

Does the Border Make the Difference? Variations in Women's Paid Employment, North and South

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Introduction

THE GENDERED NATURE OF IRISH SOCIETY, North and South, is very much a taken for granted reality. Connell (1987) has argued that although we think of gender as a property of individuals, it is necessary to go beyond this and to see the social landscape as being more or less 'gendered' in the sense that its practices and structures are more or less mapped by gender. He suggests that gender divisions are a fundamental feature of the capitalist system ('arguably as fundamental as class divisions') and that 'capitalism is run by, and mainly to the advantage of, men' (Connell, 1987: 104). The concept of patriarchy is useful to describe this phenomenon 'in the limited sense of a short hand for describing male dominance' (Pollert, 1996: 655). It has been defined by Walby (1990: 120) as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate oppress and exploit women'. It also has an ideological reality in the sense that women's position is seen as natural, inevitable or what women want rather than being due to the 'active social subordination of women going on here and now' (Connell, 1987: 215). Not surprisingly, the use of the concept as an overarching framework for understanding variation in women's position North and South is likely to provoke resistance. Equally, it is recognised that the identification of North and South as states may be seen as problematic and we recognise the difficulties implicit in doing this (see O'Dowd, 1991 and Rottman, this volume).

It is argued that the patriarchal nature of both states is reflected firstly in the fact that, to varying degrees, they are both male breadwinner states, in the sense that they are organised on the presumed existence of a male breadwinner and a financially dependent wife. Secondly, most women in both states are in a limited range of occupational positions, and at the

lower levels. It is suggested that by locating the similarities and differences in women's paid employment, North and South, in this context we can get an insight into the 'implicit gender contract underpinning social and economic organisation' which, to varying degrees, exists across Europe (*Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E.U.*, 1996, 9:1).

It will be shown that married women, particularly older married women in the North, have a higher level of participation in paid employment than their counterparts in the South, and we will suggest that this can be explained in terms of historical factors related to the demand for women's labour in occupations which were not affected by the marriage bar. It will be shown that more women are working part-time in the North and that more women are involved in low-paid work there. It is suggested that these patterns reflect the low levels of male wages; the deregulatory processes operating in the labour market and the creation of part-time opportunities by the state. It is suggested that these patterns can also usefully be located in the context of taxation arrangements; benefit systems and facilities as regards the care of children and generally reconciling work and family life. In this context the North emerges as a modified male breadwinner state insofar as it combines contradictory elements, such as individual taxation with means-tested benefits and little or no childcare provision (*The Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E.U.*, 1996, 9). On the other hand the South emerges as a strong male breadwinner state with married women's lower levels of participation in paid employment co-existing in a context where there is, effectively, household-based taxation and benefits, as well as little state-funded child-care. In both cases there is the presumption of a male breadwinner and a dependent wife (Lewis, 1992; 1993). In this respect it is argued that they differ from those E.U. countries where the assumption is that all adults of working age will be in paid work; where taxation and benefits are more individualised; where child-care is provided by the state, and where there is a less firm line between public and private responsibility. Scandinavian governments have consciously decided to move towards such a dual breadwinner model, with the state being committed to a heavy social service burden, partly to service family needs, but also partly to allow women, like men, to choose paid work (Crompton, 1995).

On the other hand it will be shown that women in the South, reflecting their higher levels of education, make up a higher proportion of those in the professional services (Breen, Heath and Whelan, this volume). However, women in the South, despite their occupancy of such positions of 'prestige', are less likely than those in the North to occupy positions of 'authority' (Savage, 1992) i.e., positions at the upper echelons of administrative and

managerial occupations. This may well reflect the impact of equality monitoring despite the prioritising of religion rather than gender as the ultimate criterion of acceptability in the North and the limited efficacy of such monitoring.

It will be shown that both North and South, as indeed across the EU, women are disproportionately represented in low paid, part-time work; they are overwhelmingly concentrated into a narrow range of 'semi-domesticated areas' (Mann, 1986: 45) and they are overwhelmingly excluded from positions of administrative or managerial power. It is suggested that these trends reflect what Mann (1986) has referred to as the neo-patriarchal nature of the society—what Walby (1990) has called public patriarchy. Some of these gendered practices and processes will be described here, although a detailed exploration of them lies beyond the scope of this paper. What evidence we have suggests that they exist in other European countries—their impact being reduced by political philosophies and collective bargaining arrangements which stress individualisation and the protection of the low paid (Norris, 1987; Whitehouse, 1992; Rubery and Fagan, 1993).

Structures, however, are not monolithic. Thus particular parts of the state apparatus pursue conflicting policies (Mann, 1993; O'Connell and Rottman, 1992). This is most obvious as regards the tension between the state's endorsement of the rhetoric of equality and degendered citizenship and the continuing support for the male breadwinner framework both North and South. There is a further tension between the creation of employment for women consequent on the expansion of the state apparatus, North and South, and the state's support for the male breadwinner model. Equally there is a tension between this model and the demands of the labour market for cheap flexible female labour.

The interpretation of these patterns is necessarily speculative. Sexton and O'Connell (1997) noted that in the South there was no clear consensus regarding the factors underlying even the growth in women's participation in paid employment, or their differential importance. Hence this chapter is organised so as to allow the reader to reach his/her own conclusions. Thus, women's participation in paid employment North and South is first described and specific features highlighted. Then the weight of evidence in favour of various explanations is assessed, focusing first on those related to the labour market supply; then to labour market demand, and then to more broadly contextual explanations related to equality policy, collective bargaining and organisational factors—the latter group being seen as particularly important in explaining women's position, as opposed to their participation, in the labour market.

Women's Participation in the Labour Force, North and South: An Overview

Participation Rates: All Women

The pattern of women's participation in the labour force was quite stable from partition until 1981 in the South. In 1926, 30 per cent of all women in the South were economically active, as compared with just under 30 per cent in 1981 (see Table 1). However from the mid-1980s the proportion of women who were economically active (using principal economic status) increased steadily in the South, reaching 33.4 per cent in 1991, and 38.5 per cent in 1996. Furthermore this measure, as opposed to the ILO one, served to underestimate the proportion of women who were economically active. By 1995, the proportion of women who were economically active in the South using the ILO definition was just under 40 per cent, reaching 41 per cent in 1996 (*Irish Labour Force Survey, 1996 [1997]*).

In the North, the pattern has been somewhat different. Thus the proportion of women who were economically active was slightly higher (36 per cent) in 1926. The increase in the proportion of women who were economically active began earlier than in the South, and hence the increase

Table 1. Economically active women in Ireland, 1926–95.

	North	South	North	South
	Married women active as % of all married women	Married women active as a % of all married women	All women active as a % of all women	All women active as a % of all women
1926	14.6	5.7	35.7	30.3
1936	—	5.6	—	32.5
1951	14.6	4.7	34.5	30.6
1961	19.5	5.2	35.3	28.6
1971	29.3	7.5	36.0	27.2
1981	40.6	16.7	41.6	29.7
1991	48.9	27.4	45.2	33.4
1995	64.8	34.2	61.0	36.5
1996	64.2	36.6	62.0	38.5

Notes: 1926: 12 yrs and over
 1951: 14 yrs and over
 1961/71: 15 yrs and over
 1981/91: 16 yrs and over
 1995/96: NI women of working age (16–59)

Sources: Calculated from the Census of Population, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. ROI figures taken from Fahey, 1990; NI and Republic of Ireland Labour Force Surveys, 1995 and 1996 (PES).

in the 1980s was less dramatic—42 per cent of all women being economically active in the North by 1981, and 45 per cent by 1991. Thus the proportion in the North was similar to the EU average, which was 45 per cent in 1995 (Eurostat, 1997) while the proportion in the South, despite the dramatic increases in the 1980s, was below the average, even in 1996.

Labour Force Participation Rates: Married Women

The differences between North and South were more pronounced as regards the proportion of married women who were economically active. In the South, almost 6 per cent of married women were economically active in 1926, compared with 15 per cent in the North. Again this pattern remained fairly stable in the South until the early 1970s. In the North by comparison, it had reached 29 per cent by 1971, while it remained much the same, at 7.5 per cent, in the South (Durkan *et al.*, 1995). By 1981 participation had increased to just under 17 per cent in the South and it continued to increase dramatically. In 1996, just under 37 per cent of married women in the South were economically active as assessed on the basis of principal economic status (just under 41 per cent of married women being economically active using the ILO definition: *Irish Labour Force Survey*, 1996 [1997]: 29, 55). In the North married women's participation increased dramatically in the 1970s, and by 1981 it had reached 41 per cent; and by 1991, 49 per cent. The EOC figures (1995: 13) show that just under 56 per cent of married or cohabiting women were economically active in the North.

These overall trends conceal substantial age variation, both North and South. Using the ILO definition of labour force participation, 63 per cent of married women aged 25–34 years in the South were in the labour force in 1996 as compared with 25 per cent of those aged 55–59 years (*Irish Labour Force Survey*, 1996 [1997]: 55). A virtually identical proportion of young women (20–34 years) were economically active in the North. On the other hand a much higher proportion (42 per cent) of married women in the 55–59 year age group were economically active in the North.

Thus variation in the economic activity rates of married women North and South (EOC, 1995: 13) reflects differences in the activity rates of the older cohorts and the longer tradition of paid employment for married women in the North. In this context then the key issue becomes one of explaining both the similarity in economic activity amongst the younger cohorts and the differences in the economic activity rates amongst the older cohorts.

Both North and South, equal pay legislation was introduced following membership of the European Community. It has been argued that at the EU level the Directive was driven by France who already had such legislation and did not wish to be economically disadvantaged on this account (McGauran, 1996). In any case the most significant single change in the wage differential in the North and South followed the implementation of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 in the North, and 1975 in the South. In the North, women's earnings were 63 per cent of men's earnings in 1973, and by 1980 they had increased to 75 per cent. This change was across all occupations, and at all levels. In the South women's hourly earnings relative to men's, amongst manual workers in the manufacturing area, increased from just under 60 per cent in 1973 to 69 per cent in 1980 (Callan and Wren, 1994). The differential has remained relatively stable since then (Durkan *et al.*, 1995). The focus on hourly earnings underestimates the male/female differential since it is widely recognised that men are more likely to receive overtime and other additional payments.

Callan and Wren (1994) found that women's hourly earnings across all kinds of paid employment in the South was 80 per cent of men's—half of that difference being explained by what they called 'productivity related characteristics'—mainly labour market experience. Women's hourly earnings relative to men's (at 85 per cent) were slightly higher in the North. In Britain, women who worked full time earned 80 per cent of men's hourly wage (EOC, 1996). The narrower pay gap in the North is due to the lower male wages.

Both the South and the North lack minimum wage agreements. Focusing on full-time women workers with earnings below two-thirds of the median earnings, it is clear that the situation in Northern Ireland (and indeed in the UK as a whole) is considerably worse than in the South or in the rest of Europe. In Northern Ireland, 40 per cent of women who work full time are low paid by this definition (as defined by the Low Pay Unit [LPU]) compared with just under 30 per cent in the South (EOC, 1995: 25). Furthermore, the LPU deals only with full-time employees, thus understating the extent of female low pay, since many are in low paid, part-time employment.

In 1991, women were equally or over-represented among the full-time low-paid workers in every member State in the EU (Rubery *et al.*, 1993). Thus, quite clearly although there is some divergence between North and South as regards the proportion of women who are low paid, it is very clear that there is convergence (across Europe indeed) as regards the over-representation of women amongst the low paid.

Part-Time Work

Maruani (1992) has noted that part-time paid employment is, generally speaking, characteristic of women in Northern Europe. Part-time workers are particularly common in the UK and indeed also in the Netherlands. The UK as a whole has the second highest proportion of female employees working part-time in the EU and is well above the EU average, while the South is below the EU average (EOC 1995: 18). In Northern Ireland the proportion of part-time female employment is lower than in the rest of the UK (37 per cent versus 45 per cent, in 1993) but very much higher there than in the South, where only just over 19 per cent of women were in part-time work.

There has been a rapid increase in part-time employment in the South since the mid-1980s. An increase in part-time employment was characteristic of most of the EU countries in the 1984–94 period. For many of them this was related to the relaxation of restrictive employment legislation regarding part-time work. This legislation did not however, apply in Ireland or Britain. Nevertheless the second largest increase, both in overall terms, and (separately) for women and men occurred in the South over that period. The share of part-time employment also almost doubled in the South over the same period (from 6 per cent in 1985 to just under 11 per cent in 1994: NESF, 1996). The growth in part-time employment in the South accounted for almost three-fifths of the total employment increase over that period—being most important in the pre-1993 period (O'Connell, this volume). In the South it is likely that the increase reflected an increasing state commitment to the service sector which is typically linked to the growth in part-time employment.

Broadly similar trends emerged in the North, although the expansion in part-time employment began earlier there and accounted for a greater proportion of employment growth. Thus, the growth in female part-time employment in the North from 1971–92 accounted for 95 per cent of the net gain in female employment over the period (Dignan, 1996) and has been closely related to the expansion in the public service, and in particular, in education, health and welfare. Apart from these areas, part-time work in the North in general involves people with few qualifications doing low-skilled jobs. The earnings of part-time workers reflect their industrial and occupational distribution (Trewsdale, 1992).

In both the South and the North (as indeed in most of the EU) women are more likely than men to be working part-time. The majority of the women in part-time employment are married (NESF, 1996: 13). In the South, four out of five part-time workers are employed in services, and they are (rather surprisingly) concentrated in the business and professional

areas (NESF, 1996: 13). Indeed, in 1996, nearly three out of five of those women who were working part-time worked either in the professional services or in commerce, insurance, finance or business services (*Irish Labour Force Survey*, 1996 [1997]: 58).

There has been some research on women's part-time work in the North (NIEC, 1992), but little research on the South (O'Connell, 1996). In any case the examination of part-time work as a uniform category of people who work thirty hours or less is fraught with difficulties. Nevertheless, it is clear that part-time work is very much more common in the North than in the South.

Occupational Segregation

Maruani (1992: 1) has stressed that the increase in women's participation in the labour force 'does not mean that women have won occupational equality . . . discrimination and segregation continue to reign'. The embedding of gender in occupations is reflected in persistent patterns of gender segregation, as well as in the reproduction of the gendered identity of jobs and occupations (Acker, 1990). This gendering may be extremely subtle and reflected in the conception of the nature or value of the skills involved in a task. Thus for example, the skills involved in cleaning or air hostess work, social work, etc., may be 'invisible' and seen as simply characteristic of the women who typically occupy these positions. The perception of these skills as 'natural' is used simultaneously to define these jobs as low skill, as suitable for women and as low paid; women's negotiating positions in such areas being often further weakened by weak unionisation.

After partition, the North was much more industrialised than the South. While agriculture was important on both sides of the border, it was more important in the South. The industrialised North featured many industries that traditionally employed a higher proportion of women than men viz., textiles (mainly linen) and clothing. These two industries accounted for over 80 per cent of women's employment until the 1940s. With the decline of these industries from the 1950s to the present day, there was an occupational shift from clothing and textiles to the service sector as sources of female employment.

The different labour market structure North and South not only affected the type of work women were engaged in, but also the accuracy of estimates of the extent to which married women were employed. Figures for married women's participation in paid employment do not include the farm work that many married women undertake on family farms (Fahey, 1990; 1993). Agriculture was much more important as a sectoral source of

employment in the South than in the North up to the 1950s. Indeed, until the 1970s, farm work was the most important form of economic activity for married women in the South. Thus the pre-1970 figures on the South may have underestimated the extent of married women's economic activity. The apparent increase in married women's participation in paid employment in the South since the 1970s may reflect a changing balance between agriculture and non-agricultural sectors, and, in particular, married women's movement from unpaid and invisible agricultural work, to paid work which is being recorded in the labour force statistics. We have no way of assessing the extent to which this is so.

Horizontal and vertical segregation are well recognised features of women's participation in the labour force, with women being huddled into a narrow range of predominantly female occupations and being congregated at the bottom of career hierarchies. North and South, the service sector currently accounts for approximately 80 per cent of female employment. Currently in the North, clerical, secretarial and sales occupations account for almost half of the jobs held by women. In the South in 1996, 70 per cent of the women who were in paid employment were in three occupational groups: clerical workers, professional and technical workers, and service workers (*Irish Labour Force Survey*, 1996 [1997]). Both North and South, women generally tend to work with other women. In the South, 77 per cent of clerical workers are women, with service and sales also being highly feminised. Just over half (53 per cent) of the professional and technical workers in the South are women, and in these areas too women tend to be concentrated into a small range of occupations such as nursing and teaching. Durkan *et al.* (1995) noted that the extent to which men and women worked in different types of jobs had changed little since the early 1980s. He noted that just under 58 per cent of women in 1981, as compared with 51 per cent in 1992 would have had to shift to male-dominated occupations to eliminate occupational segregation. The validity of indices of horizontal occupational segregation has been challenged (Blackburn *et al.*, 1993). However, the clustering of women into areas of predominantly female employment is very much a reality. It is not of course peculiar to North and South, but is a very well recognised feature of women's participation in the labour force across Europe.

Vertical segregation also exists North and South. In the North, men retain a disproportionate share of managerial and senior administrative posts. Women in the North make up 26 per cent of managers and administrators, which is low by comparison with the UK (where they make up 33 per cent: EOC 1995: 18). It has been recognised that there are considerable difficulties comparing the proportion of women in such positions internationally, because of variation in the definition of what constitutes a

management post (Rubery and Fagan, 1993). However, there is some evidence to suggest that the proportion of women in such positions is lower in the South. Thus a United Nations (1995) Report indicated that just under 23 per cent of administrators and managers in the UK were women, as compared with just over 15 per cent in the South.

The proportion of women in administrative/managerial positions varies considerably across Europe. Only in Hungary did women make up more than half of those holding these positions; with women constituting 39 per cent of those in these positions in Sweden. The United Nations Report showed that typically in Europe women constituted a much larger proportion of professional and technical workers. Thus, for example, they made up 63 per cent of such workers in Sweden; 40 per cent in the U.K. and 45 per cent in Ireland. The trends are even more extreme when one focuses simply on employees in the professional services. Here, women made up 65 per cent of those in these occupations in the South (*Irish Labour Force Survey*, 1996 [1997]: 25) as compared with 45 per cent of employees in these positions in the North (EOC, 1995: 18). Thus it seems possible to tentatively suggest that women make up a higher proportion of 'positions of expertise' in the South but a lower proportion of those in 'positions of authority' (Savage, 1992).

'Labour Market Supply' Explanations

Labour market supply theories have been the most common kinds of explanations put forward as regards married women's participation in paid employment. They include those involving the presence or age of children; taxation and benefit systems; individual choice; and educational level. Each will be briefly discussed in the following.

Children

The presence of children is widely seen as central to an explanation of the extent and nature of women's participation in the labour force. Frequently, the issue is implicitly or explicitly presented as if the presence of children had inevitable consequences as regards women's employment. In the North, using 1985–91 Labour Force Survey data, Dignan (1996) estimated that if a woman's youngest child was under two years, this reduced her participation rate by 27 per cent compared to a woman whose youngest child was 9 years or over. Similarly, Callan and Farrell (1991) showed that in the South women's participation in paid employment halved with each additional child.

However, the *Bulletin on Women and Employment in the EU* (1995: 6) clearly showed that focusing on mothers aged 20–39 years old, with a dependent child aged 14 years or less there was a very wide range of variation in mother's employment participation across the EU—ranging from 76 per cent in Denmark to 32 per cent in Ireland (see Table 2). It will be shown that such participation is also affected by education—with 95–98 per cent of young mothers with graduate education being in paid employment in Denmark and in Portugal, as compared with 68 per cent in Ireland.

Thus, quite clearly, the impact of bearing and rearing children is mediated by the state, and/or through the structure of the labour market, in the context of social norms and practices concerning women's role in the family. In Denmark, widespread state-funded child-care ensured that the overwhelming majority of women, with or without children, were in paid employment (motherhood effect = +2). In the South, the effect of motherhood on women's participation was negative and it was the highest in the EU (at -51) with the UK being in an intermediate position (at -34) (see Table 2).

Being a mother thus has very different implications in various EU countries—which tells us more about the way in which motherhood is constructed by the state, and the social norms and expectations about motherhood, than it does about the presence/absence of children. Furthermore, these patterns did not reflect a country's degree of economic development since the employment rate for mothers in Portugal (at 71 per cent) was very similar to Denmark (at 76 per cent)—despite their very different stages of economic development (United Nations, 1995). Equally, the presence of dependent children was not universally associated with high levels of part-time employment amongst women. It was clear that in some countries, full-time and part-time employment for mothers co-existed (e.g., Denmark); while in others, part-time employment was by far the dominant pattern, (e.g., Netherlands); while elsewhere (e.g., Spain), full-time employment was the dominant pattern.

Variation in Child-Care Provision and in Family Friendly Policies

In so far as child-care is not provided by women, it potentially can be provided by the state, the market and/or by other family members (for example, the husband). North and South differ little in terms of men's low involvement in housework and child-care (Montgomery, 1993; McWilliams, 1991; Rogers, 1993; Kiely, 1995; European Commission,

Table 2. Activity rates for women aged 20–39 by educational attainment and maternal status, 1991.

	Women without dependent children				Mothers ³				All	Motherhood effect ²
	Compulsory	Post-compulsory	Graduate	All	Compulsory	Post-compulsory	Graduate	All		
B	72.1	88.8	94.6	83.9	58.2	76.9	86.1	70.3	-16	
DK	75.9	85.3	94.2	85.6	82.4	89.4	95.2	87.6	+2	
D	77.4	86.7	92.9	85.4	44.8	53.9	61.8	51.9	-39	
GR	50.6	70.9	89.5	61.1	37.4	47.7	81.2	47.4	-22	
E	62.2	81.0	92.2	73.7	39.1	61.2	83.9	46.8	-37	
F ¹	na	na	na	84.3	na	na	na	69.9	-17	
IRL	71.9	84.3	91.1	82.7	29.5	46.8	68.1	40.7	-51	
I	64.9	83.5	94.6	73.9	42.4	67.4	88.6	51.6	-30	
L	78.5	95.1	93.4	83.2	41.0	48.9	68.6	43.5	-48	
NL	76.1	84.0	93.1	84.0	36.3	53.9	69.5	48.1	-43	
P	78.7	80.0	98.1	81.7	73.7	86.8	96.2	76.9	-6	
UK	89.2	89.8	94.4	90.3	56.0	64.3	74.0	59.2	-34	
EUR12	77.1	85.9	93.6	83.7	48.3	60.0	76.2	57.8	-31	

Notes: 1. Comparable education data are not available for France. Data relate to women who are the household head, either individually or as part of a couple.

2. Motherhood effect = (activity rate of mothers – activity rate of women without dependent children)/activity rate of women without dependent children × 100.

3. Mothers are defined as women with a dependent child aged 14 years or less.

B = Belgium, DK = Denmark, D = Germany, GR = Greece, E = Spain, F = France, IRL = Ireland, I = Italy, L = Luxembourg, NL = Netherlands, P = Portugal, UK = United Kingdom.

Source: *Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E. U. (1995)*: April: 8.

1997). Neither is there a significant difference in the level of state provision of child-care North and South, nor in the economic activity rates of young married women. Thus it is not clear to what extent such provision is important in affecting women's participation in paid employment, although the fact that Portugal, with a very low level of state provision, has a high level of female economic activity is certainly provocative.

The absence of such provision does however, signal a certain disinterest by the state in publicly facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life. The UK, with the South and the Netherlands, is one of the three countries in the EU with the lowest levels of publicly funded child-care services for children of all ages. Until recently, Northern Ireland had the poorest provision within the UK (EOC, 1995). In the South, public funding for children under six years, other than through early entry to the primary school system is very low (European Commission Network on Child Care, 1996). It is often argued that the availability of child-care facilities influences women's decision to opt for part-time work. This does not hold up however when we consider that the three EU countries with the lowest levels of publicly funded child-care have very different proportions of women in part-time employment.

Callan and Farrell (1991) noted the importance of the costs of substitute care in affecting women's participation where women's wage rates were low. Yet these trends sit uneasily with the fact that despite the absence of state funding for child-care, in 1991 the South, which had the lowest participation rate for mothers with children under ten years old, had the third largest increase in their participation over the 1985–91 period. Furthermore, in the South, unlike most other EU countries this increase largely reflected an increase in full-time as opposed to part-time employment. These trends clearly suggest that even in a situation where the state does not facilitate women's paid employment, young mothers' participation in paid employment can increase dramatically.

The limited evidence available suggests that both in North and South there is a good deal of interest amongst employees in arrangements to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life—both as regards the provision of pre-school care, school holiday care, job sharing and flexible hours (Turner *et al.*, 1994; Trewsdale and Kremer, 1996; EEA, 1996; Fynes *et al.*, 1996). For the most part this demand has not been recognised by the state or by employers. Thus, although the real availability of child-care facilities to all mothers in a society is useful as an indicator of that society's concern with maximising choices, there is little difference between the North and South in this area.

Benefits

In both North and South the social security systems are, by and large, organised around the principle of a male breadwinner. In this situation women derive their rights to benefits from their partners, and their access to such benefits is typically means tested. Additionally, women are less likely than men to get benefits since they are more likely to have a spouse whose income places them outside the scope of means-tested benefits. Furthermore, means-tested systems often effectively discourage spouses' participation in paid employment by taxing their income.

A number of studies in the North have found that having an unemployed partner increases the likelihood of a married woman being unemployed (Dignan, 1996; Davies *et al.*, 1995; McLaughlin, 1993). There are many reasons why so few married women with unemployed partners are in employment, such as the likelihood of shared labour market characteristics (Gallie *et al.*, 1994). However, the importance of the way in which the benefit system operates cannot be eliminated. It penalises part-time work by the partner of an unemployed man, by proportionately reducing the man's out-of-work benefits. In addition, no allowance is made for travel or child-care costs. Dignan (1996) estimated that the effect on women's participation where a spouse is employed as opposed to unemployed is almost 20 per cent. Similar patterns emerge in the South (and indeed right across the EU) with women being much more likely to be pulled into unemployment by the unemployment of their spouse than vice versa (*Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E.U.*, 1996, 9: 4).

Benefit policies in the South have steadily underpinned the position of the male breadwinner. Prior to the EU Directive on equal treatment for men and women in the social security system, married women were paid lower rates of benefit than men for shorter periods of time; they were not paid unemployment assistance and married men could claim for their wives as dependants, regardless of what these women were earning. As part of its attempt (1978–95) to implement the Directive, equal payments for various kinds of benefits were introduced in the South over the 1984–86 period. In introducing such payments, the State directed that, unless these wives were earning less than IR£50 per week, married men could no longer claim for them as dependants (Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee, 1996). In an attempt to buffer the effect of this reduction in married men's income, compensatory payments were introduced in November 1986, and these were not discontinued until 1992. These payments (up to IR£20 per week), which were only paid to married men, were seen as part of an attempt to implement the equal treatment directive. They were judged

to be discriminatory in the European Court in 1995. Their introduction vividly illustrates the extent to which indirect discrimination has become so embedded in state practices and procedures that it is literally not even perceived.

Taxation

Differences in the taxation systems North and South make it more or less worthwhile in economic terms for married women to be in paid employment. In the North, as in the UK, separate taxation for husbands and wives is now automatic and universal. Furthermore, the additional tax allowance which is granted to married couples can be allocated to either or it can be split between them (European Observatory, EC, 1996). On the other hand in the South (and arguably reflecting its stronger endorsement of the male breadwinner model) double tax allowances and double tax bands are allocated to a married couple, regardless of whether or not the wife is in paid employment. This implicitly challenges the economic wisdom of a married woman participating in paid employment, particularly part-time and/or low-paid employment (Mahon, 1994). Furthermore, unless couples specify otherwise, double tax allowances and tax bands are given to the husband automatically, if they married before 1993–94, and to the highest earner (who is likely to be the husband) if they married after that (Monitoring Committee, 1996). Thus, apparently innocuous automatic arrangements as regards tax assessment in the South create a context which implicitly discourages married women's participation in paid employment, and implicitly reinforces the male breadwinner's position.

Individual Choice

Hakim (1991; 1995; 1996) argued that women are responsible adults who choose to be either home-centred (uncommitted workers), or committed workers. However as Breugel (1996) points out, this argument pays little attention to the context in which the choice is made. The context involves a variety of factors including the cost of child-care (insofar as it is not provided by the state or the family), the wages available to women, taxation arrangements, the structure of the labour market and the legal situation. The situation may be further exacerbated by the common practice for child-care costs to be met out of the wife's income. These factors may well create a situation where the perceived economic benefit of married women participating in paid employment is very low indeed. In this situation not surprisingly, married women in the South and in the North often

referred to family/personal reasons for opting out of the labour market (Fine-Davis, 1988; Trewsdale, 1987).

Normative expectations as well as economic considerations can be expected to shape the choices made. In the South, the Roman Catholic Church endorsed an ideological position stressing the importance of women's role within the home—a position which Cousins (1996: 13) has suggested was 'not unrelated to the fact that there was always a comparatively high level of unemployment and underemployment amongst Irish men'. Women in Ireland are more likely than any other European women to favour a situation where the wife is not in paid employment (Rubery and Fagan, 1993). However, the proportion doing this was roughly the same size as the proportion favouring a husband and wife having equally demanding jobs—the co-existence of these two opposing views being unusual in European terms, and possibly reflecting differences in age and education.

It is increasingly accepted that women have the right to 'choose' to seek paid work, but the popular perception is that men 'ought' to seek paid work (Callan and Wren, 1994). Insofar as alternatives are not available, it is women who are more constrained in their attempts to decide 'how they shall live', since it is they who are seen as ultimately responsible for child-care, and so it is they who must consider how to combine child-rearing and domestic work with paid work (Crompton, 1995). There are real costs to women in terms of labour market returns because of child-related interruptions, effectively reducing women's wages relative to men's. They affect in purely economic terms the process of internal bargaining between couples, even those with identical preferences and similar capabilities (Callan and Wren, 1994). This kind of analysis illustrates the importance of examining the context within which women make choices. Hence a model such as Hakim's (1991; 1995; 1996) which implicitly ignores structural constraints seems less than satisfactory. Women in various societies do make choices about their paid working lives, but they do so under varying conditions, and largely not of their own making. Rational choice theory also fails to account for the fact that full-time work for women with children under five is restricted to those with higher educational qualifications (Ginn *et al.*, 1996). A plausible explanation for this is the considerable cost of private child-care—a cost which only those with high incomes can meet.

Education

In every EU country, participation in the labour force is associated with women's educational level. It is not clear to what extent these patterns

reflect the greater economic return that such women can expect, their different attitudes as regards the importance of mothers being at home full-time, or their smaller family size (*Bulletin on Women and Employment in the EU*, 1995, 6: 8). Level of education had an effect in every country, although the strength of this effect varied even amongst young women with dependent children. Thus, for example the impact of education was modest in Denmark. It was stronger in Portugal, and greater still in (Southern) Ireland. Thus there was a difference of 38 per cent in the economic activity rates of mothers with compulsory and graduate education in the South (see Table 2). Dignan (1996) estimated that in the North having a degree increased women's participation rate by some 26 per cent compared to those without qualifications. Thus quite clearly right across the EU higher educational levels are associated with women's—even young mothers—participation in education, with the impact of education being somewhat greater in the South than in the North.

The educational attainment of women, North and South (like those in the rest of Europe) has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Thus for example 67 per cent of women aged 25–9 years in the South completed second-level education, as compared with 33 per cent of those aged 50–9 years (Eurostat, 1995, 12: 4). These differences are probably not unrelated to the very substantial differences in the economic activity rates of older and younger women in the South. Younger and older women in the North do not display the same differences in employment participation rates. Educational level as such then, cannot explain the differences in women's participation in paid employment, North and South.

Labour Market Demand Explanations

A good deal less attention has been paid to explanations related to the structure of the labour market, although it is of course obvious that the extent and nature of women's economic activity will be affected by the demand created by such structures, both in their own right and as they are shaped by state policies and practices.

The Marriage Bar and the Reintegration of Women in Paid Employment

The labour market is not always allowed to operate without manipulation. The classic example of such manipulation was the imposition of the 'marriage bar' by the state. Similar to many Western European countries, women in the North and South were subject to a marriage bar, whereby

women in public sector employment had to leave paid employment on marriage. The imposition of this bar reflected and reinforced the male breadwinner model. In the South, the marriage bar was lifted in 1957 for primary school teachers, and not until 1973 for other public sector employees (e.g., civil servants and secondary school teachers). Although the marriage bar was not legally enforced in many other areas of paid employment, such as the banks, up to 1973 there was a clear expectation that women would retire on marriage and this was institutionalised through the marriage gratuity (i.e., a lump sum paid to women on their marriage and subsequent retirement). Thus directly or indirectly the marriage bar affected the participation of women who entered the labour force prior to that time i.e., those women who are currently in their forties or older.

In Britain, the marriage bar was removed in 1946 (Bagilhole, 1994), but not in Northern Ireland until the early 1970s. Fahey (1990) noted that the marriage bar was not a straightforward state policy on gender employment, but was rather the outcome of a complex and shifting interplay of labour market forces, cultural attitudes and state regulation. This would help explain the later removal of the bar in Northern Ireland where there was a greater labour surplus than in the rest of the UK. The interaction with the labour market also explains why, despite a similar marriage bar, there was a higher percentage of married women in paid employment in the North. Textiles and clothing were the main source of employment for women there, and these industries were not subject to the marriage bar. The much higher proportion of older married women in paid employment in the North reflects these factors.

The reintegration of middle aged married women into the labour force is particularly important in the South since their low level of economic activity was fostered by the social and economic policies of the state, by employers and trade unions. Such women face considerable difficulties as regards reintegration. Even if they define themselves as unemployed and attempt to register as unemployed, they find that, having been out of work for a period of time, they are not entitled to receive unemployment benefit, and frequently do not have enough insurance contributions to register for credits. If their husband is in paid employment, the level of the household income (regardless of how it is distributed) will determine whether or not they will be entitled to the means-tested unemployment assistance. If their husband is unemployed himself and is unwilling to 'swap eligibility', this option is closed to them. Because of the way it is done, 'splitting the claim', which is technically possible, is likely to reduce the total household income, and so it is likely to be an unattractive option. Hence married women are unlikely to be officially registered as unemployed (i.e., on the Live Register). It has been estimated that only 48 per cent of unemployed women are

on the Live Register as compared with 85 per cent of unemployed men (Conroy Jackson, 1991).

Employment and training schemes in the South are overwhelmingly targeted at those who are on the Live Register. They are thus very effective in excluding women. Insofar as such schemes are basically concerned with the reintegration of people into paid employment 'there is no justification for any Live Register requirement' and it has been suggested that it may constitute indirect discrimination contrary to the Employment Equality Act (Cousins, 1996: 4). Thus through a myriad of apparently innocuous gender neutral rules and regulations, most courses and employment training are effectively targeted at men rather than women. This is particularly ironic since such training is substantially funded by the EU to facilitate reintegration, on the specific understanding that it will be gender audited.

It is suggested, therefore, that the continued low level of participation by older married women in the South reflects not only the marriage bar, but the ongoing implicit endorsement by the state of the male breadwinner model, as reflected in these policies and practices.

Industrial Policy

It is now widely recognised that in the South, state directed industrial policy contributed to the relatively low level of women's economic activity from the 1920s until the mid-1980s. The 1936 Conditions of Employment Act allowed the minister to restrict the employment of women in an industry so as to arrest any tendency to increase female over male labour (Daly, 1992: 122–3). In the 1960s and 1970s, the state directly and indirectly influenced the gender composition of the work forces of foreign firms entering the South (Pyle, 1990). Export-led industries preferred female labour, but the state actively tried to encourage foreign firms to provide employment for men. The semi-state body with particular responsibility for attracting foreign investment stated explicitly in the late 1960s that they were 'seeking employment that will employ predominantly men'. Their 1970/71 annual report stated that 75 per cent of new jobs should be for males (Pyle, 1990: 75). Even into the mid-1980s, there continued to be a preference for multinational companies who would provide 'male' manufacturing jobs. Pursuing male employment fitted with both the Constitution and Church ideology. It also reflected the state's perception of unemployment as a male social problem.

The higher participation rate of women in paid employment in the North after partition should not be construed as indicating that there was greater benevolence towards women's employment there. It is more

accurate to see it as something that was accepted, rather than desired (McLaughlin, 1989a). As in the South it was male unemployment that was seen as a social problem (McLaughlin, 1989b). The image of Derry as a city of female breadwinners was used by nationalists after partition as proof of an oppressive Unionist sectarian state that would not provide employment for (Catholic) men (McLaughlin, 1989a). A report in 1971 stated that Derry was a place where too many women were in paid work, even though at that time female employment represented 20 per cent of all employment in the city (McLaughlin, 1986). Even in 1985/86, 70 per cent of the jobs created in Derry's Enterprise Zone were for men (McLaughlin, 1989a). Male unemployment, and reliance on female breadwinners west of the river Bann (the traditional Catholic marker), was perceived as evidence of the partisan nature of the Northern state. Beyond this however, the primacy of the male breadwinner model was not challenged.

On the other hand, however, both in the North and South the expansion of public sector employment generated a demand for female labour, mostly in the health and related welfare areas (Smyth, 1997; O'Connell, 1996). This occurred right across Europe, although it was strongest in Sweden where, because of its well developed welfare state, over 40 per cent of total employment, and over 60 per cent of women's employment was in the public sector in 1994. In the South, over 25 per cent of all employment and 40 per cent of women's employment was in these areas in 1994 (*Bulletin on Women and Employment in the E.U.*, 1996, 9: 2). In the North (but not the South) the growth in the public sector also accounted for most of the part-time employment growth during the 1970s and 1980s. In the South, the state implicitly and explicitly endorsed full-time paid employment as the norm. This was illustrated by the fact that although job sharing was technically available in almost four-fifths of public sector organisations in the South, and was predominantly used by women, the state as their employer effectively penalised those who opted for it by reducing their increments. The European Court of Justice ruled in 1997 that this was indirect discrimination (Honan, 1997).

The Structure of the Economy

In the South the decline in agricultural employment, and in semi-skilled and unskilled employment over the past 30 years, together with the expansion of middle-class positions (O'Connell, 1996) potentially favoured women, since they were less likely than men to own land and more likely

than men to do well at school (Hannan *et al.*, 1996; Lynch and Morgan, 1995). O'Connell (this volume) notes that over the 1961–91 period the overall proportion of employees in upper-middle class occupations increased from under 10 per cent in 1961 to over 22 per cent in 1991. The increase occurred amongst both men and women—the proportion of women in such occupations rising from 15 per cent in 1961 to 28 per cent in 1991. Similar, although less dramatic trends occurred amongst lower-middle class employees so that by 1991 more than three-quarters of the women at work were middle-class employees as compared with roughly two-fifths of the men (Ibid.). Similar patterns have been observed across Europe, leading Maruani (1992: 1) to note that 'The feminisation of the working population, especially in white collar jobs, is one of the most important social developments of the late twentieth century'. However, there were clear limits to such opportunities in the South since, for example, within the upper-middle class the proportion of men in the higher professional category almost doubled, while the proportion of women declined by about one-third (O'Connell, this volume).

Walsh (1993) noted that increases in the importance of the service sector were associated with employment opportunities for women. In 1995, right across the EU, the main area of employment (and of employment growth) was in services: 65 per cent of all EU employment being in this sector, compared with 60 per cent in the South (Eurostat, 1996: 4). Just under 80 per cent of women across the EU (and in the South) were in the services sector. However, in the South, right up to the late 1980s, the state effectively disregarded the service sector, encouraged the industrial sector and tried to bulwark the agricultural sector—both areas of predominantly male employment. Jobs—'proper jobs'—were seen as being in the manufacturing and agricultural areas, a kind of focus which was very compatible with a focus on male employment.

In their analysis of women's participation in the labour market in the North, Heaton *et al.* (1993: 179) argued that non-service industries were organised along the lines of a 'male' model of employment, with full-time work being very much the norm for men and women. On the other hand, the service sector was characterised by having many 'small' jobs. It is certainly true that in the North and South there are very different opportunities for full-time and part-time work depending on the occupation and the sector. The increase in part-time work, North and South, has been linked to increased employment in the service sector. It is difficult, however, to know to what extent the reliance on part-time workers in this sector reflects weak unionisation rather than the intrinsic nature of the job.

Wider Contextual Factors

Women's participation in paid employment is affected by wider contextual factors as well as by labour market policy. Attention is focused on three of these here: namely equality policy, collective bargaining and organisational factors. It is suggested that these are particularly relevant to understanding variation in women's position within the labour market.

Equality Policy

Equality legislation represents the most direct attempt to ensure labour market equality and economic independence for women. Over the past 20 years, the legal and constitutional framework provided as regards women's position in society both North and South has come under a great deal of scrutiny. Initially, this arose in the context of entry to the European Community in 1973. As signatories of the Treaty of Rome, Ireland and the UK became bound by a series of Directives regarding equal pay and equal treatment in the area of access to employment, vocational training and social security. Such directives have been widely seen as an attempt by the EU to give concrete expression to a gender-neutral concept of citizenship.

In the North the passing of the Equal Pay Act (1970), the Fair Employment Act (1976), the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order (1976) and the establishment of the Fair Employment Agency (1976) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (1976) were all part of this development. A plethora of equal opportunity directives have emerged since the 1970s, prompted by religious inequalities, but increasingly including gender as a category (for example Policy Appraisal on Fair Treatment). Largely due to economic and international political pressure, and the threat to internal stability, attempts have been made to tackle religious discrimination (Osborne and Cormack, 1989). They include monitoring the composition of the work-force, affirmative action, contract compliance and grant denial for employers who fail to meet their statutory obligations—the very measures long advocated by the sex, race and disability lobbies in both Britain and Northern Ireland (Maxwell, 1989; 1993). These raised the issue of 'read across' i.e., the question of why a strengthened policy could be promoted in Northern Ireland but not in the rest of the UK. By confining the new policy to religion (and not gender or disability) it could be depicted as of relevance only to Northern Ireland—'a place apart' (Osborne and Cormack, 1989: 293). Such an approach reflects the state's limited commitment to gender equality.

Jewson and Mason (1986) argue that the dominant approach to such

equal opportunities initiatives was a liberal one. Theoretically, an attempt was made to deal with the value of women's work through Equal Value Legislation. It was introduced in the UK in 1984, following an EU ruling, but seems to have had little impact in Northern Ireland. Maxwell (1989; 1991) noted that the legislation was tortuous, complex and ambiguous. She argued that with hindsight it was difficult to resist the view that it was specifically designed to minimise any progress. Thus she noted that a limiting feature of the Sex Discrimination Order (1976) was its reliance on individual proceedings to eliminate wage discrimination. In reality, wage discrimination is rarely an individual rights issue, and more usually a structural or collective issue.

In the South, similar sorts of legislative and institutional changes occurred in the 1970s with the passing of the Anti-Discrimination (1974) and Employment Equality Act (1977), and the establishment of the Employment Equality Agency (1977). Because of ambiguous wording in the Employment Equality Act (1977) it has been almost impossible up to now to establish the existence of indirect discrimination since 'the Irish courts and tribunals have generally applied the law of indirect discrimination in a way that exposes subtle and institutionalised forms of sex discrimination' (Fourth Report of the Fourth Joint Oireachtas Committee, 1996: 13). This approach was fostered by the wording of Section 2 (c) of the 1977 Equality Employment Act. The *Nathan v Bailey Gibson* case, which drew on the Equal Treatment Directive and case law from the European Court of Justice, established for the first time that it was sufficient to show that a practice bore more heavily on one sex than another to constitute indirect discrimination and so nullified 'the impossible requirements of section 2 (c)', (Honan, 1997: 12).

More recently the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts (1997) were passed by the Oireachtas but referred by the President to the Supreme Court for an assessment of their constitutionality. It is questionable to what extent either of them are concerned with actively promoting gender equality (as opposed to outlawing certain kinds of discrimination). Thus for example, certain kinds of positive action are allowed, but not required in the Employment Equality Act. In any event, particular parts/sections of the Equality Act (15, 16, 35 and 63 [3]) were found to be unconstitutional, and it will have to be redrafted. None of these sections were specifically concerned with gender.

Women's low pay is recognised as being related to their concentration in particular occupational groups which then tend to be defined as low skilled and poorly paid and which are not amenable to equal pay legislation (Trewsdale, 1987; Rubery and Fagan, 1993: 2; EOC, 1996). At EU level in an attempt to tackle the problem, a Code of Practice was adopted in

1996 on Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value. It aims to do away with discrimination in job classification and job evaluation schemes (European Commission, 1997: 10). However, it is not a legally binding instrument. There is also a proposal to include a reference to 'equal work of equal value' in the new European Treaty. It remains to be seen what effect, if any, such initiatives will have.

It is not clear that either state, North or South, is seriously committed to improving or even monitoring the effectiveness of the legal machinery in the employment equality area. While equal opportunities legislation exists in both places, there is no powerful interest group pressuring the state to implement or extend it in the area of gender. By contrast, equal opportunities legislation in Northern Ireland relating to religion is very much more rigorously monitored.

Collective Bargaining

Bercusson and Dickens (1996) and McCrudden (1993) have highlighted the inadequacies of legislation as a way of promoting equality. Collective bargaining is seen as potentially an alternative or supplementary route, although it is recognised that collective agreements may perpetuate discriminatory practices—particularly in situations where women have little power within the union, and where there is little importance attached to equality bargaining. Neither in the North nor in the South was equal pay legislation campaigned for by the unions. In fact, in both cases the unions negotiated on the basis of a male-female wage differential. In Scandinavian countries there is a much lower wage differential between men and women's earnings than in either the North or the South. This has been attributed to centralised wage negotiations and a commitment to limiting wage dispersion and it has proved more effective than legislation in minimising wage differentials (Callan and Wren, 1994; Lester, 1987). Thus while the South and the UK theoretically have better legislative protection than places like Denmark, the wage gap is lower in the latter (Lester, 1987; Bercusson and Dickens, 1996). The existence of a national minimum wage (which is currently attracting support in the UK and the South) is also advantageous to women since they are particularly likely to be amongst the low paid. However, it is interesting that the proposal by the Conference of Religious Ireland (CORI) (Clark and Healy, 1997) giving a basic income to every adult, and so representing the complete ending of the male breadwinner system, was greeted with derision by senior civil servants.

Whitehouse (1992) found that across OECD countries the size of the (hourly) wage differential between men and women was affected by the

existence of collective bargaining, while there was no clear evidence as regards the effect of legislative measures. She recognised that in some cases the capacity of the unions to regulate the labour market hindered the influx of women into paid employment. Indeed this kind of pattern can be seen in the South where, at least up to the late 1980s, the unions were mainly concerned with the creation of full-time 'male' jobs in manufacturing industries. In the North, on the other hand, casualisation and deregulation were accepted at an earlier stage and hence facilitated women's participation in paid employment. In both cases however, the effectiveness of the Unions in protecting the wages and working conditions of part-time workers was limited. Whitehouse argues, however, that this need not necessarily be so. Thus for example in Sweden, union control over the conditions associated with part-time work (which is predominantly done by women) was such that employers had to look for other ways of achieving flexibility, apart from creating low security, poorly paid, part-time jobs.

Even in Sweden however, it has been noted that at particular points in time and in particular sectors (such as banking in the 1980s) managers acquired greater discretion to set individual weekly wages over and above those agreed collectively. Thus for example they decided at what point on the scale employees entered, when they should be promoted, and how merit payments should be distributed. Acker (1991) noted that overwhelmingly in these situations the net effect was to increase the wage differential. Thus like Rubery and Fagan (1993) and Whitehouse (1992) she concluded that wage differentials were likely to be minimised by wages being collectively negotiated. It is impossible to say why it should be so, although Pollert's (1996: 654) observation that 'Male dominance feeds on itself in terms of vested interests defending the status quo' is provocative.

Organisational Factors

These factors are seen as particularly important in explaining the position of women within the labour force, and in particular, in explaining the persistence of vertical segregation. It has been widely argued that women's absence from senior administrative and management positions reflected the impact of the marriage bar and/or the presence of children. Both of these explanations are increasingly seen as questionable in view of international evidence. Thus for example the proportion of women in senior positions in the Civil Service in the UK is much the same as in Ireland although the marriage bar was removed there in the 1940s. The proportion of women in such positions varies considerably across Europe but is very similar in Denmark and Ireland despite their very different levels of state support

for child-care: (14.4 per cent and 15.1 per cent respectively: United Nations, 1995: 84). Variation also appears to be unrelated to stage of economic development.

Similarly, it appears that although women's educational levels can play a part in increasing their possibilities as regards access to such positions, educational level may facilitate access to positions of expertise but not authority (Savage, 1992). Norris (1987) suggested that socialist/left-wing governments were most likely to reduce vertical segregation—with the presence of right-wing parties being most likely to increase it. However, although this seems plausible in terms of the proportion of women in such positions in Sweden or Hungary, it is obviously not a sufficient explanation since the proportion of women who were administrators or managers was roughly the same in the United States as in Sweden. Furthermore, in the United States and indeed also in Australia, in contrast to the typical European pattern, women's educational expertise appeared to be more than proportionately reflected in their access to positions of authority (United Nations, 1995).

Women in the South show the typical European pattern i.e., constituting a very high proportion of those in the professional services area, and a very low proportion of those in the administrative and managerial areas. These trends reflect various aspects of organisational structure and culture in both the public and private sectors which the state has failed to challenge. For example, the virtual absence of women from senior positions in the local authorities in the South can be seen as reflecting the narrowness of the 'channel' from which such positions are recruited (Mahon, 1996). The absence of women in senior positions in the Health Boards can be seen as related to similar factors, compounded by the absence of a career path from areas of predominantly female employment, such as nursing, into mainstream management positions; and reflecting the tendency for areas of predominantly female employment to be remote from decision-making structures. The absence of women from senior positions also reflects both the very low ratios of promotional posts in female dominated areas of employment and men's greater access to them (the possibility of promotion being 28 to 1 in the case of women moving from staff nurse to assistant matron/matron, as compared with 14 to 1 for men in a similar position; and a 1 in 2 chance for male clerical officers to move into supervisory positions in the administrative structure in the health boards: O'Connor, 1998). Organisational procedures which militate against women's promotion in the public and private sectors, such as all-male interview boards, frequently chaired by retired men whose ideas reflect a stereotypical view of women, are also likely to be important (Mahon, 1996; O'Connor, 1996) as is the tendency to allocate high profile tasks to men (Mahon, 1991; O'Connor,

1998). The persistence of an organisational culture characterised by male prejudice which 'chills' women out has also been highlighted (Mahon, 1991; Barker and Monks, 1994; O'Connor, 1996; 1998). Such phenomena are not, of course, peculiar to Ireland. For the most part however they have been virtually ignored by the state in the South—the persistence of patterns of vertical segregation being perceived as 'natural'. Such a view seems highly questionable in view of the fact that such patterns changed dramatically over an eight-year period in the case of applications for and appointments to principalships in primary schools in the South (Lynch, 1994).

In the North, there is some evidence to suggest that although women are less likely than their counterparts in the South to be in the professional services, they are more likely to be in administrative or management positions. There are methodological difficulties in making such comparisons. However, it is interesting to note that similar trends emerged in the case of senior academic appointments—with women constituting 4 per cent of those at professorial position in the South, where such positions are typically linked to administrative responsibilities, as compared with just over 9 per cent in the North where they are not (Smyth, 1996; Ince, 1996). These differences may also reflect the more rigorous monitoring of appointments in the North. They cannot however, obscure the fact that in both states the overwhelming majority of such positions are held by men.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, we have explored the extent and nature of women's participation in paid employment, North and South. However, mindful of the caveat that there are methodological difficulties in making such comparisons, the most striking differences are the higher proportion of older married women who are in paid employment in the North; the higher proportion of women who are working part-time and the higher proportion who are low paid. These trends are compatible with the depiction of the North as a modified male breadwinner state, where, traditionally and currently, women's participation in paid employment is facilitated, in the context of an expectation of economic dependence on a husband. Low provision of child-care, individual taxation, means-tested benefits, and a deregulated employment policy are currently associated with this pattern in the North.

The South appears to be a strong male breadwinner state insofar as more systematic attempts have been made to exclude women from the labour force and to inhibit their reintegration. A non-individualised taxation system, together with a low level of child-care, means-tested benefits,

and an employment policy focused on the creation of full-time jobs in areas of predominantly male employment further reflects this strong male breadwinner ethos.

Young women in both North and South have similar levels of participation in paid employment. Today, most women North and South work in the service sector, in broadly similar kinds of occupations. Paradoxically however, the commitment of the state in the South to education and to the expansion of middle-class service occupations within the state apparatus, combined with women's high educational performance, has created a situation where roughly two-thirds of those in professional services are women. In the North the proportion of women in professional services is lower, reflecting women's lower educational levels (Breen, Heath and Whelan, this volume). In the North however, women constitute a higher proportion of those in administrative or managerial positions than they do in the South, possibly because of more assiduous monitoring of appointments.

Equal opportunities legislation has been introduced in both North and South since the 1970s. The extent of either state's commitment to the implementation of such legislation in the area of gender is questionable, particularly where it conflicts with policies premised on the idea of a male breadwinner. In a situation where collective bargaining is weak and/or unconcerned with gender issues it is difficult to challenge the kind of organisational practices and processes which perpetuate discrimination.

For both North and South, explanations which focus on individual choice are attractive since they ignore the very real structural parameters within which such choices are made. In particular they make it possible to ignore the prevalence of women amongst the low paid, and men amongst the publicly powerful. They make it possible to ignore the fact that both the North and South are patriarchal societies.

Individual choice explanations also ignore the question of who benefits from the existence of a male breadwinner and from neo-patriarchal patterns within the paid employment areas. Depicting such patterns as freely chosen plays an important part in their legitimisation and obscures part of the reality of women's experiences North and South.

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