

## Before and After Gender : Launch event 5 May 2016

This is quite an extraordinary occasion for me. Here is another of HAU's surprises for the world of anthropology, and I must begin by thanking Giovanni da Col for his enthusiasm, and among his team in particular Sean Dowdy who has been a magnificent press editor. And on this side of the pond, Gavin Stevenson.

But the reason behind this extraordinary occasion I owe entirely to Sarah Franklin, who thought there was some future possibility in something long buried in the past for me. On top of that, I am not used to being the subject of book launches: this is the first time anything I've been associated with was launched in this manner! The reason for that obscure phrase -- anything I've been associated with -- is because I feel it is in this present guise as much her book as mine.

However, if I were to go back to the original manuscript -- that I do owe also to someone else: Jean la Fontaine and her work on the RAI [Royal Anthropological Institute] Council at an early period of discussion on bringing the teaching of anthropology into schools. She wanted to set up a book series on accessible, everyday topics. She invited me to produce a text on 'men and women'. That was far sighted! A year or two on from my PhD, I was in Canberra and working in Papua New Guinea, and then living in Port Moresby (1973-4).

It was not produced in a vacuum -- there was a huge swirl of writing at the time and on the horizon, notably Shirley Ardener's *Perceiving women*, which came out in 1975, containing among other things Edwin Ardener's highly prescient 'Belief and the problem of women', in which Jean had also had a hand: it was she who originally elicited his article for another collection. What we have here is basically *first draft*, and I am in no doubt that under Jean's eye it would have changed for the better. But in coming back to it now, a kind of historicism has prevented me from doing anything but a light edit, since it would have been impossible to keep hindsight at bay.

In brief, the idea was that an anthropological topic of general interest should be illuminated by readings from diverse sources, drawing on what had already been written. So the plan was to reproduce significant passages from the literature, especially anthropology -- hence the substantial sections, which are meant to be part of the text and read continuously with it. The argument proceeds in large part by demonstration, that is, by laying out diverse materials and

different points of view with an invitation to the reader to make up his or her own mind. The method was thus consonant with the anthropological aim of providing something of a context for what is being described, enough to enable understanding and appreciation of the materials themselves, regardless of how they are being deployed in the author's argument.

Maybe the time lag since the writing of the book actually enhances the utility of lengthy extracts. They will remind the reader of – or introduce the reader to – materials that were available for discussion in the early years of second-wave feminism. They will also give a flavour of the language of the 1970s, and of the kinds of issue in the air and how they were dealt with, less through authorial interpretation than through direct engagement. A kind of immersion in the debate as it was at that stage. Hopefully they will thus extend a participatory welcome to readers, who are invited to read the extracts for themselves and not only in terms of how the author uses them.

Finally, although Ann Oakley is in the references, and the term gender is used occasionally (at beginning, towards the end [where it becomes a focus]), the argument is written very largely in the pre-gender language of 'sexual stereotypes', 'male-female relations', 'interaction between men and women', etc, in which 'the sexes', and 'male and female', were doing much of the job which at that very moment was being taken over by 'gender'.

Let me come to what is also extraordinary about the occasion: to have this book find a *context* in the flourishing Reproductive Sociology Research Group here at Cambridge and in the Goldsmith Centre for Feminist Research. They make it not only an isolated bit from the past – but something 'found' once again in the midst of feminist concerns.