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GENDER

Division or comparison?

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If one were ever to make a list of anthropological reconstructions of feminist arguments, fairly near the top would have to come debunking the 'myth of patriarchy'. The very idea of patriarchy in twentieth century understandings – the supposition that the variety of human forms of organisation are bound to provide examples opposed to patriarchy – itself derived from an older evolutionary anthropology – with its supposition that the invention of patriarchy changed the bases of human organisation. In searching for patriarchy, Euro-Americans have searched for organisational forms shaped instead by maternity, and for systems where women have been dominant and have wielded power. [One form of practising feminism which relies on just such a search is discussed by Greenwood in Chapter 5 – Eds] Anthropologists have for a long time now been sceptical about the power and the dominance. Comparisons between the significance of maternity and patriarchy, on the other hand, continue to be made. I shall dwell not on the mythical nature of the ideas about patriarchy but on certain of the gender constructions on which they are based. These are the constructions of a living and very much contemporary culture.

The culture in question I call Euro-American, to refer to the largely middle-class, North American/Northern European discourse of public and professional life. The gender constructions entail among other things a supposition about addition or augmentation. There is a sense in which masculinity or femininity can be construed as a matter of degree, to be gauged from a multiplicity of attributes. Thus a person can display 'more' or 'less' masculinity, or a type of social organisation can be 'more' or 'less' influenced by feminine principles. This may be accompanied by an

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interpretation of identity that presupposes some kind of unity between elements, so that all the bits will 'add up' to a whole. As a consequence, heterogeneous elements will seem contradictory and have to be explained. Hence early and mid-twentieth-century anthropologists had to explain how a rule of group organisation that traced descent through women (matriliney) could co-exist with rules of residence that meant a woman moved to her husband's village at marriage. A principal anthropological example came from the matrilineal Trobriand Islands in Melanesia. The point was that such a heterogeneous combination of apparently 'male' and 'female' principles of organisation seemed counter-intuitive to the Euro-American anthropologist. It was much easier to understand systems where tracing group ties through men (as in patrilineal descent) matched a local organisation based on women joining their husbands at marriage (patri- or virilocality) and the exercise of power in male hands. Arrangements augmenting the importance of one sex at the expense of the other – men as ancestors, fathers, leaders and so forth – seemed self-evident. One is a man by doing masculine things and acting in a male way with men's interests at heart. How 'completely' male, or female, this or that person or organisation is will depend on how everything adds up. The augmentation or exaggeration of gender attributes is no problem in this view; on the contrary it is evidence of an unambiguous identity. What become problematic are borrowings between or cross-overs from gendered attributes otherwise conceptualised as distinct. Hence, for some anthropologists, a social system based on matrilineal descent and virilocal marriage seemed to be based on contradictory elements.

I raise the question of the addition or augmentation of identity in order to comment on certain consequences that recent debate over the new reproductive technologies holds out for Euro-American discourse on gender. Rather than beginning with these concrete and probably now familiar examples, however, I begin in a less familiar place, and in an unfamiliar way. These opening remarks may well seem abstract as a result. The point is that I wish to set the scene by reference to other cultural materials, and in doing so to pursue the role that *comparison* plays in such Euro-American discourse. Comparison is central to feminist practice. In offering a critical commentary on some of the ways it is deployed, I wish to render unfamiliar the question of how it is that 'male' and 'female' attributes come to be compared at all.

The Euro-American question of 'how much' masculinity or femininity can be recognised depends in part on the degree of difference between male and female, and difference is made manifest in comparison. Divergent attributes become significant in respect of some continuum or quality otherwise held in common. The result is that each sex may be judged relative to the other, as in the case of models of patriarchy. Here the male exercise of (formal) power becomes the common measure by which male and female dominance are compared. And I stress comparison rather than division in order to reserve the term *division* for a different mode of conceptualising gender difference altogether. This introduces into the chapter a certain division of material.

The field of gender relations from which I draw concerns parenthood; the reader will note that I make a division here between two modes of gender differentiation and proceed to compare them. These two modes themselves comprise 'division' and 'comparison'. They are elucidated (compared) through different cultural materials. I would add that the divisions and comparisons I offer are in fact trivial by contrast with the conundrums these materials pose. The presentation thus remains true to a certain brand of empiricism: making the data so presented apparently outrun the theoretical effort to comprehend it.

DIVISION

In general parlance, division segments what already exists as a whole; thus arithmetic division presupposes a number to be partitioned. The 'division of labour' understood as a single manufacturing or production process divided into separately organised components exemplifies such partition. Indeed, twentieth-century Euro-Americans have no trouble in recognising the divisibility of work processes. But gender? There are certain situations where what goes for number can also go for gender. Thus Minica (1988) describes a Melanesian people whose counting system is based simultaneously on divisions of the human body and the division of an original androgynous cosmos into male and female elements (also see McKinnon, 1991). It is the androgyny that is taken for granted. Indeed for Melanesia in general, I would argue, insofar as people there seem to gender values, institutions and the acts of persons, their discourse suggests the sexes have to work to divide themselves off from each other. They present persons as though

they were socially composite, and divisible, entities. A singular (undivided) gender identity is seen to be created only through the active shedding of 'the other' (cross-sex) component. Unitary or singular (same sex) identity is thus in a sense always incomplete. By the same token, this is also an active or generative condition. What, in these formulations, completes a person is not 'more' same-sex attributes but their cross-sex complements.

Consider the Trobriands. Mosko (n.d.) argues that the way in which matrilineal Trobriand Islanders vest political leadership in men and emphasise residence at the husband's village draws on an explicit metaphor of paternity.¹ Trobriand fathers are nurturers of their children as husbands are of their wives, and village headmen and chiefs are cast into the nurturant role of 'fathers'. The point is that this fatherhood requires a man being able to divide his activities as 'father' from those he performs as a male member of his matrilineage. The stringent avoidance between the Trobriand brother and sister in all matters to do with sex and marriage emphatically separates these facets of a man's activities from those he has vested in his sister. As 'father' he is sexual partner to his wife and fathers her children; this constitutes his paternity. As a male member of his matrilineage he has rights and duties towards his sister's children; in this sense he is a 'male mother' (to use an African idiom) and this we may say constitutes his maternity. If a man thus divides his paternity from his maternity, a woman divides her maternity (as a matrilineage 'mother' and future ancestress, she bears children for her brother), from her paternity (as 'female father', to continue the idiom, towards the children whom her brother fathers). Each orientation complements the other.

What is true of the Trobriand person is also true of the way the lineage group claims a single gender identity through division. It emerges in its most unitary form on the occasion of a death (Weiner, 1976). During the mortuary ceremonies, the deceased's matrilineage finally pays off all the debts that the lineage member accumulated in life. Above all these are debts to the lineage of the person's father and spouse for nurture given. The food and assistance that made 'body' of the deceased is thereby sent back to whence it came. The paternally, and conjugally, derived parts of a person become separated from the maternally derived parts (cf. Battaglia, 1990), and the deceased person is reclined as pure matrilineal spirit. In life, however, nurture always takes place across lineages, one feeding another (cf. Foster, 1990; Wagner, 1986), and

it is in their role as 'fathers' that men are most active in political and economic activities, conducting exchanges with partners, and engaging in sexual activity. The same is true of women as 'spouses'. Paternal and conjugal activity thus gives body to matrilineal spirit, and the living person is imagined as a composite (androgynous) being. What becomes exaggerated in such a system is the practice of division as such – not adding together everything that makes up a group or a person, but instead repeating, and thus duplicating the division of female from male members, maternity from paternity. Difference is made manifest in division. However, differences are not cumulative; rather the 'same' division (between male and female) is repeated over and again through different phenomena and in different contexts.

Such gendering is no less true of those systems in Melanesia that appear to be founded on consistent, homogeneous principles, namely, those patrilineal, patrilocal, male-dominated societies of interior Papua New Guinea where ideologies of power and gender seem by contrast to present a unifying picture. I would argue, following Mosko, that in these systems also each assertion of the male ethos depends on a fresh division of a composite identity into male and female components. Godelier's (1986) account of the patrilineal Baruya (cf. Strathern, 1992: ch. 7, 1991a) is a case in point.

The initiation rituals which preoccupy so much of Baruya male life are predicated on the necessity to partition men from women, sons from mothers, semen from milk, one kind of semen from another kind of semen, and so forth. Men in effect divide themselves off from other parts of themselves so that it is out of a composite that a 'man' momentarily creates a singular gender identity. In the case of semen, what is divided is regarded as a finite stock or reservoir of substance (each transmission of semen to nourish boys or to inseminate wives depletes the Baruya stock and has to be replenished). There is so to speak only 'one' amount of semen, as semen is the only 'one' source from which all persons are made (cf. Gillison, 1987), that source being divided into male (semen) and female (milk) versions. The difference between male and female is thus the outcome of partition. So at initiation boys are separated from their mothers and secluded with their fathers, while girls are separated from their fathers and secluded with their mothers. Repetition does not augment gender so to speak – a man is not made 'more' a man or a woman 'more' a woman thereby. Rather,

each division creates again the separation of a man from female parts of himself, a woman from her male parts.

Gender through division would seem to be one of the processes entertained in two tales interpreted by Houseman (1988) for Samo and Beti, west African societies 'patrilineal' in kin reckoning. (They are also preoccupied as we shall see with generational difference through division.) Here people are talking out loud, so to speak, about the possibilities of duplication. It is not too fanciful to read both stories as turning on the same question: if a man had two penises would this double his generative power? In Euro-American we might put the question: would a man with more than the usual number of organs be 'more' of a man?

I start with the Beti version. A Beti father cannot transmit his patrilineal identity unless he has sons borne to him (by other men's daughters); however he always has the possibility of persuading the man married to his own daughter to give up 'jural' fatherhood and remain attached to his household simply as a 'physical' father who would provide future generations for his own (the father-in-law's) patriline.²

Once there was a big chief who had lots of wives and riches but no sons, only a single very beautiful daughter, whom he loved very much. Not wanting her to marry, he decreed that he would only give her to a man having two penises. Many suitors arrived – important men, white men – but all in vain: the girl would not give in; the father refused. Then an impoverished young man decided to try his luck. Going to the girl's father he announced: 'Here, I am just made that way. I have two penises.' The chief is astonished and decides to give him his daughter. Festivities are organized, and that evening, the girl prepares herself for having sexual intercourse with a man for the first time in her life. She is very happy as the other women have told her that it is very good. She draws her future husband into her room and lays down naked beside him. But he just goes to sleep! The girl gets angry. The young man explains: 'My father gave me this recommendation: 'Because you have two penises, never ever make love at the girl's home.' 'All right,' says the girl, 'let's go to your place.' They get up and begin walking in the middle of the night. The girl walks in front. All of a sudden, in the midst of their journey, the young man begins to wail. 'What's

the matter?' asks the girl. 'Alas, I've lost one of my penises' he answers. Retracing their steps, they search in the darkness in vain: they cry and wail. [Back at the girl's village] the girl tells this suspicious story to her father. 'Father, did you check?' she asks him. 'Bah!' he answers. 'If he lost it, it's not his fault; he still has one penis left and I am going to marry you [to him] anyway.'

(Houseman, 1988: 661)

A man without sons tries to turn his daughter into an heir: in this condition, as Houseman explains, the son-in-law cannot represent his own patriline, and his children would be assimilated to his wife's.³ Unfortunately, the doubling of the organ on which the father-in-law insists renders the suitor impotent, until, that is, he acts on advice *his* father gave which causes him to 'lose' one of the two. He becomes a father through a triple partitioning.

First, the son (the father-to-be) abandons one of the organs in the context of another kind of doubling, between himself and his own father. He cannot be his own father, as the two organs might suggest, and is restored to potent singularity when he acknowledges the distinct existence of his senior parent (the point at which he recalls his father's admonitions). An appropriate duplication of persons (father and son) substitutes for the inappropriate attachment of both organs to one man. Second, the same duplication of persons also substitutes for the inappropriate duplication of another pair of persons. If the Beti hero could not be a father himself till he had divided his potentiality between two persons, the appropriate persons are son and father, not son-in-law and father-in-law.⁴ I would suggest that the father-in-law was trying to keep both his maternal and paternal identity – both giving his daughter in marriage and endowing the son-in-law with 'his' own extra organ. Third, then, the Beti son, in separating off the superfluous organ also creates the difference between two types of fathers, the men who will be father's father and mother's father to his children. Only once that separation is done has he the potential to be a father himself. In Houseman's terms this is as a jural and physical father who can transmit property to his sons (he is 'completed' by the cross-generational parent). In terms of the gender constructs I have been discussing, the man's potential to be a father is also realised in his ability to have intercourse with his wife (he is 'completed' by the cross-sex partner).

The Somo story about two organs also gives a man an unlikely double endowment, but does so against the background of women's constitutional doubling. The patrilineal Somo hold that each generation of persons is replenished by an infusion of blood (cf. Héritier-Augé, 1989). Blood is constituted through semen (semen turns into blood inside a woman's body, so much of a child's maternal blood is the husband's semen transformed; a woman's own blood comes from her father). But while the transmission of paternal substance (blood/semen) can be thought of as continuous over the generations, the maternal contribution to procreation creates discontinuities. Indeed, maternity is obliterated at each generation, for a woman passes on only part of her father's blood: she cannot transmit her mother's. The principal blood she transmits is that which she makes from her husband's substance. Women are thus vessels for the transmission of male blood. The importance of shedding the 'female line' is brought out in the Somo story that Houseman (1988: 665) quotes:

One day, a man, who already had a first wife, decided to marry again. . . . While the first and second wives were spinning cotton together, the first said to the second, 'I am very happy that you have come to join us, but I must warn you about one of our husband's peculiarities.' 'What might that be?' asked the second wife. 'He has two penises,' the first wife answered. 'Consequently,' she continued, 'when he comes to make love to you, be sure to grab hold of one of them, for if both enter at the same time, it is very painful.' The second wife listened to what the first wife told her. When, that night, the husband came to make love to the second wife, the latter grabbed hold of his penis. The man jumped back in surprise. He approached her again; the same thing happened. The same thing went on until dawn, at which time the second wife ran away to return to her home. Upon arriving, she learned that her mother had just died. . . . If you do not explain everything to me, it is not only your mother who will be buried today, but you as well, and in the same tomb.' The second wife was afraid, and recounted everything the first wife had told her. When the husband heard this he said, 'I understand' for the first wife had told him that the second wife was a penis snatcher, the reason for which he jumped away whenever she grabbed his penis.

The woman who imagines that her husband has two penises has a (same-generational) double in a co-wife. But she is only able to consort with him when she realises that after all he has only one organ for her. That realisation occurs, in this story, after her (cross-generational) mother dies.

It is the Samo woman who has to differentiate between her father/husband, for she cannot reproduce via both of them (be both herself and her mother). That differentiation is brought home, I surmise, through the mother's death. With the removal of the mother comes the removal of the person who once worked transformatively on the father's blood; the heroine comes to her husband constituted through blood whose paternal source alone is evident. Over the generations, blood is thus constantly divided, as daughter is divided from mother. In the separation of daughter from mother, the daughter (the 'wife' in the story) in effect partitions herself: her own future pregnancy will allocate the blood within her to its sources in two men (father and husband), and as a 'mother' she will above all transmit (her) husband's paternal blood.

Now the Beti son-in-law shedding his extra organ by invoking (an admonition from) his own father suggests a parallel to the Samo woman discovering her husband's single penis after her mother dies. Houseman dwells on the fact that the former story stresses a connection with the senior parent (father-son continuity), and the latter an opposition (mother-daughter discontinuity). He finds paradoxical the opposition of motherhood to itself, and takes this referencing as evidence of a role that is indeterminate or uncertain (1988: 666). Motherhood in Samo, he argues, has to be proved as, for very different reasons, fatherhood does in Beti.⁵ Thus the Samo asymmetry between motherhood and fatherhood rests on the indeterminacy of motherhood (it has to be proved through parturition); at the same time, he argues, the need to overcome this indeterminacy formally subordinates the father to the mother. To the degree that motherhood is doubly established, through the reference to the other mothering figure, Houseman takes the Samo mother as the superior figure in a hierarchical relationship. I would add that we can also read the differentiations as division: in that case, what is being duplicated over and again is the need to divide one organ (the Beti penis) from another, one substance (Samo blood) from another and (in both cases) one parent from another. The gender of persons is an apposite framework for analysis insofar as both stories turn on the proposition that attributes such

as the generative power of the male organ or of female substance are in human relationships properly distributed between (divided between) persons. Thus the male organ is only double in its generative capacity when it is attached to a human double, that is, distributed between two different women (Samo) or belongs to the persons of two different fathers (Beti). And in the same way as Samo blood is only procreative when a woman obliterates her mother's contribution, so the Beti father-in-law can only bestow a procreative daughter on a man who has an exclusively (singular) paternal organ: maternity properly comes from the daughter and was quite improperly pre-fixed in the man's second penis. Male and female attributes, then, are duplicated or divided in differences between persons: it is persons who differentiate the effectiveness of particular organs and substances.

COMPARISON

In all four cases one kind of parent is being defined by reference to another. For Baruya we may say that semen and breast milk are analogous to each other as male and female versions of the nutritive/generative substance from which human beings are created. At the same time both can appear in a single encompassing manifestation, semen, that also stands for them both, since it is semen that takes either a male or female form (as semen, as milk).⁶ Following Houseman's argument for the Beti one could say that semen is thus defined with reference to itself — it appears in a duplicated form like the double Beti father — whereas milk is not. (Milk, maternal semen, is not passed on but shed afresh each generation.) But there are two forms of gender duplication in these constructions. First, 'one' entity may be divided into two same-sex versions of itself, as Beti fathers are divided into senior and junior manifestations of fatherhood; here the same-sex link is also a cross-generational one. Second, in a cross-sex mode one (same-generational) entity is divided into differently gendered versions of itself, as fatherhood is divided into 'fatherhood' and 'motherhood'.

In colloquial English (Euro-American), however, this is exactly what we would *not* say. We would recognise the first gender duplication as a kind of augmentation (fatherhood vindicated by fatherhood). But the second? Here we would have to say that 'parenthood' is divided into motherhood and fatherhood. English-

speakers would reconcile the apparently contradictory elements by appeal to a superior class taken to be a different order of phenomenon from the elements it thereby unifies.

To discover the class to which things belong, items that already appear different in kind, as the sexes do, can be compared by virtue of what is common between them, e.g., being 'human'. That commonality gives a measure of what they share, whether it is literally imagined as a higher-order class or as the common denominator on which difference is built. What is similar is taken as belonging to the class, and what is different as the distinctive and pre-existing identity of the individual components. I have elaborated elsewhere (1991b) and in another context of Euro-American thought, namely in the relationship between individual and society, the way an overarching entity, as 'society' is imagined, appears to be of a different order from the individuals that Euro-Americans say 'make it up' (so where Melanesian constructs appear to divide persons from persons, Euro-Americans try to see how they can bring individuals together in society). Distinctiveness can thus be imagined as deviation from what is held in common, and it becomes feasible to contemplate *degrees* of distinctiveness. One can in Euro-American ask, by reference to features connoting masculinity or femininity, how 'male' is this man, how 'female' is this woman – that is, how differentiated are they not only from each other but from what they otherwise have in common. This leads to normative possibilities, for instance that 'men' do some things more appropriately, 'women' other things. As a result, one sex may be modelled on the other as providing the 'best example' of this or that attribute.

The abstract possibility of a common measure against which comparison proceeds is part of what makes Euro-Americans imagine equality between the sexes. In the Melanesian and West African cases I have referred to, equality in this Enlightenment sense is simply not an issue. One gender may be taken either as the analogue to the other or else as encompassing it, as a male may appear in female form or female in male form.⁷ It is thus as a *father* that a male Trobriand Islander is 'like' a mother; in no way equal, the claims of fathers at mortuary ceremonies are very different from those of mothers, as they make quite distinct contributions in the person's lifetime. It is the claims to distinctiveness that are analogous. By contrast, when Euro-Americans champion equality they often try to submerge difference. So Euro-Americans might

argue that a father is like a mother in being a *parent*; in the same way as a woman is like a man in being *human*.⁸

The Euro-American notions of 'parent' or 'human being' provide a common measure across the gender classes, mother/father and man/woman. If within each class the measure is that of divergence (how much of a female, i.e., not a male, is this particular woman?), between the classes the measure is what they have in common (who is 'more' a parent than the other, a mother or a father?). I say this on grounds of social practice. It has become accepted in recent years, for instance, that litigants in custody disputes may appeal to evidence about which parent has been 'more' of a parent to the child(ren) than the other. The claims of mothers and fathers are adjudicated on the grounds of comparison. In cases of assisted conception adjudications may turn further on which of two mothers (or fathers) is the 'real' (more of) mother (or father).

It is to late twentieth-century Euro-American social practices that I now turn. As elsewhere the sexes are opposed and contrasted, their attributes seemingly divided off from one another; however, I wish to pursue the extent to which such differences draw not on the kind of division found in the Melanesian and West African cases but on what I have been calling comparison. Examples derive from the field of recent Euro-American debates over the social implications of new reproductive technology.⁹

First: a piece of speculation. This comes from a columnist (Ellen Goodman, *Albuquerque Journal*, 6 November 1990, paragraphs elided; my emphases) syndicated in the American press.

BOSTON – Not long ago, after a midnight session with a male friend who was considering fatherhood at 50, I decided that middle-aged men suffer from a distinct biological disadvantage. They don't go through menopause. This was a fairly quirky, contrary point of view... It is more often women who resent the biological clock ticking loudly over their leisurely plans. If anything, the female fertility deadline seems positively un-American, unfair. We are, after all, citizens of a country that believes in endless choices and unlimited options. Moreover, this biological destiny seems like a remnant of inequality: *If men can have babies in their seventies, why not women?* Still, it seemed to me that the biological clock was a useful warning system about the life cycle. It was a way of saying that life changes and time runs out...

Now it appears that the biological alarm has been turned down. We are reading headlines that would have confounded our grandmothers: 'Menopause Found No Barrier to Pregnancy'. Doctors have discovered a way to beat the clock.

... The promise is that women can keep their biological door open, at least with the help of a stranger. The problem is that it also prevents closure. ... When you remove nature from the equation, there is a whole new set of calculations to be made. They bear, not surprisingly, a strong resemblance to the ones that men have faced. ... The issues become energy, and age gaps, and the real midnight on the biological clock: mortality. One infertility counsellor who heard about this 'breakthrough' asked out loud, 'When do you say, enough is enough?' The female body once said it for us. *Now women, like men*, will have to use much less predictable organs: the heart and the brain.

Here what women can do is compared to what men can do, but with reference to what? The reference point is the potential of the human body as a gender-free category, manifest in the biological clock that both share despite their different experience of it. Now perhaps they will be able to experience it in similar ways! The other idea is that it is possible to add to or supplement natural endowment by new techniques. In this case the extension of a woman's reproductive clock can be taken in one of two ways – it may make her 'more' a woman, that is, augment her capacity to experience motherhood for a longer period in her life; or it may make her 'more' like a man, that is, bring the comparison closer, for men can in any case conceive a child till well into old age.

Second: a commentary in the popular British press (*Sunday Express*, 10 January 1993, paragraphs cited) which sets out the same comparison with further explicitness. The context was the possibility of harvesting ovaries from (aborted) foetuses, which would enable not just otherwise infertile women but women past the menopause to have children. The spokesman is from King's College Hospital, London:

The female menopause in humans is one of nature's design faults. In all other animal species, the menopause occurs very close to the time of death. Only in humans do you have the female having this relatively premature menopause and spending about a third of their lives in a hormone-deficient state.

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And to underline the comparison with the rest of the animal kingdom:

Men are far better designed when it comes to fertility and hormones.

The gentleman clearly thinks he is on the side of women, for he adds: 'The menopause is profoundly sexist. It is one colossal bit of biological sabotage on women'.¹⁰ Again, this view simultaneously affirms about women what appears most feminine (viz. the capacity to bear children) and offers an unfavourable comparison with men (women do not enjoy men's prolonged fertility).

Third: a comparison that presupposes rights to act on or claims to press. In 1990, a solicitor wrote to the *London Times* in the following vein: 'Parliament appears to, be proposing to perpetuate a definition of motherhood which flies in the face of present genetic knowledge' (cited by Morgan and Lee, 1991: 154). The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act going through Parliament that year contained what he claimed was an anomaly with respect to surrogacy arrangements. An amendment (Section 30) had been introduced to bypass the cumbersome procedure of insisting that commissioning parents adopt their child.¹¹ The solicitor was moved to write on behalf of a client who had been required to fulfil the legal criteria for adoption. Of the two parents, the mother was at a disadvantage in a way the father was not, for already existing conventions concerning illegitimacy recognised the genetic claims of paternity.

My client, the genetic mother, would appear to have no legal rights whatsoever in her own children. On the contrary, her husband, the genetic father, would have the right to apply under the guardianship legislation to have himself recognised as the father of illegitimate children and no doubt, custody, if he required; a truly anomalous situation in these days of the equality of the sexes. Surely genetic mothers, at the very least, should be accorded the same rights and privileges as genetic fathers.

(D. B. Forrest, *The Times*, 28 February 1990, cited in Morgan and Lee, 1991: 153–4; my emphasis)

In appealing to equality, he states the common ground: a genetic mother ought to be accorded the same rights as the genetic father. We might note that the law is to be persuaded by an appeal to what is already the case. On the grounds of the pre-existing convention that the genetic father of an illegitimate child can

already have his paternity recognised in law it is proposed that the 'same' right should be extended to the mother. An alternative option could be to suspend all genetic claims; were neither to press claims on the grounds of genetic relationship, equality, if little else, would be as well served. Instead, the father's pre-existing claims appear as an exemplar for how to consider the mother's. So what starts out as a comparison by appeal to a common measure – mother and father are equally genetic parents – ends up with a comparison that wishes to bring mother's rights in line with the kinds of rights that fathers presently claim. The father's position is presented as a norm from which (through social inequality) the mother deviates. The maleness of the common standard becomes explicit.

Fourth: the gender of gametes. This last example comes from the work of Haines (1993) on gamete donation. Differences between gametes lead to evaluations, and Haines makes a direct connection between comparison and gender stereotyping (for an American case, cf. Martin, 1991). As in the previous example, debate is based both on the possibility of equality *and* on striving towards an always incomplete equality by assimilating female claims to male ones.

What began Haines's investigation was the claim that egg donation is the 'female equivalent' to semen donation. Thus the 1984 Warnock Report:

It is both logical and consistent that the law should treat egg donation in the same way as AID [DI].

(Warnock, 1985: 36)

An analogy is thus sustained with regard to the desirability that the law treat both equally. But why should the mother's contribution be modelled on the father's? Here too one might imagine an alternative: to think of the transaction not as a donation but as the rendering of services. However, although women have been known to 'help' one another in such matters, the law, at least in recent years (see Smart, 1987: 101), never recognised an illegitimate mother (the natural mother was the mother). There was no construction in place as a model for adjudicating claims between different types of mothers. Instead, semen donation provided the model for thinking about egg donation, and the act of 'donation' was thereby created as the common measure between male and female procreative assistance. With this common measure in place,

people have a ground for considering all the features that also make the acts different. Comparisons abound.

Since semen donation was already tolerated, there could be no objection to donation as such; however in her discussions with members of the Warnock Committee, Haines found that many had disliked the idea of it, both as a sexual practice on the male donor's part and from the point of view of the donor as a third party. The idea of egg donation was more palatable. Indeed, egg donation could be assimilated to presumptions about other aspects of women's mothering roles – altruism, concern for others, passivity, liability to exploitation. As in the discussion of menopausal pregnancy, the comparison between semen and egg donation both affirmed the femininity of women (the female act was compatible with other female acts, and augmented them) and simultaneously offered men's acts as a model for them (the female donation approximated to the male one).

While for the subjects of Haines's study semen donation had on balance negative (assertive) overtones, egg donation had positive (passive) ones. Arguments in favour of anonymity for semen donors included the desire to protect the recipient couple from 'the invasion of the third party into the family' (Warnock, 1985: 25), whereas in the case of egg donors, reference was made to their potential closeness (cf. Price, 1989: 46–7); it was conceivable that they might be related (as sisters say). In the eyes of some, the motives of either men or women might be equally suspect; however, their pathology was then differently constructed:

male concerns in reproduction were presumed to revolve around ideas of virility, genetic continuity and generally being assertive and in control. Female concerns were presumed to revolve around the need to become a mother which led to a form of pathological assertiveness when otherwise the woman's role was characterized by passivity.

(Haines, 1993: 87)

The mother's assertiveness is thus compared with the father's.¹² Semen donation evoked a sense of unregulatable excess, fears of men siring too many children. Egg donation was regarded as more benign, an intervention that could be monitored. In that the male act carried resonances of an unregulated 'nature', the female act evoked the kind of potential that technology could domesticate to social ends.

Haines relates these several differences to a familial ideology concerned to protect the family's boundaries. I would underline the mode of comparison. When a baseline provides a common point of reference, either sex may seem closer to the norm. Divergence is also implied. For instance by comparison with the (natural) process of conception through sexual intercourse, semen donation was formerly regarded as 'unnatural'; the complex arrangements that nowadays attend egg donation have since made semen donation appear as a relatively simple, 'natural' matter. In these discussions, and whether negatively or positively, the already acknowledged donation of semen appears as the principal discursive reference point for thinking about the new and complex processes of ovum extraction as another type of donation.

DUPLICATION OR FRAGMENTATION?

Between these many examples lie my own divisions and comparisons, including the way I have considered both 'division' and 'comparison'. The exposition is intended to exemplify certain Euro-American approaches to gender difference, both anthropological and feminist. The observer may augment the perception of differentiation, adding up everything that seems to be germane, comparing one arena with another, or may instead shed some differences in an attempt to reduce manifold differentiations to the one that appears analytically potent. These two modes were evident in the old gender arguments about patriarchy to which I referred at the beginning. On the one hand, questions about the power of women could be answered in terms of the numbers of powerful attributes or examples of influence that could be added together; on the other hand, there was an implicit comparison with the kind of authority with which men were traditionally credited, and this served as a common measure for considering degrees of women's power and authority. The same could be said of cultural difference: in this chapter I have both duplicated the cultural materials offered here (Melanesian, West African, Euro-American) and offered a single axis of differentiation (an analytical contrast between division and comparison).

The chapter has dwelt on conceptualisations of persons and their attributes. It has become an issue for the lines along which Euro-Americans are invited to think about the consequences of new reproductive technology, and is in this respect an issue for feminist practice. It concerns the kinds of identity to be constructed

from the way persons are regarded as sharing characteristics with other persons. The sharing may be bodily (sharing genes, sharing blood) or may rest on differences or similarities in endowment or behaviour. The relevance to feminist practice is that any critical commentary on the gender of male and female attributes needs to reflect the conceptual strategies through which cultures divide the one from the other or, for that matter, compare them.

The way in which the distribution of attributes between persons in the Melanesian/West African cases is imagined as the duplication of 'one' already existing entity (such as an organ or a substance) seems to be echoed in apparent duplications afforded by present Euro-American techniques of assisted conception. But what kind of comparison is this? Are Euro-Americans acting out the partitioning of parenthood for which the Melanesians and West Africans in my examples construct ritual or myth? When Mary Warnock says *aptropos* egg donation,

Egg donation produces for the first time circumstances in which the genetic mother (the woman who donates the egg), is a different person from the woman who gives birth to the child, the carrying mother. The law has never, till now, had to face this problem. There are inevitably going to be instances where the stark issue arises of who is the mother ...

(Warnock, 1985: 37)

she means that what has to be compared between the two women is the weight given to their claims of maternity. It looks like duplication. Yet what is at issue is not the doubling of two (single) figures, but distribution of a single (biological) process between persons. Moreover, there is no logic to them being 'two', as in a pair; rather, 'two' are only the beginnings of a potentially infinite proliferation. Proliferation raises questions about which component will establish the superior claim. A moral philosopher (Wolfman, 1987: 200) puts the issue plainly. English law previously recognised 'two possibilities as to who is the father of the child' whereas there was ever 'only one possible "real" mother'. Now both motherhood, and fatherhood, as in Wolfman's juxtaposition, must be subject to the kind of practices of verification for which fatherhood alone once stood.

The explicitness of the comparison across gender classes (mother modelled on father) offers a measure for parenthood (the role of gamete supplier) in the context of ambiguities raised by the

addition of persons to the procreative process. The proliferation of 'mothers' does not seem to have had the effect of making motherhood a more powerful force. On the contrary, it is interesting that far from being regarded as an augmentation of motherhood, the new proliferation may colloquially be described as a 'fragmentation', reducing the claims of each and dispersing the bundle of attributes that before held together as a potential whole. Writing at the beginning of the present debates on artificial reproduction, Snowden, Mitchell and Snowden (1983: 32-5) had no comment about referring to 'the complete father' and 'the complete mother'.¹³ When, by contrast, all the manifold attributes that add up to making a mother are instead divided between persons, the presence of other mothers makes any one mother appear less than complete. It was the traditional wholeness and hence indissolubility of the mother-child bond that appears to have been the principal sticking point in the Warnock Committee's treatment of surrogacy (after Cannell, 1990: 673). While the HFE Act did find itself able to make a decision on the rights of 'gamete-donors' in the case of a baby being carried by another woman (Section 30) [see above], it was all but silent on the practice of surrogacy itself.

The debate surrounding surrogacy at the time of the Act introduced a new measure for comparing mothers with mothers: who is 'more' of a mother could be settled partly by reference to the standard expectation that 'real' mothers are 'good' mothers. If the surrogate introduces the idea that there can be two kinds of carrying mothers (the 'natural' and the surrogate), public opinion would add that there can be two kinds of surrogates. Fenella Cannell describes how the press dwelled on the difference between the good and the bad. Surrogates were positively valued in the context of creating a child as an act of love or altruism for childless women; negatively when they were seen as prostituting maternity for money. In fact, the bad surrogate was compared with the unscrupulous semen donor; both exploit innate capacities for personal ends (however obscure), whereas the good surrogate/donor acts out of compassion for others. However, if the good surrogate augments some of the qualities of maternity by her selfless act, on the evidence of public opinion at the time it would seem that the bad surrogate mother is 'worse' than the bad semen donor. She offends against nature where he is simply being irresponsible.

So whereas egg donation is regarded as relatively benign by comparison with some of the apprehensiveness surrounding semen

donation, when semen donation becomes the measure for maternal surrogacy the values are reversed. Indeed, in respect to modern European views in general, Giulia Sissa (1989: 133) is able to assert that donor insemination 'is considered perfectly acceptable social practice, whereas the notion of a surrogate mother is often found distressing and shocking'. The single male act thus provides a double comparative measure: semen donation affords a reference point for both egg donation and maternal surrogacy.

Rather like the duplication of organs and substances in the West African stories, gamete donation and surrogacy arrangements provide limiting cases for the kinds of comparisons through which Euro-Americans think about degrees of motherhood or fatherhood. But the limits depicted in these accounts speak to different cultural practices of differentiation. Although I have confined my observations to what in turn has been a limited, and in some cases rather eccentric, range of material, there will be many other contexts to which they can apply. At any rate, my own argument tries to practice what it preaches. Thus the chapter is as much organised through the division and comparison of materials as it is about such organisation. I hope that this might stand for a larger intention of the chapter as a whole. Among the many traditions that feed into feminist practice, de-familiarisation is crucial. But one cannot de-familiarise the world all at once; one has to proceed from the side, literally from the eccentric, in order to make the most obvious of questions seem not so obvious after all. Comparing what men and women do, or comparing male and female attributes, seems a completely obvious procedure. By giving a certain weighting to a contrast between comparison and division, I have tried to suggest that already built into the idea of comparison are the very ideas about the construction of gender that lead Euro-Americans back to their familiar questions.

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and I thank Michael Herzfeld and Jane Schneider for their commentaries at the time. I am also grateful to Jane Schneider for a longer review. A specific inspiration for its argument was Houseman's paper, which is why I dwell on the Samo and Beti cases, although I turn his analysis to my own ends.

NOTES

- 1 See also Mosko (1992), and for elsewhere on the Massim, Damon (1983). I am grateful for permission to cite Mosko's unpublished paper.
- 2 Houseman is concerned with a relationship between 'jural' and 'physical' parenthood that I do not address here.
- 3 The Beti woman's situation is different: she may be regarded as the mother of children whether or not she bears them, for it is through marriage that she becomes mother to her own or (if 'childless') to other women's children. Maternity is created by marriage and does not have to be further proved. However, marriage seems to pose some problems for the ethnographer. It does not seem to him a sufficient basis for parenthood, and Houseman interprets motherhood as part of a larger parenting role evident in the figure of the father. In Houseman's view, Beti fatherhood is defined with reference to prior fatherhood and this renders the father an indeterminate figure *vis-à-vis* the mother (in this interpretation, 'father' cannot stand by himself as a single figure but requires emphasis in order to be effective).
- 4 Houseman's preference is to analyse this as the invocation of jural status: he argues that the man becomes a father in his own right by virtue of his jural identity as a patriline member.
- 5 Samo fatherhood is, by contrast, in his argument, unproblematic: a Samo man is virtually a father by the fact of his own birth – provided he is married, children borne by his wife are credited to his (patrilineage, and he does not have to prove physical paternity. However, while even a childless man will have someone to perform sacrifice (and thus recognise him) after death, a childless woman in Samo is divested of personhood. She can only be a jural mother through physically giving birth.
- 6 The Baruya ethnography indicates semen as the substance that is divided over and again into different versions of itself, as milk it does not have the same divisibility (milk is not encompassing in the same manner as semen is).
- 7 Melanesian representations of androgynous, composite entities invariably cast them into a male or female form (thus the Mountain Ok ancestress Afek is an androgynous mother; the Iqwaye ancestor Omaleye is an androgynous father).
- 8 'Parent' and 'human' appear to be gender-free terms. It is an established point of feminist critique that the unmarked term, the standard, is likely to be based on specifically 'male' values.

- 9 Two briefly: the second two, given at more length, have been deployed in another context (Strathern, 1991c).
- 10 The view is one in the long line already documented by Emily Martin (1987) which sees the postmenopausal body with aversion.
- 11 The fact that the gametes (egg, sperm) of the commissioning parents had contributed to the child would be sufficient grounds on which they could be treated as its parents in law. The particular case that the solicitor pressed led to a further amendment to allow a retrospective application of this ruling to already existing surrogacy arrangements.
- 12 Haines is here referring to reports of commissions in 1948 and 1960 which preceded the Warnock Committee. She also notes that the whole context of sperm donation was, in these two earlier reports, associated with ideas of inappropriate sexuality: adultery, masturbation and illegitimacy. By contrast, the woman's receipt of the donation is regarded as a passive act, essentially asexual in that no activity is required of the woman.
- 13 In their formulations, the former combines genetic and nurturing roles, the latter genetic, carrying and nurturing roles (1983: 34).

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3

BEING A FEMINIST IN CONTEMPORARY GREECE

Similarity and difference reconsidered

Jane K. Cowan

In this chapter I explore, from the perspective of ten years after, my own feminist-informed intervention in 1983-5 in the study of gender discourses and relations in contemporary Greece. I attempt to contextualise it within, and show how my approach developed as a response to, academic writings and debates of the 1970s and early 1980s surrounding the issues of women's powers in feminism, in anthropology generally and in the anthropology of modern Greece specifically. I reflect upon the implications of researching such issues in a society poised at a critical historical moment of social reform, when legal constructions of gender difference were undergoing radical transformations, and when feminism (in its Greek version, *feminismos*) was a part of the scene, as a congeries of ideologies, a contested cultural symbol and a social movement. I argue that the dual presence of feminism in my fieldwork – as a theoretical perspective that informed my enquiry, and as a symbol and social movement that constituted part of the field or object under investigation – unsettled the separations between 'self' and 'other' erected within both anthropological and feminist discourses, enabling a dialogue about the dynamic interplay between theory and data, research and researched, feminist self-knowledge and knowledge of gendered others.

An interrogation of feminist research on gender discourses in Greece offers, as well, a fresh look at the related and perpetually difficult issues of 'similarity' and 'difference'. Anthropology and feminism have both been centrally concerned with this dichotomy, and in both cases the emphasis on one term or the other has shifted historically. This is critically related to shifts in the social and political meanings of 'similarity' or 'difference' when speaking about the categories of 'humankind' or of 'women'. Until fairly