



Panel

## 7.1. Female Activism in Rural Civil Society: Women on Farms and in Agricultural Organisations in the Twentieth Century

**Panel organiser: Varley, Tony, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland; Moser, Peter, Archives of Rural History Bern, Switzerland**

The crucial importance of the impacts women have made in agricultural and rural economies and societies has long been recognised. Yet their many and diverse contributions to agricultural organisations, farmers' parties and international agricultural organisations have been largely overlooked by historians. Such an omission has, if anything, tended to reproduce and even amplify the marginalisation of women in rural societies. In this panel we will consider the experience of women farmers and non-farmers in a variety of agricultural organisations. How did these relatively few, but often remarkably strong, women negotiate a way forward for themselves and their organisations? These questions can be studied by exploring the roles the women performed, the coping and survival strategies they devised and came to follow, and the activist 'careers' they came to carve out for themselves. Their experience can be further investigated by considering the impacts of their activism for themselves as individuals and for their families, for agricultural and rural women in the wider society and for the farmers' movements and international institutions in which they participated and to which they gave their time and energy.

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

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 0900 – 1030 // Session 7 – Room A-126

### 7.1.1. An Irish Country Woman's Life: „Miss Nora“, a woman in a woman's world?

Paper

**Byrne, Anne, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland**

Socio-biography is a possible frame for the narration of rural history, sensitised to the complex intersections of self and social. What can we learn about individual capacity to live a life of one's own in tension with the family tradition of male farm ownership? Reflecting on the life projects of a single woman farm owner in Ireland, Nora Byrne (1895-1986) is positioned as the unlikely inheritor of a prosperous family farm, who pursues a career choice as a poultry instructress for the Department of Agriculture in the early 1920s and nurtures a life long involvement with a farm women's organization, the Irish Country Women's Association (the founding of which in 1922 is described by Ingham (2007) as having landmark significance for Irish women). What were the social, political, familial and personal factors at play that gave shape to her life and enabled her to live in a man's world? How important to her was her involvement with the Irish Country Women's Association and the politics and opportunities presented to engage in public life? The consequences of 'choosing' or 'having to choose differently' for Miss Nora, for the lives of those for whom she provided care, for the future of the family farm, and crucially for '...the experiences and politics of women's lives diversely lived' (Smyth 1989) are traced in the socio-biography of one woman's life in rural Ireland, in the first half of the twentieth century.

### 7.1.2. On the margin of the centre? Comparing the activist careers of Elizabeth Bobbett in Ireland and Augusta Gillibert-Randin in Switzerland

Paper

**Varley, Tony, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland**

**Moser, Peter, Archives of Rural History, Bern, Switzerland**

At first glance the histories of Elizabeth F. Bobbett (1899-1971) and Augusta Gillibert-Randin (1869-1940) appear to be strikingly different. Elizabeth Bobbett, the co-founder and General Secretary of the Irish Farmers' Federation from 1936-1955, became a leading activist in the male-dominated sphere of agricultural politics in 20th century Ireland. Augusta Gillibert-Randin, on the other hand, as the founder of the first female farmer producers' association in 1918, dedicated much of her activist career to the betterment of women in the Swiss agricultural sector by building bridges to women's organisations and feminist circles. Why Bobbett opted to throw in her lot with organised male farmers and Gillibert-Randin with farm women's organisations is the central question posed in this paper. In pursuit of answers we will discuss the two women's social backgrounds, their farming experience and their motivation for engaging in public life. We will further consider how farmers, farm women, agronomists, politicians and civil servants viewed the activism of Bobbett and Gillibert-Randin. By considering some theoretical approaches and the great variety of source material documenting their activism, the paper will conclude by identifying the advantages for rural historians in making women farmers and activists such as Bobbett and Gillibert-Randin more central to their narratives.

### 7.1.3. Agricultural Internationalism: the pioneering efforts of Louise Howard at the ILO in the Interwar Years

Paper

**Ribi Forclaz, Amalia, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland**

This paper focuses on the role played by Louise Howard in the International Labour Organisation in the interwar years. Between 1920 and 1930, Howard, a former lecturer in classics at Cambridge, was the head of the Agricultural Service of the ILO. Howard's career (or rather lack of it) within the organisation has important implications for the international history of women activists in agricultural organisations. Throughout her tenure, Howard battled with the organisation's bureaucracy to increase both financial support for and international expertise on marginalised agricultural questions. Howard particularly tried to promote the Agricultural Service's role as an international hub for the circulation of statistical data and information on social questions concerning agricultural labour. The paper analyses Howard's contribution to the internationalisation of rural social issues against the backdrop of growing concerns about agricultural production and rural welfare.

#### Participants

##### Byrne, Anne

Dr Anne Byrne is a sociologist at the National University of Ireland who writes on gender, identity, rurality, anthropological historiography, socio-biography and qualitative methodologies from a narrative inquiry frame. Founder of the Narrative Studies Group, Galway recent publications include (2012) Irish Journal of Sociology, 'Yours Sincerely: Letters and Lives' review article, Byrne, A. (2011) Echanges épistolaires en anthropologie : l'enquête Harvard-Irlande/Letters in anthropological research: the Harvard-Irish Survey (1930-1936) in Ethnologie Française Irlande après Arensberg et Duilearga, 4(2), 2452-252.

##### 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.

##### Moser, Peter

Peter Moser is Director of the Archives of Rural History in Bern and President of the Swiss Rural History Society. Latest Publication: Integration through Subordination. The

Politics of Agricultural Modernisation in Industrial Europe, Brepols, 2013 (together with Tony Varley).

##### Ribi Forclaz, Amalia

Amalia Ribi Forclaz is currently a SNF Research Fellow at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Before joining the Institute she was a research fellow at the Karl Jaspers Centre in Heidelberg and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oxford, from where she also holds a PhD. Her first book Humanitarian Imperialism. The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940 (in press at OUP) offers a new perspective on the history of anti-slavery organizations and their interaction with imperial politics. Her current research focuses on the transnational history of agricultural labour regulation, ca. 1930-1970.

##### Varley, Tony

Tony Varley is a senior lecturer in political science and sociology at the National University of Ireland, Galway. His research interests centre mainly on agrarian politics and rural social movements. Latest publication: Integration through Subordination. The Politics of Agricultural Modernisation in Industrial Europe, Brepols, Turnhout 2013 (together with Peter Moser).