexual equality, an assessment that no
ethnographer, regardless of theoretical perspective, has made of the Highlands.
CHAPTER 1
SEXUAL ANTAGONISM

Introduction

The New Guinea Highlands have been characterized as an area of remarkable cultural homogeneity in spite of considerable linguistic diversity and a large number of small autonomous political units (Langness 1967:161). Early ethnographers produced cultural descriptions that emphasized common economic, religious and political patterns. Thus, Langness writes:

All of the Highlanders are horticulturalists and pig raisers, and hunting is a minor activity. The staple crop everywhere is the sweet potato ... Material culture has only slight regional variations. The gross features of religious, political and economic organization likewise resemble one another ... The major rituals are alike in their fundamentals (Langness 1967:161).

Langness does, however, note significant variations in "courtship, marriage and sexual behaviour" (1967:162). All the same, ethnographers consistently detected highly charged relations between the sexes, and characterised Highland New Guinea societies as "male-dominated" and "sexually antagonistic".

Although the term "sexual antagonism" appears in post-Victorian literature (e.g., Heape 1913) and in early psychoanalytic and "culture and personality" literature (e.g.,
Roheim 1926), it came into wider usage only in the 1950's and 60's in the ethnography of the New Guinea Highlands. Read (1952, 1954), Meggitt (1964) and Langness (1967) define "sexual antagonism" as a pattern of opposition and tension in male-female relations.

Ethnographers of "sexually antagonistic" societies depict women as oppressed, subject to measures of male control, and dangerous to men because of their abilities to pollute and to use sorcery. They portray women as engaging mainly in domestic and subsistence activities, excluded from the political and ceremonial activities of "male" society. Furthermore, these ethnographers represent the interests of the sexes as frequently opposed; inter-sexual relations, particularly between wives and husbands, are characterized as tense and hostile. Indeed, some anthropologists suggested that this sexual polarity created two distinct subcultures sustained by an elaborate pollution ideology, residential segregation, strict gender division of labour and separate spheres of personal and ritual action (Herdt 1981, Meggitt 1964, Read 1954, Wedgwood 1930).

In this chapter I examine the use of the concept of "sexual antagonism" in the work of Read, Meggitt and Langness. Their portraits of Highland societies will serve as an introduction both to the region as a whole, and to current issues in the study of gender relations.
Defining the Sexual Antagonism Model

Read's two important early articles, "The Nama Cult of the Central Highlands, New Guinea" (1952) and "The Cultures of the Central Highlands, New Guinea" (1954), constitute the first instance in Melanesian ethnography of what may be called the "sexual antagonism" model.

The Gahuku-Gama were a group of tribes that, at the time of Read's fieldwork, numbered roughly eight thousand people living in the area around Goroka, in the Asaro Valley in the Central/Eastern Highlands of New Guinea. Because much of the present discussion is intimately concerned with Highlands ethnography, Read's general description of Highlands societies serves as an introduction to the common ethnographic features of the area:

... the sweet potato is their staple crop, and much the same subsidiary foodstuffs - bananas, yams, taro, pit-pit, and various greens are cultivated everywhere, though there are some regional variations ... The simple digging stick and stone adze are the principal implements ... Gold-lip shell (pidgin English kina) is an important valuable throughout the region ... Ceremonial dress is everywhere brilliant and elaborate, but in general the decorative and pictorial arts are not highly developed ... Social structures are non-centralized and segmentary. There is no rank or class system ... hereditary leadership is not found anywhere ... There are no specifically political offices. Kinship, economic and religious institutions provide the framework for political action and operate politically when occasion arises ... The economic pattern is that of a subsistence economy in which there is a margin of goods for ceremonial exchange ... The basic economic unit is the family, whose members provide for most of their joint needs ...
Money has rapidly entered the economy, but for the most part wealth still consists primarily of perishables. Any accumulation of wealth can only be for a short time, and it does not, therefore, give rise to permanent class distinctions though it confers prestige ... (1954:7-12 passim).

"Gahuku-Gama culture", Read states, "is characteristically Melanesian in respect of certain salient features" (1952:2). The peoples of the Eastern Highlands traditionally lived in small villages, as opposed to the scattered settlements of the Western Highlands (1954:13). Residential segregation of the sexes and a single men's "club house" were also typical features. The great pig exchanges of the West Highlands existed on a somewhat smaller scale in the East but carried a similar social importance:

Throughout the Highlands, pigs are the most important items of wealth, and the greatest social gatherings are concerned with their exchange between groups (1954:18).

Among the Gahuku-Gama, pig festivals were primarily a group activity, and individual prestige was more intimately bound up with group achievement than in the Western Highlands, where complex networks of exchange provided greater opportunity for individual prestige-seeking. Like other peoples of Highland New Guinea, the Gahuku-Gama traditionally engaged with known enemies in coordinated warfare characterized by "aspects of expectation and regulation" (1952:2).

Of the typical social features that Read notes, the most notable is "the absence of chieftainship and of any sui generis
political machinery or offices" (1952:2). The Gahuku-Gama "tribe" was simply the largest group within which warfare did not occur. Tribal territory was divided among sub-tribal groups composed of patrilineal clans, and there were no tribal territorial rights as such. Strong tribal bonds did exist, however, with "the great idza nama festivals" functioning primarily as "an expression of tribal unity" (1952:3). The subclan (dzuha), "a strictly exogamous, landholding and predominantly local group" (1952:3-4), was the functional political unit and, more frequently in the past than in Read's time, also formed a residential group. The subclan was "made up of a number of related patrilineages", each having "a depth of between four and five generations" (1952:3-4). Read notes that Gahuku-Gama patrilineal ideology was strong, but that other social principles impinged on its supremacy:

While the patrilineage is, again, mostly a local residential group the very strong bonds which exist between age-mates may operate to modify the internal structure. Thus, some men prefer to set up house and identify themselves in everyday affairs with the members of other lineages with whom they passed through the initiation rites and spent a long apprenticeship in the men's house (zagusave) (1952:4).

"The cultures of the east" (Highlands), Read states, "are characterized by a marked sex dichotomy which finds its most obvious and elaborate expression in the institution of the men's club house" (1954:12). This "club house" was traditionally the centre of the sacred flute (nama) cult,
and the flutes themselves were "exclusively male possessions" and "apart from their religious significance ... (were) preeminently symbols of male dominance" (1954:12). They were used not only in men's initiation ceremonies, but also in the related idza nama festivals (the ceremonial pig kills), and in fertility rites. Flute tunes passed down through generations were considered "the common and traditional heritage of the males" (1952:7). It was also men's exclusive right to play the flutes; public ideology stated that women knew nothing whatsoever about the flutes, and they were not permitted to see them, but "are compelled to hide whenever the flutes are played, and the penalty for disobeying is death" (1954:25).

In his 1952 article, Read presents a less dogmatic view of women's relationship to the sacred flutes. There, he suggests that the cult did not apply a strictly categorical view of women. This is evident in his description of the dramatic beginning of the cult ceremonies and the parading of the flutes:

An advance guard goes ahead to warn the waiting women of what is coming, and, as the procession passes, these men stand guard, bow in hand, to make sure no female or uninitiated male looks at them ... women either turn their backs or lower their heads where they sit ... Old women, however, are permitted to stand up and face the men, emitting a shrill stylized shout ... (1952:5, my emphasis).
Thus, the flutes clearly symbolized not only the hegemony of men over women, but of the old and the initiated over the young and uninitiated. Women and children, (including uninitiated boys), were led to believe that the sound of the flutes was produced by mythical birds which appeared in the men's house. Yet, Gahuku-Gama men fully acknowledged that "human agents produce the tunes" and that "the nama bird does not exist and was invented for the express purpose of misleading the women and children" (1952:6). Women, however, knew of the existence of the flutes, and men were equally aware of women's knowledge. The deception was perpetrated on all sides.

Read states that the nama flutes were not objects merely "designed for the glorification of a particular sex" (1952:6). While functioning as instruments of male hegemony, they carried an important religious meaning. The flutes were symbols of unity and "the common origin and continuity of a particular group of men" (1952:7) construed in opposition to "women" as a category. Thus, not only were the flutes "the supreme symbol of male hegemony" (1954:25), but, Read suggests, they also glorified social cohesion and transmogrified the practical solidarity of the male group into an enduring value and life principle. The nama cult provided a spiritual confirmation of "the universal validity of the relationships, aims and aspirations of men" (1952:13). The initiation rites themselves
affirmed the rigid sex dichotomy of the culture and the communal nature of male interests.

These initiations involved different ritual treatments for boys according to age. Small boys were temporarily separated from their mothers and briefly exposed to the formal ceremonies of the male world. They were then returned to their mothers, and a few years later entered the next phase of the formal socialization process. Adolescent boys were admitted to the men's houses as novices. Their socialization included daily ritual purifications (nose-bleeding, and cane-swallowing to induce vomiting) that rid them of the contaminating influences of women and guaranteed their physical and masculine development. Following these rites, the boys underwent a period of confinement in the men's house, and subsequently the secret of the flutes was revealed to them. In all, it was a lengthy and arduous period of indoctrination to the male world and male values, carried on in isolation from the female world:

They are allowed only the minimum of contact with women and race about in small bands practising vomiting and blood-letting, and in general, preparing themselves for wider participation in the affairs of men (1952:11).

Older adolescents, having previously undergone initiation rites, repeated them, then entered into a period of seclusion in the men's house and prepared to assume the status of betrothed warriors. The entire initiation period lasted for several years and constituted a formal educational and
socialization process. Boys were inculcated with "the sentiments which underlie the solidarity of the male community" and by means of the same process "the common interests of its members are forged and cemented" (1952:11).

The nama cult, Read suggests, may legitimately be seen as "an artificial and consciously contrived mechanism through which men hope to demonstrate and preserve their superior status" (1952:16). He further describes it as "both an index of male dominance and an institution serving to maintain the status quo of male hegemony" (1952:16). In short, it is Read's assessment that, underlying religious beliefs aside, the nama cult, in operational or effective terms, was primarily about the dominance of men over women. Female dependence, submission and inferiority were translated into spiritual terms, such that male dominance was integrated into the spiritual and ideological meanings of the society. The dominance of men over women became an immutable "fact" of life.

Sexual opposition in Highland societies was perpetrated through both ideology and collective symbolism. It was most forcefully perpetrated through socialization practices, and Read notes that across the Highlands "variations in the treatment of adolescence are of ... significance for the formation of adult sex attitudes" (1954:31). Masculine socialization, particularly, was the key to the perpetration
of generational cycles of tension and antagonism between the sexes.  

One result of male socialization in Gahuku-Gama society was an elaborated cultural differentiation of male and female that was far more than "the simple assignment of complementary roles based on observable or imputed physiological differences" (1952:14). Deeply inculcated beliefs about the sexes and the psychology sustaining those beliefs were mutually reinforcing. "No man", Read states, "regards a woman or her activities as being equal in importance to himself and his own affairs" (1954:24). This masculinist public ideology and social psychology differentially valued both men and women as persons and the masculine and the feminine as principles:

Men are conceived to be the more important members of society. They are, ideally, aggressive, flamboyant, given to quick outbursts of anger - the warriors, guardians of custom, and repositories of knowledge on whom the continued welfare and security of the group depend. Women's role is seen to be one of submission. A disproportionate share of both the drudgery and heavy work entailed in daily life falls to them, while men are free to gossip, indulge in speech-making, and put on their brilliant decorations seek diversion elsewhere. Even in procreation, the woman is assigned a secondary part. She is merely a receptacle for the

Read's emphasis on male socialization is one of the strengths of his work, and his lack of attention to female socialization, one of the weaknesses. Generally, socialization is a theme that has remained underdeveloped in Melanesian ethnography. I will later argue that a strong and highly constructed or institutionalized opposition between the sexes does not exist purely as a formal or aesthetic feature, that is, as a structure, but must be seen as resulting in and from the interaction of social and psychological factors.
man's semen. Without a man, it is said, a woman is nothing; but the converse does not apply, for a man, as a member of the male sex, always, as it were, carries around with him the potentiality of fatherhood, requiring only the submissiveness of a woman to achieve expression. (1952:14).

It is important to note here that this was the male view of the social order. Read reports that Gahuku-Gama men believed that they had to "maintain a constant vigilance to preserve their superiority" and that women, "given the opportunity, are prepared to challenge it" (1952:14). For instance, men contrasted their own desire to have children with women's desires, believing (quite rightly according to Read) that women "dislike bearing children" and "take steps to prevent or terminate pregnancy" (1952:14).

Male socialization in Gahuku-Gama society clearly involved a kind of psychological conditioning, and Read's explanation of "sexual antagonism" accordingly ventures into psychological territory. He identifies a relationship between "sexual antagonism" and the "aggressive" Highland character, emphasizing that "physical aggression and violence is the dominant orientation of the Highland cultures" (1954:22). He relates this tendency to the perpetual state of war in which these cultures, especially those of the Eastern Highlands, existed until relatively recently. However, Read claims that physical aggression was not simply a result of intense inter-group hostility, but was "a more fundamental
trait" (1954:23). Aggressivity and tendencies to violence, Read suggests, characterized most Gahuku-Gama interactions:

Physical violence and antagonism are the warp of the cultural pattern; present to some extent in most important relationships, they receive innumerable forms of symbolic and institutionalized expression (1954:23).

Read's explanation refers to men, but he also notes that women were no less aggressive among themselves. Co-wives often fought viciously, but these fights were typically viewed by men as semi-serious and were likely to be terminated by male intervention.

The institutionalized expression of physical violence included violence perpetrated by men against their wives as punishment for various misdeeds. While the punishment of male or female wrongdoers generally involved "public beatings" and "vicious humiliations" (1954:23), men specifically directed their violence against female sexuality:

Women suspected of adultery have sticks thrust into their vagina, or stripped naked, they are tied to a post while men throw dirt and urinate on them. Beatings across the breasts and shoulders with lengths of rattan cane are common for less for serious offenses (1954:23).

A third important element of male socialization was the cultural belief that "the female principle is in itself ... inimical to men" (1952:14) and therefore to the production of masculinity. Gahuku-Gama masculinity and male superiority were consequently constructed on the precarious basis of men's
self-acknowledged physiological inferiority. Girls were believed to mature "naturally" into women, as breasts begin to grow and menstruation occurs without provocation; nothing was required to engineer the transformational process. It was believed that boys, however, if left to their own devices, would not become men. Manhood had to be achieved. The obvious signs of the female process of maturation are "without obvious parallel" (1952:15) in boys, and men's initiation rites were designed to induce maturation through imitative practices such as cyclical blood-letting. Initiation rites and menstruation were therefore thought to serve similar purposes. Thus, men saw themselves as both superior to and inferior to women. Indeed, their physiological inferiority demanded that they construct for themselves a cultural superiority. The belief that the female principle was inimical to masculinity resulted in a view of sexual relationships as "fraught with dangers" (1954:27). Initiates were separated from women, close contact with whom would sap masculine strength and threaten burgeoning manhood. Sexual intercourse was debilitating and polluting, even for mature married men.

While a danger to men from within, as a source of pollution and a threat to masculinity, Gahuku-Gama women as wives posed a threat to men from without. In-married women did not become members of their husbands' clans, and thus were always regarded as strangers. This permanent outsider
status, what Strathern (1972) has referred to as "in-betweenness", was, from the husband's point of view and that of his clan, a potential danger. The resulting mistrust between spouses not only created marital tension, but also allowed women what may be interpreted as a certain political "power".  

Read argues that women's political "power" consisted of resistance and recalcitrance in the face of inevitable male domination. To escape the restrictive parameters of their ideologically assigned position, women resorted to "extreme" tactics: the use of sorcery and the desertion of husbands. For a Gahuku-Gama man to achieve social adulthood, he had to marry and produce children and "no one has a high opinion of him if he is unable to do so" (1954:29). Thus, by leaving marriages, women inconvenienced their husbands. Read states that "in most cases a woman's leaving a man results in a "violent reaction" and "ceaseless litigation" (1954:28). Yet, women possessed no legitimate powers or rights corresponding to the ideological legitimacy ascribed to male superiority.

In addition, women posed an even greater threat to men as "the principal agents through which a sorcerer works" (1954:27). Young men were warned to steer clear of sexual offers that could be attempts on the part of women to procure

---

3 But see my critique of Strathern's similar argument in Chapters 2 and 4.
semen for use in sorcery. Thus, a man's wife was, in one sense, his most deadly enemy.

For a young man the paradox of sex was truly a double bind. The social pressures of masculine values impressed deeply upon him the paramount importance of marriage to his social position, and yet women posed a threat to his very survival. In the essential processes of courtship and marriage, his personal well-being and his social well-being came into conflict.

Read's analysis of the sexual politics of Gahuku-Gama society highlights the relationship between ideology and practice. He focuses on the "partial and largely formal realization of the male ideal ..." (1954:30), noting that the ideal rests on a contradiction: "men feel that women challenge their authority and oppose their interests, and ... one of their principal concerns is to demonstrate and preserve their superiority" (1954:30).

"Lechers" and "Prudes": A Sexual Antagonism Typology

Read argued that male-female hostility probably occurred throughout the Highlands in a variety of forms. His description of the cultural differences between the Eastern and Western Highlands suggested to Meggitt the possibility of "consistent regional differences in the pattern of relationships between men and women" (Meggitt 1964:205). Meggitt subsequently
proposed a comparative measure of the tension and opposition
between the sexes across Highlands societies.

Meggitt was not concerned with the causes of inter-sexual
hostility; his model is largely descriptive and classificatory,
and aims to show that the variations in inter-sexual relations
were "correlated with the presence or absence of particular
kinds of men's purificatory cults, with differences in the
status of women in everyday life and the degree of hostility
existing between affinally related groups" (1964:206). Meggitt
suggests that there existed two identifiable types of inter-
sexual opposition: the Mae type (men as "prudes") and the
Kuma type (men as "lechers"). In addition, he suggests that
a third type of "sexual antagonism", a combination of the
Mae and Kuma types, existed in the Eastern Highlands.

Meggitt focuses principally on male socialization, giving
little direct attention to women, detailing the effects of
femininity on masculinity and male beliefs about women. Indeed,
we note that his identified types, "prudes" and "lechers",
refer to male attitudes, reactions and behaviours towards
women.

Meggitt takes the Mae Enga of the Western Highlands as
his principal case study. The Mae Enga numbered about 30,000
out of a total Enga population of 100,000 in 1964. Like other
Highlanders, the Mae Enga were sedentary horticulturalists
who grew sweet potatoes, raised pigs and participated in an
elaborate system of ceremonial exchange (the tee). The important socio-political groups were the localized patriclan and its subclans, composed of patrilineages. Residential separation of the sexes was the common practice at the time of Meggitt's fieldwork, but the men's house was not, as in Gahuku-Gama society, the centre of any ritual activity, but simply a meeting and sleeping place.

From an early age, children, especially boys, actively internalized cultural beliefs in the fundamental differences between the sexes. Adult men advised young boys against spending excessive amounts of time in the company of women. At around five years of age, boys began sleeping in the men's houses and spending the majority of their time with other boys. Under the supervision of older youths and adult men, they were instructed in a set of rigid beliefs about the female sex. Like Gahuku-Gama boys, they were taught that women were polluting and dangerous, and that menstruation and birth were unclean processes, dangerous and debilitating to masculinity. Thus, much like Gahuku-Gama society, Mae Enga society perpetrated through socialization an "enduring complex of beliefs, attitudes and usages connected with the assumption that women are intrinsically unclean" (1964:208).

Given these beliefs, Mae Enga men's angst about sexuality is understandable; they were actively inculcated with beliefs that reproduced acute gynephobia. "There is a fear", Meggitt
states, "that copulation is in itself detrimental to male well-being" (1964:210). As a result, "the ordinary husband copulates with his wife only as often as he thinks necessary to beget children and, naturally enough, regards with abhorrence any erotic preliminaries to the sexual act" (1964:210). To what degree Mae men's statements about sex reflect their feelings when engaged in the act is not clear from Meggitt's analysis.

Mae women thus posed a threat to masculinity. The male initiation ritual (sanggai) was consequently designed to cleanse and strengthen young unmarried men, and to protect them from the onslaught of debilitating female influences to which adult life inevitably exposed them. The sanggai involved a short period of seclusion and purificatory rituals, but it did not entail the blood-letting or vomiting of the Gahuku-Gama ritual. Rather, sanggai purifications were based on various dietary restrictions and other prohibitions "which aim at completely shielding ... (the initiates) from femininity, sexuality and impurity". Thus, "not only must they avoid women", but also "they may not use anything already polluted by women's viewing" (1964:213).

When the young men emerged from the ritual house after several days of activities, they joined a public celebration that included the singing of blatantly sexual songs, ritual teasing, and the selection of bachelors by parties of girls.
These activities triggered a cycle of competitive singing performed by groups of young men, and on the following day, singing, dancing, feasting and speech-making proceeded. It was a general celebration of the emergence of the bachelors as "new men". The whole affair culminated in several days of pompous parading:

... the armed and decorated bachelors perambulate the territories of their own and neighbouring clans to show off their "new skin" and their finery. They halt frequently to chant topical songs and at night sleep in men's houses wherever they are visiting; they must not enter women's houses or accept food from women. On the last morning they go back to the seclusion houses and remove their ornaments and change into ordinary dress. Then they cook and share a meal of pork or fowl before returning to everyday life where, strengthened by the rituals, they face once more the insidious influence of unclean women (1964:216-217).

From Meggitt's description, it is clear that Mae women were actively and formally involved in this ceremony:

Throughout the preceding afternoon parties of girls arrive, and the mothers and sisters of the bachelors offer them hospitality. At dusk the girls assemble in groups on the dance-ground, and those who have sweethearts or friends among the bachelors lead the singing, which refers indelicately to the young men’s attributes .... These songs greatly embarrass the married men, who ostentatiously leave the dance ground ... At dawn the girls gather on the danceground and, still chanting, set off for the seclusion area. There they all sing by the outer gateway, then those who fancy particular bachelors sing at the inner gateways of the seclusion houses (1964:214-215 passim).

In spite of women's obviously active participation in the male initiation ceremonies, Meggitt concludes that they
"rarely participate(s) in public affairs except to provide food for men or to give evidence in court cases" (1964:221). Mae men, he argues, "have won their battle and have relegated women to an inferior position" (1964:220). Thus, he characterizes Mae women's status as relatively low, and women themselves as "jural minors", "passive" and "less mobile" (1964:221). Women, he claims, "maintain a much narrower range of social relationships" (1964:221). In addition, male fear of female sexuality determined inter-sexual relations considerably more restrained than those among the Kuma of the Central Highlands.

Meggitt's distinction between the Mae and Kuma types of societies and types of intersexual conflict is based mainly on differences in male attitudes and behaviours towards women. Thus, Mae men were "prudes" who exhibited an overriding fear of female sexuality and avoided contact with women, while Kuma men were "lechers" who sought frequent sexual access to women:

The one reflects the anxiety of prudes to protect themselves from contamination by women, the other the aggressive determination of lechers to assert their control over recalcitrant women (1964:221).

Meggitt thus constructs his model of Mae Enga "prudes" on a "constellation of traits which includes fear of sexuality and of pollution, emphasis on a male cult and frequent conflict between affinally related groups" (1964:219-220). In contrast,
among the Kuma, "men have little or no fear of contamination by women" and "premarital sexual intercourse is common and uncondemned". Furthermore, "Kuma do not attribute enduring hostility to affines" (1964:220). Meggitt concludes that these features are correlated:

... in Highlands societies, where there is no persisting animosity between affinally connected groups, there is also little or no fear of feminine pollution and sexuality (1964:220).

The principle characteristics of Kuma "lechers" were their lack of generalized fear of female sexuality and their desire to exercise control over women. Men's efforts to dominate women in Kuma society thus produced "a deep-rooted antagonism between the sexes" (1964:220). Meggitt's analysis of Kuma society relies on Reay's ethnography in which she judges that "relations between men and ... women ... are characterized by a fundamental antagonism" (Reay 1959:161), and that, although sexual antagonism "is not stressed in ritual", it is "basic to Kuma life" (1959:162). Kuma women, she notes, displayed "undisguised recalcitrance" (1959:162) for bearing children and marriages were "fraught with tension" (1959:162):

Women who are pampered and sought as young girls resent polygyny, openly envy their husbands' sanctioned promiscuity and are generally dissatisfied with the place assigned to them by the men (1959:162).
Meggitt, however, minimizes these sexual tensions in favour of emphasizing Kuma women's "relatively high social status" (1964:220). While "men continually strive to dominate women", Meggitt states, women "obstruct men's aims by exercising choices the men try to deny them" (Meggitt 1964:220, Reay 1959:23). Indeed, Meggitt assesses Kuma women's status primarily in reference to the fact that men are not always successful in their attempts "to combat those expressions of feminine "unreliability" that would undermine male pretensions to superiority" (1964:220). At the same time, as I have already noted, he adjudicates women's status on the basis of the lesser degree of fear of female pollution and sexuality.⁴

The third type of "sexual antagonism", the Eastern Highlands type, was, Meggitt suggests, a combination of the

⁴ Reay's own conclusions about Kuma women's social status, however, clearly suggest that it was an unenviable one. She describes "the warring of the sexes" (p.192) and women's brutal conditioning to "a most unequal social position" (p.192), noting that "male dominance is manifest in every institutional context" (p.23). However, while stressing male dominance, Reay also identifies women's "distinctive" values, their "disturbing ways" of interpreting male values (p.23), and their ability to "obstruct the men's achievement" (p.156). I would argue that if women's "freedom" is perceived to determine their "status", "status" itself becomes problematic, dependent on the degree to which women may exercise their freedom. With respect to the Kuma, we may ask: to what extent did women's distinctive values translate into real possibilities for controlling their lives? Kuma women's freedom, Reay implies, did exist, but was constructed within the parameters of the prevailing ideology, one that legitimated male dominance. Later in the discussion I return to the relationship between generalized male dominance and female autonomy.
Mae and Kuma types. Moreover, this antagonism defined women's status: "... the position of women in the Eastern Highlands falls somewhere between that of women of the Central Highlands and that of women of the Western Highlands" (Meggitt 1964:222). Thus, Eastern Highlands women were both highly polluting and the objects of constant sexual conquest. Although young men were admonished to avoid contact with women and particularly to abstain from sexual activity, "most men, married or single, are engaged in a constant sexual struggle" (1964:221). Citing Berndt's study of the Kamano of the Eastern Highlands (1962), Meggitt points out that the more sexual activity a man engaged in, "the more highly are his strength and powers assessed. His sexual relations with women are regarded as a kind of armed combat" (1962:129; Meggitt 1964:221-222). Meggitt concludes that the position of women in these societies was "ambiguous" and that their lives were at times "severely restricted" and their status "depressed". However, they simultaneously "enjoy considerable sexual freedom and actual physical mobility" (1964:222).

Meggitt's model established a typology with which to judge both the degree of "sexual antagonism" and the political status of women in any Highland society. Thus, his conclusion:

... women's status is highest in those societies which do not sharply conceptualize long-term hostility between affinally related groups and do not stress the initiation of youths into male associations (1964:222).
Sexual Antagonism in the Eastern Highlands

Langness's essay (1967) on "sexual antagonism" among the Bena Bena of the Eastern Highlands was directly inspired by Meggitt's suggestion that, in addition to the Mae ("prudes") and the Kuma ("lechers") types of Highland intersexual hostility, a third type of sexual antagonism existed mainly in the Eastern Highlands. Using the Bena Bena as a case study, Langness examines this Eastern Highlands type. He surpasses Meggitt's descriptive model by positing "a genuine and/or functional nexus between four disparate phenomena, namely: warfare, male solidarity, sex and dependency needs, and hostility between the sexes" (1967:163). His basic proposition is as follows:

... living in a hostile environment and faced with the almost constant threat of annihilation by enemy groups, has resulted in or is related to a distinctive pattern of male solidarity which offers what the Bena Bena perceive as a better chance for survival (1967:163).

In the 1960's, the Bena Bena numbered roughly 14,000 people belonging to some sixty-five independent tribes. These consisted of exogamous patrilineal clans that had traditionally co-operated in warfare and conducted joint initiation ceremonies and annual pig exchanges. Warfare had previously been endemic, and defence of primary importance. Traditionally, men slept in separate houses and were always prepared for defensive action.
This pattern of male defensive solidarity was closely linked to male psychological ambivalence about female sexuality. Although Bena Bena men were wary of the dangers of femininity, they valued attracting women and having many wives and children. Within their own groups men did not fear female sorcery, nor did they express the categorical fears of menstrual blood expressed by Gahuku-Gama men. Indeed, sexual matters were frequently the subject of joking; pre-marital sex was encouraged and all-night parties during which young people made love with several different partners were held every few weeks in the men's houses. Nevertheless, male feelings towards women were ambiguous, and this was reflected in what Langness calls the "curious contradiction" (1967:166) of male initiation: men were socialized to attract and pursue that which was most dangerous to masculinity - the female sex.

Through religious expression, of which the male initiation ceremonies were a part, Bena Bena men exclusively maintained their own values: prestige, male fertility and patrilineal ideology. As among the Gahuku-Gama, "the men's cult constitutes the religious system, which operates on the principle of male superiority" (1967:175). Male initiation ceremonies thus explicitly reinforced the value of male solidarity and perpetrated a masculinist ideology.
Bena Bena male initiation procedures and ritual purifications closely resembled those of the Gahuku-Gama (Read 1952, 1954). After a period of practising nose- and penis-bleeding and cane-swallowing, initiated youths were inducted into the *nama* cult. Once again, the initiation process was "designed to impress upon the youths the importance of male solidarity and the evils of associating too much with women" (1967:165). Implicit in Bena Bena religious beliefs was a paradox reflecting ambivalent inter-sexual relations: the "secret" *nama* flutes and the cult constructed around them were not the closely guarded male secrets that men publicly claimed them to be.

Langness claims that women accepted the *nama* cult as a ritual expression of male dominance. Interestingly, he also questions why women accepted the situation as it was, suggesting that they must have believed that male dominance was essential to their survival:

... both men and women accept the situation for what it is - a ritual expression of the relations that obtain between males and females, a means whereby males can exert their dominance over, and solidarity against, females. It is an expression of clan strength and unity ... It is difficult to understand how the farce can perpetuate itself, and why women in particular continue to accept it, if there is not some felt realization on the part
of all people that things must be the way they are, that male solidarity is a necessity (1967:174). 5

Whether Bena Bena women consistently accepted male dominance or not, socialization to adult responsibilities prepared girls and young women for politically restricted lives. As children, girls participated more in domestic work and functioned as "relatively important adjuncts to female economic activities" (1967:167). Then, following first menstruation, they were allowed a period of relative freedom before marriage. Upon marriage the political position of women was altered, and subsequently differed dramatically from that of married men. At an early age, girls showed reluctance to enter into the confines of marriage, and Langness notes that, generally, Bena Bena girls actively resisted marriage and resented the increased responsibilities and more restricted life-style that marriage presented. Running away was common, but "invariably they are located and brought back, often by violent means" (1967:169).

The differences between Bena Bena women's position in marriage and that of men applied equally to sexual relations. Young wives undertook a considerably altered lifestyle, living

5 The notion that there existed a "felt realization on the part of all people that things must be the way they are" is problematic because of its failure to account for women's perspectives. I return later in the discussion to the question of women's "acceptance" of male dominance and the problem of deconstructing power-neutral terminology.
with their mothers-in-law and assuming the adult responsibilities of their new state. Newly married men, however, continued in the juvenile and irresponsible pattern of their adolescence: "Young men", Langness states, "continue to court whether married or not" (1967:169). However, if an unhappy new bride became sexually involved with one of her new husband's relatives, she was "invariably blamed" and sent back to her own people in disgrace. Divorce was common, and marriages were tense:

... even in the best marriages there are continuing tensions having to do with attitudes towards women, rules regarding sexual behaviour, and the amount of time a man can comfortably spend with a woman (1967:170).

Langness makes his strongest argument about the restricted political position of Bena Bena women in his discussion of their clan status. Firstly, patrilineal ideology marginalized women within the clans into which they married. Thus, Langness notes that women were by nature "extra-group" and had little input into major group decisions:

Men make all major decisions as to when and where to garden, when and where to move, when to hold pig exchanges, when to buy brides, when to fight etc. Women have nothing to do with decisions about major activities, whether they be ritual, social, religious or political; and they have only slight direct influence on economic tasks (1967:166).

Consequently, men treated female relationships, for example, those between co-wives, with a lack of seriousness indicative of their belief in women's lesser importance to the group.
The following commentary about fights between co-wives and the potential for negative impact on clan welfare suggests that men were seriously concerned with women's interrelationships only insofar as these disrupted men's own clan-related interests:

Quarrels between co-wives occur ... at the rate of about one per week and are often violent ... Men stand around laughing, unless they struggle becomes too violent, when they intervene. Fights between co-wives are disruptive, and even though the men profess to be indifferent, they are concerned, as the trouble affects the well being of the clan, pig-raising, gardening, and other economic pursuits, all of the things that must be tended to if men are to gain prestige and be successful. The men must have domestic peace, they need children, gardens, pigs and so on, but they also recognize the nature of women and the feelings of animosity between co-wives (1967:171).

Here, it is apparent that men's dependence on women was a factor contributing to their ambivalent feelings. In addition to resenting active female disruption of their affairs, men disliked having to care for themselves when their wives were absent or distracted by their own concerns. Thus, while men perceived women to be politically necessary with respect to relations between and within patriclans, they accorded women little intrinsic value:

... even from the beginning, women cause trouble and hostility within the clan - but not as much as one might suppose, because women tend, ideologically, to be valueless, and none is ultimately worth serious dissention between males of the same clan (1967:169).
The political or clan status of Bena Bena women was equally affected by "the importance of warfare in shaping life" (1967:166). For example, Bena Bena explained the practice of female infanticide (which may be interpreted as a measure of the value of women) in practical terms: girls did not become warriors and were therefore less valuable to the group.

In spite of women's lesser value to the group, a man relied on his wife's co-operation and "... would not think of killing a pig or arranging a marriage for his son or adopted daughter without consulting his wife" (1967:172). While this suggests a hidden measure of complementarity, Langness points out that "ultimately ... in a battle of wills, a husband wins out" (1967:172). The Bena Bena pattern of male and clan solidarity included men's belief that "it (was) ... their responsibility to keep women in line" (1967:165-166).

Bena Bena women were, Langness believes, extremely resentful of this inferior status, and their frustration was both political and sexual. Langness states that in conflicts between husbands and wives "no matter what the precipitating cause of the fight ... the woman at some point in the argument says specifically that her husband does not have intercourse with her" (1967:174). In addition, women were "ashamed of menstruation" and "wish to be men"; they agreed that men were superior because they did not bear children.
On one hand, Langness argues that Bena Bena women accepted male dominance, while on the other, he argues that they "freely admit their discontent" (1967:175) and indirectly expressed "resentment" through "attempts to abort, uncooperativeness, nagging, delight over incidents that frustrate men ... and so on" (1967:175). Concurrence with an ideology of male dominance and acceptance of male superiority appear to conceal envy of male political advantage.

Bena Bena men strove to maintain their position of sexual superiority and solidarity in the face of considerable social change. For example, while some men were keen to live with their wives, others rejected greater sexual integration. The major obstacle to greater sexual equality was the persistence of religious beliefs and the continued existence of the nama flutes. Yet women's political position had improved. Langness notes, for example, that women no longer committed suicide at the death of husbands out of fear for their own treatment at the hands of new husbands. By 1967 Bena Bena men had become familiar with the notion that "a woman has certain rights and freedoms ... that she did not possess before" (1967:176).

Langness concludes that although Bena Bena men feared female pollution, the "highly elaborated purificatory cult" (1967:176) that existed among the Mae Enga was severely attenuated. Thus Bena Bena women's status (the degree of political control over their own lives), was higher than that
of Mae Enga women. The degree to which sexual antagonism did exist in Bena Bena society was, Langness states, due to a complex psychology that required both male solidarity and a precise measure of sexual hostility:

... the exigencies of warfare have made it necessary to sacrifice the satisfaction of certain individual needs. This affects males differently from females but results in mutual hostility and antagonism ... Bena Bena beliefs and rituals appear to attempt to control the expression of hostility between the sexes but simultaneously to betray an understanding of the necessity for it (1967:176-177).

In short, Langness interprets Bena Bena "sexual antagonism" and the ambivalent relationship between men and women as meeting the survival needs of the group. Because it could not accommodate "individual needs", this sexual opposition took its toll in human or individual terms. Socially valued male solidarity thus obstructed any "natural" potential for harmonious relations between men and women.

Critique of Sexual Antagonism

The concept of "sexual antagonism" has only recently been critically examined. Herdt and Poole (1982) suggest that in its heyday it served as a cover term for a myriad of beliefs and behaviours, and became a "fictionalized ethos" (1982:21-22) imposed on the Highlands, used as a "metaphoric link" (1982:22) to define an otherwise diverse area. "Sexual antagonism",

... the tradition following Read's (1954) use of the term has covered all of the following: ritual rhetoric; cultural beliefs; ethos; ideology; ritual activities; gender constructs in ritual and domestic discourse; indigenous models of marriage; notions of conception and parturition; personhood and selfhood; morality; the tenor of both formal and informal behaviour; institutionalized social relationships; sex and age aspects of social stratification; the organization of group boundaries and ethnic identities; personal experience; intrapsychic and inter-personal conflict; erotic feelings and excitement; the dynamics of family life; masculinity and femininity in individual development; and other topics (1982:21).

The inclusion in "sexual antagonism" of a wide variety of topics resulted in an advantageous breadth of coverage. Ethnographers did not conceive of "sexual antagonism" as a set of specific features, but rather as a pervasive organizational principle, and consequently it functioned as a broad framework of gender-related issues from which detailed portraits of Highlands societies emerged. Herdt and Poole also note that "sexual antagonism" served a unifying purpose with respect to anthropology's concern with the "culture area" and served to integrate analyses in a comparative framework. "Sexual antagonism" did indeed provide a common theme linking Highlands societies and established a thread of analytical continuity, such as we see in the chain of analysis that connects the works of Read (1952, 1954), Meggitt (1964) and Langness (1967).
In addition, "sexual antagonism" served the important purpose of directing anthropological attention to gender relations and gender-related issues. Ethnographers produced portraits of Highlands societies replete with detailed descriptions of sexual divisions of labour, inter-sexual behaviours, male initiations, gender ideologies, and male beliefs about women and female sexuality. Langness has suggested that in its time "sexual antagonism" was in fact a reasonably appropriate gloss for Highland gender relations (Langness 1982:79), and indeed, simply by putting women and gender relations on the ethnographic agenda, the anthropologists of "sexual antagonism" laid the groundwork for future critical studies that would identify their ethnocentric and androcentric biases.

Herdt and Poole's assessment that the concept of "sexual antagonism" "importantly belongs to our own social discourse and yet seems to address Melanesian cultural patterns as well" (1982:22-23) provides an insight into the anthropological production of ethnocentric and androcentric portraits of Highland women. The "simple, vague and inconsistent" term (Herdt and Poole 1982:4), "sexual antagonism", reflected prevailing Western concerns about the sexes and their relations as much as it mirrored Highland social realities. In grafting Western social scientific constructs, such as the "domestic/public" dichotomy and "politics", onto Melanesian
social forms, ethnographers produced a dreary portrait of Highland women as downtrodden, domestic, socially peripheral and non-political.

At the same time, these ethnocentric views were androcentric. The variety of forms of sexual animosity, male domination and female resistance to male control that were empirically evident in Highlands societies were not examined through women's socialization, experiences and perspectives (cf., Reay 1959). For example, as I have suggested with regard to Read's work, "sexual antagonism" did not adequately consider women's socialization to their sex roles. Discussions of child-rearing and socialization to sexually appropriate behaviours are generally limited in this literature to male-focused descriptions of the debilitating effects of female sexuality on men, explanations of the separation of young boys from women, and details of male initiation and purification rituals.

The weaknesses of "sexual antagonism" fall into two major categories. "Sexual antagonism" highlighted and, indeed, exaggerated: (1) cultural elaboration of differences between the sexes (particularly in physiology), male anxiety associated with female sexuality, and inter-sexual conflict; (2) the essential "maleness" of public culture, women's "acceptance" of masculinist ideology, and women's secondary political status and their subjugation to male control, including physical coercion. I will discuss these two categories of issues in
order to clarify the ethnocentric and androcentric nature of the model, and thereby identify the bases on which later criticism is founded.

Read, Meggitt and Langness focus heavily on the cultural elaboration of the physical differences between the sexes, but most significantly, they emphasize the implications of these differences for men. Meggitt, for example, provides lengthy descriptions of the effects of female persons and female substances on men, with little discussion of women's strategic or political use of their polluting powers (Meggitt 1964:207).

These ethnographers also focus primarily on men's views of women and the masculinist aspects of the cultural ideology, particularly the belief that women were polluting, dangerous and depleting of masculine energy. Meggitt states:

Females, they say, are basically different from males, for their flesh is laid "vertically" along their bones and not "horizontally" across them; thus they mature more quickly than do males and are ready for marriage earlier. Whereas youths are still vulnerable because they are not yet fully adult, adolescent girls have already acquired through the menarche their most dangerous attribute, the ability to pollute males ... Men regard menstrual blood as truly dangerous. They believe that contact with it or a menstruating woman will, the absence of counter-magic, sicken a man and cause persistent vomiting, turn his blood black, corrupt his vital juices so that his skin darkens and wrinkles as his flesh wastes, permanently dull his wits, and eventually lead to a slow decline and death (1964:207).
Meggitt directs his attention almost exclusively to men's views of the effects of menstruation on men, and to the "requirements" that men apparently imposed on women during menstruation. He describes these "prescriptions" in great detail: women were obliged to avoid all actions that risked contaminating anything male, for example, men and "male" crops such as taro. While Meggitt presents the reader with every detail of what women did not do during the period of seclusion, he gives no information whatsoever about what they actively did in their menstrual huts, and describes only what women did upon emerging from seclusion.

It is striking that although the New Guinea literature is overloaded with elaborate descriptions of what men and initiates did in men's houses, there is little speculation about menstrual hut activities. Can we assume that Mae women sat in seclusion in a menstrual hut for four days doing strictly nothing? Menstruation is not an illness, but a usual event in women's lives, and it would be erroneous to assume that menstruating women were invariably ill or non-functional. Yet, Meggitt implies that women's seclusion in menstrual huts served the exclusive purpose of avoiding thepolluting of men. This is a male view that fails, perhaps inevitably, given

---

6 Meggitt was no doubt unable to talk freely with female informants about these matters. Accessibility of information was an important factor in determining bias and in weighting the resulting ethnographic portrait more heavily with information about men and men's views.
the lack of information, to include women's experiences; the more serious analytical defect is that it is not identified as such, but is presented a complete and accurate picture of social reality.

Read, Meggitt and Langness place a singular emphasis on conflict and discord in general, and in intersexual relations. "Physical violence and antagonism", Reads states, "are the warp of the cultural pattern"; "dominance and submission, rivalry and coercion are constantly recurring themes, manifest alike in day-to-day contexts and in ceremonial (contexts)" (Read 1954:23). This "underlying tenor" of "mutual suspicion and scarcely veiled antagonism" (1954:23-24) firmly impressed the ethnographers of the time. Their ethnographic evidence of inter-sexual disharmony so dominated the portrait of gender relations that "sexual antagonism" effectively eliminated the analytical possibility of any positive views of male-female relations. Thus, co-operation and harmony between wives and husbands, which must certainly have existed in some measure, is eclipsed by the overriding view that "physical aggression and violence is the dominant orientation of the Highland cultures" (Read 1954:22).\(^7\) In contrast, later

\(^7\) Read's description of Highlanders is typical of the ethnographic portrait of the period. In the space of one page, he characterizes Highlanders (men) as "difficult to live with", "flamboyant", "aggressive", "proud", "quick to take offence", "quarrelsome", "florid and theatrical talkers", "demonstrative", "seldom ... relaxed" and "continually on the verge of some more or less violent and unexpected
ethnographers (e.g., Feil, Lederman, Errington and Gewertz) explore the harmonious, co-operative and complementary aspects of gender relations in such a way as to counterbalance this negative image.

The second major weakness in the "sexual antagonism" model is its characterization of the public world as male and its inadequate treatment of the political position of women. Ethnographers overlook women's roles as social actors and producers of society. Sexually antagonistic societies thus appeared to revolve around male and patriclan activities, particularly clan solidarity and the aggressive competition among groups of men.

Read, Meggitt and Langness use the solidarity of the patriclan as an analytical lens through which to view relations between the sexes, particularly relations between husbands and wives. Women consequently appeared to exist almost exclusively in opposition to men general, and specifically to husbands as members of other clans. For example, Langness (1967) views marriage as an institution primarily serving the needs of men and the patriclan. The following passage illustrates this point:

If a man has a good wife, one who works hard and co-operates with him, does not run away or have affairs with other men or cause trouble and so on, he wants to keep her happy. This entails maintaining

outburst" (1954:5-6).
adequate sexual contact with her as well as doing the various jobs he is obliged to do, such as building and repairing her garden fences, fetching firewood, and helping with the feeding and care of pigs... If a man does not like his wife, he has different problems. If he is to have prestige and a "name" he must have many pigs and gardens (1967:172).

The implication is that women "cooperated" (or chose not to cooperate) in the male production of society. This portrays women, in an unexamined way, as political "non-persons", and validates the Western notion of women as pawns in societies made by men.

However, while these ethnographers portray women as peripheral to "male" political and ritual activities, they inadvertently suggest formally recognized female participation that, when examined, casts a different light on political and ritual processes. Read, for instance notes women's role in the making of decisions pertaining to pigs:

Pigs are regarded as their special charge, and it is understood that a husband will consult his wife before he undertakes to kill an animal. Social recognition is also accorded the wives of those who supply the largest pigs. Such women are permitted to decorate themselves with male ornaments and to dance with the men on the concluding day of the festival (1952:22).

While this description hints at a formal decision-making role for women, it explores women's powers in a very minimal way. Indeed, it implies that certain women were granted an honourary male status, or "allowed" some small measure of participation in activities that remained firmly "male". Note, for example,
that "social recognition is ... accorded the wives of those who supply the largest pigs" (1952:22). Read implies here that men's supplying of pigs overrode women's production of pigs, and that women's exceptional presence served only to reinforce the masculine exclusivity of the event. He excludes the perspectives of the women participating, particularly with respect to their own interests, i.e., ownership and control of pigs.

Read's discussion of male initiation ceremonies also largely excludes women's related activities. Although Gahuku-Gama women were not present at initiation or other public ceremonies, they traditionally attacked the male group as it returned to the settlement after performing purification rites. Read only briefly mentions this female political and ritual activity:

The women, armed with a variety of weapons, from bows and arrows to stones and heavy pieces of wood, set upon the company when they return to the settlements (1952:14).

Meggitt also implies that women had little formal involvement in the male intiation ceremony (sanggai), yet his own data provides a fairly detailed portrait of women's participation in that ritual, which appears to be both substantial and formally recognized:

Throughout the preceding afternoon parties of girls arrive and the mothers and sisters of the bachelors offer them hospitality, and those who have sweethearts or friends among the bachelors lead
the singing, which refers indelicately to the young men's attributes ... These songs greatly embarrass the married men, who ostentatiously leave the danceground (1964:214).

Read, Meggitt and Langness all note that Highland belief systems valued male identity and solidarity, and constructed these in categorical opposition to female attributes and to women as a social group. All three ethnographers suggest that women accepted these masculinist public ideologies; Langness, argues with particular conviction that Bena Bena women willingly shared the dominant values of the ideology. The implicit androcentrism of this view subsumes women's views and feelings under the notion of "acceptance". Although ample references to recalcitrant and resistant women appear in the literature, these ethnographers do not explore women's understandings of masculinist ideology in any great detail, but choose rather to emphasize women's subjugation and the disruptive impact on male activity of female resistance, for example, to marriage and child-bearing.

The ethnographic evidence suggests that women's political rights in these sexually antagonistic societies were constrained by masculine ideology in ways that men's powers and rights were not. Women's political rights, the degree to which those rights were exercisable and the role of ideology in defining the contexts in which legal rights were or were not exercisable are issues that later ethnographers have taken
up. In Strathern's work (1972) on Melpa women of the Western Highlands, passive "acceptance" of a masculinist ideology is transformed into active "autonomy", the particularistic ability of individual women to circumvent political constraints and act as persons in the domestic domain. Feil (1978a, 1978b), in his discussion of gender relations in Enga society, severs the connection between the deprecating, masculinist ideology and social practice (see Chapter 2).

The "sexual antagonism" model also highlighted the male use of violence against women, but the approach was largely descriptive and simply noted the legitimacy of men's use of physical coercion to control women. For example, in describing an altercation between a husband and wife, Read states:

The domestic tangle was exhibited with full publicity in the street outside my house, the shouts and imprecations of its progress often drawing me to the door to find Gotome sprawled in the dust with the imprint of her husband's foot on her stomach, the other villagers watching the quarrel in silence, perhaps prepared to interfere if matters became too violent, but recognizing the right of husbands to beat their wives (1965:88)

Read has recently reiterated that "force or the threat to use force was a recognized instrument of male control over women in domestic and public relationships" and that "its legitimacy as a sanction was not questioned" (1986:231-232).

Did "sexual antagonism" exaggerate the extent, in terms of frequency, of violence against women? How frequent were violent incidents of the kind that Read describes? Langness
has wondered whether "men (Bena Bena) more or less typically treated women badly" (1982:81) and has concluded that this is unlikely. He states:

Although men in the neighbouring Bena Bena group certainly could and sometimes did treat women badly, this behaviour was not in my opinion very typical (1982:81).

The significant word in this statement is "could". Although treating women badly may not have been "typical", it was nevertheless a legitimate, ideologically validated male behaviour, and the only legitimate intra-group use of physical force in Highlands societies.

The domination of women via masculinist ideologies that legitimated the use of violence is a matter that later ethnographers have also considered, yet this issue has remained largely unexamined from women's perspectives. Whereas the "sexual antagonism" model abandons the question after acknowledging that the use of force was "a recognized instrument of male control over women in domestic and public relationships" (Read 1986:231), the anthropologists in the 1970's who produced the concept of "women as persons" address the issues of male control and the political position of women more directly.
**Conclusion**

The exclusive focus of early ethnographers on the readily observable features of gender relations and their ethnocentric and androcentric interpretations of these observations are responsible for the weaknesses of "sexual antagonism" as an explanatory framework for gender relations and the status of Highland women. Later anthropologists, as I have pointed out, directly address many of these weaknesses. Proponents of the "anthropology of women" of the 1970's, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2, reacted vigorously to the generally negative portraits of women and of gender relations that "sexual antagonism" produced. These anthropologists argue that, largely because of Western biases, "sexual antagonism" did not adequately represent the full range of female social roles, and did not acknowledge, in one instance, women's legal personhood (Strathern 1972), in others, women's active participation in public and political affairs (Faithorn 1975, 1976, Feil 1978a, 1978b), and finally, the capacity of substances carried by both women and men to pollute in certain contexts and at certain stages of life (Faithorn 1975, 1976, Meigs 1976, 1984).
CHAPTER 2
WOMEN AS PERSONS

Introduction

As early as the 1930's anthropologists were critical of the androcentric and Western biases in ethnographic descriptions of Melanesian women and non-Western women in general (e.g., Blackwood 1935, Kaberry 1939, Powdermaker 1933, Wedgwood 1937a, 1937b). In this chapter I consider more recent analyses in a similar vein, Strathern (1972), Faithorn (1975, 1976) and Feil (1978a, 1978b), in the context of the reactive, or corrective "anthropology of women" of the 1970's.

These scholars commit themselves to feminist critiques of androcentric perspectives in Melanesian ethnography and shift the anthropological focus away from men, "sexual antagonism" and the exclusion of women, towards women's roles and their distinct contributions to activities previously considered exclusively male. Yet, in so doing, they arrive at different conclusions in their respective case studies. Writing about the Melpa of Mount Hagen in the Highlands, Strathern suggests that female personhood was generated within and limited by a social world structured and controlled by men. Melpa women, Strathern argues, were persons without political power. What "power" they possessed derived from their "autonomy" as jural or legal persons. Yet, neither their
productive activities, nor their linking roles in the creation of exchange "roads" between patriclans nor their status as autonomous persons precluded their status as "judicial minors" in relation to the male-dominated political domain. Writing about the Kafe and Enga in the Highlands, Faithorn and Feil argue that women participated in and shaped socio-political affairs traditionally presented by ethnographers as domains of male control. They claim that "women are 'persons' in New Guinea, whatever the received notion and whether or not they appear so in the literature" (Feil 1978a:220). Thus, Feil argues that it was empirically evident that Enga women were active in the male political arena; in the tee ceremonial exchange women manipulated their interstitial positions by "shaping the content of the exchange relationship" (1978a:221).

These studies thus yield two distinct models of female personhood: (1) as a cultural construction distinct from the political personhood of men in a male-dominated social order; that is, women were persons with minimal and contingent influence on male-dominated political activity; (2) as an expression of autonomy exercised in political activities shared by men and women; that is, women were persons whose involvement in public life equalled that of men.
Melpa Women: Domestic Persons

In *Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World* (1972), a study of the Melpa of Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands, Strathern examines women's lives and roles in a male-dominated society. Melpa society traditionally consisted of exogamous patricians, residing virilocally. Dispersed settlement groups cooperated in clearing gardens, building houses and preparing feasts. Men and women occupied separate dwellings; pigs were stalled in the women's houses. Women were "regarded as having a polluting or weakening influence on males" (1972:11) and confined themselves to designated huts during menstruation and childbirth (1972:10-11). Melpa women's involvement in exchange was apparently minimal, whereas their participation in gardening and pig-raising was extensive.

Anthropologists have traditionally described the Melpa as a classic Melanesian big-man society; the ceremonial exchange of goods was a preeminent social institution in which other social institutions, such as kinship, production, politics and prestige, converged:

Big-men ... coordinate activities which involve group participation, act as spokesmen in settling disputes, and from pursuit of their own interests and reputation as wealthy men also bring prestige to those associated with them ... it is largely through ceremonial exchange (*moka*) that big-men build their reputations today (1972:9-10).

In societies with patrilineal ideologies the position of women, particularly in-married women, is determined in
part by their relations to their clans of origin and to their husbands' clans. The patrilineal nature of Melpa society, Strathern argues, affected the political status of women. "Hagen society", she notes, "fits Barnes characterization of New Guinea Highlands systems in which 'a married woman neither remains fully affiliated to her natal group nor is completely transferred to her husband's group but rather sustains an interest in both', and where 'the division of rights in and responsibilities towards the woman is not exclusive' (Barnes 1962:6)" (1972:vii). Strathern thus depicts Hagen women as "not incorporated" into the patrilineal structure into which they have married: "women cannot unambiguously participate in the political confrontation of clans, for they represent the interpersonal links between them" (1972:154).

In many Highlands societies, because of women's structural marginality with respect to clans, men traditionally viewed women as potentially hostile to male interests. In Melpa society, for example, women's own interests lay equally with their husbands' clans and their natal clans. Men also

---

8 The question of women's incorporation into patriclans is problematic. If male groups are taken as the basis for analysis, women are axiomatically marginal or interstitial. However, Melpa men and women likely experienced and characterized their relations to patriclans differently. Strathern's view may coincide with a male perspective on patrilineal ideology. She presents no clear evidence that Melpa women perceived themselves to be "links" between groups of men.
considered that women interfered with men's prestige-seeking manoeuvres, creating not only links in male exchange networks, but also potential fissures or weak points; women had the capacity to sever exchange relations. For instance, if a woman abandoned her husband, his exchange relations were disrupted.

However, Melpa men and women, like the Tombema Enga and other Western Highlanders, greatly valued the "roads" (affinal connections) created by marriage; these "roads" created "channels for wealth" (1972:65). From the perspective of men, Melpa women did not merely represent exchange potential in an abstract way, but they embodied exchange paths and actually produced exchange relations. Thus, a practical relation existed between marriage and exchange; because marriage created affines and affinal relationships were important in moka exchange, "kin on both sides acquire a vested interest in its continuity" (1972:198).

In spite of her emphasis on patrilineality, Strathern remains firmly focused on Melpa women and their roles in the society. She presents a detailed picture, unique in its time, of the relationships between men and women, and between exchange and production. Although she claims that male values excluded women from "society" and that women were therefore peripheral, rather than strictly unequal, she consistently argues that Melpa women exercised a certain autonomy or independence. However small Melpa women's roles may have been
In public and political life, Strathern explores these fully, largely because previous ethnographers had neglected them. In judging the society to be male-dominated, Strathern confirms the stereotype of the sexual antagonism model: women were domestic. Yet, in scrutinizing women's activities she also challenges the stereotype: women were not merely downtrodden drudges, but possessed the rights of "persons". Hence, her claim that Melpa women were persons in the domestic domain.

Strathern's invocation of a domestic/public distinction is a familiar social scientific device, one that anthropologists have repeatedly used to explain the exclusion of women from this or that kind of social activity. The domestic/public opposition, as Western thought has understood it, implies a hierarchy of values; those who do not operate in the public domain are necessarily excluded from it, and their actions less socially constructive and inferior to those of persons acting publicly.

Although Strathern relies on this hierarchical dichotomy, claiming it is indigenous to Melpa thought, she points out that "the nature of domestic ties between spouses cannot ... be understood without reference to the political domain" (1972:50) and that "obligations inherent in the husband-wife relationship are ... related to the politico-jural domain" (1972:259). This statement in fact blurs the domestic (personal)/public (clan) distinction and suggests that it
was not hierarchical. Thus, we may equally assume that the nature of the political domain and clan relations in Melpa society could not be understood without reference to domestic ties and personal relations between spouses.

In Melpa society the "maleness" of the exchange institution, the moka, derived primarily from men's apparently exclusive participation in public transactions. In addition, it derived from men's claims of the moral superiority of their exchange transactions and prestige-seeking activities over and above the productive and domestic activities of women. Women's lesser involvement in transaction and exchange was ideologically transformed by men into evidence of female inferiority. Moreover, men ideologically extended male pre-eminence in exchange into other areas, creating what appears to the anthropologist as a generalized "male dominance":

From their actual dominance in the political domain, men claim superordination in any sphere of importance (1972:288).

This claimed superordination was an ideological practice; it was a moral incorporation of women into a value system that elevated male activities, priorities and perceptions of social forms, for example, clans, marriage and affinal relations.

Melpa men's deprecating judgements of women, as weak persons owning no valuables, "little nothing things", provided further evidence of the moral incorporation of women into
a male public value system. These judgements were counter-balanced by other strategically used characterizations of women as strong and able to produce food and children. Men used these dogmas contextually, reflecting the ambivalence in their stereotypes of women. Thus women were "weak" in some circumstances and "strong" in others.

Strathern's assessment of Melpa women's "roles in a male world" is an attempt to demonstrate that in spite of male political and ideological domination, Melpa women were indeed persons. The questions that I will address are: How does Strathern understand male political dominance and the generalized sexual inequality that was both cause and effect of women's exclusion from the political sphere? How does she simultaneously construct Melpa women's "autonomy" and "genuine independence" (1972:314) as persons? Strathern's version of "women as persons" is complex; on one hand, she suggests that Melpa women subscribed to public (male) values that denigrate female production, did not transact publicly, were peripheral to male political activities and subject to various measures of male control, including physical domination; on the other hand she claims autonomy and personhood for women. This argument is built on the concept of "domestic personhood". Even though Melpa women did not participate in "male" political activities, they were still very much "persons". The question
is: what sort of persons are domestic persons and how do they differ from political persons?⁹

Using both patrilineal ideology and the domestic/public dichotomy to explain women's intermediary, semi-incorporated state, Strathern examines women's activities, the extent of their autonomy and the kind of constraints that bound them into a "male world". She depicts this world as dominated by a masculinist ideology and by male public values to which women also generally subscribed. This male ideology valued male transactional activities, agnatic solidarity and collective action over female productive and domestic activities. While women valued their own contributions as producers to the exchange system, men undervalued production and often neglected their own productive activities in favour of devoting greater attention to transactions and to moka affairs in general. Men devalued productive activities because these did not offer the kinds of opportunities to influence others that transactional activities afforded; renown came not from production but from transaction. Thus, pearlshells, both more numerous and more valuable in the exchange system

⁹ The notion of "domestic personhood" is an essential concept in Strathern's later attempt to step outside a set of related Western notions including "person", "subject", "object", "equality" and "dominance". It is particularly important in her later analyses of male-female relations and the "Melanesian aesthetic" (1988). I discuss these themes in Chapter 4.
than pigs, were not be produced as such, but were acquired through male transactions.

Melpa men exercised dominance over women most prominently through their control of exchange. Strathern argues that women were "producers" of certain exchange goods (pigs) and that men were "transactors" of those goods. Exchange was a political activity, and the prestige accruable through it was a political outcome for men. In contrast, women's political non-involvement resulted in political minority. However, women were not axiomatically non-persons. Conceptually, this argument accommodates both "women as persons" and male political dominance. Dominance thus becomes pre-eminence, not domination of persons in the sense of control. Melpa men did not totally control women, but strove to use their political pre-eminence to dominate women generally. But, Strathern suggests, men were only partially successful, insofar as they could prevent women from functioning as transactors.10

Strathern has more fully developed her theoretical position on personhood in recent works (1984a, 1984b, 1988), but its analytical underpinnings are quite clearly visible in two heuristic distinctions that she defines in this early work: (1) producer/transactor; and (2) jural minor / judicial

10 Here (1972), but not in her later work, she states that men did in some measure "control" women.
Strathern uses these contrasting pairs to construct the parameters of female (domestic) personhood.

In making the important distinction between "jural minor" and "judicial minor" Strathern reconciles women's inability to exercise rights with their ability to act as persons. Thus, jural minors are legal non-persons, whereas judicial minors are political non-persons, or more properly "non-actors". Western thought has conflated jural and judicial minority, implying that an infringement on political rights is tantamount to an attack on the fundamental rights of the person, i.e., rights without which personhood is denied. Strathern applies the distinction between jural rights, which exist in theory, and judicial rights, which are practically exercisable, to the social situation of Melpa women: "Rights and duties entailed in various roles may receive general acknowledgement but the extent to which rights can be exercised is another matter" (1972:259).

Strathern's assessment of Melpa women's social position thus includes both personhood and judicial minority. To what extent, then, were Melpa women persons, that is not jural minors, and to what extent were they "non-persons", i.e., judicial minors? Both sexes believed women to possess noman.

---

(mind, heart, will), the defining characteristic of "persons". Because women met the cultural criterion for personhood, they were persons. So, for example, women, like other legal persons, were responsible for their actions. Consequently, they were able to act as principals in court cases, but, importantly, "the extent to which they themselves can make claims, their judicial status, is related to the fact that they are in a way "political minors" (1972:260). Melpa women's political minority entailed: (1) exclusion from clan and lineage affairs, i.e., women did not represent their clans, (they represented connections between patriclans); (2) women did not have the same liability in respect of their lineage kin that their husbands had; (3) husbands exercised jural authority in practice, e.g., in relation to disposition of property, (men considered women to be propertyless (korpa = "rubbish"); (4) women could only settle minor grievances themselves and negotiate limited compensations (1972:262-264, 270); they required male support to do otherwise. Strathern summarizes women's judicial minority: "In short, women cannot participate to the extent that men do in the affairs of their lineage or clan and cannot represent it ..." (1972:261).

It is evident from this list of limitations on women's political rights that there was more at stake than representation of the clan or lineage. Women were apparently persons in theory, but not always in practice. If indeed women
lacked property rights and were unable to press their claims, to the Western observer and certainly from a feminist perspective, Melpa women were politically dominated to such a degree that the "autonomy" and "genuine independence" Strathern suggests they possessed become suspect.

Kafe Women: Political Persons

While Strathern's analysis leaves Highland women firmly in the domestic arena, Paithorn claims that Kafe women in the Eastern Highlands were persons in a different sense: autonomous political actors. Both Paithorn (1976) and Feil (1978a, 1978b) are critical of the anthropological neglect and stereotyping of Highland women. They argue that Highlands societies did not consist of sexually distinct sub-cultures in which a static female world served as a neutral backdrop for the active dramatics of the male world. Yet, as Feil points out, this was the predominant view until relatively recently:

... women have barely been mentioned in works on the Highlands, and their invisibility in exchange activities is a symptom of their alleged lack of power and interest in these supposedly male-dominated affairs. Highland women have been portrayed simply as those who, with child slung overhead, daily trudge back and forth to the gardens to fetch sweet potatoes while the men alone engage in ceremony, exchange and things political (1978b:265).

Faithorn also notes that anthropologists studying the Highlands focused primarily on women as wives and on the marriage
relationship. The result was a uni-dimensional portrait of women and the extrapolation of marital discord into a generalized hostility between the sexes as groups.

Faithorn's work serves as a convenient point of departure because it was she who introduced the notion of "women as persons" (1976) in an attempt to correct the erroneous, generalized belief that Highland societies were simply "sexually antagonistic" and Highland women merely domestic drudges. Her two essays (1975, 1976) on the Kafe of the Eastern Highlands deal with substantially similar issues: women's status and female pollution.

Here, I focus on "Women as Persons; Aspects of Female Life and Male-female Relations Among the Kafe" (1976), in which Faithorn argues that, until the 1970's, the ethnographic literature grossly oversimplified women's lives by focusing exclusively on the themes of sexual segregation, male dominance and female pollution (1976:86-87). The "sexual antagonism" theme or model, used to describe intersexual relations elsewhere in the Highlands, is not, Faithorn suggests, useful for understanding Kafe behaviour or ideology. In contrast to the typical portrayal of downtrodden Highland women, Faithorn demonstrates that Kafe women were "full participants in social, economic and political decisions beyond the household" and that Kafe men were "capable of 'polluting' or endangering others in the same ways as ... women" (1976:87).
In Kafe society, then, there was no clear division between male and female worlds, and "Kafe men and women do not interact with one another in ways patterned primarily by sex-class difference" (1976:93).

Faithorn first demonstrates the interdependence of Kafe men and women by examining the sexual division of labour in the preparation of gardens. While certain tasks were assigned by sex, husbands and wives frequently worked together performing "the same or different, but interdependent, tasks" (1976:89). Claiming complementarity in the sexual division of labour as evidence of some sort of equality or absence of male domination was undoubtedly not a new insight, but it bears repetition even today; we have only to consider Godelier's recent presentation of Baruya women as virtual drudges, performing dull, unskilled and repetitive labour, somehow prevented by men from doing anything more interesting (Godelier 1986).12 Faithorn's point is therefore well-taken.

Faithorn then demonstrates women's substantial, but less visible, participation in marriage negotiations, which ethnographers have traditionally presented as a male prerogative in Highlands societies (1976:90). Male public discussions of marriage appeared, superficially, to constitute

---

12 Godelier's description of Baruya women's tasks in the division of labour (1986:14) revives old familiar arguments that women's work was more monotonous and required less co-operation, and therefore bestowed a lesser status (see Dahlberg 1981, Slocum 1975).
a complete process of marriage negotiation and transaction. In fact, women, including the prospective bride, her mother and classificatory "mothers", were involved in major steps of the marriage transaction that "(occur) through numerous smaller debates and consultations" (1976:91), for example, in the determination of an acceptable bride-price and appropriate time to deliver the bride to her new village. Marriage negotiations thus involved both sexes in a complementary way. Despite such evidence of women's political activity, ethnographers consistently overlooked "informal" discussions and "non-public" decisions. Faithorn's work clearly shows that the inclusion and accurate description of women's negotiatory activities are essential to an adequate portrayal of Kafe social dynamics.

Complementarity also existed, Faithorn suggests, in the domain of cultural knowledge (1976:92). Kafe men claimed exclusive knowledge of sorcery, while women claimed exclusive knowledge of contraception. In practice, however, men and women were well-informed of each other's epistemological territory, including so-called secret knowledge. Moreover, persons of each sex could participate in the activities of the other; for example, women were able to attend divinations to determine sorcery as a cause of death, and some men ingested contraceptive bark. In the case of cultural knowledge, then,
an ideology of sexual difference masked the practical reality of complementarity.

Faithorn makes her most impressive attack on the stereotype of Highland women with her analysis of pollution beliefs among the Kafe. She argues that pollution-related behavioral taboos, once believed to place restrictions only on women in relation to men, actually applied to different categories of persons, including men, in different relations and contexts (1976:93). For instance, because semen belonged to the same class of dangerous substances as menstrual blood, Faithorn suggests that "it appears that men are as potentially 'polluting' or dangerous to others as are women" (1976:92). She notes that men had to exercise extreme caution in controlling semen "in order not to endanger themselves or others" (1975:137). Women feared accidental contact with semen left on men's clothing, and men as well as women were prohibited from stepping over food or people (1975:137). Thus, the ability to pollute derived from "dangerous substances" (1976:92) and did not simply inhere in all women at all times. The deprecating pollution ideology affected both sexes, and the "polluting woman" was no more a Melanesian type than the "polluting man".

While Kafe society was in many ways unique, much of Faithorn's analysis is clearly applicable to other Highland societies. Thus, she suggests that a re-analysis of male-female
relations in the Highlands would likely reveal women's participation in public affairs and in major group decisions, and therefore, the interdependence and equality of the sexes. Deconstructing the unexamined equivalence of "male" and "political" is a central point in Faithorn's argument. To this end, she argues that Western views of indigenous political practice are biased and fragmented, and that "when the political decision-making process is viewed as a whole ... women can be seen as full participants in political issues that transcend the domestic level" (1976:94).

Although Feil (1978a, 1978b) adopts a similar approach in attempting to prove the extent of women's participation in "male" activities, his in-depth scrutiny of a single institution, exchange, provides a more focused picture of women's social lives and political activities.

Enga Women's Roles in the Tee Exchange

Feil (1978a, 1978b), like Faithorn, has argued that the stereotypical image of contaminating and despised Melanesian women does not correctly portray Enga women in the Western Highlands, nor does it adequately describe their lives; in particular, it masks their participation in the society's central cultural activity, the tee exchange.

The tee ceremonial exchange system is a complex socio-economic structure involving relations of credit and debt
based on a "currency" of pigs and other valuables. Similar in many respects to other Highland exchange systems such as the Melpa moka and the Mendi mok ink, the tee extends over a large geographical area and involves as many as 150,000 people (Feil 1978b:264). Men generally establish tee exchange partnerships on the basis of their relationships through women such that they "... are placed in a web of female linkages" (1978b:272). Feil characterizes these tee partnerships as "relationships of choice" (1978b:267), solidified by the exchange of valuables; the tee itself, he argues, is "at least in its political sense, an alliance of friendship among individuals who are otherwise members of enemy groups" (1978b:267).

Feil notes the "curious lack of information" about women's exchange activities; particularly curious "when we note that in Enga society, as elsewhere in the Highlands, women are in charge of raising and caring for the most valuable exchange items, pigs; and that a man's most valuable exchange partners are most often men related to him through some living female" (1978b:264). He argues that the connecting role of women was crucial in the establishment and maintenance of tee relations:

- Women acting between men create obligations, sanction the partnership, and are instrumental in shaping the content of it and in bringing off the transactions in many cases (1978b:268).
Because tee partners were female-linked "women become essential political persons" (1978b:267).

Early masculinist social anthropological studies of the Highlands dominated by the jural model of society and by the concept of descent groups as politico-jural entities failed to consider women in this way. Meggitt (1964, 1965), for example, emphasized the relationship between a woman's status and her structural exclusion from the patriclan into which she had married, "her inability to ever be incorporated into one of these androcentric units" (Feil 1978b:265). Feil, however, points to the importance of non-agnatic relations (relations through women) and the role of kinship in providing crucial social identities; he criticizes the devaluation of kinship as "non-structural" (1984a:52-53). "Women", he points out, "provide the crucial relations which define and link intergroup exchange" (1984a:53). Thus, Feil challenges the view of ceremonial exchange as a strictly public, political enterprise from which women, as non-group members, were axiomatically or definitionally excluded:

Our concentration on the public side of politics has hidden the significance that women may have in private negotiations that affect public proceedings (1978a:228).

He goes on to challenge traditional views of male-female relations:
... our over-concern with the seemingly obvious aspects of male-female relations has dulled our appreciation for the less obvious ones (1978a:228).

Appreciating the less obvious aspects of inter-sexual relations includes unveiling the hidden power that women actually exercised in the tee. Feil argues that in order to recognize Enga women's power it is imperative to discredit "the more ideological statements that men make of women in situational vacuums" (1978b:263). "Men's statements about women's performance and abilities in the tee", he notes, "bear little relation to their more programmatic ones when women are viewed in a situational vacuum" (1978b:275). Enga men, like men in many other Highland societies, made "ideological" or "programmatic" statements about women (as women also did of men, and both sexes of themselves); these statements contributed to an ethnographic portrait of Highlands societies fraught with "intersexual anxiety and conflict" and "inherent sexual hostility" (1978b:263). Anxiety, conflict and hostility between the sexes were imputed to such cultural features as "the strict separation of the sexes in sleeping arrangements, the elaborate sexual and menstrual taboos, and the presence of male cults and secret initiations in which boys and bachelors are taught the harmful effects likely to occur from prolonged contact with females" (1978b:263). This is the familiar "sexual antagonism" model of the Highlands ethnography of the 1950's and 60's. Feil argues that this portrait of
inter-sexual relations, in fact, reveals very little about Enga women's "status" or the daily interactions of men and women (1978b:263). Most importantly, men's programmatic statements about the other sex obscured the considerable socio-political and economic power that women wielded.\textsuperscript{13}

In reconstructing Enga gender relations, Feil challenges the patrilineal model of the \textit{tee}, that is, the assumption that it was largely an interaction between patriclans, in which individuals had little personal stake. The \textit{tee}, Feil counters, involved "men competing for power and renown through their participation in and manipulation of proceedings" (1978b:264). Although these men were Melanesian "big-men" in the familiar sense of the term, they represented themselves as individuals, not their groups. Thus the \textit{tee} was essentially made by individuals, not clans: "the major nexus of competition is not between hostile enemy descent groups, but rather between individuals vying for prestige among their closest agnates within their very own group" (1978b:266). This analysis importantly suggests that individual transactions were not ultimately under the control of big-men, such that "the clan's

\textsuperscript{13} As I argue later in this discussion, ideological statements about gender or about men and women are clearly imbued with not only symbolic, but strategic, value. This strategic value derives from the fact that the qualities or symbolic meanings attributed to "maleness" and "femaleness" are also judgements of relative value that may be selectively applied to persons and actions, i.e., used manipulatively.
or subclan's stake in tee proceedings is exceedingly small" (1978b:266). Thus, exchange was not simply a transformation of hostility and confrontation between corporate groups (see Meggitt 1965). The conflict model judged the patrilineal group and its identity to be primary to the explanation of ceremonial exchange, and thus precluded the inclusion of women, precisely because women acted individually and did not represent patrilineal groups. By suggesting that the tee was an individual expression, Feil opens up the possibility of including women's individual activities in the sphere of the tee. In short, he proposes a re-definition of the tee that does not peripheralize women.

Pigs were of crucial importance in the tee and their production and control lay largely in the hands of women. Enga women both cared for "financed" pigs, those acquired through transactions or temporarily held while awaiting ultimate delivery elsewhere, and raised exchange pigs. Men distributed both kinds of pigs to their tee partners linked across clans through these women. Yet women directly produced the "house" (home-raised) pigs, "owned" them and had final jurisdiction over them:

A woman will in most cases direct these pigs to persons related to her, or to exchange partners to whom she is the link. Exchange partners whose links to her husband are other than through her (for example, through his mother or his sister) may take pigs only by dealing directly with her. She often enters into "special" relationships with
these persons, characterized by name taboos that are a mark of friendship and mutual interest in exchange matters. Requests for these "house pigs" are male-to-female transactions rather than male-to-male ones. She not only releases these pigs but is entitled to take the reciprocation for them that will come in subsequent transactions (1978b:270).

Other transactional features also demonstrated women's ownership of pigs. For instance, the pig holdings of wives in polygamous marriages were kept separate, ensuring correctly allotted returns for transactions (1978b:270). In the case of disputes, both wives and husbands were obliged to provide the offended party with a pig that the latter was then free to dispose of as he or she pleased (1978b:270). Women could therefore use pigs they had received from their husbands in compensation for the wrongful distribution of house pigs to create their own exchange networks (1978a:222, 1978b:270):

Women invested these compensatory pigs in the tee with men who were not existing exchange partners of their husbands, thus creating exchange ties of their own, independent and apart from their husband's exchange networks (1978b:270).

Women's ownership of pigs was further reflected in the cultural association of women and pigs. Both Enga men and women imputed a special dimension to women's relationship with pigs: women were believed to exercise a "coercive ability" (1978b:269) over both pigs and men in matters involving pigs. Moreover, Enga men believed that women were able to make pigs uncontrollable and to cause them to stray (1978b:270). Thus,
men acknowledged "women's control over the beasts" and claimed that they gave women pigs "quickly and without argument 'whenever a woman asks'" (1978:269).

Although women did not have as many tee partners as men did, they were nonetheless able to gain prestige and influence among their own relatives by directing gifts to them. Through the tee, Enga women exercised socio-political power in the following ways:


[2] They had control over the direction and distribution of the products of their labour.

[3] They were caretakers of their husbands' herds of pigs; in this capacity they possessed "a potential power source" (1978a:223), i.e., they influenced pig distribution.


The implication of Enga women's socio-political power is clear: the tee was not a male-contrived institution based strictly on exchange relations between men.

Strathern's (1972) analysis of Hagen society suggests that Melpa women played a more interstitial role in the moka exchange than did Enga women in the tee. This difference reflects the difference in the social orientations of the two exchange systems. While the tee and the moka appear superficially to be in same general Highland mold, Feil suggests that closer examination shows that they constituted quite different forms of sociality. Where the "major political
nexus" of the tee was located "at the level of intra-group affairs and ... between individual partners", "the political significance of the moka ... rests in the wider context of inter-group affairs, where women have no place" (1978a:225). The difference in the origins of the valuables circulated in the moka and the tee both determined and reflected women's participation in the exchange institution. For example, the pearlshells that traditionally dominated the moka (numerically and in terms of their greater value) originated in men's transactions. Tee pigs, on the other hand, were produced by women; even financed pigs originated in this way.

Enga women were more able to manipulate their interstitial position by "shaping the content of the exchange relationship" (1978a:221). They acted in tee planning, decision-making, information passing, and in the initiation and cessation of partnerships. Thus tee activities, Feil argues, were complementary and sexually non-competitive; a husband and wife had distinct but not incompatible interests:

He is concerned with its size as a challenge to his agnatic competitors; she is more interested in directing pigs to linked partners and those persons important to her. Thus, their motives are not in conflict and there is no competition in a tee between wife and husband (1984b:114-15).

Feil's model suggests cooperative involvement of both sexes in a non-competitive way. Thus, within a common activity (the tee) the interests of the sexes were clearly distinct. In
contrast, In *Women in Between* (1972), Strathern suggests that Melpa women and men did compete, and that women strove to achieve "quasi-participant" status in *moka* exchanges (1972: Chapter 6). Feil notes, for instance, that Strathern portrays women and men "as pitted against each other for the same scarce commodities" (Feil 1978b:275). Thus, Strathern's model suggests greater inter-sexual strife and competition; while the spheres of activity of the sexes were more clearly distinct (i.e., production and transaction), the similar interests of the sexes in attaining transactional control frequently resulted in conflict.

**Critique: Inclusion and Exclusion**

The notion of "women as persons", whether women are seen to be included in male political activities or excluded from those activities, is necessarily predicated on the equation of the domestic and the non-political. The political is then, by definition, the public world, external to and encompassing of the household and domestic relations. The domestic/public hierarchy serves Faithorn's and Feil's inclusion arguments and Strathern's exclusion argument equally well. I will briefly consider each ethnographer's argument with respect to his or her use of this dichotomy and the ethnocentric and androcentric implications of this application.
In Faithorn's case, this taken-for-granted notion of the political forms a frame of reference for her contention Kafe women did indeed participate in political action: "women may be full participants in social, economic and political decisions beyond the household level" (1976:87). In contrast, a common refrain in the Highlands literature of that time, and one which Langness echoes in his critique of Faithorn, was the view that "... women in the New Guinea Highlands seem never to have engaged in politics" (1976:101). This reaffirms, as I have suggested, the particular construct of the political process that "women as persons" adopts strictly as a frame of reference. Langness states:

If it is necessary to take into account the "numerous small-scale consultations as well as the large-scale discussion typically associated with the Highlands political process", are you not acknowledging that women are not truly "full participants"? The whole point of the argument up to now is not that women have nothing to say about politics but, rather, that what they say is said in "small-scale" rather than "large-scale" consultations. They do not, that is, hold public office or engage in "politics" (1976:101).

Langness takes issue with Faithorn's term "full participants", arguing that "no one has ever suggested that women were not participants in some way; they have argued essentially that they were not 'full' participants" (1976:101). Because Kafe society did not produce "big-women" in the same mold as "big-men", and because "big-men were clearly aboriginal political figures and are present-day political figures",
it is obvious, Langness believes, "that women were not and are not engaged in political activity in the same way as men" (1976:101).

The obvious question here, and the issue that Faithorn directly confronts, is: If Kafe and other Highland women did not act politically in the same ways as men, can we characterise their actions as, ipso facto, non-political? Langness clearly suspects Faithorn of claiming equality or personhood for women by placing whatever it was that women did in the domain of politics. Yet, his assessment that women did not participate in "male" political activity deflects attention away from the substance of women's actions, and directs it towards a world of politics pre-defined as male. Faithorn, in contrast, directs our attention towards both the substance of women's actions, and the reclassification of these actions as "political".

Feil's corrective approach, like Faithorn's, aims to remove women from the domestic domain by demonstrating that they were "essential participants, making key political decisions" (1978b:265). In order to prove that women played

14 Lederman (1986, 1989), has examined Mendi (Southern Highlands) forms of sociality and has demonstrated the complex articulation of individual exchange networks (twem) and larger clan exchange events (sem). Lederman characterises twem activities, in which women participated autonomously and extensively, as no less political than sem onda (clan) activities, in which women did not directly participate. Significantly, for the definition of politics, twem exchanges fed into, but did not exist solely for, clan exchanges.
important political roles, Feil first identifies the *tee* as "the central institution of Enga society" (1984b:237), and then demonstrates women's involvement in that institution. "Personal" or "domestic" decisions, he argues, directly affected "public" and "political" *tee* exchange activities. Yet the initial association of women with the personal and domestic remains, and, in fact, he too simply reclassifies women's activities. While granting equal importance to "the part that women play" (Weiner 1976:11) is a essential first step, it may result in little more than the inclusion of women in a "male" category if the essential "maleness" of the components of social organization is not challenged. Interestingly, Feil approaches a preliminary interrogation of the pre-definition of politics as "male" and the validity of the domestic/public distinction in stating that "the public *tee* arena is not a separable sphere of activity in which unique and precipitous prestations and decisions are made ..." (1978b:273).

Feil later (1984a) attempts to examine Enga women's perceived ability to act in the *tee* in the context of the traditional opposition between kinship and descent, which parallels other traditional anthropological dichotomies: domestic/public, personal/political, and individual/clan. He questions the exclusive association of exchange with the public or political domain, and of kinship with the domestic
or personal domain. He notes that "cumulative, interpersonal exchange relations" (1984a:58), (i.e., kinship relations through women) carried political significance:

Partnerships are based on matrilateral kinship and affinity. These, not ties of descent, form the "political structure" of Tombema Enga society ... The domestic domain of interpersonal kinship shades into the public, jural domain of descent (1984a:58).

This deconstruction of categories is crucial to Feil's argument about the political position of Enga women: "... relations through women become fundamental economic relations" (1984a:66). Out of the domestic domain of kinship, women produced economic relations of exchange which were extra-domestic, blurring the boundaries of the "economic" such that "there is no easily isolated subsistence-oriented or purely domestic-focused economy" (1984a:67). This transformation of personal relations into economic relations gave "structural significance" to ties through women; women became "highly valued members of society". Thus, because women's relations were kinship (and not descent), and kinship was, in addition, "structural", women were unequivocally "structural" themselves, i.e., part of what anthropological analysis calls "society". Therefore, precisely because Feil self-consciously removes women from the domain of kinship (the domestic world) and places them in the domain of clan structure (the public world), his argument remains a classic inclusion argument.
Faithorn's and Feil's works point to masculinist and hierarchical assumptions underlying the definition of politics. However, in challenging the traditional view of women as non-political, they suggest only that women be included in "masculine" social forms which themselves remain unexamined. Thus, beyond suggesting that "small" and "informal" decisions are as much a part of the political process as are "large" and "formal" decisions, they do not challenge a problematic epistemological stance, that is, the inclusion of women in a "male" world.

In contrast to Faithorn's and Feil's inclusion of women in politics, Strathern presents Melpa women as excluded from male political activities. Strathern's ethnographic focus in *Women in Between* is in fact women, and their presence in the ethnography is substantial. However, in spite of this topical focus, the work is problematic from a feminist perspective for two reasons: (1) Strathern's frame of reference relies heavily on patrician organization, male political activity and male dominance over women; she does not adequately account for women's perspectives; (2) The author writes power and control out of the analysis by equating women's political marginality with independence and autonomy. She does not sufficiently consider the ramifications of women's judicial minority, for example, women's experiences of domination, their feelings of lack of control over their lives and the
tradition of violence against women (see, for example, 1972:187), but focuses rather on women's abilities to circumnavigate structural constraints. I will briefly discuss these two points of critique.

The title of the work, *Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World*, establishes from the outset that a patrilineal model is the basis of analysis, and in fact Strathern first discusses marriage and the position of married women vis-a-vis their husbands' clans (see vii-ix). She argues that although the sexual division of labour was complementary and created "a reciprocal dependence" (1972:132), "(a woman's) work in raising pigs, a major exchange valuable, is the point at which her economic role most clearly feeds into her status as an intermediary in the exchange system" (1972:131, my emphasis). Melpa men, she argues, largely controlled exchange activities, and in relation to men's transactions, women functioned primarily as producers of transactable goods, i.e., as intermediaries. Although she does note that "women see themselves ... as more than passive links between groups" (1972:280), Strathern adopts the term "participant intermediaries" (1972:280), considers women largely in relation to structures and activities "pre-defined" as male and is reluctant to accept women's views of these "male" realities.

The most noteworthy example of Strathern's failure to account for women's perspectives is her treatment of women's
views of the moka exchange. Strathern argues that Melpa women's principal sphere of action was private, domestic and non-political, and that despite participation in the affairs of their husbands' groups, the focus of female interest was the household. Melpa women, she states, "accept the major domain of their roles as domestic and non-political" (1972:146). Consequently, Strathern places women's moka-related actions in the domestic sphere because men said this was so:

A man needs a wife to advise him on how many shells he should return for pork or live pigs, (women) say. But while a husband may in private grant this, from his point of view internal decisions are a domestic matter: women have no political role in transactions (1972:140).

Strathern appears to accept men's perspectives on the domestic and public spheres and their assignation of women's advice-giving roles to the domestic sphere as reality. She does not consider how women perceived their roles as givers of advice that was clearly as much "political" as "domestic". Melpa men may have invoked the domestic/public distinction strategically, and failing to state this explicitly causes women's different constructions of their roles to disappear in the analysis.

Melpa women's version of moka was, in fact, different from men's. Women asserted that men could not make moka without them (1972:140), demanded recognition for their productive efforts and their moka contributions, and frequently tried
to interfere in men's transactions (1972:146). Melpa men, on the other hand, attributed all transactional control to themselves and "... claim they can conduct their affairs over (a woman's) head" (1972:142).

Given these obviously different claims and views, Strathern's description of gender interests focuses, predictably, on female frustrations and inter-sexual conflicts concerning the disposition of pigs.\footnote{Different perceptions of ownership and conflict over the disposition of pigs were problems that apparently arose more frequently in Melpa society than in Enga society. The \textit{tee}, Feil suggests inspired greater spousal cooperation and less competition.} Competition between spouses was common, women striving to influence transactions and retain pigs. The frustrations, grievances and anger that men said women kept in their hearts, in Strathern's words, "arise from the ... desire to assume a quasi-transactional role" (1972:144).

In fact, in Strathern's own data there is ample evidence that Melpa women saw themselves as playing, rather than desiring to play, a transactional role. For example, Strathern passes rapidly over the point that women "are most certainly likely to demand that the return for transactions with "their" pigs are made to them and not another wife. Women list exchanges which have involved their herd as \textit{moka} which \textit{they} have made" (1972:151). There are two points of interest in this description: first, women (surprisingly, it seems)
referred to their pigs as "their" pigs, thus claiming ownership of transactable goods. Secondly, women identified their own actions as being moka-related, that is, political. Surely, this indicates that women attributed to themselves an active role in the moka. It is conclusive that although Melpa women were, for the most part, effectively peripheralized from public exchange, they did not see themselves as structurally excluded from moka activity and consequently described their involvement in it differently.

In Strathern's account, which is clearly androcentric in this respect, Melpa women's different views of the exchange system are minimized in relation to the male view that derives from patrilineal ideology. Consider the following passages:

(1) Men are ready to recognize the importance of the wife's producer contribution, but while they appreciate links through her kin, these are only one of many potential avenues to moka partnership. The wife's insistent support for her kin is short­sighted, exchanges with them seeming more important to her than they actually are in the wider configuration of her husband's network (1972:140, my emphasis).

Strathern's use of language gives greater credibility and a weighter reality to men's perspectives on exchanges with women's kin than to women's perspectives. Because Strathern provides supporting evidence, we are compelled to accept the argument that men did not place these exchanges at the same level of importance as women did. But to claim that these exchanges "seem" more important to women than they "actually
are" is to deny the reality of women's experiences and points of view. The "wider configuration" of men's exchange networks did not constitute an exclusive social reality.

(2) For all that women are involved in men's exchanges and may feel possessive over the items transacted, men are the formal donors and recipients (1981a: 675). This statement is biased in favour of the formal and assigns a lesser importance to women's involvement and feelings. What women "may feel" is given less credibility than what men objectively "are". Inverting the key grammatical features of the statement to give first place, and thus greater credibility, to women, changes the reality presented. The altered passage reads:

For all that men are the formal donors and recipients, women are involved in men's exchanges and feel possessive over the items transacted.^[16

A few small linguistic changes colour the reality of exchange such that the roles of men and women and the meaning of exchange to the participants are differently presented. Women are not marginalized and their feelings are not denied. Their involvement in the "formal" process is undoubtedly a lesser one, but an accurate portrait of men's experiences cannot legitimately obscure women's experiences.

---

^[16 The changes are grammatically and stylistically minimal: the difference between the subjunctive "may feel" and the indicatives "feel" and "are", and the switch that puts "men" into the subordinate, concessive clause ("for all that") and "women" into the independent clause.
In *Women in Between* Strathern concludes that Melpa women represented outside origins, retained divided clan loyalties, were politically powerless persons, "judicial minors", and exercised less control in the disposal of valuables; these conclusion are not in dispute. But these are male perspectives that situate women only in relation to male-dominated spheres of action. This perspective is justified, Strathern argues, because Melpa women generally accepted the dominant male ideology, valued the ethos of exchange equally and did not frame their statements about men and moka in general terms (1972:145-6). Women's acceptance of the ideology of exchange is not especially significant in that it does not eliminate the possibility of their different perspectives on such a "shared" ethos or ideology. While women undoubtedly valued exchange, acknowledging only this does not address how they may have constructed it differently.

Conflicts over transactional decisions provide an appropriate example of the omission of women's views of the dominant ideology. These conflicts, Strathern argues, are suggestive of a congruence of values (1972:150), but, I suggest that they also indicate the extent of women's involvement in moka matters, a point that Strathern neglects. She cites the specificity of women's complaints against men, particularly husbands, (1972:145) as evidence that women shared the basic male values of the society. Women's complaints, she notes,
did not focus on their "exclusion" from political affairs. In addition, because women did not as frequently make programmatic, disparaging statements about men, Strathern judges that they paid little attention to the male ideology that denigrated women as a category. However, two other explanations may be considered here: (1) if women did not see themselves as categorically "excluded" from political affairs, it is unlikely that the general "exclusion" of their sex would become a point of inter-sexual contention; (2) if women were in fact oppressed by the dominant ideology is it unlikely that they would frame their dissatisfactions in general terms; "shared" values may also be "dominant" values, and women may only have been able to subvert their "judicial minority" in particularistic ways. The fact that the positive values of exchange (reciprocity, prestige etc.) were shared by both sexes does not preclude women's harbouring of negative views of other aspects of public ideology.

Strathern concludes that Melpa women were neither jural minors nor any less persons because of their domesticity. Yet the fact that they were able to exercise some measure of free will and press their claims to some degree does not negate the fact they were formally powerless persons. It would seem that the degree of personal freedom that Melpa women exercised from a position of political minority would necessarily be tenuous and unreliable because it was entirely
dependent on specific contextual factors. Domestic personhood, for all that it provided, did not provide Melpa women with the same political rights as men.

Conclusion

The works of Strathern, Faithorn and Feil in the 1970's clearly served a corrective purpose with respect to sexual antagonism. These authors' concepts of "women as persons" emphasized women's productive and domestic (Strathern) or public and political (Faithorn, Feil) capacities and the intricacies of gender relations in societies previously characterized as simply "sexually antagonistic" or "male-dominated". The perception of women as crucial in day-to-day social affairs and the recognition of their active social participation was a welcome new perspective. Women were no longer downtrodden drudges and polluting pariahs, but persons with social goals.

Strathern's, Faithorn's and Feil's versions of "women as persons" all rely on a traditional assumption of the social sciences, the dichotomization of social life into two distinct spheres, a domestic or private world of women and a more highly valued, public or political world of men. These anthropologists adopt the domestic/public dichotomy to disprove women's political involvement, in Strathern's case, and to substantiate it, in Faithorn's and Feil's.
Strathern argues that Melpa women simultaneously did not participate in political affairs and exercised a considerable degree of personal "autonomy". Thus, as I have noted in this chapter, she concludes that Melpa women's political minority did not in any way diminish their jural and domestic personhood. Faithorn and Feil, on the other hand, argue that empirical evidence proves that Kafe and Enga women acted politically in "male" domains. Thus, Feil, for example, demonstrates that Enga women did in fact participate in the tee exchange.

These two distinct versions of "women as persons" reflect the beginnings of two fundamental processes of redefinition: (1) Strathern's notion that Melpa women were jural persons and persons within the domestic domain prefigures later arguments (Strathern 1984a, Errington and Gewertz 1987) that analyses of gender relations and domination must take indigenous or emic definitions of personhood into account; (2) Faithorn's and Feil's arguments that women did indeed participate in political and patriclan activities prefigure a more profound questioning of "power", "politics" and the dichotomization of the domestic (or personal) and the public.

The argument that Melpa women were persons acting only in the domestic domain suggests an important distinction that other Highlands scholars did not apply at the time: it is possible to conceive of personhood outside the terms of Western individualism and the proprietary assumptions of "commodity logic" (see Barnett and Silverman 1979, Gregory 1982, Strathern 1984b, 1987, 1988).

The redefinition of "power" and "person" to account for indigenous or emic views of gender relations is particularly salient in the works of Weiner, and Errington and Gewertz, which I discuss in Chapter 3. These authors first examine the anthropological interplay of Western assumptions and indigenous notions of the nature of personhood and the nature of power, and secondly, the inter-sexual complementarity that appears to exist when gender relations are considered in the light of these emic constructions.

In addition, these studies divest the domestic/public dichotomy, as a hierarchical framework, of its analytical salience. Weiner's re-definition of power in the context of Trobriand society suggests that the significant complementary social domains were the socio-political (male) and the socio-cosmic (female). Errington and Gewertz's analysis of gender interests, based on a re-definition of person, explicitly suggests that in Chambri society, the public world and the domestic world did not co-exist in a hierarchical relation, but provided equal opportunities for male and female persons, and were therefore complementary. While "women as persons" relies on the domestic/public hierarchy for its terms of reference, the concept of complementarity transports the study of gender relations beyond hierarchy.
CHAPTER 3
GENDERED DOMAINS AND SEXUAL COMPLEMENTARITY

Introduction

Those anthropologists concerned with demonstrating women's personhood draw very different conclusions from their case studies. Strathern emphasizes Melpa women's almost exclusively domestic role, while Faithorn and Feil, emphasize Kafe and Enga women's participation in "male" political activities. Thus, as we have seen, Strathern demonstrates women's exclusion from the "male" political world, and Faithorn and Feil demonstrate women's inclusion in that world. In both cases, a domestic/public distinction is used, in the first instance, to disprove, and in the second, to demonstrate, women's involvement in political activity. The domestic/public distinction raises the further possibility that these are gendered domains within which women and men respectively enjoy autonomy. However, these authors do not explicitly invoke the notion of sexually distinct spheres of activity, that is, gendered domains, existing in a complementary relationship.

\[\text{Strathern's notions of Melpa women's "autonomy" and "jural personhood" may indeed imply a kind of complementarity, in that women's ability to act in the domestic domain paralleled or corresponded to men's ability to act in the political or public domain. Moreover, Faithorn and Feil also stress the complementarity of men's and women's activities, without, however, identifying separate spheres or distinct}\]
In contrast, Weiner, in her landmark work on the Trobriands (1976), and Errington and Gewertz in their recent study of Chambri society (1987), apply the notion that the sexes exercised different, but complementary, powers and functioned as persons in distinct, but equal, domains of activity. These studies thus present gender relations in terms of equality and complementary cultural domains.19

The Trobriand Islands and Chambri are both Lowlands societies, and they differ in a number of respects from the Highlands societies described in earlier chapters. The Trobriands are a group of coral atolls in the Massim Strait, between the island of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Traditionally, Trobriand society differed from Highlands societies in its socio-political organization, which included hereditary chiefs and ranked clans. However, Trobriand society did not resemble a Polynesian-style chiefdom, and at the time

19 For a discussion of the concept of complementarity, see McDowell's essay on Bun society (1984). McDowell notes that "the frequency with which the concept is invoked suggests ... that it encompasses many of the issues we confront in the anthropological study of women" (1984:32). In addition, she identifies the difference between Weiner's concept of complementarity and the common assumption that "things that are different must in some sense be unequal". Forge (1972), for example, links complementarity and hierarchy. The definition of complementarity that McDowell proposes is the same notion that Weiner and Errington and Gewertz invoke. McDowell states that "if ... things are complementary", not only are they "related or somehow connected" and "different in character or content", but "these differences are reciprocal, as each complements or completes the other in some essential way to form a whole" (1984:32-33).
of Weiner's fieldwork it had retained the dynamics of a big-man society (1976:45). The fundamental social dynamic of exchange and the ethos of reciprocity bound Trobriand society, much in the same way that these values served to bind Highlands societies. However, Trobriand society was matrilineal, and the ideological importance of women in maintaining clan continuity was without parallel in Highlands societies. Yet another major difference between the Trobriands and the Highlands was the absence, in the former, of secret male societies (e.g., the nama cult), of initiation rites and of elaborate pollution beliefs and taboos. Matrilineality, women's productivity and reproductivity, and the status or "value" of women are central to Weiner's analysis of complementary domains in Trobriand society.

The Chambri live on Chambri Island and in the area around Chambri Lake, in the Sepik River basin. Like the Trobriands, Chambri society was "typically" Melanesian in that exchange and reciprocity were pre-dominant social values. Although the society was nominally patrilineal and patriclan membership of great importance to social identity, affinal relations and male indebtedness to affines (who provided wives and mothers) constituted an equally powerful social dynamic. The relationship between Chambri men's ontological debt and women's "natural" ability to produce children is central to Errington and Gewertz's analysis of complementarity in Chambri society.
The ethnographic differences between the Trobriands and Chambri society, on one hand, and the Highlands, on the other, are not insignificant, and the degree to which the authors invoke complementarity in explaining the position of women is due both to ethnographic reality and to their theoretical agendas. In short, it appears that Trobriand and Chambri women had their own domains of "power", and a more "equal" status than Highland women, and that feminist anthropological interest in these societies derives from this fact. The apparent absence in these societies of sexual polarity, antagonism, competition and domination presents a fertile field for re-defining "power" in other than political terms, and "person" in terms other than those of Western individualism.

Both Weiner and Errington and Gewertz suggest that these re-defined terms may be applied further afield in Melanesia. If comparisons of Melanesian societies, Weiner argues, were "based on the differences in the socio-cosmic distributions of power and control" (1976:15), we would find that in a variety of matrilineal and patrilineal societies, women possessed a form of cosmic power and exercised a significant measure of control over the regeneration of ancestors. Similarly, Errington and Gewertz emphasize the cultural significance of women's power to produce children and the importance of matrilateral relationships in the construction of Chambri identities. More importantly, they use their
culturally-contexted reassessments of "person" and "domination" to argue that "it is not inevitable that male strategies for achieving worth result in the domination of women" (1987:140). This clearly raises the possibility that characterizations of other Melanesian societies as "male-dominated" may be erroneously based on unexamined concepts of "person" and "domination".

_Trobriand Women's Socio-cosmic Power_

_Weiner_ directs her attention to Trobriand women and to the complementarity of female and male domains and powers. Gender relations in Trobriand society were characterized by a clear division of powers, non-competition and a balanced complementarity. Trobriand women's exclusive ownership of certain wealth items and their pre-eminence in the ideology of social reproduction defined two areas of female power distinct from male power. Women's autonomy as persons, 20

---

20 The contrast between _Weiner's_ title, _Women of Value; Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange_, and _Strathern's_ title _Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World_ (1972) is instructive. _Weiner's_ title focuses our attention on women first and on complementary domains and powers; where women have value, men gain renown. _Strathern's_ title, however, focuses attention on women's position between patricians and the degrees to which women are included in and excluded from a predominantly male society.
Weiner argues, derived from the exclusivity of these areas of female control.

Although, in the work as a whole, Weiner brings female and male activities and powers into equal analytical focus, she begins by examining the social significance of women's activities and powers: their control of wealth items and of matrilineal continuity. In short, rather than beginning with a system of exchange or politics pre-defined as male and attempting to determine if and where women fit into that system, Weiner chooses as her point of departure women's activities and the meanings of those activities in the Trobriand ideology of social continuity. Beginning the analysis of Trobriand society with women is a corrective measure that undermines two traditional anthropological assumptions: (1) Exchange, politics and public activities are inherently male. Although anthropologists have identified women's participation or degree of inclusion in male activities, they have not questioned the "inherent" maleness of those activities. (2) Political power, in the traditional public sense of the term, is the only culturally recognized form of power. Thus, anthropologists have tended to assess the relative "powerlessness" of women in conjunction with the unexamined conflation of power and political or public action.

Historically, early androcentric ethnographers of the Trobriands directed their attention primarily to men's
activities, neglecting social features that Weiner, as a feminist, deems equally important: women's activities, the ideological importance of women and the complementarity of male and female domains. These early ethnographers, particularly Malinowski (1929) and Powell (1956), failed to investigate two important facts about Trobriand women: (1) Women played significant roles in exchange and had particular structural importance in mortuary ceremonies; (2) Women possessed social reproductive powers, culturally recognized as the "value" of women. These facts, Weiner argues, demonstrate that Trobriand women were persons who exercised both socio-economic and cosmic or transcendental power.

Weiner thus contends that power and control operate "not merely within the 'politics' of social relations" but "extend(ing) beyond the social to concepts concerning articulation with cosmic and transcendental phenomena" (1976:12). The cosmic therefore equalled the political in importance, and where early anthropologists had failed to do so, Trobrianders themselves gave full recognition to women's socio-cosmic power. This broadening of the definition of "power" is the theoretical key to Weiner's argument, and it represents an analytical innovation. She clearly does not privilege political power as previous ethnographers have done; neither does she argue that women were active participants in a male political process, but rather demonstrates that
Trobriand women were powerful in distinctive and "non-political" ways (1976:228). When we redefine power as existing in a variety of forms, women's non-political power becomes self-evident.

This re-definition of power precludes the possibility of women's political "equality", or even their political involvement (1976:13). The argument further implies that autonomy and equality were linked not to political activity, but to sexually specific forms of cultural production, which included the growing of yams and the making of banana leaf skirts and bundles, objects of exchange which in turn symbolized social identities and gendered powers. These processes of exchange, Weiner argues, were based not on reciprocity alone, but on self-interest and control; exchange is "a process that holds a system of power relationships in balance" (1976:227). Included in these power relationships are those that existed between men and women. Thus, the

21 Weiner questions the definition of power and its conflation with politics; she does not, in fact, question the definition of politics. Thus, she argues that women's possession of wealth and their control of property did not constitute political powers, but rather that these powers were socio-economic. The distinction is perhaps meaningless. From Feil or Faithorn's perspective, Trobriand women probably did have some political power. However, this does not, in fact, affect Weiner's argument that women's principal power was transcendental and ahistorical, while men's principal power was political and generational.

22 Weiner's perspective on exchange differs from classic analyses of exchange based on altruism, reciprocity and non-exploitation (e.g., Malinowski, Mauss, Levi-Strauss, Sahlins).
analysis is ultimately based on a concept of separate spheres, "the division of society into two separate but articulating female and male domains"; "within their own domains, men and women control different kinds of resources and hence affect different degrees and kinds of power over others" (1976:18). However, Trobriand men and women were not completely independent of each other; they were not "free agents", and while women's and men's lives were equally affected by the powers of the other sex, Weiner emphasizes the degree to which men's lives were affected by women's powers:

No woman or man becomes a strong person (e.g., powerful, beautiful, wealthy) without investments made in him or her by others. At issue is the way men must work ... around ... the limitations set up by women's control in certain contexts (1976:14).

This is a reversal of more traditional androcentric and early feminist approaches in which anthropologists attempted to correlate female status with degrees of male control over resources (Weiner 1976:15). Weiner, however, begins her analysis with female control of resources, arguing not that all female objects were wealth items, but rather that "given that women control some kinds of cultural resources defined as their own, it follows that they maintain some degree of power that differs from male power" (1976:14).

Trobriand women had power precisely because they produced, acquired and transferred objects of social and cultural importance: they possessed their own exchange wealth. More
importantly, their redistribution of those wealth items at mortuary ceremonies was significant both in a socio-economic sense, and in a transcendental sense, with respect to the regeneration of matrilineal ancestors. Only Trobriand women possessed the power to regenerate society through the trans-generational control of clan property and the continual transmission of matriclan (subclan or dala) substance.\(^{23}\) Wealth exchange was the material manifestation of the ideology of matrilineal continuity. Thus, women's power derived not only from the concept of women's regenerative "value", but from the material reality of their social affairs:

But women, besides serving merely as conduits of matrilineal identity, are actively engaged in various ceremonial and economic activities which function to maintain that identity (1976:16).

The most significant of these ceremonial and economic activities was the mortuary ceremony, which traditionally included a series of wealth distributions organized by the kin of the deceased. During these ceremonies women distributed large numbers of uniquely female wealth items: banana leaf skirts and leaf bundles. The distributions of women's wealth

\(^{23}\) If Weiner had begun her analysis, as Strathern (1972) does, with male political and prestige-seeking activities, (e.g., yam production and exchange, the kula and men's exchange of other valuables), men themselves would likely have appeared dominant by virtue of being constituted the first object of analysis. In beginning a social analysis with women, the unconscious omission of men is far less likely than the unconscious omission of women that results from the unexamined equation of "society" with "men".
generally consumed many hours, circulated thousands of bundles and dozens of skirts, and involved hundreds of exchanges.

A major purpose of the mortuary ceremony was the negotiation of death through exchange, and only women were able to re-work the fabric of social continuity rent apart by death. For Trobrianders, death was socially disruptive in that social relations established through the deceased were in immediate danger of disintegrating. Multiple exchanges liberated the deceased from all worldly obligations (1976:84-85) and closed the social rift occasioned by his or her death. These circular exchanges kept social disintegration in check, while simultaneously maintaining necessary social oppositions. Thus, the mortuary ceremony dramatized social relations, eased their transformation and compensated for their disruption. Women took centre stage during these ritual distributions of wealth, demonstrating their own economic role, and affirming the symbolic meanings of the skirts and bundles: dala (subclan) continuity and the value of women's regenerative power.

The mortuary ceremony thus presented the appropriate occasion for Trobriand women to reclaim dala land if the deceased was a member of another dala and had simply exercised generational usufructuary rights over that land. Land, like ancestral essence, was thus recycled through women, and the relationship between persons as subclan members, on one hand, and land and other sorts of dala property, on the other,
provides evidence of women's control over the dynamic movement of clan property.

According to the matrilineal ideology, a Trobriander was born into his or her mother's dala. At some time during adult life, he or she likely lived on and made use of his or her father's dala land. Because men's yam exchange gardens belonged to the recipient of the yams, a boy's first yam garden belonged to the man with whom he resided, possibly, but not necessarily, his father. By giving yams to his father he invested in future rights to his father's property, i.e., the right to use his father's dala land. The result was a system in which most men worked land that was not their own dala land, but was the property of their father's dala.

Thus, although each dala clearly owned its own land, the use of land by persons belonging to other subclans was such that the reality of land tenure was extremely complex. Men controlled the distribution of dala property, including land, throughout the "historical time" of one generation. However, land or other property lent out by men on a generational basis was never permanently lost to the dala that was its original owner because women possessed the power to reclaim such property. This process of reclamation represented an ahistorical or timeless continuity, such that the ultimate ownership of dala property was not affected by temporary, generational dispersal. The women of that dala
retained ultimate control of the land. In this way, complementarity between the sexes existed in their relationships to land and other dala property: while men lent out land for immediate, generational power-building, women maintained the continuity of the land by continually calling it back as timeless dala property.

The recycling or dynamic movement of clan property included the transmission of matrilineal substance. Thus, the second and equally important aspect of Trobriand women's power was their regeneration of ancestors. The traditional conception ideology attributed to women the power to conceive independently of men. Only through women did matrilineal substance pass on to future generations:

...matrilineality is experienced primarily as the cultural fact that women impart a significant aspect of social identity, that is, ancestral essence, to their children (1976:16).

In contrast to women, whose power was both social and cosmic, Trobriand men exercised power on a purely social plane, controlling historical time and maintaining the continuity of social relationships within and between generations. As individual seekers of renown, men strove to achieve immortality through temporary control over valuable objects and land.

The ideological balance of female and male had practical ramifications, and complementarity characterized Trobriand marriage. Because a woman likely married a member of her
father's dala, marriage reinforced her position in that dala. Yet, marriage equally solidified a woman's position in her own dala by triggering a series of exchanges between her kin and her husband's kin. Thus, at marriage, a woman's father made a yam garden for her and gave yams to her husband in her name, creating an obligation on the part of the husband to help his wife to accumulate women's wealth. The husband then relied on his own wealth and kin connections in order to accumulate banana leaf skirts and bundles which his wife eventually used in mortuary distributions.

Yam production and exchange, along with the accumulation of valuables, was the most important male activity. Although women also grew yams, their yams were strictly for consumption, did not represent wealth and were not exchanged. Men's control of major resources and the absence of inter-sexual competition for the control of yams no doubt strengthened marital complementarity. Moreover, although male and female wealth items appeared to be circulating in very different domains, they were inter-connected; men's provisioning of married women with yams required that women produce and distribute wealth when a death occurred. There was thus an implicit cultural link between yams and women's wealth that reflected the complementary nature of male-female relations:

Superficially, yams and their distribution appear to be completely associated with male domains of economics and politics. But the production of yams
equally concerns the relationships between women and men (1978:180).

Within this cultural complementarity, men and women exercised different kinds of powers. Correspondingly, both sexes believed men and women to contribute differently, yet complementarily, to reproduction: women controlled the transmission of timeless dala substance and men exercised temporal intervention. Dala substance was thus female in origin. The male influence on the child developing in the womb was an entirely exterior, temporal process. The difference between female and male contributions was symbolically rendered in the belief that children were of their mothers' dala substance, but physically resembled their fathers. In addition, the naming of a child with two names reflected the different contributions of the sexes to reproduction. Names were significantly connected to the cultural concepts of historical time (male/father) and cosmic time (female/mother):

Names given by women are always the property of women, but names given by men can never be reused beyond their children's generation. Similarly the name that a woman gives her son (his true dala name) cannot be reused beyond his child's lifetime (1976:128).

Trobriand ideology did not only assign cultural value to the regenerative power of women; in addition, it defined the fundamental difference between women themselves and the social value of their regenerative power or "womanness". Weiner has appropriately referred to the "reproductive model" in
Trobriand society (1978, 1979, 1980) and has viewed reproduction as "a total organizing principle" (1978:175). Trobriand "reproduction", she claims, was a blend of the biological and the social, and as such, was tantamount to a cultural achievement. Thus, she ultimately presents Trobriand women as culturally productive persons; they are not "objects but ... individuals with some measure of control" (1976:228).

The redefinition of reproduction as a cultural achievement and the difference between women and their value ("womanness") are crucial to the understanding of marriage. Weiner argues that in marriage Trobriand men did not acquire women as objects of exchange (cf., Levi-Strauss), but rather acquired "womanness", that is, the regenerative power of women and the potential for social continuity. Men, therefore, did not exchange women; at the heart of exchange lay the social interdependence of spouses and at the heart of marriage "exchange" lay the process of social reproduction. Through economic activity (accumulation and circulation of wealth)

Here, as Strathern (1984a) suggests, there is an implicit link between cultural production and individual autonomy. Weiner's model is also informed by the Western dichotomy between nature and culture; she removes reproduction from the natural domain and places it in the cultural domain. This parallels Faithorn's and Feil's endeavours to remove certain female activities from the domestic domain and place them in the public/political domain. See Chapter 4 for my review of Strathern's critique of Feil's and Weiner's attempts to demonstrate female personhood via the transfer of female activities from a devalued to a valued sphere.
and cosmic activity (control of dala continuity), women were an autonomous force; "... men maintain operative social relations directly with women, and ... women are not 'one of the objects in exchange' as Levi-Strauss claimed" (Weiner 1978:178). Therefore, as Strathern points out in her critique of Weiner, the notion of "womanness" is not "mere biology" (Strathern 1984a:18). Trobriand men did not simply appropriate women's biological procreativity, but gained access to its social reproductive value.

Following Weiner's argument, we can summarize the key features that characterize the position of women in Trobriand society: (1) Through their production, acquisition and transfer of objects of social and cultural significance (banana leaf skirts and bundles), Trobriand women controlled resources and therefore exercised social power. (2) Through their transmission of matriclan (dala) substance and their reclamation of dala property (land, names etc.), women possessed a culturally valued regenerative power. (3) While men's valuable objects and manipulations of property within one lifetime did not transcend mortality, women's control over cosmic or ahistorical time allowed such transcendence. Thus, it appears that complementary gender relations and Trobriand women's equality were determined largely by: (a) women's immediate control of wealth items and long-term control
of dala property; (b) the culturally-valued association of women with the timeless continuity of the matriline.

Weiner claims that she does not propose a universal model for assessing the roles and status of women, nor even one that embraces all kinds of male-female interaction in the Trobriands (1976:12). Nevertheless, she implies a differentially recognized universal value that she variously denotes as female regenerative power, "womanness" or the "value" of women. The supposed universality of "womanness" inspires Weiner's unfortunately polemical criticism of Western societies in which, she claims, people undervalue the regenerative power of women, and overvalue the temporary political power of men. In attempting to universalize a particular set of ethnographic facts, extrapolating from what appears to be a good account of Trobriand social reproduction, Weiner establishes Trobriand Woman as the equal of Malinowski's Trobriand Man (see Strathern 1981a). In so doing, she leaves herself open to the criticism that her work is essentialist.

Weiner's analytical stance is feminist and corrective. Her most significant contribution is the redefinition of power: power exists in a variety of forms, and lack of political power is not equivalent to a lack of power of any kind. As we have seen, she situates power both inside and outside political activity.
While she directs her deconstruction of power mainly to the anthropology of Malinowski, she also addresses in passing the more recent anthropology of Andrew and Marilyn Strathern (1971, 1972). The Stratherns, Weiner argues, have failed to consider adequately the ideological importance of Hagen women's "distribution of netbags across affinal, consanguineal and inter-generational lines" and their "dancing in ceremonial attire at pig feasts" (1976:13). Weiner poses the following question:

... when a Melpa woman dance in splendid ceremonial attire at a pig feast, is she merely being granted a favour by her husband, as Andrew and Marilyn Strathern (1971) suggested? Or, regardless of what Melpa men say about her activities, is she acting out an aspect of her own power which is structurally central to the socio-cosmic dimension of Melpa realities? (1976:14).

This statement explicitly questions the nature of "power" and suggests that Trobrianders may not be unique in valuing socio-cosmic power. Weiner appears to claim that the presumption that power and politics are one has obscured anthropologists' abilities to perceive social realities.

**Male-female Complementarity in Chambri Society**

In *Cultural Alternatives and a Feminist Anthropology: An Analysis of Culturally Constructed Gender Interests in Papua New Guinea* (Errington and Gewertz 1987) the authors examine two cultural features of Chambri society: (1) how
the differences between Chambri women's and men's social strategies resulted in non-competition and complementarity, and (2) how these complementary gender relations were dependent on a concept of the person as a social being, deriving personal worth and individual identity from social relatedness.25

Errington and Gewertz's principal theoretical argument is that any analysis of gender relations must take cultural premises about personhood into account. Indeed, they explicitly question the use of a Western concept of "person" in the study of non-Western gender relations, and specifically criticize Mead's unexamined use of "person" in her 1935 analysis of Tchambuli (Chambri) gender relations. The Chambri concept of "person", they argue, is a cultural construction fundamentally different from the Western concept of "person" as individual subjectivity:

The concept of the person by which individuals shape their sense of self, the definition of the individual worth and the strategies of men and women are ... substantially different for Chambri than for ourselves and form very different sorts of individuals in each case (Errington and Gewertz 1987:131).

Using Mead's work as a point of departure, the authors contrast Western "subjectivity" and competition between the sexes with Chambri "positional" personhood and non-competitive

25 The concept of "individual identity" derives from Western ideas of individualism and a psychologically and emotionally constituted subjectivity. Since this is not part of the Chambri concept of personhood, I use the term advisedly.
inter-sexual relations. They consider Chambri men's and women's social interests in relation to a culturally particular concept of "personal worth" (1987:139) which existed within a set of cultural beliefs or "premises" (1987:13) about persons and their social goals. These premises were "embodied in (the) social action" (1987:13) of men and women.

The culturally defined interests of Chambri men and women determined their different social strategies: men engaged in continuous socio-political competition with other men, practising political strategies "to succeed at the expense of others" (1987:13); women did not engage in political struggles to the same degree, but adopted "more reliable and less competitive" (1987:13) methods of achieving social worth, pursuing largely "domestic" goals. From these "gender interests" emerged sexually distinct, complementary spheres of action, or domains. As a result, Chambri society, the authors argue, was characterized by sexual complementarity, sexual egalitarianism and the absence of domination.26

26 Errington and Gewertz explore the relationship of Chambri "positional" personhood and concept of personal worth to "gender interests". As I have suggested (see Chapter 2), this frees the analysis from the domestic/public dichotomy and its usual implication of universal female subordination (see Rosaldo 1974, 1980). Although Chambri men appeared to be acting in "public" or "political" ways, while Chambri women appeared to be acting in more "domestic" ways in that they were little concerned with the politics of affinal exchange, women were not subject to domination because, like men, they were fully able to achieve personal worth within the terms set out by their culture.
In his analyses of Enga society, Feil (1978a, 1978b) notes men's and women's different, but complementary and non-competitive, interests in the tee. Errington and Gewertz extend this form of argument to suggest that in Chambri society men and women maintained generally different social interests, and that marriage was the "essential context" in which they pursued these "respective interests" (1987:99). While both sexes owed their lives to the wife-givers who had provided them and their clans with their mothers, Chambri men alone were eternally indebted to affines. Beginning with bridewealth payments, men continually strove to repay this ontological debt; however, the debt could never be fully acquitted and exercised a life-long hold over Chambri men. Men's lives consisted of the relentless pursuit of equality with those affines who, by providing the mothers of men, had caused men's existence:

Only with reluctance do men act together in clans to educate their agnates in ritual knowledge and to compensate their affines: they long to be able to achieve equality through gaining release from their social obligations (1987:66).

Through the politics of affinal exchange, Chambri men also strove to dominate other men, to achieve "effects" as they competed "to become equal to those who have caused them" (1987:48) and "to replicate the power of those who have produced them" (1987:52). The cultural belief in the inequality of men thus undermined agnatic solidarity, and both inter-
and intra-clan relations involving the acquisition of totemic names were, for men, "manifestations of relative power" (1987:47):

The totemic names ... men hold provide the possibility of gaining power over others and are the focus and basis of political competition. Men seek to augment their own power through gaining control of the names of others, as when one clan subsumes another and so acquires its ritual estate ... men define themselves primarily in terms of relative control over names, over that which gives them power (1987:47).

While Chambri men became powerful exclusively through the possession of powerful totemic names, Chambri women drew power from two major sources, one of which was totemic knowledge. Chambri women "know as much about the general characteristics of this immanent totemism as do their husbands since they too are recipients of totemic names and (some) objects of totemic significance" (1987:79). Women knew of the existence of the "secret" flutes and water-drums used in male initiations; in addition, they became powerful through knowledge of men's totemic names.

Women's primary power, however, lay in their ability to repay their "ontological debts" by giving birth to children. Although Chambri women defined themselves as men did, by their totemic names, the power of women's names was related to reproduction; powerful names engendered reproductive power:

... the power conveyed by their names cannot shape social relationships as does the power of the names men hold but, instead, ensures reproduction. Because
the power of women cannot be transferred into the male sphere of politics, women do not compete with men for political eminence (1987:47).

Thus, Chambri women exercised the power of their names in the reproductive and ontological sphere, and consequently, were scarcely interested in male political intrigues. Women were fully able to act as causes, in an ontological sense, in a culture that Gewertz says "profoundly believes that causes are more important than effects" (1984:627).

The sexual balance of powers in Chambri society is reminiscent of the complementarity of female and male powers in Trobriand society. The distinction between men's lifetime strivings to buy back their existence echoes Trobriand men's generational pursuits of renown. Chambri women's reproductivity, like Trobriand women's regenerative capacity, acquired the significance of a "cultural" achievement (Weiner 1976) and liberated women from the endless material cycle of debt repayment. Chambri women's greater value (i.e., greater than bridewealth valuables) and their "natural" ability to acquit their own indebtedness through production of children granted them their ontological advantage. Sisters also possessed an ontological importance, assuming "the role of transformer in all major rites of passage for Chambri males" (1987:92). The parallel here speaks for itself: Trobriand women exercised a "transcendental" power; Chambri women exercised a similar "ontological" power. Weiner speculated
that the transcendental or cosmic power of women responsible for the transmission of identities was likely not restricted to matrilineal societies (1976:15). This has been demonstrated (Bell 1983), and Errington and Gewertz's analysis confirms the speculation.27

For all that male totemic names and patrilineal identity figured prominently in Chambri consciousness and in the

27 We may also speculate that sexual complementarity in both societies, Chambri and Trobriand, was related to the absence of a strong ethic of male egalitarianism. Errington and Gewertz argue that Chambri men employed strategies of dominance to compete with each other, but women and men did not compete, and we have seen that in the sexually polarized world of Melpa society, women competed with men for control of pigs destined for moka exchange. The moka masked inequalities among men, perpetrated the ideological valuation of male over female, and thus provided a suitable terrain for the seeds of institutionalized male domination. Here, overt competition between the sexes, the minimization of inequalities among men and the domination of women appear co-related.

Conversely, drawing on the Chambri evidence, we may postulate a relationship between three facts: (1) culturally explicit competition and inequalities among men, especially agnates; (2) weak patriclan solidarity; and (3) sexual complementarity and non-domination. The question arises: when competition between the sexes was tempered by competition among men that was not solidly masked by an ideology of egalitarianism, was there less room for the political domination of women? Overt competition between men, in the Chambri case, and remnants of a hierarchical structure of ranked clans permitting inequalities among men, in the Trobriand case, may have consigned men in these societies to the prosaic task of validating their generational existence, that is, proving themselves vis-a-vis other men. In the Trobriand case, the proof was renown; in the Chambri case, it was the power of totemic names to prove men's equality.

The ethnographic facts of inter-sexual complementarity and weak patriclan solidarity in Chambri society were mutually reinforcing. This was clearly not a simple sequence of cause and effect, and women's transcendental and ontological powers cannot simply be construed as a by-product of male intra-sex political machinations. However, Weiner's and Errington and Gewertz's data do suggest a correlation of overt or structural recognition of inequalities among men and complementarity in inter-sexual relations.
constitution of the person, the pre-eminence of patrilineal identities by no means precluded the existence of matrilaterally constructed identities (in addition to Bell 1983, see Feil 1984a, Schwimmer 1973). In fact, Chambri fully acknowledged both patrilineal and matrilateral identities, and the following passage indicates the importance that Chambri granted to affinal relations and the transmission of totemic names through women:

Each Chambri is given totemic names by his or her patrilineal and matrilateral relatives. Men acquire more of these names, as well as names which are more powerful, than do women. Both men and women receive more, as well as more powerful names, from their patrilineal than from matrilateral kin. Nonetheless, all Chambri derive much of their initial identity through their possession of these totemic names. They become in substantial measure the incarnation of their patrilineal and matrilateral relationships (1987:31).

With respect to the social construction of identities, Errington and Gewertz adopt an explicitly feminist approach. That is, they are committed to presenting women's views of the social order, and therefore do not fail to include women's perspectives on patrilineal ideology and on the pre-eminence of patrilineal identities:

Since women produce children for a clan other than their own, they are unlikely to take with male seriousness the principle that clan identity generates absolute differences (1987:102).

This passage unequivocally indicates that Chambri women understood patrilineality differently from the ways in which
men understood the same social "structure". This different understanding is further illustrated in the following description of a Chambri wedding in which the authors clearly acknowledge women's perspectives on agnatic and affinal relations:

So while Pekur and his kinsmen united as solidary wife-takers to accumulate the money necessary to acquire a woman from their wife-givers, their sisters and wives were uproariously ignoring not only the distinction of generation but the structural distinction between affines by describing themselves as merged daughter-mothers and mother-daughters. Even those clan sisters who contributed to the bride-price and who did derive a measure of status and prestige from the game of affinal exchange... were thus discounting the importance of agnation and affinal opposition as the fundamental basis of identity (1987:102).

Not only did Chambri people acknowledge matrilateral relationships, and not only did Chambri women discount the structural bases of identity construction, but in addition, there were echoes of matrilineality or bi-lineality in Chambri kinship organization. Men passed names to their sisters' sons. Although Errington and Gewertz note that this was a functional device preventing sons from competing directly with fathers, it further suggests that the patrilineal "structure" was not rigid and may in fact have been differently constructed by women. Consider the fact that daughters were equally endowed with clan valuables which they eventually gave to their sons, who in turn used them to repay their maternal uncles. That this forestalled fathers' rivalry with sons or served as a
delayed bequest to sons (1987:96) is a structural explanation that does not account for the practices of the system from the perspective of women. Women may have viewed their role in this process differently; that is, they may not have seen themselves as intermediaries in a patrilineal process. Here, Errington and Gewertz do not fail to note women's roles, but they do not fully recognize that women may have understood both their own roles and the social structure differently. In this instance, the authors explore neither the potential for female control of clan valuables, nor women's perceptions of the circumstances.

In spite of the fact that Chambri women were generally disinterested in men's political machinations, their own "domestic" lives were in fact far from apolitical. Because they had knowledge of their husbands' totemic names and ritual objects "women can, if they choose ... act as political catalysts" (1987:80). Women were able to use knowledge of totemic names for their own purposes, to undermine both their husbands' power and the power of their husbands' clans.\(^2\)

Women's political potential, that is, the ability to exercise some form of social power, clearly existed in Chambri society insofar as male security depended on women's political

\(^2\) This latent female political power was perhaps what Mead detected when she suggested that Chambri men were "legally dominant", but "emotionally subservient" (Errington and Gewertz 1987:79).
disengagement. But, this disengagement was not equivalent to the political marginalization experienced by Melpa women. While Melpa women were unable to act as political or judicial persons (Strathern 1972), Chambri women were able to validate themselves fully as persons without active recourse to the kinds of "political" actions practised by men. Thus, Chambri society, as I have already suggested, did not exhibit the social dynamics of Melpa society, in which men's activities masked male intra-sex competition behind the smokescreen of an egalitarian ideology and reinforced women's "judicial minority" (Strathern 1972). Melpa men drew on heavy symbolic ammunition to reassert their claims to pre-eminence in the public sphere of politics, and the opposition of the sexes had far greater cultural salience than the competition among men. But, as we have seen, Chambri men's situation was primarily characterized not by their superiority over or opposition to women, but by their unequal abilities to acquit their ontological debts, and thus by the inequalities among men themselves. These inequalities acquired the status of social facts. Gewertz asks:

How can men regard themselves as equal to women when they are produced by women?; how can men regard themselves as equal to other men when they receive their wives from other men? (1984:627).

Consequently, the equality that men sought through the pursuit of political power and prestige was strictly symbolic and
produced an ideological inversion that "ultimately defines women as subservient" (1984:627). 29

The ideological inversion aside, Errington and Gewertz sustain the argument that Chambri society was sexually egalitarian. If men and women were not ontologically equal, and if, on a psychological level men dealt with their culturally established "inequality" through ideological inversions, gender relations were nevertheless complementary and neither men nor women were socially dominant.

Complementarity and Personhood

Errington and Gewertz's analysis of Chambri social action postulates that men and women acted in sexually distinct or gendered domains. Furthermore, distinct gender interests permitted the achievement of personal worth for both sexes, and the complementary goals of those interests produced non-competition and sexual complementarity. The "status" that men achieved through political means, women achieved through domestic and reproductive means. Because neither sex posed

---

29 This portrait of women as subservient leads us into the realm of gender ideology and symbolism. Familiar, unpleasant questions reappear: What do we make of yet another gender ideology that devalues and denigrates women? How do we reconcile such an ideology with the social reality of Chambri women's greater ability to pay back their ontological debts? How are we to understand the relationship between a gender ideology that denigrates women and a purportedly egalitarian practice? I address these questions more directly in Chapters 4 and 5.
a threat to the personal or social worth of the other, there was no domination of one sex by the other.

The relationship that Errington and Gewertz establish between complementarity and non-domination derives directly from their understanding of Chambri personhood, and from the notion of validation of personal worth, and how this is accomplished differently for Chambri as "positional" persons, with equal opportunities for both genders, and for Westerners (Americans) as "subjective" persons.

At issue here, with respect to the theoretical argument, i.e., that Chambri women cannot be said to be dominated, is firstly, the nature of personhood, and secondly, the relationship between the achievement of personhood (or recognized worth) and non-domination. In order to understand how the idea of person functioned to eliminate the possibility of domination and produce complementarity, we must examine how the Chambri concept of "person" differs from Western notions of personhood, and how, particularly for women, personal or social worth is achieved in Chambri society.  

The conclusion that relations of domination did not exist in Chambri society challenges Mead's (1935) conclusion that Chambri women, through their economic or public activity,

---

30 I return to the question of personhood and the "validation of subjectivity" (Errington and Gewertz 1987) in Western societies in my larger discussion of Melanesian personhood in Chapter 4.
dominated Chambri men, whose interests focused on personal and domestic concerns. In her 1935 study of the Tchambuli (Chambri) people, Mead concludes that the stereotypical, biologically-based Western configuration of the passive female and the dominant male was simply reversed (1972:216). Mead's analysis implies that the Chambri were both similar to and different from Americans. Insofar as gender traits and roles were reversed, Chambri "deviated" from the stereotypical American gender pattern. On the other hand, Mead suggests that Chambri constructed gender identities and roles from familiar fundamental building blocks, that is, recognizably American traits and polar oppositions associated with gender, such as passive/active and submissive/dominant.

Gewertz (1981, 1984) and Errington and Gewertz (1987) propose that the Chambri were even more different than Mead suspected. Her analysis, they argue, is inappropriately predicated on a Western concept of "person". In Gewertz's view, Mead's attempt to demonstrate that Chambri men were like Western women and Chambri women like Western men is a distorted projection, "New Guineans ... exhibiting characteristics that are but permutations of established Western categories" (1984:616). Errington and Gewertz further suggest that Mead viewed Chambri men and women "in Western terms as subjective individuals seeking self-expression through an economically derived individualism" (1987:45). Chambri
men, Mead argues, lacked control over resources, were controlled by women and even suffered from individualized psychosexual conflicts (1987:46, see Mead 1935:290-309).31

Errington and Gewertz contend that Mead mistakenly relies on a strictly Western notion of the individual person "created by emotionally formative influences over time" (1987:43) and that Chambri persons do not fit this description. A "person", in Chambri terms, was a primarily a social being whose existence was defined by the parameters of the clan. A Chambri was, by definition, a member of a patriclan, embodying both matrilateral and patrilineal relationships through the possession of totemic names passed through the father's affines (1984:619, 1987:31). "Person" thus implied and embodied a set of agnatic and affinal relations (1984:618-9; 1987:25-26) such that Chambri were not autonomous individuals, but rather "the incarnation of their patrilineal and matrilateral relationships" (1987:31). They were not "subjectivities" but "repositories of social relations" (1987:41).

In the Chambri context, the conceptual difference between "individual" and "person" was critical, and the two should not be confused. As an "individual" or socially autonomous

---

31 The same set of Western psychological, (and largely Freudian), assumptions underlie Mead's work and the work of Chodorow (e.g., 1974) the psychoanalytic feminist. Errington and Gewertz take both Mead and Chodorow to task for failing to consider a non-Western concept of self in their explanations of gender differences and relations.
being, no Chambri could achieve viability as a "person". Only through social relationships did the individual human achieve personhood, and only by way of the social context were his or her actions meaningful and explicable. Individualized, inner motivations did not exist. To illustrate the absence of recognition of inner motivation and subjectivity, the authors consider the case of Yaboli, a man who drank and beat his wife:

... no one . . . had speculated as to why he had drunk so much and why he had beaten his wife ... No one . . . speculated on what we might regard as the underlying reasons for his conduct ... (this man) ... was not to them a subjectivity, expressing discontent and alienation through anti-social behaviour, to be understood as perhaps a novel consequence of his own formative experiences (1987:34-35).

The Chambri explanation of this type of behaviour addressed the state of the man's social transactions and their role in his ability to act as a person: "... because his social transactions had become as they were he could no longer constitute himself as a viable person" (1987:35). This example suggests that Chambri proposed social explanations for individual behaviours. There were no indigenous explanations of behaviour that referred to an "underlying' subjectivity" or to an "internally integrated" (1987:35) personality or character:

Chambri do have emotion, intention and experience but they do not understand these as constituting themselves as subjectivities: that is, they do not
see themselves as having an individually distinctive pattern of dispositions, capacities and perspectives (1987:35).

This passage notes a blending of what Westerners perceive as differentiated, and frequently opposing, features: role or social persona and inner essence or "true", individualized self (see Lutz 1988). In Western thinking, the two are quite distinct, but "in Chambri society ... the distance between what we ... would consider someone 'really is' and his or her social relationships ... vanishes" (1987:37-38).

The authors also suggest that the Chambri experience of self largely corresponded to the cultural definition of personhood. Chambri experienced and presented themselves as the sum total of their social transactions. Identity was thus the product of social relationships, and diminished or increased in tandem with the transactions that created social relations. Personal identity, in Chambri thinking, was therefore formed mainly, if not entirely, from outside the self:

To be a person among the Chambri ..., is to belong to a patriclan, whose members assume corporate interests in affinal debts and credits and assert common ownership of totemic names. These names are the basis and indicators for both men and women of the social networks which afford them and their children basic identity ... Of most importance, totemic names allow both men and women to pursue, respectively, their culturally defined preoccupations of political competition and the bearing of children (1987:47).
As we have already seen, political competition in Chambri society, setting men against men, derived from men's desires to possess powerful totemic names and did not in any way impede women's access to totemic names or women's ability to acquit their social debts by producing children. Thus, the absence of inter-sexual competition resulted from the absence of competing male and female subjectivities. The ultimate result was an absence of domination; men and women had equal access to the means of achieving personal worth and were equally recognized as persons.

Chambri society has not remained static and its economy has been subject to gradual monetization. With the merging of two economic systems (market/money and gift exchange), money has become more than a functional equivalent of the shells and other valuables used in traditional exchange. Errington and Gewertz note that because money can be used to buy anything, unlike traditional objects of exchange, it is or becomes anything. The authors predict that this recent change in the meaning of money may encourage inequalities, not only between men and women, (as Chambri men have been involved in wage labour to a greater extent than have Chambri women), but also among men (see also A. Strathern 1982, and the substantial literature on women, wage labour and development). As relationships become monetized and as money takes on a unitary meaning (i.e., it is used not only to buy
things, but also as bridewealth), women may become commoditized. In the case of the Chambri, the potential thus exists to alter the process of establishing personal worth, for both women and men:

To the extent that social relations become substantially monetized ..., the concept and experience of ontological debt and, consequently, the way in which personal worth is defined and established are likely to undergo substantial change (1987:111).

The shift from a total cultural emphasis on "social relations" to a greater emphasis on relations between persons and things is reflected in the disappearance of the large men's and women's houses that existed into the 1970's (1987:119). With the gradual infiltration of a money economy, Chambri have found it more difficult to live together and to maintain the values of exchange:

... those who do earn money wish to assert disposal rights over that which they have purchased, such as radios, tape-recorders and watches and are reluctant for these possessions to circulate freely within the clan (1987:120-121).

Money "can allow Chambri to lead viable lives quite apart from other Chambri" (1987:125) and "leads to a shift from positional to a private, subjectivist definition of person ... (and) a shift in the criteria and strategies for establishing worth" (1987:126). This directly echoes Strathern's argument that commodity relations engender a type of "person" unknown in gift exchange relations, i.e., a subject
who may be objectified. While Strathern does not explore the implications of change for Melpa women, Errington and Gewertz suggest that money and Western notions of property will redefine the Chambri person and along with it, the complementarity that has existed between the sexes.\footnote{In Chapter 4 I discuss in some detail Strathern’s deconstruction of the subject-object dichotomy and her analysis of the nature of persons in gift exchange economies (1984b, 1987, 1988).}

In demonstrating the existence of complementary gendered domains of actions in Chambri society, Errington and Gewertz examine gender relations almost exclusively through social practice, not through ideology. They are concerned with men's and women's social actions, behaviours and strategies, their "gender interests", not with Chambri ideas of "maleness" and "femaleness", or their ideological beliefs about the sexes. Interestingly, Chambri gender ideology apparently did not include the symbolic association of "maleness" with prestige and social good, and "femaleness" with domesticity and self-interest that Strathern (1981b) has found in Melpa society (see also Lederman 1986, 1989, on Mendi society). A similar evaluation was nevertheless echoed in the association of men with activities ostensibly serving public and clan purposes, and of women with domestic and personal goals. This distinction did not, however, take the Melpa form of cross-sex opposition; ideological evaluations did not characterize Chambri women
as particularistic and self-interested in contrast to men. Lack of competition in cross-sex relations likely contributed to the absence of the type of exaggerated moral and evaluative contrast of the sexes that existed in Melpa society.

However, in spite of the absence of a strong cross-sex opposition in ideology, evidence suggests that even in this sexually egalitarian practice and complementarity, there were undercurrents of male domination, control and the exercise of force. The authors refer to men beating their wives, and in the case of the wedding mentioned earlier in the discussion, the groom's younger brother, referring to the substantial bridewealth, pointed out that the bride's "father and brother had, in large measure, already been compensated if she were to be killed by her husband during a fight" (1987:105). While the authors interpret this statement as a rhetorical show of strength on the part of a clan asserting itself in the face of its wife-givers, it is disconcerting and suggestive of other sexual dynamics, including physical violence, that the authors do not fully explore. They do, however, link this statement to the monetization of affinal relations and the potential for the commoditization of women (1987:162, note 6).
Conclusion

Weiner, and Errington and Gewertz explicitly invoke the concept of sexual complementarity in their attempts to study men and women in an equal way, without presuming the nature of "power" or of "person". From Strathern's (1972) assessment of Melpa women's lack of both political power and "judicial personhood", to Feil's (1978a, 1987b) and Paithorn's (1976) assessments of Enga and Kafe women's possession of political power and full personhood in the Western sense of the term, Weiner and Errington and Gewertz have deconstructed both "power" and "person". Trobriand women's socio-cosmic power equalled men's political power, and produced a complementarity in gender relations similar to the complementarity created in Chambri society by the equal access of both women and men to substantially different means of achieving personhood, as it was defined in Chambri terms.

Errington and Gewertz's "feminist anthropology" stands in opposition to earlier universalist feminist positions (e.g., Rosaldo 1974). The authors' analysis of Chambri personhood aims explicitly to demonstrate that it is not inevitable that male strategies for achieving worth result in the domination of women. Where Western social scientists see hierarchy, there may be only a kind of difference that is difficult to grasp without a deep understanding of cultural premises, including particular beliefs about persons, and as we have seen with
respect to the Trobriands, beliefs about power. As anthropologists, we are compelled to believe that there exist cultural alternatives to the equation of politics and power, and the equation of individual subject and person, and that these are not merely re-arrangements of Western cultural features.

Weiner, and Errington and Gewertz demonstrate the social mechanics of two distinct cultural alternatives. They avoid the hierarchical implications of the domestic-public model, and yet at the same time clearly distinguish the different kinds of actions or modes of being exercised by men and women and the cultural motivations for those actions. They conclude that these gendered modes permitted a similar achievement of personal worth (Chambri), value or renown (Trobriands) for both sexes, and yet were sufficiently different so as to eliminate the possibility of "domination by or even interference from members of the other group" (Errington and Gewertz 1987:13).

Both Weiner's and Errington and Gewertz's arguments rest on a culturally relativistic scrutiny of indigenous definitions and categories; inter-sexual complementarity emerges from the redefinition of "power" and "person". From a feminist perspective, these are appealing analyses. Yet, in the case of Chambri society, Errington and Gewertz's theory of social action notwithstanding, it is apparent that a gender ideology
that denigrated women by defining them as subservient and the physical domination of women did exist, at least in some measure. Consequently, we are left with the problem that Chambri gender ideology cannot simply be explained away by examining why it existed, i.e., by arguing it was a psychological consequence of men's structural position and their "natural inferiority" to women. Rather, an adequate explanation must also examine the effects of that ideology on those who are implicated in it, i.e., those whose beings and qualities become the key symbolic categories. Weiner's study, on the other hand, deals substantially with gender ideology, in addition to social practice, and the denigration of women as a category was apparently not part of this ideology.

In Chapter 4, I discuss in greater detail the problems of culturally relativistic views of personhood, gender ideology, gender symbolism and their relationship to the domination of women.
CHAPTER 4
DECONSTRUCTING DOMINATION:
PERSON AND GENDER AS IDEOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter I expand a theme introduced in Chapter 3: the cultural construction of personhood and its relevance to gender relations. In addition, I examine anthropological understandings of Highland New Guinea gender ideologies and their role in the domination of women. More precisely, I am concerned in this chapter with the relationship between notions of person and the ideological and symbolic uses of gender categories, on one hand, and the ethnographic existence of gender hierarchies and the domination of women, on the other. Anthropologists studying the New Guinea Highlands have recently examined ideologies of "person" and "gender", distinguishing these from social practices and producing what appears as a "deconstruction" of the male domination of women (see Strathern 1981b, 1984a, 1984b, 1988, Lederman 1986, 1989). This chapter is therefore primarily an examination of the anthropological relationship between ideologies of person and gender and the political status of women.

Anthropologists have recently characterized the concept of domination as highly ethnocentric. In Chapter 3, I discussed Errington and Gewertz's (1987) re-definition of person and
deconstruction of domination in Chambri society. Chambri women acting in a domestic domain that granted them "personal worth" were in no sense associated with a *devalued* domestic world. Neither were they "subjects", and therefore, could not be dominated as such.

Predating Errington and Gewertz, Strathern (1984a, 1984b) makes the identical claim that Melpa women were neither less fully persons because of their domestic status, nor subject to domination as subjects. Melpa women were "judicial minors" (1972), "domestic persons" (1984a) and "wealth" (1984b), but were neither assigned the status of "jural minors", nor denigrated, nor objectified. In general, Strathern argues that Melpa women can be shown to be acting as persons, and yet not subject to Western forms of the domination of persons. Thus, she too demonstrates the relevance of cultural concepts of the person to the characterization of gender relations, implying that domination as a perceived reality is directly dependent on the assumed definition of personhood.

Anthropologists have also used gender symbolism and ideology to deconstruct domination (Strathern), or at very least, to examine the ideological roots of hierarchical discourses (Biersack, Lederman). These scholars contend that

---

33 In Western thought, legal minority, denigration or devaluation, and objectification are three key forms of the domination of persons (see Errington and Gewertz, 1987).
if gender is recognized as a symbolic code that is not only about itself, but about a great many other things, it follows that the symbolic meanings of gender, the values attributed to "maleness" and "femaleness", have little material effect on women's status or social opportunities, and do not, therefore, contribute to their domination. Thus, Strathern and Lederman suggest that the devaluation of "femaleness", while passing judgement on certain forms of social action, does not enact the denigration or the domination of women.\(^{34}\)

In this chapter, I first consider anthropological ideas of Melanesian personhood, i.e., what Errington and Gewertz (1987) refer to as "positional" personhood. Secondly, I examine Strathern's use of Melanesian personhood to re-evaluate what she perceives as the misapplication of Western ideas of domesticity, subjectivity and the domination of women. Thirdly, I discuss gender ideology in three Highland societies, Melpa, Paiela and Mendi, and examine the ways in which the ethnographers of these societies have separated beliefs about gender from gender-related practices in order to establish that gender functions primarily as a socio-moral or evaluative framework. I then examine Strathern's concept of the "Melanesian aesthetic", which encompasses the internal logic

\(^{34}\) In Chapter 2, I discussed Strathern's argument that Melpa women exercised autonomy as "jural persons" and were able to circumvent the gender stereotype that characterized women as weak and self-interested.
of Melanesian gift exchange societies and the related logic of personhood and gender symbolism. Finally, in a critical review, I suggest that these views of person and gender are abstract in the extreme and produce a relativistic assessment of domination in its most manifest forms: women's deprivation of political rights and men's "legitimized" use of physical violence. The role of socialization to beliefs about gender and the psychological factors involved in the perpetration of these forms of domination do not enter into the analysis.

Melanesian and Western "Persons"

Anthropological interest in culturally distinct concepts of person and personhood predates the work of Errington and Gewertz, and Strathern, by some years (see, for example, Dumont 1970, Geertz 1966, Lee 1959, Mauss 1938, Read 1955). Recent interest in these ideas, inspired in part by Geertz's now classic essay, "Person, Time and Conduct in Bali" (1966), has focused on the contextual definition of non-Western persons. "Person", these scholars argue, is a relational status that does not imply the existence or possession of a unique subjectivity. Thus, "person" is not an independent category into which any human individual automatically falls. This relational view of persons, "the occasion-bound, socially contextualized person concept" (Shweder and Bourne 1984:192),
is quite different from the Western idea of persons as uniquely constituted subjectivities and distinctive wholes.

The moral implications of the differences between Western and other ideas of personhood were subject to early examination by K.E. Read in "Morality and the Concept of the Person Among the Gahuku-Gama" (1955). Read contends that the Gahuku-Gama did not perceive an ethical or moral category of the person. He suggests that in the Western "person-configuration" such an ethical category allows for a "perceived disjuncture" between the individual and his or her status (1955:255). Thus, Western persons are persons, irrespective of the social relations from which they derive particular status.

In contrast, in Gahuku-Gama society, the lack of an independent ethical category implied that no separation of individual from social context existed, and that no intrinsic moral value was perceived in the individual. By definition, a person was a member of a social group. Thus, people "are not conceived to be equals in a moral sense; their value does not reside in themselves as individuals or persons; it is dependent on the position they occupy within a system of interpersonal and inter-group relationships" (1955:250). The Gahuku-Gama person was not a unique centre of individuality, but a primarily social being to whom "moral responsibilities devolve" by virtue of his/her being a member of a group, "rather than by virtue of any qualities which are intrinsic
to his psychophysical nature" (1955:280). Thus, the Western concept of the autonomous, self-conscious subject, characterised by Geertz as a "bounded, unique, more or less integrated, motivational and cognitive universe" (1973:48), may well be unique to the Western world, and Western persons may alone be viewed as containers of an abstract human value.35

In their examination of the differences between Chambri and Western ideas of personhood, Errington and Gewertz (1987) argue that a different state or condition of personhood implies a different process of gaining recognition as a person. With respect to Western societies, the authors suggest that personhood is a state achieved through a process of "validation of subjectivity" (1987:131-141) which engenders competition between women and men. This validation of personal worth is attained mainly through productive work, and Western men and women have differential access to the processes of validation. The authors note particularly the relationship between work and consumption, on one hand, and validation of individual subjectivity on the other, concluding that "because domestic labour is unpaid and relatively private, it does not provide as powerful a validation of individuality as does work" (1987:134). American women's social definition, arising less

35 This concept of person is probably unique to the post-medieval, and most certainly to the post-industrial, Western world, (see, for example, Carrithers et al. 1985, Dumont 1970, Gurevich 1976, Mauss 1938, Thompson, E.P. 1967).
directly from domestic labour and more directly from consumption, is linked not only to the expression of their subjectivities as individuals, but to notions of maternity, nurturance and the care of husbands and children. Women are more contingent than men and "have greater difficulty in establishing worth in terms of the capacity to demonstrate a distinctive and competent subjectivity - to demonstrate a valued individuality" (1987:138). In short, in Western thought, full personhood is established, not through having been born into a set of social relations, but through the individual validation provided by the public world of work.

In Chapter 3, I examined Errington and Gewertz's argument that the social ramifications of the Chambri concept of person were largely responsible for the complementary nature of gender relations in that society. Because Chambri women were not in competition with men, because their "positional" or "relational" identities had equal access to the cultural means of achieving worth, women were not susceptible to male domination. In correlating personhood with the unfettered ability to achieve personal worth, the authors explicitly address "domination", proposing that it is a culturally specific phenomenon, related to the suppression of personhood:

Dominance ... is that which impedes or prevents an individual from following the strategies necessary to meet the cultural standards which define personal worth. For members of a culture which defines person in subjectivist terms, acts
which are interpreted as depersonalizing are experienced as at least a mild domination: to be primarily a member of a category is to lack individuality and thus is, for us, to be less than a person of worth. When depersonalization is not just a bureaucratic convenience but is used to preclude access to worth, then it becomes a powerful form of domination (Errington and Gewertz 1987:139).

In addition, the authors note that a Western definition of domination includes the belief that "depersonalization is often part of the process of domination through practices of discrimination" and that "those excluded from access to significant resources are frequently described both categorically and negatively" (1987:171, n.27). Western concepts of domination focus on the ways in which power may be apprehended and personhood denied. Domination, as a construct, draws heavily the domestic/public and nature/culture dichotomies, which devalue and even denigrate domesticity and the natural. Thus, the natural and domestic worlds, with which Western thought associates women and female qualities, are seen to produce depersonalization and lack of individuation, obviously, most directly with respect to women. Strathern (1984a, 1984b), whose arguments about personhood I examine in the following two sections, advocates a theoretical shift beyond these Western dichotomies into an analytical mode relying on indigenous concepts of person, social action and forms of sociality.
The Misuse of a Western Concept of Person

In this section I examine Strathern's argument that in Western thought the concept of person includes a particular idea of how individuals are incorporated into society and how they stand apart from it. The Western model of society as incorporative, she suggests, may be inadequate for understanding Melanesian relationships and may impede our understanding of Melanesian concepts of the person (1984a, 1988). In demanding that women be treated as individuals or persons in their own right, anthropologists, Strathern argues, are simply appealing to Western assumptions about the nature of personhood and the relationship between individuals and society.

Three redefinitions are critical to Strathern's argument. Firstly, she notes that person is a cultural construction and that Western ideas of the person as an individual standing in a hierarchial relationship with society, or as a subject who may be objectified, are not applicable to Melanesian persons:

We can usefully talk of Hagen ideas of the person in an analytic sense, provided we do not conflate the construct with the ideological "individual" of Western culture. This latter is best seen as a particular cultural type of person rather than as a self-evident category in itself (Strathern 1981b:168).

Secondly, Western notions of society and culture (as opposed to nature) do not obtain in Melanesia:
'Society' is not a set of controls over and against the 'individual', and people's achievements do not culminate in 'culture' (1984a:17)

Thirdly, the concept "woman" is as much a cultural construction as "person", and the two are interdependent:

What it means to be a women in this or that situation must rest to some extent on the cultural logic by which gender is constructed. Analysis of women's participation in events should be informed by concepts of the person, individuality, will and so forth ... (1981:683).

Strathern criticizes (1984a) Feil's unexamined use of "person", and Weiner's equally unexamined use of "individual" and "woman" (see Feil 1978a, 1978b, Weiner 1976), arguing that neither scholar explicitly defines a theory of the person. In attempting to rescue Melanesian women from misrepresentation as non-persons, both Weiner and Feil inadvertently base their analyses on Western concepts of personhood, individuality, adulthood and socialization.

In Chapter 3, I examined Weiner's analysis of the transcendental power of Trobriand women and its symbolic embodiment in uniquely female activities and objects (wealth items). In Chapter 2, I noted that Feil's analyses favour the ways in which Enga women, contrary to the ideological statements about them, were active players in public politics, particularly in the tee exchange. Although Weiner and Feil differ in their assessments of the nature of women's power, both maintain that women possessed power of some sort, and
were "persons" or "individuals". By removing women, as Feil does, from the domestic sphere, and placing them in the public sphere of politics, or by re-valuing the natural (reproduction) as a cultural achievement, as Weiner does, these authors are able to demonstrate that women were the virtual opposite of everything that androcentric anthropology had construed them to be.

In Strathern's view, Feil's and Weiner's arguments exhibit "an interesting congruence" (1984a:16) in that both are informed by the association of women with nature in the context of the nature/culture paradigm, and both subscribe to the belief that "certain categories of persons may be rather less than persons" (1984a:17). Both scholars, Strathern argues, "imply that to ignore these factors (that is, women's powers) is to see women as less than full persons" (1984a:16).

The Western concept of the autonomous individual implies a socialization process which transforms natural beings into cultural persons. Moreover, this socialization from a pre-cultural state is a uniquely Western concept and is predicated on the "paradigmatic relationship between nature and culture" (Strathern 1984a:17). "Socialization and social formation", Strathern states, "are concepts embedded in our own evolutionary and industrial heritage; ... industry and culture involve a break from nature and domination over it. Within these terms to be a person one must be culturally creative"
Weiner's analysis of Trobriand women's power is the case in point. In removing reproduction from the natural sphere, and re-constructing it as a cultural achievement, Weiner is indeed talking about the importance of human regeneration in the Trobriand universe, but Strathern argues that "her intention also seems to be to rescue women from that state of nature implied in our own nature/culture constructs" (1984a:23).

"Naturalness" characterizes not only nature, but the domestic sphere. Through their association with the natural qualities of the domestic world (as opposed to the cultural qualities of the public world), women, in Western traditions, have been characterized as undersocialized and less than persons. "Full personhood" (1984a:18), Strathern argues, is contingent on separation and independence from the domestic world. That is, persons are those who have been socialized into personhood, out of the "natural", domestic world, which Western ideology then denigrates, and along with it "domestic persons". This is what Strathern refers to as "the denigration of domesticity" (1984a:13).

Just as Weiner removes Trobriand women from the natural world in order to establish their personhood, Feil removes Enga women from the domestic world. Strathern notes that Feil's analysis of women's roles in the *tee* exchange re-values the
personal or domestic, by associating it with the political or public:

At some points in his analysis these interpersonal networks appear as the essence of the system, in contrast to group-based relations, and at other points these networks are to be seen as being in themselves politicized, so that the political is inseparable from the personal (1984a:24).

In Strathern's view, Feil attempts to prove that women are persons by demonstrating that they acted in the *tee* in reference to interpersonal interests. If Feil can demonstrate that women's *tee* concerns were more personal than men's, that women were actively involved in the *tee*, and that the *tee* itself was political, then he may safely conclude that the domestic, personal relations of kinship merged with the public, political relations of exchange. Women, then, by virtue of their active participation in political activities, albeit in a more personal way, were nonetheless acting politically and acting as persons. The desire to prove that women are persons, Strathern argues, derives from Feil's own Western assumptions, including the "denigration of domesticity" (1984a:26), that permit the anxiety that women in fact might not be persons.

The Western denigration of domesticity does not correspond to the Melpa situation. The Melpa people did indeed make symbolic and social connections between femaleness and domesticity, but, Strathern argues, these cannot be explained
by the Western distinctions between nature and culture or the domestic and the public (1980, 1984a:17-18). For Hagen women to be valued, it is necessary neither to revalue the domestic or the natural, nor to demonstrate that women were active in the public sphere.

Nor does Hagen thinking include the concept of "socialization" into personhood, that is, the idea that "natural" children are transformed into social persons. Melanesian children, as Read (1955) and others have argued, are born into sets of social relations and in this sense are, by "nature", pre-eminently "cultural". Strathern therefore contends that the Western belief that personhood requires cultural production, which in turn requires independence from the domestic group, does not apply to Melpa persons. Noman or "mind", which manifests itself at a very early age, is evidence of personhood (see A. Strathern 1981). Personal autonomy, including women's "measure of genuine independence" (Strathern 1972:314), derives from the presence of noman. Thus, Strathern argues that "Hagen women have no distinctive "culture" (1984a:18); they had no special sphere of action other than the domestic sphere, and they were no less persons because of it:

One does not have to find for Hagen women a domain of cultural activity that refers to their own special powers in order to take them seriously (1984a:23).
Here, Strathern is clearly also concerned with the culturally variable construction of "woman". The existence in every culture of ideological valuations of abstracted female qualities, something which may be termed "womanness" (Weiner 1976) or "femaleness" (Strathern 1981) or "femineity" (Ardener 1975), is not in dispute. Strathern's point is rather that ideas of the female in the abstract are differently put together in different cultures and cannot be reduced to a universal cultural valuation of female reproductive powers. Particular studies, the case in point being Weiner's study of the Trobriands, do not, Strathern argues, "... yield universals about the condition of womankind as such" (1981a:670). "Trobriand Woman", whose "womanness" embodies the cultural value accorded reproduction, "cannot be a paradigm for Woman" (1981a:682). In Hagen society, she notes, "maleness ... carries much of the symbolic load borne by femaleness in the Trobriands" (1984a:21), and the symbolic value of Hagen femaleness is defined within the domestic sphere.³⁶

Subjects, Objects, Women and Property

With respect to Feil's and Weiner's work, Strathern argues that the Western denigration of domesticity produces the anthropological fear that women may be less than persons,

³⁶ I address the implications and uses of Melpa gender symbolism in greater detail later in this chapter.
and must therefore be shown to act in cultural, as opposed to natural, domains. Strathern further examines the anthropological urge to demonstrate women's personhood in a discussion (1984b) of the Western equation of personhood and subjectivity, in which she notes that the Western notion of person implies a particular relationship between persons as subjects and things or objects. This relation is "ownership", and the things that stand in this relation become "property". Western persons are therefore subjects exercising rights of ownership and control over property, most significantly over the products of their labour. However, property, ownership, appropriation and the domination of persons through the appropriation of property (or products) are not universally applicable relations, Strathern argues, but are Western commodity-based relations that do not obtain in Melanesian societies.

My particular concern has been to put something in the place of our western paradigm of property ownership which is itself so very much bound up with a special view of the person. In following Mauss's dictum that the thing given is personified, we have of course discovered that it matters also how the person is constructed (1984b:173).

Furthermore, with respect to the matter of demonstrating women's personhood, Strathern contends that the Western equation of persons and subjects reveals the additional anthropological anxiety that women be shown to act as subjects,
as opposed to being treated as objects, for instance, in the case of the "exchange" of women and wealth.

The notion of the "exchange" of women by men, or the equivalency of women and valuables, has figured prominently in the literature of the Highlands. Strathern affirms this equation with respect to Melpa society. In defence of her early argument (see Strathern 1972) that Melpa women did not transact goods or act publicly in the moka exchange, she clarifies that women's control and distribution of netbags was not a form of culturally recognized power comparable to Trobriand women's transcendental power (Strathern 1981a, see Weiner 1976:13). Netbags, she claims, were not women's wealth, and in fact, Melpa women did not possess wealth, but rather were themselves wealth (1984b:166). This equation of women and wealth is not to be confused with Western notions of objectification or commoditization of women. Melpa women were wealth, but they were not property.

This characterization of women as wealth, but not as objects or property, bears an important relation to the ideas of person and domination that I have discussed up to this

37 Strathern objects to Weiner's implication that what women exchange is always "the culturally objectified key to their power" (Strathern 1981a:673). Melpa women's exchange and distribution of netbags are not socially important, Strathern argues, and neither men nor women are particularly interested in them. Weiner, as her study of the Trobriands clearly demonstrates, favours looking first at objects controlled by women.
point. Here, I examine Strathern's analysis of the Western disjunctures between subject and object, person and property, and the relationship of these to the distinction between the logic of a commodity economy and that of a gift exchange economy. (Strathern 1984b, 1987, 1988).

In her assessment of the status of women in the New Guinea Highlands, "Subject or Object? Women and the Circulation of Valuables in Highlands New Guinea" (1984b), Strathern notes that Western ideas of property include the following principal points: (1) property relations are not social relations, but are the relations that exist between people and things in which rights are exercised over others; (2) the difference between people and things parallels the difference between subjects and objects; (3) persons may be treated as things or objects in which others have rights; (4) "a person is defined as an acting subject, recognisable ... by his or her rights, which should properly include control over the products of labour" (1984b:162).

In Melanesian studies, a number of scholars, including Josephides (1985, see Chapter 5 in this discussion), have adopted a concept of property based on ownership, encompassing the belief that denial of property rights is a form of domination. Through the processes of capitalism and capitalistic types of appropriation, the products of a person's labour may be alienated from the original owner resulting
in domination. Josephides, for instance, examines the process by which Kewa men in the Southern Highlands "appropriated" the products of women's labour. In the movement from production to exchange, pigs were alienated from the women who had produced them. Multiple exchanges mystified this alienation and appropriation process, obscuring women's ownership of pigs.

In contrast, Strathern's explanation (1984b) of the difference between Daulo and Melpa women's ability to retain control of their money is informed principally by the absence in Melanesian thinking of concepts corresponding precisely to "property" and "ownership":

... what crucially differs here is women's participation in public affairs, the amount of control they exercise over wealth and thus also the very relationship between the product of their labour and rights to its disposal. This suggests examining the nature of ownership and mechanisms of appropriation, and thus claims to property as an index of the extent to which women act in their own right (Strathern 1984b:161).

In explaining property as gift, Strathern relies on Gregory's (1979, 1980) distinction between gift and commodity: "... whereas a commodity exchange establishes a relation between the objects of a transaction, gift exchange establishes a relationship between the subjects" (Gregory 1979:404). Most importantly, Strathern argues that property and ownership, as conceptual tools, cannot be applied to gift exchange economies. "How", Strathern asks, "can we conceive of women
being "deprived of 'rights' over the disposal of property when such rights appear not to have been allocated them in the first place? More crucially, what do we mean by 'property'?" (1984b:162). Thus, with respect to the relationship between property and person insofar as women are concerned, Strathern concludes that "discussion of social relationships in terms of control over property ... is ... a covert discussion of how far this or that category can act as 'persons'" (1984b:162).

The question of women's personhood has been an issue in studies of the New Guinea Highlands since the earliest characterizations of Highland and other Melanesian women as downtrodden drudges, peripheral to the business of making society. This concern and the more recent desire to prove women's ability to act as subjects have been partially responsible for the attention in the literature of the Highlands devoted to the exchange of women and valuables by men. In Melanesia, Strathern suggests, "ideas of personhood are not necessarily bound up with a subject-object dichotomy or with its attendant issues of control ... It is the Western dichotomy between subject and object which often informs the anthropological desire to make women the proper subjects for analysis, to treat them in our accounts as actors in their own right" (1984b:162). It is our own fear of misrepresenting women as "objects" that has engendered the desire to prove
that women are social actors. What appears as the objectification of women, is problematic for us, but not for those who engage in the practice. Thus, when women are equated with wealth, especially in contexts of ceremonial exchange, creating relations based on gift debt, it is, in fact, the "implicit equation between wealth of this kind (women) and property as we understand the term" (1984b:166) that is problematic from our perspective. Hence, the anthropological desire to restore women to subjectivity involves examining "their active participation" and "their decision-making powers" (1984b:163), as Faithorn, Feil and Weiner have all done. Strathern concludes that "one can deny that women are really objects (things) by pointing to their acting as subjects (persons)" (1984b:163).

Strathern's assessment that "person", "woman", "subject" and "property" are ethnocentric concepts that anthropologists have applied in unexamined ways, relates, I have shown, to larger conceptual frameworks that anthropology has taken for granted: the nature/culture dichotomy, the concept of socialization into personhood and the subject/object dichotomy. In the following sections, I discuss Strathern's and others' relativistic assessments of gender: firstly, I examine analyses of gender symbolism and inter-sexual relations in which the authors argue that the denigration or devaluing of "femaleness" or domesticity in ideology did not in any way denigrate women
as persons; secondly, I attempt to explain Strathern's concept of the internal logic of Melanesian thought, the "Melanesian aesthetic" (1988).

Gender as a Symbolic Code

Anthropologists working in Melanesia have recently directed their attention to the study of gender ideologies as ordering principles and ranking mechanisms (see Battaglia 1983, Biersack 1984, Gillison 1980, Goodale 1980, Kahn 1986, Strathern 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1988). In this part of the discussion, I examine the symbolic values and imagistic uses of gender categories in three societies (Melpa, Paiela, Mendi), and examine the ways in which scholars have approached gender as a symbolic code.

Gender, in its symbolic meanings, is a system of formal categories that refer not only to men and women and their relations, but have metaphoric value and play a role in the conceptualization of social life (Biersack 1984, MacCormack and Strathern 1980, Ortner and Whitehead 1981, Strathern 1980, 1981b, 1988). Gender ideology functions in this sense as a socio-moral framework, "a master code in an indigenous reflexive philosophy" (Biersack 1984:120).

In these recent New Guinea studies, scholars suggest that the denigration of qualities identified as "female" neither inevitably reflects on women as persons nor
substantially circumscribes their social opportunities (see Lederman 1980, 1986, 1989; Strathern 1980, 1981b, 1988). In Highland societies (e.g., Melpa, Mendi) consumption, weakness and domestic concerns were seen as "female" and were consequently associated with women, but women were not defined strictly in these terms. Gender idioms, these scholars argue, denigrated not women, but self-interest and autonomous action. These idioms strategically and situationally ranked group or clan concerns over personal or domestic concerns, placing these different social potentials in a common moral frame.

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, if the values attributed to "maleness" and "femaleness" may be shown to have little material effect on women's status or social opportunities, if the devaluation of "femaleness" does not produce or contribute to the denigration or domination of women, "gender", like "person", serves to dismantle what has appeared to anthropologists as male domination. Strathern, in particular, has used gender ideology in conjunction with the ideology of person to deconstruct domination. It is not women who fall under the domination of men, but the values associated with "femaleness" that fall under the domination of the values associated with "maleness".\(^{38}\)

---

\(^{38}\) There are problems with this type of argument. The nature of the relationship between women's status and deprecating ideology is one that Feil (1978a, 1978b) encountered. He suggests that in order to see the power that Enga women actually exercised in the
In my discussion of Strathern's, Biersack's and Lederman's analyses of the implications of gender ideologies in Melpa, Paiela and Mendi societies, I will address the problem of the potential attribution of denigrated "female" qualities to women and the strategic manipulation of gender ideology. If symbolic devaluations in fact reflect on persons, we must accept that ideological statements are imbued with both symbolic and strategic value. Thus, the qualities and values of "maleness" and "femaleness" may be used manipulatively and applied directly to persons and actions. We must then address the question: In what ways may the treatment of "gender ideology" as an object of analysis distinct from the practices of social life mystify practices of domination related to the devaluation of "femaleness"?

Melpa Gender Symbolism

In *Women in Between* (1972), Strathern identifies Melpa women as producers, interstitial to the transactional and exchange activities of men, and notes that Melpa society devalued production in relation to exchange. In "Social Good and Self-interest: Some Implications of Hagen Gender Imagery" (1981b) Strathern elaborates this model, suggesting that Melpa exchange, it is necessary to "discredit the more ideological statements that men make of women in situational vacuums" (1978b:263). Thus, he is not concerned with deciphering symbolic meanings and simply passes over the parts of the cultural ideology that denigrated women.
men were not only transactors and investors, but undertook social activities for the general social good. Women, on the other hand, were producers and self-interested consumers who "wasted" money on domestic concerns.

The Melpa association of "femaleness" and domesticity contrasts with the Trobriand association of "womanness" and social reproduction. Gender symbolism in Melpa society, Strathern argues, produced a cross-sex definition of "femaleness" and "maleness", an antithesis between female in-betweenness, domesticity, self-interest and autonomous individuality, on one hand, and male collectiveness, clan identity and concern for the social welfare of the group on the other:

Womanness is the foundation not of society and cosmic time but of particular partnerships, exogenous connections, fertility individually manifested, production at the household level. When this domain is brought into antithesis with politically charged alliances, internal solidarity, clan perpetuity and group transactions, values thus associated with males are set against females ones (1981a:683).

Thus, Melpa gender symbolism provided "... a contrast between male and female (that) may stand in the eyes of Hagen men and women alike for contrasts between group prestige and rubbishness, between group and individual orientation and so on" (1981a:678). The male-female contrast identified differences in social orientation and created a language for negotiating or mediating those differences. Indeed, Melpa
gender symbols provided a way of "symbolising or activating the collective conscience":

... by linking the capacity for success to gender. Hageners sustain an image of the person in which the orientation and not just the results are a reward. People's intentions and endeavours are seen to be set on certain ends and these are symbolised as male or female (1981b:180).

The Hagen distinction between domestic/female and group/male interests was abstract, Strathern claims, and the differential evaluation of women as "rubbish" and men as "prestige" was "not to be confused with the Hagen definition of persons" (1984a:23). The male/female opposition was predominantly metaphorical and was used to order socially valued distinctions. "Male" prestige (nyim) and social good were indeed opposed to "female" rubbishness (korpa) and self-interest. However, gender, Strathern argues, primarily structured values as "Hageners detach posited qualities ofmaleness and femaleness from actual men and women" (1981b:178) and re-directed these categorical evaluations to actions and things.

The symbolic detachment of "maleness" and "femaleness" resulted in gender identities that were malleable or manipulable:

... whether people behave in a "male" or "female" way is linked to the evaluation of activities likely to bring prestige or rubbishness (1980:211).
Thus, an individual's actions were in some measure distinct from his or her sex, and he or she may have behaved in either a "male" or a "female" way. Strathern stresses that the actions of female individuals were separable from the symbolic values of "femaleness", and that women as persons were not exclusively defined in female terms and had considerable social manoeuvrability. The denigration of domesticity was contained specifically in the opposition of domestic and public things, and the fact that domestic concerns were "rubbish" (korpa) in relation to the "prestige" (nyim) concerns of politics and clan activities did not affect "women's stature as persons" (1984a:26).

This framework of gender ideology created "the terms of reference through which they (women) pursue their own autonomy" (1984a:25). Women were interstitial, and precisely because of their intermediary position were able to contest or manipulate the dominant values. In arguing that Melpa women were able to circumvent gender stereotypes, Strathern concurs with Feil's and Faithorn's conclusion that there was a significant difference between gender stereotypes and how women actually lived their lives.

To summarize Strathern's argument: the attribution of contrasting qualities adjudicating the value of particular social orientations was the principal social dynamic that Melpa gender ideology created. It did not rank persons, that
is, real men and women, only their actions. It did not produce domination. "Femaleness" was denigrated and devalued, but women were not.

**Paiela and Mendi Gender Ideologies**

The Paiela live in the Southern Highlands of New Guinea, "just west of Enga speakers and just north of the Huli" (Biersack 1983:85). As in Melpa society, among the Paiela the symbolic polarisation of "femaleness" and "maleness" was linked to a domestic/public opposition, which took the form of a moral contrast between the inside (domestic) and the outside (public). Paiela characterized the domestic as non-communicational and associated it with individual, inward-looking goals, that were fissionary to society as a whole. Only the public aspect of household production was oriented towards social goals and fusion of households, for instance, in marriage and clan-oriented activities. Paiela consequently perceived the household as largely "autonomous, self-sufficient and non-cooperative" (1984:122).

The principle cultural dichotomy, fission/fusion, paralleled the domestic/public dichotomy and surfaced in the gender ideology. Paiela men were perceived as doing "mind work" which "connotes communication, transaction, calculation and ultimately the moral clarity that inspires men to pursue and safeguard the fusion goal" (1984:128). Women, on the other
hand, did "hand work". They neither acquired nor exchanged pigs, and attended clan events only as spectators. "Women", Biersack states, "operate in the domestic domain ... in the interest of promoting purely intra-domestic goals" (1984:128).

Thus, again as in Melpa society, a gender ideology served to express a moral difference between two distinct social orientations. While the Paiela belonged to a "class within which gender is hierarchical and males dominate" (Biersack 1984:119), they, like the Melpa, distinguished individual women's actions and behaviours from the cultural stereotypes of the female sex and "femaleness" as a quality. In fact, Paiela gender stereotypes "are similar to those ... reported for the Mt. Hagen area" (1984:119), and served in Paiela society as "polar archetypes" (1984:119), qualifying social orientation and moral action, and producing an ideology of the person. Paiela used the physical difference between the sexes "to signify a polarity that is thought to characterize the species as a type of social and moral being" (Biersack 1984:134). However, whereas Strathern invokes indigenous meanings and symbolisms, discounting hierarchy and potential domination to a large degree, Biersack, in contrast, emphasizes that gender is an evaluative discourse. It is, she states, "the heart of reflexive discourse" and a "reflexive language" (1984:134) implying stratification because "a non-evaluative reflexive discourse is unthinkable" (1984:134).
Lederman (1980, 1986, 1989) parallels Strathern's assessment of Melpa women's autonomy and their abilities to counteract gender ideology in her argument that Mendi women in the Southern Highlands exercised a considerable degree of autonomy, particularly with respect to their own exchange networks (twem exchanges), and rejected the denigration of "femaleness". However, while Mendi ethnographic evidence supports the view that gender ideology functioned primarily as a moral evaluation of different forms of sociality, Lederman also notes that the denigration of female qualities "carries over" (1986:137) from the realm of ideology into the practices of daily life, suggesting that Mendi women were in some sense the "dominated" group in a gender hierarchy. This analysis of Mendi evaluations of social orientations clearly implies that while gendered values operated in particular contexts and were not generally applicable, they contributed to the production of a hierarchy of gendered values that may at times have produced a hierarchy of gender. This concurs readily with Biersack's dual assessment of Paiela gender ideology as an evaluative and hierarchical discourse, and of the society as hierarchical, that is, male dominated.\footnote{The implication of Biersack's argument is that discourses become written on the body, and that ideological forms of hierarchy filter into social practice (see Buchbinder and Rappaport 1976, and Godelier 1986 for a somewhat convoluted discussion of this idea).}
Mendi sociality, Lederman notes, existed in two distinct forms that were manifest in exchange relationships: (1) group-oriented, male-dominated *sem* relations operating primarily in clan exchange events; and (2) individualised *twem* relations involving both sexes, operating one-to-one on a daily basis.

The Mendi "person", by definition, exercised autonomy in *twem* exchanges:

"If *sem* constitutes a kind of sociality understood to transcend the personal, a relation of identity between fellow clansmen by means of which the individual comes to represent something larger than himself, *twem* constitutes a kind of sociality through which a culturally specific sort of "person" is itself constructed ... in other words, whereas *twem* and *sem* relationships together have to do with the construction of sociality in Mendi, *twem* itself has to do with adult personhood (1986:87).

Women were involved *twem* exchanges:

... in Mendi, unlike the Mt. Hagen area (M. Strathern 1972), women have their own exchange partners and may be involved in exchange autonomously from their husbands and brothers (1980:479).

On the other hand, although, women, "compared with women in the Highlands generally, are unusually autonomous participants in exchanges" (1980:492), they did not participate to any great extent in the "formal" aspects of ceremonial prestations. The participation of men in *sem onda* (clan) affairs was seen by both sexes as natural and appropriate, whereas women's participation in clan events was seen, at least by men, as inappropriate. Lederman rightly wonders "what aspect of
femaleness is being ruled off stage" (1980:492) and concludes that personal identities, such as those incarnated by women, were assigned a negative value in the clan context, where group identities dominated. She notes:

In Mendi, the male/female distinction can come at times to stand for the group/network distinction and, furthermore, to give group action a positive cultural value. It follows from this, then, that in formal contexts, not only are women ruled off stage, but so also are the "personal" identities of men (1980:493).

This explains why, at times when clan events were impending and resources were needed for clan prestations, men discussed exchange patterns and the particular up-coming events in a gender idiom that was normally less prominently used in day-to-day discussions. The exaggerated use of a gender idiom was a means, as it was for Melpa men, of mediating the relationship between different kinds of social obligations and the different forms of social action that these obligations required.

Although "femaleness" was denigrated, it was neither women nor twem relations per se that men denigrated, but the self-interest and autonomous action of both sexes. These represented a form of sociality that articulated with and sustained clan sociality, but was nevertheless perceived as working against it, by distracting people's efforts from clan business. Men's denigration of twem affairs (twem became a female preoccupation), was a temporary reordering of the values of the two forms of sociality that spoke directly to the
circumstances. It was also a political manoeuvre designed to persuade men to neglect *twem* relations and individual self-interest in order to serve *sem* relations, clan interest and the overall social good.

Lederman concludes that although the Mendi situation did not discourage transference of the symbolic devaluation of "femaleness" from formal to informal contexts, in the latter this devaluation lacked efficacy:

It is ironic ... the most explicit and frequently reported (but least convincing) expression of "male superiority" in the Highlands come in those personal contexts where it does not, in fact, hold (where it is not reinforced formally), in Mendi: for example in talk between husbands and wives (1980:495).

Mendi women interpreted men's deprecation of "femaleness" in a variety of ways, and Lederman notes that regardless of the severity of reaction, women's responses "do not seriously challenge the cultural source from which expressions of male superiority issue, since they occur in the very same personal contexts in which those expressions are meaningless and inappropriate" (1980:495).

Lederman in fact argues that Mendi gender ideology, in particular the denigration of "femaleness", simultaneously did *and* did not carry over into gender relations, creating a gender hierarchy and resulting in the domination of women. In addition to her reference to the meaninglessness and inappropriateness of men's deprecation of "femaleness" in
personal contexts, she notes that Mendi women's restricted participation in formal exchanges and the periodic valuing of collective concerns and identities over domestic and personal matters created "an asymmetry that is culturally loaded and constitutive of political hierarchy" (1980:495-496). This is reminiscent of what Biersack calls Paiela "reflexive philosophy" or "evaluative discourse" (1984:134). In Mendi society, as in Paiela society, "evaluative discourse" produced a form of ideological hierarchy that was not without ramifications in practice. Certain ways of being and acting were, in certain circumstances, valued over others. Lederman judges that these valuations constituted a "contested order" (1989). In Mendi, "competing" forms of sociality (twem and sem) existed in a dynamic relationship, and thus "the organization of clan-sponsored events ... is a contingent and contested achievement" (1989:230). These contested values, however, implied some measure of ideologically validated domination (of sem values over twem values), and because the evaluation itself was implicitly hierarchical, the result was a practicable form of gender hierarchy that was not institutionalized, but could be strategically invoked. Strathern, while concurring with the views that collective actions constituted one type of sociality that co-existed with another type, domestic relations, rejects the notion of hierarchy altogether, suggesting that "the relation between
the two is that of alternation, not hierarchy" and that "the values of one are constantly pitted against the values of the other" (1988:319).

Their differing views as to whether gendered discourses produced gender hierarchies aside, Strathern, Biersack and Lederman in fact examine the same two processes: (1) the relationship between gender ideology and evaluative discourses; and (2) the social workings and ramifications of gendered discourses. In spite of Biersack's and Lederman's somewhat greater concern with the production of hierarchy, these three scholars concur in the general conclusion that negative evaluations of femaleness and all its attendant associations, (e.g., domesticity, fission, non-communication, consumption, weakness, self-interest, personal exchanges, individual relations) were contextually distinct from the denigration or domination of women, if indeed domination existed. These scholars grapple with the slippery problem of clarifying both the opposition and the articulation of ideology and practice, attempting in differing degrees to dissolve or qualify the hierarchical relations between symbolic meanings and social life.

The Melanesian Aesthetic

Strathern's analyses of Melanesian personhood and gender symbolism are relativistic and rely heavily on the
understanding of indigenous meanings. In her recent major work, *The Gender of the Gift* (1988), Strathern examines these meanings by constructing a dialogue of oppositions, (e.g., Western/Melanesian, commodity exchange/gift exchange, product/inalienable object), producing a complex and challenging analysis of the internal logic of Melanesian symbolic and ideological systems. The nature of persons and forms of sociality in gift exchange societies, what Strathern refers to as the "Melanesian aesthetic" (1988), is, she argues, the analytical key to understanding Melanesian relations, including gender relations. But on a symbolic level, gender in Melanesian societies was itself the expressive form of alternating sociality, that is, of the ways in which people interacted both as individuals and as collectivities. Gender was "the medium through which differentiation itself is apprehended" (1988:298):

Social life consists in a constant movement from ... one type of sociality to another ... This alternation is replicated throughout numerous cultural forms ... Gender is a principal form through which the alternation is conceptualized (1988:14).

The "Melanesian aesthetic" is a broad conceptual umbrella sheltering the concepts of person, wealth, exchange, sociality and gender-as-code, concepts that I have examined earlier in this chapter. To explain the Melanesian aesthetic more precisely, I return to Strathern's explanation of Melanesian
gift exchange logic, which in essence, because it encompasses notions of person, agency and gender, is the Melanesian aesthetic.

The differences between the equation of women and wealth, on one hand, and Western concepts of property, on the other, are crucial to an explanation of the aesthetic. These differences, Strathern argues, must be considered in relation to "the way in which wealth items signify aspects of the person" (1984b:172). In an exchange economy, gifts are inalienable from persons (but, see Josephides 1985), and a relationship is established between the subjects or persons involved in the exchange. Hence, the idea of giving part of oneself. It follows, then:

... that when people are exchanged they may ... stand not just for themselves but for aspects of personal substance or social identity located at another level. They are equated with "things", yet their symbolic referent is not a thing in the sense of an object, but aspects of personhood (1984b:165).

Things stand for aspects of persons and therefore "cannot be opposed to persons, as our own subject-object matrix postulates" (1984b:165). Thus, while Melpa wealth and women may in some sense be seen as "things", they are not objects alienable from a subject.

---

40 This is Strathern's concept of the "partible" or "dividual" person, one in whom others have rights, and whose distribution of wealth items symbolically renders the distribution of those rights.
In Melpa society the equation of women and wealth was explicitly stated, but because "the definition of personhood is not tied up with the manipulation of things" (1984b:164), Melpa women were not considered objects. Furthermore, because other sorts of wealth items were not objects, if women were wealth, they were nevertheless not objects:

Highlands valuables, including money, are not always treated as objects in the Western sense, and are not to be understood as "property" if property entails objectification (1984b:164).

The logic of gift exchange and its implications for the meaning of personhood, led Strathern to the conclusion that men, as representatives of clans, were exchanging parts of themselves or of their collective self when they "exchanged" women:

Hagen women sent or received in marriage may thus stand for aspects of what I call the "clan person". From the viewpoint of women, aspects of themselves are bound to their identification with their clan brothers (1984b:167).

Strathern extends this argument, concluding that the Melpa person was male. Both men and women had a male identity as clan members, but only women were detachable from the clan person:

Metaphorically constructed identity thus makes the Hagen "person" male. In this sense women as well as men have a male identity. They are nurtured (mbo) clan members. Their efforts and achievements are to different ends. Whereas men augment this maleness through their transactions, women make the increment detachable. Whereas women are pre-eminently detachable, men become so only in specific contexts (1984b:170).
The sexual duality in both men and women, Strathern suggests, did not function collectively, and was replaced by a unitary collective sexual identity, that of the male "clan person". Detachment was the process through which women, in whom both male and female elements existed, were recognized as social persons or clan members, having a male identity.

Strathern ultimately applies this concept of detachability in her explanation of the considerable differences between Hagen and Daulo women's relationship to money secured through cash cropping. Melpa and Daulo societies shared many social features typical of Highland New Guinea societies. However, whereas Daulo women in the Eastern Highlands had succeeded in gaining control over cash entering their economy and had formed savings and exchange networks, (wok meri), (see Sexton 1982), Melpa women, in the Western Highlands, in spite of similar economic development, had not gained control of the money they earned through the cash cropping of coffee. In Mt. Hagen, men appropriated large sums of coffee money on the grounds that these were "valuables" and hence, belonged to men.

Melpa women, unlike Daulo women, were like valuables; they were both part of and detachable from the clan body. As a result "there is no ideological locus for them to act as public manipulators of wealth, any more than they can act as full representatives of (metaphorically identified)
clanship" (1984b:170). To understand why Melpa women allowed men to dispose of wealth, Strathern argues, requires an appreciation of the fact that "their detachability points to a source of nurture and productivity separate from men's" (1984b:170), i.e., domestic. 41

An essential element of the aesthetic, and one closely tied into the concept of the "relational" or "positional" Melanesian person, to notions of property, and to the questions of appropriation and domination, was the fact that "causing another to act is not to be understood simply as the manifestation of a power that some have over others in particular contexts". "Agents", Strathern states, "do not cause their own actions" and "are not the authors of their own acts" (Strathern 1988:273). Thus, a wife's production of pigs for her husband was seen as "her" act, although she was not the cause of the act, and this, regardless of the fact that the pigs were then "appropriated", or in Strathern's terminology, "re-authored" by the husband. This re-authoring

41 In keeping with Strathern's general argument about the nature of persons in gift exchange economies and the implications of this for women, Errington and Gewertz (1987) suggest that when gift exchange economies are transformed, it is axiomatic that persons will be transformed and gender relations altered. In the case of Chambri society, sexual complementarity is threatened by the introduced notions of property and objectification that accompany the infusion of money into gift exchange (see my discussion of this in Chapter 3). Although Strathern does not address this issue, that socio-economic changes would affect the concept of person is implicit in her argument.
was, she argues, neither appropriation, nor control, nor domination, insofar as the husband was acting as a agent, performing actions caused by others. The logic of gift exchange and of the Melanesian aesthetic implies that because women's "products" were from the outset destined for others, they were not appropriable. Similarly, women's actions as agents in raising pigs were in reality caused by a series of multiple others whose claims to "authorship" were equally legitimate. Thus, a "product" failed to have one "owner", and agency and cause were separated. This aspect of the Melanesian aesthetic, Strathern argues, "is the single most significant metaphysical basis for the understanding of Melanesian relations" (1988:274).

Critique

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that these studies of the ideologies of person and gender in Highland New Guinea societies, particularly Strathern's analyses, produce a "deconstruction" of domination. Through the lens of indigenous meanings, Melanesian social relations take on the appearance of formal elements in a symbolic structure, such that women's perspectives on their own social and political lives appear superfluous to the analysis, and the material and political domination of women disappears. A serious consideration of psychological factors and the
socialization processes related to the internalization and manipulation of gender stereotypes is almost entirely absent from these analyses.  

Strathern's work in particular raises a number of questions. The first is one that I have addressed in this chapter: If Melanesian women cannot adequately be seen as "full participants" (Faithorn 1976), Western persons (Feil 1978a, 1978b), "individuals in their own right" (Weiner 1976), persons socialized into adulthood (Strathern 1984a) or subjectivities in the Western sense (Strathern 1984b), what kind of persons are they? The second is one that remains to be asked: If the domination of women in the Western sense includes the denigration or devaluation of the natural and domestic worlds, the categorical use of gender imagery, the objectification of subjects, the appropriation of property and the limitation of political rights, are Melanesian women immune to domination? And where, in this configuration, do we place political forms of domination, including coercion, violence and physical abuse?  

42 Given Strathern's argument that individual psychological constitution (subjectivity) and socialization are Western notions, her failure to include any discussion of psychological effects and socialization processes is not surprising.  

43 Anthropologists have been relatively silent about the use of physical violence to control women. As Counts points out, "domestic violence was largely invisible to anthropologists, who gave little consideration to it as a problem in other cultures" (1990:1). Counts also notes that the recent collection, The Anthropology of Violence
I have concentrated my discussion in this chapter on Strathern's analyses of person and gender symbolism because they are the most forthright, extensive, abstract and problematic, culminating in the author's master concept, the "Melanesian aesthetic" (1988). Throughout the body of her scholarly work, Strathern has identified features of Melpa women's status that derive from indigenous concepts: women's definitional, jural and domestic personhood (1972, 1984a), their status as "wealth" but not objects (1984b) and their detachability from the male clan person (1984b, 1988). On the other hand, she has minimized the effects of the structural and ideological limitations on women's abilities to act as "political persons" exercising the rights that jural personhood allocated. Indeed, she has continued to argue in increasingly sophisticated language that although there existed serious restrictions on what women in Melpa society could do, and that those same limitations did not apply to men, women were incontestably "persons" in the domestic domain. Able to use influence, manipulation and connivance to achieve their ends, Melpa women had some measure of independence and could not in any Western sense be considered dominated. Domination becomes a non-issue, and the "Melanesian aesthetic" simply (Riches 1986), includes no mention of domestic or marital violence.
provides an encompassing social philosophy as a context for Strathern's earlier arguments about women.

Strathern's use of "person" to deconstruct domination is particularly problematic in its lack of attention to: (a) psychological factors and socialization processes, and (b) the perspectives of women. Although she provides an insightful analysis of the ideology of person, she all but ignores the psychology of person.

In Melpa society, personhood was defined by the presence of noman or "will". If women were less at liberty to exercise their wills politically and press their claims over property, for example, in matters that affected men's moka-making potential, the question then arises as to the psychological function that the concept of women's "wills" served. For Strathern, noman serves to counterbalance the evidence of men's abilities to exert ideological pressure on women:

If we are to look for domination in interaction between the sexes, it is in the manner in which individual men in their domestic and kinship relations can override the particular interests of others by reference to categorical, collective imperatives. Women have no such recourse. The single most effective sanction at the disposal of a Hagen woman is bodily removal of her person (1988:337).

This "bodily removal of her person", for instance, if a woman left her husband, was attributed to "will". Thus, Strathern notes that Melpa women's noman was used by men as the explanation for their leaving marriages, but women's own
reasons for leaving were seldom cited. Were men's explanations an ideological mystification concealing problematic aspects of the relations between domestic and clan affairs? If so, an indigenous concept of "women as persons" (i.e., having "will") was strategically invoked as an explanation for the degree to which men could not control women. Thus, as Strathern notes, blaming women's "will" or personhood "enables divorce to be achieved without challenge to the value which men place on enduring alliances" (1972:222).

The explanatory use of women's disposition and women's apparent acceptance of this device, in Strathern's judgement, "foreshadows a possibility of independence" (1972:222). She does not consider the limitations on that independence and the extent to which it was constructed by a manipulative use of noman. It is possible that Strathern was coopted by an indigenous masculinist ideology of "person" that was of strategic value in the maintenance of male interests. Women's beliefs in free will may in fact have served a compensatory function with respect to their lack of political personhood. Here, a psychological explanation is relevant and must be considered.

Another important example of Strathern's neglect of psychological factors is the "metaphorically constructed identity" (Strathern 1984b) that results in women symbolically becoming male persons. Strathern has simultaneously argued
that Melpa women were persons, and that the Melpa person was male. As clan members, Melpa women had a male identity. This is an inadequate psychological explanation of identity, and it creates a logical conundrum implying that women were male persons and that female persons did not exist. More precisely, women acting as political or clan persons did not exist within the conventions of the Melanesian aesthetic. If we pursue this logic, which Strathern does not do, Melpa women, although not subject to male domination as "persons", were subject to domination, notably political oppression, as female persons, that is, as women.

Melanesian persons, Strathern also argues, did not exercise proprietary rights over transactable wealth, and Melpa women, in particular, who were themselves a form of wealth, allowed men to take control of cash earned through coffee production because women's detachability from the clan body did not permit ideological validation of the ability to act on behalf of the clan (Strathern 1984b). With respect to this disposition of wealth, there may well have been additional, far more prosaic, reasons why Hagen women "allowed" men to dispose of wealth. In her discussion of women's "judicial minority" (1972), Strathern makes it quite clear that men controlled "property" or things to which women believed they had legitimate claims. But if rights in property cannot be summoned in defence of this particular point,
because, as Strathern suggests, such rights were never allocated (1984b), how are we to understand women's claims to their "property" and protestations of male appropriation (see Strathern 1972)? Once again, psychological factors and socialization to behavioral norms do not figure in the analysis.

With respect to women's perspectives on their personhood, Strathern makes no mention of women's identification with their residential groups or other women, for example, their clan sisters. Neither does she consider women's experiences of being "sent" and "received" in marriage. Did women experience themselves as detachable parts of the male collective person? These questions parallel my criticism of Strathern's handling of Melpa male notions of women as "roads" for transactions and of marriage as primarily derivative of the structure of exchange networks. While women may have "shared" these beliefs, their experiences (and possibly their values) were not shared. Cultural standards which define personal worth and cultural definitions of personhood may very well be "shared" values, but men and women experienced personhood differently, i.e., personhood is necessarily gendered.

In this chapter I have also examined analyses of gender symbolisms and ideologies and their relationship to the evaluation of forms of sociality. In these studies, "gender"
is invoked in both a formal and substantive way, referring simultaneously to the symbolic values of "maleness" and "femaleness" and to men and women. Through the abstraction of gendered qualities, "gender" itself becomes a polysemous and ambiguous concept, and consequently gender ideologies are said to be both about gender, (for example, gender relations or the political status of women) and not about gender.44

For the reader concerned with women's own perspectives on their social lives, the treatment of "gender" as symbolic evaluative system poses a number of problems related, like those posed by the use of "person", to psychological issues, particularly the association of women with devalued "femaleness" and the degree to which negative ideological versions of women were internalized. Strathern notes, for instance, that "men attempt to generalise the nyim/korpa (prestige/rubbish) model and use it to represent power relations between the sexes", adding, however, that "such relations are not their general focus and men are not very successful in their endeavours" (1981b:170).

44 Strathern has gone so far as to argue that gender or sex as a "role" is a Western fabrication (1988). Sex-role models, she suggests, have dominated anthropological accounts of gender, and accounts of gender symbolism have therefore remained too narrowly focused on men and women.
In spite of this caution, it seems unlikely that the Melpa denigration of femaleness and domesticity did not in any way affect women's possibilities to control or enhance their own lives. Men clearly had the advantage of ideological ammunition. The fact that gender categories applied in the moral evaluation of action typically cast "femaleness" in a negative light and placed it at the bottom of a hierarchy of values in which "maleness" figured at the top produced practical effects. Thus, Melpa ideology not only characterized consumption and weakness as "female", but actively re-associated these characteristics with women. Strathern states that Melpa women were typified (likely by men, but this is not clear) as "less amenable to social control" and "more prone to wild behaviour" (1980:205), that they symbolized autonomous individuality and self-interest, and that they pursued personal and intra-domestic ends. In contrast, men were typified by themselves, and to some extent by women, as having social interests at heart.

If indeed this was a strategic symbolism, we may ask: whose interests were best served by the ideological strategies that such symbolism permitted? Why were these ideological versions of women invoked? Strathern's arguments imply that these stereotypes could be invoked to support the public power differential between men and women. On one hand, women's domestic activities acquired a negative moral connotation
because public values stated that women should devote themselves to group enterprises and should help their husbands by assuming their husbands' group-oriented goals as their own. On the other hand, men's acquisition of prestige acquired a positive moral connotation because status gained through ceremonial exchange enhanced not only personal status, but the status of the clan. Clearly, women only gained prestige when their activities were perceived as supporting the social whole by contributing to male enterprises. Thus, Melpa gender symbolism was largely used by men to evaluate actions that negatively affected clan/male affairs.

Most importantly, we cannot assume that ideological statements about women that drew on the devaluation of "femaleness" arose, as Feil eloquently suggests, in "situational vacuums" (Feil 1978b:263) and had no social or psychological importance. The pertinent point here is that gender categorizations used to evaluate social action ultimately reflected back on the beings whose existence set the terms of categorization. Buchbinder and Rappaport raise precisely the same issue in their assessment of symbolic interpretations of gender:

... it may be asked whether the male/female distinction is "good to think with" even if it is easy (or even natural) to think with. Its costs are high for the men it elevates, as well as for the women it subordinates. By using their own bodies and the differences between them to give living substances to conventional forms, both men and women
become possessed by whatever abstract furies those conventional forms spawn (Buchbinder and Rappaport 1976:33, my emphasis).

From the perspectives of both men and women in the Highland societies under discussion, negative evaluations of "femaleness" and its attendant qualities must unquestionably have had psychological impact and ultimately have carried over into social life. Both men and women were socialized to accept the gender stereotypes and gendered ideas which inevitably had some bearing in men's strategic application of the ideology to women's actions and for women's "willingness and ... seeming connivance in situations that appear to go against their own interests" (Strathern 1988:339).

Lederman, in her analysis of Mendi gender ideology, also de-emphasizes male domination and the strategic applications of gender ideology, noting that Mendi women's own spheres of activity were generally positively valued (1980:495) and that the cross-sex contrast of domestic/personal and public/clan was less pervasive than in Melpa society. This difference was due largely to Mendi women's extensive independent exchange networks (twem exchange) and "extra-domestic" activities, and to the fact that the rigid

45 In keeping with Strathern's argument that Melanesian persons are not subjects in the Western sense, we may consider that the notion of "psychological" or "emotional" impact is predicated on the Western concept of persons as mentally and emotionally constituted through individual experience (see Errington and Gewertz 1987, Lutz 1988). Certainly, Strathern's arguments imply as much.
application of the ideology of differently valued male and female activities broke down in the daily business of twem exchanges. Mendi women's twem exchanges, unlike Melpa women's (Strathern 1972), were independent and could not be overridden by men, and as a result, there was a less evident fissure on a daily basis between women's and men's social orientations. In Melpa society, on the other hand, women were much more often seen to pursue personal goals and idiosyncratic interests (1981b:184).

Lederman, like Strathern, argues, as I pointed out earlier in the discussion, that the deprecation of "femaleness" did not hold in informal relations. However, in the formal context of Mendi clan events, the removal of men's personal identities did not preclude men's controlling "who can and cannot speak" (1980:494), and Lederman points to women's "passive acquiescence to the values expressed in the form of the event" (1980:494). This suggests that the devaluation of "femaleness" in formal contexts could indeed carry over into informal contexts, and while it was "femaleness" alone that was devalued, the repercussions on women were not non-existent.

To what degree Mendi women were dominated as a result of out-of-context invocation of stereotypes that were normally contextually limited is a question that we may ask in a general sense about the relationship between ideology and domination. Strathern considers that Hagen society made "not a simple
de-valuation" of women but "an ideological comment on self-interest" (1981b:184), and while this concurs with Lederman's assessment of Mendi gender ideology, I question whether an ideological comment on self-interest can remain a moral judgement, provoking no material or political consequences. Lederman, in fact, raises this very point, albeit, indirectly:

... even those acts of personal rebellion, in which women actively oppose men's definitions of the social order (such as M. Strathern describes, 1972), raise questions about the extent to which male ideology can be understood fully without appreciating how this ideology is an argument against women's ideas, rather than simply a positive, independent statement (1980:495-496).

Clearly, ideological commentary by one sex about the other did not remain in the realm of abstract moral evaluation, but simultaneously implicated those persons most susceptible to accusations of self-interest. This "implication" readily took the form of restriction or exclusion or judgements of inappropriate behaviour. Lederman suggests that this produced a situation resembling hierarchy:

... The restriction of participation also inherent in formal contexts may create an asymmetry that is culturally loaded and constitutive of political hierarchy (1980:495-496).

Indeed, the fact remains that in Melpa society it was not "femaleness", but real women, who were deprived of certain political rights and were subject to "legitimized" violent treatment at the hands of their husbands.
As is the case in the analyses of "person", these analyses of "gender" favour symbolic understandings. The deficiency of this type of analysis is apparent in Strathern's comparison of "femaleness" in Melpa and Wiru societies, in which she presents the difference between women and the symbolic meanings of femaleness in defence of the argument that women's exchanges did not necessarily represent social reproduction, as they did in the Trobriands. Unlike women in Melpa society, Wiru women participated in exchange:

Although we "see" Wiru women initiating certain exchanges, and others being given in reference to them, this does not mean that as persons women are axiomatically paid high regard by Wiru men and women (1981a:676).

Here, Strathern transmogrifies women's acts in exchange into symbolic acts in which "femaleness" is the principal player and women are absent; we "see" them, but they are not there. This is further illustrated by the following statement about Wiru women:

Sometimes a woman talks about herself as being at the centre of an elaborate network of exchanges, yet ultimately at the centre is her bodily substance (1981a:680).

This statement privileges a symbolic understanding which is unclaimed. Is it Strathern's interpretation? Is it Wiru's men's understanding? Did Wiru women know that it was not themselves, as persons, at the centre of their networks, but only that which some aspect of their persons represented?
This favouring of the symbolic not only impedes grounded considerations of women's status, but also risks dismissing women's accounts of their lives as spurious beliefs or false consciousness. ⁴⁶

The separation of ideology and practice that this type of analysis favours is particularly problematic with respect to physical abuse and violence against women in Highlands societies. Physical domination disappears into the "Melanesian aesthetic" (1988:338). In *The Gender of the Gift*, for example, Strathern (1988) construes acts of domination as aesthetic outcomes:

Domination is found in particular acts of excess, then; in the Highlands these often involve what we would regard as violent behaviour. In stressing the individual and everyday context of such acts, I have wanted to avoid making domination out to be anything more than it is. At the same time there is a cultural reason why it is specific acts on particular occasions that become out of balance. Domination is a consequence of taking action, and in this sense I have suggested that all acts are excessive. Since in Melanesian metaphysics each action is indivisibly "one" event, it has to be in interpersonal situations that domination is exercised. When an exchange of perspectives is denied between people who are also partners, when a "big" man beats a "small" woman, it has to be in such situations because it is in his male form

⁴⁶ The question of the relationship between false consciousness and domination is complex. Feminists have argued, for example, that the domestic/public distinction which, in some forms, espouses the idea of separate but equal gendered spheres, "originates in the effort to justify the subordination of women to men" (Dworkin 1983:202). Thus, false consciousness can be considered a form of domination, "the incapacity to recognize the fact and means of domination" (Errington and Gewertz 1987:171:n.26).
as an individual agent that a man is forced to find an adequate aesthetic vehicle for the capacities that have grown within him" (1988:337-338, my emphasis).

This passage purports to explain a particular form of male dominant behaviour, violence against women, in terms of indigenous meanings, cultural reasoning, metaphysics and aesthetics. Neither socio-psychological factors, nor men's explanations of their behaviours, nor women's understandings of these experiences enter into the discussion. An account of gender relations that does not address the legitimized use of violence against women in relation to women's lack of political rights is necessarily inadequate.

Conclusion

These analyses of the ideology of personhood and gender symbolism exhibit three major weaknesses: (1) because they deal with cultural philosophy, they do not address the socialization processes and psychological factors related to ideological beliefs; (2) they fail to include women's experiences and perspectives, presenting ideologies primarily from the perspective of men; and (3) the abstract qualities of the analyses cause both women and domination to disappear into the language of personhood, gender symbolism, evaluative hierarchy and so on.
Strathern presents "gift exchange logic" and the "Melanesian aesthetic" as immutable structures that explain why domestic and jural personhood did not include political personhood or denigration and objectification. Strathern, Biersack and Lederman, to different degrees, present the devaluation of qualities associated with women and the domestic world as part of moral structure serving to evaluate forms of social orientation. However, the analysis of "person" and "gender" as ideological structures does not eliminate the need to examine women's contingent experiences of these ideologies, particularly the degree to which women could not exercise political personhood and could not free themselves from gender stereotypes.

Strathern, however, seems to suggest that gender is only or primarily an aesthetic form, having little to do with what anthropologists have perceived as male domination. Thus, she concludes that "we must ... stop thinking that an opposition between male and female must be about the control of men and women over each other" (1988:15).

Strathern's contention that male domination was only one of many kinds of "excessive acts" (1988:337) and was little more than the potential for male advantage is countered by ample ethnographic evidence that in many New Guinea societies, the position of women was, and indeed, is, an unenviable one (see, for example, Reay 1959, Read 1954, 1955, Langness 1967, .
Doko 1989, Counts 1990). The hiatus between ideological claims and women's lives is disturbing. In Melpa society this may have been tantamount to domination, and the practical outcomes of the potential for male advantage cannot be ignored.

Understanding gender as a symbolic code implies, as Strathern has in fact explicitly argued, that gender refers primarily to cultural facts other than men's and women's lives and gender relations. Although gender may very well be about things other than gender, it is always about itself. The internalization of gendered values and gender stereotypes is a powerful and unconscious process deeply embedded in psychological processes and in social learning. Domination in its most extreme forms - political control, coercion and physical violence - may perhaps be better understood by recognizing the patriarchal and hegemonic power of those gender ideologies that categorize women and, by abstracting "femaleness" out of women's lives, transmogrify it into a devalued quality that may then be strategically mustered as evidence against women.

The ideas that I have examined in this chapter are largely incompatible with neo-marxist views. Indeed, the neo-marxist interpretations of gender relations that two anthropologists produced in the 1980's (Josephides 1983, 1985, Godelier 1986) take up many of the concerns that I raise in my critique of the symbolic approaches to gender. Josephides and Godelier
are explicitly concerned with the material and ideological domination of women and adopt male political power, not as an unexamined given, but as the necessary framework for understanding the political position of women. Eminently more conscious of culturally relativistic concerns than were the ethnographers of "sexual antagonism", Josephides and Godelier nonetheless re-introduce into the study of gender relations the idea that power is necessarily public and political, and that the appropriation of women's products and the denigration of female sexuality constitute domination.
CHAPTER 5
RECONSTRUCTING DOMINATION: NEO-MARXIST PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the works of two ethnographers explicitly concerned with sexual inequality and the domination of women by men: Josephides (1983, 1985) and Godelier (1986). These authors adopt individually distinct neo-marxist perspectives in their respective analyses of two New Guinea societies, the Kewa (Southern Highlands) and the Baruya (Eastern Highlands). Both ethnographers, however, argue that women were indeed dominated. Josephides maintains that Kewa men exploited women through the material appropriation of the products of women's labour (pigs), and Godelier, that Baruya men exercised dominance and control over women through the ideological appropriation of female fertility and procreative powers. Both Josephides and Godelier also conclude that, gift-exchange economies notwithstanding, "appropriation" and "alienation" (either of products or of sexuality) existed in these societies, although neither ethnographer argues that women constituted a dominated "class" in the classic Marxist sense of the term.

These neo-marxist reconstructions of male domination present gender relations almost exclusively in terms of domination, subordination, appropriation and alienation, and,
in so doing, address the very issues that symbolic approaches override. Josephides and Godelier do not dispute the evidence of what appears to be domination: Kewa women's investment of labour in property that ultimately passed into men's control, and Baruya men's claims to existent procreative powers superior to those possessed by women. Consequently, the manipulation of gender ideology, the nature of property relations and rights of ownership, and the domination of persons through the appropriation of products and attributes are of major thematic importance. In addition, these studies reflect an interest in the psychology of domination and control. Psychological conditioning and the facts of socialization are seen to contribute to women's acceptance, and men's execution, of appropriation, both material and ideological.

These neo-marxist views are clearly incompatible with the views of those who have based their interpretations of gender relations on emic or indigenous notions of "personhood" and "domination". With respect to personhood, neither Josephides nor Godelier questions the nature of "persons"

Josephides' critique of *The Gender of the Gift* (Strathern 1988) includes the comment, that, in Strathern's work, "domination and exploitation are seen as categories with no substantive, objective reality in the structuring of social relations" (Josephides 1991:148). In this respect Josephides' understanding of domination is diametrically opposed to Strathern's (see my discussion of Strathern's views of domination in Chapter 4 of this discussion).
in a search for a more relativistic understanding of gender relations. Josephides' assumptions, for example, that persons are synonymous with subjects, and that they do indeed "own" "products" which may be readily "appropriated" by others, resulting in domination, are etic notions that are not entirely unexamined, but which the ethnographer understands to be cross-culturally applicable. Similarly, Godelier's analysis of male initiation as a mechanism of male dominance and gender ideology as a justification of that dominance takes male political power as a given. This revives a major theme of "sexual antagonism", in a more sophisticated form however, since Godelier explores in some detail the relationship between Baruya gender ideology and the practices of male domination. As we saw in Chapter 4, symbolic approaches to gender minimize and even disclaim a relationship between deprecating ideologies and practices of domination.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I examined culturally-contexted interpretations of gender relations, and I argued that these analyses deconstruct essential analytical categories of anthropology: "power", "person", "subject", "object", "property", "ownership" and "domination". In Chapter 5, I re-open the subjects of political power and domination insofar as the ethnographers under discussion understand these to be self-evident cross-cultural social realities. I examine how Josephides and Godelier use the notions of appropriation
and alienation to account for perceived power differences between men and women. In these neo-marxist frames of reference women appear as the objects of male control within systems or structures of domination that are materially and ideologically enacted. I will argue that both Josephides and Godelier over-emphasize the structures of domination, failing to account adequately for women's perspectives and their contingent actions and experiences with respect to the structures of domination, whether material or ideological.

Male Domination and Material Appropriation

In The Production of Inequality: Gender and Exchange among the Kewa (1985), Josephides examines the relationship between gift exchange and the political position of women among the Kewa of the Southern Highlands of New Guinea. The work is an informative analysis of the sexual dynamics of exchange, the relationship between women as "producers" and men as "transactors" (see Strathern 1972).

Josephides argues that significant sexual inequalities in Kewa society were systematically engendered and perpetrated in the practice of wealth exchange through a process of "mystification" which obscured women's labour input and their ownership of the pigs that were circulated in exchange. Consequently, gendered activities (female production and male exchange) expressed a relationship of subordination and
domination, and sexual inequality existed in spite of a strongly egalitarian social ethic. This "egalitarian" ideology cannot be reconciled with the fact that exchange and production sustained hierarchial relations in which women were economically dependent on, and politically subordinated to men (1985:8). Men were able to appropriate and distribute wealth produced by women, to use this wealth to create relations of debt and credit, and to accrue prestige to themselves as individuals and to their clans as groups.

Josephides' analysis of exchange focuses on two related processes: (a) how objects were alienated from producers (women) in the process of being circulated in the exchange system by transactors (men), and (b) how this produced inequality between men and women. The author attempts to identify precisely how, and at what point in the exchange system sexual inequality was created. Inequalities also existed among transactors. The exchange sphere itself was not truly egalitarian, as goods and prestige were differentially accrued. Considering both inter-sexual and intra-sexual inequalities, Josephides' draws the general conclusion that gift exchange economies are "not really inimical to alienation, maximization and the creation of inequality" (1985:221).

In order to demonstrate that Kewa women were economically dominated, Josephides constructs the argument that appropriation and alienation of products may occur in a gift-
exchange economy. She draws on and ultimately challenges Gregory's distinction between clan-based gift exchange and capitalist, class-based commodity exchange (1980, see also 1982). A gift exchange system, Gregory suggests, does not allow persons to accumulate or alienate the products of others' labour. While he claims that "... a clan-based economy is relatively egalitarian in the sense that there does not exist one group of people who live off the surplus product of another group of people" (1982:19-20), this is precisely the relationship of inequality that Josephides perceives to have existed between Kewa men and women.

Contra Gregory, she suggests that alienation is made possible in gift exchange systems through a process of "conversion" whereby domestic or use values are transformed into public or exchange values. Analyses of gift economies, she argues, must consider "the conditions and circumstances in which gift-items are acquired/created" (1985:203), as it is in these circumstances that the transformation of "use" into "exchange" values may take place. Thus, in response to Gregory's distinction that gift exchange systems "maximize net outgoings" (1980:636) as opposed to commodity-based maximization of net incomings, Josephides points out that chiefs in traditional redistributive societies (for example: Trobriand, Kwakuitl) "maximize net outgoings of other people's products and net incomings of gift-credit or prestige to
themselves" (my emphasis) and that in this process they simultaneously "alienate, appropriate and mystify" (1985:214). Gift economies, she argues, must be recognized generally as mystifying unequal exchanges, and with respect to inter-sexual relations, as providing opportunities for men to appropriate and alienate women's products. The result in Kewa society was an economically-based male dominance:

Male-based groups, the ownership of the means of production in the male line, patrivirilocality, all these provided the economic base for the political domination of women, allowing men to monopolize the convertibility of values from the domestic into the public sphere (1985:219).

The Kewa

The Kewa live in the southeastern part of the Southern Highlands and in 1978 numbered approximately 50,000 people. In the Sugu river valley where Josephides conducted her fieldwork, the Kewa lived in settlements dispersed across a rough and forested terrain (1983:293). The Kewa "tribe" as a whole shared a common territorial affiliation and an ideology of common identity. As was typical in Highlands societies, patrilineal clans were subdivided into sections containing patrilineages and "named clans or clan-sections can be said to be corporate to the extent that members stress continuity, shared agnatic descent and common interest in property, especially land" (1983:293). There was a "powerful
and pervasive ideology of cooperation along agnatic lines" (1983:294).

Among the Kewa there was not (nor had there ever been, Josephides claims) a rigid separation of the sexes, although girls and boys were socialized to the appropriate roles, behaviours and tasks of their sex. Over the years, colonial and missionary influences had contributed to changes in family organization, social practices and beliefs about the sexes. At the time of Josephides' fieldwork, men did not harbour a strong fear of female pollution; menstruation huts, birth huts, men's houses, cult houses and women's houses were no longer in use. The ethnographer discovered neither puberty nor initiation rights, and suggests that these did not exist at any time for either sex. Although Kewa men were traditionally initiated into spirit cults, this was not specifically a process of initiation designed to induce manhood, as was the case in the Eastern Highlands. Among the Kewa many adult married men were among those inducted into the cult (see also A. Strathern, 1970).

Kewa subsistence patterns and the sexual division of labour were typical of the area. Like other Highland peoples, the Kewa were principally horticulturalists and pig-raisers who adopted the cash-cropping of coffee while continuing to pursue more traditional economic activities. Garden work was shared by men and women, men undertaking the heavy clearing
and women doing the bulk of the planting and tending. Josephides notes that although in daily tasks there was considerable cooperation between the sexes, women were responsible for most of the pig-raising and child-care, and in other social domains the participation of the sexes was not balanced. For instance, traditionally, women were not permitted to be warriors or cult leaders, and similarly at the time of Josephides' fieldwork, they were barred from becoming catechists or pastors, and were not permitted to run for government offices (1983:296).

Exchange and the Appropriation of Women's Products

As in other Highlands societies, among the Kewa, the exchange of wealth items was a central organizing principle and an important social metaphor. Ethnographers have traditionally characterized Highlands exchange systems as embodying the values of "reciprocity" and "egalitarianism", implying a state of balance and social equality. However, as Josephides notes, Highland exchanges have also been characterized as competitive systems in which men sought to surpass their fellows in the acquisition of prestige, and women remained peripheral to what was essentially a patrician activity (see, for example, Forge 1972, Godelier 1982, Modjeska 1982, A. Strathern 1982). These contrasting characterizations, one ideological and the other empirical, raise the question
of how apparently conflicting interpretations of exchange may be understood as aspects of the same system. The problem of reconciling an ideology of egalitarianism with empirically identified inequalities is particularly relevant for Josephides' argument that gift exchange economies are capable of engendering social inequality, not only among men such that prestige accrues to individuals unequally, but also between men as "transactors" and women as "producers" of transacted goods.

Kewa productive relations, Josephides argues, defined a politically inferior position for women precisely because these relations did not, in practice, conform to the social ideal of egalitarianism; rather they were unequal or hierarchical relations masquerading as egalitarian relations. The equalizing forces of gift exchange were such that no Kewa big-man could maintain a permanent hold on power, yet power was nevertheless concentrated in the hands of big-men. The ideals of complementarity and reciprocity between equals were in fact emic mystifications. Thus, hierarchical relations, Josephides argues, are always present in conjunction with complementary or equalizing relations in exchange systems and as a result, alienation is always possible (see also

48 See Jolly (1987:171) for a discussion of the "ideological slide" that has conflated achieved power and equality, and ascribed power and hierarchy/inequality. See also A. Strathern (1971) for a discussion of the "alternating equilibrium" in the moka exchange.
Flanagan 1989, for a discussion of hierarchy in egalitarian societies).

Josephides suggests that delayed gift exchange in Kewa society created "the possibility for some individuals to appropriate and redistribute products of other people's labour" (1985:176), with the result that the continuity between labour and product were "blurred" (1985:176). This "blurring" of continuity took place prior to the major exchange event, when a series of lesser exchanges created "smokescreens in which the provenance of items circulating in them is dissipated" (1985:109). In this way, the connection between product and labour was obscured:

... men often try to suggest that pigs acquired in this way through a series of exchanges were somehow "produced" by them and had little to do with their wives' labour (1985:197).

In reference to the Enga of the Western Highlands, Gregory suggests that "pigs on tee roads are the inalienable property of other women who have lost possession of the pigs but not control" (1980:641, my emphasis). Contrary to this reciprocal theory of exchange, Josephides argues that pigs could be alienated:

... transaction upon transaction creates a smokescreen in which woman's labour in the acquisition of exchange pigs is irretrievably lost. Women's labour receives official recognition at the pig feast, but this is exactly where the products of that labour are appropriated (1983:306).
In essence, the mechanism of exchange, i.e., the series of transactions, provoked the separation of labour and product. Kewa women "lose control over the products of their labour" (1985:108) as those products were absorbed into the larger exchange system.

In the same way that the Stratherns (1971, 1972) argue that a Melpa woman's participation in ceremonial dancing, albeit minimal, was an expression of male prestige and power, Josephides suggests that when a Kewa woman distributed pork to her kin at the ceremonial pig kill, "it may look as if she is really transacting exchanges", but in fact "she is presiding over a distribution" (1985:100) in which she had little say and which neither accrued prestige nor created obligations to her. This example serves as ammunition for Josephides' argument that "we must guard against instant characterizations of social relations from direct observation of social practices" (1985:101). There is, she argues, a crucial difference between what Kewa women appeared to be doing and what they were "actually" doing in terms of political power and its distribution, i.e., in terms of control of group activities. Economic marginalization thus determined, in part, the political position of Kewa women.

Although Kewa husbands claimed to make all distribution decisions, wives were consulted and had some measure of influence. But as in Melpa society, it was a Kewa woman's
personal relations with her husband that determined the extent to which she influenced exchange decisions and benefited from the exchange process. Such "political" influence, Josephides suggests, had no systemic meaning or formal place in the realm of male political action. Thus, "husbands can dispense with wifely consultation" (1985:196), and with respect to pigs, such consultation did not guarantee the recognition of women's role in their acquisition and production; "the discontinuity between labour and its product is thus not exposed as a strategy" (1985:196).

In order to understand this discontinuity and the conversion of use values to exchange values, I return to the question with which I began this discussion of Josephides: Precisely how does alienation take place in gift exchange systems (such as the kula, the tee and the moka)? In the case of the Kewa, Josephides suggests that pig production was in fact a "fragmented process" that poses the following problem: "Who ... is the owner of a pig that so many people have fed and cared for while it has been passing from hand to hand?" (1985:208).

The fact that all these "owners" could not be recognized is the key to the processes of mystification concealing the labour invested in pigs. Josephides calls these processes "smokescreens". Whereas Feil claims that in the tee pigs are "returned" to their producers (i.e., a woman received a whole
pig), in the Kewa pig kill system women in fact recovered only a share of the pigs that had passed through their hands. It was therefore the succession of exchanges that dissipated women's products and constituted the smokescreen obscuring the relationship between the object exchanged and the labour that had produced it. In the Kewa situation, it appears as though pigs were produced in exchange, and using a classic Marxist argument, Josephides suggests that the true origin of the exchange object was lost as the object circulated, and that what was produced as a use value was thus transformed into an exchange value (1985:208). Although Kewa society was principally oriented to the production of use values, the structure and process of exchange converted these into exchange values. It was because pigs were not produced as alienable items that their alienation was mystified, and it was when pigs entered the exchange system that this mystification occurred.

Inequality in fact existed prior to the entry of pigs into the exchange network, i.e., in the household, "because while both husband and wife are engaged in producing use values, only the husband can convert these into exchange values" (1985:210). Men, the author argues, were able to control domestic labour by removing its products from the domestic sphere. The following statement summarizes Josephides' principal argument about the alienation of products from
producers, the consequent "production" of inequality and the political implications of these processes for women:

By whatever mechanism alienation is carried out, whether at the point of production or at a later stage when domestic products are converted into exchange values, the underlying activity at work in both gift and capitalist economies is the unequal control of the pool of labour power. When the product of a woman's labour is repeatedly alienated, it is more than an object which is being appropriated: her rights to control her own activities are themselves being denied. This is where the two meanings of the Marxist concept of alienation meet: material alienation of the product of one's labour, and psychological self-alienation of the producer. The important issue is that through the control of things, people and their activities are controlled (1985:210).

The Political Position of Kewa Women

In The Production of Inequality (1985), Josephides argues that the assessment of Highlands societies as fundamentally "egalitarian" continues to mislead, and that the social

In assuming etic notions of person and property relations, this view is incompatible with Strathern's understanding of gift exchange relations. In the passage cited (1985:210), Josephides' presents Marxist preoccupations: production and alienation, and "persons" from whom "products" may be alienated. These do not articulate in any way with Strathern's deconstruction of the Western "person", and of the "industrialist" property relations embedded in that concept. In fact, Strathern (1988) argues, in direct opposition to Josephides' argument with respect to pig-raising, that women's labour was fully acknowledged and that their economic contribution was not obscured. The conversion of use values into exchange values involves what Strathern terms a shift in "agency" or "authorship" (not "appropriation"), these being distinct from the commodity concept of "ownership". Thus, pigs, "re-made" in the process of transaction, were "multiply-authored" or "joint" products and, thus like Melanesian persons owing parts of themselves to a variety of others, were not unitary, individual subjects, or in this case, products.
practices and dynamics of acephalous polities must be more closely scrutinized (see also Flanagan 1989). Such scrutiny, she suggests, will reveal that the absence of formal political structures did not preclude the existence of positions of power and of the use of political force.

Parallel to this, is her argument concerning the difference between the "legal" and the "political" positions of women in Kewa society. While there existed an indigenous ideal of "egalitarianism", the notion that all persons had value (1985:143), "this does not mean that in practice people are equal or even that there exists such an emic notion of 'equality'" (1985:144). Kewa women as a category were apparently political minors, but they were not jural minors, and bridewealth was not thought to "buy" women. However, because rights in women were widely distributed and their group affiliation weak, their ability to influence group events, i.e., their political power, was correspondingly weak.

"When discussing questions of political power", Josephides states, "the individual's relationship to the group ... is of the utmost importance" (1985:100). If political power is understood to be "the ability to control events within the group" (1985:99), then Kewa women, who were "peripheral to group ideologies because they are considered to be sojourners in respect of any group" (1985:99-100), had little or no political power. Women were perceived (by men) as peripheral
to social groups defined exclusively in the patrilineal idiom of group identity. In turn, this peripherality excluded women from permanent claims to land and from positions of group leadership:

Group solidarity is male solidarity in such a system, and there is no room for an autonomous female domain (1983:306).

Furthermore, because the group "legitimizes political authority", women as peripheral sojourners, had no basis on which "to build on personal advantage and gain influence" (1985:100). In short, Kewa women were political minors.

Women, like politically weak men, did "have a certain threshold of rights" (1985:45) that were defined in principle, although, as Strathern also notes in the case of Melpa women (Strathern 1972), there were political constraints on these rights such that they were not always exercisable. This inability to exercise "theoretical" rights with respect to the group further determined Kewa women's political marginality. The difficulty that Kewa women had in exercising the rights that they possessed in theory was due to their lack of political influence. For example, Kewa women, like Melpa women, had "equal" access to the court system for dispute settlement only in principal.50 Josephides concludes that

50 Here, we may recall Strathern's point that women's so-called "equal" access was ideologically bound up with the notion of noman or personhood, and practically speaking, may not have been equivalent to the access afforded men.
Kewa court decisions "are informed by, and implemented in, an essentially male-oriented context" (1983:299).

This characterization is reminiscent of Strathern's description of Melpa women's "in betweenness" and "judicial minority" (1972). In comparing Kewa and Melpa societies, Josephides notes that in both cases women "are never permanently or completely identified with a group" (1985:100) and that the paradoxical combination of political minority and jural majority served largely to assign duties and responsibilities rather than to endow women with rights, precisely because the extent to which rights could be claimed was a function of political power and influence (Strathern 1972:260, Josephides 1985:100).

However, Josephides does not acknowledge women's own perspectives on their social circumstances. The recognition of women's views is clearly distinct from a relational view of women, i.e., women's perspectives cannot be subsumed by or seen through the perspectives of men. Closer examination of Josephides' assessment of Kewa women's "peripherality" will clarify the extent to which her perspective draws on patrilineal ideology.

Josephides begins with men's perceptions of women's place in the patrilineal system. Kewa women, we are told, did not define the group, but neither were they "in between" groups. They were "peripheral to group ideology and sojourners with
respect to any group" (1985:217). Unlike men, Josephides argues, Kewa women did not have a sphere of action that excluded the other sex and did not share an ideology of female solidarity which could influence group identity. Women were perceived (by men, we must assume) to have an "unstable attachment" and "partial commitment" to the patriclan (1983:294). This was not, Josephides suggests, because they "marry their enemies" (Meggitt 1964), but rather because "Kewa marriages do not set up group exchanges or create political links between groups" (1983:294). Kewa women, she argues, cannot be described as "in between", but are better characterized as "marginal", and their political position as one of marginality or peripherality:

This marginality marks women off not as a part of the group with which they are residing but as individuals without any solidarity ... While women may participate in the everyday manoeuvrings to defend their claims to various resources, their lack of a base prevents their participation in leadership politics in the public domain. They cannot legitimize their power and turn it to authority because they are not thought to represent the group. Thus both sexes say that women have no "talk" (in Kewa agele naya), this being the idiom for political influence (1983:294-295).

The categorization of women as "peripheral sojourners" draws on the fact that women moved between groups, and although "they are not exchanged like objects because they are persons", they are nevertheless "exchanged among men against objects of wealth" (1985:65). It was this fact, Josephides claims,
that determined how their status in groups was perceived (by men):

Because they move, they have a less stable relationship to land and therefore to the name of the land-owning group; so their rights to the land and the name become tenuous ... Because as part of normal social practice (marriage, divorce, widowhood) women are expected to move at least once in their lives, men talk of them being sojourners in respect of any group. This status informs their position vis-a-vis group ideologies, and physical sojourners become ideologically peripheral (1985:65).

Interestingly, Josephides notes that "most women as wives are not in fact sojourners in their husband's group, but make it their own and stay for life" (1985:65, my emphasis). Ideological bias, she suggests, did not reflect social reality and the two concepts ("sojourner" and "peripheral") self-referentially constructed a circular argument. Women's peripherality in relation to groups and their status as sojourners were used to explain each other (1985:66).

The important material effect of this status was Kewa women's inability to accrue independent rights to land: "it is the fact that men control land, and the resultant ideology that land ownership is by definition male, which lays the foundations for ... sexual inequality" (1985:66). Property relations determined by kinship and residence rules "automatically expropriate women on divorce" who were nothing more than "permissive occupants" on their husbands' land (1982:300):
When married, women's rights to land are a direct result of that marriage and can therefore be revoked on divorce. This was vividly demonstrated on one occasion when a woman who had been divorced by her husband argued that she had a right to stay on in his settlement in spite of his rejection of her. She considered herself a co-founder of the settlement since she had helped in the building of the longhouse, and believed that her interests in the place should accrue as a result of her residence there over a number of years. Her claim did not even receive serious consideration however, for the group that determines access to land is the male core group which does not admit wives as full members with rights in perpetuity. The fact that men may also change their clan affiliation (though this is rare) is overlooked; ... the idiom of brotherhood may include non-agnates, but it excludes women (1985:63).

This passage highlights the obviously different perspectives of women on their relationships to land. Kewa women's experiences, perceptions and interpretations of patrilineal ideology were clearly different from men's, yet Josephides elects to emphasize that Kewa wives did not acquire rights in property as did their husbands. She states:

For all that women consider that they have the same rights as men and lay claims to their products and strive to control their lives; for all that there is an ideology that accords value to each individual, the unavoidable conclusion is that when it comes to very basic issues the fact that women are considered sojourners both in their natal and their marital home weakens their claims ... A husband and wife may appear to have equal rights to their joint income ..., but if they separate she forfeits her investment (1983:300).

However, the fact that Kewa women were considered by men to be sojourners on patriclan land must not preclude the inclusion of women's perspectives. Although Josephides'
ethnographic evidence of patrilineal and agnatic ideology, male political domination and men's greater control of property cannot be disputed, she minimizes women's perspectives by giving them less credence. Women's claims may indeed have been weak, their political status that of minors, but the fact of male politico-economic dominance did not negate the fact of women's different perspectives on that status and those claims.

Indeed, Kewa women, not surprisingly, were dissatisfied with their political minority. Josephides notes several instances in which supporting husbands' endeavours, supplying wealth items for male exchanges and prestige activities and working land in which they acquired no permanent rights became seriously contentious issues. The pressures that women individually exerted on men "meet with male hostility" and remained "unstructured incursions into the public domain" (1983:297):

... women may constrain men's actions in the public domain by various acts of sabotage in particular situations. But their protest is always from the outside so that even when it is effective it does not challenge men's right to make unilateral political decisions in general: it only protests at one particular decision (1983:297).

Josephides' analysis of "judicial minority" differs from Strathern's (1972) with respect to their theoretical perspectives on "power". Power, Josephides states, is "the ability to influence social decisions and control group events"
inequality is "the unequal share in this power as a result of unequal access to the goods and statuses to which it relates" (1985:110). Josephides attributes preeminent social importance to political power; "whatever its pedigree, power must become politicized before it can have any influence on social life" (1985:110). Thus "an unequal share" of power resulting from "unequal access to goods and statuses" implies a system of domination deriving from economic and political structures. Because women participated only minimally in politics and because their products were appropriated, their ability to exercise autonomy was systemically limited. Josephides does not claim that women's resistance, recalcitrance, small forms of sabotage and small measures of freedom and autonomy were in any way systemically or categorically recognized.⁵¹

**Kewa Gender ideology**

Like egalitarianism, complementarity, Josephides argues, is an emic mystification, and Kewa gender relations did not enact a model of "equal but different", but rather ensured that "while status is achieved for men it is ascribed for women, determined by their sex" (1983:297). Yet, Kewa women

---

⁵¹ Strathern, however, (see Chapters 2 and 4), defines Melpa women's "autonomy" in the face of male domination and claims that this small measure of freedom constituted some form of genuine power.
apparently concurred with what men said of them, "accepting" the dominant ideological version of themselves to the degree that they averred that women were not strong, owned no wealth, had no talk, knew no stories, had no judgment and were ignorant (1985:122). This gender ideology was manifest in programmatic statements made by men. The female stereotype could be strategically invoked, and served as both "a very powerful tool on occasions when men want to get the upper hand on women" and "the general rationale for women's dependent position" (1985:127).

Women, however, did not unequivocally accept the male version of themselves, nor did they fail to invoke gender stereotypes for their own strategic purposes. I would argue that any "mutual complicity" or "acceptance" likely masked a female version of social reality. What, to men, was an intrinsic fact of being female (owning no wealth, having no talk etc.), from the perspective of women may well have constituted a description of their social circumstances. Thus, as I argue later with respect to Godelier's use of the term "mutual complicity", "acceptance" must be deconstructed to reveal the power differential that it obscures. Josephides does indeed point out that "the rules of the 'gender game' were not the same for both sexes" (1985:130):

Gender ideology delineates men's ideal domain as the public, but women welcome their participation in the domestic. By contrast, men jealously guard
the public domain from female incursions. In other words, a man may cross the gender line with little trouble, whereas a woman will be blocked by a hostile, united male front (1985:130).

This brings us back full circle to a question I raised earlier in this discussion: What is the relationship between a gender ideology that posits sexual inequality and an ideology of personhood that posits a notion of fundamental human value and basic human rights? Josephides does not question the definition of "person", nor at any time does she clearly state what definition of person she is using. The Kewa, she tells us, believed that every person had intrinsic value, and she herself observed that "in everyday life men and women appear to enjoy equal rights" (1983:298). In the politics of everyday life "women seem full participants" (1983:298). They participated in informal public discussions and entertain guests with their husbands. They maintained interests and conducted private exchanges outside the domestic sphere. This empirical observation of complementary inter-sexual relations to some degree belies Josephides' principal argument that women were "peripheral sojourners", whose labour and products were appropriated in the course of exchange, i.e., they were politically and economically dominated.

The matter of physical violence against women problematizes Josephides' characterization of a congenial daily life in which men and women exercised equal rights and
women's status as political minors played an insignificant role. In her 1983 article, "Equal but Different: The Ontology of Gender Among Kewa", Josephides states that while domestic fights were fairly usual, outright violence was not common. In her later work, however, she states that violence against women and particularly the threat of violence were prevalent (1985:56). After detailing women's rights in marriage, and noting the fact that women were not forced into marriages and "exercise a reasonable freedom of choice" (1985:55) both in marriage and in the decision to divorce, Josephides points out that, these "liberal attitudes" (1985:55) aside, "women were never free from the threat of violence from their husbands" (1985:55):

In the old days men often demonstrated their authority over women in physically aggressive ways. They would parade up and down the settlement and threaten to put an arrow or spear in the woman's thigh ... Nor are women safe from violence today, although they can no longer be killed with impunity (1985:56).

The issue of violence and the potential for violence against women highlights the discrepancy between the theoretical rights of persons and women's systemically produced inability to exercise rights. In addition, despite the apparent importance of cultural beliefs about women, Josephides does not scrutinize the relationship between the gender ideology and the perpetration of violence against women, nor does she relate these to politico-economic domination.
Critique of Josephides

In a brief review of the literature on sex and gender in New Guinea (1985:97-101), Josephides refers to the corrective aspect of the transition from the "sexual antagonism" model to the view of "women as persons" and raises the issue of whether or not "studies which present women as politically dominated by men are necessarily suffering from male bias" (1985:98). Josephides argues that studying Kewa society and its gender relations through a patrilineal lens provides a "true and lucid representation of the respective statuses of men and women" (1985:99). The patrilineal nature of Kewa society, she suggests, cannot be analytically whitewashed without sacrificing a "true" view of social reality. Read, in a recent re-assessment of his early work on Gahuku-Gama society, makes a similar point:

The worthy aim of trying to demonstrate that women are persons in their own right with their own values, knowledge and community of interests ... may have resulted ... in an exaggeration of their influence and a possible wish-fulfilling tendency to find mutuality between the respective cultural spheres of men and women (1982:77).

That Josephides and Read deem it necessary to construct a categorical dichotomy between male domination in Highlands societies and women's "values, knowledge and community of interests" is itself suggestive of a bias, the assumption being that if women are politically subordinated to men, the ideological and social structures responsible for that
subordination necessarily constitute the best, and perhaps only, perspective through which women in that society may be properly understood.

Josephides' minimal treatment of Kewa women's involvement in exchange illustrates this type of bias. Although a woman gives to her own kin at the major exchange event, discharging her husband's obligations, she also had "other unrelated obligations or joint obligations with her husband" (1985:195). These "other unrelated obligations" suggest some measure of independent female involvement in exchange. But this is glossed over in Josephides' claim that women merely "distributed" and that the wife who presided over the distribution of goods to her clan merely "seems momentarily endowed with the power of transactor". In fact, Josephides claims, "she cannot use the wealth to transact independently and create debts toward herself, but must give it to her clan" (1985:196). Josephides thus does not address the differences between women's and men's perspectives on exchange and does not adequately account for women's "other unrelated obligations".

In the 1982 article cited above, Read discusses the changes in Gahuku-Gama gender relations and the position of women in that society since the 1950's. He notes a variety of material and ideological changes, but principally emphasizes that "men still own and control the basic resources of production" and that "women have made almost no inroads on
their (men's) political power and authority" (1982:76). Similarly, Josephides' data on male-female relations among the Kewa showed that in 1981 "men still owned the basic resources of production and women still did not occupy any significant political position, but remained peripheral to group ideologies" (1985:99). Here, both Josephides and Read characterize male-female relations among the Kewa as predominantly relations of dominance and subordination: Josephides states:

...there is little doubt that in any confrontation of interests the men's political muscle, which gains its strength from their control of productive resources as well as the exchange sphere, will prevail against the women. Politically, women are indeed dominated by men, and it would be taking great liberties with the data to present the case as being otherwise (1985:99).

In taking this approach, Josephides risks ignoring women's perspectives, but acknowledges feminist concerns in two ways: (1) she directly raises the question of whether anthropologists "are still falling into the 'male trap' of labelling, a priori, only male activities as being 'political'" (1985:99); (2) she cites Weiner's lament that we need to understand more about women than that they are "secondary to men in status and power" (1982:55).

Nevertheless, for Josephides, it is axiomatic that the analysis must first address male political activity:

A rosy lens, or one green with hope and wishful thinking, can distort as much as an androcentric
one. In order to understand these statuses, we must tackle, head on, the questions of politics and social power" (1985:99).

Josephides is not misguided in addressing the practices of male political power. On the other hand, I suggest that the importance of the role of male political activity in the processes of the domination of women must not distract us from attending to the reality of women's political views. Leroy (1985), in his study of Kewa society, illustrates this very point:

Young women do not, in fact, treat the pig kill as solemnly as men, nor do they respect its political definition. In their songs they too celebrated pig killing, but they sing about consuming pork rather than about exchanging it ... the songs provoke critical remarks and groans from men. Emotional needs, physical comforts, and other "domestic" matters have their place in ceremonies, so women seem to say (Leroy 1985:190).

Women's concern with consumption was, it seems, as much a "political" interest as men's concern with exchange. Women's concerns, what women "seem to say" in the face of politico-economic domination and a masculinist ideology, are only partially examined in Josephides' work.
The Ideological Appropriation of Reproduction

Godelier's study of Baruya society, *The Making of Great Men: Male Domination and Power Among the New Guinea Baruya* (1986), is thematically similar to Josephides' study of Kewa society. Godelier, who, like Josephides, is concerned with Baruya men's "monopoly over the means of production" (1986:11) and the consequent material and social dependence of women, is more broadly concerned with men's ideological appropriation of the means of reproduction and the expression of male superiority. His analysis focuses on the relations governing the social aspect of the reproduction of life and the respective positions of the sexes in that process.

Throughout *The Making of Great Men* Godelier develops a central analytical theme: in Baruya society sexuality assumed meanings beyond itself. Gender functioned as a symbolic mechanism codifying an ideology of male superiority, that in turn provided a rationale for domination. For the Baruya, "every aspect of male domination, whether ... economic, political or symbolic, can be explained by sexuality" (1986:xi).\(^52\) Insofar as sexuality and its representation in the ideology of social reproduction served as "a kind of cosmic foundation of women's subordinate position, and of ... the

---

\(^{52}\) Here I assume that Godelier refers to Baruya men, although he does argue that women are co-opted and also "believe" in male superiority.
oppression that they endure" (1986:xi), Baruya gender ideology itself constituted a system of domination.

In studying male domination and social inequality in Baruya society, Godelier's larger theoretical goal is to examine how sexuality and gender were translated into social practices reaching beyond their own bounds. His analysis challenges those anthropologists who suggest either that deprecating ideologies may be ignored, or on the other hand, that because the relationship between such ideologies and the material practices of domination does not reflect institutionalized control of women or of female sexuality, women were able to manoeuvre their way through the ideological minefield of gender and emerge unscathed as "persons". Godelier's argument thus challenges those who claim that what presents itself to Western eyes as "domination" is in fact not strictly so.

Strathern, Lederman and other ethnographers have dealt with sexuality and gender as a system of moral evaluation (see Chapter 4). Godelier's analysis differs from Strathern's in his unstated assumption of individual personhood and the concept of domination that this implies (see Chapter 4, also Errington and Gewertz 1987). His analysis also differs from Lederman's views of Mendi "contested values" in that he assumes a rigidly hierarchical relationship between male, "public"
values and female "domestic" values, the outcome being an inflexible gender hierarchy.

In this part of the chapter, I examine Godelier's assessment of the political position of Baruya women and his understanding of the role of sexuality and gender in the ideological and material oppression of women, what he refers to as their "general domination". I compare his assessment of women's political position and their oppression at the hands of men with Josephides' assessment of Kewa women's status as "peripheral sojourners" (Josephides 1985) and Strathern's assessment of Melpa women's "judicial minority" (Strathern 1972).

The Baruya

The Baruya people live in the Kratke mountain range in the Eastern Highlands Province of New Guinea, and at the time of Godelier's fieldwork (the late 1970's) numbered approximately 2,000 individuals. Godelier describes the Baruya as "an acephalous tribe" consisting of patrilineal groups residing patrilocally. This residential pattern resulted in "coexistence and interdigitation around a central core of segments of lineages belonging to different clans" (1986:1-4 passim).

Horticulture, pig-raising and salt production were traditionally the principal economic activities of the Baruya.
Their major food crop was the sweet potato, although taro was of prime social and ceremonial importance (1986:5). The cultivation of these crops was relatively intense, but did not compare in intensity to the cultivation practised in the Western Highlands.\(^{53}\)

The Baruya were what Godelier calls a "great-man" society. Men acquired "greatness" through the assumption of certain prestigious social roles or statuses (warrior, shaman and cassowary hunter), but, in contrast to the men of the "big-man" societies of the Western Highlands, they did not accumulate wealth. Baruya society was remarkable, Godelier notes, both for "the absence of direct links between power and wealth" (1986:xi) and for the absence of an elaborated system of bridewealth involving the "exchange" of women and wealth items:

In contrast to many other societies in Melanesia and elsewhere, only a woman is worth another woman, and cannot be exchanged for pigs or other forms of material wealth when two groups wish to ally and ensure their reproduction (1986:xi).

Women were seen by men as both "equivalent" and as an abstract unit of exchange. This principle of equivalence was applied in marriage and thus "governs the social aspect of the reproduction of life" (1986:xi). It also furnished the "deep-seated reason preventing wealth and power from combining in

\(^{53}\) Eastern Highlands societies, relative to those of the Western Highlands have been characterized as "low-production" societies (see Modjeska 1982, Feil 1987).
the Baruya social structure" (1986:xi). However, the absence of a correlation in Baruya society of wealth and power did not preclude the existence of certain positions of power (those achieved by great men) which "form a social hierarchy distinct from men's general dominance over women" (1986:x). Godelier argues that these two types of inequalities (between men and women, and among men) constituted the basis of Baruya social life.

The Political Position of Baruya Women

In his comparison of big-man and great-man societies, Godelier suggests that in the former, because the female labour force and its production of wealth (pigs) were of considerable importance, and because women themselves were "a necessary conduit for the circulation of wealth" (1986:180), they in fact had more "autonomy" but were "economically exploited" (1986:180) compared to Baruya women. Comparisons of this nature are extremely difficult to make, and adjudications of degrees of domination are next to impossible. Although the Baruya traditionally maintained a complex initiation "machinery" that promoted male domination in a more forceful way than did the spirit cults of big-man societies (for example, Melpa society), and while Baruya women may indeed have had a certain economic "independence" that women in societies tied into large-scale wealth exchanges did not have, it is nonetheless
problematic to try to measure these different statuses against each other.

Godelier states that in Baruya society: (1) women owned neither land, tools, nor weapons; (2) women were excluded from salt-making and trade; (3) women neither owned nor used sacred objects for controlling the reproduction of social life; (4) in the relations of kinship, women were subordinate to men and were exchanged by men. This list of exclusions and restrictions indicates that Baruya women's political position was affected by a number of factors, the first of which was their limited access to land. As in other patrilineal Melanesian societies, among the Baruya, land was collectively owned by the patriclan and formally controlled by the men of the clan. As a result, women's relationship to land was particularly tenuous and impermanent:

...women retain the right to use their ancestor's land through their lifetime, but they do not inherit it and, consequently, cannot hand it on to their children (1986:5).

Thus, like Kewa women, Baruya women lacked the permanent rights in land that were readily claimed by men. While women's immediate access to land was not restricted, their ability to maintain long term claims to any given piece of land was strictly dependent on their relations with fathers, brothers and husbands.
Secondly, the manufacture of productive implements (for example, digging sticks) was a male prerogative; "this male monopoly over the manufacture of the means of production makes the women both materially and socially dependent on the men" (1986:11-12). Women's exclusion both from land ownership and from the manufacture of tools was tantamount to exclusion from the material means of production. Godelier, like Josephides, stresses that women's "real and rather substantial rights" over products (pig meat) resulting from their labour were circumscribed by "men's collective control" (1986:15).

Thirdly, women's access to "the means of destruction" (1986:11) was equally restricted. The manufacture of weapons was an exclusively male activity, and the warrior function an exclusively male role.

The conclusion that Baruya women were denied access to the means of production, destruction and government leads Godelier to wonder whether they were an exploited class in the classic sense of the term (according to A. Smith or Marx). "The classless Baruya", he states, "have ... constructed in their mental world all the conceptual [ideel] elements of class exploitation and its legitimization ..." (1986:146). However, he concludes that class relations did not in fact exist in Baruya society because men, while exercising ideological domination over women as a category, "have not ceased to be direct producers" (1986:143).
It is important to note that Godelier's analysis of women's position in Baruya society is exclusionary. He defines the status of women and describes their social roles and opportunities strictly in relation to the male activities from which they were excluded.

Initiation: a Mechanism of Male Domination

The most important mechanism of male dominance in Baruya society was the "initiate machinery" (1986:19). Baruya initiations were characterized by many of the features typical of such ceremonies in other Eastern Highlands societies (see Chapter 1, Read 1952, Langness 1967). Among the Baruya, initiations (both male and female) served as the "the social mechanism whereby the unequal rights and duties of the two sexes are legitimized, instituting and amplifying male domination and the subordination of women, of all women to men, to any man whatever ..." (1986:30).

Female and male initiations, despite apparent differences in degree of complexity and duration were actually "complementary aspects of a social practice that establishes and legitimizes the domination of men over women" (1986:62). Godelier notes that the complicity or cooption of women was apparent in female initiations and that these promoted the dominant ideology. Female initiation was, in Godelier's judgement, "the complement or projection of the men's
initiation into the world of women; it was the women's share in the task of promoting a single law and order, that of male domination" (1986:50). In fact, in the course of initiation, Baruya girls were aggressively socialized to and inculcated with the tenets of male domination.

The socialization process bound up in female initiation ceremonies was significant, and the attention devoted to wives' duties to husbands was substantial. These ceremonies included "a long series of harangues aggressively delivered to the young girl by old women" (1986:43), detailing Baruya notions of acceptable female conduct, and thereby serving as a formal introduction to the practical realities of male domination and its implications for adult women. Young women were primarily instructed to submit to their husbands in all ways.

Highlands ethnographers have frequently noted that male initiations demanded a greater expenditure of energy which was directed towards the transformation of boys into men. Like Read and other early ethnographers, Godelier suggests that the initiation of Baruya boys was of greater significance because it represented "a complete break" (1986:47) with the female world and a triumph of the masculine over the feminine:

... whereas the boys, once separated from their mothers, are plunged for at least ten years into an utterly different exclusively masculine world, from which they will emerge reborn, young girls spend only a few days in an exclusively feminine world, thereafter returning to live the same life as before (1986:47).
As in the Eastern Highlands societies discussed in Chapter 1 (e.g., the Gahuku-Gama, the Bena Bena), Baruya male initiations were associated with the denigration and fear of women. Baruya men believed, for instance, that their masculinity was threatened by the debilitating power of menstrual blood.

The Ideological Justification of Male Dominance

The triumph of the masculine over the feminine was both effected through initiations and reflected in Baruya mythology. Baruya men recounted an esoteric version of the mythology of the Sun and the Moon that reflected male appropriation of female attributes, notably fertility. Baruya men transformed the Moon who, in the female or common version of the mythology, was the Sun's wife, into the Sun's brother. This transformation, Godelier states, depicted the absorption of "the female into the male" and of "the submissive feminine (Moon-wife) into the subordinate masculine (Moon-younger brother of Sun)" (1986:95).

The mythological claim that the Moon was not a female principle, a counterpart to the male Sun, but was the Sun's younger brother, and the implication that women's powers derived from a male principle were reflected in the Baruya "theory of life". Through this theory, in which bodily substances acquired crucial symbolic meanings, Baruya men
asserted their essential and dominant role in the creation of life. Sperm (semen) was the substance from which all life derived:

For the Baruya, a child is first and foremost produced by the man, by his sperm, his 'water' (1986:51).

Semen was therefore thought to be the source of all strength and life, and it was accordingly fed to both male initiates and young wives. Fellatio made young men grow and made women strong, healthy and able to produce children. It was also responsible for developing women's breasts and producing the breast milk required to nourish children. Thus, the "theory of life" (semen = life force) served to express and maintain male domination on both physical and symbolic levels.

Seeking an explanation for male appropriation of female reproductivity, Godelier wonders "why ... the Baruya come to attribute to women, in thought, powers that thought immediately sets about confiscating and adding to those of men?" (1989:229). He proposes a psychological answer echoing earlier arguments that anthropologists proposed to explain sexual antagonism: male envy of female fertility created the psychological need to claim the ability to reproduce life. This caused men to "magnify" their own role and "deprecate" women's "primordial" role (1986:229). In addition, men harboured a psychological need to minimize their apparent dependence on women for the production of children for their
patricians. Thus, men claimed total responsibility for the reproduction of life, denying the obvious physical evidence.

In this way, men of one generation gave life to those of the next. The generalized exchange of sperm down the succeeding generations of initiates was thus an imitative process, Godelier suggests. Men giving life to men established a "kinship" system of sorts that overrode the kinship relations of consanguinity and marriage, and as a result, male society, "stands above social relations of intimacy and mutual help engendered by the exchange of women" (1986:54). This subordination of women in the reproduction of life was required "in order to establish society properly on a firm basis" (1986:146).

In addition to explaining men's exclusive rights and powers, Baruya myths also expressed and legitimated male violence against women. They were "a means of convincing all concerned, men and women alike, that things are now as they ought to be, that the order now reigning is the correct one, and that it legitimately, necessarily implies the exercise of some violence by the men against the women" (1986:73). Thus the myths "are themselves acts of genuine violence" (1986:73).

Godelier argues that Baruya women did not have a counter-model to the model of male domination, but in large measure consented to it. Nevertheless, individual, particular instances
of female resistance to male oppression were common. "The existence of consent", he states, "in no way implies an absence of resistance and opposition on the part of women to the order by which they are dominated" (1986:30). Thus, female opposition to the male order and women's different perspectives on their social position with respect to men are apparent in Godelier's description of women's ceremonies:

I did hear them making fun of their husbands and discussing them with very little of the respect that they show toward the men in public. But it took place somewhat on the fringe of things, in the chatting and joking that went on among the married women, in between the dances and sketches making up the ceremony, which they knew by heart (1986:50).

Thus, while it appears that Baruya women were ideologically dominated or coopted, in informal ways, "on the fringe of things", "in between" the formal parts of the ceremony, they expressed attitudes of resistance and gave evidence of harbouring other views of the social order. However, Godelier also notes that the formal parts of the ceremony (dances and sketches) served to reinforce the dominant ideology:

The message contained in these dances and sketches or mimed scenes did not deride the male order, as the men claim, nor did they incite to rebellion or propose a female countermodel of the social order; instead they explicitly encourage women to consent to male domination; they represent a remarkable plea to the young women to accept this order, a reminder that what is is what ought to be, that their customs comply with the order of
things, and that this order is legitimate (1986:50).

The order that maintained the "general subordination" of women, was not, Godelier suggests, completely infallible. Baruya men feared women's freedom, and the fact that women could "act, think and speak beyond the men's direct control" triggered confused and fearful reactions. Women's possibilities for independent action posed a threat to male dominance. For example, traditionally, women's initiation gatherings, which celebrated female procreative powers, were followed by an outbreak of male violence, i.e., an attack on the women's group.

Critique of Godelier

Godelier's analysis of the political position of Baruya women suffers from an androcentric bias in a number of respects. Firstly, he argues that the division of labour does not explain men's social dominance because, in Baruya thinking, it presupposed it (1986:14). Yet, Godelier's own description of women's tasks revives old familiar (Western, androcentric) arguments about the tediousness of women's work and compares it unfavourably to men's work, which was by implication, more creative and interesting. Women's work was duller, more

---

54 The question of women's consent is problematic and I return to it later in the discussion.
monotonous and routine, required less skill, less cooperation and few intense bursts of energy output (1986:14). The implication is clearly that such work was less prestigious. Certainly this assessment appears to be the male ideology, and Godelier notes that "it is to these differences that Baruya men refer when describing women's tasks as inferior to theirs" (1986:14). But Godelier himself also minimizes the value or importance of women's work, for example, their control of garden plots, noting only as a kind of aside that "it is worth pointing out by the way that a man always asks his wife when he is about to divide his garden into plots ..." (1986:17). Godelier's claim that, for the Baruya, the sexual division of labour presupposed male dominance, i.e., that it was predicated on the assumption that men's work was more interesting and required greater skill precisely because men's "natural" superiority qualified them for such work, is a male ideology that excludes women's views of the division of labour and of the nature and importance of their own work.55

In addition, Godelier's assessment of the position of female shamans and "warrior" women is hierarchical and exclusionary. In comparing measures of female "greatness" to measures of male "greatness", he notes that there were

55 There is further evidence of Godelier's male bias in his descriptions of the role and status divisions in Baruya society. The statement that "every Baruya is a warrior, hunter and horticulturalist" (1986:197) clearly does not mean every Baruya, but every Baruya man.
Baruya women who were greater than others, while it remained "unthinkable ... that any woman could be as great as the great men" (1986:x). In shamanism, for instance, which was the only area involving cooperation and competition between the sexes with respect to a common activity (1986:x), women were excluded from two crucial activities: magical struggles with enemy tribes and the initiation of others into shamanism. Women warriors fought only against other Baruya women. Thus, these women distinguished themselves only "in the women's world" (1986:80), and Godelier claims that "the importance of this distinction is far narrower than in the case of men" (1986:80). He fails to state to whom the importance of the distinction was narrower. He presents no evidence to support the implicit claim that male distinction as warriors was more important to women than female distinction as warriors.

Because Godelier concludes that women had few opportunities of distinguishing themselves (1986:98), he does not adequately address differences and inequalities among women, but focuses almost exclusively on inequalities among men and between men and women. Men were diverse, but women were not: "Contrasting with the men's world, where individual differences are both sought after and produced, the world of women appears to be far more homogeneous, much duller" (1986:80). Throughout the work, women are generic women, that is, wives.
Godelier's analysis of the Baruya theory of life also suffers from some measure of male bias. The distribution of semen was not the only exchange of bodily substance in this society. Baruya women participated in a similar process of exchange of bodily substance, those women who had recently given birth giving their breasts to the young female initiates to suck. Godelier's brief description of this is couched in terms that imply that the female sharing of body substances acted as little more than a poor imitation of the male sharing of semen:

The women too try to nourish themselves, to fortify themselves and grow without the help of men (1986:55).

He refers to women's actions as an "attempt" (1986:55), implying that what men were able to "do", women merely "tried to do". Similarly, he later notes that "by giving her milk to young girls about to marry, a wife merely anticipates what the young bridegrooms are about to do, when they too fortify their brides with their sperm" (1986:57, my emphasis). Viewing women's actions strictly relationally, in terms of "anticipated" male action is clearly biased. Godelier does not explore the possibility of the intrinsic meanings of these actions to women themselves, but assumes that these meanings were largely derivative.

Although Godelier may be faulted for adopting an analytical frame reminiscent of the sexual antagonism model
with its emphasis on patrilineal ideology and society as an inherently masculine form, his ethnographic evidence of women's lack of property and political rights cannot be disputed. However, the extent to which Baruya women constructed a counter-model of their society is less readily determined. Certainly the fact that women "(make) fun of their husbands" and "(discuss) them with very little of the respect that they show toward the men in public" (1986:50) bears testimony to women's other experiences, views and feelings about their lives and social relations. Mockery and lack of respect represented a contestation of values, albeit a particularistic and "informal" one. Godelier, however, chooses to highlight the "fact" that these contrapuntal views served to reaffirm the dominant male ideology.

Women's perspectives, however, are not completely absent from this analysis, and Godelier certainly cannot be accused of blindly ignoring the possibility that Baruya women's perspectives differed from men's. Following the passage cited above, he notes that "this attempt clearly throws into relief the tension, if not to say opposition, that exists between the sexes, endlessly giving proof that ... the subordination of women to men (is) neither total nor definitive ..." (1986:55). He goes so far as to wonder whether, in the absence of the controlling practices that preempted women's construction of an "independent" feminine world, women "might
... not imagine the existence of a female world entirely outside the control of men" (1986:69). By talking to women about their views Godelier was able to determine, for example, that the Moon was a woman, that women placed great importance on their sharing of breast milk and that they concealed this practice from men. Thus, Baruya women did in fact claim more power and a more independent perspective than men were willing to acknowledge. But this evidence of female "independence" does not inhibit Godelier's conclusion that male symbolic practices did not merely minimize or challenge women's claims to autonomous action, but in fact superseded them. "We can see", he notes, "how an idea and a symbolic custom can represent a force capable of blocking or facilitating the development of a different social personality or a new society" (1986:69). The implication is that the ideological overriding of "femaleness" and the symbolic appropriation of female reproductivity produced concrete effects. These constituted the "general subordination" of women.

Thus, Godelier argues principally for the "general subordination" of Baruya women, while conceding that women's perspectives existed. The argument is tentative, as if he were unsure, less as to whether women harboured other views or not, than as to what those views might have meant in relation to the "formal" and "public" male ideology. Consider the following passage:
Just as men give their penises to other men to drink and thus withhold a portion from the world of women, so women apparently give their milk to other women and so withhold a portion from the child whom the men have made in their bellies. This aspect of women's behaviour suggests the existence of another world in which women, notwithstanding their general subordination to men, conceive or lay claim to some form of autonomy, to a power of autonomous growth rather similar to the one that the men claim for themselves and imagine that they possess (1986:57).

Here, Godelier appears uncertain of the implications of Baruya women's perspectives and possibly different constructions of social reality. His tentative, at times vague, constructions convey this uncertainty: women apparently gave their milk to other women; notwithstanding their general subordination, they conceived or claimed some form of autonomy that counterbalanced the autonomy that men claimed and imagined.

At the same time as suggesting that women harboured other views and quite possibly constructed social reality differently, Godelier, believes that "to the extent ... that women share more or less fully the ideology according to which everything comes either directly or indirectly from the men, they will view the generalized exchange of milk between generations of women as evidence that they really are as inferior to men as the latter would have them and claim them to be or, on the contrary that they are much less so, even if they cannot say so in public" (1986:57). This passage both presents the male ideology and "general" dominance of men over women as actively creating Baruya social reproduction,
and suggests a continuum of female acceptance of the dominant view.

By focusing on degrees of female acceptance, Godelier obliquely suggests that the sexes did interpret the same ideas differently, and that these distinct interpretations provided "an outlet for the tensions and conflicts that inevitably arise when one part of society ... is dominant over the other" (1986:58). Although the degree to which women resisted male domination is undetermined, Godelier recognizes that Baruya women may not have seen themselves or their social circumstances as men did. But, Baruya women's views were nonetheless only a "partially opposed ... manner of shedding light on the same ideas and experiencing the same practice" (1986:58).

This view is not simplistic. Godelier notes, for example, with respect to the contradictory nature of menstrual blood (debilitating, but indicative of fertility), that "a rigid opposition between the positive and negative sex corresponds to a superficial level of thought" (1986:63). Male domination, Godelier argues, was imposed on "women who possess real power" (1986:65), but more emphatically than Strathern, he insists that the fact of women's "power" and "autonomy" did not make male domination "any the less oppressive and violent" (1986:65). With respect to male initiations, he notes that in these ceremonies "violence combines with ruse, fraud and
secrecy", all of which served to distance the sexes. But, again, to avoid overstating the case, he then counteracts this with the comment that: "... we must not forget that Baruya women have their own secrets, protecting them from men and constantly reminding them that women have powers too" (1986:231).

Godelier's analysis thus becomes entangled in the dynamic tension between women's "powers" and the reality that these powers gave women precious little political advantage and did not exempt them from the practices of male domination. This analytical entanglement is indicative of the complexity of the social relations that Godelier discusses. 56

The question remains as to what we are to make of a social system that ideologically legitimized violence, including physical violence, against women. Godelier argues that the Baruya myths are "truly acts of violence, even if this violence is neither physical nor directly psychological" (1986:74). It is evident, however, that physical forms of violence and repression exercised against Baruya women were recognized by men as legitimate (as Read notes about Gahuku Gama society; Read 1986:231-232). The "formidable barrage of conceptual and ideological violence aimed at women" (1986:148) was

56 I suggest that Godelier's theoretical perspective and use of the Marxist metaphor of "appropriation" prove inadequate for addressing the two levels of analysis or "levels of thought" (1986:63) that he suggests here.
accompanied by "other less conceptual [ideel], that is physical, forms of violence, humiliations, insults, and other kinds of psychological violence, and social violence as well, such as the kind of violence that consists in forcing a woman to marry a man against her wishes, or in separating her from her sons" (1986:148). Godelier does note that outbreaks of physical violence were relatively rare, but on the other hand states that "conceptual violence" permeated the entire social organization. The ideology, Godelier argues, was "self-legitimizing and (justified) all the forms of physical, psychological and other violence" (1986:148).

The practices of male domination (including, we may assume, physical forms of domination) were able to persist, Godelier argues, because both sexes conceived of the social order in a relatively similar way and because women "consented" to their domination. The author's exploration of the nature of women's "consent" is minimal, and he abandons the analysis at a most interesting point. He states:

But we cannot here go into the multitude of different ways in which people either passively accept or manipulate the social relationships within which they find themselves during the various stages of their existence. Our sole concern has been to analyze the machinery of male and female initiations, and to show how these institutions work together to establish and legitimize the general domination, as a matter of principle, of all men, qua men, over all women, qua women (1986:75-76).
Godelier stresses that the relations between the sexes were at one and the same time relations of "general" domination and subordination, yet they were not simple, categorical relations untempered by individual dynamics. In the passage cited above, the author sets up the possibility to explore "the multitude of different ways in which people either passively accept or manipulate the social relationships within which they find themselves" (1986:75-76), but does not pursue it. The following passage similarly suggests the complexity of social relations:

Although there is indeed competition, hostility, confrontation and even violence between the two sexes among the Baruya, relations do not amount to a reign of terror or hell on earth. The institution of the principle of the general domination of all women by all men still leaves plenty of room for non-mechanical, highly complex and even extremely contradictory relations among individuals (1986:159).

Despite his disclaimer that he will not address the complexities of the manipulation of social relations, in fact in his discussion of female dissatisfaction, rebellion and resistance, Godelier does explore some of the means available to women for affecting their social relationships with men, especially their husbands. Female resistance to male domination and control (including women's response to physical mistreatment) involved neglecting ("forgetting") to prepare food, excessive visiting of relatives, the neglect of gardens and pigs, refusing to make love and the pronouncement of loud
public reproaches directed at the husband. More extreme forms of resistance included infanticide, the use of sorcery, murder, and suicide.\textsuperscript{57}

Godelier, like other Highlands ethnographers, notes that female resistance was individual and that "cases of group resistance appear to be rare" (1986:151). However, these forms of resistance were political actions, regardless of the fact of women's "general" political domination. The political nature of women's acts of resistance was born out by men's reactions. Baruya men were seriously threatened by any indication of female resistance and "close ranks whenever a woman happens to endanger the symbols of their superiority" (1986:151).

In spite of this resistance on the part of women, Godelier argues that there existed a "mutual complicity of the sexes", indicating that men and women alike recognized the necessity of male domination:

They (women) resist male domination in thought as well as in deed, but their resistance does not necessarily mean that they have any quarrel with the actual principle of such domination (1986:151).

Women's complicity was evident, Godelier argues, in the political cooption of female initiations, i.e., the fact that these ceremonies did not contest male domination but represented the penetration of male consciousness into the

\textsuperscript{57} Among the Baruya, as in other Highlands societies, there was a high incidence of "retaliatory" female suicide.
practices of women. However, I argue that in this respect Godelier's view of women's views is androcentric, naive and probably wrong. Women's notion of the "necessity" of male domination may more closely have resembled inevitability, given that the power differential operated to women's disadvantage. It is obvious that one does not break free from a dominant ideology by simple acts of personal resistance or will. But these acts are precisely acts of resistance that respond to other actions legitimized by the dominant ideology, and insofar as they counter this ideology they must be seen as condemning it. "Mutual complicity" is a power-neutral cover term that must be deconstructed in order to recognize that Baruya men retained the political upper hand. Yet, ironically (for Godelier) there was perhaps a greater complementarity in daily relations and interactions between the sexes than is apparent from his gloss, "general domination". Godelier himself notes the complexity of inter-sexual relations, women's "real power" and so on, but nonetheless focuses primarily on the highly masculinist ideology and to some degree downplays the counter-practices, implying that they are of less significance than the ideology.

Conclusion

In their respective studies of the Kewa and the Baruya, Josephides and Godelier arrive, via different analytical
routes, at the same conclusion: they deem the women that they studied to be subject to male domination. Rather than adopting the broadly descriptive approach of "sexual antagonism", these ethnographers adopt neo-marxist perspectives, examining the social processes that enacted or produced domination. While the cultural particulars of the enactment of domination differed from Kewa to Baruya society, the authors argue that domination was an institutionalized social form, shaping Kewa women's economic and political status and, Godelier claims, penetrating virtually all aspects of Baruya women's lives. These authors are concerned with the mechanics of domination, with demonstrating precisely how the exchange system, in Kewa society, and the gender ideology, in Baruya society, fostered appropriation and alienation, and ultimately produced domination.

As we have seen, Josephides demonstrates Kewa women's status as "peripheral sojourners" with respect to their husbands' patricians and land, men's greater socio-political power and their ability to work the exchange system so as to obscure women's input of labour into pigs. Her study thus posits a relationship between: (a) gift exchange as an economic structure and (b) the alienation of goods or products as a process enacted through the economic structure.

Godelier focuses primarily on gender ideology and the social processes involved in transforming thoughts and beliefs
into practices of domination, that is, the processes through which a masculinist gender ideology permeated "the myriad details of everyday life" (1986:65) and assumed a social reality. Thus, he argues that Baruya gender ideology was itself a symbolic practice, "a means of transmitting ideas from the world of thought to the material world ... while at the same time turning them into social relations, into social matter" (1986:229).

These neo-marxist studies re-problematize the evidence of the domination of women. Josephides argues that what appeared as male political ascendancy in the Kewa exchange system was tantamount to the domination of women; Godelier similarly argues that what appeared in Baruya society as an ideology promoting male procreative ascendancy and the denigration of women, in fact, sustained the domination of women. In attending first to the social structures through which domination is enacted in order to understand the political status of women, these ethnographers readmit the empirical evidence of domination to the analytical process.

However, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, both Josephides and Godelier overstate the case in favour of immutable structures of domination, and fail to address fully the contingencies of women's experiences, as well as their interventions in opposition to those structures. Josephides' caveat that the characterization of social
relations from the empirical observation of social life is an unreliable measure diverts our attention from women's understandings of their own actions. Yet, these understandings, for example, Kewa women's views of their "apparent" distribution of pork at the ceremonial pig kill must be seen to have social meaning.

Josephides' implication that women's political influence had no systemic meaning parallels Godelier's argument that their countervailing views aside, Baruya women were subject to "general domination". While Godelier is clearly intrigued with the possibility that Baruya women constructed a counter-model of society, he is ultimately more interested in their "consent" to their "general domination". That is, he too perceives an overriding structure of domination that is of greater social significance, in his assessment, than the counter-practices to that domination.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the anthropological understandings of the social and political positions of women in several New Guinea societies. Since the 1950's, when ethnographers first portrayed Highland New Guinea women uni-dimensionally, as peripheral to the business of making society, different discourses of women's status and gender relations have been produced, serving different theoretical agendas and, most importantly, attributing to women differing degrees of social involvement and types of power.

In my discussion I have considered a number of ethnographers' adjudications of New Guinea women's status and socio-political positions: women's almost total domesticity and lack of political involvement (Read 1952, 1954, Meggitt 1964, Langness 1967) their "equal" participation and status as "persons" (Faithorn 1975, 1976, Feil 1978a, 1978b), their political or judicial minority, status as domestic persons, and status as a non-objectifiable form of wealth (Strathern 1972, 1984a, 1984b), their lack of subjectivity (Strathern 1984b, Errington and Gewertz 1987), their personal autonomy and status as producers of transactable goods (Strathern 1972, Lederman 1986, Josephides 1983, 1985), their economic domination and political "peripherality" (Josephides 1985),
their economic marginalization and ideological (or "general") domination (Godelier 1986), their possession of "socio-cosmic" power equal to male socio-political power (Weiner 1976), and their "ontological" power and status as the mothers of men (Errington and Gewertz 1984, 1987).

In this literature women's exclusion from, or participation in, politico-economic affairs, the degree of women's access to "male" political power or their possession of other sorts of powers, their state of personhood, and the question of their "domination" are central organizing themes. Thus, three issues have been of particular importance in the discussion: (a) how power and political action are to be defined, and whether they may equated; (b) whether political power maintains primacy in relation to other power bases, (c) what kind of persons New Guinea women may be said to be, and whether or not they may be dominated.

The Problem of Domination

The studies that I have examined all deal directly or indirectly with the degree to which women may be said to be dominated by men. Those who judge that women were not dominated, perceive, in two instances, a male-female complementarity produced by equal but different gendered interests and powers (Weiner 1976, Errington and Gewertz 1987), and in two other cases, female autonomy (Strathern 1972, 1984a,
Lederman 1986). This autonomy derived from women's ability to act as persons and to circumvent male political advantage and the contextually specific application of denigrating gender ideology.

Among the more recent studies, a salient and compelling perspectival difference is apparent: on one hand, several interpretations favour indigenous meanings and symbolisms, suggesting that "domination" was itself a mutable process in which women actively negotiated their status (Strathern, Lederman), and a cultural construction dependent on the definition of person (Strathern, Errington and Gewertz). In contrast, other ethnographers consciously apply Western-based definitions of person, autonomy and domination, concluding that these, and the concomitant concept of appropriation (of property and of the qualities of persons, e.g., fertility) are cross-culturally applicable (Josephides, Godelier).

These polarized views constitute an analytical impasse in adjudications of women's "domination" in the New Guinea Highlands. This impasse derives directly from the chain of corrective analysis that began with "women as persons". As discussions of women's roles were transformed into debates as to whether women were or were not "persons" and whether they did or did not act "politically", the problem of definitions set the scene for an analytical deadlock.
As we saw in Chapter 2, the first ethnographers concerned with women's personhood revalued women's domestic roles, emphasized their productive roles, and examined the nature of their involvement in public and political affairs. In *Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World* (1972) Strathern described women's lives far more fully than previous ethnographers had done, and indeed presented a much needed, detailed account of women in the Highlands. Although "women as persons" relied on a hierarchical dichotomy, the domestic/public distinction, to both substantiate and disprove women's political involvement, in applying this dichotomy, Strathern produced an analytical innovation, based on the recognition of indigenous meanings: the concept that political minority (Melpa women's domesticity) precluded neither personhood and nor the possibility for autonomy and independence from an apparently repressive ideology. Domination, she implied was not inherent in the relation between the public and domestic world, but was a continuously enacted and contestable process. 58 "Women as persons" thus began two processes of redefinition: the questioning of "person", and the questioning of the equation or conflation

58 Jolly wonders if Strathern is suggesting "that adjudications of equality / inequality are not possible in the context of domestic interdependencies" (1987:177). If so, the husband-wife relation is necessarily complementary, and involves what Strathern has called "unmediated transactions" (Strathern 1988).
of power and politics, and their location in a more highly valued public sphere.

Weiner, and Errington and Gewertz subsequently undertook their studies using redefined concepts of power, person and domination. When they considered gender relations in the Trobriand Islands and in Chambri society, respectively, and introduced these emic understandings of their analytical categories, intersexual complementarity appeared to exist in both societies. Thus, in Errington and Gewertz's study the domestic/public dichotomy is no longer hierarchical, but complementary; in Weiner's study, it no longer exists and the author identifies sexually complementary domains and powers ("value" and "renown", socio-cosmic and socio-political power) that Trobrianders themselves recognized. In both studies the authors provide detailed descriptions of precisely how women's powers (socio-cosmic and ontological) were played out in social life. The analytical innovation of these studies consists in the examination of: (a) the power bases (Weiner) or interest bases (Errington and Gewertz) of both sexes; and (b) the socially contexted inter-relationship of these powers and interests.59

59 See also Bell's (1983) study of Warlpiri (Australian) women, Daughters of the Dreaming, which is "an analysis of the power differentials of male-female in Aboriginal society" (1983:246).
These studies imply a relationship between the recognition of emic meanings and the absence of gender hierarchy. Thus, previous ethnographers, in accepting the notion that political power is the only kind of power with social salience, and that political action is by definition "male", necessarily accepted, to varying degrees, women's lesser power. In the extreme, this view can be understood to suggest that the identification of gender inequality is an artifact of the anthropological failure to account for indigenous understandings. This becomes anthropologically problematic when what appears as evidence of domination (e.g., political minority, denigration, lack of property rights, physical abuse) is said, in fact, not to be so. The conception of "domination" as an anthropological by-product is an instance of the dissension within anthropology with respect to the validity of analytical categories:

To what degree are the analytical categories of anthropologists adequate to describe and explain life in Melanesian societies? In raising that issue the dissenters appear to claim ... that indigenous cultural constructions define and delimit the questions that an anthropologist should ask" (Carrier and Carrier 1991:224).

Indeed, Strathern's analyses (and the work of other ethnographers) in the 1980's that focus on indigenous notions of personhood, gender symbolism and gender ideology, produce, as I suggested in Chapter 4, such a "deconstruction" of domination. Strathern's arguments challenge the conclusion
that men "controlled" women and "exploited" their labour (e.g., Josephides); her deconstruction of categories questions the denigration of the domestic world and the proprietary relation between people as subjects/owners and their labour/products, concepts upon which Western definitions of domination are based.

If gender, as Strathern argues, refers primarily to cultural facts other than men's and women's lives and other than gender relations, then the devaluation of femaleness, for instance, is not a process open to exploitation, but is part of a moral structure deriving from a larger cultural structure, that is, gender ideology. Josephides (1991) suggests that gender, for Strathern, is not primarily a socially and psychologically acquired role, but a social principle and a cultural structure:

Male and female are the two principles that form society, though they are analogues of each other and do not inhere in any individual as a sex. Gender is not an attribute at all, but a form of action. Activity sexes persons (bodies) (1991:149).

Indeed, it seems that in Strathern's work gender is not only a form of action, but a symbolic or ideological framework that qualifies and explains action.

In Chapter 4, I argued that the distinction between gender ideology as a mental structure and the practices of gender relations and male domination fails to account for women's experiences of gender ideologies in practice. I have also
suggested that in Strathern's work, women's experiences and the processes of domination disappear into two apparently immutable structures: "gift exchange logic" and the "Melanesian aesthetic". Whether these may usefully be considered discrete "structures" is questionable. Jolly, for example, has noted the problem of identifying "gift exchange" as a structure: "How", she asks, "can we sustain a division between the world of the commodity and the world of the gift when the two interpenetrate so intimately in contemporary Melanesia?" (1987:178). This highlights the relationship in Strathern's work between the privileging of an idea of culture and an ahistorical perspective; she is not, in fact, talking about social developments presently unfolding in "contemporary Melanesia", but about an aesthetic, or set of formal conventions that are said to constitute the "culture".

In Chapter 5, I discussed the neo-marxist reading of the problems that the symbolic approaches to gender pose. Josephides' and Godelier's arguments that the material and ideological domination of women indeed existed are based on the assumption that male political power is the essential framework for understanding the position of women. They reintroduce the view of power as necessarily political. Domination, they suggest, can only be seen to exist in relation to male-dominated socio-economic and ideological structures.
These authors are thus primarily concerned with the nature and effects of structures of domination.

Josephides and Godelier re-problematize the empirical evidence of domination and re-admit it to the analytical process. Yet, both ethnographers also define immutable structures of domination and fail to incorporate the contingencies of women's experiences and interventions. Both argue that women's political influence and other constructions of reality had no systemic meaning, and that the overriding structures of domination were more socially significant than the counterpractices. Thus, women disappear from the analysis, just as they do when the processes of domination are seen to be less significant than the gender ideology (Strathern).

**Domination and Inequality: Structures or Processes**

Earlier in this discussion I noted that studies of gender, gender relations and the political position of women in New Guinea societies have reached an analytical impasse insofar as there exists a polarisation of views. On one hand, there are those who imply that "domination" as a concept explains little or nothing about the status of women, and on the other, those who argue that "domination" explains a great deal. Both views are structural and model-based: the symbolic studies suggest an indigenous model of culture, while the neo-marxist studies suggest an anthropological model of power, control
and domination. In the first instance, culture becomes a self-contained mental structure. Josephides has recently referred to this as "cultural functionalism" and notes that "individual human input is recognised as socially effective only when it reproduces the patterns of sociality already identified" (1991:159). The processes of domination and the counter-practices to it are so entirely contingent that they are seen "not to exist". In the second instance, domination is itself a structure derived from two other "structures": exchange (Kewa) and the ideology of reproduction (Baruya), and the processes of contestation and women's re-interpretations of the ideology cannot be systemized in the same way, and are therefore seen "not to exist". With respect to Strathern's work, we may ask, as Jolly does, whether her "persuasive argument and compelling metaphors ... render all talk of inequality in Melanesia inadmissible" (1987:178). However, Josephides' argument that material inequality was an objective reality is extremely important, and so, too, is Godelier's argument that masculinist ideology produced real and observable forms of oppression.

How, then, are we to think about Highland women and the evidence of domination? As anthropologists, we may need to attend less single-mindedly to these perceived structures of domination, gender and ideology, and these apparently permanent states of inequality or fixed status. It is not
a new insight to suggest that we must devote equal attention to examining social processes and thinking in terms of the contingencies, contexts, intentions, actions and so on that induce us to perceive structures. Indeed, Tiffany (1978) has argued that structural-functional models of gender, as opposed to historical-dialectical models, do not deal with process, change, dissensus, conflict or informal roles.

If we reject the idea that "domination" in Highland societies exists as a permanent social structure, so too must we reject the notion of permanent states of "inequality". The nature of inequality in egalitarian societies has been a long-standing subject of interest in Melanesian and Pacific studies (see, for example, Strathern 1982, Modjeska 1982, Godelier 1982). Sahlins (1958:1), in fact, suggested that truly egalitarian societies do not exist. More recently, Flanagan, in a discussion of hierarchy in egalitarian societies, suggests that most egalitarian societies exercise forms domination, "whether ... based on age, gender, kinship, or some more institutionalized form of domination" (1989:249 from Hendricks 1988:217). Gelber has also suggested that male domination in the New Guinea Highlands is part of a larger
system of practices of inequality that includes age as a factor (Gelber 1986).

Suggestive of processes of domination, rather than permanent structures, and reminiscent of Lederman's notion of "contested values" (1989), is Flanagan's idea of hierarchy and equality as "co-existing modalities of a single system" (Flanagan 1989:261). Flanagan suggests, firstly, that the practice of social life sets up and perpetuates inequalities and "that such practices are ... frequently, context specific" (1989:261), and, secondly and most importantly, that we must not characterize systems as either hierarchical or egalitarian because "... the idea of egalitarian and inegalitarian may mask the very problem into which we wish to enquire" (Flanagan 1988:176-177). This is clearly the case with respect to gender relations and the socio-political status of women.

More recently, Carrier and Carrier, in Structure and Process in Melanesian Society (1991) present an overview of the structure/process dynamic in the studies of kinship and exchange. They note that "the structuralist victory ... allows

---

60 The studies that I have discussed deal minimally, if at all, with age stratification among women. As I noted with respect to Godelier, there has generally been little attention devoted to inequalities among women in Melanesian societies. However, this is a topic of current interest, as evidenced by the working session, "Age Stratification Among Women in the Pacific", at the 1990 meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (see ASAO Newsletter, June 1991:13). There is also an increasing interest in the differences and inequalities among women triggered by changing economic and educational opportunities.
researchers in the 1980's to assume that the structures that they discern within the cultures they study are adequate foci of analysis" (Carrier and Carrier 191:23). This echoes my criticisms of both symbolic and neo-marxist approaches to gender.

The Perspectives of Women

My interpretations of the ethnographies that I have considered in this discussion suggest the need for theories and frameworks that accommodate women's views of social reality and recognize women as social actors exercising culturally recognized powers. Feminist ethnographers such as Weiner (1976) and Bell (1983) have demonstrated the importance of examining women's perceptions of their lives. "Women's self-perceptions of autonomy and independence are neither fantasy nor nostalgic longings" (1983:229-30), states Bell. Like Weiner, Bell began her study of Warlpiri women with an examination of women's power bases, and like Weiner, avoids judgements of "equality" and "inequality". Indeed, Bell, Weiner, and Errington and Gewertz all examine the power bases of the sexes and the ways in which these male and female domains and powers are interconnected. As Bell points out, "we know too little of the female half of society to argue for male dominance as an enduring, timeless reality" (1983:246). We can argue, she implies, neither that domination is non-existent nor that
it exists as a permanent structure, but we must examine social life, including the processes of domination, from the perspectives of women.

A Note about Domination and Violence

When the evidence of the physical abuse of women is summoned in defence of the argument that male domination exists, there is no longer an argument. Indeed, one of the most disturbing processes of domination is the use of physical violence by men against women. The New Guinea Highlands have exhibited and continue to exhibit an extremely high incidence of physical abuse of women, particularly wives. Counts (1990) notes that wife battering is "most pervasive in Simbu and the Western Highlands, where 97 and 100 percent, respectively, of surveyed women said they had been beaten by their husbands, and least widespread in Oro and West New Britain where the figures were 49 and 53 percent, respectively" (1990:225, from Law Reform Commission 1987:2). Doko reports that "73 percent of women killed in Papua New Guinea are killed by the constant beating of their husbands" (Doko:1989:5).

Although wife-beating was and is widely practised in New Guinea, the anthropological tendency has been to intellectualize the issue and to address it in a perspective that fails to include women's views, experiences and changing social circumstances (e.g., Strathern 1988). Both early and
more recent ethnographers have only minimally documented violence against women in the Highlands, and they have generally explained the historical perpetration of violence in terms of the aggressive Highland personality (e.g., Read 1964), pre-contact conditions of endemic warfare (e.g., Langness 1967), social organization (e.g., Strathern 1972) and ideological devaluation (Strathern). Consider the following description of the treatment of women:

A husband who was afraid that his wife would run away and estimated that he was unlikely to obtain a bridewealth return ... occasionally anticipated the event by inviting his clansmen to plural copulation before getting rid of her. Even someone anxious to retrieve a runaway wife might nevertheless punish her severely. Several stories from the past describe how a husband with supporters from his sub-clan would bodily carry the protesting woman back to his place, trussed up like a pig, and set on her; kicking the genital area or perhaps stuffing her vagina with an irritant such as a mass of ants (Strathern 1972:187).

Here, it is difficult not to judge that men perceived women as a form of property over which they could legitimately exercise control. Indeed, Counts suggests that at present, in some societies where bridewealth "legitimize(s) men's control over women or promote(s) the attitude that they are the property of their husbands" (1990:237), wife-beating is a more common occurrence.

Clearly the practices of interpersonal violence and the degrees to which different societies have tolerated and continue to tolerate such violence have varied. How are
anthropologists to address domestic violence cross-culturally? Counts believes that there is currently no cross-cultural consensus as to the definition of domestic violence and suggests that "... if we are to understand the nature of family violence in other societies, the perceptions of the people we study must take precedence over definitions derived from Western experience" (1990:3). This implies that with respect to New Guinea the practices of domestic violence must be considered in relation to both the historical tradition that legitimized violence, particularly the physical control of wives, and the contemporary social and economic changes that appear to be exacerbating violence against women. These include changes in family organization (e.g., the increasing isolation of the nuclear family), increasing social stratification, women's increased access to education and their changing social roles. Thus, Doko's statement that "wife-beating really is a problem of the educated woman" (Doko 1989:5) confirms that the contemporary social context must be taken into account.

A Note about Contemporary Gender Issues

When Carrier and Carrier note that "process and history ... are missing from so much contemporary research" (1991:231) they are speaking of kinship and exchange, but their criticism also applies to studies of gender issues. Thus, it may also be said of gender studies in Melanesia that "... most of the
writing ... has failed to attend to the modern context" (Carrier and Carrier 1991:234, but see, for example, Brown 1988, Jolly and MacIntyre 1989, Lederman 1986:Chapter 7). Carrier and Carrier go on to note that "this is unfortunate because it is not at all clear that we can make sense of kinship and exchange as ideologies, structures or processes, unless we recognize the context in which they now necessarily exist, the context provided by the modern, capitalist economy and state" (1991:234). Again, this applies not only to kinship and exchange, but to gender and domination. Brown (1988), for example, notes that little has been written about changing gender concepts and relations:

As discussions of the position of women and gender relations mostly concern traditional societies of the Highlands, they sometimes seem to assume an unchanging situation of sexual antagonism, exploitation, and dependence (1988:125).

While ethnographies have presented "essentially atemporal accounts" (Brown 1988:125) of gender relations, "changes in the goods and relationships of the exchange system" (1988:125) have provoked changes in gender relations. This is but one of a large number of socio-economic and political factors that currently affect gender relations and the positions of women in New Guinea societies. These include rural-urban migration, economic development, women's economic development (e.g., indigenous women's savings organizations), wage employment opportunities, the ever-increasing infusion of
money and market and consumer concepts into gift exchange economies, education, increasing social stratification and the development of a professional elite, new status positions for men and women, changes in the family, changes in legal institutions, and of course, women's new political position as citizens of a nation state.

The present anthropological mandate in the study of Melanesian women and gender issues seems clear: anthropologists must direct their efforts towards producing studies of women's changing lives that address the factors affecting women and gender relations. With respect to domination and inequality, Jolly (1987) has suggested that we need to examine both the ideals of equality of opportunity enshrined in the Papua New Guinea constitution and the present situations of women, including the positive and negative impacts of the forces of change, and women's current perspectives, experiences and aspirations. She is not optimistic, however, and notes women's decreasing opportunities, their "worsening position" (1987:180) and the "depressing pursuit of the chimera of equality in post-colonial Papua New Guinea" (1987:180) (see also Meggitt 1989). On the positive side, Doko notes the increasing numbers and importance of women's groups and non-governmental organizations devoted to women's interests, the role of the National Council of Women, and the provincial councils of
women, and women's increasing interest in political participation at the state level (Doko 1989:5-6).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Newsletter, 78: June 1991.


Jolly, M. and M. MacIntyre. 1989. Family and Gender in the Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the


Rethinking Women's Roles: Perspectives from the Pacific. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.


