This article attempts to examine certain manifestations of female militancy in Africa, not only for their own interest, but also to see whether they can throw any light upon the completely independent modern women’s liberation movements with which we are now familiar in the West. The African ethnographical material, which is set out first, refers mainly to the Bakweri, the Balong and the Kom of West Cameroon. Besides oral reports collected from Cameroonians about traditional behaviour and on particular occurrences, for the Bakweri there is additional relevant documentation from Court records. For the Kom some published material is available, but I rely here mainly upon information collected by a Kom who had an interest in social anthropology, as well as being the son of one of the principal female actors in the drama which will unfold below. The Cameroon material is followed by some relevant data from other parts of Africa. Discussion is then broadened to include material on the women’s liberation movement in America and England.

The Bakweri

The Bakweri live on the slopes and around the base of the Cameroon Mountain, which is a volcano of some 13,500 feet lying on the west coast of Africa. They are the largest autochthonous population in the area, numbering near 20,000 persons. They speak a Bantu language, and they distinguish a category which they label titi ikoli which is relevant to our discussion of female militancy. It is difficult to give a precise translation of the expression. Bakweri explain it in different ways: Titit ikoli is ‘beautiful’; titi ikoli means something valuable ‘as if one married a woman for £1,000’; yet, ‘the word refers to an insult’. As we shall see, it is possible to speak of the ‘native law of titi ikoli’ and of things being ‘of the nature of titi ikoli’. The expression falls into two parts: ikoli has the independent meaning of ‘thousand’. Titi is said to be a childish word for the female vulva, although the normal term for this is ndondo. It is sometimes used to refer to young girls. Everyone is said to ‘know the implications in [the combination] titi ikoli’ and usually mention of the expression brings forth embarrassed laughter. It comprehends the following main associations: ‘a woman’s underparts’ (the genitals, anus and buttocks), and the insult of these; and ‘women’s secrets’ and the revealing of these. At the same time it is associated with certain types of mandatory female sanctions which follow upon insults.

The insult is typically envisaged in the form of an accusation that the sexual parts of women smell. If such an insult has been uttered to a Bakweri woman before a witness, she is supposed immediately to call out all the other women of
the village. The circumstances having been recounted, the women then run and pluck vegetation from the surrounding bush, which they tie around their waists. Converging again upon the offender they demand immediate recantation and a recompense. If their demands are not met they all proceed to the house of the village head. The culprit will be brought forward, and the charges laid. If the insult is proved to have taken place, he will be fined a pig of a certain size for distribution to the group of women, or its money equivalent plus something extra, possibly salt, a fowl or money, for the woman who has been directly insulted. The women then surround him and sing songs accompanied by obscene gestures. All the other men beat a hasty retreat, since it is expected that they will be ashamed to stay and watch while their wives, sisters, sisters-in-law and old women join the dance. The culprit must stay, but he will try to hide his eyes. Finally the women retire victoriously to divide the pig between them.

The songs the women sing are often obscene by allusion, as for instance, in the song:

\[ \text{Na l-umwe njenje, e.} \\
(\text{I prick thorn}) \]

Another kind of song would be:

\[ \text{Titi ikoli, a senje veoli,} \\
\text{mollywood na molonga} \\
(\text{Titi ikoli is not a thing for insults,} \\
\text{beautiful beautiful}) \]

Other types of insult are recognised, as we shall see below, but it was said by a youth that offences relating to \text{titi ikoli} had become less common, since 'people were more clever and would not insult people like that. Not that they would not insult nowadays, but that they were cleverer to do it in the house with no-one to be witness'.

Cases of abuse of the type discussed were reported as having occurred, not only in Bakweri villages, but also in the ethnically mixed immigrant-dominated plantation camps and townships lying between them. For instance, in 1953, at a plantation labour camp, a Balundu boy cursed a woman saying she was 'rotten'. The women were all annoyed and they combined, regardless of tribal origin, and attempted to catch the offender. He managed to escape, but they determined to watch out for him.

**Judicial procedures**

During the late colonial period women had largely replaced these traditional direct sanctions by the use of formal Court procedures. Looking through notes taken from old Court records for a number of Bakweri villages for 1956, several cases of abuse of this type were revealed. The records were kept in English or pidgin English, by Court Clerks, and give useful examples of situations which could provoke such insults.

In the dispute taken by Mary Ekumbe and other women of Mafanja against Efende Mwendeley of Mafanja, before the Bonjongo Court, the charge was:

The plaintiff claims jointly for self and other women of Mafanja Bakweri Native Town the sum of £20, being damages for defamation of character and slander on about the 14th
February 1956 at about 2 p.m. In that Defendant did on 14th February 1956 at about 2 p.m. meet with Madam Therisia Ese at Mafanja town and used the following words in Bakweri language: ‘Ngwete ja varana isasosa imbondo jawu. Eveli ndi varana vase. Ese nyi? Ema linga ena na mene o vewa. Ndi na suu mwango’. The above speech in Bakweri language means that the women in this village have smelling bottoms and are not washing their bottoms. You are glad that I have gone to prison. I have won the case.

The defendant, Efende, denied the charge. The leading plaintiff, Mary, gave the following evidence:

Some months ago defendant had a case of a cap gun with Carl Bweme. This matter was reported to police and a police constable came [from town] to arrest defendant [and took him away]. A few days later defendant returned rejoicing that he had been acquitted. We all were happy to hear that, and we were trying to welcome [him, and] he turned to us and used the words mentioned above on us. We got offended and reported the matter to the village head Kekele where defendant was found guilty and asked to pay £5.0.0 to the women, [but] he refused. Then we took action in the magistrates’ court. The Magistrate’s Court had then referred the case back to the local village Court.

The women’s case was much strengthened by the support of the Defendant’s wife, who after reporting what her husband had said about the Mafanja women, remarked sadly: ‘Hearing this I was touched’ (that is: upset). The Court ruled in favour of the women and awarded them £10 damages, and costs of £4.0.6d. The reasons given by the Court for this decision were:

Defendant admits that he used insultive words on the people of Mafanja including women. But has refused to tell court the words on the people. Plaintiff has 3 witnesses to support her statement and defendant’s wife is one. Defendant has no witness for his defence. The real damages that would have been awarded to the women according to local customary laws is £5.6.0. The court considers the award of £10.0.0. because defendant has suffered the women by going to Buea Magistrate’s Court and to this Court.¹

In the same Court, Namondo Lokita of Ewongo accused another woman of (as a judge put it) insulting ‘the lower part of women’. She claimed £3 ‘being damages for insult that Plaintiff speaks with the anus’. Namondo’s evidence went as follows (I paraphrase where not in quotation marks): The Defendant, Sundi, is my sister-in-law. She began to talk against me and I reported this to her sister Misis, who then warned her not to do so. Whereupon the Defendant Sundi, in front of witnesses, said ‘my disgrace of suing people to court had gone far and wide’. Namondo continued:

I asked whether suing people to court was a crime. I told her that she should not forget she is so mouthy that she could not stay with the husband in a house for a long period. Then she said I speak with my Anus. Tondi heard this . . .

Sundi’s side of the story was as follows:

It is true [that the] Plaintiff is my sister-in-law. One day her husband came to ask me that I talked ill of Plaintiff that I asked whether plaintiff was wearing high hill shoes. I refused the fact. [Later I was with the Plaintiff and] she began to quarrel [with me]. She said I had a disgrace that I would not stay in any house with my husband because of being too mouthy. I asked whether she was speaking with her anus . . .

Namondo had taken Sundi before the Village Head, Nambele Moka, who supported her complaint. But Sundi would not accept his ruling and had then gone to another elder who supported her instead.
After hearing all the evidence the Court ruled in favour of the plaintiff Namondo, awarding 30/- damages and 12/6 costs. The reasons given were:

1. Defendant admits that she said Plaintiff speaks with the anus.
2. Defendant was found guilty by chief Nambile who heard witnesses. The second elder who found the plaintiff guilty [that is, found Sundi, our Defendant, not guilty] did not hear any witnesses.

The Court then added the general principle, with which we are now concerned:

'It is unlawful to insult the lower part of women'.

Another case which was brought before the Lisoka Court is useful because it concerns the definition of titi ikoli. The interpretation of the term made by the women plaintiffs was not upheld by the all-male Court bench. The case was brought by Namondo Keke of 'Wonjia Women Community' against another woman Elisah Ngalle, also of Wonjia. The claim was for £6.10.0 'being compensation for woman "titi Ikolli"'. The plaintiff being ill, was represented by another woman of the same community. Her case was presented thus:

One day I was in my house and so Defendant and her husband had a dispute. She suspected the husband of adultery. That she met a rag on the bed owned by one Lyona [= Liengu] Ikome. This rag is what we women use for co-habiting. It was a very shameful thing when this was brought out. We then decided to call for Lyengu [Liengu] Ikome. Defendant disagreed. This is why the community of Wonjia women have sued her to Court that she has proven women's secrets.

The rag was produced in Court. The Defendant, Elisah, did not in fact deny the circumstances, but said as part of her evidence:

Very soon woman said I have offended them by native law of 'titi ikoli'. This was at my surprise. 'Titi ikoli' means a person who has abused another the private part. I did not abuse anybody. I wonder to be sued in Court.

Although the plaintiff (acting for the 'women's community') affirmed that 'any rag of this nature is of "titi ikoli"', the Court dismissed the case against Elisah. Here, however, we meet the element of 'revealing women's secrets'.

These incidents all involved Bakweri. There are many migrants from other parts of Cameroon in the area, and at Muea Court, in the same year, a woman described as 'Catherine of Yaounde at Muea' sued a plantation worker from the up-country plateau who was known to the Court as 'Thomas of Grassfield at Lysoka Camp'. She asked for £15 'being compensation for immoral insult against Plaintiff in that her private part is watery and hollow since 2 weeks'. Thomas did not show up in Court. Catherine gave her evidence as follows:

One day while coming from the farm in company of [two Muea women] the Defendant saw me and called me. I kept mute. He began to abuse me to say my private part is hollow and watery. I then held him. The Molyko [Cameroon Development Corporation] Manager met us and on inquiry, I told him the whole story. He then advised me to sue to Court. Before suing to Court I first of all approached the Overseer and the headman of [the Defendant's plantation work gang] was authorized [to hear the complaint]. The defendant was called for hearing but refused. This is why the case has been brought before this Court.

The two Muea women witnesses confirmed Catherine's story and the Court ruled in her favour, awarding her £10 damages and costs. A Free Warrant of Arrest of the Defendant Thomas was issued.
The seriousness with which the Courts regarded insults of this kind is confirmed when we consider the level of damages awarded at that time in other types of defamation case. In Bonjongo during the year under examination, 206 new cases were heard (plus 50 enforcement cases). Fifteen of these (or approximately 7 per cent. of new cases) involved defamation of one sort or another. Apart from the two cases we have considered above there were: defamation by accusation of witchcraft, six cases; by accusation of corruption (also in fact a witchcraft case), one case; one case of false accusation of theft; one case where the plaintiff claimed to have been falsely accused of destroying crops; one defamation case where plaintiff (who was to be a selector in a succession dispute) had been accused of not being a citizen of his village. There was one case each of ‘scandalising’ or ‘traduction’ of name, and one where the plaintiff had been insulted by being called a fool. The damages awarded in the cases which were successful were as follows: false accusation of witchcraft, two cases, damages assessed at £1 and £5. False accusation of theft, £6, and for falsely alleging that plaintiff had destroyed crops, damages 10/-.

‘Scandalising my name’ was proved, and a recompense of £1 was given; and damages for suggesting that Plaintiff was a fool were assessed at 3/-.

The fines in the cases which were discussed earlier were as follows: Namondo, who had asked for £3, received 30/- damages from Sundi. In the case where Efende had to pay damages to the women of Mafanja, the Court assessed the customary charge as £5.6.0, but ordered him to pay £10, for putting the women to the trouble of taking him to Court (the women had wanted £20). The women of Wonjia asked for, but did not get £6.10.0, since the case was dismissed. Although Catherine did not get all the £15 she asked for, she was awarded £10. These sums may seem paltry by modern English monetary standards, but they were quite high in Bakweri terms at the time, especially compared to damages paid for other insults. They were surprisingly high when one considers that damages demanded of co-respondents in divorce cases were set as low as £2.2.6 (a sum known as ‘an adultery fee’), and that where divorce was not involved compensation paid by an adulterer was likely to be in the order of £5: only half the sum which Efende had to pay the Mafanja women.

* * * * *

What can be teased out of the evidence so far considered? In titi ikoli we find a semantic field which includes ‘beautiful and above price’, the female genitals and, possibly by extension, the neighbouring area of the anus and buttocks, and is associated with ‘women’s secrets’. It includes the serious offence of stating publicly that the private parts of women smell. Both men and women may commit the offence. Such insults concern not only the woman directly abused, but all women. Mandatory militant action follows which overrides allegiance to kin and tribal groups. Women demonstrate, not on behalf of the victim of the abuse, but on behalf of themselves as a sexual group. Traditionally on these occasions they dress as the ‘wild’ in green vegetation. Judicial procedures controlled by men may be invoked in both traditional and modern circumstances.

In stressing the particular association of titi ikoli with women, the possibility of an association of the term with men has not been excluded. In response to questions it was said that men would resent insults of the kind under discussion, but it was
agreed that there would be no question of men coming out to demonstrate en masse or to dance or to sing indecent songs. The only alleged evidence of such insults being directed against men that I have, was the attempt by Efende to escape the wrath of the women of Mafanja by saying he had ‘insulted all people both women and men ... I did not call one’s name’. He hoped, it seems, thus to desexualise the insults, but no offence seems to have been taken by the men if he did so. Young brides are particularly warned not to insult their husbands in certain ways: these include spitting, and a certain gesture made with the hand, but no mention is made of titi ikoli insults.

The Balong

The Balong are a people numbered in hundreds only, who live in four villages at the foot of the mountain, about forty miles inland, sharing a boundary with the Bakweri. In all four villages immigrants are very conspicuous. Although there are differences Balong also share many features with the Bakweri. Balong women too are prepared to come out in defence of their sex:

When a man insults his wife and says ‘Your ass de smell’ it is like insulting all women, and all the women will be angry. Even if a brother curses his sister like that it will be the same. The women will tell other women and in the evening they will go to that man and demand a fine of £,5 and one pig and soap for all to wash their bodies because he has said that women smell. If the man refuses, the women will send a young woman round the village with a bell to warn men to stay indoors. They [the women] will be angry and they will take all their clothes off. They will shame him and sing songs. They will sing NdungtufJinwefiga wa (I knock my toe, it hurts, meaning ‘man curse me, I vex’).

Usually the man will pay the fine, but if he still refuses the women will go and tell the old men of the village. If they do not get satisfaction there, in the last resort they will take the offender to Court.

Balong women told of these events with obvious glee. The chief’s sister, a youngish woman, said that she had on one occasion been ‘a soldier boy’, that is one of the young women chosen as messengers by the older women to do ‘the fighting’, and she claimed that she had helped to seize a man. The Balong also reported a case of two women who had quarrelled and had insulted each other in the standard way. The women of all Yoke village gathered and fined them £5 each, which they paid. The money was used to buy salt from a town about forty miles away. It is to be noted that this salt was divided among all the women of Yoke village, including the newly born female children. The Balong called this titi ikoli-like custom: ndong. I cannot offer a firm etymology for this, but it resembles Duala ndon, ‘beautiful’.

The Kom

The Kom (some 30,000 strong) live in a very different environment from the Bakweri and Balong, some 300 miles inland on the rolling mountain tops of the Grassland Plateau. The only immigrants in significant numbers are the transhumant Fulani cattle-herders who, by arrangement with the Kom chief, obtain permission to graze their stock on Kom lands. Descent is matrilineal, and in their traditions of migration and early history females occupy a prominent role. It is
recounted that, due to an act of trickery by an enemy, all the active male members of the community were once slaughtered. To defend the group the women decked themselves in their deceased husband's military garb and weapons and camouflaged themselves in vines. The women kept guard and repelled enemy attacks, while the few remaining old men built the houses, hunted for food, and went and paid the required tributes.

The Kom have a female practice called anlu with aspects very similar to those associated with titi ikoli and udong. Anlu

traditionally referred to a disciplinary technique employed by women for particular offences. These include the beating or insulting (by uttering such obscenities as 'Your vagina is rotten') of a parent; beating of a pregnant woman; incest, seizing of a person's sex organs during a fight; the pregnancy of a nursing mother within two years after the birth of the child; and the abusing of old women (Ritzenthaler 1960: 151).

We should note here Ritzenthaler's term disciplinary technique. Chilver and Ka-berry (1967: 141), speaking also of the Kom, say that 'when the women of a village wished to resort to disciplinary action against a man ... they assembled as anlu'. Anlu they derive from the root -lu meaning 'to drive away'. The term anlu itself, then, is not a Kom equivalent for the expression titi ikoli. It appears to con-note the Kom equivalent of the patterns of militant behaviour associated with titi ikoli.

The invoking of anlu is described by a Kom (Francis Nkwain) as follows:

'Anlu' is started off by a woman who doubles up in an awful position and gives out a high-pitched shrill, breaking it by beating on the lips with the four fingers. Any woman recognizing the sound does the same and leaves whatever she is doing and runs in the direction of the first sound. The crowd quickly swells and soon there is a wild dance to the tune of impromptu stanzas informing the people of what offence has been committed, spelling it out in such a manner as to raise emotions and cause action. The history of the offender is brought out in a telling gossip. Appeal is made to the dead ancestors of the offender, to join in with the 'Anlu'. Then the team leaves for the bush to return at the appointed time, usually before actual dawn, donned in vines, bits of men's clothing and with painted faces, to carry out the full ritual. All wear and carry the garden-egg type of fruit which is supposed to cause 'drying up' in any person who is hit with it. The women pour into the compound of the offender singing and dancing, and, it being early in the morning, there would be enough excreta and urine to turn the compound and houses into a public latrine. No person looks human in that wild crowd, nor do their actions suggest sane thinking. Vulgar parts of the body are exhibited as the chant rises in weird depth . . .

Until the offender repents, he is ostracised, a punishment said to be worse than death, which seems the more welcome because 'by it a new door is opened into a room peopled by relatives and friends and there are always sacrifices to link the living with the dead', whereas ostracism 'kills and gives no new life'. When he repents, the offender will be taken and immersed in a stream, and any of his cooking pots which had been contaminated by the garden eggs will be cleaned also. After the purification, the incident is regarded as closed, and is not to be referred to again.

Thus the Kom can be seen to have a pattern of female militancy not unlike that of the Bakweri and Balong. Revenge is taken on an offender by corporate action, and typically he is disgraced by a display of vulgarity on the part of the women.
The traditional picture is of such militancy being aroused by offences against women of a broadly sexual nature. Although anlu could involve the participation of women from more than one village, it used to be said that only very few old men could recall incidents beyond simple boycotts limited to the village where the offender lived. One might easily have been led to assume, therefore, that the practice had become enfeebled and was dying out. Experience elsewhere (for instance, among the Bakweri) has shown the unreliability of such assumptions. The concept of symbolic ‘templates’ which serve to generate events from time to time in unexpected ways has been set out in Ardener (E. W.) 1970. Something like this process took place among the Kom in 1958, when 7,000 anlu women rose up. It must be noted that their grievance was not, in this case, sexual insult, but the ‘template’ for action was that of anlu, and for that reason is of interest here. Events astonished everyone, including the Kom. The following account rests on Nkwain’s data, although Ritzenthaler has also published a version (1960).

It may all be said to have started in 1955 when a regulation was brought in to force the women of the Grassfields to build their farm ridges horizontally along the hills instead of vertically, to prevent soil erosion. Not, you might think, a very provocative requirement. It is, however, as I can confirm from experience, much harder to ridge horizontally on a steep slope. Demonstration farms were set up to instruct the women, to no avail: they ignored the order. Some were fined. Despite the unpopularity of the measure with women, the new methods were supported by some ‘progressives’ (teachers and others) on the all-male Kom local government council. In 1958 a zealous Agricultural Assistant unwisely tried to force the issue by uprooting some farm crops, traditionally an offence in Kom. About this time also, a Sanitary Inspector had been trying to improve hygiene in the market by pouring away tainted liquor and destroying bad food. The Chief was also becoming unpopular with the women due to his supposed leniency with Fulani cattle-herders who allowed their stock to wander into the women’s farms. Other changes at that time included the development of national party politics. The Government party was then led by a Bakweri, Dr Endeley. In Kom his party was associated with the modernising policy which had resulted in the destruction of food. The party was also unpopular on other grounds.

Matters came to a head on Friday 4 July when the Council met to consider two issues: the fining of women for farming offences, and the organising of a welcome party for the impending visit of the Premier, Dr Endeley. A Council member, Teacher Chia, was advocating both, in the face of known opposition from the women. The atmosphere became tense. Then Mamma Abula stepped forward from out of the crowd of spectators. She performed some dance steps, and gingerly walked up to Teacher Chia and spat in his face. Suddenly,

A woman from Tinifoinbi sprinted up to the said Chia and also spat. Then a third woman, Mamma Thecla Neng, doubled over and shrilled the ‘Anlu’ war cry, which was echoed and re-echoed in a widening circle beginning with the women who had been in attendance at the Council. Fright gripped Chia and he started for his bicycle only to find it covered with twines, around which a growing number of women were dancing and singing. Women started to pick up bits of stones to throw them at him cursing him as they did so. He ran to the Mission House and made for the Father’s latrine. The Rev. Father bolted the door and stood with his back to it. The women gathered in dance, and vines and branches were cut and heaped in front of the latrine.
The headmaster tried to disperse the women, but they sang mocking songs about him.

The women sang and danced and, as emotions grew, told the world Mr Chia belonged nowhere—"He is excreta". And they would shrill out 'U-li-li-li-li-li' and inform the ancestors that their culprit sons were on the way to join them. Death wish! Terror! And then they turned and left the Mission and went up the Yongmbang Hill overlooking the Njinikom market, there to set up their [own] demonstration farm, with the ridges running down the hill in a challenge to the new Agricultural Department's directive. No broadcasting station could surpass the Yongmbang Hill and soon this hill was black with teeming thousands of women. When they came down that hill planning had already been fixed. ‘Anlu’ had started ... The next day, Saturday, 5th July, saw the women in Bobe Andreas Ngong's compound where fighting ensued. Jerome Ngong used a cutlass on one of the women and sticks flew here and there battlewise. After ruining much property the 'Anlu' marched on the market beating and driving away such men as had dared to put up wares . . . 'The men can't have their fun while we are suffering'.

To cut a long and fascinating story short: the place was in uproar. Since the teachers and the Catholic Father had determined to send the school children out to the road to welcome the Premier, the women kept the children away from school, which therefore had to close. The prominent catholic establishment in Kom was finally forced to concede the transfer of some unpopular teachers, but not before the notorious headmaster had died (of, it was said, high blood pressure). Disgusted with the Courts which were prepared to consider fining women, the anlu leaders even set up their own, and insisted on dealing with all land cases, in defiance of the Chief and the Administrative machine. "'Anlu' raged', there were 'breaches of the peace' and finally the police had to take notice, and a number of men and women were arrested. The expatriate police official in Bamenda intervened and ordered their release on condition that they report for questioning to the police station in Bamenda, about forty miles from Kom, at a later date.

In the intervening weeks anlu operated in a hushed atmosphere that was said to be more frightening than the more overt demonstrations. The women took advice from those men who were opposed to Mr Chia and the government party of Dr Endeley. Anlu became highly organised.

On Thursday afternoon, 20 November, two thousand women left for Bamenda, wearing vines, and with unwashed bodies painted black. They were accompanied by two men. Another 4,000 women (the elderly, suckling mothers and the like) settled down in the Njinikom market to await their return. The column of women were ordered not to speak to any man on the way, and to eat only Kom food and drink only Kom water which they therefore carried with them. No peel, nor any remains of food were to be left on alien soil. An exception was made of the settlement just outside Bamenda where they were to spend the night. They arrived there totally exhausted, their feet swollen, some never having travelled such a distance before. They spent the night singing special songs. The next day they marched up the escarpment to Bamenda, where the leader made a long statement to the police. In the end, however, the police decided to take no further action. The women returned to Kom in triumph—ferried part of the way in two trucks lent by the police.

For some time the opponents of anlu were ostracised and prevented from
attending public functions and ceremonies, funerals, childbirth feasts and co-operative farming units. They were by these means denied access to some farming lands. These were traditional anlu methods of forcing quick penitence. Eventually peace was made and things settled down, although to a new order. The anlu leader sat on the local Council. The Catholics and the anlu women became reconciled. Indeed they teamed up against the American Baptists who were said to have referred to the women as ‘anlu-nuts’. Mr Chia made his peace with the women too. He is now said to be happy when he recalls the day when the women ‘cleansed’ both him and his compound. ‘I felt good after that’ he is quoted as saying, ‘Be careful with our mothers’.

Comparative African material

The ethnographic data presented above all come from West Cameroon. The use of obscenity by women, including exposure (real or implied) of parts of the body which are normally covered, exists elsewhere. Mrs Steady kindly reviewed her material for Sierra Leone and confirmed that ‘It is not unusual for signalled references to be made to the genitals or the bottom in disputes.’ In what is often regarded as no more than a childish parody, she says, children ‘usually accompany the gesture by the characteristic flippant remark “ax mi wes” (ask my bottom)’. ‘Between adults it is far more serious. It is more commonly employed by women mainly, I think, because of the greater mobility of women’s clothing.’ ‘Prostitutes are known to employ this form of insult whenever a client refuses to honour his credit . . .’ ‘[At] least three cases are known where [gestures of vulgarity] were used to counter the husband’s physical violence.’ Mrs Steady’s information all related to instances of individual action, except for one where ‘this form of protest was used by a girl and her mother against a man for his breach of promise of marriage’.7 She stresses that such vulgar behaviour would normally be considered disgusting.

Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, in a paper about prescribed or ritualised obscenity, cites a case of female exposure which is relevant here. Among the Azande:

the behaviour of the wives of a man when his sister’s son has made a predatory raid on his belongings, for which, according to native law, there is no redress, seems from one aspect to be a custom in the same category as those already described in this paper. These women tear off their grass covering from over the genitals and rush naked after the intruder, shouting obscene insults at him and making licentious gestures. We mention these occasions, but the obscenity, though permitted is neither a prescribed nor a collective response (Evans-Pritchard 1929: 320; 1956: 87–8).

Professor Evans-Pritchard is no doubt correct in stating that the behaviour of the women is not prescribed, but it seems to be a standardised or predictable response. Although he states that such behaviour is not collective, we may notice that he refers to ‘the wives of a man’, and not merely to ‘a wife’.

Kikuyu women, it seems, also expose themselves in certain circumstances. In the Kikuyu data which follow we may note that the notion of ‘women’s secrets’ once again appears in association with the technique:

It is said that in the Meru group when a girl becomes a woman, that is when her first child is born, a contingent curse is sworn on the amniotic fluid to regulate her future conduct as a
woman and to preserve the secrets of the woman's social life; this oath was also used to hide the fact of second circumcisions practised on initiated girls at the time of childbirth. A form of curse employed by women and known throughout the Unit is the deliberate exhibition of the private parts towards the thing or person cursed. To do this is *guturama* in Kikuyu and *futuramira ng'asia* is to curse So-and-So in this way. Quarrelling women sometimes use it, and when co-wives dispute about a garden one of them if she gets thoroughly angry, may put it out of use entirely by uncovering her person and making sexual gestures at the garden in the presence of her rival. It is to be noticed, however, that this is not a recognized and regular form of contingent curse, and Africans, except when they are inflamed by anger, find its use disgusting. But occasions when it has been solemnly employed, even by all the women of a large community, are sometimes mentioned, as when the women of a ridge have gathered together to show their disapproval of another ridge or of some over-bearing personality who has annoyed them. The method is then to remove their under-garments, stand in a line with their backs towards the offender, bend forward, and lift their skirts in unison (Lambert 1956: 99).8

Mary Douglas states that among the Lele of the Kasai (Congo), any married woman who ran away with a lover ran the risk of involving her relatives in a blood feud. If this happened she would be blamed, and 'The women, mothers and sisters of the dead men in the village where she had fled, would treat her with every contumely, dancing around her, singing abusive songs, stripping off their skirts, unforgivable in itself, and rubbing her face in the dirty clothes' (Douglas 1963: 137).

These small scraps of comparative material from different parts of Africa do not allow firm conclusions to be drawn, but they do show that some elements in the pattern found in Cameroon are not unique in Africa. Perhaps more similar evidence has been overlooked.

Militant techniques and their application in Africa and in the women's liberation movements

Having looked at the African material, can we now see any similarities between the garden-egg throwing women of Kom and the women who threw flour over Bob Hope during the Miss World competition in London? Are the strippers of Balong and the bra-discarders of America motivated alike? Has Germaine Greer anything in common with the Bakweri?

First let us consider the use of obscenity itself. This can best be understood through consideration of respectful, deferential and submissive behaviour. There are a great number of symbolic systems through which degrees of deference towards a superior or the structuring of mutual attention can be manifested, and these may have positive and negative aspects. Thus not only may prescribed modes of address express relationships, but the avoidance of certain terms and phrases may also be significant; certain gestures may be exacted, while others are deliberately suppressed; parts of the body may be revealed, or they may be covered.9 The existence of an array of signs for demonstrating respect and submission permits the generation of the oppositely marked contraries that express their antitheses: disrespect, or the denial of dominance. It is from such oppositions that the absurdities of obscenity draw their symbolic force, or derive what Mrs Steady has termed the inherent power in vulgarity. When the women of Cameroon subject a man to such a display they demonstrate that they no longer recognise his power to elicit conformity. He is further demeaned to the extent that normal
social relations are denied him, and his recognition as a full member of the community may be put in jeopardy (‘Mr Chia belonged nowhere’). Thus the obscenities of anlu mark the middle stage in the series:

respect → disrespect → no respect
(or: seemly behaviour → unseemly behaviour → ostracism
or: + → − → o)

Lambert similarly explains that, when the Kikuyu women lift their skirts in unison ‘they indicate that they will have no further social dealings with the people of the area concerned or that they do not recognise the authority of the man whom they have thus deliberately insulted’. In Sierra Leone, within the domestic unit, as Mrs Steady puts it, such behaviour is ‘a retaliatory threat to the husband’s position of dominance in the household’.

A full examination of why certain symbols are selected to indicate deference, rather than others, is not possible here. Each will no doubt have a different social ‘etymology’. We might note, however, that the use of expressions normally taboo (e.g. swear words) seems to be more widespread among the men of some societies (e.g. our own) than among the women. The practice is often intended to symbolise the inability of others to demand deference or exert control over the speaker or group of speakers, and it may be that women do not swear as frequently because their dependent position does not allow them this freedom. Perhaps where women do adopt the habit, they feel themselves to be in relatively independent or secure positions. How far modesty and the preserving of ‘women’s secrets’ rests upon the need to avoid the dangers of molestation, it is difficult to say. If the motive for obscuring parts of the body by women, through verbal avoidance or otherwise, is interpreted as a form of self-defence, this itself implies a position of weakness or inferiority, and the symbolic usages to indicate politeness might be an extension of this. I cannot go into such speculations now, but we can note the need for further discussion.

In moving on to examine the modern women’s movements in America and Europe, I stress the distinction between ‘women’s rights’ and ‘women’s liberation’. Those who concern themselves with the former seek the recognition of a claim to a greater share of valued resources, both tangible and intangible, as contemporarily defined. Those concerned with ‘women’s liberation’ believe that this cannot be achieved without changes in the stereotypes of women which have supposedly largely been determined by men. Victoria Brittain says of those representing the former movement: ‘When they think in feminist terms . . . it is about actual discrimination and prejudice against women rather than a general challenge to society’s stereotyping of women’ (1971: 12). Germaine Greer, a liberationist, speaks of the necessity for women to question ‘the most basic assumptions about feminine normality’: a little more variation in the stereotype will not do (1970: 14). Betty Friedan believes that there is acknowledged evidence ‘which throws into question the standards of feminine normality, feminine adjustment, feminine fulfilment, and feminine maturity by which women are trying to live’ (1963: 31). The dichotomy between the ‘reformists’ who are interested in ‘rights’ and the ‘revolutionaries’ who are interested in ‘liberation’ is not, of course, rigid, and most women liberationists include ‘reformist’ proposals in their programmes. Neverthe-
less the distinction is a useful one. Perhaps the notions ‘instrument’ and ‘expression’ may be relevant here: women’s rightists may be concerned with overcoming ‘instrumental exploitation’ (involving money, jobs, consumer goods, etc.) and women’s liberationists with ‘expressive exploitation’ (which is ‘related directly to the irrational and unconscious psychological processes and motives characteristic of man’s complex mental structure’ (De Vos)).

Social anthropologists recognise that men and women in society organise their perceptions through ‘models’ of varying degrees of articulation and generality. The difficulty which men (and ethnographers) encounter in identifying the models of the world which women actually use—as opposed to those which, directly or indirectly they admit to—has been raised by Edwin Ardener (1971b). He asked: ‘if the models of a society made by most ethnographers tend to be derived from the male portion of that society, how does the symbolic weight of that mass of persons—half or more of normal human populations . . . express itself?’ (1971b: 138). His remarks are a modern formulation of the question for which Freud said he could find no answer, despite his ‘thirty years of research into the feminine soul, . . . what does a woman want?’. E. Ardener suggests that we might abstract female models of the world by a study of symbolism, since, due to the relative inarticulateness of women, they are less ready to speak, and ethnographers are less attuned to hear them.

It seems to me that the women’s liberation movements can best be understood as attempts ‘to speak’: their volubility is, indeed, a marked feature. Yet women, it seems, encounter many difficulties in doing so, for ‘this world, always belonging to men, still retains the form they have given it’ (de Beauvoir 1953: 641), and, ‘one of the results of the sexual role-playing which both Freud and society as a whole encouraged, is’ (according to Figes 1970: 141) ‘that most women, even if asked, would no longer really know what they wanted’. ‘Women’, writes Firestone ‘have no means of coming to an understanding of what their experience is, or even that it is different from male experience. The tool for representing, for objectifying one’s experience in order to deal with it, culture, is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes. So that finally, signals from their direct experience that conflict with the prevailing (male) culture are denied and repressed’ (1972: 149). Women, then, are searching for new models of themselves and the world around them. All women, and all men belong to many different sets, for each of which we may expect there to be different models. Tiger notes that ‘being human is more persuasively characteristic of a human male than being male’ (1971: 56) and similarly ‘being a male is part of being a person’ (p. xiv). This could be rephrased: the set ‘person’ (and the set ‘human’) includes the set ‘male’. In such a scheme, we might presume that it also includes the set ‘female’. Ardener in his 1969 paper on Bakweri models of men and women states: ‘The objective basis of the symbolic distinctions between nature and society, which Lévi-Strauss recently prematurely retreated from, is a result of the problem of accommodating the two logical sets which classify human beings by different bodily structures: “male”/“female”; with the two other sets: “human”/“non-human”. It is’, he suggests, ‘men who usually come to face this problem, and because their model for mankind is based on that for man, their opposites, woman and non-mankind (the wild), tend to be
ambiguously placed. Hence in Douglas’s terms (1966), come their sacred and polluting aspects. Women’ he continues, and he is thinking primarily of Bakweri women, ‘accept the implied symbolic content, by equating womankind with the men’s wild’ (published 1971b: 154). While it might be true that Bakweri like other women are often prepared to play men’s games, as we have seen they sometimes, like the proverbial worms, turn. We also find, implicit in recent writings of the women’s liberation movement, the very complaint that while ‘male’ may indeed be ascribed to the set ‘human’, the set ‘female’ does not have an equal place in it. Firestone explicitly states that: ‘Women, biologically distinguished from men, are culturally distinguished from “human”’ (1972: 192). Her answer is ‘not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally’ (ibid: 19).

Thus among the models being sought, are many in which the criterion of sex is apparently to be regarded as not of diacritical importance, a position which may appear to point to statements that there is no difference at all between men and women. Yet in fact the differences are rarely if ever denied; indeed, the opposite is usually true: they are stressed. ‘[T]here will always be certain differences between man and woman;’ writes de Beauvoir, ‘her eroticism, and therefore her sexual world, have a special sensitivity of their own and cannot fail to engender a sensuality, a sensitivity of a special nature’ (1953: 686). Firestone, herself, states that ‘men and women are tuned to a different cultural wave-length, that in fact there exists a wholly different reality for men and women’ (1953: 151). Thus we find, beyond the search for new models for various sets which can include both men and women, a desire, conscious or not, to identify a specifically female model (of that ‘special nature’) in which the essential attributes, physical, spiritual and moral appear: a model of what we may perhaps term ‘femineity’ of the deepest structural level and greatest degree of generality, which is quite distinct from the old, supposedly male-derived, ‘femininity’ with its load of associated ‘secondary sexual characteristics’. Greer admits to ‘relying upon a concept of woman which cannot be found to exist’ (1970: 21). Firestone seeks ‘an exploration of the strictly female reality’, from which will be developed an ‘authentic female art’, a task which, she stresses, is not to be regarded as reactionary but rather as progressive. This searching for ‘femineity’ may possibly have a parallel in the attempts to isolate ‘negritude’ by some Africans. Femineity is not merely an equivalent of femininity, since it is located at a different level of abstraction and articulation.

Most men and some women find it hard to understand the appeal (not necessarily unaccompanied by criticism) which the writings of the women’s liberationists have for many women (both in and without the movement) who might appear to have gained access to resources to an extent at least equal to that of their male counterparts. It is the identification of the model of ‘femineity’ and its relation to other models, which, I suggest, such women feel, intuitively or otherwise, to be unsatisfactory. The more sets which women consider do or should include themselves, the more critical does an acceptable model of femineity become in establishing separate sexual identity and the more critical does the question of the relevance of this identity to these other sets become.

In Cameroon, the militant techniques associated with Titi ikoli, ndong and anlu did not originally seem to have been principally used for securing ‘women’s
rights’. The reason for this was probably that there were other sets—e.g. bi-sexual kin groups—which had an interest in preserving these rights, at least to an acceptable minimum degree. A woman’s access to land, to food, to clothing, to medicines, to freedom from assault, and so forth, affected her role within the groupings to which she belonged and her duties as a mother and therefore her capability of maintaining the groups. Males as well as females had an interest in her well-being, and they would intervene on her behalf in certain circumstances. In Kom, in 1958 when new forces brought changes affecting women which other groupings seemed unable to control, almost it seems by an act of inspiration on the part of Mamma Neng, the processes of anlu were redirected to the defence of ‘women’s rights’, but this seems to have been somewhat novel.

Insults of the type associated with titi ikoli (although often referring to the external organs of generation) do not seem to have been regarded as reflecting upon, or as being directly concerned with a woman’s capacity, role or ‘function’ as child-bearer, even though motherhood is a matter of the very greatest attention in Cameroon societies. It is interesting to note, therefore, that liberationists single out the sociological and anthropological theories of ‘functionalism’ for special criticism, particularly as they are applied by American educational sociologists influenced by Margaret Mead and Talcott Parsons. Functionalist description, complains Millett (1969), inevitably becomes prescriptive. ‘Utility alone detains its clear and disinterested glance’. It justifies the system it perceives. Support for maintaining existing ‘complementary’ sex-differentiated ‘roles’ is derived from it. A Times leader writer was near the mark when he complained: ‘Perhaps the real criticism of the Miss World competition should also be applied to the Women’s Liberation movement: that they both exalt an essentially functionless feminism’. Possibly that is exactly what the latter wish to do. I suspect, however, that they may not agree with the Times that the Miss World competition is functionless: it may seem to them to reify one of those male stereotypes of women which they find so inadequate, and which may be used to exclude them from other human sets to which they feel they should have the possibility of belonging (e.g. sets defined by ‘competence’ perhaps, or other criteria).

Titi ikoli, then, arose in cases where neither women’s rights nor their functions as mothers, was the basic issue: this was of another kind. I venture to suggest that it was the dignity of a concept which they considered valuable and beautiful—the dignity of their sexual identity of the order of that which I have called ‘femininity’ and of which the symbol was their unique sexual anatomy. Unaware of this long-standing preoccupation among Bakweri, Greer arrives independently at a position close to theirs when she recognises the value of such symbolism and seeks its reinstatement. ‘The vagina’ she complains, ‘is obliterated from the imagery of femininity in the same way that signs of independence and vigour in the rest of her body are suppressed’. It may seem contradictory that women should suppose that vulgarity can be a means of enhancing dignity. It can be one when the obscenities are merely signals conveying a message which is not obscene.

Cameroon women particularly abhor the imputation that vaginas smell, an accusation which does not seem to have been common in America and England until recent years. Suddenly women learn that ‘there are some things even a girl’s best boy friend won’t tell her’. As Fiona McKenzie (1972) remarks, ‘He
doesn’t need to. Media man does the job for him.’ ‘The problem of vaginal odour was invented by the toiletries industries’, says Greer (1971: 28). Mary Douglas (1966: 142) has suggested that ‘When male dominance is accepted as a central principal of social organisation . . . beliefs in sex pollution are not likely to be highly developed’. It is tempting to follow this by arguing that it was the weakening of the authority of the American male which led to the sudden discovery of the need for vaginal deodorants. But, however, they are explained, the reaction among women has been swift. Campaigns have been mounted against their introduction. ‘As anxiety-makers, vaginal deodorants are tops: not only a fear that you may smell’ writes Jane Alexander, ‘but a fear that you are sexually offensive. They rouse terrible wrath in some people—notably sensualists and women’s liberationists and people who are concerned with human dignity’ (Alexander 1971: 93). Shrew complained that ‘Most women would be too embarrassed to talk about their private sexual areas to all and sundry, yet somewhere a panel of admen and probably women, must have sat round and worked out a campaign about us. The campaigns’, the paper states, ‘are in themselves an invasion of the special privacy of women . . .’ (‘Women’s secrets’ yet once again!).

Greer suggests that ‘efforts made to eradicate all smell from the female body are part of the . . . suppression of fancied animality’ (1970: 38). Perhaps the accusation that women smell may seem to support the repudiation of their classification as human beings by placing them among the animals. This might account for the fact that the insult may become the concern, not merely of the victim, nor only of women who are sexually active, but of women of any age-group. It is interesting that Bakweri say that there is a special association of women with apes, in so far as women are sometimes said to be afraid that they might give birth to them, and their children are thought sometimes to be attracted away by them from human society into the wild of the bush. The word for ape should not be mentioned in their presence. As a footnote, as it were, we should also note that the reaction against brassieres also appears to be the rejection of the implied accusation that women’s unique anatomy is not acceptable in its natural state. ‘What’s wrong with being real?’ says Midge Mackenzie, ‘I never tell women that they should try to improve on nature . . .’

I suggest that the Cameroon women’s movements and those of women’s liberation can no longer be viewed only as isolated and independent phenomena. For instance, we should consider whether, by focusing attention as Greer would wish upon the vagina Bakweri women may be demanding respect, not merely for their sexuality in the narrowest sense, but also for a more general model of female-ness (call it ‘femininity’ or what you will), pride in which and acknowledgement of which is perhaps necessary for the releasing of that vigour and independence which Greer is seeking. Is this the level at which the Cameroon women and the liberationists meet? Both seem to be concerned with the ‘deep structure’ of human identity. ‘Feminism’ says Mitchell ‘. . . is about being women’ (1971: 96). To use terminology suggested elsewhere: perhaps titi ikoli is a programmatic statement for ‘women’s lib.’ Few I think would doubt that ‘Black is beautiful’ is a symbolic statement of a programmatic type. The song ‘titi ikoli is not a thing for insults—beautiful beautiful’ offers a remarkable coincidence.

The realien of the traditional women’s militant movements in Cameroon and
women’s liberation in America and England are, of course, different; may not the springs of action share a common source? We have discussed the opposition of positively and negatively marked patterns of symbolic behaviour in Africa. When stating that ‘In extremities of random violence or in the breaking of cultural taboos, feminists turn femininity on its head’ Mitchell exemplifies this (1971: 69). Greer speaks (though not approvingly) of those in the movement who ‘mock’ and ‘taunt’ men. This she may not herself do, but does not the mode by which she presents her case itself sometimes appear to be a verbal display of vulgar parts? ‘The key to the strategy of liberation,’ she says, ‘lies in exposing the situation, and the simplest way to do it is to outrage the pundits and the experts by sheer impudence of speech and gesture...’ (1970: 328). Titi ikoli indeed!

This article has attempted to do two things. First, ethnographic material from Africa has been presented which is of independent interest. Secondly, an attempt has been made to set alongside this material other data on the women’s liberation movements which offer parallels. From within entirely different social contexts, women of dissimilar positions in relation to their worlds and with very different experience, have produced statements and patterns of behaviour of beguiling similarity. The one element which the generators have in common apart from their humanity is their sex. If we allow ourselves to adopt, for the moment, the hypothesis that the parallels are closer than would result from chance, we are led inevitably to consider a third aspect: whether or not we are dealing here with phenomena of a universal kind. Whether perhaps women require a model of ‘femineity’ of a certain nature, the maintenance of which may, in certain circumstances, seem to some to be under stress. Perhaps Germaine Greer, by an effort of the intellect, has raised to consciousness, structures of thought of the set ‘female’ which the Bakweri (and possibly others) have intuitively perceived and expressed symbolically. The problem of whether or not the parallels which have been laid out in this article are coincidental or are a result of observational overdeterminism, or whether they represent universals of some kind, cannot yet be decided. The evidence so far does, however, draw me towards the last proposition.

NOTES

A version of this article was first read at the Institute of Social Anthropology, Oxford, on Friday 12 March 1971. The study is being further elaborated for a longer work now in preparation.

1 Bonjongo Civil Cause Book 2/1956 (164/56).
3 Lisoka Civil Cause Book 1/1957 (112/56).
4 Muea Civil Cause Book 1956 (17/56).
5 This extract and others which follow have been taken from a very interesting paper on Anlu by F. Nkwain (1963). Estimates of the number of women involved are his own. Another account of these events is given in Ritzenthaler 1960.
6 See Ritzenthaler 1960: 152.
8 An illustration of Kikuyu women performing a vulgar dance may be found in Wellard.
9 For a discussion of ‘meeting’ and ‘greeting’ behaviour in animals and man see, for example, Callen 1970: ch. 7.
10 Possibly the use of terms for sexual organs as expletives primarily symbolises the power to control the part referred to and is at some level a threat to do so. Thus the uttering of the term for female genitals might represent the threat of rape. Support for this may be suggested by the
rarity in England, outside the middle class, of this use of the term for penis, and the presence of the term for testicles, which possibly represents the threat of castration (perhaps a relatively weak threat since men are more easily able to defend themselves). Of course, even if such primary referents applied, they might not necessarily be in the awareness of those using the terms: speakers might only associate their use with robustness or aggressiveness of a general kind. We should not in any case overlook the ‘social content’ of rape: perhaps the component ‘assertion of dominance’ greatly outweighs that of ‘sex’.


12 Edwin Ardener’s comment that even female ethnographers have faced difficulties in gathering and presenting effectively data on women’s models of the world is borne out, not only by an examination of work done in past decades, but by looking at a recent attempt to present a female view of Hagen life by Marilyn Strathern. In her interesting book Women in between (1972) she finds it necessary to write at the beginning of that crucial chapter on *Pollution and Poison*: ‘Men with male dogma that I have to deal with the main, for men . . . are the more articulate and coherent in their statements. Women do not make contrary assertions with the same apparent cogency; they half, although only half, agree with what men say’ (1972: 159). Joan Lewis has argued in a number of publications (e.g. in Ecstatic religion, 1971) that the relative inarticulateness of women is part of the reason why women so frequently speak in tongues and get possessed.

13 In answer to Freud’s question, which she quotes.

14 Hence, I suggest, the extensive coverage given by writers like Millet, Greer, Figes, O’Faolin and Marines *et al.*., to quotations from male literature which are intended to demonstrate the low esteem in which women are held by such writers. Stress is often placed on the view of women as polluting or de-civilising influences; and complaints are often made of the de-humanisation of women by their being regarded as sex ‘objects’.

15 Femininity: The quality or nature of the feminine sex; womanliness; womanishness. (First usage: Coleridge, 1820) Oxford English Dictionary.

16 The Bakweri, for instance, have a system of double-unilineal descent (see Ardener 1956). Three different kin groups have an interest in a woman and/or her children: her patrikin, her matrikin, and later, her husband’s patrikin.

17 As an example of what she ironically terms his ‘neo-Freudian contribution to sexual understanding’, Firestone (1972: 68) quotes the following interesting affirmation by Theodor Reik (1966): ‘I believe that cleanliness has a double origin: the first in the taboos of the tribes, and the second another matter coming thousands of years later, namely in women’s awareness of their own odor, specifically the bad smells caused by the secretion of their genitals’.

18 One might perhaps rather say that sex pollution becomes a problem when there is a critical lack of fit between the male model (of, in the case of the Lele and the Hagen, supremacy over women) and a discrepant model which the actions of women force upon the attention of men. By operating according to their own distinctive models, women may seem, in this sense, to threaten to distort or pollute the male model (Douglas 1963: 113; 1966: 149, 150; Strathern 1972: ix, 153, 150).

19 Quoted in Alexander 1971: 94. Mrs Barbara Bond reported an incident among University students in Sierra Leone which might have a bearing on our discussion. It seems that female students resented publication of an article in a student journal which discussed the practice of abortion in the University. A special meeting was called and the women imposed a fine upon the men. Was this, I wonder, because they were guilty of getting their facts wrong (if so, editors beware!), or had they committed the offence of making public women’s secrets? (Bond 1972, verbal communication).

20 The complex relationship between Bakweri men and women and animals has been discussed by Ardener (E. W.) elsewhere (1970). Bakweri men boast of the power to turn themselves into elephants. ‘Some women rather half-heartedly claim the role of bush-pigs, but’ states Ardener, ‘like Dames in an order of chivalry or girls at Roedean, they are performing a male scenario’ (1970: 155). The relationship of women to apes and water spirits (possibly originally manatees), seems to be of another more dangerous kind.


23 One way the Kom *anlu* women turn ‘femininity’ on its head is by referring to themselves as men and by addressing men as men would women: ‘Sweet girl, is there any kola nut in your bag?’ (Nkwain 1963).

24 That processes of a similar nature may be found in association with other sets defined by different criteria (not necessarily biological) I hope to demonstrate in a further study now in hand.
REFERENCES


ADDITIONA

I regret that a paper by R. B. Edgerton and F. P. Conant, 'Kilipat: The Shaming Party among the Pokot of East Africa' (SWest J. Anthrop. (1964) 20, 404-18) escaped my attention, since it provides ethnographic data which parallel in surprising detail many elements which I have set out above. Kilipat is a 'weapon of considerable ferocity and effectiveness . . . for the controlled expression of violence in sexual relations and the alleviation of marital antagonisms'. It is mostly associated with revenge by wives on a miscreant husband by means of ridicule and vulgarity (including exposure of their genitals, and urination and defecation on their victim). I will discuss the relevance of this paper to my own study elsewhere.

The paper submitted by Edwin Ardener at the A.S.A. Conference, 1973, ('Some outstanding questions in the analysis of events') further explores our capacity for structuring thought. In his terms, 'femineity' would be of the order of a 'p-structure'; 'femininity' would be at the level of an 's-structure'.

This content downloaded from 194.221.86.126 on Mon, 22 Jan 2018 15:01:09 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms