

gender and status in agrarian societies

last time we talked about modes of gender acquisition: socialization, ritual — ways that kids learn there's a significant distinction between girls and boys — put in different clothing (especially for important occasions), ritualized differentiation (counting off boy/girl for dodgeball). And they learn that to be a *good* girl/boy often means not acting like the other — “big boys don't cry” (meaning that girls do); girls should sit with their legs closed (meaning boys don't have to).

if gendered *rituals* make meanings explicit, the power of gender *socialization* (as opposed to formal ritual) lies in its implicitness, often glossed as “common sense” — “just the way things are” without explicit reason given: share a sense of what is meant by “boys will be boys”, “be a good girl”

while powerful, kids internalize gender lessons only to an extent
there's often a gap b/w social reality and ideology

definition of ideology: official story told, retold, to articulate and, perhaps, explain status quo, often inequality; dominant norms, values sedimented in our institutions, ritualized in public events, elicited by others

in patriarchal societies, gender ideology buttresses male prestige
i.e., masculinity often more valued than femininity; gender-neutral = masculine rather than feminine, like “tomboy”

and, as we'll start to see in our readings, gender ideology can also reinforce other forms of social inequality: racism, class hierarchy

BUT ideology is never totalizing, never complete story — again, masks fissures, tensions, contradictions, exceptions

much about gender ideology ‘evidenced’ in childhood has to do with adults seeing what we *expect* to see, not noticing — or attaching social significance to — behavior that challenges norms — AS we'll see in *Middlesex*

SO, to understand gender, cannot merely ask “how men/women act or behave” (assuming that there is a meaningful difference) but rather at how individuals *use* gender ideologies creatively, strategically — or, perhaps, self-destructively

this is an argument Jane Collier makes

p. 101; “To understand conceptions of gender, we cannot look [merely] at what men and women are or do, but rather must ask what people want and fear, what privileges they seek to claim, rationalize, and defend.”
and how they use gender to do so

this week and next we'll study historical shifts in gender *ideology* -- *and* ways that people have maneuvered within those ideologies to make status claims, in European/American societies

reference HANDOUT (factors affecting gender roles) — use it to assess not so much degree of gender inequality — more/less patriarchal — but primary ideological *reasoning* for gender inequality in different cultures and societies

beginning with subsistence base — economic system (h/f; agrarian; chattel slavery; market capitalism) points to labor and resource allocation as basis of social inequality

next couple classes we'll look at rise of capitalism and how that affected gender and sexual relations

today we'll talk about early modern agrarian Europe (Greece, Asia Minor; Spain)

pairing Jane Collier and beginning of *Middlesex*, which is historically and culturally well-researched

looking at handout, we should be able, on basis of readings, to say something of agrarian Mediterranean about #s 1-5 — and more, about how these are related to one another

- 1) subsistence base — contributions to material needs of group
productive labor; division of labor
- 2) distribution & exchange of goods & services
- 3) child-rearing
- 4) sexuality
- 5) symbolism & ritual
- 6) extraordinary events (who deals, and how, with unexpected crises, illness, etc.)

...

one key site where these factors intersect is
FEMALE CHASTITY (premarital virginity + marital fidelity)

WHY, according to Collier, do we often find a preoccupation with female chastity, sexual modesty, in agrarian societies? (also pastoral ones — where subsistence based on herding cattle, camels, etc. — middle east, east Africa)

Collier: “To question the chastity of a man’s mother is to question his right to the status he claims as his. In such a world, women’s bodies appear as gateways to all privileges... The status and reputation of a family thus rest on the degree to which its women are protected from penetration—by women’s own sense of sexual shame, by being locked away, and/or by the courage of family men in repelling seducers” (101)

this exemplifies one way in which **gender is a vector of social status, and therefore, of inequality/hierarchy** — this is Collier’s thesis

definition of **status** of an individual = rights due to and duties expected of one; person's position relative to others (usually hierarchical in some way) in same society

2 basic types of statuses, having to do with recruitment

ascribed: assigned to individual, often (not nec.) from birth (e.g., lineage)

achieved: gained through special effort or choice; requiring special knowledge, skill, qualities (e.g., occupation) and that are regarded as responsibility of individual

do you think gender is better viewed as an ascribed or achieved status?

some statuses can be either ascribed or achieved — **marriage** (arranged or chosen)

agrarian societies tend to emphasize **ascribed statuses** (clan, age, arranged marriage)
how does Collier explain this?

capitalist societies clearly based on ideal of **achieved statuses** (educational degree, occupation, chosen marriage)

how are differences and inequalities explained?

statuses, whether ascribed or achieved, imply **roles** -- refers to the *dynamic* aspect of status; what people *do* and *how* they do it, what relationships with others they engage in, as person of particular status position

all statuses must be maintained through proper performance of roles

Collier is describing a shift in ROLES attached to PROPER WOMANHOOD

we'll continue discussion of this historical shift tomorrow