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”Creating a room of one’s own”: French farm women, agritourism and the pursuit of empowerment

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1 **Introduction**

2 Invisibility has characterized the experience of women in agriculture (Barthez, 2005;
3 Delphy, 1983; Nicourt, 2014; Rieux & Dahache, 2007). Despite the fact that women have
4 always been integral to food and fiber production, their participation in farming, especially
5 because it took place within the context of the family, remained largely unnoticed (Delphy,
6 1983). French farm women's invisibility has historically been accomplished by both legal
7 and socio-cultural means and can be traced to the contours of peasant society characterized by
8 patriarchy and agrarian ideology (Clearly, 1989; Mendras, 1995; Segelan, 1983).

9 Results of the 2010 French agricultural census appear to challenge this
10 conceptualization by shedding light on a demographic shift: more than one-fourth of all farm
11 operators and/or co-operators are women, up from only eight percent in 1970. Likewise, one-
12 fourth of beginning farmers are women (Wepierre et al., 2012). Since the 1970s, women have
13 altered their agricultural status through inclusion in legal frameworks meant to recognize and
14 protect their interests which has allowed them to gain visibility and voice (Barthez, 2005;
15 Rieux & Dahache, 2008). French law today allows women to be recognized as full farm
16 partners.

17 Studies suggest that women tend to farm differently than most male operators
18 (Dahache, 2014; Rieux & Dahache, 2008). Today's farm woman may operate her own farm
19 independently or may be a co-operating partner with another individual (typically husband).
20 She is more often older than the average farmer—respectively 54 and 51 years old (Wepierre
21 et al., 2012), more educated, and she tends to operate smaller and more diversified farming
22 systems. Female operators are more often engaged in sheep and/or goat milk production, fruit
23 and vegetable farming, or viticulture production (Wepierre et al., 2012). Women are also
24 more likely to open their farm up to the public in the form of farm tourism (Brandth &
25 Haugen, 2011; Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995; Giraud, 2011). In fact, women are popularly

1 claimed to bring new insights and sensitivities to agriculture in general, owing to what are
2 perceived to be their ‘unique’ skills, knowledge and subjectivity. Headlines routinely now
3 explore the meaning of this feminization of agriculture: *Les femmes sont-elles l’avenir de*
4 *l’agriculture* (“Are women the future of agriculture”) (Groult, 2010, p.1)?; “*Les femmes en*
5 *agriculture: Le statut des femmes évolue et l’agriculture y gagne*” (“Women in agriculture :
6 The status of women evolves and agriculture gains”) (Le Sillon, 2013, p. 1); or, *Les*
7 *agricultrices agissent pour l’avenir du monde rural* (“Farm women act in favor of the future
8 of the rural world”) (Ouest France, 2012, p.1).

9 Recently, we (Wright and Annes, 2014) explored how farm women involved in
10 agritourism can build bridges and foster dialogue between farming and non-farming
11 populations. Yet, in this paper, our intent is to move away from assessing what farm women
12 bring to agriculture, but to interrogate the benefits women acquire for *themselves*. Using the
13 case of a farm women’s agritourism network in southern France, we explore the question of
14 women’s empowerment, asking whether participation in farm diversification through
15 agritourism allows farm women to exercise their agency and challenge patriarchy and
16 agrarian ideologies.

17 Farm tourism has gained recent attention¹, but is not new to agriculture. Much of rural
18 Europe has used rural tourism as an economic stream for decades (Oppermann, 1996;
19 Sharpley & Vass, 2006). France introduced financial support systems to help redevelop old
20 farm buildings into guest accommodations in 1954. However, it was only by the end of the
21 1970s, early 1980s, that it gained support from agricultural leaders. Currently, there is
22 increased scrutiny of, and resistance to modern agriculture, creating space for new
23 entrepreneurial climate (Muller, 2009; 1987). Agricultural leaders became wary that
24 productionist agriculture could lead to undesirable consequences for national food production,

¹ Today, three percent of French farms are engaged in tourism (Lerbourg, 2013).

1 ecological well-being, and cultural *patrimoine*, now stress a new production model based on
2 the multiple benefits gained by agricultural diversity (“multifunctional agriculture”).
3 Multifunctional agriculture valorizes production, but it also couples it with the production of
4 other non-market related goods, such as health and nutrition, landscape, and cultural welfare.
5 As a result, new farm activities - traditionally seen to be of little value² - are increasing
6 supported, such as on-farm processing, direct sales, and farm tourism³.

7 Multifunctional agriculture in general, and agritourism in particular, provided women
8 new opportunities to invest in agriculture⁴. In fact, agritourism and gender often intersect.
9 Several studies show that farm women are frequently pioneers in this economic development
10 initiative (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Busby & Rendle, 2000; Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995;
11 McGehee et al., 2007; Oppermann, 1995). Hosting visitors on the farm is suggested by the
12 existing research to afford women the opportunity to move from a position of societal
13 invisibility to assume roles that hold promise for personal empowerment (Cánoves et al.,
14 2004). Brandth and Haugen (2010, p. 425) argue that “engaging in farm tourism implies a
15 change that not only demands new skills and competencies, but may also influence the
16 conditions under which gender relationships, power, and identities are enacted.” Others
17 (Evans & Ilbery, 1996) have discovered it offers no changes in women’s position. Sharpley
18 and Vass (2006) found that farm women operating tourism initiatives in north-eastern rural

² Until then, these farm activities existed but only due to individual initiatives. Agricultural leaders actually did not consider these types of activities legitimate. See the work of Muller (2009; 1987) for a more complete discussion of this point.

³ Growth in farm tourism grew significantly when officials touted it as desirable for multifunctional agriculture and supplied subsidies to encourage its development. Benefits are often touted as numerous: it is often claimed to be a remedy for economic stress (Benjamin, 1994; McGehee et al., 2007); rural development (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1998; Ploeg et al., 2000), nature conservation (Lane, 1994), and cultural consumption (Bessière, 1998; Burton & Wilson, 2006).

⁴ Studies show that, in the 1960s, modernization of agriculture not only pushed farm women out of agriculture, but also from the countryside (Lagrange, 1996). The 1970s are characterized by a significant exodus of rural women—especially among unmarried women who ventured into nearby urban centers in search of employment. Bourdieu (1962; 2002) contends that this female exodus had a significant impact on rural cultural norms, particularly related to marriage, land/patrimony transmission, and the farm division of labor.

1 England to be highly motivated by job satisfaction and a sense of independence that farm
2 tourism provides. They consider this an employment issue, however, we see this outcome as
3 more of a socio-political issue. In the French context, it has been suggested that agritourism
4 provides women with purpose, or a niche to fulfil on the farm (Giraud, 2004; 2007; 2011;
5 Giraud & Rémy, 2013). Giraud (2011) argues that while tourism allowed French women to
6 realize autonomy and to give value to their skills, this autonomy is not unfettered; it occurs
7 within a context of dependence. Women are free to chart their own space for creativity and
8 income generation, yet only to the extent it is agreeable with their husbands. This alerts us to
9 the importance of the broader social structure, such as patriarchy or agrarian ideology, in
10 which tourism is pursued. Patriarchy and agrarian ideologies are lingering expressions of rural
11 France. For instance, Saugeres (2002a; 2002b; 2002c) indicates that, under an agrarian
12 ideology, farm women are perceived as “incomplete farmers.” She examined the
13 representation of farm women in the French Aveyron region—the same region where we
14 conducted this study—and found that women are perceived as lacking an innate knowledge of
15 farming and an embodiment to the land (Saugeres, 2002a), as well as inadequate physical
16 strength to be competent farmers (Saugeres, 2002c). Thus, the extent to which involvement in
17 farm tourism modifies these cultural representations and therefore dismantles agrarian
18 ideology remains unsettled.

19 In this article, we explore how women, ‘create a room of their own’ on the family
20 farm, or how women use agritourism to pursue empowerment. In seeking to examine the
21 empowering effects of agritourism, we have two objectives. Firstly, this work contributes to
22 the conceptualization of empowerment—a concept which has mainly been mainly used to
23 understand the experiences of women in developing countries. This geographic lens allows us
24 to add nuance to our understanding of this process. Secondly, we want to add to the literature
25 on gender and farm tourism in general, and agritourism as a vehicle for women’s

1 empowerment, in particular. Most existing studies are based on field research in Anglo-Saxon
2 and Scandinavian countries. Our research focuses on a French case allowing us to bring a
3 Francophone perspective to the debate.

4

5 **Conceptualizing Empowerment**

6 The title of this paper references the work of English writer Virginia Woolf and her
7 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf's writing is considered a classic feminist treatise
8 on women's rights and basic needs (Brody, 2011; Coleman, 2012; Filimon, 2009; Lemaster,
9 2012). Woolf argues that women's empowerment comes from the acquisition of financial
10 independence and a private (physical) space—a 'room of their own' (Filimon, 2009, p. 26) in
11 which they can work for themselves apart from the demands of husbands, children or others
12 and pursue their personal interests. Lacking of financial resources and/or access to private
13 space, women remain oppressed by patriarchal ideologies and institutions that confer the
14 demands of others upon them (Coleman, 2012).

15 A second scholarly work from Woolf—*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)—adds to the
16 conceptualization of women's experience of subordination in western societies and further
17 refines our understanding of empowerment. In this text, Woolf highlights the everyday
18 activities that constitute women's lives. According to Brody (2011, p. 10) this focus allows
19 the *Mrs. Dalloway* character to “[bring] value to activities important to women that were
20 otherwise trivialized or invisible.” Herein lies a key dimension of empowerment - making
21 visible in the public sphere women's abilities and skills performed in the private sphere.
22 Capitalism and patriarchy often intersect in western societies to make women's work in the
23 private sphere invisible. By rendering transparent that which is unseen, women's roles in both
24 the productive and reproductive spheres can increase in value (Brody, 2011).

1 Woolf's scholarship helps to shed light on the material dimensions of empowerment
2 by stressing the need for financial resources and space for self-expression, as well as the
3 necessity of making visible women's mundane activities. Crucial for understanding the daily
4 lived experience of rural women is an awareness of the significance of spatial dynamics.
5 Historians have documented cases where farm women went months without interaction with
6 others outside of the immediate household. Freedom to visit neighbors or kin, attend
7 community meetings, or church services was infrequent for most rural women, creating the
8 conditions for isolation that, in some cases, was excruciating (Fink, 1992). Cleary (1989)
9 writes that farm life created considerable isolation for French women and this condition was
10 exacerbated by agricultural modernization. In addition to the isolation structured by their
11 remote living conditions and the farming lifestyle, agricultural modernization stripped women
12 of common venues for social interaction. He writes that "[a]mongst the first victims of
13 modernization have been places of female sociability - the communal water well or the village
14 wash-house have vanished along with the local baker or butcher, replaced by the travelling
15 shop" (Cleary, 1986, p. 158). As a result, isolation and loneliness have been of critical
16 importance in understanding rural gender relationships.

17 Whereas Woolf views empowerment as an outcome of the acquisition of material
18 resources, development scholars are more likely to view empowerment as the exercise of
19 personal agency (Ali, 2013), or the "ability to define one's goals and act upon them" (Kabeer,
20 1999, p. 438). This attempt to exercise agency occurs in the context of, and is constrained by,
21 power relations grounded in social structures (Nazneen et al., 2014). Charlier (2006) argues
22 that empowerment necessitates a reconsideration of patriarchy and relations of domination
23 between men and women and it also mandates that we scrutinize other patterns of domination
24 embedded in socio-cultural arrangements, such as racism, colonialism, and heterosexism.

1 Only once we have dismantled the inequalities embedded in these practices, can we initiate a
2 power shift (Charlier, 2006; Kabeer, 1999; 2001).

3 For development scholars, empowerment is transformative; women become agents of
4 their own transformation. However, it is important to note that empowerment is not an end-
5 state, but a dynamic, on-going process (Kabeer, 2001). Drawing upon the work of Foucault,
6 development scholars (Charlier, 2006; Oxaal & Baden, 1997) identify four types of power:
7 “power over”, “power to”, “power with,” and “power within.” “Power over” implies relations
8 of domination and/or subordination. This type of power rests upon control and domination of
9 one group over another and may be given freely or extracted illegitimately. “Power to”
10 includes the ability to make decisions, have authority, seek solutions and exercise creativity. It
11 acknowledges the importance of skills and competencies (human resources) as well as
12 tangible resources. “Power with” underlies the notion of solidarity signaling the capacity to
13 collectively organize in the pursuit of common goals. Lastly, “power within” refers to
14 personal self-esteem, including the ability to see oneself as a change agent. Others suggest
15 that “power inside” also refers to the cultivation of reflexivity or women’s ability to identify
16 the sources of their oppression (Afshar, 1998; Murthy et al., 2008).

17 In short, the expansion of agency is related to the acquisition of three of the four types
18 of power: “power of,” “power with,” and “inside power” (Charlier, 2006; Oxaal & Baden,
19 1997; Williams et al., 1994). Based on this conceptualization of empowerment, and fine-tuned
20 by the inputs of the work of Woolf (1925; 1929), we suggest that farm women’s
21 empowerment in the context of agritourism can be understood as the threefold process of: (1)
22 making decisions, acting upon them, and exercising creativity (“power to”), and, in this
23 process, acquiring new resources and skills, as well as finding one’s personal space on the
24 farm; (2) being able to collectively organize to reach goals (“power with”), and, in this
25 process, collectively gaining new resources and skills; (3) identifying sources of oppression

1 and building self-esteem (“power within”), that can be approached as challenging dominant
2 cultural representations and making visible in the public sphere abilities and skills performed
3 in private.

4 In the following section, we present the case we use to explore farm women’s
5 empowerment in the context of agritourism.

6

7 **The Case: *Réseau de Visites de Ferme***

8 *Réseau de Visites de Ferme* (RVF) is an agritourism network of farm women located
9 in Aveyron, France, devoted to educating tourists about the technical and cultural aspects of
10 sheep farming⁵. Agriculture remains central to the economic portfolio of Aveyron, employing
11 15-20 percent of the labor force (Frayssignes, 2011). Its origins lie in the small scale agro-
12 pastoral system, but today it is known for highly specialized sheep farming which produces
13 milk for the Roquefort cheese market. Roquefort is a blue cheese made of milk derived
14 primarily from Lacaune sheep. Its distinctive blue-green vein is created by injecting penicillin
15 and allowing the cheese to ripen in the limestone caves located beneath its namesake village -
16 Roquefort-sur-Soulzon.

17 The Network was launched in 1993 by two of its current members. Members welcome
18 tourists to their family farms to provide a *goûters à la ferme*, or ‘farm snack’ - a popular form
19 of farmstead hospitality in France (Bessière, 1998). The snack is accompanied by a guided
20 tour where the host shares knowledge of milk production and the cultural heritage of sheep
21 farming along with the natural amenities of the area that make Roquefort distinctive and
22 globally recognized. Each member of the Network offers roughly the same services: first, the
23 educational tour, then the snack, typically consisting of cheese, wine, and desert. Membership

⁵ Aveyron belongs to the southern Midi-Pyrenees region and is a landscape of geological diversity composed of massive and craggy mountains, deep gorges, and serene meadows. The high limestone plateau known as the *Grands Causses* runs through the region and is made up of a series of underground caves.

1 in RVF is contingent upon possessing a suitable ‘old’ barn in which to host guests. The
2 leadership of RVF prefer to keep the Network small; at its largest there were six members;
3 currently there are four.

4 We use RVF as a case to explore the potentialities of agritourism for farm women’s
5 empowerment. The age of this Network (almost 20 years) is particularly relevant. This 20-
6 year experience allows for a better assessment of empowerment outcomes associated with
7 membership. Moreover, as stated in the literature (Kabeer, 2001), empowerment is a dynamic
8 process which is better observed over time.

9 To understand how the involvement of these farm women in RVF contribute to their
10 empowerment, we focus on the following three questions based on our conceptualization of
11 empowerment: (1) How does participation in RVF reflect abilities to design and manage their
12 own economic activity? By carrying out this project, does it allow farm women to acquire
13 financial independence and a space of their own on the farm? (2) How does participation in
14 RVF help farm women reach their goals and to acquire additional skills? Finally, (3) how
15 does participation in RVF contribute to challenging dominant cultural representations of farm
16 women as well as reflecting adequately contemporary farm women’s daily experience?
17 Related to this question is the issue of whether participation fosters women’s confidence.

18

19 **Research Methods**

20 To answer these questions, we primarily used qualitative semi-structured interviews.
21 In order to have an in-depth understanding of the Network, efforts were made to interview all
22 the current members of the RVF network (four members). In addition, one former member
23 was also interviewed as she had only recently resigned. Therefore, we interviewed a total of
24 five women ranging in ages between 45 and 62. Four interviewees (three current members

1 and the former member) are full-time farmers working with either their husband or son⁶, while
2 the fourth member has the status of farm employee. The farms with which these women are
3 associated range in size from 80 to 110 hectares and between 450 and 550 ewes are milked.
4 All farms have been in their husband's family for at least three generations. In addition to
5 being in charge of the farm tourism activity, the women also were responsible for milking the
6 sheep twice daily. All women were also responsible for the management of the farm records,
7 and some engage in other farm activities, such as poultry and gardening. Four out of the five
8 interviewees had a previous career before becoming officially/legally involved on the farm⁷;
9 three grew up on a farm, but none of them had formal agricultural training. Finally, two
10 interviewees were among the founders of the Network, one entered it a couple of years after
11 its creation, and another joined one year ago. This diversity provides a broader range of
12 perspectives on experiences, motivations, and benefits associated with Network membership.

13 Data were collected in 2012 and each of the five interviews were conducted at the
14 respondent's farm and ranged in length from 1 ½ - 4 hours. Interviews were conducted in
15 French, tape-recorded, and later partially transcribed and translated. Both authors were
16 present for the interviews as was a language interpreter. Interviews consisted of
17 approximately 40 open and closed-ended questions covering subjects such as farm history,
18 farm and agritourism organization and interaction, motivations, gender dynamics, and future
19 visions. In each case, researchers were also given a guided tour of the farm. Each respondent
20 has been assigned pseudonym to shield her identity.

21 Interviews form the main source of data in our analysis, however, we also conducted
22 participatory observation and document analysis. Each author assumed the role of tourist on
23 two separate occasions and took part in a farm visit along with other guests. The visit allowed

⁶ These four women are involved in a GAEC (*Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun*), a legal structure allowing two or more individuals to enter into a business partnership, sharing the decision-making, the work and the benefits (the contractees are considered as co-operators).

⁷ Interviewees were involved in nursing, social work and secretarial work prior to marriage.

1 us to observe the interaction between host and guests and to experience the visit as a tourist.
2 We also analyzed a number of documents such as advertising brochures and website. These
3 data sources do not explicitly appear in the following results section. They mainly help allay
4 challenges to internal validity by allowing us to better contextualize our understanding of this
5 Network and to corroborate interview findings.

6 A general inductive approach to data analysis was used. Both authors systematically
7 read and coded each transcript which resulted in the emergence of significant textual themes.
8 The identified themes were analyzed based on their congruence with concepts from the
9 empowerment literature.

10 Our research design provides us with an in-depth understanding of the experience of
11 these five current/past members of RVF, yet, there are limitations to these data that should be
12 noted. Given the small sample size as well as the homogeneity in our respondents', it is not
13 possible to determine if these findings represent all women agritourism entrepreneurs. We
14 offer these data to ignite further scrutiny of how empowerment unfolds via women's
15 involvement in farm tourism. In particular, we believe this case offers relevant insights on
16 factors both contributing to, and thwarting, empowerment.

17

18 **Findings**

19 In this section, we analyze how involvement in agritourism contributes to
20 empowerment. We specifically focus on the origin of the initiative and daily operations which
21 demonstrate that, through farm tourism, women are able to create a space of their own on the
22 farm allowing them to gain "power to," "power with" and "power within."

23

24 "Power to":

1 Here, we explore the following questions: How does participation in RVF reflect the
2 abilities of women to conduct and manage their own economic endeavor, and, by carrying out
3 this initiative, does it allow them to acquire financial independence and a space of their own
4 on the farm? We examine agritourism motivations as well as strategies for realizing this goal.
5 We specifically the acquisition of material resources and of space.

6 Upon marriage each of the women settled onto their husband's farm where he, along
7 with his immediate family, resided. Three of the five women, literally moved into the same
8 dwelling with their new in-laws, which was typical of French farm families until the 1970s
9 (Bourdieu, 1962; Mendras, 1995). Three had been raised on a farm, but none of them intended
10 to become farmers. At the time of marriage, all but one was employed in the local village..
11 After some years on the farm, each of the women began to adopt tasks to contribute to the
12 overall welfare of the farm. They gradually left their paid jobs and devoted increasing time to
13 child rearing, household maintenance, and farm activities typical of French women, such as
14 milking the sheep, bookkeeping, and assisting their husbands and/or sons with the birthing of
15 lambs. Over time, they each became an official full time farm co-operator. Each, however,
16 also accentuated a sense of loneliness and isolation that they experienced on the farm.
17 Repeatedly, respondents bemoaned the limited social networks and their desire for increased
18 human interaction. Jeanne explains:

19 I was a nurse. Of course, I had the kids, but, at home, at times, I was bored! It was
20 important for me to have relationships. I thought that creating this activity -welcoming
21 people to the farm - would help me to recreate those relationships I was missing.
22 When I was a nurse, I really enjoyed interacting with other people. Then, I ended up
23 on a farm, milking sheep, taking care of lamb births... you know, a ewe does not speak
24 too much!

25 The desire to conduct a project - something that they could call their own - motivated the
26 women to initiate their agritourism business. Each entrepreneur launched their business once
27 their children were older.

1 My children were older, less demanding. On the farm, my husband and I were in a
2 routine where there was not too much work for me. I also wanted to meet people. I
3 needed social interaction (Nathalie).

4
5 There is also the fact that at some point, there is a time when the kids are grown up,
6 when the farm is under a cruising mode, when there is less work...then, for a lot of
7 women, it [agritourism] is a way to meet the outside world, to do something, to
8 conduct a project (Véronique).

9
10 To our surprise, generating additional income on the farm was not the primary motivation for
11 launching this agritourism activity. As expressed by Véronique, their motivations were not
12 only to meet people outside the farm, but also to “conduct a project” of her own, in order to
13 find legitimacy - a sense of purpose on the family farm. Nathalie echoes this sentiment when
14 she says: “it makes you feel valuable to conduct a project. It makes all human beings [feel]
15 valuable.”

16 Once the personal decision was made to embark upon agritourism, each of the women
17 set about amassing appropriate resources; the first was the husband’s consent.

18 My husband was into farm unions, he asked a lot of support from me. I received a lot
19 of people here, at home, I had to stand in for him on the farm. I was telling him that I
20 needed my own activities, my own projects! He would tell me: “For God sake, why
21 can’t you stay home? (Jeanne)

22
23 Jeanne’s husband’s lack of enthusiasm did not stop her from proceeding, but in order to do so
24 she had to negotiate traditional gender expectations.

25 I am well organized. If I leave my house, my bedroom is tidy, meals are ready,
26 everything needs to be planned ahead. It’s just a question of organization, otherwise,
27 you know, people could say that Jeanne did this or that, went to this place or that one,
28 but when it comes to her own house...

29
30 Similarly, Nathalie faced strict gender expectations not only from her husband, but her in-
31 laws. She wanted to enroll in a cheese-making course requiring her to leave the family and go
32 to northern France for four months. Her in-laws expressed concern, fearful of neighbors
33 would say if she left her family for such a period.

1 Once acceptance was granted, each of the women embarked upon acquiring material
2 resources. They each first negotiated with their husband's - and in some cases, their in-laws -
3 for the use of the old stone barn on the property. These barns were typically being used as
4 storage facilities since they were no longer suitable for modern-day sheep production. The
5 barns became both their own physical space to conduct their agritourism work as well as
6 representative of a symbolic space to exercise their own autonomy and creativity. Jeanne
7 articulates well the freedom she had to stage her barn to her own liking without interference:

8 My husband did not disagree with the project. He was thinking about it too. He had
9 his own idea on what to do and how, but he let me set up my project alone. The first
10 year, there was still hay in the barn because of the cold [weather]. With the money I
11 had, I had electricity installed and I restored the main room. This money was my
12 money. It was not farm money. I set up my account. I have always had a separate
13 account for my visits. With the money I had, I always managed to do what I wanted.

14 Jeanne's statement emphasizes that launching her business required both physical
15 space and financial income. Using her personal income gave her autonomy, echoing Woolf's
16 (1929) call for women to have a "room of one's own" and "money of one's own" if they are
17 to be less subordinated to men. Through the development of agritourism, farm women created
18 a "space of resistance" within patriarchal and agrarian structures where they could express
19 themselves. They were able to chip away at the isolation that had plagued them for years and
20 find their own outlet affording social interaction, creativity, and income generation.

21 Most of the women held to cultural convention and restored their barns with traditional
22 elements customarily found in an old barn. Antique scythes, wagon wheels, and ox yokes are
23 often hung on the walls as works of art. Each of the women also attempted to evoke a very
24 rustic, traditional imagery of old world France, but each of the women have also customized
25 the space and used the venue to imprint her personality. Madeleine displays her fossils
26 connection; Brigitte sells her homemade jams; Nathalie shares her past-time with visitors by
27 hanging from the ceiling rafters a large Harley Davidson® Motorcycle flag, and, Veronique

1 installed a modern (and state-certified) kitchen and toilets to rent her barn for other catering
2 events.

3 While all barns have in common their age (built circa 1850-1880) and their
4 architecture (limestone harvested from the region), inside, they differ as they reflect the
5 diversity of their caretakers. In this way, the women of RVF have acquired “power to” define
6 their goals, to act upon them, and to express creativity (Charlier, 2006; Oxaal & Baden, 1997;
7 Williams et al., 1994).

8

9 ‘Power with’:

10 Empowerment should not only be considered as an individual process, it should be
11 also approached as a collective journey (Charlier, 2006; Kabeer, 2001; Umut Bespiran, 2011).
12 In this section, we want to understand how agritourism helps participants reach their goals and
13 to acquire new resources as well as additional knowledge and skills. We discuss the collective
14 nature of participation in RVF by examining the social relationships of our interviewees and
15 the knowledge participants gained from this Network.

16 Our research shows that, even if the RVF members received only modest economic
17 capital from their farm tourism, they acquired invaluable social, human and symbolic capital.
18 Much of the revenue stimulated is devoted to barn restoration and covering other expenses;
19 they do not generate large sums. Even among those hosting the most tourists annually -
20 around 3,000 guests – their profits contribute no more than ten percent of the total farm
21 income. But, the women were adamant that it was other non-financial resources that drove
22 them. Madeleine explains:

23 My neighbors, they tell me that it looks like so much work. They only see this side.
24 It’s hard work, it’s true, but it’s also a satisfaction. Interactions are so important! It’s
25 so important to be able to interact with people from everywhere.
26

1 Each of the women echoed Madeline’s assessment; participants were driven to launch their
2 initiative by the desire for social interaction. The opportunity to interact with visitors and to
3 “travel the world while staying at home”, as Jeanne put it, was their primary impetus for
4 opening their farms to the public. Feelings of isolation and lacking a sense of purpose on the
5 farm motivated the women to develop their business. They could have embarked upon farm
6 tourism alone, but these women joined the Network because it also afforded them the chance
7 to develop relationships with like-minded women. Nathalie explains:

8 Being in the Network allowed me to feel less isolated; I was with people who knew
9 this activity. I gained and saved time. Also, a network is always a strength. The
10 Network is well-known ... They [the members of the Network] knew about farm
11 tourism; they had knowledge to share, and it fitted with what I wanted to do.

12
13 Members were welcomed into a Network that was highly regarded and had
14 considerable knowledge about how to organize a successful agritourism operation. This was
15 no small asset according to the respondents. The possibility of being mentored by
16 experienced entrepreneurs meant that skill development could proceed quickly and much time
17 and energy could be saved. In the early days, however, the originators –Madeleine and Jeanne
18 – participated in programs offered by the *Parc Régional Grands Causses* which provided
19 invaluable resources and training opportunities. They were assisted in grant writing which
20 awarded them funding to help offset the costs of barn renovation, but the fundamental training
21 was something they all emphasized as critical to their personal development and confidence.

22 Jeanne articulates the types of knowledge they acquired:

23 “They [trainers] explained to us the type of tour we should give to people. They taught
24 us how to organize a visit, how to explain, how to create a tour, a snack, how to have
25 people taste our produce. [With this new knowledge] we were able to develop three
26 different types of visits.”

27
28 In addition to acquiring knowledge about farm tour organization, membership in the
29 Network also allowed women to gain technical knowledge of cheese, its production and
30 proper tasting qualities. Now, older members pass this down to newer members when they

1 enter the Network, in this way reproducing cultural and techno-scientific knowledge. Nathalie
2 remembers:

3 It [being in the Network] brought me a lot of knowledge about cheese. When I entered,
4 there were four of us, and the Network had been going on for more than 15 years.
5 They shared with me a lot of information and knowledge which they had put into
6 practice for many years. [They taught me] how they welcome people, the way they
7 were doing the snack, etc. At the beginning, I visited all of the farms to see how they
8 were doing things.

9
10 Evident from the comments above and those of other members is the role that the
11 Network played, to forge bonds of community. These relationships helped them create the
12 solidarity needed to overcome isolation and assist each other in organizing their operations
13 demonstrating their ability to exercise “power with” (Charlier, 2006; Oxaal & Baden, 1997;
14 Williams et al., 1994).

15

16 ‘Power Within’:

17 Empowerment is not only about defining one’s goals and acting upon them, it is also
18 about cultivating and exercising “power within.” It requires the ability to be reflexive about
19 one’s circumstances which can lead to an understanding of opportunities for growth, as well
20 as awareness of the sources of their oppression. Therefore, we analyze the degree to which
21 participation in RVF helps members challenge dominant cultural representations of farm
22 women and reveals the complexity of their everyday experience. We also address whether this
23 participation may foster women’s self-esteem.

24 We must begin by reinforcing what may appear obvious, but the very visibility of farm
25 women is far from insignificant. As farm tourism entrepreneurs, the women are no longer
26 relegated to the sidelines of agriculture and considered ‘farm help’ (Barbieri & Mshenga,
27 2008; Brandth & Haugen, 2010; Jennings & Stehlik, 1999; Mendras, 1995), but they are
28 clearly visible and able to use tourism to craft a professional image and demonstrate

1 specialized knowledge and authority to the public. Agritourism not only provides an
2 opportunity to challenge dominant representations, but it also provides a chance to appear as
3 agricultural professionals. As shown by Saugères (2002a; 2002b; 2002c), French farm women
4 are often perceived as “incomplete farmers.” The tour given by the women is an opportunity
5 to demonstrate their knowledge of agriculture and to challenge this traditional image.

6 A professional identity is constructed at the very onset with marketing materials that
7 work to de-emphasize farming and farm tourism as a way of life, or hobby, but as a
8 “profession”. The brochure reads, “Animated by the desire to share their passion for their job,
9 four *agricultrices*’ [farm women] invite you to discover their job in all its richness/intensity.”
10 Historically, farm women were referred to as a *paysanne or fermière*. Around the mid-century
11 – during rapid adoption of industrial farming methods, the modern label of *agriculteur* began
12 to be applied to farmers who embraced production for commercial markets with intensive and
13 scientific methods (Bessière, 2012). At the same time, a woman similarly engaged in
14 commercial agriculture began to be referred to as an *agricultrice*. By invoking the label
15 *agricultrices*, Network members align themselves with this professional, modern status.

16 A professional identity was reinforced by each member, but was most noticeable
17 among those younger who appeared eager to construct a professional agritourism business.
18 Nathalie left her husband, two sons, and the family farm for four months to attend cheese
19 school due to her belief that proper training was crucial. Professionalism is also accompanied
20 by the assertion of independence and autonomy. Women resisted traditional roles where they
21 were ascribed to subservient tasks. Perhaps the most forceful in her demand for autonomy was
22 Veronique who agreed to “work on the farm and in agritourism only if [she] was in charge to
23 the same degree as [her] husband and brother-in-law.”

24 Each of the members saw themselves as the primary agritourism entrepreneur and the
25 husband as secondary. This relocates women in positions of authority and demotes men to the

1 role of helper. Even though Veronique claimed her husband was an equal partner, she
2 described his role as being primarily confined to maintenance and repair. His regularly
3 occurring visible role was to entertain tourists; when she removes herself to retrieve the snack
4 he performs a sheepdog demonstration.

5 According to Brigitte, she and her husband also embarked upon agritourism as a
6 partnership. They divide leadership of the tours even though rural gendered norms frown on
7 this work for men:

8 My husband likes leading the tours, but he says that most farmers around here would
9 not, rural areas are patriarchal where men drive tractors and women milk. Other
10 farmers would make fun of him if they knew he hosted visitors on the farm...I don't
11 consider welcoming guests as feminine. My husband prepares flowers and jam, but
12 some do.

13 These cases suggest that women's professionalism in agritourism casts men in secondary
14 roles. Now men play the part of 'helper' and assist in uncompensated work.

15 Facility with science and technology is another way in which women demonstrate
16 professionalism. Farm women conduct the tour in ways that demonstrate a vast knowledge of
17 complicated social, biological, and technological processes. Tours highlight state-of-the-art
18 buildings equipped with the latest technology, such as milking machines and hay driers.
19 Women commonly reported that the guests were unprepared to see such 'modern' technology
20 and production practices. Madeleine said, "when they arrive they are surprised to see the way
21 we work, the buildings, the milking room. They see the milking room tiled and they say 'it's a
22 real lab that you have.'" Veronique's overview shows how she disseminates highly technical
23 information.

24 I start it in the area where we dry hay where there is enough space and were I set up
25 explanatory posters. There, I explain how to manage a sheep herd. Everyone can ask
26 questions. I explain everything, births, lambs' sales, why milk control, old ewe's sales
27 - the entire production cycle. Then, I tell them about the principle of in-door hay
28 drying which takes place right behind them, the feeding of the sheep. Then we walk
29 across the sheep barn itself, I tell them why there are different areas, how it works. I
30 start the automatic feeder to show them how it works. After, I go into the milking
31 room where I start the milking machines so that they can see how it works and we take
32 advantage of this moment to speak about what happens with the milk and its process

1 into Roquefort cheese. We speak about the milk, its components, all the sanitary
2 controls, traceability, the arrival of the milk into the cheese factory then the Roquefort
3 caves.

4 Each of the women showcased state-of-the-art production practices and reinforced adherence
5 to quality assurance standards. Guests were exposed to stainless steel bulk tanks that store
6 milk at precise temperatures, equipment used to test milk for pathogens, and machines that
7 can milk 500-600 sheep in an hour. They are shown posters that detail scientific nutritional
8 formulas that vary by the season; they are instructed on the importance of lactation cycles,
9 genetic improvements, and artificial insemination. Veronique incorporates a PowerPoint
10 presentation that explains the origins of *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) regulations
11 for Roquefort. Jeanne recounts the program of selective breeding that has improved milk
12 production over the last 20 years and Madeline adds fluency in international agricultural
13 policy when she discusses farm subsidies.

14 To this vast body of knowledge, the women are also able to share culinary acumen that
15 is equally in demand. Madeleine explains with pride that:

16 Everybody wants my recipe for 'pain d'épices' jam. I give a lot of recipes! Even
17 recipes they did not try. For example, I tell them to try the Roquefort and leaks quiche,
18 to take a fig, stuff it with Roquefort and put it in the oven. It's delicious! After that,
19 people send me emails. Sometimes, I can't even reply to all of them!

20 Within the household, Madeleine's culinary prowess might have gone unrecognized or
21 trivialized, but an audience for her skills has provided her with a new avenue in which to
22 enhance her confidence.

23 Presenting themselves as professionals within sheep industry rather than as "helpers"
24 is not the only challenge to dominant representations that agritourism affords. Our
25 interviewees also position themselves against dominant, idealized, even romanticized,
26 representations of farmers. The farm women reveal themselves through their bodies by
27 dressing to look the part of an authentic farmer. Some agritourism operators find it useful to
28 wear culturally specific attire to evoke some desired sentiment (Brandth & Haugen, 2010), but

1 the women in the Network eschew costumes in favor of modelling a twentieth-first century
2 representation of a farm woman. Veronique is often told by guests that they did not expect to
3 “meet a farm woman looking like [her]. Maybe they were expecting someone older.. They tell
4 me that they were not expecting a modern, dynamic woman like me.” Nathalie also manages
5 an impression of herself bent on challenging conventional representations:

6 Sometimes the kids tell me they want to see the *fermière* [farm woman]. I tell them I
7 am the *fermière*. It is true that in kid’s books the *fermière* is more likely to appear with
8 a scarf holding a basket. I think there is a difference for some people between what
9 they expect and what they see... I wear a pair of jeans and a t-shirt ... personally I
10 think we should show people that they are not arriving where *bouseux* [nednecks] live.

11 In a similar defensive vein, Madeleine adds that she wants them to know that she is not
12 “*bagnard*,” or a convict, that she is not chained to the farm toiling endlessly, but enjoys the
13 same activities as urban residents. “Before coming, they have a lot of clichés in their
14 mind...Parisians still see us with clogs and boots.”

15 Just as the enacting of professionalism and a diverse skill-set reinforces one’s sense of
16 self, so too does the opportunity to lower personal masks and reveal their true selves. Woolf
17 contends that making public the mundane, taken-for-granted, and invisible is a crucial step
18 toward empowerment (Brody, 2011). Under patriarchy, only men’s work (outside the
19 household) is valued and women’s private work is under-valued and often invisible (Coleman,
20 2012; Delphy, 1983). By welcoming tourists on their farm, Network members showcase the
21 reality of their lives. Sophie makes an effort to ensure guests have an authentic experience. “I
22 try to have them understand that we work here...We clean up, but it should not be too
23 perfect...it is a working farm.” Jeanne punctuates the multiple demands modern women have
24 on their shoulders by communicating the multi-tasking she does. When they call for an
25 appointment, I tell them “that they cannot come 30 minutes late because otherwise I would be
26 late to complete my other chores like the milking.”

27 Each of the women also reported having their tours interrupted by family members
28 from time to time. Children barge in with a question, husbands stop by to greet the guests,

1 phones ring, and oven timers buzz forcing women to briefly excuse themselves to tend to
2 other responsibilities. Such disruptions bring to light the numerous activities that require
3 women's attention and, at the same time, communicate a blurring of productive and
4 reproductive spheres.

5 Challenging persistent cultural representations and offering a more authentic image of
6 their lives gives our research participants more "power within", allowing them to see
7 themselves as agents of change on their farm. Women additionally noted improvements in
8 their self-esteem once they realized they were capable of managing their own business.
9 Véronique, reflecting on her experience before and after she launched her business, explains:
10 "I was not the same person. I was staying at home, I was working on the farm without being
11 paid and without opening my mouth. Now, it's different... I am like Roquefort cheese, I have
12 character!"

13

14 **One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward?**

15 The acquisition of "power to," "power with," and "power within," demonstrates a
16 growing empowerment of the farm women of RVF. Within a patriarchal environment, where
17 heterosexism and agrarian ideology persist, these women created spaces of resistance. As
18 suggested by Woolf (1925), these women found in an old tattered barn a place where they can
19 express their creativity and pursue their goals. The extent to which this barn constitutes a
20 space of resistance could be questioned, however. In fact, existing literature suggests that
21 empowerment is also about changing power relations between men and women as well as
22 other socio-cultural structures of domination (Ali, 2013; Longwe, 1990). If this activity allows
23 women to challenge cultural representations of farm women which portray them as
24 incomplete farmers and/or reduces them to farm helpers, other unequal power relations persist
25 which may impede empowerment.

1 Participants were able to successfully conduct their own project, and create a “space of
2 their own” on the farm. However, they could not have done so without their husband’s
3 accommodation—this questions the extent to which they can define themselves, their
4 objectives and act upon them. For example, Véronique states that: “It would be hard for a
5 woman to set up such an activity if her husband disagrees with it.” Madeleine recalls
6 previous members who were forced to leave the Network due to spousal disapproval.

7 In the past some women left the Network because they got involved without really
8 their husband’s consent. So, they [the husband’s] were fed up with seeing people
9 “parading” on their farm. They did not like it! For example, Christine Delmas left
10 because of disagreements with her brother-in-law. Another, Monique Courderc, quit
11 because her son was making his own cheese, so she did not have any more
12 possibilities to welcome guests.

13
14 The women mentioned above abandoned their goals because it conflicted with activities led
15 by males. The case of Huguette Labarde is particularly telling:

16 Huguette Labarde set up all the activity to launch her farm tourism business. She has a
17 very nice old mansion, a real beauty. [The first time she hosted tourists] her
18 husband...he saw *one* bus in his farmyard... He told her: “listen, this was the first bus,
19 it’s also going to be the last one.” When he saw all these people being unloading from
20 the bus, he didn’t like it. She cried. She had done everything with us. She had bought
21 the fabric for tablecloths, plates, glasses (...). It was hard for her.

22
23 These cases show that, for farm women, the creation of a “space of their own” is contingent
24 upon male approval. Even though women created and maintained their own personal space
25 for income and creativity expression, its presence was contingent upon the good will of their
26 husbands, sons or brothers-in-law⁸. Huguette’s experience also reminds us that farm property
27 is also considered male property. Should agritourism activity conflict with farming activities
28 controlled by men, it might come to an end. If, to the view of male family members, the
29 tourism activity is the domain of women, this activity remains secondary. This finding echoes
30 existing literature on the different values attributed to farm work. Even if such diversification

⁸ Our data do not allow us to conclude why certain men would authorize women to conduct agritourism. We can hypothesize that individual characteristics as well as age, parental education, educational training, involvement in organizations outside the farm, previous employment might be responsible.

1 is perceived as a remedy for economic stress, it is frequently de-valORIZED in comparison with
2 traditional farm work (Giraud & Rémy, 2013).

3 In addition, women in the Network reproduce traditional gender roles by welcoming,
4 nurturing, serving, and cooking for the guests. In this way, their present organization of farm
5 tourism may not foster the social change needed to inspire empowerment. This reproduction
6 of traditional gender roles reinforces the consequences of the modernization of agriculture
7 which assigns women to the domestic sphere (Giraud & Rémy, 2013). Moreover, when it
8 comes to explaining why the Network is only made up of women, essentialist arguments
9 about women's skills arise. Madeleine suggests that: "we [women] have a charisma, a
10 feminine sensibility...that people tell me that I pass on the passion of our profession."
11 Reflecting on the same issue, Brigitte says: "I think that we [women] have a sensitivity,
12 something different that men don't have." In both cases, the women explain involvement in
13 farm tourism using inherent characteristics perceived to be shared among all women. They
14 use similar essentialist descriptions to explain men's lack of interest or involvement in farm
15 tourism. Nathalie explains:

16 Often, in this region, what's related to agritourism is related to women. Ok, it's true
17 that first of all, it's a question of time, I don't go work into the fields. So, the time I am
18 here, I can welcome people. And also, men are more bad-tempered. I am here, so it's
19 not a problem.
20

21 Such explanations tend to position individuals into mutually exclusive categories which
22 become reified over time and used to justify unequal opportunities. By perpetrating this
23 essentializing discourse, the women were unable to identify the source of their oppression,
24 which can limit their ability to act upon it, or to cultivate, "power within."
25

26 **Conclusion**

27 The objectives of this paper were (1) to contribute to the conceptualization of
28 empowerment, and, (2) to add to the literature on gender and tourism by specifically looking

1 at agritourism as a potential vehicle for farm women’s empowerment. We have shown that
2 involvement in farm tourism has both contributed to farm women’s empowerment and
3 reproduced challenges to empowerment.

4 In order to conceptualize empowerment, we combined the work of English writer
5 Virginia Woolf with the model put forward by development scholars which implies three
6 types of power - “power to,” “power with,” and “power within” - that facilitates
7 empowerment. We showed that through participation in the Network and the management of
8 farm tourism, farm women experienced “power to” conduct and assume responsibility for
9 their business and exercise creativity. Membership in the Network also facilitated “power
10 with” through the creation of solidarity. Participants found support, shared experience, skills
11 and new knowledge. Lastly, in the Network, they cultivated “power within” by developing
12 self-confidence and challenging dominant representations portraying farm women as
13 “incomplete farmers” that reduced them to the role of farm helper. In fact, they are able to
14 craft a professional image by demonstrating specialized knowledge and authority to the
15 public. Through their professional interaction with the tourists, they revealed the reality of
16 their everyday experience.

17 However, if the process of empowerment has been engaged, the persistence of a
18 patriarchal culture and agrarian ideology also mitigates this development. Our data suggest
19 that empowerment potential is constrained and calls to advance farm tourism as a vehicle for
20 women’s empowerment may be overstated. In line with the scholarship of Giraud (2011), our
21 findings substantiate the notion that farm women experience autonomy, within dependence. In
22 other words, the women were able to pursue and realize autonomy but not as fully as they
23 desired - they also navigated structures meant to constrain their agency. In fact, as suggested
24 by Nazneen et al., “developing a sense of agency does not necessarily lead to loosening
25 patriarchal structures” (2014:55). The women in this study demonstrate that their ability to

1 pursue farm tourism is contingent upon male approval, a recognition of the persistence of
2 “power over” women. Male approval is contingent upon the lack of interference with primary
3 farming activities controlled and managed by men. It is also contingent upon the maintenance
4 of traditional gender performances that reinforce the smooth functioning of primary
5 agricultural work. In other words, the activity must refrain from disrupting men’s work,
6 family meal preparation, household work, or other farm chores assigned to women.

7 In this paper we have focused our lens on the empowerment potential of farm tourism
8 given the accolades often bestowed upon this strategy as a tool for rural economic
9 development. This question clearly requires more empirical research and may be expected to
10 differ by region, the presence of competing economic opportunities, or tourism type. Also,
11 results may be expected to differ based on respondents’ personal characteristics. Studying the
12 experience of farm women who operate as sole operator, or as co-operator with other women,
13 might bring different insights. In fact, fostering the empowerment process of farm women
14 may be contingent upon redefining the heterosexual couple as the household norm and as the
15 pillar of French modern agriculture. In other words, women are unable to share power with
16 men when their activity takes place within the family farm unit. The family farm as a mode of
17 production, blurs the line between domestic and professional spheres, allowing circulation and
18 therefore mutual reinforcement of long standing patterns of oppression from one sphere to
19 another. Breaking this legacy is a pivotal step toward empowerment.

20
21
22

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