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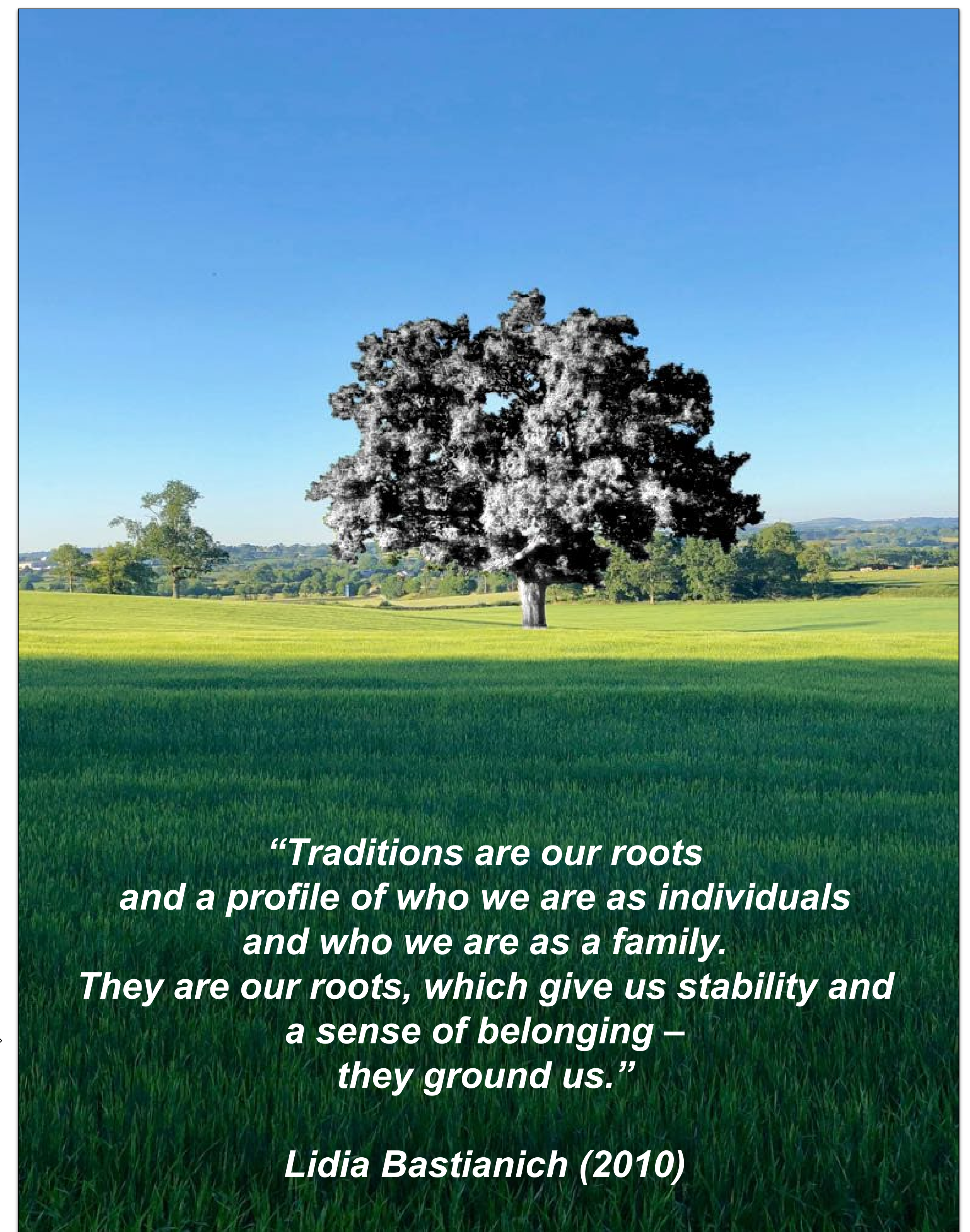
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# Emotional Geographies of 'Belonging' In Northern Ireland: Challenges For 'Remaining In & Leaving' Family Farming

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## INTRODUCTION:

- The family farm and the agri-food industry play a more significant economic role in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK with an annual turnover of £4.5bn from 24,956 active farms (DAERA, 2017).
- Family farming remains at the 'heart of rural communities.
- A patrilineal farming structure & identity continues to be important in Northern Ireland (Price, 2012).
- The agricultural and rural landscape has endured many challenges due to globalisation, modernisation, demographic changes etc.
- Government interventions including the EU have shaped the countryside and ultimately farmers' decision making (Johnston & Scott, 1998).
- Policies aimed at restructuring farming (encouraging older farmers to retire) have only been partially successful. There continues to be delayed retirement in Northern Ireland.
- This research asks if perceptions of rural 'belonging' contribute to Northern Ireland's on-going patrilineal farming structure and identity? Might this be an obstacle or an asset to changing rural communities?
- Past studies on agricultural restructuring have largely taken an economic focus: here the focus is on farmers' emotional attachment to the family farm and how this influences their decision to retire.



## RESEARCH AIM:

To go 'beyond the farm gate' to apply an emotional rather than an economic framework to explore how patrilineal farmers (over 50 years) emotional sense of rural 'belonging' and identity within contemporary rural landscapes, contributes to their retirement decision making in Northern Ireland.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

- Illustrates (see fig. 1) how the agricultural and rural landscape has evolved/developed through rural restructuring to understand contemporary challenges for farmers' decision making.
- Emotional Geography then connects the Patrilineal farmers' identity to a 'sense of belonging' and 'place belonging' to illustrate how emotions of 'belonging' can be the connective tissue that informs farmers' retirement decision making.
- Emotional Geography allows us to link places and spaces by our emotional experiences which can 'shape society and space' (Anderson & Smith, 2001).

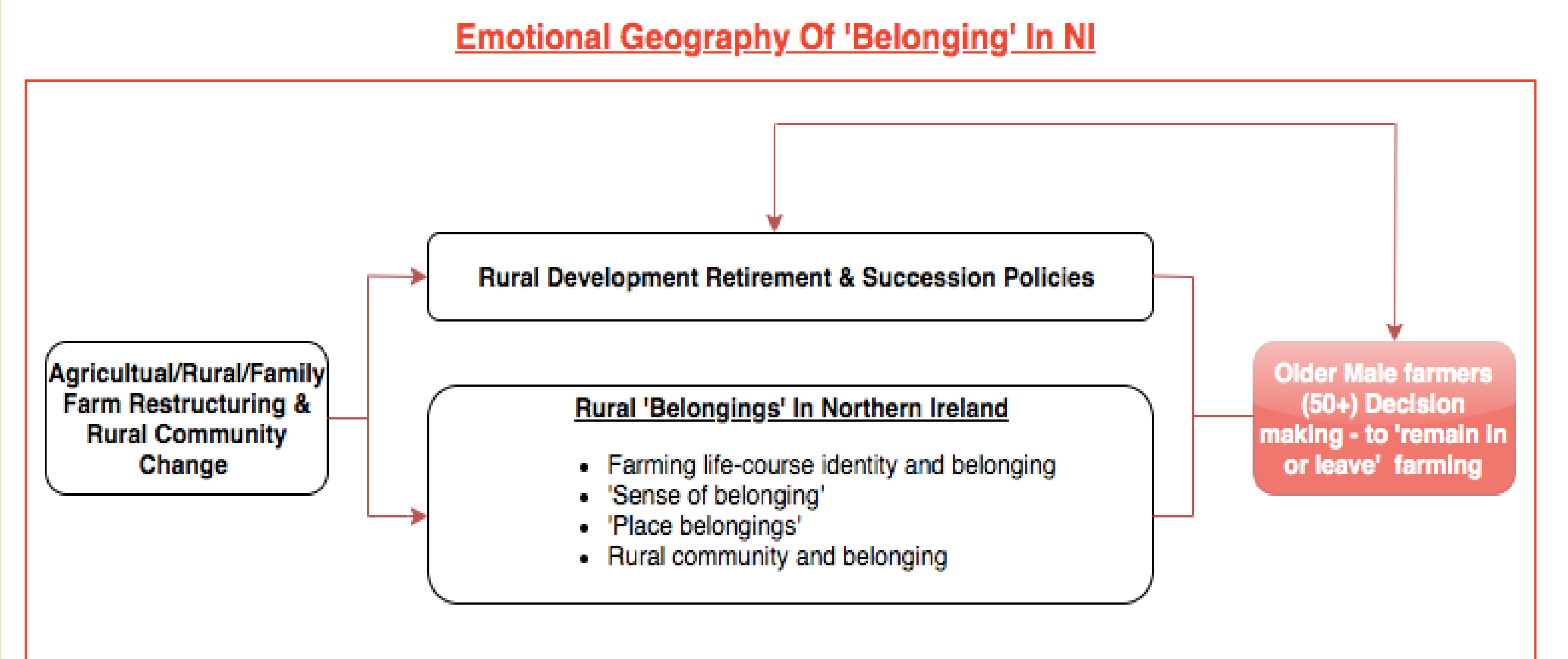


fig. 1, Theoretical Guide, Emotional Geographies of 'Belonging' in Northern Ireland

## RESEARCH PLAN AND DESIGN:

- A qualitative methodology is applied to provide in-depth understanding into farmers retirement/succession decision making.
- Work and talk, oral life history interviews and focus group will support the researcher in understanding the 'everyday lives' of the participants.
- Interviews will reflect on farmers' life course with reference to their 'sense(s) of belonging' and 'place belonging' (as identified in the literature review).
- Research will be broken down into 3 phases:

### 1st Phase:

Steering Group with 6 industry experts/gatekeepers to discuss farm type, farm size and participant access for research.

### 2nd Phase:

60 'work and talk' oral life history interviews (male farmers' 50+/spouse/successor) purposive sampled.

### 3rd Phase:

Post-Focus Group with industry experts/gatekeepers to discuss findings of research & present to DAERA to inform future rural development policies.

## CONCLUSION:

- Family farming has been challenged due to technological advances, globalisation and demographic changes, which may also be causing a shift in traditional patrilineal farming identities.
- There is a gap in rural/agricultural literature to understand the emotional aspect of this patrilineal farming identity embodied by a sense of 'place'.
- This research goes 'beyond the farm gate' and rural literature using Emotional Geography as a lens to understand how a 'sense of belonging' affects farmers' retirement decisions within changing rural communities.
- The premise is to give patrilineal farmers in Northern Ireland a voice to communicate their emotive issues pertaining to current retirement policies and also inform future rural development policies in Northern Ireland.

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