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Jean Ensminger

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PASTORAL WOMEN

FEMINIST CRITIQUES

by Jean Ensminger

Each of the other papers in this series deals with one theoretical perspective (Marxist, formalist, development, symbolic, regional, or multicausal) and its application to pastoral societies. I have undertaken the ambitious task of discussing the merits of each of these perspectives toward our understanding of pastoral women. My intent is not to produce a partisan position paper which argues that any one of these perspectives necessarily captures the essence of the woman's situation. Even if such an effort were deemed defensible in the abstract, I am not convinced that we have enough data on pastoral women to make such judgments at this time. Rather, I will critique the perspectives as a group from a variety of feminist orientations. In other words, I am addressing the more general question of how feminist scholars differ in their beliefs about the potential for adapting traditional theoretical perspectives to the study of women. Whether or not these perspectives can be applied to women depends not only upon our assessment of the relative worth of each perspective, but more importantly, upon our view of how women and men are different. The latter subject is one which feminists continue to debate at length.

This paper is in two parts. First I shall discuss three feminist orientations and their implications for the successful application of traditional theoretical perspectives to the study of women. Finally, assuming the most moderate of these orientations, I shall illustrate briefly how development, Marxist, formalist, and regional approaches can be combined in a "multicausal" analysis of Galole Orma women of Kenya.

Three Feminist Orientations

The Biological Approach

Arguably the most radical and controversial orientation in feminist criticism is that which posits biological differences between women and men as the foundation for variation in mental processes and imagery. Among literary critics this orientation is most associated with the French concept of écriture féminine. Their view is that "women's writing proceeds from the body, that our sexual differentiation is also our source" (Burke 1978:851, cited in Showalter 1982:18). According to these critics, if women were to express themselves naturally, the female body would be "imprinted" (Cixous 1976) in female language, text and art.

Carried to its extreme, proponents of this perspective characterize men's nature as "phallic--solipsistic, aggressive, excessively rational," while women's nature is praised for being "other-oriented, empathetic, multiimaginative" (Jones 1981:255). In short, those subscribing to the écriture feminine orientation, far from denying or even minimizing the biological differences between men and women, call for a "celebration" which attempts to "maintain" (Jones 1981:255) women's distinctive nature.

Although proponents of the theoretical perspective above would probably allow for more mediation of the environment between biology and social behavior, there are parallels between this position and the sociobiological perspective within anthropology (see Hrdy 1981 and Barash 1977), which also looks to biological explanations for social behavior. From such a position follows logically the view that only entirely new theories based upon women's biological differentiation can advance our understanding of female culture. Such theorists would maintain that the traditional orientations such as Marxism, formalism, and development, can not uncover the essence of male/female differences, which rests in biology.

The idea that there are biological explanations for differences in male/female behaviors such as thought processes is unsettling to many authors (Haraway 1981, Jones 1981, and Showalter 1982:17). Some attack this perspective by questioning to what extent "biology is destiny" (Shields 1982), and others by disputing the direction of causality between biology and behavior (see Lowe 1983). Showalter (1982:17) summarizes the fears of those who view the renewed orientation toward biological determinism with some trepidation,

Simply to invoke anatomy risks a return to the crude essentialism, the phallic and ovarian theories of art, that oppressed women in the past. Victorian physicians believed that women's physiological functions diverted about twenty percent of their creative energy from brain activity. Victorian anthropologists believed that the frontal lobes of the male brain were heavier and more developed than female lobes and thus that women were inferior in intelligence.

The Cultural Approach

Members of another school of feminist criticism also hold that men and women have different cultures, but as a result of socialization, not biology. This perspective, also widely employed by feminist literary critics (see in particular Showalter 1982), is parallel to the work of anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener (1975). The Ardeners propose the idea of a woman's model of the world distinct from, but overlapping the male-oriented dominant model. The Ardeners argue not only

for a separate woman's model, but attempt to account for the inability of women or others from "subdominant" constituencies to articulate their model. This perspective is summarized below by Shirley Ardener (1975:xii).

The implications are that a society may be dominated or overdetermined by the model (or models) generated by one dominant group within the system. This dominant model may impede the free expression of alternative models of their world which subdominant groups may possess, and perhaps may even inhibit the very generation of such models. Groups dominated in this sense find it necessary to structure their world through the model (or models) of the dominant group, transforming their own models as best they can in terms of the received ones...As a result, the latter might be relatively more 'inarticulate' when expressing themselves through the idiom of the dominant group, and silent on matters of special concern to them for which no accommodation has been made in it.

According to this theory there may be considerable overlap between the dominant and subdominant models (for which in the context of this paper one can read male and female). To the extent that these models overlap, I believe that the Ardener's would agree that the traditional theoretical perspectives enumerated above could as adequately illuminate the position of women as they can that of men. However, how do we determine to what extent men's and women's models overlap, and to the extent that they do not, what methods do we use to discover the women's model? If as the Ardener's suggest, women's articulation is blocked by the need to communicate through the foreign, but dominant model, this may not be an easy undertaking. For this reason the Ardener's turn to the study of ritual, myth, and the arts, as domains where the women's model has flourished in a purer state. This theory would certainly make a strong case for the use of a symbolic approach, at least at the initial stages of investigation while we are still trying to identify the outlines of women's worldview.

Those who adhere to this orientation would find the use of more traditional theoretical perspectives enlightening only to the extent that we ascertain an overlap between women's values and culture and those of men, whose interests are generally reflected in the more traditional theoretical perspectives. Perhaps only after a symbolic analysis has been carried out can we determine the validity of each of the other approaches in explaining women's culture. In other words, while feminists who accept the idea of a separate "female culture" may agree that "formalist" models are good at predicting maximization behavior, maximization may not be deemed to be a female concern. Similarly, while Marxist models may provide the best approach to the study of hierarchy, hierarchy may be a specifically male worldview. Similar arguments could be leveled against

"development" approaches aimed at increasing productivity and the study of markets, often the focus of "regional" analyses. The "multicausal" approach would seem in this case to be equally as useful to the analysis of men's or women's culture in that it does not target specific variables.

A Moderate Approach

The last feminist position to be considered here is a more moderate one which would allow that traditional "male" models can be adapted to the study of women as long as they are reworked to rid them of their male bias. Such an alternative will surely come as a comfort to many theoreticians (who after all have a vested interest in salvaging at least part of their expertise). Among the feminists who subscribe to this stance are de Beauvoir (1980) and other contributors to Marks and Courtivron (1980). These authors do not see the need to invent new theoretical approaches for the study of women, as they do not believe in a separate women's culture. De Beauvoir (1980:149) summarizes this perspective nicely, and details her differences with the cultural orientation discussed immediately above.

I don't believe that when women have won equality they will develop specifically feminine values. The fact is that culture, civilization, and universal values have been made by men because they were the ones who represented universality. When the proletariat rejected the bourgeoisie as a dominant class, they did not reject the entire bourgeois heritage, and in the same way, women, when they have won equality with men, will have to make use of some of the tools created by men. It is true that in creating universal values--I would call mathematical science a universal value, for example--men have very often given them a specifically masculine, male, virile character and have confused the two in a very subtle, sly way. It becomes a matter of separating the two, of getting rid of the contamination.

In a different passage, de Beauvoir (1980:153) speaks more directly to the first position discussed above, associated with those who believe in a biological determinist model of male/female difference.

...it would be an error to ... think that the feminine body gives you a new vision of the world...

The eternal feminine is a lie, because nature plays an infinitesimal role in the development of a human being. We are social beings. Because I do not think that woman is naturally inferior to man, I do not think either that she is

naturally superior to him.

In the remainder of this paper I shall deal exclusively with this last orientation. How might we adapt theoretical perspectives designed for the most part by men, toward male concerns, to the study of pastoral women? I focus the rest of this paper on this feminist orientation for two reasons. First, the data just do not exist at this point which would allow us to address the idea of a "female" pastoral culture, were one inclined toward that perspective. As I indicated above, those of the symbolic orientation, such as Galaty (this volume), may hold the key to enlightening us on this issue. Second, I am inclined toward the position outlined by de Beauvoir above, and it is this perspective which I have employed in my analysis of economic and political change among Galole Orma women. I do believe that traditional perspectives can tell us something about women's position in pastoral societies, and that they address issues of concern to women. The biggest failure to date in my mind is not the inability of these perspectives to account for women, but the failure on the part of researchers to employ them toward that end. In my own research I have not relied exclusively upon one theoretical paradigm. I am committed to what Salzman (this volume) has labelled the "synthetic" or "multicausal" approach. As a result, I have employed some aspect of each of the following perspectives in my study of pastoral women: Marxist, development, formalist, and regional. My work on the changing status of Orma women has demonstrated very clearly to me that each of these perspectives is enhanced in combination with the others. In the next section I share a few of my own findings gleaned from the use of these theoretical models toward the study of Galole Orma women.

The Case Study

The Galole Orma are Islamic pastoralists dependent primarily upon cattle. They inhabit Tana River District in northeastern Kenya, between the Kamba and Somali. At the time of my fieldwork there (1978 to 1981) roughly forty percent of the population was sedentary and heavily integrated into the market economy, while sixty percent were nomadic and more dependent upon subsistence production. This cross-sectional differentiation, together with some longitudinal data, provided the basis for much of my analysis of economic and political change among Galole women.

While the heuristic of dichotomizing nomadic and sedentary settlement patterns is used in the remaining analysis, I recognize that these strategies form a continuum, with habitual distance from market center correlating closely with dependence upon the market. Sedentarization and involvement in the market economy go hand in hand. With sedentarization milk yields fall drastically due to overgrazing around settlements and because more stock are kept away from the village in cattle camps to

ensure their health and survival. Consequently, sedentarization demands that householders shift from subsistence milk to commercial beef production. This process has in turn set in motion a series of effects which have markedly affected women.

While development experts have diligently made efforts to increase the productivity of pastoral production systems by converting them from subsistence milk to commercial beef production, little attention has been given to the effects of this transition upon women (see for example Sandford 1983 and Simpson and Evangelou 1984; for an exception see Horowitz 1981). As is the case with the Orma, women are the owners of the milk and men are the owners of most of the livestock in many pastoral societies. The transition to commercial beef production, therefore, threatens the primary source of capital for women in pastoral societies.

For the Orma beef production is incompatible with subsistence milk production. Those who engage most in beef production live in settled villages which are sufficiently overgrazed that they can support only limited numbers of livestock, and even then the cattle produce approximately half the milk of those kept away from the village. While the sedentary villages are the best places to gain access to information about traders and prices, the bulk of the livestock are kept in remote cattle camps where they are completely inaccessible for household consumption or conversion to ghee for sale by the women. Milk production has also suffered because the Orma have changed the breed composition of their herds to favor animals which put on weight quickly in the wet season (thus ensuring a better price at market), over those which produce the most milk or have high resistance to drought (see Ensminger 1984a). As exchange and sale of milk are the primary avenues of accumulation for women, the decline in milk production has drastically altered women's economic position vis a vis that of men.

The increased marketing of livestock has also in many cases had a negative impact upon women's ownership of livestock. Galole women receive a few livestock in the form of dowry, indirect dowry (see Goody and Tambiah 1973), and gifts. Prior to the marketing of livestock it was conceivable that a women's holdings would grow over time to appreciable numbers. Today, however, women in those households which produce for the market complain that their stock are some of the very first to be sold, and as they have few in number at any time they are frequently completely wiped out with little hope of ever having the nucleus of a breeding herd.

Marxist scholars from Engels (1972) to Leacock (1978) have emphasized the relationship between the development of the state and class stratification, and the decline in women's status. Longitudinal data on the Orma appear to indicate very clearly

that market integration has led to growing inequality in the distribution of wealth among households (Ensminger 1984a), Engels and Leacock would predict, therefore, that such an increase in stratification would be associated with a decline in women's status. If we measure women's status only in terms of control over the means of production, then their theory appears to be supported. The data presented above do indicate that women's control of the means of production relative to men's has suffered as a result of the advent of large-scale livestock marketing.

Formalist anthropologists have written in detail about the manner in which pastoralists maximize in the absence of markets (see in particular Schneider 1981). Frequently such behavior takes the form of herd maximization maintained through a series of stock associate relationships with other herders. Such stock friendships are on the decline among market-oriented Galole herdsmen. While the Galole talk fondly of having many different types of relationships in living memory, few practice them to any significant extent today. For many, the marketing of livestock seems to have interfered with this practice. The problem may be that households need more immediate access to their livestock, or that the security and insurance aspects of such practices are no longer as necessary. Whatever the reason for the decline of investment in these social relationships, I suggest that we consider the effect of this change upon the position of women. To the extent that stock associateships involved affines, women were the crucial link in these relationships and the decline in this practice may have significantly affected the position of women, most especially their role in inter-household and inter-village affairs.

The reorganization of household production to satisfy market incentives has also had some interesting repercussions upon the division of labor. As more and more livestock move out to the cattle camps they move out of women's control, as only young men of approximately 15 to 29 live in the cattle camps. Increasingly, therefore, one finds that women are less involved in direct production, and more oriented around the domestic sphere, much as Draper (1975) documented for the recently settled !Kung. While all women are responsible for the building and repair of their houses, sedentary women choose to build larger and more numerous houses, adding considerably to the amount of time spent in their upkeep. Elsewhere (Ensminger 1984b) I have estimated that sedentary women use sixty percent more firewood than nomads, and this, together with the increased distance walked in procurement, increases gathering time by an estimated 1300 percent. Time spent fetching water also increases, due both to the greater distances travelled and the larger quantities demanded by the diet. Because sedentary subsistence is based less on milk and more on purchased grain and tea, sedentary women spend far longer in food preparation than do nomadic women.

While precise time allocation data from nomadic women are not yet available, I do have data on the time spent in domestic

activities for sedentary women. These data are broken down by wealth, and indicate some considerable differences within the sedentary sector. Wealthy sedentary women spend far more time in domestic activities than do poorer women because they have larger numbers of dependents and also because their homes are the focal points in the village for visiting and for entertaining travellers. The sedentary villages are the centers of market and political activity, and the outside traders and nomads who frequent them must be fed and sheltered. The wealthy women who can afford such entertaining bear the brunt of this extra work in the form of additional cooking, serving, fetching of water and firewood, and even the need of an extra house to serve as guesthouse and kitchen.

A survey of time allocation which I conducted from November 1979 to August 1980 clearly documented this trend. Among the poorest forty percent of the survey households, 902 observations of women between the ages of 7 and 44 revealed that such women spend on average 5.3 hours per day in all of the domestic tasks listed above. Among the richest 30 percent of the survey households, over 1500 observations of women in the same age bracket revealed that they spend 7.0 hours per day in domestic activities, or a difference of 32 percent.

Rosaldo (1974) and Reiter (1975) have attributed much of the decline in women's economic status to their confinement in the domestic sphere, away from where public policy is formed. In a related argument, Sacks (1974 and 1979) attributes the fall in women's status that accompanied the development of class stratification to women's exclusion from "social labor," which she defines (1974:212) to "include any work done (singly or as part of a group) for use or appropriation by someone of another household." She maintains that women must contribute to "social labor" in order to be "social adults" and thus have a say in decision making. The data presented above, indicating a considerable decline in work outside of the home for Galole women who sedentarize, may therefore be indicative of a loss of status.

Given the data and theory presented above, it would appear that sedentary women today have lost much status in relation to men as a consequence of market integration. However, I would maintain that we can not really understand the changes going on among Orma women by resorting to monocausal explanations such as those presented above. There are many interaction effects at work which complicate the situation. I believe that it is not possible to generalize to all Galole women about the effects of any of the changes discussed above. In order to make meaningful statements about women's situation we need to consider the effects of development and formalist behavior through a lens which combines both Marxist attention to class stratification and regional analysis which raises the unit of analysis beyond the exclusively "sedentary" or "nomadic" community to the larger political and economic system of which the Orma are a part.

Most of the differentiation to which I am referring exists along two dimensions, between more and less market-oriented women, and within those groups between wealthy and poor women. By analyzing the nomadic and sedentary villages as part of one system we are struck by the change in the balance of power which has recently shifted from a more autonomous, egalitarian organization of villages, to a regional system with power and marketing centralized in one sedentary village. Proximity to the center of decision-making is essential to having an effect on policy. Galole nomads are consistently the victims of policies decided for them by the sedentarists, for example: the forcing of children to go to school, requirements that they travel in groups of no fewer than ten households, and restrictions on their access to grazing around sedentary communities. When one considers the effect of this differentiation upon women, one finds that for nomadic women factors such as lack of direct access to market (they must usually send their goods with men), and lack of access to information (available only in the market centers), severely constrain their ability to be effective politically and economically. This differentiation in many cases overrides the effect of wealth differences within the community. In fact, with respect to access to information, one could argue that sedentary women have an advantage over nomadic men.

While the increase in domestic work, especially by wealthy sedentary women, was associated above with a decline in their status, one ought not overlook the fact that to a certain extent the public forum has moved into their houses, where much socializing and information sharing takes place among elite men and women. Thus, while they are burdened with the extra duties necessitated by entertainment, they also reap the rewards of privileged access to a great deal of information. In this sense they may be in a more advantageous position than even poor sedentary males.

Elite sedentary women also achieve some access to male information networks through their mature sons. Wealthy sedentary women are particularly influential in keeping their sons between the ages of 15 and 29 at home, rather than in the cattle camps. By so doing they have the advantage of a political and economic ally close by. Through their sons, whose loyalty is more to them than to the father, women are able to learn about discussions at the Mosque to which they do not have access, dealings with the chief, and economic information about cattle trading. Such information is crucial if women are to exercise economic and political decision-making, such as veto power over the sale of certain stock. They are far more effective in exerting their will if they are able to take action before being presented with a fait accompli.

Wealthy households are able to keep their sons at home because large numbers of young men from poor families hire themselves out to herd for pay. On average, wealthy sedentary households employ 3 such men per household, or exactly one for

each male member in those households between the ages of 15 and 29 (see Ensminger 1984a). A regional analysis of these labor transactions indicates that only half of the young men employed in sedentary villages came from such villages. The rest come from nomadic Galole villages and even from other pastoral groups in Kenya (primarily the Boran). In this sense wealthy sedentary women are advancing their position, but at the expense of poorer women (both sedentary and nomadic) who are losing their sons to these households.

The data from this case study lead me to two conclusions. First, I think we must be careful about generalizing the effects of single variables unilaterally upon women. In most cases our analysis is best served by differentiating among women. Second, this effort to differentiate women's experiences is facilitated by use of a variety of theoretical perspectives in combination.

Conclusions

I have detailed here a few of the ways in which we can employ traditional theoretical perspectives to better understand the position of pastoral women. It is my view that our failure to use these tools toward this end stems not from the fact that these perspectives are incapable of enlightening us about women, but rather, that researchers have rarely made the effort to use them this way.

At the beginning of this paper I presented three feminist orientations. Proponents of these positions are in disagreement over the wisdom of the venture in which I have just engaged. Those subscribing to the biological determinist model of male/female differences would be unlikely to find the application of the theoretical perspectives discussed in the last section of this paper elucidating. From their perspective these efforts can at best be middle level attempts to track relationships at the behavioral level which could be better accounted for by biological theories of a higher order.

Those represented by the second perspective described above hold that women have a different model of the world, albeit one which overlaps with that of the more dominant male group. We can best understand their model through symbolic analysis of myth, ritual, and the arts, where it appears in its most unadulterated form. This position is not entirely inconsistent with the approach employed in this paper. To the extent that men's and women's models overlap, we can learn something about women by employing the Marxist, development, formalist and other approaches of the dominant group. Indeed, until data are forthcoming to elucidate such a gap between male and female models, we have little choice but to proceed with those theoretical tools which are at our disposal.

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Jean Ensminger
Dept. of Anthropology
Franklin & Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania
U.S.A. 17604