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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/56f426xf>

ISBN

9780852554036

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Publication Date

1993-06-24

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V Women's Place is Every Place: Merging Domains & Women's Roles in Barbuda & Dominica

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In the United States some women wear a button that reads 'Women's place is every place'. This slogan is meant to counter the belief that women's place is in the home. Yet both clichés express the western assumption that social life is divided into two spheres, the public, usually dominated by men, and the domestic, usually dominated by women. This division is not just an ethnocentric assumption; it is also a construct that until recently has succeeded in illuminating gender cross-culturally.

In her introduction to *Woman, Culture and Society* (1974) Michelle Rosaldo argued that gender inequality begins with the conceptual and psychological linking of women with birth and child-rearing. This association 'leads to a differentiation of domestic and public spheres of activity' and underlies those aspects of social organization and human psychology that relate specifically to gender (Rosaldo 1974: 23). Sex roles and the relationships between men and women can be analysed in terms of two spheres of activity, the public and the domestic. Public activities 'link, rank, organize or subsume particular mother-child groups', whereas domestic activities 'are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children' (Rosaldo 1974: 23). Sherry Ortner (1974) widened the dichotomy, proposing that male things become associated with extra-domestic 'culture' and female things with domestic 'nature'. She later developed this distinction into a concept of prestige structures from which gender ideologies are extrapolated (Ortner and Whitehead 1981).

In the Caribbean, the public/domestic distinction holds up best when we think about men's role (for example, Anderson 1986; Berleant-Schiller 1977; Moses 1976). The more we think about public and domestic spheres in relation to women's activities, the less distinct the two domains become (Barrow 1986; Durant-Gonzalez 1977; Gussler 1980; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1977).

In this chapter we explore the ways in which the public and domestic domains merge in women's roles in two islands of the Lesser Antilles, Dominica and Barbuda. We are concerned not only with differences and similarities between the two islands, but equally important, with a critical evaluation of the public/domestic dichotomy. We examine women's roles in the intra-island economy and informal social organization and analyse these roles in relation to recent generalizations in anthropology about gender domains. We show how women's roles become integral to a range of social and economic processes that are not confined within the household. We are not concerned with the status of women or the evaluation of their roles, either by folk or observers' criteria. We argue that the study of gender in the Caribbean can contribute to a comparative regional understanding of social networks, economic exchange and informal social control. Our work is based on field research, which we carried out separately,

Maurer in Dominica in 1987 and Berleant-Schiller in Barbuda at various times from 1971 to 1987.

Gender Research in the Caribbean

Many scholars have applied the public/domestic dichotomy to the study of women's roles in the Caribbean. Patricia Anderson, for example, analysed four fundamental features of gender in the Caribbean, all of which relate to the household. Women, she states, support their own households with household and extra-household work and achieve influence through their domestic and maternal roles. Status, on the other hand, they achieve through affiliation to men. They defer to men's decisions in the public realm, and exercise power only within the household (Anderson 1986: 291-324).

Although Anderson's analysis is typical, it is not universal. Judith Gussler, for example, does not question the dichotomy, but she demonstrates the flexibility of the domestic sphere as it relates to social and economic realities on St Kitts. Where resources are scarce cooperation becomes essential 'and the social system itself depend[s] on the ability of the female to be mobile, flexible and resourceful, rather than tied to a specific structure or role' (Gussler 1980: 208).

Christine Barrow, going further, argues that the conventional assignment of public roles to men and domestic roles to women is a stereotype that does not fit the Caribbean, 'where women are perhaps outstanding in their continuous contribution to economic and community life' (Barrow 1986: 131-76). The work of Constance Sutton and Susan Makiesky-Barrow also challenges the separation of domains. Barbadian women, they show, are neither confined to domestic units that are linked to the outside through men, nor are they 'submerged within kin groups' (Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1977: 313). Rather, the overlapping of domestic and community spheres renders such a dichotomy useless for understanding sex roles and gender ideologies.

The Caribbean evidence clearly necessitates a rethinking of the original dichotomy. We show that the personal and familial relationships and activities that are located within the walls of the household do not necessarily imply and do not fully constitute a social role. Women's work includes tasks that maintain the household, but the social importance of these tasks defines a social role that extends well beyond the domestic and into the public, and in fact blurs the distinction between the two.

Women's household work fosters a set of social roles and activities that link the private and public: networking, marketing and religious activities are a few general types. Distinguishing between work and roles allows us to see the public nature and public importance of women's social roles founded on, but not bounded by, house-based work. This work immediately influences the public sphere. The significance of women's work in the Caribbean is different from that described elsewhere. In Andalusia, for example, 'Women can regularly leave the home for shopping ... [but] their domestic role is reinforced: marketing is necessary for the upkeep of the household' (Brandes 1981: 217). In Dominica and Barbuda, the work of women keeps up the household, but their roles become public when this work also contributes to economic and community life. Indeed, many women's tasks are carried on in public, which is no less public because the milieu is female. We must avoid the circular thinking that defines activities carried on in public as private because the activities themselves maintain the household and only women are present.

Barbuda & Dominica

Barbuda and Dominica are two very different islands of the Lesser Antilles. Together they form a microcosm of the range of Caribbean physical environments and their disparate physical features are associated with differences in economy, history and land use. Neither is at all typical, though such a statement begs the question of whether any Lesser Antillean island can be called typical. Indeed one of the great challenges in Caribbean research is reconciling the unmistakable pan-Caribbean commonalities. These two islands, therefore, can be used as a laboratory from which to derive hypotheses for regional research.

Barbuda, one of the outer Leewards, is a dry, flat, limestone island of about 160 square kilometres. Its high point is only about 40 metres above sea level. There are no streams on the island; Barbudans depend on dug wells, modified sinkholes and rain cisterns for their water. No hills break the continuous sweep of the northeast Trades. The effects of desiccating winds on vegetation have been intensified by human land uses of the last three centuries. Since the first settlement in the seventeenth century grazing livestock, woodcutters, shifting cultivators and charcoal burners have altered the landscape and changed the once-dominant evergreen scrub forest into a variety of drought resistant plant communities that range from a scattered, goat-bitten thorn scrub through cactus and zerophytic scrub forest to remnants of the old vegetation in areas protected from grazing (Harris 1965).

Recurrent drought thwarted the development of plantations in Barbuda and, from its earliest English settlement, the island was given over to the raising of livestock and provisions. Attempts at commercial plantation crops repeatedly failed (Berleant-Schiller 1978). On the fringes of the colonial plantation economy, Barbuda was also outside the ordinary mode of English colonial government in the Caribbean. For 200 years, until 1870, the Codrington family held the island as its private fief on lease from the British crown. Barbuda eventually became a dependency of the colony of Antigua and Barbuda.

In this history and setting an unusual community developed. After emancipation the freed people of Barbuda became a community of subsistence and small cash producers, all living in a single village, Codrington, and holding in common all the unparcelled lands outside the village walls. Barbudans still hold the vast flat bushlands in common, although house sites are now deeded and have begun to nibble into commonlands. The island is beginning to yield to tourism and to pressures on the land from the Antiguan central government and foreign development interests (Berleant-Schiller 1987). Nevertheless, many of the 1400 inhabitants still carry on their old productive pursuits — fishing, lobster-diving, shifting cultivation, making charcoal and keeping cattle, goats and sheep on open range. Since emancipation, emigration and remittances have been necessary adaptations to the island's meagre resource base.

Dominica, located midway between the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, is of volcanic origin. Steep valleys separate the high peaks, some as high as 1380 metres. The island occupies about 790 square kilometres, much of which supports a dense tropical forest crossed by hundreds of streams. Abundant rainfall (200 centimetres a year) coupled with difficult terrain hindered the development of large-scale plantation agriculture on the island, though there has been more commercial agriculture on Dominica than on Barbuda. Now the banana industry dominates the economy. Many Dominicans also engage in some form of food production for the household and for local sale in markets in the two largest

towns, Roseau and Portsmouth. Roseau, the capital, has about 20,000 residents; Portsmouth about 8000. Small villages are scattered along the coast.

French settlers entered Dominica at the end of the seventeenth century, but it was ceded to Britain in 1763. In 1979 Dominica became an independent state in the Commonwealth Caribbean. There are some 83,000 largely Afro-Caribbean English and French patois-speaking inhabitants and about 700 Caribs who remain in a small reserve on the windward coast.

Dominica and Barbuda are prototypical 'high' and 'low' islands, with all the differences in moisture, plant communities and human ecology that this basic distinction implies (Burrows 1956). Nevertheless, both are characteristically Caribbean products of the large-scale physical, cultural and economic processes that shaped the region. Both islands have meagre resources and a narrow economic base with the consequent poverty relieved more by the possibilities of emigration and of subsistence production than by the tourism to which so many Caribbean national hopes are attached.

Merging Domains in Dominica

An understanding of the ways in which Dominica's rugged terrain and inhospitable coastline have hindered development and communication is crucial to an understanding of Dominican gender roles. Travel is so difficult that, as one informant put it, 'transportation *is* communication'. Going to Roseau to sell vegetables, for example, means taking every village shopping list, every message to a friend and every bit of business that needs the facilities of the capital. Informants tell of the days before transinsular roads, when women gathered up children, vegetables, bags and business and set out on the Chemin Letang, a rough footpath through the interior to get to market on Saturday morning.¹ Many people walk this path even now. The village of Grand Bay, in the south of the island, has long had closer economic, political and familial ties to Martinique, which was easier to reach by boat than was Roseau by foot. It is still a community set apart (Caribbean Agro-Economic Society 1977).

Nevertheless, Dominican society remains closely-knit and this integration is achieved through women's work and women's roles. Social networks have an important communication function, facilitated by women. Dominicans say, as do people everywhere in the Caribbean, 'This island one big family you know!' This conceptualization of community as family alerts us immediately to the problems of applying a domestic/public opposition in the region. During six months of fieldwork in Dominica I rarely met anyone anywhere whom I could not trace to my landlady's family and the families tied to hers. These families are spread over the whole island and often include people not linked by birth.

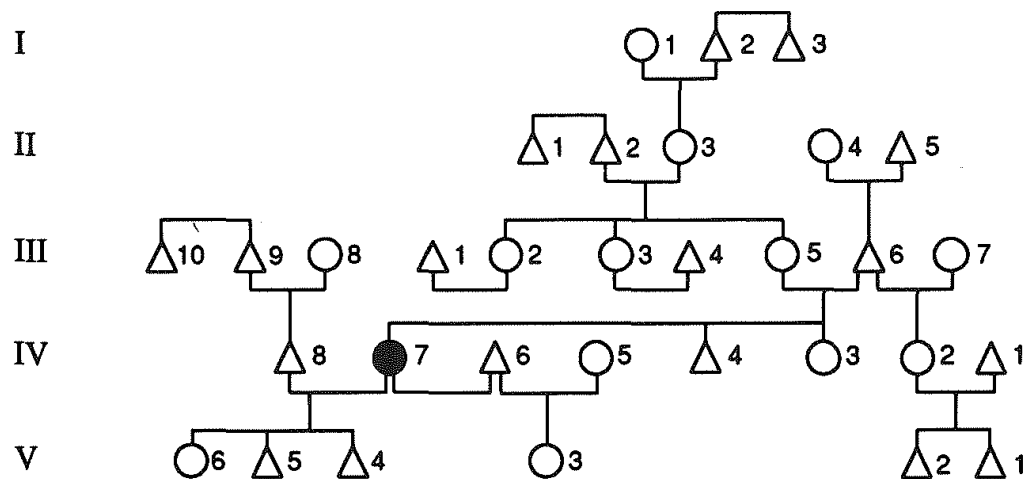
Two case accounts will illustrate the role of women and men in two linked networks. They will show how familial communication becomes public communication and how domains begin to merge as women go about their tasks.²

Case 1: Frances Louis

Frances Louis is a retired woman of 63 (IV 7 in Figure 5.1).³ She is comparatively well-off and is known island-wide as a no-nonsense woman who respects others and commands respect, partly as a consequence of her long public career as a

teacher, nurse, administrator, secretary, political activist and member of the Red Cross and several agricultural, marketing and credit organizations. Her involvement in social and political organizations is not atypical of women in Dominica. At the time of writing, four women, all friends of Frances, occupied the four highest political positions in Dominica (Prime Minister, Speaker of the House of Assembly, Magistrate and Mayor of the Capital).

Figure 5.1: Frances Louis's Family Network



At present Frances lives alone. Her three children (V 4, V 5, and V 6 in Figure 5.1) are abroad. Savings, pensions, boarders, occasional part-time government projects and her own cottage industry, producing and selling cocoa, jellies, juices and chickens, all make up her income. She has never been married and although her children all bear the surname of their father, she speaks nothing of this man except his name: Robert Robinson (IV 8). He belonged to a prominent Dominican family, which was founded by two brothers who first came to Dominica from the UK (III 9 and III 10). One settled in the northeast and one in Roseau. 'You see how many Robinsons there are in Dominica?' an informant said. 'Well, then you know them boys they wasn't just with one woman! They came and populated the island.'

After Robinson left, Frances 'shacked up' for a year or two with a man named Munro (IV 6). When Munro later had a daughter, Adele (V 3), by another woman, Frances considered her a step-daughter and maintained a close relationship with her. The Munros are also an enormous family, mainly owing to another relative of

Frances's, David Munro (not in Figure 5.1), a legendary figure in Dominica. He and Frances feel warm toward each other but rarely meet. By his own account and that of many others, David Munro is father of innumerable children around the island. Thus Frances is linked, through the Robinsons and Munros, to two huge families which are themselves linked to other families.

In spite of these connections, Frances holds greater affective ties to her kin reckoned through the women in her network. These ties are channels for the exchange of moral and economic support, as the following story illustrates. Bernard and Harold (V 1, V 2), both in their twenties, are the sons of the daughter of Frances's father and his second wife (III 6 and III 7).

Several years ago Bernard and Frances met at a store where Bernard works and took an instant liking to each other. Neither knew they were related, as Frances had never maintained ties with Bernard's mother, Alexis, even though the two women had the same father. Meanwhile, however, Frances took a dress to a friend's shop to be mended. Alexis happened to work there and 'remembering' that she and Frances were related, asked to borrow the dress for a fête.⁴ She fell sick, however, and sent her son Bernard instead. When he arrived at Frances's house with the dress, each was amazed to see the other. When Bernard explained that his mother, Alexis, had sent him, they realized their relationship. They explained their compatibility as common 'blood', which had 'spoken' to them through the friendship they had formed. Alexis died soon after and Bernard and Harold have since been like sons to Frances.

These examples disclose the extent and nature of kin networks; the next shows how they operate economically. Frances keeps a flock of chickens, which yields 24 birds for slaughter and sale every other month. She does not take them to market, but sells them mainly to relatives reckoned through her mother and mother's sisters, III 2 and III 3 in Figure 5.1. Three of her customers, for example, are related distantly through a mother's sister who married a Syrian immigrant (III 3). By this connection Frances is linked to the five large and influential Syrian and Lebanese commercial families in Dominica (see Myers 1981: 103). This link connects Frances into the families of the majority of the inhabitants of the Roseau area. Through these families Frances can buy any non-food item she could want.

Frances's female relatives link her to families all over the island. Frances's mother's other sister (III 2) married a man from a small village in the north. Although Frances has not much kept up her ties in the north, she is friendly with those members of the Jones family who live in Roseau. Frances's mother's mother (II 3), the daughter of a French immigrant who founded another large family in the south of the island, is her link to the south. Through her mother (III 5), also the daughter of a Frenchman, Frances has ties on the east coast. In Roseau, some distant relations of her mother's run a small shop where Frances can obtain her food without depending on the unreliable Saturday market.

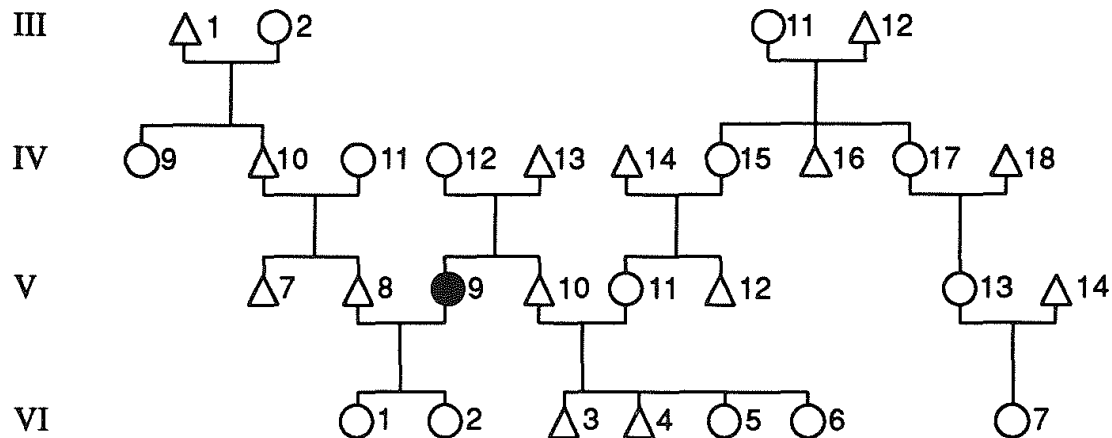
Thus Frances is connected to all the major families of Dominica. With extension and a little effort she can find a blood connection to anyone she chooses. The following case study (a family that is itself a small branch of Frances's network) demonstrates how these connections are activated in practice.

Case 2: The Joneses

Albert Jones (age 35) and Cynthia Jones (age 34) live in Roseau (V 8 and V 9 in Figure 5.2). Cynthia's family, the Stephens, came from a small village in the north, but most of them have moved to Portsmouth. Her mother (IV 12) heads a house-

hold there, which includes the wife of one of Cynthia's brothers and her four children (V 11 and V 13-6) and Cynthia's two daughters (VI 1 and VI 2). Cynthia's brother (V 10) is in the United States.

Figure 5.2: The Jones's Family Network



Several years ago a distant relative of Cynthia's brother's wife died, leaving a granddaughter, June (VI 7), with no one to care for her. Cynthia's mother's house was full, so Cynthia agreed to take in June. Note that Cynthia's kinship tie to June is entirely through women except for the initial brother-sister link, which is of course a tie through the mother.

When I asked Cynthia what would happen if one of Albert's relatives were in a similar situation, she replied that the child would be the responsibility of Albert's 'people'. It is standard practice in Dominica for the kin of women of a single household to share that household in times of need, even if the husband objects. This objection, however, is only a symbolic claim of male authority in the household.

These cases demonstrate the scope and effectiveness of women's networks in providing support. Now we will see how women use these networks to surmount the island's enormous barriers to communication. Indeed, these networks are integral parts of a Dominican communication system, which telephone and radio contacts complement rather than supplant and in which women's participation is critical. Men can and do spread news around the island, but most Dominicans

agree that men get their news from women in the first place. In this section I show first how news spreads and second how the communication functions of women's tasks and networks become an integral part of the politico-jural domain. I discuss food gardening, marketing, washing and hair-plaiting.

Of all women's activities in Dominica, there are only two that can be considered non-economic, although they are allied to economic activities. These are hair-plaiting and washing clothes (which in the Dominican countryside is a household task that is not done for pay). Dominican women spend hours each week plaiting each other's hair in complicated styles that are a source of pride to them. News spreads during these plaiting sessions, as any woman who has just returned from Roseau will bring word of deaths, wars and anything else newsworthy. While I was in Dominica, Fiji, a fellow member of the Commonwealth, underwent a coup d'état. We first heard of this from a woman who got the news from her hair plaitee, who had heard it on the local radio news at one o'clock. The US news stations on television did not carry the story until that evening.

More important is washing, where news and debates of immediate significance to daily life are exchanged. The majority of Dominican women still do their laundry at one of the 365 rivers and streams on the island. Here news spreads among different communities who use the same stretch of water. The issues are serious, such as coming elections, government corruption, grassroots unrest and the emergence of a new and possibly threatening cult in the country. As one woman said while doing her wash, 'Any news you need, you get it at the river. The ones close to two rivers spread the news that way. All news, personal, family, marriage, religion, even politics, it starts at the river'.

Still more important and more complex than these, however, are women's food-producing and marketing activities. As in many parts of the third world, the growing of vegetables and root crops is the work of women, whereas the production of export crops, in this case bananas and some citrus, is the work of men. Dominican women share in the work of export agriculture, but also maintain their own small food gardens and raise small stock. Cooperative labour exchange is a feature of both kinds of agriculture, although it is declining among men.

Koudmen or *journée*, as cooperative labour exchange is called, mainly occurs among men during house construction and land clearing.⁵ Informants say that it is declining in men's agricultural work as a consequence of land fragmentation and increasing competition. Yet, whether working their own food plots or the export plots of their male connections, women continue to participate in and enlist cooperative groups for weeding and harvesting. Although women's food production is essential and is carried on without male help, it is not perceived as distinct from men's agriculture. It is regarded by women and men alike as 'helping' and is devalued. Nevertheless, even as a household activity of women it engages the network and furthers, through *koudmen*, social integration and news dissemination.

Many writers have noticed the social roles of marketing in the Caribbean, though its communication role has been comparatively neglected (for example, Durant-Gonzalez 1977; Legerman 1962; Mintz 1959, 1961; Norvell and Thompson 1968). Men exchange news from different parts of the island while they wait with their crop at the banana boat. Significantly, this is often news they heard from wives and women friends who picked it up at the river or elsewhere. Meanwhile, at Roseau market the largest forum for information and debate occurs among women of all classes and from all parts of the island.

Roseau market is held on Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays. Monday is the day for hucksters to buy produce that they take in their small boats to other

islands of the Eastern Caribbean and exchange for manufactured goods. Huckstering also brings new ideas and products onto the island. The trade has long been important in the economic and political development of the island and the hucksters themselves command a great deal of influence (Honychurch 1984: 63; Homiak 1986).

Yet it is not only the hucksters who spread news and ideas into, out of and within Dominica. The Saturday market is the greatest means for intra-island communication. Women and a lesser number of men from all over the island begin their cash and social transactions as early as 4.00 a.m. and as late as noon. Although the former are the stated reason for market day, the latter are often more important. I observed a friend for an hour and a half making seven cash transactions and 22 social ones. I went to market not only for food, but to see friends from parts of the country I could not reach. One Saturday I was with my landlady as she discussed political committee business with a fellow committee member. Another member, a man, came up and jokingly said, 'So you come here to discuss the grant meeting!' My landlady replied 'We come here to discuss EVERYTHING'.

Both purchasers and vendors have their regular, understood spots at the market, even though vending spaces are supposed to be available on a first come, first served basis. Furthermore, vendors from each locality tend to congregate, making it easy for anyone who wants to send a message to a particular village. Many women engage in the social transactions of the market almost unconsciously, whereas others are fully aware of its social functions. Many men, however, are unaware of the communication networking. One man who became my close adviser expressed disbelief when I told him what I had learned from a woman at the market. After seeing it for himself he said, 'Well, that's Dominica for you' and dismissed the activity as a silly women's thing. Communication networking is thus devalued even though many Dominicans rely on it to get news, spread ideas and influence others.

There is a decided political tint to these activities and many a social movement in Dominica is said to have begun with an incident at the market. Although networking at the market is founded on a household maintenance activity, it not only influences the political and jural domains, but constitutes them. In one instance I found out about the nomination of a city council candidate at the same time and from the same source as a newsman from the Dominica Broadcasting System — a woman who heard it from a friend who heard it at the river from someone who heard it at the market. The radio station carried the story soon after.

Thus intra-island communication takes place in Dominica primarily through the work of women. Although men contribute to the spread of news, they usually receive it from women in the first place. This communication is not only on a personal level. Rather, it has political, integrative and economic functions that warrant a rethinking of the public/domestic dichotomy.

Merging Domains in Barbuda

We have made a domestic or home-based distinction between social roles and work and have pointed out that the carrying out of domestic tasks does not necessarily imply a wholly domestic role. We have seen in Dominica how women's roles function in (and partly constitute) the public sphere. Now we look at Barbuda, different in many ways but also historically marginal in the regional plantation economy.

There are no problems of communication in Barbuda (as there are in Dominica) and there is no market. Both these contrasts are related to physical and demographic differences. Barbuda's 1400 people all live within walking distance of each other, the village terrain is perfectly flat and the vegetation is open. Barbudans also say they are one family and the saying is true: anyone can trace a connection to anyone else. Everyone has convenient access to provision grounds and grazing on the commonlands, though Barbudan plots, always at risk of drought, lack the richness and variety of food gardens in well-watered islands such as Dominica (Berleant-Schiller and Pulsipher 1986). Nor is much cash cropping possible in Barbuda: only in years of adequate rainfall might a few cultivators grow a little cotton and a surplus of pigeon peas and ground nuts for export. There is, nevertheless, local buying and selling of meat, fish, fruit and vegetables and of course there are a few small shops for a limited range of imported foods and goods.

These contrasts (absence of market, more meagre and proportionately fewer subsistence gardens, negligible cash cropping and ease of communication) immediately suggest questions about gender contrasts between the two islands. Are there other opportunities in Barbuda for autonomous feminine roles which might help constitute a public domain? If not, should we advance the hypothesis that gender roles in Dominica are a function of the requirements of communication, economic production and distribution, of the wider structural and economic complex, or of the absorption of men into cash cropping? If they are, should we understand gender itself as an independent variable in the nature and working of Caribbean society, or should we seek some other commonality between the two islands which might account for women's roles?

In Barbuda the domestic role of women is very apparent, they are noticeably responsible for supporting and maintaining households. The various ways in which Barbudan patterns of land tenure, inheritance, child-rearing, house ownership and household composition bolster the domestic aspect of women's roles are discussed in an earlier paper (Berleant-Schiller 1977), so need not be reiterated here. At the same time, men's work and men's roles have a very definite integrating social effect and men's clusters and networks are important economically and socially (Berleant-Schiller 1977). Yet this is not to say that the entire role of women coincides with their domestic tasks, or that there is necessarily a sharp division between public and domestic domains. Those are still the very questions we explore. Let us approach them as we did for Dominica, in relation to women's networks, women's tasks and the locus of women's tasks.

We saw how moral and material support flows through women's networks in Dominica and how encompassing these networks are. The same is true of Barbuda, where we find multiple links between people and where people are quick, in the most ordinary contexts, to identify each other as kin. Children provide an important link with other households and the role of mother and household manager is important (perhaps paradoxically) in merging the domestic and public spheres. As the following example illustrates, even when activities are centred around the physical house, in their managerial functions women use and extend the network ties they have acquired through producing, consuming and distributing their resources.

Lilliane, aged 24, lives with her four brothers, all in their twenties and her three children. The house itself was bequeathed jointly to Lilliane and her brothers by their mother. Even without further details we can see that such a situation implies a number of things about women's roles: in the household there is only one adult woman; there is no husband-wife pair and no father-child relationship; the house

itself was owned and bequeathed by a woman. Additional details will clarify what implications Lilliane's domestic activities have in the extra-household sphere.

The men who contribute materially to the household are Lilliane's four brothers and the two fathers of her three children. These six men work the typical range of Barbudan jobs for men: lobster-diving, fishing, charcoal-making, cultivation and intermittent wage labour. They provide money and kind; Lilliane uses these as she sees fit. Thus her role as household head makes her a centre for the redistribution of basic economic goods, over which she has decision-making power. In these functions the support of herself and her children is her first concern and she must be able to juggle her resources if any of the men should cut or withdraw their contributions. Her own contributions of labour, garden provisions and money from her own charcoal kiln will always provide minimal support.

What, if any, public functions do her roles as manager, redistributor and provider of resources have? Most of Lilliane's managerial activities, aimed at supporting herself and her own children, do indeed link and organize households centred on mothers and their children and in some instances subsume them. Her resources are inseparable from a network of complex and shifting social relationships among persons and households. Her brothers have children in other households; her children link her to two complete and separate sets of kin and their households; the fathers of her children are also members of and contributors to the households in which they live. Here we should note that in the Caribbean the question of where some men and children 'live' is not always either clear-cut or settled and in fact is symptomatic of the merging domains we have mentioned. These social and economic connections pass through nodal women such as Lilliane, who are household heads and redistributive agents. Goods, services and even children flow from household to household.

Let us look more closely at Lilliane's three children. Through their fathers they create links between households. The fathers give to Lilliane, but the link is more complex than that. The ties of affinal kinship between Lilliane and her children's paternal grandmothers and aunts (ranged in several households) open up channels for the exchange of goods and services. These households can and do provide a temporary home for a child when the child, or Lilliane, or the aunts and grandmothers find it suits their needs. Thus Lilliane's role as mother is a public asset in its potential for linking and organizing private mother-child groups. Her brother's children have identical and reciprocal economic and kinship functions for Lilliane and open up her household to the needs of their mothers. This situation is similar to the one we described for the Joneses and Stephens in Dominica, though the matrilateral bias is less pronounced. In any case, women's support networks are broadened and enhanced through their children, i.e. through their roles as mothers, even though most of the tasks of motherhood take place within the home.

The place of men in the linking we have just described also argues the case for merging domains. Men have their own male networks of workmates, kin and neighbours, but their roles as sons and brothers and fathers tie them into inter-household networks as providers of some of the resources that women manage and distribute.

Like Dominican women, Barbudan women keep their own provision grounds, though they may also work plots jointly with their husbands. Men, too, keep their own provision grounds. However, cooperative labour exchange in agriculture no longer exists in Barbuda, though informants remember it from the 1920s and earlier. Food gardening, therefore, does not draw Barbudan women into any public sphere. Men, however, exchange labour in house construction, as they do

on Dominica. If we consider building a house to be a household task, then here is another example of merging domains in men's work that applies to both islands.

Barbudan women also launder and make charcoal. Since there are no rivers or streams in Barbuda, the women gather at two or three of the public wells to do their washing. Laundering is a time for socializing and gossip, but since news travels so easily in Barbuda anyway it does not have the vital communication function that washing does in Dominica. Its gossip function should be noted, however, since gossip is an important means of informal social control. Charcoal-making, carried out in the bush, is the work of couples, or single women, or single men, or a pair of cooperating kin, either male or female and may be done either for export sale or home use. In any case, it has little or no public or integrating function although it is very important economically for those who undertake it.

There are other kinds of women's work that do make use of domestic roles and that do draw on networks and thus merge with the public domain. Among these are small-scale entrepreneurial activities that attract women who in other Caribbean places might become higglers. They include, for example, retailing in small amounts what the women have purchased in large amounts — kerosene, cooking oil, matches, school supplies and sweet drinks. Women use their connections to obtain these goods from Antigua and sell to their loyal customers. Some women bake cakes and pastries for sale. Usually such goods are sold from the back door. Women also hawk in public, on the walkways and streets: fish brought in by mates and boyfriends, fruit from their own trees, garden surplus, ice cubes, flavoured ices ('frozen joy'), or desirable produce brought from Antigua, such as tomatoes, garlic or carrots. At dances and fêtes they sell cooked foods. All these bring together the public and domestic domains and, to some extent, draw on network ties in the form of loyal buyer-seller relationships.

In the absence of a market these pursuits and their social concomitants are less obvious and less elaborated than in Dominica, but just as clearly they demonstrate the association between networks and economic pursuits. The area in which social and economic activities coincide is also where the domestic and public spheres merge, for it is here that women widen the social roles founded on domestic tasks. But how does the communication function of women's networks in Dominica fit into this association? If we think of the economic sphere as where the distribution of valued goods is dealt with in a society, we immediately see that, given the difficulties of communication in Dominica, news may be regarded as a valued good, flowing through the same network of relationships sustained by and used for moral and economic support.

It is not only through kin and neighbourhood networks, however, that Barbudan women act in public roles, nor are all their public roles founded on domestic tasks. They also assume a role in informal social control by means of gossip (which is unceasing) and through public tirades ('cussing out') against those whose violation of ideal codes has injured them directly and personally. One cussing out I witnessed was staged against a woman and her daughter-in-law, although the latter was not present. The daughter-in-law had fled to New York after her husband had slashed her, leaving six children in the care of their grandmother, her husband's mother. The graphic tirade publicly exposed the women's neglect of the six children, the 'worthless vagabond' of a son and the grandmother's alleged prostitution. It was performed at the gate of the grandmother's house by a woman whose husband was trapped inside for the duration; it was as effective as a sermon and certainly more entertaining.

Over the course of their life cycles women's roles also change. Once past high school young women rarely appear on the street in groups, except when they are

walking to church. They do their socializing at the wells or in the yards, whereas groups of young men are highly visible in public. But when women and men alike pass into middle age their social worlds begin to merge; the men spend more time at home and the women become more publicly gregarious and engage in more activities conventionally defined as public. Once past their forties, persons of both sexes share favourite late-afternoon congregating places in the shade; older men and women renew the friendly kinship-influenced relationships across the sexes, which they had dropped after childhood. Although there are very few formal public roles and opportunities available to anyone in Barbuda, women do become more visible. One woman, for example, ran for a seat on the local governing body, the Barbuda Council, after having brought up 11 children. Another woman in her forties, who had taken in sewing at home and worked as a laundress while her children were growing up, opened a tavern and also became active in local party politics. Of seven tiny shops in Barbuda, three are run by older women. There are, however, no formal public roles to compare with those of Dominica.

Conclusion

Despite their differences, both Dominica and Barbuda demonstrate that the public/domestic dichotomy, useful as it has been for initiating an understanding of gender, cannot be applied universally. We have seen that women's networks in these islands and, in all likelihood, throughout the Caribbean, link women and their households and create channels for the distribution of resources that are essential to everyone. The public functions of women's networks include communicating news, reinforcing social norms, reviving and maintaining social ties and providing moral support. These social and cultural goods are as much essential resources as are economic goods and services. We have also seen that public and domestic domains are hardest to distinguish in zones where social networks and economic pursuits coincide, as they do, for example, in marketing and *koudmen*.

In Dominica, women's activities foster social roles that not only bring women into the public domain, but constitute the public domain. Public life in Dominica could not function without the integrative role of women effected through their marketing, washing, plaiting and networking activities. In Barbuda, where everything is on a smaller scale, private relations have public significance, as the case of Lilliane demonstrates. Personal relationships, inter-household kinship ties and small-scale commercial relationships are socially integrating, even though there is no market and no communications problem. Because of their differences in productive economy, topography, land use, social structure and demography, Dominica and Barbuda exhibit differences in some of the public roles of women and in the degree to which women's roles constitute the public domain. Yet in each, the social importance of women's 'domestic' tasks places women in 'public' roles. In each, the two domains merge, both economically and ideologically.

This merging shows that a public-domestic dichotomy is not universally useful in explaining status differences. Our data suggest that the study of gender may productively focus on kinship, economic associations and the ideology of the household, without necessary reference either to relative statuses or to organizational dichotomies, as perceived by actors or described by observers. This is not to say that status differences and inequalities between men and women as groups do not exist, but that they are separate questions that might better be explored as phenomena of class, productive economy, male economic dominance, economic development and scarce resources, perceived or real.

We have mainly focused on women's pursuits related to economic production and reproduction. One reason for this was our concern to show that tasks and roles are not always coterminous; we also wished to supply an example of public social roles founded on household work. But women do other things that may demonstrate the merging of the public and domestic spheres which should also be investigated. These include women's activities in religious organizations and mutual support societies (which are discussed in Chapter 8). The cases of Dominica and Barbuda also raise questions about the relationship of resource abundance and paid employment to women's mobilization. Further, considering children as resources available to adults poses questions about the role of children as participants in the production and consumption of community resources.

Our work on Dominica and Barbuda also raises questions that are specific to the Caribbean. Why, for example, have Caribbean societies been the most resistant to applications of the public/domestic dichotomy? Can further work on merging domains be integrated with the abundance of work on gender inequalities, class and economic change in the Caribbean, even while the two endeavours remain conceptually distinct?

The Caribbean is an extraordinarily varied region, yet pan-Caribbean cultural phenomena are obvious. It is therefore an ideal region in which to focus widely on manageably bounded problems, such as those we have presented, with the possibility of achieving conclusive results. We have been able to combine our interest in gender relations as a live anthropological issue with our dedication to the Caribbean as a research area. We hope that in doing so we have demonstrated the significance of the region for current discourse in anthropology.

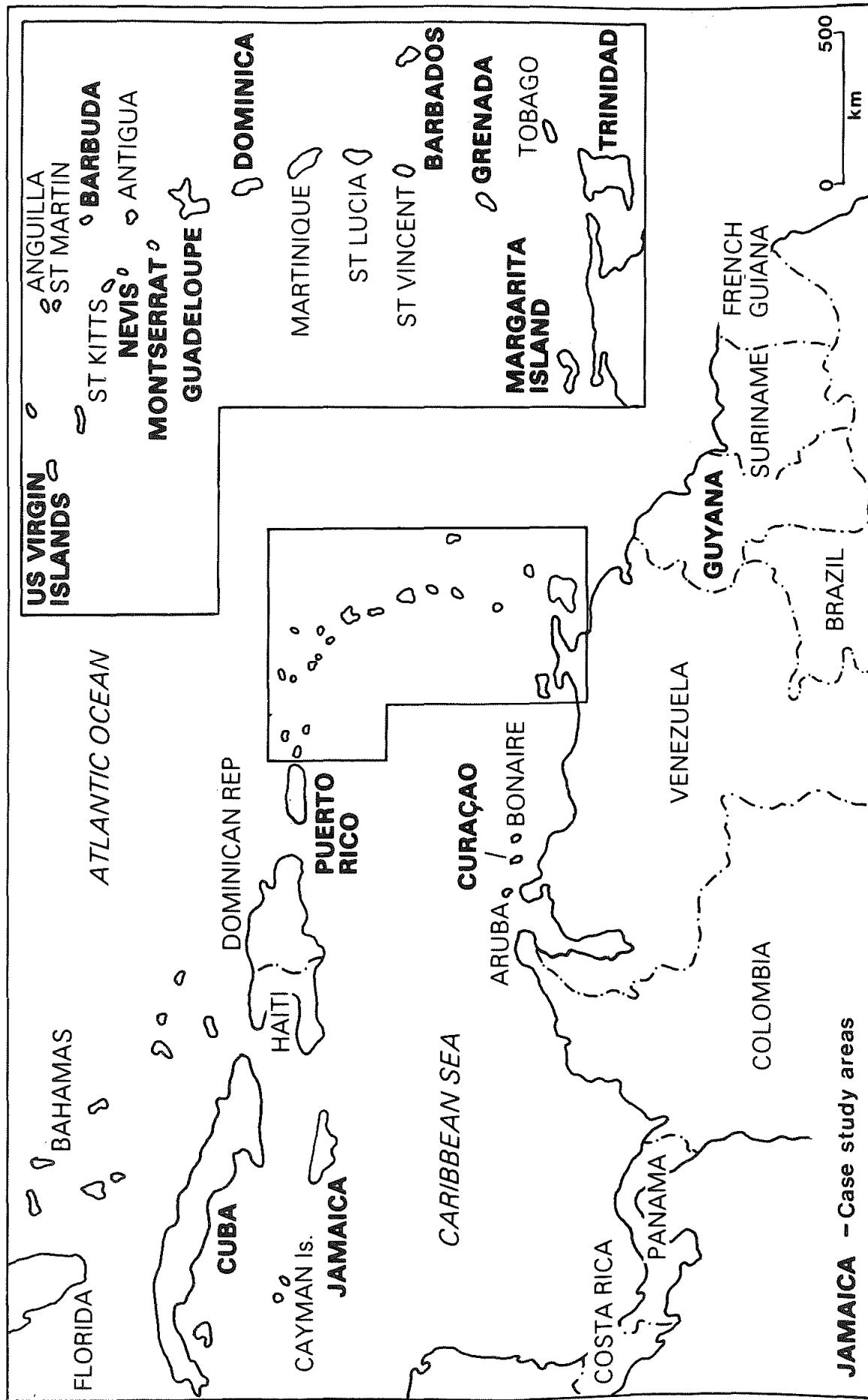
Notes

- 1 Meaning 'lake path' because it runs past the freshwater lake (Letang) deep in the island's interior.
- 2 All personal names in this chapter have been changed. Where knowledge of a person's European ancestry is significant, pseudonyms reflect this ancestry. Place names that might reveal identity have been omitted.
- 3 Numbering is consistent in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. Many persons are left unrepresented so that the major connections explained in the text will be clear.
- 4 'Remembering' relationships when convenient is a feature of Dominican family politics. Large family networks often drop members who take spouses of lower status and who dissolve marriages. Those involved in common-law relationships are more likely to be dropped.
- 5 Langrish (1973) refers to this practice as *jeuner*, although in Dominica the preferred spelling is *journée*. The more common term is *koudmen*.

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Women & Change in the Caribbean

A PAN-CARIBBEAN
PERSPECTIVE

EDITED BY
JANET MOMSEN

IAN RANDLE
KINGSTON

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
BLOOMINGTON & INDIANAPOLIS

JAMES CURREY
LONDON

James Currey Ltd
54b Thornhill Square, Islington, London, N1 1BE

Ian Randle Publishers
206 Old Hope Road, Kingston 6, Jamaica

Indiana University Press
601 North Morton Street
Bloomington 47404-3797, USA

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Women and Change in the Caribbean:
Pan-Caribbean
Perspective

I. Momsen, Janet Henshall
305. 4209729

ISBN 0-85255-403-6 (Paper)
0-85255-404-4 (Cloth)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Women and change in the Caribbean / edited by Janet Momsen.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-253-33897-2 (cloth). — ISBN 0-253-33896-4 (paper)

1. Women in development — Caribbean Area. 2. Women — Caribbean Area — Social conditions. I. Momsen. Janet Henshall.

HQ1240.5.C27W66 1993

305.42'09729—dc20

93-422

1 2 3 4 5 97 96 95 94 93

Typeset in 9/10 pt Palatino by
Selro Publishing Services, Oxford
Printed by Villiers Publications, London

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