# 1. *Introduction*

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Throughout history, cloth has furthered the organization of social and political life. In the form of clothing and adornment, or rolled or piled high for exchange and heirloom conservation, cloth helps social groups to reproduce themselves and to achieve autonomy or advantage in interactions with others. This book brings to light the properties of cloth that underlie its social and political contributions, the ritual and social domains in which people acknowledge these properties and give them meaning, and the transformations of meaning over time.

Malleable and soft, cloth can take many shapes, especially if pieces are cut for architectural assembly. Cloth also lends itself to an extraordinary range of decorative variation, whether through the patterned weaving of colored warps and wefts, or through the embroidery, staining, painting, or dyeing of the whole. These broad possibilities of construction, color, and patterning give cloth an almost limitless potential for communication. Worn or displayed in an emblematic way, cloth can denote variations in age, sex, rank, status, and group affiliation. As much as cloth discloses it can conceal, however, homogenizing difference through uniforms or sackcloth, or superimposing disguised identities through costumes and masks. Cloth can also communicate the wearer's or user's ideological values and claims. Complex moral and ethical issues of dominance and au-

tonomy, opulence and poverty, continence and sexuality, find ready expression through cloth.

In addition to its seemingly endless variability and related semiotic potential, cloth is a repository for prized fibers and dyes, dedicated human labor, and the virtuoso artistry of competitive aesthetic development. As such, it attracts the attention of power holders, including those who would build chiefdoms and states. Throughout history, the architects of centralizing polities have awed spectators with sartorial splendor, strategically distributed beautiful fabrics among clients, and exported the textile output of royal and peasant workshops to earn foreign exchange. Cloth has often become a standard of value, circulating as money, so it should come as no surprise that cloth wealth has enriched the treasuries of many kingdoms and chiefdoms, conferring credibility on political elites along with gold, silver, jewels, and exotic shells.

Another characteristic of cloth, which enhances its social and political roles, is how readily its appearance and that of its constituent fibers can evoke ideas of connectedness or tying. Wrapping individuals to protect them from the malevolent forces of their cultural or natural environment, bark cloths and woven textiles can also envelop more than one person, as in an Indonesian marriage ceremony where a tubular, uncut fabric binds the bride to the groom. A moment's reflection brings to mind any number of instances in which a cloth or thread metaphor illuminates similarly "tied" relations—for example, Anaïs Nin's portrait of love in one of her novels: "She was weaving and sewing and mending because he carried in himself no thread of connection . . . of continuity or repair. . . . She sewed . . . so that the warmth would not seep out of their days together, the soft interskin of their relationship" (1959: 57–58).

Indeed, cloth metaphors echo from many parts of the world, today and in the past. Social scientists and laypersons regularly describe society as fabric, woven or knit together. Cloth as a metaphor for society, thread for social relations, express more than connectedness, however. The softness and ultimate fragility of these materials capture the vulnerability of humans, whose every relationship is transient, subject to the degenerative processes of illness, death, and decay. Weiner (this volume) recalls Homer's description of Penelope, weaving Laertes's shroud by day but then unraveling the same fabric each night, seeking thereby to halt time, neither burying

her husband nor marrying a suitor in his absence, and thus preserving the balance between the gods and humans.

To seek the symbolic potentialities of cloth in its material properties is, however, but a preliminary step, and only partially compelling. Equally important are the human actions that make cloth politically and socially salient. The papers in this volume identify various domains of meaning in which people use cloth to consolidate social relations and mobilize political power.

First is the domain of cloth manufacture itself, as spinners, weavers, dyers, and finishers harness the imagined blessings of ancestors and divinities to inspire or animate the product, and draw analogies between weaving or dyeing and the life cycle of birth, maturation, death, and decay. The ritual and discourse that surround its manufacture establish cloth as a convincing analog for the regenerative and degenerative processes of life, and as a great connector, binding humans not only to each other but to the ancestors of their past and the progeny who constitute their future.

A second domain in which cloth acquires social and political significance is that of bestowal and exchange. Participants in life-cycle celebrations in general, and rituals of death in particular, frequently make of cloth a continuous thread, a binding tie between two kinship groups, or three and more generations. The cloth-givers on such occasions generate political power as well, committing recipients to loyalty and obligation in the future.

In a third domain of meaning—ceremonies of investiture and rulership—powerholders or aspirants to power declare that particular cloths transmit the authority of earlier possessors or the sanctity of past traditions, thus constituting a source of legitimacy in the present. A fourth domain involves manipulations of cloth as clothing, the uses of dress and adornment to reveal or conceal identities and values.

The actors who manipulate cloth in one or another domain of meaning vary according to gender. Women are by no means the universal producers of cloth, but in many societies they monopolize all or most of the manufacturing sequence, giving them a larger role than men. Many societies also assign women, rather than men, to exchange or give the cloths that tie the living to the dead, the bride's family to the groom's family, the politically dominant to their dependent clients. In ceremonies of rulership, cloth is generally in the hands of the men, but here, too, women may participate as produc-

ers or handlers of sanctified materials. Emblematic and communicative uses of cloth are, finally, as common among women as men; in the fashion system of contemporary Western capitalism, women's dress is elaborated to a uniquely high degree. As this volume suggests, the study of cloth can illuminate women's contributions to social and political organization that are otherwise overlooked.

One can imagine people imbuing cloth with social and political meanings in domains other than the ones just outlined. The domains we describe, however, illuminate with particular precision a theoretical problem posed in a variety of ways by the papers in this book. Capitalist production and its associated cultural values reordered the symbolic potential of cloth in two interrelated ways. First, altering the process of manufacture, capitalism eliminated the opportunity for weavers and dyers to infuse their product with spiritual value and to reflect and pronounce on analogies between reproduction and production. Second, by encouraging the growth of fashion—a consumption system of high-velocity turnover and endless, ever-changing variation—capitalist entrepreneurs vastly inflated dress and adornment as a domain for expression through cloth. Despite these shifts of emphasis and the worldwide expansion of capitalist manufacturing and fashion, ancient cloths and traditions of making them continue to reemerge with political—indeed often subversive—intent, above all in societies emerging from colonial domination. Exploring the domains of manufacture, exchange, and the legitimation of rule, as well as the domain of dress, helps one understand this continuing role of cloth in the reproduction of social life and power.

## PART I: CLOTH IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES

Annette B. Weiner's paper, "Why Cloth? Wealth, Gender, and Power in Oceania" introduces Part I, which considers the political significance of cloth in small-scale societies. Focusing on succession to authority, Weiner compares the relatively unstratified Trobriand Islands with Western Samoa, where ranked chiefly titles prevail. In the Trobriands, women gather banana leaves, scrape, dry, and bind them into bundles, or intricately tie them around waist cords to make skirts. At mortuary ceremonies, the female kin of a deceased person amass and distribute these "cloths," valued at hundreds of

U.S. dollars. In Trobriand society, people characteristically attribute death to sorcery, interpreting the loss of a person as a direct attack on the vitality and continuity of his or her kin group as a whole. The more cloth the group's women bestow on others, the better they protect themselves and their kin against continued enmity and political danger. Their distributions simultaneously "untie" the deceased from former social and political obligations.

Where Trobriand women process banana leaves to create a rudimentary form of cloth, women in Samoa soak and dry pandanus, plaiting the narrow fibers into large mats that, when carefully made, feel as soft as linen. Of the two, Samoan "cloth" has more permanence, with some fine mats lasting for as long as 200 years. The oldest mats carry the highest value. Often possessed of individuated histories, these mats are exchanged in all life-cycle ceremonies and at the investitures of chiefs. Relying on these mats to emphasize their associations with ancestors and mythical events of the past, living political actors legitimatize their claims to titles and ranks. In contrast, recently produced wealth circulates at Trobriand mortuary distributions, and new bundles and skirts are considered far more valuable than old ones. A similar contrast separates the ancient polities of Fiji from those of the Hawaiian Islands. Upon the death of a predecessor, the Fijian chief wrapped himself in magnificent rolls of barkcloth, including a train 100 yards long (Kooijman 1972). Although exemplifying the authority of his newly acquired position, these rolls also betrayed the underlying weakness of his succession for, unlike the dynastic cloaks of the substantially more stratified islands of Hawaii, they were not themselves heirlooms.

According to Weiner, the relationship between a greater degree of permanence in cloth and a greater elaboration of political hierarchy is not coincidental. The two go together because a hierarchy depends in part upon sumptuary paraphernalia to objectify rank and, more importantly, to constitute a physical bond between the past and the present. In some Polynesian societies such as Hawaii and Tahiti, it was historically the custom when rulers died to destroy their personal belongings as potentially polluting. But inaugural regalia, in the form of feathered cloaks and girdles, passed from generation to generation as the very substance of dynasty (Henry 1928; Valeri 1985). As Graham Clark (1986) noted for Medieval and Renaissance Europe, the regalia of office transmit ideas of sanctity and majesty as well as social status. Replete with cosmologi-

cal referents and believed to be seats of spiritual power, such objects have even been said to "rule" in lieu of humans (Heine-Gildern 1956:10).

Weiner observes that once cloth attains a degree of permanence, absorbing value from the passage of time, political elites attempt to hoard and store it, not as capital for eventual deployment or merely for display, but as treasure to be saved in the face of all exigencies that force its dissipation. More than an economic resource or an affirmation of political status, treasure facilitates claims to the past—its names, legends, and events—that justify the transactions and extend the power of living actors. Treasure, of course, also includes valuables of stone, bone, and precious metals with which dynastic elites fill the vaults of state. Hard where cloth is soft, and far more durable, these objects would seem a better vehicle for expressing continuity through time. Weiner argues, however, that all social groups experience contradictory yearnings—for circulation and permanence, for expansion through alliance and conquest, and for rootedness through an internal deepening of authority. Precisely because it wears thin and disintegrates, cloth becomes an apt medium for communicating a central problem of power: Social and political relationships are necessarily fragile in an impermanent, ever-changing world.

The second chapter of Part I, Gillian Feeley-Harnik's "Cloth and the Creation of Ancestors in Madagascar," similarly emphasizes the tendency for cloth to legitimatize power while suggesting the fragility of relationships. The case concerns the Sakalava people of coastal Madagascar, who wrap their dead royalty in cotton cloth, place them in wooden coffins, and bury them in a royal tomb located on a small, offshore island. Unlike the Merina and other peoples of highland Madagascar, the Sakalava do not practice secondary burials in which, as Bloch has described for the Merina (1971), corpses are disinterred to be rewrapped for placement in ancestral tombs. Rather, in Sakalava belief, the dead remain social beings only by returning to possess the living, whom they make ill. In possession episodes, returning spirits disclose their identity by demanding cloths appropriate to their status—cloths that friends and relatives must wrap around the person who is possessed. Most of the returning spirits are of royal ancestry; their high position leads them to ask for *lamba* cloths that, because of age and authenticity, are among the most expensive and difficult to procure. A *lamba* is a rectangular

length of silk that also serves as "a common form of dress, a marker of social status, and a valued medium of exchange." Reincarnated through the aid of such fabrics, deceased royalty can pronounce on events of current interest, offering prophesy and vital talk in voices that disguise the politics of the living.

The voices, however, are tenuous. The *lamba* wrapping that clothes a spirit and makes it audible is also like a shroud, demanding silence. Drawing attention to the ambiguity of speech and quiet, revelation and concealment, Feeley-Harnik reflects on the relationship of hard to soft objects in other Sakalava rituals. Besides possession, whose episodic occurence mirrors the distribution of individual illnesses, are events of regional significance, staged collectively at the ancestral tomb. In one such event, a kind of reburial, guardians of the cemetery and the royal capital, assisted by spirit mediums, lead the populace in cleaning the tomb, replacing the fence around it, and weeding the grounds. The activities, Feeley-Harnik suggests, establish an analogy between the skeleton and fleshy corpse, the dead body and its shroud, the tomb and its surrounding greenery, the hardwood fencing and its "wrapping" of leafy branches, hard valuables and the soft silk *lambas*—an interplay of concepts suggesting durability and decay.

Whereas in Madagascar the dead demand cloth from the living after they have been buried, possessing them to make their wishes known, elsewhere negotiations of the deceased for cloth precede burial, constituting a focus of the funeral ritual. Patricia Darish's essay (Chapter 4), "Dressing for the Next Life: Raffia Textile Production and Use among the Kuba of Zaire," illustrates this alternative. Considering a corpse to be nude unless adorned with elaborately embroidered raffia textiles, the Kuba make costly prestations to the dead as a way of ensuring their peaceful transition to an afterlife. The dead, they believe, wish to be buried with cloth of sufficient quantity and quality to facilitate a continued existence as social beings. If disappointed in this request, they will interfere malevolently in the lives of the living.

Darish traces the complexity of fulfilling the sartorial demands of the dead in funerary rituals. The members of the deceased's clan section will have collectively prepared raffia cloth over the years; men weave small squares of it, to which women add a plush-pile embroidery and then assemble the squares into larger garments. At a formal meeting during the mortuary celebration, section members

decide which of the various cloths wrapped up in the clan treasury are worthy of bestowal, taking note of the past associations of individual pieces of cloth. Finally, close kin of the deceased observe, evaluate, and criticize or praise the textiles placed on the corpse by more distant relatives and friends. Spousal offerings are especially scrutinized for appropriateness of quantity and workmanship, spouses of course being of a different clan. According to Darish, although the Kuba are an otherwise modern people, who have substantially abandoned raffia cloth in favor of Western dress, their funerals continue to highlight the capacity of cloth to mediate between past and present, the dead and the living, ancestral authority and contemporary political claims.

Janet Hoskins' contribution (Chapter 5), "Why Do Ladies Sing the Blues? Indigo Dyeing, Cloth Production, and Gender Symbolism in Kodi," shifts our attention from death and investiture rituals to textile manufacture and the reproduction of children as domains for attending to the meaning of cloth. Living in western Sumba the Kodi, like other rural Indonesians, give pattern to cloth through the resist dyeing of warp yarns prior to weaving them with plain wefts on the backstrap loom. Known as ikatting, the patterning of the yarns is done by specialists, instructed in the manipulation of various earth tones and indigo. Older Kodi women, past their childbearing years and likely practitioners of herbal medicine, midwifery, tatooing and, more covertly, witchcraft, are the ikat dyers. In communication through sacrificial offerings with the ancestral spirit who introduced indigo to Sumba from the nearby island of Savu, these women alone are in a position to manipulate the color blue.

According to Hoskins, Kodi indigo dyeing involves rituals, songs, laments, and sayings that establish an analog with another process of creation: the conception and birth of a child. Cloth, the Kodi reason, is patterned through the "quickening" and "dampening" of dyestuffs in the blueing bath, whereas children are conceived by the "quickening" of men's sperm and fetuses are nurtured by the "dampening" of the mother's blood. Not only are the most respected and powerful women simultaneously midwives and dyers; they make strikingly parallel ritual offerings on behalf of both dyepot and womb. Fittingly, expectant mothers and older female dyers use the same herbs and barks to enhance their respective forms of productivity, while women's laments compare miscarriages to imperfectly dyed cloths.

Analogous to birth and regeneration, Kodi textile dyeing is also vulnerable to the cycle of death and decay. Hoskins records that practitioners associate the unpleasant smell of the dyebath with the putrefaction of rotting flesh, and consider the bath polluting to gestation. Pregnant women should not look at the dye pots, lest the sight of the dark and churning liquid dissolve the contents of their wombs. Reciprocally, menstruating women are kept from the pots, as the flow of their blood is believed to disrupt the dyeing process. The dependence of birth upon death, gain upon loss, creation upon destruction, is acknowledged by the Kodi in other ways: They model their weddings and funerals after each other, using the same indigo-dyed fabrics to wrap both bride and corpse, and associating blue with the sadness of either separation. Visions of blue add symbolic fuel to both birth and the ikatting process, imbuing them with sacred qualities. From this, Hoskins implies, it is but a short step to the belief that cloth enhances fertility and protects humans from harm.

Kodi rituals and proscriptions are reminiscent of peoples elsewhere who, in the process of making cloth, mythically relate the creation of fabrics to the creation of social progeny. Exemplifying the train of thought that makes one set of processes an analog for the other are taboos that exclude menstruating women from weaving as well as dyeing, and forbid sexually active or pregnant women from seeing or handling the loom (e.g., Emmons 1907; Gustafson 1980; Kent 1983; Messick 1987; Rattray 1927). Also common is the tendency for cloth makers to interact with the spirits and divinities of their homelands and their ancestral pasts, hoping thereby to perfect their skills, acquire inspiration for new motifs, and animate their product with a blessing (e.g., Davis 1982; Tedlock and Tedlock 1985). Besides the Kodi dyers, many peoples believe that weaving skills derive from a mythical diety or ancestor, and are transmitted through dreams or revelations (e.g., Aronson 1983; March 1983). By careful attention to ritual and taboos, the weaver not only demonstrates respect for these sacred sources, but also reactivates the spiritual connection, consecrating the raw materials, the techniques, and the emerging cloth (e.g., Best 1898; Mead 1969; Weiner 1985).

Acknowledging sacred associations in the process of cloth manufacture is like acknowledging historical and mythical past events in the process of cloth bestowal and exchange. Both enhance the affective qualities that are lodged in objects of value. Anthropologists

have long puzzled over these qualities. In 1922, for example, Malinowski wrote a poignant account of Trobrianders dangling prized *kula* shells over a dying man as if the shells could inspire him with life (1922: 512–13). Perceiving the power in such objects, Marcel Mauss (1954) emphasized that, in the Trobriands, people encoded *kula* shells with highly significant names and past histories. Ultimately, Malinowski (1926) opted for a rational explanation that equated *kula* valuables with the intense interest of customary exchange, but Mauss held to the idea that the affect elicited by the shells indicated a spiritual force. "One gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence" (1954:10). The papers in Part I of this book support Mauss's view. Examining the domains of succession, gift exchange, and manufacturing, they show how cloth comes to symbolize such fundamental processes of human experience as biological and social reproduction, the transmittal of authority or legitimation of power, and the vulnerability of people and their relationships to illness and death.

## PART II: CAPITALISM AND THE MEANINGS OF CLOTH

On reflection, anyone who lives in a large-scale, industrial capitalist society will agree that cloth is far more than a means to profit in the textile and garment industries and a means to status among fashion-conscious consumers. People under capitalism continue to mark sacred and ceremonial moments with banners, hangings, shrouds, and robes that they carefully conserve from year to year and often over generations. They also acknowledge the birth and maturation of children with gifts of clothing or bedding that are chosen to evoke security, if not a protective power, and they marry with trousseaux of lingerie and linens. Nor do the citizens of capitalist societies refrain from collecting treasured fabrics in heirloom chests, as antiques, or in museums, where they gain in value. Granted, many textile treasures grow threadbare under capitalism, abandoned or abused by owners who see no return—either monetary or sentimental—in them. Equally common, however, is the rediscovery of both sorts of value in one's grandmothers' quilts, or in the hand-crafted cloth of formerly colonized peoples. Finally, notwithstanding the spread of capitalism, political and religious elites still depend upon

cloth to mobilize human emotions in support of such large-scale institutions as the nation-state. Flags and military uniforms are two powerful examples.

Yet the roles of cloth have also changed under capitalism. A central difference flows from the vastly expanded scope of fashion that capitalist production and merchandizing encourage. Although not new to the Early Modern period of Western European expansion, the hegemony of fashion in that time and place went so far as to marginalize the idea that cloth constitutes a binding tie to authorities and sacred sources of the past. As Roland Barthes has argued (1967), obsolescence and rapid turnover are the essence of the fashion system, with the result that a disproportionate volume of cloth ends up in the ragbag or as hand-me-downs when compared to non-capitalist circulation.

The changing funeral ceremonies of the seventeenth-century English aristocracy might be seen as heralding a related transformation. As they became increasingly expressive of private loss, these funerals no longer allowed kin groups, through spectacular cloth prestations, to channel death into regeneration and political gain. In earlier times, the mourners had received black drapes from the kin of the deceased; now, to accompany the funeral cortege, they had to supply their own. Cloth no longer expressed the continuity of the groups with ancestral authority and their reproduction through time (Gittings 1984).

The three papers that make up Part II highlight a second difference between the meanings of cloth in capitalist and non-capitalist societies. Under capitalism, the domain of cloth manufacture seems incapable of generating or sustaining ideas of benevolent spiritual or ancestral involvement in the production process, or analogies between this process and the reproduction of offspring. Even when, as in each of the papers, manufacturing is organized through home industries and involves considerable handwork—even when, as in two of the papers, factory production has yet to emerge—market pressures to cheapen and streamline labor prevent spinners and weavers, dyers and finishers, from thinking about or ritually acknowledging the transmission of a sacred ancestry through cloth.

From its inception, capitalist manufacture elevated entrepreneurs whose goals emphasized profit to positions of strategic importance. Merchants or merchant-manufacturers procured the raw ma-

terials, structured the production process, supplied equipment or credit for equipment, and arranged for eventual marketing and distribution. Above all, they pressured workers so as to reduce the cost of labor in production. Although factories and well-capitalized machinery represent the extreme of pressure on labor, they were not historically or even today the only alternative. Also common is "putting-out." Where the organization of guilds or unions renders labor more costly, entrepreneurs place textile orders with non-organized producers in rural homes. Here, no less than in factories, the impact of the market is felt. Homeworkers typically experience low piece rates, the fragmentation of the production process among different categories of operatives, the introduction of labor-saving machinery, and the employment of women for less remuneration than men (see Goody 1982; Medick 1981; Schlumbohm 1981).

Entrepreneurs are hardly the only non-producers to have controlled production in the course of textile history. Political and religious elites sponsored the specialized workshops of luxury cloth manufacture in the large-scale agrarian civilizations of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Here, too, spinners, weavers, and dyers depended upon others to procure their raw materials, organize the labor process, supply equipment, and manage distributions. Luxury industries, however, competed with each other less in the domain of cost than in the domain of aesthetic elaboration, and cloth artisans retained control of aesthetic decisions (see Schneider 1987). Indeed, the luxury cloth of centralized workshops characteristically incorporated not only exotic materials but intensive and highly skilled craftsmanship as well.

Capitalist entrepreneurs sometimes organize productive activity in which aesthetic elaboration is a more salient goal than cutting labor costs. In these situations, the aesthetic judgments, skills, and time of the workers are protected, making possible a continuing role for ritual. But capitalism historically has focused on the manufacture of commodities, defined not simply as goods for sale (for luxury cloth was frequently merchandized), but also as "commodious"—useful, advantageous, beneficial. Such goods strike a middle ground between luxury and deprivation, indulgence and necessity and, if inexpensive enough, permit non-elites to enrich their patterns of consumption. Commodities in the form of commodious textiles, produced in cottages under a putting-out system and eventually in factories, illustrate most dramatically the decline of

manufacturing as an arena for imbuing cloth with sacred and ancestral referents, relevant for enhancing its social and political symbolism. As Marx observed, under capitalism it is consumers and not producers who make commodities into fetishes, and in ways that have nothing to do with their manufacture.

Jane Schneider's essay (Chapter 6), "Rumpelstiltskin's Bargain: Folklore and the Merchant Capitalist Intensification of Linen Manufacture in Early Modern Europe," captures an initial phase of what might be called the "disenchantment" of cloth manufacture under capitalism. Schneider outlines how a burgeoning transatlantic trade and domestic fashion market gave an unprecedented spur to linen production in Northern Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leading to the formation of rural "proto-industries" as an alternative to the urban guilds. In some of the industries, peasant households performed all stages of manufacture, selling a finished or nearly finished product to itinerant buyers or at regional fairs. More commonly, merchant-entrepreneurs divided the stages of manufacture, putting out raw materials and semifinished goods to different laboring households, remunerating them by the piece. Either way, entrepreneurs manipulated peasant spinners and weavers by offering premiums for extra work, advancing credit and equipment selectively, and promising opportunities for marriage through participation in manufacture. They also employed women at lower piece rates than men.

In addition to tracing how linen entrepreneurs reshaped cottage industry in Early Modern Europe, Schneider examines a changing folklore of flax and linen production. She describes a new tendency for animistic spirits to take on demonic qualities, as exemplified by the Rumpelstiltskin tale in which a poltergeist offers assistance to a poor spinner, but only at the price of her firstborn child. The negative, malevolent message implicit in such a devil-pact contrasts with the previously widespread idea that spirits impart socially binding protective powers to cloth. There is another transformation as well. In the cloth-making contexts of non-capitalist societies such as that described by Hoskins, women's reproduction is often represented as an analog to dyeing or weaving. The Rumpelstiltskin-type tale, by contrast, pits the goals of production against the goals of reproduction, suggesting that they are inherently contradictory rather than related. Schneider speculates on the possible connections between the merchant capitalist intensification of linen production

in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, and the folkloric transformation of spirit helpers into demons, hostile to women's fertility and reproduction. The transformation, she thinks, was part of the process through which cloth manufacturing ceased to be a setting for thinking about, and articulating, the regenerative power of cloth.

Chapter 7 by Linda Stone-Ferrier, "Spun Virtue, the Lacework of Folly, and the World Wound Upside-Down: Seventeenth-Century Dutch Depictions of Female Handwork," looks at a similar transformation from a different angle, that of the seventeenth-century Dutch artists who interpreted linen cloth production in oils and woodcuts. Painting and drawing at a time when Haarlem and other Dutch cities were becoming centers of linen manufacture for the Atlantic economy, these masters frequently included textile motifs in their art, above all images of spinners and winders of yarn. As Stone-Ferrier points out, in real life the Dutch did not support much flax cultivation or spinning, concentrating instead on the more lucrative stages of the manufacturing process, the weaving and especially the bleaching of imported yarn and cloth. The images of spinners in paintings and prints must therefore be read not as depictions of reality, but as a moral commentary on the subjects as their activities became enmeshed in proto-industry.

According to Stone-Ferrier, seventeenth-century Dutch oils portrayed individual spinners and winders, always female, as proper and virtuous, but poked fun at women who indulged in, or produced for, fashion. Thus, embroiderers and lacemakers were made to appear licentious, as was the fashionably dressed woman, painted with a lover under her skirt. Oil paintings of spinning rooms, as distinct from individual spinners, depicted a raucous and sexually promiscuous world in which women, devoid of all reference to their reproductive role, cavorted with demons and dominated men—a newly intrusive element. This theme of unbridled sexuality and devilish play also typified the spinning rooms shown in woodcuts, a cheaper medium of communication than oils. Popular among the expanding ranks of bourgeois consumers, woodcuts portrayed even individual spinners not as virtuous, but in erotic poses. In their overall effect they, even more than the oils, undermined associations between yarn production and the continuous re-creation of a moral order, promoting instead the lewd and antisocial symbolism of a world turned upside-down by pending change.

The final paper of Part II, "Embroidery for Tourists: A Contemporary Putting-Out System in Oaxaca, Mexico," offers an ironic twist on the problem of cloth manufacture as a symbolic domain under capitalism. In this essay (Chapter 8), Ronald Waterbury examines the traditional Zapotec Indian wedding dress, once offered by grooms to their brides but made today for boutique and tourist markets whose buyers live in, or come from, the industrial United States and Europe. Decorated with colorful inserts of hand-embroidered birds and flowers, the dress is laden with sentiment. To the young Oaxacan women who traditionally received it, the embroidery conferred a religious blessing; to many contemporary North American and European consumers, it represents a nostalgia for lost arts, for the people and crafts that industrial capitalism so brutally pushed aside. Yet the present conditions of manufacture, structured through putting-out, allow no opportunity for reflection or action on these meanings. According to Waterbury, peasant women in the poorest outlying areas embroider the designs on swatches for merchant entrepreneurs, who assemble the pieces using sewing machines. Neither the entrepreneurs, for the most part local women, nor the embroiderers, view their labor as imparting a social meaning to the product, understanding it only in relation to its monetary return in profits or piece rates.

Part I considered domains of meaning in small-scale societies, where political actors attempt to legitimatize their power through displays or transfers of cloth believed to embody associations with authoritative persons of the past, and thus with sacred or ancestral sources. We might wonder whether the changes in manufacturing and the hegemony of fashion that accompanied the emergence of capitalism interfered with this legitimating role of cloth in a substantial way. Diane Owen Hughes (personal communication) has observed that the reliance of fashion on cutting and tailoring challenges the idea that continuous weaving transmits a spiritual force. In relatively uncommercialized areas of the world, taboos on cutting cloth still make this point. Some Indonesians, for example, continue to distinguish between cloth for wearing and cloth for bridewealth, the former being cut and sewn, the latter's endless warp representing "the continuous threads of kinship and descent" (Barnes 1983:17). Similarly the Yoruba (Drewal 1979:198) permit the use of tailored and purchased cloth in Ege/Gelede cult performances that emphasize alliance-making, but insist on "tied, bound or wrapped"

fabrics for the Egungun cult in which lineage ancestry and solidarity are celebrated.

Characterized by perpetual mutations, rapid obsolescence, and high-velocity turnover, fashion is propelled through the interaction of designers or "tastemakers" and the changing wants of consumers. Not so the cloth that in small-scale societies binds brides to grooms, the living to the dead, ancestors to heirs, the past to the present and future. At times such binding material is of foreign provenance. According to Feeley-Harnik, many of the expensive *lamba* cloths coveted by Sakalava ancestors in possession episodes are imported silk fabrics that arrived long ago through the precolonial trading networks of the Indian Ocean. But as a rule, the ritual manipulation of particular cloths as symbols of continuity and closeness gains power from the realization that, in their making, they absorbed ancestral authority as well as fibers and dyes. The early ethnographer, Rattray, in his 1929 book on the Ashanti, recorded how kings in investiture rites discarded their luxurious royal robes to don bark cloth, the earliest cloth of their people. It seems fair, in other words, to conclude that the breakthrough to capitalism challenged cloth as a medium of political power. It is the overcoming of this challenge that concerns us in Part III.

## PART III: CLOTH IN LARGE-SCALE SOCIETIES

Three large-scale, class-stratified societies, all historically in tension with the expanding markets and institutions of Euro-American industrial capitalism, draw our attention in the final part of this book. Each of them—Peru, India, and Japan—boasts a deep past of interacting textile traditions, some at the level of peasant households, others at the level of state. Identifying these interactions, the papers of Part III also examine the still broader processes that were set in motion by the local appearance of commercial and factory cloth. In each case, certain indigenous handmade cloths persisted despite this pressure, or have been revived, not merely to satisfy boutique and tourist markets as in Waterbury's case study of Oaxaca, but as aspects of the consolidation of cultural identities and the mobilization of political power. By detailing the past meanings and values of cloth in societies of the scale of India or Japan, Part III offers insights into these emotionally charged revivals.

Leading off is Chapter 9, John Murra's revision of his 1962 article, "Cloth and Its Function in the Inka State." Facilitating our comprehension of large-scale contexts, Murra disaggregates the peasant and state levels. Woven with "magical precautions," peasant cloth was the main ceremonial good, the preferred gift for reciprocal exchanges among kin at funerals and weddings, and a seminal offering, sometimes in diminuitive form, to the dead and to religious idols. Peasant women, the preeminent weavers, also produced a surplus for the state. Mobilized through the Inka tribute system, the cloth of Andean peasant populations was piled so high in the royal warehouses as to stagger the Spanish conquerors. Although destined for many uses, military attire was among the most important, soliders being rewarded for distinction in battle and made to feel ritually protected through grants of clothes.

In addition to the peasant surplus, the Inka state relied for cloth on weavers at court and in administrative centers, including the well-known cloistered women called *aqlla*. These specialists were the source of exquisitely fine tapestries, woven from a mixture of cotton and wool and dyed in many colors. Coveted as items of diplomacy and foreign exchange, tapestries could not be worn or displayed in the absence of royal approval, while kings offered them to attract the loyalty of lords in newly incorporated peripheries. Most valued for this overtly political purpose were cloths from the royal wardrobe, steeped with associations of past rulers and deeds. An "initial pump primer of dependency," suggests Murra, cloth of this sort was hoarded and treasured by the lords of the provinces for four or more generations, symbolizing at once their obligations to Cuzco, and Cuzco's bestowal of citizenship in return. Even today, Murra notes, peasants of the Andean highlands celebrate ancestral tapestries as the standard for beauty and value—a value emphasized by the pirated dispersal of many ancient weavings into the art markets of the industrialized world.

In Chapter 10, "Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century," Bernard S. Cohn notes a parallel between the uses of cloth at the state and the domestic levels. Indian village families and the Mughal court both stored gifts of cloth as "emblems of honor for posterity," letting them mark the events of history and the cycles of life over several generations. In both rural households and the royal palace, trunks and chests conserved the textile tracers of bygone social and political relations. Even more varied than in

the Inka state was the production of cloth at different levels, with specialized industries responsible for renowned traditions in wool, silk, sheer, and painted cotton. Peasant manufacture articulated women's household spinning with the weaving castes. As among the Inka, the Mughal court thrived on cloth accumulated from distant producers, whether as tribute or through markets. According to Cohn, Akbar stockpiled a collection from Indian, European, and other Asian sources, classifying the multitude of textiles in his midst by their weight, color, and day of arrival at court.

Focusing on the nineteenth century, Cohn's paper highlights the misunderstandings that ensued from British rule. As in the small-scale societies analyzed in Part I of this book, the Mughals believed that their garments, handed down through a continuous succession of donors and receivers, served as a medium for the transfer of essential substances, thus constituting political authority, the unity of rule. When British colonial overlords, culturally prepared to anticipate contracts, treated gifts of cloth as bribes, the Mughals were offended. Nor was this the biggest disjuncture. The various constituencies of the Indian population had to negotiate between three conflicting pressures regarding dress. These were their own rules of propriety in relation to social rank, the hegemonic British presence that tempted some to enter the fashion system of Westerners, and the contradictory and changing body of British sumptuary requirements governing what Indians should and should not wear. Although the British disdained "Oriental" clothing, they recognized its capacity to demarcate hierarchically ordered social statuses and, according to Cohn, encouraged its perpetuation, "Orientalizing" the ruled. An especially striking manifestation of this tendency was the turban that the Sikh regiment was urged to adopt as an "Oriental" symbol of military prowess, covering yet harnessing the fierceness of uncut hair.

Complementing Cohn's essay is Susan Bean's Chapter 11, titled "Gandhi and *Khadi*, the Fabric of Indian Independence," in which we follow Gandhi as he arrived at homespun cotton cloth and the peasant woman's spinning wheel as the central, unifying symbols of the national struggle for liberation from British rule. By the late 1880s, Manchester cottons had penetrated much of India, creating a severe trade deficit and artisan unemployment (Bayle 1986:307–09,212). Gandhi's campaign for the renewed production and use in dress of a handspun and handwoven textile is testimony

to the potentiality of cloth to unify large-scale societies. Not only did *khadi* displace the trousers, hats, shoes, and tailored coats that English manufacturers were dumping, along with machine-loomed fabrics, on Indian markets; it also challenged British rule and its arrogant imposition of sumptuary codes. Most important, through its ascetic imagery and identification with the poor, *khadi* dissolved the boundaries that divided Indian society. Distinctions of region, religion, gender, and rank were overcome by a simple and colorless textile as Gandhi, the renouncer, summoned up the oldest and most humble traditions of the subcontinent.

In the final essay of this book, "The Changing Fortunes of Three Archaic Japanese Textiles," Louise Cort analyzes rustic and ancient fabrics made from the long fibers of mulberry, *kuzu* vine, and thread-banana leaf. Difficult to collect and necessitating a lengthy soaking, rotting, boiling, and beating process to render them pliable for weaving, these fibers long ago surrendered to the cultivated "grass basts" like ramie and flax, in turn superseded by cotton and, in the famous urban workshops, by silk. Notwithstanding their lowly position in this evolving textile hierarchy, the long-vegetable fibers survived in two "extreme situations,"—in Japan's poorest, most remote regions and as the preferred cloth for sacred state rituals, above all the installation of new emperors. An expression of the "ancient core of Japanese culture," according to Cort, the cloths of rough, uncultivated fibers entered court circles through a process reciprocal to that of royal bestowals. Historically, an expanding Japanese Empire incorporated them as it subdued their producers, seeking not only tribute but a unity of disparate cultural elements in the interest of pacification.

Examining the three "rough" or "thick" cloths of peripheral Japan, Cort addresses themes important to the earlier chapters of this book: The centrality of cloth to gift exchange at marriage and death, the beliefs in its affective, spiritual powers—its capacity to bless and protect—and its evocation of continuities, however fragile, with the past. As a political center of gravity for the Ryukyu island chain, Okinawa even elevated banana leaf cloth to be a courtly textile. Only after the Japanese takeover in the seventeenth century did silk displace this fabric, reducing it to the role of an export to Japan. "Thick" brown cloth of mulberry fiber, woven in the remote mountains of Japan's main island, had long since undergone a parallel transformation, becoming a ritual mainstay of the imperial court.

Like the Ashanti ruler donning bark cloth for ancestral rites, like Gandhi adopting *khadi* in the struggle for Independence, the emperors of Japan forwent their fine silks on occasions of death and investiture, seeking legitimacy from a master symbol of "neolithic" ancestral ties.

Cort's account spans new uses of rustic cloth under modern conditions. Already in the late nineteenth century, mulberry textiles ceased to be used for clothing and ritual purposes. Instead, poor women manufactured food and storage bags from this sturdy material, selling their output for cash. More recently still, an urban movement of craft revival has defined mulberry as a fiber of choice for studio weavers. Comparable but different is cloth of the banana-leaf fiber, promoted today by an Okinawan folk-art movement seeking to establish a cultural identity for the Ryukyu islands independent of Japan—and in competition with the Japanese government's claim that this cloth belongs to the "Living National Treasure." In these and related examples, we see the whole range of cloth symbolism in a complex society, from its ancient beginnings to its myriad uses in rituals of continuity and legitimation, to its mobilization for tribute and, despite the competition of fashion and factory, its contested retention as an anchoring point, a link to real and imagined roots of the past.

## CLOTH AND GENDER

The division of labor between men and women in cloth manufacture and distribution, and the assignment of gender symbolism to cloth, emerge as issues in virtually all of the papers in this book. These papers leave us with the impression that, in many societies, cloth is more closely connected with women than with men. As a warning against universalizing this impression, but also as a way to consider its implications, we conclude with a discussion of gender and cloth.

To analyze the gender relations of cloth production, it is essential to acknowledge the multiplicity of steps involved in the manufacture of most fabrics, from the harvesting or collecting of fibers, to soaking, drying, softening, cleaning, and spinning them, to their reconstitution through weaving and their further elaboration through dyeing, bleaching, embroidery, appliqué, and so on. In many cloth traditions, especially those where textiles are associated

with ancestral histories, production demands not only technical and artistic skills, but rigorous attention to ritual as well. Men and women may take on some of these tasks in complement to each other, each participating in different stages of the production process, or the preponderance of technical, artistic, and ritual tasks may fall to one gender, excluding the other.

The ethnographic record includes many social groups in which cloth is manufactured wholly or largely by men. In much of Africa, men rather than women, or men as well as women, work at the looms. Among the Lele of Central Africa, women are responsible for food cultivation, leaving men to weave the fine raffia textiles so important to the politics of acquiring wives, settling disputes, and participating in exchange (Douglas 1965:197; 1967). As Darish's paper (this volume) shows, neighbors of the Lele, the Kuba, also assign men to the weaving of raffia, although women add the plush-pile embroidery that gives the material its aesthetic form. In the characteristic "men's" cloths of West Africa, men brocade imported silk or woolen yarn into their weavings but rely on women to spin for the cotton ground. Historically, among the Pueblo Indians, men spun as well as wove and embroidered, all of these activities taking place in the male ritual center, the *kiva*. The weavers and dyers of many urban or courtly textile traditions in large-scale societies were also men. Nevertheless, on a world scale and over several centuries, women have played a larger role than men in cloth production.

It does not necessarily follow that the producers of cloth are the controllers of its distribution. In the Lele case, where men do all of the weaving, women control some raffia exchanges as recipients of especially fine pieces (Douglas 1967:107–09). Yet women's role in production often gives them a larger say in distribution than one might expect. In Samoa, as Weiner (this volume) reports, it was more common for men than for women to hold the highest-ranking titles—but as producers of important textiles, women influenced decisions about bestowals regardless of their rank. Elsewhere, women not only make cloth but also preside over its allocation at major rituals of death and regeneration, marriage and the establishment of new families, investiture and the transmission of ancestral authority.

The predominance of women in cloth production and distribution in many parts of the world is linked to the widespread symbolic systems in which cloth evokes female power. The Kodi of western

Sumba typify this pattern. As Hoskins (this volume) shows, although Kodi women do not participate directly in men's political affairs, their role as skilled dyers renders them fearful, even polluting, to men and gives them command of their own destinies. Like people throughout Indonesia and much of Southeast Asia, they also adhere to symbolic categories that identify cloth with women and "hard" wealth, above all metal, with men. Each set of objects acquires gender-associated values that relate to sexuality, kinship, marriage alliances, and politics.

Upon a Kodi marriage, the groom's kin present gold ornaments along with buffalo and horses to the bride's family, while the kin of the bride give pigs and cloth to the relatives of the groom. Reinforcing the binary code of male and female oppositions are permutations internal to each category. Motifs on Kodi marriage cloths depict the wife-takers' bridewealth offerings, for example buffalos' eyes and horses' tails, while the gold ornaments that grooms offer resemble female genitalia. Both signify the loss of a daughter to her natal lineage and the transfer of her sexuality to her husband's group, a separation that Kodi women compare to death. Yet, according to Hoskins, the secrets of indigo dyeing redress women's subjugation after marriage. Indeed, one finds married women adorning themselves in beautiful ikats as a warning to their in-laws that outstanding bridewealth debts must still be paid.

The Kodi elaboration of a symbolic opposition between cloth and metal, related to each other as "women are to men" and differentially produced by each gender, has parallels among the Iban of Borneo, whose myths juxtapose textiles to sacred traditions of headhunting. "Even in this century," writes Gittinger, "no man's prowess was confirmed until he had taken the head of an enemy, and no woman was fully recognized until she had woven a *pua*" (an elaborate ikat blanket). During the preparation of mordants for the ikat dyeing of yarns, Iban women, like the Kodi, observe the same taboos as those imposed for childbirth and, comparing the laying out of warps for the loom with the taking of heads, call this activity "the warpath of women" (Gittinger 1979:218–19).

Other Southeast Asian symbolic systems balance cloth against writing—the textile and the text. Among the Temang in Nepal (March 1983), women make cloth for bridewealth and funerals, and are depicted as the horizontal weft threads of the loom in contrast to men, symbolized by the vertical warp threads. Whereas the

men's texts record the divine oaths that give continuity to ancestral lineages, exchanges of women's cloth at marriage bind the disruptive breaks in lineage solidarity. The contrast extends to an association of men with the right hand, women with the left and, in a mythic past, men with hunting and women with the loom (March 1983; see also Lefferts 1983; Messick 1987).

In societies where women are the main producers of cloth and control its distribution at marriage and death, their contribution to social and political life is considerable. Unfortunately, as Weiner details for one famous instance, ethnographers often overlook this possibility, whether from a disinterest in women's activities, or in fibers and fabrics (as distinct from food), or both. The famous instance is that of Malinowski, whose field research in the Trobriand Islands began in 1915 and led to publications that subsequently influenced theories of "primitive" exchange (notably Firth 1967; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Polanyi 1944; Sahlins 1972). The Trobriand wealth that formed the basis for Malinowski's discussions was produced and exchanged by men. Women's wealth, in the form of banana-leaf bundles and skirts, was obscured by men's production of yams, aesthetically displayed at harvest, and by the shells that men circulated in *kula* exchanges.

As Weiner (1976) asked, would Malinowski have ignored banana-leaf wealth if men had produced it? He did photograph women distributing this "cloth" and in his fieldnotes recorded the Kiriwina term for it as well as its role at death. Yet he overlooked its economic and ritual importance in relation to men's wealth, missing how women leveled the wealth of men (Weiner, this volume). Obligated to contribute to their sisters' accumulations for mortuary payments, men were constrained in the accumulation of "male" wealth, hence in their ability to create and sustain political alliances. Taking a comparative view of the differences between chieftaincy in Melanesia and Polynesia, Weiner (this volume) points out that as political hierarchies gained support from cloth wealth in Polynesian societies, some women achieved political prominence equal to that of men.

What about political formations that transcend chieftaincy, integrating or attempting to integrate a large-scale class society? The cases of Japan, India, and Inka Peru presented in this book are suggestive. In each instance, locally produced cloth, in addition to being the substance of kinship, became a basis for tribute or taxation

and an element to be stored in dynastic treasuries. Although women produced this cloth in the Andes and the mountainous peripheries of Japan, in India they often spun for male weavers. In all three societies, courtly and urban textile traditions made use of male artisans, for example the weavers of silk in Japan or the Inka weavers of feathered cloth. Highly skilled female specialists could also play a role in urban or court workshops, however, the cloistered *aqlla* of the Inka state being an outstanding example.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from the large-scale societies introduced in this book concerns women's continued affinity for the sacred values that local and rural people historically invested in cloth. These values, derived from concerns about continuity with the past and about transcending the disjunctures of death and marriage, were appropriated, distorted, and at times suppressed as classes and states emerged. Yet they did not go away. Revived during struggles for independence against impinging colonial powers, both the values and the women associated with them enjoyed an elevation of status, at least temporarily. The independence movement of Okinawans against Japanese hegemony (Cort, this volume), and of India against British rule (Bean, this volume), symbolically characterized both women and their role in cloth production as mainstays of the claim to an authentic past and a politically autonomous future.

It is against this backdrop that one might consider the impact on gender of capitalist production and culture. As suggested by the papers in this volume, market pressures to reduce labor costs made women vulnerable to loss of recognition for their contribution to textile wealth. Heavily recruited into the cottage industries of early modern Europe and subsequently into factories, female spinners and weavers were systematically paid at lower piece rates or wages than men. In Europe and perhaps elsewhere, these developments coincided with ideological changes such as those detailed by Stone-Ferrier and Schneider, in which women's manufacturing roles, earlier linked to sexual continence and domestic virtue, were increasingly portrayed as lascivious, demonic, at odds with reproduction. In contrast, the Kodi dyers, although guardians of industrial secrets considered polluting and possessors of such occult powers as witchcraft, command attention; some of these women become priests and even important leaders.

Women's involvement with cloth production exposes in complex ways the complementarity, the domination, and the subversive tactics that together comprise gender relations, forcing us to rethink women's roles in kinship, economic, and political domains. The sacred qualities historically associated with cloth express sexuality as they also transmit notions of biological and social reproductive capabilities, all attributes associated with women. As a master symbol proclaiming the legitimacy of ancestors and succession, the cloth that circulates at births, marriages, and deaths establishes obligations and legitimacy. Such cloth gives women a measure of economic autonomy and even, in some cases, political authority. From these cloth-related perspectives, the analytical categories used to define oppositions between women and men, such as domestic versus public and nature versus culture, are simplistic and inadequate.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps there is a kind of *hubris* in picking up threads from societies so separated in time and space and drawing them together into a meaningful portrayal of the social and political implications of producing and controlling cloth. But the analytical and historical perspectives represented in this book are, by their variety, a powerful testimony to the role of cloth in social transformation. In Part I we saw how, despite the presence of national currencies in societies such as those of Oceania, traditional cloth wealth not only remains an integral part of social and political life, but the continual demand for its presence also integrates its economic value with each nation's inflationary trends. In areas of Madagascar, imported silk textiles, replacing traditional ones, mediate death and relations with ancestors while also constituting symbols of national political importance. Even when vast public displays of cloth are subsequently buried with the dead, as among the Kuba, the continuation of these ancient rituals can subvert the local chiefly ranking system, drawing attention to an economy of equality that levels wealth in contradiction to the hierarchy of regional nobles and chiefs. The attribution to cloth of such a range of symbolic and economic roles reflects more than the labor invested in its production; the connections of its threads and weaving patterns with ancestral or mythical knowledge

ultimately make it a political vehicle for transmitting legitimacy, authority, and obligation.

Like language, cloth in its communicative aspect can be used to coerce. In Parts II and III, we see this coercion in situations of complex, socially stratified, capitalist and colonial societies. Whether we view the merchant capitalist cloth manufacturing in early modern Europe or the contemporary Mexican putting-out system, meanings in cloth and the gender division of labor were transformed by those in dominant positions. One society's representations of cloth were misread and misused by another, as the British colonial rule in India so incisively demonstrates. Yet, especially in the examples from India and Japan, we see the political power to be gained through the possession of cloth that symbolizes a sacred past. Cloth as an expression of "keeping while giving" does not articulate the ranking and hierarchy among groups and their chiefs only in small-scale societies. These same principles emerge in different times and places as rallying points for national legitimization. Valued as currency, shroud, ancestor, royalty, or fashion, cloth represents the key dilemmas of social and political life: How to bring the past actively into the present. Ultimately, the opposing properties of cloth—its inalienability and its fragilty—exemplify these universal needs and their contradictions.

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