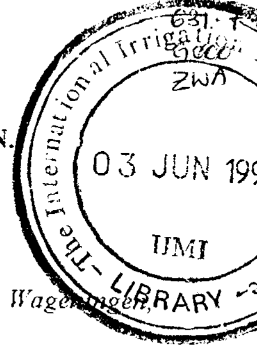
RURAL WOMEN'S QUESTIONS ARE AGRARIAN QUESTIONS. A DISCUSSION OF THE INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITIES OF RURAL WOMEN.



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Paper to be presented at the conference 'Agrarian Questions: The Politics of Farming anno 1995'. Wageningen, Netherlands, May 22-24, 1995.

Introduction

The most important project for feminist scholars focussing on agriculture and farming is to explain and change subordination of rural women. Intellectually, this task consists primarily of challenging the 'conventional' image of rural women and female farmers which is produced though various representational discourses, and by replacing it with new images which are more 'real' in that they better represent rural women's own experiences. Feminist scholars have gradually begun to realize that the project of constructing these images of women comprises a simultaneous project of deconstructing the conventional terms and elements that are taken to describe and analyze farming and rural life. 'Seeing' rural women is thus not just a question of moving or widening the focus of the same old camera; new and better lenses are required and maybe even entirely new cameras need to be designed.

Almost twenty years of studying rural women in western and non-western countries have produced a proliferation of images: Women are the poorest of the poor, women are the safeguarders of environment, women are overburdened with work, women are the world's food producers, women are the victims of double exploitation, women are submissive, women are strong and creative. In development thinking, women are repeatedly referred to as the solution to almost any problem: food scarcity, water scarcity, deforestation, social dis-integration,... Rather than facilitating the task of properly understanding and analyzing rural women's own experiences, this wood full of images has made it almost impossible to see the trees; the historical and material realities of rural women.

In this paper we want to question to what extent feminist scholars, among whom we include ourselves, have succeeded in making sense of farm women's experiences and realities and have contributed to their feminist struggles. This question is rooted in two fundamental concerns. The first is a concern with the explanatory potential of analytic strategies employed by feminist writings. In particular, we fear that many feminist rural studies continue to be based upon and reproduce the very analytical categories that they aim to criticize, for example by continuing to implicitly conceive farming as the 'real world' and the domain of men. Delineating specific and hitherto invisible women's domains or spheres (e.g. the family, reproduction) from which clearly identifiable and specific women's interests and needs (e.g. Moser, 1989) can be derived is probably a good way of proving that women are different yet important, but has it also helped to better understand rural women's own experiences? Or, as Mohanty (1991) formulates it: what is the relation between 'Woman' - a cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through feminist discourse- and 'women' - real material subjects of their collective histories?

The second concern is with the political effects of rural feminist studies. All too often, the room for women's empowerment or emancipation is situated outside of agriculture, in a 'specific little world of women' which is analytically and politically separate from the real men's world of farming. The numerous little women's projects (see Zwarteveen, 1993) that have been added on to irrigation projects and the "Emancipatienota" of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture are clear manifestations of this separatist trend. Existing irrigation and Dutch (or EC) agricultural policies remain unquestioned and unaltered. To what extent, then, have feminist rural studies contributed to the feminist struggles of rural women?

Those concerns are intimately rooted in our own professional involvement with the study of rural women, and our own commitment to 'the feminist cause'. Our argument in this paper is that we, and other 'rural feminist scholars', have maybe got trapped in the political struggle to establish our own legitimacy. The struggle to establish gender inequality as a problem, as something that exists and therefore can be studied and the struggle to establish

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feminist concerns as topics, worthy of scientific attention has greatly determined the choice and reproduction of certain representations of rural women over others, as well as the analytical categories and concepts underlying these representations. Rather than to give credit to and understand the historically, culturally and materially grounded realities and experiences of rural women, the images created have been primarily selected and constructed with the objective of 'getting women on the agenda' and thus, ultimately, to confirm and define our own identities as feminist scholars. After having examined how this process of the construction of images of rural women has taken place, and how this construction process has shaped the choice of analytical tools, we will proceed with suggesting possible ways out of this feminist trap.

The history of feminist construction of images of rural women

'Rural women' have been the object of study long before feminists developed an interest in them[1], but unlike those previous studies, feminist scholars do not take the division of roles, tasks, responsibilities and incomes between men and women on farms for granted. Instead, they made these very gender divisions the primary focus of study, because they considered these as manifestations of the subordination of women and their project ultimately consists of changing this subordination. However,

> "before feminists scholars could get on with this task, they found themselves having to deal with an all-too-familiar stumbling block. First, gender inequality had to be established for the non-believers as a problem: something that existed and, therefore, could be studied. Just as their activist sisters were faced with having to establish that women were a political group, sharing common problems, interests, and a (more or less) common view of how to ameliorate them, academic women had to establish their own concerns as topics, meriting scientific attention within the hallowed halls of science. Thus, before investigating how asymmetrical gender relations were being produced and reproduced in the context of women's everyday lives, early feminists had first to convince the predominantly male gatekeepers of academic resources that there was, indeed, something to study" (Oldersma and Davis, 1991:3).

It is in this struggle for legitimacy that rural feminist scholarship has its roots. The interest of feminist researchers to study rural women (or any category of women) "arose, in part, as a result of their own position as underpaid and under-represented members of the academic community and as a response to the androcentric biases which they were discovering within their own disciplines" (Ibid:2). The study of rural women and the further discovery of one's own identity are thus two projects that are intimately connected. It is telling in this respect that the first introductory course of western women's studies at the Department of Gender Studies in Wageningen focusses on better understanding gender identities of students, and on difference between male and female ways of learning and knowledge production, rather than on better understanding Dutch farm women.

Politically, rural women's studies in the Netherlands are thus deeply rooted in the Dutch feminist movement (Landbouwuniversiteit Wageningen 1994/1995) and depart from western, urban, feminist pre-occupations. First feminist studies on farm women in the Netherlands were inspired as much by the continued need for protecting the very existence of 'rural women's studies' as a separate domain of study, as by concerns about and feminist solidarity with the fate of rural women. It is not surprising, therefore, that this process of self-justification has greatly determined the nature and outcomes of many of these studies, for what had to be (and was) represented through the representation of rural women were feminist scholars themselves. In this respect, there is little difference between representations of rural women in the west, and 'third world women'; Mohanty's argument that representations of 'third world women' ultimately serve western feminists' self-representation is equally valid for representations of rural women in the west. Through the creation of 'a farm woman' or 'a third world woman' as backward, traditional, oppressed (etc.), feminist scholars implicitly define themselves as modern, liberated and as having control over their own lives (cf. Mohanty, 1990:74).

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[1] See for example Postel-Coster, 1991 for a quick history of studying women in anthropology, and Endeveld, 1992 and Hobbelink and Spijkers, 1986 for descriptions about developments in the study of farm women in the Netherlands.

Studies on third world women are not only inscribed in western feminist discourse, but also in the development aid discourse. Sarah White's remark about writings on rural women in Bangladesh is probably true for many third world countries: "virtually every text on women in Bangladesh has been funded by foreign aid" (White, 1990:16). This means that the 'society' in which these texts are written is the donor community, which in turn implies that rural women's images that are produced depend as much or even more upon the traditions and conventions of the aid discourse than on any external point of reference in the studied societies themselves (cf. White, 1990:3). "Donors are motivated to sponsor research that will help them to make their programmes more effective" (Ibid:16). Hence, whether women are pictured as a 'backward' sector, 'left-out by development', as 'human resources or resource managers' or as the 'target of programmes to reduce fertility and draw them into capitalist production' (Ibid:19) depends more on the aid community than on the society itself and is ultimately a function of the (expected) effectiveness in terms of getting women on the agenda.

It was this same process of having to struggle to get gender on the research agenda of the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI), that led to abandoning the use of feminist concerns (e.g. women's subordination or gender inequality) as arguments. Within the IIMI context, these concerns invoked images of poor, victimized women who needed help. Also, it was argued that IIMI - an institute concerned with improving the performance of irrigation systems - could not be expected to be held responsible for, or to remediate, gender inequalities. Instead, arguments that referred to women's contributions to the performance of irrigation systems and irrigated agriculture proved to much better serve the objective of establishing legitimacy.

It is likely that the struggle for existence, and the resulting need for self-definition, of feminist rural studies has sometimes - and necessarily so - led to sacrificing empirical validity and analytical correctness. It has also led to a certain protectionism of feminist studies on rural women. Although protectionism, through a focus on and claim to difference, has been necessary to establish the specific identity of feminist rural studies, is also carries the risk of isolation and even marginalization "as the significance of gender relations to the social and economic dynamics of rural life remains a segregated 'specialism'; a specialism in which rural women and 'their' issues can be safely corralled by researchers and policymakers, while mainstream research and policy concepts and concerns proceed untouched" (Whatmore, 1994:108).

Women's world and men's worlds

Feminist scholars' first pre-occupation was to make women visible, to establish and prove women's oppression and to show that gender matters. Within the context of farming, the oppression thesis has generated a whole gamut of studies on the marginalization of women as a result of agricultural modernization, rural restructuring or commoditization. Most rural feminist studies conceive gender inequality as the product of some combination of patriarchy and capitalism. The focus of these studies was on women, rather than on agriculture; rural areas and farming provided the 'locus' rather than the 'focus' of the study; and intellectually most of these writings are grounded in feminist discourse rather than in agrarian discourse.

Within the development aid context, the strongest case for intellectual and political attention to women could be made when subordination was linked to other, more easily accepted rural development goals, such as reduction of poverty, food security or environmental sustainability. It is probably its attractiveness in this respect that has led to the widespread adoption of the format provided by Hanger and Moris (1973) for the analysis of changes in gender relations (or the position of women) as a result of the introduction of large-scale irrigation. Dey (1981), Schrijvers (1986), Jones (1986), Carney (1988) and Bernal (1988) all describe comparable processes of change leading to a strikingly similar effect of deterioration in the position of women for countries as diverse as Cameroon, The Gambia, Sri Lanka and Sudan. Basically, the pattern described is as follows: Large scale irrigation development entails a redistribution of land, a process in which women's traditional rights to land are not recognized. The result is that men's rights and access to land are strengthened, which in turn provides the basis for men gaining greater control over the labor of their wives. It is in male control over female labor that capitalist and patriarchal interests coincide with respect to the exploitation of women; the intensification of agricultural production (the introduction of an extra crop, and/or the introduction of more labor intensive improved crop varieties) heavily relies on the

availability of family labor, and the easiest way to secure access to female labor is through their husbands, by denying women the access to their own productive resources. It depends on the bargaining position of women, which is basically a function of the access they have to alternative avenues of employment and income (see Carney, 1988), which determines their power to resist this process of marginalization.

Endevelds' and O'Hara's reviews of feminist writings on farm women in capitalist societies shows that these studies produce a similar picture of female exploitation as a result of capitalist developments (Endeveld 1990; O'Hara, 1994). For example, the conclusion of Symes and Marsden (1983) in their study on the changing role of women on large scale arable farms in England is that male domination increases with the expansion of capitalism. De Rooij (1992), in a very detailed study on farm women on dairy farms in the Netherlands, comes to a similar conclusion. She links the labor contributions of women on dairy farms to the degree of influence they have on farm decision making. Her conclusion is that when farm women have a domain of activities of their own, their overall influence on the farm decision making process is bigger. Processes of specialization and increase in the scale of farming imply that farm women lose their control over their own labor, as well as over the labor process as a whole. Also the nature of the work done by women changes with processes of specialization and expansion: gradually the level of 'craftwomanship' that is required for carrying out female tasks diminishes. The work of farm women thus becomes work 'of the second order' (De Rooij, 1992:221).

A general description of how the position of women on farms in capitalist societies is represented in feminist writings is given by O'Hara:

> "Women are exploited in the family, not because of the work that they do, but because of the relations of production in which they work (family-based households) and the fact that their work is unpaid. Even though farm wives produce so visibly for the market, they are just subordinated as non-farm women because of the relations of production (i.e. the family) in which they live and work - they work unpaid for the Head of the Household (HoH). Consumption within families is also unequal, with men and older male children being more privileged than women or daughters. Transmission of property and resources also favours men over women, specifically in farming where sons generally inherit the farm, but also because resources are distributed to individuals according to their status as persons, differentiated by age, sex and marital status" (O'Hara, 1994:53).

Although the various authors write with varying degrees of care and complexity, as Mohanty argues (for third world women), "the *effect* of their representation of third world women is a coherent one" (Mohanty, 1990:57). Women appear primarily as victims of processes of rural development, rural restructuring or commoditization. Rather than uncovering the material and ideological specificities that lead to the marginalization of rural women in a particular process of rural change, the objective of the studies is to prove the general point that women, as a group, are marginalized.

The oppression thesis is implicitly based on the existence of a universal female identity; women are "an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions" (Mohanty, 1990:55). This group of women is identified prior to the process of analysis (cf. Mohanty, 1990:56) and prior to their entry into the arena of social relations (Ibid, 59) or to the development process (Ibid, 63).

There are three basic problems with this kind of use of 'women' as a group. First, it limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing other identities. The biggest problem with this reductionism with respect to the analysis of farming is that women's identities as (co-)farmers are not recognized. The feminist pre-occupation with women as women, and the strong ideological connotation of the word farmer as symbolizing male identity probably account for the difficulties apparent in many feminist writings to conceive women as farmers. The sudden and unexpected wave of interest of the media in the Netherlands in a study on young female farmers who had decided to take over the farm of their parents is illustrative in this respect: "On the radio and

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on television, everywhere these female farm successors had to show up to present their stories. Apparently, women who want and are able to run a farm enterprise are still a novelty" (Endeveld, 1992:100, translation MZ). Rural and farm women themselves often do identify with farming as a profession and as a way of life. O'Hara for example shows how Irish women relate to the farm family enterprise. Although there is considerable variation in women's relationship to the family farm and in their own understanding of that relationship, only 23% (14/60) of the interviewed farm women have constructed a vocational identity unrelated to the farm enterprise (O'Hara, 1994). Recognizing and portraying women as farmers is somewhat more usual in studies on rural women in the third world. However, although non-western studies recognize women's 'autonomous' farm production and 'female heads of farms', these studies find it equally difficult to adequately give credit to women's experiences as co-farmers of family or male plots and often continue to interpret women's contributions to these plots in terms of male control over female labor and thus female exploitation.

The second problem of analytically constructing women as a pre-constituted group is that it "structures the world in ultimately binary, dichotomous terms where women are always seen as in opposition to men, patriarchy is always necessarily male dominance, and the religious, legal, economic and familial systems are implicitly assumed to be constructed by men" (Mohanty, 1990:70). Within the context of farming, gender divisions are established either through the gender division of labor, or through the delineation of separate women's domains or spheres. The discussed irrigation studies discovered women's 'independent' farming activities and implicitly equalled these (depending on the target audience) either with autonomy and power, or with the capacity to produce food and health. At the same time, women's self controlled production is considered to be opposed to and conflicting with mens' productive activities. In the Netherlands, de Rooij (1992) delineates cheesemaking as the relatively autonomous domain and sphere of activity of women in dairy farms, and clearly conceives it as an important source of female power and autonomy.

The domain of the family and the home, and the sphere of reproductive activities are likewise delineated and defined as specifically female or feminine, with 'the farm' and 'productive activities' as their necessary male opposites. The very existence of 'female' and 'male' tasks, domains and spheres is often judged sufficient to provide proof of women's oppression and of male dominance. In the process of doing so, the activities, domain and spheres attributed to men are implicitly taken as more important and of higher value.[2] More fundamentally, the representational construction of the farm in these binary, dichotomous terms ultimately only perpetuates and reinforces the very gender divisions that feminists aim to criticize.

The structuration of the world in binary oppositions is accompanied by a concept of power which also defined in binary terms: "people who have it (read: men) and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited" (Mohanty, 1990:64). Power is automatically conceived as something male and therefore negative and working against women. "It invokes images of evil men holding women down and of helpless poor women as victims of male supremacy (Endeveld, 1994:148). While men's activities and actions can only be interpreted as working as 'power moves' ultimately intended to further control and exploit women, women are reduced to so-called cultural dopes or zombies. The working of power has most explicitly been conceptualized in feminist writings concerned with farms in capitalist societies, often by making use of the concept of patriarchy: "Internal relations on the agrarian firm are characterized as patriarchal relations within which men are powerful and women are being oppressed. This situation is conceived as a specific expression of capitalism" (Endeveld, 1990:103).

The third and last basic problem with the oppression thesis, and its construction of women as a universal category is that it makes it very difficult to properly assess the value of women's work and experiences. Women are defined as non-men, but at the same time (and because the analysis continues to be based on the same binary oppositions that constitute the 'male' world) women's contributions can only be measured against 'male' norms,

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[2]. Part of the attractiveness of thus constructing and creating female domains is that it facilitates the identification of specific women's interests and needs, which can serve to develop and plan 'women-targeted' projects and interventions. White (1992) elaborates on this argument.

e.g. in terms of the number of hours or days of labor contributed to the farm labor process, or in terms of her influence in 'male' farm decision making processes. The domestic and child-care activities of women, for example, although made visible, remain difficult to be assessed in terms of their intrinsic importance or value. Or as Whatmore remarks: "Any attempt to make women's work (...) count requires a methodology that elucidates the ideologies which legitimize exploitative labour relations and inform the experiences and meanings of work for women themselves" (Whatmore, 1991:47).

The difficulty of evaluating women's activities (or spheres or domains) also underlies the problems to articulate strategies for women's empowerment. The basic dilemma is the familiar feminist dilemma between equality or difference, or between integration and autonomy: For women to become respected and powerful, is it best and wisest to 'conquer the male world' or is it more fruitful to cherish and further develop relatively autonomous 'female worlds'?[3] While this is a dilemma for most feminists, it becomes particularly pronounced in the feminist analysis of family farming, because of the interconnectedness of family and farm: for farm women the conquering of the 'male world' implies increasing their contributions to the male farm domain, and thus a further increase of the husbands' control over his wife's labor. The position feminist scholars take implicitly or explicitly depend on where they situate the principal site of gender struggles, and on how they relate patriarchy to capitalism. If the family is regarded as the site of subordination, increased autonomy for women can either be achieved through a reinforcement of women's autonomous productive activities or through women's entry into the wage labor market. If, on the other hand, the family is seen to offer some measure of support against oppressive class relations and forms of labour contract outside of the farm family and enterprise, the proposed strategy is to strengthen women's position on the family farm.

The first position was (and maybe is) particularly popular among feminists dealing with third world countries; women's control over their own income is seen as one of the best strategies for their empowerment. Within irrigation projects, efforts to redress gender inequalities thus typically focus on small-scale income generating projects for women outside of the irrigation domain, or on the attribution of small plots within the irrigation system to groups of women for the collective cultivation of vegetables. In the Netherlands, the second position was somewhat more popular and resulted for example in the promotion of agricultural training for farm women. Also, legal and social protection for farm women, which would lead to their recognition as 'equal partners' were (and are) important ingredients of the Dutch empowerment strategy. What is striking in both strategies is that, although most feminist analyses clearly link agricultural modernization processes with processes of female marginalization, no strategies are devised to alter these processes of agrarian change so as to reflect feminist concerns.

Beyond advocacy: feminist answers to agrarian questions

As long as people have tried to think meaningfully about farming, its family character , and especially the non-separation of capital and labor, has been identified as one of its major and most puzzling and intriguing characteristics. The principal success of rural feminist scholars so far is that they have brought the hitherto elusive domains of the family, the home, consumption and reproduction back on the agenda. Feminists have done a very good job in pointing out that the farm consists not just of one male farmer, and have adequately demonstrated the importance of farm women in farm production and reproduction. However, it remains difficult to combine the two insights: to make women's contributions visible beyond those that can conveniently be placed in the traditional female domain (the family) or beyond those that continue to conceive women's contributions in terms of "help to their husbands". We have argued that this is a logical consequence of the political history of feminist scholarship; feminist scholars first had to gain credibility. The only way of establishing the 'female difference' without losing the possibility to communicate (and thus to fight the feminist struggle) was to express themselves in the language, and to use the concepts and analytical categorizations, of the 'agrarian discourse'.

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[3]. Ecofeminists are the most obvious advocates of the last strategy, by equalling the female world with nature and by parallelling exploitation of women by men with exploitation of nature by men. See Jackson (1993) for an elaboration.

Our contention is thus that the first step of the struggle of rural feminist scholarship has been successful in that rural women and gender do appear much more often on research and policy agendas. The identity of rural feminist studies is more or less established. The logical consequence of this success is that it is now time to remediate the somewhat simplistic ways in which rural women have been portrayed. In other words, it is time to revisit the family farm and to picture rural and farm women in ways which give more credit to their own experiences and perspectives. We believe that enough room has been created to not only focus on differences between Men and Women, but also on similarities.[4]

One possible fruitful area to search for similarities is between the agrarian discourse and the feminist discourse. Logically, the project of describing and analyzing farming in a way that admits farm women's (and men's for that matter) own experiences and perspectives as constitutive does rely as much on a proper analysis of the family farm, as it does on a proper analysis of gender relations. In fact, Sarah Whatmore (1991) has already made some important first steps in this direction. She shows that the commoditization debate, or the analysis of Petty Commodity forms of Production, suffers from some of the same shortcomings as does the feminist 'marginaliza-tion' or 'oppression' thesis - both being grounded in structuralist, essentialist notions of change. The two basic elements of the critique on the commoditization thesis is that it fails to account for empirical diversity, and the inadequacies of the analysis in their treatment of human agency, ideology and lived experience. Whatmore show that the two strands of criticism are interrelated "in the sense that it is primarily through the mediation of human agency that the commoditisation process is seen to be modified and realized differentially between farms in particular time and places" (Whatmore, 1991:25).

Both feminists as political economists thus struggle with the question of how much 'room of manoeuvre' and influence to attribute to individuals while at the same time acknowledging that their actions and experiences are structured and constrained by patriarchal gender and/or capitalist relations. Both of their projects are to develop an analysis which gives more serious weight to the ways in which the actions and strategies of farm household members shape the impact and outcomes of capitalist -patriarchal interventions. Long (1986) argues, among others for closer attention to 'the management of operational units' and the better and more secure definition of households - which is clearly also in the interest of feminist scholars. And, in order to give more credit to farm household members' responses to 'external changes', he advocates for a point of view which takes these responses as active, rather than passive (Long, 1986:18/19). The same argument is made by feminist scholars in trying to overcome picturing women as passive victims of combinations of patriarchal and capitalist systems; women themselves constitute these systems and actively process and (re-)shape them. Endeveld, for example, goes to Giddens for a possible way out of the agency versus structure dilemma: "Most important is the idea that actors, both men and women, reproduce and transform the structural features of society in their day-to-day lives" (Endeveld, 1994:149).

Also, overcoming the dualistic conceptual framework founded upon an opposition between political economy and domestic economy is as much a question of the agrarian discourse, as it is one of the feminist discourse. The 'feminist reconstruction' that Whatmore proposes is interesting in this respect. She reconceptualizes the reproduction process as a multi-layered process which is intimately related to production through the process of subsistence. The productive labor process comprises both the processes of production for subsistence and for 'social exchange' (Whatmore, 1991:38/39). The figure underneath outlines her representation of the component processes underlying this concept of reproduction.

The greatest advantage of this conceptualization of the reproduction process, is that it allows to visualize that "domestic labour, as non-commoditized labour, is characteristic of all household members' labour, across agricultural as well as subsistence production, and is not restricted to women's 'domestic' work" (Ibid.:39).

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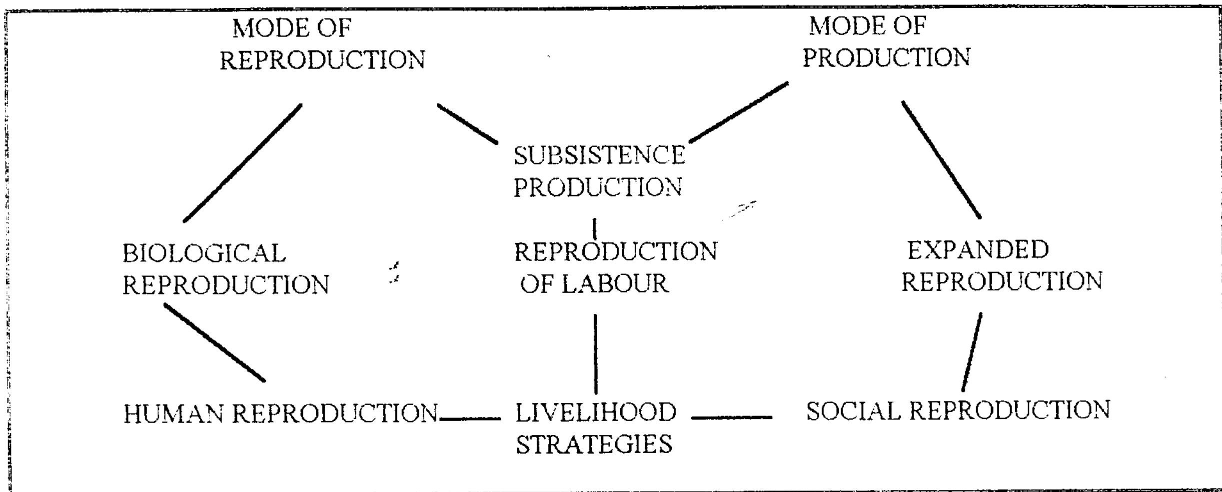
[4]. Likewise, there is enough room now for acknowledging not only similarities among women, but also differences. Since this point has been made much more often and much more widely among feminist scholars, we will not elaborate on it here.



Production, reproduction and livelihood - Taken from Whatmore 1991:39

The conceptualization of the farm in terms of a family, and the consequent change in focus from its productionist and economist functions to its subsistence and livelihood functions, shows the way to a second fruitful area to search for similarities between Women and Men. If farm production is the principal component of the farm household's livelihood strategy, than it automatically follows that, in principle, farm production is a collective interest shared by both women and men. Or: female and male farm members not only have conflictual or competing interests, but also shared ones. The farm family is not only "the key site for the construction and contestation of patriarchal gender relations" (Ibid.: 40) or the location of gender struggle, but it is also the key site for the construction of family identities and thus for 'gender cooperation'. Friendship, intimacy and even love between farm husband and wife, and between farm parents and their children, do exist and are important ingredients both of farm members' own identities and experiences, as of the farm production and labour processes. Preliminary data of IIMI studies in Nepal and Sri Lanka in fact suggest that the highest returns to land and to labor are achieved by farm households in which husband and wife have a good relationship. The women belonging to those households perceive themselves primarily as partners of their husbands, and they take a strong pride in their farming achievements. Also, in O'Hara's study of farm women in Ireland, 40% (or 24/60) of the interviewed women perceived themselves as partners of their husbands: "They understand farming as a 'family enterprise' and have a strong sense of involvement in the farm as business and in farming as an occupation. (...) They describe farm work as something which they enjoy and to which they bring certain skills. (...) The family enterprise is describes in terms of 'we' and 'ours', rather than the 'his' and 'theirs' typical of farm women more distant from the family enterprise" (O'Hara, 1994:56).

A plea for the recognition of love, mutual respect and collaboration as a basic ingredient of relationships between husbands and wives has also been made by Komter (1985), based on her study of couples in another context than farming. It is a departure from the view that expressions of love only serve to mystify and ideologically justify the basic gender inequalities that constitute such relationships. Love and mutual dependency, as Endeveld (1994) shows, are and should also be conceived as power, and provide in fact good entry-points for recognizing the many non-material aspects of power.

A related advantage of a better recognition of the family function of farms is that it helps to better locate and understand gender struggles. Rather than over women's labour to the ('male') farm perse, as many feminist scholars have tried to argue, most gender struggles in family farms are likely to arise either as a result of the failure of farming to adequately sustain subsistence and reproductive needs, or over the control of means to produce surpluses or the appropriation of surpluses. In many of the described irrigation studies, for example, it is likely that the described reluctance of women to contribute (more) labor to the male controlled family plot cannot be simply interpreted as

female resistance to a patriarchal power move, but is related to the disappointing yields of irrigated production, and thus to the resulting difficulty to feed the family. Rather than escaping from male control, as for example Carney (1988) has argued, the fact that women, if possible, preferred to work on their own fields is also due to the fact that labor productivity on these plots was higher and that working on own plots was thus better in terms of the family's overall livelihood strategy[5].

This brings us to a last advantage of acknowledging that the farm is also a family: that it allows for the recognition of identities, roles, functions and responsibilities of men. Although it is true that 'conventional' studies have wrongly represented farming as a male world, this representation is not only wrong in that farming is also a female world, but it is also wrong in its overemphasizing men as farmers to the neglect of their other roles and identities. Most feminist studies on the other hand, even those that very explicitly depart from a gender perspective, continue to focus solely on women, and are only concerned with changes in women's roles and positions. Men continue to be merely conceived as farmers. However, in the same way as women are wives and mothers, men are men, husbands and fathers. And in the same way that women do not just have a gender identity, but also a farmers' identity for example, men do not just have a vocational identity as farmers.

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[5] The study of Braun et al. (1989) for example suggests this.

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