Ethnographic studies have emphasized the unusually high "status" of women in Southeast Asia. Although the various definitions of status frequently confuse norms, jural rights, and actual behavior, the favorable position of Southeast Asian women has generally been interpreted as a function of their contribution to the household and rural economy. Indeed, in the case of Java, neither the colonial period nor the postcolonial developments appear to have lessened the relative economic and social independence of rural women. This paper, which is based on fieldwork in a Javanese village, considers two questions: (1) by what means and to what extent have women gained and maintained access to economic independence and social power in Javanese rural society, and

This paper is based on fifteen months of field research carried out by myself and Benjamin White in a south central Javanese Village from August 1972 to December 1973. I am grateful for the detailed, extensive, and helpful criticisms of Lina Brock, Bette Denich, Lawrence Hirschfeld, Nancy Lutkehaus, and Benjamin White. A shorter version of this paper was delivered at the Seventy-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, December 1975.


2. To avoid the ambiguities inherent in definitions of "status," I shall use the concepts (1) "female autonomy," the extent to which women exercise economic control over their
(2) what are the effects of increasing demographic pressure and economic stratification on production relations and the role of women within them?

The question of class relations is, in my view, analytically prior to an investigation of male-female relationships within classes. And yet, studies of the economic determinants of female autonomy in both non-class and class societies have focused on the intra- and intersexual organization of labor. According to one theory, female cooperative work patterns are an essential means by which women isolate themselves from male supervision and control.3 This "strength in unity" argument (also advanced by Brown, Johnson and Johnson, Sacks, and others),4 however, assumes that the organization of labor accurately indicates which members of society control the production process. Whether this assumption holds in nonclass societies is debatable;5 it certainly does not apply to a stratified society such as Java. Although the division of labor in Javanese rural society is fairly well defined along sexual lines, the relationship of both men and women to the production process is not indicated by gender alone but, more important, by access to strategic resources which crosscut sexual distinctions. The following analysis shows that women gain autonomy and economic independence through the nature and flexibility of the sources of income available to them.

In examining female autonomy within class societies, a number of authors have maintained that transformations in traditional economic organization cause an increased dichotomization of sex roles and concomitant sexual inequalities. Engels, for example, insisted that the development of private property created a division of labor which diminished the value of female production from social use to private use

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own lives vis-à-vis men (e.g., in disposing of the fruits of their labor), and (2) "social power," the extent to which women exercise control over the lives of others outside the domestic sphere (e.g., in appropriating the product of another person's labor). Although these are more limited categories than that of "status," they allow us to distinguish two dimensions of the economic role of women which are often confused.


of the household unit. A derivative theory suggests that capitalism augments the exploitation of women by excluding female domestic labor (which remains unpaid but "socially necessary") from social production. More specifically, Boserup and others have argued that increased production of cash/export crops demanded by the colonial powers from an indigenous economy progressively excluded women from export production and confined them to the subsistence sector. This suggests that whatever the particular nature of colonial exploitation, the most severely affected members of peasant society are women.

Despite their different terms, each of these theories assumes that domestic production and subsistence production involved limited social relations and networks, as compared to those resulting from social production. The introduction of private property, the emergence of class stratification, and the imposition of colonial rule have frequently produced sexual dichotomization, but they do not necessarily do so. Javanese society is a case in point which does not disprove the general validity of these distinctions, but questions the universality of their application.

**Historical Perspective on the Sexual Division of Labor in Java**

The historical conditions of Javanese precolonial and colonial periods can shed an essential light on the determinants of female autonomy and, more specifically, on the reasons why agroeconomic change has not been accompanied by increased sexual inequalities. As Boserup points out, we must consider the traditional sexual division of labor in order to understand the response of men and women to these changes. Prior to the colonial period, Javanese peasant households were primarily engaged in production for use. Both men and women participated in agriculture as well as numerous handicraft industries, and even indigenous forms of exploitation extracted both male and female labor. Although many different kinds of crops were grown under colonial rule, and through many different systems of extraction of land, labor, and/or

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produce, none of them confined female labor to the subsistence sector alone. The structure of the indigenous economy in Java was kept basically intact, and commercial crops such as sugar were ecologically and economically superimposed upon it. The fact that colonial extraction worked within the framework of Javanese household economy had profound implications for the sexual allocation of labor. Through village leases with the plantation estates, a household was allocated a certain amount of land to grow wet rice and sugar. The ecological compatibility of sugar cultivation and wet rice cultivation made it possible "to conscript maximum amounts of land and labor into the commercial sector on a temporary basis while leaving that sector 'morally' free to contract whenever market conditions so indicate." While cheap Javanese labor enriched the colonial economy, the maintenance and reproduction of labor power remained the responsibility of the indigenous economy.

Both the African and Asian patterns of labor extraction under colonialism, Boserup points out, depended on reducing labor costs in the export sector to an absolute minimum. In Africa it was possible to extract solely male labor as women basically could and did carry out the main subsistence activities themselves. In Asia, on the other hand, both male and female labor were required for wet rice cultivation; therefore, the patterns of labor recruitment in Asia utilized the entire family labor force, rather than fragmenting the household production unit. Dutch recruitment of labor strictly adhered to this principle by localizing export production and by integrating it ecologically into the peasant farm system. Under the period following the Cultivation System (1830–70), when larger tracts of land were put over to sugar and greater amounts of labor were demanded for cultivation and processing, both male and female Javanese labor contributed directly to export production. Female labor accounted for "a great deal of the seasonal work including the

11. Ibid., p. 57.
strenuous work at the centrifuges in the sugar factories." Moreover, decreasing access to arable land for subsistence production caused increased labor intensification in wet rice production. In proportion to the amount of male labor extracted from the subsistence economy, there was not only an increased demand for female labor in agriculture, but an increased demand for child labor as well. The entire household labor force was mobilized to intensify subsistence production. Thus increased sexual inequalities which emerged as a result of a dichotomization of sex roles in other colonial situations did not occur in Java.

An analysis of the relationship between the peasant class and its colonial exploiters must not ignore the socioeconomic distinctions within the peasantry, sharpened by the colonial experience. For if precolonial Java displayed a relative homogeneity in landholdings, as population grew and land became increasingly scarce, variations in amounts of land held were transformed into critical advantages. As the primary means of production, land, became less available, slight differences in land wealth became translated into differential access to all strategic resources and thus represented the genesis of intrapeasant class distinctions. These distinctions, over and beyond the historical conditions we have described, have determined the range of opportunities available to women and the role of women within the organization of household economy.

**Peasant Class Structure and the Economic Role of Women**

Although the anthropology of women has addressed cross-class differences, it has tended to view peasant women as a homogenous social group and has dealt inadequately with the differences between women at different socioeconomic levels in peasant economy. Assuming that female autonomy and social power are a function of access to strategic resources within the domestic and social sphere, the primary strategic resources of land and capital reveal significant differences for each class within peasant society—for both men and women. And yet the concept of "shared poverty," the "division of the economic pie in smaller and smaller pieces" through land, labor, and food sharing, which

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15. Wertheim, p. 249.
18. Remy, in Reiter, ed.
19. "Class" here is defined as a group who share the same relationship to the means of production.
20. Clifford Geertz, "Religious Belief and Economic Behavior in a Central Javanese..."
Class Structure and Female Autonomy

has been used by Geertz and subsequent authors, obscures the fact that Javanese society has always been stratified (and has always stratified itself) through differential access to strategic resources. It is surprising, then, that the "shared poverty" concept remains the most popularly held characterization of Javanese rural society, despite the existence of many studies which document the more relevant theme of class stratification based on differential access to land.21

In the central Javanese village of Kali Loro,22 in which my own research was conducted, sawah (irrigated rice land) provides a major subsistence resource and work related to rice agriculture is an important, though secondary, source of employment. However, the distribution of landholdings indicates great variation in levels of participation in rice production and a correspondingly wide range of income differences. Of 478 households surveyed, 6 percent own more than half of all the sawah, 37 percent are landless, and another 40 percent work farms too small to produce their basic rice requirements.23 In other words, at least 75 percent of the households have to meet their subsistence needs either primarily or completely through sources other than ownership and cultivation of rice land. Among these alternate income-producing activities are agricultural wage labor, various forms of market trade, handicraft production, and mixed garden cultivation for sale and consumption. While some of these activities are in part gender specific, the

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23. Under present conditions of cultivation in Kali Loro, one-fifth of a hectare of double-cropped sawah is the minimum to produce enough rice to feed a household of average size throughout the year.
amount of time men and women spend in each, the scale of their activities, and the combination of activities they engage in reflect the demands of each particular household economy.

Neglect of the consequences of such socioeconomic inequalities within village society would result in two biases against women. First, an emphasis on sawah farmers could obscure the fact that female employment provides crucial income sources for a majority of the households in Kali Loro. Second, we would have to assume that all women are subject to the same social and economic constraints on their activities and thus theoretically should have equal access to social power within village society. An examination of several activities in which women are involved (rice harvesting, trade, and ceremonial exchange) will illustrate that, although village women as a whole perform similar activities, not all women participate equally or with the same degree of control in the production process.

**Rice Harvesting**

The traditional rice-harvesting system in Kali Loro involves a labor-intensive technology and large numbers of women, who are paid in kind with a share (bawon) of the harvest. It is cited by Javanese as the stronghold of mutual cooperation (gotong-royong) and by students of Javanese society as the prime example of “shared poverty.” However, closer examination reveals a delicately balanced set of exchange relationships which determines both differential access and returns to harvesting opportunities.

Women harvest rice with a small single-bladed implement (the ani-ani) which cuts each panicle individually. Whereas ploughing, hoeing, and harrowing (all male tasks) require only a limited number of man-days and can be spread over a relatively long period of time, harvesting is the most labor intensive of all agricultural activities, demanding large supplies of labor at concentrated periods. However, the large

24. These activities by no means exhaust female resources. Although Islamic and Javanese customary (adat) law both prescribe that on the death of a parent a son will inherit twice as much as a daughter, in fact neither law is strictly adhered to. In Kali Loro sons and daughters alike inherit rice land; however, no hard and fast rules determine who will receive how much, although generally women do not inherit house-garden land. Women retain rights to land in marriage and in the event of divorce take the property they have brought with them to the marriage. Whereas adat also prescribes that men should retain twice as much as women of the communal property, in fact the division is usually more equal. Thus women have full rights and access to the strategic resources upon which social power is based.

25. Although studies have noted the contribution of female labor in rice production, they have not recognized the importance of harvest wages as a source of income for Javanese women and their households.
number of women mobilized for harvesting, even on relatively small farms, is not simply a function of the requirements of wet rice production. By paying members of a neighboring household in kind with a relatively large share, a farmer spreads the risks of cultivation and is assured of reciprocal employment opportunities for the female members of his or her household. Two factors directly determine the size of the harvest share: the amount of land the harvester herself controls, and her social proximity to the host household. Three degrees of social proximity can be distinguished. Close relatives receive anywhere from one-fourth to one-half of what they harvest, although a poor relation may be given the entire amount. Shares of one-sixth to one-eighth are given to women from neighboring households who fall within the social network of reciprocal labor exchange. The final group includes anyone outside the first two categories, that is, distant villagers and nonvillagers, who generally receive shares from one-tenth to one-twelfth.

The small landowner (who meets labor demands principally by recruiting kin and close neighbors) is forced to give higher shares than the large landowner (whose labor demands are greater and who thus can employ a greater proportion of women outside the first two categories). Whereas a small landowner and harvester exchange labor with one another, larger landowners, who are independent of these reciprocal relationships, have a stronger bargaining position vis-à-vis the harvesters. Thus the average share paid by a large landowner is lower than that paid by a smaller one.

Quantitative data on harvesting activities and incomes were gathered from a sample of seventy-five households which approximately reflects the distribution of landholdings in the village as a whole. The distribution of harvesting work and wages in table 1 shows that landless families harvest for the greatest number of woman-days (i.e., the total number of days all the women harvested in a given household) and bring in the largest total income in harvest wages, but receive the least amount of rice for each time they harvest, that is, the lowest returns to labor. Women from larger landholding households, on the other hand, receive the highest average returns to labor and harvest the fewest number of woman-days. Why are women in poor households forced to accept lower wages for the same work?

The varied types of income-producing activities available to women in each of these groups provide an explanation. For women in poor households rice harvesting is by far the most productive source of income. Mat weaving and some small-scale trading, for example, have much lower returns to labor and do not compete with time allotted to harvesting. During the harvest season, many women stop trading temporarily, but more often they combine each of these activities to maximize the opportunities available. Women from larger landholding households, on the other hand, have a different set of options. Basic rice
**Table 1**

Number of Woman-Days of Paid Harvesting per Household and Total Income from Harvesting according to Landholdings in Rainy Season Harvest, April 1973 (N = 75 Households)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harvested Area of Hh's own Rice Farm (in Hectares)</th>
<th>N Hh Who Did Not Harvest</th>
<th>Average N Days Harvesting per Hh</th>
<th>Average N Times Harvesting per Hh</th>
<th>Average Total Harvesting Income per Hh</th>
<th>Average Income per Woman Day of Harvesting</th>
<th>Average N Harvesters per Hh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None (i.e., landless) (N = 16 hh)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>111.1 kg</td>
<td>2.5 kg</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤0.2 hectares (N = 40 hh)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>77.8 kg</td>
<td>3.1 kg</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;0.2 hectares (N = 19 hh)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>59.6 kg</td>
<td>4.0 kg</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.**—Hh = household; harvesting incomes in cols. 5 and 6 are given in kg of threshed but undried and unhulled paddy (gabah teles), the most common form in which paddy is measured directly after the harvest; 1 kg of gabah teles yields about 0.56 kg of hulled rice.
requirements can be met within the household, and as traders with much larger capital investments, they can ensure profits far beyond what they could earn from harvesting. Furthermore, they oversee the harvest operation, control the number of harvesters invited or admitted, decide on the share each harvester receives, and preside over the threshing, bundling, and distribution of shares which takes place at the home of the landholder. Indeed these women do not harvest unless invited and thus receive much higher shares. Landless women, on the other hand, lack the economic flexibility to choose when and where they harvest. If they do not harvest for close neighbors, where they are assured a larger share, they are forced to seek harvest opportunities further afield in order to meet consumption needs. They receive less rice per harvesting time, simply because they have to harvest more often. And because they have nothing to exchange but their labor, they can earn the right to harvest only by obligating themselves to a patron household.

Harvesting opportunities are a vital resource for poor households, and control over harvesting opportunities reflects a direct control over the labor and lives of others. Insofar as owning or farming rice land gives a household control of a much demanded “good” (wage labor opportunities), it is (1) women in the farming households who control the distribution of this “good,” and it is (2) women harvesters who obtain this “good” for their households. Vertical dyadic relationships thus cross-cut the possible strength women might gain by exerting collective pressure on a wealthy landowner. The Javanese harvesting system illustrates that it is not participation in collective social labor which gives women economic power but rather a woman’s ability to mobilize the social labor of others.

Trade and Markets

The Javanese market system provides another important source of female employment. In Kali Loro almost 40 percent of the adult women were engaged in some form of trade and probably another 30 percent had traded at some point in their lives; only 8 percent of the men were traders. Because of an abundant labor supply and a scarcity of capital there is a highly specialized division of labor: the majority of traders (bakul) deal in a limited number of goods, take small risks, and obtain small profits. For small-scale traders (bakul eyek) who deal in small quantities of locally grown produce for local consumption, capital investments range from Rp 500 to Rp 700, and average daily profits are as little as Rp 50 and frequently less. Because they are usually women

27. Compare Sacks, in Rosaldo and Lamphere (see n. 4 above).
28. Dewey (see n. 16 above).
29. Rp 415 = U.S.$1.00.
from landless and small landholding households, they can neither with-
hold their earnings from the household economy nor accumulate enough
capital to increase their trading activities.

Kali Loro does not have a conveniently located intermediary market
town to which small traders and producers can bring their goods. The
result is a prevalence of village-based, medium-scale traders who act as
middlewomen between the village and the city of Jogjakarta some thirty
kilometers away. These traders, with capital of about Rp 2,000–5,000,
buy up local produce (mats, eggs, chickens, and coconuts) directly from
producers or small traders and sell them to larger wholesalers in the city;
or they may buy dry goods (tea, tobacco, soybeans, etc.) in the city for
sale in the village. Because of the costs of transport, such traders are
limited to women whose capital allows them to deal in quite quite large
volumes of these relatively high priced, compact goods. Even though
these women acquire a strong degree of independence and their profits
are important supplements to the household economy, their activities
give them neither power over other traders nor enough wealth to buy
land. Thus these activities are a source of economic independence but
not necessarily of economic power.

Significantly, the small majority of large-scale traders (both men and
women) are also among the largest landowners in Kali Loro. Their capi-
tal investments range from Rp 20,000 to Rp 200,000 ($50–$500), and
their debts to city-based wholesalers are often large.30 While some travel
long distances to buy and sell, others are strictly “armchair entre-
preneurs”; their profits simply reflect their control over cash resources.
Several of these market entrepreneurs actively buy up rice land, or rent
land for fixed periods of time, then sharecrop it out; three of these
wealthy traders are also moneylenders who appropriate the debtors’
land or services upon default. Thus these armchair entrepreneurs not
only command the most strategic resource in the market (cash) but in-
vitably use their profits to buy land and control labor.

Trade at the village level then (unlike the town marketing system
described by Dewey) is intricately affected by socioeconomic relation-
ships in the village economy (and vice versa). A woman’s economic inde-
pendence is not simply a function of the fact that she trades, but that she
earns a regular and reliable income from her activities. Among poor
households, the woman’s earnings provide her with an important posi-
tion within the household economy; among wealthier households, such
earnings provide her with the material basis for social power.

Domestic Production and Interhousehold Exchange

Although certain types of female labor are “productive” in the tradi-
30. C. Geertz, Peddlers and Princes, p. 37.
tional sense, household labor which does not directly produce wages or items of measurable value has been systematically underestimated in peasant economic literature. However, Marx\(^31\) has argued that we must consider both the day-to-day maintenance of laborers and the transgenerational maintenance of labor (reproduction). By excluding women’s household work from our measurements, we exclude an essential input in the production process.\(^32\) The fact that women often have “nothing to show” for their efforts does not render their labor less important.\(^33\)

Javanese adat (customary law) recognizes the female contribution to household economy. As Geertz writes, “Since husband and wife are an economic unity, even though the wife may not participate directly in the acquisition of income, her performance of household tasks is considered part of the productive economic enterprise. . . . For this reason all goods acquired during the marriage, other than by inheritance, are thought to be community property.”\(^34\) The household, as the basic unit of production and consumption, is in practice under the unequivocal authority of women. Women and young girls usually cook; child care is shared by women, older siblings, and less frequently men; household marketing is done by women and children; water is fetched by young girls and women. Men and young children usually collect firewood (which is often scarce and thus a time-consuming task) and care for animals. Tasks are allotted among all the household members, but authority is not. According to Jay, Geertz, and Koentjaraningrat,\(^35\) women clearly control family finances and dominate the decision-making process. Although an emphasis on female control in the domestic domain often implies male control in the public/social domain, Javanese rural society, based on extensive symmetrical and asymmetrical socioeconomic ties, shows “domestic” activities to encompass the “social” sphere. Daily “domestic” decisions concerning cash expenditures for wages and labor exchange clearly belong to the social domain as well.\(^36\)

Foreigners often have the erroneous impression “that the Javanese wife holds an inferior status in the household” because she “retires” to the rear of the house when formal guests arrive.\(^37\) The husband is in fact the household head and mediates between the family and the outside world. However, the discrepancies between appearance and reality are

\(^32\) Secombe (see n. 7 above).
\(^33\) See White, “Production and Reproduction,” for a discussion of this problem, specifically the problem of assigning.
\(^34\) H. Geertz, p. 49 (see n. 1 above).
\(^36\) Jay, p. 92, my emphasis.
\(^37\) Koentjaraningrat, p. 104.
exemplified in the core ritual of Javanese rural society, the *slametan* or ceremonial feast, which is given for births, weddings, deaths, harvests, and in "response to almost any occurrence one wishes to celebrate, ameliorate, or sanctify": "The ceremony itself is all male. The women remain *mburi* (behind—i.e., in the kitchen), but they inevitably peek through the bamboo walls at the men, who squatted on floor mats (in front—i.e., in the main living room) perform the actual ritual, eating the food the women prepared. . . . Most of the food remains uneaten. It is taken home, wrapped in the banana leaf dishes, to be eaten in the privacy of their houses in company with their wives and children. With their (the men's) departure the *slametan* ends."38 However, in Kali Loro, the ceremony itself was often perfunctory and the distribution of food the centerpoint of activity. Focusing our attention on the distribution of food, rather than the symbolic aspects of ritual, it becomes clear that the real mediators of interhousehold relationships in the *slametan* are the women and not the men. The women buy, cook, and make the decisions as to how the food will be distributed, the latter a task often more complex than Geertz's description might imply. Men who appear for the ceremony at the host's house are given a rice package along with various small quantities of vegetables and condiments (the size of the package varies but is usually enough to feed two adults and several children).

Households who have not sent a representative in some cases have food sent to them. If food is left over, the women who participate in the cooking and who are fed once or twice (depending on how long the cooking takes) decide to whom it should be sent. If the amount of food has been underestimated, again the women decide which households can most inconspicuously be excluded. The distribution of food is an affirmation of symmetrical and asymmetrical socioeconomic ties: the invited guests belong to households with which the host household exchanges labor for harvesting, for housebuilding, and for other productive activities. We might, then, view this aspect of the *slametan* complex as one in which men, rather than women, "retire" to their "rigmarole" and in which women assume the center as mediators. Of course this is not true of all *slametan*; in house-building parties or at funerals both sexes often represent the household in their own domains. But the essential role of women within the *slametan* complex, their participation in "collective social labor," must not be ignored. At the same time, we must not forget that collectivity consists of people in subordinate, equal, and powerful positions vis-à-vis other members of the group. In Kali Loro, wealth differences crosscut alliances based on sex. Thus, although poor women from landless and small landholding households have the right to represent their household, it is important to remember (because it has been largely neglected) that what they represent is the subordinate position of their households in social production.

Agricultural Change and Its Impact on the Female Labor Force

Despite the obvious need for detailed studies concerning the effect of technological change on the economic role of women, interest in this field has come only recently with the elimination of certain female employment opportunities that accompanied the "Green Revolution." In Indonesia as in other countries, the introduction of new high-yielding rice varieties, hulling machines, expensive pesticides, and fertilizers to increase agricultural production has primarily benefited the already secure members of rural society and has increased rural income inequalities. Poorer village households have become more impoverished, not simply by their exclusion from the benefits, but directly by having their employment opportunities further limited. Thus, poor women have not been "released" from agriculture, as Boserup suggests for wealthier village women, but rather forced out of agriculture and obliged to seek nonagricultural employment. Two principal changes have affected female economic activities in the poorest segment of village society—women have not been affected equally, nor have they responded by sharing the limited opportunities available equally among them.

One of the most rapid and widespread changes in Indonesia in recent years has been the replacement of traditional home pounding by rice hullers. While the earliest analyses of the effects of this change indicated a benefit to village society in general, subsequent studies have shown a marked difference in the advantages of rice hullers to the richer and poorer members of village society. For large landowners the hullers save costs, and more important, preserve rice better than pounded rice and facilitate sale. Thus, although a few large landowners still hire client women for daily pounding, hulling machines have almost completely replaced this labor. Rice pounding for a wage was formerly a major and regular source of income for women in poor households, with returns per hour comparable to those from harvesting. For 75 percent of the households in Kali Loro who do not cultivate enough rice even for subsistence, let alone enough to sell, the rice hullers, then, severely limited employment opportunities. In recent years the necessity of seeking alternate sources of income has, on one hand, set off an influx of these

41. Boserup (n. 8 above).
women into local small-scale trade, and on the other, has increased the importance of their harvesting incomes.

Recent changes in more densely populated areas of Java also indicate that harvesting wages may not remain a secure income source. In order to cut harvesting costs and escape the "traditional obligations" of higher shares, large farmers are selling their rice before the harvest to middlemen from outside the village who assume the responsibility of harvest management, bring in outside harvesters, or drastically reduce the number of local harvesters. While harvesting costs have been cut by as much as 42 percent, this process has caused the loss of jobs on a huge scale. Even more drastic reductions in harvesting opportunities have occurred where middlemen employ a small group of male harvesters using sickles rather than the traditional tool (the ani-ani) which cuts stalks individually. Under such a system, which reduces the number of harvesters by as much as 60 percent, women from large landholding households benefit in that they are freed from the job of harvest management and in fact are "released" (as Boserup suggests) to invest their time and capital in lucrative trading enterprises. For the poorer majority of village society, both men and women suffer as more and more land is concentrated in the hands of the wealthier households. However, the decline in female employment opportunities is more easily observable.

With all of these limitations on female employment, we would expect, as Boserup and others suggest, that the position of women would be inversely correlated to changes in economic development. And yet Java rural women from small landholding and landless households have been traditionally involved in alternate income-producing activities outside of rice cultivation. It is men, in fact, who have a smaller set of viable alternatives to agricultural labor. Women are, in a sense, better equipped to deal with the situation of increasing landlessness and can manipulate a more familiar set of limited options. Figure 1 indicates that within two groups of households below the 0.2-hectare threshold, the purely female income sources (female trade, handicrafts, and agricultural wage labor) contribute one-third of the household's total income. For households above that threshold, however, female income sources comprise less than 15 percent of total income. This does not mean that women in the latter group necessarily make a smaller contribution to household income. Their earning power is a function of their control over land and capital and not of their participation in the labor-intensive employment activities of poorer women.

We cannot, then, view women as a homogenous group in village

society, nor can we assume that exploitation will occur primarily along sexual lines. Changes in the structure of precolonial, colonial, and present Javanese rural economy did not catalyze an increased dichotomy of sexual roles, but rather an increased scarcity and concentration of strategic resources. These changes adversely affected both men and women in the lower strata of village society. Thus the simple generalization that women in Java have a relatively high position obscures fundamental differences in their access to and control over productive resources. Poverty is indeed shared, but only among the already impoverished men and women of rural Java.

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