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Responsibility, trust and gender in the economic decision-making of peasant households: enclosure in Southwest Finland 1760–1820

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ABSTRACT

This article studies gender roles in the economic decision-making of peasant farms in Southwest Finland in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. This is a new perspective on enclosure and a new context to study gender roles in economic matters. Decisions concerning enclosure were primarily made by male household heads. Exceptions to the decision-making norm open up a perspective onto a more detailed picture of gendered responsibility in economic matters in peasant households. The results show that the responsibility of a male head of a household for making decisions regarding the land was binding. Whereas men used representatives in extremely exceptional circumstances only, a half of the female household heads used a representative at least at some point. Both men and women primarily trusted the younger generation when it came to choosing representatives. Women attended enclosure meetings rarely, but when they did, their participation was not questioned. Women acted just like other stakeholders at the meeting.

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1. Introduction

On Monday 15 August 1791, surveyor Daniel Wirzenius arrived in the village of Oripää to talk to the local farmers about privatising the common meadows and village land. The fields had already been enclosed, and now it was time for every farmer to receive private meadows and forests. Some 30 farmers, mostly peasants, participated in the discussion and signed the resulting agreement. Some farmers could not attend the talks themselves, so they authorised representatives to act on their behalf. Son-in-law Thomas took part on behalf of Matts Eskola, and father-in-law Jacob participated on behalf of Johan Erkkilä. Widow Brita Pruukka was ill and sent her eldest son, Samuel, to make decisions on behalf of the farm. Michel Pietilä had also fallen ill, and he was represented by his wife, Catarina. Together, these people – the surveyor, the farmers or their representatives, and two lay judges – evaluated the quality of the soil and came to an agreement on how each farm's share would be located in the terrain.¹

Thousands of events like the one described above were organised in Southwest Finland from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. They were part of an enclosure reform called

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¹Kansallisarkisto, Turku (National Archives of Finland, Turku) (KA, Turku), Turun ja Porin läänin maanmittausarkisto III, Oripää 2:3, protokoll 15.8.1791.

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storskifte that was being conducted in the Swedish realm (Gadd, 2000, pp. 273–282; Saarenheimo, 2003, pp. 349–364). Unlike in other parts of the realm, in Finnish areas *storskifte* was a general partitioning of land that affected all villages and farms (Laine, 2020, p. 77). This meant that all farmers had to make decisions about land use from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Enclosure decisions were primarily made by men, but as the example of Oripää demonstrates, women were also involved in making these important economic decisions as widows and as wives, even though the public operating space for women was limited in the patriarchal system and in eighteenth century legislation (Pylkkänen, 2005; Sogner, Lindstedt Cronberg, & Sandvik, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to analyse gender roles in peasant households with regard to decisions that concerned the farm as a whole, especially the decisions concerning the farm's most valuable resource: land. The source material is based on the official records of the enclosure processes in four parishes in Southwest Finland at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The article analyses the gendered decision-making of peasant households through the concepts of responsibility and trust. In what kinds of situations did male or female household heads delegate their decision-making responsibilities to someone else? Who did the male or female head of the household trust when they did decide to delegate their responsibilities? What can the decision-making situations tell us about the gender roles within the household?

The patriarchal order of the household forms the starting point for this article. The central household resources were controlled by a male head of the household, and all the other women and men in the household fell under his authority; he was also their representative in the eyes of the law (Stark, 2016, pp. 18–19). Thus, the bearer of responsibility and the maker of decisions concerning the entire farm was usually a man. This study focuses on those situations where a decision concerning the entire farm was made by someone other than a male head of the household. Patriarchalism is never absolute, and the activity of women within patriarchal structures does not necessarily contain a desire for change (Cederbom, 2020, p. 4). This article is not about behaviour that goes against the norm (cf. Eilola, 2002; Lilieqvist, 2002), but about exceptions found within the system. By studying these exceptions, it is possible to highlight subtle nuances in patriarchalism and gender roles in rural households.

I bring up two different exceptions to the decision-making norm: 1) a situation where the male head of the household has died and his role is transferred to his widow, and 2) a situation where the male head of the household does not participate in the decision-making and delegates the responsibility to his chosen representative. Both situations are marginal exceptions in the overall picture of enclosure; however, by using extensive source material, enough of these exceptions can be highlighted to make the marginal visible.

2. Gender roles, responsibilities and trust within the household

The household was an important factor in defining the meanings of gender in everyday farm life, and its organisation entailed different roles of womanhood and manhood (Östman, 2000, pp. 31–32). The economy of an early modern farm was founded on marriage, which meant that the household was headed by a married couple or by the person who was left behind after the death of their spouse (Erickson, 2005; Ling, Hassan Jansson, Lennersand, Pihl, & Ågren, 2017, pp. 81–88). The economic partnership was born out of the wealth and work that each partner brought to the household, but the role of husband and wife were different due to, for example, inheritance practices and the gendered division of work (Erickson, 2005). The spouses were expected to assist one another, to work towards common goals and to be loyal (Ling et al., 2017, p. 92).

Marriage was a source of agency and authority for both spouses when compared with unmarried men and women, but it was also a partnership between unequal parties (Lindström, Hassan Jansson, Fiebranz, Jacobsson, & Ågren, 2017; Ling et al., 2017, pp. 98–99; Ogilvie, 2003, pp. 173–178).

Married women were under marital guardianship which made their position split. The spouses led the household together, but the wife was subordinate to her husband because legislation and church texts placed the husband above his wife (Lövkrona, 2001, pp. 37–38). If the farm was on inherited land, it was owned by one of the spouses and the other spouse had no right to it. Regardless of who owned the farm, however, the man was the one who made the decisions about it (Ågren, 2013).

Court cases and the gendered division of work tell us about the wife's position within the household. Working a farm usually required the work contributions of at least two adults, and marriage was an economic partnership formed to ensure that the farm work could be done successfully. Some of the work, such as the harvest, clearly involved both genders, but some work tasks were strongly gendered. Ploughing, for example, was often men's work and anything related to milk was women's work (Lindström et al., 2017, p. 238; Ling et al., 2017). Marriage had an impact on what kind of work the women did. Unlike unmarried women, married women commonly performed administrative work, managerial work and trade (Lindström et al., 2017, pp. 238–245; Ogilvie, 2003, pp. 159–162; Pylkkänen, 1990, p. 282).

The local courts were a public arena, and women had a right to appear there; in many instances they were also actors. Women either appeared in court themselves or were represented by their husbands, relatives or other representatives. Women also represented others, and married women represented the household (Sogner et al., 2000, p. 174). Typically, a wife was allowed to operate independently during her husband's absence (Dübeck, 2005; Ling et al., 2017, pp. 93–94; Sandvik, 2005; Van der Heijden, Schmidt, & Wall, 2007, pp. 227–228). In practice, the courts considered spouses to be cooperative partners; either of them could represent the household, so the wife did not need her husband's permission to appear in court (Ling et al., 2017, pp. 94–95; Pylkkänen, 1990, pp. 128–129; Sogner et al., 2000, pp. 178–179).

According to Pylkkänen (1990), in Finnish court cases the husband was responsible for representing the farm in the community, fulfilling the farm's responsibilities, monitoring the ownership of the farm, and managing land use, debts and trade and matters related to inheritance. Matters concerning housekeeping, sustenance and cattle were the exclusive domain of the wife. Either spouse could represent the household in matters related to household management, family members or hired workers. Other studies have shown that wives had a wide-ranging yet limited capacity for action in economic matters, but the court cases they were involved with were usually of small monetary value and seldom related to real estate (Andersson, 2001; Ling et al., 2017, p. 95; Pylkkänen, 2005, p. 81). Men's hegemony concerning land was related to the desire to pass the land along the male lineage and the power aspect connected with the land and its use (Pylkkänen, 2005, p. 81). In this light, it was not expected that many wives would be found in the enclosure records.

When a husband died, it was possible for his widow to take his place as the head of the household. Legislation allowed women to be a legal subject and achieve financial independence after becoming a widow (Johansen, 2004; Moring & Wall, 2017; Toivanen, 2005; Velková, 2010). Because women lived longer and married younger than men, they were likely to end up as widows. In Finland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was common for women to be widowed at the age of 50 or so, and a woman would spend some 15 years of her life as a widow (Moring & Wall, 2017, pp. 189–191).

Even though there had always been widows who were household heads, a widow running a farming operation was exceptional because most widowed women did not assume the power and responsibility associated with being a farmer (Johansen, 2004, p. 179; Moring, 2010, p. 242; Pylkkänen, 1990, p. 314; Toivanen, 2005, p. 120). At the end of the eighteenth century, one quarter of Finnish farmers' widows were heading farms (Moring & Wall, 2017, p. 83, 131). The widow's decision to head the farm was mostly affected by the age and competence of the heir to be. Widows with adult married children would most often retire (Moring, 2010).

Regardless of their authority, widows who were heading a farm could send somebody else to represent them in court if they felt it was in their interests to do so (Andersson, 2001, p. 28; Sogner et al., 2000, p. 170; Toivanen, 2005, pp. 38–40). Interpreting the use of representatives as a judicial

strategy emphasises the widow's wide scope for action. However, the use of representatives can also be an indication of an insufficient scope for action. A poignant challenge to a widow's freedom of action as the head of a farm has been highlighted by Östman, who has studied Ostrobothnia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Östman (2000), the communal decision-making in villages was a male-dominated arena and there was a high threshold for a woman's participation, even when the woman was the head of her household (p. 257; see also Ogilvie, 2003, pp. 248–257).

Responsibility was a strongly gendered concept in early modern Sweden (Ågren, 2009, pp. 96–97). Although the head of the household was responsible for the household whether they were male or female, there are indications that their actual position was not the same (Karlsson Sjögren & Lindström, 2004, p. 248; Sogner et al., 2000, p. 167). According to Fiebranz (2003), the widow's responsibility was not individual: rather, she had duties to both her children and her husband's relatives when heading a farm on his inherited land (p. 234).

When transferring responsibility to an outsider or another member of the household, trust was a necessity. Trust could be based on reputation or personal experience. In a rural environment, the best conditions for the creation of trust existed among family members, relatives and neighbours (Hemminki, 2012; Kotilainen, 2012). Lay judges and other farmers with a trustee function in the local community were important people in local networks of trust (Piilahti, 2007, pp. 269–272; Toivanen, 2005, p. 39).

According to Andersson (2001), the honour of individual and farm was considered to be more significant in social relationships than gender (p. 29). Although work gave both men and women credibility (Hassan Jansson, Fiebranz, & Östman, 2017, p. 153), gender affected how the concept of honour was defined. A man's value within a community was defined by wealth and age, but his scope for action could be limited by reputation and honour, which was an aspect of manhood in addition to responsibility, stability, honesty and strength (Jokiaho, 2002, pp. 203–205; Lövkrona, 2001, p. 39; Vilkkuna, 2014, p. 94). A woman's honour and her scope for action were tied to her work, marital status, role in the household and reputation as a good housekeeper (Andersson, 2001; Ling et al., 2017; Lövkrona, 2001, p. 39). However, in economic matters gender had significance and maleness carried symbolic capital. A woman could compensate for her lack of symbolic value through economic capital, well-developed social networks or having a man represent her (Andersson, 2001, p. 29).

In the context of decisions about enclosure, the pool of possible trustees was significantly small. Being thoroughly familiar with land use in the village was a great benefit at an enclosure meeting. However, neighbours from the same village were not an option, because they had their own interests in the same procedure. Therefore, it is presumable that people who lived on the farm or knew it well took priority when representatives were being chosen.

3. Enclosure and economic decisions

In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, land use in large parts of Europe was based on common lands and an open-field system (Dyer, Thoen, & Williamson, 2018, p. 1; Renes, 2018, pp. 121–125). Southwest Finland represented the north-east corner of the open-field system in Europe (Talvitie, 2018). The reforms that were aimed at the dissolution of open fields or the privatisation of common lands are referred as enclosure (De Moor, Shaw-Taylor, & Warde, 2002, p. 17; Overton, 1996, pp. 147–148).

Enclosure is a widely studied set of reforms. Researchers have been interested mainly in the connection with agricultural development: whether enclosure increased agricultural output (e.g. Clark, 1998; Olsson & Svensson, 2010; Turner, 1986) and at which stage of agricultural development it occurred (e.g. Allen, 1999; Jones, 2016; Overton, 1996). The discussion about peasants and enclosure has focused on their support and opposition to the movement (e.g. Bäck, 1984; Frazer, 1999; Henningsen, 2001). However, enclosure was a complex process with many considerations. For

example, Laine (2020) shows that enclosures can reveal a lot about individual decision-making and ways of making compromises. Studies on enclosure often completely bypass the role of women – or the lack thereof. Falvey (2013) has raised the issue of women’s involvement in anti-enclosure protests. In addition, Kingston-Mann (2018) focuses on how women often experienced the flipside of enclosure. The privatisation of common land prevented those who did not own the land from accessing pastures and kitchen gardens, which were common rights that were especially utilised by women. For her part, McDonagh (2009, 2018) highlights the actions of gentlewomen as promoters of enclosure and developers of agriculture in England.

Storskifte, which began in 1749, was the first enclosure reform in the Swedish realm. It represented an aspiration to use land more efficiently and increase agricultural production, helped along by legislation. In Swedish research, *storskifte* is presented as a partial reform. It reduced the number of strips within the framework of the open-field system (Gadd, 2000, pp. 277–279; Ols-son & Svensson, 2010, p. 293). In this form, enclosure does not appear to set the stage for momentous decisions. However, the type of enclosure that took place in Southwest Finland was rather different.

Compared with the Swedish parts of the realm, the results in Southwest Finland were more radical and the reform was carried through in every village. *Storskifte* revolutionised the economic foundations of the farms. The meaning of the village community in people’s lives changed as a consequence; however, the process also came with many agreements that enabled economically affordable cooperation between the villagers, even though the land-use system that supported this cooperation was being abolished. The decisions concerning enclosure involved many major and minor questions regarding costs, use of labour, productivity of land, and risks of annual crop variation (Laine, 2020). Because the productivity of agriculture was low (Ojala & Nummela, 2018), choosing the wrong solutions could have been fatal for households, especially in years of crop failure.

Enclosure is an excellent opportunity for analysing decision-making and the related bearing of responsibility. Often, sources only highlight the actions of active individuals or those who acted in some exceptional manner. When analysing enclosure in Southwest Finland, the decisions made by every farm become visible. Furthermore, enclosure could not be postponed because of illness, death or similar obstacles. Therefore, the pages of the source documents contain a diverse group of decision-makers. Because decisions were being made on the most important questions that a peasant household had faced, who was responsible for making them was not a trivial matter.

4. Sources and method

The data is based on information collected from the enclosure records of four parishes in Southwest Finland. The records were scoured for information on all widows who were heading a farm and for situations where someone else participated in the enclosure process on behalf of the head of the household. Background information on the people who were found in this manner was collected from communion books and lists of the baptised, married and deceased. In addition, information about the transference of headship was collected from tax registers. The sum of these sources resulted in a database of individuals who had participated in exceptional decision-making situations regarding enclosure.²

Most of the enclosure records begin with a list of the people who were present at meetings about the procedure. These lists also mention if an individual was attending the event on behalf of someone else. However, such a list of attendees was not always included in the records. In these cases, the

²Enclosure acts: Maanmittauslaitoksen arkistokeskus (National Land Survey of Finland) (MLAK); Kansallisarkisto, Helsinki (National Archives of Finland, Helsinki) (KA Helsinki), Maanmittaushallituksen uudistusarkisto; KA, Turku, Turun ja Porin läänin maanmittausarkisto III; the index of enclosure acts is available in Laine (2020, appendix 1). Parish archives: KA Turku, parishes of Alastaro, Huittinen, Kauvatsa, Koski Tl, Loimaa, Marttila, Oripää, Pöytyä, Säskylä, Tarvasjoki, Vampula, Yläne. Tax registers: KA Helsinki, Läänintilit, Turun ja Porin läänin tilejä, henkikirjat.

presence of a representative may become apparent in the text describing the discussion or from the signatures on the agreement. All the situations where a representative was found to be present, and all the information on widows was collected in a database. The wording of the records was also analysed insofar as they described these attendees who deviated from the norm.

The names collected in the database were given stories by supplementing them with background information from other sources. Information on a person's birth, death, marriage and family relations was available in registers maintained by the parishes. This made it possible to find out how old the person participating in the decision-making was, whether the woman owned the farm and who else in the household could have borne the responsibility for making the decisions. Information on when the headship was transferred and who was entered as the head of the household was collected from the tax registers.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the data. A statistical analysis of the database provided an overall picture of the transference of responsibility and the decision-making of widows. This was supplemented by a qualitative analysis of the wording of the records, which revealed how the representatives and widows were talked about in the records and how the records depicted their actions in decision-making situations.

The study targeted four large parishes – Huittinen, Loimaa, Marttila and Pöytyä – located inland in Southwest Finland. These parishes were ideal for studying the activities of peasant farmers, because the local peasants were responsible for about 90 per cent of the farms. They were freeholders or Crown tenants, so they were allowed to make decisions regarding their farms freely. Agriculture was tremendously important to the economy of the local peasants, because there were practically no secondary occupations in the area. For this reason, the decisions made in the enclosure process were of great consequence for the peasant households (Laine, 2020).

Nearly all of the enclosure processes in the area were conducted between the years 1760 and 1820 (Laine, 2020, p. 44). The data composed for this period contains enclosure procedures from 220 villages, where there stood a total of 1,140 farms. The situations focused on in this study were clearly the exceptions, because they concerned just 111 farms (10%). This is a result as such: a male head of a household made the important decisions about land in the vast majority of the enclosure procedures. Because enclosure occurred in stages – fields were enclosed first in most cases, with meadows and forests entering the picture at a later stage – the number of people who participated in the enclosure process was higher than the number of farms.

5. Transferring the responsibility to the younger generation

The enclosure records included in the data indicate that a total of 95 household heads were represented by someone else at the enclosure meeting. Seven of them sent someone else to represent the farm at two different events. Of those who authorised others to act on their behalf, 71 were men and 24 were women.

Both women and men primarily trusted a male from the younger generation when it came to choosing their representatives, which meant that they chose their sons, stepsons and sons-in-law. The representative came from these categories 69 times out of 102 cases in total (68%). The same proportion of men and women authorised someone from the younger generation to act in their stead. In the context of enclosure, this was natural given that the decisions concerned future land use. Three farmers chose someone other than their adult son to represent them.

When looking more closely at the cases where the representative came from the younger generation, we can see that the original farmer was not inhibited from taking part in the procedure in all cases. Since the Middle Ages, farmers had been using retirement contracts according to which an ageing farmer would hand over their farm to their child in exchange for care for the rest of their life (Lundh & Olsson, 2002, p. 374; Moring & Wall, 2017, p. 126). If a retirement was imminent at a farm, the enclosure decisions could be left to the future farmer. These decisions about enclosure would affect the new farmer's household management, so it was only natural to allow him to

participate in the decision-making even though the headship had not yet been transferred. For example, the records from the village of Talola state that Matts Thomasson Frantsila sent his son-in-law and successor, Jacob Simonsson, to represent him.³ As for widow Maija Simonsdotter Jacola from the village of Tapala, she authorised her son Jacob Mattsson to represent her at the enclosure meeting and he was referred to as a ‘young farmer’ in the records.⁴

The connection between retirement and choice of representative is reinforced by the fact that the average age of those male farmers who authorised a member of the younger generation to represent them was 60 years. It is known that men usually retired at that age (Jutikkala, 1958, p. 325; Lundh & Olsson, 2002, p. 386). The effect of retirement on representative selection can be confirmed by looking at the transference of the status of head of the household in the tax registers. Of the 50 situations where men authorised their sons or sons-in-law to represent them, 33 (66%) can be associated with retirement at the farm. This conclusion may be drawn from the fact that the son or son-in-law who was authorised to represent the farm in the enclosure procedure appeared as the head of the household in the tax register no later than two years after the procedure.

The average age of the women who transferred their responsibility to the younger generation was 55 years. Women often retired at a slightly younger age than men (Jutikkala, 1958, p. 325; Lundh & Olsson, 2002, p. 386). Nevertheless, clear instances of retirement were less common in the representative choices made by women than in the choices made by men. Of the 19 situations where widows authorised their sons or sons-in-law to represent them, eight (42%) can be connected to retirement through the information in the tax registers.

Taking retirement into account changes the overall picture of representative selection. If the mandates connected to retirement are ignored, only 61 mandates (60%) remain. A member of the younger generation remains the most common choice of representative, with a share of 46 per cent; 42 per cent for men (17 mandates out of 41 in total) and 55 per cent for women (11 mandates out of 20 in total). Usually, the representative later became the farmer. In five cases, a son or son-in-law who represented the farm in the enclosure meeting never became the farmer.

The members of the younger generation who were chosen as representatives were by no means inexperienced youths: their average age was 31 years. Only one boy under the age of 20 was handed the responsibility of making decisions about enclosure. Generally speaking, experience brought by age was considered to be a benefit when choosing a representative from the younger generation, but majority was not necessarily required (Sogner et al., 2000, p. 176). Choosing a woman from the younger generation was out of the question. The representatives in the younger generation whose mandate can be connected to retirement were usually married, but 54 per cent of the other representatives from the younger generation were unmarried.

6. Men’s representatives: the wife in the enclosure meeting

When we take into account that more than 1,000 male farmers participated in the enclosure processes studied, it was truly rare for a man to give a mandate to someone else; indeed, it happened only 41 times (when mandates related to retirement are discounted). This is a clear indication that the male farmers considered the responsibility for making decisions regarding the farm to be binding for them. This responsibility was transferred to someone else in exceptional circumstances only; illness was the only reason mentioned in the records.

In cases where a member of the younger generation was not an option, men favoured a relative from their own generation as their representative. 14 mandates (34%) were given to relatives from the same generation. The men who gave these mandates chose either their wife or their brother. Of these, the wife was the more common option. The data contains nine wives (ten mandates) representing the farm, while only four brothers were given the mandate. The older generation was a rare

³MLAK, Koski 13, protokoll 5.11.1794.

⁴MLAK, Koski 14:1, protokoll 10.8.1812.

choice and men in retirement age were not chosen as representatives at all. The men chose a father once, a stepfather once and fathers-in-law twice, but the oldest of these was 56 years. The fathers-in-law were chosen when the head of the household was a son-in-law on the farm.

Six male farmers chose a non-relative as a representative. One of them gave a mandate to a neighbour from another village on the opposite side of the river. The chosen relatives, and probably the neighbour, knew the economy of the farm well. Five farmers, however, did not care about knowledge of the land and farm but chose a member of the gentry to represent them. These cases are exceptional, because it seems that not all of the farmers were forced to use a representative; some of them chose to do so because they wanted to achieve more authority for one reason or another. For example, in the village of Joenperä, which was composed of two farms only, there was a conflict between the farmers. In this situation Johan Isotalo did not want to negotiate with his neighbour, so he authorised a member of the local gentry to represent him.⁵

Most of the farmers who gave a mandate to their wife also had a close relative who was an adult male. Unfortunately, the sources do not specify the circumstances that influenced the farmers' choices. For example, Thomas Perttula from the village of Kallio authorised his wife, Beata, to participate in the decision-making, even though the same household included his 47-year-old brother and his 22-year-old son.⁶ Meanwhile, Anders Hunnas from the village of Vännilä trusted the farm's decision-making to his 34-year-old wife, Brita, instead of his 60-year-old father or his 27-year-old brother.⁷ When a wife represented the farm at an enclosure meeting, it was not because she had inherited the farm. The background of one wife could not be uncovered, but all the other wives who participated in the enclosure decisions had arrived at their farms as daughters-in-law, so they had no right of ownership to the farms because they would be passed down through the husband's family line. In addition, Pylkkänen (1990) has paid attention to the fact that owning land did not bring the wife more power or put her in a stronger position in the relationship between the spouses: for the status of a woman, being a wife was more significant than whether she owned land or not (p. 338).

For a wife to participate in decision-making as a fully competent party, it was not enough to have her husband's trust in her ability to make decisions. The wife had to be a respected member of the village and be considered a capable decision-maker for her to be allowed to participate in the discussion and enter into the agreement. For example, according to the records from the village of Palainen, wife Lisa Palta acted just like the other farmers in the negotiations. She demanded that the plan be corrected so that the Palta farm would have some forest next to their meadow, which was left in the middle of their neighbour's forest. This would make it easier to use a fence to protect the meadow from grazing cattle, as the wood required for the fence could be taken from next to the meadow instead of having to haul it in from further away. Her perspective was taken into account in the final solution.⁸

In one instance the wife was the primary petitioner in the enclosure procedure even though her husband was present. In the village of Halikkola, farmer's wife Sara Julla had filed a complaint to the court about how the enclosure process was progressing. The court ordered the village to conduct an inspection into the terrain to uncover the reality of the situation. It was recorded that the inspection was attended by Sara Julla, who had requested the inspection, and her husband. Therefore, Sara was considered to be the plaintiff even when her husband, who was the farmer and the owner of the farm, was present.⁹

One of the farmers' wives, Catarina Pietilä, apparently had some permanent responsibility for the matters of the farm. She represented the Pietilä farm on two occasions during the

⁵MLAK, Loimaan kunta 14, protokoll 18.6.1762; KA Turku, Turun ja Porin läänin maanmittauskonttori, Hab1, Diarium af Extraordinarie Landtmätären Jacob Ståhlström öfver alla dess Ämbets förrättningar uti Åbo Höfdingedöme för år 1762.

⁶MLAK, Metsämaa 1:2, protokoll 24.7.1797; KA Turku, Metsämaan seurakunta, rippikirja 1792–1803, Kallio, Bertula.

⁷MLAK, Alastaro 3, protokoll 27.4.1793; KA Turku, Alastaron seurakunta, rippikirja 1793–1799, Vännilä, Hunnas.

⁸MLAK, Marttila 13:1, protokoll 21.8.1798.

⁹MLAK, Koski 1:1, protokoll 22.12.1802.

enclosure process. On the first occasion, the records mention that Michel Pietilä was ill and of a disturbed mind.¹⁰ The wives of such chronically ill men could end up in a position similar to that of widows – where they were responsible for the farm – even though their husband was still alive (Toivanen, 2005, p. 80).

The enclosure documents also contain a feature that supports the view of spouses as co-managers of the household. When the records of the enclosure contain a mention of a wife being present at the meeting, most often they do not mention her being there on behalf of her husband. We can find a wife representing a farm in 10 documents, but the fact that the wife had power of attorney is mentioned only once. On three other occasions the records mention that the wife was there on behalf of her husband, and in half of the cases the husband is not mentioned at all. In other words, the wives appear in the records as a self-evident representative of the farm. Even though the number of cases is small, the documentation practices indicate that the surveyors did not question the wives appearing as partners in the process of the enclosure. This was the case regardless of the fact that the matter concerned the basic resource of agriculture, land, with which women usually did not have any significant relationship.

When a man was unable to attend the enclosure meeting, he chose a family member or close relative to represent his farm. The wife was one option besides adult men, but other women were excluded. Decisions concerning enclosure were decisions made within a village. The farmers did not want to authorise outsiders and they could not authorise their neighbours in the same village, so they had few options.

7. Widows as bearers and transferrers of responsibility

The data contains information on 48 widows who were acting as head of the household during the enclosure process. Given that enclosure often progressed in stages and contained several meetings and agreements, the same individuals can appear in the enclosure records several times. Six of the widows were presented as head of the household in more than one enclosure document.

In terms of age, the widows who participated in enclosure represented the entire spectrum of adult women. The youngest widow was 21-year-old Lena Vähä-Puno, whose husband had died a year earlier. Lena participated in the enclosure process with her fiancé, so for her, being head of the household was a short intermission between two marriages. The oldest widow was 74-year-old Lisa Sankari, who authorised her son to make the decisions on behalf of the farm three years after her husband's death. The average age of the widows was 48 years. Their experience varied; Anna Penttilä and Maria Paavola had to face the enclosure process just a month after the deaths of their husbands, whereas Walborg Eino had already been heading the farm for 16 years. The average period of widowhood before enclosure was 2.9 years, while the median duration of widowhood was one year. Most of the widows were in control of their husband's possessions, which would eventually be passed on to his descendants. In terms of their connection to the farm, 29 (60%) of the widows had arrived at their farms as daughters-in-law and nine (19%) were living on their homesteads. The farm ownership status of 10 widows was left unclear in the sources.

Widows delegated the responsibility for decision-making much more often than men did. Indeed, 24 (50%) of the widows took advantage of the opportunity to use a representative. However, their use of representatives might also have been situational. Walborg Kännö and Christina Eskola, who appear in multiple enclosure documents, are examples of this. During Walborg Kännö's stint as head of the household, four enclosure documents were drafted in the village of Siivikkala, and Walborg was present for two of those while her son Matts was present for the other two. Walborg herself took part in the first and last meetings, which took place nearly five years apart.¹¹ Similarly,

¹⁰KA Turku, Turun ja Porin maanmittausarkisto III, Oripää 2:3, protokoll 15.8.1791; MLAK, Oripää 2:6, protokoll 20.11.1797.

¹¹MLAK, Vampula 14, protokollen 12.12.1791 & 14.12.1791; MLAK, Vampula 14:3, protokoll 4.8.1791; MLAK, Vampula 14:4, protokoll 9.9.1796.

Christina Eskola sent her son Henric to the first enclosure meeting in the village of Ollila, but she attended the second event (a year later) herself.¹² These cases demonstrate that roles were flexible, as was the division of responsibility.

It is extremely difficult to find out why some of the widows decided to participate themselves instead of authorising a representative. For example, the widow's age or her length of time as head of the household do not divide the widows into groups that exhibit distinctly different behaviour. It can only be stated that the oldest widows, those over 70 years of age, did not personally participate in the decision-making. Economic background factors also fail to produce a pattern for the widows' behaviour; in other words, this data cannot be used to say that a woman needed wealth or a large farm to support her authority (cf. Andersson, 2001). It is impossible to know if the widows experienced social pressures, but there are no signs of claims for a male representative in the sources (cf. Karlsson Sjögren & Lindström, 2004, p. 249; Ogilvie, 2003, p. 237).

As made apparent above, like the men, the widows trusted the younger generation when it came to choosing their representatives. When mandates related to retirement are discounted, widows gave 20 mandates. All of the widows' representatives were men, and a member from the younger generation was chosen 11 times (55%). The other family members used as representatives by the widows were usually from the deceased husband's family. The representatives included one father-in-law and two brothers-in-law. The position of the deceased husband's male relatives was based on the farm being passed down through the male lineage (Fiebranz, 2003, p. 235). Only Anna Sahko turned to her own family, choosing her brother to represent her. Anna's brother was also a farmer from the same village, so he represented two farms at the same enclosure meeting. Two widows authorised their new fiancés to attend the enclosure meeting.

Primarily, the widows placed their trust in relatives. In court cases, widows preferred to use lay judges as their representatives when relatives were not available (Toivanen, 2005, p. 39). In contrast, because knowledge of the farm mattered more than social standing when it came to successfully participating in the enclosure negotiations, widows did not look for a person with prestige but for someone who knew the farm, if there were no relatives available. Two widows, one of them twice, authorised a male servant to represent them at the enclosure meeting. A mandate given to a farmhand appears to be exceptional when compared with the mandates issued by men. When granting the power of attorney, the men always authorised a person from the same or a higher group in the social hierarchy.

Enclosure was not only a question of land but also a question of work. The enclosure documents clearly show that decision-making was more difficult if the decision-maker did not work in the fields, meadows and forests. For example, members of the gentry made mistakes when they did not understand what the result would mean in practice.¹³ As a consequence of the gendered division of work, the knowledge and experience that was useful at the enclosure meeting was often concentrated among men.¹⁴ The type of work the widows did could have influenced the widows' readiness to participate in the decision-making regarding the enclosure. Thus, gendered structures had an influence on each other. This perspective, together with the aim of finding a representative from the same village, explains the use of male servants as representatives.

Sometimes widows also brought men, such as their fiancé or their son, to assist them in the enclosure processes. This meant that the widows could hold on to their power and responsibility, while using assistance to fill the gaps in their expertise or to reinforce the farm's position in the negotiations through the symbolic capital of maleness (Andersson, 2001). However, when compared with the behaviour of men, the behaviour of the widows in the transference of responsibility clearly demonstrates that a woman's responsibility was not perceived to be as personally

¹²MLAK, Marttila 12, protokoll 24.11.1781; MLAK, Marttila 3, protokoll 7.9.1782.

¹³E.g. MLAK, Loimaan kunta 8, protokoll 2.6.1791.

¹⁴According to information collected in the 1830s in the research area, ploughing, ditching, hay-cutting and tar-burning were most often the responsibilities of men. KA, Helsinki, Böckers samling, Statistikuppgifter 1834–1835, mf 99.

binding as that of a man. Whereas men used representatives in extremely exceptional circumstances only, half of the widows took advantage of the opportunity to use a representative at least at some point.

8. Conclusions

The overall picture of decision-making in the context of enclosure is very unambiguous. The male heads of the household negotiated and entered into agreements among themselves. This overall picture corresponds with results on spouses' actions in economic matters in court cases (Andersson, 2001; Pylkkänen, 1990). The farm's most valuable resource, its land, was perceived to be the men's domain.

Men and women took responsibility in different ways as the head of a household. Men acted personally – at least in economic matters concerning land, the primary area of a man's responsibility in the household. The reasons to use a representative were either retirement or illness, except for unusual strategic choices. Widows' tendency to use representatives has been shown by many studies (Andersson, 2001; Sogner et al., 2000; Toivanen, 2005). This study shows that the same tendency is also apparent in the most local context: the village.

The main principles of choosing someone to represent the farm at an enclosure meeting were same whether the head of the household was male or female. An enclosure procedure was about decision-making within a village, and the decisions were made by the people who lived in the village. The most dominant characteristic when choosing a representative in the context of enclosure was that the representative came from the same farm. This creates a connection with the inheritance of the farm: in-laws were chosen when the farm was the other spouse's inherited land. A principled order was followed inside the family when choosing a representative. Retired men, who had handed over power and responsibility, were not chosen as representatives, even though they would have been very familiar with matters of the farm. Instead, individuals in the younger generation who were looking forward to becoming farmers were often given the responsibility for making decisions concerning future land use.

According to Ling et al. (2017), 'marriage was a source of agency and authority to both women and men, but as a rule it was women's only source' (p. 99). Concerning decisions related to enclosure, even marriage was not enough for women. A woman had to be the mistress of the household to participate in an enclosure meeting. Therefore, the wife was an option for a male head of a household, but a widow could not authorise any woman. Although authorised men were usually married, unmarried men, such as sons, brothers and even male servants, were also able to make decisions about enclosure.

A woman participating in the decision-making related to the enclosure was an exception. Widows had a legal right to participate as head of the household, but the participation of wives was traditionally accepted and based on choices of their husbands. Nevertheless, the participation of women was not questioned, and they presented themselves as fully authorised representatives of their farms, whether they were wives or widows. The wording of the enclosure records does not indicate that women did not have enough scope for action. Therefore, the enclosure records support the interpretation that the use of representatives was a strategy for widows, rather than an indication of insufficient scope for action.

Enclosure stresses the symbolic capital carried by maleness in economic matters: a man could make important decisions about land regardless of his social standing. Women's participation in the economic decision-making was not excluded but it was strictly limited. Even important economic factors like ownership did not reduce the meaning of gender when decisions were related to land.

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