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Le contexte traditionnel est le fond sur lequel va apparaître le « changement » : cocon étroit de la parenté, matérialisé par la maison refermée sur son espace intérieur, lieu des femmes. Tâches ménagères et culinaires, soins aux enfants le matin, visites aux femmes de la parenté et du voisinage, *tafrîsa*, l’après-midi. Répétition monotone de cette routine quotidienne au fil de l’année, à peine interrompue par les fêtes et les événements majeurs de la vie familiale. Les hommes assurent les relations avec le monde extérieur. Entre monde masculin et monde féminin, partage radical qui domine toute la vie sociale et dont le voile est le symbole. Dans leur sphère propre, les femmes ont une « relative indépendance » ; fortes de leurs connivences, elles se jouent de ce monde masculin inaccessible dans les chants, les saynètes et les farces.


Bien que l’ouvrage recèle des notations justes, sa lecture crée un malaise : d’une part l’échantillon est mal choisi puisque, dans le monde islamique, ce sont justement les citadines — exclues de la production, à l’inverse des femmes rurales et des nomades — qui sont le plus assujettis à une vie recluse. Fallait-il, pour étudier le changement, choisir le cas des femmes urbaines ? Il semble, d’autre part, qu’un appareil conceptuel partiellement abandonné aujourd’hui entretienne les analyses au moment où précisément elles devraient être poursuivies. Le changement n’apparaît guère à la lecture de ces quatre chapitres et la « transition » est une notion vide de sens. On aurait souhaité que la description des rôles et l’analyse des fonctions que remplissent les femmes au sein du patrilignage fussent approfondies. On aurait eu alors quelque idée des ajustements possibles et probables de cette structure face à cet événement majeur qu’est la scolarisation des filles. Faute de cette analyse, les « forces modernes » qui doivent entraîner le changement et les rôles tenus par les citadines de San’a semblent bien minces.

**Colette Le Cour Grandmaison**


Annette Weiner has, through this analysis of the life cycles of Trobriand women and men—and their rights on each other as established through the giving of objects—, contributed importantly to the dialogue concerning exchange in non-state societies. She has argued that anthropologists need to broaden the context of primitive exchange to include cultural conceptions of time and space, since these conceptions shape people’s identification of spheres associated with women and men. ‘Trobrianders’ concern with transcendence of human mortality, coupled with their association of women with
cultural/lineage regeneration and boundless time, and men with generational and historical time, involves women in exchanges which have until now been treated as insignificant with regard to women's authority and autonomy.

Weiner examines productive and reproductive relations and activities in more than their economic, political and social aspects: in the Trobriands, as in other non-state societies, the cultural context of such relations has a comic/symbolic content which is not reducible to other meanings. She argues persuasively that one cannot penetrate the meanings of Trobriand exchange without investigating the connections between the society and the Trobriand perception of cosmic time. For these connections engage women simultaneously in the social and cosmic planes, through women's control of cultural regenesis and their control of women's wealth in mortuary distributions.

Her discussion of marriage exchanges focuses on the passage of both newly married people from peripheral involvement in formal exchange relations, to full participation in an adult network of reciprocal obligations among women, among men, and among women and men. Young women have considerable latitude in choosing a spouse, more autonomy than young men. But for both parties, marriage activates networks of male and female relatives who are integral in affirming and building each spouse's personal value. This affirmation is expressed in the display and distribution of gender-linked wealth objects. Weiner points out that the presentation of yams to the husband by men of the wife's lineage and her father's lineage—in her name—must be reciprocated: this reciprocity takes the form of a husband working and involving his network to help accumulate women's wealth (sometimes through the exchange of men's wealth) for his wife, in order that she may build her reputation at mortuary ceremonies (which do not ordinarily involve the husband's kin group).

Weiner's examination of exchange theory is fruitful and lucid. She considers self-interest as motivating the gift, at the same time as the exchange process constrains that self-interest in ways that do not entail exploitation or more than a temporary control of other humans and their resources (including labor). Exchange mediates autonomy and dependence in a way that does not threaten personal autonomy, while it temporarily resolves the opposition of self and other(s). Exchange influences others without rendering them dependent, since the donor is constrained in the act of giving. But magic, unlike exchange, seeks to curtail the other's personal autonomy, i.e. particular interests which may thwart one's own. As exchange manipulates social space, magic manipulates personal space. Malinowski's "unbridgeable gap" is here interpreted as not knowing what others' interests are. This aspect is intimately connected with kinship expectations, and Weiner urges that magic and conflicting interests be considered aspects of exchange.

Control, as she uses the term, is concerned with the circulation of goods, the labor of others, and the regeneration of humans through time—time considered in social and cosmic dimensions. Power is not restricted to politics; rather, there are articulating realms of control that are mutually significant and balanced through the exchange of wealth objects that symbolize those sources of power. In addition, Weiner stresses that women, through their exchanges of women's wealth objects, demonstrate socially their personal value and "womanness", as well as their control of cultural renewal and kin group continuity.

Women control immortality through their capacity—in mortuary ceremonies and in conception and childbirth—to recapture and recapitulate the lineage identity of their kin. Women do not control men's wealth; yet they enter into social/historical time, the male realm, through their structured competitive wealth distributions. Men, on
the other hand, cannot become involved in the woman-controlled ahistorical sphere, but are limited to the control of the circulation of goods and persons embedded in generational time and space. Men's objects can be lost, their control over objects and property is dependent upon memorizing genealogies and origin myths. Women's sphere of control cannot be lost, so there is no need for an ideology supporting control of their, and their lineage, identity and property. Men's exchange objects symbolize fertility, life, death, and rebirth; women control the cycle. Thus men build personal identity and renown through building networks and relationships with women and men which fragment upon death. Women's value is intrinsic and timeless, yet their value is involved socially with kin group identity and personal prestige as well.

But there are a few unresolved threads to this richly textured bundle. Weiner's focus on internal exchanges on the hamlet level could perhaps have been more fully integrated with men's kula exchanges. For instance, are the men's valuables which husbands sometimes exchange to obtain women's wealth for their wives ever kula valuables? Do any female relatives have rights in kula armshells or necklaces? The points of convergence of the internal and external exchange systems might be further developed.

Weiner has since elaborated on the effects of Western colonization on Trobriand women (M. Etienne & E. Leacock, eds., Women and Colonization, New York, Praeger/Bergin, 1980). But there remains the problem of considering all resources equally important in the face of pressures to privilege one or another. She glosses bodily secretions such as mother's milk, subsistence resources such as land, subsistence staples, magical spells, and goods considered valuables as "resources" which circulate and become the focus of reciprocal obligations. This integration of immaterial and material, subsistence and valuable substances does not help one understand, for instance, the tendency for chiefly groups in situations of state formation to increasingly reciprocate in non-material ways, while increasingly calling on local kin groups for material goods. There is a latent inequality in symbolic gender realms, which may body forth under certain circumstances (cf. I. Silverblatt, "Inca Women", Feminist Studies, 1978, 4 (3)). Weiner seems aware of this in her mention of institutional religions usurping mortality transcendence from women. The spheres of control may remain articulated in a complex manner, but they may also become hierarchic: on a hamlet level this may not be apparent.

Weiner's treatise is provocative, elegantly argued and a corrective to the frequently encountered Western obsession with creating solely political power regardless of cultural contexts of authority which are not associated with a political sphere. Weiner's thesis concerning authority and autonomy does not contradict that of Clastres (Society against the State, New York, Urizen Books, 1977), but whereas his analysis mentions, but never pursues, women's symbolic realms, Weiner has clarified the structuring of authority and autonomy through recognizing one of the sources of women's power, and how that sphere of control articulates with men's. The complex and fluid balance of the articulation of men's and women's spheres comes through the exchange of objects symbolizing the value of each donor and recipient, their one-ness and opposition, their mutual dependence and inviolate autonomy.

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