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THE MYTHOLOGICAL ROLE OF GENDER IDEOLOGIES: A CROSS-CULTURAL SAMPLE OF TRADITIONAL CULTURES

Richard Owens

Hunting and gathering along with horticultural societies provide a basis for understanding contemporary ideologies. Such groups are generally labeled as egalitarian societies from their status and treatment of females. A survey of traditional hunters-gatherers and horticultural societies compared their mythological charters on gender ideologies to the daily interactions of gender roles in order to determine their level of influence on the culture. Traditional societies are thought to be a basis to observe gender stratification among all known societies. The division of labor is in all cultures, as a means to limit control economic resources, often favoring men. In this paper the role of gender ideology is analyzed through mythological, ritual and religious beliefs to determine its significance. Universally females are reported as second class to males; the reasons for this are less clear. It has been suggested by Ortner (1981, 1996) that females are viewed as closer to nature and men as closer to culture. Females are often viewed as polluting and dangerous, based on their perceived connection to nature, a lower but powerful element that culture seeks to suppress. Females are expected to be associated closer to nature through symbolism, ritual and myth, preventing them from attaining equal status with men.

Anthropological discussion of women, men and society has been primarily based on the status of women, with males universally being the dominant sex and females the subordinate sex (Hammond 1976, Ortner 1996). Traditional hunting and gathering and horticultural societies are explored for their mythology and ritual beliefs on gender ideologies. I expect that myths articulate certain cultural values that provide charters in the socialization process of each society, but they may not necessarily provide the reality of daily life as pointed out by Lepowski: "Gender ideologies embodied in myths, beliefs, prescriptions for the role-appropriate behavior, and personal statements sometimes contradict each other or are contradicted by the behavior of individuals" (Lepowski 2001: 254). The basis of the paper will be presented from Ortner's female to male as nature is to culture model, in which she argues females are subordinate to males as nature is subordinate to culture. Hammond's (1976) work provides empirical data for female roles in traditional societies.

In looking at Ortner's model, of female-

to-nature and male-to-culture paradigm, religion and myth are considered important tools for the transcendence of gender ideologies to each succeeding generation. Ortner's model has been challenged by Ortner (1981, 1996), Lepowski (2001), Ardener (1992), Dahlberg (1981), and White (1959), for its simplicity and its implication of biological determinism. Views held by opposing anthropologists are analyzed and presented. In this paper I will consider Ortner's views that women are universally subordinate. If women are subordinate then there must be a cause; and most likely there is a singular reason, argues Maria Lepowski, either materially or ideologically. "More recent findings in feminist anthropology have stressed multiple and contested gender statuses and ideologies, and the impacts of historical forces, variable and changing social contexts, and conflicting gender ideologies" (Lepowski 2001: 253). Ardener (1992) presents data from the Bemba culture arguing that women and men are polluting, but it is only through the female that purification is attained. Along the same lines, Dahlberg (1981) challenges the notion

of females as subordinate by their biology alone. Dahlberg looks at three cultures, the Mbuti, Chipewyan, and the Australian aborigines. She found no evidence to support Ortner's model of female subordination because of their association with nature. Lepowski (2001) argues that among the Vanatinai, of Papua New Guinea, gender ideologies in their multiple levels strengthen the value of women and provide a mythological charter of self-autonomy on a daily basis. Ortner's hypothesis that women-are-to-nature as men-are-to-culture stands on the shifting strata of word magic and is untestable; attempts to refute Ortner's claim are unable to do so to any significant degree. In the end, Ortner's model remains as one possible explanation for the universal phenomenon of female subjugation.

In cultural constructs we find symbolism defining gender roles based on the natural order of the cosmos. In each society, the environment plays an important role of the culture. Sex-roles determine the participation of men and women in economic, political, social, and religious institutions. These roles are assigned as though they are natural objects rather than cultural constructs (Ortner 1996). Using a symbolic analysis will partially alleviate the entanglement of sex and gender. Gender ideologies vary greatly across cultures, yet, there are certain general themes classifying women and men. "The nature of sex and reproduction appear across a wide variety of cases" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 6). For instance, males are often glorified as hunters and killers, but women are labeled as life-givers and pious mothers, hence the differences between the sexes. "Ortner, following Levi-Strauss's train of thought, closed the circle by suggesting that men will tend to be aligned with culture and women with nature, one reason being that men control the sphere of wider social coordination, while women occupy the sub-units being coordinated" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 7). In a given society, it may seem that male prestige is a function of ritual knowledge, bravery in warfare, and/or hunting ability, but deeper beneath the

surface, it is often the female that performs the essential tasks that enables the male to be such, be it through her labors, kinship links, trading partners, and/or property rights over her children, allow the promotion of female procreation and domestication (Ortner and Whitehead 1981).

Ortner lists three levels of the problem:

1. The universal fact of culturally attributed second-class status of woman in every society. Two questions are important here. First what do we mean by this; what is our evidence that this is a universal fact? And second how are we to explain this fact, once we have established it?
2. Specific ideologies, symbolizations, and socio-cultural arrangements pertaining to women that vary widely from culture to culture. The problem at this level is to account for any particular culture complex in terms of factors specific to that group.
3. Observable, on the ground details of women's activities, contributions, powers, influences, etc., often at variance with cultural ideology (although always constrained within the assumption that women may never be officially preeminent in the total system). This is the level of direct observation, often adopted now by feminist-oriented anthropologists (Ortner 1996: 23).

Ortner claims cultural value systems universally place men in control of power. Women are, in some aspect of society, preempted by men due to their association with nature. The power of females to pollute through their menstrual cycle restricts their activities until they are past menopause. Women that have reached menopause may attain an important and/or powerful position within the culture. In this paper I will look at the mythological ideology of gender and how it determines the status of females in traditional societies.

Methods

I searched for anthropological literature on gender ideologies based on mythological

origins. Gathering data was based on literature review and the HRAF database. Results were limited to hunting and gathering and horticultural societies. There were few studies that looked closely at gender ideologies through mythological charters and/or cosmic origins relating to female ideologies. A survey of available research yielded some basis to compare a belief in traditional societies that women are viewed as polluting and are dangerous, and conversely in modern societies they are pure and must be protected. In all anthropological research, women are reported as subordinate. This is certainly true in America and may reflect a male bias in reporting other societies.

Reports indicating women as polluting or associated with nature and men associated with culture were targeted and analyzed. Unfortunately, few articles covered these topics specifically. Data on division of labor was considered an important view of how the division of labor compares to the status of the female. Since there are few cultures (in my search) that have myths of female goddesses in their religion, they were considered significant. Their gender ideologies had strong asymmetrical stratification favoring men. The myths or rituals were expected to reflect gender ideology as viewed every day in the culture. Cultures that allowed more sexual freedom to women were thought to be more likely to have an egalitarian mythological charter. This was based on the idea that most societies do not allow the same sexual autonomy for men as they do for women. I did not find any conclusive evidence that myth or religion plays an important role in determining the gender ideology within the traditional hunter and gatherer and horticultural societies.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are broken into different components of gender ideologies: 1) universal subordination of women, 2) cultural symbolism, 3) mythology and religion, 4) gender ideology, 5) Symbolica

and ritual representations, and 6) nature and culture.

Universal subordination of women

Our planet is often referred to as "mother earth." Many have argued this maybe a remnant of goddess worship from the mythological time of the matriarchate, when "anything suggesting such a cult or a female deity of any kind was assumed to be evidence for its reality" (Hammond 1976: 3). Yet nowhere are goddesses worshipped to the exclusion of the gods, and the presence of both simply reflects the fact that there are two sexes. "The famous "Venus" figurines of the upper paleolithic may well be fertility symbols, but not all archaeologists are in agreement about this, and even fewer agree that the Venuses were representations of the earth goddess" (Hammond 1976: 4). Some anthropologists contend that sexually egalitarian societies previously existed (Lepowski 2001 citing Leacock). Despite cultural diversity in masculine and feminine qualities, there are some universals in gender roles. "Everywhere woman's primary roles are determined by the family, and her activities are related to domestic life" (Hammond 1976: 6). The regulation of women would seem to place them in a subordinate position of the domestic sphere. The public life, which concerns men, contains power and authority. Male activities dominate society. Women live in a male-world. This is rationalized in many ways such as, women are less competent, too emotional, and so forth. In many traditional societies women are a source of danger, because through their bodies they are capable of polluting, "Almost universally, menstrual blood, sexual pollutants which threaten the well being of the community in general, and of men in particular"(Hammond 1976: 6). Menstruating women are often subject to restrictions, and often secluded to the women's hut. Or, where is no seclusion, there are numerous taboos to prevent the pollution from damaging others. "Among the Lele of Central Africa,...she is not

permitted to go to the forest lest her contamination spoil all the hunting or interfere with rituals that require the use of plants from the forest" (Hammond 1976:6). Another widespread belief is that men should avoid sexual intercourse with women when engaging in or preparing for male activities, such as hunting, fishing, and ritual ceremonies (Hammond 1976). Such beliefs keep women suppressed in the society; they are dangerous to be around. These ideas support female segregation from full participation in society. Women are believed to be profane, and are kept in the lower echelon of society.

In every culture women are restricted in how much power is given to them, which restricts them from handling or controlling economic resources. Ortner states, "that everywhere, in every known culture, women are considered in some degree inferior to men" (1996: 23). From the ethnographic record, all societies can be classified into three characteristics regarding gender hierarchy: (1) Primary hierarchies always filled primarily by men, (2) the highest status roles are male, and (3) dominance in male-female relationships always favors males (Goldberg 2001). There has been no evidence of a matriarchy or reversal of gender roles like the mythological Amazons. There is no society where men do not dominate (Gordon 2001).

Lepowski disagrees, but is ambiguous in her statement, pointing out the Vanatinai women who are generally equal. They hold positions of power and are able to control rights to, and the means of production, the products of labor and the products of others (Lepowski 2001: 252). Here, Lepowski argues, equality of women is significant yet there is no evidence that women are completely equal with men during their menses. She does not make it clear whether this is the only time they are restricted from positions of power. Lepowski goes on to say women are not classified as weak or inferior. Each relationship is unique in the Vanatinai: "Power relations" and relative influence vary with the individuals in their various roles and situations. Ortner's focus looks at

the asymmetry of cultural power and dominance. Lepowski argues such a view potentially distorts gender role analysis and ideologies over egalitarian relations, yet her findings actually support Ortner who claims that in all societies women are restricted to some degree by their pollution.

Ortner presents three categories of data where women are excluded in cultures: (1) elements of cultural ideology and statements that explicitly devalue women, (2) symbolic devices, such as religious or ceremonial objects, which may be implicit in devaluing women, and (3) the socio-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside (Ortner 1996). These may all be interrelated, but do not necessarily need to be. Symbolic indicators such as defilement are usually sufficient to establish female subordination according to Ortner, although there are a few cases in which men and women are both polluters to one another. Then additional indicators of gender status are required (Ortner 1996). Ortner disavows the notion of any matriarchal or genuinely egalitarian society. An example from the matrilineal Crow is used to illustrate Ortner's point. The Crow women played a greater honorific role in the Sun Dance, held high positions as the directors of the Tobacco Ceremony. They were given access to seek vision, could enter the sweat lodge, and could be doctors. But during menstruation women were given an inferior horse to ride, as they were viewed as polluting. Nor could they approach a wounded man, or men starting a war party (Ortner 1996).

Crow females have certain rights and ceremonial privileges, but they are limited when they menstruate and become polluting to warfare, one of the most valued institutions. In this example, women are placed in what appears on the surface to be a superior role than males. However, in further analysis females are defiled during their period of menstruation. And thus, we will likely find a subordination of women in every culture, preventing them "full"

equality rank. Next, I present the significance of symbolism on gender.

Cultural Symbolism

Every culture uses symbols to represent abstract ideas to explain its cosmic origins and gender hierarchy. For instance, in Christianity the cross is a symbol of love and peace, but to the uninitiated it might appear to be the opposite. When looking for clues of symbolism, Ortner suggests there can be considerable confusion in understanding and interpreting meaning. In the Chinese culture the status of women can vary in many aspects which might influence understanding. In the ideology of Taoism, *yin*, the female principle, and *yang*, the male principle, are given equal significance. These forces of opposing polarity give balance and harmony that create stability in the universe. This symbol might lead us to expect a gender ideology based on equality. But in fact we see a general patrilineal society, favoring sons and giving the father absolute authority as the head of the household (Ortner 1996: 22). Looking at the social aspect, China can be viewed as an archetypal patriarchal society. Ortner points out that the substantial economic contributions of females gives them a great deal of unspoken status: "Or again we might focus on the fact that a goddess, Kuan Yin, is the central (most worshipped, most depicted) deity in Chinese Buddhism, and we might be tempted to say, as many have tried to say about goddess-worshipping cultures in prehistoric and early historical societies, that China is actually a sort of matriarchy" (Ortner 1996: 22). In looking at cultures it is important to be clear about what is being stated and observed.

Mythology and Religion

Mythology plays an important role in culture and in many ways is synonymous with religion. Myth explains the natural environment where humans live. Myths are an explanation of how things are and came to be; they are a means of adjustment and

control over the environment through ritual and proscribed conduct. "Mythology is but the verbal component of a great complex that includes ceremony, and paraphernalia as well" (White 1959: 265). However private or personal an individual's religious experience may be, religion itself is highly institutionalized in most cultures. "Religion is a vital source of power and a sanction for authority" (Hammond 1976: 120). Ceremonies provide a means of educating and creating harmony and unity that more often supports male dominance, leaving women to play only minor roles in religion. Hammond (1976) reports that where women actively participate in major religions it is only in subsidiary positions to those of men. In goddess worship we might expect to find some indication of female power and/or ideology of gender roles.

In Hinduism, goddess worship continues in the province of Orissa, among many other places. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, is believed to be ready for breeding for three days during the month of June. The goddess represents the earth and eats only vegetables to cleanse herself before menstruation. Both the goddess and the villagers do not bathe or eat rice for the three days of ritual pollution. On the fourth day she becomes ready for breeding and receives a bath and food. The goddess worship in Orissa is a display of great female power. The goddesses' fertility attributes are encoded in the Indian society. It is particularly interesting that Indian goddesses are equal and in some cases are superior to their male counterparts, yet this does not reflect an accurate picture of Indian social structure. "Though motherhood is deeply respected in India, women are not equal to men the social sphere" (Preston 1980: 97). The supernatural figures of gods and goddesses share human traits, but are not bound by social rules of human nature. They are meant to provide solace and comfort, inspiring humans to be more than they are.

Religion promotes the well being of the community. In masculine dominant societies where warfare or exclusive male houses exist, women are always excluded

from religion by definition (Hammond 1976). In some cultures, such as the Takuma and Selk'nam (described below), religion evolves around masculinity itself, and women become the target rather than the beneficiary of symbolic constructs.

Among the Tukano of Amazonia, their mythological tale of origin, including ritual singing and dancing, is done exclusively by men. "A powerful mystique evolves around hunting, male sexuality and male-controlled religion" (Richel-Dolmatoff 1971: 24). In their myth the males establish their supremacy. "Females are variously depicted as dangerous, selfish, treacherous, and non-human. They are enemies who can never really become friends, destructive to "good" male's intentions and threats to male solidarity" (Richel-Dolmatoff 1971: 25). Richel-Dolmatoff suspects that both myth and ritual buttress the unstable male position, opening up insecurities of male superiority. "The ceremonies are meant to impress the females with the power and authority of men and to give supernatural sanction for the subordination of the women" (Hammond 1976: 121). Male cults depicting "sexual antagonism" are widespread (Hammond 1976). Only men may own, handle or even see sacred objects; only they may perform the sacred ceremonies (Ortner 1996, Hammond 1976, Preston 1980, and Chapman 1982). The explanation males provide of the women's role is mostly negative; they are to keep their distance and to show their awe of the mysterious rites. However, there is some indication that women are well aware of the roles played by men, and are not in any way cowed or mystified by the ceremony (Hammond 1976, Richel-Dolmatoff 1971).

Such ceremonies often require feeding large groups of people who attend. This responsibility is chiefly the females'. There are some exceptions: "In Polynesia men of high status will prepare the great earth ovens and roast the meat for ceremonial feasts" (Hammond 1976: 122). According to Hammond (1976) women work several weeks preparing the other foods accompanying the feast. In Indonesia both

men and women prepare offerings and feasts to the spirits (Hammond 1976). The role of women is critical to the ceremonial process. The preparation of food is hardly in league with spiritual activity, yet it provides the support system for men in public and private activities.

In some cases women were religious practitioners. "In much of Northern California, shamanism was predominantly a feminine occupation. Elsewhere in Western North America, especially in the Great Basin, both men and women were shamans" (Hammond 1976: 122). The spirit power of a shaman came through dreams. Becoming a shaman was much easier for women after menopause (Hammond 1976). Menstruating women were not permitted to be present let alone perform shamanistic rites. Shamans were called upon to cure sickness, failing to do so would cause them to lose their power (Hammond 1976). Women found it easier to perform shamanistic healing duties after menopause where they would never be a source of pollution.

Gender Ideology

The Selk'nam of Tierra del Fuego are highly stratified through gender ideologies, yet their daily activities do not reflect the images portrayed in the rituals. Anne Chapman reports the females' ability to recognize the males' need to dominate them and humiliate them during the Hain celebration. Chapman indicates that the women were not victims of the system and were capable of defying the men's authority, of abandoning an obnoxious husband and of challenging a male shaman in power competitions. "The women were not passive reproducers nor submissive wives and workers" (Chapman 1982: 62). The myths of the Hain provide an ideological foundation for the Selk'nam society. One myth describes a time when women were in charge over everything (*hoowin*). Men were obliged to hunt and to procure all the necessities of life, as well as take care of the children and do the domestic chores. Until one day one of the men overheard the

women talking about how they were able to dupe the men into procuring more meat by simply claiming that the spirit of the moon (Kren) was hungry for more meat. So powerful was Kren that even today she is feared by the men, especially during an eclipse. When the men discovered the power of the women was a hoax, they set upon them with their spears until all were killed save the innocent girls and infants. From then on the men were careful to set up their system of patriarchy replacing the previous (mythological) system of matriarchy. Today no women can enter the ceremonial hut, nor can they ever learn the sacred knowledge of the Hain. Today the moon is feared by all (Chapman 1982).

The myths here are an ideology because they provide an explanation and a justification of power (Chapman 1982). The men explain that the women did the same as them, and they feel completely exonerated of their actions because of it. "Moreover, the ideology solicited the sympathy, support, and allegiance of the women through man-eating females Xalpen [a powerful spirit] and Moon" (Chapman 1982: 76). Both of these spirits threaten only the men, not the women. This brings about a paradox, with the female spirits attacking only the men, but Chapman believes this is to compromise the females' subordinate gender role. The ideology is thought to play an effective rationale, keeping the men in a position of power. Chapman states, "An outside enemy unites the society on a common front" (Chapman 1982: 76).

Among the highland Sepik of Papua New Guinea, male prestige is generated by female productive labor. Women raise pigs that men use for trading to establish influence. Women have the power to undermine their husband's ambitions through pollution. There are elaborate cults to counter the female's pollution (menstruation) and to assert male self-sufficiency. In contrast, the lowland Sepik males derive their prestige from hunting and warfare and there is no widespread cult or belief about female pollution (Ortner 1981). Pollution is based upon the female's

activities and must be carefully guarded against by men. According to Ortner and Whitehead, female pollution is likely to be found in areas where women play an important role in building male prestige.

The lowland Sepik have elaborate social networks including female rituals, and Ortner and Whitehead observed this as well in Samoa and in North America. Although these cultures may not directly involve male prestige, such beliefs regarding female pollution are widespread (Ortner 1981).

Lepowsky reports men of the Vanatinai are allowed to have more than one wife, increasing their influence as a "gia", one with great creative power and influence. Polyandry is not permitted. Women's roles are clearly powerful and close to equal to that of men, but they are still restricted. The Vanatinai menstrual taboos prohibit women from entering the gardens and planting yams. Lepowski argues that female menstruation is not a justifiable reason to explain female subordination. Instead, she argues, female (polluting) power does not invoke gender asymmetry among the Vanatinai. The female is permitted to forage, cook and have intercourse during her menses (Lepowski 2001). "Both men and women who have had intercourse in the last few days are barred from the new yam planting, and the genital fluids of both sexes are inimical, at this earliest and most crucial stage, to the growth of yams (Lepowski 2001: 255). The barring of women from the garden is seen as a pleasant break, rather than as a curse.

Lepowski reports that men are as polluting as females, and are restricted from planting yams. But it is the female who is polluting a male through sexual intercourse. It is the men who hold the positions of power and authority, not women. Her argument is diminished by the fact that women are, by their nature, powerful (from pollution), which restricts them from true equality with men.

It has been well established that in all societies, sexual differences are symbolically elaborated so that the concepts of "man" and "woman" carry a load of

meanings which are much wider and more abstract than the 'facts' of human physiology (Ardener 1992: 90). Ortner has argued the origins of gender differences are based on the polarity of nature and culture. Domestic and public categories act as a means to legitimize the subordination of women to men. "The analysis of gender symbolism continues to concern the understanding of ideas that give social meaning to physical differences between the sexes, rendering two biological classes, male and female, into two social classes, men and women" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 83). Ardener (1992) argues the simplification of gender symbolism creates more problems than solutions when applying gender symbolism to cross cultural differences: Biology applied as a seemingly invariant base upon which different clusters of concepts linked gender with a wide range of other cultural representations. The analysis of these clusters would offer a new understanding of myth and ritual, as well as explaining the universal 'fact' of inequality between sexes, ultimately, providing fundamental insights into the nature of all human society (Ardener 1992: 91).

Such paradigms, according to Ardener, are thought to be naïve, but her argument relies on rhetoric. She chooses to overlook empirical data of the subordination of women. She argues, there instead has been a shift from the consideration of "abstract dualities" to a more focused look into the context of gender ideologies. "It is increasingly obvious that to link the categories of gender, especially as they are symbolically displayed in myth or ritual, directly with the social behavior of living individuals creates problems of interpretation rather than solving them. Cultural analysis is inadequate without a consideration of the social structural context in which ideas are imbedded" (Ardener 1992: 91). Ardener goes on to say, the problem in identifying female status is that in no cross-cultural case is there gender universals. What about the role of female in primary childcare, one aspect of the domestic sphere where women are chiefly

responsible? Her argument does not refute Ortner's model, but it does provide a sense of female significance in ritual and daily practice. She carefully avoids any description of symbolic devices. Relating individual behaviors to gender categories creates confusion or problems. For instance, among the matrilineal society of the Bemba, the women are described as having a reputation for independence and high status, yet "women used to greet men kneeling, and they still do in some formal occasions" (Ardener 1992: 91). To explain this contradiction Ardener (1992) looks at two factors: first, the social construction of the person; and kinship, which has lost its centrality recently among social anthropologists.

The notion of gender includes sexual anatomy, sexual functioning and sexual reproductivity. In many procreation myths there are folk-concepts assigning causative qualities to male and/or female reproductive physiology (Ardener 1992: 93). The physical process of maturation is broken into stages by social constructs such as, rites of passage, which give meaning to the individual's life cycle. In many societies the role of children has been overlooked by many anthropologists, they are almost invisible as social actors in the community. Children are often labeled as sexually premature by the society and are generally viewed as being pure (Ardener 1992). According to the Bemba, sexually active people are "*hot*; sexual heat pollutes fires which transmit this pollution to the food cooked on them. The effects are harmful to young children particularly babies to whom they may be deadly" (Ardener 1992: 94). Since only a wife's purification of herself and her husband can remove the pollution, adultery is considered dangerous for the children of either a man or a woman as it pollutes their fire. Mothers are observed cooking fires away from the main sociable fire to avoid careless people who may pollute the fire (Ardener 1992: 94).

Childhood is distinguished from adulthood by the absence of sexual maturity. The onset of gender is often during the

physiological transition of sexuality and is therefore based on the differentiation of each sex. There is usually a form of social maturity that completes the social aspects of adulthood. A process of learning social customs is important but here there are no physiological traits that are present. Ardener states, "Despite the attention paid to the onset of menstruation, maturity is always socially defined and ritually marked, imposing an arbitrary break on the process of development in the individual (1992: 94). The Bemba test a girl through *Chisungu* (initiation rite), that tests her maturity and confers her the status of adult. In the Maasai, a woman is cleansed from the dirt of childhood through her circumcision, and she becomes an adult.

The Maasai rituals are based on division between childhood and adulthood. Maasai girls and boys are circumcised and both leave childhood, but the development is different for each. The Maasai believe that girls' breasts develop through sexual intercourse, which helps explain the traditional pre-arrangement for marriage before circumcision. Uncircumcised boys may not have intercourse; those that are circumcised are considered sexually mature, and are permitted to take mistresses. Circumcised males are called *moran*, protectors, and are not permitted to marry until they become *elders*. Among the Maasai, sexual reproduction and sexual maturity are separate rights. This emphasizes the differences in gender, which separate physical coupling and parenthood. Among the Bemba as well, sexual activity is permitted before marriage. There is no stigma attached to premarital sex, although pregnancy before marriage is a taboo (Ardener 1992). The guilty couples are often driven from the village lest they involve others in the guilt.

Once a girl begins menstruation, her mother will remove her from her betrothed. She must be publicly sanctioned at her wedding, in which the husband plays an integral role in her initiation. He is given the right to "eat" the *Chusungu* by being the first to sleep with her after it. This first act

is of great significance to the Bemba, it is the central part of the wedding, and it is designed to test the virility of the male. It is so powerful that it is considered too dangerous for chiefs who have a court official perform the ceremony. A social sanction allows the couple to produce children and dangerous sexual "heat" (Ardener 1992).

In looking at kinship, it essentially defines the concepts of gender roles in terms of male and female. Kinship provides the ideas and rules behind which the society finds commonality and purpose; by controlling persons and economic resources it defines the relations that govern and limit the distribution of goods. Kinship guides the community's organization allowing people to claim rights and obligations to or over others, and "Kinship both elaborates on gender and introduces principles of differentiation within male-female relations (Ardener 1992: 96).

In looking again at the Maasai, they explain the dependence of women on men as due to the latter's ownership of cattle and recount a myth that describes how women lost control of the cattle they once herded. "Llewelyn-Davies argues that the myth is used to make explicit the connection in Maasai thought between the men's ability to exploit their herds and their ability to co-operate with each other" (Ardener 1992: 101). Among the Maasai, women are divided by their interest in their children and husbands. In the long run it is the children who will provide and care for them long after their husbands have past on. Men and women represent the approved and disapproved values of Maasai society, symbolizing them in human form.

In the Maasai society, "*moran* are endowed with extraordinary glamour; they embody the culture at its most splendid" (Ardener 1992: 101). The *moran* are the protectors of the herds and the village; during their tenure they are expected to mature and develop control and restraint and perform their tasks effortlessly in order to evolve into an elder. "Girls and young women are said to exhibit the qualities of

grace and sexual attractiveness, but differ from the *moran* in their lack of courage....The unequal attributes of gender and age represent the subordination of fear to courage, beauty to wisdom and completion to authority" (Ardener 1992: 101). For the elders, the general authority is based on a "natural" transition to their age and masculinity. It is the elders who own cattle, not men in general as Ardener (1992) points out; the elders exercise control over others and have the right to butcher cattle and to marry. The reality in Maasai society as opposed to the mythological charter is, according to Ardener (1992), one of female solidarity and male competition, and not female division and male co-operation. The elders compete for women creating a system of stratification, where some are more powerful than others, and some men fail becoming *ilkiriko*, men without substance (Ardener 1992). The differences in individuals and the ideals of age and gender categories are used as symbols of legitimacy that builds up the conformity between the genders roles of the society.

The contradictions observed between people and their categories might be explained by examining the individuals. Gender categorizes relations and to a certain degree categories are a distortion of reality. They distort the critical features that make the definition of the classification, argues Ardener (1992). The roles that gender plays are extremely important on the behavior and belief of the individual. Over time the ideas and other "natural qualities" of the individual are shaped. For example, Maasai women call boys over to kill snakes, and when they arrive they are told exactly how to do it (Ardener 1992). The reason they do not kill the snake themselves is because "males are braver" (Ardener 1992: 102). Gender should not be confused with the material reality of living human beings; the concept of gender, argues Ardener (1992), does not adequately describe the complexity of women's roles and social actions.

Among the Selk'nam, the men were not manipulators of power; they were convinced the dangers of female pollution were real.

The struggle against the polluting female spirits was not perceived simply as a strategy to justify female inferiority. Patriarchy is the believed to be the correct social construct, ensuring peace and harmony. "The existing social order, the patriarchy is opposed to a hypothetical (mythical) antithesis, the matriarchy, which is totally opposed by all men and concerning which, the women are supposedly ignorant" (Chapman 1982: 76). Chapman argues the system cannot be altered by the women because of the uncertain calamity of returning to a matriarchy would ensue. The ideology expresses that absolute status quo be maintained. The myth provides an interesting example of how mythological charters place gender ideology on the society. Changing the system would be detrimental to the men, without which there would be no society.

Symbolic and Ritual Representations

In the Mbuti society, as in others there is a division of labor based on sex and age. Dahlberg (1981) states there is no difference between the sexes. Both sexes have initiation rites, where they dress as the opposite sex and ridicule its physiological feature- the penis or menstruation. The balance in the rituals promotes a stasis of everyday life. There is no data on the social and economic hierarchy to compare to the sexual symbolic one, but Dahlberg (1981) looks at the Australian aboriginal women and the Chipewyan, who also use sex to define a more specific sexual division of labor.

The Australian Aboriginal women provide the larger share of the food, and men bring in meat from hunting. Both contribute to the religious life, but in different ways. Women according to Dahlberg (1981), introduce their children into the religion. The conception site is determined by the mother, which is said to be critical to her son's spiritual life (Dahlberg 1981). But again, it is the men who dominate the religious ceremonies.

The Chipewyan women do not gather. And they contribute little to the food supply (Dahlberg 1981). The men provide 90% of the food by hunting and trapping. The sharp contrast of the Chipewyan from other hunting and gathering societies differs in its flexibility, diversity and interdependence among the foragers (Dahlberg 1982). To ensure a balance between the sexes, cultures often recognize females as being endowed with power. "Chipewyan men may need, and must seek, power/knowledge in order to be successful hunters" (Dahlberg 1981: 25). Women are powerful by nature, similar to the Mbuti females who are viewed as closer to the forest. The social division between the sexes is divided into procuring and processing. The women process the meat and are given complete control of its use. This creates interdependence between the groups. Females encourage males to work (by hunting) and men rely on spirits and power to help their hunting (Dahlberg 1981). The ownership of the food further explains the differences between the groups. In the bushmen own the food, but in the camp, the women own the meat. They dry, cook and share it with others. This system allows for a balancing out between the sexes, which is needed for harmony according to Dahlberg. In order for women be on an equal level to men, a super-infrastructure is in effect created where the women control hunting success by wielding the spirits to procure food. Dahlberg (1981) suggests that economic theory of female status based on primary food production will not address the Chipewyan culture, where women have power regardless of their dependence on male procurement.

Nature and Culture

Nature surrounds and overwhelms us; we must adapt to it or perish. Nature is viewed, according to Ortner, as inferior to culture; through culture humans were created. Women are symbolized as a connection to nature. Every culture devalues nature and identifies itself as being superior to nature (Ortner 1996). Every culture is involved

with symbolic representations providing meaningful systems that define humanity as different from nature. "Culture is viewed as assigning power to men. Because women can never escape from biology, that is, from nature, reproduction remains a premise rather than an issue subject to cultural analysis" (Weiner 1978: 330. "We may thus broadly equate culture with the notion of human consciousness, or with the products of human consciousness" (Ortner 1996: 26). Humanity is actively attempting to assert its power over nature. Each culture does this to varying degrees. Ortner suggests, cultures move actively to control and manage nature as opposed to passively acting with nature. For instance, myriad of evil forces must be constantly fought of through rituals, divination and adherence to taboos.

Traditional cultures make conceptual distinctions between girls and women by labeling them as pure and polluting. Pollution is seen as a powerful force that can spread its contamination with everything it comes in contact with. To counter the pollution, a cleansing ritual must be performed to attain purity, this ritual is believed to be more powerful than the forces of pollution, and hence the symbolic ritual devised by culture overcomes nature's power to pollute. Women are symbolically linked with nature, in contrast to men who are linked with culture. Culture is designed to subvert nature, so too is it to subordinate women who are associated with nature, argues Ortner (1996). Under this framework women are argued to be subordinate to men; a universal status found cross culturally that can be explained by the notion that in most or all cultures women will be associated with being closer to nature.

Women are viewed closer to nature is based on their unique reproductive abilities. Ortner cites three levels that can differentiate women from men: (1) the women's body in functions relating to "species life" is greater than the male's physiology, such as breast feeding, and pregnancy; (2) a woman's body and its functions place her in "social roles" that in turn are considered to be at a lower order of

the cultural hierarchy or process than man's; (3), a women's traditional social roles, imposed because her body and its functions are seen as closer to nature (Ortner 1996: 27). The physiology of the female's body seems to place her in a cultural context that traditionally has been one of submission, or second rate to that of men.

The female's body is designed to create life; males, in contrast, lacking such ability and assert more creativity through culture (Ortner 1996). It is interesting that men are not considered more relevant to the procreation process. Ortner may consider this role insignificant compared to pregnancy and lactation by women; or by addressing the male role there is the implication that nature is not as clearly linked to just females. Ortner continues to suggest that through culture, man creates lasting symbols and objects that transcend multi-generations, whereas, the female creation of life is viewed in an ephemeral context. Here, we are entreated to the notion that men strive to create, be it life or culture. Whether or not men realize their role in creating offspring, they are not attached to children in the same way women are. The difference apparently frees men to create elaborate symbols and rituals and restricts women to provide offspring.

The occupation of males involves risky behavior. Often war and hunting are viewed as positive life taking powers and are more highly regarded than the female's life giving qualities. The act of taking life in and of itself is not important, rather it is the social context that gives it significance. "For it is not in giving life, but in risking life that man is raised above the animal" (Ortner 1996: 27). Thus, argues Ortner, the concepts of man associating with culture and woman relating closer to nature are universal beliefs, either conscious or unconscious.

The process of lactation in the female after pregnancy leads to a natural bond with the child, and is both biologically and culturally encouraged. Female involvement continues past infancy on through early childhood, as children need protection from the environment. This activity tends to

confine women to the home, and establishes a pattern that leads to a division of labor between the sexes.

Men are not able to connect as strongly as females with children as necessitated by nature. Men function on an interfamilial basis, lacking the "natural" basis (nursing, generalized to childcare) that women possess. Men operate in the "higher" contexts of the culture. They become the "natural proprietors of religion, ritual, politics, and other realms of cultural thought" (Ortner 1996: 33). This is not to say that women are completely consigned to nature and men to culture, nor is it to say women play no part in creating culture, because they are an essential aspect of it. There is no reason why they should be assigned to childcare and not the father, or anyone else argues Ortner. But the fact remains that they are and it seems likely it is for a reason, one that is likely to be connected with motherhood. Women play a vital role in teaching cultural values to their children. In this role women represent culture more than males. But it is the male who teaches the upper echelon of culture. For example, university professors are predominately male, but females tend to fill in teaching positions at grade-school levels.

Ortner's objective is simply to hypothesize that women are closer to nature than men, based on culture structures. In reality there is no difference between males and females relating to nature, both are equally connected to it. "Both have conscious; both are mortal" and "ultimately, both men and women can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women be seen as aligned... in culture's ongoing dialectic with nature" (Ortner 1996: 42). I suppose then, it is a universal ideological problem, where women will then get an equal chance to rule the world, leading to more peace and harmony.

Dahlberg's (1982) data challenges the notion that female maternity lessens the value of women. Dahlberg (1982) points out that the idea of "anatomy as destiny" is shown in female cultural ideology. At the

life cycle stage of adult, "Women then are seen as possessing the ultimate power of all that life-which brings them closer to the forest than men can be. Men approach the forest in the Mollie ceremonies, but women during their childbearing years are already close (Dahlberg 1981:23). In the Mbuti society maternity or its possibility changes the sexual experience for both males and females. Marital sex is considered far better than the joy of premarital sex. This distinction is based on the possibility of pregnancy, which is viewed as ecstasy. "The Mbuti appear to be seeking a balance between the sexes by compensating men for the fundamental biological inadequacy of being unable to give birth" (Dahlberg 1981: 24). Here women are associated with nature, they are seen as positive components to the society. Dahlberg has gone to great lengths to demonstrate the beauty of female anatomy in the Mbuti society, but we are not shown the aspects of power structure. Men hold position of power and authority; women may be more powerful and revered for their life giving attributes, but in all likelihood, it is men who control the power in the society.

Conclusion

Does equality or inequality, between men and women result from material or ideological causes? (Lepowski 2001: 257). How gender ideology comes into play is unclear. Does mythology facilitate the notion of gender ideology? The Maassai have a myth explaining the ownership of property by men, which mystifies the role of power. The power of the female is the power of life and nature. This has given the male an opportunity to focused on creating life through custom and culture. By confining and overpowering nature, culture is raised above nature, as the male is raised above the female. In many rituals and myths males are depicted as superior spiritual beings. It is my opinion that in Western culture boys are given the color blue representing the sky and girls, pink for its earth color. Females are often viewed as

closer to the forest or nature. In many cultures women are power, whereas males may attain power. In many societies females are restricted from the culture's highest status or ritual knowledge. As Ortner (1996) claims, in all known societies females are pre-empted by males. Mythological charters, when available, provide an indication of gender ideology, but they are often limited in their meanings and cannot be completely analyzed without observing the daily practices of the culture.

Ortner explains that the reason women are subordinate to men in every known culture stems from their symbolic connection to nature. Culture strives to control nature; therefore, the tradition of suppressing women is explained through mythological and symbolic links to nature. Women by their biology, places them in a culturally defined subordinate category.

Dahlberg, Lepowski, and Ardener, disagree with Ortner's model. They argue biological determinism does not adequately explain female cross-cultural subordination; they confuse Ortner's use of gender. Here Ortner views gender culturally not biologically; Ortner does not suppose females are genetically inferior to men. If Ortner's model is flawed in its assumptions of cultural power favoring only men, none of the researchers offer an alternative solution; they do not agree outright that women are universally subordinate, but beat around the bush demonstrating how much power the women do have. Their examples of female equality are based on the daily lives and activities of the women; they do not address the fact that when leadership is required everyone knows who is in charge, or that females are restricted from leadership roles due to the belief that they are polluting. They also present data that women are not necessarily inferior to men when they are associated with Nature. Dahlberg (1981) and Ardener (1992) demonstrate that women have power, whereas only some men may achieve power. They cite evidence of women balancing the disproportionate economic contributions made by men by

controlling the spirits that aid men in hunting.

Dahlberg and Ardener argue in some cases both men and women have polluting powers, but it is only the female in such cases who can remove the pollution from the men. This connection is weakened by the fact that women pollute men. In many cases the authors do not explain menstrual taboos. Instead, Dahlberg, Ardener, and Lepowski describe systems of female power, autonomy and the various forms of female attributes.

I believe that Ortner is not suggesting women are biologically destined to be subordinate, rather it is under the cultural confines that gender ideology is defined. Women by their sex have been viewed as dangerous to culture by their ability to pollute; they contaminate the tools and sacred objects that culture defines as crucial to controlling the physical environment. Therefore childbearing women are generally feared for their polluting power. Women are not genetically inferior to men, but have been symbolically associated to nature through culture.

"Individual women can, in some instances exert considerable power by virtue of the strength in their personalities. They are forceful women who can command respect and even fear" (Hammond 1976: 130). Strong-mindedness with seniority makes a formidable woman. They have nothing to lose, and with age they have the freedom to voice their opinions. "Any traditional society, whatever its structure, can produce similarly intimidating old women" (Hammond 1976: 130). In small-scale band or village societies, sharp distinctions between public and private life cannot be made. These societies are based on kinship organization that focuses primarily on the family unit. "In these loosely structured, relatively egalitarian societies, most social roles can be as much a function of individual capabilities as of ascription by age or sex" (Hammond 1976: 130).

The concept of role is a basic approach by which social patterns are discerned

through behavior of individuals.

Application of mythological charters to cross-cultural investigation revealed its weakness when applied to a role theory model such as Ortner's. The findings were variegated in their approach to explaining female status. The degree to which women are subordinate to men varies. "They are least subordinate in small-scale egalitarian band societies" (Hammond 1976: 133). Women can wield an enormous amount of power. In many societies women constitute a major labor force, provide most of the subsistence, and have full control over domestic resources (Hammond 1976). Women are far from being passive counterparts; they play active roles in the community and are the backbone to men's political sphere, which they either directly or indirectly contribute to. Further research in anthropology should continue placing emphasis on subordinate aspects in traditional cultures. Most of the research has been on superordinate aspects and has neglected to better understand the women's roles in society. The mythological explanation of cultural gender roles has been difficult to establish. In all cases, females are described as being disenfranchised. The reasons for this stem from their pollution capabilities. How gender ideologies are aligned with mythology is less clear. Mythology is complex and is rarely definitive in its explanatory capabilities.

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