

Doing Ethnography: Irish Community Studies and the Exclusion of Women

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This paper is an exploration of the structure of "male bias" in a specific set of ethnographic, i.e. descriptive texts. The focus of the enquiry is a set of community studies carried out in Ireland at different points of time: *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study* by Conrad Arensberg, 1937, republished 1968; *Family and Community in Ireland* by Conrad Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, 1941, republished 1961; *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* by John Messenger, 1969 and *Inishkiltane: Change and Decline in the West of Ireland* by Hugh Brody, 1974. This particular set of studies has been chosen because they are good descriptive accounts. Some of them, particularly the work of Arensberg (1968) and Arensberg and Kimball (1961) are still used and referred to as exemplary community studies. The judgement is not entirely incorrect; they are good descriptive accounts. The problem that is addressed here is that these two studies and the other community studies undertaken later but in the same geographic areas, are partial. They are incomplete accounts. What they omit are adequate accounts of the structure of women's lives and work. The basis for this omission and the structure of the ethnographic enterprise which allows such omissions is the issue under investigation in this paper. The rules that define the process of gathering data are the focus of interest. What is demonstrated is the way ethnographic or descriptive

accounts are put together so that interpretation excludes women's experience, or includes it only in its representation through men. The main emphasis throughout the paper is on displaying the ways in which such accounts are incomplete, and the ways in which unstated assumptions and judgements interfere with more adequate presentations.

My approach is that of textual criticism, presenting a critique of the ethnographic or descriptive material as it appears and suggesting an alternative interpretive framework. Throughout, my concern is with the situation of women and women's work and women's lives as they appear in the accounts. In particular I will focus on tradition and change in women's lives as they become visible through the ethnographies. The division of labour in the household and the community and the changing patterns of marriage are the two substantive issues I shall present to illustrate my arguments.

A brief word about the nature of "ethnographies." Ethnographic accounts are descriptions given by anthropologists who have lived in the community for a period of time. As such they provide accounts of the situation and the time as interpreted through the experience of the ethno-

grapher. They present us with a picture of the community frozen into the stillness of its own time. The degree to which such accounts can be used to inform us about the society beyond the immediate community is variable. It depends on the extent to which the writer links the observations to the wider context of which the community is a part. It also depends on the nature of the linkages made, for example, whether they concern language and culture as reflected in local tradition, and/or the political economy of the overall context. The ethnographies of rural Ireland generally provide the former since they are particularly concerned with the local culture. Frequently, also, ethnographers do not adequately establish the historical context of their studies. The descriptions, nonetheless, provide us with accounts of life and work in rural Ireland and it is as such that I am using them. I have abstracted material from these accounts to reflect on their adequacy in making this understanding possible.

I will begin by presenting a critical review of the production of descriptive or ethnographic studies; that is, the way in which the material for such studies is gathered and interpreted. My concern is with the ways in which traditional approaches to carrying out research present women and interpret their situation, and the ways in which women are excluded from recognition or consideration. I will explore the meaning of such inclusion and exclusion in order to explicate a framework which provides the basis for making women's work and women's worlds fully visible. Finally, I will look at the picture of women's lives and work which emerges from selected community studies carried out in rural Ireland. My general concerns then can be summarised as focussing both on the analytical framework that provides the rules for generating the data, and on the data themselves so as to provide a picture of life and work in the Irish countryside.

I

The assumptions that are built into the conventions of "doing anthropology," of carrying out fieldwork, of presenting and interpreting the worlds of other peoples, cultures and societies are central to the production of ethnographic studies. The method that is used is that of "participant observation." The anthropologist, or observer, enters the community being investigated and provides through the experience of participation, of discussion with members, an account of the life of that community. A convention that is generally accepted, is that the sex of the observer makes no difference, in process or presentation (See also Frankenberg 1976). The notion of objectivity which governs the rules for doing the study and presenting the interpretation demands that we put ourselves as persons, aside from the enterprise, that we behave as if we stand fully outside our experience in the community, and as a corollary outside the interpretation we present of that experience. We are then to be seen more as observers than as participants. Arensberg in defining his enterprise in *The Irish Countryman* (1968) puts it this way:

For the observer the difference in scale is of immense value. It allows him an objective view of the whole which is practically impossible in our own modern life....(p. 28)

and again:

...Only the most painstaking objectivity and the most colourless vocabulary can safeguard the temerarious investigator. And the only fair treatment is that of the laboratory: to treat the behaviours in their own settings and to analyze them for nothing more than their function in that setting....(p. 100)

These quotations indicate briefly some of the rules for the investigator, that objective observa-

tion is possible, that the whole “community” can be made visible, that vocabulary can be safeguarded in such a way as to ensure the presentation of an “uncoloured” picture. This presentation of the rules for doing research in this manner is not unique to Arensburg (1968); it represents the rules of enquiry, in one form or another, for the discipline (see Pelto and Pelto 1978 for example). While the problems of presentation in this form are frequently discussed, the assumption that this stance of the objective observer can be achieved, in one mode or another, is less frequently considered. Certainly, it is implicit if not explicit in the majority of community or ethnographic studies. It is this relation of enquirer to subject and situation that I want initially to regard as problematic. My critique here contributes to a growing body of literature treating related problems and issues. In the discipline of anthropology such problems have been explored and explicated by Collier and Rosaldo 1981, Lamphere 1977, Leacock 1981, MacCormack 1981. These researchers are concerned with the problems of interpreting ethnographic data and the problems posed by implicit or explicit rules which exclude women, or fail to define women’s situations adequately. The approaches to the problem posed are various but that there is a problem is agreed. Since this paper is not aimed at providing a survey of the literature in general, I want here simply to note the work to which it relates and the context of which it is a part. My critique then begins by constituting the relationship between ethnographer or enquirer and subject as problematic.

A review of the approach as I have defined it, then, will show that the ethnographer, the enquirer, the observer, the investigator, the researcher, all take a masculine pronoun - all become “he” when the work to be undertaken is defined, when abstract rules for its generation are given, or when generalisations about method are made. (Note that I have been careful to avoid the use of pronouns so far!) I will give two examples of this bias. The first is taken from

a book by Thomas Rhys Williams entitled *Field Methods in the Study of Culture*, he says:

...The anthropologist serves as a model by his very presence in a community. His actions influence the culture he studies, whether he intends to have such influence.... He will be imitated while he is feared. He will be queried while he is being given information....(p. 46)

The second again comes from the study of Arensburg (1968), he notes:

Yet the question of the organization of the community confronts the social anthropologist. He seeks to analyse the means by which men relate themselves over time and space. (p. 105)

This mode of making comments and giving direction is systematic. It directs us to look at or seek information about relationships between or concerning men. The point is not simply that the masculine pronoun is used. It is that its use directs us to a framework in which the exclusive focus of questioning is towards men, while the answers are understood to encompass the entire community or society, i.e., both men and women.

There are further consequences to this mode of giving direction, of elaborating rules without attending to the gender of the speaker as observer or as informant. First, it means that we take for granted that consideration of gender is irrelevant; second, it means that we take for granted that men are always the actors, the focus of the interpretations, the speakers as anthropologists or ethnographers, and as members of the community of investigation. Women, then, are included in the sense that information is given about them. Understanding, descriptions, interpretation, explication of the situation of women depends on their relation to men in the research enterprise as it is defined. Women are in other words spoken about, they rarely speak for them-

selves. "She" is not seen as an actor. Nonetheless, the adequacy of the account can be measured by the extent to which both actors in the situation appear. By this standard the majority of ethnographies here present more than usually adequate accounts. However, women are excluded in the sense that accounts do not recognise women as speakers in relation to their own concern or in general. Women do not stand as having views of situation or society separate from those of men, spoken by themselves, as themselves. Women do not give accounts of their own work, lives, situations or experiences. They do not speak in the first person in the accounts. There is a double mediation involved, first by their men in their situation, and second by the ethnographer. I should here, parenthetically, add that women doing ethnography abide by the same general rules. The same meditations in presentation apply. Let me emphasize here that what is problematic initially is the procedure, the legitimacy of the account is not in question. A further problem arises when the claim is made that the account is "complete." I am here arguing that all accounts we have are partial in the sense that they exclude women. A complete or full account of any community would be one which included women's descriptions of their own situations and the world of which they are a part, as well as those given by men. If there are to be omissions, I am arguing for a conscious exclusion rather than an unconscious one.

In the anthropological accounts we have of Irish communities, the investigators bring their values, their prejudices, their experiences, their expectations into the elaboration and constitution of the framework for viewing the world. In other words, the perspective is that of men writing, and women take their place within the definition of this perspective. In these examples, the ethnographers are male and the bias in the description reflects their position in society and their views of the world. However, these have become fully incorporated into the discipline itself. Thus "male bias" becomes a feature of the

discipline itself not simply a product of the gender of the ethnographer. "Male bias" is the bias that used men's experience in an organisation of the world as the basis of generalisation, without recognising that it is partial, and assuming that what applies to or is learned from men is equally applicable to women.

This is reinforced at two levels. First, by the manner in which the anthropological framework is formulated. Secondly, since women are indeed subject to men's control, do have lesser rights, are dependents, their invisibility as themselves is doubly reinforced. I will conclude this section of my paper with an example of this in the ethnographic context. The example is taken from John Messenger's account *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland*, (1969).

Messenger and his wife conducted fieldwork in the area together. He is careful to document their joint participation, intermittently noting: "...my wife and I took great pains to disentangle real from ideal culture...." (p. 84), and "...My wife and I obtained some immigration statistics for the siblings of folk now living in Inis Beag...." (p. 129). However, there are only two occasions when he attributes this information directly to his wife and documents women's situations of living it. (pp. 77, 129) This clearly defines the perspective and the rule for inclusion. The relation is defined as one of the dependency of women expressed in the framework of the analysis, and in the descriptive account of the situation. It is derived from Messenger's own context as well as reinforced in that it reflects reality in the context of his study. It is this relation that I want now to explore further, in general first of all, and then specifically, in the Irish community studies context.

II

Women and children are defined, in Western society, as the dependents of men. This can be made explicit in commonsense and analytical

explanations. Messenger's account provides an example of the former. His relation to his wife, and in general of men to women appears as an unquestioned assumption, doubly reinforced, as I have argued, by his own experience and by the situation he is describing. It is an accurate presentation not, however, an analytical one. The analytical framework which serves to make these relations fully visible, and therefore in need of explication, is one which begins with the recognition of the differentiated sphere of men and women. This differentiation is between the public sphere, the world of men, and the private domestic sphere, the world of women. Smith (1977) defines this in the following way:

...our existence is bifurcated into "public" and "private" spheres....

The public sphere is that sphere in which history is made. But the public sphere is also the sphere of male activity. Domestic activity becomes relegated to the private sphere, and mediated to the public sphere by men who move between both. Women have a place only in the private, domestic sphere.... (p. 18)

In the work of anthropologists and sociologists this mediation of private to public sphere is made manifest in the accepted framework which excludes women as actors. Women's experiences, situations, are mediated for our understanding by the interpreter not spoken by women themselves, (See also Barker and Allen, 1976; Hamilton, 1978; Jacobson, 1979). It is taken for granted that this is the appropriate mode of presentation.

Smith (1977) argues that women have a place only in the private sphere. A different way of putting this is to say that women can be in the public sphere but never of it; thus the rules for operating in that sphere as person or analyst are the same for women as for men, they are not modified for women. Women's practices as eth-

nographers is then the same as that of men. However, that women can manage those "public" rules sometimes occasions surprise, which makes the difference visible. An example of this can be seen in the following comment made about a book entitled *Contemporary French Women Poets* (Hermey, 1977): "...And though they are women, their themes are universal...." (back cover). The general expectation is that women's concerns will be local or trivial, rather than general, circumscribed by their location in the private or domestic sphere.

The importance of using the approach exemplified by Smith (1977) both critically and analytically is that it provides a framework for fully including women, their lives and work. It makes it possible to account for the different positions in society. It lays the foundation for documenting women's work and analyzing women's situations in their own right. Smith (1977) puts it this way:

The production of the home as an actual material state of affairs is the direct responsibility of the women. They are central to the home as an enterprise. Their work, their ability to manage, and their commitment to the daily drudgery of housework are fundamental. (p. 29)

Women's work in the private sphere is not fully described in the available or conventional ethnographies. This is one area of omission that arises from the failure to recognize the differentiation of public and private spheres at the outset. Ethnographers assume that it is the work of the public sphere that is the focus of their enquiry and do not question this assumption. In other words, no analysis of the differential locations of men and women in the society appears. Descriptions, however, are to be found, and it is to these that I now want to turn.

III

This section includes an account of the characteristics of women's lives and work as they appear in the ethnographic accounts. As mentioned previously, I will discuss briefly two areas; first, the division of labour, second, patterns of marriage relationships. Again, in discussing the information we have available, I will also note the mode of inclusion and the effects of exclusion in relation to these presentations of the situation of women.

The first ethnographic accounts we have are those of Arensberg and Kimball. The field work, conducted in County Clare in 1932, appeared in published form as *The Irish Countryman* in 1937, republished in 1968, by Conrad Arensberg; and as *Family and Community in Ireland* published in 1940, republished in 1961, by Arensberg and his co-worker in the field, Solon T. Kimball. The following picture of women's work and spheres emerges from their accounts. The separation of tasks is clear, Arensberg (1968) says:

Yet the woman's role is separate. It is auxiliary; the simpler, less arduous tasks fall to her. The heavier work and command of the enterprise rests with the men. The plough, the harrow, the mower, the scythe, the spade and the turf cutting slane are regarded as masculine implements....(p. 61)

In previous discussion another reference has been made to men's "more arduous" work (p. 61) and housework is referred to as:

But familiar housework is not the whole of the woman's duty. Her work takes her beyond the house door. After breakfast she takes the milk buckets and goes to milk the cows in the sheds. This is merely one of the many trips she makes out into the haggard, for fuel, for water, and to feed the animals and poultry. Milking over, she must not rest for the whole process of converting

milk to butter is her charge. She is an expert at the churn.... (p. 56)

Although a description of some of the tasks of housework does appear it is recurrently defined as "familiar" (Arensberg 1968: 56) as in the following passage; from Arensberg and Kimball (1961): "Housework is familiar to us; the point of itemizing it is merely to make clear the confined sphere in which the woman's current and indispensable duties fall." (p. 36) Finally here, in considering housework, the words of a farmer of County Clare (Arensberg 1968):

"Here is something I want to tell you and you can put it in your head and take it back with you. The small farmer (in Ireland) has to have an intelligent wife or he won't last long. He may do for a few years, but after that he can't manage. You take children's clothes...if she knows how to buy material and make clothes she saves lots of money, and there are a thousand ways an intelligent woman makes money." Here his wife interrupted him and asked, "What about the tillage?" "That's all right," he went on. "But if it wasn't for the woman the farmer wouldn't last, and when he's getting a wife for one of his sons, he should look to a house where there has been an industrious intelligent woman, because she has taught her daughters how to work and that is what is needed." (p. 62)

There are a few points to note in relation to these characterisations of women's work. First, the work is recognised, visible and validated in the accounts. The picture that emerges is one of a division of labour in which tasks are understood to be complementary (Arensberg and Kimball 1961: 65-66). Men control the overall work enterprise. In the structuring of the accounts, however, it is important to note that women do not describe their work themselves; their work is seen as being both "familiar" and "less arduous." These ascriptions are assumptions of the ethno-

grapher which give tacit validation to the rule that the work of the domestic sphere need not be fully described. This is a criticism that can be more generally applied to ethnographic accounts. (See also for example Wolf 1972).

Nonetheless, in these Irish community studies, the nature of the division of labour, the mode of allocation of tasks emerges clearly. Initially in the accounts the work of men and women is seen as being complementary. The "natural" abilities of men and women define the tasks they carry out (Arensberg 1968: 63). It is an important cultural definition of work and its nature and one of the areas in which there has been considerable change. Rural Ireland has seen the decline of the agricultural sector in relative wealth and importance. (See for example Humphries, 1966) With this change the situation of the farm and farmwork have also changed. To understand the dimensions of these changes, it is important first to note what tradition demanded.

Taking this into account I want to look at two other ethnographies. The focus of interest here is first, to show how women's lives and work appear when they speak for themselves; and second, the light their comments throw on change expressed through migration, and different marriage patterns. John Messenger and his wife spent time in 1959 and 1960 in Inis Beag, Messenger's published account appeared in 1968. From Messenger's account we have one of the few reports given by women:

Women commonly express jealousy of and resentment against not only what they consider the less time consuming and stressful work load of men, but also the greater freedom enjoyed by their husbands. Many times women confided to my wife that they are greatly distressed at being forced to remain home minding their children and performing tedious household chores, while their spouses range the entire island and

the sea about it in their economic pursuits and are involved in numerous social activities forbidden by custom to women. Some of these same women expressed deep concern over being compelled by the unauthorized decree of local curates, as well as the sexual demands of their mates, to produce as many offspring as possible; they complained that the constant bearing and rearing of children increase their work, restrict their freedom, and perpetuate the poverty. Few men whom we questioned were aware—or willing to admit—that such sentiments are held by their wives, but most men cited as one of the more attractive aspects of local life their being bossed by no one and being able to shift from one job to another among a wide variety to avoid boredom. (p. 77)

This is a very important piece of documentation. It provides us with a reason for the exclusion of women from accounts. Men and women move in different circles. These circles are closed to each other in the public world and intersect only in the private, the home or the domestic sphere. Information then passes most readily from men to men, from women to women; the information also is different. The importance of the mediation by Messenger's wife then becomes apparent, he could not obtain it himself. His mediation produced the views of men and the contrast is also apparent in this passage. Contrary to Arensberg's assumption of the more "arduous tasks" being those of men (1968: 61-62), women have their own view of whose work is the most arduous! It is not important here to resolve the issue of competing evaluations but rather to recognise that the framework incorporates a value judgement and to note its source. The investment that men have in presenting their view of the world also becomes clear. To be in control, to be "the boss," to be "free" in the ways defined is what is consequent. Seen in this light, men cannot objectively present the views of women or adequately represent them. Women must do that for themselves so that the view of

the world and of work can emerge as it appears differently from their perspectives. Men's view of women and women's work, and vice versa, can then stand as well but cannot be read or presented as the only reality. In each case it is important to recognise that the aim in presenting the accounts initially should be one mediation only, that of the ethnographer. When there are more, this should also be noted and correctly attributed.

IV

One feature of the social life of rural Ireland that does emerge with unusual clarity from the ethnographic accounts is that of the social organisation of relationships between women, within family and household. The society as it appears through the accounts emerges as one in which there are sharp divisions based on age and sex. Men move in society, and work with other men, similarly women with women, Messenger (1969):

...Separation of the sexes starts within the family among siblings in early childhood, and is augmented by separation in almost all segments of adolescent, and adult activity. Brothers come to associate mostly with brothers and sisters with sisters, at play in and near the cottage, travelling to and from school, and in the chapel.... Boys and girls are separated to some extent in classrooms and completely in play at recess. During church services there is a further separation of adult men and women, as well as boys and girls....(p. 108)

These patterns of interaction start early and continue through life. Men interact with each other in the public world, women within the context of the domestic. We know more about the public world and about relationships between men than we do about their equivalent forms for women. For example, Arensberg has a chapter entitled "Boys and Men" (1968: 105-135) but there is no equivalent account for women. We do

not fully know, therefore, what ties or patterns of interaction link women in different households.

However, we do know a great deal about the internal organisation of the household and the differentiated roles of women through their lifetimes as daughter, as daughter-in-law, as mother and as mother-in-law. This sequence reflects the different stages in a woman's life, if the sequence is complete. A woman as daughter grows up in the household of her parents learning her role and tasks; Arensberg and Kimball (1961) put it this way:

Women's work on the small farm is complementary to that of men.... The young girl growing up on the small farm learns this, just as the young man acquires masculine techniques. The girl is thrown constantly with the mother and the older women of the household. After she is seven, her pursuits differ completely from those of her brother and, except as she is in very close association within the household, she has no working contact with her father. (p. 66)

A woman has no right to control household affairs until she marries; "The younger woman, the girl, is at the older woman's command" (Arensberg and Kimball 1961: 67). In these relations important general principles of social relationship and organisation are made visible. Women work with and learn from each other within their own spheres. Age and marital status define the relationships and women's rights and duties at each stage in their lives. A woman begins her life serving an apprenticeship in the household of her parents, she continues it in the household of her husband and parents-in-law. The latter is particularly important. Brody puts it this way (1973):

...They lived always in a close and affective relationship with their mothers, which ended only with their marriage usually at a

relatively early age.... At marriage, the bride moved to the groom's family home, taking nothing with her. Dowries were given by a girl's father to her new husband. The new wife owned not so much as a teacup. And she owned no more when she was eighty: everything passed to her son, whose wife in her turn would use but never own the household possession. (p. 110)

Although they did not own the property as such, women had an investment in its control. The position of mother and/or mother-in-law was the most powerful one that women could aspire to. It depended both on marrying and having children and on the willingness to serve half a lifetime of apprenticeship. Not surprisingly women often choose to reject the pattern of life where they have a chance to.

One other task that women carried out was to go to market to sell kitchen garden produce, poultry and eggs. (Arensberg and Kimball: 66-67). This is important for it provides women's links both with each other and with the public sphere. It meant a chance to move away from the household and its immediate locality and to learn the skills needed for entering this different world. We do not have documentation either of what this meant to women or of how this marketing system operated. Nonetheless, it is clear that it occurs and we can deduce its consequences. They are important when we consider that women choose migration as an alternative. The information and skills to be used in the public world must be learned, and marketing skills then provide a major avenue to knowledge and learning outside the household. Marketing is the one area in which women exercised control in their own right in the public sphere. This contact and learning situation provided the foundation for later moves away from the rural area, as well as for some control of resources by women.

It is against this background of household organisation and family structure and control

that decisions to marry, or remain single, to migrate or stay at home are made. The choices made and the consequences are very different for men and women. The problem that recurs in discussions of the structure of Irish communities is that people marry late or do not marry at all, or prefer to migrate and marry when they settle elsewhere. The varying interpretations of these different patterns which do not fully take into account the different situations and perspectives of men and women will be the focus of the discussion which follows.

In relation to marriage, men are in a stronger position to make their own choice. They might choose not to marry on the grounds that it creates for them a prospect of lifelong poverty; as parents age and as children appear, their responsibilities increase and their prospects may not improve. Since they have a choice in the situation they can choose to exercise it directly. Women can only do so indirectly; that is, they can avoid the issue or opt out. The mode of doing this is what I want to focus on now.

The most frequent option then open to women as an alternative to marriage is to leave. Movement away from the countryside is frequent, has been for some time, and continuous. Speaking of Inishkillane where he lived in 1966, Hugh Brody (1973) describes the situation in the following way:

By comparing people of various age groups living in the parish today with the baptismal records, it is possible to calculate ...what percentage of each generation has remained on the land. The results indicate a continual decline.... Inishkillane is losing the young and keeping the old.

The rate at which the young of the parish leave is not however, the same for men as it is for women. Women leave when they are younger, and they leave in larger numbers....(p. 92)

The parish girls are strongly opposed to marrying local people. They do not want a life on the farm, and they do want to discover life in the city.... (p. 93)

And he adds:

It was the girls of the parish who came quickly and implacably to feel the disadvantages of staying in the countryside. The huge number of country girls in Irish towns and cities, working in any niche they can find, indicates how widespread this disaffection rapidly became. The girls' reaction has been more rapid and more determined, but now the men are following.... (p. 99-100)

Note here the status differences we hear of "girls" and "men." The case history which follows is that of Joseph Murphy, (Brody 1973: pp.100-101) There is no partner account to provide the reasons for women's migration. If we return to Messenger's account and look at women's characterisations of their lives, the reasons for the migration pattern of women become more apparent. Further documentation of this kind is needed to complete our understanding of this phenomenon but there seems little question that women's dissatisfaction with their lot as the wives of farmers give impetus to this pattern. Messenger notes (1969: 125) "Some girls admit that they are emigrating because the possibility of their being asked to marry is remote, but far more of them are dissatisfied with the lot of married women in the island and are attracted by what they consider a more rewarding life on the mainland and abroad." Brody (1973: 127) argues that mothers support their daughters in this enterprise, understanding its reasons. Women have different given options based on their marginality in the social organisation. Since women hold no material possessions and do not inherit, they say it is possible for women to leave more readily or easily. Men are bound to the land, sons to fathers in their expectations and duties to hold

the family farm for themselves and for future generations, (Brody 1973:127):

Only with considerable difficulty - as testified by a multitude of isolated bachelors living on the land - could a son, the owner and inheritor, defy his duty and neglect his responsibility. Even the last daughter, however, has been spared this tension, and has felt free to leave home without guilt. (p. 127)

It is important to note in passing that migration to the city or abroad is not only or always thought of as an alternative to marriage; people may work and marry elsewhere. Often, what they seek is a better situation in work and in marriage. (Humphreys 1966)

The different obligations and responsibilities for men and women emerge clearly from Brody's (1973) account. What is not stressed or recognised is that if men have greater obligations they also have greater control of their own lives, access to property if there is any, and more alternatives if they choose to leave or stay single. I will return to the former point a little later. Here I want to emphasise again that the idea that women are "free" in the way described here is illusory or indeed wrong. This view does not take into account their very real obligations to and feelings for each other, as mothers and daughters, as sisters, or perhaps within the community. Their ties to their fathers and brothers are minimised. If we explore the literature a little further we can see that what women seek is not a solitary life away but rather a better situation in marriage, or failing that, independence if it can be achieved. Porter and Venning writing in 1976 describe the situation in the following way:

It is unlikely that Irish women will in the near future adopt the androgynous life but they have for some time been "voting with their feet." Rather than endure what has

been described as a condition of virtual peonage, rural Irish women simply move into the cities in such numbers that there are now twenty-four rural bachelors for every ten single women. Their independence once achieved, women appear reluctant to marry and relinquish the standard of living provided by their incomes. And while the rates of female postponed marriage and permanent celibacy are lower than those for males, not all Catholic Irish women consider their biological destiny to be of paramount importance, and some prefer to remain single rather than to become farmers' wives. (p. 97)

However, the traditional view of the division of labour still defines the basis for women's participation in society in two senses. First, that women wherever they are, move principally in sectors of the labour force that channel them on the basis of their definition of their role of service. Second, women still carry out a dual role: that of worker in the public sphere, and "houseworker" in the private sphere. Third, they retain their roles in childcare.

Porter and Venning (1976) make this clear with the following information:

Irish women comprise 26 % of the work force...81% of employed women are single and an additional 10%, most of them in agriculture, are widows. Over 50% of employed women are under thirty years of age.... Overall they earn 55 to 65% of male wages. In industry, the gap is narrowed by collective bargaining agreements, in retailing, teaching, and in the civil service women earn 60 to 80% of men's wages. An equal-pay commission has been established. (p. 91)

While the information it presents may well be dated in its specifics, the overall situation has not altered appreciably.

In these contrasts what is presented for our understanding is the disruption of traditional values and patterns of action and choice. For women, what was once lived and defined as "a complementary division of labour" has now come to be seen and to operate as "a condition of virtual peonage." For men the transfer of power and property from one generation to another has become an area in which dispute is necessitated to preserve the interests of all parties.

There are now pressures on men that produce the effective rejection of traditional patterns and responsibilities; for example in Inis Beag (Messenger 1969):

A major cause of celibacy, late marriage, and emigration related to the system of inheritance, seldom mentioned,...is the common practice of a father playing off his sons against one another for the patrimony in order to achieve favored treatment for his wife and himself in their waning years. Elders are well treated,...in part out of the fear that after death their ghosts will punish those who have maltreated them. Often the playing off of sons for the patrimony leads to factionalism within the family and may provoke a secretly favored son to emigrate, or more seriously all sons acting in concert to depart in anger and disgust. (p. 72)

If we compare this with the following account given by Leyton (1975) we can return now to some of the questions raised in this paper.

...The domestic group formed by the nuclear family or unmarried siblings is the ultimate source of affection in Aughnaboy; it is around the family hearth that the most intimate confidences can be exchanged, the most unfettered display of emotional love can be permitted. Here men and women are able to drop the air of caution and restraint which govern their relations with "strangers" (p. 61)

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The view of the family as a harmonious whole depends in this context on a failure to differentiate the locations, rights and responsibilities of its individual members, by age and gender. If differentiation is made, then introducing the perspective of women and recognising that they have accounts to give in their own right immediately alters the picture. It is both less harmonious and differently structured. The further implication of this is that the situations and locations, and indeed the problems of men cannot be adequately understood unless their statements are attributed to them, rather than allowing them to speak for the entire community and/or family without any distinctions being made. What would follow from this in the Leyton example is that such a characterisation might well be correct for some men, some women, and some families but not all. To provide an adequate account, both gender and age must be part of the description. Ideals and practices must be described by and attributed to those who define them. It is not sufficient to present as a complete ethnographic account, one in which men alone are reported as speaking for the entire family and community; spokesmen only cannot define its characteristics, or represent the experiences of all its members. In collecting ethnographic data, care must be taken to take account of gender in this way as a basis for differences and in presentation and interpretation. Differentiations based on gender are a necessary part of the descriptions. Any ethnography which fails to do this is at best partial and at worst a biased and limited account.

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