

The Importance of the Patriline in Middle Eastern Cultures
and Its Impact on the Lives of Women

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William O. Beeman

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By

Earl J. Heinrich

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The patriline is often of paramount importance in Middle Eastern cultures and to preserve it great restrictions are placed on the activities of women which are justified in a variety of ways relating to morality, reputation, culture and even religion. The principle cause of this is insecurity on the part of the males and a general feeling that women were by nature promiscuous (Jacobs, 2014). Because of this issue male family members want to maintain control over and ensure the continuance of the family line in the way they perceive to be best. This cultural concern for securing the continuance of the patriline is the root cause of the restrictions often placed on women in Middle Eastern cultures, not the religious justification often given both by outsiders and by the males attempting to continue the practice. This attitude can also be found in the belief held by many in the region (and other areas where this is practiced) that it is the only the male who contributes to the creation of life, i.e. patrogenesis (King, 2014).

What they are guarding against is demonstrated by the recent DNA analysis of the English King Richard III. Examination of his paternal DNA showed that between him and his great-great-grandfather Edward III (or between Edward III and his male-line descendants who were tested and/or the descendants of Geoffrey of Anjou, ancestor of Edward III) there were one or more cases of infidelity/false paternity in the royal line (Fang, 2015). Prior to the advent of DNA testing the only way to ensure that the husband was the father was to greatly restrict the freedom of the wife/mother to avoid situations that would result in infidelity and the resulting false paternity/corruption of the patriline.

Patrilineal Inheritance

Inheritance through the male line has been the traditional way in most cultures around the world. In many cultures that practice primogeniture only the oldest male offspring has any real hope for a substantial inheritance. Although not practicing primogeniture, many Middle Eastern cultures do emphasize inheritance through the male line and, like the Pharaohs and kings of old, favor marriage within the family to preserve the integrity of the family's wealth, be it land, flocks or other physical goods. They don't, however, go so far as to practice sibling marriage, but do favor cousin marriage, especially of the "father's brother's son/daughter" kind (King, 2014).

The Importance of Virginit

The virginit of the woman is often regarded as of paramount importance, even above other factors such as relationship and beauty. King (2008) relates a story of a Kurdish man in his thirties who stated "How can I be *sure* that she did not actually have a relationship with a man during a time when no male relative was watching her?" (p. 329). His insistence on "unimpeachable" virginit in his bride has led to his continued bachelorhood and he holds little hope that he will find what he wants.

Virginit is so important that in Tunisia (and elsewhere) there is a growing business in surgery to restore the appearance of an intact hymen, so that a woman getting married who is not a virgin may have the appearance of being one (Foster, 2014). Foster (2014) goes on to relate the story of a young woman who was asked to get a 'certificate of virginit' from a gynecologist by the family of the relative her family had chosen for her to become engaged to when she was going away to university. After visits to two gynecologists she got a certificate even though she was not technically a virgin (although only she and her then-boyfriend knew that).

The Role of Children

Children are principally seen as a means of continuing the family line. It is even widely felt that only the man contributes to the act of conception, “planting seed in the soil” of the woman’s womb. The importance of the child being assuredly a part of the father’s family contributes to continued restrictions on the woman even after marriage (when her virginity is no longer in question).

Infertility

Male infertility is growing, but little discussed, problem in Middle Eastern cultures, perhaps in large part due to the generations-long continuing practice of consanguineous marriage within family groups (Inhorn, 2014). The importance of producing children (especially male children) is evidenced by the lengths the Lebanese man Fuad went to in attempts to artificially impregnate his Russian-born wife with his own sperm. He had low sperm count and a high rate of mutation in the semen and gave up drinking “spirits” and cut back on smoking in an attempt to increase his sperm count (which did rise somewhat). He attributed his infertility problems to lifestyle (including drinking, smoking, lack of activity) and stress (about employment, travel, finances) rather than genetics (Inhorn, 2014).

Adoption

Adoption, which is widely practiced in the West and was even practiced by the Romans in their efforts to maintain a family line, is not viewed with favor by most Middle Eastern cultures. This is because the adopted individual is (likely) from outside the patrilineal family and hence would not be a true member of the group and able to pass on to the next generation the family’s lineage (Inhorn, 2014).

Artificial Insemination

Some forms of artificial insemination are acceptable in Middle Eastern cultures, but usually only if the father's own sperm is used. The use of sperm donors would be tantamount to permitting adultery, as the resulting child would not be part of the patrilineal family (Inhorn, 2014). It is perhaps felt to be better to have no children than to have a cuckoo in the nest.

A Woman's Place

In reality the prevailing view in Middle Eastern society is that 'a woman's place is in the home' (or the harem). Despite the existence of precedents such as the Prophet's wife, Khadijah, who was wealthy in her own right and ran a business, or his daughter, Fatima, who was much favored by her father and traveled with him from a young age (Aslan, 2006), it would be difficult to use these precedents and keep within the guidelines to ensure female purity by limiting their contact with outsiders and restricting their ability to travel unescorted.

Education (or Lack Thereof)

Groups such as the Taliban and Boko Haram seek to restrict access to education, especially for females. Even in areas where education is available, as in Tunisia, there is often a glaring lack of knowledge about things that are the most personally important to females; i.e. topics such as sexuality and pregnancy. Many engage in practices which they feel cannot result in pregnancy, but which in reality can (Inhorn, 2014). Attitudes toward the continuation of many cultural practices that restrict women's activities or affect them (often negatively) varies based on the level of education (and employment and area of residence. Those with higher education, who have professional jobs and live in an urban area are less likely to support the continuance of such practices than those who have little or no education (many of whom have no jobs outside the home and live in poor or rural communities) (Reymond, Mohamud & Ali, n.d.).

Female Genital Mutilation

In areas where patrilineity is of significant importance one of the means of controlling women beyond restricting their actions is the practice of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (King, 2014). This practice has been shown in surveys to reduce women's desire for and enjoyment of sexual activity (and even to result in painful intercourse) and two of the principle reasons given for supporting the practice are preservation of virginity and prevention of promiscuity (Reymond, Mohamud & Ali, n.d.). Other reasons for supporting the practice were that it was a "good tradition" (whatever that may be), "a religious requirement (although it is more of a cultural tradition than a religious practice, see King, 2014), provides better marriage prospects (because males in the culture display a preference for those who have the procedure), and enhanced male sexual pleasure (through forcing the female to experience painful intercourse?) (Reymond, Mohamud & Ali, n.d.).

Family Honor

Much of Diane King's work in Kurdistan has focused on the topic of family honor. It is a major topic of her 2014 book and was also the topic of her 2008 article about *namus*. In her book she relates that everyone she spoke to seemed to know of someone who had fallen afoul of the rules governing family honor.

"Honor Killings"

The practice of killing of females who have appeared to violate family honor is widespread in the Moslem world, although it also is practiced in other cultures, but usually without any form of governmental or legal sanction allowing it. The threat of this happening causes many females to live in fear of being accused of a violation, perhaps even a false

accusation by a rival or frenemy (King, 2014). King (2014/2008) also relates that other researchers have found similar situations in areas they have studied.

A wide-ranging 2014 story in the *Washington Post* by Terrence McCoy relates that an estimated 1,000 women die in “honor killings” each year in Pakistan and that 83% of Pakistanis support the practice. The first instance discussed is of a 25 year old woman, who was pregnant and married the man she loved (likely the father of the child) without her family’s approval. Her father led the stoning of his daughter as she left a courthouse after being married. No one stopped them and he felt he could justify the action because it was for “honor.” The last incident related in the article is of a 13 year old girl in Somalia who went to authorities (whoever they might be in Somalia) to report that she had been raped by three men. But rather than leading to the arrest of the men, her report resulted in her being accused of adultery and being stoned in a public stadium after being buried up to her neck (McCoy, 2014).

The practice is so embedded in the culture, and, by some, given a religious justification, that it has even occurred in the West. In Texas an Egyptian man who drove a taxi is believed to have killed his two daughters (ages 17 and 18) because they dated non-Moslem boys against his wishes and then sought refuge with family members in New York City (Siemaszko, 2012). In a bizarre twist on “honor killing” a Moslem man who founded a television station to counter negative stereotypes of Moslems after 9/11 was convicted of beheading his wife after she filed for a divorce (Associated Press, 2011).

The Changing Role of Inheritance

With the changing settlement patterns and the growth of cities and the draw of education and prosperity associated with them, the importance of protecting the inheritance of the family changes. Someone living in a city will not have any fields or flocks to be inherited, and may not

even own land if they live in an apartment. As the justification for the imposition of restrictions on women fades and people are exposed to outside influences, where they will see that people in other cultures are perfectly capable of controlling their impulses and working and relaxing around women with bare heads and legs, etc., change may occur. But the practices' strong association with culture and attempts to use religion to justify it will make it difficult.

Conclusion

Despite the changing cultural climate which decreases the importance of patrilineal inheritance the practices associated with it still are clung to by the primarily male (and primarily less educated female) supporters due to cultural and religious justifications. This despite (or perhaps in some cases in reaction to) exposure to other cultures from outside (primarily Western) where these practices are anathema, where women primarily go where they please, do as they please and wear as much or as little as they please without significant impact on the ability of the male population to accomplish things or the culture as a whole to develop. It continues to be of import to these cultures even as they struggle to integrate into the world economy and 'new world order' as King (2014) relates in her account of recent developments in Kurdistan's regional government. It is also of import as groups of people from these areas move to other areas in the Western world and seek to continue these practices in a new environment that often does not approve of them.

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