
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

NEOLIBERALISM, GENDER, AND PROPERTY RIGHTS IN RURAL MEXICO*

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Abstract: The Mexican Constitution was revised in 1992 to foster privatization of agrarian reform lands. Legal inheritance protections for spouses were removed, and individual title holders (85 percent male) obtained rights to sell land formerly considered family patrimony. State disinvestment contributed to economic crisis in the land-reform sector. This longitudinal study of four communities in northern and central Mexico explores the counterintuitive effects of agrarian law, customary inheritance norms, and women's changing roles in household economies and community sociopolitics on the material and ideological bases for women's entitlement to land. Quantitative and qualitative data show that women's rights to land under customary inheritance norms were upheld locally and that women's control of family land increased along with growing responsibility for production and community activism. Women's property rights were enhanced rather than eroded as families and communities struggled to meet the economic and social challenges posed by the neoliberal agenda.

Throughout Latin America, the agrarian reform projects of the middle and late twentieth century awarded land rights and other means of production disproportionately to men (Nash 1986; IDB 1995; Katz 1999). Land redis-

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tribution programs that enabled small-scale producers to access lands formerly held by large estates often favored full-time estate agricultural workers, most of whom were men, and generally stipulated that usufruct rights be issued only to heads of households. Most rural households included a male head, who was presumed to be his family's primary economic provider (Arizpe and Botey 1987; Deere 1986; Deere and León 1987). During the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American governments following a neoliberal model reduced public investment in the reform sector and began to privatize agrarian reform lands. These counterreforms were intended to stimulate private investment by developing land and credit markets in the reform sector. In a study of women's property rights under counterreform in eight Latin American countries, Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena León found that women generally have fared somewhat better under neoliberalism because parcelization and titling programs in some countries promoted the joint titling of land for married or conjugal partners or prioritized the claims of single female household heads or both (Deere and León 1997).

The single exception to this incipient trend is the Mexican counterreform, which not only failed to provide for joint titling and the needs of single female household heads but eliminated inheritance rights enjoyed by women under the reform. The neoliberal agenda in Mexico is widely expected to deepen the inequities of agrarian reform. Yet sharp contrasts between the gendered provisions of agrarian codes and women's actual ownership and control of land have been observed throughout Latin America (Deere and León 1999; Deere et al. 1999; Escoto 1993). Gains for women under the counterreforms have been modest, as ideologies of male providership and doubts about women's ability to make productive use of land have persisted within implementing institutions. Gendered patterns in ownership and control of land can be expected to vary according to local political economic history, social norms, underlying cultural values, and women's political, social, and economic activism (Hamilton 2000a, 2000b, 1998; Deere and León 1997).

In four Mexican agrarian-reform communities that I and others studied before and after counterreform was instituted, women's entitlement to land derives from material and ideological bases that have been strongly affected by the neoliberal project, but in unexpected ways. This study will explore the effects of Mexican agrarian law, customary inheritance norms, and women's changing roles in household economies and community sociopolitics on the ownership and control of land.

The Political-Economic Context of Gendered Property Rights under Agrarian Reform and Counterreform

Between 1917 and 1991, agrarian reform in Mexico resulted in redistributing about half of Mexico's rural land area to ejidos, groups of twenty

persons or more who organized to receive and work the land expropriated from large estates following the Mexican Revolution, and to primarily indigenous agrarian communities. These lands were declared to be inalienable from the ejidos. In most ejidos, household heads were granted use rights to particular land parcels that could be retained and passed along to heirs as long as the land was worked or maintained for the community's benefit. The fortunes of the ejidos rose and fell with varying national agendas for investment in small-scale agricultural production and rural development, but ejidos consistently manifested low productivity and political corruption (DeWalt, Rees, and Murphy 1994).

During the economic crises of the 1980s, neoliberal national administrations began a push for counterreform. Public institutions widely perceived as corrupt or inefficient were restructured, including those that had provided financial services and insurance in the reform sector (Gates 1996). Subsidies and most guaranteed prices for agricultural commodities were eliminated, and the agricultural research and extension system was significantly reduced (Appendini 1992; Myhre 1998). The resulting cost-price squeeze, together with historically unequal access to agricultural infrastructure, made agriculture an increasingly risky and marginal undertaking for many of Mexico's three and a half million *ejidatarios*. In 1992 the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari engineered revisions to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution that allowed for privatizing and selling ejidal landholdings. What some have called "the end of agrarian reform" (DeWalt, Rees, and Murphy 1994) was intended to create an efficient land market through which small landholdings could be purchased and consolidated by those with sufficient resources to engage in high-input production. *Ejidatarios* who could not produce competitively would have the option of selling their land rights and using the profits to stake nonagricultural livelihoods. Critics of the counterreform feared that the poorest *ejidatarios* would be forced to sell. Dispossession would also threaten those who were most vulnerable to political bossism because ejido authorities could manipulate the process of privatization to benefit themselves and their cronies (Gates 1996). Many critics feared that women would be particularly vulnerable, both economically and politically.

Throughout the decades of Mexican agrarian reform, women accounted for only a small minority of ejido members. The 1927 revision of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution contained the first mention of gender, specifying that ejido members should be males or single women or widows supporting a family (Deere and León 1997, 15). This qualification established a precedent that women must be the sole support of a family unit to qualify for ejido membership. Moreover, women who attained rights to ejido land would forfeit their rights if they subsequently married *ejidatarios*. Essentially, land was viewed as a family resource, with only one ejido membership allotted per family. In 1971 the Ley de Reforma Agraria established that

both males and females could be granted ejidatario status without specifying household headship (Article 200) and that women would no longer lose ejidataria status on marriage to an ejidatario (Article 78) (Deere and León 1997, 15, 58). Most important, ejido land could be willed only to a spouse, child, or other economic dependent (Articles 82, 83), and a succession default clause established that land would pass first to a spouse or partner and then to children of ejidatarios who died intestate (Article 86). The law also provided for creating the Unidad Agrícola Industrial de la Mujer (UAIM). Plots equivalent in size to the average individual holding were to be set aside for the productive activities of wives and daughters of ejidatarios. Groups formed to take advantage of this provision were to have one vote in the ejidal assembly.

Despite the 1972 revisions, the percentage of ejidatarios who were female averaged only 15 percent through the 1980s. Most ejidatarias were widows (Arizpe and Botey 1987). If a woman could not manage to have her land worked, her male relatives or cronies of ejidal authorities could successfully challenge her right to the land. In some settings, widows and other single women have been at a disadvantage in recruiting labor (Stephen 1994; 1998; Goldring 1998). Further, inheritance norms in many ejidos favored sons over spouses (Baitenmann 1998). At best, women were likely to be caretakers of the family patrimony until they passed along ejido rights to their sons. UAIMs were formed in only 9 to 15 percent of all ejidos (Deere and León 1997, 16), generally depended on ejido leadership to channel limited credit and funding (see Isaac 1995), and often failed to become functional (Stephen 1997, 172). No provision was made to assist women in defending their rights, which were often contested (see Stephen 1997, 172–88; Pérez Prado 1998) or effectively ignored (Baitenmann 1998).

The familial nature of land inheritance and the inalienability of land from the ejido were viewed by many scholars as benefits that women lost in 1992, despite the inequalities of practice under the reform (Zapata Martelo 1996; Stephen 1994; and Deere and León 1997, 17). Under the counterreform, widows remain the default heirs of men who die intestate, but family members are no longer privileged in constituting wills. Should an ejido vote to certify ejidal rights through the issuing of certificates of individual ownership (or certification titles) under the Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales y Titulación de Solares Urbanos (PROCEDE), ejidatarios would be entitled to sell land to other ejido members. Spouses and children are legally entitled to challenge a sale by exercising the right of first refusal (*derecho del tanto*) and purchasing the land themselves (Agrarian Law, Article 80; Hendrix 1993, 22). The second phase of land privatization requires that a majority of ejido members vote to authorize fee-simple or unrestricted ownership, which would allow land to be alienated from the ejido. For sales under this regime, spouses and children are limited to rights of first refusal. The formalization of an ejidal land market is unlikely to offer women compen-

satory advantages, as women may be less able than men to purchase land (Goldring 1998).

Most women are barred from participating directly in decisions on the degree to which an ejido will privatize landholdings in that these decisions are to be made only by ejido members. Further, ejidatarias may face dispossession within both ejidal political institutions and their own families. Women are likely to turn over direct cultivation to male relatives or to rent out their lands. PROCEDE establishes preference for long-term users, providing a legal basis for dispossession should ejidal authorities decide to invoke an interpretation favoring those who directly work or manage land (Katz 1999). Some scholars doubt that the rights of women will be honored equally with those of men, given women's potentially greater vulnerability in ejido politics (Zapata Martelo 1996) and the fact that titling can exacerbate conflicts between women and men over land that women have been unable to work (Stephen 1994). An additional fear is that women, especially elderly widows, may be more easily pressured to sell by their heirs (Deere and León 1997, 21). These women would then lose the measure of economic security and political representation accorded by ejidataria status.

In sum, the legal framework of counterreform has rendered women increasingly vulnerable to dispossession and disinheritance. The degree to which women will suffer losses under the current revision of Article 27, however, depends not only on the national legal framework but also on a number of local-level factors. These include the ways in which land and individuals are valued, in both social and economic dimensions, and the ways in which privatization is instituted at the local level.

Neoliberalism and Agrarian Change in Four Ejidos

The findings reported here are based on a longitudinal study of production systems and social and economic well-being in four ejidos (B. DeWalt et al. 1987; K. DeWalt et al. 1990). These communities are located in northern and central Mexico, along with the majority of Mexico's ejidos and ejidatarios (Morret-Sánchez, cited in Johnson 1997, 15). The ejidos chosen exhibit a range of local land-tenure patterns and production practices that is broadly representative of this north-central region, from larger irrigated farms in the north to much smaller rain-fed and irrigated holdings in the south. All are mestizo communities.¹ They represent neither the richest nor the poorest subsectors among the nation's ejidos and agrarian communities.

Data collection was carried out in 1984 and 1996 by interdisciplinary

1. Considerable variation in women's roles in agriculture, their value as economic actors within households, inheritance of land rights, and political participation has been observed between mestizo and indigenous communities. See Stephen (1994), Arias (1994), Mummert (1994), Marroni de Velázquez (1994), González Montes (1994), and Rothstein (1995).

teams of Mexican and U.S. researchers. Household surveys were administered to male and female household heads in 324 randomly sampled households in 1984, and in 125 randomly sampled households in 1996. In most households, both male and female household heads were interviewed concerning their individual and shared current incomes, landholding, and other economic assets. Men also provided extensive information on agricultural production and migration. Women were interviewed about the demographic characteristics of the household and children no longer residing in the household, their own agricultural production and migration histories, household finance (lending, borrowing and saving patterns), food consumption, and family health. In families with single household heads or in which one head was living outside the community, one informant provided both data sets. The 1996 sample used for analysis includes 120 households in which a female household head was interviewed.² Anthropometric measures of child nutrition were also collected. Team members engaged in participant observation and conducted informal interviews concerning land tenure, inheritance practices, women's work and control of productive resources and incomes, agricultural production, health, and community history.

Most households made economic gains during the 1984–1996 interim, as evidenced by improved housing quality (less crowded living conditions, better building materials, ownership of refrigerators and gas stoves); possession of vehicles and other expensive material goods; and child nutrition (B. DeWalt 1998). Landholding did not become more concentrated, as evidenced by mean and median difference tests for the 1984 and 1996 samples.³ Nonetheless, households relied less on agriculture and more on nonagricultural incomes and remittances from the United States than in 1984.

Quebrantadero, Morelos / This community received ejido land in 1928. Located in a semi-arid region with relatively high rainfall, the community sits

2. In three of the four communities, 30 to 32 households were chosen at random from resident populations ranging from around 100 households (in Porvenir) to 155 (in Alcalde y Bateas) to around 170 (in Derramaderos). Households were selected from an original census of every occupied housing site in the community, checked against health-clinic census records. In Quebrantadero, Morelos, the population was much larger, with estimates ranging from 431 (INEGI 1995, 1990 census) to 500 households (1996 interview with local government official). Because no current census could be located for the community, a random sample of 30 was chosen from the most recent (1991) list of 291 ejido members, supplemented by an additional 15 households selected according to neighborhood, apparent socioeconomic status, and key informants' expectation that most of the households would not include an ejidatario. Of these 45 households, 31 completed the survey, including two-thirds of the ejidatarios and two-thirds of the families not included on the ejido list. The term "female household head" refers to the woman in each household who was recognized as its female head, whether or not she had a husband living at home at the time of the interview. "Single female household head" refers to female household heads who did not have husbands or male partners.

3. T-test, $p = .354$; median test, $p = .917$; descriptive statistics will be listed by community.

on a major highway near urban markets. The largest and wealthiest of the communities studied, Quebrantadero boasts a diverse economy noted regionally for livestock production and an expanding nonagricultural commercial sector. In 1996, 65 percent of surveyed households held ejido land, averaging 5.7 hectares;⁴ 40 percent held irrigated land, averaging 2.6 hectares.⁵ Economic and nutritional well-being for families improved between 1984 and 1996. Median household income for the year preceding the 1996 survey was 25,700 pesos (conversion at the time of the survey was 7 to 7.5 pesos to 1 U.S. dollar). Household income averaged 36,132 pesos.⁶ In 1996 one-quarter of all household income was derived from household agricultural production (compared with 58 percent in 1984). In 1996, 14 percent came from local agricultural wage labor, 28 percent from local salaried work, 14 percent from the earnings of family members working outside the community, 9 percent from commerce, and 10 percent from other sources.

Derramaderos, San Luis Potosí / This community also received its ejido land in 1928. In this very arid region, crop failure constantly threatens on the rain-fed lands that make up the ejido, but the community has relatively good transportation infrastructure. In 1996, 72 percent of households surveyed held ejido land, averaging 5.4 hectares.⁷ No one held irrigated land. Although economic and nutritional well-being had improved dramatically over 1984 levels, Derramaderos remained much poorer than Quebrantadero. Median household income for the year preceding the 1996 survey (the second year of a severe drought) was 11,475 pesos, and household income averaged 15,290 pesos.⁸ In 1996, 6 percent of all household income derived from household agriculture (compared with 17 percent in 1984), 7 percent from local agricultural wage labor, 50 percent from the earnings of family members working outside the community, primarily in the United States (up from 43 percent of income in 1984), 11 percent from commerce, 12 percent from government transitional agricultural support payments, and 14 percent from other sources.

Both these ejidos were made up of former workers on local haciendas. Although out-migration to the United States is a major factor in the economies of many transnational families, especially in Derramaderos, both communities continue to place high value on landownership and attachment to community. Significant improvements in public health and physical infrastructure observed since 1984 in both communities resulted largely from community-based activism. Women's activism played an important part in the remarkable improvements in child nutrition, especially in Derramaderos.

4. Standard deviation of the mean is 3.5. At the median, ejidatarios held 6.4 hectares.

5. Standard deviation of the mean is 1.5.

6. Standard deviation of the mean is 31129.

7. Standard deviation of the mean is 2.2. At the median, ejidatarios held 6 hectares.

8. Standard deviation of the mean is 11157.

Guía del Porvenir, Tamaulipas / This settlement was founded in 1964 by migrants in an area of recent colonization. Land grants were relatively large (more than 20 hectares), and the introduction of irrigation in 1972 made the land much more valuable. In 1996, 65 percent of households surveyed held ejido land, averaging 23.5 hectares.⁹ All ejidatarios held irrigated land, averaging 15 hectares. Although colonists arrived from a variety of locations, they expressed pride in having created a socially viable community. On average, families were doing relatively well economically in 1984, and significant improvements were observed in 1996. Social activism has been less pervasive in Porvenir than in the older ejidos, but community members have worked together to improve physical infrastructure and community health. In 1984 child undernutrition was a serious problem in Porvenir. By 1996, however, child nutrition had improved even more than in the older ejidos. Median household income for the year preceding the 1996 survey was 13,200 pesos, while household income averaged 25,431 pesos.¹⁰ In 1996, 29 percent of all household income was derived from household agriculture (compared with 70 percent in 1984), 16 percent from local agricultural wage labor, 13 percent from the earnings of family members working outside the community, 11 percent from government transitional agricultural support payments and land rental, 9 percent from salaried work and commerce, and 22 percent from land rental and other sources.

Alcalde y Bateas, Michoacán / This ejido, made up of two settlements in Michoacán's *tierra caliente*, was formed in the early 1960s primarily by migrants from the highlands who made little common ground. Community development has been limited by violent political factionalism, high levels of in- and out-migration, and serious infrastructural deficits. The ejido is located along the Río Tepalcaltepec, but no local bridge has been built. Transportation of agricultural produce to market requires lengthy journeys or risky ferrying. Plans for irrigation never materialized. In 1996, 57 percent of households surveyed held ejido land, averaging 10.8 hectares;¹¹ 3 percent held irrigated land, averaging 3 hectares.¹² Families here have not enjoyed the improved standards of living observed in the other ejidos: more children were undernourished in 1996 than in 1984. Political factionalism and the lack of social cohesion appear to have aggravated this situation. Median household income for the year preceding the 1996 survey was 14,720 pesos; household income averaged 15,653 pesos.¹³ In 1996, 18 per-

9. Standard deviation of the mean is 4.4. At the median, ejidatarios held 24.5 hectares. For irrigated holdings, standard deviation of the mean is 0.

10. Standard deviation of the mean is 23210.

11. Standard deviation of the mean is 7.6.

12. Standard deviation of the mean is 1.

13. Standard deviation of the mean is 9110.

cent of all household income was derived from household agriculture (compared with 55 percent in 1984), 33 percent from local agricultural wage labor (earned primarily on nearby citrus plantations and other irrigated holdings), 25 percent from the earnings of family members working outside the community (compared with 8 percent in 1984), 10 percent from government transitional agricultural support payments, and 14 percent from other sources.

Although landholdings did not become more concentrated between 1984 and 1996, transfers among households increased. Moreover, ejido land was generally treated as *de facto* private property in 1984 (Hamilton 1991), and many ejidatarios viewed participation in PROCEDE as irrelevant to participation in increasingly liberal land markets (Johnson 1997). Possession of any certificate—including those issued before the counterreform—was considered a license to sell.¹⁴ Increased purchases by outsiders were accomplished by admitting the buyer to membership in the ejido.

In terms of official land certification and titling following the reforms to Article 27, Quebrantadero had completed the PROCEDE in 1994; Derramaderos was mid-process during the research survey in July 1996; Porvenir had rejected it due to a boundary dispute; and Alcalde y Bateas had rejected it in a divisive vote that left many ejidatarios unsatisfied and pushing for a second vote. None of the communities had considered full legal privatization of ejido lands. Members of the Alcalde y Bateas factions were plotting to roust the opposition rather than disband the ejido.

Women's Membership and Inheritance Rights in Four Ejidos

Women formed a significantly larger proportion of ejido membership in 1996 (table 1). In 1984 the proportion of female ejidatarios averaged 13 percent, ranging from 4 percent in Porvenir to 25 percent in Alcalde y Bateas. In 1996 ejidatarias averaged 22 percent, ranging from 5 percent in Porvenir to 33 percent in Derramaderos. The ejidos studied are representative of Mexico in terms of the relative feminization of ejido membership, generally estimated at 15 to 30 percent (Deere and León 1997, 60; Stephen

14. Ejidal participation or nonparticipation in PROCEDE does not appear to have been the watershed event anticipated by many researchers. As of 15 Mar. 2000, 72 percent of ejidos and agrarian communities had completed certification titling, but few had opted for full privatization (Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria, <http://www.sra.gob.mx/procede/procede-untrav.htm>). Although sales within ejidos and to outsiders have increased gradually since the 1980s, no sharp increase followed the constitutional changes (Robledo Rincón 2000). Case studies of land transfers within ejidos point to widespread historical disregard of prohibitions on sales and to an increasingly liberal environment for land transfer that accompanied the state's decreasing involvement in ejido production (B. DeWalt, Rees, and Murphy 1994, 34–43; see Gates 1993). Certification titles have been treated as a license to alienate land from ejidos (Goldring 1996), and ejidos continue to exhibit wide variation in local norms for both land sales and inheritances (Baitenmann 1998; Katz 1999).

1994, 252). Ejidatarias controlled an average of 7.2 hectares,¹⁵ compared with 12.8 hectares controlled by men.¹⁶ The difference in size of holdings is statistically significant (the significance of *t* is .018). This difference, however, reflects the fact that few women were ejidatarias in Porvenir, where nearly all holdings were 20 hectares, much larger than in the other ejidos.¹⁷ Two-thirds of ejidatarias were single household heads, primarily widows. Ejidatarias were older (average age 63) than other women (average age 43), just as ejidatarios (average age 56) were older than other men (average age 44).

To test statistically the relative importance of several variables that could influence whether a woman would have ejido land in 1996, a logistic regression model was constructed.¹⁸ The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure of whether a woman held ejido land and membership: a value of 1 indicates membership, while 0 represents lack of membership. Marital status and age structures in the ejidos indicated that these variables should be entered into analysis to test their independent effects. It was also hypothesized that because women could be more vulnerable than men to having their right to ejido land challenged, women with smaller and less desirable holdings would be more likely to have retained their holdings. The size of holding was entered into analysis to test the independent effect of the economic value of land in determining whether a woman would hold title to it. Rain-fed land is generally much less desirable than irrigated land. Given that the largest holdings in this sample also contain by far the largest proportion of irrigated land, the size of holding serves as an indicator of land desirability.¹⁹ To control for differences among the ejidos' social, cultural, and political-economic profiles, the ejido of residence was also entered into the analysis.

Results of both models indicate that marital status and age significantly influenced the likelihood that a woman would hold ejido land in 1996. Surprisingly, the size of holding was not a determinant of ejidataria status. Where a woman lived also did not predict whether she would be an ejidataria. These results suggest that although women were more likely to

15. Standard deviation of the mean is 3.9.

16. Standard deviation of the mean is 9.4.

17. When Porvenir is removed from the sample, mean differences in the amount of land controlled by women (6.34 hectares, standard deviation of the mean is 2.06) and men (7.64 hectares, standard deviation of the mean is 6.04) are not significant ($t = 1.117$, $sig. = .245$).

18. The logistic regression model ($N = 118$) was constructed using forward stepwise entry. The model X^2 is .000. Independent variables accepted in the equation are single female household headship ($R = .313$; $Sign. Wald = .001$; $Sign. Log LR = .000$) and woman's age ($R = .317$; $Sign. Wald = .001$, $Sign. Log LR = .000$). Independent variables not in the equation include size of landholding ($R = .000$; $Sign. Score = .226$).

19. It was not possible to determine differences in the proportions of women's and men's land that are irrigated, as this information was collected from men but not from women.

TABLE 1 *Ejidatarios in Four Mexican Communities by Gender, 1984 and 1996*

<i>Ejido</i> ^a	<i>Sample</i> ^b	<i>Ejidatarios</i>		
		<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Quebrantadero ^a	1984	55 (83%)	11 (17%)	66 (100%)
	1996	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	20 (100%)
Porvenir ^a	1984	48 (96%)	2 (4%)	50 (100%)
	1996	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	20 (100%)
Derramaderos ^{a,c}	1984	49 (94%)	3 (6%)	52 (100%)
	1996	14 (67%)	7 (33%)	21 (100%)
Alcalde y Bateas ^a	1984	43 (75%)	14 (25%)	57 (100%)
	1996	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	16 (100%)
Entire sample ^b	1984	195 (87%)	30 (13%)	225 (100%)
	1996	60 (78%)	17 (22%)	77 (100%)

Source: Household surveys taken in 1984 and 1996.

^a Community of residence predicts whether a woman was an ejidataria in 1984 ($\chi^2 = 13.197$, sig. = .004; phi = .242), but not in 1996 ($\chi^2 = 5.116$, sig. = .164; phi = .258, note small cell counts).

^b Percentage of ejidatarios who are women differs between 1984 and 1996 ($\chi^2 = 3.870$, sig. = .049; phi = .112).

^c Percentage of ejidatarios who are women differs significantly between 1984 and 1996 (Fisher's Exact Test, sig. = .005).

obtain ejido land if they were single heads of household (limiting the number who would be eligible), they were not more likely to be dispossessed of larger and more desirable holdings by family members or ejido bosses.

Women in the four ejidos gained ejidataria status in several ways, all dependent on their conjugal or consanguineal relationship to an ejidatario. Most had been named by their husbands as heirs (successors) to the husband's rights to ejido membership and land. Some had been named by the ejido in place of their out-migrant husbands during one of the several land reparcelizations and regularizations that took place before the counter-reform of Article 27. A few inherited land from parents, grandparents, or other relatives. None had gained land through independent petition for a new grant during reparcelizations, although women could legally apply after 1972. No surveyed women reported having bought ejido land, although a man in Quebrantadero reported selling his land to a local businesswoman who bought several parcels.

Given the perceived license to sell without participating in PROCEDE, the observed direction of change appears to be largely independent of the new constitutional framework. The direction of change for women's access to ejidataria status was positive for two ejidos: one (Quebrantadero) had completed the PROCEDE two years earlier and created a climate increasingly positive toward land sale, and the other (Derramaderos) had not

yet completed PROCEDE. No change was found in women's access to land rights in the other two ejidos.

Although a decade of counterreform does not appear to have dispossessed the current generation of ejidatarías, several questions must be raised regarding the relative security of Mexican women's rights to land. How have women fared in terms of inheritance? Do women who hold ejidataría status actually control the land certified in their name and receive income or products derived from its use? Do women appear to be differentially subject to pressures from children or other relatives to sell land? And finally, are women's rights more tenuous and dependent on ejido politics than men's?

The 1996 sample included only three cases in which wives had been bypassed in the succession list: one son had inherited in place of his widowed mother (in Porvenir); one living father had already transferred title to his son (in Alcalde y Bateas); and one ejidatario had changed the succession in favor of his son (in Derramaderos). In one instance, an ejidatario had died intestate, and his widow was undergoing the formalization of her default right to succession, unchallenged by her sons (in Quebrantadero). The degree to which a widow directly managed production on her parcels varied by community, but in no case did the widow lose access to incomes and products from her land. In most cases, the land was worked by her children or rented out, with the widow receiving rental income or a share in products or income that she considered to be appropriate. Widows did not have greater difficulty than men in managing to have their land worked, nor were they more likely to rent out their land.²⁰ Nor were widows worse off than the general population in their standard of living. Even the widow who had been bypassed in favor of her son stated that she received a good income from the land, and the material evidence of her standard of living did not contradict this statement.

Among the many widows who exemplified a relatively secure position were María, an eighty-year-old woman who maintained her own household in Quebrantadero, and Carmen, a seventy-year-old who shared a family compound with the families of two sons in Derramaderos. María held eight hectares that were worked by her sons, planted in maize and sorghum. The five hectares planted in maize did not yield income during 1995–1996, when much of the crop was lost, but María received maize. She did not receive income from the son who planted sorghum, possibly reflecting low net incomes from sorghum (Johnson 1997). María reported nevertheless that she was satisfied with the amount of money received from her children because they gave money according to their ability to help her: "My children have their own families to maintain, with children in school and other

20. An ejidatario's gender did not predict whether a holding would be rented out in 1996 ($\chi^2 = 1.220$, sig. = .269).

heavy expenses, but they support me. The more they make, the more they give. My daughter has a salary in Cuernavaca; she has the most and she gives me the most. I have what I need."²¹ María supplemented the support of her children by selling eggs and contributed to the family agricultural enterprise by cooking for field-workers. She lived in a large, well-furnished house, owned all the household amenities, and enjoyed relatively robust health despite arthritic knees.

Carmen was more involved in managing her land, although she no longer worked in the fields. Fieldwork was done by her two sons when they were not working in the United States and by their wives, children, and hired workers. The proceeds of agricultural production were divided into thirds, with Carmen receiving one-third. She belonged to a tractor society, which allowed her to obtain service at half-price. Providing tractor service was Carmen's contribution to family production. She also participated with her sons and daughters-in-law in decisions on land use and investment in labor and material inputs. Carmen left decisions regarding the daily management of production and assignment of labor tasks to the younger generation, whose female members made decisions unilaterally regarding planting, cultivating, and managing pests during the six months each year when the men were working in the United States.

Although harvests were scant during 1995–1996 and the community was still crippled by a three-year drought, Carmen's household had planted maize and were planning to plant sorghum. The decisions to plant were made by the women in the family. Their labor and skillful management of the maize crop were yielding excellent results on the portion of family land with access to runoff from a rain-fed lake. Carmen also received remittances from children who had left the community permanently. She said that her daughter sent more regularly than her sons. Carmen lived in a well-furnished and immaculate two-room apartment within the family compound, where she shared kitchen appliances and access to the family truck with her daughters-in-law. She was in good health, slender, and strong for her age.

Both valuations of land and attitudes toward selling land rights varied by ejido, but women were not more likely to sell their land than were men. Nor did ejidatarías report pressure to sell on the part of their children. In Derramaderos—where holding, working, and conserving land were valued as economic security measures despite the high risk of rain-fed agriculture in a drought-prone region—women expressed their intent to hold on to their land rights. In Quebrantadero, where land also was highly valued but intra-ejidal land transfers were on the rise, the proportion of female ejido members had increased.

Recognition by the ejido's political leadership of an individual's right

21. All translations from the original Spanish are the author's.

to land did not appear in 1996 to vary by gender. In Derramaderos at the outset of the PROCEDE process, both men and women voiced uncertainties that they hoped to have clarified, questions generally dealing with taxation and freedom to dispose of land as they saw fit. Most women expressed confidence that their evidence of rights to land would be recognized and thought that the process would enhance their tenure security. Histories of how women obtained their ejido rights revealed a pattern of honoring women's claims within the ejido, even when a husband returned to claim rights that had been assigned to his wife during his absence. In the case of one divorced couple, the woman retained her right to the family's parcels, which had been assigned to her during her husband's absence, even after he returned to the ejido. The wife of an alcoholic had been named the family's ejido member during her husband's absence and was expected to retain her right, although the husband was present during the PROCEDE titling. She was generally acknowledged to be the more responsible householder. In one case where a female child held an ejido right in trust, neither male relatives nor other ejidatarios had challenged the child's right to land or her grandmother's right to protect it. In *Alcalde y Bateas*, the situation was similar in that women had obtained land during their husbands' absences as well as inheriting it, and they had retained their land rights through several ejidal administrations. Women had also maintained a UAIM for many years in this ejido, with the backing of ejidal leadership.

Within families and within ejido political organizations in 1996, there did not appear to be a pattern of dispossessing widows and other women who claimed entitlement to ejidal rights. In Derramaderos, where individual rights were somewhat more likely to be pressed, women had received egalitarian treatment by ejidal authorities. In the other three communities, both women and men maintained that land is a family resource and the name on the certificate is of little importance. Although this perspective does not guarantee women access to land, it contributes to the naming of wives as successors in the overwhelming majority of cases. Widows insisted that they were free to choose their successors, although they generally ratified the order of succession originally entered by their husbands. Ejidatarias with living husbands also said they had named heirs according to their own wishes.

The distribution of ejido memberships in 1996 and ejidatarios' succession preferences demonstrated that when land rights were willed to children, sons were far more likely to be named than daughters. Both women and men in most of the ejidos remarked that daughters do not need to inherit land because the sons will have the primary responsibility for supporting their own families. Most women appeared satisfied with their position as mothers in families that were expected to honor their rights to succession and subsequent disposition of the land. Most seemed untroubled

by the dependent, if not precarious, nature of their access to ejidal rights or by the fact that their menfolk were legally at liberty to disinherit them.

In sum, an increasingly liberal land-transfer environment has had little effect on the relative security of ejidatarias' land rights and the privileging of wives as heirs. They depend largely on the goodwill of family members and the ejidos' male majority and leadership. Women have derived a considerable measure of the requisite goodwill from their social status as mothers deserving of their children's cooperation and the respect and aid of the community following the death of the family patriarch. Just as ejido members consider that their sons will need land to support their own families, they also consider that widows and other single female household heads have these same needs. Women have earned this concern for their welfare through their recognized work in caring for home and family.

Women's Productive Labor and Control of Economic Resources in Four Ejidos

Mexican women's productive labor may also provide a basis for successful claims to ejidal land rights and to management of land (González Montes 1994). Women's agricultural work and expanding responsibility for managing household agriculture have contributed to a dramatic increase in women's control of land in two of the ejidos with high levels of male out-migration. Additionally, women's nonagricultural incomes have become increasingly central to many households, and earning this income appears to entitle women to increased participation in household economic decision making.

Most women in the ejidos produced nonagricultural incomes or worked in household agriculture in 1996. The proportion of female household heads who earned independent nonagricultural income increased significantly between 1984 and 1996. In 1984 only one-fifth of women earned nonagricultural income, while by 1996 nearly half reported independent nonagricultural income (table 2). Women were more likely to work outside household agriculture in Quebrantadero at both times, but the increase over 1984 is also much more dramatic in Quebrantadero. This pattern reflects the greater diversity and higher level of commercial activity in Quebrantadero during the years studied, as well as significant changes in women's activities in the interim.

Although only 6 percent of women reported salaried income in 1996, this figure increased from 1984, when fewer than 1 percent of women reported a regular salary. Women were less likely than men to earn regular salaries but were equally likely to hold professional positions. This pattern reflects these women's choice of professions that offer local employment, such as teaching and nursing, and the gender-egalitarian access to education observed in the ejidos. Among all household members, females had

TABLE 2 Proportion of Women Earning Independent Income in Four Mexican Communities in 1984 and 1996

<i>Ejido</i>	1984 ^a	1996 ^a
Quebrantadero^b		
Number of women surveyed	99	30
Women with independent income	28 (28%)	23 (77%)
Porvenir		
Number of women surveyed	72	31
Women with independent income	10 (14%)	8 (26%)
Derramaderos^c		
Number of women surveyed	75	30
Women with independent income	10 (13%)	12 (40%)
Alcalde y Bateas		
Number of women	92	29
Women with independent income	23 (25%)	12 (41%)
Entire sample^d		
Number of women surveyed	338	120
Women with independent income	71 (21%)	55 (46%)

Source: Household surveys made in 1984 and 1996.

^a Community of residence significantly predicts whether a woman earned independent income in 1984 ($\chi^2 = 8.902$, sig. = .031; phi = .162) and 1996 ($\chi^2 = 17.139$, sig. = .001, phi = .378).

^b In Quebrantadero, significantly more women earned independent income in 1996 than in 1984 ($\chi^2 = 22.547$, sig. = .000; phi = .418).

^c In Derramaderos, significantly more women earned independent income in 1996 than in 1984 ($\chi^2 = 9.200$, Fisher's exact test sig. = .006; phi = .296, sig = .002).

^d For the entire sample, significantly more women earned independent income in 1996 than in 1984 ($\chi^2 = 30.709$, sig = .000; phi = .254).

completed an average of 5.2 years of education, compared with 5.5 years for males.²² The difference is not statistically significant.²³ Access to post-primary education, a significant indicator of regional earning potential, also did not differ by gender.²⁴ Individuals of both genders with the education necessary to hold professional positions were likely to leave the ejidos, and adult children who had migrated out were significantly better educated than their siblings who stayed in the ejidos. Among out-migrants, women and men had been educated equally.

In 1996 most women's nonagricultural income derived from owning

22. Standard deviation of the mean is 4 for females and 4.2. for males.

23. Two-tailed significance of T is .318.

24. Significance of X² is .438.

TABLE 3 *Women's Independent Sources of Income in Four Mexican Communities in 1996*

<i>Source of Income^a</i>	<i>Number of Women^b</i>
Owning a store	8
Selling eggs, chickens	7
Selling milk, cheese	6
Selling tortillas or other prepared food, owning a restaurant	9
Selling fruit and vegetables	1
Washing, ironing at home	7
Sewing, doing artisan work at home	9
Working for a regular salary ^c	7
Selling shoes, clothing	8
Selling cattle or pigs ^d	4
Domestic work	2
Agricultural labor outside the family	3
Child care in home	1
Total number of women reporting independent income	55
Number of women not reporting independent income	65
Total	120

Source: Household surveys taken in 1996.

^a Crop income not included.

^b Number reporting income does not sum to 55 because some women reported more than one source of income.

^c In comparison, 22 men reported salary income.

^d Not all women who raised animals for sale reported sales during 1996.

a small store or restaurant; selling dairy products, clothing, shoes, or prepared food in their local or regional markets; sewing or creating artisanry at home; and earning salaried incomes in teaching, nursing, secretarial work, and administration of the stores operated by CONASUPO (Comisión Nacional de Subsistencias Populares) (see table 3). Although some of the women earned nonagricultural incomes because they needed the income to provide food and other basic necessities for their families, women from more affluent households also earned independent incomes. Given that women often used their income to buy household goods, it is not surprising that earning this income correlated positively with household material standard of living, as measured by scaled ownership of locally valued goods such as vehicles, electronics, and furniture.²⁵

Women not only earned more independent income than in 1984, they also reported increasing control of jointly produced incomes and intra-household transfers. Stores, restaurants, and other formal businesses often

25. Partial correlation, controlling for household income: $r = .321$, $p = .001$.

were viewed as family enterprises by both women and men, usually reflecting their joint labor and material investment. None of the women working in family enterprises indicated that they relinquished control of earnings to their husbands.²⁶ Many women recounted how they had successfully prioritized the use of these incomes, often for children's education. Women also reported more direct control of their children's remittances. In most cases, money orders were sent by children to their mothers. One son visiting Derramaderos from Texas remarked, "We know Mom will use the money for everyone's benefit, and she knows how to stretch it." Male household heads often did not know the exact amount of their children's remittances, nor how often money was sent. The pattern emerging across communities suggests that women in the many households where remittance incomes were critical to the family economy could derive considerable authority in economic decision making from their more direct access to these incomes.

Informal interviews with a majority of women in landholding households, together with qualitative information collected in 1984, indicated that women's work in household agriculture had increased during the interim and that wives of ejidatarios had gained increasing control of land and other productive resources in three of the ejidos. In Derramaderos and Alcalde y Bateas, where most women worked in household agriculture, women reported decision-making roles in production and in the proportioning of household investments. Many women were full managing partners in the agricultural enterprise, participating in joint decisions on land use, herd management, input use, and marketing. In Derramaderos, 63 percent of male household heads had migrated temporarily during the ten years before the 1996 survey and 31 percent during the previous year. Women whose husbands were absent often made significant production decisions without being able to consult their husbands. But women's agricultural decision making was not limited to households where men were absent during the survey. In Alcalde y Bateas, the rate of male out-migration during the ten years prior to the 1996 survey averaged 52 percent; only 13 percent had been absent during the previous year. Yet many men and women reported joint management of agricultural enterprises. It is possible that women's decision making expanded during their husbands' earlier absences

26. Women surveyed were asked if they "had" a store. They listed store income as independent, even if both husband and wife worked in the store, accessed income derived from the store, and owned assets. In contrast, women were not asked if they "had" agricultural income, only if they earned wages (which could have been derived from agriculture). With a few exceptions, women did not list income derived from household crops or animal sales among their independent sources of income. Because women were more likely to be unilaterally in charge of dairy production and sales, they listed independent income from this source.

and that women continued to participate in managing household agricultural production following the return of their husbands.

In Quebrantadero women did not work with crops but produced and marketed livestock and animal products, a significant source of household income in 1984 and 1996. A few women remarked that they generally did not discuss crop management with their husbands, who "took care of" the crops. Only one woman who reported discussing crop management stated that her husband did not listen to her recommendations, while several women maintained that agricultural decisions, including land-use decisions, were made jointly. Because remittance income often served to subsidize investment in crop and animal production in this community and women appeared to have considerable say in disposing of these funds, women's input into decisions on investing family resources in agriculture versus other enterprises may have derived from their control over these funds. It is also possible that women's work and earned incomes provided leverage in calculating tradeoffs among potential investments in agriculture and other income-earning activities.

In Porvenir, women's participation in agricultural decision making did not increase, although women were working in household agriculture in 1984 and 1996. But women did have a voice in deciding whether the landholding would be rented out or the family would invest in the high-input production typical of this ejido and how much would be invested.

In all the ejidos where women worked in household agriculture, women from both wealthier and poorer households performed this work. It was not just economic need that drew women into the fields but their wish to be involved in their households' income-earning activities despite the heavy work required. Women worked in household agriculture during their husbands' absences, when they increased their own field labor, as well as when their husbands were at home. All but two of the many women who described their work in family agriculture said that they liked the work and preferred being in the fields to being at home.

Examples from Alcalde y Bateas will illustrate women's reasons for engaging in fieldwork. Lupe, the forty-eight-year-old wife of a former ejidal president, was the female head of a relatively wealthy household. She was heavily involved in both field labor and livestock production, which she controlled directly. Lupe said her husband would prefer that she work less in the fields, but she liked the work and was involved in all phases of agricultural production. When the family moved into dairy and livestock production, Lupe applied her greater knowledge of livestock (gained before her marriage) to this enterprise. She managed a herd of more than forty cattle, large by ejido standards. She also produced milk and cheese, from which she earned about 135 (U.S.) dollars per month, more than a daily wage would produce in the ejido. Lupe managed this income independently, along with remittances from children, which averaged at least 200 dollars per

month. Her husband agreed with Lupe's estimates of remittance income, by far the family's largest source of income during the year preceding the survey in 1996. Lupe's relatively independent control of most of her household's income reflected both her greater labor input into a lucrative area of farm production and the more direct control of local women over remittance income.

Evelia, a much less affluent woman of similar age, worked in all phases of household agricultural production. Although several of her thirteen children helped in family agriculture, Evelia worked in the fields. She also looked after three cows and took in washing and ironing with help from her children. Evelia and her husband both reported that she was a full partner in all areas of family agricultural decision making. One son sent remittance income directly to his father; another sent his remittance to Evelia. She had an equal voice in deciding how all this income would be spent, including the proportion that would go to agricultural production. Evelia also found time to contribute to efforts at community improvement. Although she was discouraged by the general lack of participation in the ejido, she took a leadership role in the UAIM. Her husband, who had held several ejidal offices, observed that women had kept many local families from starving and disintegrating and that if the ejido should ever manage to work together for community improvement, it would be because women challenged their husbands to equal their own commitments.

Lorena, a woman of forty-nine whose family was among the poorest in Alcalde y Bateas, did not work on the land lent by an ejidatario to her husband. Despite her family's economic need, Lorena did not pick fruit on the large groves near the ejido, where several women from Alcalde y Bateas earned seasonal wages. Although she was a sturdy, healthy woman with no greater reproductive responsibility than other women who engaged in fieldwork, Lorena said her husband did not want her to work. He was reputed to be a violent man who had come to Alcalde y Bateas to escape prosecution for murder in a distant city. Like many men in Alcalde y Bateas, he was often armed. Several other women reported domestic violence or intimidation, but they engaged in independent economic activities despite their husbands' threats. Lorena was the only woman interviewed who reported abiding by her husband's preference that she remain at home.

It is clear that women in these ejidos are heavily involved in the work of agricultural or livestock production across household socioeconomic levels and that women's income-producing work and economic decision making at home have increased since 1984. In Quebrantadero, where the increase was most dramatic, both women and men said that the growth in women's economic activity represented a significant change in the community and that women's work had contributed to an improved standard of living. Findings from Derramaderos indicate that women's input on economic decisions and overall intrahousehold authority have grown. Al-

though out-migration certainly played a major role in the change, migration rates for male household heads were no higher in 1996 than in 1984. The change may reflect a growing recognition of women as economic actors, derived from their work and management of the household economy during their husbands' absences over the years. In Porvenir and Alcalde y Bateas, less dramatic changes in nonagricultural income earning by women have been accompanied by increased involvement in agricultural enterprises and decision making in Alcalde y Bateas.

Women's expanding economic responsibility should not be considered an unmixed blessing, however. Although the growth in productive labor was accompanied by an increase in owning labor-saving devices and services in most households, overall labor increased for some women. Managing the administration of household agriculture without their husbands was viewed by some women as a heavy burden. Some agonized over deaths, illnesses, unjust incarcerations, and other tragedies that had befallen children or husbands while working in the United States. Although these women placed great importance on their more visible economic roles, increased intrahousehold authority came in many cases at a high cost.

Conclusion

The constituting of women's entitlement to land in these four ejidos has arisen from their execution of economic and social responsibilities under conditions of economic crisis and from growing recognition of women's critical productive and reproductive roles within families and ejidal political structures. Although the new constitutional framework increased Mexican women's vulnerability to dispossession and disinheritance, the playing out of the neoliberal agenda in household economies reinforced the validity of women's individual claims and increased women's control of family lands. This unintended result points to a double irony. Despite the increasing difficulty of sustaining rural livelihoods, the widespread selling of ejidal assets anticipated by planners did not occur. Rather, families intensified and diversified income-producing work, together with social activism, in an effort to maintain the economic and social security vested in land and community. With considerable labor input from women, this effort paid off: family welfare improved between 1984 and 1996. Women's entrepreneurial efforts, social activism, and ability to manage agricultural production became increasingly visible in household and community. Women's intrahousehold bargaining positions were strengthened as household agricultural production was increasingly subsidized through remittances sent by children to their mothers.²⁷ The hardships imposed by sustained economic crisis thus afforded women more control of household economic resources.

27. Families received considerable support from their daughters and were investing in

Women also benefited from recognition of their lifetimes of reproductive labor and sacrifice to family. Remittances were sent to women largely because children knew they could count on mothers to use the money wisely and for the welfare of all family members. The welfare of widows and other single female household heads, although not legally protected under the counterreform, was a major concern in the ejidos. Despite legal provision for selling land by individual ejidatarios and the disinheritance of wives and children, land continued to be viewed as a family resource. Most women were not concerned that the ethos underlying protection of their welfare also undercut their individual property rights. Despite the high value placed on women's economic contributions, sons were still expected to provide for the rising generation and were favored over daughters in inheriting land rights. Cracks in this ethos were observed in the ejidos where women had shouldered the heaviest burdens as providers and in families with a single female household head among potential heirs. The gradually increasing visibility of women's providership in the wake of difficult local-level "structural adjustments" may prove to be the final irony of this case study.

This study was completed during the early years of the Mexican counterreform. Although it is too soon to evaluate long-term results, observed trends suggest that women in these ejidos are unlikely to be dispossessed or disinherited in the coming years. Should women desire greater independent access to ejidal membership in the future, they have established records of land management and community participation on which to base their claims. In these ejidos, both the land and the women who worked to maintain it proved to be highly valued by the male majority of ejido members. Despite structural commonalities noted among the research communities and the majority of ejidos, these findings cannot be generalized to the entire Mexican agrarian-reform sector. Case-study results point to the importance of local political economies, customary rules of inheritance, social norms, and gender ideology in the playing out of national counterreform agendas. These results should not be interpreted as evidence that legal structures are irrelevant in determining gendered property rights. Rather, these results point to the importance of local political economies, customary inheritance rules, social norms, and gender ideology in the constitution of women's rights to land and in the playing out of nation counterreform agendas.

their daughters' education. According to de Janvry, Gordillo, and Sadoulet, the average amount of remittances sent to ejido families by family members in the United States in 1993–1994 did not vary by gender (1997, 171–72). In their sample, a smaller proportion of female family members in the United States sent remittances than men, but the sample included unemployed visiting housewives.

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