COMPARISONS AND IMPLICATIONS: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

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The great strength of an anthropological approach lies in the questioning of received ideas, of the "common sense" notions of our own culture, as a result of a confrontation with the different "common sense" of other cultures. This means that generalizations that make a claim to cross-cultural validity will not be based on an unquestioned acceptance of our own home truths. In this way, the comparative perspective offers a challenge to traditional thinking. Basic to such an approach is the need to take seriously what informants tell us, to accept their view of reality -- human and other-than-human -- as valid and meaningful, and to seek to understand their behavior in terms of their conception of the world in which they live. It follows that interpretations, explanations and comparative analysis must be based on solid ethnographic grounding.

The twelve sociocultural settings of women's lives presented in this volume offer us an opportunity for such comparisons and allow us to specify the conditions of the comparisons. Although our settings appear to span the globe from South East Asia to West Africa and the Western Hemisphere, and from Southern Brazil to Western Alaska, they may, in fact, be grouped within six major cultural traditions. These traditions include beliefs and concepts concerning the nature of men and women, and of sexuality. They embody value systems that have direct bearings on behavior and its control. The relationship between ideology and behavior is best seen as reciprocal, the ideology being both a cause and a rationalization of behavior.
Three of the six cultural traditions appear in a number of combinations. The other three appear each only once, though in combination with one of the former group. These are the South East Asian rice tradition (Brunei), and two quite distinct Native American traditions (Maya and Eskimo). Among those of the first group, which we encounter several times, there are two variants of the Mediterranean tradition, the Islamic and the Ibero-Catholic. Islam, in its expansion from its historic source in Arabia, carried important aspects of the culture of the Mediterranean basin to South East Asia and to West Africa. The Spaniards and the Portuguese brought their versions of the Mediterranean tradition, itself influenced by centuries of Arab rule of the Iberian peninsula, to their colonies in the New World. In our cases, the Islamic tradition appears in its classic form in Saudi Arabia, and, in somewhat modified form, among the Malays of Brunei. It is also seen among our two West African groups, the Dioula of the Ivory Coast and the Hausa of Niger. Both now live in multi-ethnic nations that were once French colonies. The Ibero-Catholic tradition is represented by our Latin American examples: the Brazilian cities of São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul, the Yucatán Peninsula of Southern Mexico, and the Washingtonian Cubans.

The Mediterranean tradition, both in its Islamic and its Ibero-Catholic form, embodies concepts of key importance with regard to the status and roles of women. In her discussion of Saudi Arabia, Deaver speaks of the values expressed in the concepts of honor and shame. The basic pattern she describes, although in somewhat modified form, holds for both Islamic and Ibero-Catholic Latin American cultures.
In all of these societies, males are responsible for the behavior and the reputation of their sisters, wives and daughters. In the absence of other appropriate male relatives, of their mother as well. A woman's offense against the rules of sexual purity brings shame on her kin group. To save the honor of the family, the men must punish any violations. In an extreme case, a father may kill his daughter. Therefore, to avoid the dangers of shame, female seclusion and veiling exist as barriers to temptation and the infraction of the rules of modesty. Temptation always exists because sexuality is perceived as a force that is not subject to internal controls, and women are believed to more highly "sexed" than men. They are, therefore, dangerous to men, who must not be exposed to temptation. John Gulick (1976) has argued that, contrary to the idea that this puts the women into a key position, in fact it places the "burden" of family honor on them. The existence of such a burden is seen in the control that men exercise over women, whose violations of the rules they seek to prevent, and, if they occur, to punish.

A number of authors have shown the interrelated themes of honor and shame to be part of a general Mediterranean pattern of values (e.g., Peristiany 1966, Schneider 1971) and some explicit comparisons have also been made between the world of Islam and that of Latin American (e.g., Haggag Youssef 1974). Quigley (1973) speaks of a "Pakistani-Peruvian axis", meaning that there is a single cultural complex, of great historic depth, that extends from Islamic Asia to South America. In the context of the present volume, it may be
is this: how can women be economically active and maintain independence without challenging the honor of their men? The accomodations that have been worked out merit our attention.

In the New World, slavery to a large extent destroyed the African family unit, and for lower class families, a widespread pattern of matrifocal consanguineal households resulted. Where the Spanish legacy came into contact with the Maya tradition, as among the peasants of Yucatán, there is little evidence of the honor/masculinity complex (machismo) that so strongly characterizes northern Mexico (Paz 1961).

The third cultural tradition, that appears several times and in a number of combinations, may be termed Anglo-Protestant. It is represented in our cases in clearest form in Appalachia. It is also found in the Anglo-Caribbean, where it appears in combination with elements of the West African tradition. Moreover, it is the dominant tradition in the United States, to which Cubans and Eskimos alike must adapt. The Anglo-Protestant tradition is in many ways quite markedly different from both the Mediterranean and the West African tradition. It shares certain features with each, yet in doing so places stress on different qualities and goals. In contrast to the emphasis of both of the other traditions on lineages and large kin groups, the emphasis in the Anglo-Protestant tradition is on the independent, self-reliant individual, and beyond the individual, on the nuclear family. Sexuality is seen as, essentially, evil, and individuals must be brought up to develop internal controls. In the
words of a Mexican observer, "the North American hides or denies certain parts of his body and, more often, of his psyche: they are immoral, ergo they do not exist. By denying them he inhibits his spontaneity" (Paz 1961:37). Women are less sexed than men, so that it is easier for them to be in control of themselves and they must see to it that men are held in line. There are no veils, no walled compounds, no chaperons.

A clear picture of this Anglo-Protestant tradition can be seen in the life of Joyce's Sarah Penfield: the self-reliant, hardworking Ohio farm family of the first decades of this century, the rules by which children were brought up, the sexual double standard. Because controls are supposed to be internalized, there is a good deal of external freedom for young people here. The Cubans in Washington find this one cultural difference with which they must learn to cope. Many elements of this tradition are couched in religious terms and are expressed in Protestant fundamentalism. In this form they can be seen in the Pentecostal and Apostolic churches of the Caribbean and Latin America. In our cases, they are discussed with reference to St. Vincent and Yucatán.

A word, finally, must be said about one additional factor that affects the kaleidoscopic variations of culture, namely "westernization" or "modernization", terms that are often used synonymously. To a considerable extent, this involves an export version of Euro-American culture. Its most readily visible aspects are various forms of technological and economic change. As such, it constitutes one element in each of our cases, yet, with regard to the status of
women, as we have seen, its impact is not always the same.

The twelve studies presented in this volume all deal with complex, stratified societies. Only the Eskimo were until relatively recent times a "tribal" group, with little internal differentiation. Several of the societies are also multiethnic in character. Although a number of the papers deal with two or three groups and contrast their ways, the concern is never with the society as a whole but only with the localized segments, that could be studied by fieldwork. Yet the situation of women in a particular local group cannot be understood without reference to the larger society, or indeed, to the major cultural traditions, the values and systems of meanings they embody.

It is with these considerations in mind that we may now turn to the three central concerns that we set out in our Introduction. These concerns, it will be remembered, are the economic roles of women, the utility and applicability of the concept of domains (public versus domestic or private) for our understanding of women's status, and lastly, the effects of culture change.

A reading of these papers suggests that women's roles are highly diverse, yet share a core of common features. Most of the women, whom anthropologists have studied in class societies, belong to the lower stratum; they are peasants and, sometimes, urban slum groups. Some in our sample are middle and upper class: the urban upper class Saudi women, the middle class Cuban women, the Brazilian middle class group in Rio Grande do Sul and the upwardly mobile lower class in São Paulo, upwardly mobile groups among the Hausa and the Dioula.
In discussing women's roles and status in stratified societies, it quickly becomes apparent that these are affected to a significant extent by class position. In such societies, women hold social positions as wives and daughters of men of particular classes. Class position affects not only the economic role of women but also their other activities, as well as the scope and range of their movements among the several domains. It influences the women's perception of their position, and the effect of social change on all of this. Class position is expressed in the availability of resources and in the size and structure of households. Status is validated by the way in which the household is run and how it interacts with other segments of the community, both economically and socially. If women are responsible for the operation of various household functions, this means that important aspects of status validation are assigned to them.

We may begin with Saudi Arabia in a consideration of these points. Here, Deaver tells us, there are male servants in urban upper class households. They do much of the domestic work that, in less wealthy families, is carried out by women. Within the households of their employers, such men become socially neuter: they do "women's work," they take orders from women, they enter the quarters of the women, who appear unveiled and ignore the servants' presence. The inclusion of servants in a household and often also of dependent relatives, modifies the workload of the women. On the one hand, it reduces the amount of physical work to be done by them; on the other hand, the supervision of servants and of a large and diversified household becomes one of the responsibilities of the woman who is the female head of the domestic organization.
The status of a Saudi man is validated by a number of factors. One of these is the hospitality he is able to offer, and this, in turn, depends on the skill and organizational ability of his wife and, indeed, on her cooperation. The prestige that accrues to the husband as a result of generous hospitality, however, reflects on the woman herself as well.

Another element of status validation concerns the continuation of the family line. It is important for men to have children, particularly sons. It is therefore not surprising to read that Saudi women have high self esteem and that part of it "comes from their recognition that they are the only source of children" (Deaver, p. ). Although secluded women may not participate in economic production in the public domain, they do produce children. As Gonzalez (1974:44) points out in criticism of Sanday's thesis, "lives themselves may be strategic resources."

Status, as we have already seen, is also validates by the strictness with which a man and his kin group observe the honor/shame code. In day to day terms, this means the seclusion of the women of the household. The code also means that the honor of the family can be endangered by the women's behavior, so that their conformity is crucial to the well being of the group. Seclusion is perceived by women as well as by men as offering protection for the women's moral and physical person, and for their social status. It is better to be able to send a servant or a younger male relative to market than to have to go oneself. Going to market is a sign that one lacks such dependents and therefore involves a reduction in status—not merely for the woman herself, but for her household. Deaver tells us that seclusion, rather than being perceived
by the Saudi women as a handicap, as imprisonment, or some form of
denigration, is seen as status enhancing and provides a feeling of
security. In terms of Sanday's paradigm, the upper class Saudi woman
does no productive work in the public domain and has no position in
that domain. She does not participate in the economic or political life
of the society. In this instance, we see that the higher the woman's
class and position, the more restricted the scope of her physical
movements, and the more limited her access to other domains.

Under these circumstances, it is interesting to see that technological
change in the form of the petroleum industry, has contributed to the
enhancement of traditional values and to the capacity of a larger segment
of the sedentary population to live up to them. Increased wealth and
the presence of imported goods have led the greater seclusion of a
larger number of urban women. For the nomadic Bedu, on the other hand,
increased wealth has had the opposite effect, in spite of their greater
religious and cultural conservatism: here female seclusion appears to
have decreased and there is greater participation of women in the market
place, since there is greater demand for their goods and they can now
purchase more as well.

For Saudi Arabia, the division of the world into two domains, the
public and the private or domestic, works well. Indeed, this dichotomy
corresponds closely to the concepts of the people themselves. It is
expressed in all aspects of the social structure and is revealed in
the physical arrangements of life. Deaver, (1971) deals with several
questions about this dichotomy: what goes on in the domestic/private
female domain? How are the domains related to each other? How do the women perceive themselves? Does culture change and modernization break down the wall?

It is important to note that the domains are perceived as complementary, and not as ranked. The women have high self-esteem and are aware of their power. Deaver's report is consistent with other reports she cites from the broader region of the Near and Middle East. That women may prefer seclusion and separation to struggle in the world as equals may seem surprising to Westerners, yet it may be quite realistic for the Saudi women, who think that they have a great deal to lose. It is possible to be secluded, to have self-esteem and indeed to pity the Western women who cannot rely on men to support them, and who may deprive themselves of the joy of motherhood. And, one might add, who do not play a pivotal role in a complex of honor and shame, and who do not perceive themselves to be sensual creatures.

We have discussed Saudi Arabia in some detail because it raises a number of issues. For one thing, it shows emphatically that cultural differences do exist; Arabia is a good test of our ethnocentrism. It also shows us that culture change may serve to reinforce existing values, rather than to modify them. We might say that, using a term introduced by M.J. Herskovits (1945), honor/shame and the separation of domains represents the cultural focus of Arabia. Our findings are consistent with the views expressed by Herskovits, that the cultural focus tends to guide the transformation of cultures, while remaining itself unchanged. Thus, culture change may, in fact, support rather than
destroy the traditional patterns. Another issue that is raised by the Arabian materials concerns women's work load, for it suggests that we need to consider women's administrative and managerial responsibilities and competence. As we move on to other Islamic societies, we may ask: does the division into domains hold? Is there managerial responsibility and competence? What gives women self esteem? How does change affect all of this?

We may now turn for comparison first to the Brunei Malays and then to our two West African societies. Brunei, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, is a multi-ethnic society, of which the Moslem Malays are the dominant group. Kimball's discussion concerns two segments of this society: a village community of rice farmers and a segment of the urban society.

Brunei peasant women participate actively in food production. They contribute a major share of the labor, and carry on a great many different kinds of work. Although traditionally there is a degree of seclusion, farm work requires an extension of the scope of the domestic domain beyond the house and the yard. The division of life space and social relations into public and private/domestic domains, synonymous with male and female, is ideologically based in Islam, as is the control of women by men. Yet the scope of the domestic domain appears to be wider and the boundaries looser than in Arabia. Veiling apparently is not, and was not, practiced. Women engage in a series of traditional professions, as healers and midwives, and also as seamstresses. The greatest restrictions apply to women with young children. This also means, for the most part, women in their first few years of marriage. The professions are open to young unmarried women or to older women. Women who have little daughters
of five and six begin to pass some child care chores on to them. Child care responsibilities may also be shared with other female relatives.

Segregation of the sexes in the domestic sphere means an assignment of "inside" space to women and of "outside" space to men. In multifamily dwellings, where a single kitchen with separate hearths is shared, this inside space brings women of different families together. There, also, female guests are received, while male guests are entertained in the front room or on the verandah; they remain on the margin of the family residence.

Kimball's intimate glimpse into the lives of Brunei women allows us to see something of the difference between the ideal image of the dominant husband and the reality. Men appear to have great formal control over their wives, particularly in the early years of marriage. However, traditional marriages begin with a period of uxorilocal residence; marriage is firmly and fully established, and publicly recognized as such only after the birth of a child. Yet after some years, women make judgments as to whether or not they actually need a husband's consent for paying a call or undertaking some activity. Women have major responsibility with regard to hospitality. Their importance in this regard is most clearly seen in the preparation and organization of weddings, the primary ritual expression of kinship and family status. For well-to-do families a wedding involves a series of activities extending over a period of time, and include repairs to the house, preparation of the wedding chamber as well as entertainment and food for large numbers of guests whose presence may last more than a week. Such an event entails major expenditures of resources and of effort, requiring planning and organization of work
activities, provisions and supplies. These are also important occasions of exchange of help with other families. Women are clearly in charge of these events and their skills in management are fully appreciated. Kimball says they "boss" the occasions. Yet the formal act of cooking on the appointed day is left to the men. It is tempting to interpret this as a symbolic expression of the myth of male dominance.

Women gain renown not only for their management of weddings and feasts, but, more generally for cooking and baking. It is not accidental that the kitchen is the center of their social lives, the core of their domains. Here, too, the symbolic dominance of the husband is expressed by the fact that he is offered all dishes first. Yet behind this apparent gesture of deference, there lurks a threat: men may demand deference and they may beat their wives, but women may poison their husbands.

Kimball suggests that women's self-esteem relates to their economic contribution, their children, their managerial skills, their specialized knowledge. They have power through their cooking and their ability to maintain their own reputations and that of their families by the standards of their hospitality.

The greatest factor of change, breaking down the traditional pattern of women's seclusion, is free public education for girls. This brings them into contact with boys, takes them away from home villages to boarding school, may even prepare them for jobs in the westernized sector of the society. When women do hold salaried jobs,
their income provides a major element in the family economy. In this respect, Brunei is more similar to the westernizing societies of the Middle East, than to the most conservative petroleum rich countries of Saudi Arabia and the neighboring countries along the Persian gulf.

At our next stop, among the Hausa of Mirria, in Niger Republic, we observe the effects of the interaction of Islam and West African traditions. Here, women engage in a variety of remunerative activities, mostly, however, on a small scale. Many of these are carried out within the limits of the household. Women may also own land, which they lend or rent to men for cultivation. While a man has an obligation to support his wife, a woman's income is her own. The hours she spends on income-producing work, however, are limited by childcare and household duties and these absorb most of her time. There is a strict division of labor by sex, so that men do not cook and are entirely dependent on women for this service. Women exercise "material control" over items that circulate beyond the confines of the domestic unit, and there is, indeed, a demand for their produce. However, Sanday's second pair of criteria for status in the public domain are not met: they do not participate in the political sphere, and there are no female solidarity groups.

Among the Muslim Hausa there is an ideologically based separation between the domestic/private domain and the public domain, and this is symbolically and physically expressed by the existence of walled compounds that house families, and by the seclusion of wives. Seclusion applies only to a small minority of wives. It is associated with wealth and polygyny. Women consider both
desirable, because they reduce their work load, allowing more time for income producing crafts. Seclusion is no obstacle to trade.

The compounds of wealthy men will contain more than one mother-child unit, if they are polygynous, and more than one nuclear family if brothers or a father and his married sons live together. A senior wife has authority over junior wives, dependent children and daughters-in-law, and she has a demanding role which yields respect for the competence with which she performs the management of a large organization and its resources.

An interesting aspect of Hausa life lies in the high divorce rate, for almost half of the marriages end in divorce. The divorce court is one area of the public domain of which the women make active use. A woman, in effect, remains married by choice, although Islamic law makes divorce much easier for men than for women. Men appear to have more to lose by divorce, for it is difficult for them to be wifeless and remarriage is expensive. They depend on wives for cooked food, household management, full adult status, and finally, achievement of the status of head of household. Women have greater freedom in the "marriage game," for polygyny facilitates remarriage for them. Also, there exists a status, that of courtesan, which makes a woman independent both of kin and of husband. This, however, is a temporary status, from which she can return to the position of married woman. (It should not be confused with that of "prostitute" in the modern sector of the larger cities.)

Culture change has meant a withdrawal of women from farming, an increase of wealth and an increase in the percentage of secluded
wives. It has meant the development of a modern sector, with education based on a French pattern, leading to salaried jobs. Here, too, segregation between the sexes remains in force. The abolition of polygyny, which some advocate as part of modernization, would severely reduce the freedom and mobility of women, for it would reduce the demand for wives.

Among the Muslim Hausa, then, women do not have power and authority in the public political domain. They do hold significant power and independence in the economic sphere, and in marriage. They have strong self-esteem and they visibly and consciously affect the lives of men. Culture change has provided some increase in their power, but full westernization may reduce it.