

Preprint

Author's original manuscript.

Gray, Jane. 2005. Chapter 1. 'Introduction.' Pp. 1-19 in *Spinning the Threads of Uneven Development: Gender and Industrialization in Ireland During the Long Eighteenth Century*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. ISBN: 978-0-7391-0947-2

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The story of recent social and economic change in Ireland has often taken the form of a myth. According to the myth, Ireland was a stagnant agrarian society until the 1960's, when enlightened government policies, together with changing social attitudes, finally set in motion the processes of industrialization and modernization. Thus Ireland is seen as a "latecomer" (O'Malley 1989) to the industrial transformation that had already occurred in Britain and other west European countries by the 19th century.¹

Yet throughout the 18th century Ireland's single largest export was an industrial commodity, namely, linen cloth destined almost exclusively for British markets. The cloth was woven in rural households throughout much of the province of Ulster and parts of Connacht, and to a lesser extent, in parts of Leinster and Munster as well (**Map 1.1**). Before the establishment of mechanized spinning in the 1830's, even greater numbers of widely dispersed households produced linen yarn that supplied Irish and British looms. Thus from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, almost all households in the northern half of Ireland, and many households in the south-west, had at least some connection to the commercial linen industry. Women and children comprised the industrial labour force in the majority of these households. Rural industrialization had profound effects on the social and economic structure of both spinning and weaving districts. With the mechanization of spinning and its spatial concentration around Belfast, large areas of the Irish countryside experienced de-industrialization and impoverishment.

The story of the linen industry thus belies the modernization myth of agrarian timelessness. This book explores the part played by rural industrialization in the

incorporation and subsequent peripheralization of Ireland in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century world-economy, and in the development of regional disparities within Ireland. Its central argument is that gender relations were at the heart of these uneven patterns of development during the transition to industrial capitalism, conceived as a world-historical process, rather than as a separate occurrence in individual countries.

Scholars have begun to explore the salience of gender in the political economy of Ireland in relatively recent times.² This book seeks to expand on that literature by demonstrating the multi-layered significance of gender in the Irish linen industry: as an axis of social organization with independent causal effects on the trajectory of rural industrialization and the transition to the factory; as a negotiated set of customs, ideas and values governing the division of labour; and as an identity structuring the differential experience of capitalist transformation. Each of these layers was dynamically related to the other two in the changing relations between women and men during the period under consideration.

In developing the argument in this book I engage with four broad areas of scholarship that have influenced research and writing on historical capitalism over the past twenty-five years. These fall under the headings of proto-industrialization, the evolution of the modern world-system, working-class formation and the family strategies approach to household production and consumption. In the following paragraphs I give a brief account of each of these perspectives, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses and showing the points of intersection between them. I argue that in order to make sense of the great transformation that ushered in the modern capitalist era, scholars must make a renewed effort to open the “black box” of the family-based household production unit (De Vries 1993, p.117), and I propose a

theoretical strategy for doing so.

Capitalism Before the Factory: Proto-Industrialization in the Modern World-System

A number of scholars have applied the concept “proto-industrialization” to the Irish linen industry.³ Franklin Mendels introduced the term in 1972. He argued that this “first phase” of industrialization was characterized by the rapid growth of traditionally organized, market-oriented rural industries, and by the emergence of a dynamic interaction between industrial regions that were no longer self-sufficient in food, and the commercial agricultural regions that emerged to supply them. Based on his research on Flanders, Mendels argued that population growth sustained proto-industrial expansion by ensuring a permanent “over-supply” of labour. He hypothesized that this occurred because proto-industrial producers remained subsistence-oriented, with a high preference for leisure. Thus instead of investing additional income from rural industry, they used it “to enter into a marriage which they would otherwise have postponed, or to have a child which they would otherwise have avoided” (1981, p. 248).

Almost from the beginning, the literature on proto-industrialization encompassed a “family” of diverse and sometimes contradictory theories of the transition to industrial capitalism (Ogilvie and Cerman 1996a, p.3). Moreover, two decades of scholarship revealed enormous variation in the trajectories of rural industrial regions, such that none of the original proto-industrialization hypotheses has emerged unscathed (Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm 1993; Ogilvie and Cerman 1996b; Lehnert 2003). As we will see, research on the Irish case neither fully supports nor rejects the theories of proto-industrialization. Ogilvie (1996) and Pfister (1996) have argued for new theoretical and methodological approaches oriented

towards explaining divergences among proto-industrial regions. This book makes a contribution towards that agenda.

Some of the original proto-industrialization hypotheses dovetailed with emerging directions in comparative historical sociology, and in the sociology of development, during the 1970s and 1980s. Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm's work (1981) formed part of a renewal of the debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which in sociology was occasioned by the dependency critique of modernization theory, and by the publication of the first volume of Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) "Modern World-System" (Brenner 1977; Medick 1981c).⁴ The dependency theorists pointed out that the models of socio-economic change prevailing in sociology were a-historical, and that they ignored the significance of relationships between different world areas in the process of development (Frank 1966). Wallerstein (1974, Chapter 1) took the dependency argument a step further, arguing that the solution to the problems associated with modernization theory lay in conceptualizing capitalism as a single world-system dating from the 16th century. The system was composed of unevenly developing core, semi-peripheral and peripheral zones, linked by surplus commodity flows towards the core. In order to make the claim that production by Caribbean slaves, East European serfs, and West European tenant farmers, could all be described as capitalist, Wallerstein modified the orthodox Marxist association between "free" labour and the capitalist mode of production.

Free labor is indeed a defining feature of capitalism, but not free labor throughout the productive enterprises. Free labor is the form of labor control used for skilled work in core countries whereas coerced labor is used for less skilled work in peripheral areas. The combination thereof is the essence of

capitalism. (Wallerstein 1974, p. 127).

Thus for Wallerstein a combination of waged and unwaged labour was not evidence of the incomplete development of capitalism, but was rather at the heart of how capitalism works as a system. The centrality of this insight to Wallerstein's theory is often overlooked. As I will show, it has important implications for understanding how gender and household relations function under capitalism.

The authors of Industrialization before Industrialization (Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm 1981) did not whole-heartedly embrace the world-systems perspective on capitalism – indeed one of them explicitly rejected it (Schlumbohm 1981, p.94).⁵ Nonetheless, their model of proto-industrialization was congruent with world-systems theory in several ways. First (like Mendels), they highlighted the importance of inter-regional and overseas trade in increasing the demand for industrial products (Kriedte 1981, pp. 33-37). Second, they drew attention to similarities between the spatial organization of production under proto-industrialization and the “new international division of labour” of the late 20th century (Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm 1981, pp.; Schlumbohm 1996b, p.22). Thus they raised the possibility of structural continuities (or cycles) in the process of uneven development over time. Finally, the demo-economic processes posited by the authors (especially Medick 1981a) dovetailed with Wallerstein's (1974, Chapter Two) insistence that European proletarianization began long before the industrial revolution. This point was highlighted by Charles Tilly (1983), who argued that proto-industrialization led to major changes in the relations of production long before the factory, and that these changes “produced a scattered but fast-growing population of families that were essentially dependent on the sale of their labour power for survival – a proletariat, in the classical sense of the word.”

Despite these affinities, world-systems scholars have, with few exceptions (see Perlin 1983; Sanderson 1995) paid little attention to the scholarship on proto-industrialization. Some have explicitly rejected the concept (Frank 1998; Wallerstein 1997). Moreover, despite its theoretical affinities with critical development theory, the scholarship on proto-industrialization has paradoxically suffered from the a-historical formalism typical of stage models of socio-economic development (Pfister 1996).

In this book I argue that the theories of proto-industrialization, with their emphasis on the dynamic interrelationship between the micro-level strategies of individual households, communities and regions, and macro-level processes of socio-economic change (Schlumbohm 1996a), have the potential to address two of the major theoretical problems that have been identified within the world-systems paradigm: (1) the tendency towards functionalism (McMichael 1990; Tomich 1994; O'Hearn 2001); (2) the neglect of gender as an explanatory condition (Ward 1993; Dunaway 2001). In turn, the emphasis of world-systems theory on the significance of the timing of incorporation to the capitalist world-economy, together with its insistence on the explanatory importance of relations of production and exchange across space, can help to address the problem of regional "exceptionalism" in the literature on proto-industrialization theory. Thus, in this book, proto-industrialization is understood as part of an intrinsically uneven process of capitalist development, rather than as a stage of development occurring separately in different regions and countries.⁶ The uneven ways in which rural industrialization affected local economies led to different patterns of class formation in different regions.

The Uneven Formation of Working Classes

Over the past two decades the concept of social class has been thoroughly problematized in the field of historical sociology. In a recent overview, Hall (1997: 7) concluded that “[The] future of class analysis has slipped off the charts of radical social theory, along with any self-assurance about how to use class analysis to understand the past.” Two related theoretical critiques contributed to this loss of confidence. First, it was argued, especially by feminist scholars, that traditional class analysis fails to capture the complexity and diversity of relationships of power and social inequality (Frader and Rose 1996; Scott 1988). Secondly, scholars influenced by post-modernism have eschewed the idea of class as an “objective” structure – indeed some argued that this eschewal is the only way to incorporate diversity in class analysis (see e.g. Scott 1992).

The critique of structuralist understandings of class can be traced to the enormously influential contributions of British social historian, E. P. Thompson. In contrast to the orthodox Marxist assumption that the subjective dimension of class was ultimately a reflection of objective circumstances, Thompson (1966, p. 10) argued that class-consciousness must be understood as the way that the experience of class was "handled in cultural terms" - terms that were created by past experience and by the particular cultural heritage of local groups. According to Trimberger (1982, p. 212), Thompson’s approach represented “[A] theoretical method intended to capture historical process and to integrate an analysis of culture and human agency into a macrostructural analysis of social change.” His work had a profound effect on the practice of social history for more than two decades (Koditschek 1997).

However, in a trenchant critique of Thompson's (1966) classic study of The Making of the English Working Class, Scott (1988a) argued that his analysis was

both teleological, in that it depicted rational, secular politics as the natural culmination of working class "making," and falsely universalizing, in that it conceived of this collectivity in unified terms that preclude the incorporation of diversity. "The Making" was fundamentally a story about generic male subjects, in which particular women could only be incorporated as exceptional practitioners of the rational politics associated with men, or as examples of "the crazy strain in working class discourse." For Scott, Thompson's vision of politics included previously excluded elements - such as morality and artistic expression - by refining, rather than challenging the existing, gendered representation of class: that is, by redefining culture as "masculine." If scholars were to transcend the limitations of Thompson's analysis, they must reject the notion that consciousness is immanent in social experience (Scott 1992), and instead analyze the construction of meaning (and of political identity) as a "set of events in itself" (Scott 1988a, p. 89). That is, they must pay attention to discourse. According to Frader and Rose (1996, p. 22):

Discourses constitute ideologies as well as cultural meanings that are articulated in material practices. These ideologies and cultural meanings are crucial in the formation of political identities, and they are the means by which some subjects are included and others are excluded from sites of power, influence and political consequence.

Scott's critique inspired a new generation of feminist scholarship, that has been of crucial importance in drawing attention to the fact that social processes like class formation are not "gender neutral," and to the ways in which sexual difference has often been used to "naturalize" social inequality.⁷ However, in line with other dissenting voices (Kalb 1997; Steinberg 1996), I am not convinced that materialist analysis necessarily excludes diversity, as Scott's (1988, 1992) argument suggested.

First, as Koditschek (1997, p. 349) pointed out, in practice the empirical scholarship on gendered class-formation falls “squarely within the classical Thompsonian mold” (see also Avdela 1999).⁸ Secondly, if structural change is conceived of as inherently differentiated and uneven - as in world-systems theory - then diversity can be explained without resorting to post-structuralism (Kalb 1997). However, as I argue below, to fully achieve this goal, world-systems theory must be modified to incorporate gender as an independent axis of social organization, cross-cutting households and regions.

Wallerstein’s argument that capitalism functioned by combining different methods of labour control created the possibility of new ways of thinking about working-class formation. In his now classic study of Europe and the People Without History, Eric Wolf (1982, p. 358) rehabilitated the 19th century expression “working classes” in order to convey the plurality of ways that the same relation of labour to capital was produced at different times and places. William Roseberry (1989) took the argument a step further when he challenged the orthodox Marxist notion of working-class formation as a unilinear movement from free peasant to proletarian and argued that instead we must look at how different kinds of working populations were produced by the same historical process. “Uneven development”, he wrote, “has one of its most important effects within the capitalist mode of production in a process that can be called uneven proletarianization” (Roseberry 1989, p. 215). This argument suggested that very different kinds of workers from the traditional factory operative – such as peasants and slaves – might be included under the rubric “working class.” The idea was first mooted by Sidney Mintz in 1979, when he answered a qualified “yes” to the question, “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian” (Chase-Dunn 1989, p. 40). Mintz (1985) pursued the theme in his analysis of the transatlantic sugar trade,

where he demonstrated a structural continuity between the processes of proletarianization in Britain, and enslavement in the Caribbean: “Slave and proletarian together powered the imperial economic system that kept the one supplied with manacles and the other with sugar and rum” (Mintz 1985, p. 184). More recently, Don Kalb (1997) employed insights from the world-systems perspective to analyse regionally differentiated processes of class formation in the Netherlands.

According to Tomich (1997), materialist class analysis has foundered either on the reification of theoretical categories (relations of production versus relations of exchange), or on the reification of units of analysis (the totality of the world economy versus regional specificity). He argued eloquently for a “more historically and sociologically adequate understanding of processes of world economy and world class formation,” in which “the object of analysis is particular class relations, [but] the appropriate unit of analysis is the totality of relations forming the historical world economy” (Tomich 1997, p. 308, emphasis in original). It is my contention that attention to gender relations is crucial to understanding the interdependence between class-formation in proto-industrial Ireland, and the developing world economy centred on British-dominated world trade (Tomich 1997, pp. 304-305). The division of labour within linen manufacturing households – specifically, the allocation of the most labour-intensive phases of the production process to women and children - affected the overall development of the industry. An understanding of gender-relations requires some theoretical attention to the family-based household that lay at the heart of production, consumption and exchange in the linen-manufacturing districts.

Gender, Development and Class Formation: Opening the Black Box

While the world-systems perspective provides us with powerful tools for analyzing local and regional diversity in development and class-formation, it is relatively silent on intra-household forms of inequality (Dunaway 2001; D. Wolf 1992). This is true despite the centrality of the household to Wallerstein's understanding of unequal exchange – that is, to the process of surplus transfer from periphery to core.⁹ According to Wallerstein and Smith (1990), households survive by pooling incomes from multiple sources, including wages, profits, rents, transfers and subsistence production. In the modern world-economy, no household is either fully proletarianized – in the sense of being entirely wage-dependent – or completely outside the market – in the sense of being entirely self-sufficient – although there is an overall trend within capitalism for the extent of proletarianization to increase. Nonetheless, households at the core have historically been more proletarianized than households at the periphery, which have depended on subsistence production to a greater extent.¹⁰ All other things being equal, capitalist employers prefer to draw on labour from semi-proletarian households, because their members can get by with lower wages than their proletarian counterparts (Wallerstein 1983). Thus in Wallerstein's model, semi-proletarian households at the periphery, through their subsistence activities, “subsidize” both capital accumulation and the relatively high wages garnered by workers at the core.

Wallerstein and Smith's (1990) argument clearly drew inspiration from the literature on the “domestic mode of production” that flourished in the 1970s and early 1980s, partly in response to the publication of the first English translation of the work of Russian economist, A. V. Chayanov (Thorner, Kerblay and Smith 1966). According to Chayanov, the economic activities of peasant households were

determined less by market forces than by the requirements of the “family economy.” Peasant households sought to balance their labour output against their subsistence needs and, other things being equal, to minimize the drudgery of their work. Thus, when market conditions were favourable, peasants might withdraw labour from production. On the other hand, under unfavourable market conditions, peasants sometimes continuously increased the allocation of labour to production, to the point of “self-exploitation.”

Both kinds of behaviour were irrational from the perspective of a capitalist firm, but they made sense from the perspective of a production unit oriented primarily towards the daily survival and long-term reproduction of a family. However, scholars of developing societies observed that, under certain circumstances, capital might advantageously tap into the domestic mode of production without destroying it (Wolpe 1980). Medick (1976) drew on this model of the “articulation of modes of production” in developing his account of proto-industrialization as a “transitional mode,” predicated on the “peculiarly stable but at the same time flexible” relationship between merchant capital and the family economy of rural industrial producers (Medick 1976).¹¹

All of these authors recognized – but most failed to problematize – the fact that the allocation of labour within household production units was gendered. Wallerstein and Smith (1990) observed that there was a general tendency for men to be responsible for waged income, and women for subsistence production, without venturing an explanation of why this should be so. As Dunaway (2001, p. 8) observed, the world-systems perspective “admits that resource allocation is inequitable...but we have not prioritized that household reality in our theory or our research.” Similarly, Medick (1981a, p. 51) recognized that in proto-industrial

households, women and children “contributed a necessary share to the family wage without which the subsistence gap could never have been closed, but their labour did not result in a proportional increase in income.” However, this recognition did not lead scholars to include gender inequality as an endogenous factor in their models of proto-industrial development.

The idea that women’s activities are determined by their biology often lies behind the failure to examine gender difference as a social construct. Deere (1979, p. 144) suggested that Third World rural women took responsibility for subsistence production because it was more compatible with the requirements of biological reproduction – especially given that having a large family represented a rational response to poverty. While this is clearly an important factor, by itself it fails to explain variations in the allocation of men’s and women’s labour across time and space.

In their now classic study of Women, Work and Family in England and France, Louise Tilly and Joan Scott (1978) used the idea of family economy to explore how family strategies, including the gender division of labour, changed alongside the process of industrialization, but also varied according to the timing and nature of local patterns of industrial development, and according to the family life cycle. As Moen and Wethington (1992, p. 234) observed, the construct of “family strategy” has “a certain intuitive appeal, bringing the family back in as an active participant in the larger society, an actor responding to, reworking, or reframing external constraints and opportunities.” However, the family strategies model has also been criticized on several fronts. First, the model assumes decisions about labour allocation are made in the interests of the household as a unit, without any explicit recognition of the possibility of coercion and exploitation (Moch 1987).¹² A related

critique points to the historical evidence that pre-industrial households often did not function as undifferentiated units of production (Knotter 1994). Second, it might be argued that the model underestimates the significance of cultural constructions of gender in determining both family strategies and the changing economic circumstances to which they adapted (Moen and Wethington 1992, p. 237; Hareven 1991).

Amartya Sen's (1990) model of the household as a site of "cooperative conflict" provides an alternative approach to family strategies that has not received the attention it deserves in sociology. Briefly, according to Sen, the gender division of labour emerges as a "bargaining" solution to two different kinds of problems faced simultaneously by household members: on the one hand they must pool their resources, a shared interest which necessitates cooperation; on the other hand they must divide them up, which inevitably entails conflict amongst individuals with divergent interests. Moreover, the "solution" can and usually does reinforce inequalities both within the household, and in the wider socio-economic milieu. This is because the relative bargaining strength of different household members is affected by three factors: (1) their perceived loss of well-being should the household unit break down; (2) the extent to which they perceive their self-interest in terms of individual well-being;¹³ (3) the perceived size of their contribution to the overall well-being of the group. Crucially, Sen emphasizes that these factors take the form of perceptions that may not be accurate reflections of the real state of affairs. For example, because women's labour is often unremunerated, its importance to household survival is often underestimated.

The focus of Sen's argument is on how gender inequality is maintained – that is, on how "the relative weakness of women in cooperative conflict in one period

tends to sustain relative weakness in the next” (Sen 1990, p. 138). However, in my view the strength of the model lies in its capacity to incorporate change. While perceptions about men and women may contribute to stabilizing the household “bargaining solution” over extended periods of time, they are subject to revision if they deviate too far from objective circumstances. For example, an increase in women’s ability to earn money income may increase their bargaining power by simultaneously improving both their “breakdown position” and their perceived contribution to the family economy (Sen 1990, p. 148).

Sen’s model is powerful because it emphasizes the contingent nature of household divisions of labour, and the agency of men and women in reproducing or changing those relationships. However, in order to connect micro-level household bargaining to larger spatial and temporal continuities, it is necessary to include a macro-level conceptualization of bargaining outcomes and the perceptions that inform them. I argue that household strategies were stabilized in different times and places by gender contracts¹⁴: coherent sets of cultural prescriptions governing the rights, expectations and behaviour of different family members. A whole range of factors, including perceived contribution to the family economy, agricultural and land-holding practices, customary and legal relationships between landlords and tenants, state policies and of course ideological beliefs about the “natures” of men and women, affected the form taken by gender contracts. Changes in any of these factors might destabilize the existing contract, leading to the renegotiation of family strategies. Thus by combining the concepts of “cooperative conflict” and “gender contract” I aim to develop a dynamic model of the intersections between structure, culture and agency in Irish rural industrial households.

Irish Linen in the World Economy

Individual households lay at the heart of the Irish linen industry during the ‘long’ eighteenth century. Men, women and children reached bargains about how to allocate their labour time - amongst work and leisure, profit and subsistence-oriented activities, agricultural and industrial tasks - and how to dispose of their income. All of these co-operative conflicts occurred in the context of the family life-cycle, which was itself the subject of negotiation at critical junctures – marriage, taking in servants or sending children into service, the marriages of children, the death of a spouse, the transmission of property to heirs.

Household bargains were made in the context of world-economic processes over which rural industrial producers had no direct control. In this sense their households represented nodes on long commodity chains, linking local fairs and markets to faraway sites in Britain and the Americas. Nonetheless, their decisions were also constrained by local socio-economic circumstances, many of which can be traced to the timing of incorporation to the world economy through colonization, the commercialization of agriculture and proto-industrialization. Some local circumstances affecting household bargains – such as the quality of land – remained partly independent of world-historical change.¹⁵ Finally, household bargains were framed by gender contracts that stabilized co-operative conflicts across time and space, but which were themselves subject to alteration in light of changing world-economic and local circumstances.

My central thesis is that the allocation of labour by gender was key to the overall development of the Irish linen industry, and to regional patterns of industrialization, de-industrialization and class-formation. The story I tell in this book uses a dynamic model of household bargaining to draw together theoretical

threads from the literature on world-systems and proto-industrialization, in order to link an explanation of locally divergent paths of development to an understanding of the evolving capitalist system. Denis O’Hearn (2001) recently provided a comprehensive analysis of Ireland’s changing position in the Atlantic economy from a world-systems perspective. He showed how, at different historical periods, peripheral elites were constrained in their attempts to redirect Ireland’s development towards industrialization, both by the actions of powerful core elites in Britain, and by path-dependent mechanisms that tended to lock Ireland in to particular economic trajectories. My study complements O’Hearn’s by emphasizing the extent to which the actions of non-elite players also affected the course of Irish economic development during the long eighteenth century.

In Chapter Two I give an overview of the expansion of the Irish linen industry, placing it in the context of the growing Atlantic trades that were increasingly dominated by Britain. In Chapter Three I explore how the linen industry was implicated in regional patterns of development in Ireland through a comprehensive examination of the scholarship on proto-industrialization and its application to the Irish case. In Chapter Four I shift the focus to local paths of rural industrialization with an in-depth empirical examination of the historical evolution of the linen industry in County Cavan. Cavan was not a “typical” Irish linen county – it was neither at the core nor the periphery of the industry, and my choice was in part driven by the availability of data. Nonetheless, I show how a careful meso-analysis of processes of differentiation at the local level sheds light on divergences at wider regional levels. In Chapter Five I employ the concepts of “cooperative conflicts” and “gender contracts” to make sense of these divergent developments at the level of individual household strategies. I draw on a range of evidence, including folk poetry,

to demonstrate how gender functioned as a key axis of processes of uneven regional development and working-class formation in the linen districts. Finally, in Chapter Six, I move to a macro-comparative analysis of the Irish, Scottish and Flemish linen industries. I argue that the divergent development of these regions during the ‘long’ eighteenth century can be explained partly in terms of differences in the nature and timing of their incorporation to the evolving world-economy, and partly in terms of differences in how men’s and women’s labour was mobilized in the articulation of household and market.

Competing Voices: Sources and Methodology

The problem of structure and agency is one which, as Abrams (1980) noted, every generation of social scientists rediscovers for itself. How do we conceptualize the social patterns that constrain peoples’ actions with the force of external “structures,” without losing sight of the fact that those very structures are produced and changed by peoples’ actions? The trend Abrams observed towards fruitful interaction between history and sociology contributed two main strategies towards the structure-agency problem in the 1970s and 80s. First, on the part of many sociologists, there was a renewed determination to “take history seriously” (Tilly 1984). This involved both an understanding that “when things happen within a sequence affects how they happen,” and a recognition that “things might have been different” (Wolf 1982, p.6). Second, especially on the part of historians writing in the tradition of E. P. Thompson, there was a new emphasis on subjectivity – on reconstructing the interpretations and motives that mediated actors’ experience of, and response to historical processes. These strategies seemed to go some way towards meeting the challenge of revealing historical change as “both a chain of

events and a relationship of abstract conceptions (Abrams 1980, p. 14).

For some scholars, as we have seen, the analytical separation between culture and structure reified the hierarchical distinction between “real” material conditions and “ephemeral” ideologies, thus inevitably reproducing the crude economism that Thompson had rejected. By the end of the 1980s, the “solution” of treating culture as a discursive framework constitutive of, and thus logically prior to social experience, had been widely adopted (Berlanstein 1993). More recently, however, a number of critics pointed out that economism simply sneaks in at the back door – often unrecognized and unexamined - in such radical culturalist accounts (Biernacki 1997).¹⁶

In this book I take the view that a self-conscious analytical distinction between the abstract interpretations of sociological explanation, and the experiential interpretations that constructed historical events, is both necessary and legitimate, provided the sociologist’s categories are “held tightly in check by the voices of the past” (Davis 1985, p. 5). The methodological strategy of this book is one of “incorporating comparison” (McMichael 1990). This approach addresses the structure/agency problem by treating units of comparison as “provisionally isolated instances” of a larger world-historical process. The goal of comparison is to differentiate “particular historical sequences and spatial configurations by locating them within the evolving ensemble of relations forming the world economy” (“Tomich 1994, p. 355). This makes it possible to explain different paths of social change in terms of variation in the nature and timing of incorporation, specific social and environmental contexts, and gendered household strategies.

Any analysis of the strategies of historical actors requires careful attention to the question of whose voices are heard in the historical record, and whose are silent. I

draw on three kinds of sources in this study: contemporary "statistical" reports, census and land valuation data, and popular poetry. Both narrative and statistical accounts from the 18th and early 19th centuries must be treated with caution, because they are usually incomplete and may often have been inaccurate. The greatest shortcoming of upper-class commentaries is the probability that the observers were biased in their judgements. Reports by contemporary British and Anglo-Irish observers naturally contain elements of ethnocentrism, and were often written from a colonial perspective (O'Cadhla 1999). At a deeper level, both quantitative and narrative surveys are problematic in the sense that they are implicated in a growing effort on the part of the state and ruling classes to "write the nation" (Patriarca 1994), and to regulate the lives of their citizens (Shaw and Miles 1979). The obsession of upper-class observers in the early nineteenth century with the industriousness or lack thereof of the Irish rural poor anticipated the later need of capitalist industry for an expanding labour force, and in their concern with "regularity" in everything from dress to the layout of fields these reports must be seen as part of an attempt to impose discipline from above. However, this obsession also resulted in the comprehensiveness and systematic attention to detail that make the reports valuable to the sociologist. By the middle of the 19th century the quality of official data collection and analysis had reached an exceptionally high standard (Mokyr 1985).

Donnelly (1997) observed that the collection of official statistics required the "invention" of categories that in turn became constitutive of social change. The problem posed by reliance on government documents and upper class observers is closely linked to the methodological and theoretical problem of trying to apprehend simultaneously how people "make their own history" and how history happens "behind men's backs." Statistical information channels our vision away from human

agency towards a deterministic understanding of social change, and just as importantly cannot provide us with a view of social change from the perspective of those whose lives were most profoundly affected. In response to this problem social scientists have turned to oral history as part of an attempt to rewrite history from below (see Cohen 1997). Of course this is not possible for the period covered by this book. I have relied instead on published poems and songs as a unique alternative source in which the voices of some ordinary people may be heard.

A number of little books of poetry by weavers and one spinner were published by subscription in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Hewitt (1974, p. 7), friends, acquaintances and prestigious persons were "...solicited to take one or more copies of the book when printed, at a stated figure, usually half a crown." Many of the poems are written in the Scots vernacular which was spoken in east Ulster. While some of the little books were published at the instigation of upper-class patrons, most of the poems and songs were originally written for a local audience. As Akenson and Crawford point out (1977, p. 4), community support for the rhyming weavers is evidenced by the titles by which many of them were known: Hugh Porter, for instance, was called "The Bard of Moneyslan." Furthermore, the poems are directly linked to a longer, oral tradition: Hewitt (1974, p. 4) argues that the rhymes are characteristically "approximate, vowel-rhymes or assonances", more pleasing to the ear than to the eye.

Akenson and Crawford (1977) made a strong case that the weaver poets were representative of their particular communities in the conventional sociological sense, and they must be considered immensely valuable in "giving voice" (Ragin 1994) to those who are not often heard in upper-class narratives and official reports.

Nonetheless, the poems also suppress voice. First, the weaver poets are drawn almost

exclusively from the Presbyterian Scots and English-speaking communities of east Ulster where the linen industry originated at the end of the 17th century. Their poems tell us nothing about the lives of those Catholic and Irish-speaking people who were incorporated to the industry in growing numbers from the middle of the 18th century. Second, with one possible exception, there were no “rhyming spinners” (Hewitt 1974, pp. 40-41), although late 19th century folklorists collected a number of spinning songs. In their original form, these consisted of partly improvised, bantering exchanges amongst young women gathered together to spin (Schneider 1989). While the rhyming weavers began their versifying careers in similar settings, their female counterparts never bridged the gap between oral and written composition. This is partly because women were much less likely than men to be literate.¹⁷

The third way that the poems “suppress voice” is through self-censorship. The rhyming weavers were very conscious that, in publishing their work, they were exposing themselves to a “respectable” middle- and upper-class readership. To what extent did their ambition to be recognized by this new audience affect the material included in their collections? James Orr, the “Bard of Ballycarry” wrote that:

My rude Scotch rhymes the tasteful justly slight,

The Scotch-tongued rustics scorn each nobler flight.

To the sociologist it is tempting to treat as “authentic” only those Scots-language poems on everyday life and explicitly political subjects, and to ignore the substantial number of English language items on conventional poetic themes, such as unrequited love. But might not those quaint songs about tea, whisky and fairs equally be written to appeal to upper-class prejudices? As Hewitt (1974, p. 62) observed of Orr’s lines, “we can only guess what veins of irony inform that couplet.”

Hugh Porter (1813), the “Bard of Moneyslan,” tells us in his “The Author’s

Preface" that:

I made my sangs to please my sel',
My dearest worthy frien's and ithers
No' just sae dear, but rhymin' brithers
To whom, just as they are, I sent them,
But never for the public meant them.

Of course it is only because he submitted his songs to the public that we can now read them, and so we must, to the best of our ability, take them "just as they are." The poetry's value lies less in the "representativeness" or otherwise of individual weaver poets, but in the extent to which, as popular literature, it reflected the cultural values and ideals of ordinary people of its time. My interpretations of the poems and songs inevitably depend on the sociological categories and models that I think explain what was happening in rural industrial Ireland. At the same time, the voices of the rhyming weavers act as a check on my explanations, constantly challenging me to evaluate and revise them in terms of their meaningfulness to those whose lives are being described.

REFERENCES CHAPTER 1

- Abrams, Philip. 1980. "History, Sociology, Historical Sociology." *Past and Present* 37: 3-16.
- Akenson, Donald H. and William H. Crawford. 1977. *Local Poets and Social History*. Belfast: Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.
- Biernacki, Richard. 1997. "Work and Culture in the Reception of Class Ideologies." Pp. 169-192 in *Reworking Class*, edited by John R. Hall. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Brenner, Robert. 1977. "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism." *New Left Review* 104: 25-92.
- Chase-Dunn, Christopher. 1989. *Global Formation: Structures of the World Economy*. London: Basil Blackwell.
- Cohen, Marilyn. 2003. "The Dynamics of Capitalism in the Irish Linen Industry: A 'Space-Time Structuration' Analysis." *Journal of Historical Sociology*. 16: 432-459.
- _____. 1997b. "Introduction." Pp. 1-36 in *The Warp of Ulster's Past: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Irish Linen Industry, 1700-1920*, edited by Marilyn Cohen. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon. 1983. *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Deere, Carmen Diana. 1979. "Rural Women's Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery." Pp. 133-148 in *Peasants and Proletarians: The Struggles of Third World Workers*, edited by R. Cohen, P. Gutkind and P. Brazier. New York: Monthly Review Press.

- De Vries, Jan. 1993. "Between purchasing power and the world of goods: understanding the household economy in early modern Europe." Pp. 85-132 in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter. London: Routledge.
- Donnelly, Michael. 1997. "Statistical Classifications and the Salience of Social Class." Pp. 107-132 in *Reworking Class*, edited by John R. Hall. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Dunaway, Wilma. 2001. "The Double Register of History: Situating the Forgotten Woman and her Household in Capitalist Commodity Chains." *Journal of World-Systems Research* 7: 2-31. <<http://csf.colorado.edu/jwsr/>> (11 June 2004)
- Frader, Laura L. and Sonya O. Rose. 1996. "Introduction: Gender and the Reconstruction of European Working-Class History." Pp. 1-36 in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, edited by Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Frank, Andre Gunder. 1998. *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- _____. 1996. "The Development of Underdevelopment." *Monthly Review* 18: 17-31.
- Hall, John R. 1997. "The Reworking of Class Analysis." Pp. 1-40 in *Reworking Class*, edited by John R. Hall. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Hareven, Tamara. 1991. "The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change." *American Historical Review* 96: 95-124.
- Hewitt, John. 1974. *Rhyming Weavers, and Other Country Poets of Antrim and Down*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

- Kalb, Don. 1997. *Expanding Class: Power and Everyday Politics in Industrial Communities, The Netherlands, 1850-1950*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Knotter, Ad. 1994. "Problems of the Family Economy: Peasant Economy, Domestic Production and Labour Markets in Pre-Industrial Europe." *Economic and Social History in the Netherlands* 7: 19-59.
- Koditschek, Theodore. 1997. "The Gendering of the British Working Class." *Gender and History* 9: 333-363.
- Kriedte, Peter. 1981a. "The origins, the agrarian context, and the conditions in the world market." Pp. 12-37 in *Industrialization Before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism* by Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick and Jurgen Schlumbohm. Translated by Beate Schempp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kriedte, Peter, Hans Medick and Jurgen Schlumbohm. 1993. "Proto-industrialization revisited: demography, social structure, and modern domestic industry." *Continuity and Change* 8: 217-252.
- _____. 1981. *Industrialization before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism*. Translated by Beate Schempp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lehners, Jean-Paul. 2003. "Introduction. Part 1: Proto-industrialization, industrialization, and family change." *History of the Family* 8, 1: 3-6.
- McMichael, Philip. 1990. "Incorporating Comparison Within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method." *American Sociological Review* 55: 385-397.

- Medick, Hans. 1981a. "The proto-industrial family economy." Pp. 38-73 in *Industrialization before Industrialization. Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism* by Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick and Jurgen Schlumbohm. Translated by Beate Schempp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1981c. "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism: Renewal of the Debate." Pp. 120-129 in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- _____. 1976. "The proto-industrial family economy: the structural functions of household and family during the transition from peasant society to industrial capitalism." *Social History* 3: 291-315.
- Mendels, Franklin. 1981. *Industrialization and Population Pressure in Eighteenth-Century Flanders. Dissertations in European Economic History*. Originally presented as the author's thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1969. New York: Arno Press.
- _____. 1972. "Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process." *Journal of Economic History* 32: 241-262.
- Mintz, Sidney. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin.
- _____. 1978. "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?" *Review-Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 2: 81-98.
- Misra, Joya. 2000. "Gender and the World-System: Engaging the Feminist Literature on Development." Pp. 105-127 in *A World-Systems Reader: New Perspectives on Gender, Urbanism, Cultures, Indigenous Peoples, and Ecology*, edited by Thomas D. Hall. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Moch, Leslie Page. 1987. "Historians and Family Strategies." *Historical Methods* 20: 113-115.
- Moen, Phyllis and Elaine Wethington. 1992. "The Concept of Family Adaptive Strategies." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18: 233-251.
- Mokyr, Joel. 1985. *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Ó'Cadhla, Stíofán. 1999. "Mapping a Discourse: Irish Gnosis and the Ordnance Survey 1824-1841." *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 4: 84-109
- O'Hearn, Denis. 2001. *The Atlantic Economy: Britain, the U.S. and Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- O'Malley, Eoin. 1989. *Industry and Economic Development: The Challenge for the Latecomer*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Ogilvie, Sheilagh C. 1996. "Social institutions and proto-industrialization." Pp. 23-37 in *European proto-industrialization*, edited by Sheilagh C. Ogilvie and Markus Cerman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogilvie, Sheilagh C. and Markus Cerman, eds. 1996. *European proto-industrialization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1996a. "The theories of proto-industrialization." Pp. 1-11 in *European proto-industrialization*, edited by Sheilagh C. Ogilvie and Markus Cerman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1996b. "Proto-industrialization, economic development and social change in early modern Europe." Pp. 227-239 in *European proto-industrialization*, edited by Sheilagh C. Ogilvie and Markus Cerman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Orr, James. [1804, 1819] 1935. *Poems on Various Subjects by James Orr of Ballycarry, With a Sketch of His Life*. Belfast: Wm. Mullan and Son.
- Patriarca, Silvana. 1994. "Statistical Nation Building and the Consolidation of Regions in Italy." *Social Science History* 18: 359-376.
- Perlin, Frank. 1983. "Proto-Industrialization and Pre-Colonial South Asia." *Past and Present* 98: 30-95.
- Pfister, Ulrich. 1996. "A General Model of Proto-Industrial Growth." Pp. 73-92 in *Proto-Industrialization: Recent Research and New Perspectives in Memory of Franklin Mendels*, edited by Rene Leboutte. Geneve: Librairie Droz.
- Porter, Hugh. 1813. *Poetical Attempts by Hugh Porter, A County of Down Weaver*. Belfast: Archbold and Dugan.
- Ragin, Charles. 1994. *Constructing Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Roseberry, William. 1989. *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History and Political Economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Sanderson, Stephen K. 1995. *Social Transformations: A General Theory of Historical Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Schlumbohm, Jurgen. 1996a. "Proto-industrialization as a research strategy and a historical period – a balance sheet." Pp. 12-22 in *Industrialization before Industrialization. Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism* by Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick and Jurgen Schlumbohm. Translated by Beate Schempp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1996b. "Micro-History and the Macro-Models of the European Demographic System in Pre-Industrial Times: Life-Course Patterns in the Parish of Belm

- (north-west Germany), Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries.” *History of the Family* 1: 81-95.
- Schneider, Jane. 1989. “Rumpelstiltskin’s Bargain: Folklore and the Merchant Capitalist Intensification of Linen Manufacture in Early Modern Europe.” Pp. 177-213 in *Cloth and Human Experience*, edited by Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Scott, Joan W. 1992. “Experience.” Pp. 22-40 in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge.
- _____. 1988a. “Women in ‘The Making of the English Working Class’.” Pp. 68-92 in *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- _____. 1988b “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” Pp. 28-52 in *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sen, Amartya K. 1990. “Gender and Cooperative Conflicts.” Pp. 123-149 in *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*, edited by Irene Tinker. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Steinberg, Marc. 1991. “The re-making of the English working class?” *Theory and Society* 20: 173-197.
- Smith, Joan and Immanuel Wallerstein. 1991. “Households as an Institution of the World-Economy.” Pp. 225-242 in *Gender, Family and Economy: The Triple Overlap*, edited by Rae Lesser Blumberg. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Thompson, Edward Palmer. 1966. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Thorner, Daniel, Basil Kerblay and R.E.F. Smith. 1966. *A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Tilly, Charles. 1984. *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- _____. 1983. "Flows of Capital and Forms of Industry in Europe, 1500-1900." *Theory and Society* 12: 123-142.
- Tilly, Louise and Joan W. Scott. *Women, Work and Family*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Wilson.
- Tomich, Dale. 1997. "World of Capital/Worlds of Labor: A Global Perspective." Pp. 287-312 in *Reworking Class*, edited by John R. Hall. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- _____. 1994. "Small Islands and Huge Comparisons: Caribbean Plantations, Historical Unevenness, and Capitalist Modernity." *Social Science History* 18: 339-358.
- Trimberger, Ellen Kay. 1982. "E.P. Thompson: Understanding the Process of History." Pp. 211-243 in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, edited by Theda Skocpol. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ward, Kathryn B. 1993. "Reconceptualizing World-System Theory to Include Women." Pp. 43-68 in *Theory on Gender/Feminism on Theory*, edited by Paula England. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1997. "Merchant, Dutch or Historical Capitalism?" *Review-Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 20: 243-254.
- _____. 1974. *The Modern World-System*. Vol. 1. *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wolf, Diane. 1992. *Factory Daughters: Gender, Household Dynamics, and Rural Industrialization in Java*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wolf, Eric. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wolpe, Harold, ed. 1980. *The Articulation of Modes of Production*. London: Routledge.



Map 1.1. Ireland: Counties and Provinces

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹ For an analysis of the use of this myth in state development strategies, see Gibbons (1990).

²For useful overviews, see Daly (1997) and the introduction to Cohen and Curtin (1999).

³ This literature will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. For a summary, see the introduction to Cohen 1997.

⁴ For useful summaries of these debates, see So (1990) and Peet (1991).

⁵ In general, they were more sympathetic to the structuralist Marxist idea of “articulation of modes of production,” which some development scholars adopted as an alternative to world-systems theory. See Peet (1991) and the discussion in Chase-Dunn (1989, pp. 20-47).

⁶ The potential contribution of world-systems theory to an understanding of regional industrialization in Europe was earlier identified by Pat Hudson (1989, p.35).

⁷ For overviews, see Koditschek (1997), Frader and Rose (1996, Introduction).

⁸ In a review of articles on gender and work, published in the journal Gender and History between 1989 and 1999, Avdela (1999, p. 534) found that authors “insist on the importance of material circumstances and social relations, even when they take language and meaning into consideration” and that “no examples of clear-cut postmodernist approaches are to be found in the journal.”

⁹ Indeed Wallerstein’s household-based explanation is probably the least influential model of unequal exchange within the world-systems literature. For an overview, see Chase-Dunn (1989, pp. 228-255).

¹⁰ Contemporary households in the periphery may be more likely to rely on a combination of wages and informal sector activities, such as petty trading (see Wallerstein et al. 1992).

¹¹ Mendels (1981) also drew on Chayanov's account of the peasant family economy in his model of proto-industrialization, but unlike Medick he did not develop this into a fully elaborated theory of proto-industrialization as a socio-economic system.

¹² Harrison (1977) has applied this criticism to the original model of the family economy developed by Chayanov. Similar criticisms have been made of Becker's notion of the "altruistic head" in his rational choice model of the family, which Moen and Wetherington (1992) rightly identify as a variant of the family strategies approach.

¹³ Here Sen (1990, pp. 125-126) is thinking of empirical research showing that people in traditional societies – especially women – find the idea of personal welfare unintelligible, and understand their interests only in terms of the well-being of the family unit.

¹⁴ The idea comes from Scandinavian theories of the twentieth century "gender system," although my usage of the term is somewhat different. It was developed "in ironical analogy with the idea of the social democratic contract." See Duncan (1996, pp. 95-96.)

¹⁵ It must be emphasized, however, that the ecological context is not independent of human activity. For example, poor quality land may be "improved" by reclamation and drainage oriented towards commercial agricultural activity. Similarly, repeated flax-cropping may diminish the fertility of the richest soil. Whether either activity

occurred depend partly on the processes described in this book. Here, the concept of “ecotype” proves useful. See the discussion in Knotter (1994).

¹⁶ It is sobering to remember that the structuralist Marxist theorist Richard Johnson made precisely this point about Thompson’s work in 1979. Thus the structure and agency debate appears to travel in endless circles.

¹⁷ In Ulster in 1841, 41% of all males above the age of 5 could read and write, compared to 19% of all females.