

6.1. Authority, agency, autonomy? Change for rural women in Europe 1850-1914

Panel organiser: Clear, Caitriona, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

The rural 'world' has often been portrayed as an unchanging 'past' from which women (and men) had to 'emerge' before they could reach 'freedom' (economic, social and political). This panel includes research papers on the changes which actually happened to (and were brought about by) rural girls and women who lived in the countryside in this period between the political upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War. Did the commercialization of agriculture offer new opportunities to females, or take older customary privileges from them? How did increased contact with the town and with townspeople affect rural girls and women? Was the introduction of compulsory school attendance a burden or an opportunity for them? And what kind of rural women took up the opportunities to be more involved with local government/voluntary organizations – public life, in short? And whatever about authority, which we know many rural females to have enjoyed, do concepts like 'autonomy' and 'agency' have any meaning for rural females in these changing times? Must we be always aware of that other 'a' – altruism as defined by French rural historian Tessie P. Liu – as the origin of rural females' power, or was this familial context for the exercise of authority becoming less important over this 70-year period?

Chair: Clear, Caitriona, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

Tuesday, 20 August 2013 // 1515 – 1645 // Session 5 – Room A 024

6.1.1. Public Women in Rural Ireland: Exploring the West, 1880-1918.

Clancy, Mary, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

This paper looks at how rural conditions generated strands of private and public effort, thus positioning girls and women in complex public view. It will analyse, in particular, the establishing of local relief industries (such as lace, knitting, basket-making, nursing) and the election of women to Poor Law positions. Essentially, the paper argues that rural Ireland offered an accommodating, though politically complex, space to women at this time of transitional imperial and gender political power.

6.1.2. Women, farm and family 1850-1922.

Clear, Caitriona, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

Looking at farmers in their own right, farmers' wives and other 'assisting relatives', servants and the dwindling though still noticeable number of female day labourers, this paper is a contribution to the long-running and ongoing historical argument (Rhodes, Bourke, Daly, Lee, Segalen, Liu, Sarti, Hufton, Maynes) about whether women's economic power on the land expanded or declined in these changing times, in a transnational context.

6.1.3. Comment

Verdon, Nicola, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Participants

Clancy, Mary

Mary Clancy lectures in history at the Women's Studies Centre, Galway. A founder member of Galway Labour History Group, she is also an active committee member of Athena: Advanced Thematic Network in Women's Studies in Europe. Her publications include 'Aspects of women's contribution to Oireachtas debate 1922-1937, in: M. Luddy & C. Murphy (eds.) *Women Surviving: aspects of women's history in nineteenth & twentieth-century Ireland* (Dublin 1990); 'Women of the west campaigning for the vote in early 20c Galway 1911-1915' in L. Ryan & M. Ward (eds) *Irish Women and the Vote* (Dublin 2007).

Clear, Caitriona

Caitriona Clear lectures in modern history at NUI, Galway; her publications include *Nuns in Nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin 1987), *Women of the house: women's household work in Ireland 1926-61* (Dublin 2000) and *Social Change and Everyday Life in Ireland 1850-1922* (Manchester 2007). She has also published on other aspects of women's history, on the history of homelessness and on oral history method and practice.

Verdon, Nicola

Nicola Verdon is Reader in History. She has broad interests in social and economic history of the British countryside since 1750, with special reference to gendered patterns of employment, family and domestic life, poverty and household economies.