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1	Article Title	Gender, Land and Sexuality: Exploring Connections		
2	Article Sub- Title			
3	Article Copyright - Year	Springer Science+Business Media New York 2013 (This will be the copyright line in the final PDF)		
4	Journal Name	International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society		
5	Corresponding Author	Family Name	Jacobs	
6		Particle		
7		Given Name	Susie	
8		Suffix		
9		Organization	Manchester Metropolitan University	
10		Division	Department of Sociology	
11	Address	Manton Building, Rosamund Street West, Manchester M15 6LL, UK		
12	e-mail	S.Jacobs@mmu.ac.uk		
13		Received		
14	Schedule	Revised		
15		Accepted		
16	Abstract	<p>This article explores links between the issues of sexuality and gendered control over agricultural land. It discusses gendered land rights in several settings, concentrating particularly on agrarian and land reforms. I argue that land redistribution in the “household” model, discussed for Chile and Nicaragua, tends to entrench male household and agricultural control. In contrast, more collective forms, discussed for Vietnam, have displayed economic weaknesses but had potential to undercut such control by socialising women’s labour. Fears about and visions of female sexuality have much to do with backlashes against inclusion of women, either through allowing them membership of cooperatives and collectives or through granting rights such as joint titling to land. In sub-Saharan Africa, there currently exists much discussion of improving women’s control over agriculture and its products. These continue to meet opposition, despite female predominance in agriculture in the region. Thus, even though women work on the land in many societies, this does not give them any automatic “closeness” to nature or say within households. Control over women’s, especially wives’ labour within peasant households, is linked to the manner that their persons and their labour are bound up in this socio-economic form. The article also examines two feminist attempts to configure alternative agricultural forms: the case of a lesbian agricultural collective in the west of the USA and an Indian model of new female-centred households for single women. Heterosexuality as an institution and gender</p>		

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| 17 | Keywords
separated by ' - ' | Gender - Land rights - Sexuality - Agrarian reforms - Peasantries -
Ecofeminism |
|----|--------------------------------|--|
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- 18 Foot note
information

Gender, Land and Sexuality: Exploring Connections

Susie Jacobs

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Abstract This article explores links between the issues of sexuality and gendered control over agricultural land. It discusses gendered land rights in several settings, concentrating particularly on agrarian and land reforms. I argue that land redistribution in the “household” model, discussed for Chile and Nicaragua, tends to entrench male household and agricultural control. In contrast, more collective forms, discussed for Vietnam, have displayed economic weaknesses but had potential to undercut such control by socialising women’s labour. Fears about and visions of female sexuality have much to do with backlashes against inclusion of women, either through allowing them membership of cooperatives and collectives or through granting rights such as joint titling to land. In sub-Saharan Africa, there currently exists much discussion of improving women’s control over agriculture and its products. These continue to meet opposition, despite female predominance in agriculture in the region. Thus, even though women work on the land in many societies, this does not give them any automatic “closeness” to nature or say within households. Control over women’s, especially wives’ labour within peasant households, is linked to the manner that their persons and their labour are bound up in this socio-economic form. The article also examines two feminist attempts to configure alternative agricultural forms: the case of a lesbian agricultural collective in the west of the USA and an Indian model of new female-centred households for single women. Heterosexuality as an institution and gender subordination more broadly, as the examples here indicate, have to do not only with sexual practices or identity but extend also to issues of labour and access to crucial resources.

Keywords Gender · Land rights · Sexuality · Agrarian reforms · Peasantries · Ecofeminism

This paper explores the question of sexuality in relation to land and gendered land rights. This “terrain” is largely unexplored despite what is now a growing literature on women’s land rights (e.g. for a small selection on land rights, see Agarwal 1994; Deere and León 2001; Englert and Daley 2008; Razavi 2003).

Control over land and agriculture is bound up with the nexus of kinship, gender, sexuality and household-based economies in many rural areas. I use case studies to explore these linkages and the control over wives’ sexuality entailed. Since this subject is little-studied or

S. Jacobs (✉)

Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manton Building, Rosamund Street West,
Manchester M15 6LL, UK
e-mail: S.Jacobs@mmu.ac.uk

documented, the article draws on those works that analyse gender and land issues with some reference to sexuality. 38 39

The paper presents a comparative study: comparative analysis can draw attention both to the “local” and to similarities that are relevant. Aspects of the local are variable and, to some extent (like households), unique. Nevertheless, continuities also exist and comparisons can highlight notable similarities across social and cultural contexts. Despite women’s involvement in agricultural labour, discourses supporting male domination of family farming often persist in the contemporary world, even where women own and manage farms. 40 41 42 43 44 45

The cases discussed here illustrate the difficulties entailed in acknowledging women’s agricultural labour and in their extending commensurate control over agriculture. Here, I contextualise discussions of gender, land and sexuality in terms of institutions and statuses such as kinship relationships and marriage, women’s labour on farms and within households, beliefs and ideas about women’s proper place, women’s [potential] pollution and relation to nature, and notions of masculinity and femininity as they pertain to sexual respectability. 46 47 48 49 50 51

Materialist feminist perspectives have attempted to analyse gender subordination; those referred to here agree that women’s subordination and gender relations more widely are complex, multifaceted and not reducible to one cause or process (Whitehead 2006). Moreover, in order to analyse gender relations, sexuality also needs to be brought into the analytical frame (see “Background”). Jackson (1999) and Rahman and Jackson (2010) use the concept of heterosexuality as systematic: heterosexuality is not only to do with sexual practices or desires but is also bound up with wider social institutions. In attempting to excavate aspects of sexuality in the context of land issues, both the importance of sexuality within gender relations and the multifaceted, complex nature of women’s oppression in most gender regimes should be considered. As Budhiraja et al. (2010) note, women’s sexuality is regulated in most or all societies and regulation is maintained through the legal sphere, social constraints and punishments (p. 137). These formulations point to the systematic nature of inequity and hierarchy and to the role of sexuality. 52 53 54 55 56 Q2 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

The article contributes to literature by discussion of issues that often lie “hidden” within discussions of gender and land rights. It argues that one aspect of the strong resistance to equity in land rights concerns fears, from both heterosexual men and women, about women’s independent actions and the implications for sexuality that may follow. 65 66 67 68

The paper is structured as follows: the second section discusses contextual issues; the third outlines some relevant themes within ecofeminist thought and provides a critique. The fourth and fifth sections discuss women’s land rights within contexts of agrarian and land reforms: firstly, taking the “household” model of land redistribution, using Latin American examples as well as one of a contemporary Indian movement. The fifth section analyses the impact of collectivisation, using the example of Vietnam, as well as lesbian agricultural collectives in the USA. The sixth briefly discusses land tenure issues in sub-Saharan Africa before concluding. 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76

Background 77 Q3

The background to this discussion concerns women’s labour in agricultural production in contexts where land is held by families or communities. On both subsistence plots and land used for cash cropping, women perform a wide range of tasks. The exact scope and types of work vary a good deal according to crops, soil type, size of holding and also to sociocultural context. Typically, however, women are responsible for sowing seeds, planting, weeding and for other aspects of routine “upkeep”, care of small livestock and processing crops. 78 79 80 81 82 83

There exist regional and social differences in the extent of women's agricultural participation or, in any case, in the extent of public acknowledgement of their contribution. In sub-Saharan Africa, women have the main responsibility for agricultural production and they undertake the majority of agricultural work (Davison 1988; FAO 2005; World Development Report 2008). In most of the rest of the world, it is men who are viewed as having responsibility for provisioning and who are seen as primary "farmers". However, women usually have important agricultural roles, and these may be equivalent in terms of effort and time spent, to those of men (ActionAid 2005; FAO 2011).

Despite women's work in fields and in keeping livestock, their agricultural labour—like housework—is often hidden and is devalued (ILC 2013; FAO 2011). The social identity of "farmer" is also assumed to be linked with masculinity because in most societies, land rights are held by men (FAO 2011; Jacobs 2010; Razavi 2003). Male landholding predominates in the large parts of the world in which the patrilineal and patrilocal (or virilocal) lineages and residence principles operate—much of sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, South and West Asia, East Asia and parts of Southeast Asia.¹ In these societies, even where lineages no longer operate as corporate entities, the patrilineal principle is a strong underpinning to norms of landholding. Where *shari'a* law operates, daughters are entitled to inherit land, although on an unequal basis to male siblings. In other societies, land is believed to be linked with ancestral spirits and is passed down the male line.

In other parts of the world, for instance the Americas and most of Europe, bilateral kinship systems hold the possibility of more egalitarian property relations in that women can inherit land in their own right. However, they are usually still marginalised in terms of landholding and effective control over agricultural production (Brandth 2002).

Women hold approximately 1 % of wealth globally (World Development Report 2012). Within this context, attempts to calculate the extent of female landholding have been made: where disaggregated statistics are available, these indicate that women hold relatively little land (FAO 2011). Rao cites South Asian studies indicating that women own and operate 10–15 % of land in the region (Rao 2011, p. 4). Reports from different countries (e.g. Brazil, Nepal, Uganda) yield similar figures (cited in ActionAid 2010, p. 5). These findings are likely to indicate an *increase* in women's land ownership as well as very large discrepancies between male and female control and ownership.

Women on small and medium farms usually work as part of families and the farm itself is usually seen as a family farm (see below). Their work is not undertaken purely as labour, then, but acting as mothers, wives and daughters, doing work sometimes termed "reproductive". The term has been long critiqued; it is often loosely used and can perpetuate the idea that caring work is not work (Jacobs 2010; Whatmore 1991) or, indeed, is a substitute for all non-waged work.

In discussions of agriculture, land and gender, any reference to sexuality usually refers to motherhood—that is, the link with sexuality is through childbearing. This tends to link women's mothering roles with a special access to the natural world through their embodiment—bearing, nursing and caring for children and family—and through labour on land. Assumptions about women's nurturing nature often extend to the types of work considered appropriate for them. For instance, women in China, Vietnam and elsewhere often transplant rice seedlings as this is seen as appropriate and an extension of nurturing capacities.

¹ A small number of matrilineal societies exist in some parts of the world such as Southeast Asia and the African central "belt", but space does not allow discussion here but patterns of landholding differ and give more leeway for women lineage members.

Ecofeminism/s

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Ecofeminist work frames much writing linking women’s roles and work with a special relation to nature. The following summarises several arguments and issues for debate, before focussing on the question of women and land. 130
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Like other environmentalisms, ecofeminisms posit the interconnectedness of life forms and the position of humanity as only a (small) part of nature. Broadly, the term refers to the view that the mentality and actions that have led to the domination of women by men are directly connected to pillaging of the natural environment. Women are often viewed as closer to nature than men. Ortner (1974) argued that women’s subordination is due to the widespread *association* of women with “nature” and of men with “culture”. Women are stereotyped as more rooted in nature and as having more direct affinity with it because of their physiological capacities and roles. The identification of the premise that women are viewed as mediating between culture and nature, with consequent denigration of the natural world (and of women), was a significant contribution, with resonance for discussion of gender, sexuality and land rights. 133
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Both Mies and Shiva (1993) and Mellor (1997) differentiate tendencies within ecofeminism. For Mies and Shiva, these are termed “spiritual” and “political” orientations; Mellor discusses “affinity” ecofeminism, a radical cultural and spiritual feminism that can be distinguished from a second strand that stresses both the social construction of and material basis for women’s relation to nature. It is also of note that some ecofeminist theories attempt to avoid universalism through recognition of differential positioning of women in the global north and south and through acknowledgement of the destructive roles of [Western] colonialism and imperialism. Thus, Mies and Shiva (1993) refer to the “three colonies” of capital: nature, women and people of the Third World. 144
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Some strands of ecofeminism thus hold that women—particularly many in the global south—are in fact more in touch with nature and the environment than are men, but that this takes place through the construction of socio-economic roles rather than relating to women’s nature (Mellor 1997). Rather than being “closer” to nature because they give birth or farm, women may in fact have more knowledge about biology or about the environment or more inclination to protect local environments than may (some) men, because their livelihoods may be more dependent on particular environments. 153
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Women, Land, Peasantries and Ecofeminism

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Little is written within ecofeminism about land and landholding, despite the focus on nature (Jackson 1993). The work of Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies (1999), however, does address the “woman/land” question in a defence of the subsistence perspective. This stresses the need to put activities needed to maintain life at the centre of economic life rather than capital accumulation and finance. They argue that male ownership of land has led to commoditisation, food export, overgrazing and consequent degradation of land. Men’s control of commercial farming has marginalised the production of food for household use, mainly by women. 161
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This aspect of the argument is predicated upon a Chayanovian view (Thorner 1966), also taken up by Shanin (1974, 1990). This theoretical stance holds that peasant economies have their own logic and rules and that they are relatively undifferentiated communities. This differs from Marxist views of peasants as representing the agricultural aspect of petty-commodity production, which can exist in several types of economy, including feudalism and capitalism. Marxists also emphasise class differentiation within peasantries, rather than 168
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community cohesion. Neither viewpoint, however, discussed gender within peasantries (Jacobs 2010). Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies do attend to gender relations, and they acknowledge that many farms today are patriarchal in nature, noting that the farm is usually the man's property and the wife is usually his "first maid" (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, p. 93). Although they acknowledge that most men have decision-making powers within the farm, they posit that women in the past had much autonomy within communitarian peasant economies. "We cannot strike off the suspicion that the modern dismissal of the peasant economy (...) is largely due to the fact that women have too much independence within it" (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, p. 95).

There does exist evidence that [capitalist] colonialism undermined women's position in many traditional societies and lessened the areas of autonomy they did possess (e.g. Lastarria-Cornheil 1997; Pankhurst and Jacobs 1988), particularly in female farming areas (Boserup 1970) such as sub-Saharan Africa. And it is often noted that women are most involved in subsistence farming or farming for consumption. However, there exists much evidence for an alternative view that peasant economies or sectors, rather than being sites of autonomy, are more typically sites of extreme control over women. Control over women's sexuality/ies constitutes an important element of the intensive forms of male domination often found among peasantries. Smallholder women find themselves in close relation to land and agricultural activity—precisely because there is little differentiation between "farm" and "household" and because much of the work is not commoditised. The conceptualisation of Glucksmann (2005) of the total social organisation of labour demonstrates the interconnectedness of work undertaken in different socio-economic spheres and perhaps provides a way forward, particularly in the contexts such as small farms.

The identities available to women often depend on (heterosexual) kinship relations—that is, as wives, sisters, daughters and mother (Jackson 1999), and this is particularly true within smallholder households. Women, especially as wives and mothers, are crucial because of the importance of their labour on many small farms, particularly where there is no option of hiring in other workers. Their ability to bear children is key, and women often hold a symbolic significance as mothers and nurturers. Despite the centrality of "family" labour—or perhaps because of this—they rarely control land.

Taboos, Sexuality and Pollution

Various stipulations and taboos about women and agriculture act to distance women from productive use of land: these often relate to biological reproduction or to sexuality. For instance, in India and more widely in South Asia, women are forbidden to plough as their contact with the plough would be polluting (Agarwal 1994). Similarly (if less permanently), women in China traditionally should not do agricultural work during their menses as this is considered harmful to young plants.

Biological discourses of embodiment in agrarian communities often construct what seems to be a natural order in which women's bodies are inferior to those of men (Saugeres 2002). Taboos often operate powerfully to label women's bodies as inherently polluting. This is, of course, common across many societies, but the taboos referred to here may hinder agricultural participation.

The issue of pollution also comes up in some protests for land rights. In some examples, African women have stripped naked, employing a specific bodily and sexualised protest. For instance, Haripriya and Gilmartin (2002) document a 2000 protest in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Here women, including the elderly, protested against a chief who allowed cattle to

eat their maize crops and in favour of women's land rights and extension support. In this protest, women stripped and walked down the roads of Buffelspruit: women's public nakedness is seen as a curse in some societies and so such action was embarrassing. Such action is usually (and not incorrectly) analysed as an aspect of empowerment and of subversive social action. However, it is worth noting that women's sexualised/naked bodies are not thought of as necessarily revealing hidden strength: instead, these may uncover female pollution.

Taboos and ideas of pollution operate effectively to distance women from land rather than linking to land and to nature. It is more common, however, for less direct social means to be used. Women's secondary relation to land and property may be emphasised or reinforced, for instance, through domestic ideology. Relatedly, women who work and control land, particularly without men present, are often viewed as unfeminine (Brandth 2002; Saugeres 2002). Thus, as Budhiraja et al. (2010) argue, the "dangers" of non-conforming sexuality and femininity/masculinity can stretch to encompass a number of realms apart from sexual acts. Thus, in instances in which women have acquired or control land despite the obstacles faced, they may be policed through denigrating identities—and seen not to be true women.

The extended examples of gender and agrarian reform given below illustrate the operation of such inequalities in control over agriculture.

Gender, Land and Agrarian Reforms

Land reforms offer examples of ways that ideas about women's sexuality affect claims for productive resources. Land reform—the redistribution of land to landless or land-hungry rural people—can take a variety of forms (Jacobs 2010). I first discuss reforms in which land has been redistributed to individual households—called the "household" model. I then discuss collective models of land redistribution in which land is held by a collective body and/or by the state. Whereas household models tend to reinforce women's positioning within the domestic sphere and as mothers/wives, the collective model separates part of women's labour from household control. These models, therefore, have different implications concerning gender relations and sexuality. Thirdly, I refer briefly to the sub-Saharan African situation of communal landholdings.

Gender, Land Reform and the Household Model

The examples discussed in this section provide illustrations of the embeddedness of gendered and sexualised inequalities within peasant agriculture.

Redistribution of land within land reforms has been carried out, usually only after bloody struggles, for a number of reasons. These include reduction of rural class inequalities, quelling peasant unrest and—most importantly—raising productivity on the land. Increased democratisation in rural areas has also been a rationale for reforms. This includes lessening of landlord power (Barraclough 1991): in many countries, rural landlords wielded great and quasi-judicial power over peasant/subjects (Thiesenhusen 1995). For instance, in Mexico, landlords often demanded sexual services of wives of *peones*.

Land redistribution freed peasants from this and some other types of "extra-economic" abuse by landlords. However, in other respects, land reforms' promises of democratisation and increased autonomy for small-scale producers have privileged peasant men. The most important mechanism through which this takes place has been the designation of the "household head"—nearly always assumed to be male—as holder of land titles or land permits. For instance, in one example more explicit than most, in the extensive Mexican

reform, landholding was open to people who were “Mexican, males over 18 or single women or widows supporting a family” (van der Haar 2000). Thus, men qualified for landholding as a result of gender alone, but women only on the basis that they supported dependents. Bergeron (2010) notes that international development policy and discourses have tended to privilege particular household types as well as heteronormativity, as evident in these examples. This pattern is nearly universal and has served to entrench not only normative sexuality but also male privilege (Jacobs 2010).

Such processes have meant that rather than women (as wives) becoming empowered through land redistribution policies, their autonomy is often undermined. This is despite real gains such as increases in agricultural production (El-Ghonemy 1990) and in household incomes. Most studies of land/agrarian reform overlook gender relations. However, a review of 32 cases in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe (see Jacobs 2009, discussing 29 cases) that do discuss gender and/or women’s social position indicated that women have been affected negatively in several ways. I summarise relevant processes below.

Women have lost out in several ways through household model land reforms. These include material and spatial aspects such as loss of access to wives’ “own” customary land and loss or diminution of women’s own (as opposed to household) incomes. Some ways in which wives have been negatively affected have more to do with changes in kinship and family roles, with implications for sexuality. For instance:

1. Women are often pushed into “housewife” roles; this sometimes is accompanied by more nuclear family structures within land reform or resettlement areas.
2. There often exists pressure to bear more children to help out with the farm and to consolidate family property (Palmer 1985). This took place, for instance, in Vietnam following decollectivisation, even with the two-child policy (Gammeltoft 1999).
3. The fact that husbands are more continuously present and have a stronger interest in the farm often results in loss of autonomy and of decision-making powers for wives.

The intent here is to explore how sexuality or perceptions about sexuality often tie in with other factors rather than to discuss land reforms in detail. The examples given in the following subsections are Latin American. This is not because the interlinking of “land” and “sexuality” issues is specific to the region, but because Latin American feminists are more commonly engaged with discussions of sexuality as one aspect of gendered relations. The Chilean and Nicaraguan examples are followed by an Indian example of a movement attempting to formulate new models of household landholding for single women on state-granted land.

Chile

Chile’s agrarian reform took place between 1965 and 1973, under Eduardo Frei’s Christian Democratic government (1964–1970) and then Salvador Allende’s *Unidad Popular* [UP] government (1970–1973). Approximately 20 % of the rural labour force benefited, including some 58,000 households (Deere 1983, p. 190).

Chilean agriculture had had a similar structure to much of Latin America: a small number of large estates (haciendas) occupied the most productive land, while a large number of smallholders usually worked on marginal land; these were accompanied by an even larger population of landless workers.

The organisational form of redistributed land under Frei, called an *asentamiento* (settlement), was similar to a production cooperative. The Frei reform strongly favoured the resident male agricultural workforce (Garrett 1982). The eligibility requirements consisted of being a capable peasant of good character, aged 18 or married and an effective head of

household. Under this proviso, nearly all women were excluded, as were many men (Garrett 1982; Kay 1999). The aims of the Allende government were more egalitarian in class and gender terms and it created agrarian reform units (*Centros de Reforma Agraria* or CERAs) in which women as well as unmarried men were included.

Garrett, in an early intervention (Garrett 1982) and Tinsman (2002), in a detailed study of the Central Aconcagua region, have studied issues of sexuality in relation to Chile's agrarian reform.

Land occupations and their eventual outcome in the *asentamientos* both fostered male ties and a sense of alternative masculinity. The labour movement brought men together, but the sense that unions did not and should not directly include women also keenly shaped its fraternity and few women were *asentadas* [settlers] (Garrett 1982). "Beyond unions' exclusion of women, their affirmation of men's domination over women and in particular, men's sexual access to female bodies defined their masculine integrity" (Tinsman 2002, p. 117).

The *asentamientos*' creation of a rural elite had resonance for ideas about masculinity, through men's access to land and to "be our own bosses" (Tinsman 2002, p. 171). *Campesina* [peasant] women, in contrast, benefited from land almost exclusively through men. The process of land reform strengthened existing gender hierarchies, reinforcing married women's economic dependence on men and reinforcing peasant men's sense of authority over wives. Tinsman writes that *asentado* men were particularly eager to display a reinvigorated masculinity by policing the parameters of feminine domesticity (Tinsman 2002, p. 184).

It was rare for wives to organise for land rights for themselves. Their responsibilities for childrearing and household production usually overshadowed any seasonal participation in agricultural work. The matter was different, of course, for female household heads, whose needs were almost entirely ignored by the unions (Lago 1987). From the late 1960s, *campesino* efforts to speed agrarian reform created greater militancy including physical confrontations in occupations (*tomos*). Men predominated, but Tinsman argues that some women seized upon the logic of gender mutualism in agrarian reform propaganda to expand the boundaries of women's activism and acceptable interventions for women—for instance, they became concerned with land and housing struggles (Tinsman 2002, p. 207). Later, in the Allende period, *tomos* escalated (Kay 2002). Women's activism, especially that of single and younger women, pushed the boundaries of struggles (p. 271).

Most women had very long workdays, averaging over 12 h, and found it difficult to participate in CERAs. The main impediment to women's participation, however, was male hostility as well as jealousy. Garrett (1982) found that over 90 % of men discouraged their wives from participation. One of the most frequently cited complaints about CERAs was precisely that they had *permitted* female inclusion (p. 22). As opposition to the government was fomented, local-level agrarian reform officials warned the national UP that its insistence on incorporating women was jeopardising male support for the agrarian reform and for the government itself (Tinsman 2002, p. 245). Women's assumption of political roles was experienced as demasculinising and as a threat (Tinsman 2002)—of particular import in the fraught and hostile atmosphere the Allende government faced. This pattern of local rural resistance has occurred historically, in other cases (see below).

These struggles were, of course, brought to an abrupt halt through the 11 September 1973 CIA-backed coup by General Pinochet, which put a bloody end to the socialist experiment and any gendered dilemmas entailed.

Nicaragua 355

In Nicaragua, the main agrarian reform took place under the socialist Sandinista government, which expropriated the huge estates owned by the ruling Somoza and related families. The

policy from 1981 was to favour agricultural production cooperatives, but in practice, about half of units were owned by smallholding peasants (Martinez 1993, p. 481). The Sandinistas were noted for strong feminist influence on social policies. The first law concerning gender was enacted and prohibited the use of women as sex objects in advertising. Another eliminated the distinction between legal marriage and informal unions. An important piece of legislation was the “nurturing law” (*Ley de Alimentos*) which declared the equality of all household members and need for equal participation in housework and childcare. Part of this initial legislation was the agrarian reform law, unusual in that neither sex nor kinship status was to be an impediment to qualify as an agrarian reform beneficiary. The Agricultural Cooperative Law (1982) stated that women should be integrated into cooperatives and specified that women had rights to *involvement* in cooperatives, including management.

However, women faced a range of difficulties in activating their rights, as related by several studies. The government did not realise that actions other than legislation would be necessary to secure women’s new rights (Collinson 1990). Activating gender rights on cooperatives was also to prove difficult. By 1990, 12 % of members were female (Disney 2004). Most husbands considered it “enough” that they themselves joined and many opposed wives becoming full members. An official mid-1980s study of five marketing and eight production cooperatives found considerable discrimination against women (Mayoux 1993) despite formal membership.

The micropolitics of a particular collective are explored by Montoya (2003), who has paid particular attention to the way sexualised dynamics frame interaction and subjectivities structuring everyday life. El Tule was a model collective with a strong Sandinista identity. Men in the collective were able to hold to “revolutionary” identities while adhering to their gender privileges. The particular form of dominant masculinity was highly controlling women’s sexuality, geographical movement and their social standing. Early on, an underlying ambivalence surfaced:

In particular, the collective was plagued by men’s relentless attacks on women collective members as *vagas* (vagrants), with implications of avoidance of work and of sexual availability. Most men, including Sandinista militants, accused women of neglecting domestic duties and going to collectives to look for men. Some beat and threatened to leave their wives for participating (Montoya 2003).

In the face of such pressure, most women were forced to capitulate and to leave the collective. Others, however, fought to remain within.

Montoya’s picture of the “good wife” on El Tule has wider resonance. The ideas of “good” and “bad” women and “the home” vs. “the street” underpinned gender ideology and much of women’s lives: a “good” woman, who was by definition married, remained at home except in emergencies, confining economic activity to that which could be household-based (Montoya 2003). She was modest, faithful and attentive to her husband and concentrated on performing domestic duties and raising children. Ideally, she was not involved in village affairs and did not gossip, monitor her husband’s activities or question her husband’s sexual prerogatives. In return, a man should be able to “provide” and should protect his family. Village women were subject to high levels of restriction on their movement. After 1979, the building of a school, a clinic and a road widened opportunities for mobility, as did membership of the local women’s committee (the *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza*, AMNLAE).

Women who ventured beyond these few prescribed places would risk being seen as being “of the street” rather than “of the home”. And the street was—at least symbolically—the only territory for “bad women” as well as for [all] men. As elsewhere, “the street” functioned as a disciplinary technology to keep women “in their place” (Montoya 2003).

Tuleño women established a small, all-female horticultural collective from 1982. In 1999, the collective, whose membership had declined, disbanded because men from the cooperative demanded their land back. By working outside the home without absolute economic necessity, women were seen as breaking the terms of the conjugal or sexual “contract” (Pateman 1988); the threat was perceived as sexual and moral. Men often drew sexualised parallels between married women collective members and single mothers: “They walk around like those single women who lack a man’s rein.”—*les falta reinda de hombre* (Montoya 2003, p. 62).

Some women persisted in their collective membership despite husbands’ opposition. Perhaps symbolically, in 2000, a new, small horticultural collective was established in El Tule, on the grounds of the original collective.

The Chilean and Nicaraguan examples both stressed land redistribution to individual households, although Nicaragua emphasised co-operatives more strongly. In both, women’s proper place was seen as firmly located within male-dominated households, spatially and symbolically; women’s sexuality or suppositions about this were subject to near-constant community and family policing. In Nicaragua, however, at a later date and with much stronger legislation and feminist organisations, there was more basis for contestation of “encapsulation” within peasant/smallholder households.

Ekal Nari Shakti Sangatham, Northwest India

A contemporary example in the context of privatised landholdings comes from the ENSS (Association of Empowered Single Women) in Himachal Pradesh, Northwest India (see Berry 2011). The term “single women” here encompasses a wide range of marriage statuses, including widows, divorcees and abandoned women, never-married women and wives fleeing domestic/intimate violence. The movement explicitly challenges both women’s dependent status and the necessity of (heterosexual) marriage in rural sectors, in that it demands resources and new forms of organisation enabling single women to subsist outside marriage. These demands include free health care, individual registration in local council registers, ration cards—which are crucial markers of individual identity—as well as for access to a range of government programmes and resources and the grant of two acres of state-held agricultural land to meet basic food needs.

What makes the ENSS particularly unusual is not only its organisation of non-married women but also its demand for a new form of household or “marital family” [*naya susural*] in which an older woman joins with a younger woman (usually, with dependent children) to form a viable farming unit. While this is in part simply a practical measure, such measures challenge the “heteropatriarchal” (Berry 2011) basis of access to land in North India. Since women living outside the protected status of heterosexual marriage are automatically suspect, the new household relations are also intended to enhance single women’s community status.

Contradictions exist, however. The new arrangements may create new sites for control over single women’s sexuality (Berry 2011). Access to property may attract a new (male) partner, which would entail loss of the land granted by the state. The spectre of sexual reputation looms large; the possibility of lesbian sexual relations is not discussed in the account, but sex with a male partner outside marriage would tarnish the reputation of the woman directly involved as well as the other women in her household. However, Berry notes some historical precedent for Indian widows having sex with a new male partner but managing to retain land. This came about because some local communities deemed that only remarriage, rather than simply having sexual relations as a widow, invalidated a widow’s

claim to land. Thus, it might be possible for women willing to risk their reputations and community status to form heterosexual relationships but to maintain the new form of female-centred household.

This example provides an attempt to construct new, women-centred households which also have an agrarian basis. These are not (or not explicitly) based on sexual relations but on labour, cooperation and redistribution within the new household. These provide an interesting contrast to the consolidation of peasant households and control over wives indicated by mainstream household agrarian reform models.

Agrarian Reforms: the Collective Model

The links between male control over land in smallholder household, and control over women's sexuality and labour, are clearer in societies which have attempted more radical agrarian reforms than in the above Latin American examples. Following revolutionary upheavals, societies such as the USSR, Cuba, China, Vietnam and elsewhere attempted collectivisation of agriculture either on a full or partial basis. Within collectives, people are either paid in wages (on state farms) or else through work points according to days worked or work undertaken. The reasons for collectivisation have nothing to do with gender: it was assumed that in agriculture as in industry, large units were the most efficient. Abolition or severe diminution of private property meant the proletarianisation of peasants, and so skirted around the problem of a "suspect" class with petty-bourgeois/small capitalist tendencies (Jacobs 2013). Collectivisation nonetheless had profound gender implications. The lack of private property and payment methods meant that women's "productive" work in fields was undertaken for the collective body rather than the family or husband. Payments in work points lent visibility and public recognition to women's labour. This often met with resistance from men.

Vietnam

In North Vietnam, Confucian traditions from China prevailed and patrilineages were strong: women were subject to the "three Obediences"—to father, husband and elder sons. Women customarily had more autonomy in Southeast Asia than in China: for example, often working as traders and taking charge of family accounts (Pelzer-White 1987). Nevertheless, in both, their status was low especially in the countryside. Their work in agriculture—rice and vegetable cultivation, small animal husbandry—was/is very important for family survival, although as elsewhere not fully acknowledged.

Both Vietnam and China were predominantly agrarian. In both settings, large landlords had long dominated impoverished peasants. In China, in areas first liberated by the Red Army during the Long March of the 1930s, land reform was enacted swiftly. The promise of land redistribution and, therefore, basic livelihood security was crucial to ensuring peasants' support for the Communist Party. Although the main reason for support was due to food security factors, the desire to "restore" peasant men's control over their "own" households was also of importance (Stacey 1983). Nevertheless, in both countries—and very unusually—women were given shares of land under land redistribution programmes.

In North Vietnam under the Viet Minh (from 1946), important legal reforms were enacted. Women were declared legal equals of men. They were given rights to vote and to hold office, as well as family rights (e.g. taking the custody of children) and the ability to divorce husbands. Forced and child marriage were outlawed, polygyny outlawed and minimum marriage ages set. These were significant reforms, as elsewhere in the then Soviet world, and markedly raised women's status.

In North Vietnam after the 1954 division of the country, and in China from the late 1950s, collectivisation was enacted. Although many younger women and single women joined cooperatives, many men were opposed. In neither setting, landless or land-hungry men fought for a revolution amid much privation, to find themselves losing control, or partial control, over women's labour and bodies.

Wiergsma (1991) gives a powerful account of peasant men's antagonism and resistance to collectivisation for Vietnam. She highlights ways in which peasant men and particularly middle peasant men—that is, those most firmly “placed” in the agrarian economy—subverted collectivisation policies. They resisted and eventually managed to dilute Party policies, to delay implementation and to retain much control over agriculture and their households. In both China and Vietnam, from the late 1970s and mid-1980s, respectively, control over agricultural production was returned to households and household heads.

There are many reasons for the wholesale failure of agricultural collectives—and in particular, for the unprecedented disaster of the Great Leap Forward in China, entailing the death by starvation of millions (Yang 2012). These include collectivisation in over large, unwieldy units (in China), planning failures, underreporting of food shortages by cadres and lack of economic incentives. Many women as well as men disliked collectives—and of course failure to deliver economically meant hunger, if not worse. However, there exists much testimony of some support for collectives particularly among women who were socially marginalised, such as widows, single women, female-headed households as well as some married women (see Deere 1983, 1986; Frenier 1983; Pelzer-White 1987, for a few examples.)

The ability to direct the labour of wives, daughters and daughters-in-law was and is linked to ability to oversee or control the spatial movement of family members, particularly women in the family. This in turn has sexualised implications: in peasant households, labour, spatial movement and control over sexuality come as a “bundle” and are hard to disentangle. These are taken-for-granted aspects of male domination in many peasant households, and so the reactions and emotions involved may be particularly fierce. Thus, the partial loss of control over women differentiated collectives from the household model of land redistribution. The latter constitutes only one part of the story of unpopularity and failure of collectives, but is an important and neglected aspect of this history.

South Oregon: the Lesbian Collectives

On a completely different scale of socio-economic experiment, some women have attempted to circumvent norms of male dominance of land and to utilise collective forms. These are the lesbian cooperatives and collectives of Southern Oregon state, USA, which were established from the early mid-1970s (Sandilands 2002). The aims of the different farms and women establishing them were several: one important aspect was establishing a safe space for lesbians to live and to conduct relationships in safety; another was the vision of harmony with nature. A number of the founders wished to establish a radical, alternative culture and space that was self-subsistent and which removed issues of material as well as sexual “ownership”. Based on documentary analysis and interviews with participants, Sandilands estimates that hundreds and possibly thousands of women lived on the farms for a period of time from the 1970s to the early twenty-first century.

A key difference with the situation of agricultural collectivisations discussed above is that this was a very small-scale experiment and, more importantly, these were intentional communities—which hold the possibility of withdrawal in case of disagreements. And conflicts did appear—over social class, over race, over sexual jealousy, resource use, use of collective space, among others (Sandilands 2002, p. 141). However, the land itself

sometimes bound community members together even when separatist ideas unravelled: that is, realities of survival on the land sometimes overrode disagreement. 546
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Sandilands argues that the lesbian collectives should not be dismissed as an example of essentialist separatism. People who remained on the land often modified their views or, in any case, came to live with alternative visions. For some, the assumptions of spiritual ecofeminism through links between women and earth remained paramount; others saw the collectives as a space of resistance against corporate capitalism. Crucially—and paradoxically since this takes place within the USA context of firm private property rights—the centrality of social class was recognised, and there were attempts to modify property arrangements so that a greater number of women could participate. Women who did remain on the land necessarily developed the skills and capacities to work on it, to build houses, to manage forest resources, etc.: this was essential, whatever their views concerning ties to land and nature. 548
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It is hard to draw “lessons” from the collectives of South Oregon, given the small scale of the farms and their voluntary nature. However, lesbian feminism here produced collective visions of ownership which also tried explicitly to sidestep male-dominated gender relations and to disrupt the heterosexual division of labour found in most smallholding sectors. Their existence also challenges various binaries, including that lesbians are always associated with the urban, and draws attention to the sexual organisation of rural communities. Nevertheless, landholding arrangements in most of the world ignore lesbian and bisexual women and continue to discourage manifestations of women’s independence. 558
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African Tenure Systems, Customary Law and Women’s Rights

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The last set of examples discussed is taken from sub-Saharan Africa. The traditional systems of land tenure usually entail collective landholdings by lineages or clans although individual households work the land. Traditionally, a wife had rights to a plot of land on which to cultivate her “own” crops, usually for family consumption; however, husbands had to grant this land, so that women’s rights were secondary and accessed through men. Within patrilineal systems, men as fathers and husbands (and sometimes as elder sons) held (and usually hold) decision-making powers. In general, in the region, women have had more access to land than elsewhere, but their lack of control is an indication of, and reinforces, subordinate status and poverty. 567
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Contemporary situations concerning land tenure in many African countries are complex. Scenarios are framed by a number of factors, including privatisation and land titling, dual customary and statutory systems in many countries and large-scale land deals or “land grabbing”—which threaten the rights of women as well as men (Behrman et al. 2012). Contemporary debates also concern how women can gain more effective rights and control over land within or outside customary systems. 576
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Individual land titling has recently been put forward as a way for women to gain greater rights to and control over land. Although space does not allow discussion here, this is of relevance in context of discussion of political economy. Again, much debate exists about the advisability of titling/privatisation in communal contexts (Englert and Daley 2008; Manji 2006; Razavi 2003): one possibility is that women may gain individual rights over land, only to lose these in the market (Fortin 2005), as happens not infrequently to the rural poor. These debates and conflicts have often been played out on national stages in formulation of new land laws (e.g. in Uganda, Tanzania). In cases such as Tanzania, feminist lawyers advocating individual titles have been pitted against land commissions and other bodies stressing the advantages of customary law (Tsikata 2003). 582
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A summary of 26 projects researching women’s land rights across sub-Saharan Africa is provided by Budlender and Alma (2011). These are of special interest because the samples involved are large, because the country coverage is very wide and because these are very recent. Most of the projects and initiatives discussed found that customary law still played a strong role in regulating women’s access to and control over land even where formal legislation restricts the power of customary norms. Women continued to suffer vulnerability upon divorce or widowhood, especially (in the latter case) if they refused to be inherited by one of the husband’s surviving brothers or male kin; many widows end up destitute.

Changes in laws and regulations to promote women’s rights where custom reinforces inequalities entail strengthening of statutory rights over land, including the necessity for joint titling in both/all spouses’ names, the need for permission of family members to alienate land and wider constitutional or legal provisions concerning equity.

When women seek to assert their rights, they—predictably—often meet opposition, particularly not only from in-laws (the husband’s family) but also from husbands, siblings and their own children. Falk Moore (1998a, b) details ways that statutory rights are often circumvented through everyday practice. Lack of enforcement of laws concerning gender equity, land and agriculture is routine rather than exceptional (Englert and Daley 2008). Underlying such obstacles are often strong fears and feelings about community, family, agriculture and masculinity/femininity if women were to gain greater control (Cross and Friedman 1997, pp. 27–28). Thus, although a turn to the market poses dangers for women’s rights, so too does a return to the “local” and customary (Razavi 2003).

Conclusion

Much more attention is being paid to the issue of women’s land rights in recent years. Some attention has perhaps been for negative reasons, including lessened importance of agriculture in livelihoods (Budlender and Alma 2011; Pearson 2001). The increasing numerical predominance of women in rural areas and understanding of current and looming food security crises are also factors. International institutions, aid agencies and NGOs such as the FAO, UN Women, USAID, ActionAid, Oxfam and others have highlighted women’s land rights recently and have supported campaigns for smallholder agriculture. Attention at international and official levels can only be positive, since women’s lack of control over land has been such a neglected issue.

At local levels, however, it remains difficult to gain rights or to enforce any legislation giving rights. Budlender and Alma (2011) conclude for the African contexts studied that there exists minimal support for women demanding land rights and that the efforts to address gendered land and property rights remain isolated and disjointed (p. 73). Translation of official pronouncements and statutory law into changes in practice is challenging.

This article has summarised some of the issues “behind” such inaction and resistances, whether overt or covert. Resistance to land rights for women has been very widespread: perhaps more so than to women’s entry into paid work in industry.

Women’s land claims have often resulted in violence, including sexualised violence. This is the case in many contexts globally, and testimony from a number of different sources (Agarwal 1994; Budlender and Alma 2011; Cross and Friedman 1997; Davin 1988; Jacobson et al. 2000) stresses this risk. Violence against women is common, of course, and women may face violence not only in asserting claims but also in cases where they have *won* land. In this case, newly won rights are undermined in bodily, material ways.

Work on agrarian reforms and land redistribution indicates that symbolic and institutional ties between land, masculinity, male power and control over wives persist in many societies.

Despite many social and cultural variations, these form a strong underlying theme that supports gender and sexualised hierarchies. A number of dilemmas are entailed in securing women's land rights and control over agriculture, and some of these touch on the issue of sexuality. Thus, the article has stressed how issues of control over land and agriculture are bound up with the nexus of kinship, gender, sexuality and household-based economies in (many) rural areas. The cases discussed illustrate this nexus in differing ways. For instance, land reforms in the household model have often benefited men, and sometimes households more widely, materially but have worked further to "encapsulate" women within the agricultural/household unit. Even within progressive movements aiming to empower rural people, as the Chilean and Nicaraguan examples indicate, possession of land can boost men's community status and, with this, plays of masculinity—interpreted as requiring control over women. Because women's reproductive capacities are particularly important in this type of household, control may be heightened.

Turning to collective forms: African customary law is collective in that land is held by elders on behalf of the community, although usually worked on a household basis. This can mean a certain amount of security for men in terms of access to land. Patrilineal forms (which form the large majority), however, seriously disadvantage women who cannot hold land apart from small garden plots on a long-term basis. Nevertheless, the "African land ethic" (Cross 1992) sometimes means that divorcees/widows with children can access some land for subsistence by chiefly grant (Paradza 2010). Nonetheless, many widows, deserted women and divorcees are left destitute and without land. African customary law thus poses a conundrum with regard to gender equity, since women's land rights are likely to go along with privatisation or titling of land—and poor women like men are likely to lose their land in the neoliberal marketplace.

Collectivisation of agriculture in state socialist societies provided a partial—and radical—break through severing the link between household control and (most of) women's agricultural fieldwork. However, agricultural collectives in the main failed to raise productivity, and attempts to disrupt the nexus discussed above gave rise to much resistance against collectivisation of private property, in which fears about women's labour and sexuality played a part.

The article also discusses two attempts to step "outside" the foundational role of heterosexual relations within agricultural households. One example is that of the lesbian collectives in Oregon; the other is the ENSS movement in Northwest India, which aims to provide single women both with means of subsistence in land and through access to state grants and to form new female-centred households. The latter in particular may form a model for the increasing numbers of single and divorced women in the countryside in many world regions (IFAD 2001). However, the kinship-gender-sexuality-land nexus is difficult to break, and women's control over land appears to be particularly problematic across a number of societies. In the case of the ENSS, what appears as a threat is the *lack* of sexual basis to the household: if women form heterosexual relations outside the new household and these result in marriage (with the property as potential attraction...), then the new household would be dissolved. If the relationships did not result in marriage, the threat would be to social standing and women's reputation (no doubt, any lesbian or bisexual ties would be seen as more decidedly outside community norms). As indicated above, it might nevertheless remain possible for women to circumvent sexual norms and to keep their land, as long as this is still leased by the state—and as long as such strategies are not met by violence. Both examples pose challenges and resistance to the "peasant" household model and attempt to formulate new strategies.

I have argued that the question of sexuality and fears about women's sexuality form part of the "story" of the very widespread dispossession of women from control over land,

despite their work in farming and within smallholder households. Further research on the manner in which land claims become tied up with beliefs, fantasies and emotions about sexuality would assist in the analysis of these complex processes. Interrogation of the dimension of sexuality might also contribute to change “on the ground”—where women’s land rights most matter.

Acknowledgments I am very grateful to Jasmine Gideon, Kimberly Hoang and Christian Klesse for the feedback on and suggestions for this article.

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- Q1. Please check the suggested running page title if appropriate. Otherwise, please provide short running title with maximum of 65 characters including spaces.
- Q2. The citation “see Introduction” was changed to “see “Background””. Kindly check if such modification is appropriate.
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- Q4. The citations “Razavi 2007”, “Shanin (1971)”, “Lastarría 1997”, “Deere 1986”, “Daley & Englert 2008”, “Razavi 2007” and “Falk Moore (1997)” (original) were changed to “Razavi 2003”, “Shanin (1974)”, “Lastarría-Cornheil 1997”, “Deere 1983”, “Englert and Daley 2008”, “Razavi 2003” and “Falk Moore (1998a, b)”, respectively. Please check if such modifications were appropriate.
- Q5. “Aconcagua region” was changed to “Aconcagua region”. Kindly check if such modification is appropriate.
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- Q8. Kindly provided complete accessed date (i.e. day, month, year) for reference entries “FAO/Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (2011)”, “International Land Coalition (2013)”, “Rao (2011)” and “World Development Report (2012)”.
- Q9. Kindly provide page range for reference entry “Razavi (2003)”.
- Q10. Kindly check if the provided publisher location in reference entry “Tinsman (2002)” is correct.