SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF GENDER IN ANDEAN SOUTH AMERICA:
A WORKING ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

JANISE HURTIG

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Social Transformations of Gender in Andean South America:
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Janise Hurtig
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1. Social formation and change in (Andean) South America

Background Readings


Readings specific to Andean South America


An eloquently presented conceptualization of the patterns of socio-economic domination that have contributed to the formation of modern Latin American nations -- including, of course Andean countries. In writing this "informal history" which locates Latin America within an international political and economic context, Galeano disrupts many of the models of "underdevelopment" informing social scientific analyses of the region. As he succinctly puts it, echoing the stance of 'dependentistas,' "Latin American underdevelopment is not a stage on the road to development, but the counterpart of development elsewhere."


A comparative overview of approaches to the study of peasantry and agrarian conflict since the 1960s. Stern outlines certain assumptions about peasants and peasant rebellions prevalent in the literature, and then compares these views to the experience of native Andean peoples in highland Peru and Bolivia. He notes that the implications of the "Andean experience" in understanding peasant resistance in general have yet to be explored, most Andean studies remaining insular to the region in their conclusions. (The reasons he gives for this insularity can be compared to regional gender studies as well.)

Stern then discusses four areas in which paradigms and assumptions need to be reassessed: (1) the role of peasants as continuous initiators; (2) the time frames selected as units of analysis; (3) the diversity of peasant consciousness; and (4) the significance of ethnic factors in explaining peasant consciousness. (These factors also have their corollaries in gender studies.) He then offers constructive methodological suggestions for their reconsideration, such as the encorporation of multiple time frames into analyses, and the treatment of peasant consciousness as problematic, not predictable.


A comparative examination of the meaning of capitalist development for plantation laborers in southwestern Colombia (Cauca Valley) and mine workers in Bolivia, as signified, or symbolized, in the figure of the Devil. Taussig's intention, at one level, is to explore the process by which traditional fetishism is supplanted by capitalist commodity fetishism; and at another level, to reflect this process back onto our own worldview in order to expose and demystify the naturalized assumptions upon which not only capitalism but social science too, is built.


Influenced by the modernist sensibility of Walter Benjamin and Bertholt Brecht, Taussig examines the relationship between the colonial experience in Southern Andean Colombia, and the ways in which its various representations and rationalizations served to naturalize the mysterious disorder it engendered.

Taussig's book is also a rare exemplification of ethnographic counter-discourse. Taussig both challenges the politics of traditional explanatory modes of social science discourse, and presents an alternative, inspired by avant-garde techniques of montage and Brechtian "alienation effect".
2. Women/gender in Andean South America


Detailed historical review of Peruvian women's ("of the popular classes") involvement in political struggles, especially women's movements. Based on years of ethnographic research, provides information previously occulted from the public. Essentially descriptive, with no explicit interpretive framework.

Considers Peruvian marketwomen as exemplifying limitations of both the public/domestic and production/reproduction paradigms for understanding women's socioeconomic status. Points out that the view of these women's work as the extension of their domestic tasks into market is a facile use of "reproductive work." Babb emphasizes in contrast the various skills these women need to sell in the public marketplace which are not learned at home. Thus, Babb suggest, marketplace activities seem to entail both reproductive and productive work; or, according to another transformation of this dichotomy, both use-value and exchange-value.

As an alternative to viewing women's work as coterminus with reproduction and men's with production, Babb suggests the two be viewed in "dynamic relationship, as integrated social processes" - in other words, dialectically. Unfortunately, Babb does not then proceed to apply this alternative approach to Andean marketwomen. Instead, by ending with the point that Huarez marketwomen self-identify as "workers," she seems to return to the reified categories she began by questioning.

A careful, historically contextualized examination of the constraints of Peruvian urban bourgeois, Catholic notions of femininity and sexuality on the lives of middle class women. Includes three short "testimonials".

A poignant (auto)biography of a working-class Bolivian woman from the mines, based on interviews with a Brazilian journalist. As an articulate, militant activist, Domatila has become a prototypical subject for subsequent "testimonies". The 1978 postscript includes Domatila's insistence that materials produced by Western researchers be returned to the working class peoples whose struggles they are about.

Anticipating but failing to find meaningful distinctions by sex in the modes of expression of the Ecuadorian Andean people she studied (in contrast to E. Ardener's propositions), the author found gender (and age) categories represented through the interpretation of diseases. Bernand first presents the gender system as embedded in a typology of disease. She then offers an interesting inversion of the standard interpretation of "machismo", suggesting that because of the requisite alcoholism, men are perceived, not as dominating women, but quite the opposite. While they are out of control, tips toward the side of nature ("bascule du cote de la nature"); women, meanwhile, required to manage the land and the family, become the core of culture. Whether this analysis presumes an Andean nature/culture duality (contested by Harris, Skar), or assumes its universality whether or not it is an indigenous binary opposition, is unclear.


Comparative ethnographic analysis, based on individual case studies, of women in two Andean towns, distinguished by their degree of involvement in the market economy. Already considered something of a "classic," perhaps because it is pitched at an accessible (But not overly simplistic) theoretical level. Attempts to combine materialist and symbolic analyses of gender roles. Includes a good overview of traditional anthropological approaches to the question of women's subordination. Proposes "alternative" which combines a "class analysis" and "social ideology" perspectives. However, the authors' bias is obviously on the side of a materialist-determinist argument: social values are consistently presented as changing in response to changes in the socio-economic structure; and women's "real power" is assessed in terms of their roles and status as producers or participants in the political sphere. Also, the authors fail to question the ethnocentric assumptions common to both frameworks they are ostensibly combining.

Another shortcoming, typical of the "anthropology of women" that proliferated at this time, is its near-exclusive focus on women, an over-compensation which means that their analysis is not set within the broader analytic context of the gender system.

The authors find that, contrary to development models which view modernization as the road to improved status for rural women, the encroachment of the commercial market economy in fact undermines various traditional sources of economic autonomy and status for women, and increases gender stratification. (cf. Boserup, Deere.) They also suggest that, while (elite) women in the commercial town of Chuichin are able, "for the moment," to take advantage of their economic status to develop political clout, and even act in solidarity as employers with less privileged women, these are roles merchant women acquire by tapping into the traditional kinship and trade networks with the
highlands, and thus may be based in transitional socio-economic relations and hard to maintain as the town becomes increasingly tied into the coastal economy.

A collection of interviews with working class women from five Latin American countries, including Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru. Discussion includes the specifics of each woman's family and work lives, as well as their perspectives on gender roles, "women's liberation," and the role of women in political change.  
Most of the women Bronstein interviewed were active participants in work cooperatives or community development projects, so that their views, like those of most subjects of "life histories," may be more politicized than those of other (most?) women in their communities. Nonetheless, these pieces offer an interesting complement or comparison to the generalized depictions of Andean women's worldviews presented in the ethnographic literature.

Challenging the tendency of feminist social research to examine "women" as a class and thereby failing to discern the dynamics of class differences among women, Burkett offers a comparative study of the experiences of white, black, Indian and mestiza women in early colonial Peru. Importantly, she points out on the one hand the hierarchal relationships between these women, in their public and private lives, but on the other hand (and despite Burkett's skepticism regarding "women's solidarity") an interactive network which generated a measure of solidarity that transcended class differences. Interestingly, such cross-class connections did not exist for Peruvian men, whose social networks were rigidly class-bound.

A corrective to (most) ethnohistorical accounts of post-Conquest Andean society, which leave women out, based on their presumed minor role, this article attempts to write women back into the picture. More than this, though, it presents a view of urban women at the time which inverts the traditional stereotype of men as centrally involved and women peripheral to, colonial Spanish society. Burkett suggests the greater involvement of Indian women -- as wives, concubines, vendors, domestics. She also paints a (somewhat romantic) picture of women having greater independence in post-Conquest society than within the socially rigid Inkan regime.

In this article the author challenges the present emphasis on the household as the basic unit of analysis, which she sees as resulting from the imposition of a Eurocentric grid on Andean reality. (See O. Harris, 1981, for similar position.) The consequence of this focus is an obscuring of productive relations that divide, rather than unify, family members -- the result of a focus on surface forms of the institution, rather than on the dialectics of its determination. Collins examines the social structure of an Aymara-speaking peasant community in Southern Peru, which she presents as emerging from the articulation of two distinct modes of production (kin-based and capitalist; see Wolf, 1982 for this distinction). Through this analysis she points out that Aymara adults have many statuses and commensurate behaviors, not all of which are encompassed by the concept of household.

Importantly, Collins emphasizes the particular historical processes through which the household, in its particular Andean configuration, has developed. She also provides a brief (but important) discussion of the relationship between gender ideologies and the role of the state in establishing a male-headed household in which men's labor is considered more significant than women's "domestic" work.


A comparative analysis of changes in women's work in the transition from "servile to capitalist" relations of production in the Peruvian Sierra. Deere assesses this transition in terms of a changing "rate of exploitation." She finds that the shift to capitalist relations of production has contradictory effects on different groups of rural women, depending on their relations to the means of production. Thus Deere compares the working lives of hacienda women who were proletarianized as the hacienda became a capitalist enterprise, of women on non-capitalist minifundios, and of women in the cooperative enterprises formed under agrarian reform.

__________ (1986). Rural women and agrarian reform in Peru, Chile, and Cuba. IN *Women and Change in Latin America*, June Nash and Helen Safa, eds. South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey.

A comparative examination of the effects of agrarian reform on rural women in Peru, Chile, and Cuba, focusing the assessment around the degree of incorporation of women in the reform process. Deere compares the Peruvian and Chilean reforms which failed to incorporate women effectively, to the post-1959 Cuban reforms which had as an explicit policy the incorporation of women. Deere illustrates the important point that the exclusion of women in the ideology and implementation of land reform in Peru and Chile was not only detrimental to them as workers, but to the reform process in general.
Deere's intention is to emphasize the relationship between state policy and women's status in agrarian reform, and to illustrate the fact that processes of socioeconomic change are not "gender blind." Although Deere notes that such change is "complex," what is missing in her presentation is a more complex interweaving of the relationship between gender ideologies, state-level planning and implementation, state ideologies, and the impact of these factors locally.


A comparative study of the impact of capitalist development on women's productive labor in three agricultural regions, two in Colombia, one in Peru, each of which has experienced different degrees of development. The authors find that the sexual division of labor in agricultural production varies, not only by region, but also by task, form of labor procurement, and according to class position. (This article is consistent in its strengths and weaknesses with other work by these authors annotated above.)


Analysis of gender relations among the Laymis of N. Bolivia, which challenges gender definitions based in an assumed opposition of conjugal roles. Presents as alternative, the indigenous concept of chachawarmi -- woman-and-man -- to express complementarity and unity basic to Laymi gender (and broader social) relations. Important examination of the contradictions between this ideology and certain conflictual aspects of conjugal relationship, such as marital violence.


Subtle analysis of Bolivian Laymis' concepts of gender and sexuality, pointing to inappropriateness of both Levi-Straussian and Ortnerian nature:culture::female:male dualism and Lacanian notions of female sexuality. Interesting comparison of women's and men's relationship to language and other modes of "symbolic production."


An examination of sexual complementarity as a dominant theme in Andean cosmology, and a basic element of Andean social structure. Isbell presents continuities and changes in this ideology since pre-Conquest times through a quasi-semiotic analysis of the drawings of Pachacuti Yamqui, an indigenous nobleman, and those of contemporary Chuschino children. She then suggests that, as
western concepts enter the andean social order, this basic structural principal of sexual complementarity will be lost -- as will the principal of sexual equality, its correlate.


An orthodox Marxian comparative analysis of the sexual division of labor in four agricultural regions of Colombia, and changes in this division of labor which have been brought about by capitalist development.

The authors see these changes as interrelated with local, regional, national and international changes in the social relations of production. Thus they begin their analysis by examining the integration of each region into the national and international economies, and then consider how the different processes of integration "are reflected in" changes in the sexual division of labor.

In each case, the authors are able to link changes in the degree and nature of women's participation in production to changes in relations of production related to labor required for crop production and the particular form of surplus appropriation at work.

The authors conclude that, despite areal differences, in all cases women serve as a source of reserve labor for capital. Thus women are forced into the rural labor force at low wages in addition to maintaining their domestic responsibilities -- thus are doubly oppressed. What is absent from their analysis is any consideration of either "domestic" labor or reproductive labor. In other words, they take the categories of the capitalist to be empirical. Also, while they suggest that the "sexual division of labor in production is determined by a complex interaction of economic and ideological factors," the latter enter into their discussion only as reflections of, or means of reinforcing, economically induced changes in the sexual division of labor.


A Marxist-feminist approach to the study of changes in women's status. Mallon's ethnohistorical analysis is unusual in its emphasis on the interaction of gender and class, presenting a convincing case for the determining role of patriarchy, over class, in the particular forms that the subordination of Peruvian women took within various classes. Moreover, she inverts traditional analyses by examining class systems in terms of gender systems. Thus she notes that changes in women's socio-economic roles with the transition to capitalism were channeled through and organized by preexisting patriarchal forms.

The integration of these two perspectives leads to a complex and somewhat ironic analysis, showing how the very forms of resistance to capitalist dependency adopted by the peasant household drew upon communal traditions which in turn depended on the subordination of women.

Description of the historical tradition of Bolivian rural women's participation in political protest and resistance. Noting the continued exclusion of women from political and economic arenas, calls for separate women's organizations within liberation movements.


Excerpts from extensive interviews with Basilia, a 58-year old Bolivian woman and mine-worker. Focuses on issues of sexuality, family dynamics, and class consciousness.


A fine early study, suggesting impact of rural capitalism in Colombia to be: an increase in sexual tension; an increased dependence on men, ambivalently accepted; and a deterioration of women's position which has had "counter-progressive" consequences -- changes which emerged in the transition from "peasant" to "plantation" modes of production. Rubbo offers the interesting suggestion that, where for farm women domestic work, child-rearing, and farming are "organically interconnected," these three components of daily life are structurally differentiated for townswomen.

Rubbo includes an interesting discussion of the role of sorcery, used by women to capture men in the context of a new set of gender relations in which women's increased dependency on men leads to competition between women for men. This use of sorcery contrasts notably with that of women in early colonial times who often relied on it to protect themselves from abusive men. Nonetheless, Rubbo suggests, sorcery also unites women by providing an acceptable rationalization of men's mistreatment of them. More than most "modes of production" studies, Rubbo tacks between economic and cultural/ideological realms.


A detailed analysis of the relationship between the gender ideologies and political institutions of the Inca State, and their transformation under early Spanish colonial rule. The author traces the development of Andean women's resistance to colonial oppression through traditional religious practices, first condemned by the Spanish as witchcraft, then taken up as such, exploiting the attribution of dangerous power to witchcraft. Two problems: the romanticization of Andean women's resistance; and the presumed acceptance of their naturalized oppression under the Inka state.

Points out the inapplicability of the "public/private spheres" dichotomy to world view of highland Peruvian Indians. Criticizes ethnocentric bias in the model, and its male-oriented derivations. Offers as alternative the indigenous concept of yanatin, meaning equal and/or opposite or mirror-image; suggesting male/female complementary difference (cf. O. Harris, 1978, above).


Ethnographically-based description of process by which poor rural adolescent girls' economic mobility is facilitated by domestic labor. Author suggests domestic service is an indirect "bridging occupation" (in socio-economic parlance), rather than a form of traditional exploitation.


Examines the changing relationship of domestic servants to the "patron family" with the recent recession in Peru. Discusses the way familial ideology based in a public/private distinction, masks the domestic's marginality and socio-economic insecurity. (cf. Margo Smith, above.)


While the focus of Wagner's dissertation is not gender in the Andes per se, she provides a considerable amount of descriptive material and some interpretive analysis of the gender system in the Southern highlands community of Sonqo, Peru where she conducted her field work.

Wagner's emphasis is on the "separate and complementary" nature of women's and men's tasks, an egalitarian relationship which is represented cosmologically and ideologically as well. However, her analysis seems to rely alternately on indigenous and western ideologies of gender, leaving a contradictory view of men and women as "separate but equal" on the one hand, and men as "dominant," particularly in the "public" sphere of politics and religious ritual; and in the home, where they beat their wives. Wagner's inability to reconcile this contradiction, or at least adequately interpret it, may lie in her confusion of categories of analysis, and a conflation of belief and behavior.

An examination of Andean elite women's social position and its relationship to property in the late 19th century, Wilson's analysis is important in that she attempts to integrate studies of kinship and family which neglect the intrinsically hierarchical aspects of these domains, with studies of women's oppression and the division of labor by sex which fail to consider the role of marriage, family, and inheritance in the reproduction of these gender relations.

Wilson successfully deconstructs both the concept of property and the category of 'women'. She shows how property was constituted differently for women and men, a difference which contributed to women's economic subordination, despite their apparently equal access to inheritance. And she breaks down the category "women" into subdivisions of daughters, sisters, wives, and widows, each of whose social roles and status varied in terms of their respective relationships to property.

3. Gender roles and ideologies in early modern and colonial Europe.


A seminal essay examining early modern European notions of sexual temperament, as they related not only to men's and women's actual behavior, but also to the uses of sexual symbolism. For, as Davis points out, "sexual symbolism... is always available to make statements about social experience and to reflect (or conceal) contradictions within it" (127).

Focusing on the dominant image of woman as disorderly, Davis suggests, counter to traditional feminist analyses, that this image (particularly as manifest in festive rituals of inversion) did not simply serve to keep woman in her place. It offered a range of alternative behavioral roles for women; and, in its symbolism of the lower classes, it served as a formal means of social protest as well as "a temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy." (Her analysis can be fruitfully compared to those of Bakhtin and Stallybrass & White.)


An important study of the emergence in early modern Europe of the nuclear family as a construct based on the ideals of strategy, identity, and order. Davis makes the important point through her example of changes in French middle and lower class family structure, behaviors, and ideology, that such transformations often are generated, neither by a ruling elite, not by such abstract processes as "urbanization" to which people reacted automatically, but rather "from the decisions of myriad small groups" making up the middle sectors of society. Hers is thus an unusual example of an analysis which posits "the people" as agents of historical change. It is also a suggestive piece in considering the impact of European norms of gender and kinship relations on colonized peoples.
A simply presented but useful historical overview of the development of the modern nuclear family and sexual division of labor in the West. Kelly points out the relatively recent formation of the nuclear family (and only among the middle classes at that), thus lending social-historical perspective to the norms and biases of many anthropological and feminist analyses of the family and gender roles which essentializes the nuclear family model. Kelly also emphasizes the relevance of class and economic conditions to family structure, and points out the range of family structures that can co-exist within a given society.
This historical sketch raises questions about the prevalent assumption that the gender role models imported from Europe to the Andes were based on the nuclear family ideal.


A detailed study of the changes in women's work in England and France from 1700 to 1950, focusing in particular on nineteenth-century working-class families and their response to the pressures of industrialization. They provide a rigorous, concrete discussion of the relationship between economic and ideological change, concluding that, despite the impact of industrialization on family roles and relations, the continuities of family values and behavior prevailed over the changes.
One shortcoming of the analysis occurs because of the authors' emphasis is on changing modes of production, in the strict Marxian sense of the term;, thus they are lead, unfortunately, to exclude "domestic activity" from their study once this can be distinguished historically from wage-earning, "productive activity" -- an exclusion which leads to some inconsistency in identifying their unit of analysis -- 'work' -- over time.

Theories of social reproduction and transformation.

1. Background Readings

2. Gender roles/ideologies: theories of production, reproduction, transformations and/or resistance


Presents a synopsis of Edwin Ardener's theory of the relationship between "dominant and "muted" groups' models of society and perceptual processes, or structures of thought. The author then applies this model to men and women, who constitute dominant and muted groups, respectively. She points out that the application of a perceptual model focuses attention "beyond contingent events, beyond economic considerations of real importance in themselves, to the underlying perceptual and symbolic systems which give them significance.

In constituting the muted model as a kind of negotiation between the dominant perceptual model and the muted group's structural position (and thus experience) in society, she offers an interesting suggestion for the frequent conservativism of muted groups, who "even cling to models which seem to disadvantage them" -- a perspective which is worth comparing to Marxian concepts of "false consciousness".


An early comparative, and highly quantitative, study of the changes in patterns of gender relations in the process of "economic development" in the third world. Boserup begins with a discussion of women's and men's roles in agricultural production, emphasizing distinctions between shifting cultivators and plough agriculturalists. She then examines the impact of industrialization on women's labor and status. Her conclusion is that, because men's labor productivity increases with their monopolization of modern equipment, greater access to education, and acquisition of the role of independent cultivator, while women's output remains static, educational level low, and
productive roles reduced to that of family aid or hired worker, women's "relative status within agriculture" declines. This is a proposal which at the time countered the prevailing assumption that "development" necessarily improved women's status.

Boserup also discusses changes in labor patterns and "attitudes" when home industries and market trade are replaced by modern forms of industry and trade. This transition leads to an increased gap between the nature of men's and women's work and its valuation.

Lastly, she examines patterns of labor in urban settings, and the impact of formal education on the division of labor by sex. Unfortunately, Boserup's model of development is based in the neoclassical assumption that there is a direct correspondence between the internal logic of the productive system and the ideology modernization, which leads her to offer reformist suggestions for the improvement of women's situation, such as an emphasis on women's education and training.

Despite certain fundamental epistemological and methodological problems in Boserup's analysis and the weaknesses inherent in the totalizing conclusions she tends to draw, it was nevertheless a groundbreaking study. In fact, her economic determinist perspective continues to inform many subsequent studies of women's work and social status.


A ten-year retrospective of Boserup's seminal study, analyzing the contributions of her work and its shortcomings. The authors note four contributions Boserup's book made to the study of women's oppression cross-culturally: (1) it demonstrated that gender is a basic factor in the division of labor, pointing out the variety of patterns the sexual division of labor takes cross-culturally; (2) it offered explanations for these differences in women's work patterns; (3) it pointed out the negative effects of colonialism and capitalist expansion on many third world women (in contrast to prevailing views of modernization as a "liberalizing" process; and (4) it emphasized the omission of women's subsistence activities in statistical assessments of production and income.

Related to these contributions, suggest the authors, are three major weaknesses. The first is the empirical quality of Boserup's presentation, and a tendency toward "ad hoc introduction of values and ideology [which] often take the place of explanation." Second, although Boserup presents the negative impact of modernization on women, she does not extend this to a general critique of modernization. Instead, she blames "cultural prejudices" for women's marginalization. In general she uncritically upholds the tenets of modernization theory, so that her suggestions for improving women's status are basically reformist.

Third, the book fails to consider the role of reproduction in determining both the sexual division of labor and hierarchical gender relations which uphold this division in its specific forms.
Concomitantly it lacks an analysis of the role of the household in reproduction. Thus the authors characterize Boserup's analysis as falling within a traditional (as opposed to 'feminist') approach to women's issues, which locates the solution to women's oppression in the economic, public sphere.

Unfortunately, in attempting to correct for Boserup's deficiencies, Beneria and Sen use reproduction in a problematic way. They define it as meaning both biological and social reproduction (compare to Harris and Young); but in actually analyzing changes in women's status in the context of economic development, they effectively reduce reproduction to domestic labor, or housework, thereby reinforcing the problematic domestic/public dichotomy as an empirical set of analytic categories.


A comparative analysis of "women's economic participation within the periphery" and theoretical formulation of the contribution of rural women to capital accumulation. Deere suggests that, while women's agricultural labor takes a range of forms cross-culturally (she does not consider meanings, however), the variations are all local variations on a common theme: the impact of a capitalist system attempting to maintain the cheapest labor force, and a familial reproduction strategy attempting to overcome the constraints of market-induced rural poverty.

While Deere's theoretical framework is economically quite sophisticated, it is equally economically deterministic. With the exception of a brief, superficial comment regarding men's and women's class consciousness, there is little consideration of the people she discusses as conscious agents. Instead, they come across as reactive cogs in the advanced capitalist system.


A sophisticated marxist-feminist consideration of the problematic and facile uses of major concepts in discussions of women's subordination cross-culturally. While the authors broadly identify the source of the problem to be the ahistorical, atemporal category "woman," they focus on the ambiguous and contradictory applications of the concepts of "production" and "reproduction", particularly in Marxist-feminist analyses. See Harris and Young, below, for a further elaboration of this critique.


Insightful (and self-critical) marxist-feminist examination of the universalizing of a "domestic domain" as a category of analysis in feminist, marxist, and marxist-feminist analyses, exemplified by the problematic usage of the concept of "household" as a natural
category, frequently conflated with an equally troublesome category, "the family."

Concluding remarks suggest that such analyses participate in an ideology which contributes to circumscription and control of women; and, interestingly, that the compulsion to naturalize the domestic domain is related to contradictions inherent in the "project of fully subjecting women to the control of men."

Harris, Olivia and Young, Kate (1981). Engendered structures. Some problems in the analysis of reproduction. In The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies, J.S. Kahn and J. R. Llobera, eds.

Addressing the problematic conceptualization of gender difference itself, the authors set out to "deconstruct the category of women" by focusing on the problematic dichotomy commonly appropriated in Marxist and feminist distinctions between men and women: production/reproduction.

Harris and Young carefully examine the ways in which the concept of reproduction has been used in feminist anthropological analyses, and discern three distinct uses (of "different theoretical orders") often conflated: social reproduction, biological reproduction, and the reproduction of labor. In their elaboration of these distinctions, the authors also succeed in dissolving the universality of the public/domestic dichotomy, which rests, in part, in a collapsing of these three forms of reproduction.

Generally a very insightful critique, particularly of Meillasoux' book, Femmes, Greniers et Capitaux. They acknowledge his important contribution, which is to raise the issue of the relationship between the control over women by certain men and the reproduction of the social formation. But, they point out, his analysis is flimsy because he fails to distinguish between control over women's labor and control over women's capacity for biological reproduction; in other words, in conflating biological and social reproduction, he fails to make the distinctions between levels of reproduction that the authors delineate.

The authors also occasionally fall into the very reductive trap they expose; for instance, by suggesting that reproduction of labor be redefined to included non-laborers, they move toward a biologizing definition (pg. 113). (See Yanagisako and Collier for a critical summary of this article.)


Leacock argues against the "commonly held" view that 3rd World women are traditionally oppressed, and that modernization improves their situation. She claim that, given its imperialist context, development in fact undermines the "status and autonomy" of most women.

Leacock makes several important points: (1) that women's oppression must be examined within the broad context of a "world system of exploitation"; (2) the prevalence within anthropology of
racist and ethnocentric formulations in characterizing "traditional" societies and women's situations within them; and (3) the related prevalence of bio-psychologically based arguments which naturalize and universalize women's subordination.

However, certain biases appear in the article, such as the unqualified use of the term "egalitarian"; the equation of women's "equal" status with their "autonomy"; and an emphasis on (3rd world) women's important public roles as evidence of their power and autonomy. This latter orientation reinforces a public/domestic dichotomy whose universality Leacock herself questions; and it valorizes the "public" (=male) side of that problematic dichotomy.


A critique of the theory that women's subordination is ideologically based in the universal equation of male/female to culture/nature, claiming that such a syllogistic analysis both distorts non-Western gender ideologies, and "ignores the historical relations between ideological and structural change."
The authors examine Levi-Strauss' formulation (and de Beavoir's and Ortner's later derivative analyses), pointing to his universalization of modern, Western epistemology and related gender ideology. They then offer as counter-examples the Arapaho and Aztec gender systems and notions of nature and culture, point to biases in the ethnohistorical record which have led to the distortion of indigenous beliefs and practices to support a Levi-Straussian universalizing framework.


A timely exposition of the articulation of Foucaultian and certain feminist criticism of traditional conceptions of the relationship between sexuality, power, and knowledge; and an insightful comparison of the alternatives these two perspectives offer, particularly in terms of strategic orientation and methodology.

In this article Martin not only presents the confluence of these two frameworks, but uses each to effectively reveal problems and limitations with the other. Thus, for instance, feminist criticism is called to task for its traditional failure to problematize the processes through which meanings are inscribed and negotiated discursively at any given historical moment. On the other hand, the material danger of a post-structuralist position as represented by Foucault, which claims that sexual difference and sexuality itself are no more than discursively constructed fictions, is also discussed.


An early "feminine" critique of social science models of
development, unusual in its concern, not solely with their
analytic power, but with their impact on public policy in
development programs.

Nash's "feminine" critique focuses on the way women are
omitted in sociological analyses and thus in neglected in the
formulation of public policy. She points out the ways in which
Weberian/Parsonian theories of modernization reinforce the
ideological centrality of men in the economic system, emphasizing
the capitalist market (=male public sphere) as an index of
progress. Women are considered participants in modernization only
as consumers. These stereotypes on the one hand neglect the
significant social and economic roles women play, and on the other
hand, when implemented contribute to the imposition of this
division of labor by sex in regions where women have traditionally
shared basic productive functions with men.

Even more radical dependency theorists, Nash points out, fail
to consider the specific impact of capitalist exploitation on
women, but tend instead to interpret women's subordination to a
male wage-earner as "personal oppression," rather than a
structural extension of exploitation into the domestic sphere. In
other words, male dependency theorists do not extend their
concepts to explore the system of internal dependency between male
and female household members which serve to reinforce dependency
relations at higher levels of social integration.

In a brief overview of structural models dominating social
policy in Latin America, Nash raises three issues: the family,
demographic structures, and education as it relates to
occupational levels. In each case, policy decisions are based on
a patriarchal, nuclear-family based gender ideology, which serves
to: restrict women to an isolated, nuclear household; deny women
control over biological reproduction; and restrict women's
educational opportunities.

Nash emphasizes the importance of bringing women's
perspectives to bear on issues of development, not only in order
to "write women in," but because women observers tend to be more
self-conscious of personal bias in their interpretations, less
totalizing -- a romantic and problematic universalization itself.

Nash, June and Safa, Helen I., eds. (1976). Sex and Class in
An early, groundbreaking collection focusing on Latin American
women's participation in the "public sphere." The topics and
analyses of the articles reflect a then-emerging feminist critique
of "development" literature for its denial of the role of women as
workers in general, and in the development process more
specifically. (See especially June Nash's introductory essay,
"Critique of Social Science Roles.")

Unfortunately the emphasis is on the importance of women's
work outside the home, or apart from "domestic tasks"; domestic
labor is not perceived as "work," so that the domestic/public
dichotomy is preserved within the critique.
Focusing on how gender is conceptualized, rather than on gender roles or asymmetry per se, the authors present a model for examining gender ideologies based in both symbolic-analytic and "actor-mediated" perspectives. In attempting to discern the principles governing both the production and transformation of gender ideologies, the authors identify certain key social spheres, such as kinship, marriage, and prestige relations. It is the social organization of (male) prestige (used by Ortner and Whitehead following Weber) that is considered to most directly affect cultural notions of gender and sexuality, and, importantly, to be the structural bridge between socio-political and economic spheres and gender ideologies.

While attempting to reconcile what the authors identify as the 'myth and reality' problem in the assessment of gender relations and women's status, their bias toward "meanings" over "behavior" is manifest in the distinction they make between their emphasis and that of Collier and Rosaldo, who focus on the role of political-economic and marital-kinship relations in the construction of gender ideologies. For a sequel to this debate, see Yanagisako and Collier, below.


A critical assessment of existing feminist anthropological interpretive frameworks, focusing on the limitations and biases they have introduced into the analysis of such central topics as the origins of women's oppression, the universality of women's subordination and the analytic validity or productiveness of the domestic/public dichotomy. Rosaldo points to the ways in which the questions themselves emerge out of a particular epistemology which has its basis in a Victorian gender ideology, epitomized in the work of H. Spencer (cf. K. Sacks).

Rosaldo suggests that an alternative framework would generate an alternative and more productive set of questions, in terms of their contribution to understanding and changing oppressive gender relations. Rather than ask why sexual asymmetries exist, or how they came about (questions that encourage dichotomizing and biologizing), she insists on theoretical perspectives which examine gender relations in their wider social context, and focus on the social processes sustaining these relations.


Sacks offers a framework for examining "women's places," based on three interrelated premises. First, anthropology is based on a "social-darwinist" model of cultural evolution, which reduces gender relations to innate, biological differences and essentializes modern capitalist hierarchical relations as well as women's subordinate position in the hierarchy (particularly as wives and mothers). Second, an examination of women's and men's relations to the means of production provides an alternative way
of analyzing women's places as based in multiple modes of production, which vary depending on whether one focuses on women's relations of production as sisters or wives. Furthermore, it is as sisters (the neglected set of relations in Spencerian thinking) that women have more equal status to their brothers, typically in pre-state societies. Sacks' third claim is that it is the disruption of sister relations by state society that has historically destroyed the possibility of equal relations between men and women. (Private property, she suggests countering Engels, is one other manifestation of the larger process of the dissolution of corporate kin groups, not the cause itself of women's subordinate status.)

Sacks illustrates these points through an examination of three African "pre-capitalist", "non-class" societies, comparing them to African kingdoms in which class structures did emerge.

Generally, an interesting and well-constructed application of a Marxist framework to the cross-cultural study of gender relations. However, her appropriation of Marxian concepts is relatively uncritical (from a feminist perspective). Her critique of Ortner's work seems to be based on a misreading. And her use of social-darwinism as an umbrella construct is not always convincing.

An important contribution to the study of the interaction between modes of production and forms of consciousness in the constitution of women's subordinate position in class society.

Saffioti begins with the general thesis that women's "marginalization" is the result of a capitalist economy to employ all its potential workers, and its need for a "reserve army of labor" which, in the case of women can be drawn out of or relegated to the home according to economic exigencies. In a sense, she is applying theories of dependency to gender relations.

In considering the particular form this exploitation takes in Brazil, Saffioti considers the process of men's and women's socialization according to what she calls "the masculinity complex" and "the feminine mystique" — ideologies which serve to rationalize women's status and lead to their acquiescence. Within this context, she considers the way in which the naturalized categories of sex and race obscure the essentially class nature of exploitation (in contrast to Mallon above, for instance).

Scott begins with a review of the use of gender as a term and construct within feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and historical theoretical traditions. She then submits her own definition of gender, which contains two basic propositions: that "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes"; and "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (1067). From this perspective, gender is construed in terms of four related aspects: (1) cultural symbols that evoke various representations; (2) normative
concepts in terms of which these symbols are interpreted; (3) the construction of gender through political as well as social institutions (such as kinship, traditionally the exclusive locus of gender studies in anthropology); and (4) the historically specific subjectivity of gender identity.

The article ends with a series of historical examples of the relationship between gender, politics and power, as an attempt to counter the tendency Scott notes within historical analysis to consider gender as relevant to "the real business of politics" (an example of the permeation of the public/private dichotomy into critical theory).

A comprehensive critique of recent theories of kinship and gender, demonstrating that the two fields are mutually constituting and are both based on problematic dichotomies -- public/domestic, culture/nature, production/reproduction, for instance -- which take the biological difference between men and women as their basis. This bias, they suggest, derives from the Western folk model of reproduction upon which gender and kinship theories are based, as are feminist and Marxist models of egalitarian societies.

The authors then suggest an alternative methodological and conceptual strategy to "transcend" these analytic dichotomies, to "move beyond the dichotomies by focusing on social wholes" by asking how differences are defined in a given society, rather than taking them for granted. They begin with the premise that social systems are by definition systems of inequality, and offer an analytic program with three components: (1) an analysis of cultural systems of meanings (cf. Ortner and Whitehead), particularly how difference is conceptualized; (2) an examination of how inequality is organized (based on the assumption that ideas and actions are part of a single dialectical process), and the construction of systemic models of inequality (following Bourdieu); and (3) an emphasis on historical analysis that seeks to understand dynamics of continuity as well as change.

3. Feminist critiques of (feminist) ethnographic (and other theoretical) discourses of women

Militant criticism of white feminist scholarship for its failure to recognize differences between themselves and Black and Third World women; and/or for patronizing acknowledgment of such differences when recognized. Contains a pointed critique of such cross-cultural studies as anthropology which exoticize Black/Third World women as their subjects, with no critical awareness of the contradictions inherent in feminism and the anthropology of the Other.

Confronts textual/discursive encodings of "woman" and "femininity" by various disciplines, including anthropology, in terms of a subtle but rigorous distinction between "woman" as construct and "women" as historical beings. Examines how narratives engender the subject, particularly in relation to desire; thus returns to questions central to feminism recently appropriated or ignored by semiotic approaches.


Discussion emerging from a dialogue between the authors about the suppression of difference that occurs in the search for and expression of "the woman's voice." While not specifically about ethnographic representation, the authors deal in a refreshingly straightforward manner, with the politics of representing, or being represented by, an other/Other. Also actually suggests ways of engaging in non-imperialist, non-ethnocentric theory.


A critique of Western feminist discourse on third world women. While (again) not specifically about ethnographic discourse, the author's discussion of the politics of analyzing third world women's situations in terms of a posited universal subordination of women is particularly relevant to feminist anthropological practices.


Addresses the confluence of feminist literary critical studies' recent concern with historical contexts, and historians' concern with language, exemplified in her investigation into the formation of middle-class women's class identity. Her model of class formation provides a complement to those based on a definition of class (and gender) in terms of its relation to production. She takes class and gender to be conceptual systems constituted in discursive relationships, just as language is constructed dialectically in part in terms of class and gender dynamics.


In a complex assessment based on psychoanalytic and deconstructive literary theories, Spivak considers colonial and recent representations of 'Third World Women' in terms of discussions of sati, or widow-sacrifice.
Beyond her critique, Spivak constructs a theoretical space from which "post-colonial intellectuals" (by whom, given her use of feminine pronouns, I assume she means women intellectuals from the third world, like herself) can speak about the sub-altern (who, says Spivak answering her title question, cannot speak) -- by making the objectification of the sub-altern her subject as intellectual.

Background readings on narrative and discourse


Culture Critique, vol. 6 (1986). (Special issue on minority and counter discourses.)


4. Theories of Modernity/Modernity.

[While this set of issues may seem irrelevant to the bibliography's topic, I have included them because they deal with the formation of modern consciousness and its relationship to the development of capitalism. For an example of the extrapolation of these formulations to South America, see Taussig 1980; 1987.]


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