mean that there are no dimensions of “male dominance” to be found in such societies or that the elements of male dominance must be effects of exogenous forces. Instead, I tried to describe the sense in which such nonhegemonic elements can be important yet, as it were, contained, such that most areas of ordinary life apparently remained organized along other—egalitarian—lines. As for the question of “mythical male dominance,” although I find the phrase problematic (it suggests that cultural myths or ideologies are relatively trivial), I would nonetheless agree that one must always look at both the cultural ideology of “prestige” and the on-the-ground practices of “power.” At the same time, I have argued that one must look at the relationship between these “levels” so much for purposes of classification—indeed this will never yield satisfactory results—as for purposes of examining the historical dynamics of given cases over time. The analysis of the Hawaiian case is meant to illustrate these points. The case can be taken as a reasonable example of “mythical male dominance,” in the sense that the core of male superiority was lodged in the cultural “myth” that men were kapu/sacred and women were noa/profane. Yet the myth did not exist at some purely cultural or ideological level as opposed to some on-the-ground reality. Rather it was hegemonic, in the sense that a whole range of on-the-ground practices were predicated on its premises—it was part of, in Raymond Williams’s terms, a “whole lived social process” (1977:108–9). At the same time, as with instances of male dominance in the Andaman case, there were other areas of practice in which the hegemony did not prevail, in which women had significant amounts of power, authority, autonomy, and prestige. Moreover, I was able to show, as I was unable to do with the Andaman material, the ways in which these arenas of nonhegemonic practice became the bases of a significant challenge to the hegemony, in this case not only to “male dominance” but to the entire chiefly system.

I am inclined to think (or at least to hope) that this approach goes a long way toward resolving the by now rather sterile debates over the universality of male dominance. It allows us to be hard-headed about the realities of power and status at a given ethnographic moment yet at the same time to be analytically flexible about its long-term possibilities. Hegemonies are powerful, and our first job is to understand how they work. But hegemonies are not eternal. There will always be (for both better and worse) arenas of power and authority that lie outside the hegemony and that may serve as both images of and points of leverage for alternative arrangements.

So, Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?

The paper “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” was my first piece of feminist writing, and my second professional publication. It was written for the Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) collection, *Woman, Culture and Society*. The first three papers of the volume—Michelle Rosaldo’s, Nancy Chodorow’s, and mine—received a lot of attention, in good part because they all took the position that “male dominance” was universal, and then tried to offer some kind of (universal) explanation for that “fact.” The idea that male dominance was universal was (meant to be) somewhat shocking to many non-anthropologists, who seemed to think that although our own Western society is patriarchal, “the anthropologists” would have some little stock of more reassuring cases of matriarchy and egalitarianism to bring forth. The universal male dominance position also went up against the intellectual assumptions of a certain “Marxist” wing within anthropology, and thus played into some preexisting—and already quite heated—intellectual politics within the discipline.

“Is Female to Male . . .” has continued to have a life of its own, well into the present. On the one hand many people seemed to have found it persuasive. On the other hand it attracted—and still seems to attract—a great deal of very intense criticism. I do not know whether I would write the same paper today, but I assume not, both because the questions have changed (universals are of less compelling interest), and because what would seem sati-
factory as answers to those questions has changed (exposing an underlying logic seems less satisfying than exposing the politics of representation in play). Yet the paper's role as theoretical lightning rod over time remains interesting. To borrow a phrase from Lévi-Strauss, the paper has been good to think (Lévi-Strauss 1963b). A brief tour through some of the criticism of this paper will allow me then to reflect on some aspects of both feminism and anthropology as these have (and have not) evolved over the past twenty or so years.

Is Male Dominance Universal?

This seemingly simple question can be constructed in a variety of ways. It may take the form of an empirical question: let us look around the world and see if all cases have this quality. This, I think, is how Rosaldo, Chodorow, and I treated it initially. We looked around and the answer seemed to be yes.

But the first round of reactions, as noted above, came from people committed to a certain Marxist evolutionary paradigm, especially Eleanor Leacock (1981) working from Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Within this paradigm, early human societies were presumed to have been egalitarian, and factors of inequality were introduced in conjunction with the emergence of private property. Thus if examples of egalitarian cases in the contemporary world could not be found, it is not because, in their pristine state, they did not exist. It is because all societies have already been touched in one way or another by capitalism, and/or because anthropology has been theoretically blinded by capitalist culture.

Even granting Leacock's points about both capitalist penetration and bourgeois blinders, there were simply too many cases that could not be worked into Leacock's picture. Nonetheless at another level what she and others were saying is that recognizing egalitarianism is not as easy as it appears, that it is a matter of interpretation. I came to agree with this position, and in a recent paper ("Gender Hegemonies," this volume) I argued that if one looks at certain cases from a certain theoretical angle, they look more egalitarian than not. It is not that these societies lack traces of "male dominance," but the elements of "male dominance" are fragmentary—they are not woven into a hegemonic order, are not central to some larger and more coherent discourse of male superiority, and are not central to some larger network of male-only or male-superior practices.

My point, in other words, was to look again at some cultures at the relatively egalitarian end of the spectrum. I wanted to try to rethink the significance of culturally unmarked elements of "male dominance" in such cases, to try to get a better feel for their relative weight within a culture's gender patterns. I felt that my mistake earlier had been to play up such items too much, to seize upon any indicator of male superiority, female "pollution," etc., and label a whole culture "male dominant." Behind my rethinking are larger shifts in the conceptualization of "culture" in the field of anthropology as a whole, in the direction of seeing "cultures" as more disjunctive, contradictory, and inconsistent than I had been trained to think.3

The case I focused on was the Andaman Islanders, and I concluded that it was fair to view them as "egalitarian," despite the presence of certain items of special male privilege and authority. I argued that, since these items were not woven into a hegemonic order, they could not be treated as pervasively redefining the dominant egalitarianism. Interestingly enough, Jane Atkinson and Anna Tsing published papers at virtually the same time as "Gender Hegemonies," taking up similar kinds of materials in similar kinds of ways. Atkinson examined gender relations among the Wana of Central Sulawesi, and Tsing considered material from the Meratus of Kalimantan, both within Indonesia. Their cases are both very similar to the Andaman example I had discussed. In all three cases there is a lack of formal ideology about male superiority; in all three cases there are extensive patterns of gender equivalence and equality; in all three cases there is a tendency not to use gender as a conceptual or social organizational principle at all.4 Very few things are limited to men simply because they are men, or to women simply because they are women. But in both cases some people nonetheless come to occupy, and/or to create for themselves, positions of influence and authority, and those people tend predominantly to be men.

We three authors wind up in slightly different places with respect to the egalitarianism question, although this seems largely a function of the way each author posed the problem in the first place. My agenda had been to try to learn to "see egalitarianism"—to see how some kinds of de facto male dominance might remain isolated and, at a given moment in time at least, not basically challenge a prevailing egalitarianism in a culture. Atkinson and Tsing, on the other hand, were interested in seeing how male dominance gets produced and reproduced, largely in an unmarked way, in societies that represent themselves as basically egalitarian. Together, however, the papers convey a suggestion that you can call such societies "gender-egalitarian" if you want, and you would not exactly be wrong, but the egalitarianism is complex, inconsistent, and—to some extent—fragile.
Picturing the Emergence of Male Dominance

These papers also raise another point about the male dominance issue, one that was not much debated at the time of the publication of the Rosaldo and Lamphere volume, but that nonetheless seems to me important: how shall we imagine the process of the emergence of male dominance in human societies? Should we think of it as the product of male intentionality, some sort of "will to power" emerging from a "natural" aggressiveness? Or should we think of it—as I did in "Is Female to Male..."—as a kind of side effect, an unintended consequence of social arrangements designed for other purposes?

The cases just discussed show how tricky this question is. On the one hand they can be read as supporting my original contention. Whether we call them "egalitarian" or not, these cases show that certain kinds of male privilege emerge in a de facto way from certain relatively functionally defined arrangements. Men emerge as "leaders" and as figures of authority, vis-à-vis both women and other men, as a function of engaging in a variety of practices, only some of which are predicated on power, including trade, exchange, kinship networking, ritual participation, dispute resolution, and so forth. That is, male dominance does not in fact seem to arise from some aggressive "will to power," but from the fact that—as Simone de Beauvoir first suggested in 1949—men as it were lucked out: their domestic responsibilities can be construed as more episodic than those of women, and they are more free to travel, congregate, hang out, etc., and thus to do the work of "culture."

In a subsequent paper, Collier and Rosaldo criticized the functionality of this argument (1981; see also Rosaldo 1980). Although they did not argue that men "naturally" sought to dominate women, they nonetheless emphasized that male power relations, often grounded in violence and threats of violence, had to be at the heart of understanding gender inequality. In general I shifted over to a more political perspective in my own work as well. Yet I retained a certain commitment to the "functionalist" argument in the context of the nature/culture paper, that is, in the context of the origin-of-male-dominance story that is embedded in that paper. We seemed to have two choices: either to imagine that male dominance came about as, in Engels's famous phrase, "the world historical defeat of women" by men (1972), or alternatively that it came about as the unintended consequence of certain functional arrangements and other paths of least resistance.

SO, IS FEMALE TO MALE AS NATURE IS TO CULTURE?

I preferred the latter interpretation, in part because the will to power position presumed, even if it did not clearly declare, some kind of essentialized male aggression, and I thought essentialized characteristics were exactly what feminists (at least some of us) were trying to get away from. Yet it is clear from cross-cultural data (Said 1978, 1990) that issues of greater male physical size and strength, and perhaps greater male "aggressiveness" in some form, do matter in many cases, although in a wide variety of not entirely predictable ways. The issue haunts contemporary feminist politics as well, where one finds a fairly deep split between what I think of as the "body feminists," who focus on rape and other forms of violence against women (e.g., Brownmiller 1975; MacKinnon 1987), as against the more socially and culturally oriented thinkers and activists. I would more fully acknowledge today, then, the challenge to capture bodily issues in our understandings of gender asymmetry, but without essentializing either women or men.

Is Nature/Culture Universal?

The second bundle of arguments against "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" concerned its use of the nature/culture opposition to explain (universal) male dominance. Again there were several sets of issues here: Is the nature/culture opposition truly universal? Does it have more or less the same meanings cross-culturally? Does an alignment between gender on the one hand and nature/culture on the other in fact explain universal male dominance? And even if it does not, is there still some significant sense in which female is to male as nature is to culture?

Beneath these various questions, there seems to me to be one large question that is of continuing relevance today: in this era of poststructuralism, does it still make sense to talk about "structures," and if so what do we mean by them? In order to get to this question, I will first yield and set aside those parts of the argument in "Is Female to Male..." that now seem to me probably wrong, or at the least, not very useful. And then I will defend what still seems to me right, partly in the spirit of defending myself, but largely—hope—in the spirit of learning something from all this.

The biggest substantive "error" in the paper may be the main point, that is, the point that a linkage between female and male, race and culture "explains" male dominance, whether universal or not. Rather, an explanation of universal or near-universal male dominance seems to me largely explicable in ways just discussed: as a result of some complex interaction of functional arrangements, power dynamics, and bodily effects.
early review by Beverley Brown (1983) took the volume to task for this confusion, as did more recent essays by Valeri (1990), Hoskins (1990), and Peletz (1996). Simply finding an absence of terminological categories in a particular cultural case does not mean that the structure is not there; the structure is a patterning of relations that may exist without cultural labeling.6

But what shall we mean by structure? There have been many definitions of the term, and this is not the place to review the state of structural theory in general. Part of the problem, I think, was Lévi-Strauss's tendency to picture structures as binary oppositions,7 and also in fact—despite disclaimers—to picture them as sets of terms, words. My own way of thinking about structures, however, is to think of them as existential questions, even riddles, which humanity everywhere must face. Of these, one of the most central is how to think about the confrontation between humanity and nature, that is, between humanity and what happens without the agency, or without the voluntary and intentional agency, of man” (Mill 1874, quoted in Valeri 1990: 266), or between humanity and, in Marilyn Strathern's terms, those processes that proceed autonomously in the world, and “that limit the possible” of human action (quoted in Valeri 1990: 266).

Nature/culture in one or another specifically Western sense—as a “struggle” in which “man” tries to “dominate” nature, as a confrontation with a system that obeys “natural laws,” and so forth—is certainly not universal. Even the idea that “nature” and “culture” are two relatively distinct kinds of objects is probably not universal. But the problem of the relationship between what humanity can do, and that which sets limits upon those possibilities, must be a universal problem—to which of course the solutions will vary enormously, both cross-culturally and historically.

Now add gender into the equation. Gender difference, along with nature/culture, is a powerful question. And the gender relationship is always at least in part situated on one nature/culture border—the body. What I think tends to happen in most if not all cultures is that the two oppositions easily move into a relationship of mutual metaphorization; gender becomes a powerful language for talking about the great existential questions of nature and culture, while a language of nature and culture, when and if it is articulated, can become a powerful language for talking about gender, sexuality, and reproduction, not to mention power and helplessness, activity and passivity, and so forth. The particular articulations of the relationship will vary greatly across cultures, with surprising and unexpected shifts and
alignments. But the chances that the two sets of issues will be inter-connected in specific cultural and historical contexts still seem to me fairly high.

The chances seem to me high, further, although less so perhaps than the chance of sheer interconnection, that the relationship between the terms will be asymmetrical, and that both women and nature will be in some sense the more problematic categories. The logic that de Beauvoir first put her finger on—that men get to be in the business of trying to transcend species-being, while women, seen as mired in species-being, tend to drag men down—still seems to me enormously widespread, and hardly an invention of "Western culture." From a range of tribal societies with male-only rituals and practices that would be spoiled by women’s gaze, to so-called high religions, both Western and non-Western, that exclude women from their higher practices, the basic logic shows up. And it is a logic grounded in a particular construction of the relationship between nature and culture, the idea that culture must at least in part be about the transcendence of nature.

I think the final question for this paper is probably, “so what?” While I do think there are such things as structures in the sense just discussed, large existential questions that all human beings everywhere must cope with, I also think that the linkage between such structures and any set of social categories—like female/male—is a culturally and politically constructed phenomenon. From early on after the publication of “Is Female to Male . . . ” my interests lay much more in understanding the politics of the construction of such linkages, than in the static parallelism of the categories.

In conclusion, then, I must say first that it is very odd to have written what has evidently become a “classic”; I certainly did not set out to write one in advance. I and all the other authors in the two founding volumes of feminist anthropology—Woman, Culture and Society (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974) and Toward an Anthropology of Women (Reiter 1975)—benefited enormously from the fact that the feminist movement as a political movement had created a virtually ready-made audience for the books. And the argument in “Is Female to Male . . . ” written from the position of a young, white, middle-class female academic, trying to figure out how to live a life as an embodied woman while launching a career as a disembodied mind, evidently touched something in many others similarly positioned in that era.

Borderland Politics and Erotics

Gender and Sexuality in Himalayan Mountaineering

Introduction

The image of the “borderland” is a powerful presence in contemporary theory. Borderland thinking initially took shape within the theorizing of ethnic and minority studies, and emphasized the construction of complex, hybridized identities for those who must live within, yet are excluded from, the dominant cultural order (Anzaldua 1987; Behar 1993). In anthropology the idea of the borderland has been used particularly to rethink the object of anthropological study—to get away from the study of supposedly bounded and timeless “cultures,” and to attend instead to sites of social friction and cultural encounter where culture is no longer an inert object but something constantly under challenge and construction (R. Rosaldo 1989; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Davis 1994; Foley 1995).

Borderland work emphasizes the movements of, and the encounters between, people, images, and so forth across cultural and political spaces (e.g., Appadurai 1991; Chambers 1990; Clifford 1992; Hannerz 1992; Pratt 1992). While always potentially transnational, or even global, in scope, it is—ideally—at the same time local and ethnographic (e.g., Rouse 1991; Kearney 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1992), looking at real places and asking what kinds of things happen on the ground when people who started
was precisely through feminist scholarship that I came to move away from my earlier training and to try to work out, first on my own, and then through the discovery of the likes of Bourdieu et al., some kind of practice perspective.

4. For extensive discussions of power and practice, see Dirks, Eley, and Ortner 1994.

5. De Certeau is an apparent exception to this point. I do not deal with him much in this essay because, despite the title of his book (The Practice of Everyday Life), I do not see him as a theorist of practice in the broad sense defined by the work of Bourdieu, Giddens, and Sahlin. While I like his work, I see him largely as a “resistance” theorist, not particularly interested in the ways in which practice either reproduces or transforms enduring “structures.”

6. In his appendix titled “On the Wrath of Cook,” Sahlin focuses on the events surrounding the removal of a wooden fence from a temple compound by some of Cook’s sailors. Obeysekere uses sources that show that some Hawaiians were quite upset by this event and took it as sacrilegious, and Sahlin spends most of the appendix dismissing Obeysekere’s key sources. Aside from the fact that I found Sahlin’s discussion in this context relatively unpersuasive, it does not actually address the larger portrait of the growing “wrath of Cook” constructed by Obeysekere from other sources that Sahlin elsewhere treats as reliable.

7. The issue of gender in Grimm’s Fairy Tales is now the subject of a lively and growing body of literature. See Barzelai 1990, Zipes 1993, and especially Bottigheimer 1987.

8. In one version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the girl and her grandmother get up on the roof and successfully kill the wolf and turn him into sausage. In “The Seven Ravens,” the girl goes to seek her brothers, and finds and rescues them with great resourcefulness, virtually unassisted. In “Hansel and Gretel,” as noted, it is Gretel who kills the witch. In “The Robber Bridegroom,” the girl is helped by an old woman and between the two of them they bring about the execution of the robber and his band. And in “Fandevogel,” the girl actively and resourcefully saves her brother from a wicked old woman.

9. “Sweetheart Roland” is a variant of a tale called “Fandevogel.” Other variants in this pattern would include “The Twelve Brothers” and “The Six Swans” (variants of each other and of “The Seven Ravens”). All of these, the heroine sets out on a quest to rescue her brothers. But despite her good intentions, she causes her brothers damage as a result of her activities to save them, and goes through a seven-year period of complete silence and solemnity (including in one case making shirts for her brothers and in the other case simply spinning for seven years) before getting married at the end.

10. See Ahearn (1995) and Kratt (n.d.) on the negativity of male agency in a Nepalese and an African case respectively.

11. I cannot resist a footnote about what appears to be a cultural configuration often found among French intellectuals: an unshakable opposition to theoretical notions of intentionality and agency on the one hand, combined with a tendency toward extraordinary authorial agency on the other.

12. Geertz used the phrase “serious games” in “Blurred Genres” (1983: 23) as part of a discussion that overlaps in some ways with the one developed in this paper. One is reminded as well of his phrase “deep play” in the cockfight paper (1973).

13. Sahlin (1981) gets in trouble with Obeysekere for his “cosmological dramas,” although I did not in fact read him as Obeysekere did, as implying a rigid pre-scripting of life. I used a similar notion in High Religion (1989), which I called “cultural schemas.” But I also discussed in that context the variability of ways in which actors may hold, or be held by, such schemas (1989: 126–29).

14. I find the idea of narrative to be a very powerful intellectual tool, and have tentatively explored some of its theoretical implications in an unpublished paper (Ortner 1990b). Pieces of the discussion about the rupturing of agency in the present essay come from that paper, but the rest of it seemed too unworked out to be published.

15. My later work on Polynesian gender data indicated that the emergence of any kind of “stratification,” institutionalized inequality, was enough of a factor, and one did not need the full apparatus of the “state” to make the argument.

16. The original title was “Gender and Sexuality in Hierarchical Societies: The Case of Polynesia and Some Comparative Implications.”

17. Originally entitled “The Founding of the First Sherpa Nunnery, and the Problem of ‘Women’ as an Analytic Category.”

18. See for example Trinh T. Minh-ha’s demonization of “anthropology” (1989). Trinh’s discussion is unfortunately both excessive and out of date (her main target is Malinowski), but I cannot discuss it in any detail here.

Two: Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?

Preface 1996: In about 1971, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere sent out a note to a number of women anthropologists, inviting them to write something for a contemplated volume on—I’m not sure what they called it—(maybe) “the anthropology of women.” They also called a
meeting in one of their rooms at the next American Anthropological Association meetings, and I can still picture the scene—people sitting on beds and on the floor and standing around along the walls. And I said it sounds like a good idea, but I don’t know anything about women, and Shelly said, neither does anyone else. I can’t remember how the rest of the conversation unfolded but although I had been meaning to refuse I wound up agreeing. Shelly was very persuasive.

This paper was one part response to early feminists inside and outside of academia hunting for examples of “matriarchal” or “egalitarian” cultures; one part appropriation of the hot theory of the day, the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss; and one part personal meditation on the pitfalls of inhabiting a female body. It came together almost full-blown in my head, and most of it was written quite feverishly in one sitting.

The paper was first published in 1972 (Feminist Studies 1(2): 5–31) and then again in 1974 in the Rosaldo and Lamphere volume. Over time, it took on a life of its own, something that was at first gratifying, and subsequently both fascinating and problematic. I address some of the criticisms the paper has attracted in “So, Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” and “Gender Hegemonies” later in this volume.

Preface 1974: The first version of this paper was presented in October 1972 as a lecture in the course “Women: Myth and Reality” at Sarah Lawrence College. I received helpful comments from the students and from my co-teachers in the course: Joan Kelly Gadol, Eva Kolisch, and Gerda Lerner. A short account was delivered at the American Anthropological Association meetings in Toronto, November 1972. Meanwhile, I received excellent critical comments from Karen Blu, Robert Paul, Michelle Rosaldo, David Schneider, and Terence Turner, and the present version of the paper, in which the thrust of the argument has been rather significantly changed, was written in response to those comments. I, of course, retain responsibility for its final form. The paper is dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir, whose book The Second Sex (1953), first published in French in 1949, remains in my opinion the best single comprehensive understanding of “the woman problem.”

1. It is true of course that yin, the female principle, has a negative valence. Nonetheless, there is an absolute complementarity of yin and yang in Tàoism, a recognition that the world requires the equal operation and interaction of both principles for its survival.

2. Some anthropologists might consider this type of evidence (social-structural arrangements that exclude women, explicitly or de facto, from certain groups, roles, or statuses) to be a subtype of the second type of evi-
that women's status *improved* with a shift from rank to class, something that would not have been predicted by many theories of women's status. The whole question would have to be investigated much more closely on a comparative basis, but it illustrates well the complexities of the relationship that may obtain between gender asymmetry and other forms of asymmetry.

24. Another theoretically predicted correlate of the relative equality of


2. There was another line of argument against the universal male dominance position, represented in part by Sanday (1981). The various positions are discussed relatively fully in "Gender Hegemonies" (this volume).

3. When I was in graduate school at the University of Chicago, for exam-