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STRUCTURE OF AGRICULTURE AND WOMEN'S CULTURE IN THE GREAT PLAINS

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The family farm has prevailed as a bastion of petty capitalism in the Great Plains. Although capital and labor are highly differentiated in the larger society, they are combined in the family production unit in Great Plains agriculture. In addition to being the economic base for much of the Great Plains from the settlement period onward, the family farm provided a cultural base from which a series of values emerged. Women were important in reproducing this culture that tended to stress agrarian values and the primacy of the family as building blocks for a community based on the values of equality, hard work, optimism, and self-improvement. But family farm culture manifests itself differently depending on each member's location within the family: there is a dominant male culture and a female culture of resistance.

FAMILY FARM PRODUCTION UNITS

The survival of the family farm as a production unit in the midst of a society dominated

by capitalist relations of production is due, we hypothesize, to three properties of family farm production units: 1) provision of a flexible labor force; 2) absorption of risk, and 3) heavy capital investment relative to the profit generated. Women are key actors in providing these characteristics to family farm units. Their willingness to serve as "hidden" cheap labor, to absorb and reduce risk, and to invest in the farm unit instead of consumption or other business enterprises, can vary, however. It is our hypothesis that this variation is due in part to the way agricultural production is structured, particularly the degree to which the farm family has access to and uses land, labor, capital, and management. As the relations among the factors of production on family farms differ, so do women's participation, control, and commitment to the farm enterprise as expressed in the values they espouse and the activities they engage in, particularly within female groups.

Provision of a Flexible Labor Force. The farm family is able to call forth a reserve labor force at key periods in the production cycle while maintaining and reproducing that labor force when it is not needed for those production activities. The ideology that legitimized and mobilized family labor, particularly the way it has defined female labor as "unskilled" and serving to "help out," has manifested itself in a variety of cultural patterns. As we begin to appreciate women's productive contributions to family farming, we can also attempt to identify the

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female cultures that undergirded that form of production and the degree to which those female cultures defined reality and responded to it.

The agricultural production process differs qualitatively from the industrial. In agriculture production processes are consecutive, not simultaneous,¹ and there is a difference between production time and labor time.² These two facts mean that agriculture requires a uniquely flexible labor force quite different from that of industry. Labor must be available at times of peak demand that are determined not by market forces but by natural rhythms. When weather is unpredictable, as it is in the Great Plains, or uncontrollable, in the case of dryland crop agriculture, provision of labor in a timely fashion is especially problematic. As a result, agricultural labor in the Great Plains is generally mobilized outside the formal contractual relationships that unite capital and labor in a modern economy. The provision of labor depends instead on informal mechanisms of exchange. In such cases, the family is the ideal basic production unit, particularly when society assigns no value to the opportunity cost of family labor.

The recruitment of freeholding families was the best way to ensure an adequate but variable labor force in the absence of slavery, indentured servitude, or other institutions of tied labor in a labor-scarce region such as the Great Plains. (The native labor force was not amenable to becoming a subservient agricultural labor force and, therefore, was eliminated.) Family members, particularly women and children, can be mobilized to "help out" at harvest or farrowing, lambing or calving time, and then assume the role of "dependent" during the rest of the agricultural cycle. The family absorbs the cost of labor. Since the family, as owner of the means of production, seems to be exploiting only itself, this posits no particular dilemma for the family unit. When we analyze the flow and control of resources within the farm family unit, however, the nonexploitative nature of family farming might be questioned. It is interesting to note under what structural conditions women define as exploitative the seasonal demands for labor and their own lack of control of the money generated by their labor, and when they view these as their proper contributions to the family enterprise.

Family labor is not the only reserve labor supply agriculture has used throughout history with different agricultural systems. Slavery was used in many plantation economies and migrant labor has been used in the "factories in the field" that predominate in California, Arizona, south Texas, and Florida. Further, when agriculture has been able to reduce the difference between labor time and production time, as in the broiler industry and increasingly in hog production, a reserve labor supply at peak production times is no longer needed.³ In fact, much agricultural research is devoted to reducing labor input or to controlling it when it is required.

The crop and livestock systems prevalent on the Great Plains, particularly wheat, grain sorghum, sheep, and cow-calf operations, are noteworthy in that they all resist industrialization of the production process because gestation, germination, and maturation periods resist being substantially accelerated. There is a significant difference between labor time—the time actually needed to plant, weed, and harvest the crop—and production time—the time lapse from beginning to end of the production process. Winter wheat in the Great Plains is in the ground about nine months, and the harvest cannot be staggered throughout the year, as occurs with sugar in the Cauca Valley of Colombia or lettuce in the Imperial Valley of California. There are long periods of relatively light work loads required in the dominant, market-oriented parts of the farming system.

The relatively low and irregular precipitation on the Great Plains in combination with a variety of soils, some productive and some marginal, encourages family-based, grain-livestock farming systems that have dominated production since the settlement period. Because yields per acre were relatively low in the rainfed portions of the Great Plains and because one could graze relatively few head of stock per acre, populations tended to be dispersed, affecting both labor availability and cultural and social formations.

Farm women and their children have been the major source of reserve labor in Great Plains agriculture. They have provided a major component of hidden but necessary work that kept a variety of farming systems functioning in this labor-short region. Whereas labor demands for the major crops produced in the Great Plains

(wheat, sorghum, cattle, and some corn) were sporadic, the demand for female labor was not. Water and fuel had to be provided each day. Meals had to be cooked and clothes washed. Milk cows and chickens needed daily attention. Women's work was doubly necessary since cultural norms made it possible for women to do men's work, but not for men to do women's work. Even though men did women's work in extreme cases of necessity, it was definitely viewed as abnormal.

Not only have women and girls provided the labor, they have been proud to "help out" and have built a variety of cultural structures around the role of farmwife. An ideology of separate and somewhat unequal spheres surrounds family farming. The system is undergirded by a firm agrarian ideology that the family working in harmony as a production unit is the best possible way of life, even though that unit may be defined by the male in the household. The relation of production (that the household provided management, capital, and labor to the enterprise, with little labor bought or sold) helps explain the fact that all in the enterprise were expected to contribute to the whole to make it work. Women's culture contributed to that sense of family, life-style, and community—and has helped to mobilize the needed labor at key moments in the production cycle.

Absorption of Risk. It is not just the uneven demand for labor that makes it unattractive for corporate capitalism to enter Great Plains agriculture. There is also the problem of risk. Families absorb the risk on their farms (at times with the help of a variety of government programs that are another source of risk). Women are key in the absorption of risk.

Great Plains agriculture runs great risks from weather that threatens crops and livestock. Because of capricious weather conditions, these risks are far greater there than in the cornbelt.⁴ There is either too little moisture or too much—often in the same year. Or the moisture comes in the wrong form, such as hail, right before the wheat harvest. An early or late freeze or too many successive days of high temperature all put undue stress on plants and animals and reduce yields. Even when the problems of weather are diminished through technology, such as the installation of irrigation or enclosing livestock to protect them from the elements,

the problems of pests are always present. The soil has nematodes and soil-borne mosaic viruses. There are chinch bugs, hessian flies, and a host of other insects to attack crops. When technology is developed to deal with one of nature's sources of risk, resistant organisms evolve, and the process continues. The Great Plains, though biologically fascinating in regard to its invertebrate populations, is highly risky as a result.

Nature is only one of the risks. The markets for the crops and livestock produced on the Great Plains run in boom and bust cycles. Cattle bought at a high price to fatten can quickly become part of an upward production trend and must be sold at a loss. These risks, too, have been shifted to the farm family, with corporations preferring to accumulate capital in buying and selling a product rather than in directly producing it.

Women have been crucial in risk reduction, primarily by allowing for enterprise diversification on the family farm.⁵ This diversification included their production of milk, cream, eggs, and vegetables for local markets, as well as participation in the male-controlled farm enterprises when necessary. Women's culture of resistance was particularly strong in maintaining these enterprises, for men often saw them as taking women's time away from the mainstream farm work. Further, these diversified enterprises allowed women to control their own income streams, often seen as threatening by males. (Documentation, however, shows men focusing on the time women "wasted" on their animal enterprises and the general dislike of the kind of animals, particularly chickens, that women kept.) Diversification also meant that women took off-farm jobs to generate income in cash-short periods and this reduced risk still further for the farm enterprise as a whole.

Heavy Capital Investment. A third element that keeps Great Plains farms in family hands relates to the land-extensive nature of production there because it requires a relatively large investment to get the volume of production necessary to support a family. Although in California or Florida it is conceivable that a family can make a decent living with five acres of land in strawberries, we have estimated that in the eastern part of the Great Plains at least 350 acres is required, and more than a thousand

acres is the minimum needed for a mixed crop and livestock operation in the western part of the Great Plains. Even though land is worth considerably less per acre in the Great Plains than in California, the total investment in land—a relatively illiquid investment—is greater than in other industries and in other types of agriculture. Corporations are not likely to tie up their capital in the way required by the farming systems that predominate in the Great Plains.

For family farmers, however, being “land poor” is defined as a virtue, not a liability. The value of self-improvement as described by Vidich and Bensman for small-town America is best manifested in family farms, which acquire more and more equity throughout the life cycle.⁶ Social mobility in that culture is defined by the acquisition of roots as objectified by land and not by less permanent consumption objects. The use of capital for land and farm improvements instead of home consumption has moral worth for farm families rather than being perceived in terms of opportunity cost. Anticonsumption norms that help disguise community inequalities are fostered by farm women’s culture on the Great Plains, thus undergirding the large capital investment and capital risk experienced by farm families. When individual women were perceived as too demanding of household goods or fashionable clothing, they were put down by their female neighbors as selfish and unworthy. It took the more urban-based movement of cooperative extension and the home economics movement to legitimize consumption.

A woman’s culture that accepts investment in the barn rather than in the house, or in a truck or tractor rather than a passenger car, has been a necessary corollary to family farmers’ heavy investment in land and machinery. In current times it means emphasis on garage sales rather than shopping malls. In the 1920s and the 1930s it meant that rural women risked looking like “hicks” when they went into town, where, despite their net worth, they dressed their family in flour-sack garments in order to conserve capital to reinvest in the enterprise. In the settlement period, a women’s culture that stressed low consumption as a virtue meant that when there were costs involved in schooling, boys and not girls were sent to town for high school. As we shall see, from the settlement

period on different farming strategies that demanded different kinds of female activities caused variation in the nonconsumption ethic in Great Plains communities and farm families.

WOMEN’S ROLE IN THE SETTLEMENT PERIOD

In this paper we attempt to describe the roles women have played in Great Plains agriculture, relate those roles to specific farming systems and agricultural structures, and hypothesize on the interaction between the structure of agriculture and women’s culture. Although we have solid data and strong quantitative support for our discussion of the structure of agriculture, we have fewer data on women’s role in agriculture, which is systematically undermeasured throughout the world, and even fewer indicators of women’s culture.⁷ We present the data we do have, in conjunction with our hypotheses, in order to stimulate further data collection and theory testing in this area, however.

Women’s early and continuing contribution to U.S. agriculture is increasingly being documented.⁸ Yet such input is in no way homogeneous among different farming systems. Women’s participation in productive and reproductive activities, crucial for family farm survival and growth, varies with the ethnic heritage of the family and by the type of farming system, particularly as different ratios of capital, land, and labor result in monocropping as opposed to diversified farming operations.

We focus on Ellis County, Kansas, but draw on other counties in the western part of the state where ethnographic data are available. Supplemental data are taken from plains literature and our other studies on agriculture and community in the Great Plains. Ellis County is located in west-central Kansas and is in many ways typical of much of the Great Plains region. Officially organized in 1867, its growth was initially dependent upon the Kansas division of the Union Pacific Railroad, whose intercontinental railway passed through the county. The railroad, granted large tracts of land by the United States government as an incentive to build, sought to generate short-term profit from land sales as well as long-term profit through the increased rail traffic a more densely settled

area would generate. With the completion of the railroad, the Union Pacific began energetic efforts both in the eastern part of the United States, particularly Indiana, Illinois, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, and in Europe to bring people to settle along its right-of-way. In addition, the U.S. Congress authorized homesteading on the government-owned portions of the land, which attracted less wealthy but equally ambitious people determined to live better, more independent lives.

Ellis County was touted by the railroad for its good climate and rich soils. Not mentioned was the tendency of the soil to erode rapidly once plowed, the limited and highly variable rainfall, and the intense extremes in temperature. These unstable environmental conditions, coupled with the highly variable economic conditions for agriculture at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, made it difficult for family farms to survive as economically viable units in Ellis County. Population turnover was rapid.

The end of the depression of the 1870s signaled the arrival of the first large wave of immigrant farmers. The majority of these were German Russians from the Volga region of Russia. They had never integrated themselves completely into their Russian setting, as indicated by their maintenance of the German language and their Roman Catholicism. Women were even less likely than the men to have learned Russian, and they remained isolated from Russian culture since men dominated market activities in the Volga region. Women did market their home-produced items, but mainly to each other within their own villages. Pressure on the available land in the Volga region, occasioned in part by the large families of the German Russians as well as the threat of conscription, motivated the more farsighted to seek farming opportunities elsewhere. The Kansas land available for purchase from the railroads at prices far less than those in the eastern U.S. seemed ideal. Many of these men sold their Russian assets for considerable profit, which, combined with the cash generated from their agricultural sales after the last harvest in Russia, allowed them to pay for land, passage, and basic production expenses upon settlement in Ellis County.⁹ A strong ethnic identity, reinforced by a devout religiosity,

supported a sense of community, as the more well-to-do Volga Germans lent money to their comrades, ensuring the establishment of communities in Ellis County that were practically transplants from Russia. Entire villages made the move to Kansas, bringing with them cultural patterns that were to determine their farming success into the next century.

Besides the Volga Germans, there was heavy migration directly from Germany. Although less united than the Volga Germans, their ethnic traditions of Lutheranism or Catholicism and family interdependence were strong. Both Volga Germans and Germans viewed farming as a way of life and were yeoman farmers in Salamon's terms.¹⁰

In addition, there were U.S.-born families in the area. In contrast to the Volga Germans and Germans, many of these families did not have an extensive farming tradition and tended to view farming only as a way of making a living. These families can be classified as entrepreneurial farmers by Salamon's typology.

During the settlement period, which we intensively studied through record linkage of some 208 families in the area, economic and ecological factors varied considerably, leading to a high rate of farm failure. Thirty percent of the families left farming in the area between 1885 and 1895 and another 30 percent left between 1895 and 1905. Between 1885 and 1905 there were two economic depressions and three periods of relative prosperity. Natural conditions, coupled with the fluctuating prices for wheat, the major cash crop, provided pressures for continuing farm expansion.

Cash for land purchase or mortgage payments was generated by selling labor in addition to crops. Although the temporary migration of German and Volga German men seeking wages is more thoroughly documented, interviews suggest that daughters contributed to the cash necessary for land purchase and payments by selling their labor as hired girls and cooks for harvest crews. It was common in the early settlement period for German ethnic women to hire out for domestic work to "English" families, who considered them hardworking and trustworthy. In addition, women and girls collected chips and bones, from both cattle and buffalo, that were sold to a growing fertilizer industry. Male

and female wages continually subsidized the farming enterprises as the families sought multiple survival strategies.

The U.S.-born farm families were more likely to use formal credit mechanisms, especially bank loans, to finance their entry into farming and their later expansion. Women's economic contributions were not part of the calculus in obtaining formal credit—nor was the land in women's names. Reliance on formal credit by these families increased their risk and their dependence on cash crops to repay the loans. Girls in U.S.-born families appear less likely to have worked as hired girls.

WOMEN'S CULTURE, AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURE, AND SEX RATIO

Differential dependence on female family labor in farm strategy is reflected in the sex ratio among ethnic groups with different farming strategies and resulting farm structures. Migrants from Germany and Russia differentially brought their sons, perhaps because daughters were married off at a young age in the old country. The skewed sex ratios of children over 12 gradually declined during the settlement period: 153.3 boys per 100 girls in 1885, 115.1 in 1895, and 112.5 in 1905. The death of a spouse was likely to result in sending away girls, but not boys. Of the households that had lost either spouse through death between 1885 and 1895, two-thirds had sons over 12 at home, while only one-third had daughters over 12 at home. In such a crisis, sons' labor was apparently critical for the survival of the farm and daughters were more useful working off the farm and bringing in modest wages. For U.S.-born families, the loss of a wife often meant leaving the farm entirely.

SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION AND FARM SURVIVAL AND EXPANSION

Although the farming systems and farm goals were dominated by a market orientation with wheat as the primary market crop, subsistence production was key to farm survival and expansion during the settlement period in the Great Plains. Wheat production was controlled by males, whereas subsistence production was de-

fined as part of the female sphere.

Subsistence production as measured in the Ellis County study indicates 1) risk reduction through diversification of production; 2) participation of women and children in productive activities; and 3) independent income streams for women that gave them some modicum of economic power apart from that gained through their husbands.

Data were collected by the county assessor on production and sale of seven subsistence products. In the case of five (potatoes, pigs, butter, cheese, and sorghum for making syrup), the quantity produced was entered on the assessor's form. In the case of two additional items, milk and poultry, information was collected on dollar sales. Since the amount sold was not large, it was clear that these products were raised for both sale and home consumption. An index was constructed by simply counting the number of subsistence activities in which the family engaged, from zero to seven.

Because of the fact that nearly every male farmer was married, there was little variability in availability of wives' labor. There was, however, differential availability of male and female children's labor from one farm to another. Thus, it was possible to determine (supplemented by interviews of descendants of the settlers and by diaries) which activities were principally male or female activities. Number of girls was associated with amount of butter made and with the composite subsistence index itself, whereas number of boys was not associated with either. (Pearson coefficients for number of girls with the two measures were .16 and .15, respectively—significant at the .01 level. For number of boys, the corresponding coefficients were nonsignificant, .05 and .04.) Numbers of boys and numbers of girls were positively associated with the value of poultry products sold and the number of milk cows, horses, and mules, as well as numbers of cultivated acres and acres in wheat.¹¹

We may conclude from these data and from more anecdotal sources that women's and girls' work included cheese and butter making; hog production; potato growing and gardening; sorghum syrup production; sale of cheese, butter, cream, and eggs; as well as collection and sale of cattle and buffalo bones and collection

of cow and buffalo chips for fuel. Boys and men were more likely to do fieldwork involving production of commercial crops and were also likely to be involved in milking cows and poultry and egg production.

Lucy Martin, a western Kansas pioneer farm woman, describes division of labor on a day when company was expected (in a household where the husband helped out more than most):

By the time I had the gingerbread and chickens in the oven, and some plum pies ready to go in next, it was near midday. There I was, still in my morning work dress, Harry [the baby] crying again, Henry [her husband] I didn't know where, and the churning yet to do, though Henry had finished the milking as always. This isn't what all the husbands round here would do, you know. Many women take all the care of their milk cows and poultry, beside their other housework.¹²

It can be assumed that girls' jobs included child care and other reproductive household activities like ironing and assisting their mothers in the washing, thereby giving their mothers more time to engage in productive activities in the garden and with small animals.

Subsistence production activities, and the diversification of production implied therein, contributed to the survivability of the farm enterprise, although such activities were negatively associated with the most rapidly growing farms as measured by percentage change in farm size.¹³ This illustrates the importance of diversification and of women's and children's productive activities for risk reduction but not for capital accumulation. Conversely, hiring wage labor had a negative impact on farm survivability, not necessarily because it was costly, but for what it implied about the failure to engage in risk reduction through diversification of productive enterprises. A preponderance of male productive labor—whether hired or family—implies limitation to a few productive enterprises, expansion of farm size, and greater risk. The greater likelihood of such farms not surviving implies two opposite scenarios: the high risk of concentrating on commercial wheat production results in decapitalization and loss of the farm, or the high risk strategy results in

capital accumulation and expansion or sale of the farm and a willingness to start anew, either in farming where land is cheaper or in another business. As such strategies were highly related to ethnicity, there tended to be a movement of U.S.-born to town-based small businesses, with the Germans and Volga Germans surviving on the land. As we will see, the different strategies were both caused by the different activities of German ethnic women and U.S.-born women and resulted in further differences emerging in their cultures.

In the Ellis County case, German ethnicity was associated with subsistence activities, partly through having larger families, which meant more family labor was available for such activities. Being U.S.-born was associated with concentration on a few commercial crops, willingness to take greater risks, and for those farms that survived, greater capitalization and expansion. Male production patterns dominated and male cultural values predominated. Women's culture in U.S.-born families tended to be town based, not farm related. Consumption was more acceptable among these women, as was the acceptance of social class difference which different levels of consumption indicated. This pattern illustrates Salamon's entrepreneur and the German families represent her yeoman farmer ideal type.

As suggested by Barnard, culturally defined male and female rhythms are different.¹⁴ Men approach work as something finite to be accomplished, whereas women's work tends to be continuous and never fully accomplished. This is particularly clear in farming roles where the seasonal nature of agricultural production—planting, cultivating, harvesting, and marketing—allows for clear beginnings and ends of operations that are male dominated. Even though women may contribute to those same activities and have other seasonal activities of their own, they have the hidden and continuous obligations of reproductive labor—child care, cooking meals, and washing clothes. This is illustrated in the agrarian saw, "Man may work from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done." Many of the productive activities engaged in by women and children were of this continuous character and, hence, had substantial potential for industrialization. For instance, egg, milk, and

cream production are continuous throughout the year, as is the making of butter and cheese. With time, all of these activities were industrialized and largely disappeared from the diversified farming operation.

GENDER AND SUBSISTENCE PRODUCTION

Women and girls performed many of the key subsistence activities necessary for farm survival and expansion. As a result, the diversified farms were much more stable than the monocultural ones. Women who invested their labor in these enterprises could feel some assurance that their sons would harvest the fruit of their labors. Women in the diversified German and Volga German farming families valued work on the farm as contributing to an ongoing symbol of familiness. Girls did not regularly do field labor, although they did participate at key points of high labor demand as field hands and, even more crucially, as cooks for field hands who were hired or came in labor exchanges in relatively large numbers prior to mechanized harvesting.

U.S.-born farm families' emphasis on a single crop and formal credit sources increased risk. The women did not participate in on-farm production activities to the extent the German and Volga German women did—nor did they identify with the farm and its product. Moves of unmarried daughters off the farms of U.S.-born families were likely to be related to education, as mothers sought something better for their daughters than the long, hard days gathering wood or cow chips and hauling water.

German and Volga German girls often went to town, but in an income generating capacity, as household help. In these families, the mothers had extra household chores unrelieved by a daughter's help. But in compensation, a small income came in regularly. That income was sometimes crucial in maintaining land payments or even in buying seed or food for the remaining family members; it contributed to farm survival but was not adequate for aiding farm expansion.

A labor-intensive strategy was related to the presence of both sons and daughters, which, in turn, was related to fertility and ethnicity. The

Volga Germans had the largest families, followed by the Germans. U.S.-born parents had substantially fewer children. The Volga Germans had the most staying power, followed by the Germans, with the U.S.-born a poor third. Family labor and community solidarity, often maintained by the religious organizations and strong kin networks of Volga German and German women, contributed in large measure to their success on the land. Volga Germans were also the least likely to invest heavily in machinery. Because of their large families and their community support network, they were able to substitute labor for capital, which allowed them to weather the boom and bust price cycle marking that epoch. In contrast, the U.S.-born population tended to invest heavily in machinery, which had one of two opposed effects: either it increased their debt load—and their bankruptcy rate—or it contributed to farm size expansion.¹⁵

Using labor instead of capital was a strategy applied not only to wheat, their principal cash crop, but to subsistence activity as well. Female labor was the backbone of the labor-instead-of-capital strategy. Although we have no measures of it from the censuses since they were biased toward male-oriented, cash-producing activities, women's activity in providing food and fuel freed men for fieldwork.¹⁶ Those families that persisted on the land followed a cautious, labor-intensive, diversified, risk-reducing strategy—a strategy that depended upon, but did not recognize, the input of women and the children, particularly the female children, that they bore.

The U.S.-born families that remained on the land tended to adopt the same diversified farming strategies as did the Germans and Volga Germans. Women from these families had the same investment in an agrarian ethic as did the German Catholic women, an ethic only partially shared by their town neighbors, though the rural and urban American-born women shared Methodist or Presbyterian origins. For these rural women, country churches became a major source of validation of the yeoman farmer agrarian ethic, while those women who had left the farm developed very different cultural structures in town churches and a wide variety of social and service clubs.

DAUGHTERS, WOMEN'S STATUS, AND WOMEN'S CULTURE

For both the Volga Germans and the Germans, it was a man's world in the settlement period. When there was money for education, the sons were educated. Education for girls would be wasted since girls were raised to be married. Marriage as an inevitable fate for women affected property transfer as well. Property, particularly the valued land that provided the link to community, went from father to son. Giving girls property was like turning one's deed over to another family. Girls were necessary but not valued.

Life was particularly hard for the oldest and youngest daughter in Volga German and German families. For the oldest, family responsibilities often meant taking over the chores of their mothers, some of whom were often ill from many pregnancies and miscarriages. Diaries reveal that, while feeling genuine affection for their wives, men valued them for their fertility and their religious devotion to it. Yet maternal mortality was high in Ellis County up to the Second World War, and many older daughters who dropped out of grade school early to help an invalid mother ended up replacing her in performing all household chores when another pregnancy proved fatal. When the father remarried, as he often did, the new, younger wife was often happy to have her stepdaughter continue with the drudgery of laundry, water carrying, fuel seeking, and cooking that consumed the hours from before dawn to after dusk.

For the youngest daughter, the pattern was different. She would often be able to complete a few more years of grade school than her oldest sister, but, being the last to leave home, she was required by the enormous amount of female work to be done to give up whatever "city" options she might fancy in terms of schooling or employment.

The avenues of escapes for the daughters in these families were marriage or a religious vocation. For devout families, the choice of a religious vocation for either sons or daughters was an occasion of great rejoicing, although it also required great sacrifice, both to pay for the education and to replace the labor of the child sent to the Church. A religious vocation for girls was limited to those with a basic education,

and, thus, priests were more numerous than nuns among the children of the first settlers.

Marriage for a woman often meant moving to the household of her in-laws and taking over the heaviest, most onerous chores allocated to women. While many of the older German and Volga German women interviewed reported great respect for their mothers-in-law and recalled fondly the female companionship shared, they also recalled their joy at finally establishing a separate household, where, at least briefly, the number of people served was reduced.

The U.S.-born families not only had fewer children, they were less likely to live in extended family households. They were also less likely to have the strong kin networks in place to share work, provide credit, and validate for women the value of their reproductive activities.

STRUCTURE AND PATRIARCHY

The diversified family unit that was necessary for family farm survival required coordination and discipline. Each Volga German and German family member was required to put the good of the family above the individual's desires for growth or change. And the father decided what was good for the family. Since he was tied to his community, he was closely observed in these decisions. Active in his church and Catholic men's groups, a father too harsh on his children could be controlled by community pressure, and, if necessary, a chat with the priest, often in German, the language with which he felt most comfortable. His wife's status was so closely linked to his that their mutual identity was assumed. While spousal "discipline" was a given right, evidence suggests that Volga German and German patriarchs seldom abused their privileged positions, since strong female solidarity networks, also linked to the local priest, provided important protection for women.

The U.S.-born women, in contrast, though equally economically dependent on their husbands, had fewer informal control devices. Thus, in those communities, more formal ways of controlling men's misuse of power, through such organizations as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, were promoted by women. Linguistic barriers as well as differential perceived need made temperance groups religiously and

ethnically homogeneous to the U.S.-born population.

The German and Volga German father's control of his children was assured in part because of their economic dependence upon him. Although daughters could and did hire out locally for domestic service, they did not view such employment as a viable alternative to their family responsibilities. Permanent, local, off-farm employment for males was relatively scarce, and made more so by the ethnic insularity of the Volga Germans and Germans, whose linguistic separateness decreased their commercial employability in Hays, the Ellis county seat. They could do as their fathers told them, with the understanding that one day they would work in partnership with them or be able to acquire their own land, or they could leave the county. A financially independent son did not remain to confront his father's authority.

The absolute power of the patriarch was based on his control of access to land and livelihood. Patriarchy was mitigated by strong female community networks that were both informal, through the extended kin networks present in the ethnic communities, and formal through the women's groups of the Catholic and Lutheran churches. In other sections of the Great Plains, other ethnic churches and communities facilitated women's togetherness. The dominant male culture was public and focused often around informal ties in trading. Women also sold what they produced independently, to other women as well as storekeepers. Thus a normative structure limiting women to the home or church was not problematic for German and Volga German women. In the settlement period among yeoman farmers such as the Germans and the Volga Germans, a strong sense of women's community seemed to mitigate the men's almost absolute control over resources and the general undervaluation of women's contribution to the production of those resources.

Women associated with entrepreneurial farming had much more public roles. In some dryland farming counties, such as Haskell County southwest of Ellis County, women at times predominated in formal organizations. Women organized their own social clubs, while "the man's social life is unorganized."¹⁷ For example, these women attempted to organize schools and cultural events, which meant they

had to prevail upon men to fund them when volunteer labor would not suffice. Thus, despite the importance of women's initial organizing efforts, males tended to hold formal positions on boards with actual control of resources, such as school boards.

CONCLUSION

In the settlement period, ethnic groups farmed with different strategies. Women and girls performed various roles in these two strategies, and different agricultural structures emerged. Men dominated in both structures, but the women developed two distinct cultures of resistance in response.

The U.S.-born farmers developed a strategy that can be classified as entrepreneurial. They focused on cash crops, had minimal production of subsistence crops, and, because they depended more on hired labor, were more prone to substitute capital for labor when possible. Women's activities were focused in the reproductive area, involving both housework and cultural activities, and included education. These women started community organizations, schools, and book clubs, and they often encouraged their husbands to move to town, basing their agricultural enterprise there rather than in the more isolated rural areas. Because their farms were larger and therefore even more isolated, women found they could maintain their culture more easily from the more urban base. Men had the farm, but women had the community. The organization of community cultural events, from dances to poetry readings, was an expression of women's culture removed from production that was controlled by men.

In contrast, the more conservative, risk-reducing Volga Germans and Germans employed a yeoman farmer strategy, only expanding when necessary to set a son up in farming and only cautiously investing in machinery. Labor was seldom hired since family labor, drawn from the large farm families, was readily available. The work of women and girls in subsistence production was a key but little valued part of this emerging farming system. Women's reproductive work took up relatively less of their time and was focused on childbearing, housework, and cultural reproduction primarily through church and kin groups. These women were much

less active in nonreligious community organizations than were U.S.-born women and they were more likely to continue their farm residence and to reduce home and personal consumption, often substituting their labor for investment in clothes or food. They supervised a wide variety of low-cost subsistence production activities and were able to maintain a degree of control over the product. Education was not highly valued, but religion was. While education was an escape from the drudgery of farm work for U.S.-born farm women, marriage and the church were the primary avenues available to Volga German and German farm girls.

Thus larger, more capital-intensive, less diversified, risk-taking farm enterprises led to a different female culture than did the smaller, more labor-intensive, more diversified, risk-reducing farm enterprises of the Germans and Volga Germans. Both female cultures were in opposition to male control of the major means of production. Each provided women status and a sense of self-worth relatively independent of the male structure.

NOTES

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