

THE USE OF THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE FRAMEWORK IN
THE ANALYSIS OF EGALITARIAN SOCIETIES

In much of the literature concerned with the analysis of the role of women in a given society one theme seems constantly to repeat itself. In a very general sense this theme can be summarized by the old saying which Elizabeth Janeway uses to introduce the first chapter of her book Man's World, Woman's Place (1977): 'It's a man's world. Woman's place is in the home.' These two aspects of cultural space have been labelled public and private or public and domestic. Often they are depicted diagrammatically as overlapping or concentric spheres, or, as I have done, (Skar 1978) as a vertical continuum corresponding to altitude, a model which tries to take into account an outside world. This image of space as divided between the sexes is no doubt useful in the analysis of ethnographic material, particularly material from the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Nevertheless I feel there are some problems in trying to apply such a model to the analysis of the role of women in an acephalous society such as the one I studied in highland Peru.

In the case of Matapuquio, I found the exercise to be ethnocentric, reflecting our own preoccupation with woman's liberation and our struggle to enter a man's world, to break out from the home and participate on a wider scale in an area previously reserved for male activity. The model which characterises the men's sphere as public and the women's as private or domestic corresponds to divisions in our own society or rather to a pervasive myth in our culture, and is constantly reinforced in our literature. For this very reason, however, we should be wary of applying it elsewhere. Indians in Matapuquio do not compartmentalize their world in this way.

A second danger in applying this division is that it evokes a long list of characteristics associated consciously or unconsciously with each sphere. Public/private is linked with active/passive, extrovert/introvert, outside/inside, culture/nature, high prestige/low prestige and so on. 'Woman's place' is a shorthand phrase which sums up a whole set of traits, attitudes, and ways of presentation which we think proper to women along with the obligations and restrictions that these imply.

I should stress that I do not see myself as an opponent of this way of analysing sex roles and/or the division of labour in western cultures or in others. Rather I am searching for new ways of examining the problem which can give a truer grasp of a particular anthropological situation. There have been some very convincing arguments put forward in the literature as to why the designation of the public sphere can be equated with the male domain and the private sphere with that of the female.

I shall outline some of these before considering them in relation to my own work. Many of these arguments are based on the assumption that women are universally in a subordinate position to men: because women bear, give birth to, and nurse the infant members of a society, they are bound to the home and to domestic activities to a much greater extent than men. The mother-child relationship is thus seen as the pivotal point around which the public/private framework is articulated. Rosaldo defines the domestic sphere as referring to 'those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized

immediately around one or more mothers and their children; "public" refers to activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize or subsume particular mother-child groups' (1974:23). She goes on to say that this model 'does not determine cultural stereotypes or asymmetries in the evaluations of the sexes but rather underlies them' and, finally, that the opposition between domestic and public orientation 'provides the necessary framework for an examination of male and female roles in any society' (ibid:24, my emphasis). Her definition of public and private assumes, however, a certain lack of male activity in the private sphere; it is a model used 'to understand the nature of female subordination and the ways it can be overcome' (ibid). But is such a framework necessary or even desirable in the analysis of cultures in which the public and domestic spheres are indistinguishable and the centre of life for both men and women is the home? If the public sphere is so diffuse and the private sphere so pervasive for both sexes what would be the analytical use of such a framework?

Engels, drawing on Morgan and Marx's notes, attempted in The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State to provide a 'consistent cultural-materialist view of prehistory' (Harris 1969:247). In prehistory, he claimed, there was virtually no private sphere except in the context of the mother-child relationship. Emergence of private property was the determining factor in the creation of the private sphere and women became the main occupants of this sphere. Here we are provided with the elements around which so much of the later discussion of the role of women in a particular cultural setting has revolved. Engels distinguished between a public and a private sphere, one being the domain of men and the other the domain of women. Most importantly he linked the existence of these two spheres to a materialist cause, the emergence of private property. It is recognized now that Engels was inaccurate in some of the details of his theory but Marxist writers involved with women's studies, seeking to shed light on the relationship between the nature of women's role in the domestic sphere and the mode of production, still try to link materialist causes to the relative inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the public and private spheres (see, for example, Bujra's introduction to Women United, Women Divided (1978)). Much of the discussion centres around the differences in degree of female subordination between foraging societies and sedentary ones. Many of the articles in Reiter (1975) exemplify this. Reiter's own article in the book makes a case for the increasing isolation of the public and private spheres as part of a whole range of changes brought about by the emergence of the state: class develops as an organizational institution which competes with kinship as the principle around which resources are controlled; the declining importance of kinship ties has resulted in a gradual and more complete segregation of public and private spheres.

Other students of women's role are more concerned with gaining an understanding of how women in a given culture view themselves and how they are viewed by others. The symbolic articulation of being female as well as the ideal norms associated with the status of being a woman are taken as important signposts in the analysis of woman's role. Okely (1975) and Hirschon (1978) are two examples of this sort of investigation. Analyses such as these, searching for the perceptual factors which delineate the boundaries of female status and role in a given society, view the public and private domains not so much as articulations of the

division of labour between two inherently different modes of production (as in Marxist analyses) but as a means of dividing space both symbolically and perceptually. The public and private spheres in this instance serve as conceptual aids in understanding the significance of the status/role complex of women.

In studying the literature on Latin America as background to my work in Matapuquio, I have found too much emphasis given to the stereotype mestizo concepts of machismo and marianismo. Though ultimately sex categories, these two ideal types, one associated almost exclusively with the public domain, the other with the private, are Latin American phenomena with roots in the continent's Mediterranean heritage. The use of these ideal types to explain much of the interaction between male and female in Latin America has become so prevalent that it is difficult to conceptualize the problem in other terms. One is constantly confronted with them, both in the literature and in every-day conversation. The more familiar figure in the dyad is the macho, who is defined as possessing a 'sense of exaggerated masculinity or a cult of virility whose chief characteristics are extreme aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships' (Stevens 1977:141). Marianismo, the female side of the coin, takes its name from the veneration for the Virgin Mary, who is the female ideal and who symbolizes the excessive veneration demanded by women. Women see themselves as having greater spiritual strength and capacity for sacrifice than men. Marianismo expresses the women's philosophy of passive acceptance of life's hardships including the aggression and infidelity of men. The women's place in this context is not simply in the domestic sphere but more restrictedly in the home, waiting faithfully for the macho to return from his exploits in the public sphere, those with 'loose' women as well as those in the political-economic arena.

This Latin American example of macho and maria as social types strongly associated with the public and private spheres stands in stark contrast to Indian images of what it means to be men and women. In contrast to the macho/maria pattern of the dominant mestizo culture, with which the Indians live in constant contact, Indian males do not

engage in sexual conquest as a validation of their masculinity; sexual conquest does not add luster to the reputation of the individual. Exploitation of one sex by the other encounters little sympathy just as political or economic exploitation of one by another is not countenanced within the boundaries of the community (Wolf 1959:223).

In order to discuss these perceptions of male and female roles among a particular group of Quechua Indians, as well as to come to grips with some problems in using the public/private dichotomy, a certain degree of background information is necessary.

I carried out my fieldwork with my husband in 1976-1977. Our purpose was to study the impact of the Peruvian land reform on a Quechua Indian village in the southern sierra (or high mountains) of Peru. I was particularly interested in studying the changing role of women under the process by which the large landed estates (haciendas) were being turned into co-operatives (Skar 1978). The village we lived in was called Matapuquio and

was divided into two moieties, an upper half called Antaccasa and a lower half simply retaining the name of Matapuquio. The village was located half way up a steep south-oriented slope in the Pincos Valley.

To simplify the discussion, I am going to concern myself solely with the situation in the upper village of Antaccasa, taking into account the possible implications of the lower village material in my closing remarks. I will try to illuminate the problems involved in applying the public/private framework to this material and to suggest an alternative way of conceptualizing the position of Matapuquio's women in relation to men.

Let us start by considering what much of the anthropological literature would define as the private domain. In Quechua the term for household is wasifamilianchis - literally 'our house family', as opposed to other family members that are not of 'our house'. The emphasis here is on the house, a place of residence usually consisting of one or possibly two adobe structures partially enclosed by a low wall, the whole complex again being surrounded by the household's corn field. The one or two adobe structures that comprise the wasi are not lived in, however, in the sense in which we think of living in a house. The 'living' goes on in the courtyard or under the overhanging eaves of the buildings. The actual structures have two purposes. One has the dual function of kitchen and a kind of pen for small domestic animals such as guinea pigs, chickens, and dogs. The other room or structure serves as the household's warehouse and is called the marka. The marka contains the maize, potatoes, grains, dried meat and cheeses by which the household subsists. Agricultural tools, saddles and horse blankets, a few purchased staples, festive clothing and the musical instruments played only on ritual occasions are all hidden within the bowels of the windowless marka. All household members no matter how young or old have certain rights over the contents of their marka. They guard these rights from intruders, both symbolically and practically, by simply sleeping in front of the marka door at night and having watch dogs posted outside the carefully padlocked doors during the day. Protecting the marka against thieves or mishap is of extreme importance to the household members. The contents of the marka represent rights in land and animals for every person in the household; therefore guarding it is equivalent to guarding the very basis of one's livelihood.

Although the marka's contents ultimately are pooled to provide food and clothing for all the household's members, it would be erroneous to equate the wasifamilia with the family farm in Chayanov's sense of the word - i.e. a production/consumption unit, the means of production held and exploited jointly between household members. Wasifamilia members show a qualitatively different view in their attitude to the contents of their marka and to the basic resources of land and animals which the marka represents. Every household member from the infant at baptism (or more typically at his first haircutting ceremony) to the aged are individual owners of land and animals. Through gifts, inheritance, and industry a person can increase his possessions. Though productive activities are carried out jointly, individual household members never lose sight of their approximate rightful share. This individualistic orientation applies equally for females and males. For instance, inheritance rules by which all offspring divide equally the land and animals of their parents assure sisters equal economic status with their brothers.

In productive activities men, women, old and young members of the household each have their particular duties, to a certain degree defined by sex. Men and women work the fields together while the older generation takes care of the youngest children. Older youngsters may tend the animals or help alongside their parents in the fields. Sex-defined tasks seem to be complementary and not rigidly enforced.

There are, however, two areas in which male and female activity are segregated to a greater extent than otherwise. Women have the main responsibility for herding, and men comprise almost all the regular work force at the hacienda in the valley. Both of these activities are at least in part integrated into a money economy, whereas all other production belongs strictly to the subsistence economy. Thus women and men have independent access to money, which again reflects the basic orientation of the individual exploitation of resources.

In anthropological work in other contexts the household is taken as the very heart of the private domain associated with women. Here, however, it is a kind of corporation whose members, male and female, each claim shares in the contents of the marka. It is the home base to which members return in the evening from their dispersed activities to eat and sleep, only to be up and gone again at day-break.

As to the demarcation of a public sphere, there is indeed constant vigilance against 'foreign' calamity from the unknown, a vigilance which bears witness to a basic orientation villagers seem to have towards anyone from the outside; but this, I argue, has no similarities to anything which might be called a public sphere in the traditional sense of the term. If the marka represents the centre of the household, something to be guarded by night and carefully locked by day, who are the thieves or outsiders who would threaten one's very existence by stealing from it? When asked directly, this question elicits many vague answers, such as "the people of lower Matapuquio. They are bad people (mala gente) and cannot be trusted." In other contexts, however, tales begin to surface of robbers who until recently roamed the mountains preying on undefended Indian villages. Travellers fed themselves by stealing from the fields, and in time of food shortage, mestizos simply rode into the mountains killing sheep and chickens and demanding maize and potatoes without recompense. There was no justice. From all the historical accounts of the lawlessness in the sierra, these stories might certainly be true. Fear of being robbed is very real, even though the enemy is ill defined and in one's mind ultimately resides on the periphery of village acquaintances, typically someone (unnamed) from the other village half. This threat from outside the household group, while seeming to come from the 'public' domain of the village, is actually a force which comes from outside the village altogether.

In my description of the wasifamilia, I have gleaned away many of the details of daily life that make this an intimate and thoroughly integrated group in order to bring out the underlying individualistic attitude towards production and consumption activities. The household ideally is comprised of the nuclear family and is naturally the scene of very close family ties. But the household is a part of the village as well and must in some way be integrated into this wider system. It is in the process of such integration that we might expect the first signs

of public institutions to appear, 'activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother-child groups', as in Rosaldo's definition quoted above. Now the private domain of the mother-child dyad, if we could say such existed in Matapuquio at all, is composed ideally of the triad of male, female and offspring. The privacy of the private domain is thus made no less so by the active participation of males in child rearing and in domestic activities of all kinds, not only in those considered to be the responsibility of men, but also in others ideally designated for women. This seeming equality between the sexes within the context of the wasi and wider afield on the village slopes is the basic reality of everyday life for villagers of both sexes. Having established that, in this context, there is no private or domestic domain peculiar to women, we must answer the remaining question: are there any 'linking institutions' which might be termed public and specifically the domain of men? Going beyond the boundaries of the single wasi, we must seek out the organizational principles that form the basis of village integration.

True to the male-oriented nature of our discipline, our first reaction might be to look towards political institutions as a source of asymmetrical positioning of the sexes. This initial reaction, however, would divert us from the most important integrating factor within the village, that of the ayllu.

Matapuquio is a village of the dispersed type; after the Spanish Conquest there was no resettlement of its population, as in the case of the reducciones. In colonial times some villages were forced to relocate, building their homes close together around a village plaza and going out to their fields on the outskirts of town to work each day; the dispersed village type is undoubtedly of pre-Conquest origins. In a dispersed village there is no plaza. Each house is located on the edge of its fields, particularly maize fields, so that a map of the houses and fields has a distinctly patch-work appearance. The few families who sell basic supplies as a source of extra income do so from an extra room in their house, one that opens out onto a village path. Practically speaking, then, there is no village centre or focal point; each of the composite units which make up the village seems to exist independently in relation to the others. This, of course, is an illusion. Each household unit is bound to other similar units by a complex system of cooperative work groups and reciprocal ritual activity. The principle of the formation of such groups is found in the concept of ayllu.

A Matapuqenian defines ayllu as 'our extended family' or familianchis. Because the very notion of ayllu implies mutual trust and aid, the question that naturally follows is, how far does the extended family extend? The reply to this question is unfailingly : it depends on the situation. Your ayllu is first of all your close kin group, both affinal and bilateral. It is with this closest group that you share reciprocal work arrangements, called ayni, and that you have the greatest social contact. Because of the system of inheritance in which all children inherit land equally from both their parents and a system of marriage which shows strong endogamous tendencies not only within the village but more importantly within each moiety, your nearest neighbours tend to be members of this closest kin group. The members of a marriage partnership do not live at any great distance from their parents, or more importantly from their

married siblings. However not all members of this closest kin group, which in the literature is often termed minimal ayllu, are in fact mobilized to work in ayni. Such work group formation is dependent not only on kinship affiliation but on all participants having approximately equal resources. Forming work arrangements with siblings of the same sex seems also to be a factor, the group being just as frequently brought together by sisters as by brothers.

No two groups of full siblings share exactly the same minimal ayllus; thus the various minimal ayllus (including spouse, half-siblings and first cousins) form a kaleidoscope of overlapping affiliations which at its greatest extension encompasses the entire village. When work projects of a wide nature are undertaken, mobilization of personnel occurs through the coupling of minimal ayllus. Neighbourhood irrigation projects bring together perhaps a few minimal ayllus, while the cleaning of all the village's irrigation ditches involves everyone. Such community-oriented work projects are called faena.

Participation in the faena is at the very heart of community membership. A village-wide faena is always organized in such a way as to express the inherent competition between moieties. The work is divided in half so that workers from the upper village compete against those from the lower village in completing the project. Because there is 73% endogamy within the two moieties, the village halves are closely knit kinship groups which for convenience may be termed optimal ayllus. Though the very idea of community-wide faena confirms the acceptance of the claims of the maximal ayllu, the village, effective mobilization takes place within the context of the two optimal moiety ayllus. Village integration is thus a family affair which, as is true in most families, is fraught with ambivalent feelings of dependence and competition. Although a person with a strong personality - a man or a woman - may emerge as a leader in the context of a particular project, the real power resides in the ayllu configurations and the affiliation one has with these.

There is in fact only one village institution which can be said to represent even slightly a form of village leadership. The varayokuna are the appointed officials in the village, appointed yearly and in rotation, and as the name implies, the institution has roots in both a colonial and Incaic past: Vara means staff in Spanish; yog is the Quechua suffix for "master of" (Métraux 1959:231). In Matapuquio there are four varayokuna. They have both a ritual and a law-enforcing role to play in the community. Because the ritual responsibilities require the efforts of both partners of a marriage team, all varayokuna are married, and though the appointment is made in the name of the male partner, it is in function an office held by both husband and wife. Formal appointment of the new varayokuna is made on New Year's Day in the town of Huancarama. On this occasion both husband and wife must travel to town to accept the new staff of office; though the husband is the one to step forward and accept the staff and the official blessing, the wife is also present. Just as her participation is needed in fulfilling the responsibilities of the office, her presence is required for the ritual acceptance of that responsibility. Travel outside the village is a rare occurrence, and those few times in the coming year when the varayokuna are called upon to leave, they will do so together, husband and wife.

Equally, the responsibilities of the varayoqkuna can only be carried out by a marriage team, the men, for example, organizing the work of a community project and the women administering and directing the preparation of the large quantities of food necessary. The authority of both the man and the woman are again needed in aiding in the resolution of conflict. Often this occurs by the mobilization of relevant kin to intercede or by direct confrontation between the varayoqkuna and the conflicting parties, which are most typically mixed groups of men and women. Finally, the economic requirements of holding the office of varayoc requires the cooperation and complementary efforts of both spouses. Here the stores of the marka are in question, and before the year of office is over many will have had to contribute economically to the carrying out of official duties.

Our search for something outside the context of the household which might bear resemblance to the public sphere so far has met only with wider and wider rings of family affiliation traced through both the men and the women of the household. The increasing inclusiveness of the ayllu organization eventually takes in the entire village, binding it together into two moieties but ultimately into a single unit. Aside from the varayoqkuna who are in effect male-female representatives for their segment ayllus, there are no true leadership positions in the village, in its traditional form.

In the case of a basically acephalous village organization based largely on kinship affiliation, a complementary, though certainly not rigidly exclusive, division of labour between the sexes, a basic attitude of individual economic independence, and an ethos of mutual respect and cooperation as well as a certain degree of competition between the sexes, the applicability of public and private spheres seems questionable. What then can be used as an alternative model by which to grasp the significance of men's and women's roles in such a society?

Here we have arrived at the crux of the problem. I can find very little warrant for the use of public and private even as conceptual tools to begin the analysis of sexual roles. Household and village organization are in fact not separate at all, but are parts of an integrated whole, the organizational principle of which can be traced to the nature of the bilateral kinship system. What then is the difference between the roles of men and women in Matapuquio? If indeed it is so difficult to point out differences between the economic roles of the sexes, and the public/private spheres do not correspond to any symbolic or perceptual organization of the problem, surely there must be some other perceptual model which can deal with the fact that to be a woman in Matapuquio is not the same as to be a man?

The best way of addressing the problem seems to me to be through the Quechua concept, yanantin. Yanantin means equality or equal entities but has the additional connotation of a mirror relationship (Mayer 1977:77). The conceptualization of space is perceived in this way, the upper and lower villages representing mirror images of each other. The village is so situated on the slope that whether in the upper or the lower half, the other moiety is laid out before you. You are directed automatically towards contemplating the opposite though equal image. Left and right hands are also seen in this way. They are opposite yet equal. The concept of yanantin is linked with many aspects of

Quechua ritual life as well and seems to be a basic part of the way in which the pervasive duality of the culture is expressed. In fiestas women sit in a long line facing the men, each group ritually drinking together. The woven designs on ponchos and mantas (carrying cloths) are made in such a way that one half is the mirrored opposite of the other.

It should come as no surprise that the conjugal relationship is said to be a yanantin relationship. As is true of the poncho, the one half of the conjugal pair is felt to be incomplete without the other. Though the complementarity of the division of labour within the household is rarely rigidly maintained, the pervasive attitude is that both man and woman must labour together as a unit in order for their work to be successful. This is most clearly expressed in planting and harvesting activities, where both the male and female working together in the fields are felt to be essential to the fertility of the earth. In the cultivation of maize, for instance, the man digs the furrow and the woman plants the seed. These equally important though opposite activities of digging up a furrow and closing the earth over the seed are more than simply means of ensuring agricultural fertility. They express the equality and opposition in the relationship between husband and wife.

The concept of yanantin is essential to the analysis of sex roles in Quechua society. In the case of Matapuquio this conceptualization of sexual difference seems to have certain advantages over the public/private framework. The mirror image model does not ignore the existence of differences between the sexes, and differences in ways of experiencing and perceiving one's own sexual role. On the other hand it avoids the obvious question of subordination implicit in the public/private framework, a question which raises the problem of not only the degree of subordination but also the different nature of the subordination in the public sphere and in the private sphere - if such spheres can be found at all. The concept of yanantin has the added advantage of being an indigenous concept rather than a potentially ethnocentric one. Some students of cultures may criticize this use of indigenous concepts in that they hamper our ability to make cross-cultural comparisons. I would argue, however, that our comparisons should establish how indigenous groups understand sex differentiation, rather than how we might understand it.

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