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WEAVING, WRITING AND GENDER

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Tamang symbols of weaving and writing draw upon the positions of the sexes in a patrilineal descent system where cross-cousin marriage is practised. As gender symbols, weaving and writing figure in (1) the representation of the ethnic and religious solidarity of Tamang in Nepal; (2) the construction of counterpoised theories of Tamang culture and society derived from the opposing perspectives of the sexes; and (3) the contemplation of the relation between mutually contradictory, but necessary, gender-marked views of the world. The unique power of gender lies both in its ability to represent things simultaneously as the same and different and in its operation in the world(s) of the sexes.

For the Tamang, weaving and writing are not only technical skills but dense symbols of gender. They are gender symbols not only because they tell the Tamang about the separate roles of the sexes, but because they are about what transpires between the sexes as each defines the other. Two opposing conceptions of the world emerge as Tamang men and women view one another; gender symbolises both the opposition and the reflexivity of these world views.

Tamang symbols of weaving and writing draw upon the differences between the positions of the sexes in a social system where fixed patrilocalities and patrilineal clans interact through bilateral cross-cousin marriage. Women's weaving is uniquely associated with the flux and irregularities of marital exchange; men's writing with the fixity and preordination of localised clan identities. As gender symbols, weaving and writing figure, first, in the representation of ethnic and religious solidarity of the Tamang as well as in the construction of indigenous gender-marked theories of culture and society. Next, in so far as weaving and writing are related to the relative positions of the sexes in Tamang life, they display the world as it is presumed to be perceived from the stereotypic vantages of the sexes in social reality. Finally, as elements in a symbolic system, weaving and writing interrelate, through gender, two mutually contradictory but necessary conceptions of the world order.

This investigation of Tamang gender both underscores the systemic nature of symbols and explores their relation to social reality. The analysis of gender has three moments: first, uncovering the logic of the social interdependence or distinctiveness of the sexes; second, interpreting the abstract cultural symbols of gender, and, third, interrelating sex-linked realities with gender-marked symbols.

In the first instance, analysis must focus upon the social, economic and political realities of the sexes as people in their historical context. Pivotal issues

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in this social sexual analysis revolve around differentiating, for example, the various bases for men's and women's political authority, their relative positions in the division of labour and property, and in systems of kinship and marriage. This helps document the place of sexual stratification (or equality) within the wider political economy of any given society, and, potentially, provides a basis for both cross-cultural and historical comparisons among societies.

To analyse gender *per se* is to focus upon the meaningfulness of sex at a different level, that of culture. Gender represents a complex of ideas, beliefs, abstractions, images, imaginings and even fantasies—not people. No component in a gender system stands alone. As with all systems of meaning, each part defines all the other parts in a whole that is greater than their sum. Sexual difference, on the other hand, operates in social reality where real people make real choices—who will do what work; who will eat what, or first, or with whom; and so forth. At least in terms of the time and space they occupy, such sexed choices are mutually exclusive. In the domain of gender, not only do all possibilities exist simultaneously, but each necessarily defines the other.

But, finally, in so far as gender is a system of beliefs about sex, its ideology is uniquely about people. The analysis of gender ultimately interrelates a system of beliefs to a society of believers, ideas about maleness and femaleness, or about feminine and masculine, or idealised men and women, to real people, women and men. However, this interconnexion is neither transparent nor simple. This article looks at gender as a system of beliefs about the world as the Tamang imagine it, including, and perhaps building upon, but not restricted to, the positions of the sexes in their real worlds.

Weaving: the social fabric

Weaving, especially the weaving of women's skirts, is a vital symbol of the Tamang women's world, marking Tamang women in several important ways. It identifies them immediately and visibly as Tamang, an ethnic group living in the mid valleys of the Himalayas in north central Nepal.[1] In the western Tamang regions, women are still active weavers of distinctive blue and red skirts (*syama*), brilliant plaid overgarments (*gya* and *barku*) and patterned red turbans (*tokoro*). Wearing this cloth, Tamang women contrast themselves sharply with other Nepalese women both from other Tibetan Buddhist groups, who wear dark jumpers with bright striped aprons, as well as those from Hindu groups, who wear the Indian *sari*. Among those Hindu groups, most of whom dwell in the lowlands of Nepal, to be Tamang carries little prestige. Hindus call them 'eaters-of-dead-cows' or 'Tibetan,' thereby disparaging the Tamang with whom they share no cultural, religious or linguistic affinity (Holmberg 1980: 33–4; March 1979: 51–5). Among the Tamang of the region themselves, this weaving stands increasingly as a show of ethnic, religious and perhaps female pride.

In addition, weaving marks women within the community of Tamang women themselves. Like the Guajiro (Watson-Franke 1974), Tamang women evaluate one another in terms of their weaving: a skilled weaver is thought of as a clever, hard-working, admirable woman (and vice versa). Such character

judgements are initially based on the technical demands of weaving, but a good weaver must not only exhibit skills in technique and design, she must also, and more importantly, know how to distribute her textiles so as to tie her into the widest possible web of social relations. Women's weaving, above all, marks Tamang social exchanges (see also Hockings 1979; Murra 1962). Among Tamang villages and clans, the exchange of drink, food and cloth—more or less in that order—is critical to all important social intercourse. Less permanent, less intimate or more tentative relations may involve the exchange only of drink and food, but the thread of all enduring social ties is traced in textiles. Cloth moves within and reaffirms the most reliable reciprocal networks of affection and mutual obligation known to the Tamang. It is truly the social fabric itself.

When young men and women court, for example, they engage in night-long competitive songfests, during which marriages and trysts are arranged as elaborate poetic repartees are sung back and forth. Early in the evening, young men parade displaying objects they have made—bamboo boxes coveted by women for storing personal valuables and long bamboo combs that women use as beaters in their upright looms. The young women show off their textile crafts, especially turbans and sashes for the men. By the end of a night of singing, the young men's boxes and combs have been secreted inside the robes and satchels of the best women singers, while the women's textiles have come to hang like trophies from the umbrellas of successful male singers.

As couples mature and marry (and many Tamang marriages follow such nights of singing and exchanging), further exchanges of cloth legitimate their union. All Tamang marriages occur between cross cousins, which is to say that everyone marries the child of someone called father's sister or mother's brother. Such a marriage system establishes alternating exchanges that continue through generations. A system of cross-cousin marriage is never in perfect equilibrium but resembles a pendulum: the momentum of prior marriages operates as a powerful incentive to continue to exchange. The exchange of cloth at marriage locates bride and groom in a proper set of reciprocating affinal relations. Even if there had been irregularities in the kinship relations between the families of the new couple before marriage, the exchange of cloth is part of the ritual to rectify and re-weave them, creating a proper a network of cross-cousins, fathers' sisters and mothers' brothers.

After marriage, women move to live with their husbands' families, but, throughout married life, maintain contact with their natal kin through weaving. Weaving sustains vital social and emotional bonds between kinswomen. Mothers, daughters and sisters continue to weave with and for one another throughout their lives. Clan-sisters, too, maintain their solidarity through weaving together, singing together at the songfests where cloth and comb beaters for weaving are exchanged, and by exchanging gifts of cloth. Even women's ritual friendships are marked by the exchange of textiles.

But the most crucial relation a woman must maintain is that with her brother(s). The tie between Tamang cross-sex siblings is the balance point from which all sociality hangs. In the relation between Tamang sister and brother are counterpoised the forces of patrilineality, which dictate clan membership, and those of cross-cousinhood, which determine potential marital relations. The

bond between cross-sex siblings simultaneously stems from shared descent and foreshadows subsequent marriages. In many social systems, a clear shift from sibling to spouse occurs over the life cycle, but for the Tamang, looking forward to one's duties as a parent requires a look back to the obligations between siblings. Although gifts of many kinds serve to reinforce the bond between sisters and brothers, the most highly symbolic gifts are textile. It is with great pride that sisters recount weaving, and brothers recall receiving, the turbans and other gifts of cloth exchanged 'out of affection' between the two. Such gifts may be offered whenever a sister 'remembers' her favourite brother(s), but at certain ritually prescribed times her textile gifts become charged with a complex gender symbology.

There are two central moments at which sisters (re)constitute relations with their brothers through gifts of ritually significant cloth. One is at the brother's son's first haircutting. Gifts of cloth, as well as the haircutting itself, delimit an inner circle of important non-lineal kin for the boy: his mother's brother cuts his hair, while his father's sister provides the new turban and other cloth to dress him 'like a king.' In this way, the ceremony that marks a boy's first social persona emphasises the ties between cross-sex siblings. As well, at the large mortuary feasts that are the most prominent feature of Tamang ritual life, kinswomen trace their ties to the deceased—whether man or woman—with textile symbols. Sisters are among the chief mourners: to mark their relation to the deceased, they provide important pieces of cloth both to adorn the death altar and for the effigy of the deceased; to disentangle themselves from the dead, they unbraid their hair, wear old cloth and weep, chanting songs of mourning.

Textiles are equally essential to Tamang efforts to reach the supernatural. Along with food, drink, flowers and song, cloth is given as an obligation to divinities to protect, or at least not harm, their supplicants. All altars are draped with cloth—to attract, please and clothe the divinities, in hopes that relations thus established with the supernatural realm will simulate human ones. Textile gifts attempt to make divinities reciprocate with affection and material goods, to protect the prosperity of the givers, in much the same way that humans weave social relations of reciprocal obligation among themselves.

When Gang Jyungmo, a mythic female figure for the Tamang,[2] went to seek her father, an important Buddhist recluse and mystic in Tibet, she was told by other female monastics that she would have to take the proper offerings. In addition to needing beer, flowers and songs, she was told she would have to weave strips of cloth to take as a particular gift to her father. The ritual weaving and giving of cloth, which is identified as female in Tamang practice, is probably also generically related to the Tibetan and Sherpa Buddhist custom of offering white cloth scarves on all important social and ritual occasions.

Shamanic divinities and lesser malevolent supernatural forces are connected to human beings through cloth as well. The spirit of a witch, for example, can move from the witch to someone else in a gift of cloth, or even by the wearing of clothing borrowed from the witch. *Tsen*—divinities central to Tamang shamanic practice—are transmitted from one woman to another along with the inheritance of silver jewellery or fine cloth (Holmberg 1983; March 1979).

Weaving, however, is most important in mythic accounts that underscore the

problematics of human connexions to the divine. Gang Jyungmo's story tells of the origin of traditional religious offerings, but it is primarily a tale of spiritual frustration: as she sat weaving the cloth to take to her father, she ate a hailstone and became pregnant. The other female monastics did not believe that it was the hailstone which made her pregnant, turned her out in disgrace, and told her father, who disowned her. Gang Jyungmo wandered for many years before building a large religious memorial in the Kathmandu Valley. Eventually, Gang Jyungmo's true religious worth surfaced, as she was instrumental in the killing of the great enemy of Tibetan Buddhism, Gyalbo Lungdar. But her spiritual value was not recognised in her lifetime: weaving is associated in the myths with the moment of her break with organised religion, her separation from her father, and the cloud of illegitimate pregnancy, all of which hampered her religious efforts.

A woman sits weaving at a similar juncture in the shamanic myths of the Tsen. In mythic times, it is said, when human beings and divinities were not yet differentiated, a 'Tsen' woman and a 'human' man were married. The husband went hunting with his wife's brother, who, when some game was killed, became nostalgic about his sister and said that part of the kill should be offered respectfully to her. That human-divine marriage, with all its concomitant exchanges and reciprocal obligations, was wrecked, however, when the human husband failed to see the significance of the offerings linking his wife to her brother. When the husband returned home, his wife (the Tsen) was sitting at a crossroads weaving. The husband threw the meat that her brother had sent down into her lap disrespectfully, breaking her outstretched leg. 'Why did you break my leg?!' she demanded, declaring that she would no longer enter into any marital exchange with human beings. Since that time, the Tsen have been divinities, whom people may no longer approach with confidence in affinal reciprocity. When the human husband broke her leg, the Tsen wife got up from her weaving and departed, leaving humankind forever to attempt to reweave, in ritual, the thread of perduring exchange that had been unravelled.

Weaving and cloth are thus pivotal symbols[3] for the Tamang. Weaving asserts the importance of exchange in the Tamang conception of themselves as a moral society. The association of women with weaving, in both myth and contemporary life, emphasises the women's perspective on Tamang society, which underscores the importance of exchange. But it also recognises difficulties inherent in the weaving of reciprocal obligations and, above all, the possibility of imbalance and rupture.

Writing: the original script

Weaving is often juxtaposed with another rich symbol in Tamang life: writing. One of the most eloquent statements of the analogy between writing and weaving is found in a song called the 'Story of the Loom', said to have originated in a disagreement between a brother and a sister over the relative importance of weaving and writing. The brother was said to have been learning to write or become a lama, a specialist in the Buddhist texts; the sister was learning to weave.

Each verse of their song begins with a refrain placing their encounter in mythic times, when everything was first taking its place in the Buddhist cycle of rebirths. The central lines of each verse use metaphors based upon the implements of weaving and writing to make the claims and counterclaims of sister and brother for the relative merits of their respective activities. Thus, for example, as the brother lauded his pen, the sister sang about her *chhusying*, the device used to trickle water over a piece of weaving in progress so that the weft can be beaten in tightly. Or, as the brother sang about the walking stick used by lamas on begging rounds or on pilgrimage, the sister is said to have pointed out the sticks which served as her lease and hettle rods. Or, again, when his verse glorified his ritual knife, she is said to have retorted by displaying her beater—a large piece of wood, shaped like a sword, with an inlaid strip of iron along the beating edge.

The analogy between knives or swords and beaters is drawn again in rituals (today rarely performed) celebrating the histories of two Tamang clans. Those clans are said to have originated in incestuous marriages, in recognition of which, once a year, men are to brandish swords and dance wildly through the village (as lamas actually dance at major rituals and death observances). Those men are supposed to shout sexual insults at their clan sisters (as they would never do in ordinary life), while the sisters are to counter with obscenities of their own, brandishing beaters and rods from their looms. Similar analogies recur throughout Tamang myth and song. Gang Jyungmo learned to weave in a monastery, the place where most male novitiates learn to write.

Although growing numbers of Tamang are becoming literate in Nepali, the writing which matters to this discussion is done in Tibetan script. These are the letters in which the sacred Buddhist texts of the Tamang are written. As Holmberg (1980) has demonstrated, this writing is an important symbol to the Tamang. The meanings of writing intersect with those of weaving in several significant ways. Like weaving, lamaic writing initially marks the ethnic distinctiveness and Buddhist solidarity of the Tamang in the officially Hindu state of Nepal. Moreover, as weaving is a women's speciality tied to a particular vision of the 'fabric' of Tamang society, so writing is associated with men and inscribes a different vision, or male 'writ,' for society.

Tamang frequently refer to themselves as *Lama*, using the term for a specialist in the Buddhist texts as a general term for Tamang ethnic group identity. To declare oneself 'Lama' is to claim text, to assert ethnic affiliation through text. Text is an authority recognised by both Tamang and Hindu traditions. By identifying themselves with their texts and textual specialists, Tamang liken themselves to Hindus, and their lamas to brahmins, an analogy which implies a relation of greater parity between the two groups than the hierarchical, caste-based, Hindu interpretation admits (Holmberg 1980: 44–50).

Text, like cloth, not only marks interethnic relations for the Tamang; it also singles out certain men for special prestige. Lamas are men who learn and practice the letters of the Buddhist texts. These are special skills which require considerable effort on the part of both teacher to transmit and student to learn (Holmberg 1980: 178–183). The teacher, the *gyeken* or *lopon*, is particularly honoured; it is only by working with a teacher that a student gains access to the

texts of Buddhism. Succeeding generations of teachers and students create tutorial lineages.[5]

Although these tutorial lineages are distinct from the social patrilineages[6] of the Tamang, the two share not only a genealogical quality, but are sometimes directly identified with one another; moreover, both are thought of as male. The maleness of lineage and lama appears repeatedly in song and ritual recitation by contrast with female referents. Thus, a prototypic female honorific, *lhi shengpi dinjen phamo*, 'the female [divine] being who makes the body and bears the pollution of giving birth to it', is compared to the *syim dembi hrangki tsawai lama*, 'the lama who does the mortuary recitations for one's own ancestors'. In other instances, *dinjen phamo*, thought by all Tamang to be the most respectful way to refer to 'one's own biological mother', is contrasted with *dinjen tsawai lama*, described as 'the lama who did the purification rituals after a birth in one's line', and is more generally thought to indicate that line of lamas who have always performed the rituals required by one's own ancestral line. In some recitations, one's own mother, *dinjen phamo*, is juxtaposed simply to *dinjen tsaw*, 'the line of one's own birth'. The femaleness of birth-giving mothers in these poetic oppositions highlights the maleness of both lamas and lineages. A specific contrast between female symbols and the maleness of lamaic tutorial lines appears in the two parallel references to *lhi shengpi kale ama*, the 'Kale mother [a female spirit responsible for making babies] who makes the body', and the *sem khyepi dorje lopon*, (loosely) the 'thunderbolt teacher who makes the mind'. *Dorje lopon* is the primordial teacher of teachers and original fount of institutionalised Buddhist knowledge. In so far as the Tamang know these mothers of the body to be unequivocally female, they evoke a contrastive maleness in their understanding of lineages, spiritual or tutorial lines, and Buddhist teaching.

If Tamang lamas learn and practise Buddhist letters, they do not read them; they recite them. As Snellgrove found in far western Nepal, not only do lamas 'learn by rote . . . but very few indeed can ever dissociate the meanings from the phrases they have learned and construe them with different words' (1961: 119). 'Tamang lamas . . . do not "read" texts in ways immediately recognisable to us . . . texts have a predetermined value in Tamang culture. The texts are not strictly sources of Buddhism. Texts are metaphorically appropriated in Tamang culture as a total representation of the power of the written word as the truth and determinancy' (Holmberg 1980: 88). For writing to be read in our populist sense, it must have a popular voice; it must speak as people speak. Among the Tamang, lamaic writing does not transcribe common speech; it reiterates divine oaths. Order in the world was determined by the word of the Buddhas, bound by their primordial oaths (*damla*). There can be no 'new' lamaic writing. Among Tamang lamas today, the only 'writing' which occurs is the limited reprinting of drawings and texts from carved woodblocks.

Lamaic Buddhist writing and the texts of Tamang Buddhism do not simply record how the world was created by divine oath. The divine speech inscribed in Tamang text cannot be read mundanely; its very recitation reutters the original sacred oaths and reconstitutes the original oath-bound order. The recitation of sacred text declares that divine word (see also Tambiah 1968) will continue to be reflected in reality, that text and the world are bound to one another by the

determinate power of the Buddhas. Both the reality represented in text as well as the relation between text and the reiteration of that reality are thus distinctive. Lamaic writing is a fixed and durable representation of a determinate and enduring order. Not only do Tamang Buddhist texts declare that order in the world was predetermined by the Buddha-oaths binding everything into its proper place, but the texts dictate a particular stance toward deviations from that oath-bound order; this stance is clearly different from the redressing of order by balancing various textile and marital exchanges. When chaos of any kind disrupts the textual vision of male order, it is rectified by reinscribing the letters and words of the original fixed order.

The lamas who recite text presume to recreate thereby a world of relationships unaltered through time. According to Tamang lamaic tradition, if women marry into their husbands' houses, but brothers continue to have obligations to their sisters, it is because such relations were ordained by the Buddha; they are thought to have been written in the texts. The problematics of husbands and wives, of sisters and brothers, have no place in these determinate texts. Imbalance in this view, if not impossible, is nevertheless an unforgivable deviation from the text, a lapsing of the balanced relations established by Buddha-word. If everyone knew the letters and the words of the sacred lines, such a view asserts, there should be no confusion; when there is confusion, however, the lamas' recitations operate as an imperative to reinstate the original script.

Just as weaving is in many ways enacted from within a woman's perspective on the flux in the Tamang social world, the fixity of writing and the lamaic perspective is like a man's. The world of Tamang men has a continuity that women do not know directly. Men are born, mature, marry, father children and die within a single physical and social milieu. Ties between men define the patriclan and patrilocale which constitute the tangible origins and linear immortality of Tamang society. The rights and obligations of patrilineal and local affiliation are presumed to be unambiguous, preordained, and eternal.

Women, who leave-but-do-not-leave as sisters and who enter-but-do-not-enter as wives, disrupt the determinate continuity of localities and patrilines with their demands for affinal exchanges. When the human husband of the Tsen myth failed to see the importance of his wife's brother's offering, he was looking with the male eyes of a husband and father in his own house; female vision must continue to balance ties between brother and sister. The perspective of text is male and represents, for the Tamang, a fixed and predictable world order, transmitted through lines of lamas much in the way their experience of social fixity is transmitted in lines of people traced through men.

And gender: the paradox of conflicting views and mutual regards

Tamang constantly juxtapose the many metaphors of weaving with metaphors of writing. Both sets of symbols grow from and stand for a rich complex of relationships, social as well as metaphysical. Yet if text and textile are important and analogous symbols, there are nevertheless several significant different levels to the play of gender within that analogy. An understanding of the distinctive

characteristics of gender symbolism is vital to the unfolding of those different levels. Externally, weaving and writing mark (1) Tamang ethnic relations with other groups. Internally, gender not only defines (2) the Tamang sexes separately, but ultimately provides (3) a double perspective on relations between the sexes as they are envisioned within a world order cleaved by contraries.

Engendering ethnicity: gender between groups. Weaving and lamaic writing consolidate symbols of the Tamang as a distinct ethnic and religious society. In situations of interethnic interaction, both can be construed as signs of the Tamang order itself; they stand for the integrity of that which is Tamang as it faces that which is not Tamang.

The gender of these markers is significant (Balzer 1981). Tamang society and culture, when seen as populated by men, lineages of patriclans, Buddhist lamas and writing, display a distinctive ethnic texture. To be Tamang is, here, to be born into a particular patriclan in a particular area. The lines of one's fathers trace an identity through time which is continuous, geographically bounded and self-contained. Lamaic writing inscribes a similar religious continuity. Both portray Tamang society as if it were eternally sufficient unto itself. This perspective on Tamang solidarity draws heavily upon the shared male symbolism of both text and patrilineality. To be 'Tamang,' here, is to have sacred text, to have lamas, to be born among the 'Lama' clans and people. This conception of ethnic unity is symbolically male and puts the continuity of Tamang society in writing; the ordained and literate lineages of Tamang lamas parallel and uphold the patrilines and patrilocales of socially continuous society. Patriclans, like lamaic text, symbolically perdure, ever reconstituting the social script by which generations of Tamang trace their lives.

Textile, on the other hand, is the more elusive social thread. Like women, it moves between groups, and symbolically ties people together, but is always in danger of becoming frayed; the Tamang social fabric must be rewoven with the marriages of each succeeding generation. A female perspective on the texture of Tamang ethnicity is different from the male. The possibility for determinate linear continuity among women is broken up by the requirements of human marriage, but the capacity for a female social ideology is not thereby shattered. Instead, it is transformed: it is precisely in the dynamics of exchange that the potentiality of femaleness among the Tamang lies. Women, textile, marriage and exchange not only structure an alternate female interpretation of Tamang society internally, they also suggest the possibility of ties beyond the boundary patrilines of Tamang clans, warning all the while of the problematics of such exchanges. Thus weaving, wearing and exchanging their cloth, Tamang women, at this first level of analysis, generate the female perspective from which their society looks necessarily, but perilously, outward.

Signs of separate sexes: gender between women and men. The gender symbolism at play in writing and weaving also highlights the significance of the sexes within Tamang society. Married women, who move from their parents' houses to their husbands', are seen (by men) as exchanged like their weaving; women see themselves as permanently in-between. Their intermediate social position, like

the mediating symbolism of their weaving, embodies considerable potential power, if also some instability (March 1979). Men, staying in their home birthplaces throughout their lives, stand (for both men and women) like texts, for a more determinate linear continuity, undeniably authoritative, but inevitably limited by its very fixity.

Understanding Tamang gender symbolism in this way underscores the parallel and separate worlds of the sexes as people and of their gender metaphors. Women's weaving, in this light, fabricates a world in which people and divinities are entangled in a web of reciprocal exchange obligations very much like those which arise because of the way in which women move between affines. The accumulated momentum of those reciprocal obligations ensures that the cycles of exchange will persist. Disorder in the world described by weaving, like the rupture in women's experience of affinal relations, is seen to be caused by a break of imbalance in the patterns of exchange. Textiles, then, are part of a Tamang vision of both order and disorder which is analogous to the patterning of women's place in the social order.

This vision is quite different from that of text as associated with men. Text, for the Tamang, records the divine oaths ordaining the moral world order. Those textual oaths, like the conceptual maleness of patrilines and -locales, represent the determinate linear continuity of the world order; disorder in the world that is inscribed in writing, like that of the clans and places, is seen as a straying from the preordained line of text (and local descent). The textile vision redresses order by reestablishing balanced exchange, while the same is accomplished within the textual vision by reiterating the word. The symmetry of metaphors here appears to create an interesting string of analogies. In so far as:

(1) Tamang women's social positions: the problematics of affinal and other exchange cycles:: femaleness: textile; and
(2) Tamang men's social positions: the determinate continuity of local descent and other lineages:: maleness: text; then
(3) the femaleness of both textile and women: the maleness of both men and text:: the problematic cycles of exchange: lines of determinate continuity.

This sequence might be represented by summary analogies:

(*) women: men:: weaving: writing; or
(*) female: male:: reciprocal exchange: linear continuity.

Such analogies, however, neither dichotomise the sexes completely nor insist upon a special relation between women and the symbols of femaleness, on the one hand, and between men and the symbols of maleness on the other. Gender symbols are not derived from the sexes separately. Nor are male gender symbols only meaningful to men or female ones to women. An analysis that depends upon defining differences between the sexes as inherent is inadequate because it exaggerates the concomitant exclusivity of their worlds and experiences. It sees gender not only as resulting from difference, but also as causing further sexual segregation, in so far as female symbols would have to speak first from, and then to, women's experience, and male ones, derived initially from men's experience, would come to have meaning primarily to the men sharing those experiences. Gender cannot be reduced to two such parallel lists; gender

meanings grow from a system of presumed relations. Perhaps when gender operates as sets of simple signs, it informs each of the sexes it signifies, but at another level, as elements in an interrelated system of meanings, gender symbols can never refer exclusively to only one part of the whole field. The femaleness of one set of symbols can never be 'of' women intrinsically; gender-marking occurs only as women are contemplated in relation to men. And, of course, vice versa.

Tamang differentiate women from men through a stylised social logic which emphasises women who move at marriage but maintain relations in both the patricommunity of their birth and the one where they marry, while men stay in one place. Men are aware of their continuity only through awareness of the mobility of women; women experience marriage both as rupture—because they know that their brothers stay behind—and as exchange—because they carry gifts, affection and themselves across patrilines. Maleness, then, becomes distinctive as men's relations to women are defined; men see their reflection in female eyes. Femaleness, conversely and simultaneously, emerges as the cultural gaze shifts in the opposite direction.

Weaving, as we have seen, stands for the femaleness of exchange and its vagaries, especially in marriage; writing, for the maleness of determinate continuity, especially in patrilineal and local descent. When we speak of the presumed different meanings of weaving and writing for the Tamang, however, we do not implicate the literal or lexical separateness of the sexes and their experiences. Gender, in the interactions of Tamang women and men, of weaving and writing, marks different views of the world, but that difference is not one of sex-segregated substance.

Neither male nor female gender-marked vision stems from any immanent or separate meanings within their sex-specific worlds; rather, each is based upon different views of the transcendent relations between the meaningful parts of their worlds. The Tamang social world, for both women and men, contains patrilineal clan cluster members ('parents' and 'siblings') as well as affines ('spouses,' 'potential spouses' and 'in-laws'). There is no lexical confusion about the terms for these social relations among either men or women. The elements of their shared social world—in this case, the social figures of mothers, mothers-in-law, fathers, sisters, spouses and so forth, as well as the cultural images of weaving and writing—remain essentially the same whether spoken of by either women or men and whether placed in the metaphors of either gender. What differs, and at times seriously jeopardises mutual comprehension between the sexes, is that text 'inscribes', while textile 'fabricates', significantly different conceptions of the principle or tension which unites those elements into a coherent system. Gender, in short, is neither just 'of' or 'for' the sexes, it is 'between' them.

Symbols of gender: gender between world views. A gender-marked universe does not exclusively, nor even primarily, consist in sex-specific, parallel but distinct worlds. Gender is not only about mutually exclusive sexes nor is it tied to the segregated world view of the sexes. A theoretical framework based upon separatist genders reduces interactions between the sexes to complicated

choreography, and resorts to the poorly defined notion of complementarity to explain the relation between gender symbols.

Gender is not, as can be seen through this Tamang ethnography, the additive sum of its various parts. Gender involves a distinctive interplay between its elements—not simply a combination of the segregated meaningfulness of the sexes, it is about the relations between them and the wider significance of that structural relation. The gender of world views is relational in two senses: (1) it is about different perceptions of the logic of human relations; and (2) it is about the relation between those different perceptions. In first approaching Tamang gender symbols, it may be conceptually helpful to posit two parallel, sex-specific, gender-marked universes: one, in which writing inscribes a male writ for a world order in which social relations traced through men are determinate and linear, and the other, in which weaving fabricates a female design for the place of women balancing exchanges. But ultimately neither male writ nor female weaving belongs exclusively to either sex. Female and male symbols cannot be exclusive to one sex or the other both because of the interrelatedness and communicativeness of the sexes in social life and because of the systemic nature of gender symbolism itself.

The gender of weaving and writing is significant to Tamang not (or not only) because women weave and men write, nor even because writing and weaving promote two very different theories of society and culture. Through its female symbolism, Tamang textile asserts that the logic, interest and strength of human relations lies in exchange, that impetus for the future of Tamang society originates in the momentum of past exchanges, and that this distinctively female view of Tamang continuity is somewhat precarious. The male gender logic of lamaic writing depends upon a very different theory of order, one in which the perpetuation of life is determined by faithful adherence to the lines of its transmission, by the precise repetition of preordained relationships. Particular lines may be broken, just as specific texts can be lost, without disrupting the integrity of those which remain or challenging the male principle of lineal permanence. These two gender-marked perspectives are primarily distinguished by the way in which each locates the sources of permanence and change in the world. Each postulates a different tension or force binding the universe together; each postulates a different source of disruption or disorder. In short, each constructs a different gender metaphor for the social and cosmological glue, suggesting different avenues for repair when things come unstuck.

Ultimately, the true elegance of the system is that each gender-marked vision of the logic of human relations requires (inscribes or enfolds) the other. In the Tamang case, while it is reasonable to assert that metaphors of weaving emphasise a female perspective on social and ritual exchange, and that writing elaborates a male view of lineage and continuity, it would be wrong to insist that either women or men see their world, or act in it, exclusively from the perspective of their sex-appropriate metaphors. Both men and women participate in marriage exchanges; both women and men retain lifelong membership in their patrilineages and clans. Both weaving and writing, in other words, have profound meaning for both sexes.

To say that metaphors are gender-marked, even to show that they reflect the perspectives of one sex or another, then, is not necessarily to declare that only the male view speaks to or for men alone, or that the female is the exclusive prerogative of women. Social and ritual life show a systematic and measured alternation between the two gender-marked theories of social relations, for both sexes. Neither ideology is independently sufficient; each mutually necessitates and evokes the other.

Thus, for example, at a boy's first ritual hair-cutting, where gifts of fabric admit the boy to the ongoing affinal exchanges which will culminate in his marriage, the cloth to be offered must be sanctified before it can be given. That sanctification depends upon the recitation of the 'history of cloth', a mythic tale of its origin and meaning. Women, according to that 'history', were bound by the oaths of the Buddhas to weave and give cloth. The text of this tale must be recited at most ritual occasions when cloth is given, no matter who actually gives the cloth. In this, and other such texts, an attempt is made to fix women's weaving into a determinant world order where exchanges of cloth were bound by Buddha-word.

Yet if women's weaving is at times fixed, lamaic fixity is often woven. Perhaps the best demonstrations of this are found in two devices used by lamas. First, lamas use thread constructions commonly known as 'God's eyes'. In addition to reciting their texts to reestablish the proper order, lamas use these string webs or snares to trap errant divinities and bind them back into their proper place in the world. Lamas also make various charms to protect their clients from dog bite, disease, demons. These charms consist of a piece of paper on which has been stamped the appropriate text. This paper is then folded into a little square and carefully bound in multi-coloured threads. The power of these two devices lies in the interdependent meanings of gender, weaving and writing. It is not just the binding of textual oaths that makes them effective, but also the binding of threads; nor, alternatively, is it just the weaving of cloth that unites the world, but also the weaving of words.

The special problem of gender as symbolic of the relation between women and men here becomes a question of understanding how two substantially different views of the world can be simultaneously underscored and entwined in a larger world symbology as well as understanding why gender is a particularly powerful way of both relating and separating those different perspectives.

Gender symbolism is quintessentially mythic: it poses the coexistence of multiple possibilities. Tamang gender symbology composes its scenarios in stereo. The male eye sees the stylised linearity and determinacy of a world inscribed in text; the female eye, the fluidity of exchanges woven through textile: the perspective of gender in Tamang culture acquires true depth by combining the two vantages, much as, in naturalistic sight, the ability to perceive multidimensionality, depth and parallax movement depends upon binocular or stereoscopic vision. The power of gender lies in its ability to portray the social and cosmological landscape from two different viewpoints.

The special paradox of gender is more complex: gender not only provides multiple perspectives on the world, but those perspectives are interconnected, contradictory and simultaneous. Not only does each gender-marked symbol

among the Tamang depend upon and define a different theory of the sociological and cosmological relatedness of the world, but there is a special relation between gender logics. For the Tamang, lineal continuity and affinal exchange are not two random metaphysical principles. They stem from the interdependence of patriliny and cross-cousinship, that is, from the interdependence of local clan membership and birth, on the one hand, and of marriage and death, on the other. Tamang society and culture is not formed by the simple addition of these two principles, but rather by their interplay over time.

Similarly, their total gender logic cannot be imagined as a simple complementary combination of two points of view. Male writing and female weaving do not only parallel one another as alternate interpretations of social and cosmological relatedness; each is inherently dependent upon the other for its very construction. However the two perspectives engendered by weaving and writing are described, a logical relation underlying their contrast is consistently highlighted: continuity *v.* rupture, fixity *v.* mobility, determinate *v.* oscillating, self-sufficient *v.* synergetic, singular *v.* multiple, uniaxial *v.* symmetrical, homogeneous *v.* heterogeneous, preordained at birth *v.* worked out through marriage, permanent *v.* (ex)changed, and so forth. A definable relation—that of negation, opposition, inversion, or some other type of contradiction—exists between the two halves of all these propositions. Each inverts, denies, opposes, contradicts, or simply doubts, what the other asserts; each is a transformation of the other in the truest sense.

The parts of these gender pairs are conceptually related because each pair grapples with the same issue, while each half of each pair postulates a mutually contradictory interpretation of that issue.[7] Thus, for example, on the Tamang issue of locality, several paired possibilities are gender-marked: (he) stays in a fixed place, (she) moves to others; (he) has a commitment to one local line, (she) has ties in two; (male personal) space is continuous and unified; (female personal) space is discontinuous and multiple. Around any given cultural abstraction of interest to the Tamang—such as lineality, locality, reciprocity or marriage—and around many phenomena of interest in other cultural systems as well—such as periodicity, number, mutability, continuance or symmetry —gender admits the simultaneous representation of mutually necessary but contradictory interpretations.

One final feature of gender symbolism is, in some ways, most distinctive of its symbolic structure. This is its capacity to represent contradictory vantages simultaneously. In this simultaneity of contradictory possibilities lies what might be called the antinomy of gender. On any of the Tamang propositions about themselves and their world which have been examined here, gender simultaneously asserts that one interpretation is true, and then, that another, plainly and categorically opposed to the first, is also true. The totality of gender declares that the world both is, and is not, as it seems from either gender-marked perspective, or, that the world cannot be fully described within the logic of either. In many respects, gender is caught, as are all cultural constructions, in the irreconcilability of representation and reality. Behind all cultural meanings lurks not just the possibility, but at some level the certain knowledge, that all culture is at the same time not true, and not false, but representation (symbol, metaphor,

icon, sign, signifier). Any substitute for reality that itself acquires reality is problematic in this way.

Gender as a symbolic system specifically represents this very problematic or paradox, indeed, antinomy: to represent things that are, and are not, the same; things that might be the same if they were not interpreted from opposing perspectives; perspectives that emerge as opposed because they arise as women and men consider the gender logic of each other's position; men and women who, as they consider one another, confront the many ways in which they are, and are not, the same.

NOTES

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[1] Tamang came originally from Tibet, practise 'Tibetan' Buddhism, and speak a Tibeto-Burman language. All references to the 'Tamang' in this article refer exclusively to the 'Western Tamang,' living to the north and west of the Kathmandu valley. The orthography of Tamang terms used in this article is not rigorous, but intended to facilitate ready pronounciation by English speakers.

[2] Gang Jyungmo also figures, but somewhat differently, in classical Tibetan tradition.

[3] I am not here concerned with addressing the question of whether or not these are either 'dominant' (Turner 1967) or 'key symbols' (Ortner 1973). Nor am I at present concerned with the emotional impact of symbols (Lévi-Strauss 1967 [1963]; March 1982). Instead of emphasising their centrality or affect in this article, I hope here to show how these symbols work in a particular ethnographic circumstance to help Tamang conceptualise important points of both social and cultural tension.

[4] The contrast I wish to draw between the gender-marking of weaving and writing depends upon Holmberg's prior work on the meaning of Tamang sacred writing within the total Tamang religious complex, and, especially upon his characterisation of the 'lamaic vantage' embodied in Buddhist writing as 'moral, just, and determinate, truthful and good' (1980: 236).

[5] In the institutionalised monastic traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, some lineages achieve the status of a recognised line of incarnations. In the process of incarnation, not only spiritual training is passed on from one generation of monastics to another, but, as well, the actual individual essence and religious merit of one exceptional monastic finds rebirth in another to create historically identifiable and institutionally localised lines of religious succession.

[6] According to the Tamang, no father can be the lamaic teacher of his own biological son.

[7] Holmberg (1980) found a similar relation between lamaic Buddhism and shamanism in Tamang religion. Those familiar with his work will recognise many similarities between my analysis here and the language he developed to discuss Tamang religious complexity.

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