

Appendix: *the organization of labour*

It seems to me that an analysis of the position of women in gardening should also take cognizance of the practical organization of labour, and in so doing address the question of whether certain symbolic associations linked with men and women influence the sexual divisions that occur. I believe that such an approach might prevent an oversimplified view of woman's role and significance based solely on the amount of time or energy women, as compared with men, spend in this pursuit and the amount of explicit recognition woman receives.

Female-male work ratio

The Trobriand ethnographic data have a number of inconsistencies and omissions with regard to time apportioned to different tasks. Cleaning the plot is more particularly women's work (though it may be performed by joint labour); placing boundary sticks and fencing is men's work; together they cover a period of 30 days during which women and men work concurrently, the actual time spent by the sexes on their respective activities being unknown.¹ Weeding (female), garden protection and related activities (male) occur concurrently, though the time devoted to weeding appears to be longer than that spent on garden protection.² Harvesting of *taytu* is a joint wife-husband activity although each sex concentrates on its own share of work. There is no clear indication as to the importance of the harvest of large yams.³ The total time registered for male and female activities discussed possibly exceeds the overall period spent in gardening. The reckoning presented in Table I is therefore unfortunately approximate through a lack of

Table 1

TIME IN DAYS SPENT BY MEN AND WOMEN IN GARDENING *TAYTU*⁴

TYPE OF WORK ⁵	MALES	FEMALES	JOINT
(First Phase)			
Cutting boundary belt & path into plot	1	—	—
Cutting scrub	30	—	—
Cleaning plot	—	30 ?	—
Placing boundary sticks, fencing	30 ?	—	—
Planting	60	—	—
(Second Phase)			
Weeding	—	75	—
Garden protection, erecting supports, thinning tubers	45	—	—
Harvesting large yams & taro	—	—	30±
Major harvest, construction of arbour, display of <i>taytu</i>	—	—	60
TOTAL DAYS:	166 ?	105 ?	90±

accurate day-to-day information, but some indication of the relative proportions is possible.

Trobriand males appear to spend most time at work in the gardens⁶ and predominate in the first phase of the season, females being actively employed in the second phase. A considerable amount of work is accomplished jointly by husband and wife, especially at harvest.

The breakdown of figures is as follows:

Males work alone	3 months
Females work alone	1 month
Males and females work concurrently but at separate tasks ..	2½ months
Joint work (males and females)	3 months
Total work time in the fields per annum	9½ months

Austen with a four-day working week postulates a 17 week gardening period for the Trobrianders.⁷ His figures however omit weeding and thinning as well as *taytu* harvesting, which account for approximately another 23 weeks. If these are added to his work schedule a total approximating to the above estimate of 9½ months is reached. It is worth noting that with this type of work-year the Trobriand Islanders have sufficient food and time available for rest and leisure activities.

Malinowski's description of horticultural ritual leads to an estimated total of 10½ days spent by men in the activities concerned,⁸ compared with 2½ in which women actively participate.⁹ Most of the magic is performed by the garden magician alone or with his acolytes.¹⁰

To a certain extent the division of labour in gardening is dependent on the "heaviness" of tasks – i.e. the amount of energy and strength required in a short period. Patterns of labour in Oceania are frequently explained on the basis of this criterion.¹¹ Trobriand men fell trees, clear the heavy growth and build the fences, whereas women are involved in the steady, more tedious but less physically exacting work of weeding.¹² Such an apportionment could be attributed to bodily strength.¹³

It would be incorrect, however, to approach the question of the division of labour in terms of a purely western pattern, i.e. the number of days or hours men as opposed to women spend in the gardens, or the amount of physical energy required for a task. A symbolic interpretation would seem more appropriate.

Allocation of different facets of garden work on the basis of sex are not accidental in the Trobriands, for the practical division of labour concurs with the cultural procreative metaphor of gardening already observed in the horticultural ceremonial. Cutting of the path into the plot as well as planting, performed by the men, have been associated in the symbolic analysis with preparing the way for conception¹⁴ and the insertion of the foetus.¹⁵ Weeding is women's work, performed communally, which in the interpretation of horticultural symbolism was linked with female purity, gestation and maternal care of the foetus.

There is a time when a wife assists her husband during the predominantly male period of scrub-cutting and preparing the garden, but her activity is confined to clearing ground-refuse, which may symbolically

represent the cleansing of her body. Similarly the man assists the wife by erecting *taytu* supports and thinning tubers in the female period of weeding. Erecting *taytu* supports is "heavy" work and thus suited to the man, but the fact that the woman does not handle the growing tubers, even during thinning, is consistent with her symbolic position if the *taytu* represents the foetus within her.

Harvesting of the tubers is significantly accompanied by joint labour, it being the concern of both man and woman. As was previously proposed, their mutual involvement is akin to the solicitous care of mother and father at childbirth.¹⁶ The woman, for instance, does not dig the tuber out of the soil,¹⁷ which symbolizes her womb, but is mainly involved in caring for and cleaning it, as with her child.¹⁸

Interrelation of symbolism and the Trobriand year

Malinowski indicates that the Trobriand system of time-reckoning reflects the essential interests and events that are meaningful to the people, cognizance being taken of meteorological, astronomical and cultural factors such as expeditions and feasts.¹⁹ The gardening cycle shapes the Trobriand year and lends it the name *taytu*.²⁰ Botanical and environmental characteristics influence the Islanders' conception of time. Yams (*Dioscorea*) grow in regions where dry and wet seasons are clearly differentiated.²¹ The Trobriander recognizes ten lunar months which are divided into two parts: the unripe and ripe moons.²² Such a distinction acknowledges the two contrasting periods of *taytu* growth.

Cultural features are interwoven with natural phenomena: the bipartite division of the year coincides with periods of predominantly male, as opposed to female, work. As in the magic, so in the symbolism of work, males are for the most part assigned the initial unripe, dry five months, characterized by foetal dormancy.²³ Females are apportioned the later ripening wet time²⁴ of hyperactive vegetative growth.²⁵ Both male and female are involved in harvesting. As has been shown, the division of the year and gardening cycle thus appear to replicate the two phases of the pregnancy ceremonial separated by a break during the fifth month.²⁶

The work schedule therefore harmonizes with the two phases of horticultural ceremonial and human pregnancy and indicates the contrasting, yet complementary, roles of the sexes. The first stage concedes some assistance from the male, the second concerns the attentive female, and the birth involves both sexes. It is therefore not primarily the actual

amount of time spent in gardening that is significant in establishing the position of woman in gardening, but metaphorically meaningful time, and the fact that both sexes are included.

Trobriand organization of labour reinforces the themes expressed in the horticultural ceremonial: the woman as worker is active in spheres related to the care of the garden, clearing refuse and weeding, for this represents her body. She is identified with the garden, nurturing the growing embryo, and so is active in the second phase of fieldwork. Finally, woman is revealed as a new mother in according the newly-harvested *taytu* the same solicitude as her newly-born child.

Notes

- 1 9–10 above; Malinowski 1966 I figure 14 (438)
- 2 Malinowski 1966 I 61 n.3, 138–139; Malinowski 1927a 210
- 3 Cf. Malinowski 1966 I figure 3 (50–51), 61 n.4
- 4 Estimates are drawn from the following sources: Malinowski 1966 I figure 3 (50–51), 61 n.1–4, 92–93, 136, 149, 421–422, figure 14 (436–442), 460, 462–463 n.1; Malinowski 1921 5; Malinowski 1927a 211; Austen 1945–46 36–40, 47
- 5 Time women spend preparing and cooking food is not considered relevant here. Cf. Hyndman 1973 83; Conklin 1957 151 (Yagaw Hanunóo, Philippines)
- 6 Cf. Pospisil 1963 163–164 (Kapauku Papuans, New Guinea)
- 7 Austen 1945–46 47
- 8 Malinowski 1966 I 63, 94–95, 99–102, 126–127, 152, 166, 168, 170–171, 285–288 figure 14 (436–443)
- 9 9–13 above
- 10 Malinowski 1966 I figure 14 (436–443)
- 11 E.g. Hogbin 1946 17; McCarthy 1943 76 (New Guinea); Wedgwood 1934 396 (Manam Island, Schouten Group); Hadfield 1920 68 (Loyalty Islands); Kroeber 1919 144 (Philippines)
- 12 9–10 above; Malinowski 1932 21–22; Malinowski 1966 I 102, 126
- 13 Cf. Firth 1959 209–211 (Maori, New Zealand)
- 14 18–19 above
- 15 38–40 above
- 16 50 above
- 17 11, 56 above
- 18 56–57 above
- 19 Malinowski 1927a 204, 210–212, 215
- 20 Malinowski 1927a 209–211, cf. 213–214; Malinowski 1966 I 52–53; cf. Codrington 1891 349 (Melanesians)
- 21 Coursey 1967 42; Coursey 1972 217

- 22 Malinowski 1927a 213–215; Austen 1939 239, cf. 244, 246; Leach 1950
249–250, cf. 247, 254–255; Malinowski 1966 I 52
- 23 47 above
- 24 47 above
- 25 Coursey 1972 217
- 26 52, cf. 47, 49 above

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