PREFACE

In this volume, we have undertaken to present the lives of women in a
dozen sociocultural settings dispersed over a large portion of the globe.
The descriptions are based on original fieldwork by a dozen anthropologists,
several of whom have maintained long-term associations with their people.
In Brunei, in St. Kitts, in Yucatán, to cite only the most extended field
series, changes and transformations in the communities and in the lives
of individual women have been observed over a period of a dozen years or
more. As this book goes to press, several of the contributors are renew-
ing their ties with their friends of long standing.

It has been argued that women's lives center around their families and
households, about the domestic and private domain. Where this is true,
fieldwork involved admission to this sheltered area and participant obser-
vation of the activities of the women. This might mean attending women's
belly-dancing parties in Saudi Arabia, learning to be a traditional mid-
wife in Brunei, a medium in the Umbanda cult of Porto Alegre, Brazil,
gathering wild plant food or cleaning game birds with Eskimo women, or
following a group of scavenging children in St. Kitts.

This book grew out of a course on the Anthropology of Women that I
have been teaching for a number of years at the Ohio State University.
Several chapters were first presented to that class as reports by research-
ers recently returned from the field. The enthusiastic response of the
students encouraged us to think that others might wish to share in what
these fieldworkers had discovered. At the same time, I have sought to
present these materials within a theoretical setting of issues in the
current state of the anthropology of women's roles and status, and to draw
together our findings to examine what we have learned by sampling this
descriptive set of cultures. This volume, then, might be helpful to others
who are teaching courses dealing with women in different societies. It may also
serve in area courses on Afro-America, Latin America or the Mediterranean
tradition, or in courses on culture change.

The book may, however, not only be of interest to anthropologists
and their students, but also to the general reader, prompted by curiosity
about other lifeways. Indeed, the materials we offer in these pages tell
not only about women in far away places; more often than not, they may
have direct implications for our own lives and those of our readers. Some
of this relevance is related to the renewed interest in this country in
ethnic identities and increased awareness of differences in traditional
cultures. On the other hand, there are also the facts of culture change
and of its impact on all aspects of our lives. Anthropological accounts
of distant peoples permit us to see ourselves in others. They also help
us to understand how what appear to be private and personal situations
partake of the larger stream of cultural patterning and the forces that
are at work in the transformation of societies. As is seen in a number
of our contributions, the relation between tradition and transformation is
often full of paradoxes. Radical steps in the reorganization of society
sometimes take place in the defense of traditional values.

As I write these lines, the news media are reporting that a California
jury has awarded a large sum in damages to a woman who sued her husband
for defamation. The case is likely to make legal history in the further-
ance of women's rights, for in the past it has generally been held that a
wife cannot sue her husband except for divorce. Yet this advance in the
cause of women was won in a case concerning a most ancient and traditional issue: the honor of a woman and her family centering about the virginity of a bride. The woman is a member of a Sicilian community, who had entered an arranged marriage. The husband, according to the plaintiff, had defamed her and her family by claiming that she had not been a virgin at the time of the marriage. The suit was brought to vindicate the honor of the woman and her family. The values were traditional, the means of redress were those of a society with different norms, and the outcome is innovative both for the Sicilian community and the larger society.

The concern with the values of honor and shame appear in several of the societies in our series. A discussion of the impact of culture change and the means people devise for coping with the transformations in their lives are dealt with by all. Three of our studies describe groups living within the borders of the United States, each facing a particular situation and coming to it from a special cultural background.

Acknowledgements. Many people have contributed to the making of this book: the individual women and their families, who allowed the contributors to study them, and the various agencies that gave support to the individual projects. These are acknowledged by the various authors. We also wish to thank the students at Ohio State and at several other institutions who have stimulated the presentations offered here. I am personally grateful to my collaborators for their willingness to participate in this common enterprise. I wish to thank my publisher, James F. Bergin for his interest and support of this project and my editor, Judy Garvey, for her assistance in the production of the book. For bibliographic research, I am indebted to Susan McCabe. Jeanne Peebles prepared the Index and I wish to express my
thanks to her for her painstaking work. To my husband Paul H. Bourguignon goes my gratitude for his encouragement and his wisdom and his own cross-cultural perspective on the lives of men and women.

Erika Bourguignon
Columbus, Ohio
June 1979