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female forms of power and the myth of male dominance: a model of female/male interaction in peasant society¹

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Every attitude, emotion, thought, has its opposite held in balance out of sight but there all the time. Push any one of them to an extreme, and . . . over you go into its opposite (Lessing 1969:601).

introduction

[In all societies] the men usually exercise control . . . the sheer physiological facts of existence make [the female] role secondary to that of the male in the decision-making processes at any level higher than the purely domestic . . . [In non-primitive societies] for a good part of her life a woman may be free to make some impact on the male world. It is curious therefore that this has not been felt more. Even with these increased opportunities, the woman's role is still secondary (Fox 1969:31-32).

Analysis of 46 peasant community studies reveals a recurrent androcentric social structure, with control and authority in the hands of men (Michaelson and Goldschmidt 1971:330).

That women virtually everywhere play a subordinate role is a recurrent implicit or explicit assumption in anthropological literature. Whether this is due to the "androcentrism" of anthropologists, or of human societies in general, remains an open question. This paper represents a challenge to these kinds of assumptions, asking what forms this "androcentrism" takes in traditional societies, what is the actual position of women, and how the two are related. Before proceeding, it should be pointed out that the theoretical basis for assumptions of androcentrism may be found, in part, in the way problems related to power, control, and decision-making have been approached in conventional anthropology.

Political anthropology is the subdiscipline which is most directly concerned with these problems. The two major interests to be found in the literature of this field are: analysis of "the taxonomy, structure, and function of political systems," and, more recently, "the study of political processes" (Swartz 1966:1). Swartz, in his introduction to the textbook

The assumption of universal male dominance, which stems from epistemological biases in anthropology, is belied by evidence that women wield considerable power within the context of the peasant household and community. The apparent contradictions between public stances of male dominance and the realities of female power can be resolved and explained by a model which is potentially extensible to other types of pre-industrial societies. In conclusion, the transformation of male dominance from myth to reality during the process of industrialization is briefly explored.

Political Anthropology, explains, “the study of politics is the study of the *processes* involved in determining and implementing public goals and in the differential achievement and use of power by the members of the group concerned with those goals” (1966:7). In defining the political process, he sees as its first characteristic its “public rather than private” nature (1966:4). Citing Talcott Parsons, he maintains that “ ‘power’ should be understood to rest on legitimacy” (1966:14). It is clear that what is of interest to these scholars is a special kind of political process. They include by definition only that which is visible in formal or institutionalized power structures.

Cohen widens these concepts by distinguishing between power and authority (legitimized power), noting that all power in a group cannot be contained within authority structures (1970:491). However, authority structures, because they are formally organized role networks, are easier to observe and record than are power structures (1970:488). It is largely for this reason, he suggests, that political anthropologists have worked within a definition of the political system which focuses on the structural features of the authority system, rather than on the nature of the political act (1970:487). Recognizing the significance of power structures as well, he suggests that the relationship between the two may be seen in the decrease or breakdown of authority, or in the process of the legitimization of power (1970:492). Thus he sees power in terms of, and subordinated to, authority.

In most societies, males evidently tend to monopolize positions of authority and are more involved with formal political institutions than women are (Stephens 1963:289). If anthropologists limit their interests to the formal level of political processes, assuming it to be the most significant, men will obviously appear to be dominant, and women to be relatively powerless. This dominance/subordination pattern gains further credence in the fact that in many societies, both men and women behave as if men were dominant and as if formal decision-making processes, controlled by men, were actually the most significant (Stephens 1963:289-290). Anthropologists seem generally to have accepted this behavior at face value, and we are left with an assumption of virtually universal male dominance and a preoccupation with formal forms of power.

The result is the formulation of power models which have no room for the input of informal power. Recently, a number of investigators have become interested in the roles of women, finding that women do, in fact, often wield significant amounts of power, in the sense of having considerable input into, or control over, important decision-making processes. This is problematic, however, because women’s power usually does not involve authority or legitimization. Because women tend to wield power without directly participating in formal political institutions, their power does not fit into earlier models and so has not been explained in terms of larger societal-level power processes. In an attempt to redress the imbalance in extant male-oriented data, students of female power have tended to be heavily descriptive, and to dismiss outright, or to treat as a relatively uninteresting given, male forms of power and culturally elaborated ideologies of male dominance. Because of a lack of appropriate analytical tools and, until recently, a lack of data, the relationship between female and male forms of power has not been explored.

The purpose of this paper is to show the larger structural dimensions of women’s power, using peasant society as an example. In essence, I will demonstrate that, although peasant males monopolize positions of authority and are shown public deference by women, thus superficially appearing to be dominant, they wield relatively little real power. There is a largely powerless authority, often accompanied by a felt sense of powerlessness, both in the face of the world at large and of the peasant community itself. On the other hand, *within the context of peasant society*, women control at least the

major portion of important resources and decisions. In other words, if we limit our investigation to the relative actual power of peasant men and women, eliminating for the moment those sources of power from the outside world which are beyond the reach of either peasant men or women, women appear to be generally more powerful. At the same time, the "symbolic" power of men should not be underestimated, nor can it be left unexplained.

I will argue, therefore, that a non-hierarchical power relationship between the categories "male" and "female" is maintained in peasant society by the acting out of a "myth" of male dominance. Taking the point of view of Leach, I assume myth to be the expression of an idea which may be demonstrated to be factually untrue. While it may form a significant part of the belief system of its perpetrators, "the truth which it expresses does not relate to the ordinary matter-of-fact world of everyday things" (Leach 1969:107). Thus, one cannot understand the significance of a myth if it is taken to be the expression of a literally believed idea which defines, in a very direct or complete way, ordinary behavior. To understand its significance, a myth must be viewed in the larger behavioral and ideological context of which it is a part. The "myth" of male dominance to which I refer is expressed, not in legends or folktales, but in patterns of public deference toward men, as well as their monopolization of positions of authority and prestige. I am thus referring to a different order of phenomena than that which Leach had in mind. However, because some of the characteristics he attributes to myth effectively describe the phenomenon which is of interest here, the term, used in a metaphorical sense, is applicable. That is, it may be factually demonstrated that peasant society is not male dominated. Furthermore, the "myth" of male dominance paradoxically serves to order social relationships in a non-hierarchical system. Thus, except for specific patterns of behavior directly linked with its expression, the "myth" of male dominance does not directly determine ordinary behavior: males do not actually dominate, nor do either males or females literally believe them to be dominant.

The perpetuation of this "myth" is in the interests of both peasant women and men, because it gives the latter the *appearance* of power and control over all sectors of village life, while at the same time giving to the former *actual* power over those sectors of life in the community which may be controlled by villagers. The two sex groups, in effect, operate within partially divergent systems of perceived advantages, values, and prestige, so that the members of each group see themselves as the "winners" in respect to the other. Neither men nor women believe that the "myth" is an accurate reflection of the actual situation. However, each sex group believes (or appears to believe, so avoiding confrontation) that the opposite sex perceives the myth as reality, with the result that each is actively engaged in maintaining the illusion that males are, in fact, dominant.

In proposing that male dominance operates as a "myth" in peasant societies, I mean to suggest neither that this is a phenomenon found only among peasants, nor that "peasant society" necessarily represents a homogeneous type. Tentatively, I propose that the "myth" of male dominance will occur within a particular system composed of the components specified below. These components are fundamental characteristics of the wide variety of peasant societies. They are also characteristic of other types of traditional societies. If they are, in fact, necessary and sufficient requirements for a model which operates as sketched above and elaborated below, then this model should be applicable to a variety of non-peasant societies as well. The limitation of the present study to peasant societies is a function only of my own research experience; the possibility of wider applicability remains to be tested in future research, whereupon the suggested components may be refined, added to, or discarded. These components include: (1)

Women are primarily associated with the domestic. (2) The society is domestic-oriented; that is, the domestic sphere is of central importance, at least socially, and has important implications for life beyond the domestic. (3) To the extent that the distribution of jural and other formal rights belie the power of women, most ordinary and important interactions occur in the context of a face-to-face community, where informal relationships and forms of power are at least as significant a force in everyday life as formalized, authorized relationships and power. This set of components will assure women the kinds of power to be illustrated below. (4) Men have greater access to jural and other formal rights. (5) They are occupied with activities which may at least be overtly considered important. With these two components, we have the basis for some kind of male dominance. The five elements together give male dominance a mythical nature. Felt lack of power on the part of men, while perhaps not a required component of the system, nevertheless enhances both the relatively powerful position of women and the mythical nature of male dominance.

(6) Men and women are approximately equally dependent on each other economically, socially, politically, or in other important ways. This component insures that both groups will "play the game," and a relatively even balance of power will be maintained. It should be noted that the existence of this component renders impractical the analytical strategy of using autonomy as a measure of relative power: because the two sex groups are mutually interdependent, neither can be more autonomous than the other.²

Before proceeding with a discussion of this model, I will briefly survey some of the literature on peasant power processes to support and illustrate various of the above assertions. Specifically, evidence of the following may be drawn from the extant literature: (1) peasant male lack of real power, (2) public behavior suggesting that peasant society is male dominated, (3) extent and types of power wielded by peasant women, both in the household and the community, (4) high rate of mutual interdependence between peasant men and women. The third point is the most crucial one, if we are to refute the notions that males are universally dominant and that power processes can be adequately understood with exclusive reference to formal systems of authority. For this reason, and because it is the least well-established in the peasant literature, it will be given the most attention here. Taken together, these data suggest several contradictions which are explained by the model above. However, while they tend to corroborate the suggested model, these data are drawn from scattered sources and were initially generated in response to a variety of questions, different from those of interest here. It is therefore insufficient evidence on which adequately to support or deny that the proposed model is an accurate conceptualization. For this reason, more detailed ethnographic data from G.F., a French peasant village, will be provided, which will draw together and further illustrate the themes in the literature. They will also add specific examples of male and female interaction in power processes of the peasant household and community. With this body of data at hand, we may return to the proposed model to examine in greater detail how it works and to test its ability to explain the given data.

A model of this kind should include a dynamic dimension: its explanatory and predictive powers are extremely limited, if not suspect, if it exists in a static vacuum, bearing no demonstrable relationship with other structural situations. Evidence from G.F., as well as literature and observations on industrialized societies, indicate that various components of the required contextual system sketched above may be transformed in any of several ways in the process of modernization. It is therefore of paramount interest to investigate several of these possible permutations, projecting their impact on the operation of the model. These will be outlined briefly as a conclusion to

this study; further investigation of these final hypotheses will constitute a crucial test of the proposed model.

power processes among peasants

In searching the peasant literature for information on power processes, one is first struck by the recurrent theme of a felt *lack* of power in peasant societies. These have been defined as “part” societies or cultures, belonging to larger societies which include non-peasants. Peasants are often said to be acutely aware of the fact that “real power lies outside the peasant community” (Foster 1965:301). They “feel themselves to be ‘in’ but not ‘of’ the larger culture” (Banfield 1958:4). This characteristic, it is claimed, gives rise to a cognitive orientation including sentiments of distrust and hostility toward the outside world, individualism or familism, and fatalism. While it is doubtless improvident to claim that this complex of sentiments is both universal among, and exclusively present in, peasant societies, it is reported frequently enough to warrant elaboration here.

Banfield, in his analysis of a southern Italian community, suggests that villagers “act as if they are following the rule: maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that others will do likewise” (1958:83). As a result, he says, in such a community, there are no leaders and no followers. No one will attempt to further the interests of the community except for personal gain. Any individual or institution which claims other motives is seen as a fraud. Thus, no one is likely to take the initiative to outline a course of action and persuade others to follow. If one were to offer leadership, the group refuses it out of distrust. Only those organizations which are supported from outside (e.g., the Church and the State) can exist, because villagers lack the mutual trust and the unselfish and non-material motives which are, to some extent, necessary to maintain an organization. Officials both inside and outside the community are assumed to be corrupt and self-serving (Banfield 1958:85-100). Thus villagers not only perceive their lack of power *vis-à-vis* the larger society, but they actively prevent each other from achieving power within the community.

Foster suggests a slightly different model, “the image of the limited good,” to explain and predict the same phenomena observed among peasants in Latin America and elsewhere. That which is defined as “good,” both tangible and intangible, is perceived as existing in finite quantity. Each minimal social unit struggles to possess or control scarce valuables and to prevent others from obtaining more than their rightful share. The acquisition of wealth, status, or other “good” by an individual or family is seen as tantamount to depriving others of their share and is subject to severe sanctions. Interpersonal relationships are thus characterized by caution, reserve, suspicion, and mistrust. No local leadership is given the opportunity to develop, and leadership of any kind is suspect (Foster 1965:293-315).

A similar theme is stressed by Bailey, Blaxter, J. Hutson, S. Hutson, and Layton in their collection of analyses of “small politics” in French, Italian, and Austrian mountain peasant communities. The members of these communities are found to be consciously engaged in preventing each other from “getting ahead”: “People want to be as good as one another” (Blaxter 1971:121), they “compete to remain equal” (Bailey 1971:19). There is an insistence on the maintenance of equalized reciprocity in all community level relationships. Thus,

deference based on differences in power is seldom seen. No one throws their weight around or cringes. Power-seeking within the village appears to be deliberately limited and leadership positions avoided. There is a commonly held dislike of *politique* . . . all people who ‘play at

politics' and set themselves up as leaders are suspected of dishonesty, deceit and of profiting themselves (S. Hutson 1971:44).

Here, again, is evidence of hostility and distrust toward those in power outside the community, extended to include those who try to take positions of power within it.

A final variation on this theme is found in Blythe's study of an English village. One of his informants remarked that felt lack of power can be attributed to the physical brutality of the peasant existence:

The men were beaten because the farms took every ounce of their physical strength and, as they had no great mental strength because of lack of education, they were left with nothing. Their physical strength was their pride and as soon as it was gone they became timid . . . things are different now, of course, but there is a legacy of beaten men in the Suffolk villages (1969:105).

Bailey and his students give evidence that women villagers are just as insistent on equality and just as distrustful of those who attempt to obtain power as their husbands and brothers are (e.g., S. Hutson 1971:46). Banfield and Foster, however, give little indication as to whether their data suggest that "amoral familism" or the "image of the limited good" characterize peasants in general, or only peasant men. Blythe's (male) informant distinguishes peasant women from the men: "The women never lost their independence during the bad days as the men did You don't find women in this [beaten] condition, no matter how hard their lives have been" (1969:105). This comment suggests that the cognitive orientation of male peasants ought not to be automatically assumed to be equally applicable to female peasants. For this reason, it is of interest to examine how students of peasantries have characterized women's participation in peasant power processes.

In most of the literature in which peasant women are discussed, it is assumed that they are subordinate to men. Men have little power in the community or the world beyond, but they do have power over their women and insist on preserving at least that. Recently, several champions of women's causes have shown just how much peasant women have been made to suffer at the hands of their men. Michaelson and Goldschmidt, in an analysis of forty-six peasant community studies, maintain that nearly all of them are male dominated (1971:330). While they do not make explicit their criteria for this characterization, they posit several of its structural correlates. These include strict social segregation and division of labor by sex, with men engaged in higher prestige productive work, and holding positions of authority in the household (in contrast to the "indulgent" role generally held by mothers) (1971:332-335). Michaelson and Goldschmidt go on to describe the psychological hardships of women in these "androcentric" societies, particularly those which are organized patrilineally and patrilocally, where women are most clearly subordinated by men (1971:335-347).

An extension of this approach is adopted in much of the literature on the modernization of peasant societies. Here, too, women are seen as passive and long-suffering victims, excluded from anything which might be regarded as a power process. The modernization process is considered to include the emancipation of women from their unenviable traditional plights. Thus, in his chapter entitled "the manumission of peasant women," Morin (1970:148-152) contrasts the old Breton peasant woman who publicly defers to and serves her husband with younger women who aspire to independence and a bourgeois life: "The conflict between the new feminine personality and the peasant condition is insurmountable" (1970:452). Although he alludes to the possibility that the traditional peasant woman's subordination may conceal "the power behind the throne," that she may have had a position of "responsibility" in times of

stress, “for example, when the husband has sunk into alcoholism” (1970:148), it is only those increasingly numerous “modern women” who seek or find any amount of control over their own lives.

Allauzen, in her analysis of French peasant women, takes a similar view, portraying modernizing women as engaged in a struggle to escape the bondage of their traditional roles. She, like Morin (1970:152), sees this bondage as being rooted primarily in the difficult material existence of peasant women: the never-ending drudgery of too much work and too many babies in a marriage “based on male authority” (Allauzen 1967:186). She sees freedom from farm work as the first step toward independence (1967:*passim*).

In these accounts, as elsewhere in the literature on peasant modernization (cf. S. Hutson 1971:58), women are portrayed as the modernizers, pushing and pulling their husbands to embark on a new way of life. To the extent that they have succeeded, they must have had some degree of power in the traditional order: otherwise they could never have had the wherewithal to effect change. This logical point seems to have been largely overlooked in the work of Allauzen, Morin, and others who have treated this problem. In their eagerness to portray traditional women sympathetically, and their daughters with admiration and encouragement, they have failed to see any but the younger generation as social actors with goals of their own and ways to achieve them.

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in looking at women in quite another light. Setting aside for the moment the assumption in the earlier literature that women, at least until recently, are virtually universally subordinated, a number of investigators have assumed women, like men, to be goal-setting creatures. These scholars have asked what forms of power women have at their disposal, and how they use it to achieve their goals.

Women, like other people, have goals and desires which go beyond their immediate situations—they might seek political power, control over other persons, financial security, love, whatever. Feminine behavior, then, must be interpreted in relation to the goals women are moving toward—to an extent, their actions are bound to be strategically chosen (Lewin, et al. 1971:13).

women behave as social actors, using whatever resources are available to them to achieve their purposes . . . women, like men, can use their “appropriate” behavior to manipulate people and objects in pursuit of immediate and individual goals (Lewin, et al. 1971:18; cf. Nelson 1974:553).

In virtually all peasant societies, males’ jural and other formal rights seem to place them in a position superior to that of women. That is, they monopolize whatever positions of authority are available in the community (e.g., in the household and village government), and patterns of public deference of women to men are ubiquitous. These investigators break with a great deal of earlier work by first making a distinction between legal principles, traditional (male) cultural views of women, and sometimes public patterns of behavior, on the one hand, and the realities of power processes, on the other. Because women often center their activities in the household, much attention has been focused on power processes in the domestic unit. In peasant societies, the domestic unit is of primary economic, political, and social importance, so that a woman’s power in this sphere extends to the village at large.³ In addition, it has been found that women have significant channels of power, quite apart from their households. We will look first at some of the evidence, and the ways it has been handled, relating to female participation in power processes within the household, and then examine some work which has been done on female participation in the larger sphere.

Stephens, in his cross-cultural study of the family, discusses the prevalence of deference customs in which wives take on a “general posture of respect, submissiveness

and obedience" toward their husbands. He suggests that these customs imply the recognition that the person deferred to is owed special privileges and wields superior power (1963:291). However, he later maintains that the connection between deference and power is by no means a clear one. While a deference custom is "a ritual expression or cultural expectation of an unequal power relationship . . . a cultural rule," it does not necessarily reflect accurately the power relationship between husband and wife, that is, "who dominates, and who submits; who makes family decisions . . . who gets his (or her) way in case of disagreements; who is catered to; who commands; who obeys, and so forth" (1963:296). Having made this distinction, however, he balks at a cross-cultural assessment of husband/wife power relationships for three reasons. First, he says that while deference customs are public, standardized, and clear-cut, actual power relationships between husband and wife are often not governed by cultural rules and are expressed in private, so that they are out of the ethnographer's range of information. Furthermore, because they are not governed by cultural rules, they may vary considerably between individuals in any given society. His most compelling reason, related to the first two, is that the ethnographic data on this subject are meagre, vague, and generally poorly reported (1963:296-297). In the past several years, however, more relevant ethnographic data have been forthcoming, which suggest that beyond the formal rules lie discernible patterns of behavior; the interplay between male and female power seems to be no more or less individualized than other aspects of behavior.

Dubisch (1971) has suggested a systematic method of assessing the relative power of peasant husband and wife. She maintains that this will be largely determined by the relative contributions made by each spouse to the "key social and domestic unit, the nuclear family" (1971:3) and lists a set of criteria, appropriate to the Greek village she studied, by which this may be measured (1971:5). To measure relative domestic power, she suggests the following criteria:

- (1) respect accorded one spouse by the other . . . both publicly and privately
- (2) interference of one spouse in the sphere of the other . . .
- (3) decision-making in regard to allocation of family resources
- (4) arranging plans for children (1971:6).

Riegelhaupt (1967) and Friedl (1967) in their studies of Portuguese and Greek peasant communities, respectively, emphasize the economic power base of women. In both cases, women have significant input into decisions regarding allocation of family resources, which amounts to interference in spheres legally or culturally defined as the male domain.

Riegelhaupt contrasts women's virtual economic control in the household with male monopolization of legal rights over economic transactions (1967:112). According to this study, female economic power stems from the division of labor, by which women are responsible for marketing bread and all of the family's farm produce which is not sold through government agencies. Much of the family's income passes in this way through the woman's hands; the rest is handed over to her by her husband (1967:120). Women are thus the primary handlers of the family's financial resources. They make all marketing and household economic decisions and are always consulted in "male" agricultural decisions (1967:119-121).

Friedl employs a slightly different strategy, opposing female power to male prestige. She cites evidence that men monopolize positions of prestige and "importance" and are deferred to by women in the extra-household sphere, but she points out that if, as is clearly true in most peasant societies, the family is the most significant social unit, then the private rather than the public sector is the sphere in which relative attribution of power is the most important (1967:97). She maintains that women wield considerable

power in the domestic sphere because they bring land to the household as dowry. They remain in control of it, actively participating (behind a façade of male dominance) in decisions regarding its use, as well as other household economic matters and marriage arrangements for their children (1967:105-107). Furthermore, Friedl observes that Greek women retain a strong sense of power by creating and maintaining men's dependence on, and sense of obligation toward, women.

Rosenfeld, in her study of an Arab village, provides an interesting contrast. Here women have the right to inherit land, but they usually choose to relinquish this right in favor of retaining kin ties with their natal households. Only in this way may they retain the right to return home when ill-treated by their husbands and to demand biannual gifts and emergency supplies from their brothers. In choosing to give up the possibility of increased power in her husband's household, a woman maximizes her own personal economic well-being and emotional security (Rosenfeld 1960:*passim*).

Although the women in this community are not, strictly speaking, peasants, the female strategy of manipulating an apparently male-oriented formal system to suit her own ends is an important one. Margery Wolf's study of Taiwanese peasants illustrates another way in which this may be done. As traditionally defined, the Taiwanese family is a patrilineal unit stretching across generations, so that all male members of a household are identified from birth to death with both ancestors and future generations. A woman, as a temporary member, first of her father's patrilineage, and then of her husband's, is denied access to the power and emotional security forthcoming to full members of these groups (1972:32-33). Wolf, however, maintains that women do not define their families this way. Rather, they see themselves as heads of uterine families and work to create and maintain close and loyal ties with its members, thus providing themselves with both a power base and emotional support.

The uterine family is built out of one woman's need and is held together insofar as she has the strength to do so . . . [it] has no ideology, no formal structure, and no public existence. It is built out of sentiments and loyalties that die with its members, but it is no less real for all that (1972:37).

These, then, are some of the kinds of power and strategies for obtaining it which women may wield in the household. Clearly, this power is not wholly dependent on individual temperament, but arises out of various structural arrangements in each society. In addition, Lamphere suggests that the societies where female solidarity is apt to be strongest include those in which men have little authority over each other, or where male status in the larger society is low (1974:111-112). These criteria have been shown to apply to peasant societies. In fact, informal, but nonetheless well organized, women's groups are described in many peasant societies (e.g., Arensberg and Kimball 1968:196; Reiter 1972:44-46). It seems reasonable to suggest that if women in these societies exercise considerable power in their households, they are not doing so simply as individuals but with the encouragement and support of their sex groups.

If, as has been maintained, the domestic unit is the key social, political, and economic unit in peasant societies, women's power in the household may be expected to have important extensions in the community at large. Female solidarity, expressed in informal women's groups held together by a well-developed interhousehold female communications network, is most often cited as the strongest power base from which women operate in the community. Margery Wolf, Aswad, and Riegelhaupt all describe how women's groups, more heterogeneous and less brittle than those of men, act as a kind of information control, heavily influencing community public opinion and mediating between groups of men.

In Taiwan, men's groups are formed along kin and religious lines, while women's groups are defined in terms of neighborhood and friendship (M. Wolf 1972:47). The latter act as protectors of an individual woman's rights in the household; she may appeal to her group and expect injustices to be redressed through informal group pressure (1972:39). More important, these women's groups take advantage of the well-developed male sense of preserving the patrilineage honor and manage to influence affairs which theoretically concern only males:

This is precisely where women wield their power. When a man behaves in a way they consider wrong, they talk about him—not only among themselves, but to their sons and husbands . . . it becomes abundantly clear that he is losing face and by continuing in this manner may bring shame to the family of his ancestors and descendants. Few men will risk that (1972:40).

This kind of feminine power is enhanced, I would suggest, by the fact that women, feeling little identification with the patrilineage, are not loathe to erode the institution by bringing shame to it.

Aswad suggests that the power of Arab women's groups stems from the fact that they are not, like those of the men, restricted by political alliances and stylized speech patterns. The informal and heterogeneous nature of women's groups allows them to act as mediators, preventing major conflicts from erupting between men's groups (1967:149-150). Their gossip also shapes public opinion, indirectly affecting male political decisions and behavior (1967:150).

In the Portuguese village studied by Riegelhaupt, women are virtually in control of information dissemination because of the division of labor: men work individually in the fields, while women come into frequent contact with each other in the course of their household work within the village. Men thus depend on their wives for information about village concerns, events, and personalities (1967:116-118). Riegelhaupt points out, however, that this is relatively unimportant in terms of political power, because sources of power lie outside of the community. But, at the same time, women have far more extensive contact with the urban world than men do, first as domestic servants (as young girls) and later as market women (1967:118). They may thus act as mediators between the community and political processes outside. Men cannot play this role because they lack urban contacts, are unable to form themselves into factions or voluntary organizations to act as pressure groups, and "are reluctant to put themselves in a relationship to another villager where both parties are not on an equal footing, and so are prevented from choosing a spokesman or leader from among themselves" (1967:123-124). It is pointed out that men virtually monopolize formal political rights; most women, for instance, do not have the right to vote. However, especially in an authoritarian system, sources of political power lie outside legally constituted institutions; decisions are made through informal structures (1967:121-122). It is village women, not men, who are the key actors in those informal structures to which peasants have access. In contrast to the pattern of women taking over processes in a legally male domain, Friedl reports that Greek women may disrupt processes in a traditionally male domain, upsetting orderly relationships between men by misbehaving publicly. This potential sanction is strong enough to give women significant influence over relationships formed by men (1967:108).

A final form of power wielded by women is that related to the supernatural. This is relatively rarely reported in contemporary peasant societies and accrues most often to several individuals in a single community, rather than to the female population at large. Pitt-Rivers, for instance, discusses the *sabia* or wise woman in a Spanish village. She has the power "to right what is wrong," and, although villagers, especially males, are apt to

profess skepticism publicly, they seek her out when in need of help (1961:193). Her magical powers are such that she may use them to manipulate relationships within the village. Moreover, it is believed that, if she has an evil intent, she may use her powers malevolently. For this reason, care is taken not to offend her (1961:192). Pitt-Rivers reports that all women are believed to be potentially able to evoke menstrual magic and the evil eye, two forms of malevolent magic (1961:197-198). That women possess supernatural sources of harm gives them real power through the threat of dangerous reprisals if crossed.

We thus have a series of opposing pairs of male/female power: formal/informal, subsuming *de jure/de facto*, overt/covert, and occasionally natural/supernatural. It has been suggested that informal power is the more significant within the peasant context, insofar as sources of “real” power are believed to lie outside of the peasant community, and peasants are reluctant to accord formal power positions to their fellows.

Eric Wolf, in a study of complex societies based largely on his work with Latin American and European peasants, sees informal structures as interstitial and supplementary to their formal political power frameworks (1966:2; cf. Karnoouh 1973:29). While he maintains that these supplementary sets may “make possible the functioning of the great institutions” (1966:19), he sees the former as distinct and secondary: “they operate and exist by virtue of [the] existence [of the formal structure], which logically, if not temporally is prior to them” (1966:2).

Pitt-Rivers, on the other hand, sees these informal processes and relationships as an infrastructure forming a part of the larger structure:

[The infrastructure] springs from the network of interpersonal relations within the community and depends upon the memories and cultural traditions of the pueblo rather than on the written word. The [formal structure] owes its existence to authority delegated by a central power . . . the infrastructure is an aspect of structure not a segment of the community . . . the two systems are, at the same time, interdependent and in opposition. They are both part of the same structure. If a tension exists between the two, it is as much a condition of the one as of the other. And what requires to be explained is not only the source of this tension but the ways through which it is resolved (1961:200-201).

Although Pitt-Rivers includes the supernatural powers of women as part of the infrastructure, he does not explicitly refer to those other forms of female power described above. Rather, he means to include those illegal or informal processes by which men evade formal institutions (e.g., food control versus black market)(1961:199-201). However, the paired opposition between male authority and prestige, supported by the law as well as cultural tradition, on the one hand, and female power, springing from other, covert, cultural traditions and interpersonal relationships, on the other, stand in an analogous opposition. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the opposition between male and female power involves not only that between two kinds of power but is inextricably bound up with cultural values and attitudes associated with two opposing categories of individuals: male and female. It is thus at once a more specific and more general kind of opposition than that to which Pitt-Rivers refers.

The model proposed above explains how the tension between the two is resolved. Before returning to it, however, we will examine particular examples of this tension and its resolution in a French peasant village.

G.F.⁴

Well you know, that's life. The big ones always get everything and the little ones get left to starve. There's nothing we can do about it—it's just too bad for us.

—Jacques Fresnay, retired farmer

The husband is always the *chef d'exploitation* . . . Well, that's what the law says. What really happens is another matter, but you won't find that registered in the *Codes Civils*.

—Marc Hantelle, ex-mayor, retired farmer

Vous savez, les hommes, c'est une drôle de race.

—Lucie Fraipont, farmer's widow, barber, cobbler

G.F., for centuries a peasant village, lies in the fertile rolling hills of the northeastern corner of France. Its population of 350, clustered in a nucleated settlement surrounded by outlying fields, has remained constant since the turn of the century. Village land once supported virtually all of its approximately eighty-five households, but in the last twenty years, tiny family farms have become unviable as a means of support. Increasing numbers of men have left farming and sought employment in nearby steel mills; until now only eleven households still farm. G.F. remains, however, a peasant village behaviorally and ideologically. Those who have left farming have rented their land to kin or neighbors and retain close ties with their tenants, lending a hand during busy seasons. Those who have remained in farming own no more land than those who have not and rent from up to seven or eight proprietors. The farm households are the most admired by the villagers, and farmers monopolize positions of prestige in the community. Factory families have retained, insofar as possible, behavior patterns and values of farm families. Farmers and factory workers alike feel alienated from, and hostile to, urban life. In spite of the daily commute to work in the city, factory workers do not identify themselves with urban workers and do not participate in workers' organizations or activities (cf. Lamarche 1969:165; Barbichon and Delbos 1973:18).

Farmers raise a variety of grains; about one-third of the farm land is used for wheat, all of which is sold. The rest of the land is devoted to hay and grains for animal feed and pasturage. Milk has always been the largest source of income in the village, and today about 90 percent of each farm's income comes from the sale of milk and beef. Most farms have about fifteen to twenty milk cows. Each household, farm and factory alike, raises its own garden vegetables and fruits, as well as poultry and rabbits.

The village may be conceptualized as two spheres, one fitting inside, and affecting the size and shape, of the other. The domestic sphere is solid and strong, the core of village life. The village sphere surrounds it and is at once more visible and more fragile. This complex, in turn, fits into the much larger sphere of the outside world. Women are in control of the domestic sphere and leave concerns and activities beyond that to the men. As directress of the household, the woman is responsible for growing, buying, and preparing food for her family, carrying out day-to-day duties of child rearing, maintaining relationships with kin beyond the nuclear family, keeping household (and farm) records, and preparing the family budget. Farm wives have as their major responsibility the feeding and care, including milking, of farm animals, which are housed in the barn adjoining the kitchen of each house. No married women are employed outside of the home.

Women form informal groups, based on kin and neighborhood ties. Because of the lines along which they are formed, these groups include several generations of individuals, belonging to both farm and factory households. The village is divided into about fifteen *quartiers*, invisible to an outsider, but clearly defined in the minds of the villagers. Before running water was introduced in the village (about twelve years ago), there was a public *fontaine* in each *quartier*, where women gathered to do laundry and collected water for their households. Each morning, the village baker's wife drives a van through the village, stopping in each *quartier* so that neighbor women come out together to buy their bread and chat with each other. The baker's wife acts as a gossip broker, spreading news

between *quartiers*. In the evening, those women who do not have their own cows gather in the barn of the nearest woman who does to buy a day's supply of milk. Women rarely visit each others' homes or leave their own *quartiers*, except for visits between close kinswomen. Nevertheless, in the course of their daily work, they keep in close contact with each other. In addition, all village houses are built very close to the street and to each other, with the kitchen in the front. Women keep one eye on the window during as much of the day as possible, so that little happens in the *quartier* without their knowledge.

In contrast to the women, whose activities and interests are centered almost exclusively on the household and *quartier*, men work in outlying fields or in factories outside of the village, thus spending most of their time away from home. They gather in the café or the forge in the center of the village, choosing their closest associates from the village at large and forming informal groups of age mates of the same occupation. Their groups are therefore more homogeneous than those of the women. While women's conversations and interests are largely restricted to discussions of local activities and individuals, men's conversations often include discussions of topics which extend beyond the village: regional and national politics and industrial pollution, for example. These discussions, it should be noted, almost invariably end with a shrug of the shoulders and "*C'est la vie, quoi. Qu'est-ce que vous voulez?*" They are interested in the outside world, but regard it with extreme resignation and fatalism.

There are several male voluntary associations in the village: hunting and fishing societies, a local chapter of FNSEA (farmers' union), as well as the village governing body, the Municipal Council. However, most of the members of the hunting and fishing societies live outside the village; only a few village men belong. All village farmers belong to the farmers' union, and, as a farmers' organization, it is quite prestigious. But its members say privately that the local chapter is powerless, and the regional and national organizations are controlled by "capitalist farmers" who take little interest in the problems of peasant farmers. Only one man, a native of a neighboring village who married into G.F., seems to take an active interest in these organizations. He holds office in all three and says he is sincerely interested in public service. He is not very well liked by villagers, who say he is not *serieux* enough. He was defeated when he ran for a seat on the Municipal Council. This organization, too, is highly prestigious. Great excitement surrounds elections, which amount to a public judgment of the prestige of the candidates. Soon after elections, however, interest dwindles. The organizer of the opposition party in 1971, one of the fiercest contenders in that election, said privately, eleven months later, "Oh, bah, the Municipal Council—we've only met twice since elections—once to elect the mayor and once to give the priest a *vin d'honneur* when he got transferred. The mayor makes all the decisions without consulting anyone and anyway, there really aren't any important decisions to make."

The café is regularly frequented only on Sunday afternoons when a group of old men come to play cards. Other men stop by occasionally during the week, but it is often deserted, and some men never go at all.

Although men belong in the village sphere, the domestic orientation of the village, both economically and socially, means that their family ties are strong. His activities in the village sphere determine to some extent a man's own, and therefore his family's, prestige. But he is above all, head of his family. His, ideally, is the final word at home. He spends relatively little time there, leaving its running in the hands of his wife. He remains a somewhat distant authority figure.

Men and women play complementary roles in G.F. The family is, to the villagers, an

inviolable unit, both ideologically and economically. Divorce is not tolerated, and unmarried individuals are rare and treated with ambivalence. Prestige accrues to families, not individuals. All important life events (baptisms, marriages, funerals) are marked by elaborate banquets *en famille*.

Especially in the farm families, but in factory families as well, men and women perform different but absolutely essential economic functions. The farms and commercial enterprises in the village are family enterprises, requiring the full-time commitment of both husband and wife, as well as the children. On the farms, there is some infraction of the sexual division of labor: men help their wives in the barns during the slack seasons, and women help in the fields during the busy haying and harvest seasons. Men dislike intensely working in the barns, considering it the most demeaning of the work they do. At the same time, women complain bitterly about working in the fields. It is evident that a man in the barn is helping his wife and is under her orders, while a woman in the fields is helping her husband and is under his orders. No men help their wives with other domestic work or gardening (except occasionally with spring hoeing), and women never help with ploughing or planting field crops. Factory wives have, at most, only a vague notion of the kind of work their husbands do.

Because inheritance is bilateral, both members of the partnership bring property to the family. For this reason, intravillage marriages have been common and still comprise about 33 percent of all village marriages. Land remains in the name of its heir, even after marriage. Because non-farmers prefer to rent land to close kin, a farmer may gain access to more land through his wife's, as well as his own, kin ties.

While men and women are obviously interdependent, women seem to maintain themselves alone more successfully than men do. The remarriage rate of widows is far lower than that for widowers, according to the village archives of the last seventy years. Furthermore, there are about twenty widows in the village (compared to sixty married couples) as opposed to only seven or eight widowers. While this is partly linked to demographic factors, what is of interest here are contrasting attitudes toward widowhood on the part of men and women. Widowers complain about living alone and actively seek remarriage, while widows do not. Villagers' attitudes toward men and women who live alone also contrast considerably. One young village woman was widowed when her farmer husband died in an accident. Much admired by other villagers, she has continued to run the farm, although she has had to rent out some of the fields and depends on help from other village farmers. On the other hand, there is one middle-aged bachelor who runs his farm with the help of his parents. Villagers disapprove of his single state, saying that although he has built up a prosperous farm, they do not see how he will be able to continue farming when his parents become too old to help. When a factory worker with several adolescent children was widowed, his mother, herself a widow, went to live with him to take care of his household. She much regretted having to give up her own life and received the sympathy of all of the villagers, who nevertheless recognized that she had no choice but to carry out her responsibility. A woman expects and is expected to be able to manage on her own; the same is not true for a man.

In their relationships with men, women seem to be subdued and respectful. If, by exceptional circumstances, a woman finds herself in the male domain—in the mayor's office on election day, for instance—she is visibly ill-at-ease, retiring, and ignored by the men. If a group of men are in her home, she silently serves them food or drink and then retires to a corner to watch and listen. She is unlikely to leave the room, but she is equally unlikely to participate. Even when her own husband is the only man present, she is likely to be quiet. My conversations with women, even those who were very outspoken

and opinionated, usually ended when the husband came home. He was allowed to take over the conversation and always seemed to assume that I would be more interested in talking to him.⁵ This outward deference does not, however, mean that women are necessarily subordinated. Male and female spheres are very clearly defined, and a member of one sex group simply does not belong in the domain of the other. Furthermore, the male sphere includes dealings with the outside world, which, of course, includes visiting outsiders.

One gets a very different impression of women when they are observed in a room of men, on one hand, and with a group of women, on the other. The woman in the corner is a sharp observer; what she sees is later reported to other women amidst clicking tongues, shaking heads, or gales of laughter. Women are not particularly awestruck by men, despite the impression they give when publicly in their presence. If a man happens on a group of women in the street or in a barn, they invariably disperse, fall silent, or change their conversation, losing their feminine ambiance. Thus, while women are non-participating observers of the male world, men have even less access to the female world. Women's behavior, and men's tendency to "take over" in public, prevent the latter from having access to the same amount of information women have. It should be noted that women are not overwhelmingly interested in male attention or concerns. In gatherings of the extended family or other mixed groups, the sexes segregate themselves, and there is little interchange between men and women. Each prefers, and feels more comfortable in, the company of his or her own sex group.

Women in G.F. wield considerable power both in the household and in the community at large. To illustrate, we will look at several specific examples of power processes, first in the home and then in the village.

As has been noted, women are responsible for making and keeping the family budget. This includes responsibility for allocating pocket money to their husbands. Mme. Gabin, a factory wife, does not give her husband any part of his paycheck, so he has to do odd jobs around the village to earn money for cigarettes and an occasional trip to the café. While most wives are more generous, they find nothing particularly remarkable about this behavior. Men grumble privately about their wives' refusal to give them more money, but this is recognized as their prerogative. Furthermore, they are reluctant to complain too loudly, as that would imply that they were not actually fully in authority at home. "My wife," said one farmer, "is my minister of finance." "I'm the one who gives out the money in my house," he added, "although sometimes I need to ask for some of it back again." Ideally, major budget decisions are made mutually, with the husband as final authority. When there is a disagreement, however, it is the wife who usually wins, although the final decision is attributed to a change of heart in the husband. For instance, Mme. François wanted a motorbike for fetching the cows from pasture. She argued at length with her husband, who insisted that they could not afford one for at least a year. Two weeks later, she had a motorbike. When I asked her about it, she might very well have said, "I control the budget and I wanted it, so too bad for him, I went out and bought it." But rather, she winked and said simply, "Pierre changed his mind."

Women are also responsible for child rearing. Farm children of both sexes work with their mothers, until boys become their fathers' assistants at adolescence. Factory wives have less contact with their children, since little or no work is demanded of them at home. In both farm and factory households, children are considered important, but the households do not revolve around them, and mothers are not notably child-oriented.⁶ It is mothers, however, who help children with their school lessons and are responsible for day-to-day discipline and guidance. Fathers act as disciplinarians and are quite distant

from their children. Until recently, for instance, girl children addressed their fathers by the formal *vous*. A mother's control over her children is enhanced by the father's authoritarian position. The threat of appealing to the rather frightening authority figure in the person of "papa" is generally enough to keep the children in line when her own screams and slaps fail.

Major decisions about the children's future are made in a similar way to budget decisions. In marriage arrangements, the father ideally has the final word. A young man who wants to marry a girl must first gain permission to visit her home (*entrer*). This is arranged through an intermediary, usually an individual related by marriage or blood to both the prospective bride and groom. Permission to *entre* is granted by the girl's father and is tantamount to permission to marry.

Claire Nicolas (22), a farmer's daughter, met a young man from outside the village whom she wanted to marry. Her father was unenthusiastic about the match, but her mother was adamantly opposed, saying that she still needed Claire's help at home. When Claire finally ran away to get married, her mother refused to go to the wedding or to let other members of the family go. Later, when Claire came home to visit, her mother threw her out of the house. According to village women, Claire's father would have accepted the marriage were it not for his wife's unreasonable (in their minds) opposition. This was corroborated by remarks made to me by M. and Mme. Nicolas.

Christine Motelet (20), another farmer's daughter, had as a suitor a young farmer from a neighboring village. Her father was pleased with the match and granted permission to *entre* after only a few months. Christine, however, met a factory worker, Gilbert, whom she liked better. Her father was violently opposed to this match, but her mother was not. After five months, he granted Gilbert permission to *entre*. For her wedding, Christine and her mother wanted to hold two banquets but were not sure if "papa" would consent. M. Motelet explained to me innumerable times that the old custom of holding two or three wedding banquets was very nice, but simply too expensive nowadays; Christine would only have one. Shortly before the wedding, he began explaining that, after all, "you don't marry off your daughter every day . . . we might as well do it right." Two banquets were held. No reference was made to the opinion of Christine and her mother in the course of any of my discussions of the subject with M. Motelet, and although they were usually present, they remained silent.

I do not know exactly what means are used to cajole, bully, or convince men to accept their wives' opinions in these kinds of decision-making processes. Clearly, a wife is in control of her household; it is her sphere of activity and interest, and she is selective in the information she shares with her husband about it. His dependence on her to run the household, manage financial arrangements, and, in the case of farmers and *commerçants*, contribute to the family enterprise, gives her an important power base from which to operate.

Because activities in the village sphere are closely linked to the household unit, women's power extends beyond the domestic, although, as noted above, the village sphere is the male domain. For example, the Municipal Council is made up of nine village men, elected every six years. Immediately following elections, they choose a mayor from among themselves. Because the French government is extremely centralized, the Municipal Council is actually very constrained in its decision-making powers. Furthermore, all of its decisions must be approved by the prefect of the *département*, who also has the power to suspend or dissolve municipal councils. A seat on the council, however, is a mark of high prestige. It is thus significant that five of the nine seats are held by farmers and at least three others by men in agriculture-related occupations (i.e., milk

inspector, farm equipment salesman). Two parties are always represented in the elections, but they represent village factions and have no ties with national parties. Their names (in 1971: *d'Action Sociale*, and *de Renouveau et d'Entente Communale*) only very vaguely suggest party policy. No platforms are offered, and what is at issue is the prestige of the candidates. As noted above, prestige accrues to families, not to individuals, so that it is to a woman's advantage that her husband be on the council. Because of its lack of actual important decision-making powers, it is not especially in her interest to be on the council herself.

Within *a priori* limits as to who may be seriously considered for a seat (i.e., no factory workers or *commerçants*), women play a powerful role in influencing the composition of the council. A farm wife may alternatively push her husband into the political arena, or, by demanding more help from him at home and refusing to help him in his work, prevent him from entering the race. Furthermore, because of the well-organized communications network between women, they are able to influence public opinion and so affect the outcome of the elections. The wife of a contender in the 1971 elections said:

Women fight with each other to get their husbands on the Municipal Council . . . there are aunts and cousins who don't even speak to each other because, you see, it's always between two groups, so they spread ugly rumors and all that so that people will vote for one or the other group.

Even women whose husbands are not running actively participate in the "fight." Just before the 1971 elections, the wife of a factory worker spread a rumor that one of the contenders had molested her daughter. This man, a farmer, a member of an old village family, and part of the slate put up by the group who won most of the council seats, was defeated.

Each party unofficially decides before the elections who its choice for mayor will be. The position of mayor involves the highest prestige, but its incumbent must spend a great deal of time attending to administrative details in the mayor's office, at meetings in the canton capital, and so on. There seems to be some difficulty in finding someone who is willing to take on the job. Women undoubtedly have a great deal of influence here. Although most wives are willing or eager for their husbands to get a seat on the council, they are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary for their husbands to spend so much time away from the family enterprise. The wife of one contender for a council seat said in an interview that she threatened to divorce her husband if he put himself up for mayor. Later, she said that she had only been joking, but that "really, he's already hardly ever at home and if he were mayor, we wouldn't have any family life left. I couldn't stand that" (Karnooouh and Arlaud 1973). Mme. Rouyer, the wife of the former mayor, says that her husband was too busy during the eighteen years he held office. "It was no good." But she is quick to point out (privately) that she does not control her husband the way other village wives control theirs. She is not a native of the village. The wife of the present mayor, Mme. Lajoux, complains bitterly about the fact that he spends so much time at his mayoral duties. She is German and, like Mme. Rouyer, came to the village only after her marriage. Neither woman, particularly Mme. Lajoux, is fully integrated into women's groups and so, presumably, lack support from other women and the wherewithal effectively to "control" their husbands' activities.

Ten years ago, six of the village farmers formed a machine cooperative (CUMA), as peasants have been urged by the national government to do since the end of World War II. They have been unusually successful (unlike most of the CUMAs in France), in that they not only own a considerable amount of farm machinery in common, but they also work together during the busy seasons, working each man's fields in turn.⁷ They complain

constantly about the organization. "It's too democratic. We need a *chef*, but no one is willing to let anyone else be *chef* or to take the responsibility himself, so it takes forever to decide anything, or else we just don't decide." They give two compelling reasons for not abandoning the effort: the cost of farm machinery is prohibitive for ordinary farmers, and they do not want their wives to have to work in the fields anymore. A single farmer needs extra help in the fields during the busy seasons. The wives of non-CUMA farmers, and all wives in pre-CUMA days, were expected to provide that help. But this has never, strictly speaking, been women's work. Women are very outspoken in considering it the most *pénible* of the work they had (or have) to do; it is dirty, exhausting, and demeaning, and they resent doing it, although before CUMA, it had to be done. It might be more accurate, then, to phrase the second reason for CUMA's success as the wives' *refusal* to work in the fields anymore. In fact, CUMA wives speak very warmly of CUMA, never criticizing it. It is clear that they encourage (at the least) their husbands to make it continue to work.⁸

As a final example of some of the ways in which women influence the shape of the male village sphere, we may consider their part in the move from farm to factory. This trend may be explained globally by the economic situation in France, but this is hardly a sufficient explanation for an individual decision to give up farming. Many factors are involved, but the wife's input is clearly of great importance. Because the success of a farm depends to a great extent on her willingness to make extensive work contributions, as well as on her careful financial management, if she is not fully committed to making the farm a success, it can only fail. She thus has sufficient power to make her husband give up farming. In so doing, she assures her family of a steady, well-regulated income, accompanied by some fringe benefits. A factory income is, on the average, lower than that of farmers, but it is more dependable. More important, whether her husband is a farmer or a worker, he must work. She, on the other hand, by pushing her husband to the factory, relieves herself of a great deal of work, especially the daily drudgery of animal care. On the other hand, leaving farming entails a considerable drop in her family's prestige in the community. This is a dilemma which each woman—and family—resolves for herself in her own circumstances. Virtually all of the young girls in the village say that they will absolutely refuse to marry farmers. Few of the young men in the village are so disparaging of farming, but farmer's sons are ambivalent about their future occupations. They cite the reputed difficulty of finding a girl who is willing to be a farmer's wife as their only reason for indecision. Thus women, within limits set by external economic conditions, have a great deal of influence on occupation patterns quite exterior to their domestic spheres.

female forms of power and the myth of male dominance

From the existing data, we can draw several pertinent generalizations about peasant societies. Sex roles tend to be clearly defined and to a large extent non-overlapping. For instance, Margery Wolf refers to a "woman's subculture" in Taiwan:

Some areas in the subculture of women . . . mesh perfectly into the main culture of the society. The two cultures are not symbiotic because they are not sufficiently independent of one another, but neither do they share identical goals or necessarily use the same means to reach the goals they do share (1972:41).

Virtually everywhere, it is observed that male and female peasants perform very different, but equally essential and mutually interdependent tasks (cf. Bernot and Blancard

1953:209-212; Fél and Hofer 1969:13-22; Friedl 1967:104; Pitt-Rivers 1960:85-87; Riegelhaupt 1967:116-117). In Ireland, for example,

the work of his wife is complementary to his, and in its own sphere of as great importance to the livelihood and organization of the family unit. While he may demand and expect that she fulfill her household duties, so may she demand and expect that he fulfill his in the management and working of the farm . . . the dichotomy of tasks assigned to the sexes in the economy of the farm family is more even than the reciprocal duties of husband and wife, father and mother (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:47).

In general, peasant women center their activities in the domestic sphere, which usually includes gardening, animal care, and frequent interaction with relatively heterogeneous groups of female kin and/or neighbors. Men, on the other hand, tend to form groups which are relatively more homogeneous and loosely knit, to do work which is located outside of the domestic sphere, and to participate relatively more often in community, rather than domestic-based activities. The domestic unit, however, is the central one in peasant society; it is the major production, consumption, and social unit. The work men do outside of its physical bounds is their contribution to the family enterprise. His extra-household activities often both determine and result from his family's prestige and position in the community.

The work done by women in the domestic sphere is, by its nature, far more regulated and controllable than that done by men. It varies little from day to day, in contrast to work in the fields, with its seasonal variations and its vulnerability to such vagaries as the weather and plant disease. Even the factory work of men in G.F. is regulated by forces no more controllable by workers than is the weather controllable by farmers. This theme of impotency outside the domestic sphere and control within extends to the realm of political and social activities. Because of the peasant community's position in the larger society and internal attitudes, peasants have little control over extra-household political and economic decisions. Government policy on farm prices, taxes, social security, and the like are far out of the control of peasants themselves. It has been reported that peasants are reluctant to flaunt power in their communities or to accept leadership from other villagers. In G.F., as has been pointed out, village councillors *qua* councillors have little power. From their positions in the household, women have significant input into the only aspect of village government over which villagers have any control: who will be on the council. Because they remain in the domestic sphere, they have little influence on the actual decisions made by the council, but these are, in effect, trivial. This situation is analogous to the Portuguese one reported by Riegelhaupt, wherein men, not women, have access to formal channels of extra-household political power. These channels, however, prove, on close inspection, to be virtually ineffective. It is women, because of the division of labor and men's inability to organize themselves, who have access to the only effective channels of political power available to villagers. At the same time, the domestic unit itself is apt to be more easily controllable than the village sphere, because the actors involved in, and impinging upon, the former are, for the most part, present and known, and the various influences and pressures at work are relatively more visible and understandable than those at work in the village sphere and beyond.

Because the peasant domestic unit is of such fundamental importance, a woman who centers her activities here is in a better position if widowed than is a man who loses his wife. This is reflected in the remarriage patterns of widows and widowers in G.F. An incomplete family obviously is always beset by problems in a situation where husbands and wives are so dependent on each other (Arensberg and Kimball 1968:66-67). But by staying in the domestic sphere, peasant women may assure themselves of greater security

and independence in the face of the death of a spouse than a man can. Female solidarity in neighborhood and kin groups also provide women with relatively more emotional security, as well as power, than men have. As Blaxter (1971:122-123) points out, the women in these groups are not consistently charitable to each other. However, because each is securely in control of her own domestic sphere and not attempting to deal with what is beyond her reach in the world outside, her relationships with other women are likely to be less colored with the distrust, competition, and caution which characterize relationships between men. This may also be an important reason why "you don't find women in this [beaten] condition, no matter how hard their lives have been" (Blythe 1969:105).

Given these observations, it seems that Fox's assumption—because women tend to be limited to domestic level decision-making, they universally play a secondary role (1969:31-32)—is a false one. Clearly, domestic decision-making is of primary importance in peasant societies, because there are few extra-domestic decisions of importance to community life which are within the power of peasants to make. Friedl affirms this when she maintains that in a domestic-oriented community, the fact that men monopolize high prestige extra-household positions is insignificant. The power attribution in the private, not the public domain, is of primary importance in this cultural context (1967:97).

The fact remains, however, that high prestige *does* accrue to these male activities, whether they are actually "important" or not. No matter who ultimately makes household decisions, male peasants are usually considered to be the heads of households, to hold authority positions there, and overtly to make important decisions. In G.F., as undoubtedly elsewhere, women play an important part in shaping their husbands' positions in the community, but it is *his* position which determines family prestige. I do not believe, therefore, that the male impact can be so summarily dismissed.

It will be remarked that I have failed to provide a definition of "power," preferring to delineate what I mean by the concept through the use of examples. Just as attempts at precise definition are futile, it is impossible in this context to specify exactly how much power any one category of persons wields relative to another. What we see operating in peasant society is a kind of dialectic, a delicately balanced opposition of several kinds of power and authority: overt and covert, formal and informal, direct and indirect. For this reason, I would suggest that the model of one sex group in a "primary" or dominant role and the other in a "secondary" one is specious and ignores the complexity of the situation.

This point of view still leaves unanswered several crucial questions: why are peasant men, on one level of analysis, characterized by felt lack of power, and on another, shown to be deferred to, to monopolize positions of authority and prestige, and assumed to be "dominant"? If women actually do wield a significant amount of power, why do they behave as if men monopolize power? Why do Greek women, for instance, who wield power in the "significant" private sector, take such care that it "is hidden behind the façade of male dominance" (Friedl 1967:106)? Why do women in G.F. insist that "Pierre changed his mind" when Pierre is only, as usual, doing what his wife told him to do? Why do both men and women in so many peasant societies publicly grant such high prestige to the relatively insignificant extra-household activities of men?

These apparent anomalies are resolved by the explanatory model outlined above: male dominance exists in peasant society as a "myth," acting to maintain a non-hierarchical power balance between the categories, male and female. Inversely, although we have shown that males are not actually dominant, both sex groups act publicly as if they were because each may maintain its own power in this way. It is obvious that the kinds of

overt power and authority exercised by men depend on the perpetuation of the “myth.” Women’s power also stems from it in a variety of ways. Because extra-household activities are given highest prestige, it is to men’s advantage to claim the village sphere as their own. It is to the peasant woman’s advantage as well, because it leaves her in control of the domestic sphere, which is the central unit of the community and the only sphere over which villagers may have much control. Here we have a power/prestige balance between the two spheres. It remains balanced as long as prestige is accorded to activities and actors in one, while actual power emanates from activities in the other.

Within the domestic sphere, it is also to the woman’s advantage that her husband be a figure of authority. It has already been pointed out how this may enhance her control over children (see page 741). Although she is overtly responsible for some kinds of household decisions (for example, in G.F. as elsewhere, those related to gardening and milking), it is to her advantage to act as if her husband had the final word in those decisions requiring a joint agreement. In this way, she protects herself from mistakes or omissions: “We don’t have such and such because my husband wouldn’t buy it.” More important, if he is allowed to be the overt decision maker, his status as “head of the family” is preserved, and with it, his—and his family’s—image in the community. Here, the exchange, probably unconscious, is between power and image: “I’ll give you credit for making the decisions here, if you’ll make the ones I tell you to.”

It is the nature of the “myth” of male dominance that neither men nor women will admit publicly that it is only a myth. Both men and women must publicly insist that men actually do the most important activities and are fully in charge. It should therefore be clear that the mythical nature of male dominance is never made explicit by its perpetuators. In spite of their public deference and respect toward men, however, women are clearly aware that men’s political and social activities are relatively trivial and their economic activities no more important than those of women. They are also aware that they have significant power in shaping their husbands’ activities and that it is most often themselves who make decisions in the home. There is some evidence in G.F. that women are fully cognizant of the situation: condescending winks and smiles passed when no men are looking, Mme. Rouyer’s confidence: “Most of the wives here really control their husbands, even if it doesn’t look like it.” More oblique, “humorous” comments are sometimes made between women: “*Vous savez, les hommes, c’est une drôle de race,*” “Men! They think they’re being such a big help and all they do is make a mess . . . Oh, they’re no good for anything!”

At the same time, men act publicly as if they believed the “myth.” They take the village government and other village level activities with considerable seriousness and take public implication of their lack of control over their wives and families as a slur on their manliness. For instance, in G.F., the purchaser (a farmer from a neighboring village) at a land auction which village farmers tried unsuccessfully to prevent incurred a great deal of hostility and verbal abuse from villagers. One farmer later remarked with great disgust, “He probably bought that land because his wife told him not to come home without it, and he was more afraid of her than of us.”

On the other hand, their well-documented fatalism and felt lack of power, in G.F. their constant shoulder shrugging and “*C’est la vie, quoi. Qu’est-ce que vous voulez?*,” their private belittling of village government and farmers’ organizations⁹ and resigned complaints of overbearing wives indicate that they believe no more than their wives do that males actually dominate over much of anything.

It is significant that these remarks, indicating that neither men nor women believe males to be dominant, are expressed only privately, and well out of earshot of members

of the opposite sex. It indicates that both sexes believe that it is important to act and speak publicly in mixed groups as if males were dominant, because they assume that the other group believes it to be true. By operating in this manner, they succeed in staving off confrontation, so that the whole system of rewards and perceived advantages is not threatened. Even if men are themselves not so sure how important male activities are, they continue to act as if they are the most important because women expect them to. If men are aware that women may have more effective power than they, it is acceptable to them as long as there is no public challenge, so they may continue to think that women do not realize it. If they are given credit for running things, that is good enough. If women openly admitted that they did not believe men to be dominant, the whole delicately balanced system would break down. Women, on the other hand, buy their power by granting men authority and respect, assuming that if they allow men to believe that male dominance actually exists, men will not notice that women are actually wielding a considerable amount of power. Male behavior would lead women to believe that they have succeeded in their ruse. From this point of view, too, the system would collapse if women were forced to recognize publicly that men were not actually being taken in either.

the myth of male dominance and beyond

I have predicted that male dominance will operate in this way only within the context of the system specified above (page 729). It will be noted that all of its required elements are not to be found in modern industrialized societies. In the process of modernization, at least one component inevitably changes, thereby transforming the entire system and, with it, the relationship between female power and male dominance as I have described it. Conversely, as long as the system remains unchanged, I would maintain, the society in question is not a modern, industrialized one. Thus, for example, G.F., which is characterized by all of the elements above, cannot be considered fully modernized. As I have shown elsewhere, using altogether different criteria (and for a different purpose), it may, in fact, still be considered behaviorally and ideologically a peasant village (Rogers 1972:19-27). It is, however, a modernizing village, to the extent that there are indications that it will undergo modernizing transformation behaviorally and ideologically, in addition to the economic transformation already well underway. These indications, together with some observations and literature on fully industrialized society, indicate that change may occur in any of several mutually exclusive ways, as various of the components of the structure are changed in different ways.

The impact of modernization and industrialization on the role of women, much less on the power relationship between women and men, is a large and complicated subject, far beyond the bounds of this paper. However, I will suggest very schematically some of the ways in which the relationship between female power and male dominance may change as the outlined system is transformed with changes in various of its components. I suggest these possible permutations as testable hypotheses, requiring further extensive field research and a far more thorough study of the literature than is possible here. My purpose is threefold. First, in response to the body of modernization literature touched upon above, it has already been shown that traditional women, at least in peasant societies, are by no means uniformly the downtrodden, subordinated creatures they have been assumed to be. This first assumption having been challenged, the second one—that traditional women are emancipated in the process of modernization—is left in an awkward position. If women do not actually play such a subordinated role in the traditional setting, what

happens when they become modernized? I will suggest ways of approaching this question. Secondly, because many contemporary peasant societies are in the process of “modernizing,” losing their “traditional” peasant characteristics and becoming more fully integrated into the larger world (e.g., Mendras 1967), a complete analysis should include some recognition of current trends of change. For the same reason, peasant societies represent a useful laboratory for the study of change, offering the possibility of adding a dynamic dimension to the explanatory models developed to analyze them. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is clear that there are societies, including our own, where male dominance is not “mythical.” It is important, therefore, to begin to delimit the kinds of societies in which the model can be expected to operate in the way I have outlined. The addition of this dynamic dimension illustrates how the model fits into a more global picture, providing the beginnings of a framework for the study of sex group power relationships of all kinds.

Emerson (1962) and Dahl (1957) have suggested that power is based ultimately on dependency relationships. Taking this as a focal point, it will be seen that, as long as the first five elements of the system are present, they will balance each other out, and, as long as males and females are approximately equally dependent on each other, a balance of the kind described in the model is maintained. If the first three elements (those relating to female power) remain unchanged, while either of the second two are negated, men will become relatively more dependent upon women, women’s power will increase, and the “myth” of male dominance will no longer be expressed. On the other hand, the reverse may happen: the domestic-centeredness of the community and the importance of informal face-to-face interactions may be greatly reduced or negated, while males retain greater access to formal rights and participate in activities viewed as important. Particularly if they remain in the domestic sphere, but even if they do not, women will then become relatively more dependent on men, lose at least some of their power, and male dominance will become a reality. In these two cases, I have assumed that the amount of interdependence between men and women remains approximately the same; only its distribution changes. A third possibility is the total negation of this element: women and men are no longer greatly interdependent. In this case the whole system flies apart, all elements are negated, and no significant power differential will exist between sex groups. Power, or types of power, will not be distributed on the basis of sex, so that the concept of a power balance between the two sex groups becomes meaningless. These are but three of the possible transformations of the system, chosen as among the most probable. Assuming for simplicity’s sake that only two possibilities exist for each component, negation or lack of change, there are thirty-six theoretically possible changes in the system as all possible combinations of components change. If it is assumed that components may be altered in more subtle ways and that each element will change if any one of the others changes, the number of theoretical possibilities is very large. I will, however, leave more thorough and subtle analysis for some future time and sketch how the three possibilities above might occur, bearing in mind that these are simplified and preliminary formulations.

If the first three components remain unchanged (i.e., women remain in the domestic sphere, the society remains domestic-oriented and most interactions perceived as important occur in the context of a face-to-face community), while men perform activities perceived as unimportant, it may be assumed that these are so viewed because they are performed outside of the community and do not involve community relationships. In Europe, as industrialization has forced, at increasing rates over the past several centuries, the abandonment of tiny family farms, it has overwhelmingly been men

who have sought work elsewhere. In the nineteenth century, as at present, rural women sought work off the farms, but, for the most part, returned to the domestic sphere after marriage. With the demise of the "domestic mode of production," a conflict arises between the notions that women should manage the home and family and that they should make work contributions to the family income. This conflict has most often been resolved in favor of the former (Scott and Tilly 1975). If a man is working as a wage employee of someone else, it is very difficult for him to continue to support the fiction that he is "son maitre"; his boss is not likely to be publicly deferential to him. Furthermore, because he is now likely to be working outside the community, he may no longer be perceived as a full community member. He can neither publicly control his family's standing in an arena in which he no longer fully belongs, nor can he maintain even fictive control over community activities. In this case, it may be expected that a woman, left in the domestic sphere, will become the family's primary contact with the community, so that her husband is largely dependent on her socially (i.e., to maintain his membership in the community). Women may continue to influence family standing in the community through informal means and may also take over village-level activities, so that their activities determine family prestige overtly as well. In this instance, a woman no longer needs to protect her husband's image in the community by behaving as if he were in control at home. She therefore usurps such formerly male prerogatives as overt household decision-making (cf. Bernot and Blancard 1953:205-209). Despite the fact that women no longer contribute significantly to the family income, this decision-making power may include control over financial matters. In at least several areas of Europe where women traditionally handled the family budget, they continued to do so during the early stages of modernization through control of the spending of their husbands' paychecks (Stearns 1972:110; Leplay 1878:110-111; Chombart de Lauwe, et al. 1963:158). The "myth" of male dominance is thus abandoned, both in the household and in the community, and women are overtly in actual control.

There is some evidence from G.F. that this kind of transformation will occur. There are at least two families in the village in which the wife is overtly in control of the domestic unit, and the husband appears most often as the silent observer in the corner. In both cases, the husband (unlike other village men) is a factory worker, married into the village from outside the region, and owns no land. Both are completely dependent on their wives (natives of the village) for the minimal community membership they have. Many villagers say that they do not know these men, although one came to the village directly after World War II, and the other only a few years later, and both of their wives are well known. (This disavowal indicates not only their lack of community membership, but villagers' disapproval of them. This, and the low prestige of these families, stems in part from their wives' overt control in the household, which indicates that the "myth" of male dominance still prevails in the village as a whole.) These two families are exceptional in G.F., it is true, but the significant point is that when men are deprived of community membership and are not considered to do anything "important," their wives seem to take over at home overtly.

Villagers say that the reason factory workers cannot be considered for seats on the Municipal Council is that "they don't spend that much time in the village." There are still enough male non-factory workers to continue to monopolize the council seats, but in a neighboring village, which has fewer farmers than G.F., a slate of women won the majority of seats in the 1971 elections. It may well be asked if the value attached to such positions remains the same when the system is transformed in this way, or if these formerly prestigious male village-level positions lose prestige when women begin to take

them over. It is, as yet, too early to tell what will happen in G.F.'s neighboring village. If prestige was formerly given largely in exchange for women's actual power, there will be no reason for these positions to continue to carry prestige if they are held by women who also overtly wield real power. On the other hand, if the community is to retain its former significance, these positions too may remain unchanged in meaning.¹⁰

This structural situation can continue to exist, of course, only as long as the community and community relationships are considered by both men and women to retain their traditional significance. The opposite possibility, developing perhaps as an outgrowth of the one described above, appears far more pervasive. It has been treated in depth elsewhere and may be only briefly sketched here to indicate its relationship to the model and processes under discussion.

In this case, the second and third components are negated, as the locus of social identity shifts outside of the family and community (e.g., to the workplace). Such a shift may result either from an actual move away from the village to an urban center or from the transformation of a village from an inner-centered peasant community to an outer-centered "bedroom" community. In either instance, the domestic sphere, having already lost its economic importance, loses much of its social importance as well, thus becoming altogether different in meaning from the peasant domestic unit. The man's extra-domestic activities and contacts come to be perceived as most crucial, both for family maintenance and, especially, for establishing the family's place in the larger referent group. There is some evidence that in urban working class families, social contacts of all kinds are made through the husband (Fougeyrolles 1951:92). The women in these studies are reported to have very little contact with each other (Chombart de Lauwe, et al. 1963:87) in sharp contrast to the female solidarity reported in many peasant villages.

Furthermore, males' superior formal and legal rights become a key factor in the power distribution between male and female. Their legal designation as "head of the family," access to higher paying jobs, preferential recruitment to positions and activities beyond the domestic, and so on, take on vastly increased significance and place women in a dependent position by making it more difficult for women than for men to operate in the new social context. Whereas in the context of the peasant community, extra-domestic relationships were characteristically "multidimensional" and largely based on family reputation, when primary social arenas are shifted beyond the face-to-face community, more key relationships are formalized and "unidimensional" (Bailey 1971:6). In the former case, they were highly subject to informal manipulation, while in the latter, formally defined rights and duties become paramount. The woman, still running the household, and with fewer legal and other formal rights than her husband, has considerably less access to crucial arenas and becomes heavily dependent upon him both socially and economically. His activities are the "important" ones, but they are centered outside the community, where she has no means of influencing them. Her informal power is much less effective in the larger world, and her inferior formal rights become an accurate reflection of her actual position. Her commitment to the domestic sphere now means that, rather than being in a position of significant influence over the world beyond her home, she is largely isolated from any world but her home. Even here, working class husbands appear to wield far more actual control than peasant men do (Fougeyrolles 1951:100), suggesting that increased dependence of women on men for extra-domestic social status and context enhances the latter's actual power in the household. In England, for example, although working class men turned their paychecks over to their wives during the early stages of industrialization, after about 1914 "wives began to receive a household allowance from their husbands who kept the rest and determined how it was

spent" (Scott and Tilly 1975:63-64; cf. Stearns 1972:116). Recent studies of the English working class indicate that wives rarely even know exactly what their husband's incomes are (Young and Willmott 1962:26).

In this way, women's sources of power are attenuated or removed, and the bases of male dominance are enhanced. Women become cut off, both from each other, and, except through individual men, from arenas of social interaction outside the now greatly devalued domestic sphere. The meshing, and balanced, mutual interdependence of the male and female worlds, therefore, can no longer occur. Rather, both sexes operate in a male-dominated world. While men and women, as categories, remain dependent upon one another, women are relatively more dependent upon men. Male dominance no longer functions as a "myth": men do attain a superior position, and women are relatively powerless.

A third theoretical possibility involves, most likely, the further transformation of either of the systems above, as a way of redressing their imbalance. In this case, members of both sex groups encroach on the domains of the other, insisting on sharing positions of power and prestige. Differences between the formal rights of each group are obliterated. Males and females are no longer constrained, by virtue of their sex, from access to any kind of resources and are not formally or actually defined as complementary categories in most areas of life. They are thus significantly less dependent upon each other as categories of individuals. The system collapses, differences between male and female forms of power are virtually obliterated, so that power distribution and sexual differentiation are no longer related, rendering the whole question of the relationship between male and female power meaningless.

There are indications in industrialized European and American societies that at least some of the differences between male and female roles are perceived as unjust, and efforts are being made to equalize formal rights and access to resources. Increasing interest in historical and cross-cultural variations in sex roles suggests decreasing acceptance of the inherent or "natural" quality of any one set of culturally defined roles. This skepticism, within a system which has culturally defined sex roles as a basic organizational principle, may well mark the beginning of the collapse of that system.

conclusion

In this paper, I have dealt with the problem of how power is distributed between females and males in peasant societies. Beginning with the assumption that males are virtually universally dominant, I showed that this generalization is based on a body of definitions and models which deal with only a limited and male-oriented range of phenomena and is clearly contradicted by a body of empirical evidence of real power wielded by peasant women. Given the fact that peasant women actually wield considerable amounts of power, several anomalies remain: both men and women behave publicly as if males were dominant, while at the same time male peasants seem to be characterized by a felt lack of power. I suggested a model to explain these apparent contradictions, in which male dominance is seen to operate as a myth, while a balance is actually maintained between the informal power of women and the overt power wielded by men. Furthermore, the power of both depends on the persistence of the myth, which itself is maintained by a degree of ignorance on the part of both groups as to how the system actually operates.

I have limited my discussion to contemporary peasant societies, especially European ones. The proposed model suggests a relationship between felt lack of power and forms of

female power, as described in earlier literature. It also implies that much of the literature on peasant modernization rests on false assumptions regarding the role of women.

This model, however, raises questions applicable to a far wider range of societies. While it offers an explanation of the persistence of the myth of male dominance ("conditional causes"), it does not explain its origin ("precipitating causes"). It does not explain why this particular balance is reached: why it is men who wield formal power, and why women wield informal power. It seems possible that this kind of balance has deep historical roots, at least among peasants, but the question must be raised as to whether it is not in fact a transformation of a still different arrangement. If it is, a logically earlier form might explain why power is distributed the way it is. I have suggested that the most probable or stable transformation achieved in the process of modernization is one in which men actually become dominant. Why is it that men always seem to play a dominant role, if not actually, then at least mythically? Exploration, in terms of the proposed model, of historical as well as non-peasant and non-European ethnographic data, might provide answers to these questions.

In this paper, then, I have suggested a new set of problems and a new way of viewing old ones, thus raising far more questions than I presume to answer. The most important point to be made is that it is only when we stop looking at male roles and forms of power as the norm and begin to look at female arrangements as equally valid and significant, though perhaps different in form, that we can see how male and female roles are intertwined and so begin to understand how human societies operate.

notes

¹ This paper is a much revised version of one first written in 1972, which was developed into its present form a year later for a master's paper (Northwestern University). Although I take full responsibility for its contents, I am greatly indebted to Dr. Niels Braroe (Brown University) and Dr. Joan Scott (University of North Carolina) for their encouragement and help in developing the ideas here presented. I also thank the participants in the conference on "Women's Roles in the Pre-Industrial and Modern Family in Europe" (Ann Arbor, 1974) for their critical reading and discussion of a version of this paper.

² This does not necessarily imply that neither group is in any way autonomous. Elsewhere (Rogers n.d.a), I argue that in peasant society, the two sex groups are both behaviorally and "ideologically" differentiated, each subscribing to a relatively autonomous cognitive system. I further suggest that this double differentiation has several implications; because each sex group operates within a different system, it is logically unlikely that they will be arranged hierarchically. Also, because each sex is perceived as fundamentally different (far beyond their biological differences), members of one sex group are non-interchangeable with those of the other. Because each group performs essential functions in all areas of peasant life, they are highly dependent upon each other. It is this functional interdependence and the "myth" of male dominance (as it fits into the male and female cognitive systems) which keeps the two sex-linked systems from flying apart.

³ This point, a crucial one here, is made by Nelson in her study of Middle Eastern women (1974). She points out that anthropologists have tended to impose indiscriminately the urbanized Western notion that the social world of women is private, "described as domestic, narrow, and restricted," as opposed to the male social world, which is public, "political, broad and expansive" (1974:553). Her findings, like mine, indicate that the domestic is not necessarily "narrow and restricted" and that the political, broad, and expansive influence and power of the domestic sphere cannot be dismissed *a priori* without the risk of introducing serious distortions into the analysis of power processes or of male and female status. In other words, the meaning of the domestic sphere is cross-culturally variable. It might also be pointed out that women's relationship to the domestic is variable as well; in certain cultural contexts, as, for instance, in some West African societies, it is inappropriate to assume that the female social world is closely or exclusively associated with the domestic (Rogers n.d.b:87). This does not alter the fact, of course, that there are indeed societies in which women are associated with a private, domestic, narrow and restricted social world; the point is that this cannot be assumed to be the case cross-culturally.

⁴ All proper names used in this section are pseudonyms. The data on "G.F." were collected during my six-month field study in the village (March-September 1971), and supplemented by short return

trips in 1972 and 1973. I would like to express my gratitude to M. Claude Karnoouh (CNRS, Nanterre) for initial introductions and continuing support, as well as many insightful discussions of the village. I would also like to thank Dr. Henri Mendras, director of the Groupe de Recherches Sociologiques (Nanterre), for making available to me data on the village collected earlier by members of his research team.

⁵This behavior pattern explains to a large extent the view we have been given by male anthropologists of the "androcentrism" of peasant societies (e.g., Michaelson and Goldschmidt 1971), which obscures or negates the female power reported by female anthropologists. A male anthropologist obviously has no opportunity to see or talk to women except when they are in the presence of at least one man. He is thus continually used as part of the set for the acting out of the "myth" of male dominance and is given little reason to believe that it might be a "myth." It might be noted that I was introduced to G.F. by a male anthropologist whose earlier work on informal political strategies in the village had led him to suspect that women might play a crucial role, but, as a male, he had been unable to obtain the data to confirm or elaborate this idea.

⁶In response to Fox and others (see page 729 and Hammond and Jablow 1973:3), who suggest that women are inevitably constrained by their childbearing functions, it should be pointed out that mechanical and chemical means of birth control are not widely used in G.F. Nevertheless, as was the case before such contraceptives were available at all, family size is small; two or three children is the norm (despite the French government's unflagging efforts to encourage a greater rate of population growth). "All you have to do," women say, "is pay attention."

A mother with a very small child leaves it with older kin or neighbors when she is too busy to watch it herself, and older children are expected to fend largely for themselves. Childbearing and rearing thus impinge relatively little on a woman's life. She has traditionally identified herself primarily as a contributor to the family enterprise, where childbearing and rearing constitute only a small part of her responsibilities.

⁷It is interesting to note, in light of the data on intra-village relationships above (pages 730-732), that both CUMA members and older retired farmers point out that CUMA's success is indeed extraordinary: "In the old days, people would never cooperate like that. They'd have rather starved . . . They were *jaloux*—always afraid someone would get ahead." The attitudes of non-CUMA farmers toward the organization suggest that this sentiment still persists (cf. Blaxter 1971:130).

⁸At the same time, at least some non-CUMA wives are fond of smugly pointing out that *their* family farms have retained their independence: "On est plus tranquille."

⁹The land auction in G.F. (1971) is yet another example of peasant men trying to organize themselves on the village level, taking it all very seriously publicly, but privately confiding that they would never succeed. When it was all over, they blamed their failure on the man who had organized the attempt, as well as on their position in the world, before shrugging their shoulders again with, "Just as I expected. *C'est la vie*." As far as I know, no women, with the possible exception of the purchaser's wife, were in any way involved in this episode. Village women were only mildly interested (in contrast to the intense excitement of the men), and none of them came to the land auction.

¹⁰It should not be assumed that any position will necessarily lose prestige simply because it is taken over by women. Silver (1973:837) points out, for example, that the high status of *professeur de lycée* in France has not been devaluated by "overfeminizing," despite the fact that over half of these positions are now held by women.

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