

Tents, Pyramids, and the Way We Think

I hadn't felt the stark cultural contrast of a more rural Muslim society until I saw the skyline of Dearborn (Detroit). The tall Ford Motor Company headquarters shoots up as a solitary monument to the Western multinational corporation. It stands amidst small storefront Arab businesses that lace the surrounding avenues. I was familiar with those small entrepreneurial efforts from my time in North Africa, but I never could feel how much my own culture stood in sharp relief.

Fouad Khuri, an Arab sociologist, called these two distinct commercial styles "Tents and Pyramids."¹ Ford is a pyramidal structure, where hierarchy exists, and a graded power flows by delegation throughout a large corporate system. The mental design of the tent structure "is much like a Bedouin encampment composed of tents scattered haphazardly on a flat desert surface with no viable hierarchy."²

These two metaphors helped me grasp the hold of deep structures within a culture. Two of my mentors introduced me to the way these mental models organize our social world. Paul Hiebert called them "blueprints of reality"—a mental map that orders our knowledge and experience.³ Chuck Kraft used the picture of a river to explain how these models run silent and deep⁴—there are the surface behaviors, institutions, and expressions of a corporate culture, and then there is the deeper part of the river where our values shape social configurations that then inform our actions. But it was Khuri who helped me picture the way deeper structures determine whether we build a company that requires a skyscraper or rather maneuver in the competitive fraternity of a marketplace.

Each article in this issue addresses the importance of these structures. The first challenge is to discover them. Colin Bearup's third installment on Sufism describes the way Sunni Muslims are being revitalized and then gravitating towards a more Sufi (mystical) orientation (p. 137). You'll notice that they naturally collect around a *murshid* (spiritual guide) and his *tariqa* (a spiritual way, or brotherhood). This socio-religious configuration has been evident over the centuries in many Islamic movements across Africa and Asia. Bearup sees the same today in the Muslim diaspora.

Howell and Montgomery explore the implications of patron-client relations in Muslim Mozambique (p. 129). They're aware that this same construct was embedded in the social context of the early church, and that it still manifests in

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Editor

Brad Gill

Consulting Editors

Rick Brown, Darrell Dorr, Gavriel Gefen, Herbert Hoefler, R. W. Lewis, H. L. Richard

Copy Editing and Layout

Elizabeth Gill, Marjorie Clark

Subscriptions

Lois Carey, Laurie Rosema

Publisher

Frontier Mission Fellowship

2019 ISFM Executive Committee

Len Barlotti, Larry Caldwell, Dave Datema, Darrell Dorr, Brad Gill, Steve Hawthorne, David Lewis, R. W. Lewis, Greg Parsons

Web Site

www.ijfm.org

Editorial Correspondence

1605 E Elizabeth Street
Pasadena, CA 91104
(734) 765-0368, editors@ijfm.org

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IJFM

1605 E Elizabeth St #1032

Pasadena, CA 91104

Tel: (626) 398-2249

Fax: (626) 398-2263

Email: subscriptions@ijfm.org

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a wide swath of unreached peoples today. Their sense is that the meaningfulness of the role of the “patron” actually provides a fresh opportunity to present trinitarian theology in that Muslim African context.

Khuri claims that these mental structures like patron-client are ideological constants—that “they can be transferred from one sphere to another.” They’re expressed in the way we play games, in how we rule, in our families and associations, even in our “joining a congregation for worship.”⁵ Interesting. This sociologist claims these deep structures will shape the way we do church. Richard and Evelyn Hibbert address this relationship of structure and church with their own question: What’s the appropriate structure that ensures the vitality and durability of rapidly multiplying ecclesial movements? They themselves have been involved with a movement to Christ, and their concern is for a biblically viable structure. Might a movement’s durability be determined by the use of its own deep structures—those cultural configurations from human tradition that may appear temporal and expendable?

Our association and this journal have addressed the deep structure of rapidly multiplying movements to Christ. The emerging evidence of an *oikos* (household) structure⁶ across these movements is both a social configuration and a biblically valued institution. These deep cultural structures may not be so expendable, nor should they be. Shouldn’t we expect a creative synthesis of the cultural and the biblical in these movements? The Hibberts raise this important consideration.

This year ISFM 2019 will also examine the deep structures of frontier missiology. My article on “Reimagining Frontier Mission” is a preamble to the different presentations (p. 111). I believe the health of our missiological imagination has to do with our ability to address the models which shape how we do mission. The presenters will examine our mission terminology and the deeper configurations it reflects.

You may have noticed that a penetrating analysis of our missiology comes at the hand of our book reviewers. Dwight Baker and H. L. Richard consistently prod us with their trenchant observations

in our new section, “Books and Missiology,” formerly “Book Reviews.” Baker’s review of Katherine Long’s *God in the Rainforest* (p. 146) offers a personal and iconoclastic reflection on a famous martyrdom in the 20th century. As usual, this mission historian exposes the deep proclivities of Western mission. It’s not always pretty, and certainly not comfortable. But how else will we discover the deep structures of mission today?

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Fouad Khuri, *Tents and Pyramids* (Saqi Books, 1990).

² Khuri, *Tents and Pyramids*, 11.

³ Paul Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Trinity Press International, 1999), 76–78.

⁴ Charles H. Kraft, “Culture, World-view and Contextualization,” in *Perspective on the World Christian Movement*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (William Carey Publishers, 2009), 401.

⁵ Khuri, *Tents and Pyramids*, 12.

⁶ *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 34, no. 1–4, http://ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/34_1-4_PDFs/IJFM_34_1-4-EntireIssue.pdf.

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- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate “A Church for Every People.”

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go, yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, “to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.” (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.