

Interfering Women — Farm Mothers and the Reproduction of Family Farming

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Abstract: The continuance of family farming in Ireland is dependent on family formation and reproduction which are processes in which women are central actors. Family farming as a social form is organised around gender-based work roles so that farm women have responsibility for the care and sustenance of the farm family through their responsibility for children and work in the home. Despite this, relatively little is known about farm women's involvement in the reproduction of family farming. In this paper farm women's involvement in the evolution of family farming and on the structure of Irish society is explored by examining their influence on the exceptional educational attainment of farm children. This means that the focus is on farm women in their role as mothers rather than as wives. This in turn, involves a shift away from the more conventional tendency to view the family farm as an arena of production only, to seeing it also as a site of reproduction.

I INTRODUCTION

The continuance of family farming in Ireland is dependent on family formation and reproduction and these are processes in which women are central actors. The organisation of family farming around gender-based work roles means that it is farm women who have responsibility for care and sustenance of the farm family. Through their responsibility for children and work in the home that they are at the centre of the process of family farm formation and placement of the next generation on which family farming as a social form is based. Despite this, relatively little is known about farm women's involvement in the reproduction of family farming. Explanations of restructuring in Irish agriculture have paid little attention to the way in which the internal dynamics of farm families affect the reproduction of family farming as a social form or how the actions of individual family members

are structured by gender. In this paper I wish to explore farm women's involvement in the evolution of family farming and on the structure of Irish society through their influence on the education of farm children. This means that the focus is on farm women in their role as mothers rather than as wives. In turn, this involves a shift away from the more conventional tendency to view the family farm as an arena of production only, to seeing it also as a site of reproduction.

Debates in rural sociology concerning change and restructuring in European agriculture have been largely dominated by perspectives which focus on the relationship between family farming and the wider capitalist economy (Whatmore *et al.*, 1986; Marsden *et al.*, 1992; van der Ploeg, 1986; 1993). Studies of agrarian change and continuity, while often acknowledging the importance of intra-family processes in principle, have generally paid them little attention in empirical analyses. The farm family is considered as a "unit" of production and the sphere of "reproduction", that is the whole process of care and socialisation which ensures the continuance of the family farm, is left largely unexplored; the farm is the main focus of analysis and the farmer operator (usually male) the key actor. Even studies which have focused specifically on women's involvement in family farming have, in the main, concentrated on their labour input to the *family farm*, largely in an attempt to make their contribution to farming more visible and draw attention to the under-representation of their work in official statistics (Reimer, 1986; Gasson, 1980, 1992; Keating and Little, 1994; Alston, 1995). Taking the farm, rather than the farm family as the unit of analysis means that such studies cannot address the very complex set of relations which lie inside the farm family "unit" which is structured along gender lines. The focus is on production for the market, and consideration of women's involvement in reproduction and the links between reproduction and the wider processes of changes in agrarian formations remain largely unexplored. This has not been the case in the "developing world" where anthropological studies of the household (Boserup, 1970; Goody, 1976; Meillasoux, 1981) have demonstrated the links between women's work and status, forms of marriage and inheritance, and the economic relations of production (Moore, 1988).

During the past decade a number of studies of farm women, influenced by feminist theory, have drawn attention to the centrality of gender as a social division within *farm families* (Berlan Darque, 1988; Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Whatmore, 1991, 1994; Brandth, 1994). This work has revealed, not just the contribution of women to farm production through their labour input to the farm and household, but has also focused on the relationship between production and reproduction in the farm family. Whatmore (1991) has argued that, on family farms, production and reproduction are not separate but

should be seen as interlocking processes, encompassing production both for subsistence and the market. This allows the farm family to be theorised as a social institution and the connection between family and farm to be made explicit. More fundamentally, it challenges the idea of the "unity" of the family farm and de-constructs it into constituent elements which can accommodate different interests and influences.

While the concept of reproduction is central both to understanding the evolution of family farming and women's work in the household, its use in the literature has not always been unambiguous. It has been interpreted in a number of ways ranging from a very narrow concept of biological reproduction to encompass the entire process by which the relations of production in a society are perpetuated. It has often been bedevilled by its usage alongside production as a kind of residual category, described by Walby (1990) as "hopelessly flawed", since all the tasks typically designated as reproductive (food provision, childcare, cleaning, sexual and emotional services) are also commoditised and conventionally designated as "production". In this paper reproduction is conceptualised as involving three separate but interrelated processes, aside from biological reproduction. These are the reproduction of the family farm as a business; reproduction of family farming as a social form; and, social reproduction in the wider sense of the re-creation of social life. The first of these essentially involves the reproduction of the farm as a business enterprise, which is a primary source of livelihood for a farm family. Examples of women's influence here include their involvement as suppliers of labour to the enterprise, or the contribution of their earnings from off-farm work or their skilful management of consumption to releasing farm income for reinvestment in the farm business. The other two aspects of reproduction — the evolution of family farming as a social form and of the wider social formation are the concerns of this paper. The organisation of farm family life on the basis of gender-specific work roles means that farm women who are also mothers have direct responsibility for child-rearing, socialisation and schooling. They have, therefore, a direct involvement in, and influence on, reproduction through their predominance in establishing the next generation of farm children.

Reproduction as an active process involves shaping the future, and while structuralist explanations of the evolution of Irish society and of restructuring in Irish agriculture have been common, there have been relatively few attempts to understand how individuals, groups or classes actively construct the future, or to explore the family dynamics involved in establishing the next generation. In their analysis of the significance of small-scale landholders in Ireland's socio-economic transformation, Hannan and Commins (1992) have used the concept of "survival strategies", to show how Irish farmers as a

social group have been particularly adept at securing scarce employment opportunities for themselves and their children over the past two decades. They have associated educational achievement among the children of smallholders in particular, with the high motivation among this class to seek secure off-farm employment for non-inheriting children. Education and examination success were seen by them as avenues to employment in the public service and professions (1992, p. 96). Although they identify farm parents as strategic planners who recognise the significance of education in the achievement of occupational status and plot the future for their children by carefully appraising the available employment opportunities, Hannan and Commins *explain* the relative success of smallholders' children (compared to the working class in particular) in availing of education and job opportunities as the legacy of a peasant culture and the requirements of the stem family system. Building on Hannan's earlier work, they argue that the most notable feature of the particular form of peasant economy, culture, and social structure which prevailed in the west of Ireland up to the 1960s was its effective survival and reproduction strategy, incorporating efficient arrangements for the dispersal of non-inheriting children. This explanation is based on the assumption of patriarchal dominance in regard to the placement of farm children and takes no account of intra-family processes. It is essentially a male-centred view of social reproduction in which Hannan and Commins are quite explicit in referring to the "survival strategies of individual farm owners" — presumably male (1992, p. 81). Moreover, it is not clear as to what distinguishes smallholders in this respect, since the stem family system presumably requires efficient dispersal regardless of farm size.

The purpose of this paper is to show that it is farm women who are the key influence on the exceptional educational achievement of farm children through their control over childrearing, socialisation and schooling. In this way they have a profound effect on the evolution of family farming as a social form and on the wider social formation. In the next section of the paper the exceptional educational achievements of farm children are set out drawing primarily on the work of Clancy (1988, 1995). This sets the context for the presentation of material from detailed personal interviews with a total of sixty farm women divided equally between the west (counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) and east (counties Dublin, Louth, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow) of Ireland. This material is part of a larger study of farm women's involvement in family farming (see O'Hara, 1997 forthcoming). The farm families from which the women were selected were a sub-set of a larger sample of 600 farm households which were participants in a wider Irish survey which in turn was part of an EU-wide study (Arkleton Trust, 1992). Thirty women were interviewed in each area. Just under a third of the

women interviewed were aged 40 or under, 43 per cent were aged between 41 and 55, and the remaining quarter were aged over 55. The youngest interviewee was aged 23 and the oldest 66. The differences in farming between east and west were reflected in the characteristics of the farms in the study — in the west the farms were smaller in scale, mainly involved in cattle and sheep production and dairy farming. In the east, farms in general were larger in scale and tillage and market gardening were significant enterprises. There was also a much greater dependence on transfer income in the west, reflecting the differential capacities for income generation between the two regions. The interviews covered a range of issues with the emphasis on uncovering how women themselves make sense of their “place” in family farming. Before turning to this material, it is necessary to examine the educational attainment patterns of farm children in more detail.

II FARM CHILDREN'S EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Ireland's occupational structure has changed dramatically over the past three decades. One of the features of the transformation has been what Breen *et al.*, have referred to as the “rapid growth in credentialism and in the formalisation of the labour market” (1990, p. 139). From the 1960s onwards growth in the labour market involved the creation of positions associated with industrialisation and economic expansion while self-employment and unskilled manual jobs declined. In common with other industrialised countries the Irish labour force has become increasingly specialised and segmented and employee positions predominate. Recruitment is based largely on educational credentials and, not surprisingly, prospects for occupational mobility are also strongly related to educational achievement (Whelan *et al.*, 1992).

Participation in post-primary education has also increased markedly over recent decades following the introduction of “free” secondary education in 1967. A sharp rise in the numbers remaining in school after the compulsory age of 14 was particularly noticeable among farm children. In the period 1961-71 the participation rate (the proportion of children in the relevant cohort) for farm children aged 14-19 in full-time education rose from 28 per cent to 55 per cent. This was higher than the average for other social groups and was exceeded only by the children of professionals, employers and managers (Rottman *et al.*, 1982). Over the 1980-82 period, more than two-thirds of farm children completed the Leaving Certificate compared to only 38 per cent of the offspring of semi-skilled manual workers. Only 6 per cent of farm children sat for no examination compared to 18 per cent of semi-skilled

manual workers (Breen, 1984). These high levels for all farm children did mask considerable variation within the farm population (see Hannan, 1970; Conway and O'Hara, 1986), but by the end of the 1980s these too had greatly lessened. Hannan and Commins have shown that by 1988-89 almost three-quarters of farm children (73 per cent) completed the Leaving Certificate and nearly one-third (31 per cent) went on to third level — rates only exceeded by the offspring of those in the highest social group.¹ Two-thirds of children from smaller farms of less than 50 acres completed the Leaving Certificate and one fifth went on to third level. Even on the smallest holdings therefore, farm children have been particularly adept at securing educational credentials. Hannan and Commins have argued that, as a result, working class children's upward mobility was significantly constrained (1992, p. 95). In 1992, 88 per cent of farm children completed the Leaving Certificate and these rates were exceeded only by the children of professionals, managers and salaried employees (Higher Education Authority, 1995).

The achievements of farm children are even more striking when we look at their participation in third level education. Clancy (1988, 1995), in his studies of new entrants to higher education, found that farm children were significantly over-represented. In his most recent survey of those who entered third level education in 1992, he found that 17 per cent of entrants came from the social group "farmers", even though they constituted only 12 per cent of the relevant age cohort. The participation ratio² of farm children increased markedly during the 1980s from 1.04 in 1980 to 1.35 in 1992 (dropping slightly from 1.45 in 1986). In 1992 an estimated 49 per cent of farm children in the relevant age cohort went on to full-time higher education, more than double the percentage in 1980.

As regards the type of college attended, farm children have had some interesting patterns of participation. Of all those who entered universities in 1992 farm children had a participation rate of 1.33 which was lower than that of children of professionals, employers and managers and salaried employees but higher than all other categories. The children of "other non-manual" and "semi-skilled manual" workers had participation rates of 0.53 and 0.55 respectively. The nine Regional Technical Colleges established during the 1970s provided important access opportunities for farm children, where by 1986 they comprised 28 per cent of entrants with a participation ratio of 2.24,

1. Hannan and Commins divide the non-farm population into four social groups — upper and intermediate non-manual; other non-manual; skilled manual; semi-skilled and unskilled manual.

2. This ratio is an approximate measure of the degree to which each social group is over, under, or proportionately represented among third level entrants. A participation ratio of 1.00 would mean that the participation of children from the social group in question was in exact proportion to their representation in the population aged under 15 in 1981.

the highest of any social group. By 1992 the proportion had dropped back to 22 per cent but farm children still had the highest participation ratio of 1.84 (Clancy, 1988, 1995).

Farm families have therefore been very assiduous users of the educational system at both second and third level. Farm children are significantly over-represented in the third level sector, having made considerable gains relative to other social groups during the 1980s. Farm children accounted for a quarter of 1992 entrants to University College Galway and to the University of Limerick. A major factor in facilitating farm children to achieve such high levels of educational participation has been their entitlement and willingness to utilise the various forms of financial aid to third level students. More than three-quarters (77 per cent) of farm children had financial aid in 1992 of which 40 per cent were in receipt of a Local Authority grant, a higher proportion than in any other socio-economic group. Only among the children of unskilled manual workers was there a higher proportion of third level students (87 per cent) in receipt of financial aid.³ It seems that farm families, accustomed to dealing with eligibility criteria, form-filling and other bureaucratic procedures associated with EU and state aid to farming, have been quick to grasp the opportunities which state grants for third level education, and latterly the EU Social Fund, afforded their children. In a multivariate analysis of factors related to varying county admission rates, Clancy (1995, pp. 131-132) found that the proportion of the population engaged in farming proved to be a very important predictor of admission rates to university. Counties with a high proportion of the population engaged in farming had high rates of admission to university.

III GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION

In general, while more girls than boys sit the Leaving Certificate each year, fewer girls go on to third level. Clancy found that 49 per cent of all new entrants to third level colleges in 1992 were female but that gender differences in participation were related to socio-economic background. Again, farm children were exceptional in that farm daughters had a significantly higher participation ratio (1.54) than sons (1.28). Only in two other social groups (other non-manual and semi-skilled manual) did girls have a higher participation ratio than boys and the gender differences in these categories

3. The allowance for farm stock given to farmers which originated in a time of high inflation and was primarily used to compensate for an increase in the value of stock which was not converted in to cash until it was sold, is among the factors which artificially lowered the income assessed for farmers. See Report of the Advisory Committee on Third Level Student Support, 1993 pp. 19, 49.

were very slight. Farm daughters are unique therefore in the sense that, compared with any other social group, far more of them go to college than their brothers. In 1992 almost a fifth (19 per cent) of all new female entrants to third level were farm daughters. Close to one-third of the entrants to the female dominated Colleges of Education were farm children. These gender differences were also apparent in Hannan and O'Riain's (1993) study of young adults who left school in the early 1980s. Their analysis revealed that, in terms of educational success, farm daughters were exceptional. Their educational achievement is associated with labour market success and avoidance of unemployment so that they make, in Hannan and O'Riain's terms, "successful transitions to adulthood" (1993, p. 128).

It is clear that farm families make exceptional efforts to educate their daughters. This may be associated with parents' and daughters' wishes to maximise their occupational opportunities, since they would never inherit the land, except by default — a point which Clancy suggests explains the significantly higher proportion of farm daughters entering third level (1995, p. 56). What Hannan (1979) referred to as the "efficient dispersal system" among peasant farmers in the west was particularly effective in the case of farm daughters who had little prospect of inheriting the land. Education was an important avenue of opportunity in order to secure their future outside of farming and outside of rural areas where employment prospects were often non-existent. Ensuring that daughters have a good education represents, as we shall see below, a conscious strategy on the part of mothers and daughters to enhance their daughters' life chances by enabling them to be financially independent regardless of whether or not they marry a farmer. Education assumes greater urgency in the west where limited opportunities and low farm incomes are more common.

Indeed these gender and regional differences are strikingly evident among the farm couples in the present study. In the west 57 per cent (17/30) of husbands had no post primary education, compared to 37 per cent (11/30) of wives. Only 13 per cent (4/30) had completed the Leaving Certificate or higher, compared to 37 per cent (11/30) of wives. In the east the gender differences were equally stark. Only one farm wife had no post-primary education, but 43 per cent (13/30) of husbands had not gone on to second level. Sixty per cent of wives had completed the Leaving Certificate or higher compared to 23 per cent (7/30) of husbands. Although farm wives in the west have lower levels of attainment, it will become apparent that the current value placed on education in the west appears to be greater; women's consciousness of opportunities missed is now one of the factors which impels them to ensure that their daughters have a good education.

These patterns are not unexpected as levels of educational attainment

among male farmers have traditionally been very low, with the lowest levels on the smallest farms (ACOT, 1981). This was associated with the tendency for inheriting sons to drop out of school at an early age because their labour was needed on the farm, particularly when in many cases their fathers, having married relatively late, were ageing. Since the inheriting son's occupational future was regarded as secure through succession to the farm, continuing in school as a path to eventual employment was considered unnecessary. Thus, compared both to other occupational groups, and to their own siblings, farmers have consistently been found to have very low levels of educational participation. In this context it is worth noting that when the educational and training programme leading to a vocational qualification in farming (Certificate in Farming) was established in Ireland in 1983, the provision of incentives led to a dramatic improvement in the heretofore very low participation rates of young (aspiring) male farmers in education and training. Since then, eligibility for certain tax exemptions and EU and state aid to young farmers have been made conditional on possession of the Certificate in Farming and consequently participation rates have remained high.

Before turning to consideration of the material from the present study, two main points can be reiterated. First, studies of educational participation at both second and third level in Ireland have shown that farm children have been among the highest attainers. They have used the educational system extensively and have benefited significantly from the financial aid provided to third level students. Second, farm daughters are exceptional in that far more of them than their brothers complete second level; in third level, they outnumber farm sons and females from any other social group. I now turn to an examination of farm women's influence over children's education, drawing on material from detailed interviews with farm women, across a variety of farm situations.

IV EDUCATION — THE DOMAIN OF MOTHERS

Within the farm household it is mothers who assume the major responsibility for the education of farm children. This is an integral part of the caring and socialisation role which is a major constituent of motherhood in Ireland and elsewhere. It includes all the tasks associated with care and sustenance of school-going children but also involves making key decisions in relation to education. Farm women's monopoly of action and influence in this sphere is reinforced and legitimised by the fact that they generally have more schooling than their husbands, although they may have considerably less than their own or their husband's siblings. It is a critical aspect of the mother

role in which they can exert real and lasting influence on social reproduction by ensuring that their children are prepared to exploit occupational opportunities. The means by which mothers exercise their influence range from decisions about what schools children attend, to supervision of homework, attendance at school meetings, as well as constantly encouraging, promoting and reinforcing the value of a good education. They articulate their commitment to education in terms of a conviction that achieving as high a level of attainment as possible is the key to a secure future and to maximising life chances:

I believe that education is very important, you could never put enough money into children's education. (W15)⁴

I'd like them to have as much education as possible and go to third level if they were able and interested. (W30)

Life has changed since I was a child and education has become much more important. They have to make it on their own now with education. (E25)

The educational domain is one in which women perceive clearly that they as mothers, rather than the fathers, have the major influence. They attribute this to the fact that they have a greater appreciation of the value of education, perhaps because they missed out on it themselves, and they are willing and available to help at lessons as their work is centred around the house and yard. Their husbands, on the other hand, may have relatively less schooling themselves, having in many cases, commenced their occupational apprenticeship on the farm by dropping out of second level education. This may have been, as suggested earlier, because becoming a "farmer" by taking over the family holding meant that educational achievement was considered unnecessary, or that the son who demonstrated the least academic ability and/or interest was given the farm. At any rate, fathers are inclined to shy away from involvement in school activities.

Women are more education conscious, I don't know why. Men should know how important it is. (E11)

It is the women who really appreciate the value of an education. (E5)

I was the one who kept them at their lessons and looked after the schooling. He wouldn't have a clue. (W13)

4. The letter W or E before respondents' code numbers denote their location in the West or East of Ireland. H refers to the respondent's husband throughout.

The mother is the one in the house. My husband is out all day, he is only here for meals so I am the one watching them. Education is important for kids today, there are a lot of pressures on kids, only the best will get there. I never went to secondary school and I regret it, it was a shame. (W18)

I am more fussy about education, H wouldn't be as bothered ... you must educate children to work. (E17)

In practice, ensuring that their children have the best possible opportunities involves a high degree of personal commitment, household organisation, and care and encouragement on the part of mothers, particularly at crucial times such as during examinations.

I was the one that kept them at the books and drove them to school in T. 32 miles morning and evening because I thought it was a better school. And it worked, they will get their ambitions. Where there is a will there is a way. I kept them at the lessons with the back-up of H of course. I make the rules and they follow! (E18)

I used to stay up with the kids when they were studying and give them a bit of moral support, especially when they were doing exams. They need special care when they are doing exams — to be humoured and to have their meals ready when they come home. (W9)

There was always an emphasis here on education. We got rid of the TV, it was taking over and now we only rent one at Christmas. I have noticed that since we have no TV they read a lot more. (E6)

I was the one who kept them at their books, H was gone a lot of the time. (W11)

Things are hectic here since the kids got older, with them and their friends coming and going, exams and points, football teams and so on. (W18)

Over and over again women stressed the importance of education and their commitment to ensuring that their children had every opportunity. They saw themselves as the creators of an environment in which education was very highly valued. This was particularly marked in the west where lack of family capital and local employment opportunity has always underlined the need for educational credentials. As one respondent put it:

Education is extremely important, it had to be here [in the west]. Education was not taken lightly and of course the [free] transport was mighty. (W11)

Another mother in the west has four children, all of whom went through third level education. All are now in well-paid professional occupations, three of them outside Ireland. She explained her involvement:

I was the one who kept them at their lessons, and went to the school. Both of us have a strong interest in education as we only went to national school ourselves....There was no question of them not doing the Leaving [Certificate]. We were very lucky to be near the school and they were good students...they all just knew what they wanted. (W5)

V THE COST OF EDUCATION

There are considerable financial pressures and sacrifices associated with putting children through third level education, particularly on low-income holdings in the west. In such circumstances grants and scholarships are very important. On a farm of less than 30 hectares of poor land in the west where the family of three sons had each studied engineering at university level, their mother explained:

We got grants for the three of them but we had a job to get it for the last one.... He got it eventually though, otherwise he would have had to go to the RTC [Regional Technical College] ... I kept them at their lessons, they didn't get away at night. There were no discos during school times. We kept them at it although H would be more lenient than me about this. We haven't the money for going out anyway, it was enough to dress them. (W20)

Scarcity of resources seems to strengthen the resolve of both mothers and children, who are aware of the hard work and sacrifices involved and have few of the distractions from homework more typical of town and cities. Where big families have to be educated the older children are expected to help out with the younger ones. In the following case there were seven children on a farm of just 20 hectares. At the time of interview five had completed various third level education courses and were now employed (two in London); one was studying in a Regional Technical College and the youngest was in secondary school. The father of the family had an off-farm job when the children were younger "to make ends meet"; the mother made the following comment:

They never caused us any trouble. I was never that anxious for education for myself, my mother wanted me to stay at home with her. But education was very important for both of us for the kids. There was

no question but that they wouldn't have a career ... They all helped out and all got grants to go to college ... They have all been very good here helping each other out and helping us out if we are short — not big amounts, because they don't have it themselves and they need to be saving too. The older ones buy clothes for the younger ones and tide them over if they are stuck. (W9)

Even with the availability of grants, off-farm income is usually an essential component of the drive to educate, especially on smallholdings in the west. This can happen in two ways. Either parent may take up off-farm work to offset the financial demands associated with putting children through school. The income from a parent's relatively unskilled work may be critical to financing a child's third level education. Alternatively, when the off-farm job is the primary income source, the farm itself may be looked on as a means of funding education:

Every penny goes back into the farm to build it up. I hope in the long term to have money out of it for the kids' education as we won't get grants. (W19)

Dairying is the most profitable farm enterprise, providing a predictable and regular income to meet the cost of third level education. It also involves a very significant input on the part of the farm wives. The family mentioned above who had educated their three sons as engineers were operating a small dairy farm under difficult conditions. The mother regarded dairying as a vital source of regular income when children are being educated. However, she expects that they will reduce the (labour) intensity of their farm operation when this has been achieved, perhaps by selling the dairy quota and switching to a beef-cow system. In this sense dairy farming is a means to an end, financing the education of children who will almost certainly not continue the enterprise on the smaller dairy farms when their parents retire. Parents who optimise their farm income by adopting and developing a dairy system in this way, will often switch to a less intensive system once the education costs have been met and it becomes clear that none of their children are interested in dairy farming as an occupation. In one such family the couple had recently sold their milk quota, changing to a less labour intensive beef-cow farming system. The farm wife explained their decision:

We were encouraged by the kids. Why hold the quota, they said when we will never come back to dairying. So we made the decision. There was not much point in holding on to it. It was better for us and we are glad now because the price has dropped since we sold ... Life is much simpler

now, I think it was getting H down, the seven day week and everything.
(W5)

Accepting that the consequence of educational attainment may be disengagement from (dairy) farming for the next generation is not without regret, even on the part of mothers who after all may have invested decades of labour in the enterprise. They realise, however, that the expectations that education brings may result in children not wishing to continue farming even where there is a good living to be made. On another dairy farm where the five children aged between 20 and 5 years are already in, or expected to go to third level, their mother seemed prepared to accept the inevitability of this when she said:

Having someone to take over the farm is important to us, we are getting old, we would like to see someone taking over. But if they don't want to we can't push them, they would only blame us later. (W18)

VI REGIONAL COMPARISONS

It is evident so far that the commitment to educational attainment is particularly marked in the west, and also more challenging, because farming there is generally smaller in scale and less intensive and the opportunities for off-farm work are limited. The value placed on education by parents in the west, and already articulated in some of the statements and examples earlier in the paper, was underlined by the farm women interviewed in the study who are themselves teachers:

Education was always important in the west of Ireland, it was their only hope of salvation. I think it is the women who look after education in the home — they are the ones who come to the school, to parent-teacher meetings. Of course, if the meetings are held during the day, the men can't usually come but even when they are at night, about 85 per cent of those attending are women. When parents come to the school, it's always the women. (Teacher, W29)

A teacher in the east, whose parents were part of a group of farmers who migrated from the west as part of the Land Commission resettlement scheme, explained the commitment to education there as follows:

Education was very important to my parents ... it was a priority with both of them ... I see this different attitude to education myself in school, in the children whose parents, or even grandparents came from the west. The teachers from the west see it too, a different attitude to

education. They say that the people around here got it handy, whereas nothing was handed to you in the west so they had that drive for education. You can see it at parent teacher meetings too. The kids are very ambitious and want streaming and the parents are very interested ... At the parent-teacher meeting it is 95 per cent mothers ... it is the mother who generally drives the children. (Teacher, E15)

The commitment to educational attainment on smallholdings in the west, which is orchestrated chiefly by women, extends nowadays not just to daughters and non-inheriting sons but to all the children. Farm women there recognise that they themselves and their husbands are from the last generation of adults in full-time farming for whom education was not considered an occupational requirement. Indeed, their siblings in occupations outside of farming, whose educational attainment was often considerably higher than their own, may now be important role models for the present generation of farm children. In this sense, the emphasis on educational attainment in the west also represents a lack of faith in the future of farming as an occupation. Full-time farming is not seen as a viable occupational option for the next generation. The best that can be hoped for is that one of the children will find a job sufficiently close to home to farm the holding on a part-time basis. On the larger holdings in the east, on the other hand, there is an expectation that succession to full-time farming will be an option for at least one of the present generation. Indeed, one or more children may already have commenced their occupational apprenticeship or taken over management. On 40 per cent (12/30) farms in the east, one or more members of the younger generation were involved full-time in farming (either having taken over management, or working with parents) compared to only one such situation in the west. However, mothers are not always wholehearted in their endorsement of children's succession to farming as we shall see in the next section.

VII COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY OF RESISTANCE

Women's commitment to education for their children can be interpreted as a strategy of resistance to the subordination of women within family farming and to farming as an occupation. In the case of daughters, it represents an attempt to widen the opportunity set beyond the confines of the wife/mother role so that daughters may achieve a degree of financial independence that they lack themselves. They see themselves as the last generation willing to accede to such an extent to the demands of family and farm and they have

resolved to secure their daughters' future through ensuring that by having a "career" they will never be financially dependent:

It is a very good thing that women have their own careers and have their independence, I think that is very important. Otherwise there is a loss of education and brainpower ... I would expect my daughter to keep on her career after marriage and children. (W1)

I'd advise my daughter to keep on her job after marriage for the income and getting out and about and mixing with people ... It depends on the job too, if it is a routine job ... but if you are a professional it is different. (W5)

My daughters don't intend to have big families. The girls will keep on their jobs. (W9)

Mothers, aware that they themselves are the primary proponents of the value of education, believe that appreciation of and commitment to educational attainment is itself related to gender. Girls, they argue, are more appreciative of the importance of education and are ambitious for themselves:

I'm very concerned about education. The boys all left school as soon as they could, I couldn't keep them in school. The girls will do the Leaving [Certificate]. Girls are more ambitious. If you don't go to school, how are you going to get a good job [I say to them]. (W7)

It's easier to get through to girls, they mature quicker. The boys are not academic but they know they will have to do the Leaving [Certificate]. (W12)

Daughters present during interviews confirmed these views, stressing the importance for women of having their own incomes and "independence" — views articulated by women respondents who were working off the farm, who are also of course important role models. The level of educational attainment achieved by daughters also bears out these aspirations and mothers express great pride in their daughters' achievements, particularly when they have been attained in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

Commitment to education for sons is associated with mothers' disenchantment with farming as an occupation and the risks associated with it. On smaller holdings there is universal acceptance that full-time farming is not an option for the future. All children are encouraged to maximise their educational attainment and selection of an heir is frequently postponed until one of the farm children has secured off-farm employment sufficiently close to the farm to make part-time farming feasible. Indeed, it is accepted by

mothers that the cost of educational success of children may be their eventual rejection of farming as an occupation, even on a part-time basis:

I wouldn't care about selling it [the farm] if the kids had no interest and I don't think H would either. Keeping it in the family name is not important. In the past they wanted the same *first* name too. I think that is stupid, I don't believe in it at all. (W2)

It wouldn't bother me if the farm went. I think that H too would rather that the kids had careers. (W19)

To carry on the name would be nice but it's not important if they were not interested.... I'd like to see them getting an education. (W30)

Mothers' insistence on occupational options for sons is not usually contested by fathers on these smaller holdings because they have accepted the inevitability of future part-time farming. Nevertheless, it is easier for women to orchestrate a future in which there may be no obvious heir to the farm because they are less emotionally attached to the land itself since in most cases the land is their husband's patrimony.

I'd be different. He is more attached to the land. I suppose it is because it is his family's land. (W27)

Land is not as important to people as before. There are no young fellows in farming around here. (W30)

Much of the power of fathers in farm families was based on their right to decide on the heir to the patrimony and the provision of an occupational apprenticeship to the selected successor. This power has been hugely eroded and fathers have had to recognise that they are the last generation of full-time farmers. In a situation where reproduction of the family farm will now at best be on a part-time basis, securing a local occupation is a more likely determinant of which child will succeed to the patrimony. In this, mothers more than fathers are the key influence.

Even on larger more commercial farms in the east, where succession is taken for granted and there is an expectation of full-time farming for the next generation, women perceive farming as a difficult and risk-laden occupation. The families in this study were interviewed at a time when many were experiencing a drop in farm incomes. The future of farming was perceived by them as being very uncertain due to reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Farming was also considered to be a very stressful occupation so that women regarded it as important that potential successors have another occupational option, as well as farming:

I insisted on my son doing the Leaving Certificate [before staying at home on the farm] and he got five honours. Education is no great load and they need to be educated nowadays. I feel this more strongly than H. We now have two in third level. (E10)

I think it is important to have a professional qualification. I wouldn't like a child to be a full-time farmer, either son or daughter. Carrying on the name is not important to me but it is to H. The name is important; there is something primitive about "the name" ... H is realistic, he doesn't expect sacrifices [from his children]. It is no harm in having an education, I'd like to see them have that option. (E15)

In these circumstances there may be conflict between spouses over the schooling of the potential successor. Fathers who have not themselves completed second level education perceive the inheriting son's continuing on in school as delaying their occupational apprenticeship on the farm. In these circumstance women often battle for continued schooling for their sons, insisting on the importance of occupational options. This is also a clash about the importance of the continuity of the family enterprise to which many farm women may have little commitment:

It is very important to the men that the boys take over. I can't understand this attachment to land, I can't see it. If this is what he wants [her son], but he is young and it is hard for them to know at sixteen what they want. His father is 64 and feels he has to teach him now or he won't be around. I've promised him that we will get a welding machine so that he can develop other skills. (E5)

He [her son] has stayed at home here on the farm and I could have killed him that he didn't go on for something. He was very good at studying and they wanted him to go on in the school ... I could kill H for wanting him to stay on the farm. (E20)

The difference between east and west is very important here because it highlights one of the bases of male power in family farming — patrimony and occupational apprenticeship — and how power and influence shift within the family as that power is undermined and full-time farming is no longer regarded as a desirable occupation. In the east where mothers see farming as being risky and stressful, they may wish their children to have other occupational options. But on the larger holdings this will be contested by fathers who can wield considerably more influence by virtue of their control over material resources which can provide a viable livelihood for a successor.

VIII REPRODUCTION — MOTHERS AND THE FUTURE OF FAMILY FARMING

The analysis in this paper has established farm women's influence on the reproduction of family farming as a social form, as well as on social reproduction, through their command over the education of farm children. It is in the sphere of education and socialisation of children, through the mother role, that farm women exert a critical influence on reproduction. The exceptional educational attainments of farm children can be understood as being due largely to farm mothers' recognition that education is the key to a secure occupation. Farm women are having a profound influence on the trajectory of family farming and on the wider social structure. It is in their role as mothers with primary responsibility for the successful settlement of their children, rather than as farm wives that they exercise the greatest influence on reproduction.

In the stem family system which has characterised Irish farming since the famine, a fundamental basis of male power was the ownership of the land and control over succession; male successors were apprenticed to their fathers who had a great deal of power over them (Mc Cullagh, 1991). Reproducing the farm and the farm labour force was paramount, the problem of how the remainder of the family were to be dispersed was effectively relegated to mothers. While fatherhood involved responsibility for farming apprenticeship, motherhood was constituted in terms of preparing children for an unknown world outside the family farm. Women embraced the challenge of preparing children for the wider society, not just because it gave them power and authority in a social form constructed on patriarchal lines, but as a way of resisting patriarchal dominance and creating a separate sphere of influence.

This resistance has itself a gender dimension in that, in the case of daughters, it represents an attempt to ensure that the cycle of dependent farm wife is fractured and that the next generation have better choices. In the case of sons it represents farm wives disillusionment with farming itself or, on smaller holdings, a recognition that to remain in farming will require pluriactivity. What is important is that it is in their role as mothers, who can influence children's achievements through their control over social reproduction, that this power is located. However powerless women might be in terms of control over property, labour or capital, the constitution of Irish motherhood ensures their power over children. Motherhood as a source of power and influence has been somewhat neglected by sociologists who have focused mostly on the initial experiences of motherhood (Oakley, 1979; Boulton, 1983). Research on gender and education or on the links between education and social reproduction has rarely addressed the issue of the

relationship between mothers' taking responsibility for children's education and social reproduction. Scheper Hughes (1979), analysing Irish rural families from a psychological perspective, did recognise the critical influence of the mother in mapping out a future for her children by deciding who should become teacher, civil servant or priest, and in raising daughters to be self-reliant and independent. Inglis (1987) argued that what he called the "moral power" of mothers and their influence over their children's future was dependent on the authority of the Catholic Church until the 1960s, mothers being effectively "moral agents" of the Catholic Church in the home. While Inglis sheds much light on how Irish motherhood was constituted in the nineteenth century, he underestimates the basis of the power of mothers, casting them as almost helpless dupes of the Catholic Church, even though he admits that falling fertility since the 1960s is evidence of the decline of Church influence. The crucial point is that even within the confines of patriarchal structures, women have always managed to fashion spheres of influence for themselves. This highlights the need, in the case of intra-family relations, to conceptualise negotiation and spheres of influence rather than purely coercion as critical dimensions of power.

IX CONCLUSION

In this paper then I have argued that, by their control of the sphere of education and socialisation within the farm family and through their strong belief in the value of education, farm women are the chief architects of a remarkable pattern of educational participation among farm children. Their influence therefore extends well beyond the family farm to the constitution of Irish society and the social form of rural living. Women may not inherit the land but they do give birth to the new generation, and as mothers, are primarily concerned with creating the conditions for a satisfactory life for their children. This concern, reinforced by economic realism and by dispassionate assessment of the prospects for family farming as a livelihood, is at the core of their influence on reproduction. Not surprisingly, mothers are less committed to farming than fathers except as a desirable lifestyle. Their real interest is in securing the best possible occupational options for their children. Their success in this means that they play an important role in shaping not just the future of family farming but the class structure of Irish society.

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