Ireland: A Man's World?

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Abstract: This article starts from the position that gender is crucial in understanding Irish society. Using Connell's concept of the patriarchal dividend, and drawing on a variety of relevant literature, it explores its existence in the area of paid employment, the family and the state. It suggests that although such privileging is perceived as being under pressure, it is embedded in the practises and processes of state organisations. It concludes by suggesting that although such structures can appear inevitable, they ultimately reflect the choices of powerful men, and hence are amenable to change.

I INTRODUCTION

Within Irish sociology, the reality of class is virtually taken for granted while there has been a reluctance to consider gender as an alternative or complementary social division. Internationally, at a theoretical and empirical level, class analysis is seen as being in difficulties (Bottero, 1998). In a post modern era, a focus on gender as a social structure can be seen as equally problematic. Indeed those who accept the structural reality of gender are conscious of the need to theorise the relationship between it and class (and also race). Various attempts have been made to do this (Hartmann, 1981; Young, 1981; Walby, 1990) although it is widely accepted that they have been less than successful (Gottfried, 1998; Bottero, 1998). However, Bottero (1998, p. 485) has observed that "At the heart of accounts of gender, both modernist and post-modern, has been an acceptance of the market nature of society and it is this

which must be rejected, if gender is to be theorised in structural terms". This strongly implies that theoretical developments which start with gender are likely to be more fruitful than those which attempt to add it in at a later stage — a radical and iconoclastic suggestion in Irish sociology. This paper starts from such a position. Drawing on Connell's work (1995a and b) it is argued that we live in a society where male privileging, what Connell calls a "patriarchal dividend" exists. The paper first presents such key concepts; then briefly explores the evidence as regards the existence of patriarchal privileging in the arena of paid employment, the family and the state; and finally it suggests some of the processes and practices through which such patterns are maintained within the state structures. It is important to stress that this paper is not coming from a perspective which endorses biological essentialism. However, it is argued that Irish women, regardless of their age, life stage and class position, and regardless of how they define themselves, continue to be surrounded by structural and cultural cues which define them as women (O'Connor, 1998).

Ireland has often been depicted as a patriarchal society (Mahon, 1994; O'Connor, 1998). In this context it is worth noting that its rank on the United Nations (1998) Human Development Index (17th) was considerably higher than its rank on Gender Development Index (27th) and that this was the largest difference amongst the top 25 countries. Some caveats have been expressed about the items included in these indices (Nolan, 1998). However, Ireland's rank on the Gender Empowerment Measure was also lower than its rank on the Human Development Index (24th and 17th respectively) — the former focusing on women's and men's share of administrative and managerial positions; of technical and professional jobs and of parliamentary seats. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that patriarchal privileging is not peculiar to Ireland, nor does it depend on the income level of a society. The extent of the problem is disconcerting, with the United Nations Human Development Report (1995, p. 75) noting that "no society treats its women as well as its men".

II KEY CONCEPTS

Patriarchy has been differently defined and variously weighted in models concerned with the position of women in society. Hartmann (1981) has defined it as "a set of social relations between men which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women". This is helpful in highlighting the material element; in suggesting that there is a pecking order amongst men and that male solidarity is important. However, it is less adequate in indicating the processes through which patriarchy is perpetuated. Walby's definition of patriarchy "as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate,

oppress and exploit women" is also useful, particularly since she sees "gender relations as importantly constituted by discourses of masculinity and femininity which are not immediately reducible to the economic relations of capitalism" (1990, p. 4). Pollert (1996, p. 653) recognised patriarchy as a useful "shorthand descriptive tool to indicate male dominance" but has been critical of it as describing rather than explaining phenomena; and for obscuring both the importance of agency and of divisions between women on class, age, racial background or religious lines. Connell (1995a and b) and Gottfried (1998) have tried to surmount these difficulties by using the concept as an adjective rather than as a noun. They have also suggested the importance of exploring its reality through what has been called the "excavation of lived practices" (Gottfried, 1998, p. 465) an approach which is used in looking at organisational processes later in this paper.

Drawing on Connell's work (1995 a and b), it will be argued that although we typically think of gender as a property of individuals (i.e. male/female) it is necessary to go beyond this and to think of it as a property of institutions. Connell (1995a, p.104) sees gender "as a fundamental feature of the capitalist system: arguably as fundamental as class divisions … capitalism is run mainly by and to the benefit of men". He argues that the gendered reality of institutional structures is "reflected in the commitments implicit in masculinity and the strategies pursued in an attempt to realise them" (1995a, p. 215). Thus, in capitalist societies it is because men wish to be men, within a society where being a man involves the subordination of women, that patriarchy is perpetuated. The majority of men he suggests, benefit from "the patriarchal dividend" "in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They [men] also gain a material dividend". He sees heterosexuality and domination as a key element in hegemonic masculinity, but suggests that only a minority of men will practise masculinity in this form (i.e. actively subordinating women). The majority of men are most comfortable when it appears that the patriarchal dividend "is given to them [i.e. heterosexual men] by an external force, by nature or convention, or even by women themselves, rather than by an active social subordination of women going on here and now" (1995a, p. 215). In Ireland, the social subordination of women was, until very recently, seen as "natural", "inevitable", "what women want". It was reflected in women's allocation to the family arena, where their position and status was given rhetorical recognition and validation.

Connell's ideas about masculinity and the patriarchal dividend draw together the cultural and material elements implicit in Walby's definition and help us to understand the processes through which patriarchy is maintained and the part played in this process by men who see themselves as unwitting beneficiaries rather than oppressors. Thus Connell (1995a and b) and Bottero (1998) suggest

that male privileging is maintained not only by individual or group attempts to intimidate, oppress and exclude, but also by women and men's "realistic expectations". Thus their acceptance of the status quo effectively perpetuates "a structure where different groups are rewarded unequally". Connell (1995b, p. 82) suggests that: "a gender order where men dominate women cannot avoid constituting men as an interest group concerned with defence, and women as an interest group concerned with change. This is a structural fact, independent of whether men as individuals love or hate women, or believe in equality or abjection".

Implicit in this paper is the idea that patriarchal privileging is perceived by men as being under pressure. Internationally, "crisis tendencies" (Connell, 1995a) can be identified within and between the major institutional structures (the institutional church, the state, the economic system and the social and cultural construction of heterosexuality). In an Irish context, the most obvious derive from the changing relationship between church and state. There are also tensions arising from the state's need for inclusiveness as a basis for its own legitimacy and the patriarchal nature of Irish public life where the "normal" situation is for men to represent women. Crisis tendencies also exist within the system of gender relations reflecting a decline in the legitimacy of patriarchal power in the family and change in the whole meaning of sexuality. They are evident in the economy consequent on the growth in women's employment. These socio-economic developments threaten men's perception of themselves as bread-winners. At a cultural level, male authority has been publicly eroded by a series of revelations concerning the abuse of male power within each of these structures (see O'Connor, 1995a and 1998).

Grint (1991, p. 223) has suggested that the picture is one of "increasingly embattled senior men confronted by young women undeterred by history or tradition". To many women the reality is a good deal more complex. Nevertheless, in a post-modern society where crisis tendencies exist, and where there are discontinuities in individual's experiences and identity, resistance and counter hegemonic discourses will exist. Thus, for example: "A woman who has been socially constituted as a member of a family … may also, through contact with feminist ideas and organisations, come to acquire partially, or even wholly, conflicting identifications and so come to deploy a new conception of her interest.…" (Benton, 1981, p. 181). In Irish society, in all sorts of ways, and in many arenas, women's voices and their concerns are beginning to be heard. Yet, the perceived legitimacy of those voices, especially in so far as they articulate women's needs and perspectives is still problematic: "the alternative vision offered by female knowledge and insight is suspect and a source of fear" (O'Carroll, 1991, pp. 57/58). Thus despite the impact of the Women's Movement, of institutional challenges (from structures such as the Employment Equality

Agency and the National Women's Council) and the impact of EU membership, institutionally validated male power and male privilege continue to persist. These patterns are not peculiar to Ireland. Indeed Bacchi (1996, p. 160) having specifically focused on countries (such as Norway; Sweden; Australia) which would be seen as exemplars in terms of their treatment of women concluded that: "The message I kept hearing was depressingly repetitive. 'Women' did not matter."

III EVIDENCE AS REGARDS THE EXISTENCE OF THE PATRIARCHAL DIVIDEND

In looking at the existence of the patriarchal dividend attention will be focused briefly first, on the paid employment arena, then on the family and finally on the state (for a more detailed presentation on these and other issues: see O' Connor, 1998).

Paid Employment

Differential hourly earnings is the most obvious indicator of the patriarchal dividend. What evidence we have suggests that within the paid employment arena, on average, women's hourly earnings remain substantially below men's. Even in Sweden, the hourly earnings of women (excluding overtime payments) were 84 per cent of men's; while in the UK they were 64 per cent of men's (Eurostat, 1997). Furthermore, even when these Eurostat figures were recalculated to discount the structural effects deriving from gender variation in occupations; in type of economic activity and in educational level, the difference in hourly earnings was still over 25 per cent in the UK and 13 per cent in Sweden. It is possible to see this as a gender bonus for "maleness". Similar figures are not available for Ireland. We do know that women's hourly rate is 74 per cent of men's in the manufacturing area. Callan and Wren (1994) found that overall, in their study, women's hourly wages were 80 per cent of men's (with a further 10 per cent being explained in terms of work experiences). However, since their data was collected in 1987, it does not deal with the dramatic expansion of women's employment in particular parts of the service sector (e.g. in hotels and restaurants). Eurostat (1997) has shown that pay and working conditions are particularly poor in these areas and in other predominantly female parts of the service sector, and this is the sector which has grown rapidly in Ireland in the past 10 years, and is the one where 80 per cent of women are employed.

Right across the EU, as in Ireland, "Segregation across sectors and at all levels of work remains the dominant feature of women's employment" (EC, 1997a, p. 1). Thus more than four-fifths of Irish women in paid employment are in four areas: clerical work; service work; in commerce, insurance and finance or in professional and technical work. To a greater or lesser extent within these

occupations, the absence of male comparators has limited the usefulness of equal pay legislation (see O'Connor, 1998). Work which is predominantly done by women is consistently valued less than work which is predominantly done by men (anecdotally it is useful to compare general nursing, a predominantly female occupation with computing, a predominantly male occupation). At national level such differential valuing has become embedded in pay differentials which have become an accepted part of national wage negotiations. Such practices are not helpful as regards implementing the EU Code of Practise on the abolition of the implicit gender bias in job classification schema (O'Connor and Shortall, 1999).

It is widely recognised that, overall, women's low pay is related to their concentration in occupational groups which are predominantly female, defined as low skilled and poorly paid. Across the EU it is three times more likely that a woman in paid employment will be in low paid work than a man and it has been estimated that 20-30 per cent of working women have low paid jobs (EC, 1997b). Furthermore the over-representation of women amongst the low paid persists even when part-time employment, which is even more likely to be poorly paid, is excluded (Rubery and Fagan, 1993).

Across the EU the difference in the economic activity rates of women and men is becoming smaller — particularly amongst younger and more educated men and women (the difference in the economic activity rates of men and women aged 25-59 who had received higher education was only 10 per cent (85 per cent v 95 per cent respectively: EC, 1997a, p. 4)). Ironically, in a context where men's definition of themselves has revolved around paid employment, it is women who are increasingly attractive to the market. This is partly because of the increased importance of the service sector; its persistent gendered character and the lower level of women's wages. Over the last 20 years, women have accounted for the entire growth in the EU's labour force and this trend is likely to continue (EC, 1997b). In Ireland, over the past 25 years (1971-1996), 90 per cent of the increase in employment was due to increases in women's employment. This is what has lain behind the Celtic Tiger phenomenon in the 1990s: indeed O'Connell (1999, p. 217) has noted that talk of the Celtic Tiger has "misconstrued the gender of the animal".

The cultural depiction of men as the appropriate authority figures can be seen as part of the processes through which male control is maintained. Male authority is very clearly reflected in men's and women's differential occupancy of positions of authority in the economic system. Davies (1995, p.32) has rather perceptively noted that by exerting power on behalf of women, men's own self interest is obscured and "greatness" achieved: "In pursuit of a cause, the struggle for power is ennobled and becomes worthy". Such a position is increasingly seen as problematic, although it is very difficult to change. In any case, if we look at management positions then, depending on how we define them, women hold 15

per cent-25 per cent of such positions in Ireland today, and only a tiny proportion of those at senior management levels. Change at this latter level has been microscopic in the past twenty years. It is important to stress that this does not reflect women's lack of education. Indeed a number of studies have suggested that women's educational levels need to be higher than men's in order to "compensate" for their gender. Thus, Maruani (1992, p. 20) concluded on the basis of her examination of labour market trends across Europe that "in many cases women were more qualified than the positions they filled required". Callan and Wren (1994) noted that the non-married women in their Irish study tended to have higher educational levels but not higher salaries than their male counterparts. Effectively then women are paid less than their male counterparts with similar qualifications. In the four countries in the Eurostat study (Sweden, the UK, France and Spain) the most highly educated women, although they earned more than their less educated female counterparts, earned a smaller percentage of male earnings (Eurostat, 1997, No. 15, p. 7). The difference in earnings between men and women was particularly large in the case of male and female managers: with managers, who remain overwhelmingly male, being the best paid of all occupational groups in three of the four countries studied (i.e. Sweden, the UK and Spain).

Young women currently outperform men at Junior and Leaving Certificate (Hannan *et al.*, 1996). Indeed there has been a tradition of educating women more than men in Ireland (Rubery *et al.*, 1996) in a context where property was channelled through the male line. This pattern potentially poses problems for a society which is not accustomed to having to face their life long participation in paid employment. In any case, because of their educational levels, Irish women today are more likely than men to be in what Savage (1992) has called "positions of expertise". Thus the Irish Labour Force figures show that roughly two-thirds of those in professional positions are women. Indeed, what limited evidence is available shows that women are increasingly penetrating into traditionally "male" professional areas, such as medicine and law, although they remain very under-represented at senior levels (see Meredith (1998/99) re women in academic medicine; and O'Connor (1999a) re academia).

Thus in the case of the paid employment area, what evidence we have suggests that men's hourly wages are higher than women's (even when factors such as length of experience have been taken into account); that women are concentrated into areas of predominantly female employment, which are seen as less skilled and are paid less; that women are over-represented amongst the low paid, and that despite their educational achievements, they are under-represented in management positions. Thus their contributions, skills and achievements are undervalued within a society which privileges males in various obvious and subtle ways.

The Family

It is increasingly accepted that heterosexuality as an institution (Richardson, 1996) involves social and cultural privileging in the context of "a patriarchal gender order [which] constitutes difference as dominance, as unavoidably hierarchical" (Connell, 1995b, p. 230). In this context the "normal" relationship between men and women can be seen as involving various kinds of privileging (for example, as regards the performance of domestic tasks and differential access to personal spending money). From what we know about Irish families there is evidence of both of these patterns.

Between half and two-thirds of the mothers in a Dublin study (Kiely, 1995) were solely responsible for shopping, ironing, dishes and hovering; with only roughly one in five of the fathers being responsible for doing homework, playing with the children and taking them on outings. Furthermore, these patterns did not simply reflect the adjustment by Irish husbands to their wives' desire to undertake these tasks themselves. Thus the majority of the full-time housewives in a national sample study felt that shopping, hovering, getting children ready for bed and making sure that homework was done should be equally shared between them. Yet the majority of them did not think that this was what actually happened (MRBI, 1992).

These patterns, although extreme, are not peculiar to Ireland. Thus the United Nations Report (1995) noted that across industrialised countries, although the overall proportion of work carried out by men and women was for the most part very similar, approximately two-thirds of women's work time was spent in unpaid activities, and one-third in paid activities, whereas amongst men the proportions were reversed: "So men receive the lion's share of income and recognition from their economic contribution, while most of women's work remains unpaid, unrecognised and undervalued" (United Nations, 1995, p. 88). Such unpaid work is not, of course, exclusively done within the family. Oakley (1974) was the first to highlight the status of housework as work. More recently, Fahey (1990) has been amongst those challenging the exclusion of unpaid housework from GNP and GDP on technical grounds: noting that 25-40 per cent of economic output is excluded from these measures by this practise. For Irish women the issue of what "counts" as work is particularly important given the constitutional and traditional cultural endorsement of the value of women's work in the home, with roughly three-fifths of Irish married women still returning their main occupation as "housewife" (O'Connor, 1998).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Irish married women have used the family arena as an emotional power base. This has obscured the fact that such power is exercised within legal, economic and other social and cultural parameters constructed by the institutional church and state. The importance of these parameters was underlined by the decision of the Supreme Court that the

Matrimonial Home Bill (1994) was unconstitutional. This decision made it clear that married women did not have an automatic legal right to joint ownership of the family home because of the constitutional responsibility of the state to protect male ownership as the basis of male authority within the family. This judgment threw into sharp relief the hollowness of the rhetoric surrounding the social value attached to women's position in the home.

At a different level, Callan and Nolan (1994) have shown that households headed by those working full time in the home are one of the two largest groups in poverty. Such households were three and a half times more likely to be at risk of poverty in 1994 than in 1987 (National Anti-Poverty Strategy, 1997). Furthermore, women's risk of poverty was substantially higher than men's in similar situations. Thus, whereas one in three lone mothers were at risk of poverty, only roughly one in ten lone fathers were. Furthermore, whereas women's risk of poverty had increased since 1987, men's risk, in similar situations, had either decreased or at worst stayed the same (Nolan and Watson, 1999).

There is little data on the distribution of resources within Irish households. Cantillon (1997) drawing on ESRI data, showed that there was a small but consistent difference between husbands and wives in terms of access to ten life style items, and that in all but two items, the difference favoured the husband. The two items where the wives did better than their husbands were giving presents more than once a year and saving. Neither of these items implies spending money on oneself. The same data was dealt with in a more aggregate way by Nolan and Watson (1999) who concluded that there was little difference in the overall level of deprivation between husbands and wives in the household. All were agreed that the indicators used were crude and not intended to be used to assess such deprivation. However, the trends in Rottman's (1994) study were consistent with Cantillon's interpretation. Thus he found that only approximately one-third of a random sample of Irish couples had access to equal amounts of personal spending money. At each income level, husbands were more likely than wives to have access to it: the typical situation being for the husband's "share" to exceed that of his wife by, on average, 50 per cent. Similarly where only one partner had "an afternoon out in the last fortnight … something that cost money" it was more likely to be the husband than the wife.

Perhaps the ultimate indicator of patriarchal privileging is the idea that men are "entitled" to "control" their wives. Up to very recently indeed various kinds of intimidation and harassment tended to be depicted as "not that serious" or as "rare events". Kelleher *et al*. (1995) found that just under one in five of the women who responded in the national study had experienced violence within their intimate relationships. Much is being made of the possibility of female violence towards males and indeed this may occur — although Ferguson's (1996) work found that it occurred in only 6 per cent of cases. Furthermore, the evidence

suggests that the roots of male/female violence lie in "coercive control" (see Ferguson, 1996). Similar sorts of patterns exist in the case of child sexual abuse, where girls seem to be more likely than boys to be victims. Thus, a retrospective study of 1,000 adults, with a 2 per cent refusal rate, found that 15 per cent of the women had experienced sexual abuse (as had 9 per cent of the men: IMS, 1993). Attempts to justify state expenditure on child abuse, sexual harassment and marital violence frequently refer to the fact that they do not "only" affect women — an observation which can be seen as reflecting an ideology of supremacy.

Women's ability to bear children potentially gives them a social value which is incomparable. However, there is little evidence to suggest that it is accorded high social value. Furthermore, as Rich (1977) early noted, the conditions under which the bearing and rearing of children occurs frequently makes it difficult for women to really enjoy the experience. Thus a number of studies have shown that bringing up children can be a very isolated activity; that Irish women who were full time in the home are twice as likely as those in paid employment to be psychologically distressed, their response to that situation being exacerbated by poverty (Fitzgerald and Jeffers, 1994; Whelan, Hannan and Creighton, 1991).

There can be no doubt that "Both men and women are diminished by a system that over-identifies women with motherhood and under-identifies men with fatherhood" (Mc Keown *et al.*, 1998, p. 156). The Irish Constitution makes no explicit reference to fatherhood, and it has been suggested that the judiciary under-estimates the value of fathers, and typically gives custody of the children to the mother (Mc Keown *et al.*, 1998). The position of the unmarried father is even more marginal. This is one of the few contexts where female control appears to be supported by the institutional structures (although even in this case, that control is limited in various ways). This can be seen as reflecting the low value attached by the Irish State to children and their care: a view which contrasts with an emerging post-modern one where relationships with children are rare points of stability within an insecure world (Jenks, 1996). However, although fatherhood is important to a minority of very vocal men, it is by no means clear that this view is shared by the majority, whether one looks at their participation in childcare or their willingness to lobby unions, employers or the state to make these structures more "father friendly". Irish men's adoption of role reversal (i.e. remaining at home while their wife is in paid employment) has remained minimal, with less than 4 per cent of all couples being this kind (CSO, 1997, p. 7). The current organisation of paid work and the definition of masculinity more or less exclusively in terms of the breadwinner role is not conducive to the development of strong father/child relationships. Evidence of men's responsibility as regards fatherhood is not impressive, even in the limited terms of breadwinner, if one looks at the extent to which maintenance arrangements are honoured

(Fahey and Lyons, 1995; Ward, 1993) despite the fact that they were frequently set at a very low level indeed. Furthermore, once they are no longer cohabiting, it is widely accepted that fathers contact with their children tends to fall off over time (Mc Keown *et al.*, 1998).

Thus, although at one level, women's ability to bear children might be expected to privilege them in various ways, in fact what limited evidence we have suggests that male privileging persists in the family as regards being the beneficiary of unpaid work and of differential rates of personal spending money. There is also evidence that women who are in female headed households are increasingly likely to be poor. Finally, there is no evidence that men individually or collectively are attempting to make the society more "parent friendly": the minority of vocal men being mainly concerned with reducing what they see as women's control in the childcare area — a control which has to date reflected its lack of value.

The Importance of the State

The Irish state can be seen as very subtly maintaining male privilege in the arenas of paid employment and in the family in a number of ways. Thus, for example, the embedding of pay differentials in national wage discussions has made it difficult to change pay levels in predominantly female occupations. The absence of a national wage data base has not been helpful as regards mapping wages outside the manufacturing sector (which is where most women are employed: O'Connor, 1998).

The implicit prioritising of men is reflected in the fact that it is almost unthinkable that all social welfare payments should be paid directly to mothers. Yet Rottman (1994) noted that channelling money through the mother increased the likelihood that it would be spent on the children — an important consideration since it has been estimated that roughly one-third of Irish children are in poverty (Callan *et al.*, 1996). In a context where childcare is still construed as the mother's responsibility it is not insignificant that, despite pressure from Europe, Ireland continues to have one of the lowest levels of state funded childcare in the EU and this in a situation where 63 per cent of Irish married women aged 25-34 years are in paid employment, as are 43 per cent of mothers with one or two dependent children (CSO, 1997). During the economic depression in the 1980s it was argued that it was unrealistic to expect that resources could be found to facilitate what the EU has called the reconciliation of work and family. In our now booming economy; with its high level of demand for women as employees; with the EU targeting the jobs potential of childcare services, and the continuance of our economic success limited only by a shortage of labour, expenditure on childcare has been very slow to emerge. It is difficult not to see this as reflecting the priorities of those who are not responsible for childcare on a day-to-day basis (i.e. men).

Acceptance of the patriarchal dividend is implicit in assumptions as regards the prioritising of men's needs or interests through the bureaucratic processes of the state (Witz and Savage, 1992). In Ireland, it is reflected in the prioritising of long term unemployment (which is predominantly male) over the reintegration of married women who were excluded from the labour force by the law and practice surrounding the Marriage Bar. Cousins (1996) suggested that the use of the Live Register as a way of targeting employment and training schemes might well constitute indirect discrimination, since for a variety of reasons, women were significantly less likely than men to be on such a register. However, for the most part this practice has continued, despite the fact that such schemes draw on EU structural funds and that there is a requirement that all such funds should be gender proofed (it appears that this will be much more strongly enforced in the next round of funds: Mulally, 1999).

It is difficult not to see these various patterns as reflecting the overwhelmingly male composition of the representative and administrative arms of the state. At a representative level, across Europe, although women constitute 51 per cent of the population, their average representation in National Parliaments in 1996 was 15 per cent. By far the highest levels were in Scandinavia — with women constituting 40 per cent of those in the Swedish Parliament (EC, 1997c). In Ireland in 1996 the proportion was very much lower, with women constituting 14 per cent of those in the Dáil and 13 per cent of Cabinet Ministers (O'Connor, 1998). Women, even today, make up less than 7 per cent of those at senior Management level in the Civil Service; and an even smaller proportion of those at senior levels in structures such as the Local Authorities and the Health Boards.

Under pressure from Europe and the National Women's Council an attempt was made to increase women's participation in decision making by the adoption of a 40 per cent quota as regards gender balance in the appointments of govern- ment nominees to state boards. This had the effect of increasing women's representation to 29 per cent in 1997 as compared with 9.6 per cent in 1979 and 10.5 per cent in 1985 (NWCI, 1997). Interestingly, the level of women's repre- sentation was very similar on the more newly created Regional Boards (i.e. the County Enterprise Boards; the Area Partnerships and the Leader Boards: 26 per cent). Thus quite clearly, whatever rigidities exist affect newly created as well as established structures. Furthermore, the proportion of women chairing boards remains low (18 per cent: NWCI, 1997). Thus although quotas have improved the situation, women's occupancy of positions of authority remains low.

It is widely accepted that any possibility of changing such structures so that they become more "women friendly" depends on the existence of a critical mass of women who prioritise women's needs and interests. The size of this has been debated, but it seems plausible to suggest that women would need to constitute roughly 30 per cent of those at senior management level to have any possibility

of effecting structural change in the sense of changing the priorities and expenditure of state structures (e.g. as regards the valuing of women's work in the home; altering the pay differentials between "male" and "female" employment amongst state employees).

Unless and until such a critical mass is achieved it is possible that women within such predominantly male structures will be co-opted. Indeed Kanter (1993) suggested that in that situation the price of women's acceptance by the "boys" was being hard on the girls. In so far as this can be resisted, women's presence in these male dominated structures does create the possibility of situational change occurring. The visibility of women in positions of authority also challenges implicit assumptions as regards the nature and value of women in our society. It also potentially plays an important part in challenging the processes and practices though which patriarchal privileges are maintained within organisations.

IV PROCESSES AND PRACTICES MAINTAINING PATRIARCHAL PRIVILEGES WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

My own work has been particularly concerned with exploring those processes and practices which ensure that men still overwhelmingly occupy positions of authority within state and semi-state organisations. Others' work (inside and outside Ireland) has suggested that similar processes exist in private sector employment, ensuring that men occupy the positions of authority within such structures. However, since it is by no means clear that the inclusion of women in such positions in the private sector is likely to fundamentally change the capitalist system, I do not focus on this sector. However, there is no doubt that the existence of such processes and practices in that area affects their persistence within state and semi-state structures.

1. Organisational Culture

This emerged as an important phenomenon in my own work on the Health Boards and on a state development organisation (O'Connor, 1995b; 1996 and 1997). Organisational culture is the concept which is typically used to refer to ideas about "women's place" and to what has been called the complicated fabric of myths and values that legitimate women's position at the lower levels of the hierarchy and portray managerial jobs as primarily masculine. The Hansard Society Commission (1990) identified this as one of the four "general and pervasive barriers" to women's promotion, referring specifically to what they called "outmoded attitudes to the role of women"; scepticism about their abilities; and what they called "subtle assumptions, attitudes and stereotypes which affect how managers view women's potential for advancement". A variety of studies

have adverted to the existence and importance of such a culture in chilling women out; in penalising them when they step out of their "proper place" and into "men's place" in managerial structures (Cockburn, 1991). The subtle kinds of ways in which women in the Health Board study (O'Connor, 1996) were put under pressure in this kind of setting emerged very clearly. Thus, for example, they noted how management drew attention to any mistake that they had made saying: "What do you expect? It was a woman who did that." When a woman stepped into a job that was previously done by a man there were these so called "humorous" comments. As the majority of these women at middle and senior levels of the Health Board study saw it: "It was assumed that a man would go further"; "you get the impression of so many cliques and black suits … at present the women are outside it". Yet in these Health Boards, women made up three-quarters of the employees. A widespread perception of gender bias also emerged in other studies such as Mahon's (1991) study of the civil service and studies of second and third level teachers in Ireland (ASTI, 1991 and TUI, 1990).

2. Organisational Procedures: Interviewing and Profiling

It is intriguing that despite the obvious fact that in a gendered society, bureaucracies are unlikely to be staffed by what Halford (1992, p. 172) called "degendered automatons" the gendered reality of organisations is still not accepted. Halford suggested that once we accept "that staff bring their personal interests into organisations and that these shape the way they discharge their functions, we must also accept that gendered perceptions, practices and attitudes will be present too". It has been recognised (Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee, 1996, p. 13) that it is extremely difficult to prove indirect discrimination, especially as regards promotion. Such discrimination may be reflected in the allocation of senior posts to particular areas; in the way advertisements are framed; in the importance attached to vague criteria at critical access points; in loose marking schema; in general assessments of a candidates "style" as well as in ideas that men are more "natural" management material and in idea that men need promotion more (O'Connor, 1995b; 1996; 1997; Hansard Society Commission, 1990). At a more basic level, Mahon and Dillon's (1996) work and my own noted that all male, or predominantly male interviewing Boards, chaired by men who are retired public sector employees, are not helpful as regards the promotion of women. The importance of the allocation of high profile tasks to women, which enables them to achieve visibility, also emerged from these studies as crucial in enabling women to "show form" and to be seen as an obvious candidate for promotion. However, typically such high profile jobs were not given to women because of prejudice, remoteness from decision making areas, compounded in some cases by women's own lack of awareness of the importance of visibility.

3. *Career Structures*

Halford *et al.* (1997) noted that in the organisations they studied, despite references to de-layering, the "organisational career" continued to be a reality for men. Thus it was very rare for men, other than at the start of their careers, to be in junior positions, while women typically occupied these positions for most of their careers. These trends were obvious in Mahon and Dillon's (1996) study and in my own work (1995c; 1996; 1997). They showed that career structures in predominantly male areas of employment were characterised by a reliance on a narrow "channel" from which managers were recruited. Thus in Mahon and Dillon's study of the local authorities, women made up 14 per cent of those at the first rung of middle management and 4 per cent of those at the second rung, so that as long as internal channels were used, there would inevitably be very few women at the top of the hierarchy.

In my own work there was also some evidence that predominantly female areas of employment had a lower ratio of promotional to basic posts than predominantly male areas of employment, with the sex of the person modifying these trends somewhat. Thus men in predominantly male structures, such as the administrative structures of the Health Boards, had the best possibility of promotion (i.e. better than 1 in 2) while women in predominantly female areas, such as Nursing, had the worst (i.e. 28 to 1: O'Connor, 1995b). These differences were all the more striking since the abilities and qualifications of those entering the two hierarchies would be seen as broadly similar. Furthermore, in areas of predominantly female employment such as nursing, the career path had become attenuated by the insertion of male lay managers between the matron and the management team, thereby also both eroding the matron's authority and increasing her distance from those making decisions about resources (O'Connor, 1996). This pattern reflects a well established tendency for women with professional expertise to be employed in specialised niches, while the main career and authority structure remain predominantly male. Thus, predominantly female areas tend to be remote from decisions about resources; to lack any channel up to management; to be poorly resourced and to be characterised by what Davies (1991) has called "neglect by the powerful".

4. *Absence of Arrangements to Reconcile Work and Family*

It is increasingly recognised that it is not motherhood itself, but the way in which it is socially and culturally constructed which is critical. Thus, while the effect of motherhood on paid employment in Ireland is extremely negative, motherhood has a slight positive effect in countries such as Denmark (Bulletin on Women and Employment in the EU 1995, April, p. 8). At an ideological level, work and family in Ireland have traditionally been reconciled by allocating family to the woman and paid work to the man, with the woman's paid work being

seen as a transient adjustment to a difficult economic situation or as a reflection of a desire for self fulfilment. Where paid work is based on a male model, the implicit assumption is that "normal workers" have back up (i.e. wives). Under pressure from Europe, there is much talk of the importance of "family friendly" policies to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family. These include leave arrangements (such as maternity and paternity leave; parental leave and compassionate leave); flexible working (including job sharing; flexitime; school term working); as well as various childcare initiatives (including the provision of childcare or various kind of financial support for childcare). In fact, however, in the Heath Board study and in the state development organisation, there was little evidence of such policies. Furthermore, even where job sharing was theoretically available, it was seen as militating against one's chances of promotion. In some cases no cover was provided for maternity leave — thereby generating hostility towards women in general and pregnant women in particular. As the women in these structures saw it, employing women was seen as a "total hassle": "If women were married, they anticipated the costs and inconveniences of maternity leave, and if they were not they wondered what was wrong with her" (O'Connor, 1996).

It is worth noting that it is now being increasingly recognised that family friendly employment policies "play around at the margins of work, enabling some employees to adapt to, but not challenge traditional work structures" (Lewis, 1997, p. 21). Even where such possibilities exist, Lewis noted that there may be felt a lack of a sense of entitlement to such arrangements.

5. *The "enemy within ..."*

Explanations which focus on individual characteristics are popular in explaining women's absence from positions of power, since they imply that women's subordination is "natural"; "inevitable" "what women want", a con-clusion which is very re-assuring for those who benefit from the dividend but are in Connell's words "bashful about domination". Such explanations include the idea that women are not really interested in promotion; that they are not willing to commit themselves to paid employment because of other interests or life styles; that they lack confidence and that they are organisationally naïve.

To a greater or lesser extent, some of these explanations have a certain validity. They fail however to go beyond the individual level of explanation. Thus, for example, it has been shown that women are less likely than men to apply for promotion. However, the typical conclusion that this is due to a lack of ambition; disinterest in promotion or commitment to family life is challenged by the fact that the proportion of women applying for principalships in primary schools increased dramatically from 29 per cent in 1983/84 to 51 per cent in 1991/92 (Lynch, 1994). This period coincided with a number of initiatives to promote

gender equality, including the taking of legal action; mounting of an awareness campaign by the union; training and research initiatives. Thus, it seems more plausible to conclude that women's applications increased because a culture had been created where there was a greater possibility that they might be appointed i.e. that it was simply worth their while to apply. This explanation seems all the more plausible since over that period women who applied were more likely than men who did to be successful.

Similarly, a focus on women's lack of confidence needs to be located within a wider social context. Thus Hannan *et al*. (1996) found that even amongst Junior and Leaving Certificate students, girls were more likely than boys to have low levels of physical and academic self esteem. These trends persisted even when class background and ability were controlled for. In a societal context where the face of authority is overwhelmingly male; where women's work is seen as less valuable than men's; where women are paid less; where there are very few role models within the public arena, women's lack of confidence can be seen as reflecting an androcentric cultural reality (Lynch, 1994). This conclusion is not however the one typically drawn by those who focus on the individual level.

V CONCLUSIONS

It can be argued that a focus on the patriarchal dividend is problematic for two reasons. First, that it reduces women to the status of "victims, robots or fools" (Stacey, 1986, p. 241). Second, it ignores the fact that women have both biological and socially constructed advantages (the ability to bear children and to live longer than men; and at this point in time, to be more attractive to the market, and to out-perform boys educationally). However, these advantages are not valued by the wider institutional structures. Indeed valuing them can be seen as a form of individual and/or collective resistance: with women who do not wish to see themselves as victims creating their own "separate" world (a phenomenon which has been recognised amongst various groups including secretaries; factory workers and housewives). This kind of resistance is likely to provoke little negative reaction when it involves areas which are seen as trivial rather than subversive (see O'Connor, 1999b). Resistance in the form of whistle-blowing and industrial action as regards the under-utilisation of women's educational abilities; the undervaluing of their occupational skills and the subtle resistance to their occupancy of positions of authority is much more likely to provoke counter resistance, since it is seen as much more of a threat to patriarchal privileging .

Implicit in this article is the recognition that the patriarchal dividend is not simply maintained by individuals but by discourses of masculinity which depict such privileges as "normal" "natural" "what women want". However, in a post-

modern world, counter hegemonic discourses exist, which at least allow us to recognise the patriarchal dividend as such, and to see its existence as problematic. The apparent novelty of the idea as we approach the second millennium highlights the extent to which our consciousness of male privilege has become dulled.

At an individual level the choice for men, both in the public and private arena, is clear. It is one of choosing whether they want to collude with the ongoing existence of and the perceived legitimacy of the patriarchal dividend; with the subordination of women through the fear or the reality of physical or sexual violence; with the implicit denigration of the value of women's work inside and outside the home; the devaluing of their skills; the de-legitimating of their emotional power and their exclusion from such centres of power that men define as key. In so far as they do not wish to do this then it is clearly necessary to eliminate privileges based on gender. Many men — at an individual level — have begun to come to terms with the redefinition of manhood which is implicit in these ideas. However, these ideas have not been absorbed by the main institutional structures such as the state, the economic system or the social and cultural construction of heterosexuality.

Equally at an individual level, the choice for women revolves around whether we are willing to problematise the patriarchal dividend both in public and private areas. It is hard not to see this as involving a tedious series of skirmishes; occasional victories and wearisome reversals. The legitimacy of a woman's agenda, with its prioritising of women's needs, including those relating to their vulnerability to poverty and to domestic violence, and to their under-representation in positions of authority in the wider society seems likely to continue to be key. Related to this is the value of "women's work" inside and outside the home and the possibilities for male/female relationships within a world where relationships with men are not inevitably hierarchical. The extent and nature of the solidarity between women and their ability to create and maintain structures which recognise their different experiences of discrimination; their different choices and life styles and their different levels of gender awareness is likely to be critical as regards the perpetuation of male control, a control which is increasingly likely to be mediated through women who support the system.

Acker (1998) has adverted to the "gendered understructure" of organisations which is anchored in the privileging of their claims on the individual and in their lack of responsibility for reproduction. Her work strongly suggests that the processes perpetuating the patriarchal dividend in our overwhelmingly male dominated institutional structures are by no means peculiar to Ireland. However, she suggests that such structures ultimately reflect the wishes and needs of powerful men: "Globalising processes are often cast as inevitable and 'economic',

but it is real men who make and remake, within and between their organisations, the so called economy" (Acker, 1998, p. 205). Thus she suggests that the institutional reality may be changed by the leadership exerted by some men: powerful, white middle-class men. It remains to be seen if such men will transform the institutional reality of Irish Society so as to erode patriarchal privileging and to make it a country for women … and for men.

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