



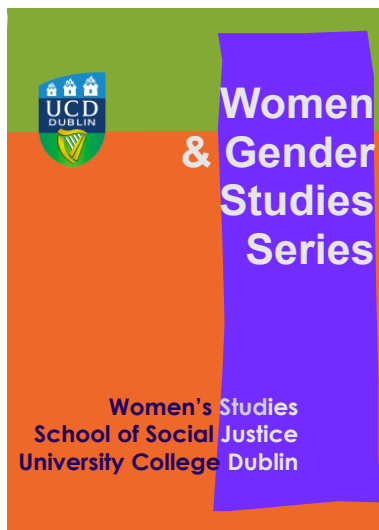
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Women & Gender Studies Series

Invisible Farmers: the Role of Irish Women in the National Farmers' Association, Farmers' Rights Campaign of the 1960s.

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Abstract

This article examines the role of Irish farmwomen during the National Farmers' Association, Farmers' Rights Campaign, which took place in 1966-67. It shows the "invisible" role that these women played during this campaign. These women illustrate the notion of "love labour", which seeks to disguise the true value of their contribution by presenting it as an act of love rather than attributing to it the true value of work. It shows how these farmwomen diminish their own role during the campaign as secondary to that of their husbands. This article addresses the importance of having a gender perspective to analyse historical phenomena; the emergence of social movements; and highlights the role of religion in the lives of Irish farming people at that time.

Key words

Irish farmwomen, invisible farmers, Farmers' Rights Campaign, love labour, women

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Introduction

The National Farmers' Association's (NFA) Farmers' Rights Campaign of the 1960s marked a highly significant watershed in farming politics in Ireland, establishing once and for all the right of farmers and their organisations, the NFA (later IFA, Irish Farmers Association) in particular, to be decision-makers on matters crucial to their own industry, and have that right recognised by government and state bodies.

My memory of that campaign is vivid and personal as my parents both played an important role in its unfolding and outcome. The gendered records from that time show ample photographic and written evidence of my father's, and the other NFA men's, participation in the Farmers' Rights Campaign of 1966/67. They can be seen marching, participating in tractor blockades, in the sit-down protest outside the Department of Agriculture, being imprisoned, having their property seized, attending meetings and shaking hands as deals are done. But my mother's and the farming women's participation in the campaign is less visible. Where it is recorded, it appears as a less serious, more colourful backdrop to these momentous events. They are photographed knitting, chatting, or tending men's sore feet, while their men got on with the real business of organising and executing a rights' campaign.

This paper examines the role of the farmwomen during the NFA Farmers' Rights Campaign through the narratives of some of those women who participated in the campaign. The analysis of their role is carried out within a feminist theoretical framework. These women came from Sligo, Clare, Tipperary, Kilkenny and Meath. I conducted life history interviews with twelve women and one man during Summer 2008. To ensure confidentiality, all names used are pseudonyms. The outcome of this campaign changed Irish society's perception of farming, and established the future of the NFA as a dominant public and organisational face of farming. The lives of farmwomen, however, changed more slowly and it took events of the 1970s, such as the Women's Movement and Ireland's entry into the EEC to make that change more apparent.

Women in the Campaign:

On the 7th October 1966, Rickard Deasy, President of the National Farmers Association, and a group of sixteen farmers gathered in Bantry, Co.Cork. Having received the blessing of the local Catholic and Church of Ireland clergy, they set off on the 217-mile march to Dublin. These represented the first steps on an even longer metaphorical road, which led to the NFA, later, the IFA, becoming the representative voice of farming in Ireland over the next four decades.

While the discourse of the day painted a picture of the farmer as male and only very occasionally, female, women also took part in the march. They were further in evidence all along the route occupying the gendered caring roles of feeding, encouraging, and tending blistered feet of the marchers. Furthermore, '[t]he effort of the marchers was equalled by that of their wives and neighbours who carried on the farm work at home' (Smith and Healy, 1996). During the sit-down, meals were provided by supporters and well-wishers. The manager of the Gresham Hotel, a woman from a Co. Clare farm, sent food from that establishment. Maire MacSweeney, sister of the Lord Mayor of Cork who died on hunger strike during the war of Independence, called to the street to offer her support. The Canadian Federated Farmers, indicating the level of international support for the NFA campaign, presented 'survival suits'.

The sit-down outside the Department of Agriculture lasted 21 days and nights. Finally, a truce was called and a meeting to address some of the farmers' concerns took place with a new Minister for Agriculture, Niall Blaney. But the campaign continued with increased bitterness in December 1966 and into 1967, in the form of road blockades and non-payment of rates, leading to the jailing of hundreds of farmers and the threat of proscription of the NFA (Manning, 1979:56). Two thousand women marched to Portlaoise prison in support of the jailed men. In March 1967 farmwomen drove their tractors through Dublin city, stopping occasionally to give away vegetables and to tell the 'Dublin housewives' of their case. In April 1967 the dispute escalated when the Government sent in the army and Gardai to seize property, in lieu of withheld rates, from the homes and farms of NFA members in Co.Kilkenny. This brought the dispute directly into the homes and families of the farming community. Later in June 1967 the farmwomen again marched through

Dublin to a meeting with Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, to secure the release of imprisoned farmers. This meeting is seen as having been crucial in terminating the NFA dispute with the Government.

Finally, in 1969 the government of the day recognised NFA's right to represent farmers' interests, and their stance on the non-payment of rates was vindicated by the Supreme Court's ruling on the unconstitutionality of rates on farming land, in 1982. T J Maher, the incoming NFA president, sought to harness the energy of the women he witnessed during the campaign. In December 1975 the National Council of the IFA set up the Farm Family Group and its women-only committees were to concern themselves with education, health, farm safety and social problems, and have representation on the Feminine Committee of COPA (Committee of Farm Associations in European Union).

I don't know why you're interviewing me. Voiceless Voices

Feminist research aims to enlighten people "about the taken for granted sexist practices that have displaced, ignored and silenced women, led to an unequal and discriminating social order, and held women captive for millennia" (Sarantakos, 1994:54). Nowhere have these taken for granted practices been more evident than in the patriarchal structure, which is the farm family. It is at the heart of this structure that my research subjects have conducted their lives. As a feminist researcher, I have studied the social conditions of these women in a sexist and patriarchal society, the taken for granted nature of which means that, men were farmers and women were farmer's wives or daughters. This is the structure, which, supported by laws and convention, existed during the period, which is the focus of my research, the 1960s.

Feminist research is an emancipatory type of inquiry. That means it not only documents aspects of reality; it also takes a personal, political and engaging stance to the world (Sarantakos, 1994). It is not sufficient to declare one's feminist position; it is necessary to act on it using feminist methodology in the pursuit of knowledge of women's lives. Accordingly, I am adopting a personal, reflexive position in relation to the experiential knowledge gained throughout the research process which will, in turn, further the knowledge of women's lives.

My initial interview target group was the wives of the 'nine' men who took part in the 'sit-down', which lasted for twenty-one days and nights outside the Department of Agriculture in October/November 1966. These women had also participated in the 'sit-down', willingly or unwillingly; occupying their husbands vacated places when the men were required to attend meetings. The role of bridging the gap for the men highlighted another gendered role assigned to the farmwomen. The decision to have the women take the places of their husbands on the street was made by the NFA organisation.

The surviving five women ranged in age from 79 to 91 years, had families of between three and ten children each at the time of the campaign and actively farmed from fifty to four hundred acres approximately in counties, Tipperary, Meath, Sligo, Clare and Kilkenny. Three of the research participants had no background in farming and had entered farming through marriage. Despite this, two of the women became property owners in their own right, through inheriting farms from relatives.

Three of the women had professional careers in teaching and nursing prior to marriage, and two of them continued working at their professions throughout their married lives, supplementing the family farm income. My research participants also included the daughter of one of the group, who although quite young at the time of the campaign, went on later to manage her father's agri-political career. I also accessed a group of women in Co.Meath, whose husbands had been jailed during the campaign. These five women were aged from early sixties to eighty-three. My contact was the youngest whose memories were from a farm daughter's perspective. Another interviewee provides the perspective of a woman farming on her own and bemoans, not the lack of a husband, but that of a wife. The sole surviving man of the group of 'nine' adds not only a male perspective to my research, but as the only participant of the 'sit-down' protest still living, bears important witness to the events of that time. He is 89 years old and still farms on his own, near the Burren in Co.Clare.

Biography, History and Gender perspective

The focus on gender rather than on women makes it critical to look not only at the category 'women', since that is only half the story, but also at women in relation to men, and the way in which relations between these categories are socially

constructed. “Men and women play different roles in society, with their gender differences shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants” (Whitehead, 1979, cited in Moser, 1993:3). Most women who become farmwomen do so upon marriage to a farmer. His already established role then defines her. She becomes not only a wife, but also a farm-wife.

The exercise of power or control has been central to the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo in the farming community. Farmwomen continue to accept their subordination even when this often means acting against their own interests. Moser (1993) and Kabeer (1997) both recognise how women’s work within the traditional household is hidden or disguised by being subsumed into the general household work. This is particularly so in the case of the farming household where women’s unseen contribution is provided in the form of their own labour and often, their children’s labour, without which the farming project could not be sustained.

Women can exercise considerable power to the extent that they do not openly challenge the formal myth of male dominance. Real gains are possible, as long as the larger symbolic order is not questioned (Scott, 1985). Feminist theory of the family sees women’s roles within family life as crucial to the perpetuation of ‘the system’, women being most responsible for the biological and socialising roles of family members (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Besides this very obvious role, and also because of it, farmwomen had a significant influencing role, as mothers, in reproducing the family farm as a social form.

Resistance through involvement with social groups, such as the ICA, was very important to farmwomen of the time. It would appear that those who had the closest family or neighbourhood network were often those who were members of such organisations. The experience of resistance is itself a denial of the necessity of patriarchy; “it is a moment of freedom, the power to embody momentarily an alternative identity. This affirmation serves as the ground for political resistance to social structures” (Welch, 1985, cited in Farrell, 1994).

Women and Social movements

At the core of my research project is the role of an agrarian social movement, its aims, methods and outcomes, and how it mobilised and affected the lives of the people involved. Connolly (2000) argues that for the Irish Women's Movement of the early 1970s to have taken place, a movement 'in abeyance' had to have already been in existence. While it is commonly believed that the more recent second wave of feminism arose as a result of the mobilisation of other social movements such as the Civil Rights in the United States, Connolly (2000) argues that rather than being an unintended outcome of a wider movement, it should be seen as a progression from the work of organisations like the Irish Housewives Association (IHA) in the 1940s and onwards (Connolly, 2000:72). The Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA), which, as the largest organisation of women from 1910 onwards, represented, if not necessarily a feminist voice, then certainly a strong voice of rural Irish women throughout the decades of abeyance, up to today. An abiding strength of organisations such as the IHA and the ICA was the fact that they were strictly non-party political and "this tactic reflected the central task of ensuring group survival" (Connolly, 2000:75).

By the early 1960s Ireland was emerging from the "lost decade" (Keogh et al., 2004), the 1950s, which was marked by unprecedented emigration and political and social stagnation. Between 1951 and 1961, over 400,000 people emigrated from Ireland (Delaney, 2004:81). That figure represented almost a sixth of the total Irish population recorded in 1951. Those leaving were predominantly young men and women. One in three of those aged thirty years or under in 1946 had left the country by 1971. The 1960s have been called the 'best of decades'. This was a time of radical change, not only in Ireland, but in much of the western world.

With the slogan, 'Better farming, better business, better living', Horace Plunkett, founder of the Irish cooperative movement, intended women to play an intrinsic role in the movement and as a result, in rural development. The United Irishwomen, a branch of the co-operative movement directed at women, was set up at a time of transition for rural women. Having lost much of their traditional role in the peasant economy, women were being forced back into the home by a relative decline in the position of women's paid employment. The churning of butter, for

example, once done by women in the home was now being replaced by creamery manufacture. Plunkett's vision for the United Irishwoman aimed to give women a greater role in public life and provided support for women's suffrage.

The Society of United Irishwomen was revived and renamed in 1935 to become the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA). Today with 16,000 members in over 1000 active guilds, the ICA is represented in every county in Ireland (Connolly and O'Toole, 2005). According to Heverin (2000), the ICA did much to improve conditions and give rural women independence through education and income-generating projects. The ICA had close ties with other women's organisations, especially the Irish Housewives Association (IHA), which was a predominantly urban-based group. In the ICA the task of improving the lives of rural Irish women was frequently combined with generating change in the wider community.

Issues of inheritance and succession have been identified as being important in the lives of farmwomen. In an examination of farm transfer intentions during the period of Kelly's (1982) study, from 1950-1977, 60% of farmers indicated their intention to pass their farm on to a son or daughter, but mostly to a son. Farms were most commonly obtained by inheritance on the deaths of the previous owner and as gifts, including marriage settlements (Kelly, 1982). Shortall (1990, 1999) recognises the importance of property transmission among the farming population, but would argue that Kelly's (1982) transfer findings reflect an overwhelming majority of land transfers being made to sons, rather than daughters. This patrilineal form of property inheritance lies at the heart of male farmer's power. Power lies in property ownership, and men, principally, own the farming property.

Things were desperate: The consolidation of Farmers' Social Movements

Central to my research question is a movement of social protest; the conditions for resource mobilisation were present, and the NFA's structure was non-party political, a tactic which ensured group survival (Connolly, 2000). The voice of the farming community and its organisations was excluded from decision making and, unlike the trade unions, was not represented in social partnership with the government. At that time "up to 90,000 farm families were living on less than £5 per week, when the industrial wage was much higher" [Peg].

Despite the restrictions of household power relations often experienced by women and identified by Moser (1993) and Kabeer (1997) there is evidence of wholehearted support for the campaign. While it was not their own campaign, the farmwomen were following the men of their families; they trusted them; they “valued [their] opinion of things in agriculture” [Mary]. They were collaborating with, and supporting a men’s cause.

Following the march by farmers from all over the country to the Department of Agriculture in Dublin and the Minister’s refusal to meet with the leaders, nine men were chosen to sit on the steps of the Department to wait for a meeting. These were committed NFA men, active, and engaged locally and nationally with farming issues throughout the organisation. They represented farmers from smallholdings and large, sharing a common commitment to the cause of Irish farming; they were “representing the whole country” [Brenda]. At that stage rural Ireland was all about farming.

While all my interviewees have been selected because of their involvement at some level, with the NFA and its Rights Campaign, it was assumed that they would have been supportive of social activism. Nevertheless, the fact was, that these people were in fact quite ‘ordinary’, caught up as ordinary people often are, in a struggle, which then carried them along with its own momentum. Despite the initial excitement, which the campaign aroused, “they were the talk of the country” [Eilis], there was anxiety as to how events would unfold, but there was great support because “everybody had a finger on farming” [Brenda].

The strength of the local NFA organisations is reflected in their ability to muster and rally their members for the sake of the cause. Rotas were drawn up for the blocking of roads and bridges; everyone, even the most reluctant, was given a role to play. According to my informants, there was a very selective process of choosing those who would participate in these events. They should be strong NFA people, capable and committed to the aims of the campaign; be steadfast and honourable. Even those who were arrested and eventually imprisoned were from a carefully chosen cohort, which the organisation considered would be able to withstand the vagaries of a prison stay. Members’ personal and family circumstances were

considered before making demands on them for active participation. Support was offered and given to farming families whose family member was imprisoned. The NFA formed a roster of substitute farmers to help with the daily farming duties of members directly involved in the campaign. This help, however, did not extend to work in the home. The farmwomen were expected to continue with this work unaided, despite the additional pressures the protest put on their families. “It was up to you how you fed yourself” was how Mary described the situation.

There were some dissenting voices in the farming community. A number of farmers did not take part in the protest. A lot of people “didn’t like breaking the law” [Brenda], so they confined their support for the campaign to indirect action, which included helping with farm work and providing back up to families. One family, which was relatively new to the area, was overwhelmed with the neighbourliness experienced and the friends they made. From then onwards they were firmly part of their new community.

A time of excitement

The wives of the ‘nine’ men took their places on the street, vacated by their husbands, and bridged the gap while their husbands attended meetings. Some observers considered the women’s participation amusing.

“And somebody who was of course very smart said, ‘It’s an awful pity you wouldn’t let off a mouse or something to see how quick they would get up’ – making a sort of joke”. [Eilis]

Being a men’s event, women were less visible during the Right’s Campaign, even though they were a fundamental part of all stages of the process. The irony of these women, whose work on the farm had them killing chickens, delivering calves and castrating bonamhs, being frightened of a mere mouse reflected a stereotypical and gendered image of women which, though in keeping with the current ideology, was at odds with reality.

Support for the campaign arose out of an awareness of the conditions in farming at the time. Farm incomes were very low and the farmwomen, in particular,

were conscious of having to stretch ever-diminishing budgets to keep home and family. There were mixed feelings as to their personal involvement with the street protest. Some saw it as a break from routine. Others were anxious about the possible outcome and all were concerned for their husbands' welfare. "You would have been in shock if you knew they were going to be sitting on the street for 21 days and 21 nights in the winter" [Mary]. The support of Canadian farmers who sent sleeping bags eased some concerns. Others were more sanguine and continued with their own work routine at home on the farm. "No, I wasn't worried in the least" [Brid]. But Hannah remembers the excitement, "it was something very exciting and very extraordinary".

God and the Irish Country Women's Association

A mainstay of the patriarchal framework surrounding the farmwomen was the Catholic Church. Hartmann (1981) recognised patriarchy as a "solidarity among men that enable[s] them to dominate women". While the importance of religion in the lives of my research subjects is recognised, the confronting of the patriarchal forces of the church in the interests of the campaign marked a new and radical departure. The farmwomen of the 1950s and 1960s lived their active lives at a time when the unseen power of Foucault's Panopticon was provided by society's rigid values and expectations, underwritten by those of the Catholic Church, and rendered them 'docile bodies'. The Catholic Church disciplined and policed the lives of these men and women. The march to Dublin from Bantry in October 1966, making the commencement of the Campaign, had the blessing of Church clergy. Such a blessing was symbolic of the farmers' wish to align themselves with the respect and power of this influential institution. In invoking the Papal Encyclical of John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* of 1961, the leaders sought to further add the Church's authority to their campaign. The Encyclical exhorted farming communities to organise and promote their own interests. It gave the farmers legitimacy and moral authority to fight for their rights.

However, in looking beyond the inherent conservatism of Irish Catholicism, to Rome for leadership and inspiration, the farm leaders were choosing the new, more socially democratic model of John XXIII to support their goals. Catholic credentials were used to bolster Rickard Deasy's authority as a leader and to establish his

standing among the farming community. “And they suddenly realised when he was sitting out on the steps, that he was saying the rosary” [Brid].

When it came to matters of importance to them, the NFA leadership found means of campaigning for change within the framework of religion, even when the Irish Catholic bishops threatened farmers with excommunication as the campaign escalated. As one of the informant states, nobody wanted to break the law, but it came to the position where it had to be broken. No such mental agility, however, was apparent when it came to recognising and campaigning for greater gender equality.

Deep religious belief and devotion are obvious from the religious references sprinkled throughout the interviews; wives and families prayed for the men on the march or in prison. Men said the rosary every night during the street ‘sit-down’. Women’s working days too, were circumscribed by church rules. Eilis remembers being afraid to put washing out on a Sunday. Nor would she dare to mend or “put a stitch in anything on Sunday. I’d be ashamed”.

Having aligned themselves so very publicly with the power of the Catholic Church to emphasise the worthiness of their cause, the power of prayer was again used to ward off the evils of sexual temptation. In an amusing anecdote one interviewee talked about the ‘Woodbine Women’, connecting these women to a particular brand of tobacco popular at the time. During the nights of the street ‘sit-down’, they received some (un)welcome visits from ‘ladies of the night’. The power of prayer was again invoked and the rosary beads were taken out to banish the ‘bad women’. This incident highlighted the association of evil with sexuality, embodied in the predatory ‘bad women’, as opposed to the passive ‘good women’ at home saying the rosary with their children, a dichotomy only too apparent in Irish society of the time.

The ICA, considered the largest rural women’s organisation in the country, had its heyday in the period of ‘abeyance’, in between the suffragettes’ time and the time of the Women’s Movement. Many of the NFA men’s wives, mothers and sisters were ICA members. This was in keeping with the gendered divisions of the farming organisations, which saw most women not getting directly involved with the NFA,

despite having family membership. NFA meetings were structured to suit farming men so very few women attended. Many of my research participants used their membership of organisations such as the ICA, as sites of “creative resistance” as identified by Welch (1985), providing moments of freedom from traditional patriarchal roles.

The NFA, and earlier, Marca na Feirme, played crucial roles in furthering the agricultural and leadership training of many of the farming men. These men had often been required to leave school after primary education. The discourse of the day suggested that to be a farmer, education was not necessary. There was no formal training for young farmers. If your family had a farm, the eldest son was expected to farm, with no education or no question as to where their abilities lay. “It wasn’t the done thing for farmers’ sons to be educated anyway” [Nora].

I wasn’t doing anything: The ‘invisible’ role of women during the Campaign

Hartmann (1981) sees men’s control over women’s labour as central to her theory of patriarchy. My research participants’ work lives on the farm provide evidence of this control. The patriarchal structure of the farming world and men’s taken for granted power within it, is observed by Brenda. Her reflections highlight the gendered nature of the patriarchal structures, which form the backdrop to life for women in farming.

“It’s not because men deliberately set out not to allow women to participate. It’s because that’s the way things have been... It wouldn’t be because men would deliberately leave you out of something. They just wouldn’t think. It wouldn’t occur to them.” [Brenda]

Many of my interviewees were surprised that their life stories could be considered worthy of record. They felt that they had done nothing throughout the campaign and discounted their roles, as trivial. “I wasn’t doing anything. I don’t know why you’re interviewing me” [Brid]. Contrary to their protestations, the farmwomen I interviewed had very full and diverse working roles during the campaign. I will examine these roles under the headings of Farm Labour, Diversification of Labour and Love Labour.

Farm Labour: *I was only the worker*

All the women interviewed repeatedly expressed their satisfaction with their roles as farmwomen, despite not receiving any recognition for their contribution to work or decision-making on the farm. A show of marital or family unity was articulated in the achievement of mutual goals, despite the fact that farm life was often a struggle and very hard for them indeed. Lukes' (1974) 'third dimension of power', referred to above, is evident in the power relations, which I have observed as being the most prevalent in the household power dynamics of my research subjects. Not only is discord not expressed, it is denied. Shklar (1990) recognised that individuals would ascribe inequalities to personal misfortune rather than social injustice. Therefore, while questions of interests and of conflict do, in fact, arise, they are not recognised or dealt with as such. Although a general contentment with 'the way things are' is expressed, the facts of their narrative might suggest otherwise, "He ran the farm. I was only the worker." [Brid]. While one farmwoman notes with resignation that, "Someone had to do it but there was nothing extraordinary about it". [Eilis]. "I mean I wasn't doing anything. I was the Minister for Home Affairs and he was the Minister for Foreign Affairs" [Peg].

Even their use of language - the diminishing 'just' followed by a litany of duties - suggests the taken for granted nature of their work and its lack of value in their own eyes. "Just the usual; milking cows and feeding calves and helping picking potatoes and sowing potatoes and helping with the hay" [Eilis]. While in reality they "did everything, from digging the potatoes to thinning the beet, turnips and mangolds and digging; binding corn, oh, everything" [Maura].

The 'power-to' suggests agency. My research subjects created their own agency through acts of resistance, but also through adopting their own projects within the farm environment. While even these possibilities were strictly gender circumscribed, many farmwomen managed to gain control over areas, which provided significant financial and personal rewards. Work in areas of their training prior to marriage, such as teaching and nursing, provided another source of power and agency for these women.

Many of the farmwomen had educational levels superior to that of their husbands and held professional positions in teaching and nursing prior to marriage. Others had developed business acumen throughout their farming lives, which saw them adopting and pursuing successful projects within the farm. This success was then subsumed into the farm business and no specific acknowledgement or credit was given to the women involved. One woman, who continued her nursing career throughout her marriage, facilitated the care of her father-in-law and young daughter, by opting for night-duty. Besides her duties as nurse, this woman did the housework as well being involved with farm work. She also set up a successful poultry business on the farm. This had to end when the sheds used for housing the fowl were required for her husband's calf project, which started on the advice of the agricultural experts, even when calves were "making nothing" [Margaret].

The farmwomen's projects were often abandoned in favour of the gendered decisions of agricultural experts or their own husbands. Farmwomen's work, which was neither remunerated nor officially enumerated, was given no value. Even though the family farm could not function without this work, as one of my female informants insightfully recognises, it remained "invisible", "They were the invisible workforce in the homes or on the property" [Mary].

One of my informants whose confidence in a new pig-breeding project proved well-founded when the pigs won prizes at the Royal Dublin Society and were sold to America for breeding stock, but, "they didn't take me seriously in the beginning" [Nora]. However a number of schemes promoted by agricultural experts and adopted by her husband, proved to be loss making. The lack of recognition given to the women's business ability, whether by male experts or husbands, and colluded in by their own lack of belief in their agency, cloaked their work in invisibility.

An interviewee who had learned to shoot at age nine used this unusual skill to supplement the family fare, "I used to go out to shoot rabbits to make ends meet" [Bridget]. Nora went on to use her unusual skills, developed during her pig-herding days, to forge a future career for herself and her family. She had taken on the role of castrating the bonamhs when the numbers involved meant regular, costly visits from

the vet. Having a natural talent for this kind of work, she went on to study and use her surgical skills in a related area of chiropody.

While hard work was at the core of the farmwomen's lives, the reality of these lives lay behind the gendered divisions of their work. Okin (1989) recognised gender as meaning "the deeply entrenched institutionalisation of sexual difference". Nowhere is this deep entrenchment more obvious than in the divisions of labour on the family farm. Not only do women become farmwomen upon marriage; they adopt the trappings appropriate to that role. With all but two of my interviewees having grown up on farms, the role of farm-wife would have been very familiar to them. The rigid definition and constrictions of the role would have meant that the two 'town girls' would have had to learn to adapt very quickly to survive.

Consideration of household structure must include the gendered division of housework, which became evident from the narratives of my research subjects. Farmwomen were almost exclusively responsible for all duties within the house, including childrearing.

"The dinner at 1 o'clock' and that was it and you'd have to have the dinner ready. You'd never expect them to be getting anything ready, like I see them doing now; and then have the tea in the evening at such a time, tea at four." [Eilis]

Some of the women had a certain amount of autonomy over the finances generated from the farm work, having direct control of the money their own projects generated. Mary "signed a cheque for whatever [she] wanted to sign a cheque for".

The farmwomen I met in the process of my research worked very hard on their family farms and homes. Their claims to have enjoyed this work despite the obvious hardship, confirms Glavanis' (1984) argument that the farm family is a non-capitalist form of production, as one interviewee emotionally remembers, "I loved it... I was brought up on a farm and that was my life" [Eilis]. In this form of production working for a common purpose ameliorates the hardship, for the women themselves and their families, "I worked twice as hard here, but it was for our own advantage" [Josie].

There was a further gendered division of work evident from the type of work farm women were excluded from. While they tended and fed the young animals, they were generally excluded from the reproductive work at the time, “Oh yes, feeding them, not the farrowing. Milking, yes, but not the calving or anything like that” [Eilis].

Diversification of Labour

In a trend, which has emerged in recent years, farmers have begun taking on part-time work outside farming to supplement the family income. During the period of my research such action would have been impossible.

“Farmers’ sons did not go out to work; the pride was there”. [Johanna]

Bouquet (1984) identified this trend towards diversification of work, which was socially acceptable and financially necessary for women during the 1960s. While some of my interviewees diversified by working at their professions, nursing, for example, others undertook home or farm-related projects, which were financially successful and boosted the family income. Bridget kept foreign students to supplement the family income and fund her own children’s education at boarding school.

“Well, I had to because I was running the farm here and I had the children – they were at boarding school. I used to take these foreign students - it was economic because we had no money”.

Love Labour – *It doesn’t cost you*

“The coupling of love and work is a special feature of a farm woman’s life” (Thorsen, 1994). In their role as farm wives and mothers my research subjects were also responsible for the care and maintenance, through love and support, of their husbands and children. Thorsen (1994) argues that this caring role, which is often ascribed to women’s ‘natural’ caring natures, is not perceived as or given recognition for being work.

“The wives were hardworking and they managed the house and they managed the children and they were good [at it]. They were happy enough being a farmer’s wife and that was fine for the majority of them, I think. That’s what women did”. [Johanna]

Connell (1998) identified the position of the traditional male farmer as seen in terms of male hegemony. The behaviour of the farm-wife, whose subordinate, supporting role, is seen as ‘emphasised femininity’. This form of femininity “is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Connell, 1998). The following testimony illustrates how a well-educated and socially sophisticated farm wife subsumed her knowledge and ability in support of her husband. She proofread his speeches and drove him to meetings. Also her knowledge of agricultural matters was crucial to his speech writing. “Actually, I knew more about farming than he did” [Bridget]. She entertained ‘for’ her husband, and used her considerable social capital to garner information useful to his position of public leadership. She recognises that her past role was “in the background” but now questions that role compared to the position of women today, “isn’t that ridiculous, when I think of it now” [Bridget].

Another interviewee participated in a protest march outside Portlaoise prison. Her husband was incarcerated for his part in the tractor blockades. When he became secretary of the local NFA branch, her “invisible” work saw that the role was filled efficiently, “He was technically the secretary and I was doing the secretarial work” [Rose]. There was a cost to ‘love labour’. The families of those very involved with the NFA organisation often paid this cost. As Brid recounts:

“Anyone that goes into public life – they pay a terrible price because my children didn’t know their father. He was never there for First Communion. I remember when (my daughter) did her Leaving Cert and she was delighted with the results... She went off down the field to tell her father. She said, ‘I did so much in my Leaving.’ [And he asked] ‘Did you do your Leaving Cert?’ Well, you see, he was too preoccupied”.

Resistance, Social Reproduction, Education, Action, and Organisations

Some of the women resisted their role in the family through what O'Hara (1998) and Shortall (1999) identified as the concept of social reproduction. The farmwoman's resistance takes the form of her direct or indirect influence on her children to carry on the particular social form that is family farming. The form of resistance, which I observed from my research participants, came in the shape of their promotion of education as a way to secure their children's futures outside farming. Most of my interviewees' children were not prepared to consider a life in farming. O'Hara (1998) and Shortall (1999) recognised that women are educating their children away from farming. Most of my research participants actively encouraged their children to continue with their education.

While the farmwomen in my research process were of a generation where there was a strict division between women's and men's work, perhaps Brines' (1984) social exchange theory will explain why the women, the intended targets of my interview process, automatically adopted the domestic service role during my visit, while some of their husbands, who were peripheral to the process, took up the dominant position in front of the tape-recorder. Townsend (1999) identified a form of resistance in which the powerless take their power through small acts of resistance. I observed this in operation when one of my research subjects, a quiet spoken woman, was obliged to get up on three occasions during our interview, while her husband sat and answered the questions directed to his wife. She made her protest through her negative body language and her over-enthusiastic and noisy handling of the tea making paraphernalia. The recorded version of the interview provided audible proof of her protest.

Scott (1985) argues that women can exercise considerable power if they do not openly challenge the myth of male dominance. Real gains are possible as long as the symbolic order is not questioned. The ICA symbolises this form of resistance. Its role in the period of abeyance never directly challenged the status quo, but worked within the system in women's interests. However, evidence of a change could be observed.

The changes, which came about as a result of the campaign, were different for the farming men than for the farmwomen. While the farming men got to realise "they

were a force to contend with... it wasn't much better for the women". [Bridget]. The most positive outcome to the campaign for the farmwomen was the community spirit engendered by the common goal of working for the campaign. The women emphasise the spirit of community and tremendous support they experienced during the uncertain times. One woman whose family were newcomers to the area found that being part of the campaign brought her closer to her neighbours and acceptance in the community, "I made great friends. We knew very few people. It brought people together". [Rose]. While Josie, 83, is fulsome in her praise of the efforts of the men in the campaign, her gendered position as a farmwomen clouds her appreciation of the role she herself played:

"I thought they were simply superb men, even though the women had to work terrible hard at home, but we didn't mind. It was for our benefit, and it was the men that were suffering." [Josie]

Change came slowly in the women's lives, noticeable too in the shift in membership from the ICA to the IFA's Farm Family Committes. The Budget of 1967 brought with it reforms which could be directly attributed to the actions of the farmers during the campaign. Ireland's membership of the EEC a few years later, in 1973, made a crucial positive difference to their lives. Perhaps more importantly the campaign lifted the confidence of farmers as a community. "The most important thing was that [they] started to work on giving farmers confidence and belief in themselves" [Hannah].

"Who kept the home fires burning? Women diminished their own work and it was hugely important, and without that a man hasn't the luxury of heading off. But that was also the culture of the agricultural sector... But women were down the rung of the ladder, and of course, how that fits into the bigger societal framework as well, informs it". [Hannah]

Hannah's comments encapsulate the role of farmwomen during the Rights Campaign. Despite the patriarchal structure within which they conducted their lives, despite the circumscribed roles attributed to women, and farmwomen in particular,

these women played a pivotal role, not only in the Farmers' Rights Campaign, but also in Irish society.

Concluding remarks:

This paper shows how in addition to the taken for granted, gendered role traditionally attributed to women in the domestic sphere, the farmwomen were also carrying out work consistent with the role of farmer. However, due to the patriarchal structure of the farm family and the gendered nature of farm work, their contribution remained largely invisible not only by society but also by themselves. Many of the women were already responsible for much of the hard physical work on the farm, while often at the same time continuing a career outside the home. Others developed specialised projects within the farm, which became economically critical to the farm family's survival. Again because of the patriarchal household structure, these were downgraded as 'women's' work and then abandoned in favour of mainstream male projects. The gendered nature of the power relations left their voices unheard. The NFA's well-intentioned, but politically opportune, decision to offer assistance to farmwomen with farm work during the campaign further rendered invisible the fact that farmwomen carried out these tasks routinely, with or without the glare of publicity. There is, however, evidence of resistance through their power of social reproduction, through education and in the choice of organisation, of which the farmwomen are now choosing to be part.

The NFA organisation showed considerable expertise and inventiveness in overcoming the obstacles encountered in achieving the aims of its campaign. There was no evidence, however, that this vision or energy was directed towards the issue of gender equality among farming families at that time. However, TJ Maher, later president of the NFA/IFA, was so encouraged by the energy of the women involved in the Rights' Campaign, that he was instrumental in the setting up of the IFA Farm Family committees, to harness that energy.

Resistance to patriarchal roles was also evident from the farmwomen's choice of social and representative organisation. While the church and farming and social organisations had been the constants in these women's lives, there was evidence of change. Membership of the ICA was on the wane, many participants no longer seeing

it as relevant to their needs. There was a move away from this traditional, less politically engaged organisation. Instead the more politically active farmwomen were now choosing the IFA Farm Family committees as their forum for influence and support.

I have observed from the narratives of my research subjects that none has expressed dissatisfaction with their lives as farm-wives. A show of marital or family unity was articulated in the achievement of mutual goals, despite the fact that farm life was often a struggle and very hard for them indeed.

In identifying and recognising the role of women during the Farmers' Rights Campaign, it is important to recognise the role of all the women involved in this campaign. Whether it is the farm women, who kept the farms and homes working while their husbands were away, while also caring for their children; the supporters along the route who fed and encouraged the marching men; those who visited the 'street' and offered food and encouragement; those who stood with and fed the men at tractor blockades and marched to Portlaoise prison to demand the release of their husbands, sons and fathers; those who marched to Dublin to plead with the Taoiseach to release their men; and even the 'Woodbine Women' made their contribution.

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