

*PART ONE:
POWER AND POLITICS FROM STATELESS
SOCIETIES TO GLOBAL CAPITALISM*

**POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND ROLES IN
“STATELESS SOCIETIES”**

Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Questions for the Study of Stateless Societies

- 1) Is kinship to be equated with “society”?
- 2) Given the relations between the genders, can stateless societies (examples given in Gledhill) be assumed to rest on consensual rather than coercive relations?
- 3) Has any anthropologist ever studied a stateless society ethnographically?
- 4) Were the Nuer, at Evans-Pritchard’s time, a stateless society?
- 5) Is power absent in warfare between the Nuer and the Dinka?
- 6) Can there be “domination” without centralized authority?
- 7) Where does one look for “power”?
- 8) Which public, goal-oriented decisions count as “political”?
- 9) What about female power?

Gender and Power: Early Notions

Q: Can kinship and marriage in stateless societies be seen as *political* phenomena?

- J.J. Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*, 1861, primeval matriarchy
- E.E. Evans-Pritchard: “in almost every conceivable variety of social institutions, in all of them, regardless of social structure, men are in the ascendancy”

Gender and Power in “Tribal Societies” : What Can We Conclude?

The Iroquois

- Women maintained the local village community
- Matrilineal and matrilocal
- Rights, property, titles, transmitted through the female line
- Women distributed all food
- Women could provision hunts, councils, war parties...

The Iroquois, cont'd...

- Women, no official political offices, considerable informal political power
 - Hereditary eligibility for council positions, through the female line
- A. Not a matriarchy, yet power of women was institutionalized
- B. Women's power not confined to the private/domestic sphere
- C. Egalitarian or not?

The Chipewyan

- Extreme subordination of women?
- Strong division of labour, insignificant women's role in food production (except processing)
- To women fell the task of borrowing—low status
- Women's "negative" power: menstruation, pollution
- Henry Sharp (1981: 227): "To be female is to be power....to be male is to acquire power. Men may have power but women are power just by being women."

The Agta, Philippines

- Women hunting large game
- Minimal sexual division of labour
- Group decisions based on consensus

Therefore...

Are such groups effectively egalitarian or not?

Does egalitarianism mean the absence of power, and the absence of politics?

Does egalitarianism mean homogeneity?

Dominance and Status: Additional Problems

- What does status entail? Deference, or control over decision making and resource allocation?
- Status—*in* rewards, prestige, power, authority, independence?—*in* kinship, politics, economics, religion, ideology?
- Status can change

Martin King Whyte. 1978. *The Status of Women in Preindustrial Societies*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press:

- 1) One cannot assume there is such a thing as *the* status of women cross-culturally
- 2) There is no *best* indicator of the status of women
- 3) There is no *key* variable that affects the status of women
- 4) There is no coherent concept of the status of women that can be identified cross-culturally

Statistical probabilities, not universals:

- Male dominance often related to division of labor by sex
- Men are more likely to engage in activities that require travel
- Is it women's contribution to the subsistence of the group that determines the status of women? NO
- Does the status of women depend on role in exchange of goods outside the family? Not universally.

Public versus Private Distinctions and the Sources of Power: More Problems

- the public/domestic dichotomy is not universal
- In kin-based societies: What is public? Private?
- Women in public office ≠ Raised status for women
- Power in “peasant societies,” or power *on* them?

Nature versus Nurture/Culture as Private versus Public?

- Not a universal distinction

Property and Power?

- Whyte: no critical correlation between ownership and status; status relates more strongly to other variables

Conclusions?

- 1. Status and dominance cannot be defined cross-culturally*
- 2. Gender division, division of labour, subsistence, control over resources*
- 3. Public—Private, Nature—Culture*
- 4. Matrilineality, Matrilocality, women's power*
- 5. Removal of women from production*
- 6. Informal power, control of information*