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**MODERNIZATION AND THE CHANGING LIFE CHANCES OF  
WOMEN IN LOW-INCOME RURAL FAMILIES**

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The opinions expressed in this study are the exclusive responsibility  
of the author.



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/PREFACE

第1页

1. 2019年12月1日，甲公司购入乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为10元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司将其划分为交易性金融资产。

2. 2019年12月31日，乙公司股票收盘价格为12元。甲公司公允价值变动损益增加200万元。

3. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

4. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

5. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

6. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

7. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

8. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

9. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

10. 2020年1月15日，甲公司出售乙公司股票100万股，每股价格为15元，另支付相关费用10万元。甲公司取得处置净收益140万元。

## PREFACE

During the week of October 23 through 30, 1978, a group of fifteen rural women and men from seven Latin American countries met in México City to discuss the changing livelihood possibilities of low-income families in their own regions over the past few years, the role which agricultural modernization seemed to play in those changes, the effect of change upon the role and status of women in particular, and possible steps which might be taken to ensure the conditions of an adequate livelihood to a greater number of rural women and their families in the future. Some of the members of the group were representatives of land reform settlements or cooperatives; some were officers of national or regional associations of rural women affiliated with political parties; some were agricultural extensionists, home economists, or rural schoolteachers; one was a bilingual development worker in an indigenous community. In addition, the group contained an expert in literacy training by radio, and a sociologist who had spent a number of years working with rural women. The countries they represented included El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Mexico.

The occasion for their interchange of ideas was a workshop entitled "The Impact of Agricultural Modernization on the Participation of Rural Women", organized jointly by three United Nations agencies (the Economic Commission for Latin America, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund) and the Mexican government (through its Institute for Integrated Family Development). The avowed purpose of the workshop was for the participants to learn from each other; they were not assembled to present papers or to receive instruction, but to compare their experiences in a relatively informal setting, and through comparison to broaden their own understanding of the situations in which they were immersed.

From the beginning, it was felt by all concerned that the best way to approach the discussion was to avoid any attempt at generalization by countries. Each country was likely to contain a number of very different rural social settings, implying differing /livelihood options

livelihood options for rural families, and thereby for rural women. To talk of "the position of rural women in Mexico", for example, would in all likelihood obscure more than it would clarify. Which rural women? Those whose families farm non-irrigated ejido land in the high mountain? The women of tropical colonization zones, recently opened to agriculture? Women in indigenous communities? Female agricultural laborers migrating over a large part of the republic in the course of a year? It seemed important to define the frame of reference well.

During the first round table discussion of the workshop, each participant therefore talked at length about the characteristics of the region in which he or she lived; to be taken as background for all comments in the following days. The range of socioeconomic settings was extremely broad: There were rather isolated, mountainous regions, where Indian families practiced subsistence corn agriculture, supplemented by seasonal migration to work in lowland coffee harvests; regions of much more modern corn agriculture on level, temperate lands, financed by credit and sold in a national market; areas where family coffee farms predominated; plantation settings, where permanent workers tended the extensive holdings of international corporations; land reform settings, in which highly capital-intensive rice cultivation was carried out collectively within a broader capitalist economic framework; collective sugar cane production within the socialist society of Cuba. The physical and social constraints on family livelihood strategies obviously varied markedly from place to place.

Keeping these differences of setting in mind, participants organized their discussion during consequent meetings around the following general themes: 1) the changing position of women within low-income rural families (their contribution to the physical subsistence of the family through non-remunerated labor; their ability to care adequately for children; their status, in their own estimation and that of others); 2) changing opportunities for participation by rural women in the labor market (the conditions

/for obtaining

for obtaining remunerated jobs; hours and wages, compared with those of men; the necessity for migration; the impact of remunerated work on family life; the use to which the income of rural women is put); and 3) trends in participation by rural women in community government, political parties, unions, and cooperatives. Then they met in general session to compare impressions and draw up a set of conclusions.

The result of this interchange of ideas was not an exhaustive analysis of the problem at hand. It could not be; the situations were too numerous, the time too short, the particular areas of knowledge of the participants too disparate. The noteworthy contribution of the workshop was rather the opportunity which it gave all participants to engage in a collective effort to understand the complexities of women's position in changing rural society. A number of facile assumptions and slogans fell by the wayside in the course of the week, to be replaced less often by better answers than by the determination to think about better answers.

The pages which follow are one attempt to comply with that obligation. They are the product of a review of anthropological and sociological literature containing information on the role and status of rural women in Latin America (most particularly in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean), as well as of the impressions gained by one observer during the October workshop. They are intended to serve as a framework for future discussion, offering interpretations and hypotheses with no pretension of definitive status. The changing position of rural women is a vast and terribly understudied topic which, as much in the academic literature as in practical meetings like the workshop, should be approached with extraordinary flexibility and open-mindedness.

The author wishes to thank the participants in and organizers of the workshop, and most particularly its director, Lilibiana De Riz,  
/for their

for their assistance in obtaining material and their kindness throughout the meetings... She also benefitted greatly from discussions with Lourdes Arizpe, who lent her library as well as her time. The contributions of other students of rural women will be reflected in the footnotes.

/I. INTRODUCTION



I. INTRODUCTION: SOME PROTOTYPES OF RURAL

MODERNIZATION.

During the past few decades, the physical and social parameters of livelihood for rural families in a number of regions of Latin America have been fundamentally modified by the changing nature of contact with a rapidly expanding urban, industrial society. With the communications revolution of the post-war period, for example, local power structures controlled by traditional large landowners or by relatively independent peasant communities have lost force before the incursions of nationally-based political parties and bureaucracies. Locally manufactured products have been replaced by mass produced goods introduced over newly constructed roads. Intra- and inter-regional patterns of exchange have been profoundly affected by the widened influence of national and international markets. And traditional agricultural practices have been superseded, where changing social organization and access to financing have allowed, by more costly and potentially productive forms of cultivation, utilizing industrially manufactured inputs. It hardly need be added that such profound alterations in the physical and social conditions of daily life have implied equally far-reaching changes in prevailing definitions of right conduct, and of a satisfying life.

This progressive collapse of the barriers which have long stood between rural people and urban society has been termed "modernization" by some, "incorporation" by others. When used with a minimum of precision, neither term should imply a value judgement concerning the desirability of integration or the unilinearity of the process. To be caught up in a process of modernization or incorporation is not necessarily good or bad,

/nor is

nor is it necessarily irreversible. It is simply a social fact, deserving analysis.<sup>1/</sup>

Within most regions of rural Latin America, the rapid modernization characteristic of post-war years has represented a drastic acceleration of more gradual, long-term trends toward the expansion and consolidation of capitalism - not only as an economic, but also as a sociocultural system. The basic tenet of this system, "profoundly alien to many of the areas which it/has/engulfed in its spread ... is that land, labor, and wealth are commodities, that is, goods produced not for use, but for sale".<sup>2/</sup> In order to free these factors of production from traditional constraints upon their use, and to combine them in such a way that profit can be made by individuals, the social organization of peasant life has undergone a number of fundamental changes, often drawn out over long periods of time. The economic and social control which the landgroup, or community, exercised for centuries over the use of local resources (farmland, pasture, woods, and water) has, for example, been weakened with the advance of capitalism.

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1/ In practice, sociological literature is plagued with value judgements concerning modernization. The term has so often been associated with "progress" that many students of social change have preferred to discard it and to employ the less value-laden word "incorporation". See Andrew Pearse, *The Latin American Peasant*, London: Frank Cass, 1975, for an excellent, detailed discussion of the process of incorporation.

2/ Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, New York: Harper and Row, 1969, p. 277.

/Communal usufruct

Communal usufruct has given way to private property, and in the process communal responsibility for the livelihood of all members has fallen into disuse. The task of guaranteeing livelihood then passes squarely into the hands of isolated family units and depends entirely on their capacity to claim private rights to the means of production, or to sell their labor. At the same time, traditional moral strictures against the individual accumulation of wealth lose importance, as do the social mechanisms which once lent them practical force: the periodic redistribution of wealth through community-wide celebration disappears as the influence of the wider capitalist system advances. Family income not needed for subsistence begins to be invested, not redistributed, and to produce more wealth. When this process evolves into the systematic utilization of the labor of some to create profits for others, social classes appear within once relatively homogeneous communities and the stage is set for a qualitatively different kind of social interaction in the countryside.

Such a sequence of change, here described schematically, has been typical of regions in which peasant communities have until recently been relatively successful in preventing the alienation of local resources to outsiders.<sup>3/</sup> A great many communities, however, fall into a different category, characterized by the early loss of control over resources to large landlords who established themselves as semi-feudal, semi-capitalist intermediaries between the community and the outside world. In order to gain access to land, woods, and pasture, peasant families were obliged over centuries to contribute produce, labor and/or money to the landlord,

3/ These communities have generally been located in remote regions, on lands of marginal quality. Despite their success in maintaining control over local resources, they have often had to provide periodic payments, in the form of taxes or tithes, to representatives of the wider society.

/and thereby,

and thereby to provide him with wealth which, when sold to the outside world, produced profits. The internal relations between landlord and peasants, in the meantime, retained elements of feudal obligation: in return for the various contributions to his household made by the peasantry, the landlord provided the latter with small subsistence plots or a regular ration of grain; and in addition, he was ideally required to provide goods and services in times of crisis, thereby mitigating the absolute insecurity which would otherwise have followed upon the forced separation of peasant communities from their land.

In situations such as these, characteristic of a significant part of the Latin American countryside, the peculiar historical experience of peasant communities deprived them of the kind of internal cohesion visible in others not subject to the landlord's will. Relations with the landlord were always superimposed on communal relation, making communal responsibility for the livelihood of all members a physical and social impossibility. The effect of capitalist modernization in this setting has therefore been less noticeably the destruction of the community (largely destroyed before the initiation of the modernizing drive), and more noticeably the elimination of the semi-feudal position of the landlord, pressed by contact with an expanding capitalist system into the mold of modern agricultural entrepreneur or simply replaced by others of a more enterprising spirit. Whatever his fate, the tenuous element of protection which traditionally accompanied the landlord's role has tended to disappear along with his function as intermediary between peasant and capitalist economies. Former peasant tenants then become small private farmers (when the estate is broken up and sold), members of a clearly delineated rural proletariat, or dedicate themselves to non-agricultural occupations. In their new situation, they stand equally divested of institutional protection (whether from the traditional peasant community or from the landlord) with which to confront the impersonal forces of a wider market economy.

A third type of setting within which one sees the impact of the expansion of capitalism upon the livelihood of rural Latin Americans is, most obviously, that of the plantation. Along certain sections of the Central and South American coast, in Northern Mexico and in the Caribbean, export agriculture has long been carried on as a commercial venture in which the process of combining land, labor, and capital to produce a profit is relatively unhindered by traditional restraints of any kind. Where some marginal obligations of a subsistence nature have existed, such as the provision of small plots of land to certain kinds of plantation workers, those arrangements have been swept aside when the cost accounting of the plantation has indicated that they interfered with profits. The typical plantation has functioned as a corporation, often foreign owned, employing a small contingent of permanent skilled workers and a large number of temporary field hands at the height of the harvest season. The livelihood of the first group, in particular, has depended upon its ability to organize and negotiate, as in the case of workers in any large enterprise. The livelihood of the second has continued to be tied to some extent to access to land or work off the plantation, in slack periods: organization has been difficult for the unskilled in a situation of excess labor supply. Both groups have had to adapt over the years to profound changes in working conditions, following upon the constant technological innovations encouraged by private owners of plantations.

Finally, a fourth group of rural cultivators can be found in Latin America who have historically belonged neither to an indigenous corporate community, nor to an hacienda setting, nor to a plantation. They are the families of small-farming settlements, working individual plots of privately-held land and interacting to a limited extent with the surrounding capitalist system through the occasional sale of farm products or labor, and the occasional purchase of manufactured goods. As modernization advances, it  
/grows difficult

grows difficult to distinguish this group clearly from the more incorporated elements of indigenous communities; the more fortunate members of hacienda communities granted their own plot of land after the breakup of the estate, or some of the temporary labor force of the plantation, dependent primarily upon the product of their own private plots for subsistence. All come to form a mass of smallholding families increasingly drawn out of local livelihood settings into the wider markets, broader political networks, and distinctive competitive culture of the surrounding capitalist society.

In the following pages, these four prototypical situations of capitalist modernization will form the background for the major part of the discussion, for the obvious reason that they are representative of patterns of change over a very large part of the Latin American countryside. Nevertheless, they leave uncovered a fifth kind of rural modernization, undertaken during the past twenty years by the socialist government of Cuba.

This experiment will be discussed separately, in Chapter IV.

## /II. MODERNIZATION.

## II. MODERNIZATION AND THE WOMEN OF LOW-INCOME RURAL

### FAMILIES: GENERAL TRENDS

As long-standing barriers between rural families and the wider society have been weakened or eliminated, and those families more directly integrated into national economic, political, and cultural systems, what has been the fate of women? Have they fared better or worse than they did in earlier settings? Have they fared better or worse than men? These are questions which do not lend themselves to general answers. They require not only an initial attempt at theoretical clarification, but also a considerable amount of field work. Drawing upon existing anthropological accounts of field situations in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, as well as the theoretical discussions which have recently been tabled by those with an interest in the position of women, it may perhaps be possible to suggest some ways in which the changing livelihood possibilities of rural women can be approached, and to offer tentative conclusions concerning the fate of different groups of rural women in particular Latin American settings.

Women in "closed" peasant communities. Let us begin by looking at anthropological evidence concerning the position of women in the more remote peasant communities of Mesoamerica before the onset of the postwar modernizing drive. These communities, surviving for centuries on the fringes of national economic and political life, maintained strong ethnic barriers to assimilation. Their inhabitants spoke indigenous languages, maintained distinctive forms of dress, practiced indigenous religions. The economic base of each landgroup was plow or slash-and-burn maize agriculture, supplemented by some hunting and gathering, the care of domestic animals, and the domestic manufacture of clothing, household utensils, and most work implements. Division of labor among families was minimal: each household tended to produce the same subsistence goods and to obtain the few remaining necessities from travelling /peddlers or

peddlers or members of neighboring communities visited on periodic market days. No large landowner had direct claims on family production at the time anthropological field work was done, although in some cases hacendados had once exercised such claims.

In order to meet the basic requirements of daily life, the labor of the entire family was required. The division of labor by age and sex within the family varied somewhat from place to place and from time to time, according to the natural resources at the disposal of each community, the availability of male and female workers, and the age structure of dependent family members. Women might well take part in planting maize, beans, or squash; they might assist with weeding; and they often helped with the harvest. If the family were recently founded (and therefore without older sons), cut off from assistance from other male kin, or headed by a woman, female agricultural labor of course assumed much greater importance. But in general, when the number of men sufficed for carrying out essential agricultural tasks, women's role in the direct process of cultivation was secondary. The primary domain of female members of peasant households, assigned by custom, was food processing, the care of children and domestic animals, and domestic industry.<sup>4/</sup>

Whether the fulfillment of these customary obligations by women provided them with a status equal to that of men, within the family and within the community, has been the subject of debate among anthropological observers of the period. Since the criteria for judging status varied from one observer to another, and were in any event the product of experience not comparable with that of local people themselves, the question was, and must always remain, impossible to answer. What does seem clear is that leaving aside the comparability of male and female status, women enjoyed high status,

4/ Robert Redfield and Sol Tax, "General Characteristics of Present Day Mesoamerican Indian Society", in Tax (ed.), *Heritage of Conquest*, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1968, p. 33. Original edition, 1952.



for the basic reason that their contribution to the household was of vital importance to survival. No man could reap the benefits of his corn harvest without a woman to process his corn, just as no woman could have corn to process without the assistance of a man. This was a situation which left little room for deprecating the efforts of either partner.

The labor of women was critical not only at the level of maintaining the household, but also in the broader enterprise of fulfilling family obligations toward the community. Civil and religious life was structured around a series of celebrations in which families or groups of families alternated in offering food, drink, and entertainment to the rest. Through participation in this fiesta cycle, both men and women acquired standing; and men, specifically, passed up a ladder of public office composed of increasingly prestigious civil and religious posts. A man who had not married and formed a household could not take part in community affairs on an equal plane with married peers, for it was economically impossible for him to provide the goods and services which civic participation required without the assistance of a wife and children. Therefore, although women did not formally hold public office, those offices were in fact "frequently conceived of as being held by a married couple".<sup>5/</sup>

The fact that indigenous communities tended to be relatively "closed" to the wider world in the period under discussion strengthened the position of women and made irrelevant a number of elements in their social environment which under different circumstances would have implied inferior status. Before full incorporation into capitalist economy, for example, land tenure among these groups was communal. Land was utilized by individual

5/ Ibid. See also Isabel H. de Pozas, "La posición de la mujer dentro de la estructura social Tzotzil", *Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* (México, UNAM), Vol. V, No. 18, octubre-diciembre, 1959, pp. 565-575.

/families, but

families, but not as private property; no profit was realized from it, nor could it be sold. The only value of family plots was to provide products consumed by the family, distributed by the family to others in return for prestige, or exchanged on a limited scale for subsistence goods. The position of agricultural producer (generally corresponding to the man of the household) was therefore structurally no more advantageous than that of food processor (corresponding to the woman's role). And the role of trader in agricultural goods was in fact quite often delegated to women. In addition, women often played a major role in manufacturing and exchanging such non-agricultural products as pottery and cloth. Therefore it must be concluded that they were at least as favorably situated as men to manage the few points of economic contact which existed between the family and the wider society.

Similarly, the extraordinary importance of the family within "closed" peasant communities, and the undoubted influence of women within family councils, assured the latter considerable decision-making authority in matters affecting their lives even though they did not openly participate in community government. As long as the family served as the basic political unit, and community politics was largely the sum of family decisions, it cannot be supposed that women were effectively excluded from the political process. Their participation took place "in private", not "in public", in congruence with cultural values giving men the predominant role in representing the family in the public sphere. As a number of anthropologists have pointed out, the position of public representative is not necessarily any more personally advantageous than that of private agent, and may under certain circumstances be less so.<sup>6/</sup> It is only with the disintegration of

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6/ See Carol Jopling, "Women's Work: A Mexican Case Study of Low Status as a Tactical Advantage", *Ethnology*, Vol. XIII, No 2, 1974, 187-195; and Beverly Chinas, *The Isthmus Zapotecs: Women's Role in Cultural Context*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973.

the family, and the inclusion of the community within a wider political system in which alliances are formed among individuals, that the exclusion of women from formal access to public office seems to become a serious liability.

The "public" role of the husband, his position as head of the household, was part of a complex of masculine prerogatives the existence of which might lead one to speak of "patriarchy" when discussing the social organization of Mesoamerican Indian communities. The marriages of sons and daughters were, for example, commonly arranged among heads of families; and brides tended to be taken to the household of the groom to serve his family until the birth of a first or second child. Men were served first at household meals and on ceremonial occasions. Especially when they reached a relatively advanced age, men were treated with marked deference by other members of the family. To call this "patriarchy", however, and to lump it indiscriminately together with the kind of extreme male dominance implied by that term when applied to other kinds of social systems, is clearly unwarranted.<sup>7/</sup> The men of relatively isolated indigenous communities, before the intensification of interaction with urban industrial society, quite simply did not have the absolute power of a patriarch.

On closer inspection of the anthropological evidence, for example, one finds that in the spheres of economy and society dominated by women, older women enjoyed the same deference from younger members of the family as older men enjoyed in their own fields. Women played an important role in consultation preceding the arrangement of marriage; in fact, the consolidation of any new kinship bond without the approval of the women involved was virtually impossible.

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<sup>7/</sup> Evelyn Michaelson and Walter Goldschmidt do so in "Female Roles and Male Dominance among Peasants", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. XXVII, No. 4, 1971, pp. 330-352.

Isabel H. de Pozas went so far as to say of the Tzotziles of Chiapas (during the 1940's) that "all important decisions are taken by common accord between husband and wife. If not, they have no value within the community".<sup>8/</sup> And Margarita Gamio de Alba concluded from her survey of data concerning indigenous groups of Guatemala that "officially the husband predominates in the Indian family, but in fact the division of authority between husband and wife is equal.... The exploitation of one sex by another does not fit within the cultural pattern".<sup>9/</sup>

The complex of male behaviour traits commonly known as "machismo"; or the aggressive assertion of masculinity, so common in modern Latin American (and other) settings, was by all accounts absent in the kind of indigenous peasant communities under discussion. Gillin concluded from his work in Guatemala between 1942 and 1948 that the attitude of Indian men toward women and children was markedly different from that of neighboring non-Indian men, who were much more closely integrated into the wider society. For the former, "man and woman are a cooperative partnership in adjustment to the universe. Wives share honors and responsibilities of men in prominent statuses ... Bickering between mates/is/uncommon: /there is/ withdrawal rather than friction in cases of incompatibility ... /The/ use of sex for exploitation is uncharacteristic". For the urban-oriented Ladinos, on the other hand, /The/ man dominates /his/ family, including his wife. Sex /is/ used for the exploitation of others".<sup>10/</sup>

8/ Pozas, op.cit., p. 571.

9/ La mujer indigena de Centroamerica. Mexico City: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1957, p. 33.

10/ John Gillin, The Culture of Security in San Carlos: A Study of a Guatemalan Community of Indians and Ladinos. New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, Publication No 16, Tulane University, 1951, p. 122.

Van Zantwijk noted the same distinction in the Tarascan area of Mexico, as late as the 1960s: "The Ihuatzio woman would not like to be in the position of the beleaguered mestizo /Ladino/ woman, exploited and without any right to voice an opinion on economic matters and, unlike the Tarascan woman, unable to assume that her husband will be faithful to her".<sup>11/</sup>

The point of this discussion on the division of authority within Mesoamerican Indian families not yet exposed to the full force of the modernizing drive is not to paint a Rousseauian picture of absolute harmony. The material conditions of daily life were hard, and the opportunities for anguish no doubt ever-present. The purpose is, however, to establish the existence of a pattern of interpersonal relations, found at one time over large areas of the Latin American countryside, which provided women not only with a vitally important economic role, but also with high status. The next step is then to ask why such a situation could exist, when other communities of non-Indian (or mestizo) peasant families, in some cases living side-by-side with indigenous groups, were not characterized by the same kinds of relations among the sexes.

Women in "open" mestizo communities. Anthropological accounts of family relations within mestizo peasant communities of Mesoamerica often contain references to patriarchy, "machismo", and the degrading treatment of women. These are the situations taken as a basis for (unwarranted) generalization by those who claim that the status of peasant women throughout Latin America has been and is uniformly low. The men of the household in such communities enjoy the dubious honor of holding all the nominal power, yet little of the day-to-day responsibility, within the family. They are generally characterized as cold, authoritarian figures whose

<sup>11/</sup> Rudolph van Zantwijk, Los servidores de los santos. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1974, p. 278.

role it is to provide the material necessities for the family, while leaving all responsibility for household management to their wives. The loving relation of indigenous fathers and children is virtually absent; the affective role is left to women. Excessive drinking and abusive sexual relations (including beatings) not surprisingly form an integral part of this psychosocial complex.<sup>12/</sup>

An extensive analysis of the "social character" of mestizo villages falling in this category was made during the 1960s by Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, in a Mexican community which they chose to call Las Cuevas. On the basis of psychological testing, as well as anthropological field work, the authors concluded that the extremely visible "machismo" of Las Cuevas served to camouflage a "mother-centered" society. It was the women who merited the respect and love of their children, while men were relatively ineffective figures capable of evoking little more than fear. The resulting conflict between a declared patriarchy and an effective matriarchy was extraordinarily destructive psychologically.<sup>13/</sup> What were the structural and cultural reasons:

<sup>12/</sup> See May Diaz, Tonala: Conservatism, Responsibility and Authority in a Mexican Town. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970; Cynthia Nelson, The Waiting Village: Social Change in Rural Mexico. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971; George Foster, Tzintzuntzan: Mexican Peasants in a Changing World. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967; and Lola Romanucci-Ross, Conflict, Violence and Morality in a Mexican Village. Palo Alto: National Press Books, 1973.

On the different functions of drinking in Indian and mestizo communities, see Willian and Claudia Madsen, "The Cultural Structure of Mexican Drinking Behaviour", in Dwight Heath (ed.), Contemporary Cultures and Societies of Latin America, 2nd edition, New York: Random House, 1974, pp. 438-451.

<sup>13/</sup> Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, The Social Character of a Mexican Village. New York: Praeger, 1970.

See also Susan Carol Rogers, "Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance: A Model of Female/Male Interaction in Peasant Society", American Ethnologist, Vol. II, No 4, November, 1975, pp. 587-601.

for this conflict? Let us begin to answer the question by looking at cultural differences between prototypical "closed" indigenous and "open" mestizo communities.

The cultural bases of insecurity in an "open" community. The culture of relatively "closed" indigenous communities provided a set of rules concerning right conduct, and the rewards of right conduct, which changed only very slowly over time. These rules, developed as a defensive response to the constant threat of outside interference, provided a large measure of security, both psychological and social, for members of the community. Every person had a clearly defined role, according to age and sex; and through fulfilling that role, he or she could be certain of contributing not only to personal wellbeing, but also to that of the collectivity. The fact that prestige was allotted on the basis of service to the community (including the distribution of surplus production), as well as advancing age, meant that everyone could look forward to increasing status and that no one would expect ever to suffer physical privation of a degree much worse than that suffered by anyone else. What was lacking in terms of technological control over the environment, a number of anthropologists have noted, was compensated by a very highly developed system of social security.

The culture of mestizo agricultural communities, by definition associated with the behaviour patterns of the wider capitalist culture, contained far fewer elements of psychological and social security. Groups of small cultivators, often disposing of no more adequate physical resources than their indigenous counterparts, faced the problems of survival with much less collective support than the latter. The household continued to function as the basic productive unit of the community but there were fewer institutions surrounding it to cushion the effects of bad luck. At the same time, the values upholding right conduct in family and community affairs tended to be less homogeneous. Both men and

/women therefore

women therefore were less able to resist the constant pressure toward individualism emanating from the wider culture than were members of "closed" Indian communities.

Measuring their socioeconomic situation against the ideal standards of the wider culture, rather than maintaining strong local standards, most members of mestizo peasant communities could only judge themselves to be "poor". They had access to neither the material comforts nor the educational credentials required to obtain prestige within modern urban society, and their political power was absolutely insufficient to exert much pressure for future improvement. They were often, in their own minds, second-class citizens of the contemporary national society, while the inhabitants of "closed" indigenous communities were first-class members of a local landgroup.

This fundamental difference in the self-valuation of different groups within the Latin American peasantry, inseparable from differences in the kind of relationship maintained with the national socioeconomic system, would seem to constitute an important element in explaining the prevalence of "machismo" in mestizo communities and its virtual absence in "closed" indigenous ones. The male head of household in the latter case had a good probability of fulfilling his role satisfactorily, and thus enjoying a respected position in society. He had no need to belittle or humiliate women in order to illustrate his worth (which is not to say, of course, that no individual ever behaved in such a way). The husband in a mestizo family, on the other hand, was more likely to find himself in what La Mond Tullis once called - in another context - a "structural bind": required by his culture to be the public representative of his family, and to defend it well, but destined by existing socioeconomic relationships to fare poorly. It is this kind of vulnerability which Oscar Lewis has shown to contribute

/substantially to



substantially to exploitative sexual behaviour among slum dwellers caught up in the "culture of poverty", as well as among mestizo peasant families in a comparable position.<sup>14/</sup>

Socioeconomic bases of insecurity in an "open" community. The particular elements in the relationship between "open" mestizo, or (increasingly, with the passage of time) modernizing Indian communities, and the national socioeconomic system which jeopardized the capacity of many peasant families to guarantee an adequate livelihood can be briefly discussed, as they were perceived by the families themselves, under two general headings: a growing need for money, and the things which only money could buy; and a relative inability to meet monetary requirements, attendant upon insufficient access to vital physical and social resources.

Within the prototypical "closed" peasant community studied by anthropologists, families were largely self-sufficient; they met their basic needs through exploiting the surrounding natural environment, without a significant use of money. Houses were built of adobe, or palm fronds, or wood, or any other material locally available. The labor required for building was provided by the family itself, assisted by kinsmen and other members of the community repaid at a later date by "returning the favor". Clothes and household articles were elaborated at home, and food was grown on family land with unpaid labor, utilizing inputs only occasionally obtained through contact with a wider market.<sup>15/</sup> Depending upon the abundance of local physical resources and the pressure of population on the land, levels of living in such communities might be relatively high or low; but they were, disasters excepted, largely under the control of the people involved.

<sup>14/</sup> See Oscar Lewis, Pedro Martinez: A Mexican Peasant and His Family. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.

Such vulnerability is, of course, not an exclusive attribute of the position of men in low-income families. Counterparts in middle- and upper-income groups are exposed to the same pressure in a competitive situation.

<sup>15/</sup> Especially iron hoes, machetes, and iron-tipped plows.

All major elements in the process of progressive incorporation into the wider socioeconomic system implied growing monetary expenditures. The communications revolution not only stirred new needs and expectations, but also opened the way for the rapid commercial penetration of even the remotest peasant villages. Clothing and household goods began more often to be bought than made at home; new services, including those provided by doctors, teachers, and government agencies (electric lighting, piped water, etc.) had to be paid for with money. To obtain a monetary income, peasant families had to sell local goods or labor on the wider market, at prices determined by the interplay of forces over which they exercised little if any control. Under these circumstances, the stage was set for exploitation for the value of goods and services provided by rural families to a modern capitalist economy was likely to be consistently greater than the value of goods and services returned.

The conditions of agricultural production in peasant villages were affected by market incorporation in a number of fundamental ways. There was, for example, a long-term tendency toward converting communal lands to private property, just as unpaid cooperative labor gradually gave way to wage labor. In the attempt to obtain a larger monetary income from private plots, commercial crops were sometimes substituted for subsistence crops, and in some cases an attempt was made to finance the use of such manufactured inputs as chemical fertilizers and insecticides. In general, the financial, technical, and educational resources at the disposal of new commercial farmers were not sufficient to realize the potential advantages of these investments, however, and technological innovation, where undertaken, tended to become associated with indebtedness.

The typical small private holding, then, continued to be worked utilizing a relatively primitive technology to produce subsistence crops. But the operation became less self-sustaining with the passage of time. Monetary expenses of production,

/associated with

associated with the new need to pay occasional hired hands or to rent a team of oxen, rather than counting entirely on the cooperative exchange of material and labor, tended to rise; and yields remained stationary or fell, as the pressure of population growth, urban sprawl, and encroaching commercial farming ventures made it impossible to rotate the land in traditional ways. Over large areas of the Latin American countryside, one thus encounters the kind of subsistence agriculture dependent for its very existence on its relation to moneylenders. Money is borrowed in order to cultivate maize, beans, or wheat. At harvest time, a large part of the crop is either delivered directly to the moneylender or sold so that the latter can be repaid in cash. In either case, the necessity to sell implies extremely low prices, as well as inability to retain a sufficient part of the crop to meet family food needs. Within a few months of the harvest, many families then find themselves buying back grains from local intermediaries at prices considerably higher than those obtained at the sale. A similar syndrome accompanies various forms of sharecropping and renting arrangements engaged in by those with no direct access to land.

When this process extracts such a significant amount of the total product of small holdings that their owners can no longer support their families with income from farming alone, it becomes necessary to find sources of non-farm income in order to pay for the planting of small subsistence plots. Wage labor may be obtained on other holdings, or in nearby towns; families, or certain of their members, may migrate to work in the harvest of such commercial crops as coffee, sugar cane, and cotton. The peasantry then becomes a kind of semi-proletariat, engaging in agriculture only in order to produce a small amount of food with which to prevent hunger. Total proletarianization does not occur simply because the wider job market is insufficient to absorb the peasant labor force at wages which would allow it to abandon subsistence cultivation.

/Just as

Just as the removal of barriers protecting local subsistence agriculture from the wider market economy has tended to pauperize family plots, so growing competition from cheap manufactured goods has tended to eliminate cottage industry. The latter has traditionally been not only a source of independent material provisioning for local people, but also a prime element in maintaining family unity. With its decline has gone much of the cooperative function of the family itself.<sup>16/</sup>

In sum, the progressive incorporation of peasant villages into a wider capitalist economy and society has removed the basic elements of livelihood from the effective control of the family and the community, leaving local people to develop new livelihood strategies determined in large part by the exigencies of an urban world.

The socioeconomic determinants of women's opportunities in different regional contexts. Whether rural women fare better or worse than men in this changing situation would seem to depend fundamentally on the ability of both sexes to establish satisfactory ties with the wider socioeconomic system. The

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<sup>16/</sup> One student of Mexican rural life, Francisco Rojas González, called cottage industry the single most important element in maintaining the cohesion of the family. See "La familia rural mexicana y su industria doméstica", Congreso Nacional de Sociología, Estudios Sociológicos, Vol. I, 1950, pp. 69-76. George Foster noted the same function for pottery making in Tzintzuntzan, op. cit.

/interdependence which

interdependence which characterizes relations among family members in a relatively isolated, "closed" setting must logically give way to some form of dependence if one member of the family controls resources more vital to survival than another. This is, however, obviously not a simple matter of individual choice or effort: it is the outcome of the particular function which peasant families assume in the new economic and political order taking shape around them. And this, in turn, very often depends upon the regional context in which they live.

The national and international economies into which peasant communities have been intimately drawn during the past few decades are made up of a variety of different geographical units, each equipped by its particular (historically developed) combination of natural and human resources to play a particular role in the process of production and exchange. To distinguish clearly between one of these socioeconomic regions and another is not always an easy task. Nevertheless, the broad outlines of very different regions can be sketched; and it would seem to be through an analysis of the way in which rural people fit into regionally-defined patterns of division of labor that the socioeconomic determinants of women's opportunities might first be approached.<sup>17/</sup>

The export adjunct context. Let us suggest briefly some of the different situations in which women seem often to find themselves as rural areas not dominated by haciendas are incorporated into a wider market system. The first of these, and perhaps the most frequent, might be characterized (adapting a term coined by Manning

<sup>17/</sup> For a cogent argument in favor of this approach, see Magdalena León de Leal and Carmen Diana Deere, "Estudio de la mujer rural y el desarrollo del capitalismo en el agro colombiano", *América indígena*, Vol. XXXVIII, No 2, abril-junio, 1978, pp. 341-382.

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Nash) as the regional "export adjunct" economy, in which the contribution of peasant families to the wider system is the provision of unskilled agricultural labor for tending and harvesting valuable commercial crops grown on large modern holdings located at some distance from peasant villages. This pattern is as old as the Conquest, but it is taking on new forms with modernization. A key element in the system is the relative lack of technological change within peasant agriculture itself, for reasons having to do not only with lack of capital and knowledge, but also with the very marginal quality of village land. The maintenance of family livelihood depends increasingly on seasonal migration to other rural areas.

In some cases, women are particularly valued as temporary field hands on the large commercial farms drawing forth peasant labor in this kind of system. However, a more common pattern seems to be the primary employment of men, who sometimes migrate in the company of their entire family in order not to lose the benefits of domestic service (and companionship) provided by their wives. Women and children may also be sporadically employed alongside the men, at lower rates and generally with the understanding that their wages will be paid to male heads of households.<sup>18/</sup> Such a situation obviously propitiates the dependence of women on men within the family, not only because it is through the latter that money is obtained, but also because women's work is patently undervalued by the wider society through the payment of lower wages.

<sup>18/</sup> When harvesting is paid by volume, and not by the hour, however, women often earn the same as men. For an excellent discussion of the discriminatory hiring and wage practices of plantations, in regard to women workers, see ILO, Sixth Session of the Committee on Work on Plantations, Report III, Conditions of Work of Women and Young Workers on Plantations, 1970. When mechanization eliminates permanent workers, women are also the first to be fired.

An interesting special case of this kind of livelihood strategy is bracero migration from Mexican villages to agricultural regions of the United States. The geographical boundaries of the "export adjunct" system are very much extended, but the livelihood principle is the same as that noted for the older, and more general, case. A most important element in the income of the peasant family comes to be remittances from an absent male member, this time almost always unaccompanied by his family. Family integration may be threatened by frequent absence of the father, but the women of the family may in fact have more independence than would be the case if they had migrated with their husbands.

Whether women left behind by migrating men play an important part in agricultural work on the family holding depends both on the complementarity of crop cycles in subsistence and commercial farming, and on the physical and social infrastructure of each peasant village. If men can cultivate their own fields at times when temporary labor is not required by commercial farms, women seem to play a lesser role in subsistence agriculture; if labor requirements coincide in the two places, then women more often have to increase their direct participation in agricultural production. In cases where the combined income from agriculture and farm labor is sufficient to permit it, however, the place of absent men may well be taken by paid male labor, thereby transforming the women of the family into managers, rather than laborers.

As the contrast between declining per capita resources within many villages and increasing affluence outside them draws more and more men away from the household during certain parts of the year, it would seem on the whole that the status of women left behind rises considerably.<sup>19/</sup> Aside from the managerial and manual labor contributions they must make to family livelihood, they are also called upon to assume something of the "public" role once reserved for the men. It must

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<sup>19/</sup> Field reports.

be stressed, however, that this probable rise in female status within the family and the community has no necessary relation to rising levels of living or family wellbeing. Male outmigration is generally a sign of increasing poverty, although in individual cases it may of course be associated with the consolidation of a rural middle class.

The rural-urban migration context. A second kind of regional economic setting within which rural men and women must develop strategies for mutual survival is similar to the first in containing a plethora of very small holdings, not suited to agricultural modernization, from which many people must migrate in search of work. The centers of attraction for this labor force are, however, less likely to be commercial farms than urban industrial and commercial centers. Here the demand for female migrants appears to be particularly strong, for positions in domestic service and petty commerce abound. To accept these jobs, women must generally be young and unmarried; children are a burden which few employers wish to shoulder. Therefore one finds a current of migration from countryside to city among adolescent girls, who work a few years before marrying or having children.<sup>20/</sup>

The migration of these girls responds not only to "pull" factors peculiar to an urban environment, but also to particular characteristics of their rural environment which "push" them out of the family. As Kate Young has shown, in areas where women do not engage in agricultural labor, and where modernization has eliminated such traditionally female cottage industries as the making of clothing and the conservation of foods, young girls are not as economically useful at home as their brothers.<sup>21/</sup> At the same time, their adolescence generally coincides with

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<sup>20/</sup> For Mexico as a whole, the proportion of women to men in rural-urban migration is 100:82. The largest number of female migrants are ten to nineteen years old. The largest number of male migrants are aged twenty to twenty-nine. Centro de Estudios Económicos y Demográficos, El Colegio de México, La dinámica de la población, 1970.

<sup>21/</sup> Kate Young, "Economía campesina, unidad doméstica y migración", América Indígena, Vol. XXXVIII, No2, Abril-junio, 1978, pp.279-302.



the most difficult years in the life cycle of their parents, when a large number of dependent children bear upon the limited resources of the household. Therefore a common livelihood strategy in this kind of setting is for families to send their daughters off to the city to engage in domestic service until younger children can relieve them of that obligation by taking their place on a rotating basis or finding other work.<sup>22/</sup>

Young girls are not, however, the only women who go to make a living in a city. Unmarried or abandoned women, as well as widows, frequently migrate from communities which provide them with little sustenance or prestige. And when poverty begins to make deep inroads among many peasant families, even married women may be found travelling to and from urban centers in search of a livelihood. One of the best documented cases of this kind of female migration is that of the "Marías" of Mexico City, studied by Lourdes Arizpe. These women, members of indigenous Mazahua villages only a few hours' bus ride from the Federal District, sell fruit, nuts, and candies on the streetcorners of the city, accompanied by their children. In general, their family holdings provide only one-third the income needed to satisfy the most basic requirements of daily life; and their husbands have little luck finding paid employment anywhere. The "Marías" cannot engage in domestic service, for they must take care of their children. Their resolution of the dilemma is therefore to become itinerant street vendors.<sup>23/</sup>

There can be little doubt that, as in the case of women left behind in villages characterized by a high rate of male outmigration, the status of women who migrate to urban areas in search of work tends to rise. Direct access to monetary income, unmediated by the men of the family, produces a certain independence unlikely in earlier settings. This higher status within the family, however, must be contrasted with the palpably low status granted women migrants within the wider urban world. While they live in the city, rural women (especially in domestic service) may be subject to a series of humiliations never experienced in their own villages.

<sup>22/</sup> For a very interesting application of Chayanov's theory to this phenomenon of adolescent female migration, see Lourdes Arizpe, "Mujeres migrantes y economía campesina: Análisis de una cohorte migratoria a la ciudad de México, 1940-1970," *América Indígena*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, abril-junio, 1978, pp. 303-326.

<sup>23/</sup> Lourdes Arizpe, *Indígenas en la ciudad de México: El caso de las "Marías"*. Mexico City: SEP Setentas, 1975.

The context of modern capitalist agriculture. A third regional setting within which peasant families confront modernization differs from the first two in containing sufficient natural resources to allow the development of commercial agriculture within the peasant sector. In the two previous cases, smallholdings could only become increasingly pauperized, leading to the search for a living outside the boundaries of the community. In the third case, however, the gradual technification and commercialization of relatively good lands replaces subsistence holdings with modern commercial farms. When this occurs within a wider capitalist setting, it constitutes the prototypical instance of socioeconomic differentiation within peasant communities: the increasing profitability of some holdings allows their owners to buy or rent more land, while former subsistence farmers unable to adapt to the new conditions are gradually converted into an agricultural proletariat.

Here the changing role and status of rural women depend quite basically upon the socioeconomic stratum of their families. The wives of commercial farmers (whether on large holdings or family farms) in most cases seem to lose all economic functions within the family, except those of having children and carrying out domestic tasks. Hired hands replace family labor rather rapidly; and in its turn, agricultural machinery replaces hired hands. Wives who do not turn to commerce or some kind of cottage industry (often sewing or embroidery) therefore find themselves entirely dependent upon their husbands for economic support. Women in this situation provide some of the most pathetic examples of dependence in the literature. Although they may work very hard at household tasks, their work is not highly valued for it produces no monetary income. They feel themselves prisoners of fate and exhibit a passive disinterest in the affairs of the community.<sup>24/</sup>

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<sup>24/</sup> For a series of poignant interviews with this kind of woman, see Fernando Cámara, Beverly Chinas, and Sonia Gojman de Millan, "Mexico", in American Association for the Advancement of Science, Village Women: Their Changing Lives and Fertility, Washington: 1977, pp. 111-198.

The wives of agricultural laborers, to a limited extent, may fare psychologically better, for the economic situation of their families tends to be so precarious that any contribution made by women to family income is clearly appreciated. Nevertheless, the sheer physical demands made on these women, as on their husbands, by the environment in which they live is overwhelming. When they can find agricultural work, often during the harvest of labor-intensive crops, they may put in a twenty-hour day, adding eight hours of domestic service for less impoverished women to eight hours of field work and four hours of work within their own homes.<sup>25/</sup> And even so, their combined earnings may not suffice to maintain the family during the rest of the year, when unemployment for both sexes is frequent. In such a situation, the nutrition of women and children is consciously sacrificed to maintain the man of the household in condition to work. As one wife of a day laborer in a commercial area of Mexico explained, "He eats first and gets the most and best, because he has to work. Without his work, we would surely starve".<sup>26/</sup>

Foreign or domestic agroindustries may enter this kind of setting, establishing various kinds of food processing operations which in practice seem to provide more employment for women than for men. The potential role of such rural industries in raising the status of women and improving the level of living of rural families in general cannot be doubted: in experiments

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<sup>25/</sup> Kate Young, "The Participation of Women in the Peasant Economy", manuscript.

<sup>26/</sup> Camara, Chinas, and Gojman de Millan, op.cit., p. 166. For an excellent treatment of this problem among the agave workers of Northeastern Brazil, see Daniel Gross and Barbara Underwood, "Technological Change and Caloric Costs: Sisal Agriculture in Northeastern Brazil", American Anthropologist, Vol. LXXIII, N° 3, June, 1971, pp.725-740.

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such as that of the People's Cooperatives of Southern Jalisco (Mexico), for example, a network of small industries did much to alleviate problems of unemployment among peasant women.<sup>27/</sup> In fact, however, the kinds of food processing and packaging plants in which most rural women work in Latin America tend to take advantage of the relatively weak bargaining position of their employees, requiring long hours of work for low wages and providing only the most rudimentary equipment with which to carry out sometimes hazardous tasks.<sup>28/</sup> As in the case of domestic service, this source of employment for rural women is largely closed to those with children.

The preceding brief survey of the changing relationship of low-income rural families to the wider socioeconomic system, in different regional contexts, suggests, then, that in general both women and men are increasingly drawn out of the domestic productive unit in order to provide a mobile, unskilled or semi-skilled labor reserve for commercial agriculture, industry, and domestic service. In some instances, most particularly commercial agriculture and industry, men are more frequently hired than women; in others, such as domestic service and small industries (food processing and sewing are cases in point) the demand for female workers may put women at an advantage over men. The status of women, in their families and in their communities, tends to rise when they are left behind to head their families during the absence of husbands forced to migrate in search of work; as well as when women obtain jobs which contribute substantially to the scarce monetary income of the family. Their status declines, on the other hand, when they lose productive

<sup>27/</sup> This case was discussed in detail at the CEPAL-FAO-UNICEF-DIF workshop. It has also been treated in Sergio Alcántara Ferrer, "The People's Collective Industries of Jalisco: A Case Study of Rural Industrialization in Mexico," Industrialization and Rural Development, Vienna: United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 1978, pp. 49-69.

<sup>28/</sup> An interesting investigation of conditions in the strawberry packing plants of central Mexico can be found in Ernest Feder, El imperialismo fresa, Mexico: Editorial Campesina, 1977.

roles within the family (often eliminated by the unequal competition between cottage industry and urban manufactures) and become entirely dependent upon the income of a resident male head of household. Both men and women of low-income rural families suffer the humiliation of low esteem bestowed upon them by the wider society, as they move from a relatively autonomous system of locally-defined status to the broader system determined by urban values.

Cultural elements in the adaptive strategies of individuals and families. The way in which women and men adapt to the changing requirements of livelihood within a wider capitalist society is determined not only by the structural characteristics of the regional economy within which they find themselves, but also by elements of their culture which predispose them to adopt certain livelihood strategies before others. In particular, the customary role of the man of the household as its "public" representative, and the concomitant identification of women with domesticity —neither of which necessarily implied low status for women within a relatively "closed" traditional setting, as noted above— have entered into the formation of new patterns of interaction, between the family and the wider world as well as within the family, in ways which have often been prejudicial to women.

There is nothing intrinsically belittling about domesticity. In a society based upon the domestic unit, not only for affect but also for production, responsibility for the smooth functioning of the home is an honor. Within a capitalist setting, however, production is increasingly separated from the domestic unit and is valued only in terms of money, not in terms of simple utility for subsistence. The work of both men and women in the home thus comes to be considered of secondary importance, and members of the family who devote themselves entirely to unremunerated domestic activities lose social recognition from the wider society for their efforts.

/Because the

Because the men of peasant families in Latin America have traditionally served as a buffer between the household and the outside world, it is they who have more readily been drawn out of the domestic unit to work for a monetary income --structural demand for their services permitting. Although the majority have quite clearly received little satisfaction in this role, they have been exposed to the all-pervasive myth that men who earn money are superior to women who do not, and they have been provided with a certain knowledge of the wider world which makes it more possible for them than for women left at home to achieve limited upward mobility. "Acculturation", as many anthropological observers have noted,<sup>29/</sup> becomes an economic resource, allowing some men to establish political and commercial ties with others who may be useful in making money. This process is reinforced by the inherent male bias of the wider society, which assumes that men, not women, should be the primary local agents of modernization. Therefore even though in certain settings unmarried or childless women may eventually be drawn into the wider labor market on an equal, or even greater, scale than men (as is the case of areas surrounding large cities, requiring domestic service), it is generally among men that one finds the few local examples of economic success.<sup>30/</sup>

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<sup>29/</sup> See Susan Bourque and Kay Warren, "Campesinas and Comeneras: Subordination in the Sierra", Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. XXXVIII, N° 4, November, 1976, pp. 781-788; and Susan Carol Rogers, "Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance: A Model of Female/Male Interaction in Peasant Society", American Ethnologist, Vol. II, N° 4, November, 1975, pp. 587-601.

<sup>30/</sup> Laurel Bossen stresses this point in "Women in Modernizing Societies", American Ethnologist, Vol. II, N° 4, November, 1975, pp.587-601.

Men and women whose families are on the ragged edge of hunger (and this may include as many as forty percent of all rural families in Latin America)<sup>31/</sup> clearly cannot afford to be as influenced as their slightly better off neighbors by the cultural ideal associating women with exclusive domesticity. Women must make a monetary contribution in order for all to survive. Yet in fact childbearing and childrearing, within a cultural setting which assigns primary responsibility for the care of young children to women, places an extremely heavy burden of domestic work upon the shoulders of female members of the family and severely limits their ability to engage in any other occupation. This is especially true when men must migrate, leaving their wives and children with sole responsibility not only for their own subsistence, but also for care of all the productive resources of the household. And it is especially disheartening in the early stages of the development of the family, when the number of dependents (and therefore economic need) is greatest, but the ability of women to take advantage of any available economic opportunity the least.

When children are young, and closely spaced, the nursing tasks of rural mothers are extremely onerous. Without many of the conveniences of urban women, like running water, gas or kerosene cooking stoves, and nearby stores, these women must often work themselves to the point of exhaustion simply to meet the minimum daily needs of their families for food, clothing, warmth, and shelter. Water for washing and drinking must be carried long distances; wood for cooking may be collected only after several hours' walk, generally accomplished with a number of children in tow. Sick children

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<sup>31/</sup> A recent study by the Economic Commission for Latin America (Oscar Altimir, La dimensión de la pobreza en América Latina, September, 1978) concludes that 34 percent of all rural families in Latin America may be below the "line of indigence", and 62 percent below the "line of poverty". (Table 12, p. 81).

/must be

must be nursed without recourse to adequate medical care. Food must be prepared through time-consuming processes requiring, in the extreme case of the tortilla, as much as six hours a day of grinding and cooking. Then there are clothes to wash and mend; animals to tend; and occasional agricultural tasks to carry out. The result is often the exploitation of the last ounce of women's energy in the process of providing society with new members at an extraordinarily low monetary cost.

Modern technology has, in the last analysis, done relatively little to ease the domestic burden of rural women, just as it has proven singularly unadapted to the task of providing an adequate income for most rural men. Tubed water has appeared with increasing frequency in rural areas of Latin America during the past few decades, but according to the 1970 census, it is still available to less than 18 percent of all rural Mexican homes, 1 percent of all Guatemalan rural homes, 5 to 6 percent of all rural homes in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.<sup>32/</sup> Most rural women, as a recent United Nations report stressed, are still water carriers.<sup>33/</sup> Gas or kerosene stoves can be found in 21.5 percent of all rural Mexican homes, leaving the rest to look for wood.<sup>34/</sup> Electricity has nominally reached 27.7 percent of all rural families in that country, 32 percent in Costa Rica, and 2 to 7 percent in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras.<sup>35/</sup> But the presence of electricity in low-income rural settings does not always represent a clear advantage for women. They generally do not have the money to buy the labor-saving appliances which electricity powers, and they often cannot afford even

<sup>32/</sup> Costa Rica is far ahead of other Central American countries, registering tubed water in 40 percent of its rural homes. Figures for Central America taken from ECLA, Desarrollo y política social en Centroamerica, August, 1976, Table 44, p. 114.

<sup>33/</sup> Noracy de Souza, "Women as Water Carriers: A Case for Evaluating Technology Transfer to Rural Areas", mimeo, 46 pp. no date.

<sup>34/</sup> 1970 Population Census.

<sup>35/</sup> ECLA, Desarrollo y política social en Centromerica, op.cit. Table 43, p. 113.



to pay the monthly electric bill. In a number of cases, electricity simply allows rural women to stay up later at night doing household chores for their own family or for others (sewing, ironing, grinding).<sup>36/</sup> Only when turned to the task of grinding corn in the primitive mills which have sprung up throughout the countryside in the past few decades has electricity served unequivocally to lighten the daily work of most women in Mexico.

In fact, the problem of women's work load is probably at least as much an organizational as a technological one. With the breakdown of community cooperation and the fragmentation of the family, many women have increasingly stood alone in the daily struggle to feed and care for their dependents. They can count less on their husbands, who are often absent; they can count less on the human resources of an extended family, broken apart by modernization; they can count less on traditional bonds of friendship and ritual kinship in the necessarily fluid social situation accompanying rapid change. They can even count less on their older children for assistance, because it is precisely when those children reach sufficient age to be useful to their mothers that they are likely to be sent to school, and thus effectively subtracted from the family labor pool for a considerable part of the day.<sup>37/</sup> In a situation of crumbling traditional social security, few modern institutions have yet made real contributions to providing new organizational bases for family welfare in the Latin American countryside.

<sup>36/</sup> Kate Young, "The Participation of Women in the Peasant Economy", op.cit.

<sup>37/</sup> Most in-depth interviews with low-income rural women stress the great sacrifice which schooling represents for harried mothers. On the one hand, education is seen as the best hope that the family may enjoy an improved economic position in the future; and for that reason, mothers go to extraordinary extremes to keep their children in school. But on the other hand, the lack of assistance from older children penalizes the family economically, preventing mothers or children from taking small jobs which might narrow the margin between subsistence and want. See Camara, Chinas, and Gojman de Millan, op.cit.; and Kate Young, "The Participation of Women in the Peasant Economy", op.cit.

### III. WOMEN AND LAND REFORM IN A CAPITALIST SETTING

Up to this point, discussion has centered around the impact upon the livelihood of rural families, and most particularly upon women, of a general trend toward incorporation, or modernization, of rural areas. This trend has been characterized by the penetration of the culture and socio-economic organization peculiar to capitalism into communities relatively isolated from that system, or by a qualitative change in the nature of the relationship between the wider system and its local tributaries, as modern means of communication and forms of organization have altered the requirements for the development of the former. None of the local situations under consideration has involved a population bound by servile relations to an hacienda.

Let us now turn to a separate case, that of the impact of capitalist modernization upon the livelihood of rural women and families living on estates, and bound to the owners of those estates by the kinds of obligations discussed in the introduction to this paper. If modernization simply takes the form of a general trend toward the "economic rationalization" of the estates (which remain in the hands of large private landowners), implying the abolition of semi-feudal ties between owners and peasantry, as well as the introduction of new technologies and crops, what is likely to be the consequence for peasant families? And if, on the other hand, modernization involves the intervention of the public sector, in an effort to "rationalize" hacienda agriculture through agrarian reform, what might be the livelihood implications?

In the first instance, the impact of modernization upon the livelihood of low-income families is likely to be even more negative than that sketched briefly in preceding pages for counterparts living in villages not subject to

/the authority

the authority of an hacienda. This is so, quite simply, because the private owner(s) of haciendas control much of the material base for the provisioning of the peasant families working and living on hacienda land. If in the interest of increasing profits it becomes necessary to reduce the number of dependent families on an hacienda, those families may well lose all access to land, woods, and pasture, as well as work. This is a particularly brusque form of the far more gradual decline in levels of living one sees in modernizing communities exercising control over their own natural resources. It is not an unfrequent occurrence; as new technologies and crops have made their appearance over much of the Latin American countryside during the postwar period, evictions of tenants, renters, and other hacienda dependents have become endemic.<sup>38/</sup> These dependents include women and children, who must look for work, like their fathers and husbands, within the unskilled labor sector of the wider economy, without the alternative of subsistence agriculture. Their success depends upon the kinds of factors discussed in detail for non-hacienda families in the previous section.

Land reform counteracts the trend toward total dispossession which accompanies the uncontrolled private modernization of estate agriculture, by guaranteeing access to productive resources to former hacienda dependents. It is, therefore, a very much better social alternative than spontaneous modernization. In addition, land reform severely limits (although it may not be entirely successful in eliminating) the ability of large landowners to dispose of the time and energy of their dependents without payment, or for inadequate payment. It allows rural people not only to count upon the

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<sup>38/</sup> See Ernest Feder, Violencia y despojo del campesino: El latifundismo en América Latina, Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1972.

use of some piece of land for their own provisioning, but also to bargain somewhat more freely for fair payment for their labor.

This is as true for women as for men. On many haciendas, the wives of dependent cultivators have been at the beck and call of the large landowner or his administrators: they have been assigned to any spare task (household or otherwise) for which labor was needed, often with virtually no previous notice and minimal remuneration, if indeed any payment were made. The particularly flagrant mistreatment of these women has been justified by considering them as nothing more than an adjunct of their husbands, and therefore as available to assist (free of charge) in maintaining good relations between male hacienda dependents and their patrons. The former could protest hacienda treatment of their wives only at the risk of losing the single livelihood option of the entire family. If ever there has been an institution in Latin American history which has provided the structural requisites for a thoroughgoing exploitation of women, it is therefore the hacienda. <sup>39/</sup>

This fact must be kept in mind when judging the position of women in postland reform situations. Social scientists who observe the far-from-ideal situation of rural women (and indeed, of rural men) involved in land reform experiments may jump to the facile conclusion that "land reform has been generally biased... toward a deterioration of women's status in rural areas." <sup>40/</sup> This is a tremendous oversimplification of reality, which can be sustained only by altogether ignoring the historical position of women on haciendas. In fact, the status of women, as well as men, is transformed from that of semi-serf to that of citizen by the destruction of the hacienda, and the

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<sup>39/</sup> See Carmen Diana Deere, "Changing Social Relation of Production and Peruvian Peasant Women's Work", Latin American Perspectives, Vol. IV, Nos. 1-2, Winter-Spring, 1977, pp.48-69; and Ernest Feder, op.cit. - Latin American novels and short stories are crowded with accounts of the maltreatment of women on haciendas.

<sup>40/</sup> "Land Reform: Status of Women and Locally-based Organizations", United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, summer, 1978, p.171. /ability of

ability of an outside agent to demand the most demeaning of services (including prostitution) on pain of expulsion from the land is considerably lessened. That women are often benefitted less than men during the process of land reform is certainly true; but that they are not benefitted at all is extremely unlikely.

Disillusion with land reform in capitalist settings stems from its inability to transcend the limitations of the socioeconomic system within which it is immersed. The redistribution of large holdings has often begun in Latin America in response to violent pressure exerted by the peasantry itself; and it has therefore gone through initial stages of responding to peasant demands for the strengthening of the subsistence base of rural families. But over the long run, land reform has served less to meet the subsistence needs of peasant families than to permit the extraction of an agricultural surplus by the state, for use in bolstering a modernizing capitalist economy. Peasant families generally live better than they did before agrarian reform, but they find themselves face-to-face with the same problems of unequal exchange encountered by smallholders undergoing incorporation in any capitalist socioeconomic system.

Women have played an important part in the peasant uprisings and strikes which have precipitated agrarian reform in Latin America. And after reform, they have frequently been organized in women's committees or leagues, with the intention of contributing to the improvement of living conditions in the community. They have not, however, generally been granted land in their own names, nor have they often asked for it. As members of peasant households, in which the family as a unit covered the needs of all its members and the man was the public representative of the family, women have not been in a position to think in terms of landownership for themselves alone. They have rather fit into the arrangement embodied

/in most

in most agrarian reform legislation: title is granted to men, except when a woman is widowed.<sup>41/</sup> Economic dependence upon men has therefore continued after agrarian reform, with the considerable difference that the men in question are members of the family, not hacendados.

In some agrarian reform experiments, women have been grouped together within productive enterprises. Although they do not own the land, they may have dairying operations, or food packing plants, or simple shops manufacturing clothing or curios for sale. An adequate institutional infrastructure which would permit these women to put aside a part of their household workload in order to dedicate themselves seriously to remunerated economic activities has, -however, generally not been provided. The wives of land reform beneficiaries have therefore had to count heavily upon the support of their husbands, as well as the tutelage of government employees. Their enterprises have tended to be short-lived, both because of their own inability to devote sufficient time to them and because small industries in any capitalist setting lead a very precarious existence.<sup>42/</sup>

Most of the communication between sponsoring government agencies and land reform communities has taken place through the men of each household. This, as in the case of the broader acculturative trends discussed above for the peasantry as a whole, has served in practice to provide those men with social resources not easily available to women. To conclude, however, that the process of land reform in itself is responsible for this inequality of access to wider networks of communication and influence seems simplistic.<sup>43/</sup>

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<sup>41/</sup> Mexican legislation does allow women to hold reform land, but in fact few women do.

<sup>42/</sup> The difficulties of participating adequately in the running of small enterprises while fulfilling household obligations were discussed at length in the CEPAL-FAO-UNICEF-DIF workshop.

<sup>43/</sup> "Land Reform: Status of Women and Locally-based Organizations," op.cit.

Discriminatory forms of communication reflect the biases of the wider society, as well as the structure of peasant families.

In sum, both men and women in rural areas of Latin America dominated by the hacienda have fought to rid themselves of the burdensome obligations imposed upon them by large landowners as conditions of access to vital livelihood resources. In the interest of economic "rationality" and political peace, capitalist states have selectively supported the peasantry through the expropriation of some large landholdings and their distribution among peasant families. Through this process, land reform beneficiaries have gained a greater degree of control over land and labor than they had under the hacienda system, and their level of living has increased. The status of women has improved, as they have been liberated from the need to comply with the whims of the hacendado and have been incorporated into limited programs of economic production and community development.

Nevertheless, the transition from hacienda dependents to land reform beneficiaries has not implied a radical transformation of peasant families or the elimination of obstacles to the full equality of women in the society at large. Neither has it implied the creation of conditions which would permit most beneficiaries to exploit their newly won economic resources to full advantage. Peasant domestic units, liberated from the hacienda, have found themselves inserted as small producers in a wider system disposing of great power to assure itself a favorable balance in terms of trade. And over time, the problems of land reform beneficiaries have come to differ little from those of other peasant families, never subject to the authority of an estate.

#### IV. RURAL WOMEN AND SOCIALIST MODERNIZATION IN CUBA

If one could summarize, in a few short phrases, the principal elements working against the full incorporation of rural women into the modernizing capitalist societies of Latin America on terms providing them equality of opportunity and status, not only in relation to rural men, but also when compared with both men and women of the wider urban world, those elements might include the following:

- 1) the urban bias of the modernizing drive, encouraged by foreign and domestic interests convinced of the need to give priority to the development of industry and services in the cities, rather than in the countryside; 2) the consequent lack of a positive correlation between public and private investment patterns and the satisfaction of the livelihood requirements of rural people; 3) the concentration of control over vital economic resources in the hands of private individuals or groups with total discretion to use those resources as they will;
- 4) the relatively restricted participation of low-income groups in the decision-making process; 5) the marked tendency of the dominant, urban culture to assign status on the basis of success in displaying material goods, earning money, and obtaining a professional education; and
- 6) the similarly noticeable tendency of that culture to exalt the kind of division of labor among the sexes which places men in positions of greater economic and political authority, and assigns women responsibility for unremunerated domestic tasks, granted much lower status.

Elements 1) through 3) are related to the difficulty with which men and women in low-income rural families gain access to sufficient productive resources to make a living: good jobs are concentrated in urban, not rural areas; good land is increasingly owned or managed by those with the strongest urban allies; steady and well-remunerated employment is reserved for those with specialized training and skills; technological innovation tends to increase profits and reduce employment opportunities. Element 4) makes it extremely difficult for rural people to exert organized pressure for a change in economic policy.

/Element 5)



Element 5) reinforces the low status of most rural people and makes them feel "poor" by denying significant value to local customs and traditions, and defining success in terms beyond the reach of the majority. And element 6) involves specific discrimination against women, limiting their job opportunities relative to men and assigning them particularly low status for their work in the home.

The transition from a capitalist to a socialist socioeconomic and cultural order eliminates, almost by definition, some of the principal impediments to the incorporation on equal terms of low-income families into national society. Investment decisions, for example, are transferred from the private to the public sphere, and public policy is oriented to a significant extent toward satisfying the most pressing livelihood needs of low-income groups. At the same time, socialist culture stresses austerity, sacrifice, and hard work; particular value is placed upon substituting cooperation for competition among socialist citizens. These changes contribute to providing an atmosphere in which low-income families may participate productively in national life, and be esteemed for it.

There is no necessary relationship, however, between a transition to socialism and the abandonment of the urban bias so typical of modernization throughout the industrializing world. National resources may continue to be unduly concentrated in urban areas, to the detriment of rural development; and rural customs may be quite roundly ridiculed. Similarly, socialist policy need not automatically give priority to providing the institutional framework for meaningful political participation by the citizenry at large. Development may continue to be directed largely from above. Finally, socialism does not always imply immediate and effective efforts to eliminate the discriminatory treatment of women within the work force and the family. Women may be incorporated into the labor market at lower levels than men, just as they may continue to bear most of the burden of unremunerated domestic work.

The case

The case of Cuban socialism is particularly interesting because it has involved not only a shift in national priorities toward the satisfaction of the basic needs of all low-income groups, but also because the Cuban government has granted special priority to increasing local-level participation in the decision-making process, fomenting rural development and providing equal opportunities for women. It has therefore gone further than many other socialist experiments in attempting to improve the life chances of low-income rural women and their families.

The reasons for this emphasis on increasing the participation of rural men and women in Cuban development, following the end of the revolution in 1959, would seem to have been both ideological and practical. On the one hand, the experience of revolutionary leaders in the countryside, during a long period of guerrilla warfare, reinforced their commitment to rural compatriots (and, one might add, to women, who played a significant role in the guerrilla).<sup>44/</sup> On the other, Cuban leaders faced the practical problem of designing an economic strategy which would permit them the resources required to carry out social programs. The competitive advantage of the Cuban economy lay in agriculture, most particularly in sugar; and sugar required an abundant labor force at harvest time, as well as a relatively skilled contingent of millworkers, located in the countryside. It was thus an ideal crop around which to organize rural industrialization and the settlement of sizeable contingents of the population in "new towns" scattered throughout rural areas.

Land reform was of fundamental importance in Cuban rural development policy. Following the expropriation of foreign-owned plantations and Cuban large-landholding interests, the countryside began to be reorganized into administrative units, eventually integrated into a regional planning system. Each unit was provided

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<sup>44/</sup> On the role of women in the Cuban revolution, see Carlos Franqui, El libro de los doce. Havana: 1967.

with technical assistance in order to fulfill production targets worked out jointly by local people and representatives of the central government. Large expropriated holdings were worked collectively as state farms; but the private ownership of smallholdings was not challenged.<sup>45/</sup> Rather the integration of individual peasant plots into the broader production scheme was encouraged through price incentives, and through the voluntary grouping of smallholders into service cooperatives which provided them with a wide range of economic benefits, including the pooling of agricultural machinery.

Unemployment, long a serious problem in rural areas as in urban ones, was simultaneously attacked through a massive program of public works and agricultural expansion. It was the conviction of the revolutionary government that there was work for everyone, and that everyone should work. Those without a skill were paid to learn, and then put to work teaching others. An expanded armed forces and civil militia also absorbed the unemployed. By the 1970's, unemployment in Cuba had been virtually eliminated, and every family guaranteed a minimum income.<sup>46/</sup> Labor shortage, rather than excess, had become a problem, dealt with in part by carrying out door-to-door campaigns in an effort to convince Cuban women to enter the labor force.

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<sup>45/</sup> In fact, land was delivered in smallholdings to peasant families subsisting before agrarian reform on the basis of sharecropping or renting arrangements with large landowners. Plantations systematically worked by a salaried labor force were converted into state farms. See Sergio Aranda, La revolución agraria en Cuba. Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1968.

<sup>46/</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, Apreciaciones sobre el estilo de desarrollo y sobre las principales políticas sociales en Cuba, September 1977, p.117.

/Women were

Women were especially encouraged to assist in providing the expanded social services required to meet the basic needs of low-income groups long excluded from access to them. As resources were increasingly invested in community clinics, primary and secondary schools, recreational facilities, the number of technicians and middle-level professionals required to staff them surpassed by far the available labor pool.<sup>47/</sup> Nursing, teaching, and various kinds of community development work were the traditional fields of women in Cuba; and under the national leadership of well-known women revolutionaries, new recruits provided both the voluntary and the remunerated staff necessary to carry out the social program of the nation.

The economic participation of women was not, however, limited to traditionally feminine fields. Women played an important part in each sugar cane harvest; they became tractor drivers, mill workers, automobile mechanics, policemen and doctors. They also filled an increasing number of high administrative posts. In the agricultural sector, they were responsible for the entire coffee harvest in Oriente Province and the administration of a number of sugar mills.<sup>48/</sup> In all, the number of women in the labor force more than doubled between 1959 and 1970, growing from 295,000 to 600,000.<sup>49/</sup>

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<sup>47/</sup> This problem was aggravated by the voluntary exodus of a large number of Cuban technicians and professionals in disagreement with the program of the revolutionary government.

<sup>48/</sup> Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Modernización de las mujeres para una sociedad moderna: el caso cubano," in Ann Pescatello (ed.), Hembra y macho en América Latina. Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1977, pp.305-322.

<sup>49/</sup> ECLA, op.cit. p.121. In 1974, 26 percent of the Cuban work force was female. Roughly comparable figures for Latin America as a whole in 1975 suggest that 20 percent of the work force was composed of women. See United Nations, ESA, SDHA, "La participación de la mujer en el desarrollo de América Latina", February, 1976, p.129.

This dramatic increase in the remunerated economy activity of women was encouraged not only by campaigns designed to make them aware of their potential contribution to national welfare, to give women a sense of their own importance, but also by the creation of an institutional infrastructure which permitted women to place a part of their domestic responsibilities in the hands of others. Through the Federation of Cuban Women, founded shortly after the revolution in order to give women a voice in public policy, public funds were invested in an extensive network of day-care centers; boarding facilities for secondary schools and cafeterias in places of work were also elements in the partial lightening of domestic workloads. And after passage of the Family Code in 1975, the men of Cuban households were made co-responsible with their wives for carrying out the daily tasks of a home.

Even with legislation like the Family Code on the books, it is certainly not to be expected that the subordination of women within the family in Cuba has been effectively eliminated. Debate surrounding the formulation of the code brought into public view the tenacity with which many men (and, in fact, many women) cling to the idea that women, by the simple nature of their sex, must bear exclusive responsibility for domestic work and in consequence remain entirely dependent economically upon men.<sup>50/</sup> Nevertheless, the institutional reforms of the revolutionary government have made it very much easier for women to take position concerning the role they consider satisfying for themselves, and to defend it.

Perhaps more basically, public policy in Cuba during the past twenty years has created many of the conditions necessary for the elimination of "marginality" as a characteristic of any social group, male or female. The deep-rooted causes of exclusion of a significant part of the population of most Latin American countries from the benefits

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<sup>50/</sup> The Cuban film Lucia provides a mordant commentary on the process of redefining the division of labor by sex in the years following the revolution.

of economic growth have been largely overcome: illiteracy is nearly universal in Cuba, unemployment eliminated, basic social services provided free of charge or for a nominal fee. The term "low income", with all the social stigma attached, has lost meaning, as the objective gap between highest and lowest income categories has narrowed, and the subjective attributes of income of any kind redefined.<sup>51/</sup> The distinction between urban and rural, similarly long implying profound differences in life chances, is increasingly irrelevant. Women and men thus stand relatively free of structural impediments to equality with others of their own sex, or of the opposite sex. What they will do with cultural definitions of sex roles remains to be seen.

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<sup>51/</sup> ECLA, *op.cit.*, p.41, estimates a ratio of one to seven between the lowest and the highest income in Cuba in the 1970's.

#### /V. CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The impact of modernization on the livelihood of low-income rural families in Latin America during the past few decades has varied according to the initial degree of control of each family over basic physical and social resources, the requirements of the wider incorporative system at particular moments and in particular geographic regions, and the fundamental purposes to which modern forms of production and social organization have been destined by those in a position to concentrate new resources in their own hands and determine their later disposition. For families originally bound to large landowners by semi-servile relations, for example, modernization has meant either rapid and prejudicial loss of access to land (as traditional arrangements have been swept away by private entrepreneurs interested in increasing farm profit), or a new guarantee of control over subsistence resources (when traditional forms of agricultural production on the hacienda give way not to a single large capitalist enterprise, but to land reform). For many families dependent in large part upon wage labor for plantations, modernization in a capitalist setting has implied the loss of income consequent upon the continuous introduction of labor-saving technology. For members of long-isolated indigenous communities engaged in a tenacious defense of communal lands, modernization within the broader framework of capitalism has brought with it the institution of private property, followed by the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of relatively few families. And for the great majority of all the smallholding families of Latin America, modernization has implied increasing incorporation into a market economy on terms systematically unfavorable to the small producer. The result has been the semi-proletarianization of much of the rural population of the region, as peasant families attempt to maintain exiguous subsistence

/plots with

plots with earnings obtained from wage labor on large capitalist holdings or outside agriculture altogether.

At the level of the community, rather than the family, it seems clear that incorporation into a wider capitalist society has tended to isolate families more than to unite them, to do away with traditional forms of cooperation and security and to put little modern institutional support in their stead. It is the pressing need to counteract this drift toward disintegration which has encouraged recent attempts to found cooperatives and to extend national social welfare programs into the countryside of the more economically advanced capitalist states of Latin America, as well as the sweeping reorganization of rural institutions in the socialist setting of Cuba.

As rural families have lost local livelihood guarantees, they have adapted to the requirements for survival imposed by the wider system into which they have been drawn. If that system has offered remunerated employment to men, the latter have taken it; if women have been preferred at certain moments or in certain places, then women have left the domestic sphere in order to enter a regional or national labor market. Family organization has of necessity undergone change in response to this modification of the bases of livelihood: the roles once played by absent family members must be passed on temporarily to others; and in that process, the status of each member is temporarily, and perhaps permanently, altered.

New patterns of interaction between the sexes are thus the product of adaptive strategies elaborated by family units, and are highly dependent upon the way in which those units are incorporated into the wider national society. This point must be clearly made in order to counteract a certain tendency on the part of many students of the changing role and status of women to analyse the family in abstraction. It is generally noted, for

/example, that



example, that "the simple nuclear family structures of early societies and of complex societies are ... conducive to a more equal relationship between the sexes than the extended, patriarchal family structures of peasant systems".<sup>52/</sup> However, aside from the fact (hopefully made clear in the body of this paper) that there is no such thing as a single "peasant system", and consequently that neither patriarchy nor an extended family structure is obligatory for peasants, such a generalization errs in searching no further for the roots of women's opportunities than the characteristics of the family itself. This is not a very useful approach, either for sociology or for public policy. If it is indeed the form of the family which limits women's opportunities, then one can do little more than wait for the form of the family to change. But in fact, the primary socioeconomic determinant of women's role in a modernizing rural setting is not the type of family, but the form of incorporation, affecting the livelihood options of both men and women alike.

The long-standing argument concerning the priority of class position or sex in determining the life chances of women here becomes extremely relevant. If one gives primary emphasis to class, over sex, then one looks first not at the bargaining position of women relative to men (circumscribed perhaps within a particular family setting), but at the differences in livelihood options presented to low-income men and women relative to high-income women and men within the wider society. The point in taking this first step is not to ignore the importance of exclusively male-female

<sup>52/</sup> Mayra Buvinic, "A Critical Review of Some Research Concepts and Concerns", in Buvinic, Women and World Development: An Annotated Bibliography, Washington: Overseas Development Council, 1976, p. 12; and Janet Giele, "Introduction: The Status of Women in Comparative Perspective," in Giele and Audrey Chapman Smock (eds.), Women: Role and Status in Eight Countries, New York: Wiley and Sons, 1977.

relations, but to clarify the structural background of these relations.

The position of low-income women in relation to men, one would then argue, depends to a significant degree upon the previously determined position of low-income women and men relative to their higher income counterparts.

Particularly in a rapidly modernizing society, the men and women of rural families engaged in an often desperate effort to defend a subsistence living must redefine their own relations on the basis of what they can expect from the wider system. Only after weighing potential combinations of economic activity can they then make the "social bargains underlying cooperation" among themselves within a family unit.<sup>53/</sup>

This is not to say that the assignment of roles between the sexes is a purely rational question of economic cost and benefit. Cultural elements obviously play an important part in the process: low-income rural women may not be allowed, for example, to engage in remunerated economic activity even though it is available, and even though their families desperately need the income, for reasons having to do almost entirely with cultural values concerning the proper place of women in society. But on the whole, culture seems responsive to economic necessity. A way will be found to justify sending daughters off to work in urban homes, or mothers or children to sell fruits and sweets on streetcorners, if family livelihood depends upon it. Similarly, women left behind by migrating men will perform men's tasks and adopt the "public" representation of the family when required to do so. The anguish caused by the conflict between cultural norms and economic reality may, of course, be extremely destructive psychologically. It is less likely to be

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<sup>53/</sup> This is Michael Banton's definition of "role" in Roles: An Introduction to the Study of Social Relations, New York: Basic Books, 1965, p.2.

so if changes in sex roles do not imply degradation: if, in other words, the economic alternatives available to family members in the wider world are relatively well remunerated and imply high status, and the social support available to those who remain at home is sufficient. But this is not often the case for peasant families in a modernizing capitalist setting.

It has been noted any number of times that there is no necessary correlation, within the rural areas of most Latin American countries, between the increasing economic participation of peasant women and their own wellbeing or that of their families. The assumption of many students of women in developed industrial societies that leaving the exclusivity of the domestic sphere in order to obtain remunerated employment is a step toward greater wellbeing is simply not applicable to much of the Latin American countryside. As modernization reduces possibilities for self-provisioning and forces both men and women into the labor market, rural women may well work outside their own homes because they have to, not because they want to. The rising monetary cost of living often means that new sources of income simply pay for the maintenance of a level of consumption equal, or even less, than it might have been in an earlier setting. And in the absence of modern institutions such as day-care centers, laundromats and cafeterias, which might lighten the domestic burdens of working women in an industrial society, the combined remunerated and unremunerated work load of peasant women absorbed into the wider labor force is staggering.

The relationship between the participation of rural women in the labor market and changes in their status, within their families and their communities, is a contradictory one, determined once again more by the exigencies of modernization than by any simple cultural standard. In traditional communities not yet significantly absorbed into a wider capitalist

/society, personal

society, personal monetary income was not particularly relevant to wellbeing, but the skills customarily taught to women were indeed so. Therefore the domestic role of women was a highly valued as the role of men in agricultural production. For women in this kind of community to perform paid services for an outsider would represent a fall in status and would be avoided.

In a modernizing rural setting, where money is necessary for survival, the ability of women to contribute to the family budget raises their status within the family and lessens their dependence upon the men of the household. This trend is reinforced by the declining prestige assigned to non-remunerated domestic work by the wider society. However, it is necessary to stress the fact that the increase in status of many women assuming new responsibilities for the maintenance of their families is basically a sign of the desperate plight of the family as an economic unit. It is therefore hardly heartening to talk of the rising status of women in peasant families over the past few decades. And paradoxically, in those families able to establish favorable ties with the wider capitalist society, and to earn a good income, the ease with which formerly much-needed services of female members of the family are usurped by hired hands, servants, and manufactured goods means a general decline in status within the family, although not necessarily within the community.

What, then, can be done in the realm of national and international development policy to improve the precarious livelihood base of low-income rural families, and most particularly to give women greater control over the direction of their lives? At a macropolitical level, the answer is as important as it is obvious: an effort must be made to reduce the exploitative nature of relations between peasant families and the wider

/socioeconomic system.

socioeconomic system. The problem of most rural people in Latin America is not that they have been excluded from the process of modernization, but that they have been incorporated through mechanisms which systematically undermine the traditional bases of livelihood and offer them in return only the most marginal and low-status participation in modern national life.

For the rural women of Latin America and their families to bolster badly deteriorated levels of living, as a precondition for later changes in the quality of social interaction within the family itself, they must be able to count upon access to sufficient productive resources within their own communities to make the constant migration of family members unnecessary. Rural development must therefore be given high priority in national planning, and the participation of local people in the planning process strongly encouraged. At the same time, the value of local culture must be upheld in the face of an overwhelming tendency toward its extinction. All of these measures may well imply the reconstruction of certain barriers to the penetration of the countryside by the broader capitalist economic and socio-cultural system. They certainly imply the existence of grass-roots organizations of men and women free to discuss local problems and manage local resources.

Within this broader framework for policy, a number of specific social services should be provided to rural women and their families: tubed water, health centers for the practice of preventive and curative medicine, literacy programs and technical training of various kinds, child care centers, adequate housing including necessary household equipment. The order of importance of such programs, as well as the best method of local participation in their realization, should be determined by the women and families involved. To deliver them entirely upon outside initiative would constitute simply an added element in a long history of modernization from above and from without.