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Family Life in a Central Norwegian Mountain Community

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(Editors' Note: Mr. Barth, a native of Norway, did graduate study in anthropology in the United States. This field study report was completed in 1951 for incorporation in our volume, but some of the findings have been published separately in his article in *Rural Sociology*, XVII (March 1952), 28-38, "Subsistence and Institutional System in a Norwegian Mountain Valley."—T.D.E. and A.H.)

SOLLIA

RURAL Norway, where it has not been modified by modern industrial developments, is still divided into numerous local dialectal and subcultural areas. Each separate valley community tends to have its own peculiarities; larger cultural areas are formed through the historic and geographic connections between communities. Any specific sociological discussion of the form and function of rural Norwegian families must take this into account, and relate the family institution to the major aspects of the *local* cultural system of which the institution is a part. In the following, an attempt will be made to describe families in the upper Østerdal valleys, based on four months' field work in a fairly representative local area. The statistics offered are those for a conveniently small and homogeneous county in the area, that of Sollia, some fifty miles north of Lillehammer, along the Atna river near Rondane. Where the community studied is known to differ from other communities in the general area, this will be pointed out.

The word community is here used in a rather loose sense to designate a local group of variable size, recognized by the people themselves as a unit. No hard and fast limits can be drawn, since habitation is scattered, and the farms are interconnected by a continuous web of relationships. The county as an administrative unit tends to tie together several or many of these local communities. The area studied, lying within the limits of Solliia, consists of four local clusters of farms, each with a population of about fifty persons. These four clusters are closely enough identified with each other to make up one larger community. Each cluster of six to ten farms covers an area more than a mile long; the county stretches along about twenty-five miles of road through two branch valleys.

The upper Østerdal valleys lie from 1,500-2,500 feet above sea level. The valley bottoms and sides are covered with a coniferous forest; the timberline runs at about 3,000 feet. Above it stretches a vast, undulating mountain plateau into which the valleys have been carved by glacial action. Ecologically, the valleys are the modified, westernmost extension of the northern coniferous forest-life habitat zone, not dissimilar to the mountains of New Hampshire and Vermont.

The climate is moderately continental. Snow covers the ground from October until May with a minimum temperature of -30° F. But the summers are fairly warm. The local farmer can count on no more than two really frost-free months. These high valleys are thus outside the limits of wheat raising, and on the margin of agricultural possibility. The constant pressure of a hostile environment produces a tightly knit culture, which is relatively uniform since, with a given technology, the economically feasible adaptation will be closely circumscribed.

In the upper valleys of Østerdal, there is thus on the folk level a distinct and recognizable sub-culture. In Solliia this asserts itself all the more strongly since, of the officials and professionals that tie the area to the rest of the country, only the minister and the school teacher are locally resident. Yet Solliia shares its legal and other

formal institutional system with the rest of Norway, and most decisions vital to the community are made elsewhere, particularly in Oslo. Where Sollia differs from other parts of Norway, this is in spite of such external influences.

We will here, then, describe a folk culture that functions in a segment of Norwegian society and modifies the local expression of Norwegian family patterns; and we shall try to show how many of these modifications may be best understood, not as peasant traditionalism, but in terms of their rationality and adaptive value in their local setting.

YEARLY CYCLE OF ACTIVITIES

Life on the farm is necessarily rhythmic and seasonally differentiated. In the extreme climate, this is even more marked. Spring comes in late April; the snow melts, the road is transformed to deep ruts or mud, or a roaring stream; the ground becomes bare, at least on the side of the valley that faces south. By the middle of May, farm work can usually start. The hayfields are plowed (each field every fourth year) and seeded and fertilized. There are some restless weeks while the sheep are lambing. Potatoes are planted and the small truck gardens seeded for the year. In the first weeks of June, the sheep are let loose for the summer. Toward the end of the same month, the wife of the house, a grown daughter, or a hired girl takes the cattle up to the summer grazing on the treeless mountain plateau. There, almost every farm has a permanent annex, called a *saeter*—a small hut and barn—and traditional grazing rights. This starts the season of gay life—traveling to visit wives and girl friends on the *saetrar*, no meeting visitors and tourists from town and city, long, light, warm nights when the young people roam on the road with bicycles or on foot.

Harvesting of the main crop, hay, starts in July. On the fields around the farm and on various distant natural fields, the grass is cut, wind-dried on long racks (*besjer*), and finally stowed away in the barn or in small storehouses by the fields. Everybody is occupied with this,

from the oldest to the youngest, for many weeks, until late in August. When a fair second growth of grass has come up on the home fields and frost starts reducing the pasture on the mountains, the cattle return from the summer camp to the farm, and the whole family group is again united. Fresh milk is again available on the home farm, and the many-months-old sour milk, stored in barrels under water since last spring, is no longer the main beverage. Later, the sheep, who have roamed freely in the mountains all summer, have to be found and driven home before the snow falls.

Some rainy week in September is set aside for lichen collecting. The reindeer lichen that covers much of the mountain plateau is usually crumbly, but becomes very elastic when wet. It has high food value and is very easy to store. So the whole family trudges up into the mountains in the pouring rain, armed with pitchforks. With these, they comb the hillside, ripping off the lichen, which has no roots, and leaving the dwarf birch and heather which are more securely fastened down. Piles of lichen are stamped into loads and marked with the farmer's mark; later, they freeze solid and are brought home by sled. Lichen may account for some 20-30 per cent of all cattle fodder.

The first snow cover starts a period of heavy transportation. The roadless forest and mountain, where wheeled carts generally cannot travel, is easily navigable by sled. The reindeer lichen may be brought home, supplies hauled up to the *saeter*, etc.

But soon, the other main period of the year starts, when attention is shifted from one major crop, hay, to the other major crop, timber. From November till May, the farmer turns woodcutter, felling and stripping the trees, hauling the logs to the river. The only big break then is the social occasion of Christmas. Finally, the yearly cycle is completed with a few weeks of floating the timber in April and **May**, while the rivers are fed by melting snow, till the ground is **bare and** plowing can begin again.

FAMILY AND FARM

These activities are performed by a small group of people organized as an independent productive unit on a family farm. The family and the farm are closely related, not only emotionally but functionally. The form and structure of the one makes sense only in terms of the other.

In this area of special study, the farm is small. The unit consists of five or six acres of cultivated land, pasturing rights in the mountains, right of use in the county-owned forests to cover domestic needs, and frequently some forest belonging to the farm itself. The average livestock is one horse, four or five cows, ten sheep, a pig, and some hens. The most valuable part of the farm is usually the buildings, generally small (except for the barn) but numerous and well built, providing ample living and storage space. The average farmer also invests enough capital in machinery and implements, and controls enough money to run his farm independently.

Cows' milk is sold directly to a butter-producing private dairy some thirty miles down the valley from the north end of the community. The road to it is open in the winter, and the valley is serviced by a milk truck. Due to the present price subsidies, the milk sold fresh gives the farmer a better price than the butter he could produce from it. Thus churning at home is going out of practice. Another consequence of this truck service and price situation is a systematic shift of the cow's calving cycle. Formerly, one arranged to have the maximum milk production while the cattle were finding their own fodder on the rich mountain pastures around the *saeter*. The *saetrar*, however, have no road connections, so the milk truck cannot reach them, and butter must be made on the spot. With the present prices, the farmer wants the cow in the mountains in her dry period, and wants maximum milk production in winter when the cattle are in the barn, and the milk can be sold directly to the dairy. This again necessitates a reduction of the stock compared to the acreage of the hayfields, since the cattle need more fodder when giving more milk.

This may illustrate how closely the local economy is tied to the larger market, and how the activities of the people are constantly adjusting to changing conditions. The tenacity of other social patterns in the face of such change seems due not so much to traditional conservatism, as to their local adaptive value.

THE FAMILY

The farm is owned and administered by the family—ideally, by a nuclear family, consisting of a married couple and their unmarried children. Frequently, of course, one or both of the old people will be alive and live with them (see Table 2). This makes up the functionally significant family, and with this small group, identified by living together on the farm, are most of the individual's activities and loyalties. In the minds of the local people, this farm-family is not only an independent economic unit but also a quite independent social unit, with few obligations to outside persons or larger institutions.

TABLE 2

Type of farm and type of family living on the farm

Farm size	Type of family	Percentage	No.
Small farm	single person	12.8	5
” ”	couple	7.7	3
Farm	sibling group	7.7	3
”	nuclear family	41.0	16
”	nuclear family + 1 old parent	15.3	6
”	nuclear family + 2 old parents	2.6	1
”	parents and married child separate households	7.7	3
”	parents and married child joint household	0	0
”	larger family group (siblings of couple, etc.)	5.2	2
	Total	100.0	39

Within this family group, there is a systematic division of labor along sex lines. No taboos are connected with this division; the male and female roles are defined in terms of efficacy, and may be violated on the same grounds. Where the woman is sick or wants the evening off, or where there are only sons, the men may do the milking and tending of cattle, normally women's work. Too great willingness to violate these role divisions would, however, result in ridicule. And where there is a deficiency of men, male help will usually be hired, since men's work is regarded as too heavy for women.

The care of the house, cooking, washing, and making clothes, milking and feeding cows and goats, feeding the pig, chickens, and usually the sheep belong to the female role. All work in the forest and on the fields, the care of the horse, cleaning the barn, chopping wood, and all transportation are the adult male's duty. The girls help their mothers; water and wood are fetched by the children in general, although the boy is expected to be in charge. The little boy wants badly to help his father but usually cannot. Up to the age of sixteen to eighteen, he does not have many duties, but about that time he is expected to start taking on his share of the adult male's work. The whole family works together at haying, lichen collecting, and potato gathering, the man being in charge of the horse when it is active.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

The role division along sex lines extends through most phases of life. It also plays a part in the family prestige hierarchy, but may profitably be discussed without reference to prestige. The feeling is largely that male and female roles are different, and (as is, of course, true) equally important on the farm. In the family situation, they are regarded as complementary, and this mutual relation and solidarity between spouses is a fundamental principle in the local family structure.

In relations to outsiders, the sex division also plays an important role. An example taken from the pattern of formalized visiting between farms may illustrate this. If a man comes visiting the farm

while both spouses are present, the woman (because she takes care of the cooking) prepares coffee for the two men, and generally takes little part in the conversation. If the topic is of great interest to her, she is, however, quite free to talk. If, on the other hand, the visitor is a woman, the women will have coffee together, while the husband sits by himself sipping his coffee and generally talking very little. If a male visitor drops in while the husband is away, he will be served coffee, and the woman will sit by the table conversing but will not take part in the meal.

The relative prestige of the male and female spheres is indicated by the fact that women who can take part in men's conversation are well thought of, whereas the man is not supposed to be interested in what the women are talking about. Actually, he is generally quite interested in the gossip she might know (and listens intently to it), but he is not permitted in his male role to show his interest.

The adult male is then at the top of the prestige hierarchy. This is formalized in a number of ways: he is served first at the table, he reads the newspaper first, he is supposed to decide on important family matters. Actually, both spouses have a part in policy forming, and the solidarity of spouses being stressed as strongly as it is, each can exert pressure on the other. If there is disagreement, public judgment will just as frequently decide the woman to be right as the man. Thus the formal recognition of male prestige gives biased evidence on the actual power distribution. Any matter of importance is discussed by both spouses, whether it be in the male or female sphere. In a folk culture, where informal social control is so prevalent in all phases of life, this discussion insures fairly equal weight for the opinions of each. Within the functioning family, *solidarity* is thus the important characteristic of the spouse relationship, and the relative prestige difference is merely accepted and much less important.

The children are recognized as independent persons, with individual likes and dislikes. The verdict of the school teacher and the minister was that the parents usually "spoil" children; they are much loved and rarely disciplined. Any correction or show of temper by

the parent in public is criticized, and physical punishment is rarely used. The children are thus fairly unpredictable members of the family—they may be at home, may be off with friends, they may be doing what they should do, they may be doing something else. The boy, especially as he grows older, is permitted to roam around more than the girl, and there is generally more pressure brought to bear on her to make her perform her tasks. By sixteen, when the boy is just starting to do men's work, the girl should be thoroughly trained in her work role.

The old people in the family, the grandparents still living on the farm, usually constitute a difficult problem. They cannot be well integrated into the family, since they have no clear role in it, and they are generally an economic burden—the small children do not need their care, and they are not strong enough to do heavy work. An old man usually spends his time chopping wood and fishing trout; an old woman will run a separate household if her husband is still alive, otherwise she will putter around, helping in the kitchen or mending clothes. If the surviving grandparent is living in the family, as will nearly always be the case, his presence is thought of as strictly temporary and unimportant, since he will soon die.

On the farm, the nucleus of parents and unmarried children is thus the functioning family. Where there are several married sons from one farm, they will start their own farms or find other work. Where the parents are still strong and active, the married son must seek temporary employment outside and live in a separate household, preferably at some other place. The farm is thought of as the home of *one* nuclear family.

The relations and obligations of this nuclear group to more distant kin are few and unimportant. Descent is certainly kept track of, and, in this small community, practically everybody traced relationship through some common ancestor. At the "*rites de passage*" of an individual, the kin will be invited, but so will friends, and much general social activity centers around christenings, confirmations, marriages, and funerals. The special relations with kinfolk do not

extend into the economic sphere; there is no patterned lending of equipment or help, not even between brothers. Kinship furthermore does not seem to influence or regulate membership in formal or informal groups. The farm family is the functioning social and economic unit, and serves as the fundamental and most important social institution.

INHERITANCE

Inheritance is regulated by official Norwegian law; each child receives a share of equal value; but the rights of primogeniture are also recognized and codified: The oldest son has a legal right to the farm. This is further elaborated in numerous rules and privileges. The farm itself is very seldom divided among the children. The total value of the estate is computed, and each child should receive an equal fraction. Thus, the son who gets the farm, usually the largest fraction of the estate, borrows money to pay his siblings for what he has received in excess of his share. The practice is to appraise the farm at a low value, to prevent it from sinking into great debt from the transaction. In actual fact, the son who inherits the farm therefore tends to receive a disproportionate share. Primogeniture is thus important in the legal system, and it dominates as the rule of farm inheritance in most of rural Norway. In Sollia, however, it receives no attention. Of eleven farms in the neighborhood that had been inherited in the male line in the last generation, six were taken over by the only son, four by the youngest son, and only one by the oldest of several sons. This one case is still talked about, and the action of the oldest son is criticized. He is said to have taken advantage of legal technicalities (viz., rights of primogeniture) to get a good farm ahead of his more competent younger brother, only to let it fall into disrepair later. On the other side of the picture, four new farms have been started. Of these, three were cleared by men with primogeniture rights on good farms, but with younger brothers. The fourth farm was cleared by a middle brother, while the youngest took over the home farm.¹

This strong tendency toward younger son inheritance, in opposition to the prevailing law, must have a functional explanation. It is clearly connected with the Sollia family pattern, which again relates to the small size of the farm. A six acre plot of land at 62° N. latitude cannot support a large number of people, even when the mountain pastures and timber forests contribute to subsistence. And, as mentioned above, the farm is regarded as the home of *one* nuclear family. The conventional roles and duties are designed to integrate no larger group than that. The unmarried children have a clear status and role; married children on the farm would be in clear conflict with the couple in charge. Their main loyalties would be to their spouses, not to the farm and parents; their great wish is, therefore, to establish an independent household, with themselves as the central, ruling couple.

When children marry while the parents are still strong, they either establish a separate household in one of the farm buildings, and the man supports his family by outside work—truck driving, wood-cutting, timber-floating, etc.—or they buy a farm or break ground for a separate, new farm. The young couple almost invariably separates off as an independent family, in contrast to the situation on the larger farms in the lower valleys, which are usually operated jointly by father and son, and where primogeniture is the rule of farm inheritance. Only one local case is known to me where a married son (the only one) stayed on the farm and worked it with his parents. This was in a very “progressive” and moderately urbanized family. Gossip tells how the difficulties were solved by the young wife working “as maid” on the farm for ten years, till the old couple grew weak enough to give up control.

The tendency is, of course, for the youngest son to be the last one to become anxious to marry. Consequently, he waits around on the farm as unmarried son, and when the parents become old and weak, he marries, runs the farm, and looks after the old ones. When **they** die, he “naturally” keeps the farm.

A complicating factor, causing much conflict between parent **and**

child, is the lack of any clear role and importance for the old people. As a consequence of this, they are unwilling to give over control of the farm and try to keep their position of power and importance as long as they are at all physically able to do so. This prevents the son from marrying and makes him impatient and dissatisfied. It also produces great emotional conflict: should he work hard on the farm, which he will eventually inherit, but thereby postpone the time he can marry and take over; or should he do little, making the parents work harder and wear themselves out quicker? It is a very real conflict, which is often resolved by the son leaving the farm and even the valley to find other work. Interesting in this connection is the fact that the only two fights reported in the valley were between father and grown son, when both were drunk.

Once the parents give up the farm, they are guaranteed by law a certain part of the farm income. Today, they will also receive a government old-age pension. They are generally by then old enough to be content with their small household duties, and the parent-son relationship becomes less strained.

The result of these patterns is a marked segmentation through time: each nuclear family tends to be separate in time and space. Somewhat irregular inheritance practices are adaptations to what seems the most practical solution in any given case, thus generally tying the family blocks together through time by youngest son inheritance.

RELATIONS BETWEEN FAMILIES

The family block, or the individuals it consists of, must also be organized in a synchronized system to regulate daily relations in the community. This is done by numerous formal and informal social groups. Actually, the family plays a minor role in this phase of community organization, as indicated by the relative lack of importance attached to kinfolk, mentioned above. Each individual tends to operate independently in the various groups; the only principle upheld is the identification with spouse. Thus, where the sex division

does not ascribe different roles to them, spouses tend to have the same status and prestige, and, in fact, the same opinions.

Community contacts between individuals are few in Sollia. In the economic sphere, they are infrequent and largely unimportant. Before a true money economy was established in the area, there was a certain amount of co-operative work (*dugnad*), regulated through an informal system of reciprocal obligations with kin, friends, and neighbours. However, the feeling that one has obligations outside the farm and nuclear family has little appeal, and, as soon as possible, money payment for services was adopted.

A number of formal groups exist: county administrative committees with predominantly male membership, and four clubs with all-women membership. The county committees have specified governmental functions, and very little social interaction goes on before or after the meetings.

The women's clubs, although organized with certain practical interests in mind, such as community health, sewing, etc., have primarily a recreational function. The rotating meetings further provide a small arena for conspicuous waste and competition. A majority vote decided that three kinds of cookies were the maximum to be served at these occasions, but everybody tries to circumvent the ruling. The clubs are mostly recent introductions, patterned after similar clubs in lowland Norway and formally affiliated with them. They, therefore, tend to function as channels for new ideas, but differ from their lowland models in their reduced formality and looseness of leadership.

A sports club existed for a while, but all attempts at introducing team competition have been unsuccessful, and the club never became popular. Shooting competitions, on the other hand, are among the greatest events in the valley.

Informal groups play an incomparably greater role than organizations, and regulate most of the social contacts between individuals. They channelize the many aggressions that seem to build up so easily in a small community. Both sexes partake, but the women are

permitted considerably greater license and overt interest. The cliques work in an everchanging net of friendship, involving visits from one farm to another. The tie of friendship is usually a common dislike of a certain person, and much of the conversation is made up of more or less well-founded stories about this person. The conversations and visits are between two persons of the same sex, or two couples. Spouses are almost always in agreement, and thus belong to the same feuding cliques; but any wider kinship patterns cannot be discerned. Even unmarried children visit freely on "enemy" farms, and are well received there.

Personal conflicts are actually frowned upon, and public expression of hostility is thought bad taste. Thus the cliques tend to stay small, and will constantly vary according to the latest grudges. For the same reason, the couples with more prestige are usually less active socially. They visit their neighbors less, and are thought wise to stay out of conflicts. Thus one farmer, quite well thought of, has literally no interaction with people for other than economic reasons. The couple never visits anyone, and people specifically remembered that they had been to a certain funeral more than a year before. Thus even the informal groups do not seem to complicate the community organization to any great extent.

The system is characteristically segmented, both in time and space; each nuclear family, living separately on its own farm, is a semi-independent social and economic unit. The family thus stands out as the basic and most important social institution, by which most of the individuals' contacts and activities are regulated.

THE LIFE CYCLE

During his life, a person passes through a series of status positions each connected with certain functions in the family and with certain relations with the larger community. In a sketch of the normal life cycle, some facets of family life and organization may be illustrated.

(1) Birth is generally at home, attended by a midwife who lives in the community. The arriving child is usually wished for or even

planned; he arrives today in a small sibling group, three on an average, due to the systematic birth control by contraceptives practiced by most couples.

Child care is generally good and rather indulgent; the mother is always present on the farm, and no strict feeding schedule is kept. Breast feeding continues through the first year. Training seems to be highly individualized and not strict; the child is toilet trained around the age of two, but frequently later.

Early childhood seems to be a very happy time; the children are active and smiling, though sometimes shy towards strangers. Most contacts are with the parents. Since the distance between agemates is so great, there is much solitary play, and much play with older and younger siblings. This is regulated by the parents, who remind the older to be "nice" to the smaller ones, and frequently give them the responsibility to look after them. But there is generally no systematic favoring of one child, and little overt sibling rivalry. Age difference ascribes different roles to them, and these roles are accepted.

Control is by explanation and admonition, with little physical punishment used. Attention centers on the parent as a source of love and encouragement. Most adults are very fond of children, so the occasional contacts with visitors on the farm are similarly gratifying.

At the age of seven, the child starts in public school. This was, until 1949, a boarding school, where the children stayed for stretches of fourteen days. Meeting the larger society and being separated from the parents was for almost all a traumatic experience. Practically everyone, when telling of their childhood, will describe how they cried secretly when they had to go off to school, how endless and dreary those long miles were to walk, and how quickly they ran when eternity had passed for this time and they were heading home again. The slower children, who also find school work very difficult, often end up with a completely rebellious fear reaction to school and are likely to try to run away or evade it. The school yard for the first three classes is a picture of ten to twelve unsocialized little things, unable to play together because they have had so little contact with

agemates. The attention centers on the teacher as a substitute parent and source of affection.

Farm work and home life, on the other hand, continue to be gratifying. The parents' attitude has not changed; love and attention are given the child. The learning process is comfortable, and roles and duties are familiar and well defined. When the mother is canning meatballs, the daughter of eight is busy making small meatballs for the dog in her own small frying pan. Most play is concerned with farm life, especially toy barns populated with cow foot bones, each bone representing a cow.

In third or fourth grade, the children discover that they have to compete with their classmates for the attention of the teacher. They become competitively oriented. They become aware of the fact that their frustration originates from their being subordinate to the group, and start trying to control the behavior of agetates. On the other hand, most competition is positively oriented toward securing love and attention; there is little teasing of the less successful and no scapegoat pattern develops. Progressively, the competitive interest comes into conflict with the adult pattern of full self-control of behavior with no overt show of personal reactions. This reverses the trend, and more social withdrawal is common in the last (seventh) grade of school.

Confirmation, at fourteen or fifteen, signifies the end of childhood and the beginning, if not of adulthood, at least of adolescence. Nowadays, most young people, at any rate the boys, are thought to need more education than the seven years of grammar school, and they leave the valley to attend secondary school (*realskole*), agricultural or forestry school, or to receive craftsman's training. During this, they are supported by their parents. Many girls go away and take work as housemaids, sometimes after more schooling; but most of them feel homesick for Sollia and return home after a year or so. By the age of eighteen, the children are expected to start work: for the boys, this is either on the farm or in truck driving or timbering; for the girls, it is almost invariably in the farm house.

(2) There is much sexual license before marriage, and an ancient courtship pattern that has been strongly modified in other parts of Norway seems to persist here. It consisted of a formalized pattern of sexual experimentation, known as Saturday night proposals. Nowadays, it takes the form of "taking the girls home" after the big dances or other social occasions.

In these matters, it is strictly the boy who should take the initiative. The strong male pattern of not showing emotion and not making a fool of oneself in front of people is therefore a great stumbling block. The inexperienced boy is very bashful about the matter, and feels he must at any price avoid having his advances declined. He thus usually prefers to watch the proceedings at a dance from the midst of a gang of agemates, occasionally venturing a dance, but not daring to go any farther. Eventually, a common understanding is somehow developed between a boy and a girl, and he will then go with her to her home. These relations are moderately few and lasting, often with the same one from the very first. Some girls, on the other hand, become very fickle, but this does not seem to reduce their prestige appreciably.

Sooner or later, such a relationship comes to be regarded as an informal engagement, especially if the partners are fairly old. The choice of partner seems to be purely personal, although some pressure is undoubtedly exerted by the parents. There being no true class distinctions in the valley, mutual fondness and ability to get along together are the most important criteria; and of them, the young ones are as good judges as their parents. The general tendency toward community endogamy is probably just a reflection of the lack of personal contacts with outsiders.

The actual marriage is usually postponed for economic reasons. If the parents are still strong, the young couple would have to break new ground, or the boy get a job driving one of the truck lines. A wedding is usually precipitated by a pregnancy. Of the last five marriages in the valley, four seem to have been decided on after a child was conceived. Formerly, this tendency was even stronger:

from 1870-85, almost 10 per cent of all children were born out of wedlock. A non-wedlock child was at that time defined as a child who was christened before the parents were married.

In some cases, a child results from an otherwise unsuccessful combination. Certainly, if one party is from outside the valley, marriage need not result, and the explanation given and accepted is that the two did not suit each other. If both parties are members of the local community, pressure is generally brought to bear through kinship and neighbor channels, and marriage results. But there is no serious stigma attached to being a non-wedlock child; numerous illustrations of this could be given.²

There are many single people in Sollia. It was indicated above that economic considerations tend to postpone the actual marriage of informally engaged couples. Sometimes, nothing comes out of it if the two wait so long that the situation changes, and at least one of them goes single for life. This willingness to wait is completely frustrating to many a well-meaning visiting matchmaker; it is connected with the fear of making a fool of oneself and the general indifferent attitude towards time.

Many attractive and nice people never get even that far. A boy may never get up the courage to court his first girl; and that first step becomes increasingly more difficult as he becomes older. Or, the first relation is a failure, as when the boy is made to look silly in front of people by a brush-off, or the girl has an unsuccessful relation which does not invite repetition. There are other difficulties that further contribute to this; the community is small, the number of eligible persons of opposite sex much smaller. Sometimes, nobody appears who is attractive enough. All these factors, when operating together, create a real problem and produce a disproportionate number of spinsters and bachelors. Where a group of siblings are all unmarried (and that is surprisingly common), they may take over the family farm together. Otherwise, single people tend to live alone on small incomplete farms, taking seasonal work on other farms.

With marriage, all sexual freedom ceases. The tie between spouses

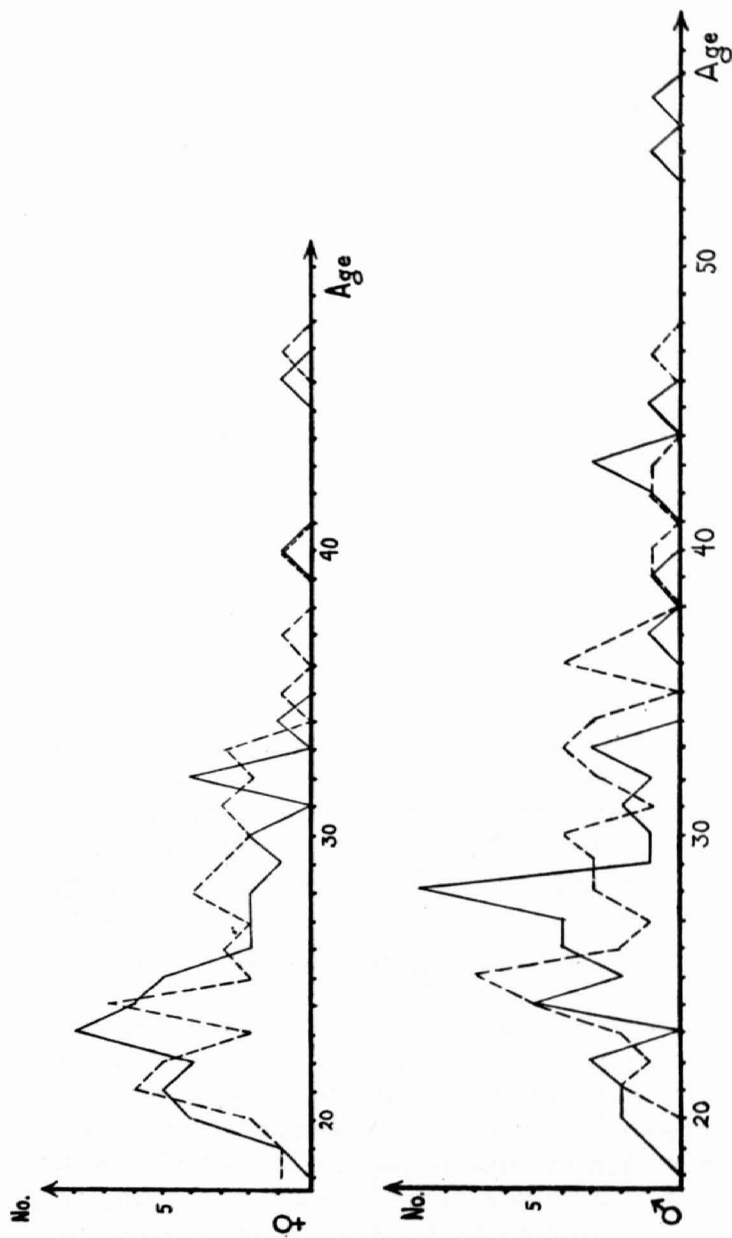


FIGURE 1. Age distribution at marriage in 1870-85 (solid line) and in 1935-45 (dashed line) for women (above) and men (below). Practices relating to age of marriage have remained unchanged in spite of great social changes. (From church records for the county of Sollia).

is thought of as complete, and there seem to be extremely few cases of infidelity. Only one case of divorce is known. The marriage that broke up was between a local woman and a man in a neighboring valley. She obtained the divorce on grounds of incompatibility, returned home, and later remarried.

Married life on the farm is well ordered and satisfying, and does not produce much conflict. As the small group of children grow older, more time is free for the woman to be active in women's clubs and gossip. Where the young people are supporting themselves by other work, such as in transport and timbering, there is more insecurity, living and housing arrangements are more temporary, and conflicts tend to develop. This type of work has considerable appeal with the young boys, who find machinery and speed much more fascinating than fertilizer and tedious work. But after the novelty wears off and all the discomforts of a long truck line on bad roads become evident, the husband's early enthusiasm for car driving fades and the result seems to be that sooner or later he gets a farm of his own.

With old age, the aforementioned conflicts with the children arise and the inevitable reduction in power and prestige looms ahead. The elders therefore try to stay strong and active, and the healthy life they lead allows them to keep going for a surprisingly long time. An old man of eighty-seven who still did his share of timbering in the forest was not unique, though he admittedly did better than most of the aged.

ECONOMY AND CULTURAL CHANGE

It has been pointed out previously (in this chapter) how government controls and subsidies modify life in Sollia, particularly in connection with milk production and dairying practices. The numerous controls of the planned society actually play a role in almost all phases of life. On an average, this sparsely populated community **on the extensive margin of cultivation certainly profits from them. The local economy is today completely dependent on the numerous sup-**

ports. One of the two main products, milk and derivatives, has considerable subsidy, and the prices on much that is bought for consumption (sugar, flour, etc.) are kept low by other controls and subsidies. A state through-road has been built during the last fifteen years; this has offered temporary work for many local men. Health insurance and various other forms of insurance, family supports for clearing of land and draining of marshes, free advice on cattle breeding, regular checks on fat content in milk, scientific care of county-owned forests, etc., all offer benefits that the community could not itself afford. This contributes to raising the standard of living and the effectiveness of farm work, but it has not basically altered the productive or social patterns in the community. They are unchanged since before the depression of the thirties, when most of these benefits were first instituted.

The community organization has remained segmented, and the farm-family institution has changed little. In the memory of the old people, Sollia has moved from the solitude of inaccessible mountains to integration into modern life, and this change has converted a local and isolated barter community to a money economy, closely connected with the world market. Institutions that have survived such revolutions are hardly shattered by a new price for sugar.

It may contribute to our understanding of the local family system to see how it reacted to economic change and was modified by the necessary readjustments.

Around 1880, the community had a close approximation to a subsistence economy. Trade passed over thirty miles of roadless mountain to the local market, where butter and tar were bartered or sold for grain, sugar, coffee, and metals. A local group of craftsmen supplied the community with their products, and the diet was adjusted to require a minimum of outside goods.

The social organization was more complex than today. In addition to the craftsmen, with their traditional rights and privileges, and the landowning farmers, there was a landless class. It consisted mostly of recent immigrants, who worked on other people's land on a share-

cropper basis. These three divisions, farmer, craftsman, and landless workman, were not fixed and clear; craftsmen had small farms on the side, and might devote progressively more time to them, or farmers might take up a craft. The more enterprising of the landless group were constantly breaking new ground and starting new farms, or learning trades.

The families tended to be considerably larger than today; sibling groups of six and eight were not uncommon. Today people smile at the one family with eight children, and many comment jocularly that somebody ought to explain things to them. The economic roles were the same as today, though stricter; men would probably not have been willing to milk the cows if it could be avoided. The work tended to be less efficient and less rationally planned; lack of knowledge about food values and fat contents resulted in inferior fodder and underfed cattle. Hours were longer and the struggle for life harder.

The family was more patriarchally structured; the traits that only partly survive today as formalized custom were meaningful and important. But the basic organization was the same as today, so the same checks on too much prestige inequality between the male and female were doubtless operative.

The church and the Old Testament, with their more authoritative attitudes regarding the position and training of children, had a greater influence. The minister was one of the central members of the community. But any strong religious tradition was probably lacking, and the church was more important as the social center of the community than for its religious function. Church festivals were celebrated with dancing, singing, and drinking. But the institution and the authoritarian viewpoints it stood for had a considerable prestige.³

The family institution of 1880 was thus essentially similar to what we find in Sollia today. There has been modification, but no disorganization has resulted, and the innovations have been reinterpreted in terms of the local culture. This is evident from the attitude of the old people to the modern community: there is little glorifica-

tion of the old days and no damning of the later innovations. Change that has taken place is generally regarded as "good," both by old and young. The basic characteristics of the nuclear family have remained unchanged through severe economic and social reorganization. This is not a case of cultural lag; the present family system is very closely integrated with the present economic and social system, and the culture as a whole seems to function harmoniously. It shows rather the fundamental adaptability of the segmented community organization and of the local family system, which in its structure and adaptability is not unlike the modern urban family.

POPULATION TRENDS

Some demographic data on the community of Sollia as a whole may serve to round out the picture of the Sollia family, and lead to an understanding of some of the trends and pressures operative today and in the past.

The total population has changed little in the time span covered here. From 458 in 1880 it was reduced to 407 in 1920 and increased to a total of 455 in 1949. The area called Sollia by the census is shown to have declined from 472 in December 1950 to 451 in January 1956.⁴

Since the differences in population are not too great, the number of births and deaths in Sollia during three time periods can be compared directly (see Figure No. 2). Around 1880, a high birth rate produced a constant population pressure, and a need for emigration. The community's economy was still fairly unmodified, with few connections with the world market. With growing contact with the larger society, innovations appeared. Good road connections were established and heavy transport became possible. The availability of new commodities stimulated new demands or at least new wishes.

A change in agricultural practices was inevitable. The point was no longer to produce a maximum of subsistence items. The growing money economy led to specialization and greater efficiency. The landless sharecropper no longer had an economic function in the community, and the craftsmen had to compete with machine-made

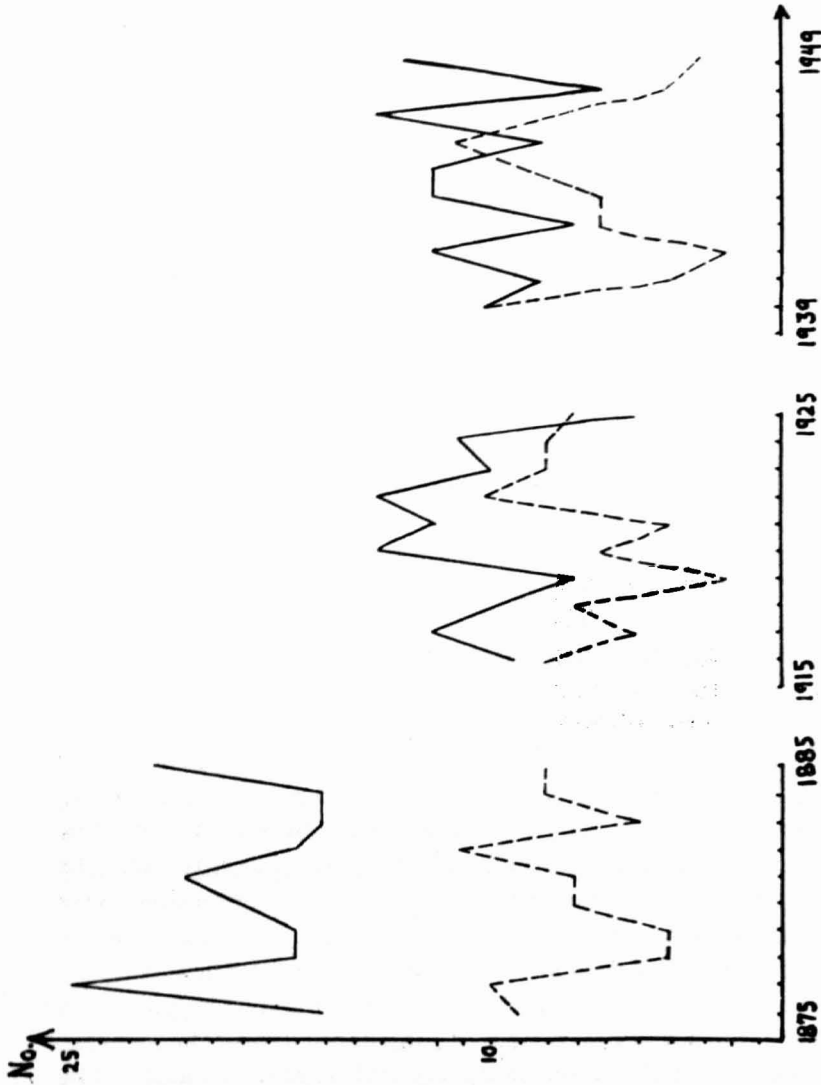


FIGURE 2. Number of births (solid line) and number of deaths (dashed line) in the county of Sollia for the time periods 1875-85, 1915-25, 1939-49. Total population has remained relatively unchanged. The drop in the birthrate between 1885 and 1915 is a result of the assumption of family planning.

goods. The result was great economic pressure and a feeling of poverty against the background of the new wants and needs.

The obvious solution was increased emigration to richer areas. This became a typical wave of fashion. Such collective behavior was called *dilla*, most closely translatable as "the bug." Beginning in the 1870's, the America bug spread like wildfire. Great numbers of people went to America; "everybody" seemed to want to go. Not only did many landless workmen and craftsmen, who felt the economic pressure hardest, migrate; the only children on big farms also left Sollia, all in a fad-like migration which greatly exceeded what the economic pressure would alone have produced. The peak was reached in 1884 when 30 persons of a total population of 450 left. The result was the reduction in total population seen between the 1880 and 1920 figures, and complete relief from population pressure in a community where most members became self-owning farmers. The landless class had been replaced by machinery and market economy, the craftsmen had been replaced by transport routes, bus routes, etc. Work with machinery and trucking now offers temporary employment for young people, as timbering, farmhand work, and crafts frequently did before.

At the same time, the man-land ratio was subjected to another type of control through the adoption of contraceptive methods.⁵ The male contraceptives are procured by mail order. The striking reduction in number of births, seen on the graph, has served to stabilize the population and to eliminate the need for migration.

By taking full advantage of the technical innovations (new methods in agriculture, money economy, and contraceptives), the local community managed to adapt to the new situation, without cultural breakdown resulting. Thus pressures that might have proved destructive to the local family system were controlled and overcome.

By 1950, the direction of migration was reversed; some in-migrants contribute to the slowly growing population in the area.

There are few luxuries to spend money on, or to feel an unsatiated

need for—the local culture functions quite harmoniously without them. Both the actual plane of living and the subjective standard of living thus appear rather high in the area, stimulating immigration and discouraging emigration.

Furthermore, there is a negative prestige consideration operative against emigration. A mountain farmer, living in his separate subculture, has considerable prestige in his relationship to urban friends and visitors. He is regarded apart from the urban social ladder. Until recently, however, he had no more than the seven compulsory years of school, and his training and knowledge apply only to his own area and occupation. Migration to the city would place him at the bottom of the social "peck order," as an unskilled laborer, and the less formal and certainly unfamiliar urban behavior patterns would produce insecurity and resentment.

A possible route of urban mobility for men is the occupation of truck driver, which would give some status in the urban community. But as indicated above, the reaction to driving seems to become negative with experience. In the few observed situations, this led to a wish to return to farm work. Truck driving is considered temporary work, and no actual cases of migration through this occupation were found.

A fairly common route of urban mobility for women is working as a housemaid for some city family, often arranged through personal connections. Housework in the city is regulated; there are set work hours and more free time, and the work is not as strenuous as on the farm. This seems to result in a relatively greater urban movement of young women and a deficiency of "eligible" women in the community. But a common reaction is homesickness for the valley, and married life on the farm is regarded as the best solution by the great majority of the young women.

A contemporary fad, the "machine bug," has motivated some to acquire technical training and even to study engineering at the Institute of Technology. But it is striking that most boys do not seek practical training, but rather the general education of the secondary

school, and the reason given for extra schooling is that it develops the personality, "it is good for you."

Life in the valley seems to offer more satisfaction to most of the community's members than what they have experienced of urban life. A slowly growing population is thus contained within the valley, and economic pressures are relieved by clearing new land. The area is still extremely sparsely populated, and the many new farms have not appreciably reduced the good land available for clearing. With the discernible trends that are operative today, it would thus seem that the local subculture has completed a successful adjustment to the modern Norwegian society. Sollia can profitably remain in relative isolation, partly integrated in the modern society, and the local life seems to give considerable satisfaction to those who participate. A locally adapted and seemingly successful subculture thus exists in the area, with a distinctive family organization. Families and other organizations are clearly meaningful as local, subcultural adaptations, which may be able to resist further influences of urbanization.

¹ A study by Olav Skårdal of agricultural families in Stranda, 1949 (published by the Institute for Sociology of the University of Oslo, 1953), found that at vocational age nearly all the eldest sons decided for jobs rather than primogeniture. Odd Ramøy, *Arbeider Offentliggjort ved Institutt for Sosiologi 1950-57* (Oslo, 1957), p. 19 (Stensilserie).

² If the question were put abstractly, as when it is summarized here, the local answers would probably be in conflict with the above. This is connected with the fact that we are describing a subculture. The general values of pan-Norwegian culture, more strongly Protestant, will always color the more theoretical and verbalized attitudes in a local community. Most local people would thus undoubtedly state that it is tragic to be illegitimately conceived; that definition of the situation is an accepted fact in Norwegian culture. But when one regards the local situation, it is striking that illegitimacy is no block to community prestige, is never used in clique criticism, etc. Thus, in terms of the local culture, there is actually little or no stigma attached to parents or child.

³ Today the social functions of the church have been taken over by a county-owned dance hall, where national, political, or club celebrations are held. The minister is not integrated into the community; the church, lying far away, is very rarely visited. Religious activities are very few. As a measure of religious interest, one might note that the few attempts at initiating revivalist sectarianism have been complete failures. The whole community belongs passively to the moderate state church.

⁴ *Statistiske Arbok for Norge, 1957*, p. 7.

⁵ Hearsay in Oslo traced the introduction of contraceptive practice in Sollia to a physician from Bergen who was a summer resident or visitor there.—Ed.