

Diverging Biographies: Two Portuguese Peasant Women

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Life-histories and biographical portraits frequently fall into the trap of “the typical” – the narrator is presumed to represent key elements supposedly common to most or all other members of a culture. Avoiding this path, we focus on the life courses of two women in a Portuguese hamlet pertaining to the upper and lower extremes of a manifold social hierarchy. These two villagers’ individual life-cycles, their marital and familial universes, and their total social worlds are indeed so divergent that we are led inexorably to the question – despite their common place of residence, do they have anything in common at all?

Three major phases of the two women’s life paths are sketched – childhood and adolescence, adulthood and marriage, old age and death – highlighting the Central European features of this community in Trás-os-Montes province, and stressing its profound dissimilarity from the Mediterranean culture area. A number of theoretical stances within the field of biographical studies hover in the background: classic anthropological texts recited by one *ego*, more sociological angles on social mobility and group trajectories, philosophically oriented hermeneutical portraits, and recent forays into post-modernist schemes focused on the dialogic relation between the observer and the observed. This paper falls clearly into the second of these trends. Might there not be at least two or even three “typical” life courses within European villages of this kind?

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What is it really like to be a peasant woman in a tiny hamlet in the extreme Northeast of Portugal? What is the nature of the social world around her, and how is it perceived and interpreted by her?

Let us glance closely at one specific case: a rural community of some 200 inhabitants in the province of Trás-os-Montes. Focusing on the life-cycles of various women who were born and raised, and who lived and died, within the confines of this small hamlet will allow us to arrive close to the point of an imaginative leap into the subjectivity and consciousness of these peasant women. This kind of portrait follows, therefore, less closely a path of objective, distant, or descriptive anthropology and more the course of a humanistic exercise in quasi-literary identification, although our aim will fall short of actually taking this leap into full sub-

jectivity. Can we come as near as possible to reproducing some of the feelings and experiences of real farming women¹ without dissolving hundreds of them into a larger statistical mass? What is the character of the sequence of overall phases of life through which these women pass?

Childhood and adolescence

Let us briefly trace the life courses of two women from rather different social origins. Immediately, we note that the ritual moment of birth is actually a false start. That is, one’s life does not begin abruptly at the moment of birth: in social terms, an entire series of patterns, habits, and orientations² are already prepared and set in motion by the total family world revolving around the infant. This will be clear when we grasp the almost diametrically oppo-

site life paths of Júlia (a fairly well-to-do peasant, with two celibate and one married daughters) and Carolina (an unmarried mother of four bastards): the "cards" to play in each of these life-cycles had already been to a large extent stacked with greater or lesser advantage for each of the women involved. One of our apparent paradoxes of analysis is this very fact – how can we explain the coexistence *within the same minuscule hamlet* of two so divergent biographical paths?

Carolina is currently 64 years of age, and Júlia would be 94. Both were baptised in the tiny Catholic chapel of Fontelas³, although in Júlia's case the space of time between birth and baptism was merely a fortnight while in Carolina's it was almost three months.⁴ Upon baptism, they entered not only the consecrated world of ecclesiastical registers but the social world of family ritual and ceaseless festivals of commemoration, which include Christmas, Easter, patron saints' days, first communion, and a whole array of lesser religious holidays. At the actual baptismal ceremony, however, we can already detect some disparate details: although all the ritualised steps carried out during the occasion appear identical, in the social realm we find a wider circle of relatives around Júlia, different modes of physical poise and dress around Carolina, but almost identical ways of cooking the baptismal feast in the infant's home (although the quantities of food and kinds of socialisation between the guests show subtle differences).

On this day, both babies will acquire a *padrinho* (godfather) and a *madrinha* (godmother) to look after them in the event of their parents' premature deaths and, in general, also to provide a parallel source of informal education and parentage. But who precisely are these *padrinhos* and *madrinhas* in each case? While Júlia acquires a highly respected landowner or local political figure and a well regarded school-teacher as her godfather and godmother, Carolina will obtain a day-labourer or middling farmer and a peasant woman of no particular social distinction. While Carolina's godparents occupy this position perhaps for the first time, Júlia's godfather and godmother play their roles not only for children of their own high social



Fig. 1. Baptismal ceremony inside Fontelas' chapel. The priest prepares holy water which will be sprinkled over the child's head shortly, above the stone font (*pia baptismal*). Note the age of the child: in cases such as this, emigrant parents resident in France may decide to wait up to three or four years to baptise their children within this village setting during their summer return visits in August.

standing but also for literally dozens of others from the lower peasant strata in outlying villages of the area, thus spreading their prestige outwards and downwards from their own family and social station.

Also on this day, Júlia's and Carolina's parents become the co-sponsors (*compadre* and *comadre*) of each of their respectively chosen godfathers and godmothers, thus establishing a strong social, economic, and festive tie between various households which will continue to be reinforced via multiple occasions of cooperation and reciprocity. But almost no one at Carolina's baptism is a relative of Júlia's, and very few of the guests at one of the ceremonies are involved in regular agricultural or social relations with the guests at the other: they

constitute virtually two separate worlds. In this sense, apart from the 30 or 40 relatives and a few friends present at each baptism, through the forging of godparental ties, both Júlia and Carolina become immediately absorbed into two complex and highly dissimilar social fields of interrelationships.

How, then, do the two women pass through their years of childhood in the village? What can we see as common or divergent in their daily domestic and agricultural activities as each of them grows up?

Firstly, let us glance at the houses in which Júlia and Carolina were raised. At the Southern end of the hamlet, directly next to the resident priest's enormous house, we find Júlia's (Fig. 7) – a large building with a spacious veranda facing South overlooking a large threshing-floor or *eira*. A stairway here in back, hidden from the public eye, leads directly into the priest's kitchen, allowing any and all of the members of these two connected households to pass from one to the other in complete privacy. In fact, both contiguous houses were originally one huge *casa* – in Júlia's childhood – as Júlia is the priest's maternal aunt. The two houses were divided upon the death of the priest's mother (Júlia's sister) when a general inheritance division was effected. The bedrooms (*quartos*), kitchen (*cozinha*), and living room (*sala*) where visitors are received are large, ample divisions, permitting a wide variety of furniture and decorative objects to be displayed.

Immediately opposite the door opening onto the narrow village street or *caminho* on the North side, only three or four metres distant, lives a niece of Júlia's, while about 20 metres to the West reside seven other families of peasants (*lavradores*) and former day-labourers (*jornaleiros*), with whom the members of Júlia's family maintain an absolute minimum of contact. Directly South, the terrain extending outwards from Júlia's house blends with a series of kitchen-gardens (*cortinhas*) used to grow vegetables and fertile meadows (*lameiros*) for the household's cows and oxen. Spatially situated in this manner, therefore, we can see that the household is almost hermetically sealed off on all four sides from the view of people passing along the nearest street.

Carolina's house provides a truly stark contrast (Fig. 2). Located at the Eastern extreme of the hamlet, in a section (*bairro*) composed of three other tiny inhabited houses and a few haylofts, the aggregate spaces comprising this household total merely about one-fifth of that of Júlia. Indeed, all of Carolina's domestic life takes place in one single room: her own and two smaller beds are crowded onto one side, and a few thin poles extend above her wooden floorboards and open hearth (*lareira*) to smoke-dry sausages in the winter. The stone walls are pitch-black with soot, accumulated over decades of natural fireside heating and cooking. There are no windows anywhere in the room. On the other side of the street, and immediately behind this minuscule house-room, extend some kitchen-gardens belonging to other villagers; Carolina does not own a private threshing-floor, but merely a share in part of the space composing one of the eleven corporate threshing-floors pertaining to groups of families in the hamlet (in her case, there are another six co-owning households). The furniture and miscellaneous objects exposed inside Carolina's room are paltry, and the entrance doorway opening directly onto the street exhibits her room instantly to any passing villager. There is no veranda, no patio, and, indeed, upon inviting the anthropologist inside, Carolina herself presented her living quarters with an emphatic note of shame.

We must not lose sight, however, of the dimension of time – born in 1902, Júlia grew up within her current household with her sister and two brothers, whereas Carolina, born in 1932, grew up in another one with her four sisters and two brothers. While the former, as a child and adolescent, will have heard much of the Monarchist Revolt⁵ led by Paiva Couceiro in this region between 1910 and 1912, and have lived through the inception of the First Republic and the First World War, the latter will recall the Second World War and, a few years earlier, the presence in the hamlet of fugitives from the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39. Rarely travelling outside the confines of the circumference of twenty or so small hamlets in the environs, or of the four Spanish hamlets between five and ten kilometres distant on the other side of the border, both women possess the common fate of



Fig. 2. View of the central sections (*bairros*) of the hamlet, showing the crowding of houses which in some cases are connected by the same stone wall. In the foreground lie half-a-dozen highly fertile kitchen-gardens (*cortinhas*), each pertaining to different owners. At centre-right, to the left of the small house with the white wall and just behind the chimney, the roof of Carolina's tiny house is visible.

rural lives circumscribed almost totally within the bounds of their own families and natal village. Without ignoring such external or international events as those mentioned above, our focus must continue along these lines of family and village: it is within these two contexts – not so much in their links with the outer world, or in the temporal epoch in which the two girls grew up – that we can trace the main divergences in these two lives. Family and village constitute two forms of social filters, through which all outside events and processes are transformed. Let us continue to examine why these two women obtained such differing experiences through this same social filtering process.

During the first years of infancy and childhood, perhaps the most striking divergence in Júlia's and Carolina's lives can be perceived via a simple opposition between an inner, domestic field (stressing the confines of the rural house) and an outdoor, agricultural sphere. From a

very early age, almost all of Júlia's activities within her family's social world were confined strictly to the household: rarely would she participate in farming chores which involved long distances from the house, and even her brief visits to the nearby family kitchen-gardens allowed only the most fleeting of verbal exchanges with other villagers. The sphere of relatives around her – including her siblings as well as an array of first and second cousins in adjacent households in the centre of the hamlet – is relatively small, thus tending to limit her instances of play and recreation to a narrow circle of two or three other households. Rarely will she be seen playing with a larger group of children in the public streets or open spaces of the hamlet: careful and conscious social training will avoid this sort of indiscriminate mingling of children, viewed by the wealthier strata as distinctively chaotic. Dress patterns, the learning of social etiquette, forms of speech and

formal linguistic address, her first religious confession⁶ and holy communion, her entry into school, first menstruation, and the contours of her overall personality and femininity will all be gently but forcefully shaped by her immediate domestic context; her mother, sisters, aunts, and *madrinha* will play decisive roles in the process.

Carolina's upbringing will clearly evince a number of parallel patterns – true, she will also have her first confession at around the age of 7 or 8 and first communion around the age of 14, enter school at the same age as Júlia had earlier, and acquire her own distinctive personality via the influence of her own mother, sisters, and other women. But here we catch the difference: the outdoor world and the roles of childhood friends and neighbours will stand out strikingly. Why should this be so? Firstly, throughout these years Carolina will spend an enormous amount of time outside her home in agricultural tasks with other women. The retreat from open places, the almost introverted escape from the public eye that characterises Júlia's family's form of social comportment, and the avoidance of socialisation with the other village children are all perfectly inverted in Carolina's case. From the minor tasks of her household such as ploughing rye fields, cutting hay, planting potatoes, and irrigating their gardens to the more large-scale events such as the enormous threshings (*malhas*) uniting up to 50 or 60 villagers or the annual pig-slaughter (*matança do porco*) and its Pantagruelian feasts, Carolina from a very early age began to work, eat, speak, cooperate, play, and joke alongside a wide array of female villagers, incessantly exchanging agricultural labour tasks throughout the four seasons of the year. In contrast to Júlia's primarily domestic activities, Carolina's have included a much greater portion of time outside the household in the fields, either at work with implements or carrying meals to and from the plots to serve the large teams or work-parties joined for each occasion. This is not to say, obviously, that the same activities do not occur in Júlia's household, but rather that Júlia's *social visibility* as an active participant in them has been radically more restricted and mute.

Two reasons for this are, firstly, differences



Fig. 3. Girl aged 9 helps her parents, grandparents, and celibate uncle (not visible) reap rye grain in late June with a sickle (*fouce*). Small fields such as this one are reaped with family labour in a few hours, while larger ones may take an entire day or more and require work-parties of up to 10 or 15 villagers. All labour is highly valued, however slow or untrained, regardless of sex.

in the ownership of land and, secondly, the role of domestic servants. At the end of the 1970s, Júlia's household owned a total landholding of 35 hectares, the fourth largest in the hamlet. Of this total, 5 hectares were rented out to other poorer villagers, the rent being paid each year not in money but in a fixed amount of bushels (*alqueires*) of rye grain. The large size of this farm implied, necessarily, the continual hiring of day-labourers to execute the myriad agricultural tasks needed for the farm's upkeep. Many of these labourers came either from Carolina's own family or wider kindred group, or from households of similar socio-economic standing. Virtually all of Júlia's land was inherited: she has never needed to purchase, rent, or swap plots of land in order to subsist.

In contrast, Carolina's landholding – totalling little more than 1.5 hectares, of which the major proportion of tiny parcels were either

rented or lent to her for cultivation – is one of the ten smallest in the 60 or so households comprising the hamlet as a whole. Carolina is barely able to provide meals for herself and her two resident sons, and depends upon frequent donations of food from her brothers, sisters, and friends during periods of festivity and abundance. This scenario with respect to land has meant that Carolina, just as her siblings, has had to work for wages or payment in kind (grain, bread, meat, fruit, and wine) on a daily basis throughout every year for other more well-to-do families. During her childhood and adolescent years, this fact became gradually clearer, as Carolina herself participated in such paid labour. However, parallel with this kind of work, there have also been a multiplicity of tasks carried out for her own family and kin: at these, the type of festivity and the atmosphere of mutual aid was markedly different. We should bear in mind, though, that precisely those shortcomings that Júlia avoided (due to her high social status from the start) were all problematic realities for Carolina: the size and nature of the key resource of land thus conditioned from a very early stage two entirely different orientations to work and general economic wealth.

Servants provide another significant factor. By tracing backwards a number of families via genealogies and parish documents, we can conclude that the half-dozen wealthiest households have nearly always had resident servants (*criadas / criados*). These would be both female as well as male, the former ideally aiding in domestic chores and the care of children and the latter in the heavier outdoor tasks in the fields and with the animals. But who were these servants, and what were their social origins? Usually they were villagers from the very poorest of families, whose subsistence in their mothers' households was precarious. At a very early age (as young as 8 or 9) they would be taken on as servants in a *proprietário* or *lavrador* household, remaining there for a long period of years. Once married, however, they would depart; we will see nevertheless that a large proportion of servants remain unmarried for the rest of their lives. Carolina herself was a servant in a number of households in the hamlet for a span of a few years at a time, while Júlia's household had

hired servants consistently during preceding generations. In fact, some servants ended up working for the same family their mother or father had served in many years earlier.

But our key point here is perhaps the following: in Júlia's case, a whole series of female servants (as many as three or four at the same time) were constantly around the house and capable of carrying out cooking and cleaning tasks as well as the rearing of children, whereas in Carolina's case, a larger sector of her life was spent working for others and in continual daily contact with women of a higher economic standing and, indeed, differing social values than her own. One outstanding characteristic of Carolina's adolescence, therefore, in relation to Júlia's relative immobility and permanence, was an exceedingly mobile and flexible series of abodes. She shifted residence between a plethora of households in different parts of the hamlet, never really settling down in any one of them, and never accumulating any considerable fortune or capital in land, animals, a house, furniture, or financial assets. Although not a perpetual servant, Carolina provides a model for most poorer and middling women who have spent some portion (however brief) of their lives working for others.⁷

Finally, courtship reveals another point of contrast which, again, indicates differences rather than any universal local feminine norm. Girls of Júlia's status, for example, rarely court more than once. There may be quite a lot of talk concerning boy A from Fontelas or boy B from a neighbouring hamlet, but real and fully defined courtship (*namoro*) tends to occur as a preparatory phase for marriage (*casamento*). There are a number of prescribed stages involved among upper level families: the parents must have intimate knowledge of their daughter's future groom and his family context. Very little contact is actually made between the two fiancés apart from ritually controlled visits and some occasions of joint family festivities (religious or lay) or at public dances (*baiões*). One key aspect is the status of a girl in Júlia's social class: once a *noiva* (fiancée) linked in betrothal to a specific *noivo*, if the courtship relation breaks off, establishing a second one is extremely difficult and can lead to total blockage



Fig. 4. *Proprietária* (large landowner), ca 1871 (reproduction of old photograph). Patterns of dress, hair-styles, and social poise among the wealthy, and even the spatial location of the person photographed – always indoors, and usually alone – demarcated them quite clearly from the rest of the peasantry.

for the girl involved. The stakes are high, and virtually everyone in the hamlet at any one moment knows exactly who is pledged to whom.

Girls in Carolina's situation confront a radically different social and sexual world. In the social groups of day-labourers, cottagers (*cabaneiros*), and artisans (carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, masons, and tailors) there exists a tacit rule that courtship does not necessarily lead directly to marriage. Many women in these groups never marry at all, but bear children nonetheless; some establish common-law "marriages" of cohabitation with men, who in some

cases are not the biological fathers of all of their partner's children. Other women may marry at as late an age as 60 or 70. Courtship, in these cases, barely exists at all. This is not to say, however, that there are not a prescribed series of phases or steps through which a girl and boy pass in their personal sexual or romantic ties. On the contrary, the latter ties proliferate – but they simply do not in the vast majority of cases lead immediately on to marriage. Carolina herself had several partners and married none of them. But there is a price to be paid for this semblance of free love or at least free choice –



Fig. 5. Young women awaiting invitations to dance at a local *baile* following a religious *feita* in honour of a patron saint. Although an occasional outsider – a relative or friend from a nearby town or city – may attend these dances (woman at far left), they are predominantly composed of rural youths from the host village and a dozen or so neighbouring hamlets. These local festive events constitute crucial moments of social encounter between prospective marriage partners: the summer months can provide a maximum of up to 20 or 30 such dances in the area comprising Fontelas and its surrounding hamlets.

when we analyse the social statuses of girls and women with multiple or sequential courtships or lovers, they systematically turn out to occupy the lower and middle rungs of the social ladder.

Many sexual encounters in Fontelas are extremely brief and take place, curiously, in outdoor contexts far from intimate bedroom spheres: in fields, meadows, thickets, and haylofts. There appears to be no pressing repression of sexuality or indeed of reserved social demanour when women speak of these relationships. Only in cases of outright rape (*violação / estupro*) or the exploitation of servants or maids by their male employers (frequently, these men are married) does a note of bitterness enter the discussion. Otherwise, the entire topic of courtship seems to remain quite remote from the conversation and preoccupations of these families. Marriage is a simple matter-of-fact affair – sex and love are quite another thing.

This absence of a well-defined set of norms and restrictions on adolescent and youthful relationships suggests that for women (and the same holds for men) there are *two* worlds of courtship: one, strictly formalised and carefully controlled in the case of a small group of wealthier families, and another, much more flexible and lax, among the poorer and middle-level families. Virginity is simply not a crucial factor in these women's lives: even a bastard child by

another father does not constitute an obstacle to cohabitation or later marriage. The existence of two distinct spheres suggests that the respective weight of factors such as property, social prestige, and the family name vary drastically in relation to each of these socio-economic levels. Clearly, individual characteristics such as beauty and general physical appearance, health, a reputation for hard work, and the subtle emotional and psychological attractions between two specific personalities play their roles: but what we note with particular attention is the absence of one, *and only one* structured path from courtship directly to marriage. Some other and quite complex mechanisms must be operative within these women's lives, in order to explain such divergent life paths with respect to courting and early liaisons.

Adulthood and marriage

In July of 1932 in the small chapel of Fontelas, at the age of 29, Júlia married a Customs Guard (*guarda-fiscal*) from a neighbouring parish (aged 31). Although Júlia was listed as a *proprietária* (landowner, or wealthy peasant) little additional information contained in the brief entry in the Parish Register tells us any more about the social context of this wedding. The youngest of four siblings, Júlia married third in order: one

brother and one sister had both married in 1923, the eldest brother marrying much later in 1943 at the age of 46 (his bride was 38). Of Júlia's three daughters, the two eldest remained celibate and the youngest married a spouse from another hamlet in the area, later moving out: this couple had a son and a daughter, who are now Júlia's only grandchildren.

Carolina has never married and, at the age of 64, will probably not marry any of the four fathers of her four illegitimate children (two of these fathers married other women, the two others remaining unmarried and residing with their married sisters). Carolina gave birth to these four sons between 1958 and 1966 – she was respectively aged 26, 28, 31, and 34 at the time of each of the births. In each case, the child was baptised subsequently in the chapel systematically registering an unknown father (*pai incógnito*). Although these baptismal ceremonies all involved family celebrations, there were no marriages and no weddings. To all appearances, Carolina produced a matrifocal kinship group of mother-and-children with socially absent and legally invisible fathers.

How can we interpret these cases in the light of the overall life-cycle phases of marriage and adulthood in this rural society? Let us first glimpse at the general picture before returning to the cases of Júlia and Carolina.

Not everyone – and we refer here equally to men and women – necessarily marries. At the end of the 1970s, for example, only 32 of 76 women over the age of 15 were married (35 were single and 9 were widows). Of the women aged 40 or more, 19 were married but 20 were still unwed. The age at which women marry is also significant: if we compare all 105 marriages in the hamlet between 1870 and just before 1980, the average age of brides has been 31.0 and that of grooms 33.2. It is extremely rare for women to marry in their teens or even in their early twenties. Another factor is the total absence of any form of dowry (*dote*). When a woman marries, she can expect virtually nothing from her parents or groom apart from a trousseau (*enxoval*) of bed linens, towels, and other fabrics. No land, animals, houses, or large sums of money are donated to the bride or even for that matter to the newlyweds as a couple. In fact, in most

cases there is no new household at all: the groom usually takes up residence in his wife's parents' household thus maintaining the overall number of houses in the hamlet unchanged. That is to say, marriage is disconnected with the construction of new homes: each married couple is absorbed by one of their parents' family lines (usually the wife's).

Four further factors are also crucial. Occasionally, the newly married couple may reside separately in each of their parents' households for up to 10 or 15 years after their marriages. In anthropological terminology, this is called *natolocal residence*, because both bride and groom continue to work and take meals in their natal households. They have merely a room in the bride's parents' household to which they retire in the evenings. The next morning, the husband will eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as work the entire day with his own parents. The children are brought up in their maternal grandparents' household with their mother, granting the father the distant, nocturnal role of a visiting husband. Eleven couples studied resided in this fashion (22 spouses) for between one and 15 years, but historical documents and genealogies indicate additional examples in former decades. The key point to stress here is that within this form of marriage, the bride and groom are as it were *preserved as if they were still unmarried children*. In other words, they are treated only as semi-adults living in a kind of extended or prolonged adolescence. Marriage changed virtually nothing in their life courses. Or, in more precise terms, the long-term social implications of marriage only take effect decades later, when their children are already well into their own life-cycles. We can well ponder: why did they marry at all?

The significance of this form of residence may not seem clear at first sight, even for anthropologists. There are very few cases reported in the ethnographic literature indicating, firstly, that the phenomenon is relatively rare and, secondly, that ethnologists themselves may not have granted it due attention. The first possibility appears most probable: in fact, the only detailed analyses available of natolocal residence (also termed by some *duolocal residence*) are those by Robin Fox (1978) for Tory



Fig. 6. Bride (*noiva*) a few moments prior to her wedding (*boda*). As is common in these Northern Portuguese villages, this bride was some months pregnant at the time. A schoolteacher in another nearby hamlet, her husband was *aguarda-republicana* (a municipal official concerned with the maintenance of "law and order" in local towns and villages). The wedding will also be followed by a dance.

Island in Northern Ireland, Carmelo Lisón-Tolosana (1971) for the province of Orense in Spain's Northwestern region of Galicia, and Meyer Fortes (1970) for the Ashanti in West Africa. Other briefer descriptions have mentioned natal local residence in Northeastern Portugal near Bragança (Riude Onor) and in neighbouring regions of Spain, namely León and Salamanca (Pais de Brito 1989). This overall geographical rarity, along with repeated cases registered in the Northwestern areas of Portugal and Spain, is simultaneously curious and perplexing, and suggests the need for further comparative research.

One of the most striking aspects of this type of conjugal residence is the almost hidden nature of the married couple. Everything indi-

cates the newlyweds' subjugation to a highly authoritarian grandparental generation: it is the maternal grandparents who bring up the grandchildren (the children of the bride and her visiting husband), while the paternal grandparents maintain control of their married son's labour and time. The possibilities of constructing a totally independent house are minimal or indeed nonexistent: the new husband and wife must simply wait for a future period of domestic independence. During these years, each natal household (that of each pair of grandparents) prevails over the conjugal pair who reside separately. Why is this situation accepted at all? Firstly, there are no direct means of access to financial capital (at least not until the late 1980s); secondly, the semi-communitarian social organization of the hamlet limits the total number of houses composing the community (each of which maintains at least some form of use rights on communal land), thus avoiding an imbalance between scarce communal resources and an excess of households or population. Thirdly, each grandparental household admits that they "need the labour of their children even when married"; fourthly, the grandparents are themselves psychologically dependent upon their children, thus favouring an extremely slow process of the latter's leaving home. All of these constitute reasons explaining, at least partially, the existence of this form of post-marital residence.

But there is a fifth explanation, which resides within the structure of the society as a whole, within its system of property transmission. As no form of property is inherited until the death of a parent, adults in their 40s or 50s still do not have access to large quantities of capital. This constitutes a sort of biographical social fact with repercussions for our analysis of women's life courses: both women as well as men pass through prolonged phases of economic and psychological dependence on their parental and grandparental generations. We found that many cases of natal local residence terminate precisely at the moment that one (or two) of the parents of one of the spouses dies. At that date, they take up joint residence. This means that, rooted within the system of reproduction of the rural household, lies a seat of domestic

power which grants a high degree of control to the elderly and a subaltern role to younger adults residing natolocally. The latter live a kind of nocturnal married life, a form of semi-matrimony, akin to Caribbean styles of matrifocal family structures in which the figure of the absent (or visiting) husband is preponderant.

Clearly, a husband and wife who reside natolocally for some 5 or 10 years will always end up living together at some later date – but during those years they will have lived within a form of semi-permanent matrimony with a note of repression. The husband is termed *pai* (father) and the wife *mãe* (mother) by the children, but the term for the wife's father, for example, will be an extension of the word "father" – *pai André*. Similarly, the maternal grandmother will be termed *mãe Amélia*, etc. The paternal grandparents, in contrast, have no special term of address – here the standard Portuguese words for grandfather and grandmother are used (*avô / avó*). These linguistic usages afford proof of the virtual social obliteration of the parental generation (the husband and wife residing separately). The grandparental generation, as it were, jumps past the parents directly to the grandchildren's generation, leaving aside the biological mother and father. It is important to stress that there is a strict gender equality within this phenomenon: both husband and wife are restricted in their conjugal life – neither the masculine nor the feminine lines are favoured. That is, there appears to be no special emphasis on male dominance or on female precedence.

Although neither Carolina nor Júlia resided natolocally, each of them has siblings, who, at one moment or another, resided for a number of years separately from their respective spouses.

But three further elements complicate the issue of marriage: firstly, bastardy is widespread in Fontelas and its neighbouring hamlets – since 1870 a total of 47% of all infants baptised have been illegitimate. Some women bear up to four or five natural children (*filhos naturais*) of the same father, later marrying him, while others have serial liaisons and serial bastards. The vast majority of *jornaleiras* (day-labouring women) and *domésticas* ("women engaged in housework") also had unknown fa-

thers, as well as mothers and grandmothers who were themselves illegitimate. We should however note that none of these relationships are ever referred to (even by the women themselves) as remotely resembling any kind of prostitution: no money circulates, and none of the persons involved conceptualises the liaisons in such fashion.

In other words, there are various differing legal and social statuses linked to the figure of the illegitimate child. For example, the parents of a bastard may later marry each other, thus legitimating the child completely. In these cases, the biological father may legally recognise his natural child (this process is termed *perfilhação*) but not marry the mother. In this case, the illegitimate child remains partially redeemed and financially protected via the judicial (but not matrimonial) link established between the father and mother. But a larger number of cases follow a more pitiful path: these are cases of *zorros* (the word derives from the Portuguese for fox – *raposa* – and suggests mischievous and/or malicious activities), whose natural parents never marry nor recognize them juridically. This category of bastard is the most shameful of all, because the child remains entirely divorced from all possible links to the biological father. Neither in legal nor in social terms are they ever assisted by the latter. This explains the pejorative connotation of the word *zorro/zorra* – these bastards are marginalized out to a virtually sub-human level. Linguistically and symbolically, they represent savages (*raposas*) within a natural world, shunted away from cultural and domestic spheres. This is an important point for our analysis of Carolina: all four of her bastard children by four different fathers are *zorros*.

Secondly, couples occasionally live together out of wedlock – they are termed *amancebados* or *amantizados* by the Church or simply viewed as *juntos* (living jointly) by other villagers. The children need not be the children of the resident male, and we must note that local priests tolerate all of these practices. Particularly among the lower social groups, children (legitimate or not) are a key resource as labour, wage-earners, and domestic company. The fact that such couples are not strongly ostracised by the rest of

the community suggests that there are not merely one but two patterns of “married” life which can be followed. The technical term *concubinage* is applicable here, although it tends to place greater stress on the concubine as a lesser or secondary spouse in relation to a husband; the *unwed mother* is the key pivot, around which multiple men revolve. The pattern appears almost polyandrous or matrifocal, as reported for the Caribbean area, with women collecting a string of relationships with different men, some of whose children they bear and retain as future domestic aid.

How can we explain these differing marital models? One means is via analysis of the inheritance system – a few heirs are favoured by their parents and marry at a relatively young

age, while their brothers and sisters are subtly pushed aside into the realm of temporary unions, concubinage, and bastardy. That is, one heir obtains the greater portion of a house and the parents’ land, while the other brothers and sisters acquire much less. Few paths are open to these – either they emigrate, marry into another village, or remain celibate in their brother’s or sister’s household, in social roles somewhat suggestive of that of domestic servants. This is why so few people actually marry: the key to high social standing is not marriage, but rather inherited wealth.

Very few women marry up strategically into the higher social groups, while a great number marry husbands of equal rank or marry down via relationships of sex and co-residence out-

Fig. 7. Júlia (second from left) on the veranda of her large house. At the time the photograph was taken, Júlia was aged 74 and her eldest daughter (far left) aged 43 and celibate. To the right, Júlia’s son-in-law and youngest daughter with their three children and a neighbour. At the far right, part of the priest’s house can be seen connected to Júlia’s kitchen. Note that the open space in the foreground, where brush and firewood are stacked, is spatially removed from the hamlet’s streets.





Fig. 8. Carolina (right) dressed in black, in mourning following the death of an elder sister, with a neighbour whose four children emigrated to France. At the time the photograph was taken (1988), Carolina was aged 56.

side wedlock. In this fashion, the landholdings and social status of the upper groups are in no way threatened by this parallel world of secondary unions: their property is not divided (or, more exactly, it is divided between fewer heirs) and the presence in the village of a large number of bastards with little or no claims to landed wealth only serves to uphold and reinforce the status of the *proprietário* group. Many of these bastards – particularly the girls – pass through a phase of servanthood for these very families. The inheritance system, thus, affords a clue to the internal logic of the dual marriage pattern.

Marriage, then, is not immediately coincident with adulthood. This is quite clear in Carolina's case – never passing through the formal ritual phases of ecclesiastical wedlock, she nevertheless has managed to participate in a whole field of other social relations and experiences including the rearing of children and membership in a large kindred group. The contact between her sons and their many cousins is constant: indeed, two of her sons live elsewhere

– one with an aunt, and another as a servant in a *lavrador* household. However, there is a price to be paid. This price is exclusion, or relative removal, from high social status. This is where Júlia's example takes over. By retaining a central role in a wealthy household, she has maintained high status both as a *proprietária* as well as her feminine role as a married woman. But it is not marriage *per se* that has granted her this, but rather an entire family legacy of social prestige and high respect. When both Júlia and Carolina – mature and in their twenties or thirties – confront the question *Who am I?*, they face the entire patrimonial and matrimonial history of their kindred groups (Bourdieu 1980:249-70). On the one hand, in Júlia's genealogy we find schoolteachers, aldermen who sat on local councils, priests, landowners, Customs Guards, police officers, and even (back in the eighteenth century) an informer or *familiar* of the Portuguese Inquisition resident in Fontelas. Carolina, on the other hand, has an immense array of relatives with less prestigious occupations populating her genealogy: day-labourers above all, cottagers, servants, shepherds, artisans, and some middling peasant *lavradores*. All of her eight siblings (sisters as well as brothers) have had one or more bastard children at some point in their lives, and many of these have also lived in temporary unions. Only two of them married.

This is not to say that some people do not move up the social scale at some moments, but simply that the relative position of any specific woman within her social group is very clearly established early on in her life-cycle. The margins or limits of each individual woman's efforts, skill, and personal inventiveness will vary and, of course, affect each one's own life path to varying degrees, but always *within the general confines of her social group*. Thus, a celibate woman of 45 years of age – exemplified by both of Júlia's daughters – maintains a highly respected social role in the hamlet despite her idiosyncratic femininity as an unmarried woman without children. Carolina's social status, however, remains quite low and her only hope of aid in old age are her sons' future assistance and the sporadic support and reciprocity available via her larger group of siblings. Thus,



Fig. 9. Middle-level *lavradora* woman (left) preparing sausages with the aid of two neighbours. This kitchen is typical of many recently refurbished houses: note the new chimney and roof. Hanging above the table and hearth (*lareira*) are smoked hams (*presuntos*) and two of the variety of local sausages.

instead of marriage, the key nexus of female adulthood is social status and its derivation from landed wealth.

A final element concerns labour and production. One of the factors contributing to social status among all but the very wealthiest women is a reputation for hard physical work. This applies to all women of the middle and lower groups. There are only half a dozen or so truly heavy and difficult agricultural chores which even the strongest women must leave for men to do. Thus, women can be seen occasionally ploughing, they will assist in the shearing of sheep (*tosquia*), guide water along irrigation ditches into their meadows and gardens, rake and collect hay (*feno*), cut rye grain in the fields with sickles during the June reapings (*segadas*), collect straw in enormous bundles at the August threshings (*malhas*), gather fruit and chestnuts in the autumn, cut firewood in the winter, and orient virtually all of the tasks comprising the December pig-slaughter except the actual killing and butchering of the swine.

Women are tireless toilers, accumulating this wide variety of essentially outdoor tasks above and beyond their domestic chores of cooking, washing, shopping, childcare, and the feeding and tending of household animals. Physical labour, in this sense, tends to create an entire sphere of social evaluations within which individual women are closely watched and judged by other women (and men) as particularly skillful, patient, and dedicated to their family's farming rhythms. The slightest lapse in this cycle of work is immediately noticed, and can contribute to negative gossip and even malicious slander.

Work, then, and more specifically highly visible outdoor work, constitutes a constant field of activity and mutual vigilance between women. While in the case of women of the highest social status, any kind of agricultural work becomes demeaning (they simply avoid being seen working outdoors), for all the remaining women in the hamlet one of the keys to generalized social respect and prestige is the

maintenance of a good reputation for healthy and consistent travail.

Even the personalities of the two women exhibit features linked to these working patterns: that of the reclusive and excessively shy Júlia contrasts sharply with the more expansive, humorous, and extroverted character of Carolina. There is no end to this rhythm of work in temporal terms: young girls are socialised rapidly into agricultural tasks, adult women continue heavy labour endlessly, and elderly women carry on working outdoors into their 70s or 80s at lighter tasks until the onset in infirmity or old age.

Old age and death

A glance at patterns of old age and death will now allow us to conclude our comparison of Júlia and Carolina. Death, unlike marriage, constitutes the major fulcrum around which much offamily life revolves. It is at death and not marriage that major readjustments of property and emotional relations take place – both between brothers and sisters or children and parents as well as between other relatives such as uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, grandparents and grandchildren. Virtually noone in any social group inherits any property at marriage, which means that extremely long life-cycles store up property partitions until very late in villagers' lives. Many mature adults only really inherit legal titles to land when they are in their 40s or 50s: until then they must depend exclusively upon the resources of their parents or upon slow and cumulative purchases or trades of small plots. Indeed, many villagers only marry precisely at the point in their biographical trajectories when one set of their parents has died, thus in a sense liberating them from fiercely dependent obligations upon their close natal kin.

The significance of this is, partly, that upon reaching old age and later senility, elderly villagers have a guaranteed source of protection and care via their children, whether the latter are married or not. In anthropological terms, this kind of kinship system appears to place a much stronger stress on descent or consanguineal relations than upon marital or affinal ones.



Fig. 10. Corpse of a woman who died (aged 66) in 1977, exposed in the living room (*sala*) of her house on the day following her death. This night, villagers will visit the deceased, sprinkle holy water over the corpse, and remain for some period between approximately 21:00 and 02:00 at the vigil (*mortóriu* / *vigília*), talking, praying, and accompanying the close relatives of the deceased. Each of the hamlet's 60 or so households should send at least one person to this vigil. The burial (*enterro*) and funeral service follow on the next day, normally in the late afternoon.

Hence the importance for poorer women of having some descendants, even if these are bastards. This will imply that the elderly always have someone from among their kin to assist them as they age; and we recall that they preserve their legal titles to land, literally until their dying day. Mortuary ritual and mourning indicate an openly expressive attitude towards death, reminiscent of Philippe Ariès' category of *mort apprivoisée* (1976). Into the nineteenth century, corpses were buried in the earth under the chapel's floorboards. Afterwards, they were buried in the churchyard (*adro*) immediately outside the church walls, until 1957 when the hamlet's cemetery was constructed. Death is

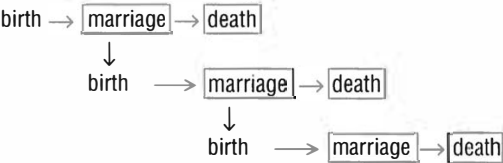
confronted in an extremely natural, matter-of-fact way, and the memory of deceased relatives is constantly refreshed annually during masses for their souls and on 2 November when flowers and petals are spread on earthen or (more recently) marble gravestones. Villagers know exactly who is buried in each grave of the cemetery, and in many cases who was buried directly underneath as well.

Upon arriving close to old age, even with ailments and a gradual retreat from physical tasks, most elderly villagers (living together or as widows) can be relatively sure that their kin will provide ample support. The agricultural and festive cycles also assure that even isolated individuals rarely enter deep depressive phases of introversion or hopelessness. There are always some family members nearby with whom one can share and collaborate. However, even at the moment of death, we find gradations of social status constantly apparent: while the funerals of women of Carolina's social standing may comprise some 50 or so odd persons, those of wealthy *propietárias* such as Júlia draw up to a few hundred, and usually include villagers from many kilometres away. We should be careful therefore, when discussing wide-ranging models such as those of Ariès concerning mentalities or attitudes towards death, not to remain blind to the subtle local differences in real peasants' practices and social comportment at such mortuary occasions.

One way of visualising the life-cycle of women in this case is to step back slightly and compose an overall regional comparison between Fontelas and the Mediterranean cultural area to the South. We can construct the following simple diagram, which will bring us back in the end to our two feminine examples. In the first part, we have a schematisation of the basic pattern of the life-cycle in the Mediterranean societies of Southern Europe, whereas the second part depicts the three possible life courses of women (and, in fact, of men as well) in Fontelas and other communities within the circum-Alpine region.

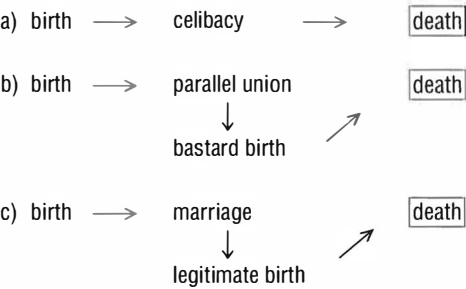
The key difference in these systems – in which that which characterises Fontelas resembles the mountain areas of Northern Spain, the Pyrenees, and the French, Swiss, and Aus-

Mediterranean Societies:



3 cycles / 6 moments of transfer

Fontelas:



3 cycles / 3 moments of transfer

trian Alps (Burns 1963) – is that in typically Mediterranean life-cycles property and social status are transferred twice in every person's life-cycle⁸, first at marriage via dowries and again later at death. Further, each marriage leads to legitimate births and, because of the high value placed upon marriage, there is a very low incidence of celibacy. Life-cycles are short, and marriage takes place (for women at least) at a very young age.

Fontelas, in contrast, affords an example of an extreme stress removed from marriage and shifted to death as the key moment of transmission. There are not one or two, but actually three common female life paths: (a) celibacy, (b) parallel liaisons or unions (brief or permanent) such as concubinage or popular marriage, and (c) formal marriage. Reproduction can occur in two of these paths (b & c) while high social status can be achieved also in two of them (a & c). In the Mediterranean, through the course of three women's life-cycles there are normally six moments at which the transfer of property and social status take place. In contrast, in Fontelas there are only three – all delayed until death. This is the crucial distinction. Furthermore,

Fig. 11. Woman placing flowers on the simple earthen grave of a relative on All Souls' Day (2 November). Note the marble gravestones of another family to the right, with respective dates, verses, and oval photograph of the deceased. These marble vaults (*jazigos*) are now progressively ubiquitous, thus displacing and antiquating the more primitive burial mounds of earlier times.



many people in the Portuguese case only marry after the deaths of their parents. Marriage is thus practically dissolved as a key biographical moment.

In other words, the entire life-cycle (and here the model applies to all social groups) is an extended, prolonged, and severely delayed process in which marriage and conjugal relations are subordinated to the firm links between consanguineal kin, particularly elderly parents. Bastards and single mothers simply reinforce this pattern. Thus, unlike the Mediterranean, in any one life-cycle, there is only one point (not two) at which major rearrangements occur – this is at death. Control of rural households by *chefes de família* (household heads), the division of land parcels, and the redefinition of agricultural labour roles all tend to take place only following a death, not before. This creates a tendency toward an excessive postponement of crucial biographical decisions to a very late phase in the cycle.

But what is the meaning of this contrast for our two specific cases? The first conclusion we can reach is that this part of the North of Portugal presents a radically different feminine world from that of the South. Our major anthropological studies confirm this: as early as 1935 Paul Descamps noted the distinctiveness of certain Northern regions, although his family monographs in the style of Frédéric Le

Play were but incipient ethnographic works (O'Neill 1994). Even demographic studies confirm the pattern as well (Rowland 1984). Emílio Willems (1955) pointed to patterns of *matrilocalismo* (matriarchy?/matrilocality?), and three modern anthropologists all note the pervasive roles of women in rural communities of the Minho province in Northwestern Portugal, although this region has been characterised for a long time by intense male emigration (Callier-Boisvert 1966; Brettell 1986; Pina-Cabral 1986). In other words, there are indications that the striking matrifocality of Northern Portuguese rural society (particularly in the Minho) is a very old pattern, but we do not yet know exactly how old or precisely to what degree (and when) the process of male emigration has contributed to this state of affairs as a primary or unique conditioning factor in the Northeast region of Trás-os-Montes.

But in the Alentejo and Estremadura provinces of the South, we find a much more radical subordination of women to men particularly in the public and political spheres (Cutileiro 1971; Lawrence 1982; Riegelhaupt 1967). We have not focused closely, for deliberate reasons, on the roles of women as reflected by the roles of men. For instance, Fontelas simply exhibits a rather calm and relaxed relationship between the sexes, quite the opposite of the tensions and conflicts described for Mediterranean Portugal.

Sally Cole's recent study of Portuguese fishing women in a Northern coastal village (1991) is particularly interesting for its discussion of women's roles in relation to men. Furthermore, illegitimacy seems to be pervasive also in other rural communities of the North, as noted already by Livi Bacci (1971) and more recently by Albino (1986) in Bragança, Iturra (1987) in Beira Alta, Callier-Boisvert (1988) in the Alto Minho, and Godinho (1995) in 6 municipalities of Alto Trás-os-Montes. The theme as presented here for merely one hamlet affords only the tip of the iceberg: patterns of parallel family and sexual life, illegitimacy, and alternative forms of marriage constitute one of the particular fascinations of early modern and contemporary Portuguese history.

Finally, we cannot ignore a micro-regional component: precisely as reported for the collective, communitarian village of Rio de Onor in Northeast Portugal (Dias 1953; Pais de Brito 1989), the socio-political status of women in many of the hamlets in Trás-os-Montes is exceedingly high. In Fontelas as well, widows and unwed mothers retain a voice and even votes on the village council (*conselho de vizinhos*), and they are consulted whenever an overall decision affecting the entire village must be taken. In wider geographical and cultural terms, then, we confront an example of the substantially *high* social status of women in European rural societies (a point already very convincingly made by Goody in 1976 and again in 1983), in contrast to the extensive Mediterranean case of relative female subordination.

That is to say, we find in the rural villages of Northern Portugal a form of kinship organization along bilateral or cognatic lines: all brothers and sisters inherit property and social status on an equal legal footing. Primogeniture is rare, and we have no reason to affirm that there are any forms of overriding or glaring male dominance. Women are simply not repressed, devalued, subordinated or exploited by men or indeed by the overall society (note that in the situations of natal local residence we have referred to, it is the married couple and not just the wife who is suppressed). Women are certainly not used as pawns in a game of chess, through complex circulations and marriage

exchanges between individual men or collective families or lineages (Goody 1990). This is why the social system exemplified by this hamlet is so radically distinct from villages that belong to the Mediterranean world: this kind of behaviour and the social statuses of women we have been examining would be almost total anathema in Southern Portugal, Southern Italy, Andalusian Spain, Greece, Sicily and Sardinia, or the Maghreb. Women in Fontelas simply live on a different planet.

Conclusion

Returning to Júlia and Carolina, we are aware that a large series of questions hover unanswered. We have not constructed a truly biographical profile of either of these two women, but rather simply a prelude to the inner dimensions of subjectivity, feelings, emotions, and overall socio-psychological orientations. We have no doubt that the two cases constitute little more than illustrative case-studies. But we have tried to deconstruct the presupposition, or assumption, that there must necessarily be *only one* model of the female life-cycle in a small rural Portuguese village. We have stressed that there are at least *two* very different extremes of personal trajectories.⁹

Neither Júlia nor Carolina rose socially in the course of their life paths¹⁰, nor did either of them descend or fall dramatically in the social scale. Each remained almost exactly within the same socio-economic niche occupied by their respective parents. Neither upward nor downward mobility characterises their social life-cycles. Instead, they provide crystalline models of the maintenance or even somewhat *hegemonic holding* of specific role positions within a concrete hierarchy of social ranks. This is why their biographies are so diverging: born and brought up within the same apparently common cultural context, their individual trajectories exhibit totally different paths. We could in fact pose the question – what do they have in common at all?

But the topic may be complicated yet further. Why not propose the coexistence of *three* feminine life-cycles? While stressing the upper and lower extremes of the social ladder, we have

perhaps lost sight of the middle-level groups. These, indeed, shift more flexibly between relatively mobile niches in the middle rungs: the social group of *lavradores*, or “peasant ploughers”, partake both of aspects specific to the upper rungs as well as elements of those lower down. This makes them even more difficult to analyse. For instance, it is among the lower and middle groups that we verify the highest rates of emigration to the more developed Western countries since the 1960s – villagers left mostly for France, but also Germany, Switzerland, and Luxembourg. This wave of emigration was not

totally nor predominantly masculine, thus precluding a situation in the village resembling that described for the Minho, of mobile male migrants and resident female villagers (Brettell 1986). This migratory element surely complicates any form of analysis of women’s life courses.

But another angle on the problem of the middle social groups is also pertinent: how closely do Júlia’s and Carolina’s biographical paths resemble those of these middling *lavradora* women? Unlike wealthy *proprietárias* or near-destitute *jornaleiras*, women in this mid-

Fig. 12. The inner emotional world, the subjective perceptions and feelings of rural Portuguese women, remain relatively out of the reach of classic anthropological monographic models drawn in objectivist, descriptive tones. Brief case-studies only give us a fleeting glimpse of these highly personal, intimate dimensions. Long, detailed individual life-histories, narrated orally by these women themselves, constitute a task of another order.



dle group tend to achieve a reasonable modicum of self-sufficiency based upon a minimal land-holding, a large domestic group of many children, and some (if not excessive) social prestige.¹¹ Are we confronted, therefore, rather than with a series of gradations of the same basic female trajectory, with three divergent life paths in essence, or merely two opposing ends of an overall pyramid with upper and lower extremes?

Most of our material seems to go against the idea of a harmonious, undifferentiated, idyllic, and nostalgic rural Arcadia – even among 200 or so villagers, the anthropological lens can focus on enormous social chasms between women living in houses a few dozen metres away from each other. This analysis provides, then, in a sense, a backdrop for further and more detailed biographical analyses. Life-histories, biographical portraits, and the use of local documents such as diaries and letters could carry on from here and lead us much deeper into the subjectivity and inner worlds of specific individual women.¹²

Our aim, however, will have been achieved in part if we have, firstly, suggested with clarity that there is *no single programmed life course for rural women*, no one form of female personal development, and perhaps even no simple expression in any particular village context of any hypothetical feminine norm of “Portuguese culture” carried within the minds or hearts of real peasant women.¹³ Secondly, should our materials have provoked even the slightest note of doubt, confusion, query, and perplexity, then we will have succeeded in highlighting some of Portugal’s intense fascination. In delving briefly into the lives of two women, we have merely scratched the surface of one of the most complex rural corners of Europe.

Notes

All photographs by Brian Juan O’Neill 1976–78, except fig. 4.

1. We have not adopted here any form of theoretical analysis deriving from feminist anthropological schools or the topic of “gender relations”, although such approaches could offer equally stimulating results. Our major stress – as reflected in the contours of our original research – has been placed upon stratification and social hierarchy rather than on masculine/feminine differences. Which factor deserves ultimate priority (gender or hierarchy?) remains a paradox.
2. P. Bourdieu (1980:87–109) would call this conglomerate of patterns, habits, and orientations *habitus*, or a set of durable dispositions inculcated slowly but forcefully over time within the behaviour and mentality of villagers via complex processes of education and socialisation.
3. “Fontelas” is a pseudonym for a hamlet located in the district of Bragança in Trás-os-Montes province. It is one of four hamlets comprising the parish and is approximately 4 kilometres from the Spanish border (Ourense province, Galicia).
4. We have access to these dates via the Parish Register of baptisms, marriages, and burials for all men and women in the four hamlets of the parish for the period 1870–1990. Innumerable other forms of information on demographic and social patterns such as intervals between births, ages of single and married mothers, kinship ties, ages at marriage and death, etc., are contained within these very detailed ecclesiastical sources, and are susceptible to sophisticated historical and anthropological analysis.
5. This Monarchist Revolt was a kind of small-scale, modern Portuguese counter-revolution resembling the Vendée in Western France at the end of the eighteenth century.
6. At the age of 7, children normally make their first confession in the church and appear listed in the priest’s Confessional Roll (*Rol dos Confessados*), which is another rich archival document for the study of social and familial relations. All residents of the parish’s four hamlets over the age of 7 are listed, with their full names, ages, other co-residents in the household, marital status, occupation, and an annotation indicating “confession” and (when taken) “communion”.
7. Until recent national legislation in Portugal following the political and social transformations inaugurated in 1974, the legal status of domestic servants was extremely precarious. In remote villages such as this, their contracts were almost exclusively arranged by word of mouth via direct personal accords between servant and employer. Payment could follow any form: goods, clothing, food, wine, grain, or money – or, of course, any combination of these.

8. The anthropological literature on Mediterranean societies is by now quite vast. For a general overview on women and property in Mediterranean Europe, see the collection of essays edited by Ravis-Giordani (1987). Laslett's map of four broad sub-regions of Europe (1983:526-7), if somewhat questionable in anthropological terms, is nevertheless highly provocative in highlighting the contrast between a Southern Mediterranean family area and a more Northerly, Central European one. See also Dias' classic but still highly pertinent points on the cultural history of the Suevi in Northern Portugal (Dias 1974).
9. We have argued elsewhere (1987b), following Edmund Leach's heretical theoretical propositions (1961), that not merely one but two systems of inheritance coexist in this hamlet. This is our major point, which has stronger implications for biographical studies of a sociological nature (Bertaux 1981; Bourdieu 1986; Mintz 1960) than for either classic anthropological life-histories (Simmons 1942; Smith 1954) centred on one narrator, more recent post-modernist biographical portraits focusing on the observer/observed dialogue relation (Crapanzano 1985), or more philosophically oriented hermeneutical analyses (Watson & Watson-Franke 1985). One of the most fascinating and challenging questions for future research resides in the potential for fusing or combining two or more of these four general trends, as Catani (1982; 1989) has shown.
10. The concept of life path is derived here from Giddens' discussion of the dimensions of time and space developed in the work of the geographer T. Hägerstrand (Giddens 1984:110-119). Clearly, the term suggests other kinds of conceptualisation of the biographical life course, whether in the form of life-histories narrated orally (Smith 1981) or of trajectories or the social mobility of individuals (Bertaux 1978; Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame 1988).
11. Curiously, women in the *lavrador* group almost always marry and bear large numbers of children, practically never hire servants, and very rarely give birth to bastard children. We have dealt elsewhere (O'Neill 1987a:173-259) with the complexities of these differences between upper, middle, and lower level women with regard to marriage, celibacy, and illegitimacy.
12. Unfortunately, no such written records (diaries/autobiographies) were found in Fontelas for either women or men; our earlier study (1987a) did not entail a full-scale search for documents of this nature. In other villages and towns of the area, future searches might well yield fertile materials in the form of letters, diaries, and memoirs. Anthropologists have not to date recorded any truly exhaustive oral life-histories of peasants in Portugal, despite Brettell's brief text (1978), although recently more attention has been granted to biography (Conde 1991; 1993, particularly with reference to artists) and life-histories of workers (Magalhães, Fernandes & Oliveira 1991). Published memoirs and autobiographies in Portugal are more abundant than is commonly assumed (Palma Ferreira 1981; Rocha 1992).
13. Along these lines, see the magnificent study of women in all of the regions of Portugal by Maria Lamas (1948), superbly documented with hundreds of ethnographic photographs. This classic work on women leaves no shred of doubt as to the wide variety of social contexts throughout the country shaping the life courses of rural women.

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