MASTERING THE STRUGGLE

Gender, Actors and Agrarian Change in a Mexican Ejido

Dorien Brunt

STELLINGEN BEHORENDE BIJ HET PROEFSCHRIFT VAN DORIEN BRUNT "MASTERING THE STRUGGLE"
Gender, Actors and Agrarian Change in a Mexican Ejido, 1992

1. Socio-anthropological research is a process. One's personal and intellectual experiences are reflected in the collecting and understanding of fieldwork material and the writing of a text. (Chapter 1, page 5).

2. "Women" on the one hand, and "peasants" or "farmers" on the other, are neither comparable nor exclusive categories. When used as the starting point of research and analysis, without problematizing, these concepts hinder the research of changing gender ideology and practices in the context of agricultural modernization. (Chapter 1, page 12).

3. In view of the complementarity of the strong and weak sides of the discussion on "gender, household and the state" on the one hand, and the "actor-oriented interface approach of intervention processes" on the other, the combination of the two lines of thought seem to be promising for each of them. (Chapter 1, page 20).

4. Taking the experiences of Mexican women claiming access to land, leads us to recognize other mechanisms for canalizing the demands of social actors than those often mentioned in the Mexican literature on the political system of distribution of vital resources. (Chapter 2, page 45).

5. Because of the manipulative jungle of rules and regulations, there is a need for 'leverage' to get the demands of the ejidatarios heard. However, the monopolization of such contacts by the political core of the ejido undermines vertical organization, which is necessary in order to articulate and push the demands of the ejidatarios. thus the monopolization of such contacts should not be allowed by the ejidatarios. (Chapter 3, page 75).

6. At the level of local politics, politicians and bureaucrats, the dominant gender ideology (a man has the right to till the land, and a woman has the right to find herself a man who maintains her) is actually stronger than the legal rights women possess over land. (Chapter 4, page 95).

7. The political intention in Mexico to privatize ejido land, is severely criticized, that this will lead to a concentration of land in the hands of a few, and proletarization of a majority of ejidatarios. The experiences in El Rancho endorse this view. It is due to the practical and legal construction of ejido titles, that ejidatarios do not lose their land, notwithstanding the severe debts that they may have at certain periods of their lives. (Chapter 6, page 122).

8. The incorporation of farms into the wider environment does not per se imply a decreasing capacity of the farmer to decide over the production process on the farm. The exact relations with the market and the institutions -the nature and the degree of incorporation- are the subject of negotiation between the farmers and the representatives of this wider environment. (Chapter 6, page 145).

9. The planners of the livestock credit programme assumed an essentially undifferentiated group of farmers. This resulted in a uniform programme. However, seeing the heterogeneity of farm practices, and the essential differences in the immediate and longer term needs of the livestock holders, the latter needed to find ways of assuring some freedom of action. (Chapter 7, page 164).

10. The experiences of female farmers show that a farm is not only a productive or economic enterprise, but that it is also a socio-political, and even an ideological enterprise. Women derive multiple social identities from being in charge of a farm, and it offers them the possibility to move more like full subjects in the world of local politics and of state institutions than they were able to do when still married and without control of property. (Chapter 8, page 184).

11. The process of reflecting together with the social actors, men and women, on the process of claiming access to vital material and immaterial resources in the light of their former experiences, social identities, dominant and alternative discourses, and horizontal and vertical organization of men and women, warrants the continuing search for the interrelation between material, ideological and socio-political aspects of everyday life. And moreover, it enables us to support the different ways in which social actors, men and women, master the struggle to cope with the problems they encounter in their everyday lives. (Chapter 9, last page).

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"Hoe langer ik leef, des te meer raak ik ervan overtuigd dat waarachtige en nuttige sociale wetenschappen, nuttige en waarachtige maatschappelijke actie onmogelijk zijn buiten de wetenschap die zijn conclusies, en de actie die zijn daden baseert op het denken en de inspiratie van de massa. Sociologische kennis en maatschappelijke actie die dat niet als uitgangspunt nemen, zullen vruchteloos blijken."

Peter Kropotkin, 1912
in: Emma Goldman, Mijn Leven, Deel II, 19852

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op vrijdag 8 mei 1992
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Promotoren: dr. Norman Long, hoogleraar in de rurale ontwikkelingssociologie
dr. Joke Schrijvers, hoogleraar in ontwikkelingsvraagstukken
INDRA, University van Amsterdam

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And then my mother, since her way of going about the problems of a seaman's wife, compelled my respect for women who, for whatever reason, have to take care of their children on their own, not at all an easy job.

Further I want to mention Norman and Ann Long, and Joke Schrijvers. Norman innitiated and guided the research project and over the years has been a continuous source of inspiration, because of his vivid and extensive knowledge of social sciences and of making challenging links between different subjects and disciplines. When I felt lost in abstractions, luckily enough there was Ann. At several crucial moments she was the one who made me understand that sociology is not just an intellectual but also a very human enterprise. Besides Norman, Joke Schrijvers has also guided my research. She has been important in two ways. One is that she gave me the confidence to trust my own judgements and feelings. The other is that she repeatedly pointed out to me the fact that an actor analysis, even when talking explicitely about women as social actors and men as social actors, does not implicitely mean that one is making a gender analysis. The latter implies that the differences between men and women are not just established, but are the subject of research: they are problematized and analyzed.

My research was part of a larger interdisciplinairy and interculturally research project. I want to thank the other permanent and temporal members of the team: Pieter van der Zaag, Magdalena Villarreal, Gabriel Torres, Elsa Guzmán, Humberto González, Alberto Arce, Pedro Ling, Milly Figueroa, Ana Isabel Gaytán, Jikke Verhulst, Hans Heydra, Monique Nuyten, Gerard Verschoor, Ingrid Veldhuizen, and Annemiek Vos. Several of them have directly influenced the course of my own research and maturity.

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Dorien Brunt
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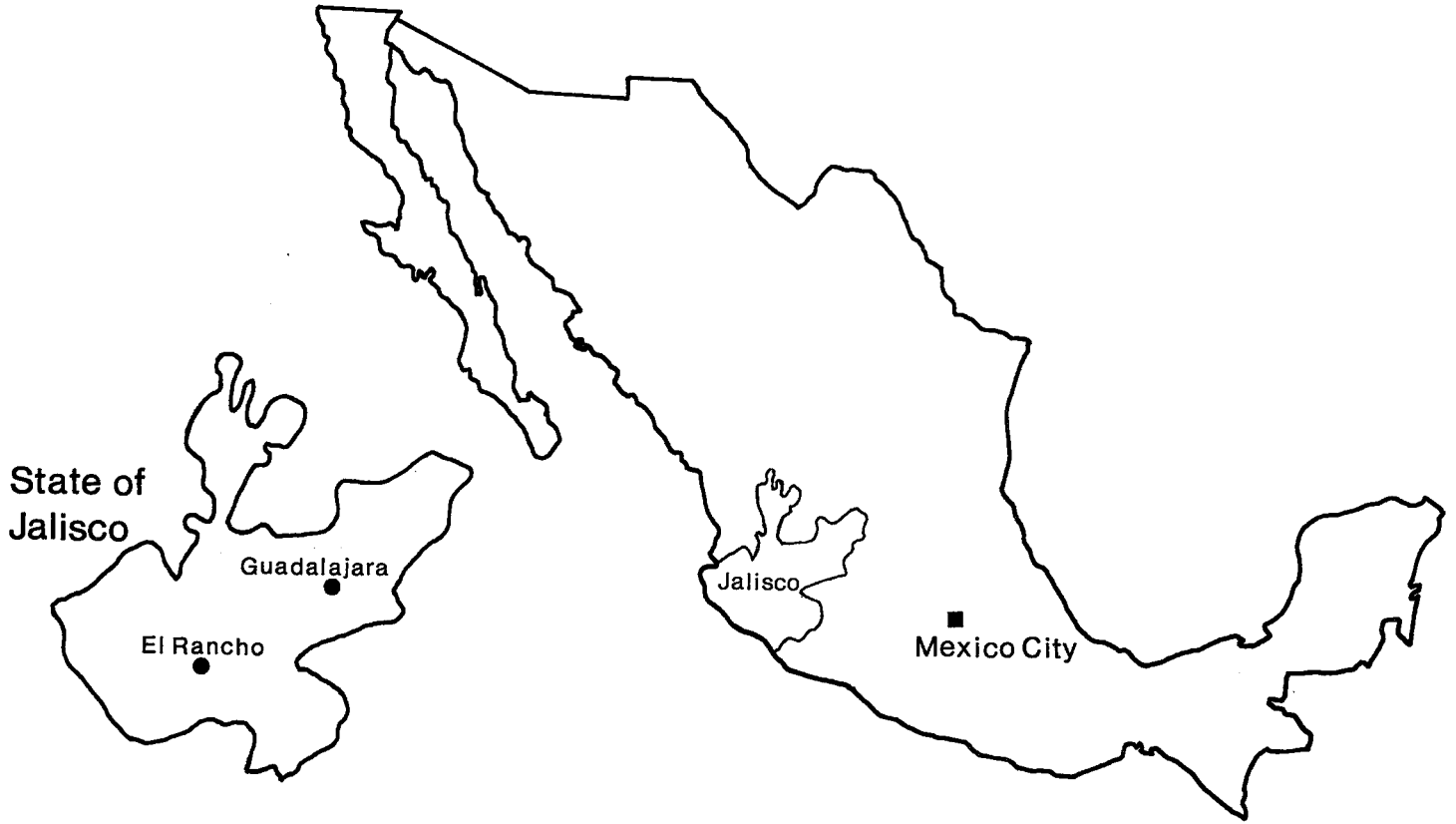


Fig.1. Mexico, Jalisco, El Rancho

I. ACTORS, GENDER AND AGRARIAN CHANGE: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction: Concepts and Objectives

Inequality worldwide, between countries, between rich and poor, between men and women, continues to exist, notwithstanding clear analyses and shocking descriptions of its everyday and long-term consequences for women and men living in both so-called developing and developed countries.

Thinking about this in global and abstract terms always provokes a sad image of those people at the bottom of the pile, women and men, victims of the developments that are far beyond their power to influence. However this image of the victimized contrasts strongly with the humour, creativity, and strength of the women and the men I came to know during my two years of fieldwork (1987-1988) in a small rural community of approximately 1100 inhabitants in western Mexico. In global terms, many of them can be located on the bottom of the economic ladder, and for a great many the basic necessities of life are of recurrent daily concern. Nevertheless, very few of them think of themselves as victims, and one can learn much from the inventiveness, toughness and good humour with which they face the problems they encounter in their everyday lives. Their strategies or responses show a strong sense of reality, a sense of their options and limitations; about what you can and can't expect of husbands, wives, sons and daughters; about the importance of social networks for daily survival and for influencing decision making at local and regional level; about identity based on gender, age, and one's position in the social relations of production; about how to present oneself, and how to make one's point; about the different arguments and discourses considered valid in different locales. In short, about how to create the space to improve one's quality of life in both an economic and an ideological and social sense.

The strategies of men and women are embedded in a texture of social relations and symbolic orders. These relations and orders both enable and constrain the abilities of different categories of social actors to create room for manoeuvre. Symbolic orders are not given but to certain extent are negotiated, and in this process they are reproduced and transformed. It is through social relationships that symbolic orders becomes legitimized or ratified. As Worsley (1970:353) puts it: "we acquire knowledge and beliefs from those who share the world with us: we learn by observation of what they do, from listening to their talk, to the advice and

lessons they give, the stories they tell, the jokes they make and so on." In this way we become aware of much more than we have personally experienced, and thus come to share beliefs and values with others.

The social and symbolic order is thus not a static, hegemonic or external entity, which defines categories and enforces ways of thinking and acting. By social and symbolic order I refer to images of 'right and wrong', and those political, social and economic practices which exceed the particularities and lifespan of individual social actors. Such order is not hegemonic, since conflicting and divergent images and practices always co-exist in time and place, counterpoints as Wertheim (1969) calls them. It is not static since it is reproduced and changed over time by social actors. Nor is it external to social actors, since everyone acts and thinks in reference to the explicit and implicit images and practices that compose it. The social and symbolic order is part of us and we are part of it. We are reproducing and changing it, but it is also the basis upon which social action takes place; and in this sense it, in part, "programmes us".

Because of its fluid and non-hegemonic character, it is useless to try to give a general picture of 'the' social and symbolic order of Mexico, the Netherlands, or elsewhere. Nevertheless it is important to have some notion of such social parameters when talking about social actors creating room for manoeuvre. Everyone knows that while trying to achieve something, especially something which is not common, resistance is encountered, within oneself and in the social environment. Obstacles have to be overcome, the right social, economic and ideological means to tackle them have to be found or created. These obstacles, and of course also those elements which enable social actors to create room for manoeuvre, can be described and analysed. In my view, focussing on the social and symbolic order at this level of analysis is very relevant, since this firstly helps us to understand why certain individuals or groups of social actors are able to achieve, for example, access to land while others are not. Secondly, it is through the actions of social actors that the social and symbolic order is reproduced and changed.

One important point should be made in this respect, namely, that these processes involve power. Some social actors are more successful in creating room for manoeuvre than others, and, consciously or unconsciously, in limiting the room of others. Social actors and organizations are engaged in enroling others into their projects: networks of interest are constituted and reproduced through conscious strategies and unwitting practices constructed by the actors themselves. Enroling others in one's conceptions is one of the devices whereby we attempt to stamp our view of the world, our symbolic order, on other people and events through constituting networks of power, control, alliance, coalition, antagonism, and interest (Clegg, 1989:204). Hence the symbolic order considered politically and ideologically legitimate at a particular time and in a certain situation, is a "temporarily stabilized outcome of previous processes of enrolment" (Callon and Law, as quoted by Clegg, 1989:204).

Social actors disadvantaged by the dominant symbolic order, such as women, children and landless labourers, often have little choice other than to recognize the legitimacy of the dominant view of the world, since this is their only chance of neutralizing those effects most opposed to their interests. The dominant view may actually become the view of the disadvantaged, thus becoming part of their "common sense", but it may also be that through lack of alternatives they just keep silent. And those who question its legitimacy - throughout history people have opposed the order and establishment of the dominant class or gender - face a challenge on two levels: one on the level of the order itself, and another on the level of the 'self-evidence of the common sense world', which is validated by consensus and is beyond question (Risseeuw, 1988:177-8). The latter, especially, is extremely difficult. For instance, it is one thing for a Mexican village woman to claim economic support from her husband, but it is quite another thing to oppose the authority that fathers and husbands exert over wives and children.

Just as it is difficult to depict the full nature of the social and symbolic order, so it is difficult to describe what power is. Power is not static. People do not 'have' power; their power is legitimized by others, and this legitimization is partly subject to questioning and negotiation, which in turn gives a certain power to the relatively powerless. Neither is power hegemonic: being able to exert influence over other people's room for manoeuvre, for instance regarding access to land, rates of pay or influential political networks, does not mean also being able to exert power over other aspects of life, such as those social processes relating to the generation of self-images or to the domain of family relations. Moreover, all societies incorporate conflicting value systems. In stories, in jokes and in myths, the dominant system and existing power structures are questioned and alternatives formulated.

Power, viewed as the ability to enrol other people into one's own projects, is fluid, relative and two-way. It is not a property and it cannot just be exerted, but is negotiable and needs constant legitimation. It is vested in social actors, resources and (the threat of) force, but also lies in access to influential social networks, and in dominant discourses and common understandings. Although it is difficult to describe, it exists, and creating room for manoeuvre through working the system to one's minimum disadvantage, certainly involves power. I agree with Clegg (1989:207-8) when he argues that, since power is a relational phenomenon - something that people do not have in proprietorial sense, but which they 'possess' only in so far as they are relationally constituted as doing so - the appropriate way of analysing it is through focussing on the social relations in which it is embedded: the relations between men and women, the relations between state and local population, the relations between parents and children, the relations between local politicians and villagers. Moreover, since power always involves power over others, and thus implies at least two social actors, power will usually call forth resistance, which may vary from excessive politeness to overt conflict that slows down the realization of the goals of power. This, then, draws our attention to the practices in which power is effectuated, negotiated and changed.

This book is about power and about the social order, but it is approached through the struggles of men and women, members of an ejido[1] in Western Mexico (highly integrated in national and international product and labour markets) to improve the quality of their lives. It explores the possibilities they see and the limitations they are confronted with, and how they try to overcome these limitations. As James Scott (1985:XV-XVII) puts it:

> "Most subordinate classes throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open political activity. Most subordinated classes are far less interested in changing the larger structures and the law than what Hobsbawm has appropriately called "working the system... to their minimum disadvantage. ... For these reasons it seems to be more important to understand what we might call everyday forms of ... resistance."

In this case, the everyday struggles are about access to land, access to credit and irrigation water, and keeping control over the land and the production process. But by no means are they only economic struggles, they are also struggles over influence, identity, ideology, creating support. Nor are these struggles only between the local population and the 'representatives of the state', but also take place within the local population itself, between men and women, between those with and those without land, between older and younger generations.

Yet what is interesting in telling the story from the point of view of men on the one hand, and women on the other, is that it seems as if they are talking about different worlds: the problems they face and the means they have to cope with them differ profoundly. While men talk about the difficulties they encounter with the ever growing intervention of the state and private enterprise on farm management practices and ejido affairs, women talk about the problems they encounter with husbands who are irresponsible, how difficult it is to earn their own income, and about the local politicians and state representatives who never take women seriously. They seem, so to speak, to face different systems - or social and symbolic orders - which they must work to their minimum disadvantage. Obviously these are not two different worlds. But such differences between men and women point to the hierarchical character of the symbolic and social order and the power relations interwoven in it: social actors need to study the practices and world views of those whom they feel limit their options in order to create room for manoeuvre. For women these are men: husbands, local politicians, state representatives. For men these persons are not women, but other men: those who have political influence and who are involved in the distribution of vital resources such as land, water and credit.

Organization of the Chapter

This introductory chapter explores the following issues. First of all, a 'letter to a friend' gives a view of the setting of the research: the village and the processes going on are introduced and the theoretical and practical motivations and objectives for the research are set out. Moreover,

by using this letter to this end, some of the analytical and theoretical steps I have made over time can also be made visible. Research is a process. Understanding is related to one's intellectual and personal experiences: it changes over time. Next I discuss and analyse some of the conceptual problems and weaknesses reflected in the letter, and discuss how to overcome these problems. The last part of the chapter deals with methodology. Through discussing experiences while doing fieldwork, the possibilities and limitations of a highly qualitative research methodology are discussed, and the setting of the research is further elaborated. The experiences gone through during the period of analysis and writing underline the statement that intellectual and personal experiences are reflected in the understanding of fieldwork material and the writing of the text.

Inner Dialogues

After two years of field work in a small Mexican ejido, where I had researched farmer strategies and the processes of agrarian change, I returned at the beginning of 1989 to the Agricultural University of Wageningen in the Netherlands. Now my task was to work out the field material and write a thesis. I found it hard to think in an abstract manner about the people who over the years had become dear to me. It was strange to discuss whether or not the experiences and livelihood strategies of these men and women confirmed or denied existing theories on agrarian change and state intervention. These discussions were so remote from the everyday worries of the people in that Mexican village. I was not really able to make the link between discussions on the state, on processes of incorporation, on power, on gender ideology, on the relation between micro and macro on the one hand, and on the other hand the seeming trivialities of the everyday livelihood strategies of men and women farmers. It was in those first months that Joke Schrijvers, one of my two supervisors, gave me some advice which in reality was very much in line with the philosophy of the whole research project as designed and guided by Norman Long.[2] Just like Norman, while guiding the fieldwork, she advised me to forget about applying formulas taken from other theoretical frameworks or simply taking over what other scientists had defined as important. Norman had told us to 'empty' our heads, get rid, as far as possible, of existing concepts, categories and theories on agrarian development. He 'brainwashed' us into letting our fieldwork be guided by the priorities and struggles of the men and women we met. He convinced us that only through taking seriously their experiences, understanding their concepts and their strategies to improve their lives, would we be able to contribute to what he would call later the "embodiment of social theory" (Long and van der Ploeg (1989:16). Joke encouraged me to take my own experiences seriously. She asked me to put into words those experiences and subjects which had struck me most during the fieldwork. "Don't bother about what other people think is important, let yourself be guided by what you think is important." She suggested that I put this into words in the form of a

letter. The letter had to be directed to a good friend, so that I would feel confident to write whatever I thought and felt. Further, the friend should not be a sociologist or some other kind of social scientist, so that I was forced to write the letter as simply as possible and not to escape into often used, but seldom clearly defined or grounded, ideas and propositions.

I wrote this letter to one of my female friends. It helped me to get going. Later, after writing most of the chapters, I realized that it displayed serious conceptual and analytical weaknesses. However, since it gives a good account of the motives and drives of the research and the starting points of the analysis, and since it gives insight into the process of the intellectual enterprise, I nevertheless present it, and follow it by an analysis of its conceptual and analytical weaknesses.

A Letter to a Friend: Motives and Themes of the Thesis

"It is Monday morning. The week is starting, and I feel reluctant to get to work again. Especially on Mondays the job which I have to do (writing a thesis, my God!) seems so elusive. And I don't know how to come to grips with it. Some days I feel challenged by it, but on other days, I feel inclined to leave it for what it is, and seek comfort in ice-creams, the river banks and Lex. Especially on Mondays, when the week is so perceptibly ahead of me, the thesis in all its dimensions dominates me, instead of me dominating it. That is why I decided to write this letter. Perhaps it will help clear my mind.

It is two months now since I returned from Mexico. Since I came back, I have been ordering the field material, thinking about subjects about which I want to write, and reading the literature on these subjects. I often can't see the wood for the trees. However, over and over again one theme returns in different forms and on different levels of abstraction. This is the relation that exists between "action" on the one hand, and "structure" on the other.

As you know, this was one of the theoretical challenges from which the project started, already now three years ago. All the other members of the team are trying in one way or another to comprehend this relation, and struggling with how to investigate it and how to put it into words. So am I. And I do have the feeling that I am starting to get a grip on it. To concretize this, I need to explain a thing or two.

The way that until now I have understood sociology (probably I was taught so) was to look for the socio-economic factors which could explain human behaviour. The sociologist defines a problem, describes and analyses the problem by isolating some surveyable elements, looks for a number of factors which are of influence on the problem (preferably a set of three, that sounds so nice: "Three factors are of great importance ...", and that is it).

Let me give you an example: the position of women. By now it is more or less generally accepted that women compared to men occupy a different and mostly a subordinate position in society. The precise form it assumes differs by culture, class, race, age, and in different socio-historical settings. But if you compare women and men from the same culture and the same social class, then it is possible to say that the position of women is subordinate to the position of men. This is measured by the position of men and women on the (paid and unpaid) labour market, the political influence they have, the ideology which exists with regard to feminity and masculinity, and often nowadays also, sexual violence within and outside marriage. The differences between men and women are often explained by not very clearly-defined notions, such as "patriarchy", "machismo", the "logic of capital", "ideology", "socialisation". And that is where it ends, that is it. These kinds of analysis result in several clear policy goals: stimulating the participation of women on the paid labour market and in politics and (women's) organizations, raising children with other images of feminity and masculinity, creating laws and judges to sentence sexual violence. I don't deny that all this is very important, quite the contrary. However, all this still does not tell us very much about the everyday lives of women; about what they themselves experience as impediments, nor about their everyday struggles to reduce these impediments to their minimum; about how, in this dynamic, the ideological and practical meaning of gender relations are given shape, are reproduced or changed in a specific situation.

Although I am convinced that the impediments that women experience in everyday life have something to do with the above mentioned notions of machismo, the logic of capital, a gender division of labour etc., in concrete situations, for different women, they arise in different forms and intensity and are differently experienced. And all these women find their own ways of coping with them, however dramatic these ways might be. It is important to recognize and to take seriously these different strategies, not only because this can lead to the refinement of sociological and feminist theories, but because -and this is as least as important- it might show us how to support women in their everyday struggles.

I will give you an example from my Mexican experience. I think that in the village in which we lived, a process is taking place which other authors have called 'house-wife-ization'. This means that ideologically women become more and more defined as housewives. However, this does not mean that they stop being responsible for household income. Their husbands are regarded as heads of household who, in theoryt, should assume the responsibility of providing their wives with sufficient money to keep the household running. Well, in practice, it has never worked this way, and neither does it now. Women have always taken on much of the economic responsibility, and have taken care of the continuity of the household. Confronted with hungry children and the need for clothes and medicines, and a husband who cannpt or

does not want to maintain the family, women do what they can to supply whatever is necessary. But not withstanding the fact that they thus have an urgent need for their own independent sources of income, they have, it seems, over the years, been losing their former sources of income, while few new ones have replaced them. While in former days women also worked in agriculture, not only without renumeration in the fields of husbands and fathers, but also paid wages working in the fields of others, nowadays, when little maize and few vegetables are grown on their plots, only sugar cane, women no longer work in agriculture. While in former days women controlled the distribution of the maize, which was stored at home, nowadays they can exert little influence on what happens to agricultural products: the sugar cane is sold to the refinery and paid to the men. While in former days women kept chickens and pigs in their gardens, nowadays they can no longer do so because of the relocation of the village: in the first half of the 1970's a completely new village was constructed, with government aid, as a response to the serious flooding problems and the polluting of the drinking water by the sugarcane refinery. Notwithstanding the nice houses and the piped water system they now have, women often express their longing for the old village: the gardens around the new houses are too small to keep pigs or many chickens. Of course other sources of income have come into existence. For instance, the work in market vegetable production in other parts of the valley. However, only a few women, mostly the poorest, work there. Women working in the tomato fields have the reputation of being of easy virtue, so husbands seldom allow their wives to work there. Another source of income might be trade. But unless this is on a rather small scale, it is often difficult to combine with small children and the care of the household. In short, the process going on can be summarized as follows: while ideologically women become more and more defined as housewives, in practice they often continue to be responsible for the economic continuity of the household. However, this is increasingly difficult in the village I worked in, since women have been losing their own sources of income due to modernization of agriculture and the relocation of the village.

So, the process is more or less defined: housewife-ization, and likewise the factors that explain it: modernization (of agriculture), accompanying changes in gender ideology and a changing division of labour. This is were sociology should start. How do women cope with the realities that confront them? What strategies do they develop to improve their situation? How do their actions influence the course of events?

By strategies I do not simply refer to women's organizations to change the overall processes, but to the everyday struggles of a relative powerless group. The seemingly trivial and constant, mostly individual and sometimes collective, struggles to influence men: husbands, fathers, sons, and local politicians, in order to improve their situation. Sometimes it concerns support in terms of money or labour, sometimes it is about

gaining their own income, sometimes it is about meeting other women, sometimes it is about access to vital resources such as land, credit or irrigation water. Sometimes it is about identity. One of the most outspoken examples of this "working the system" is of women who have been able in one way or another to gain a place in the 'men's world', the world of agriculture and of the institutional environment which nowadays surrounds it. Since agriculture, more than trade and temporary migration to the United States, is the prime source of income, you can imagine the value that access to land has for women, and subsequently access to the surrounding institutions. However, women face many problems in getting access and moving in this world, which men do not.

Up till now I have taken women's problems as an example to explain what I mean. But I think the same approach is also valuable in studying other subjects. In agrarian development studies it has been shown that incorporation of the peasantry into the wider economic and political environment, often leads to a loss of their room for manoeuvre. As a rule, modernization entails a growing dependence of the reproduction of the agricultural enterprise on the market and institutional environment, and the farm thus becomes vulnerable to exploitation. Let me explain what this means. Let me take a peasant who mainly produces for his own consumption. He sows maize and beans in the traditional way: without using fertilizers, and the seed he sows he has selected from last year's harvest. Perhaps he has a horse or oxen for animal traction and a few cows for milk. His wife has some chickens, a pig, fruit trees and she grows vegetables in the patio. This family hardly needs any money. The money they occasionally require is obtained by selling eggs, a pig, a part of the harvest or their labour. But essentially they are independent of the market. Then they start sowing improved maize varieties, or as happened in the Mexican village in which we stayed, they give up producing maize and start producing sugarcane, which they sell to the refinery. Now they are far more in need of money: all their food they have to buy. Moreover, the growing of sugarcane requires inputs: fertilizer and pesticides, and though the harvest is gathered by the refinery, the farmer must pay the costs. While the harvest is good and the prices paid for the cane are reasonable and the costs to the farmer for the inputs and maize are not too high, everything goes well. But the determination of the price is outside the control of an individual farmer. When prices change to the disadvantage of the farmer, he can do nothing save work harder in order to produce more, or quit agriculture, sell his farm and start another life. Once dependent on the market, it is argued that within the logic of capitalism, small farmers end up paying the bill: the terms of trade are to their disadvantage. The primary agricultural products they produce are always relatively cheaper than the processed agricultural and industrial products they have to buy. Moreover, because of the individualistic and atomistic nature of this production sector (every farmer has his own farm, with his

own specific problematic), farmers rarely form organizations that can influence national policies with regard to prices and services that are important for the continuity of the farms.

Agriculture in 'our' ejido has typically passed through such a development of modernization and institutionalization. While thirty years ago agriculture served mainly subsistence needs, nowadays is it mainly market-oriented. The farms are incorporated into the wider market and institutional environment. The principal crop grown is sugarcane, which is sold to the sugarcane refinery, and the second important agricultural activity is animal husbandry. Both are financed by external capital and the products are sold on the market. So they have to deal with the agricultural bank, the sugar refinery, private markets and the local department of the Ministry of Agriculture which organizes and authorizes the distribution of irrigation water. However, I do not have the impression that the farmers themselves think they are dependent or that their continued existence is threatened. On the contrary, if you analyse their own version of local history, it becomes clear that there have been periods in which they have been more dependent and vulnerable to exploitation than right now. Moreover, it seems that they give up a great part of their control over the production process on their land in certain periods, while regaining it again in others. For instance, sugarcane was introduced at the beginning of the 1970's. Small-scale farmers started to grow it, since the sugar refinery offered to level the land, one of the most important reasons why farmers were not able to make use of the irrigation system that had been constructed in the 1960's. The sugar cane refinery also offered all kinds of social services, such as health insurance, an old-age pension and study grants. This potentially offered farmers the chance to rid themselves of some heavily felt dependencies. It was precisely the low profitability of their land and their continuous indebtedness to moneylenders because of unexpected expenditures, especially because of illness, that they blamed for the lack of headway they made in life. So the sugarcane refinery offered them a way out, and many farmers started to grow sugarcane on part of their land. This notwithstanding the reality of those years, which meant that farmers more or less placed their land in the hands of the refinery. The refinery organized the whole production process, the harvest and the processing. They were also able to set the rates of pay, since the farmers had scarcely any insight into the costs of production nor the price of sugarcane. In the beginning, it was mostly the small-scale farmers who grew sugarcane. Several years later, when crop diseases and commercialization problems had taken their toll on the growing of vegetables for the U.S. market, large-scale farmers also started to grow sugarcane. They, however, did not allow the refinery to cheat them, and they started to organize the sugarcane producers. It was because of this organization that small farmers also regained powers of decision over the production process, and when I left the field situation, a great diversity existed between small

farmers with regard to the degree of externalisation of the production process: some still worked as prescribed by the refinery, with loans from the refinery, fertilizer bought by the refinery etc., while others were experimenting with inputs and working mainly with their own capital. Moreover, they said that if the refinery tries to set the pay rates again, they would just quit producing cane. All this shows that the process of incorporation into markets and institutions does not lead unilinearly to a growing dependency, but is adjusted by farmers to the realities of their different farms, and this leads to a wide variety of farm enterprises. They are people acting, people who try to make the best of things. The interesting question then is what are the possibilities and limitations in "making the best of it", and why are some more successful than others.

What I want to say is that this approach to rural development is essentially the same approach as the approach mentioned above, to gender studies. In this case modernization and institutionalization of agriculture are recognized as the important processes taking place. During the last three years, I have become convinced that sociology should not end with the defining of 'determining factors' nor with the often abstract analysis of processes. On the contrary, they should be the starting point. It is important to understand how these different factors and processes are manifested in the lives of women and men, how they experience them, what ways they devise to handle them, and how they thus take part in shaping the outcomes. In my opinion, such an approach offers many advantages. In the first place, it is an approach that takes seriously the opinions and ways of acting of different women and men. Secondly, it offers a chance to confront the theoretical concepts (those factors) from which I start, with the insights derived from the everyday life experiences of those men and women. And lastly, since the approach starts from the problems as they are experienced and the ways in which attempts are made to solve them, it offers an opportunity to support their struggle" (Wageningen, 13-03-89).

Theoretical and Conceptual Problems

This letter gives some information about the village, the subjects studied, and the motives and aspirations of the investigation. However, there are some fundamental problems with the concepts used and the theoretical ideas underlying them. In a nutshell, the letter clearly shows the conceptual and theoretical problems which are symptomatic of the still problematic relation between gender studies and studies which tackle rural development and intervention processes in general. The problem can be characterized as follows.

From the letter one might derive the conclusion that there is a story to tell about 'women' on the one hand, and 'peasants' or 'farmers' on the other hand. This however is nonsense. First of all, these are neither comparable nor exclusive categories. They are not exclusive since

women can also be peasants or farmers. As a matter of fact they are, as we will see later. And they are not comparable, since when conceptualizing peasants or farmers, at least in the more structural approaches of agrarian change, one is, in reality, not talking about people, but about enterprises with specific characteristics. 'Peasants' or 'the peasantry' refer to agricultural enterprises which are characterized by production for self consumption, the use of family labour (which in practice means also the labour of women and children), and only partial integration into markets through the selling of the surplus produced. 'Farmers' refer to agricultural enterprises characterized by production for the market, the use of paid labour (in the case of family farms, this is only partly true), and a high level of integration of the farm into the wider economic and institutional environment for the selling of the products, likewise with the reproduction of the production process. Women take part in these enterprises. But in the theory and in the concepts used they are invisible. This is understandable, since this approach is not concerned with social actors, male nor female, but with models of farms and their relation with the wider environment. These models are derived from the perspective and experiences of males, and based on the assumption that 'the farmer and his wife and children' analytically can be treated as one unit. However, the vast body of feminist literature published in the last twenty years, shows that from the perspective of women, this approach is unsatisfactory. I will come back to that later.

Second, it has already become clear in the letter, that the changes in the lives of women are related to the developments of the farm enterprise. However, not only the lives of women change, but also the lives of men, and thus the relation between men and women. In reality, there are four interrelated stories to tell: one about the changes of the farm enterprise (its internal organization and its relation with the wider environment), another about what this implies for the lives of women, a third about what this implies for the lives of men, and a fourth about what this implies for the relations between men and women (i.e gender relations), within the family, within the context of the farm enterprise, and in the wider social context of the ejido, of the institutional environment. These stories are interrelated. What happens to the farm and the way in which it becomes incorporated, influences and is influenced by both the men and women who are part of the farm. What happens to men and the farm enterprise is related to what happens to women. The principal question then is how men and women influence the course of events, in terms of the room for manoeuvre of each of them, and what are the intended and unintended consequences. An actor oriented approach to agrarian change and intervention processes in which gender is taken seriously should take this into account and breakdown concepts such as farmers and peasants from a gender perspective, and start to look at agrarian change from the perspective and experience of men and women as social actors.[3)]

Possibilities and Pitfalls of an Actor-Oriented Approach

The now widely recognized necessity to focus on actors, and not only on structure, has given rise to lively debates and new insights with regard to agrarian change, intervention processes, and state-peasant relations. Intervention processes are approached in a much more dynamic way, which does justice to the specific historical dynamics, the knowledgeabilities and capabilities of the intervened as well as of those who intervene, and the knowledge systems of the different parties involved in the process (Bierschenk, 1988; Elwert e.a., 1988; Long and van der Ploeg, 1989; Long, 1990; Slater, 1990).

Such an approach also has the potential to analyse the changing practices and ideology of gender relations in the context of a more general analysis of agrarian change and intervention processes. Precisely because of what I indicated above, an actor oriented approach to processes of agrarian change and state intervention is not so much concerned with models and typologies - in which neither women nor men are visible - but with how people of flesh and blood in a specific but changing historical and socio-economic setting cope with the problems they face in everyday life. Since we are now talking about social actors[4], it is easier to bring in 'women' and 'men', and thus 'gender'. However, notwithstanding the amount of actor oriented literature on gender, gender has not yet been fully explored in similar lierature on agrarian change. I think that this lack of women's perspectives and experiences points us to one of the possible shortcomings of the approach, as it has been concretized till now. This shortcoming has not so much to do with the ideas and the concepts of the approach itself, as much as with its historical background, and the main concerns of those working with the approach.

Although there has always been some kind of counterpoint, the actor paradigm became more generally accepted during the eighties when more and more question marks arose against structural approaches to agrarian change and state intervention. One of the main critiques was that these kind of approaches are theoretically unsatisfactory, since they cannot explain heterogeneity, the essentially different situations encountered all over the world even where the so-called 'structural conditions' remain the same. If it is true that accumulation of capital is the driving and structuring force behind rural development, how is it possible that this has such different effects in different socio-economic settings? The 'accumulation of capital' thesis was also attacked because of its overemphasis on economic exploitation of different classes, while it could not explain exploitation based on gender, race, or age. The categories used in these theories were too rigid, taking insufficient account of the fluidity of social structure and the overlap between the different categories used. Further, it was not easy to bring in ideology, the relevance of kinship relations and other social networks and political dynamics in a satisfactory way. Although, within the context of these theories, considerable efforts were made to develop a theoretical framework to overcome such criticisms[5], more and more scientists were leaving

the notions of 'structure', 'categories', 'class' for what they were, and turning to 'social actors' as a starting point for analysis.

Some rejected the whole notion of structure (the post-modernists). Others, to whom I feel more related, argued that 'structure' gets produced, changed and becomes visible in 'action'. Anthony Giddens uses the metaphor of language to explain that action to structure, 'part' to 'whole' is related,

> "...in the sense that the utterance of a grammatical sentence presupposes an absent corpus of syntactical rules that constitute the language as totality... When I utter a sentence, or make sense of the utterance of somebody else, I draw upon an absent corpus of syntactic and semantic rules in order to do so. The syntagmatic relation between the words uttered exist in a temporal-spatial context, but the 'structural properties' of the language, as characteristic of a community of language speakers, do not. These properties have 'virtual existence' only" (Giddens, 1982:33).

So, 'knowing a rule' or 'knowing how to go on', or to 'know English' is to already know an enormously complicated set of rules and the context of their application. To know English, however, is not to be able to formulate those rules and those principles: it is the knowledge of how and when to use them. With this metaphor, Giddens shows us that there exists "a relation between moment and totality: a dialectic of presence and absence, which tie the most trivial forms of social action to structural properties of the overall society" (Giddens, 1982:37). However, he does not try to specify what the structural properties of a certain society are, he does not tell us how to get hold of the virtually existing rules and principles. He leaves it up to researchers interested in this problematic to break down and concretize his concepts.

In the area of actor-oriented research concerning agrarian change, state intervention and processes of incorporation, more and more articles have appeared which take up this challenge for a specific situation in time and place.[6] In his work Norman Long suggests that one way of doing this is thrpough what he calls 'interface analysis".

> "Interface analysis focusses on the encounters between the different groups and individuals involved in the processes of planned intervention; the study of peasant based development initiatives and the ways in which local actors (including 'frontline' government personnel) attempt to create room for manoeuvre so that they might pursue their own 'projects'." ... "It stresses the importance of looking at the interactions that evolve between local groups and intervening actors. Intervention is an on-going transformational process that is constantly re-shaped by its own internal organization and political dynamic and by the specific conditions it encounters or itself creates, including the responses and strategies of local and regional groups who may struggle to define and defend their own social spaces, cultural boundaries and positions in the wider power field" (Long, 1990:16-17).

Given the fact that an actor-oriented approach to studies of agrarian change is a reaction to the structural analysis of state-peasant relations, it is not surprising that the approach especially

highlights the practical contents of those situations where peasants and representatives of the state meet. For my needs, this turns out to be a very fruitful point of entry, for in encounters at the interface, one is able to see both the ability and knowledgeability of the farmers and their practices and likewise those of the representatives of the state, all within a local socio-historical context. The analysis of discontinuities at the interface offers better possibilities for understanding the actual dynamic of agrarian change and its diverse outcomes than more structural paradigms.

However, I would like to make three observations here that spring from my struggle to integrate 'women' into such an analysis. Somehow, when focussing on state-peasant relations, 'women' seem to disappear. Some general concepts, such as peasants and farmers, which are still commonly used in the theoretical discourse of structural and actor-oriented approaches, seemingly have no gender connotations other than dominantly male ones, and their use therefore makes for difficulties in gender analysis. Another is that women are rarely present at the level of the agrarian interface (though this is less the case when looking at subjects related to health, education and religion). However, the fact that they are not present at this level in the agrarian context does not imply that what happens at the interface level does not affect them, but to see this, one has to look at what happens outside the interface. Using interface analysis therefore as a primary means of concretizing an actor-oriented approach to agrarian change and processes of intervention has its shortcomings. Let me elaborate a bit more on this.

The first observation is that in existing examples of this kind of analysis, while the concept of 'the state' is deconstructed, the concepts of 'farmers' and 'peasants' are far less problematized and only poorly deconstructed from an actor point of view. The notion of the state as a hegemonic entity has been broken down, and research now focusses on the political and cultural dynamic of the different state institutions, the conflicts between institutions, how state personnel at different levels move in this dynamic, how the state is interwoven with society through 1) the interaction of state representatives with the local population, and 2) the constant negotiation of the legitimacy of state policy, through influencing the dominant discourse (the image of the state, of development, of the role of different social actors in 'development'), through populist measures, alliances with influential networks, the distribution of scarce resources and by the threat of violence etc. This view of the state obviously stems from and helps us to understand that state intervention cannot be seen as simply top-down and a process that can be readily controlled. Social actors of different sectors of the population and state representatives at different levels of the bureaucracy are all actively engaged in what is called the development process or struggle, "the struggle over access to, and distribution of certain critical resources, and above all as normative struggles over the definition of development and the role of different actors" (Long and van der Ploeg, 1989:239).[7]

The concepts of 'farmers' and 'peasants', however, require more careful examination from an actor perspective. One fruitful area of work on the peasantry and farmers focusses on the need to acknowledge heterogeneity and on the development of criteria to conceptualize the

differences. Van der Ploeg's (1985, 1986, 1989) work for example has focussed on the degrees of incorporation of the farm labour process into the wider institutional and market environment, and tendencies to intensify or extensify production. He thus distinguishes between different styles of farming developed by farmers. Several other lines of conceptualizing heterogeneity have been developed according to the importance of non-farm labour, family composition, reproduction of the labour force, the social networks maintained, relation to the means of production, etcetera. And from the side of gender studies attention has been drawn to the fact that it is not only relevant to distinguish between enterprises, but to examine also the composition and internal dynamic of the peasant or farm household - which are influenced by changes in the wider environment - since the household is one of the main spheres in which the practices and ideology of gender relations are negotiated (Long, 1984:118-21; MacEwen Scott, 1986a,b; Whatmore, 1987; Friedmann, 1986a,b; Moore, 1988). Though the acknowledgement of heterogeneity and the refinement of the concepts used is important, seen from an actor perspective this is not where the analysis of processes of agrarian change should end. On the contrary, this is where it should start. Roseberry (1989:78) points us to the fact that the different images of the peasantry reflect more the political and ideological needs of those who create them, than they reflect the experiences and lives of the rural population themselves. It is important then to show how peasant men and women, acknowledging the differences between them, are able to influence the course of events: to analyse their part in the (normative) struggle over the distribution of critical resources.

Notwithstanding the efforts to deconstruct them, the concepts of 'farmer' or 'peasant' have too many prefabricated and gender-biased connotations to be useful for an actor perspective on agrarian change. This is not to deny that the discussion concerning farmers and peasants has not drawn our attention to interesting fields for analysis, i.e. the internal organization of the farm or peasant enterprise and their relations with institutional and market environment and many others. For my purposes, however, I feel the need to avoid their use where possible, and to use instead more loosely defined concepts or descriptive concepts with a more open connotation, such as social actors and agricultural producers, agricultural and entrepreneurial enterprises, acknowledging the fact that they consist of men and women. The latter is very important otherwise we would fail to stress that the actors in the evolving interactions between local groups and intervening parties are mainly men, or that when women are present in these interactions they have to get men to represent them or they are present on different terms than men. I come back to this later.

My second observation is that what happens at the level of the interface not only has implications for those social actors directly involved or present. Let me use a quotation of Giddens to express what I mean by this:

> "In following the routines of my day-to-day life I help reproduce social institutions that I played no part in bringing into being. They are more than merely the environment of my action since ... they enter constitutively into what I do as an agent.

> Similarly, my actions constitute and reconstitute the institutional actions of others, just as their actions do mine....My activities are thus imbedded within, and are constitutive elements of structured properties of institutions stretching well beyond myself in time and space" (Giddens, 1987:11, as quoted by Long, 1990:8).

In the case of the developments in the ejido which I discuss in this book, it is the men who dominate contacts with the wider environment. This not only has implications for the room for manoeuvre which they are able to create, but also has implications for the room for manoeuvre which women are able to create.

The third observation is related to the former. The emphasis on the interface could wrongly give the impression that development comes about only through processes of intervention. However, as Long and van der Ploeg (1989:236) argue: "even a brief acquaintance with the literature on agrarian history, economics and sociology would show conclusively that the bulk of evidence runs counter to this view. Agrarian development is not limited to intervention practices. It is potentially everywhere.....", or as F. von Benda-Beckmann et al. (1989:219) formulate it: "The interface approach defines an interesting and important domain of social interaction in agrarian change... But rural development, agrarian change, or some aspects of these, such as social security or the use of crop varieties, cannot be reduced to such a domain. ...the maintenance and change of structural discontinuities (in the spheres of normative structures and the allocation of economic and political resources) will not be found in any one "domain", "part" of social action, or system, but in many."

Some of the conclusions that may be drawn from the above observations are that an emphasis on social actors bears promising possibilities for combining gender studies, that is the study of the changing practices and ideology of power relations between men and women, with more general rural development studies. However, two important prerequisites have to be fulfilled in order to do so. One, is to leave seemingly gender neutral concepts like peasants and farmers for what they are - though the themes they take up such as the internal organisation of the peasant/farm household and its relations with the wider environment are important and should be borne in mind - and begin an analysis of the struggles over resources and identities, over creating room for manoeuvre, from the point of view of different social actors, in which gender and age would be important lines of differentiation. The second is that in an interface approach of processes of agrarian change and state intervention, in order to understand its implications for the opportunities of both men and women to create room for manoeuvre, one must analyse (inter)actions from the perspectives and experiences of women as well as and as compared to those of men, at the level of the interface, and outside it. The first prerequisite has already been elaborated, I now wish to focus more in detail on the second.

State Intervention and Changing Gender Ideology & Practices

The interface approach intends to throw new light on the actual dynamic of state intervention and processes of agrarian change in order to understand more profoundly the wide variety of essentially different socio-economic settings encountered all over the world. Understanding the essentially different gender ideologies and practices that exist and the relation between gender and 'the state', are also central themes in discussions in the feminist literature in the social sciences.

The household has always been one of the main focusses when talking about differences in gender ideology and practices. (Other important focusses are those on sexuality, race, and culture, but for my purpose the discussions on the household are the most relevant). It is now clear that the concept of the household cannot be taken as given but must be problematized. Access to resources, the distribution of production, power, the division of labour, ideology on womanhood and manhood - in short, gender ideology and practices - are all negotiated in the sphere of the household between men and women. It is clear that this is actualised differently in different stages of the life and domestic cycles, and is influenced by marital status. It is also clear that the household is neither a universal nor a static unity. Many differences between household structures exist within one and the same society, and they undergo fundamental changes over time (MacEwen Scott, 1986; Moore, 1988).

However, recognizing the differences is one thing, understanding the dynamic through which these differences come into being is another. The main line of thinking with regard to this latter question has been to question the relation between the household and the wider environment, to link micro to macro processes, to link the household and the family with the wider regional, national and international processes (Moore, 1991:73). It is clear that the household is not a domain which is isolated from the wider environment. Changes in the wider environment have their influences also on the structure of households and on their internal dynamic. However, the link between gender ideology and practices, the household and the economic and political system are not straightforward and require for their understanding a detailed analysis of practices in different historical settings.

The role of the state in this whole process is a relatively new focus in feminist social science. It is argued that economic, legal and political policies, which are designed according to prevailing assumptions and ideologies about the role of women, the nature of the family and the proper relations between men and women, affect household structures and gender relations. Men and women are different sorts of citizens vis-à-vis the state. The modern state is predicated upon gender difference, and this difference is inscribed into the political process. Even when women have equal rights under the state, they are rarely able to exercise those rights. The fact that women are not able to exercise their rights, should also be seen in the light of the gender specific dynamic of kinship relations.

"Women are located on a boundary between kinship relations and state structures in a way in which men are not. This is particularly clear in the example of women's selfhelp groups in Kenya, where the success of the women's group and their utility for the individual women involved, depended crucially on the women's ability to negotiate both with their husbands or male kin and with the representatives of the institutions of the state. Men also have to negotiate with the representatives and institutions of the state, but their ability to do so is rarely structured by their relations with their wives. This is particularly clear with regard to development policies, which tend to institutionalize men's access to the state, while marginalizing women's access, which continues to be negotiated, to a greater or lesser extent through their husbands. This process of institutionalization is the result of state policies which are themselves formulated according to various assumptions about the nature of women and men as individuals, and about the nature of gender-relations" (Moore, 1991:183,184).

The conclusions which can therefore be drawn are:

1) there exist worldwide, a wide variety of different gender ideologies and practices, and household structures;
2) state policy influences household structures and gender relations;
3) women are not able to exert their rights because of a) the gender difference inscribed in the political process, and b) because of the fact that women are located on a boundary between kinship relations and state structures in a way in which men are not.

It is important to notice that women are not passive in their response to changing gender practices and ideology, nor in their response to the political process. They are social actors. The problem is, however, how to go about examining the many different ways in which they struggle, protest and stand firm in order to create room for manoeuvre. Perhaps it is not necessary to say again that through these struggles women as social actors may also influence the changing of gender practices and ideology, as well as the political process.

I will turn now to the ways in which actor oriented studies and gender studies of intervention processes can strengthen each other.

A Promising Combination of Paradigms

Obviously the discussion on gender, household and the state, as summarized above, has many similarities with the discussion on an actor oriented approach to agrarian development and state intervention. The most important thing is that both argue for the need to analyse in specific historical situations the many different ways in which women and men struggle, protest and stand firm in the face of state encroachment. The two paradigms reach this conclusion from different angles, and they both have weak and strong sides. It is especially because of this that a combination of the two seems so promising.

While the feminist analysis is strong in problematizing the side of the 'local population' - it has convincingly shown the differential effects of rural development and state intervention on men and women, has focussed our attention on the internal dynamic of the household and family relations and how these are influenced by changes in the wider environment, and has pointed rightly on the gender bias in policy - it is weak in its conceptualization of the state, and has not yet worked out a methodology of how to go about the investigation of 'women and state intervention' in practice.

On the other hand, the actor-oriented analysis of agrarian change and state intervention offers a better worked out concept of the state, and the interface approach in particular offers a way of how to go about this. In this line of thought it is argued that it is:

> "important to focus upon intervention practices as they evolve and are shaped by the struggles between the various participants, rather than simply on intervention models, by which we mean the ideal-typical constructions that planners, implementors or clients may have about the process. Focussing upon intervention practices allows one to taken into account the emergent forms of interaction, procedures, practical strategies, types of discourse, cultural categories and the particular 'stakeholders' present in specific contexts and to reformulate questions of state intervention and agrarian development from a more thoroughgoing actor perspective." (Long and Van der Ploeg, 1989:226-227).

But it is rather weak in problematizing the 'local population', 'farmers' and the 'peasantry' with regard to gender, and it has turned out to be difficult to bring what happens outside the interface into the analysis.

To summarize: feminist studies are strong in differentiating the population along gender lines, but they are weak in deconstructing the state. Actor-oriented studies of intervention processes are strong in deconstructing the state, but weak in differentiating the population according to gender. And while the latter has a methodology and an entrypoint for studying state-peasant relations (interface analysis), the former rightly focusses attention on the wider implications of what happens at the interface. In view of the complementarity of the strong and weak sides of each paradigm, the combination of the two seems to be to me very promising for each of them.

Winding up: An Engendered Actor-Oriented Approach of Agrarian Change

It is now time to gather the bits and pieces of critiques and to formulate ideas of how to go about approaching agrarian change from an engendered actor oriented perspective.

Recognizing heterogeneity between social actors is the starting point of analysis. The labels which are necessary to give a name to the heterogeneity should be derived from the social

actors themselves. In the case of this particular Mexican ejido important distinctions were made between:

1) *las mujeres* and *los hombres*, (the women and the men);
2) *los ricos* and *los humildes* (the rich i.e. big landowners/the powerful, and the humble/labourers/powerless);
3) *ejidatarios* and *vecinos* (those with land who had benefited from the land reform and those without land);
4) *los ingenieros* or *licenciados* and *los humildes* (engineers, synonymous for influential representatives of state institutions, also often referred to as *cabrones* 'sons of a bitches' versus the humble, in this context the ejidatarios).

These distinctions were made by both men and women. It is interesting to note that women made an additional distinction: between *los que saben habler* and *los que saben hacer las cosas*, and *los que no saben hablar* (those who know how to speak in public or know how to get things done, and those who don't). This last distinction was often synonymous with the men - women distinction. Apart from the concepts used by the social actors themselves, various concepts and distinctions made in the social sciences are also fruitful; differences in household composition, those springing from age and life cycle, and the differences between farm enterprises and the concepts used to denote them have turned out to be especially important in my story.

However, an actor oriented approach of agrarian change is not concerned with heterogeneity in itself. It is concerned with the struggles of those different (groups of) social actors who struggle to define and defend their own social space, cultural boundaries and positions in the wider power field, and by doing so influence the course of development. In this process, the different social actors are confronted with what has been referred to here and in general in the literature as the 'social and symbolic order', 'power' and 'enrolment'. These struggles take place in social interactions of social actors who share the same life world together.

A useful way to study this dynamic is to analyse the (normative) struggles for critical resources and identities from the perspectives and experiences of social actors who clearly differ from each other, but who also have socio-political relations with each other: who are actors on the same battleground. The most clearly distinguishable differences between social actors are those based on gender and age. These are universal organizing principles and thus form one of the principal starting points of analysis: men and women, young and old, can certainly be said to be different social actors moving on the same battleground. Further, also relevant, since we are talking about processes of state intervention and agrarian change, are the different social actors taking part in the interactions that evolve between local groups and intervening parties, as compared to those who are obviously not a part of such interactions.

Struggles over critical agricultural resources such as land, credit, irrigation water - the distribution of which is in the hand of state institutions - seen from the perspectives and experiences of men and women form the central core of the book. As we will see, these

struggles involve the manipulating of identities, the creating of symbolic boundaries, maintaining socio-political networks, constantly legitimizing power and organizing support. Based on the experiences of the men and women involved in these struggles, I discuss the relation between actors and structures, changing gender practices and ideology, changing relations between the state and the rural population and agrarian change. The struggles of men and women over access to critical resources leads not only to theoretical insights, but also to practical insights, of interest and hopefully help to those concerned with ways in which individual and collective efforts to resolve problems might be supported.

Methodology

Qualitative Techniques: Possibilities and Limitations

The notion that theory or more abstract statements should be grounded in concrete data and that to create embodied theory one should investigate people's actions, motives and explanations, has enormous methodological implications.[8] Obviously it implies doing field research, interacting with people and 'going where the action is'. In its turn, this implies doing qualitative field research, getting to understand people by following them into different social situations, seeing them resolving their problems, discussing what is happening.

I decided to spend two years in the same village in order to improve the quality of the research. I was aware of the limitations of this decision. First, it would lead to a poor basis for comparisons with other villages in the same area, although it was clear that the differences between villages in the same valley were enormous, particularly with regard the position of women. While in El Rancho, where I lived and worked, women hardly worked in agriculture, but combined the work in the household with trading activities mainly, in another village the majority of women worked as day-labourers in tomato production. Differences in local agrarian history (El Rancho had become a 'sugar cane village') seemed to have caused marked differences in the life-worlds of the women of these two villages. Second, it implied a bias towards the interpretations of those on the receiving end of intervention (the villagers) and a neglect of those who are intervening (the representatives of the state institutions). However, since other members of the research group were involved in carrying out research in other villages and some were investigating the intervening parties[9], this seemed to be the right choice.

The material was mainly collected by means of extended, mostly unstructured interviews, all kinds of seemingly unimportant chat and gossip, life histories, extended case studies and situational analysis.[10] The latter two aim "to provide a close-up view of social interaction and confrontation in order to elucidate how structural forms and processes (reproduction and transformation) work themselves out in everyday situations." (Long, 1989:251; see also Van

Velsen, 1967). They provide the opportunity to highlight and analyse the processes by which social actors actually manage their everyday social worlds and attempt to resolve certain problematic situations. They often reveal the fragility of the so-called social order or patterns of social legitimacy. A systematic series of case studies can tell us a lot about the processes of social reproduction and transformation, and can show how human agents (individuals and social groups) play an active role in this process. Cases and situational analysis are not viewed as examples in the sense of illustrating the basic principles of social structure: that would be a structural-functionalist conception. An actor-oriented approach does not start from a pre-fabricated concept of social structure, but tries to distil generalities and patterns from the case studies and situational analysis. Case studies are neither necessarily locality based - in the sense of a simple community studies approach - nor are they simply built upon interview material gathered from key informants: observation of specific social situations and follow-up interviews with various persons are essential. This kind of analysis can only be satisfactorily worked out in here-and-now situations since the reconstruction of the past situations will always be coloured by the present. Thus, to a considerable degree, one depends on events occurring during the period of actual fieldwork, which in my case stretched from April 1987 to January 1989. It is exciting to be guided by the events actually going on, but it also causes problems.

The research team had thought that there would be no problem in linking up the different research carried out by each of us, since we thought that for instance irrigation would come up in each research, since obviously the introduction of the irrigation system in the sixties had caused great changes in the valley. That without doubt is true. However, over the years the farmers of our ejido have more or less developed a routine in solving the problems, occurring with irrigation, and in the period we did our field work, hardly any urgent irrigation problems occurred. So, "irrigation" is only partly tackled. The same counts for the production of sugarcane. Both these subjects only come up in the historical parts of the thesis, and in chapter 8 on female farmers.

Gender issues are also a subject which is not so obvious when one lets oneself be guided by the larger problems which stir the community: namely struggles over land, access to credit, the machination of the sugarcane refinery. These are subjects discussed in the streets, and in the social interactions and confrontations which take place in the public arena. The every day struggles of women as such, although they involve many of the same concerns, are no part of the discourse which dominates the frontstage of the village. And when they are discussed on the frontstage, it is from the perspectives and experiences of men who dominate such discourse. However, when talking with women, it soon becomes clear that there exist other discourses, other interpretations of what is happening in the ejido, within the households and between men and women, other limitations which have to be overcome in order to solve everyday problems. It is therefore important, and certainly it was from my point of view, not to confine the entry point of the research only to what happens on the frontstage of the ejido,

but consciously start the research at the same time from the perspective of the 'muted groups,[11] in this case women whose voices and opinions are hardly heard on the front stage.

Another advantage of case studies and situational analysis is that through them history can be made to come alive. My best insights into history came from interviews which started from the problems which were actually stirring people's minds at the time. The land question in particular turned out to be important in understanding events of the past since their origin lay in past problems. Life histories were a useful supplement to the above- mentioned methodology.

The Researcher's Experiences in Fieldwork and Texts

The research methodology requires intensive social interaction. The interaction which develops is not especially related to research techniques but is greatly influenced by those who are 'researched'. Of course the villagers themselves, who are actors in the interaction, have their own hidden agendas, their own research projects, of which the researcher is often the focus of attention. This influences the understanding of the situation (Torres, 1992). I want now to focus more on the researcher as social actor in the dynamic, since the quality and the dynamic of the relationship is also influenced by the personal background of the researcher, as well as the different cultural repertoires of the host society in which gender is a salient feature. Cultural repertoires (Long, 1989:224-5)[12], just like the repertoire of a musician, are built up over time, and different parts of the repertoire are performed before different sorts of public. To make the concept more concrete, there exist, for instance, different repertoires for women, which are related to age, civil status, motherhood, reputation and wealth. For the different stages of their life-cycle, different expectations exist regarding the ways in which women can relate to other social actors, the freedom they have in their movements, the activities they should and should not undertake and what subjects they can discuss in public. Of course what actually happens differs, sometimes substantially, from what is said should happen. But nevertheless, there does exist some sort of verbal consensus of how daughters, spinsters, married women, mothers, *comadres* and grandmothers should behave. The older a woman is, the more autonomy she can claim. I think during the course of the field research I myself have mainly drawn upon the repertoire of 'daughter'. (I will return to this further on)

In recent years several social anthropologists have stressed the importance of recognizing the links between the researcher's personal and political background, the experience of fieldwork, and ultimately the written analysis or ethnography. The ways in which "the personal interacts with the professional and the theoretical" (Schrijvers, 1985:225) have to be illuminated "not to serve the objectivist ideal by stripping the self of prejudices and preconceptions, but rather to recognize the position of the anthropologist as a 'person' interacting with other people in the society being studied.... The specificity and individuality of the observer are always present, and must therefore be acknowledged, explored and put to creative use" (Helen Callaway,

1989:2). According to Judith Okely (1989:2,3) there is a considerable reluctance to bring in the anthropologist's past, even in so far as it relates to the anthropologist's enterprise, which includes the choice of area and study, the experience of fieldwork, research, analysis and writing. This self awareness is put down as 'mere navel-gazing' or 'narcissism'. However, she argues that "those who protect the self from scrutinity both in practice and in publications could as well be labelled self-satisfied and arrogant in presuming their presence and relations with others to be unproblematic" (Op.cit:3).

The recent article by Joke Schrijvers "Motherhood experienced and Constructed" (1991) shows the relevance of bringing the self into the analysis. In this article, she reflects on both the period of actual field research and the process of analysis in the years after, and she convincingly shows how intellectual and personal developments also influence the type of material collected, as well as the analysis of the material over the years. To me the most beautiful part is when she makes clear why it was possible, within a timespan of three years, to write two articles which, superficially seen, seem to contradict each other. The one is about how motherhood makes women vulnerable and subject to extreme exploitation, and the other about the power women derive from motherhood (Schrijvers, 1985). She relates the writing of these two articles to her own struggle to combine motherhood with a professional career. Both aspects of motherhood, the vulnerability and the strength are real, as well in the lives of the Sri Lankan women she writes about, as in her own life. But only through her own experiences over the years is she able to distinguish both of them. She writes:

> "The changes in my personal life and feelings reflected itself in my writings of that year. Apparently all of a sudden I no longer victimized the 'others', the women in Sri Lanka. Instead I focussed on the ways in which they exerted influence and power! ... Although rather late I had at last recollected that the one-sided portrayal of these 'others' as passive victims of (neo)colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism was not correct. Nor did it exactly add to their dignity" (Schrijvers, 1991).

To wind up, what all this is leading to is the recognition that the understanding of a certain situation is influenced by the researchers personal, intellectual and political experiences. Or as Rosaldo (1989:8) phrases it, "All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others."[13]

These interpretations change over the years, not only because of a changing world, but also because of the personal and intellectual development of the researcher. Reflecting on this is part of the anthropological enterprise, since it helps us to understand our understanding.

My Experiences

It is not easy to link my background and experience to the fieldwork and the process of analysing the material. It was my first experience in anthropological fieldwork. I had little confidence that I would really be able to do the job. I was afraid of ethnocentrism: how could

I, a middle class Dutch woman, understand anything of Mexican peasant men and women? In the beginning I didn't have the feeling that the research was 'mine'. Norman Long had formulated the general theoretical and methodological framework, decided upon the general research focus and he had selected the research location and research team. Already in the first months it became clear that the research team, just like households or family relations, was characterized by a complex and often conflictive dynamic. Further, Lex, my *compañero*, had decided to give up the offer of a job so that we could be together, notwithstanding the fact that he was going to be my 'dependent' for two years. Of what influence was all this on the sort of material collected? Would a different researcher, of a different background and character have interpreted or seen the same event differently in this same village? I think so, since my understanding of what was happening in the village was constructed in the process of my interaction with the villagers, where I was myself a social actor, just like those with whom I interacted. But, although it is not easy to unravel the personal influences on the themes chosen, and the emerging of the central actors in the thesis, I here give it a try.

First, the whole situation made for insecurity. I often felt like a small child, not really capable of handling the situation. Later, I realized that especially in those first, conflictive months of the field research I had mainly related to people in whose company I felt emotionally secure, i.e. mostly somewhat older women who showed a sort of motherly attitude towards me. Perhaps that counts for the fact that the chapters on women in this thesis mainly hinge on the problems which older women with children encounter when entering into what is for them a rather hostile and conflictive world: the world of local politics and agriculture.

Further, I recall experiences from both the fieldwork period and the period of analysis and writing up, which reflect the fact that my being a woman researcher influenced my social interaction with the people in the village, and which reflect, on the other hand, that my own personal development had an effect on the way the material is interpreted.

During the Field Research

In this section I will describe the different ways in which Lex and I got involved in the struggle for land, which held the ejido in its spell for almost eight months during our field research. Because of his being a man and me a woman, because of the different social networks we had built up during the first months of our stay and because of the socio-political dynamic of the process of the struggle over access to land, we each developed a rather different understanding of what was going on. The material collected by each of us, resulted in two different chapters (3 and 4). The first describes the struggle for land from the point of view of men and the latter from that of women.

In the first months, we decided to do case studies of four different farm enterprises, which would consist of both the agricultural and non-agricultural, and the household part of the enterprise. The logical division of labour between us was that I would work with the women

and take up the non-agricultural and household activities and aspects, and Lex would work with the men on their fields, focussing on their agricultural practices and relationships and on the institutional environment they maintained. Consequently, we both started to develop our own social networks and foci of interest.

After some months the struggle over land started to grip the ejido (See chapter 3). We were both interested in this, since we expected it to tell us a great deal about inter-ejido dynamics, about relations between the ejido and the institutional environment, and about the history of the land reform as it had affected the ejido. Both of us thus became involved in the subject, but each of us in a very different way. While Lex became to some extent a part of the insider group, a small group of locally influential men, I became part of the outsiders, the people and especially the women who were interested in the whole process, but who knew that they would never stand any chance of benefiting from the land gained, since this inner group, the 'petit comité' was virtually inaccessible to them. Here I will elaborate on why each of us became integrated into the matter in such different ways.

It should first be mentioned that studying quarrels over land, in itself, is very difficult since it is such a sensitive subject. It is politically a hot item, as becomes apparent in the chapters on the subject. It arouses many, and strong sentiments, and interest in the subject is a cause of suspicion and gossip. On several occasions it was made clear that it was none of our business. Once, one of the main actors in this drama, Don Alfonso, forbade us to do research on the ejido in the archives that exist in the library of the Ministry of Land Reform in Guadalajara. We were told to "leave the past in peace". On another occasion, Lex had wanted to accompany Don Alfonso to Guadalajara. He wanted to be present at a critical court case. On the day that they were to go, he went to the house of Don Alfonso to ask at what time they would leave. The other men going were already present. Lex did not get an answer to his question. The small talk continued and then he asked again at what time they would leave. One of the men present said that he didn't know, that Don Alfonso would tell him and he turned to Don Alfonso and said: "Tell him". Only then did Don Alfonso explain that there had been a lot of gossip lately concerning Lex's involvement in the case. It was clear that they didn't like the idea of an outsider being involved. That they could not be sure with whom he talked and that he could perhaps be some sort of a spy. Don Alfonso said that he personally did not think that Lex was a spy, but that it was perhaps better if he did not join them on their trips to Guadalajara anymore in the future. Lex asked whether it was all right to join them just this one last time since he had never witnessed a Mexican court case. They agreed. Later, as events turned out, it was in fact the last trip to Guadalajara for all of them: only two weeks later Don Alfonso died.

It is a difficult topic of study and certainly we would not have been able to get involved in it if we had not already been living in the village for over a year when it came to the surface, and if we had not had a special relation with Don Alfonso and his family.

This special relationship stemmed from the first weeks that I stayed in the village, when I was living in the house of Don Alfonso. Lex had not yet arrived. On the third day of my stay there, Don Alfonso's wife felt very ill and had to go to the hospital. Her daughter, who was still living with her parents at home, went to take care of her mother in the hospital. Apart from Don Alfonso, there were also two grandsons of 16 and 4 years old living there. So at the time I was the only woman left in the house. I decided to do the housework. What else could I do? I cleaned the house, washed the dishes and cooked. Don Alfonso let me do it for one day. Then he said: "now I know that you are a good woman, now you don't need to bother anymore. I will call one of my granddaughters to do the work. You continue with your own work." Regularly he used to recall that day, and tell other people that my way of preparing beans was not bad at all. The friendly relation was maintained after Lex arrived and we had rented our own house. Every now and then we joined them on their trips to their sons in Puerta Vallarta, and regularly we ate together.

The delicate nature of the subject made it very important to confront people's opinions and the ways in which they reported events, with actual participant observation of their behaviour in certain situations. Don Alfonso used to draw a veil over the present and past events: he never used names, places nor dates. He always hinted a lot, but never really said much. Without other sources of information, or without knowing to what he was referring, since you had not been present on those same occasions, it was really difficult to have a clue what he was talking about. This was a conscious strategy not to involve too many people in the whole process, otherwise decision making would have become far too difficult. Thus observing him acting in different situations and testing his reporting of events against our own observations was important.

Events took place in two arenas, some within the ejido, and some in Guadalajara. Within the ejido it was not very difficult for me to be present at important events: at ejido meetings, and the time when the officials from Guadalajara came to the village to conduct the survey. This I could follow just as closely as Lex, however, from a different perspective. I will come back to this later.

When a part of the process took place in Guadalajara and not within the ejido, I could not join Don Alfonso and his small group of men of confidence on their trip. The men often left very early in the morning, and did not come back until late in the evening. This in itself is already somewhat problematic for a woman, since without doubt it would lead to all kinds of gossip. Further, a large part of the task in Guadalajara was building and maintaining friendly relations between the ejidatarios and the officials of the Reforma Agraria (Ministry of Land Reform). This is done by paying them bribes, but also by taking them out for dinner. When this was done, the three men from the Reforma Agraria always decided where they would go, and the ejido paid everything. On several occasions they ended up in the '*mariscos*', a restaurant which serves seafood, but which was also in local repute, synonymous with brothel. It was absolutely unthinkable for them to let me join them. But Lex could join them on their

trips to Guadalajara. If I had been doing this research on my own, this would certainly have influenced my understanding of the process, since reconstructing events from interviews with the key actors would have been very unsatisfactory.

As mentioned, although I had the possibility to be present when important events occurred within the ejido, I experienced those events in a very different way from Lex. Let me quote part of my diary of the day when three men from Ministry of Land Reform came from Guadalajara to the village to carry out the survey.

"Today it is Saturday. The *licenciado* and the two *Ingenieros* came to carry out the survey. Lex and I went to the ejido meeting. For the first time many women were present. While normally only two or three women regularly visit the ejido meetings, now the majority of the 14 female ejidatarios were present. All dressed up nicely, as for a special occasion. I sat down with them. To my big surprise Doña Lupe (one of the active female ejidatarios) was cleaning up the building. I had never seen her doing this. Normally it is very dusty and dirty, now it really looked spic and span. The meeting only took 15 minutes. The women were all very much interested in what was going on. However, they did not say a word. When it was announced that the two *ingenieros* needed to be accompanied by ejidatarios on the survey, I asked them whether they would join the men in the fields. No, they wouldn't, they said laughingly: there were so many things to do in their houses. Even Doña Lupe said that she would not join the men. I had thought she would, but she said that she had promised don Alfonso to prepare his house for the wedding in the afternoon and the party in the evening. Moreover, her cows had to be taken care of. So, finally I was the only woman joining the ejidatarios. I did not join them all day. I wanted to bake an apple pie as a present for Don Alfonso's daughter, who would marry that same day.

When I came back in the village, I decided to drop in at Don Alfonso's house. He had not joined the *ingenieros* either. He was taking care of his job as *comisariado ejidal*: together with the *licenciado*, the *coyote* two *pequeños propietarios* and some ejidatarios, he had settled in his backgarden, and they had already started celebrating the wedding. I sat down between the ejidatarios, on one side of the table. On the other side of the table, straight in front of me, sat Don Alfonso and the *licenciado*. The *licenciado* was already quite drunk. Halfway the down table sat the *coyote*. The *licenciado* asked me whether I would mind coming to sit next to him. I thanked him politely for the invitation, but I said that I was comfortable where I was. On my side of the table there was still sufficient space, while on his side of the table it was hardly possible to add an extra chair. "Don't you trust me?" he asked. "Well", I said "I don't know you." Some of those present started to laugh. However, it was clear that the *coyote* had taken my answer as an insult. He rose and came to me. Standing next to my chair, he started to explain me who the *licenciado* was. That he was a friend of the village and that he should be treated with respect. Then he asked me who I actually was. Without waiting for an answer, he

asked whether I would appreciate being introduced to the *licenciado*. After some slight hesitation, I thought that it was perhaps the best thing to do. So the *coyote* took me over to the other edge of the table and introduced me to the *licenciado* and more or less forced me to sit down next to the man.

I thought that perhaps the *licenciado* would be interested in what, for heavens sake, a *gringa* was doing in this small village. He was not. The only thing he was interested in was my arms, legs, shoulders and whatever else he could touch. First he took my hand. which I rid myself of without problem. Next, he laid his arm on the back of my chair. By leaning a bit forward, I could avoid him touching me. Next, he started to caress my leg so I felt that the only thing I could do was ask him quietly to remove his hand. However, he was too arrogant and too drunk to do that. Happily enough he had to relieve himself and got up to go to the back of the garden.

One of the two ejidatarios next to whom I had been sitting, came over to my side of the table saying they had seen the *licenciado* propositioning me, and that I should come to sit next to them again if I felt uncomfortable. I should not feel insulted by his interference, since he was doing it from respect for me and Lex. I really felt touched, but at that moment I thought I had it all under control. So, I thanked him, but said that right then it was not necessary.

However, when the licenciado came back, continued in his efforts ... Then I decided that it had been enough, so I rose and went back to the other side of the table, to sit next to the ejidatarios again. Of course everybody had noticed what had happened, and all of them, except the *coyote*, smiled to themselves. The *licenciado* seemed to be too drunk to really notice it. I thought it better to leave the men soon afterward and dropped into the house, to see the women. There I stayed for a while. I told them what had happened. They smiled, and said; "*así son los hombres*, that's men for you!." It was probably not for nothing that the women had not joined the men in the garden: they probably knew the 'risks'" (Field notes, 05-88).

I have paid so much attention to this, to illustrate that I got involved in quite a different way in the whole process to Lex. On that same day he was able to have informative and relaxed discussions with the men from Guadalajara, while I after the experience in the afternoon, decided to stay out of their way. Although not in the way I had expected, my experience was also informative. It said much about gender interaction, about the division of public space between men and women, about male aggression and machismo which a woman has to confront when she enters the space dominated by men. All subjects which over time also came up when talking with women who tried to get access to land, or had to defend their land titles from being withdrawn by male ejidatarios.

This somewhat extensive account of the fieldwork situation shows that the practices of doing research cannot be disconnected from both the researcher as social actor and the cultural repertoires available in a certain time and space specific context. The same applies to the process of writing a text. As the article of Joke Schrijvers shows, the personal and intellectual development of the author over time, influences the way in which the same field material may be differently analysed. While still in the process of writing it is difficult to reflect in this way, however, recently I suddenly realized that the changes in my personal life, had made me evaluate part of the field material in a different way than two years ago, when I started writing.

In Mexico I did several in-depth interviews about local history. Since I assumed that the developments are differently experienced by men and women, I decided to interview both men and women. The interviews with the men were exciting. They told of the Revolution; about the repression of the peasantry by the former hacendados; about the peasant movements to claim the land of the hacendados; the formation of the ejido, the deception for them that after the land was theirs, their economic situation hardly improved; the continuing dependence on moneylenders; the disappointment that their own local leaders slowly but certainly became *caciques* themselves; the problems with the rural bank which instead of freeing peasants from their dependency on moneylenders, was so corrupt that the peasants lost their confidence in the bank; the need of temporarily migration in order to survive; the expectations which arose from the implementation of the irrigation system; the fact that initially the peasants could not make use of the irrigation system since their land was not levelled; the coming of the North American fruit companies offering to level the land; the problems which the marketing of the fruits produced; the crop diseases; the coming of the sugarcane refinery; the ways in which the refinery at first could set the pay rates, and how the peasants slowly but certainly started to get control over the practices of the refinery. To make a long story short, they talked about what I had defined as "local history", about the process of incorporation into the wider economic and political environment, about modernization of agriculture, about the ever recurring fights for more autonomy, of entering into new dependencies in order to get rid of the old ones.

About the interviews with the women, I felt somewhat disappointed at the time. They hardly told any vivid story about the revolution, the corruption of the bank, the opening up of the area, etc. When I asked them to tell me about former days, they started to tell the history of their lives. The problems they had experienced living with their husbands since his young days, problems with drink and spending his money on other women, the hard days when their children were still young, the illnesses, the pregnancies, the constant worries about getting food on the table, the success in raising chickens and pigs, and of how life became somewhat easier once the children started to help, the resigned nostalgia of former days when women still met each other when washing clothes at the river, or during the days of the maize harvest

when men, women and children worked from early in the morning till late in the afternoon in the fields, their observation that although they now lived in nice houses, with electricity and piped water, they longed for the days in the old village where people still had not been so individualistic and women were still not so confined to their own houses. Their accounts turned mainly around their husbands, their children and the continuous struggle to obtain sufficient money and kind to feed the children. It was the same story as young women told me about their present lives. I felt that these interviews did not help me very much to understand local history. And when I wrote the first version of the history chapter, partly while still in Mexico, partly in the first months of my stay in the Netherlands, it was based nearly completely on the interviews with the men. One and a half years later I worked on the chapter again. In the meantime I had become a mother, and we had moved to a small village in the north of Nicaragua, where Lex had found a job. My one year old daughter had started walking and had to be kept an eye on full time. A quotation from a letter gives an impression of how my daily life looked then.

> "It is saturday morning. Lex will come back today after a three days trip to Managua. Teresa, the woman who works in our house, is still on holiday and I am working again on the chapter on local history. While Ellen makes the coast unclear, I try to do the wash, and prepare food for the lunch. It is hot and I am tired. Ellen woke up last night and decided not to go to sleep again. Perhaps her teeth were molesting her. It took nearly two hours to convince her that the day had not yet begun. I am thinking about the history chapter. I hope that Ellen will take a considerable nap this morning. Perhaps I will be able to work a while. It is still nearly a whole week before Teresa comes back from holidays. I am missing her. I find it very difficult to combine motherhood with working on my thesis. I have only one child, I have Lex who takes his responsibilities as father very seriously, and I have Teresa. Imagine if I would have had five or six children, a husband who does not help to run the household, and no Teresa. How for heavens sake do these mothers in Mexico manage to keep the household running, look after the children and on top of all this, earn their own income?" (January, 1991).

I was hardly able to work on the history chapter until Teresa had come back again. But in the moments when Ellen allowed me to work I started to read again those interviews with the women. It took me some time to locate them: when ordering the material according to themes one and a half year ago, I had not put them in the 'history-file', but in the file called 'family-relations'! It was almost as though I was reading them for the first time. And I decided: Yes, they are about family relations and about the continuous need for personal income, but they are also certainly history, the history of women. From this perspective I started to rewrite the chapter. Because of the changes in my personal situation my conceptualization of local history had changed as well.

The Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of eight further chapters, of which 3 and 4, and 6 to 8, are based on case material. The central theme which runs throughout these chapters is how different individuals and groups of social actors, ejidatarios, (try to) achieve access to critical agricultural resources such as land (chapters 3 and 4), credit, irrigation and more general government services (chapters 6,7 and 8). Since the chapters are written from the experiences and perspectives of different (groups of) social actors (gender is used as the main rationale for differentiating between them), a wide range elements of the social and symbolic order are made visible: gender practices and ideology, the practices of power both in state-peasant relations and between ejidatarios and men and women, the creation of ideological boundaries between different social actors; men and women, ejidatarios and vecinos (literally: neighbours, in practice the landless), practices of state intervention, verticalism, *caciquismo* socio-political networks, and the practices of incorporation in the wider economic and political environment.

Most of the chapters are focussed on here and now situations. Chapter 6 has a more historical focus and explores the changes in the room for men and women to manoeuvre that have occurred due to the agrarian changes in the last sixty years, and in what ways these men and women have influenced the course of the developments that have taken place in their ejido.

Chapters 2 and 5 locate the subjects of the other chapters in the history and the conceptualization of land reform, agrarian change and agricultural modernization in Mexico. Chapter 2 focusses on the history of land reform and the political process in which distribution of land actually takes place. Chapter 5 concentrates on modernization of agriculture and agrarian change in Mexico.

The final chapter (9) is a summary of the thesis and provides the opportunity for further reflection on its main themes.

Notes

1. Ejidos are corporately organized agrarian communities which have received and continue to hold land in accordance with the agrarian laws deriving from the Revolution of 1910. The land is received as an outright grant from the government (which legally remains the owner). The beneficiaries of this right to farm land of the ejido are called ejidatarios. While ejido land legally cannot be sold, rented or mortgaged by individuals, plots of land are usually cultivated individually (Whetten, 1948:182, Grindle, 1977:13).

2. The research project, started in late 1986, was entitled "Contrasting Patterns of Irrigation Organization, Peasant Strategies and Planned Intervention: Comparative Studies in Western Mexico". An interdisciplinary team of researchers was formed, consisting of Pieter van der Zaag, Magdalena Villarreal, Gabriel Torres, Elsa Guzmán, Humberto González, Dorien Brunt and Alberto Arce. In a later phase of the research Lex Hoefsloot, and several Mexican and Dutch students took part in the research. We all carried out research related to the central themes of the research, in the same area in Jalisco. However, in order to reveal the complexity, each of us took a different point of entry: the irrigation bureaucracy, the sugar cane refinery and the two farmers' organizations, the ejidatarios, the private landowners, and the landless labourers.

The programme of studies was supported by grants from the Ford Foundation and the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical research (WOTRO), and was affiliated to El Colegio de Jalisco, Guadalajara. I am very much indebted to the work of the other researchers, and to the continuous discussions among the team both during the period of fieldwork in Mexico and during the period of analysis in the Netherlands.

3. It should be clear that in this thesis I am only concerned with people who have land. However, the rural populations consist of many people who do not have land: labourers, traders, transporters, etcetera. When talking about rural change in the proper sense of the word, the perspective of these people should be included. However, I have chosen not to include them. One of the reasons is that there is already so much to say about the people with land, and the second reason is that the developments in the valley from the perspective of those who do not hold land, are tackled by other researchers of the team. See note 2.

4. Norman Long describes the notion of social actor in the following way: "All societies contain within them a repertoire of different life styles, cultural forms and rationalities which members utilize in their search for order and meaning, and which they themselves play (wittingly ot unwittingly) a part in affirming or restructuring. Hence the strategies and cultural constructions employed by individuals do not arise out of the blue but are drawn from a stock of available discourses (verbal and non-verbal) that are to some degree shared with other individuals, contemporaries and maybe predecessors. It is at this point that the individual is, as it were, transmuted metaphorically into the **social actor**, which signifies the fact that the social actor is a social construction rather than simply a synonym for the individual or a member of homo sapiens" (Norman Long; 1990:9).

5. See Alison MacEwen Scott, 1986a and 1986b; Sarah Whatmore, 1987; Sarah Whatmore et al., 1987; Hariet Friedmann, 1986a and 1986b.

6. See references on page 14.

7. As we will see in the following chapter, there exists a vast body of anthroplogical, political economic, and sociological literature on deconstructing the Mexican state and analysing its practices.

8. For an overview of what actor-oriented research amounts to see Norman Long, Appendix: Notes on Research Methodology: Mexican Project (Long, 1989:245-256).

9. See note 2 of this chapter.

10. Situational analysis and case studies both refer to the analysis of social interaction. The difference between them is that extended case studies refer to a series of social interactions involving the same people over a longer period of time. The actors thus can be followed throughout the different encounters. In this thesis chapters 3 (land claims) and 7 (the credit group) are examples of this kind of analysis. With situational analysis I refer to the analysis of a meaningful but incidental and intentional encounters of people, where the background is investigated through follow-up interviews with the actors and with outsiders and from all those other incidences of chat and gossip etc. just mentioned.

11. The term 'mute' does not necessarily refer to those who are actually silent. Women may speak a great deal, but they remain muted because their model of reality is seldom heard, and their view of the world cannot be realized or expressed using the terms of the dominant male model (Ardener, 1975b:21-23, as referred to by H. Moore, 1989:3).

12. Also the term 'classificatory system' is used in this context, see for instance Helen Callaway, 1989. However I prefer to use the term cultural repertoires. The latter is a more actor oriented notion: they are built up over time and can be drawn on in different situations while a classificatory system is a more static concept.

13. He bases this statement on a rather shocking experience: the death of his wife and his mourning process which made him change fundamentally his conceptualization and his understanding of the head-hunting practices of the northern Luzon in the Philippines, were he and his wife were doing field work at the moment of the accident.

II. CLAIMING ACCESS TO LAND IN MEXICO

Introduction

Access to land is a fundamental issue for rural populations. Throughout history, it has been one of the prime motives for the landless and small producers to organize themselves, or allow themselves to be organized. Mexico's agrarian history is an outstanding example of this. The impressive mobilization of the rural population - especially the forces in the south led by Emiliano Zapata, and in the north by Pancho Villa - made land reform and the preservation of communal lands the central item of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917).

Governments in the years after the Revolution did not live up to the expectations of the 1917 Constitutional Convention. Although not to the same extent as during the Revolution, in these years also, the rural population mobilized in order to press their demands. Slowly and on a small scale, land reform was effected.[1] This changed under the presidency of Lazaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). During Cárdenas' regime, 20 million hectares were redistributed to 810,000 people (Cynthia Hewitt, 1982:18). Between 1930 and 1940, the number of landless labourers declined by more than 50%. Cárdenas not only returned land to the peasants which had been expropriated during the Porfirian period (Porfírio Díaz was Mexico's last dictator from 1876 to 1910, when he was overthrown), but he also expropriated the land of the big commercial enterprises and turned this into the hands of the former workers of those estates. The private agricultural enterprises, which before 1936 had occupied 5.2 million hectares of cultivable land, occupied only 3 million in 1940.

Notwithstanding the Agrarian Reform of the thirties and its later revival in the sixties[2], access to land is as burning a question as it has always been. The land which was expropriated was often of poor quality, and access to irrigation and credit facilities were poor for small producers such as the ejidatarios. This in combination with a growing population (Table 1), makes it increasingly difficult for ejidatarios to make a living, which causes an increasing demand for land.

The 1970's and 1980's saw a marked increase in protests by numerous groups in the countryside. The protest took various forms, from guerilla struggle and violent land occupations to strikes and peasant marches to the cities and stoppages in the agricultural companies (Bartra, 1990:105).

Table 1. Population growth (in millions)

	Total population			Urban population*			Rural population		
Year	total	women	men	total	women	men	total	women	men
1930	16.5	8.4	8.1	5.5	2.9	2.6	11.0	5.5	5.5
1940	19.6	9.9	9.7	6.9	3.7	3.2	12.7	6.3	6.4
1970	48.2	24.2	24.0	28.3	14.4	12.9	19.9	9.7	10.2
1980	66.8	33.8	33.0	44.3	22.7	21.6	22.5	11.1	11.4

* Those living in towns bigger than 2500 inhabitants.
Source: *Estadísticas Históricas de México, Tomo 1*, (1986:3) INEGI, México.

Given Mexico's history, it is not surprising that many authors, interested in peasant and farmer organization, have focussed their attention on the 1910-1917 Revolution and the peasant rebellions since. Although, I would not deny that there is much to learn from these experiences, to look only at those occasions of open rebellion or conflict, is to miss what must be of equal significance, the alternative and often the only approach open to peasants to improve their living conditions, and that was to find opportunities and strategies to "work the system", instead of "opposing the system", to get access to land and other necessities. I agree with James Scott (1985:xv-xvi) when he states that "what is missing from this perspective is the fact that subordinate classes throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity. Or better stated, such activity was dangerous, if not suicidal." The Mexican experience underlines this. Peasants rebelling in the seventies and eighties were confronted with repression, violent confrontations and "disappearances".[3)]

The coming two chapters focus on how men and women try to get access to land by finding a way through the institutional social order responsible for its distribution. I have taken this as a central theme for two reasons. The first is that access to land is an emotive issue, which stirs the minds and emotions of both men and women, as we will see. The possibility of getting hold of land raises hopes for a better future and the chance to prevent one's children having to migrate to the United States. The second is that since it is seen to be such a crucial issue, people are prompted to organize to try and find a way through Mexico's institutional jungle, if they feel they have a chance of obtaining some. This enabled me to see how the social actors of a local organization, in this case an ejido, went about fighting a claim to disputed land, and it gave me an opportunity at the same time to gain some insight into the practices of the institutional environment.

But before I go into the details of the experiences of the struggle for land in this small ejido in western Mexico, I first want to offer a sort of picture of what the social order amounts to within the context of getting access to land. As argued in the previous chapter, by social order

I refer to those ideological, socio-political and economic practices which exceed the particularities and the life-span of individual actors and which enable or constrain the developing of specific strategies to create room to manoeuvre, in this case in relation to land. Apart from offering a picture of the institutional setting, this chapter also gives some background to the local setting: the ejido called *El Rancho*.

The Land Reform Bureaucracy

When trying to lay claims to land through official channels, the ejidatarios see themselves confronted with a huge and what must seem to them a perplexing and inaccessible bureaucracy. The offices of the Reforma Agraria (Ministry of Land Reform), the department which has to process their claims, is located in the state capital, Guadalajara, which is a three hour drive from the ejido. On arriving, they are often fobbed off with fair words and find it difficult to get through to the persons they want to see. The secretaries seem to be contracted for the sole purpose of preventing ejidatarios from reaching those in charge: they require written requests which have to be approved by different officials which can take several days. It is made clear that the person in question is a very busy man who ought not to be bothered with minor problems. When the ejidatarios return several days later, the wanted person is away or in a meeting. This may be repeated several times, and when in the end they are allowed to reveal their problem, the man in charge tells them that he will investigate the whole question, and that they must have some patience. Then, that is the last they hear of it, and the whole procedure must be followed all over again. Little wonder then that they feel manipulated. These practices led one ejidatario to sigh:

> "I am not against the government. Their objectives are good. It's just that its representatives are a bad lot. They don't want the farmers to prosper. If there were only good men working for the different institutions like the SARH, the Reforma Agraria, or BANRURAL, everything would be marvellous, because the government has good intentions" (Field Notes, 17-11-87).

The procedure for getting a land grant is complex. First, all or some members of a local community will petition the local Agrarian Committee. This committee consists of individuals appointed by the Governor of a state to oversee land grants within the entire state. Several investigations and procedures have to be carried out: a map has to be made of the area involved, the history of the claim has to be clearly drawn up, and the claims, which other ejidos or small landowners, the so-called *pequeños propietarios*, might have to it, have to be mapped out and judged. If this board approves, the petition is sent to the National Agrarian Commission in Mexico City which also reviews the petition. If this commission approves, it will recommend to the President of Mexico that the petition be granted. Only by Presidential Decree can a community receive a land grant. The whole procedure may take

several decades. Since laws are 'elastic', as one of the key actors explained to me, indicating that they can be interpreted in more than one way, a community seeking land may fight long legal battles with surrounding communities who might also have claims to it, and with *pequeños propietarios* who are likely to be affected.

As a matter of fact, the procedure cannot be understood in its bureaucratic and legal framework only, it must also be examined in terms of network building, creating solidarity, in terms of friendship and bribes. Since so many steps have to be taken, and so many people are involved in the decision making, and considering the elasticity of laws and procedures, the different parties have ample opportunity to try and influence outcomes in the light of their own interests.

Ejidatarios do not understand the procedures entirely, but they are perfectly well aware of the importance of someone who is able to introduce you to the right people, and who can help to guide the petition through the right political channels. Such a person in popular language is someone with *palanca* or leverage. In much of the literature on the political system in Mexico such a person is often called a broker.

Brokerage: Its Possibilities and its Limitations

Brokers,[4] those persons who have the ear of those in control of state resources, and the ear of local groups with economic and political demands, and who mediate between these relatively powerful and relatively powerless actors or groups, are deeply rooted in Mexican society.

This is related to some particulars of political practices which are probably not exclusive to Mexico, but which appear to be particularly salient there. One of Mexico's outstanding characteristics is the large and complex bureaucracy through which policies have to be implemented, and which exercises control over the distribution of a number of resources such as land, water, and credit. The other is that everything seems to be negotiable: interpretation of the law, of policy, of identity, access to scarce resources, etc. Marilee Grindle characterizes the Mexican political dynamic as follows:

> "To a much greater extent than in the political systems of the United States and Western Europe, the process of implementing public policies is a focus of political participation and competition in Mexico[5]. This is true because of the characteristics of the political system itself, such as the remoteness and inaccessibility of the policy making process to most individuals and the extensive competition engendered by widespread need and the very scarce resources. Thus while in Western Europe and the United States much political activity is focussed on the input stage of the policy process, in Mexico a large portion of individual and collective demand making, the representation of interests, and the emergence and resolution of conflict occurs at the output stage" (Grindle, 1980:15-16).

This is precisely why it is so important to look at the implementation of state policy, the practices of the distribution of state resources, and not confine oneself (only) to policy intentions.

All citizens are interested in receiving goods and services and having access to resources, scarce or otherwise. The system of brokerage is an important element in the distributing of these. Brokers mediate between local groups or 'collective political networks' - as Carlos and Anderson (1981:172) call the structures through which demands are expressed, articulated and attended - and those in control of state resources. It is important to note that these collective political networks are a prerequisite for the broker's existence: without pressure from these networks, there would be nothing to mediate. Carlos and Anderson (1981:192) state that the widespread participation of political networks in the political process, and their connection to it through their brokers, may give to the outsider an image of an open system, a kind of participatory democracy which is different from the Anglo-Saxon system, but no less effective in representing the interests of those who participate in it. However, this apparent openness should be seen against the background of the ongoing reproduction of domination and exploitation in the wider society.

Richard Adams (as summarized by Guillermo de la Peña, 1985:13-14) argues that since power in society is unequally distributed, the broker has to mediate between relatively powerful and relatively powerless actors or groups. The broker is the person who has the ear of those in control of state resources and local groups with economic and political demands. The broker himself derives his power from those by whom he is used, and thus tends to favor the interests of the relatively powerful group.

This idea is further elaborated and put within the context of a Marxist theory of the state by Roger Bartra et al (1975).[9] They see brokers as functional for capitalism in the sense that they are important for maintaining social order in an epoch of growing differentiation between the poor and the rich and of anti-popular policy. Brokers canalize popular demands and thus shield the system from revolutionary change. They argue that in this sense political brokerage is supportive of the system of state control. Carlos and Anderson (1981:192-3) come to the following synthesis of the structural position of the broker, which makes the system of brokerage susceptible to state control:

> "Only some, not all, communities have access to state resources and are included in the national brokerage system network. Those included have relative advantages that are not available to those who are marginalized or not included in the system. ... In turn for advantages, the local communities exchange political compliance, votes and acclamations of part nominees. What would occur if a community made ever-increasing demands for advantages? Such a group would be excluded from access to certain resources in favor of a more marginal group willing to offer the same level of political support for fewer advantages. ... Relative to a clientele the position of the broker is an advantaged one, yet the costs of the exclusion of his group from the network are to

him the loss of status as a broker...and as a consequence, the expected obedience of brokers to state demands from above is greater. .... When brokers are too obedient to demands from above (and do not transmit demands from below) they can be replaced by his clientele. Thus the replaceable broker faces an ongoing dilemma: if he is too forceful in making demands, the community is excluded; if not forceful enough, *he* is excluded. The long term solution for this dilemma of how to protect his status is to monopolize his political contacts, thus eliminating his replaceability from below and further entrenching his political rule. But this resolution has the effect of strengthening the strong state control structure."

So, in general, the room to manoeuvre of the broker is structurally limited, and pressure from collective political networks are a requisite for the broker's existence, since without pressure from these networks, there is nothing to mediate. Thus, it is important to focus not only attention on the brokers, but also on the way in which the collective political networks are able to articulate and push their demands: in this case this is the ejido as local organization.

The Ejido as Local Organization

The most noted aspect of the Mexican Agrarian Reform are the *ejidos*. Ejidos are agrarian communities which received and continue to hold land in accordance with the agrarian laws deriving from the Revolution of 1910. The land is received as an outright grant from the government, which legally remains the owner. The beneficiaries of the right to farm ejido land are the *ejidatarios*. The fact that the land remains state property implies that individual plots are neither divisible nor subject to sale, and are supposed to be inherited intact by the ejidatario's chosen heir, either male or female. As long as the ejidatario actually tills his plot, it is not alienable. These restrictions were designed to prevent renewed concentration of landownership in a few hands and to protect the land reform beneficiary and the ejido community as a whole from losing the land. Apart from partitioning and allocating land to landless labourers, the Agrarian Reform also provided a legal structure for administrating ejido properties, for solving problems which arise in the community, and for mediating between ejidatarios and public agencies. The ejido as a social community forms an important entry point for outside agencies at the local level. Their interventions (the provision of credit and seeds, for example) are often channeled via the ejido. But vice-versa, the ejido also offers individuals and groups of farmers access to the wider institutional and economic environment. Ejidos are thus a formalized intermediate structure between 'the state' and 'peasants'. It was within this framework of the ejido that the land struggle of El Rancho was enacted.

The ejido as a social institution is, in principle, democratically organized on the basis of one man one vote. It has its own structures: a three-member governing board, a vigilance committee - both of whose members are voted in every three years and who cannot be re-

elected - and a general assembly, which meets monthly and in which all ejidatarios are supposed to participate. In principle, the general assembly takes the decisions and sets out the general lines of conduct for the governing board. In practice, however, it functions very differently, and it is the president, the *comisariado ejidal* of the ejido who, quite authoritarianly, may monopolize a great deal of the formal decision making. He is able to do so partly by virtue of his office. He can begin the procedures for dispossessing an ejidatario of land if she/he is renting it out or has given up cultivating it. He can also redistribute this lands to those he thinks have a legitimate claim to or deserve it. He is the one who functions as an intermediary between ejidatarios and government institutions. He can benefit or prejudice the economic enterprises of individual ejidatarios by promoting or blocking credit facilities, access to land and in many other ways. He is in charge of settling disputes that arise among ejidatarios, and between ejidatarios and institutions such as the bank and the irrigation department.

But it is not only because of his formal office that a *comisariado* can monopolize decision making, but also because of the precedents and pattern of leadership set by his predecessors or because of his own personal style. Especially in the first decennia of the existence of the ejidos, *comisariados* were able to act like local strongmen or *caciques*, who were effectively able to put out of circuit those who opposed their policies, many of which often favoured and benefitted most themselves and their close relatives. This was the case in El Rancho.

The Historical Roots of Local *Caciquismo* or Bossism[7]

Just like brokers, local *caciques* or bosses are deeply rooted in Mexican history, and favoritism and patronage are important mechanisms for maintaining the status quo. Local leaders are also often brokers.[8]

Authoritarian leadership is a widely recognized phenomenon in Mexican society. To understand existing attitudes towards this phenomenon, one needs to have some understanding of the hacienda period and the first years of the ejido. It is, of course, quite possible that the memory and images of the hacienda period have, over the years, started to deviate from historical reality, but this does not alter the fact that existing attitudes towards leadership are significantly influenced by this historically developed image (Buve, 1977:15-16)

By the time Mexico achieved independence, and indeed long before, rural Mexico was dominated by haciendas[9], large areas under the ownership of a single landlord. The haciendas were relatively self-sufficient. The crops grown on the hacienda provided for all food needs, and efforts were also made to produce all the tools, building materials and other elements of agricultural operations. A permanent labor force resided on the hacienda. The tie between the *peones* (labourers) and the hacienda during the course of the nineteenth century, increasingly

assumed the form of debt bondage. Loans were frequently advanced by the hacienda store, the *tienda de raya*, with the clear purpose of tying peones to the hacienda so that they would be available during the few months when their labour was required.

The relative autonomy of the hacendado, and the dependence of the peones gave rise to a situation in which the hacendado was much more than the landowner. He was the person with whom the landless sharecropped land; he was also the person who controlled and dispensed many of the key components for farming such as credit, draft animals, seeds; he was also the person who marketed surplus production for the sharecroppers; and he was also the person who dispensed many of the basic needs such as housing, food, and health care, sometimes also providing schooling and room for religious activities. And finally, he was also "the law".

In such a situation of dependency the only viable way of improving one's own life conditions was to maintain good relations with the landlord, who repaid this loyalty with favours and protection. This system of patron-client relations, of patronage, kept the peones divided. Although they were all equally dependent on the hacendado, they were also in competition for the favors which every now and then were offered to a selected number of clients. People in such a situation become experienced at looking after their own interests. Since they had no way out of the dependency, they had no choice but to accept that loyalty to the patron, brought them and their close relatives more advantages than mutual solidarity.[10)]

Although the Revolution brought many changes, it did not eradicate the phenomena of local *caciques*, patronage and favoritism. On the contrary, it is argued that both the national political structure, characterized from within by verticalism, and the legal side of the agrarian reform, both reproduced patronage. Paula L.W. Sabloff (1981:40) argues that since the laws attribute an important intermediary position to the president of an ejido between the community and the agrarian bureaucracy, the president, while playing client to his bureaucratic and political superiors, is able to play patron to his inferiors, i.e. the rest of the community. This is because he is the sole distributor of benefits from his superiors, and he can make the community feel that without him (and his personal connections to his superiors) the community would not receive the benefits of a land grant, piped water, electricity, credit and other amenities. Several case studies[11)] show that those men who played a central role in the foundation of the ejido, were able to monopolize much of the power in the first decennia, precisely because of their intermediate position. So, although legally, through the general assembly, ejidatarios are able to control the president, i.e.the local boss, in practice they continue to be very dependent. As a consequence, the striving for personal gain, by showing great loyalty towards the ejido president, continues to exist. This, as we will see, inhibits the creation of strong collective political networks through which the ejidatarios could push their demands.

What about Women?

Women, as social actors, are not visible in the framework of land distribution presented above. One might, therefore, ask why, if they are not visible, is it worth problematizing this phenomenon? And the answer is, first of all, for both practical and political reasons. Just as for men, access to land is also a crucial issue for women. In the ejido which is the focus of this study, women demonstrated a strong interest in the whole struggle for land. These were not only women who were heads of households such as widows or *madres solteras* (single mothers), but also women who were married as they often put it, to "irresponsible men who spend the money they earn on booze and other women". However, land is far less accessible to women than it is to men. It is a great loss that the general statistics on the land reform are not specified according to gender.[12] In a comparative study of land reforms in Latin America, Carmen Diana Deere (1985:1041-42) states:

> "..throughout Latin America social custom dictates that if both an adult man and an adult woman reside in a household, the man is considered its head....Even in those cases where beneficiaries were defined as individuals, it was usually assumed, if not explicit, that only one individual per household could be designated a beneficiary, and that was to be the household head. As a result, the only women who could potentially be reform beneficiaries were either widows or single mothers with no adult male living in the household."

This was also the case in the ejido of El Rancho. If we retrace the ways in which the 79 ejidatarios originally obtained rights over land, and we specify this for male and female ejidatarios (data given in chapter 4), we see a marked difference in the ways men and women gain access to ejido rights: women obtain access only through inheritance, while for men many other options for getting hold of such a right appear to exist. How can we account for this, establishing the fact that the early Mexican Agrarian Laws hardly discriminated explicitly between men and women with regard to access to ejido land, and in later years even favoured women? To find explanations, one has to look at the system through which rights to land are claimed, processed and distributed, through the experiences and perspectives of women, and at the gender determined practices of brokers, patrons, local leaders, and political network-building. Since the law cannot be held responsible for the exclusion of women, it has to be sought in the everyday practices and ideology in which these practices are imbedded, and in those who move in the above described system, and in their interaction with women.

In contrast to the aims of the laws, in practice, the land reform has institutionalized women's dependency on their husbands. In practice, the land reform has emphasized the image of women as housewives, while their productive labour in the fields and in the processing of agricultural products is largely ignored. Men are the ones who maintain their wives and children. That everyday reality is often radically different seems not to matter. In the ejido studied, approximately 20% of all households are headed by females, and in at least the same

percentage of all 'male-headed' households, women and children take care of a very considerable part (more than half) of the actual household income. However, this does not prevent the argument "that men have the right to land, and women have the right to a man who maintains her". This is an argument often used by men at the local level to deny women the right to land, and thus to deny them the identity of ejidataria. Access to land does not only imply a material improvement in the lives of women, but considering the strength of the resistance from men, it obviously also means a challenge to the existing order of gender ideology and practice. Ineke van Halsema (1991:145) in her analysis of changing gender relations in a Brazilian village, focusses her analysis on the fact that men achieve power through making outside linkages. She argues that outside institutions that interfere in village life, create positions (in our case, for instance, the president of the ejido) which are primarily assumed by men. By virtue of these positions, men can limit the behaviour of others, and also the behaviour of women. She argues that "it is precisely through their definition as farmers that men establish many of the linkages they maintain with the outside world.... As long as women are not farmers but housewives [or as I would add, are not recognized as farmers] these linkages are not open to them and indeed do not seem to be appropriate. In this respect ... a struggle over identities becomes meaningful and important: it may be the case that changing the definition of women to farmers instead of housewives is a prerequisite to changing their relation of power to men, for it is to a large extent by virtue of their definition as farmers that men assumed many of the positions that provided them with enabling forms of power. The definition, or rather the recognition of women as farmers, may open up these positions to them as well." The experience of a women's farm in Sri Lanka confirms this: precisely through defining themselves as farmers, and their enterprise as a farm, women got access to government institutions and services (Joke Schrijvers in a personal communication). This is a strong argument for highlighting in the Mexican situation the experiences of those women who have managed to become or are trying to become ejidataria.

But there are not only practical and political reasons for problematizing the absence of women in the system of political networks, brokerage, leadership, clientelism and favoritism. There are also more theoretical reasons: looking at the whole dynamic from the experiences and perspectives of women leads us to conceptualize the social order in quite another way. First, it focusses our attention on the styles through which political networks and relations with brokers are produced and reproduced. Political networks and brokerage are not just sources that anyone interested may draw upon. Women are marginal to these structures.[13] Their case shows that the system not only channels the number and the kinds of popular demands, but it also discriminate between different categories of potential clients. Thus, starting from the experiences and perspectives of women, sheds light on the 'genderedness' of the system of political networks and brokerage, which in Mexican literature are widely recognized to be the main mechanisms through which goods and services are distributed.

Further, focussing on how women try to get access to land at the local level, or to defend their titles should they have inherited one, gives a more refined picture of organization at the local level. While political factionalism and favoritism are seen as debt mechanisms to exclude certain groups at local level from access to vital resources, the analysis of women moving in the local political scene leads us to appreciate mechanisms of ideology, labeling and the creating of social identities and symbolic boundaries, as further mechanisms of this sort. What I mean by these concepts will be elaborated further in chapter 4. Here, I simply want to make the point that starting from the problems women encounter in their struggle for land, leads us to recognizing other mechanisms for canalizing the demands of social actors, in this case women, and for denying them access to vital resources other than those often mentioned in the literature, such as favoritism and patronage.

Including women in the analysis highlights that the difference in view one may receive of enabling or constraining elements in the institutional dynamics concerning land distribution, depends heavily on whose point of view one takes, whether it is of those able to take part in it, or of those - in this case women - who are unable to do so. One of the merits of the existing literature on brokerage and political networks is that it offers such a neat, and useful framework for understanding the political processes of making demands and distribution in Mexico. At the same time its neatness is also a problem: it makes it difficult to bring the experiences and perspectives of those marginal to this process into the picture. The framework, so to speak, mutes a very large part of the population. However, the fact that they do not come within this framework does not mean that they do not try to get their demands heard or do not try to claim their rights. In the case of the women in El Rancho, it simply means that their arena and their means are different from those mentioned in the 'broker framework': they have different possibilities and they encounter different obstacles.

The Socio-Economic Setting

Before I continue with the actual case studies - in which the process of claiming access to land is approached from the perspectives and experiences of both men and women - I first want to lay out the socio-economic setting in which these case studies are embedded.

El Rancho[14] is a small village of about 1100 inhabitants located in a valley some two hours from the Pacific coast in the State of Jalisco, western Mexico. It is easily reached both by private and public transport. The main source of income for its inhabitants is agriculture, migration and small trade. The main crop is sugarcane, and to a lesser extent maize is grown and some livestock is kept.

The changes that have taken place in agriculture have had a great impact on the village. Until the 1960s, the land of the ejido was rainfed. Maize, beans and some vegetables were grown and livestock were kept. With the introduction of the irrigation system, almost all the

ejido's land (690 Has out of 760 Has) benefitted from irrigation. From then on developments can be characterized by what is usually called 'modernization of agriculture'. North American fruit and vegetable entrepreneurs became interested in the area, renting land from the ejidatarios, and soon growing vast areas with melons and tomatoes. This meant an enormous demand for labour, especially female labour because of the "delicacy of touch" needed in the different stages of the production process. Due to plagues and marketing problems the fruit and vegetable production collapsed in the early eighties. In the meantime a sugar refinery was constructed and started to function in 1971. Although slow in the beginning, sugarcane gained popularity, and in 1989 sugar was grown on 80% of the irrigated area of the ejido.

The ejido was founded in 1935. In those days the ejido existed of 41 members. It has 760 hectares of land which formerly belonged to the hacienda El Rancho. Over the years the ejido expanded and nowadays has 80 members: 14 women, 65 men, and one women's group, a so-called UIAM (Unidad Industrial Agricola de la Mujer Campesina). Not all of them live in El Rancho. Thirteen live in a neighbouring village which is closer to their plots. The present landholding pattern is quite different from that of former days. Today it consists of individual plots of ejido land of between 5-14 hectares. In former days there was a rotating land-use system in which each ejidatario was given a parcel of 4 hectares each year. The land which was not cultivated was rented to people outside the ejido. Later I will give more attention to these changes.

While in the beginning the ejido and the village coincided in that those living in the village belonged to families of ejidatarios, nowadays this is no longer true. Over the years many people from outside have settled in El Rancho, agricultural labourers attracted by the demand for labour in the valley, first in the 1950s in cotton production and later in the 1960s and 70s in fruit and vegetable production. Some of them succeeded in obtaining an ejido plot, many did not. Also many of the adult children of ejidatarios are not themselves ejidatarios. Actually about 40 percent of heads of households in El Rancho are ejidatarios. However, frequently more than one household, those of sons, daughters, brothers and/or parents), work and depend for their income on the same plot. Further, non-relatives may also have access to plots through renting, and a large number of households (about 15%) are involved in daily work in agriculture. Other sources of income are trade, house construction, remunerated employment in the sugar plant or in neighbouring towns and temporarily migration to the United States.

Within one household different kinds of economic activities are undertaken by different members of the family: while the man works as a day labourer in agriculture, the woman may have a small shop or trading activity which she runs with the children, a man might work as day labourer while at the same time being involved in trade, or a woman made keep chickens and piggs in the home garden while at the same time make clothes. This also becomes clear in Tables 2 and 3, in which the primary and secondary occupations of men and women are shown. Together the tables cover the adults of 121 different households in El Rancho, which is aproximately 80% of the total.

Table 2. Primary and Secondary Occupations of Adult Males living in El Rancho. In percentages, N=112.

1. 2.	Agriculture	Trade & Services	Labour Migration
Agriculture	64	7	4
Trade & Services	5	15	3
Maintained by Children		2	

Source: Field Data, 1988.

Table 3. Primary and Secondary Occupations of Adult Females living in El Rancho. In percentages, N=117.

1. 2.	Agriculture	Trade & Services	Household & Home Garden	Labour Migration
Agriculture		1	4,5	
Trade & Services		12	15	
Labour Migration		1		3
Household & Home Garden	5,5	15	39	
Maintained by Children			4	

Source: Field Data, 1988.

Because of the multiple economic reality of households, and the different economic activities men and women may be engaged in at the same time, it is difficult to make a sharp distinction between households based on economic characteristics.

Two distinctions however are clear and well defined. One is the distinction between men and women: the recently introduced sugarcane being a man's domain, and economic activities for women being trade and the raising of chickens and pigs. While few women - mainly widows - had land, most women used to work on the fields of their fathers, husbands and brothers in former days. If they were not chaperoned by men of confidence or family, they were often confronted with painful gossip about their reputation. When family labour was replaced by paid labour with the introduction of sugarcane, women's involvement in agriculture diminished rapidly, and as we have seen in table 3, nowadays trade and the home garden are their main sources of income.

The second is the distinction between ejidatarios and the so called *vecinos* (neighbours, those without land). This is not a distinction based on economic activities, and is thus not visible in the tables, but based on legal and political position. When I first came to the village I asked a woman (who later turned out to be an ejidataria) how many families lived in the village. She told me approximately 60. The same day I posed the same question to somebody else who answered over 150. (This turned out to be close to reality: the census showed that El Rancho consists of 153 households, of which 31 are female headed). When I showed my surprise, I was told that the woman had only counted the families of the ejidatarios, and my informant added that the ejidatarios always made clear to the vecinos that they were the bosses in the village.

Apart from agriculture and trade, the main source of income is temporary migration to the United States of America. Almost every adult male of El Rancho, regardless of whether he is an ejidatario or not, has either been to *el norte* (the north, the USA) or has close relatives living there. Migration was originally seasonal, to work on the agricultural estates of the pacific coast of Mexico or in the larger cities of Guadalajara, the capital, Mexico City and Tijuana; but from the 1940's onwards, a process of longer term migration, especially to California in the United States began. The flow of migrants continues to have significant impact on the villages of the area both economically and socially. This is shown by the number of migrant adult children of families which live in El Rancho (see Table 4).

Table 4. Number of Migrant Adult Children

	Female	Male
To other States of Mexico	18	15
To the United States of America	26	29
Total	44	44

Source: Field Data 1988.

This implies that about 29% of the adult men and 27% of the adult women lived temporarily or permanently outside El Rancho at the moment of the census.

The occupational and residential data were gathered by means of 14 genealogies. The advantage of this way of gathering this information, is that it not only offers the possibility to extract the above presented 'disembodied' data, but it also vizualizes the social structure of the village. Perhaps the village could best be characterized as different sets of interlocking extended households. This is illustrated by on extended gyneology presented in Annex I. Presicely because of these social characteristics, the dynamic of for instance village politics can not only be understood in the light of the contradictions between the 'haves' and the 'have-

nots'. Family ties, ritual kinship, intermarriage, family hierarchy are part and parcel of the dynamic.

In all of the foregoing, El Rancho does not differ profoundly from neighbouring sugar cane villages.[15] However, the village looks quite different from the other villages. The majority of the houses are made of brick, not adobe, and resemble more the houses of the urban estates that sprawl on the outskirts of the cities, than the typical houses in the countryside. This is due to the exceptional history of El Rancho, namely that halfway through the 1970s the whole village was moved to another location with government support. The whole event had several unintended consequences which I will lay out in other chapters. But one of these consequences I want to mention here. The whole process of negotiation with different government representatives at local, regional and national level over the replacement of the village, gave several ejidatarios the opportunity to built up significant social networks, and gain enormous practice and experience of swaying the course of state intervention, which still influences relations between outside institutions and the ejido. This is recognized by the ejidatarios, inhabitants of other villages as well as representatives of different institutions.

To Conclude: Not Being, But Becoming

In this chapter I have given a view of the Mexican socio-political process for making demands and distributing scarce resources and services, in which network building, the maintenance of vertical relations, local *caciquismo* and the continuous negotiation over power, are central elements. Further, based on the experiences and the perspectives of women, I have argued that this framework mutes those groups who do not take part in the process as characterized above. Examining the experiences of women sheds light on aspects of the process, which in the general framework are not identified, such as its gender determination.

However, as argued in the introduction, my objective is not to describe or to refine models of a certain social and political order, but to see how this order is reproduced or changed by different social actors striving to create room for manoeuvre. It is not "being" that interests me, but "becoming". This implies that in order to make the socio-political order visible, and to break it down to more workable proportions, research and analysis should start with what social actors actually do, how they analyze their own situation and actions and what possible alternatives for action they see. This is what has guided my fieldwork. However, in presenting the results, I find it necessary to introduce the ethnographic accounts by what I have come to appreciate as the relevant properties of the social and political order, since this gives the reader a better opportunity to appreciate the particularities and to recognize the generalities of the case studies.

That is why this background chapter is on the 'order', to be followed by two chapters in which the social actors and their actions are the core. In these two chapters access to land is

the central theme. Later chapters will be focussed on access to vital resources to make the land productive.

Notes

1. In the south of Jalisco, where the research was located, Casimiro Castillo was the driving force behind land claims. The first ejidos in the region were founded in 1923-1924.

2. The government of Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970), that massacred hundreds of students in 1968 on the night of Tlatelolco, distributed 25 million hectares of land. However, only about 10% of it was arable. Not enough food was produced in that period for the home market and he faced a serious agricultural crisis. The capitalist sector, favoured since 1940 in terms of irrigation, credit facilities and arable land, was orientated to commercial crops for export, investment in industry, and luxury or non-basic foodstuffs. Mexico was no longer self-supporting. With a new agrarian reform, Diaz Ordaz hoped to be able to cope with the food crisis (Bartra, 1990). Obviously neither he nor subsequent governments succeeded. Imports of the staples maize, beans and rice, have increased dramatically in the last two decades, from 8% of domestic consumption between 1970 and 1974, to more than 20% from 1983 to 1987 (A. de Janvry, 1981:125; José Luis Calva, 1988:14).

3. According to the "*Frente Nacional Contra la Represión*", between 1970 and 1985, 487 people disappeared. In the first half of the seventies the repression mainly focussed on guerilla groups, in later years it was mainly against social activists; peasant, union and student leaders. (*Ayala, Mexico, Revolutie op Instorten*, Mexico Komitee Nederland, 1986:51-52).

4. The concept of broker was first suggested, in an analytical sense, by Eric Wolf (1956). He introduced it within the framework of a theory on the stability of the Mexican state. He argued that the functioning of the state cannot be understood without looking at the relations between actors and groups who operate at different levels in society. 'Brokers', who may be individuals or groups, mediate the integration of the different levels. He is not able to suppress the conflicts between the levels, but can mediate them. In Wolf's conception, a broker is mainly a cultural phenomenon. The question of power is not explored. Later Richard Adams (1970) introduced the concept of political broker (both as summarized by Guillermo de la Peña, 1986).

5. She states this more general for countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, since she continues to work out the case of Mexico, I take the freedom to specify it for Mexico.

6. See for further examples R. Bartra (ed.), *Caciquismo y poder político en el México rural*, Siglo XXI, México, 1982; R. Bartra, *Campesinado y poder político en México*, Era, México, 1984.

7. In the Mexican context, the terms *caciques* or *caudillos* are often used to refer to local strongmen. *Cacique* is an Arawak term and was used in colonial days to refer to indigenous authorities, who were often allowed to retain many of their former powers as long as they acted as intermediaries between the Spanish and the indigenous people. The concept of *caudillo* is derived from latin and was first used in the nineteenth century, referring to those local strongmen, who, backed by an army, dominated extensive regions and competed for national power. (Guillermo de la Peña, 1986:2-3; B.R de Walt, 1979:128). *Cacique* is still often used to refer to local strongmen. When speaking of El Rancho, I prefer to use the term local bosses, since the local leader shows little resemblance to the former *caudillos* or the old and the new versions of *caciques*. However, despite this, I believe the local political dynamic to be related to the former and present political dynamic in the wider environment.

8. This is illustrated in several case studies. See for instance Paula L. W. Sabloff, "Caciquismo in Post-Revolutionary Mexican Ejido-Grant Communities" 1981, Research Paper, New Mexico Latin American Institute, in which she analyses the case studies of Eustaquio Ceme and Pedro Caso as drawn up by Paul Friederich (1958, 1964, 1966, 1968).

9. The following description is derived from R.D. Hanse, *The Politics of Mexican Development JHUP*: London, 1974:23-4.

10. Raymond Buve (1977:14-17) makes this analysis, from material based on the publications of Galjart (1968, 1973).

11. Paula Sabloffs refers to several studies, among which are H. Siverts, *On politics and Leadership among Tzeltal-speaking Indians*, Pomona, 1965; and P.W. Friedrich, "The legitimacy of a cacique", in: *Local level Politics*, Swartz, (ed.), Chicago, Aldine.

12. *Estadisticas Historicas de México*, Tomo I, INEGI, 1986, give data about the agrarian reform, but these data are not specified according to gender. And the *Estudios sobre la mujer* Tomo 1 and 2, SPP,1982, do not mention access to land for women.

13. The same is argued for other categories, such as the Indian communities, and people from urban core slums. These groups are the politically forgotten: making no input of demands and receiving virtually no goods or services from the government (Carlos and Anderson, 1981:176). In this respect they also, however make no special reference to women in general or as part of these categories.

14. All names of places and persons are fictitious.

15. In other parts of the valley, vegetables, mainly tomatoes, are still produced. Based on fieldwork done in these villages by other researchers, it seems that the socio-economic differences between sugarcane and tomato villages are considerable, which is most clearly expressed in terms of female participation in the agricultural production process.

III. LEADERSHIP, LEVERAGE AND ELASTIC LAWS. THE EJIDO: AN INTERMEDIATE ORGANIZATION IN ACTION

Introduction

The ejido is a legal structure for administering the properties granted to an agrarian community by the Agrarian Reform, for solving the problems which arise in the community and for mediating between ejidatarios and public agencies. As a social community it forms an important entrance for outside agencies to the local-level context. Interventions (such as, the facilitation of credit and seeds, for example) are often canalized via the ejido. But also the other way around, the ejido offers individuals and groups of farmers access to the wider institutional and economic environment. Thus, among other such structures, ejidos are formalized intermediate level structures between the state and peasants.[1] Such local intermediate organizations are potentially able to increase the opportunities available to rural people to manage their own affairs, to influence public decisions, and to participate in activities that affect their economic productivity and quality of life.

In this chapter I want to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the ejido as an intermediate structure for stimulating and reinforcing individual and group efforts to manage their own affairs and to influence public decision making. I do this through presenting an extended case study of a struggle over land, which according to old documents, was originally given to the ejido El Rancho, but which has for many years been cultivated by private landowners. The case study approach makes it possible to visualize social organization in action, and to show how specific local history, the particular shared political and economic experiences of the actors involved, and common local ideological notions, all influence the course of events.

The case study is presented in two parts. The first part contains the background to the land struggle and introduces some of the key actors involved within the ejido, and gives two accounts of ejido meetings. The second gives a chronological overview of the strategies followed by the ejidatarios to realize their dream to obtain control over land which, according to old documents, should rightfully be theirs. The first part concentrates more on the internal dynamics of the ejido, while the second concentrates on the points of articulation between the ejidatarios and the larger setting, in this case the regional department of the Ministry of Land Reform. Each part is followed by an interim analysis of the material presented.

One of the main features of the case study is the important role the ejido president plays in the course of the action and it is appropriate therefore after the case presentation to highlight the phenomenon of leadership in its local historical perspective.

Part 1: Leadership and Trust within the Ejido

Don Alfonso and His Dream

The story starts in February 1988, and ends on the 21 of September of the same year. During that period, the village (both ejidatarios and '*vecinos*') slowly but surely became feverishly excited about the idea that the ejido could perhaps claim rights to as much as 110 hectares of irrigated land. According to early documents, this land, now in the hands of two *pequeño propietarios*, had once belonged to the ejido.

This had, for many years, been one of the regularly recurrent topics of discussion and gossip. But there had always existed obstacles to investigating these rumours profoundly. The investigation implied also examining the conduct of the former leaders of the ejido who were suspected of having sold ejido property for their own benefit. Furthermore, part of the land was owned by a man who was then, and still is, politically very influential in the region. Not many people were prepared to bring that hornets' nest about their ears, certainly not while the former leaders were still in a position to exert influence over ejido affairs. Their powerful political networks stretched as far as Mexico-city. Ejidatarios had always, therefore, maintained that they lacked the necessary documents, that the ejido could not prove its right, that the new ejido leaders were just as corrupt as the old ones, that the new leaders did not know the history, nor the right politically influential people, to be sufficiently motivated to tackle the affair.

However, the tide had turned. Most of the former leaders had died or were very old, and with the profound political and economic changes that had taken place over the years, their power was gone. I will return to this later.

The new ejido leader, Don Alfonso, was one of the founding ejidatarios. When the ejido was established in 1935, he was a boy of 16 years old, and has a lively memory of those years. However, he had never formed part of the political core of the ejido. In the beginning he was too young, and later, in the sixties, he had been in jail for three years. One of his sons sold his own ejido rights to buy his father's freedom. Don Alfonso did not immediately return to the village, but travelled with his wife and youngest children through different Mexican states looking for work. In 1974, they settled again in the ejido, just in time to profit from the aid the government was providing. They obtained a new house in this way. By then his children had left home, the majority having emigrated to the United States. They were relatively well off and sent their parents money to furnish the house. With the possibility of growing sugar

cane[2)], it became relatively easy to obtain a regular income. It was not long before Don Alfonso, now one of the eldest ejidatarios, was playing an ever more important role in ejido politics. According to him, he was one of the few ejidatarios who dared to say what he thought. The others were to afraid to talk openly. To him it made no difference whether people were humble or rich and influential, he always said what was on his mind. In 1980, he was chosen as leader of a livestock credit group, acting as their representative with the bank and the Ministry of Agriculture. Several years later, in 1987, and more or less by accident, he became *comisariado ejidal*, president of the ejido.

Every three years a new directive committee is chosen. This happens while representatives of the Ministry of Land Reform are present, which is required for elections to be legal. Normally two or more *planillas* or suggestions concerning the team composition of the committee are put forward to the advisory board by the ejidatarios, and votes are taken on the proposed *planillas*. Thus, it is a team that is being voted in and not individuals as such. In this case two *planillas* had been put forward. After the voting it became clear that one of the recommendations had convincingly won by 49 to 6 votes. However, the person suggested for president in this plan refused to take the job. He had been secretary in the last directive committee and felt that he had satisfied his public obligations. With his refusal this whole team proposal became invalid, and so the other recommendation won by default.

Many ejidatarios objected to this and the ensuing discussions took up a great deal of time. People became angry and some started to leave the meeting hall. At that point the representative from the Ministry of Land Reform made a major error. He was probably getting tired of the affair, and using his authority, he brought the discussions to an end, declaring the second *planilla* as the new, legally chosen directive committee, and at the same time, he asked the thus newly chosen president who he wanted to have as his vice president. Normally the second planilla put forward, provides the vice-president but this man refused so the representative of the Ministry, maybe wanting to finalize things, did so informally and the new president suggested his friend Don Alfonso as his deputy. By then, the ejidatarios had also become tired of the matter, and did not oppose this. Later, when the land struggle was not going as they had hoped, they claimed that they had never expected that Don Alfonso, as vice-president, would ever take charge, otherwise they would have objected. However, the new president, once in office, started to commit so many and such serious blunders (he wanted to dispossess the land of ejidatarios in order to give it to his sons), that the ejidatarios decided to complain about him to the Ministry. Within seven months he was removed from his post, and Don Alfonso became president. The Ministry refused to hold another election and stated that the ejidatarios had to accept Don Alfonso until the end of his term.

By then, Don Alfonso was 68 years old. He took the job very seriously. His wife regularly complained about the strenuous life he led, and longed for the days when her husband was not so "*entremetido*" (involved) in other people's affairs. She partly resolved the problem by

forcing Don Alfonso to keep office on the veranda, so that, at least, she had tranquillity within the house.

Don Alfonso had one ambition: to solve the long-lasting struggle over land. Why is not so certain. Once he said: "*Mi intención es dar la tierra a quien tiene hambre, como yo, cuando yo tenía hambre.*" (My intention is to give the land to those who are just as hungry as I once was.) He also knew that it would cause him great trouble. Later on, when everything was difficult, he often could not sleep. He had problems with his health and his wife, but he never regretted starting the whole process. Perhaps at last he felt that he belonged to the "*meros cabrones*", those real bosses, about whom he always talked with envy, but also with contempt. He boasted that, although they thought they could do whatever they wanted, he, Don Alfonso, was smarter, and could make them bend.

The dream lasted 8 months. It came to an emotional peak after 4 months, when success seemed close. Officials of the Ministry of Land Reform came to the village, called a meeting of all the ejidatarios and the *pequeños propietarios* whose land perhaps would be affected, measured the present ejido land and compared it with the old maps, and came to the conclusion that the ejido had a fair chance of getting hold of the land. One of the prerequisites, however, was to act quickly. The time was politically right to enforce such a decision. In July that same year national elections were going to be held, and the PRI[3], hoping to derive voting strength from populistic measures, might now perhaps be willing to decide in favour of the ejidatarios. Not only Don Alfonso, but the whole village, both ejidatarios and vecinos, were excited. People began to talk of how the land would be divided, and individuals started to develop strategies to curry favour with Don Alfonso, who, everyone agreed would certainly have much voice in the matter.[4]

The hoped for decision, however, was never made. Critical time limits passed, and slowly but surely villagers started to loose faith, until finally only the hard core still believed in it. A lot of money had been spent in the whole procedure; money of the ejido[5] meant for community development projects, and money from individuals who hoped that, by financing the procedure, they would be able to put a claim on the new land. People started to ask questions about what had happened to this money. Had it really been used to fight the case, or had Don Alfonso pocketed it? He had never opened the financial side of the procedure to public inspection. The streets and bars were filled with rumours, until the moment was reached when some ejidatarios decided to call Don Alfonso to account. On the agenda of the monthly assembly of the 31th of August 1988, one of the points was the *corte de caja*, the periodical account.

However, the treasurer, Don Alfonso's son-in-law, had also noted the rumours and the atmosphere. He did not show up at that meeting. When it became clear that it would therefore not be possible to discuss the account, the ejidatarios present refused to discuss the other topics on the agenda. One of these was quite pressing, namely, the organisation of the yearly six day village festival. This is a prestigious and economically important event which requires a lot of

preparation. It is a prestigious event for the village as a whole, and for Don Alfonso personally. Good or bad festivals are directly linked to the prestige of the ejido president. There was no way that Don Alfonso could organize the festival on his own. He depended on the cooperation of the villagers. A group of ejidatarios, headed by a certain Felipe, one of the most outspoken opponents of Don Alfonso felt the issue of the fiesta was a good opportunity to force Don Alfonso and his son-in-law to put their financial cards on the table. They argued that as there was not a quorum of ejidatarios present at the meeting (officially 41, and there were only 37 at this particular meeting) the whole meeting should be cancelled. They decided to meet again on the 7th of September.

The 7th of September

The meeting was supposed to start early, at six o'clock in the afternoon. Several ejidatarios, though not very many, gathered in front of the ejido house. Don Alfonso was ill. The treasurer did not show up though he had been seen in his fields. At 7.30 pm, Don Pillo, the vice-president, '*el segundo de* Don Alfonso', decided to start the meeting. He asked people to enter. Some did so, but others, under the leadership of Felipe, refused, saying that it was of no use to meet when the leader (*la cabeza*) was not present. Finally, after some discussion, Don Pillo convinced them to enter.

Apart from the ejidatarios, some *vecinos* (landless people, called 'neighbours') and about 25 boys and girls of the village youth were present. This again was a meeting not only to discuss ejido affairs, but to discuss the organization of the yearly festival, a matter that concerned both ejidatarios and vecinos.

The meeting was opened by Don Pillo and the secretary read the list of attendance. It became apparent that only 24 of the 80 ejidatarios were present. Felipe raised this as an argument to cancel the meeting again. Don Pillo did not agree, arguing that it was not exclusively an ejido meeting but a village meeting. It was, therefore, not necessary to have a majority of ejidatarios present. Don Pillo proposed that they talk about the organisation of the festival, since that was the main point on the agenda. Paolo, one of Felipe's friends, said that most of the people present were more interested in de *corte de caja*. The secretary (the only member of the governing board present at the meeting who had been involved in the whole land affair), said that it was impossible to discuss the account, since this was a village, not an ejido meeting. Felipe argued that even for the organization of the festival they needed to know how much money the ejido could spend. In previous years, the ejido had always provided a loan to the organizing committee, so that they could contract bands for the music and bulls for the annual bullfight. Felipe's friends agreed. However, Don Pillo and the secretary were not able to present the account, and were unwilling to postpone the meeting for a second time. After another 20 minutes when all the arguments had been repeated at least three times, Don Pillo suggested a vote. The secretary called, "Are we going to talk about the festival or not?"

Two ejidatarios shouted "No." The secretary said, "Let us vote. All those against talking about the festival, let them now raise their hand." As no-one raised his hand, the secretary and Don Pillo decided to continue the meeting.

On other occasions, we had noted that in a conflictive situation, when no consensus could be reached through discussion, voting did not work. People do not like to enforce a decision through voting and it is rarely done. And when it is done, like in this situation, the ejidatarios do not feel tied to this decision. It is not seen as a jointly taken decision, but a decision taken by those who have proposed the vote.

First, some other not so very conflictive points on the agenda were discussed, though with little animo. When Don Pillo raised the issue of the organization of the festival, without saying a word, without any discussion, 18 of the 24 ejidatarios got up and left the meeting. Most of them waited outside to see what would happen.

Don Pillo and the others present stayed put in astonishment. Then one of the ejidatarios said that he had found the people *fria* (cold). He thought that it was because the *cabeza* (the head) was not present. "Without a general, one can't send an army to the battlefield." In the end the meeting was cancelled again. It was decided to meet again on the 12th of September. It was by now nearly ten o'clock in the evening.

The 10th of September

Don Alfonso was dead. He had been exhausted and regularly ill. But still it came as a shock. On the 9th, his daughter had asked us whether we could take her father to a doctor.[9] Unfortunately, our car was being repaired so we were unable to do so. On the 10th she came again, crying and urging us to hurry. We went immediately but when we arrived, Don Alfonso was already dead. It was probably a heart attack.

Very soon the news was known in the village and within less than half an hour, people started to gather in front of the house. Several women and close male relatives entered the house to comfort the relatives, to pray together, to arrange the room where Don Alfonso would be placed upon a bier, and to wash him and dress him in clean clothes. Outside the house the men placed chairs and benches where people could sit during the wake. Not only the relatives, but we also, felt comforted by all those silently arranging what had to be arranged.

During course of the afternoon, more and more people gathered, until by the end of the afternoon there were some 60 people present. Most of them entered the house to greet the relatives and to pay their last respects to Don Alfonso. In general the women stayed in the house and on the veranda. They cooked, cleaned, arranged the flowers brought by the visitors, lighted the candles, and prayed aloud together. The men sat on the benches in the street in front of the house. They had brought their drinks and talked softly together, recalling events in the life of the deceased. The atmosphere was sometimes serious and philosophical and sometimes, when recalling funny things, it was relaxed. The problems which had arisen in the

ejido in the last few weeks and the doubts expressed about Don Alfonso's role in the land affair were hardly mentioned. The only thing said was: "It is as if it was not his time. So many things still have to be finished."

In the course of the evening, Felipe also came to the wake. He was already somewhat inebriated when he arrived. He sat down and after a short while, without addressing anyone in particular, he started to proclaim loudly how he and Don Alfonso always had been such good friends and had always respected each other. Apart from some gestures of slight irritation nobody took real notice of him. It was not long before he left again. The majority stayed up all night."

Don Alfonso was buried the following afternoon. It was an impressive procession which escorted him first to the church, and later to the grave-yard. His coffin was placed before the altar and he was accompanied by six adults, three on each side, throughout the mass. His children, close relatives and good friends took turns to do this. At a certain moment Felipe also came forward to take a turn. One of the six hesitatingly gave up her place for him. However, almost immediately one of Don Alfonso's sons stood up and went to the coffin and took Felipe's place. He had been there for less than one minute, but he could do nothing other than return to his seat.

The mourning period took nine days after Don Alfonso's funeral. One day after the *novenario* had finished, the meeting which had been arranged for the 12th, but cancelled because of Don Alfonso's death, was held. It had been decided that the first part of the meeting would be only open to ejidatarios, during which time the ejido account would be discussed. The second part was to be open to all the villagers and the organization of the festival would be discussed.

The 21st of September

This meeting started on time. At half past five Don Pillo opened the meeting with the usual *Acte de Presencia*, the list of those present. As on the thirty-first of August, there were 37 ejidatarios present. Unlike on that occasion, however, this was not seen as a reason to cancel the meeting. Several people quickly stated that they not only represented themselves, but also their mother or father thus counting for two. As a result, and after counting again, it was agreed that a majority of the ejidatarios were present.

Among the main core who were nearly always present at the meetings were some less familiar faces, ejidatarios who lived in the neighbouring town. They are generally thought to be better off than the villagers, better educated, and politically influential. They rarely come to ejido meetings, except on special occasions. such as the present meeting. Their opinion on all kinds of matters is always taken very seriously. One of them was chosen as chairman for the evening.

After a few some minor matters, the *corte de caja* was finally brought up for discussion. Now, there were no further excuses: the meeting had its legal quorum, the treasurer was present and it had been declared an official ejido meeting.

Without any sign of emotion or nerves, the treasurer (the son-in-law of Don Alfonso, as we recall) started to write the income and expenditure of the ejido over the last 8 months on the blackboard. It really was a mess. The expenditure amounted to 5.5 million pesos[7] with outgoings ranging from 100,000 - 800,000 pesos specified as "Expenditures of Don Alfonso for a commission to Guadalajara", without any declarations nor any further specification. On the income side also, the account left room for many doubts. It became clear that the income over the period, together with money which was still in cash, amounted to 4.6 million pesos. This logically meant a deficiency in the budget of 0.9 millions. Despite this, the treasurer announced that the ejido still had money in the bank, namely, 1.6 million pesos!

Since Lex had accompanied Don Alfonso, the treasurer, the secretary and one or two other ejidatarios on many of their commissions to Guadalajara, he knew of certain expenditures and receipts which were not mentioned in the account. The incomings were an open secret in the village. Don Alfonso had received at least 14.5 million pesos from three different persons. Two of these were *vecinos*, landless but rich, who by financing the legal procedure to regain the land, hoped to obtain an ejido right as soon as the whole procedure had borne fruit. The third was a man from a neighbouring village, who had rented the *esquilmo*[8] of the ejido for a period of five years, and had paid two years rent in advance. This had been approved of in former meetings. They were all aware of the likely costs of the legal battle and this was seen as an easy way to obtain money. However, apart from the man from the neighbouring village, Don Alfonso had never given anyone any receipts. These kind of transactions were imbedded in the sphere of *confianza*, trust. If anyone had had the impertinence to ask for a receipt, he would have answered: "Don't you trust me? Do you think my word is not the word of a man?" This was also generally known. Only the 'outsider' was able to get a contract out of Don Alfonso: his was just a business relation. The two villagers who had paid money, had never made a secret of it, nor was it ever denied or doubted by the other ejidatarios.

Although the rumours about expenditures were widely accepted, the amounts were not known exactly by many people. This was precisely why many ejidatarios had lost faith over time in Don Alfonso's sincerity. These expenditures were made on commissions in Guadalajara. Lex witnessed the payment of 9.3 million pesos, in total, to three different higher functionaries of the Ministry of Land Reform of both Guadalajara and Mexico DF. These expenditures were not mentioned either.

Of course, the fact that the presented account in itself was found to be incorrect, and that several generally known receipts were not mentioned, gave rise to a heated debate. First, Felipe attacked the treasurer because the account was not clear. His defence was that he was sorry, but that his father in law, "God bless his soul", had never given him more specified accounts of how he had spent the money, nor had he always told him about income received.

"We all know how he was. Sometimes I asked him about it, but than he became angry and told me to have confidence. If the whole affair was finished, and the ejido had the land, none of the ejidatarios would ask about the account." So, based on the various receipts he had, this was the only account that he could present. For the rest he didn't know anything. Only Don Alfonso knew, but "God bless his soul", he had unfortunately died.

A heated discussion then arose on the responsibilities of the treasurer and the vigilance committee, in which it was stressed that the treasurer should have kept in close touch with the incomings and outgoings. The defense of the treasurer and several of his friends in the audience was to claim that he was kept in ignorance of all that had happened, and that only Don Alfonso could have given more clarity. In the end it was concluded that this was all water under the bridge but that it held a lesson for the future.

Next, the brother of one the two *vecinos* who had given money said that he wanted the 5 million pesos that his brother had paid to Don Alfonso registering in the account. Again, Felipe set the discussion by asking whether the *vecino* had a receipt. He had to answer that he did not. Well, then it was bad luck for him. How could the ejidatarios know whether he was telling the truth? All the ejidatarios agreed on this. It became worse for the *vecino*. The next topic raised concerned the distribution of the new land, should there be any. He claimed that this land should only be given to the sons of ejidatarios and not to *vecinos*. Although not made explicit, he was hereby forestalling any future claims that the two vecinos might make who had invested a lot of money in the whole legal procedure. All the ejidatarios agreed. So, the ejidatarios now publicly maintained a distance from the actions of Don Alfonso, which a few months ago they had condoned.

The man who had bought the right to harvest the ejido plot was also present and made his case. Since he had a contract, signed by Don Alfonso, his position was stronger. The ejidatarios could not deny this contract. However, they agreed that it was a bad deal for the ejido because the rent asked was very low. In the end they decided to respect the contract for the two years that they had been paid for and the situation would then be reconsidered. The discussion concerning the account being finished, and no opposition from the ejidatarios over organizing the village festival, those waiting outside were allowed to enter and discussion on the fiesta took off.

Some Comments

The meetings described above, illustrate some fundamental characteristics of the workings of this ejido. I want to highlight two of them: the notion of leadership and the closely related notion of *confianza*, trust.

Especially after his death, when he could no longer defend himself, Don Alfonso was said to have been primarily responsible for the problems that had arisen. He was the leader and had done things in his own way, not respecting the responsibilities of his son-in-law, the treasurer.

They complained that neither had he respected the wishes of the ejidatarios, who at a certain point had wanted more information about the financial matters of the land struggle.

However, most of the ejidatarios were well aware of at least some of the financial transactions, and in the past had given Don Alfonso their permission to do as he thought right. During the last eight months, there had been several meetings in which Don Alfonso had explained to the ejidatarios what he was doing, and in which he had asked the ejidatarios permission to continue with the case. They had also included financial matters, over both income and expenditure. These discussions were always very difficult to understand for me, because it seemed as if the ejidatarios only needed half a word to understand what Don Alfonso was explaining. No names nor amounts were mentioned. Dates and time-schedules seemed likewise to be irrelevant. Don Alfonso would often say: "As we all know, there is a man, a friend, who wants to help us ....." To me it was not clear who this man was and in which way he wanted to 'help' the ejido. But the ejidatarios seemed to know, they never asked questions nor did they give their opinions. And when those meetings ran to their end, Don Alfonso used to ask, quite demagogically: "You are the ones who decide. Can I continue or do I have to stop?" And without exception all the ejidatarios present would shout: "You must continue. We want the land!" However, when afterwards we asked various ejidatarios what actually had been decided, we were often confronted with many different versions. So, for the ejidatarios also, the procedure was not always clear. Nevertheless, they did not use the meetings, which in theory are very democratically structured, to get things clearer or to influence the whole legal procedure. However, as I saw it, they did take responsibility for the procedure by always confirming with Don Alfonso's opinions and agreeing with his proposals and actions. By this they advocated not so much trust in the procedure, as in the person of Don Alfonso. Felipe, perhaps, was the only one who differed in this respect, because every now and then he voiced other opinions. But he did this more often after, than during the meetings. I was thus surprised to see how the ejidatarios, quite homogeneously, kept aloof from Don Alfonso's actions as soon as he was dead. They did not respect his (and their) decisions. "He had done things his own way", now became the excuse for the ejido not to have to bear the responsibility for his promises, since they had never known, and had never been taken into account.

The other phenomenon, trust, is closely linked to the notion of leadership: 'trust me, I will take care of everything'. As stated, an open lack of trust is felt as a strong insult and is tied to questions of honour and value, and is an issue that can provoke a fight. But in the case of the two *vecinos*, it was difficult, if not impossible, to handle their affairs with Don Alfonso in any other way. They knew the risks of giving money without asking for a receipt. This had been shown more than once in the history of the ejido. However, they also knew that they depended on Don Alfonso's good-will for access to land. As president of the ejido, he would certainly have an important say in the final distribution of the land. They could not run the risk of losing Don Alfonso's good-will by a display of distrust by asking for a receipt.

The phenomena of 'leadership' and 'trust', with all their dualistic connotations, are not only typical in the social relations and decision making process within the ejido, but also in Don Alfonso's relations with officials in the different departments of the Ministry of Land Reform who were involved in their struggle over the land. And as we will see later, these phenomena also seem to have been organizing principles in former days (in, for instance, the history of the ejido), and in other kinds of social and political organizations.

Part 2: Vertical Relations: Palancas

How it All Began

As mentioned earlier, the claims which the ejido might have had on other land had been one of the regularly recurring topics of discussion and gossip over the years. However, because of local political relations and lack of anyone willing to bear the brunt, no action had ever been taken. The situation, however, had changed and Don Alfonso had been prepared to take a chance.

In February 1988, Don Alfonso was approached by someone nicknamed the '*coyote*' (literally meaning 'fox', but metaphorically referring to someone who earns his money 'on the side'). The *coyote* was an ejidatario from one of the neighbouring ejidos; a well to do man who was firmly anchored in the leading political party, the PRI, at local, regional, and also national level. As is generally known, in the months before the national elections, there is often more political space and willingness among the representatives of the bureaucracy to carry out populistic projects.[9] The *coyote* had indulged himself in several pending cases of ejido claims to the land of *pequeños propietarios* in the region. Now he offered to help these ejidos breath new life into these cases through his knowledge and his political friends at all levels. Of course he expected to be remunerated.

Don Alfonso was easily convinced that the ejido could claim land, and the *coyote* offered to bring him into contact with a high representative of the Ministry of Land Reform of Mexico city, who was to come to the area to settle another ejido land dispute. Against the advice of some ejidatarios, who knew the doubtful reputation of the *coyote*, Don Alfonso accepted the offer. He paid the *coyote* two million Mexican pesos and was introduced to this bureaucrat of the Ministry of Land Reform who was shown the original maps of the ejido land and the *Actas de Posición*. The official said that they had a fair chance of winning the case and promised to introduce Don Alfonso to officials in Guadalajara who would take care of the necessary procedures. Of course, he would need money to arrange all the *trámites* (bureaucratic tasks). Don Alfonso paid him three million pesos. And, indeed, he was introduced to several people, one *licenciado*, a lawyer, who was responsible for the legal procedures, and two *ingenieros* working in the Ministry of Land Reform in Guadalajara, who would be responsible for the

technical surveys and reports with which to start the whole official procedure to settle the land dispute. Of course they needed money to carry out the procedure. In the following months nine million pesos, at least, were paid over them.

When ejidatarios showed a lack of confidence in the officials from Guadalajara, one of Don Alfonso arguments was that, should they try to fool the ejido, he could always call in the help of the big boss in Mexico city. However, two months later, it became apparent that the big boss in Mexico city had been removed from office because of too many irregularities. When Don Alfonso explained the situation by phone to another acquainted 'big boss' in Mexico city, he confirmed the story and said that the *coyote* and his friend had lately overplayed their hand. They had often been involved together in these kind of affairs and had always promised more than they could deliver. Now the *coyote* had lost his nomination for high office in the PRI bureaucracy, and his friend had been removed from office.

By now, however, the ejido was too deeply involved to pull out. They had invested a lot of money, and Don Alfonso had staked his personal prestige. So they continued.

The Emotional Peak: The Survey

Looking back on the whole affair, the emotional peak was reached at the end of April. On the 30th, the *licenciado* and the *ingeniero* came to the ejido to investigate the situation. They first held a meeting to explain the procedure to both the ejidatarios and the *pequeños propietarios*. Next they did a survey to measure the ejido area.

The tension in the *ejido* had grown with time. Every time Don Alfonso went to Guadalajara to meet the *licenciado*, which at one time occurred almost weekly, an ejido meeting was held to give an account of what had happened, and to ask for continued support. Slowly but surely the ejidatarios started to believe they might succeed, and the whole procedure was widely discussed in the village.

Three days before the *licenciado* and the *ingenieros* came to the ejido, Don Alfonso had called a meeting which was taken very seriously and was quite militant. The days of the ejido's founding, the conflicts and dirty tricks which the *hacendado* had played on them, and the belief that "*la tierra necesita sangre*" (the land needs blood) were recalled. "It was not easy to get hold of the land, and it will be no easier now"' they declared. "We all run the risk of falling in this battle, but if such a heavy toll has to be paid, we will pay it. We will not give up." One ejidatario reminded them of how in those early days the ejidatarios had been prepared to defend the land with their lives, "*vencer o morir*" (succeed or die), and that the present ejidatarios should be prepared to do the same: defend the land if necessary with their weapons and their lives. Don Alfonso at this point used his authority to forbid the ejidatarios to carry arms when the *licenciado* and the *ingenieros* came. "*Vamos haciendo las cosas como hombres, como somos, pero no como arma armada.*" (We will do things as men, as we are, not hiding behind arms). Everybody agreed.

It was in this atmosphere of solidarity, of fighting a common enemy, that Don Alfonso asked permission to raise money, to find ways of financing the whole procedure. He said he needed 10 or 15 million pesos, and that he had found people prepared to pay this in exchange for a parcel of the new land. "Without any definite promise, of course, since *todavía la paloma puede salir de nuestras manos* (the bird can still escape). Everybody, without exception, allowed him a free hand.

The meeting on 30 April started at 10.30 in the morning. The *licenciado* and the *ingenieros* had arrived the evening before. They were treated well by the ejidatarios; to gain their good-will and to keep an eye on them. They did not wish them to be able to talk to the *pequeños propietarios*, who might try to bribe them. Never before had there been so many ejidatarios at a meeting. Even all the female ejidatarios were present, dressed up for the special occasion. The *pequeños propietarios* were also present.

Everybody was listening very alertly to what the *licenciado* had to say. He said very little, simply outlining the procedure and that the *ingenieros* would carry out a survey that day and based on the results they would decide how to continue. He asked support from both ejidatarios and *pequeños propietarios* in finishing the job promptly. The meeting took only 15 minutes. But nevertheless, the subject, the number of people gathered and the fact that the *pequeños propietarios* were present, made the meeting very special.

After the meeting the two *ingenieros* started to do their job. Each was accompanied by a group of ejidatarios, to help them find the borders of the ejido land and prevent them from getting in touch with the *pequeños propietarios*. The job was finished that same day and in the evening a big party was given by Don Alfonso. By chance his daughter married that same day, so food and drink was abundant and the Mariachi band played joyfully until two o'clock in the morning. The day had been a great success and everybody had great expectations for the future.

The Results of the Survey

The survey showed that the situation was more complicated than the ejidatarios had thought. There were indeed 40 hectares of land that had once been in the possession of the ejido and that could be rightly claimed. But those forty hectares of irrigated land had been in the possession of a politically powerful *pequeño propietario* for more than forty years. Another 72 hectares, also irrigated, was land over which the ejido had only dubious rights and they would need a bit of luck to claim them. But, if history was to be interpreted in favour of the ejido, some facts would conveniently have to disappear, as I will explain shortly. This land was in hands of an unmarried elderly female *pequeña propietaria*, Doña Maria, who had no children to inherit the land, and who had no official documents to prove her legal title to it. The land was still registered in the name of the original owner, who had rented it to the woman as long ago as 30 years. The original owner had left the area and was unlikely to claim the land.

Moreover, in contrast to the other *pequeño propietario*, Doña Maria was not one of the regional *meros cabrones* (real bosses). So, both Don Alfonso and the licenciado thought it more viable to claim this land, than the other 40 hectares, even though, according to the old documents, those 40 hectares had once had been in the possession of the ejido, while it was questionable whether the ejido could officially claim the 72 hectares of the old lady.

To explain this, I have to introduce three concepts: the '*mapa de la dotacion*', the '*acte de la dotacion*', and the '*primera ampliacion*' ('map of the grant', 'the deed of grant', and the 'first extension'). The 72 hectares were part of the grant, the 40 hectares formed part of the first extension. Let us first concentrate our attention on the 72 hectares.

It became clear that the territory actually in the ejido's possession did not coincide with that mentioned in the ejido land grant deeds. The actual boundaries followed another trajectory. However, the number of hectares mentioned in the deeds did more or less coincide with the number shown on the map. To visualize this, Fig. 2 shows the map of the ejido land, as mentioned in the deeds and that of the actual situation.

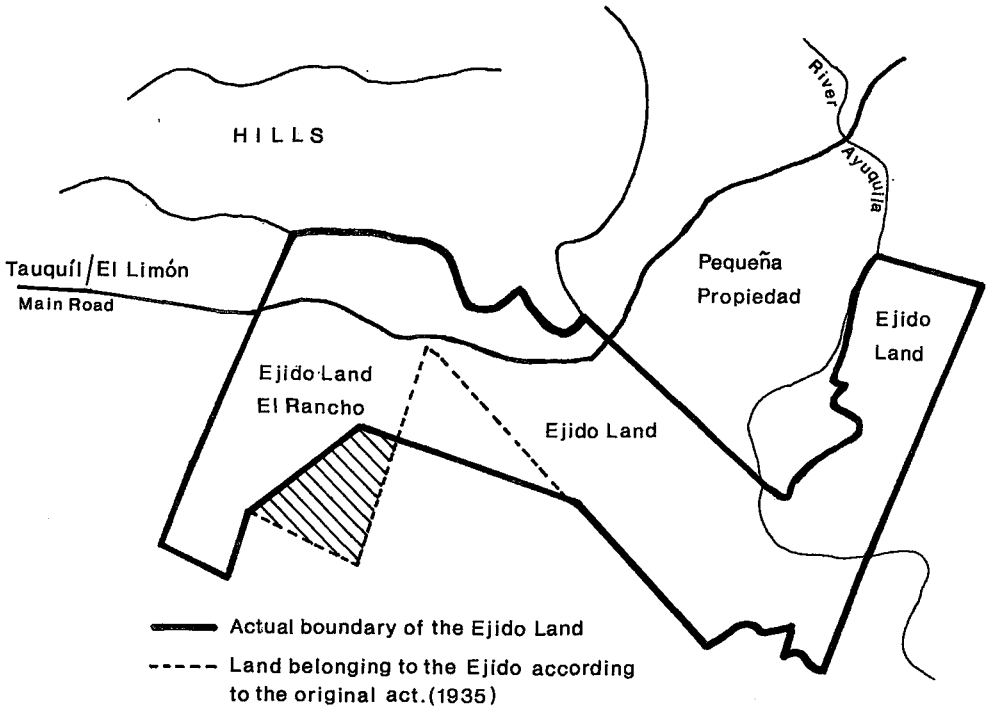


Fig.2. Map of Ejido Land

So with regard to the original land grant, according to the deeds, the ejido had nothing to complain about: they possessed the amount of land they were supposed to possess. The different borders were probably due to a swop of land between the ejido and the former *pequeño propietario* in the time of Don Jesus and Gabriel, the first chairmen of the ejido. The shaded area is the 72 Has. which the ejido wanted to claim. The deeds had never been adjusted to the new situation though the map had. In 1935, the new situation had been drawn on the original map which was in possession of the Ministry of Land Reform. To be able to claim the 72 Has. the proof that there had once been a swap, had to disappear. All the attention had to be focussed on the fact that this land, according to the original act, had once belonged to the ejido, and that this was no longer the case. According to the *licenciado*, none of this was really a problem. After some drinks, and some hints about the final remuneration which the *licenciado* and the *ingenieros* could expect, the problems seemed even more insignificant.

The case of the 40 hectares was not so complicated and the ejido's right seemed straight forward. This land was given to the ejido when the first extension was effected in 1938. The maps and the act were quite clear and unambiguous about the fact that this land belonged to the ejido. However, it was presumed that the president of the ejido of the time had sold the rights to cultivate the land back to the *pequeño propietario*, who was still cultivating it. Since ejido land officially cannot be sold, this transaction was illegal. In a court case the ejido stood a fair chance of winning the case. However, as stated before, the man had a strong political connections, and while Doña Maria he probably had no official documents to prove the land was his, she had no political influence in the area. So, it seemed more viable to put a dubious claim on her 72 Has, than a fair claim on his 40.

Everybody, including Don Alfonso, realized that in fact the whole procedure would be *chueco* (cheating). However this did not temper his enthusiasm. As he said: "Law in Mexico is very elastic. (*Las leyes en México son muy elásticas*). That is precisely why we pay all those millions of pesos to the *licenciado* and the *ingenieros*." This was confirmed by the secretary of the ejido who added: "In fact it doesn't matter what the results of the survey are. As long as we have sufficient support, we will win the case."

The Land Invasion

The results of the survey led to discussions on how to continue. It is important to note that the results of the survey were never made clear to the majority of the ejidatarios. Only Don Alfonso, and two or three persons upon whom he relied were entirely involved in the whole matter. The people were not really informed, at the meetings, of what was going on. Don Alfonso simply asked them to trust him and to give him their approval to carry on. It was even his philosophy not to involve too many people. Too many different opinions would only slow down the process. Thus, only a few ejidatarios and the three representatives of the Ministry of Land Reform participated in the discussions about how to continue.

In a private meeting held at the end of May, the two engineers voiced the opinion that technically speaking the ejido had no rights to the 72 Has, and they thought it better to concentrate all their efforts on the 40 Has. However, it was clear that they were not the boss. It was the *licenciado* who took the final decisions. He was the one who negotiated with the ejidatarios. On one occasion, when differences of opinions between them became very clear, the *licenciado* simply ordered them to interpret the survey in favour of the ejido. When they tried to avoid the issue by stating that rewriting the survey in the way suggested by the licenciado would cost them of lot of work, they were told to stop fussing about the amount of work: "You are well paid by the ejido, so do as I say." Later the *ingenieros* would comment that they were not lawyers and did not know what room the law leaves. Only the *licenciado* knew.

At that same meeting, the ejidatarios present suggested that they invade the land. Six years before they had invaded 28 Has of Doña Maria's land, and they were still cultivating it. Based on this experience the ejidatarios assumed that Doña Maria was not in a position to defend her land, partly because she lacked official documents, and partly because she lacked political support. Moreover, they argued that if they worked the land for at least one year, then this would strengthen their legal position since 'the land is for the ones who work it'.

The *licenciado* was not very enthusiastic about the idea. It was still not absolutely certain that Doña Maria was entirely without legal documents to prove her ownership. He suggested a complicated legal procedure. None of the ejidatarios understood precisely what he meant but one thing was clear: it would probably take a very long time. Don Alfonso became agitated: You told me that you would come to give us the land, and now you ask us to wait until December. "*Licenciado, asi no son los hombres*" (men do not behave that way). In eight weeks time the national elections would take place, so it was important to hasten the whole procedure. The *licenciado* immediately changed his position: "Alright, we will do as you want." He promised to check whether Doña Maria had any official documents. In two weeks time, they would have information on the latter and the new report of the survey.

The attitude of the *licenciado* left seeds of mistrust. The ejidatarios felt that had it not been for themselves, the *licenciado* would have prolonged the whole procedure. It was important to keep an eye on him. It was then that Don Alfonso called his acquaintances in Mexico-city and learned that his political friends were not so trustworthy as he had thought. They decided to try to find out for themselves whether the land was officially registered in Doña Maria's name, by trying to get access to the "*relación de contribuciones de tierra*" (the register of the yearly taxes paid on real estate). It turned out to be easy to get the information: Doña Maria had registered twenty houses and approximately 150 hectares of land, but the land which the ejido wanted to claim was not mentioned! They phoned the *licenciado* to tell him the good news and he answered: "Very good, go ahead, invade the land." He promised to seek juridical support so that Doña Maria would not easily be able to evict them.

In the week that the invasion took place, we were not present in the ejido, so what follows is a reconstruction. The ejidatarios invaded the land on a Saturday, in the second half of June. This must have been a very emotional happening. Probably again former days were recalled. Only three months earlier, a group of vecinos of the village had tried to invade land in a neighbouring valley, but they had to withdraw when the owners of the land had threatened them with guns. If the meeting of 30th of April was felt to be dangerous, the actual invasion of the land must have aroused great tension. They invaded the land in a big group: at least 30 ejidatarios participated, with their sons and some vecinos interested in the land. The licenciado was also present. However, he did not participate in the actual invasion but stayed in the village to give advice from a distance. The invaders kept watch over the land day and night. They sent away the workers of Doña Maria, telling them that the land was not hers anymore. Days passed and nothing happened. After stressing that it was important to keep control over the land, the *licenciado* returned to Guadalajara. The invaders decided that it was not necessary for so many to keep permanent watch and arranged to take turns. Don Alfonso was in charge of organizing this. Looking back, it is clear that the way in which he did this was an important breaking point in the whole procedure. It undermined solidarity enormously.

The List of Beneficiaries: Growing Opposition

Returning to the village one week after the invasion, it became clear that Don Alfonso's position had been fundamentally undermined. He was now openly criticized. The sense of avowed unity, which until then had characterized the whole process, had gone.

Don Alfonso had made a list of 16 beneficiaries whom he had called together to tell them that they and their families should take turns in protecting of the land. He had consulted no-one over the composition of the list. But he had thought about it carefully. Nearly all the men who had influence on public opinion in the village were to benefit. Of course, this lead to a strong opposition. It was said that Don Alfonso had benefitted his own family too much and that he had been bribed by some *vecinos* and that was why they were on the list. Those who had participated in the invasion thought they had some right to land, even if it was only a small plot. Felipe, and a friend of his, objected strongly to the arrangements. Neither they nor any of their relatives were mentioned in the list of beneficiaries. Felipe spoke with Don Alfonso about this and was told not to worry. He was not on the list of beneficiaries, but he would make sure that both Felipe and his friend would get land. One of the female ejidatarios of the ejido had too much land, 11 hectares instead of 8, so he would claim three of her hectares and another hectar from a male ejidatario who never worked his land (though he had sold the rights to 3 of his 4 hectares). The only thing Felipe had to promise was to support Don Alfonso in the time to come. So, Felipe was promised only one or two hectares, while the other beneficiaries were to receive 3 or 4 hectares. Felipe was not at all satisfied and said that in the next meeting he

would demand an open discussion about the division of the land and would demand a presentation of periodical account *corte de caja*.

The Court Case

Not only within the ejido did things become difficult for Don Alfonso. His relation with the *licenciado* also deteriorated. At the beginning of August, after the national elections, Doña Maria, with the help of the *Rurales* (a rural police corps), had been able to remove the ejidatarios from her land. She gave orders to her workers to repair a shed and put cattle to graze on the land. The two boys who were keeping watch for the ejido were unable to defend the land and the legal support which the *licenciado* was supposed to have arranged had not materialized. Don Alfonso immediately phoned the *licenciado* who treated the new developments as of little importance and told Don Alfonso not to worry and not to invade the land again. He was to arrange everything in Guadalajara, and was already preparing a court case (*juicio*).

In this court case the director of juridical agrarian affairs for the State of Jalisco would decide whether the appeal of the ejido could go forward. This case would decide, therefore, who would have the right to cultivate the land should the appeal take place. The appeal case, to decide who finally would be allocated the land, could easily take five or six more years. It was, therefore, very important for the ejidatarios to be in control of the land at this moment, because the director normally decides to respect the existing situation for as long as a juridical procedure is going on. This would not only give the ejido five or six years access to the land, but would put them in a stronger legal position for the appeal. Of course Doña Maria was also aware of this, which was why she was so eager to get the ejidatarios off her land before this court case took place.

The question then is why neither the *licenciado* nor Don Alfonso were prepared to invade the land again. The *licenciado* especially must have known the importance of it. Perhaps he did not feel confident about his case. Perhaps he thought he had already pocketed all that was to be gained from the affair, and it was no longer worth the bother.

Don Alfonso did not really understand the status of the court case. Moreover, he did not agree with us that even after the court case the political game would continue, and that it was important to mobilize as much political support and pressure as possible. He hoped that the *licenciado* would know his way through the jungle of laws and verdicts.

But at that moment, he could also no longer rely on any broad support within the ejido. Too much opposition had arisen against the list of beneficiaries. Perhaps he would not be able to mobilize sufficient people to invade the land again. Or perhaps he thought it too complicated. If people invested in the invasion, they would expect a say in all the other matters pertaining to the affair. This would undermine his position. At that moment only the 'petit committee' knew

more or less what was going on, and Don Alfonso was not eager to share this knowledge with more people. Whatever the reasons, the land was not invaded again.

On the 25th of August the court case was held in Guadalajara. The ejidatarios, all well dressed, had already been waiting for a while before the *licenciado* arrived. He was completely drunk. They had to wait another three quarters of an hour during which time their main preoccupation was to make sure that the *licenciado* did not fall asleep. Finally the director arrived. The ejidatarios entered, also Doña Maria with her lawyer. It was immediately made clear whose side the director was on, when he asked why the ejido thought that they had the right to claim the land considering the fact that they had never tilled it. Doña Maria he said, had tilled it all those years and had made it highly productive land from the bush land it had been when she got it. The *licenciado* tried to put the case that Doña Maria had no official document to prove that the land was hers, while the ejido could prove that the land formed part of their original grant. However, he did not sound very convincing and he was no match for the director. After half an hour the director closed the meeting with the observation that the land would stay in the hands of Doña Maria until a final verdict was reached by a judge.

After the meeting, the *licenciado* tried to cheer up the ejidatarios by assuring them that the director always favoured the pequeños propietarios. Nothing had been lost yet. They would have to continue with the legal procedures. However, on the way back home their spirit remained low. They discussed the coming ejido meeting and the fact that Felipe was requesting the periodical account, and that many people thought that they had pocketed the money instead of investing it in the land struggle. Don Alfonso stated that it was better not to discuss the periodical account right now. It was better to do so when all the *trámites* were in the past tense and when it was sure that the ejido would get the land. The ejidatarios would then not bother about all the millions spent. The others agreed, and probably wondered when that would be.

And this takes us back to the beginning of the account of this extended case. Six days later, on August 31, as we know, the monthly assembly of the ejido was cancelled, because Don Alfonso was not present to discuss the periodical account and the ejidatarios refused to discuss any other topic. And before the next meeting could be held, Don Alfonso was dead.

Discussion

As becomes clear in the above account, *palancas* or political leverage, played an important role in the course of the events. The fact that the ejido did not consider it possible to reclaim the land worked by a powerful local polítco (politician), even though it had clearly been a part of the ejido grant, was precisely because this land owner had powerful connections and leverage. Next, the whole notion to reclaim ejido land was initiated by a *coyote* who introduced Don Alfonso to people working in the Ministry of Land Reform, who encouraged him to think that they could succeed with their case. Although later on it appeared that neither the *coyote* nor his friend in Mexico City were so trustworthy, Don Alfonso never denied the importance

that the *coyote* had had in the process. He once said: "Now we ourselves know the path which we have to follow, but the *coyote* has been our guide to the path."

Further, the *licenciado* and to a lesser extent the ingenieros influenced the course of the events. For a considerable period people felt that their help would finally bear fruit for the ejido. It did not, because the *licenciado* was unprepared or unable to see the procedure through. Perhaps he felt there was little more to be gained, or perhaps his political room to manoeuvre within the Ministry of Land Reform had been drastically reduced by the results of the national elections. It is difficult to know. However, it does show the ejidatarios dependence on one or two individuals for helping them find a way through the manipulative jungle of rules and regulations, especially in situations where "*leyes son muy elásticas*" (laws are extensible), and favouritism is an important organizing principle.

There are, of course, dangers in such reliance; if the individuals let you down, for whatever reason, everything may end there. This strategy of trying to get things done through obtaining the loyalty of influential persons has, more than once in the history of the ejido, had positive results for the ejidatarios. One of the outstanding examples of this was fifteen years previously, when, backed by government funds, the village was removed from the banks of the river to its present site. The reasons for the move were twofold: First, in the beginning of the 1970s, the river overflowed its banks to such a degree that in two successive years the villagers had to be evacuated. Second, the river, which served as drinking water for the villagers, had become polluted by the industrial waste from the newly constructed sugar mill, only one kilometer upstream of the village. The president of the ejido was able to bring the problems to the attention of Guadalupe Zuno, the brother in law of Echeverria, President of México. Guadelupe Zuno was governor of the South of Jalisco, and had his own budget to spend on populistic projects. The removal of the village was one of those.

So, although fraught with problems, the strategy of trying to make effective use of *palancas* is an understandable one.

To understand the internal dynamics of the ejido, it is necessary to understand the importance yet vulnerability of two other phenomena, leadership and trust. To demonstrate this, a short account of the ejido's history is useful.

The Local Roots of Leadership and (Dis)Trust: The History of Land Distribution

The ejido of El Rancho was founded in 1935 at a time when many ejidos were founded in the region, taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the policies of Lazaro Cardenas, President at that time.

On the hacienda "El Rancho" two brothers worked as *medieros*.[10] One of them, in particular, let us name him Don Chabelo, became involved in the movement of the *Agraristas*.[11] Friends of his in the surrounding villages, where ejidos had already been formed, helped him

to find his way through the bureaucracy and bring him in contact with the right people. When the hacendado saw that his hacienda was also going to be sequestered by the land reform, he tried to stop the process by intimidating Don Chabelo and offering him a considerable amount of money to leave the area. Don Chabelo decided to accept this money, since in former days *Agraristas* had been hung by the landowner for doing less than he had done. However, before he left, he instructed his brother, Don Jesus, and brought him into contact with the right people. Don Jesus and his son, Gabriel, continued the struggle, and since the Agrarian Movement had considerable influence in those days throughout the whole country, within several months the hacienda was indeed sequestered.

The elder ejidatarios still remember vividly the day on which the people from the Ministry of Land Reform arrived at the hacienda to investigate the possibility to expropriate it. On this day the hacendado for the last time tried to prevent the reform. Early in the morning he sent cars for the workers to take them to El Limon, where he offered them a big meal and a lot to drink. Meanwhile he waited at the hacienda for the people from the Ministry. When they arrived, he offered them a good meal and money, and showed them the empty houses to convince them that the workers were not really interested in the land reform. However, not all the workers had gone. Don Jesus and his son Gabriel with several close friends and relatives had not joined the party in El Limon and had stayed to defend the interests of the workers. That day, a list of possible beneficiaries of the coming reform was drawn up. Don Jesus and his relatives played a central role in drawing up the list. One women was included in the list, a widow who had close relations to Don Jesus.

Later on, when the ejido was legalized and the land distributed, the new ejidatarios chose Don Jesus as their chairman. Since he could neither read nor write, he proposed that his son, Gabriel, should take this post. All agreed and although officially every three years a new chairman had to be chosen, Gabriel stayed chairman for nearly fourteen years. It was not long before Don Jesus and Gabriel developed into local caciques.

The ejido was given approximately 760 hectares[12]. Although not all this was cultivable land, it was more than sufficient for the 41 original ejidatarios. The Ministry of Land Reform had not specified who should work the individual plots, so Don Jesus and Gabriel had a free hand in deciding who would cultivate what. Don Jesus allowed everybody, except himself, his son and some close friends, to cultivate 4 hectares per season. He was of the opinion that nobody had either the money or the means to cultivate more than 4 hectares. At the beginning of each season he allocated plots (which might differ each year) to the individual ejidatarios. Moreover, no one knew beforehand that he would actually get a plot. One could exert influence over the yearly distribution of land by staying close friends with Don Jesus, and perhaps by paying him money. Since Don Jesus was the person who obtained the loans for the ejidatarios from the agricultural bank and private money lenders and was the one who obtained the oxen to plough the land and could offer people an extra source of income by working on his chile fields, his absolute leadership had a strong material base. The rest of the land he

rented to the former hacendado and rumour had it that he even sold part of the ejido land back to this man.

After peace had returned to the area, several landless men, mostly distant relatives of Don Jesus, came to El Rancho to ask permission to settle and become ejidatarios. Of course, Don Jesus expected some form of remuneration and political loyalty for this generosity. The new ejidatarios had to be officially registered with the Ministry of Land Reform and for this too, Don Jesus and Gabriel were very important, since they were the contact persons for the Ministry. Whenever a representative of the Ministry came to the village, he was lodged in their house. Their opinion on ejido affairs influenced greatly the opinion of such bureaucrats.

Don Jesus died in 1948. Perhaps that explains the letter, written in the same year, found in the archives of the Ministry of Land Reform in Guadalajara, in which several ejidatarios of Las Casas complained about Gabriel, asking for his replacement as chairman of the ejido since he committed too many anomalies, and had threatened those thinking of making an official complaint, that he would personally make sure that their ejido rights were withdrawn. After an official investigation, Gabriel was replaced, but people state that despite this, he continued to have a lot of influence in community affairs.

However, he could not prevent the new chairman from deciding that every ejidatario, from then on, would have the right to cultivate 8 hectares each,[13] and that the plots would be allocated to individuals for their continuous use. He also initiated the agreement that presidents should not be eligible for re-election after their three years in office.

Leadership Continues, but its Material Basis is Undermined

Although these changes were seen as great improvements by individual ejidatarios, the system of strong local leadership, in itself, did not change. The new chairman, and subsequent chairmen, did not vary much from how Don Jesus and Gabriel had managed ejido affairs. Personal loyalties, bribes and the monopolization of politically influential contacts continued to be important 'management' principles. But since the chairmen's power to control the yearly distribution of land came to an end, and the chairman's position as intermediary diminished with the growing incorporation of the village into the wider economic and political environment, leadership never again turned out to be as strong as in the days of Don Jesus and Gabriel.

With the introduction of irrigated agriculture at the beginning of the sixties, the presence of government agencies and other outside intervening parties in the valley increased and national and international markets became increasingly important. The development of an independent trading class and the growing importance of state institutions, leading to wider systems of trade, credit and communication and to alternative legal systems and systems of health care and education, gave a way of escaping the domination of the ejido chairman. In contrast to the

multi-stranded ties of past landlord-peasant, chairman-ejidatario relations, the ejidatarios of today have a variety of relations for obtaining goods and services from other persons and from state institutions[14].

Thus, although the well-being of individual ejidatarios no longer depends so strongly on the whims of the chairman, and the material base of leadership has been fundamentally eroded, the cultural notion of leadership continues to exist. Neither the position, nor the practices of the president are really questioned. It seems as if the practices of an ejido chairmen will be tolerated, with the idea of 'Let's see what he can offer the ejido. And if he doesn't live up to expectations, no problem: after three years we will be rid of him'. I got the impression that the chairman was expected, to some extent, to profit from his position, as long as it did not harm the interests of other ejidatarios. The chance to profit is open every three years, so anyone may have the chance.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the strengths and weaknesses of an ejido as intermediate structure for stimulating and reinforcing individual and group efforts to manage their own affairs and to influence public decision making. The case study shows that the internal organisation of the ejido and the relations between the ejido and the outside world influence each other. The fact that the president must build his strategy on leverage and verticalism, undermines local organization, and weak local organization allows, and perhaps enforces such an unreliable strategy. Although there is a need to use one or two people to help find a way through the manipulative jungle of rules and regulations, ejidatarios should not allow such contacts to be monopolized.

Thus local traditions and practices of leadership, trust and the system of leverages all play a crucial role in the success or failure to influence public decision making. In El Rancho, the ejidatarios allowed their president to monopolize information, crucial contacts and decision making in the ejido. They did not really trust him, but each hoped and thought that he would get the best out of it by supporting the president without conditions. However, when it became clear that the president already had a certain distribution of the land in mind, those ejidatarios who would probably not benefit had little incentive to go on supporting him. In this ejido, where leadership no longer has a very strong material base, leaders are like dancers on a tight-rope. The case clearly underlines the argument that power or authority is not something possessed or that can be exercised by dint of status, position, access to resources, repressive means or hegemonic ideology. The case study shows that power is granted, and is constantly negotiated in different social settings. It is not a status quo, it is constantly defined and redefined. "The powerful are not in complete control of the stage, and the degree to which the powerful are also themselves forged by the powerless is not to be disregarded" (Villarreal,

1991: 10) Ejidatarios accept leadership and declare their trust in the leader as long as it bears them fruit. If this is no longer the case, they have the means enough to avoid or reject the leadership. However, in this case, as long as the local leader was expected to yield them profit, they gave him their power of attorney: he could do as he liked, whatever he thought best at any particular time. However, notwithstanding the fact that leadership and trust are unstable, and time and situation specific phenomena when attributed to one person, they are nevertheless organizing principles over the longer term. If one president fails to come up to expectations, ejidatarios will drop him and chose another president. They will attribute the same kind of authority and trust to the new president. They do not, however, question the phenomena of leadership and local organisation in itself.

This results in a lack of social cohesion which was one important element here in the eventual failure. It is necessary to build up sufficient pressure from below to keep the *licenciados* and *ingenieros* working in one's favour on a case. This was especially the case in an epoch in which, according to the Mexican President, the land reform had come to an end. The Reforma Agraria do no longer accept new claims anymore, but they are obliged to process the old ones, like the one described here. In such a political climate pressure from below has to be sustained. Land invasions, understanding and manipulating emergent situations and alternative ways of continuing the struggle and pressurizing those with the supposed expertise, and keeping the wheel in one's own hands, are all needed. However, they are dependent on strong local organization. Moreover, because of the central role of the president, all of this can fall apart when he is suddenly removed, thus showing the dangers and weakness of relying on highly personalized political contacts and leverage for influencing public decisions for the common interest.

Notes

1. Other examples of such formalized intermediate level structures are water users associations, local agricultural associations, credit groups etc. See for the analysis of a local agricultural association as an intermediate organization, the Masters Thesis of Hans Heydra, *Local Organizations: Outside Intervention and Peasant Strategies*, Wageningen, 1988.

2. In 1971 the sugar refinery started to function. This was of great importance for El Rancho, not only because surgarcane became the predominant crop, but also because the whole village was relocated, due to the discharging of effluence by the refinery which polluted the river which provided drinking water for the village population.

3. PRI: the Institutional Revolutionary Party. The party which has been in power ever since the Revolution of 1910, although it was only in 1946 that it assumed its present name. Originally the party was called the National Revolutionary Party, and later on the Party of the Mexican Revolution.

4. In another paper, *Social Networks, Symbolic Boundaries and Social Identities: Women and Access to Land in an Mexican Ejido*. I discuss how women tried to get access to the core of men who were involved in the whole matter. (Paper written for the Advanced Research Seminar, Department of Sociology of Rural Development, Wageningen Agricultural University, 1989).

5. The ejido obtains money through the renting out of the ejido *esquilmos*. Literally esquilmo means harvest. One parcel of eight hectares is exploited by the ejido and the proceeds are meant to serve community needs, such as a new bullring, new buildings for the secondary school, improvements to the church, etc. Another way of earning money is from bull fights, dances and drinks organized at the yearly village festivals. Considerable amounts of money are involved.

6. During the first 6 weeks of my stay in the village, 18 months previously, I had lodged with Don Alfonso and his family. When my partner arrived we rented a house on our own. But a special tie was maintained with this family.

7. Corresponding at the time to about 5,500 US$.

8. As mentioned, one plot of ejido land is kept for community development purposes. The most common way to do this, is to rent the land, or sell the right to harvest it. In this case the plot was cultivated with sugarcane, so Don Alfonso had sold the right to harvest the cane for a period of five years, with payment for two years in advance.

9. Note the large-scale land reform carried out in the last year of Echeverria presidency, and the nationalization of the banks by López Portillo, and the remitting of ejidatarios' debts at the end of a sexenio.

10. *Medieros* are tenant share-croppers. What is normally understood by cultivating a plot *en medias* is that the landowner provides the land and the capital to cultivate and the tenant provides the labour. Of the harvest, half goes to the tenant and half to the landowner. If cultivating a labour intensive crop, like *chiles*, the *mediero* in his turn had daily labourers, *mozos* under his charge. These *mozos* had nothing to do with the *hacendado*; the *mediero* was their boss.

11. *Agraristas* were people in favour of land reform.

12. On a later occasion, in 1979, the ejido land was extended by another 28 hectares.

13. Only when land became scarce during the sixties, were smaller plots given to new ejidatarios.

14. See Samuel Popkin, *The Moral Economy*, 1979, chapter 1, for further elaboration on the concepts of multi-stranded and single-stranded relations.

IV. SOCIAL NETWORKS, SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES: WOMEN AND ACCESS TO LAND

Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how the expectation of land redistribution arouses peoples hopes, and how individuals and groups of ejidatarios try to make sure they reap some of its benefits. We note that it was men who occupied the front stage; it was men who made and maintained the relations with the necessary brokers and bureaucrats, who were themselves men; and it was men who tried to influence local decision making, in their favour, or who opposed the course of things. Women seemed to be 'non-actors' in the whole affair. This was, however, not due to lack of interest on their part. On the contrary, women are very much interested in access to land. Nor was it due to a legal framework which often works to the disadvantage of women. As a matter of fact, since the beginning of the seventies, agrarian laws have favoured women in order to redress the balance of unequal access to land.[1] No, the absence of women on the front stage can be better understood by focussing on the structural constraints faced by women in their local context. These structural constraints arise from a particular land tenure system, from a certain kind of dominant gender ideology and practice, and local and regional political and interventionist practices. These constraints make it difficult, if not impossible, for women to operate on the front stage, but they do not prevent them from being active backstage. Thus, though women appeared not to be active in the foregoing chapter, this is partly a consequence of the approach taken there, of focussing on those 'locales' where opinions are publicly voiced and where the action takes place. In Mexico, just as in many other contexts the world over, formal politics are male-dominated. Women are not involved in significant numbers in the formal political activity of any society, and they often appear to be somewhat marginal to political processes (H. Moore, 1991:178). This, however, does not imply that women are politically inactive, but it does imply that in order to get to the action, the researcher must shift his or her attention to the backstage, where the story of those who are muted elsewhere can be heard. The theory of muted groups was developed by Ardener (1975, in: Moore 1991:3-4). Muted groups are silenced by the structures of dominance, and if they wish to express themselves they are obliged to do so through the dominant modes of expression, the dominant ideology. His theory does not imply that being mute is being silent. Women (who are just one of such groups) may speak a great deal, but they

remain muted in the sense that their model of reality, their view of the world, cannot be expressed using the terms of the dominant male model. Moore also argues that: "since researchers, either men or women, are trained in a male-oriented discipline, they lack the analytical and conceptual tools to hand to be able to hear and/or to understand the views of women. It is not so that they are silent; it is just that they cannot be heard." As we will see, the perspectives and experiences of women who try to get access to land, throw new light on brokerage, on the practices of local politics, and on the practices of state intervention. They make it clear that the socio-political organization of distribution of goods and services is highly gender determined.

The actors involved in this chapter are local political leaders, the local representatives of several state agencies, and women. The subject is women's access to ejido land, something that is not at all to the liking of the local politicians (all men) of the ejido studied. At best it is tolerated, but at worst it is actively undermined, if not prevented. I confine myself mainly to local-level actors, of women through whose eyes and expressed experiences we obtain another view of the representatives of state institutions.

The organization of the chapter is as follows. First I focus attention on how women who have land titles received them. This I examine against the legal framework of the land reform laws, which raises questions of why there exists such a marked difference between men and women with regard to access to land, when the agrarian law does not discriminate between men and women. This serves to highlight the actual practices of land distribution. The mechanisms adopted to exclude women from having access to land, and the ways in which women cope with such mechanisms are explored by means of several case studies. To understand the differences and similarities between the different cases, notions such as the creation and manipulation of symbolic boundaries, social identities and social networks are introduced. Finally, I reflect on the theory of brokerage and political networks for the distribution of goods and services in the light of the experiences of these women.

Women and Access to Land

Examining the history of land allocation in El Rancho, highlights the marked difference that exists between the ways in which women and men got and are able to get hold of land. In general their are several ways to obtain land. First, it could have been received at the time of the original land gift of 1935, when the ejido was founded, and land was redistributed to the workers of the old hacienda, who then became ejidatarios. Of the 41 founder ejidatarios, one was a women, a widow who had close relations to the leader of the ejido. The land given to the ejido in the first instance was communally used, but, as we have seen in the previous chapter, over the years the land was divided up and individually farmed. This division created further opportunities to become an ejidatario, as this communal land was divided up into many

smaller plots. Probably some remuneration exchanged hands in return for the privilege, but this would be very difficult to trace. What is clear, however, is that no women benefitted in this way. The system of individually allocated plots gave rise to trade in land, or to be more precise, trade in ejido rights, though it comes to the same thing. The law formally prohibits the selling and buying of ejido land, but in reality a whole range of informal practices exists to obtain access to it.[2] For instance, during the lifetime of an ejidatario, a'buyer' might pay to obtain the right to cultivate the land as long as the ejidatario is still alive, and will be mentioned in the testament of the ejidatario as the apparent heir of the land. When, at the end of the seventies, a land extension was allocated to the ejido, it was generally supposed that the new ejidatarios had paid a considerable amount of money in order to be included in the share out. No women were included.

The official way to become an ejidatario is through inheritance. The land is supposed to be inherited intact by only one heir. This is the way in which the majority of the women holding ejidal rights have obtained them. If we trace for male and female ejidatarios the ways in which all 79 originally gained access to rights over their land, we see the pattern presented in table 5.

Table 5. Ways in which ejido rights were obtained according to sex. The ejido has 79 ejidatarios and one UAIM.[3]

	men	women
Original gift 1935	9	1
Distribution of communal land ± 1950	24	0
Inherited	13	12
Purchased rights	15	0
Unknown	4	1
Total	65	14

So, we see a marked difference in the ways in which men and women gain access to ejido rights: women today only obtain access through inheritance, while for men many other avenues appear to exist.

How can we account for this difference, considering the fact that the Mexican Agrarian Law in former days hardly discriminated between men and women with regard to access to ejido land, and more recently has even favoured women's access to land? Lourdes Arizpe and Carlota Botey (1987:70) retrace the development of the agrarian laws, and the references they make to women as potential beneficiaries. "The first agrarian law to be promulgated after the Mexican Revolution (January 6, 1915) made no specific reference either to individual land rights or to the size of holdings beneficiaries were to receive: land was either given or returned, with legal title, to communities. The land rights clauses in the 1917 constitution also

made no reference to gender. The 1920 Ejido Law - the first piece of legislation to establish that land should be distributed equitably among heads of households - made no mention of women. Article 9 of the By-Laws, ratified in 1922, stated that "wherever land is granted to ejidos, the heads of households or individuals over the age of eighteen shall receive from three to five hectares of irrigated or rainfed lands". Thus women were not explicitly included, nor excluded by the law. The 1927 law is the first statute to refer explicitly to women: Article 97 establishes that ejido members shall be "Mexican nationals, males over eighteen, or single women or widows supporting a family." It is interesting that the "supporting a family" qualification refers only to women. It is not until 1971 - nearly fifty years later - when legal equality is explicitly established in Article 200 of the Federal Law of Agrarian Reform. To receive land, beneficiaries had to be "Mexican by birth, male or female over sixteen years of age, or of any age if with dependents." Articles 76 and 78 of the same law were designed to favor female ejidatarios:

> "Land rights conferred in the foregoing Article may not be the subject of sharecropping, leasing, or third party contract, nor may be farmed by wage workers, unless the beneficiary, if a female head of household, is prevented by domestic obligations and the care of young and dependent children from farming the land herself, and the beneficiary resides in the community.
>
> Individuals may not accumulate land units ... If an ejidatario marries or becomes the common law spouse of an ejidataria having land rights, each shall retain their separate holding. Under agrarian law, it shall be considered that the marriage was celebrated under the rule of separation of properties." (Arizpe and Botey, 1986:70)

Given the fact that in the ejido studied, approximately 20% of all households are female-headed, and in at least the same percentage of all 'male-headed' households, women and children take care of more than half of the actual household income, the legal framework cannot explain why women only have access to land through inheritance. Since the allocation of land within the ejido is determined at the level of the ejido, then we need to look more closely at those mechanisms at the local level which obviously exclude women from being beneficiaries of the agrarian reform. By means of several case studies I will explore these mechanisms, and the ways in which women cope with them. However, in order to understand the similarities and differences between the cases, I would like to come back to the notions mentioned earlier in the chapter: the creation and manipulation of symbolic boundaries, social identities and social networks.

Creating Social Networks, (De)Constructing Symbolic Boundaries and Manipulating Social Identities

In talking of women who try to get access to or defend their existing titles to ejido land, we are talking of individuals who very clearly cross a symbolic boundary. Within this specific ejido the dominant ideology (expressed by both sexes) is that women are not supposed to claim any land rights, unless under certain, quite narrowly defined circumstances: namely being a widow. But even then, their rights are usually questioned by male relatives. Being an ejidatario implies not only titles to land, but also the right to participate in the most important official, administrative and political event at local level, the monthly ejido meeting.

Both agriculture and local politics are considered to be men's business. Women of course have always participated in the agricultural labour process, and together with men they sowed, weeded and harvested the maize and beans, took care of storage and were the ones responsible for the preparing of food. Women's work in agriculture even increased in the days of melon production (1968-1978). They worked as paid day labourers on the vast areas cultivated by international and national fruit and vegetable entrepreneurs. It is only recently, with the shift to sugarcane (from around 1975 onwards), that women's work in the fields has diminished. Agriculture thus is not considered to be men's business at the level of work in the field, but is certainly the case at the level of managing the production process and the commercialization of the harvest. It is considered natural, a given, that men should be in charge. Women owning land rights oppose this social order, not explicitly, but just by being ejidatarias. The men neutralize this by treating women as second rate ejidatarios. This becomes very clear in the ejido meeting. Their opinions are not asked for, they hardly ever occupy formal positions on the ejido board, they are treated as exceptions, exceptions to the rules that should apply to both. For example, if they do not attend ejido meetings, this is not regarded as "against the rules", though it is for men. This is why I say that women with land have to cross a symbolic boundary in the social order.[4] Those women who want to claim access to land still have to cross it.

What do I mean by symbolic boundary? The concept is derived from the work of Cohen (1985:12), who following Wittgenstein's advice, emphasizes the need to look for the meaning of concepts not in their lexicon, but in their use. Cohen uses the concept of symbolic boundary in his attempts to come to grips with the notion of 'community', which people used in his fieldwork area to distinguish themselves from others. "The word thus expresses a relational idea: the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities", he says. It therefore embodied for people their sense of distinction from others; it symbolized a boundary. "We are talking here", he says "about what the boundary means to people". In other words, what it symbolizes for them. But, "To say that boundaries are largely symbolic in character, though, is not merely to suggest that they imply different meanings for different people. It also suggests that boundaries perceived by some may be utterly imperceptible to others."

My intention is not to use such notions for understanding the nature of community per se, but in the sense defined by Cohen, as a useful way of looking at the nature of access to a vital and scarce resource, namely land. Neither do I want to confine my focus of attention only to the level of a community in relation to others, but to give attention to different social entities within a given community, and here the notion of 'symbolic boundaries', or to be more precise, the process of giving meaning to boundaries and creating boundaries or discontinuities, is relevant to the political process involved in denying or facilitating access to vital resources. For example, in the Netherlands, the distinction between people by means of origin, being Dutch or foreign, is often used by the Dutch to deny foreigners (especially if they are black) access to well remunerated jobs. Similarly, in the ejido studied, symbolic boundaries are used or created between men and women (mainly by already well established ejidatarios in defense of their own or their sons' rights), and between ejidatarios and vecinos, newcomers to the village, who are not the offspring of ejidatarios and have no ejidal rights.

If a woman, or a vecino want to claim ejido rights, they have to deconstruct these symbolic boundaries. They have to convince those of local political influence of the legitimacy of their claim and their rights. One of the possibilities for women to do so is to create for herself a 'social identity', in which she does not project herself as 'just a woman', but as a responsible mother who has to think of the future of her children, or as the daughter or widow of an ejidatario who has been or is very useful to the development of the ejido. She has to create for herself a social identity which justifies her claims. As part of this, she will have to use the right arguments, and be a master at using and manipulating the discourse used by those social actors in a position to influence the course of events. Two phenomena make it possible for women to play with their identities. The first is that social identity can always be interpreted in different ways. Steenbeek (1986) gives the example of how a young Mexican country girl gets permission to look for paid work outside the house. As a good daughter she is supposed to help her mother with the work in the house, but she argues that the best way to do this, is to earn some extra money. After negotiating for a considerable time she gets permission. The second is that the relation between ideology and practice, in reality is not always very consistent. By presenting oneself according to a particular symbolic social order, often gives one more room to behave differently than would outright opposition.

As we have seen in the Mexican situation, patron-client and friendship relations are important in achieving goals. These types of relationships and networks are built during the course of life, and factors such as education, occupation, and social and political environment, will influence the nature and building of these networks and relationships. As Long (1979) states, these kinds of relations, in their turn, can also serve as a springboard into new economic activities etc. These relations or social networks are maintained by a whole series of formal and informal rituals[9] and of more or less reciprocally bestowed favours. In crisis situations, these social networks are an important resource for mobilizing the political support necessary to solve the problems faced.

Symbolic boundaries, social identities and social networks are thus useful in understanding the processes of denying and obtaining access to vital resources. They are not 'givens', but are constituted in everyday life. They are given meaning and are constantly negotiated by social actors trying to create room for manoeuvre - in this case women trying to get access to land, or defending the titles they legally possess. The strength of these concepts lies in the fact that they intrinsically embrace also the notions of structure: ideology, power, gender and class, while at the same time offering the possibility to approach such structural notions in a dynamic, time and situation specific way. I will further discuss these concepts in relation to the case material.

The presentation of the case material is organized in the following manner. Attention is first given to the strategies women develop for obtaining access to land and for influencing the allocation process. Next, the experiences of two women are narrated, who legally hold ejido titles but whose access to their land and the ejido was obstructed. And last, attention is paid to the differences and similarities of the two different cases and experiences.

Obtaining Access to Land

The experience of Doña Lupe

Doña Lupe is a woman of 49 years who has been for 20 years an ejidataria of El Rancho. She is proud of being a farmer. She is one of the few female ejidatarias to till the land herself, something to which I will return in chapter eight. She is also proud of being an ejidataria. She often explicitly makes the distinction between the status of ejidatarios and that of vecinos. It was she who had told me that there were sixty families living in the village, causing me some surprise as others had told me that there were more or less 200 families living there. I confronted her with this and she agreed, and explained that she had counted only the ejidatarios. On several occasions she explained to me that in reality vecinos had to ask permission from the ejido to be able to live in the village, since the land on which the houses are constructed belongs to the ejido, and that when the ejidatarios decided that a vecino had to leave the village, he had little choice but to leave.

Doña Lupe does not in fact originate from El Rancho. She was born in a neighbouring village and settled in El Rancho when she married a son of one of the prominent ejidatarios. When she became a widow in 1968, she had 8 children, the eldest of whom was then 13 years old. She inherited her husband's parcel of ejido land but since the children were still very small she could not work the land. She asked permission of the ejido to be able to rent out the land and she went to join her sister in Guadalajara, taking all the children with her. She worked for seven years in Guadalajara before settling in the village again. During these years she took great care to see that her economic obligations to the ejido were fulfilled. She gave

money each time that the ejidatarios were asked for financial contributions for community and ejido affairs. Furthermore, she always kept contact with the chairmen of the ejido. Apart from regularly visiting them and offering them small and even large gifts, she integrated them into her network of *compadres* (ritual kin). In this way she made sure of a positive attitude from the ejidatarios towards her. Analyzing her network of compadres diachronically, it becomes clear that even after she settled again in the village, she continued with this strategy. If a new ejido board was chosen consisting of men who were not yet her compadres, Doña Lupe took care to invite one or more of them to become so on the first occasion possible.

During our stay in the ejido, we could see how, in her daily life, she cultivated her relationship with the recently chosen chairman. He was already her compadre, but their relationship had not been a close one, and she had not been at pains to make it flourish. When I had just arrived, he once told me in relation to Doña Lupe how he was sorry to have to say so, "she is my *comadre*, but I do not respect her. Look, her house is always in a mess, she doesn't take care of her land or her cows, and she's always fighting with her children." Yet, while he didn't take much notice of Doña Lupe at the beginning of his period as chairman of the ejido, after one year she had become one of his *personas de confianza*, one of those he trusted. In private, she would frankly give him her opinion on ejido affairs, but she took care in public never to dispute his authority, or his decisions. On public occasions she played it feminine, always extremely attentive, making sure that the public building was ready in time for ejido meetings by helping to do the cleaning, giving him moral support by laughing or nodding at the right moments, and never letting the chairman down. During that year she became *comadre* to his daughter, and regularly visited the house, offering him and his wife all kinds of small gifts such as home-made cheese, and asking in return for small, but easy to realize favours such as a lift to the nearby town, in return. On one occasion she asked the chairman to accompany her on her visit to the local department of the Ministry of Agriculture to pay the yearly irrigation quota. It was a yearly routine and she had always done it on her own. But that year she was a bit late with her payment and she convinced the chairman that if he would accompany her, they would certainly give her no problems. In this way she assured the chairman of his importance. This attitude struck me, in the sense that on other occasions, interacting with other people, I had never found her behaviour so 'female'. For example, when two welfare workers once came to the village to ask whether there were any women interested in the variety of (handicraft and health) courses they could offer, Doña Lupe reacted as if they had insulted her. How could these two girls possibly think that they could teach her anything useful. She had always managed on her own, and if she needed help, she knew perfectly well how and where to get it. She had her friends on whom she could depend.

Her good relationship with the chairman brought grist to her mill. A few years ago when the ejido was extended by 28 hectares, Doña Lupe bought or got hold of the rights to four hectares of land for one of her married sons, even though the son did not want to dedicate his life to agriculture, preferring to work as a truck driver. But Doña Lupe did not consider relinquishing

the land she cultivated herself. This caused a lot of resentment in the village among the landless. Moreover, it gave rise to gossip as to how she had found the means to pay the chairman. Even more resentment was caused when one day it became clear that the son, without consulting his mother, had sold half of his ejido right to another ejidatario in the village. Doña Lupe didn't like this at all, and asked the chairman to intervene in the sale. The chairman did so, and now the land is officially registered in the name of the only son who is not yet married and still lives with his mother. Further, notwithstanding the fact that Doña Lupe is already an ejidataria, and the resentment caused when her son tried to sell part of his land, she succeeded in getting the name of another son on the list of people whom Don Alfonso thought should benefit from the land they might acquire at the end of the struggle described in the previous chapter. This was more than the others hoping for a share had managed to do.

Other women: Certainly he won't take me seriously

While Doña Lupe was very successful in acquiring access to land from the extension, other women did not even get anywhere near the possibility. Another woman, a widow and mother of four children between 12 and 18 years old, was also interested in the new land, "if only for one of my sons", she said. Her main income was derived from a small retail shop in the village and a monthly pension. Since she was not an ejidataria, she was not allowed to participate in the monthly meeting of the ejido, and was therefore not privy to what was going on. However, her father and her brother were ejidatarios, so she asked them to bring her case forward at the meeting. But, due to a long-standing quarrel over land, neither her father nor her brother were on speaking terms with the chairman, so they never brought her case forward, nether formally in the meeting, nor informally on other occasions. When I asked the woman why she herself did not talk with the chairman, she referred to the family quarrel and then she added, "I don't know, I feel ashamed. I am a woman. He certainly won't take me seriously".

Comparable is the case of a woman married to a drunkard, mother of five children between 15 and 22 years old. Two of her sons worked as cutters in the cane harvest, and she herself kept chickens and pigs and sold toiletries in the village. She also would have liked to get hold of an ejido right for one of her sons. But she did not see how she could arrange that. She felt that she could not speak with the chairman of the ejido because she was sure that he would ask why she and not her husband had come to talk about it. "These are men's affairs. And", she added, "he is right, my husband should do it. But he is such a drunk, he never would". "It would be easier if I were a widow" she contended. "In that case, I could legitimately present my case to the chairman. He would have to treat me as head of the family." In the present situation, the only possibility she sees of getting access to land is to hire a lawyer, but since that is very expensive, it is out of her reach.

Based on these brief accounts, we can see a few important constraining and enabling elements in the strategies of these women. Firstly, it becomes clear that social relations - and to be more precise relations with influential men in the ejido - are important for achieving influence on the decision making process. This in itself does not differ from what men have to do to gain influence, but the interaction between men and women gives rise to another dynamic than that between men. In the case of Doña Lupe it is striking how she projects herself as a more or less dependent woman in front of the chairman of the ejido, while in other social environments she appears to behave in a completely different manner, to be a different woman. As the experience of Doña Lupe shows, her success in moving within the political core of the ejido has given rise to a lot of gossip about her decency. The two other women consider it quite impossible for them to ask the chairman a favour, let alone establish a social relationship with him. The first feels ashamed, thinks that she will not be taken seriously since she is a woman. The other thinks that the chairman will tell her that it is none of her business, it is up to her husband. I have to add, that of the three women, only Doña Lupe is of the same generation as the chairman. Because of their shared experiences and the absence of hierarchy based on age, and their *compadre* relationship, it is easier for Doña Lupe to interact with the chairman than it is for the other two women.

Another salient feature is that none of the three women tried to claim land in their own right, for themselves. This would not have been considered a valid claim. It is only through having sons, future 'heads of households', that their claim would be considered justified, even if the sons are not really interested in access to land, as the history of Doña Lupe shows.

Disputed Landownership

To explore others, and to deepen an understanding of the above mentioned constraining and enabling factors in the political strategies of women, I want to present the cases of two women, Doña Elena and Doña Concha. Both inherited land, Doña Elena from her husband and Doña Concha from her father. The two women do not belong to the same, but to neighbouring ejidos. Nor do they represent the same period - Doña Elena inherited her land in 1954 and Doña Concha in 1981. However, they have similar experiences, namely, when it became clear that they had inherited the land, male relatives tried to deny them their legacy, not legally, but in practice, in everyday life. In both cases, these male relatives were more successful than the women in mobilizing political support at local level. Doña Elena soon realized that it was no use to try and solve her problem locally and found her way to higher levels. Now, her claim to the land is undisputed and her son is working the land on her behalf. Doña Concha is still trying to solve her problem. She is still in discussions with local-level politicians, which always seem to end in a blind alley.

Doña Elena: "Why would they throw me off my land like a dog? Just because my old man died?"

Doña Elena is 88 years old. Thirty four years ago, in 1954, her husband died. By then only three of the seventeen children to whom she had given birth were still alive. The eldest, a woman, was married and lived in Tijuana. The other two, an epileptic girl of 16 and a boy of 14 years were at the time still at home living with their mother.

Doña Elena's late husband had been an important person in the ejido of Rincón.[9] He was one of the founders, and since he was one of the few people who could read and write, he always performed important functions within the ejido. He acted as intermediary between the ejido and the institutional environment, and was asked to take care of anything formal that had to be arranged. Because of this he knew many influential people in Guadalajara and Mexico City. He was certainly not one of the poor ejidatarios. He had land and rented land from other ejidatarios and he grew tobacco, chilies and vegetables. Probably he had a similar position in Rincón as Don Alfonso in El Rancho. Eight years before he died, he was involved in a serious conflict with the ejido. Doña Elena did not want to tell me the details of the conflict, but it was clear that it was the reason for their move out of Rincón to a house near El Rancho.

After he died, Doña Elena decided to join some relatives who were living in another region. Since her son Juan was still very young and she had to take care of her seriously ill daughter alone, and as she had little experience of working on the land she thought it would be impossible to manage the land herself. She was also keen on the idea of Juan learning an occupational skill from his uncles who were truck drivers. So she asked permission from the ejido to rent her land. It was agreed and she left.

After eighteen months Juan returned to the valley. Since a manganese mine had recently opened there was a lot of work for truck drivers. A few months later his mother and his sister joined him and they rented a house in El Limón, a small town near El Rancho. One day in 1956 as Juan left his house early in the morning to go to work, he by chance overheard neighbours discussing a *depuración* which had been carried out in the ejido of Rincón.

A *depuración* is an investigation, carried out by bureaucrats from the Ministry of Land Reform, to find out which ejidatarios are cultivating the land themselves and which are renting out their land on a regular basis to a third person. If an ejidatario has rented his land for more than two successive years without an acceptable reason, the land can be reclaimed by the ejido and be given to another person. This apparantly had happened to the land of Doña Elena, notwithstanding the fact that, in general, widows are exempted from their duty to till the land themselves, and that Doña Elena in particular had received formal permission to rent her land. The chairman of the ejido had told the men from the Ministry that Doña Elena had emigrated to the United States and that nobody had received any sign of life from her for many years. Although Doña Elena's brother was present when the chairman said this, he kept quiet in the hope that he would be the one in the end to benefit from her land.

Juan warned his mother and she went immediately to find the representatives concerned at the Ministry of Land Reform, at their office in Tauquíl, a town at the other end of the valley, some 20 km. from El Limón. She took her invalid daughter with her. Elena recalled that day in detail. "There I went", she said, "Shivering as if I had a cold. I was ashamed. Never in my life had I ever before been involved in these kinds of arguments". Before she reached the office, she had a stiff drink, *un vino*, so she would have the courage to speak.

When she finally arrived, she found the chairman and several inhabitants of Rincón present, including her brother. They were there to legalize the decisions taken the day before. In the meantime Juan also arrived. The bureaucrats from the Ministry tried to convince Elena and Juan that it was no use crying over spilt milk, the decision had been taken, nobody in the meeting the day before had defended her case, moreover nobody had made it clear that they even knew the two of them. Juan became angry. Elena tried to stop him, but she couldn't prevent him saying: "How can you think that they don't know us. This is my uncle, those are *compadres* of my mother. If they need money for repairing the *plaza de toros* (the bull ring0 they know perfectly well where we live. What you are doing, is *puras chuecuras*, pure dirty tricks. But I don't blame you, if they lied to you that's not your fault. However you came to get involved in it we can't arrange anything here. But don't worry, this is not the last time that we meet." They left. One of those present followed them and tried to convince Elena not to fight the decision. "*Comadre*, the decision is taken", he said. "Don't spend any money fighting it. Better buy food with it instead." But Elena was determined and answered that she was sorry but she would never agree to it and that the money would be well spent, and she would not be asking him to lend it to her.

The first step she took was to visit an old and influential friend of her late husband. He could not resolve her problem, but he knew people at the Ministry of Land Reform in Mexico City who perhaps could. He wrote a letter in which he explained the problem and asked them to intervene to the advantage of Doña Elena. Doña Elena went to Mexico City. In the first instance, Juan wanted to go, but Elena said to him "No, don't get involved in it. You are a man. You never know what they will do to you (implying that he could be killed). I am just an old woman, they won't hurt me." In Mexico City they confirmed that Doña Elena was indeed the legal owner of the ejido title. A document was made up, and with this document in hand Doña Elena visited the chairman of Rincón again.

Based on this document, it was decided at the next ejido meeting, to return half of her parcel to Elena. The other half was given to a son of Elena's brother. In this way, so they argued, it stayed within the family and Elena had nothing to complain about. Of course Elena and Juan were not satisfied with the decision, but did not know what to do to fight it.

Juan by then was no longer working as a truck driver for the manganese mine, but had joined the company responsible for the construction of the irrigation system in the valley. He started as a day labourer, digging the canals, but soon he was given training to operate the machines. A civil engineer he met became his friend and taught him a lot about engineering.

This was the beginning of Juan's career. He now has a small-scale, but successful construction business. When this engineer was transferred to the Ministry of Hydraulic Resources in Mexico City, he asked Juan to come with him. Juan accepted the offer, married in 1957 (he was 17 years old) and left for Mexico.

After two years working in the Ministry, he had the opportunity to speak to the head of the department. He told him about the land problem and asked what he and his mother could do to get their land back. The head of the department suggested that the way to solve the problem, was to write a letter to the wife of president Lopez Mateos. The first lady of the country had a special office which focussed on solving the problems of individual poor (peasant) women, especially problems which had to do with education and health. The problem of Doña Elena had not so much to do with education or health, but since they had already tried to solve the problem through the Ministry of Land Reform, this was the only solution that the head of Juan's department could think of.

Doña Elena wrote the letter. In it, she not only asked for help with the land problem, but she also asked for help for her epileptic daughter. After six months, a doctor and a representative of the office suddenly visited Doña Elena. They offered to take her daughter to a hospital. However, just a week before the visit, the daughter had died. They had come too late. Doña Elena thanked them for coming anyway and made use of the opportunity to explain again the problems over the land. The three of them together wrote a second letter, which the representative took with him to Mexico City.

One year after this had happened, Doña Elena received a letter which ordered the chairman of the ejido of Rincón to return all the land to Doña Elena. She went with this letter to the chairman. He tried to find a compromise. He agreed that the land belonged to Doña Elena, but he asked her to permit her brother and her nephew to cultivate the land in return for a small rent. Doña Elena would not agree to that and in the end, after more than four years, the ejido returned her land. Doña Elena commented while she was telling me her story, that she still felt angry with her brother and the ejido authorities. "They wanted to throw me off my land, as if I were a dog. And why? Just because I had no husband to defend my rights? Some men think that women are not capable of looking after themselves. But that is not true at all. I did not let them take my land."

Her son Juan's comment was that "They had to return us our land. The thing is, they had taken our land without permission from the centre. It all happened just because of the corrupt bureaucrats here in the valley. In the centre they did not know what they had been doing to us. And if you find the way to the centre, it's easy to solve your problems."

Doña Concha: "I think that if I were a man I would probably already have solved this problem."

The story of Doña Concha is similar and different at the same time. Doña Concha still faces her problems, and as far as I can judge, without much hope of a positive solution. After presenting her story, I will compare the two experiences.

Doña Concha is 49 years old and lives in a small village about 100 kilometres from the research location. She is married to a mechanic and has 8 children, of which four still live at home. She says: "We'll survive with what we have, but there is always the need for a plot of land. Especially nowadays, everything has become so expensive."

Doña Concha's father, who lived near El Rancho, died in 1981 and left her, his only child, his ejidal rights. He had 8 hectares of irrigated land. Doña Concha has never been able to till this land because immediately after the death of her father, one of his stepsons appropriated the land. Every month Doña Concha comes to the ejido meeting, although she is not allowed to speak or vote. She just wants to show the ejidatarios that she is not losing her interest in the land, and that she will never accept the situation. Every three years, after a new chairman is chosen, she tries to get the new chairman interested in her problem, hoping that he will take her side. During the last eight years this has not solved anything. However, after the last election things started to move.

In contrast to the husband of Doña Elena, the father of Doña Concha was not prosperous, nor did he have any influence in ejido affairs. He was famous for his drinking and treated his first wife, the mother of Concha, very badly. He regularly beat her and often gave her no money to buy food. In exchange for food she helped her neighbours with their domestic tasks. But her husband became furious every time he arrived to find an empty home, which was enough for him to beat her again. When Concha was 12 years old, her mother decided to leave him. She took Concha with her and returned to her parents who lived in the village where Concha still lives. The mother died in 1964, when Concha was 24 years old and already married.

In the meantime, Concha's father had found another woman. She was a single mother and was happy that she had found a roof over her head. She had two children of 7 and 9 years old, both of them boys. The younger of these is the one who appropriated the land. The relations between Concha's father and his second wife was just as bad as with his first wife. He also treated the boys badly. If he was drunk he forbade them to enter the house, "whether rain or shine". He did not want them to work on his land and although by then his physical health was so bad that he could not do the work himself, he preferred to rent it out than let the boys cultivate it. Concha, who now and then made visits to see her father over the years, once asked him to allow the boys to work on the land. Her father did not even want to consider it, saying, "I wouldn't even give them a bag of scorpions." The two boys left the house at an early age. The eldest was eighteen when he married a girl in the village, and the other was

seventeen when he left to try his luck in Tijuana, a frontier city between Mexico and the United States. After one year the younger came back to convince his mother to leave Doña Concha's father and she went to live with him in Tijuana. This must have happened in the last years of the sixties.

So, Doña Concha's father was on his own again. Every once in a while he tried to find women to do the work in the house. But always, sooner or later, they would run out on him, so in the end he decided that it was better to buy his food from one of the neighbours. Doña Concha regularly visited him, cleaned the house, washed his clothes, but he would always send her away after only a short stay. In the end, he became very ill with arthritis and he finally died in 1981. The eldest stepson let his brother know that their stepfather had died, and he returned to the village immediately, settled in his stepfather's house and shortly after started to farm the land.

This was all possible in the confusion of the first weeks after the death. However, it soon became clear that the deceased had left a will in which both the land and the house were left to Doña Concha. It was made in 1976 and was signed by Doña Concha's father, the chairman of the ejido at that time, and the mayor of the municipality. Doña Concha showed this testament to the chairman of the ejido in 1981. But then chairman stated that the testament had no value since it was not genuine. He accused her of having made it up herself. Doña Concha asked the people who had signed to testify that the document was genuine. Only the chairman of the municipality was still alive, and he indeed testified. However, although the chairman had to admit that the testament was genuine, he then said that it was not valid, since it was drawn up in the municipality and not in the ejido. Doña Concha complained to me, "There are witnesses. But the chairman does not take them seriously. He just wants to arrange it in his own way. I thought the municipality was important, but that was just because I did not know how these things work. Since he has political friends who support him, he can do anything he wants." She complained:

> "For eight years I have spent time and money to solve this problem. In the beginning my husband always accompanied me, but now that life has become so expensive we can't afford this anymore. In the beginning, I was still allowed to speak and to vote in the ejido meeting but a few years ago they stopped me doing even that. Now they will accept no financial contribution to communal affairs from me. They want to make it clear that I don't have any rights, not to speak, not to vote, not even to pay. I went to the offices of the Ministry of Land Reform in Tauquíl but they told me that the problem should be resolved in Guadalajara. So, I went to Guadalajara. They told me to please come back the day after tomorrow. I never returned. I don't have the money. And anyway, it is of no use if you don't know anybody who wants to help you."

Two months before I met Doña Concha, she received an invitation from the chairman of the ejido to finally solve the problem. A representative from the Ministry of Land Reform would

come to the ejido to find a solution. Concha went to this meeting but it soon became clear what solution they were thinking of. They suggested that the eight hectares be divided, four hectares for each of them. They had already formulated an official note, which only needed hers and her stepbrother's signature. Doña Concha recalled, "I became very nervous. There were no other people but this man from Guadalajara, the chairman of the ejido, my stepbrother and me. I was afraid that they would hit me if I didn't sign. I knew I shouldn't sign, but I did. I should not have done it, but only I know how scared they made me. They told me that if I didn't sign they would put me in jail. And what do you do when you are a woman? You give in and sign. Although none of what happened was legal, I don't think that I will continue fighting. I am tired and I have spent a lot of money. I think that if I were a man, the problem would have already been resolved. Because the word of a man has more weight than the word of a woman."

Discussion of the Cases

Comparing the two histories we find many similarities. Both women had the right to the land, and in both cases they were opposed by men who were related, in one way or another, to the deceased ejidatario. Neither of the women lived in the community while the men opposing their claim did. Doña Concha explained that the stepbrother was able to mobilize political support in the community because the people of the village knew him. She added that of course they also knew her, but her not being resident in the community made a big difference. Since these two women did not share everyday life with the other ejidatarios, since they were unable to build up or reinforce their social relations within the community on a day-to-day basis, which became clear in the history of Doña Lupe, it was more difficult for them to influence the whole decision making process in an informal way. They had to count on the formal ejido meetings to exert any influence. These meetings, however, are not the most important decision making arenas. Decisions taken at the meeting are frequently changed in the day-to-day interactions between different social actors, and in their turn these interactions influence the decisions taken at the meetings.

Further, both women were convinced that the fact that other people questioned the legitimacy of their rights, had something to do with the fact that many men think of women as nothing, and that the word of a man counts for more than the word of a woman. Doña Elena says that her brother and the ejido chairman would never have dared to try to appropriate the land if her husband had been alive. Of course we have to take into account the fact that her husband was an influential man, with many political friends, while the father of Doña Concha was not. On the contrary, he was a solitary man and a drunkard who caused many social problems in the community. Moreover, he had not worked his land for nearly 15 years before he died, but nevertheless, while he was alive nobody ever discussed the legitimacy of his right to the land.

Doña Concha further said that she thought the problem would have been solved long ago if she had been a man. So, not only did she think that she would not have been enveloped in such problems at all but for the fact that she was a woman, she also thought that this fact influenced the whole process of getting her legal rights accepted in daily life. This is best illustrated by recalling the meeting which was organized to finally solve her problem. While the men present scared her by saying that she would be send to jail if she did not sign, she herself also felt the possible threat of physical violence and signed. The reality of this fear was brought home to me by the story of another two women who fled in the middle of a court session which was meeting to reach agreement on the legality of their ejidal rights. They did so for the same fear of physical violence from the men that Doña Concha had felt. Thinking of all the physical violence which women face in daily life, it is not at all strange that they should feel this fear in conflictive situations involving men, women and gender ideology.

Both women expressed their lack of experience in handling such a situation properly. Doña Elena stated that she was ashamed to speak in public since she had never done so before and had never participated in the meetings of the ejido. She did not know the rules of the game, she only knew that what had happened to her was dishonest. Doña Concha was conscious of the fact that part of her problem was not knowing the right people to help her out of the mess. To turn to the Ministry of Land Reform for help is only useful if you know the right people to go to and they are willing to take up your cause, and if you have enough money to pay for the service. This she experienced when she herself went to Guadalajara, and it was confirmed by the stand which the representative of the ministry took when he came to the ejido. He was the one who intimidated her by saying that she would be taken to jail if she did not sign. If we analyze the differences in socialization and division of labour and responsibilities between men and women in daily life, the woman's lack of experience and appropriate contacts and lack of knowledge of the rules of the game is logical. Women on the whole do, and are expected to take care of the home, the children and an income when necessary (at least according to the ideology which is also partly internalized by women); and men have the responsibility for agricultural production and village politics. Because of the different social and economic responsibilities and experiences during the course of their lives, men and women construct different types of social network,[7] and acquire different types of skills. I do not wish to argue here that the men's and the women's world are two separate worlds, but I do want to argue that a woman can only move in the men's world if she sticks to her own 'role', and that it is very hard for her to do so if she wants to enter it on equal terms. I myself as a female researcher experienced that as well. When women move into the men's world in a male role (as ejidataria) they lack the proper social resources and experiences to defend their case. As one woman so clearly expressed it, "Women serve for nothing. We don't know how to read nor write."

Researcher: "But your husband also doesn't know how to read or write!"

Woman: "Ah, but you know they always have their meetings. And those who hear and those who speak, also know how to act. They are aware of what is going on. But we women, we stay too much within our houses. That is why we are left behind."

Lastly, both women had their toughest encounters and problems at the level of local politics and politicians and the staff of the Ministry of Land Reform whose actions were reinforced by the silent majority of their fellow ejidatarios. As Juan, the son of Elena says: "The thing is, that they had taken our land without permission from the centre. It all happened just because of the corrupt bureaucrats here in the valley." On this level perhaps the local socio-political dynamic and the dominant ideology (a man has the right to till the land and a woman has the right to find herself a man who maintains her) is actually stronger than the legal rights women might possess, or that is the way it is until a woman can find an effective enough way through the bureaucracy to enforce the legal arguments.

The big difference between the two cases is that Doña Elena, because of her son, was in the end able to ignore local level politicians and bureaucrats (if you find your way to the centre, it is easy to solve your problems). Doña Concha did not manage to do so, and there is now the matter of her signature to a solution she did not want, to make her path surely harder. Although she has also written a letter, just like Doña Elena, to the wife of the president, this has so far borne no result. Probably this is due to the fact that her case was not recommended by an influential politician and Doña Concha had no sick daughter to capture the interest and legitimate aims of the president's wife. Maybe if Doña Elena's daughter had not died, no doubt eliciting the sympathy of those who arrived to help her, the final results of her case might not have been the same. Yet the case of the two women who fled from the court also confirms that for women, it seems more easy to defend their case when they have an opportunity to avoid local level politicians and bureaucrats. After the court session from which they fled, they did not know what to do next. However, an acquaintance brought them in contact with a socialist lawyer in Guadalajara who specialized in cases about land conflicts. He is now helping them and so it seems to date, with some success.

To summarize the salient features of the case studies, the same elements appear in all three case histories, including that of Doña Lupe. Her case shows that it is not impossible for a woman to manage well in the men's world. She could manipulate as skillfully as the men her connections to her advantage. But all three cases demonstrate the importance of 1) having an appropriate social and political network at both the level of the ejido and at the regional or national level and 2) the ideology regarding the different responsibilities and rights of men and women makes, in general, for enormous difficulties for women to gain access to land. Even where they have the legal rights on their side, women have to be able to cross very strong cultural and symbolic boundaries. At the local level the rights of women to land are far more disputed than the rights of men. Doña Lupe's success in crossing this boundary, in practice, was two-fold. In part it was due to the fact that she built the relationships in the men's world

that would be of use to her, and in part it was due to the fact that on the level of discourse at least, she cleverly presented herself according to local feminine norms.

The cases also show some new elements. First of all they show that women who have recently become ejidatarias lack the social and discursive skills needed to defend their case. They do not know the right people, and do not really have any idea of the dynamics of local politics. This is probably not the right way to formulate it, in that it is not that they do not have any idea of how things work, but that they do not yet have the practical experiences to get something done within this dynamic. Women who for some reason or another, because they participate in the local women's group or church activities or who have experience of organizing the yearly village fiesta, for example, do have some chance to obtain this practical experiences and they often explicitly mention this as one of the positive aspects of their activities. Both the lack of the right contacts and the lack of experience are due to gender specific socialization processes and to the family organization.

Further the cases also shed light on the practices of local politicians and local level representatives of the state: here from the Ministry of Land Reform and the Judiciary. None of them showed themselves to be impartial in the conflicts. The differences between what the Agrarian law says about ejido land tenure, and land tenure in practice which is more or less accepted at the local level, gives rise to a lively political dynamic. They are all part of and take part in this political dynamic at the local level. Last but not least,I want to mention the fear which several of the women expressed about physical violence, which in one of the cases directly limited her ability to influence the course of events in her favor.

Conclusion: Understanding the Diversity

Thus, we may now conclude that the structural constraints and the opposition which women encounter in trying to obtain access to ejido land and get their legitimately inherited rights acknowledged in every day life, may be understood as the consequences of a particular relationship between a land tenure system, local and regional political and interventionist practices, and dominant ideology and practices associated with family organization and physical violence against women, and associated gender specific socialization processes.

Let us see how far the previously introduced concepts of social networks and symbolic boundaries and the manipulation of social identities, can help us to understand these processes and the differences between the cases.

Symbolic boundaries and their use is especially visible in attempts to prevent women from claiming access to land. In all the cases it becomes clear that one of these boundaries is the boundary existing between men and women. 'Men have the right to till the land, and women have the right to find themselves a man to take care of them.' Women are supposed to look after the children in the home, men are supposed to take financial care of them. But at the

same time these differences between men and women are also the arguments which women use to argue to justify their right to land. It is one way of fulfilling their obligations as a mother taking good care of her children. However, since all women are confronted with these social divisions marked by symbolic and ideologic boundaries, it does not explain the different strategies that women use nor the different outcomes. In this respect, another boundary which was mentioned before and is actively verbalized in the village is that between ejidatarios and *vecinos*. As we have seen in the case of Doña Lupe, she likes to project herself as an active and social member of the ejido, an ejidataria, capable of tilling the land herself. This symbolic boundary has no gender connotations, and by projecting herself in this way, she becomes symbolically speaking 'less a woman'. She has a repertoire of different social identities to play with and as we have seen, she does this with some skill. Of course she can only do this, thanks to the fact that she already had her status as an *ejidataria* accepted. The other women did not have this advantage. They are both women and vecinas, and both categories come with fewer rights than men and ejidatarios.

The cases also indicate strongly a boundary of 'inside' and 'outside' in relation to the ejido as a social community. This especially becomes clear when Doña Concha tries to convince the chairman of the ejido of the authenticity of the will. When finally he has to admit that the testament is authentic, he claims that it is invalid since it was not drawn up in the ejido itself, but in the municipal offices (to which the ejido belongs, seen in administrative terms). However, this inside/outside notion is not used very consistently on his part since later on in the same history, the chairman calls in people from outside to help come to a final solution of the problem. But the fact that the women were 'outsiders' in the sense that they did not live in the ejido had a strong bearing on their case. So sometimes the symbolic boundary between inside and outside is used strongly to argue a case, sometimes it is implicitly of influence, and on other occasions, under other conditions, it is ignored.

The processes of creating symbolic boundaries and social identities are very much intertwined. Labelling people 'outsiders', 'women', 'ejidatarios', 'vecinos' and attributing capacities and rights to them, influences an actors social identity and gives rise to symbolic boundaries. And as we have seen in the case of Doña Lupe, she can and does draw upon different social identities, which gives her more possibilities to cross boundaries: she is not so easy to dismiss as those whose repertoire is limited.

To conclude, a salient feature which comes forward in all the cases, is the relevance of spinning the right social networks. It was one of the principle differences between the case of Doña Elena and Doña Concha. By means of her son, Elena got access to 'the centre'. Concha did not have the opportunity to escape from the local level. All the cases show that social networks are not just 'given', and in place to draw on if necessary. Social and political networks are built up during the course of one's life time and have to be actively maintained if they are to form a resource. They are related to occupational careers and changing socio-economic posi-

tions and are to a certain degree gender specific. Their maintenance is influenced by the different social identities and cultural repertoires a social actor may draw upon.

It rests now for me to reflect on the theory of brokerage and political networks in the light of the experiences and perspectives of women. When it comes to land distribution, women have virtually no access to brokers and the political networks involved. This can be understood by highlighting the practices and the ideology through which the system of brokerage and political networks is reproduced and used. Political networks and relations with brokers are built up and maintained often over a period of many years. And looking at it from the experiences and perspective of women, for whom it is very difficult to get access to this world, let alone to influence decision making, it becomes clear that gender is intrinsically interwoven in the whole dynamic. Women over the course of their lives build up other sorts of social and political networks than do men. Their networks are mostly horizontal and relate to their everyday responsibilities for feeding and raising children, and they include neighbours, relatives and female friends who mostly live nearby and share the same daily concerns and anxieties. Even where women do have secondary occupations, these are usually activities such as petty trade or activities that can be run from home or do not take them outside their own neighbourhoods or communities.

The networks of men are often more related to their occupational life worlds, to their periods of migration for work and are often more vertically oriented. As a consequence, over the course of their lives, men gain experience in maintaining vertical relations. The ways in which vertical relations, loyalties, and feelings of friendship are created are imbedded in a culture, in traditions, and in non-verbalized shared understandings. One has to know how to play the game. As explained before, for me or for any other woman it was difficult to join the men on their trips to Guadalajara, since part of maintaining friendly relations with officials of the Reforma Agraria was dining and drinking in places where men might not take women they respect. It involved getting drunk together, and if the men from the Reforma Agraria wanted, going off to brothels. So, in that context it is unthinkable for men to let women join them. The undesirability of this was accepted by everybody, so women also would not contemplate joining men in these circumstances. And even if the officials of the Reforma Agraria come to the village, they are unapproachable for women, unless under very specific conditions, which are set by the men. It is an outspokenly male arena. It is only when women can avoid the normal channels or can use the men within their usual social range of acquaintance, as was Elena's son and an old family friend, that they are able to make contact with people high in the state bureaucracy, and get their claims heard and effectuated at local level. Women are thus aware of, and will use when they can, the verticalism which is so salient in Mexico's socio-political order. They must also rely on social and political networks, but we do not see their efforts to do so within the framework which becomes visible in the broker approach. The experiences of women make us more conscious of how constraining for women the brokerage and political networking mechanisms are, and this is why women tend to be invisible in studies that use

such an approach. Looking at their experiences highlights the dominance of the male discourse that accompanies such mechanisms and the importance of discourse and their manipulation of it in their struggles, particularly those over social identities and symbolic boundaries. These struggles are as constraining and enabling as political networks and verticalism in claiming rights to land.

Seen from the perspectives and experiences of women compared to those of men a different socio-political order becomes visible: looking at the whole dynamic from the point of view of men draws attention to the practices of state-peasant relations, local leadership and socio-political networking within and outside the ejido, but it will ignore the experiences of women. Their experiences draw our attention to practices of power based on gender, both within the ejido and in the state dominated land distribution system.

Notes

1. It should be noted that from the seventies onwards relatively little land was redistributed. So from that respect also, the agrarian legal framework could not contribute substantially to equal access to land between men and women. However this will not be given attention in this chapter where I want to focus on the local dynamics that make it very difficult for women to claim rights to land.

2. Because of these practices the size of the plots have become differentiated over time. If we exclude the members integrated most recently, who received parcels of only 4 hectares, parcels vary in size from 5 to 14 hectares.

3. UAIM: Unidad Agricola y Industria de la Mujer, i.e. the local women's group.

4. The same counts for women who work as day labourers without being "accompanied". In former days women mainly worked on the fields of their fathers, brothers or husbands and they were accompanied by respected men and thus the women's reputation was not in dispute. However, with the introduction of large-scale fruit and vegetable production for the North American market and an increasing demand for female labour, this system has been eroded. But, in El Rancho, very few women work in the fruit and vegetable production of the valley, and those who do, have to face all kind of problems which arise from being accused of being "of lose virtue". I will come back to this in chapter 8.

5. By formal and informal rituals, I refer on the one hand to ceremonies in which the relationship is publicly consolidated as when one becomes a *compadre* or *padrino*, and on the other to the more day to day rituals such as becoming drunk together, shopping in one shop rather than another, visiting each other, etc.

6. Rincón is an ejido near to El Rancho. In fact Doña Elena's fields are easier to reach from El Rancho than they are from Rincón, which was one of the reasons why, when Doña Elena's husband had problems with the ejido of Rincón, they moved to a house near to El Rancho. Thus when I mention local politicians, I am referring to the politicians of Rincón and not of El Rancho.

7. See for instance Larissa Lomnitz (1975) and Mercedes Gonzalea de la Rocha (1986) on differences in networks of *compadrazgo* ritual kinship relations, between men and women. They relate the differences that exist to the division of labour and the different responsibilities towards the children of men and women. Women choose to have comadres from their direct environment, so they can share the daily care of the children together. Men prefer to have compadres from their work place, who can perhaps provide the children with jobs in the future.

V. MODERNIZATION OF MEXICAN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: APPROACHES AND EMPIRICAL PROCESSES

Introduction: Agricultural Modernization in Mexico

Earlier chapters concentrated on access to land as the central theme. In this and the following chapters the focus will be on how land is made productive.

Agrarian development in the ejido central to this thesis, is characterized by what is usually called the modernization of agriculture and the incorporation of farm enterprises into the wider economic, political and institutional environment. After the land reform of the thirties, the economy of El Rancho revolved around rainfed agriculture, production for home consumption, and temporary wage labour. In the fifties and beginning of the sixties, an irrigation system was constructed which slowly but surely led to profound changes in agriculture. Cash crops such as vegetables and sugarcane replaced the production of maize and beans for home consumption. The involvement of the market and different private and state institutions in the reproduction of farm enterprises increased rapidly. Although commodity production was nothing new in the area - the haciendas, and after the reform the private property owners and ejidatarios were all engaged in it - due to the coming of irrigation and the agricultural expansion that followed this, the extent and social organization of commodity production changed profoundly.

The modernization of agriculture in Mexico has been widely discussed in the literature. It was in Mexico that the Green Revolution was born. During the fifties and sixties, Mexico was said to be an agricultural miracle because of the rapid increase of yields in maize and wheat due to improved seeds and new technological packages. Between 1942 and 1964, agricultural production (excluding livestock) rose by 5.1% yearly, while the population grew at an annual rate of 3.1% (Hewitt de Alcántara, 1982:99). However, attention was soon also drawn to the sociological consequences of this modernization, and to the question of why hunger continued to persist among the majority of the large rural population organized in ejidos. Given the land reform, which was thought to be an important prerequisite for more equal economic growth in the countryside, the growing inequality between rich and poor could be understood only by examining the characteristics of the process of modernizing agriculture itself.

Hewitt de Alcántara, in her book *La Modernización de la Agricultura Mexicana*, 1940-1970 (1982), gives a clear framework for understanding this phenomena. She argues that from the forties onwards Mexican policy was directed towards the development of national industries.

Following the pattern of development seen in the 'first world', industry was considered to be one of the main motors of progress. Since Mexico in those years was primarily an agricultural country, agriculture had to provide the funds for this intended industrial development. So most of the government efforts to stimulate agricultural production were invested in research and infrastructure to improve the commercial production of crops such as maize and wheat. Since these crops were also grown in the ejidal sector, this stimulation in itself does not explain why nevertheless the ejidal sector turned out to profit far less from government policy than the private sector. In practice it was the private sector, the big landowners, who were able to obtain the biggest slice of government support. Hewitt explains this by arguing that the big land owners were a political factor in the country, while the ejidatarios were fragmented and lacked organization to influence state policy and direct state funds towards the ejidal sector. When ejidatarios regionally organized themselves, their organizations were intimidated to such a degree that they fell apart, leaving the local population even more fragmented than before. In official policy documents of those years, the only reasons mentioned for justifying the allocation of state resources to the private sector are economic reasons. It was argued that the big landowners were better educated, more receptive to agricultural innovation, and that would therefore ensure better returns to the state from its investment in agriculture. This was in spite of the remarkable fact that, due to the land reform, small-scale producers were responsible for a sizable portion of commercially produced agricultural produce. In 1940, the ejidal sector produced 51% of national agricultural output! (1982:21).

Hewitt goes on to argue that the results of this policy are twofold. First, it implies that the differences between the private sector and the ejidal sector grew at the expense of the latter. This for instance, is clearly shown when analyzing the irrigation policy of the Mexican government over the years: nearly all the bigger private farmers have their land irrigated, while this is the case for only 15% of ejidal lands (op.cit.:57). Analyzing credit policies, policies on technical assistance etc. leads to the same conclusion: private landowners have been able to monopolize access to them. This phenomenon has led to the argument that Mexican agriculture is 'dual' in character: on the one hand it consists of a modern sector which is mainly dominated by private landowners who are able to monopolize state resources, and on the other, it consists of a traditional sector, i.e. the ejidal sector, mainly focussed on subsistence production, which, notwithstanding, or perhaps thanks to the modernization of agriculture, continues to face many problems of survival and often faces hunger. The discussion then is whether and how these two sectors are related.

Secondly, differences between the "traditional" ejidal and the "modern" private sector have not only increased, but also within the modern agricultural sector, in those ejidos that have had access to 15 % of irrigated lands, they have paid a high price for this. Access to irrigation made little difference to the attention they received from government. Government neglect was as great for this part of the ejidal sector as it was for their less fortunate colleagues who depended on rainfed agriculture. Since they had no access to commercial banks, it was difficult

for them to get the credit facilities and the inputs necessary to make their land productive. In this situation they were not able to compete with the big private landowners, and often this led to indebtedness and finally loss of control over the ability to produce on their lands. Although ejidal land cannot officially be sold, this does not mean that ejidatarios cannot lose control: renting out land for a long period is a normal phenomenon.

So, Cynthia Hewitt argues that also within the ejidos of the modern sector, the ejidatarios have turned out to be the losers. She argues that the modernization of agriculture has had very high social costs,[1] since industry in Mexico has not been able to provide labour for all the people who leave the countryside in the hope of making a living in the cities. Mexico is one of the countries with the most profound differences between rich and poor.[2]

The Agrarian Question

Cynthia Hewitt's analysis is one of the better grounded contributions in the generally highly abstract and generalist debate on agrarian development in Mexico. This debate focusses attention on the question of whether or not the ejidal sector will survive, given the difficulties ejidatarios have in making a living. Generally it is argued that notwithstanding the ejido structure, differentiation and proletarianization of the peasantry are the main characteristics of the process of rural development in Mexico. Alain de Janvry (1981:129), for instance, states that even though the ejido has increased both its share of land and its share of the rural population, the social relations of ejidal production have been rapidly changing towards proletarianization. He bases his conclusions on the arguments that: 1) an ever growing number of ejidatarios obtain only half their income from ejidal production, the other half they obtain through work as wage labourers; and 2) the frequency of the (illegal) renting of ejido lands by capitalist farmers is rising.

A recent study shows that as much as 84% of all ejido plots are too small to provide full employment and an adequate income for a peasant family.[3] Other authors state that these tendencies are not so clearly distinguishable, and focus on the reasons why the peasantry continues to exist such as their provision of cheap labour for capitalist enterprises and the provision of cheap food because of the process of self exploitation by the peasants.[4]

This discussion is part of the larger debate in the seventies and the eighties on what is generally referred to as 'the agrarian question'. As Norman Long (1984:3-5) summarizes, the different contributions to this debate have tended towards two contrasting interpretations. The first view holds that although the consequences of capitalist penetration may vary from society to society, there are nevertheless similar patterns in which agricultural and rural populations are affected. Incorporation implies that money gets to form an essential part of the reproduction of the household or farm unit. The reproduction of the household loses its autonomy and becomes dependent on money. Some peasant households are successful in generating an income, while others are not. The latter enter into a downwards spiral of decapitalization,

while the first are able to accumulate capital. Hence, he argues that the mechanization and commercialization of agriculture generates increasing economic differentiation within the rural population, creating a relatively small entrepreneurial land-owning class and a growing agricultural proletariat or marginalized peasantry. The second view stresses the need to understand certain persisting forms of peasant-type organization, such as the family farm with its intensive use of non-wage household and extra household labour. This persistence is explained either in terms of the way in which capitalism selectively sustains certain forms of small-scale, peasant or simple commodity production, which cheapens the reproduction costs of labour for the capitalist sector, or in terms of a certain internal dynamic which generates social and cultural resistance to capitalism itself. Others emphasize the competitive advantages of simple commodity forms of production over capitalist production: there is no structural necessity for profit and therefore under intense competition it is possible, if necessary, to work harder and consume less in order to preserve the enterprise.

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, during the eighties these approaches were increasingly criticized, since they cannot explain heterogeneity: the essentially different situations encountered all over the world. MacEwen Scott (1986a) summarizes the critiques as follows. She says that these approaches, by stressing the importance of theoretical rigour and terminological precision have produced an extremely arid debate and an impenetrable discourse. The reduction of historically specific situations to the basic algebra of value theory tended to produce oversimplified, essentialist models that belied the rich variety of concrete forms/modes of production present in Third World countries. There was an undeniable overemphasis on the economic (and a neglect of social, political and ideological) determinants of structure. Instead of focussing on the uncovering of the mechanisms of articulation between dominant and subordinated modes/forms of production, the debate focussed on the necessity of these articulations: the survival of the petty commodity production is in the interest of capitalism because of the 'self exploitation' which is proper to this form of production. The economism and formalism of the debates about forms and modes of production prevented the possibility of incorporating agency into the analysis of historical change in anything other than a crude mechanistic fashion: classes often were treated as personifications of economic categories and reduced to simple homogeneous groups such as 'peasants', 'marginal masses', 'informal workers' etcetera. Internal differentiation in these groups was studied in an extremely static way. Moreover, since the economic position of petty commodity producers was analyzed primarily in terms of relations of exploitation based on the production and expropriation of surplus labour, forms of subordination arising from kinship, gender, ethnicity, age, etc. remained at the margins of analysis.

As also argued in the introduction, in order to overcome these problems, we need to start uncovering the mechanisms of articulation between the local peasant population and the wider economic and institutional environment in concrete historical settings, and from an engendered actor oriented perspective. In other words, we need to analyze what modernization of

agriculture means in a concrete situation for the interrelated development of agricultural enterprises on the one hand, and for the men and women that comprise these enterprises on the other. We need to analyze how men and women, through the ways in which they cope with the changing environment, influence the process of change. By starting with the different interpretations of change and state involvement, and by the strategies of men and women to cope with changes, it is possible to overcome the economistic and categorical focus of more structural approaches. And by taking different actors, both men and women, of different ages, it becomes possible to incorporate gender, age, and ideology in the analysis.

Old and New Focusses in a Gender-Actor Perspective

However, notwithstanding these criticisms, which point us to the necessity of tackling the processes of rural development and modernization of agriculture from an engendered actor, rather than structural perspectives, it would be foolish not to use the insights which have sprung from research and discussions of the Agrarian Question. Let me return to the Mexican debate, in order to extract some of the salient insights with regard to the modernization of Mexican agriculture, and put these into a more actor oriented perspective.

First, in the analysis of Hewitt de Alcántara, it becomes clear that the ejidal sector, when compared to the private sector, has not been able to obtain equal access to state resources because it is not the most politically powerful sector in the country. Although they are numerous, they are highly fragmented and poorly organized in contrast to the private sector. Thus, access to state resources is an important factor in understanding the differences between the private and the ejidal sector. As we have seen in the previous chapters, an actor oriented approach illuminates the fact that although ejidatarios are not able to influence state policy in their favour, this does not mean that they do not try to get access to state resources. As we have seen, they try to work the system instead of opposing it. The same counts for the vital resources to which Cynthia Hewitt points: irrigation, credit, high quality inputs. Starting from the ways in which ejidatarios, in a certain time and place specific context, tackle the problems they face in getting access of vital resources, makes it possible to appreciate the importance of local political history, earlier experiences, ideology and the knowledgeability and capability of the actors involved. Hence, it is important to look in detail at the relations that ejidatarios maintain with the state and other agencies concerned with the distribution of resources, in order to understand why some ejidatarios get better access to resources then others, and why some of them are able to compete effectively with the private sector.

But Hewitt's analysis and the more abstract debate on the agrarian question, both suggest that the ejidal sector is the historical loser. Either it is doomed to disappear, or it will continue to exist at a very low standard of living. This focusses our attention on the importance of an historical approach. It is not sufficient to look at the relationship between ejidatarios and outside institutions at only one moment in time, it is important to analyse the changes in these

relations historically. An historical approach enables one to see how contemporary, emergent patterns of behaviour are affected by former experiences, and by expectations of the future. As Worsley has said "the simplest piece of behaviour thus involves past, present, and future" (1970:45).

Third, the debate on the agrarian question also draws attention to the internal organization of the ejido household. It is based on an analysis of this level of social organization that contributors to this debate come either to the conclusion that the peasantry will continue to exist, or is doomed to disappear. The problem with the way in which the internal organization of the household has been tackled in this debate, is that it is treated in terms of the labour available, and (self) exploitation. It does not distinguish between male and female labour, nor question the specific problems which different types of households encounter (for instance female headed households compared with male headed households); nor does it problematize power relations within the household, or take account of ideology in relation to the social organization of the labour process and control over produce.

Summarizing, the more structural approaches to agricultural modernization and rural development have drawn our attention to the relation between ejidatarios and the wider environment and, though with some major omissions, they discuss the internal dynamic of ejido households and emphasize the importance of analyzing both of these issues in an historical perspective. This is the inheritance which I will take along with me, as I begin to look at agricultural modernization and rural development from an engendered actor oriented approach.

The engendered actor oriented approach adds some further points for our attention. A starting point is the existence of heterogeneity. This I will approach by discussing the differences that exist between men, between women, and between men and women, in relation to an examination of ejidatarios and the wider environment and when looking at the internal dynamic of households. And further, such an approach draws attention to the importance of starting the analysis with the interpretations and actions of the social actors themselves. Ideology, power and social networks are an intrinsic part of actions and interpretations, thus they also are an intrinsic part of the analysis.

In the following three chapters my intention is to examine, in one specific situation, and while recognizing the structural problems the ejidal sector faces, what the process of agricultural modernization implies for the lives of women and men, and how they are able to influence the outcome of this process as they cope with it in everyday life.

The first of these three chapters, chapter six, is an historical chapter showing that the process of incorporation into the wider environment is not unilinear and is subject to negotiation. It further shows that modernization of agriculture has very different implications for women than for men. These two themes are further elaborated in chapters seven and eight. Chapter seven focusses on a case study of a livestock credit group that examines the negotiations that take place between ejidatarios and the bank. The case shows how the ejidatarios concerned were

obliged to change the credit programme rules, since the programme did not take account of the differences between their agricultural enterprises. Chapter eight, by focusing on the experiences of female farmers and the problems they encounter in making their farms productive, elaborates on the argument that agriculture has become increasingly a man's domain.

Notes

1. This policy not only had high social costs, but in the end it also had enormous economic costs. It was shown in the thirties that the ejidal sector had the capacity to take care of a large proportion of national production, and developments in recent years confirm this. However, Mexico is no longer an agricultural miracle. From the sixties onwards the growth of agricultural production declined profoundly. From 1966 to 1976 it reached only 0.8% annually, and while between 1977 and 1981 agricultural production regained its former dynamism with a 5.9% annual growth, it declined again in the years following to 0.7% annually (Calva, 1988:11-12). The crisis manifests itself most clearly in the need to import foodstuffs. While Mexico was self sufficient for many years, nowadays it depends heavily on the importation of staple foods. The temporary recuperation of the production growth between 1977-81, was due to a programme called SAM (*Sistema Alimentario Mexicano*) and other financial and technical instruments which were used to stimulate production in the ejidal sector. Although the productive effects were very positive, the investments were high and there was a continuing need to import because of the ever faster growing demand, and so the government abandoned the policy. The result was a renewed decline in production. President Salinas is hoping to resolve the food crisis through a new liberalization policy, with privatization of the economy and services as lynch pin. There is even talk of privatizing ejido lands.

2. In 1950, the poorest 30% of the population had only 9,9% of the national income; in 1969 this had decreased to 7%. In the same year, in 1950, the richest 10% of the population shared 49% of national income, and this rose to 51% in 1969. (Ayala, *Mexico, Revolutie op Instorten*, Mexico Komitee Nederland, 1986:17).

3. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Collective Agriculture and Capitalism in Mexico, in: Nora Hamilton and Timothy F. Harding (eds.), *Modern Mexico*, 1986:263.

4. Authors, who have contributed to this debate are: Roger Bartra (ed.), *Estructura Agraria y Clases Sociales en México:* Era, 1976; Armando Bartra, "Las Classes Sociales en el Campo Méxicano", in: *Cuadernos Agrarios* 1, 1976; Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Aspectos Sociales de la Estructura Agraria en México", in: *Neolatifundismo y Explotación*: Nuestro Tiempo (ed.), México, 1976; K. Appendini et al. *El Campesinado en México, dos Perspectivas de Análisis*: El Colegio de México, 1985.

VI. INCORPORATION OF FARM ENTERPRISES: MEN BECOMING FARMERS, WOMEN BECOMING HOUSEWIVES

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of agrarian change and the process of agricultural modernization in the El Limón-Tauquíl valley, and explores how these have been experienced, remembered and interpreted by local men and women. Several events, and a certain chronology mark the stories told: The days of the hacienda and the land reform in the thirties; the period of rainfed agriculture from the thirties to the sixties; and the period of irrigated agriculture, which in its turn can be divided into the years of the production of vegetables for the United States market (1967-77), and of sugarcane production from around 1975 onwards. Women mention these changes less than they mention the differences between the days in the old village and the new. The old village was abandoned in 1975, and almost everyone moved to a new village, constructed at a distance of about three kilometres from the old one. Men hardly ever mentioned this removal. It obviously did not mean as great a change in their lives as it had meant for the women, whose centre of gravity obviously moved with it.

I will analyze what these changes have meant for both men and women and show how they have coped with them in everyday life. I will also examine how, through their actions, they themselves influence the outcomes of the process of incorporation. I want to show that if the farm enterprise and its abstract relations with the outside world is not taken as the unit to analyze, but one focusses instead on the social actors as the main unit for analysis - especially on the husband, wife and children who comprise the farm enterprise, and on their interpretations and practices - then other aspects of reality become visible.[1)]

There are marked differences in how men and women experience change. Men, when asked questions, begin from a definition of themselves as ejidatarios or *campesinos*, and tell their story in relation to the modernization of agriculture. They do not feel that changes in agriculture have reduced their grip on the production process. Probably this should be seen in the light of the fact that ejido land officially is not alienable. Although they become indebted to the bank or others, they can be sure that the land will stay theirs. In this ejido, which also has access to irrigation and credit facilities, this means that although there have been periods of severe poverty and indebtedness, this has not led to an irreversible process of proletarianization. In the men's interpretation of these changes, there have been periods of

more and lesser dependence, periods in which they were better able to create room to manoeuvre, and periods in which this was difficult. In other words, it becomes clear from their accounts that agrarian change and the modernization of agriculture do not per se imply a unilinear process of growing dependence.

The women in this chapter are 'wives of farmers'.[2] Room to manoeuvre for women means something quite different from what it means for men. While for men it has to do with their decision making over the production process and the land, for women it has to do with their relations with their husband, with having their own sources of income, with birth control[3], with physical violence, with the chance to see other women, with their opportunities for getting to know what is going on in the village and wider society, or as one woman expressed it "*para salir del pozo*" (to get out of the well). It is interesting that while women closely relate their histories to their life cycle, relationship with their husbands, and to the rearing of children, men never mention their wives when they talk about their history.[4] However, women not only relate their history in terms of their own personal life stories, but they tell it also in relation to the changes that take place or have taken place in the wider environment.[5] It becomes clear from their accounts that the changes in the valley have had different effects for them. For example, women remember positively the fifties and sixties - the years just before the irrigation system was installed. The produce from their backyards or kitchen gardens (their *solares*), the influence they had on the distribution of maize and beans, and the prospects that existed to gain extra income as day labourers, gave women the means to cope with their everyday life problems. Men, on the contrary, say that life started to improve only when the irrigation system came, from the sixties onwards - the years of rapid modernization of agriculture. It seems that while men during those years gained more room to manoeuvre, women lost their sources of income and became more and more defined as housewives. While men on the whole judge the recent developments positively, women always stress the other side of the coin. Certainly the general level of welfare has increased, but at the same time they feel more isolated, and more dependent on their husbands. They state that in former days women shared their daily problems, while nowadays everyone has to resolve them on their own.

The chapter is organized as follows. After a short visit to the old village in order to give an impression of the enormous changes that have taken place, I present a chronological account of the different periods and events as seen through the eyes of both men and women: the last years of the hacienda epoch; the period of rainfed agriculture; the introduction of irrigated agriculture; and the removal of the village. Three arguments are made in this chapter. First, that over the years men have become defined as farmers, while women have become defined as housewives. Second, that incorporation of the farm enterprise does not imply that men (in their function as farmers) lose control of their farms and the production process. And third, that although women's work nowadays is more confined within the boundaries of the household, this does not mean that they are only housewives: apart from work in the house, they

continue to perform a whole range of activities in order to guarantee their own sources of income.

Since a general picture does not do justice to the specific ways in which the developments became part of the lives of the different men and women, I also give the history of one man, Javier, and the development of his farm, and the history of a woman, Rosa, and the way she has been able to defend and create room to manoeuvre. These histories make us not only appreciate the different ways in which both men and women experience history, but also lead to new insights of how men and women are able to influence the course that events take in their own lives.

The Old Village

Walking through the old deserted village, located on the banks of a small river, some of the atmosphere of former days can still be felt. The big house where the man once lived who was in charge of the daily management of the hacienda, is the only building which is still in good state. It was the only house built of bricks. The other houses, small or large, were made of *adobe*, sun dried earthen blocks. These houses soon fell into decay after they were abandoned in 1975, when almost all the inhabitants moved to the new village, three kilometres uphill. Only Doña Martina decided to stay. The old widow has decided she wishes to die in the house where she gave birth to her children. And even after fourteen years of loneliness in the old village, nobody can convince her to move. It does not matter to her that her house has no electricity, or that it is not connected to the piped water system. She has a well in her garden and she washes her clothes at the river nearby. She has no need to live near the road where the buses pass. On the few occasions that she wants to go to the nearby town, she walks. She has a large garden with many fruit trees where she grows vegetables and herbs and keeps her many chickens and two pigs. On her land she grows maize and beans, on share-cropping basis with a local man. This provides her with enough to eat. Sometimes one or other of her two children, who live in Mexico City, come to visit her. They buy her clothes and help to maintain the house, and they buy the batteries for her radio since she loves to listen to the serialized novels and always listens to the mass which is broadcast daily. She admits to being lonely, and she enjoys remembering the days when the houses were still lived in. She points out where the women used to gather to wash the clothes and she loves to tell about the games the children played on the river banks, about the jukebox purchased by one of the bar-keepers, and how all the villagers, rich or poor, used to dance in the evenings near the bar, at the junction of the two roads. She also reminisces about the problems which arose regularly between the villagers. She points out where the shooting affair took place, when three men were killed because of a row over a woman. She tells of the difficulties with child bearing, of children dying young, and women aging prematurely because of the many pregnancies. She tells about the endless

working days when all available hands were needed on the land, and of how she would wake up at two o'clock in the morning to prepare tortillas, beans and coffee, not only for breakfast, but for the whole day, since she also worked on the land. She tells with pride that she knows how to plough with oxen, knows what to do to combat different diseases in the maize and beans, and how she used to select the seeds for the following year. She tells about the difficult years, when the rains failed to come and the harvest was poor, and of the times when the men left to look for work in other areas during the dry season. She tells of how the women and the children in one way or another survived until the money earned by the men arrived. And sometimes, she recalled, they never sent anything.

Nowadays she is lonely, but it never crosses her mind to move to the new village. "What would I do with my chickens and my pigs?" The *solares*, the plots of land on which the houses in the new village stand, are very small. She says that old friends come to visit her every now and then and she tells them that she gets lonely. But these women in the new village are also lonely. They complain about the fact that although the houses are built closely packed together, they hardly see each other anymore.

The Hacienda Period

When Doña Martina talks about the past, she talks about the period from the fifties until the beginning of the seventies when everything started to change rapidly. Migration to the United States had become more or less common place and people returned with money, other ideas and luxury goods. New crops were grown, melons and sugarcane, and the refinery was built, and to top it all, the village was reallocated. She begins her story from the fifties onwards, because that is when she and her family first settled in the village. They were attracted by the demand for labour in the cotton fields of the private landowners, the *pequeños propietarios*, a crop which had its heyday in those years. Just like several other families they first settled in the old village of El Rancho, and they stayed on there after the decline in cotton production since they could rent land and later they were even able to obtain an ejidal right.

As a matter of fact, very few of the inhabitants of the village can tell about the period before the Agrarian Reform in 1935. Not even the old men, the founders of the ejido. Only a few of the original 41 founders had actually worked on the old hacienda. The majority came from other areas and surrounding haciendas. This can be understood in terms of the fact that, from the mid-twenties onwards, when the agrarian movement started to gain some momentum in the valley, the hacendados severely intimidated their workers and *medieros* (share-croppers). If they suspected anyone of sympathizing with the Agrarian Movement, this person and his whole family, without a second thought, were driven from the hacienda. Even when the tide had turned, under the regime of Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), and the hacendados were facing

decline, only very few of the laborers dared to stand up to them. They preferred to go to other areas, where they could start again. This was the case on the old El Rancho hacienda.

The stories, told by the few who have lived those years, tell of severe poverty and great dependence on the hacendado. Men relate this poverty to the practices of the hacendado. He gave them land on which to grow maize *en medias*, a share-crop arrangement. Plots of land of more or less 4 hectares each, and seed and oxen were provided by the landlord to individual sharecroppers. The sharecroppers had to provide the labour and the harvest was equally shared by the sharecropper and the landlord. At least that was the theory. However, in practice, the hacendado was often able to seize more than his half. Since the harvest was hardly enough to survive over the year, and the sharecroppers were not allowed to keep pigs or cows which could be sold in days of hardship, they had to borrow money and kind from the hacendado. At the moment of dividing the harvest, this debt plus interest was taken into account. Don Juan, 73 years old, one of the founders of the *ejido*, recalls:

> "El señor, Don Felipe Santana, gave us land *en medias*. We worked in the *chilares* [chilies were also grown on the hacienda. The *medieros* and their families worked as day-labourers when necessary]. Women worked in the harvesting and selecting of the chilies, and we cultivated maize. But, just imagine, there was never anything left over for us. El señor always kept a record of what we owed him, and at the time of the harvest, we had to give him nearly all of what we had produced. And more than that, he did not want us to have horses or donkeys. Chickens yes, but horses, donkeys or pigs, oh no. So that when something happened, you had nothing to sell, no way that you could help yourself. We were under the control of the hacendado. But, we survived, in one way or another" (Don Juan, 24-04-88).

Women confirm this, and stress the importance of having livestock - chickens and pigs, in order to cope with poverty. It was not only the fact that the hacendado forbada them to have animals any bigger than chickens that made surviving difficult, but also the fact that neither the houses nor the land surrounding them was theirs. What sense did it make to invest in the patio, plant trees, fence in a part to grow vegetables where the chickens could not ruin them, if you did not know whether next year you would still live in that same house? But from their accounts it also becomes clear that they also hold their husbands responsible for the poverty they lived in. As Doña Catalina, the near seventy year old wife of one of the founders of the *ejido* relates:

> "Many of the women helped their husbands in the fields. But I did not. What sense did it make to work hard, if he received all the money and spent it on other women? When he was young he was always after other women. And he left me with the responsibility for the children. Often we had nothing to eat, only tortillas with a little bit of salt and a glass of water. So, with what love would I help him? I washed clothes for other people to earn money. I worked in the *chilares* when it was harvest time. I

had my chickens. No I did not help him on the fields. I brought him his food, that is all I did" (Fieldnotes, 20-06-88).

The Years After the Land Reform: Rainfed Agriculture

The ejido was founded in 1935.[9] This was a very important event in many different respects. As we have seen in previous chapters, it meant that local politics changed completely. It meant a big difference in status for the former *peones*, the landless labourers, for they became ejidatarios, with *voz y voto*, a voice and vote in the management of local affairs. They now had access to credit facilities, and gradually agricultural extension services came into existence. However, two remarks have to be made. First, if we continue to differentiate between husbands and wives, it is clear that it was the men whose status changed. It was only men who formally became ejidatarios, and thus it was men who formally acquired a say in village affairs, and became the subjects for credit and extension facilities. They were the ones who became the 'managers' of the farms. Women continued to work on the land, as they always had done, but nevertheless were given no part in the new responsibilities. "We all worked on the land", says Doña Feliz:

> "He managed the plough, and we, I and the children, went behind him. We sowed. Later we had to weed. But I didn't like weeding. All day bending over. That was heavy. Sowing was alright, harvesting as well, but weeding, no. I also know how to manage a plough. Because in the years he was away I had to do it myself. My father taught me. We were only girls in the house, so we always had to help him" (Fieldnotes, 19-04-88).

Second, while men officially had become independent ejidatarios, in practice, they continued to be dependent on the former hacendados. Since the rural credit bank functioned very poorly the ejidatarios continued to obtain credits from the former hacendado. Moreover, it was the latter who owned oxen and ploughs, and who had the financial capacity to buy the harvest. Although the land was not theirs anymore, they were still able to set the rates of pay. Their continuing dependency should be seen in the light of the fact that the land reform hardly touched the practices for growing maize and beans. But women in the meantime had increased possibilities for creating room to manoeuvre. Perhaps the most important change in everyday life was the social stability which had returned to the countryside. After two decades of unrest and of being on the move in order to make a living, people could now start to settle again. They no longer had to fear being thrown out of their houses, either by the government or by the former hacendados. For women this implied that they could start to make their *solares* productive. Slowly but certainly they started to keep more chickens and added pigs, and they sowed chilies and tomatoes for their own consumption. For them, life became easier to cope with. Elia (53 years old and married to an ejidatario) remembers:

"My mother-in-law first gave me a chicken, and later she gave me eggs to hatch. I was lucky, ten of the twelve chickens survived. Soon I started to sell eggs to a woman who came once a week to the village. She bought all the eggs in the village. She also lent out money in advance to be paid back in eggs. This was very useful, because at least I could buy food in addition to the eggs we ourselves ate. And moreover, when you ran out of money, you always could pay with one or two eggs in the shops" (Fieldnotes, 08-87).

There is a marked difference between the ways in which husbands and wives talk about these years. Men tell of the fact that they continued to depend on the moneylenders, and they stress the maladministration of the bank, and women talk about making their *solares* productive, and the fights they had with their husbands about their use of the produce they generated.

The Vicious Circle of Indebtedness and Poverty

There is no need to romanticize those first years after the land reform. They were hard days. As Doña Trini, the wife of Don Juan, recalls

"we suffered grim problems, endless hunger. There were days that I could give only one tortilla to each child, with a hot pepper and a glass of water. Nothing more. How good is God that nowadays at least we have beans to eat."

Men claim this poverty was due to the continuation of debts to former hacendados. As mentioned above, agricultural practices were hardly touched by the land reform. Husband and wife had earlier grown maize and beans under sharecropping arrangements on the hacendado's land, or worked as day labourers in the hacendado's orchards and vegetable fields. After the land reform they grew maize and beans on their own fields. But, they continued to be dependent on the former hacendados and on a newly developing merchant class. The land was poor, and harvests were often not enough to meet consumption needs. They lacked animal traction, and had no cows or pigs on which to survive the difficult months before the harvest. They often had to turn to their former masters for the oxen to till their land, and for credit for production and consumption needs, or they sold part of their harvest when the crop was still on the field, at a time of the year when necessity was high, and the prices paid for the crop low. Although the men had become the owners of the land, through these mechanisms, a large part of their agricultural production continued to go to the former hacendados, and just as in former days, men, women and children continued to work on the private estates where the landowners grew cash crops.

So, poverty and indebtedness to former hacendados continued, and the new merchant class flourished, despite the fact that the regime of Lazaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) not only provided the poor with land, but also created an agricultural bank, which was intended to provide small farmers with the necessary capital to cultivate. However, the bank did not function well and

credit often arrived too late or did not reach the peasants at all. "I once applied for credit to the bank", explained one of the elder ejidatarios,

> "But they cheated me. I have never sown with the bank since. The people from the bank only give you the money after they themselves have taken a cut, after they have received a nice sum of interest. You never get your money on time" (04-01-88).

So the money often came too late, and sometimes it did not arrive at all. Felipe, who we came to know in chapter three, where he opposed the practices of Don Alfonso, relates:

> "In those days we were still very ignorant. There were ejidatarios who went to the bank employee with the money in their pockets and said here is the money I owe you, and they did not ask for a receipt. They went home with the idea that they had paid. But those at the bank stole the money, and when the ejidatario wanted to apply for credit again the following year, they told him them no, you can't have credit, you still have a debt here. And the moneylenders asked such high interest, more than twice as much as the bank. Very expensive. But at least you knew that the day you paid your debt, they returned you your IOU, and that was the end of it. Not so with the bank. They were very clever. You had engineers as well who arrived on foot and within six months they had a bicycle, and after two or three years they drove a nice car."

These were reasons enough not to trust the bank. Moreover, the credit was only meant to serve production ends, while peasants in the months just before the harvest often needed consumption credit. This was provided by the ex-hacendados, the now so-called *pequeños propietarios*. Notwithstanding the high interest asked by the latter, it was the bank employees who were labelled a bunch of thieves. The same man stated that the money lenders at least helped the peasants: "If you asked for help, you always immediately got it". The nickname for the bank, which was officially named Banco Ejidal, was Bandidal meaning a bunch of bandits.

Out of necessity many men went to the coconut plantations in the coastal area of Jalisco and the sugarcane areas near Veracruz in search of work during the dry season. From the 1940's and 1950's onwards they increasingly went to the United States, leaving the care of their land and animals in the care of their fathers, brothers, wives and children, or in the hands of the former hacendados.

Gender practices and poverty

While men say that poverty continued to exist because of their indebtedness to the merchant class, women tended in addition to also blame the men themselves. Doña Catalina, the woman previously mentioned, who saw no use in helping her husband in the field in the days before the foundation of the ejido, gave the following account on being asked whether life became easier when the ejidatarios had their own land.

> "When we had our own land, the situation improved a bit. He sold the maize *al tiempo* [when it was still on the field]. So at least we could eat. But that also meant

that a great part of the harvest went to *el rico* [a synonym for the hacendado]. Hardly anything was left for the house. Moreover, when he sold maize, he spent most of the money on booze and other women. He was a bad manager. He kept us in vile hunger, while he spent his money on drink" (20-06-88).

The experience of Doña Catalina, that her husband spent the money obtained from the selling of maize on 'wine, women and song' was that of many other women in the village. For instance, Doña Trini, Don Juan's wife, once offered to help her husband by financing them until the harvest was in by selling her pigs, so that he had no necessity to sell the maize *al tiempo*. "I cultivated maize in *el solar*", she said:

"I sowed it, weeded it and I built mounds. I grew maize to feed the animals, because in those days the chickens and pigs were fed on maize. It was not like now when the animals are fed with concentrates. He never helped me. I did it together with the children. I always liked to have chickens and pigs, because they give one the means to eat. One year I had some pigs, so I said to Juan, look Juan, don't sell the maize before the harvest. This always turned out badly and nothing was left for us. Those who had money or could sell a cow were able to pay off the money lender. But those who had nothing had to sell their maize at whatever price was offered. And why? Because the boss insisted that he was paid. It was "pay me, or give me your maize". So I told Juan I'd sell a few pigs, so that we could eat and he could cultivate the maize without debts. So, I sold three fat pigs which I had, and Juan invested this money in the maize. After the harvest, Juan sold the maize, and then what? He just went off to enjoy himself. He found a woman and took her with him. He drank and danced until his money was finished. What a life we led! We didn't buy anything, not from the money from the pigs nor the money from the maize."

Room for Manoeuvre

The first two decades after the land reform, the thirties and the forties, were hard days. From life histories and the histories of farms, I get the impression that the 1950's and 1960's were less harsh. In the 1950's several families from other areas settled in the village. They were attracted by the demand for labour in cotton production initiated by the private land owners, partly on their own land, and partly on land rented from ejidatarios. After the cotton period, rice was grown as a cash crop, and tobacco on a small scale. So from the 1950's onwards some other sources of income were available. Women and children also worked as day labourers in this cash crop production. By then women had intensified the production of their *solares*. And from the 1950's onwards migration to the United States gained momentum. Women often invested the money sent back in the farm, by buying a cow, or some pigs, thus enlarging the capital assets of the farm.

It is this period that Doña Martina remembers with some sentiment. It is in this period that women created their own room for manoeuvre. They had their own income from the chickens and pigs, they and their children were able to earn additional income by working as day labourers in the production of cash crops, and they had control over the maize and beans which were stored at home. While crops were still in the field, women could exert little control over the produce, but once stored at home it was the woman who administered it. From this they had to feed the family all year round. It gave them the opportunity to sell small amounts when they were in serious need of money, and they used it to feed their chickens and pigs on the maize. Doña Lupe, the woman we came to know in chapter four, says of her husband and those times,

> "José was a good man. He took good care of us. Although we were not rich, we hardly ever went in want of food. He never wanted to sell the maize, he wanted to be sure that there would be enough for us. However, sometimes a neighbour would come and ask me to sell her some maize, or I had to buy things for the children. So without his permission every now and then I sold some. I remember that one day I had sold some to a neighbour. José was not at home, and I told the children that they should not say anything to their father. When he came home, one of the children said: "Papa, mama did not sell any maize." and so he knew. But he did not beat me. He was a good man. He always kept a close eye on me, but he never beat me" (Fieldnotes, 09-87).

Sometimes quarrels between husband and wife arose about the use of the *solar*. For instance, one of the ejidatarios cultivated some tobacco. The tobacco leaves had to be dried and he spread them in the backyard to let the sun do its work. However, the chickens were grubbing freely around. "When he dried the tobacco here in the *solar*", she said, "I had to keep the chickens out of his way. Once he killed a hen with all her chicks! They were grubbing around in his tobacco. He took a stick and he killed them all. And do you think that I could say anything about it? No, nothing. Otherwise he would have beaten me as well" (Fieldnotes, 09-88).

Women in these ways secured the continuity of the household. They had to work hard, the household and the raising of children were nearly exclusively their responsibility. But with the help of their children, neighbours, mothers, *comadres*, and with their own sources of income, they had the means to cope. They were no longer so dependent on the unreliable financial support of their husbands.

Men on the other hand, state that life did not improve until the introduction of the irrigation system, which brought the arrival of the fruit and vegetable companies halfway through the 1960's, and a few years later the sugar refinery and the farmers unions in the 1970's. This made it possible for them to finally get rid of their dependency on moneylenders. According to them, this enabled them to finally break through the vicious cycle of debt and poverty.

Modernization of Agriculture: Men as Farmers, Women as Housewives

The introduction of irrigation at the beginning of the sixties gave momentum to the modernization of agriculture. This not only meant a change in agricultural practices per se, but also in the social relations of production. Relations between the farm household and the surrounding environment, as well as the social relations within the farm household itself, all changed profoundly. The farm production and reproduction process both became highly integrated into the market and institutional environment.

The changes in the wider environment institutionalized the main stream ideology that men were heads of households, and that women were dependent on them. Men were approached by intervening parties in their function of ejidatarios, they became experienced in finding their way through the institutional and economic environment. And in this way they became 'farmers'.[7] Women hardly had any prospects of learning this by experience: they were considered to be housewives. This, in combination with their loss of control the production because of the change from produce for home consumption to produce for the market, and the relocation and manner of laying out the new village, considerably influenced their position within the farm enterprise. Women became marginal to the agricultural production process. While men became farmers, women became housewives. Nevertheless, as we will see, as housewives, they continued to need their own sources of income given the unreliability of the economic support they received from their husbands. But let me first focus on the men's story.

Men Becoming Farmers

Becoming a 'farmer' not only implied starting to grow cash crops, it meant to a large extent, learning how to find one's way in the institutions and markets involved in the process of agricultural modernization. It was precisely through this interaction with the representatives of the institutions and markets, that men acquired the knowledge and skills that defined them as farmers. And it is precisely in this arena of interaction that farmers had to create for themselves the space for manoeuvre, to negotiate the particular degree and terms of incorporation. This is why, in the following account of the agricultural modernization that took place, I pay a great deal of attention to the interactions between ejidatarios and the representatives of the wider environment.

The Introduction of Irrigation

In the year 1960, the government finished the construction of the irrigation system. Since then, theoretically, it has been possible to grow two crops a year: a rainfed crop and, in the dry season, an irrigated crop. But it took until the end of the sixties for ejidatarios to start using

irrigation. One of the reasons for this, was the fact that they lacked the means to start using the system. The main problem concerned the levelling of land. In the 1960's, the Tauquíl-El Limón valley did not look as flat as it does today. All along the valley were small hills, almost every parcel had its bumpy ups and downs. So one essential task before irrigating could start was to level the land. The local department of the Ministry of Agriculture (SRH and later SARH), had the machinery for levelling, but as Felipe, explained,

> "those machines always went to Engineer Cobian and Engineer Zepeda and the rich people in the valley. And for the ejidatarios? There were never any machines available. Some ejidatarios tried to level their own land with a heavy trunk behind their oxen. The SRH even sent machines to other districts, but never to their own ejidatarios. To hire a machine to level your *yunta* [4 has], cost two or three cows. That was too much for the ejidatarios. So they couldn't level their land. What's more, neither did the ejidatarios yet know what it was all about. They didn't know what irrigation was" (13-01-88).

The SRH had employees who were supposed to teach the ejidatarios how to make use of the irrigation system, but as Felipe said:

> "they hardly ever got out into the countryside and when they came, we couldn't make sense of what they told us. Although they were engineers, they talked what seemed nonsense. In those days we still respected engineers too much. They ordered us to do things in a certain way, and if we didn't, they stormed at us. So we always tried to keep out of their way. We didn't get on well."

A few ejidatarios tried to find another way of starting irrigated agriculture. One ejidatario went to work in irrigated agriculture in the United States in 1963 and brought some know-how back with him. That ejidatario started to rent plots in the dry season which were more or less flat and with his oxen and plough he tried to level the land where necessary. He became one of the first ejidatarios to use irrigation. Other ejidatarios followed his example. Another already rented land lying alongside the land of a pequeño propietario who was irrigating from the river by means of a pump. The man bought water from the pequeño propriatario, and started to irrigate ignoring the fact that the land probably should be levelled.

Those were the first attempts to irrigate, but the majority of the ejidatarios were not making use of the potential of the irrigation system in those first years. It was not only a lack of means to level the land, or a lack of knowledge, nor even distrust of the SRH that accounted for the ejidatarios initial lack of interest in the irrigation system, it was also because irrigated agriculture meant a complete change of their farming system. At the beginning of the 1960's, several of the ejidatarios had been able to accumulate some capital in the form of livestock. In the rainy season, when the maize and beans were grown, the livestock wandered around in the surrounding hills grazing on the natural pastureland. However, in the dry season, the season in which an irrigated crop could be grown, the cows were brought to the valley again, to the ejido land where the stems and leaves of the maize served as fodder, and the cow dung served

as fertilizer for the land. This was a way of improving the fertility of the soils. Moreover, the ejidatarios were convinced that the land had to stay fallow for several months per year, in order to obtain good harvests in the rainy season. They expressed it by saying "the soils have to become cold in the dry period. With irrigation the soils warm up. That is no good."
So, if they had started irrigating in those months, where would the cows graze? And how would the fertility of the soil be reproduced?

The cattle were a thorn in the flesh of the SRH. They not only made ejidatarios reluctant to use the irrigation system, they also frustrated those farmers who did want to irrigate. The cattle wandered around freely since the pastures were not enclosed. They caused a lot of damage to the earthen tertiary canals, and they also caused a lot of damage to the crops in the fields. At the end of the 1960's and beginning of the 1970's, the SRH forced the ejidatarios to sell their livestock.

It is probably no coincidence that this happened precisely at a time when both the state and entrepreneurs from the United States had begun to show an interest in the potential of the valley. The former decided to build a sugarcane refinery (the first cane sowed was in 1969), and the latter wanted to grow fruit and vegetables for the North American market (in 1967, the first ejidatarios to rent out land, did so to Griffin and Brand).

Cultivating Vegetables and Fruits for the U.S. Market

The combination of the climate and irrigation made the area very suitable for the production of fruits and vegetables for the United States' winter market.

The American fruit company, Griffin and Brand, constructed a melon-packing plant. The company wanted to rent land from the ejidatarios for a period of several years, promising that they would return the land levelled. This was very attractive since it had become clear that livestock would have no future. The ejidatarios had indeed started to become interested in irrigated agriculture, and the lack of levelling was one of the main obstacles to using the opportunities offered by the irrigation system. However, since officially it is forbidden to rent out ejido land, it was not until 1971 that a way was found round this and a member of the ejido board functioned as a contractor for the fruit company. Approximately half of all the ejido land was rented by this company. The company carried out the necessary levelling of the land, and as many ejidatarios stressed, they learned to irrigate while working as day labourers on their own land. After having learned the skill of irrigation and of vegetable production, some ejidatarios did not prolong their contracts with the American entrepreneurs, but started to grow melons in share-cropping agreements, or on their own account.

Crop Diseases and Marketing Problems

In the long run the growing of fruits and later vegetables for the American market turned out to be a risky enterprise for those ejidatarios who started out for themselves. This was primarily due to the fluctuation of prices and the lack of control over the middlemen who took care of selling the fruits in the United States. The latter were able to set the prices for the ejidatarios. Several histories of corruption and bankruptcy are known to have been experienced by the farmers.[8] Ruben, a very entrepreneurial and rich ejidatario in his late forties who, apart from his land, also has a lorry and a shop remembered this time,

> "One year I grew a lot of melons. I worked very hard, and the fields looked beautiful. But they robbed me. I worked a share-crop deal with a packing company. They were to market the melons but they presented me with very unfair bills, that a train which transported the melons had been derailed, that the truck had broken down, and that the prices in the United States were very low and other such tales. They cheated us in many ways. The market was completely out of our control. For one or two ejidatarios things turned out well, but the majority earned nothing. We remained poor, as always" (Ruben, 06-01-88).

In addition, the problem of crop diseases became serious, first among the melons and later also in the tomato crops. This was due to the very intensive use of the soils and the cultivation of mono-crops, with no system of crop rotation. The plagues made the harvests unreliable and the production costs very high, since special hygiene measures had to be taken and enormous quantities of herbicides and insecticides were necessary.[9] Some ejidatarios became rich from vegetable and fruit production, but others were absolutely ruined, and sometimes the ones who had become wealthy, could became deeply indebted again after a bad year. A short account of what happened to one farmer shows the dynamic of which the farmers became a part, and gives us a clue as to why the disasters which frequently happened, did not lead to a proletarianization of the farmers, but on the contrary helped to educate farmers in the new agriculture, and taught them how to find their way through the institutional environment.

The History of Javier Padilla

Javier is 47 years old, married, the father of two daughters and a son. His parents came to El Rancho in the fifties, attracted by the cotton boom. His father, after several years, managed to buy two ejidal rights: one for himself, and one for his eldest son, Javier. Just like other ejidatarios before the introduction of the irrigation system, Javier grew maize and beans, and tried to accumulate money in the form of livestock. Together with the pigs of his wife, they were able to manage well.

When irrigation became possible, he had no experience at all of this kind of agriculture, but he was eager to learn. He was one of the first farmers to start experimenting. However, the

fact that his land was not level made his experiments difficult. When, halfway through the sixties, the melon companies wanted to rent ejido land, Javier was one of the few farmers who liked the idea: he hoped that his land would be levelled. He rented part of his land to the company for the first time in 1967. He himself worked as a *mozo* (a day labourer) on his own land. He remembers this period as learning how to irrigate and how to grow melons. He typifies his way of learning as simply looking around him. He never asked anything. Everyday he was out in the field. He saw how they irrigated and he learned what growing melons implied. After two years he had enough confidence in his own knowledge to stop renting his land, and to enter into the melon business on a share-cropping basis: the melon company provided the inputs and took care of the packing and marketing of the melons, and Javier had to organize the production in his fields. He did well, and in the following years he slowly but surely extended the area under his control. He not only sowed his own land, but he started to rent land from other ejidatarios of El Rancho and from other areas of the valley. As a matter of fact, he was the driving force behind the wider acceptance of melon growing in the ejido.

From 1971 onwards, he functioned as intermediary between the ejido and the melon company. At his height he controlled about 50 hectares of melon cultivation. He was one of the bigger *meloneros*, melon growers of the valley. As long as he sowed on a sharecrop basis, the melons were marketed through company channels, but once he was able to get credit (from both the bank and from individuals) to start on his own account, he also took charge of his own marketing. If he was able to get a favourable export contract, he exported; if not he sold to the national market. He himself maintained contacts with markets in the biggest cities of Mexico. According to him, he spent most of his time in those days on the telephone. He hardly had time to go to his fields. He was rich. He had two tractors, a vast herd of cows, and every year he bought a new pick up truck.

In 1982, he had 60 hectares under cultivation. Over the years it had become more difficult to grow melons because of escalating costs in combatting the increasing frequency of crop disease and the consequent loss of harvests. However, Javier was still going well, especially because he controlled his own marketing. He was not a victim of the middlemen, as many other ejidatarios over the years had become. But that year, 1982, was an absolute disaster. He lost 90% of the harvest. He was left with enormous debts. He sold over a hundred cows, a tractor and his new truck. But even this was not enough to cancel all his debts. His life was threatened by those who had lent him money. He was obliged to flee and for the first time in his life he went to the United States as an illegal immigrant labourer. After more than a year he returned. He was able to pay back his debts, and he settled again in El Rancho.

Since nobody could touch his ejido land, he was able to start farming again. But he had been so badly scared by the threat of death, that once back, he took no further risks. He started to grow sugarcane, which by then had become a stable and reasonable source of income. He now has a few cows, and recently, together with a brother, sowed one hectare of green tomatoes

tomate de cascara, which is not so sensitive to disease, and which brings a reasonable price in local and regional markets. He has become an average ejidatario.

In 1987, he was asked if would become a *prestanombre* and *mayordomo*[10] for an American company that wanted to buy land and grow 400 hectares of melon in another state of Mexico. Javier was not required to invest anything, and he would get 10% of the harvest. In one stroke he would be able to recover the wealth he had lost a few years before. He decided to have a look, but in the end he rejected the offer. As he explained, "here in the valley, I know all the people working for me, and I know all the money lenders. In the other state I knew nobody, and if anything should go wrong I would get the blame. Before you know it they could kill you" (Fieldnotes, 17-12-1988).

The great majority of ejidatarios, however, never started on their own account as Javier had done. They just rented out parts of their land, and apart from growing the traditional crops of maize and beans, they worked as day labourers for the companies.

In the second half of the 1970's, the production of melon was drastically reduced. The new export crops introduced in other parts of the valley, such as tomatoes, were not widely accepted in the ejido. By then the ejidatarios had started to dedicate their time and land to sugarcane.

The Introduction of Sugarcane: Old Dependencies

The construction of the Melchior Ocampo sugarmill was finished in 1970.[11] The ejidatarios of El Rancho were not in favor of the mill. The disadvantage of growing sugarcane was that it could be harvested only once a year, while the combination of maize, beans and melons resulted in two harvests each year. But perhaps more important for their negative attitude towards the refinery was that its coming provoked strong protest from the *pequeños propietarios* of El Limón, who in those days still functioned as moneylenders to the ejidatarios. They had themselves grown sugarcane in the fifties but prices had been low so its production had not been very lucrative. By the second half of the sixties they had become involved in the production of melons, but they also still obtained a large part of their income from trade in maize and beans produced by the ejidatarios. As the elderly Don Enrique explained:

> "The rich of El Limón rejected plans to make a cane producing area of this zone. They were afraid that we would stop producing maize and their business interests with us would come to an end. And in the beginning we also rejected the refinery, because we were influenced here by what the rich were saying" (Enrique, 06-01-88).

The fact that the *pequeños propietarios* rejected so strongly the idea of a sugarmill in the area, should be seen in the light of their fear that the mill would bring important changes in their relations with the ejidatarios. And in the years to come this turned out to be the case, not only because of the new productive opportunities the mill offered, but also because of the powerful farmers organization which came into existence during the seventies. When several years later,

in 1978-79 the production of sugarcane showed momentum in the ejido, slowly but surely the old dependencies between the ejidatarios and the *pequeños propietarios* started to crumble. They could not prevent the ejidatarios from growing sugarcane.

A Problematic Start

Especially for those ejidatarios whose land was not suitable for the production of melons, producing sugarcane was attractive. Just like the vegetable entrepreneurs, the refinery provided the farmers with the means to level their land, but they did not ask to rent it. The produce was to be the guarantee. In addition, the refinery provided credit and health insurance for the sugar cane producers. As Filipe explained,

> "We began to see the good side of sugarcane. At the time there were many incurable illnesses. Do you know Emilio Santana? He had severe epilepsy. Well they started to help him with money and we all started to see that the mill was willing to give us free medical care through its social security. This is what pushed us into growing cane: the benefits of security" (13-01-88).

The initial enthusiasm of the ejidatarios for the production of sugarcane was soon tempered by poor prices, and the producers were cheated in many ways. In those first years the refinery controlled the whole production process. They decided on what kind of preparation the land needed, which variety of cane should be grown, how it should be fertilized, when to irrigate it, and they also organized the harvest and controlled the processing of the cane. The ejidatarios had little overview of what sugarcane production amounted to, and since most of the ejidatarios could neither read nor write, it was easy for the mill to set the pay rates for the farmers. They claimed all kinds of unspecified costs and the prices paid for the cane were low. Rodolfo, one of the younger ejidatarios told me,

> "The mill became quite unpopular. The management imposed all sorts of extras to cheat us, a lot of costs which I know were intended to make us finally come out in their debt. Of course the people were interested in the security, true. If you didn't grow sugar and you got sick then you became more enslaved because you were obliged to rent out your land for two or three years to *el rico*, and then you were left with nothing" (Fieldnotes, 17-11-87).

Don Enrique expressed it as follows:

> "There are drones everywhere. As I wanted to tell you, in a beehive there is one queen. She is the queen of all the bees, the chief. But among the bees there are drones to take what the bees produce. Just like with the banks and the refinery, the style is the same, there is a son of a bitch of a drone who is like them, just collecting his pile, taking a percentage of what we harvest. ...Take me, I can't read or write and neither can my wife. Some years ago when I had delivered my cane, I felt that I was missing some. I felt it. I went back to reclaim it and they told me 'look sir, here are the

accounts', but as I couldn't read them what could I do? Once the engineer went with me, the one they say is the husband of Rosa. I showed him the accounts and he said 'if you ask me, they are robbing you of cane'. He came with me to the management and they paid me everything" (Fieldnotes, 06-01-88).

Those farmers not obliged to continue growing sugarcane because of outstanding debts with the refinery, soon quit the business or left only a small part of their land under sugarcane in order to keep their right to health insurance, and went back to dedicating most of their time and land to the production of maize and melons.

Farmers Gaining Control

At the end of the 1970's and beginning of the 1980's, it became attractive again to grow sugarcane. Prices rose due to state subsidies, and the fruit and vegetable business was plagued with crop diseases and growing marketing problems. Moreover, the farmer organizations, first the one affiliated to the National Peasant Confederation, the CNC[12], and later the one affiliated to the CNPP, the National Confederation of Private Property Owners[13], wielded increasing power and exercised a growing control over harvesting, transport and payment for sugarcane. And also, over the years, the refinery changed its production policy and left more of the production decisions to the farmers themselves. At the time of the fieldwork in 1988, the refinery decided only which variety should be grown. The rest was left to the farmers. The refinery tried to influence farming practice by offering inputs and credit facilities if the farmers followed their management guidelines, but they did not oblige the famrers to follow the regulations. In other words, the refinery had increasingly less room to exercise its right to set the pay rates for the farmers.

"People are nowadays more aware. In the days when they started sugarcane people were inexperienced, ignorant. They didn't know how to manage sugarcane and nobody had experience with refineries that's for sure. But now we know the sugar business and everyone knows how to tell whether they are being cheated or not. There are lots of documents in the CNC office of how things work. For example, they cannot say they have spent so many millions of pesos without stating what they have spent them on. It's not so easy for them anymore" (Rodolfo, 17-11-87).

In 1988-1989, approximately 80% of all ejido land was cultivated with sugarcane. A few ejidatarios still grew maize and had pasture for their cattle.

Room for Manoeuvre

In 1988, several state-owned refineries were privatized, and it was rumoured that the Melchor Ocampo refinery would go the same way. Farmers realized that this could imply a drop in the prices paid. However, they did not really bother about it. They said that they could always

return to growing maize and beans. And they thought that if sugarcane production declined, other crops would be introduced. In other words, they did not doubt that they could survive without the refinery. But at that moment, they could see some sense in being dependent and having debts with the refinery. In 1988, the refinery was milling at full capacity, and only with difficulty was it able to process all the supply. Despite this, the area under cane increased by nearly 10% that year. Farmers expected the refinery to refuse them permission to grow sugar on less productive areas, and they argued that as long as they had outstanding debts with the refinery, the refinery would think twice before trying to get rid of them. Even rich farmers, with vast herds of cows, who owned tractors, took care to stay indebted. The farmers saw that being indebted was in their own interests and intended to use their debts as an instrument to assist them in their negotiations with the refinery.

Farmers Creating Room for Manoeuvre

Thus, within a few decades, agriculture had totally changed. Two features leap out of the above account of the changes. First, it is entirely a men's story. The ejidatarios, representatives of the government institutions and the private company people are virtually all men. It is in interaction with these people that the male ejidatarios acquire experience in managing their farm enterprise under changing circumstances, changes which entail a growing importance of maintaining relations with the outside world for the production and reproduction of the farm. It was the men who thus became 'farmers'. Establishing this fact, however, is not sufficient without comparing it with what happened to women. It provides only half the story. And I will return to the women shortly.

Second, although farms had become almost completely incorporated into the market economy, and institutional involvement in farm practices had increased enormously, this did not lead to a unilinear process of growing dependency, and neither has it led to a process of proletarianization. From people's accounts it becomes clear that there have been periods of more, and periods of lesser dependency, and the persons and institutions on which they depend vary. The period of rainfed agriculture is remembered negatively. The continuing debts with moneylenders caused a vicious circle of poverty. Some men managed to break through this circle by migrating temporarily to the United States. Women, as we have seen had another interpretation of poverty and other ways of coping with it. In the years when new crops such as melons, sugarcane and tomatoes were introduced, or when new techniques such as irrigation, fertilizers and insecticides became available and accepted, dependency was particularly high. The story of Javier Padilla shows how room for manoeuvre, while being minimal in some years, could be regained in others. He went from renting out his land to the melon companies and working for them as a day labourer, to recuperating his independence by share-cropping with the company and later growing on his own account. Likewise, the history

of sugarcane production shows that while in the beginning the refinery was able to set the pay rates and people became indebted, as soon as debts were paid, farmers quit the cane business until later when, through the two farmers organizations, they again succeeded in gaining control over the farm production process, the inputs and the pay rates. Nowadays they feel that they have the experience to keep a measure of control.

These stories show that the modernization of agriculture, which implies both the cultivation of new crops and becoming a part of, and building up, new social relations of production, from the point of view of the farmers is a learning process with its ups and downs. However, the 'downs', in this particular ejido, have hardly led to definitive failures: to having to sell the land. And this brings me to the other point: that modernization of agriculture has not led to proletarianization. This does not imply that there are no ejidatarios who over time have not lost their land. I know of several cases, but this was never due to being indebted to 'outsiders', nor to moneylenders, nor to the foreign fruit and vegetable companies, the banks, the refinery or whosoever. They always lost their land to 'insiders', other ejidatarios, and this was always embedded in some sort of shared understanding of morality and justice on the part of those who run things in the dynamics of the local political arena. The cases of the women who had to defend their rights to land, discussed in a previous chapter, is an example of this. In another case, an ejidatario sold his ejidal rights to another villager in order to buy his fathers freedom from jail. Within his family there were various men who could legitimately take over his ejidal rights, so this was generally felt to be "a good way out".

On the other hand, ejidatarios have proved to be quite capable of defending their rights to land against those whom they consider as outsiders, and legally they are in a strong position, since officially land is not subject to sale or rent. Several stories are known of outsiders whose hopes in the long run were dashed. They had come to an arrangement with an indebted ejidatario, who in return for the remission of the debt would give him the right to work the land for several years, or would appoint him the official heir in the ejidatario's testament. The ejidatario frequently found sufficient political support in the ejido to undo the agreement, after a time. Since these kind of transactions have no legal value, the other party can do little about it. We saw examples of this in Chapter two.

So, this explains why, notwithstanding the (individual) disasters which have taken place in the process of agricultural modernization, this has not led to an irreversible process of proletarianization. By means of their rights to land, and the legal protection against selling it, the ejidatarios often manage to get their heads above water again. In the case of Javier Padilla, whose life was threatened by his creditors, he had to sell his cows, tractors and cars, and finally to flee to the United States. He had to work for several years as an illegal immigrant. But he did not lose his land, and is now on his feet again.

Women Becoming Defined as Housewives

There is another story to tell. In the history of the modernization of agriculture described above, women were not very visible. This does not imply, however, that recent developments have had no effect on them, or on their relation with their husbands, or their social and political position in the village. The developments have confirmed men in their position as the ones to run village affairs, and the shared understandings about gender ideology and practices shape the framework in which women have to create room to manoeuvre (and as stated in chapter four, this is one of the main reasons why women encounter so many difficulties in obtaining and defending their rights to land). In combination with the changing characteristics of farm enterprises, relations between husband and wife within the household have also changed.

Modernization of agriculture, as we have seen, has implied in practice, outside institutions and markets taking over most of the inputs of the farm enterprise and the processing and storage of products. Men, who have entered into social relations and negotiations with the representatives of these institutions and markets, are in this way still able to keep some degree of control. Women, however, who operate within the framework of the household, have entirely lost control over agricultural products. And since the production of sugarcane is nearly an exclusively male business, women's involvement in the actual production process has also been reduced to zero. While in former days women used to work on the land together with their husband or their father, nowadays their work is confined to the household. The process of "men becoming farmers" has reinforced the ideology that men are heads of households, and women are housewives. But women continue to need their own sources of income. As in former days, they can never be sure that their husbands will indeed support their households, and in many cases it is still the women who secure the household's daily continuity. What this process has meant for women, is that they have become marginal to the most important source of income in the village, agriculture.

Perhaps these developments have had a particular influence in this village which is dominated by sugarcane, and are particularly poignant because of the removal of the whole village to a new site. Moving to the new village meant the loss of a personal source of income from the *solares*, the large gardens that surrounded the old houses, and it also meant a greater degree of social isolation. The differences with other villages in the close vicinity is striking. While in this village no woman has ever held an ejidal office, in other villages, which were not so completely integrated into sugarcane production, or which did not suffer such strong government involvement, there are 'strong women' who have an important influence on village affairs. Doña Emilia, for example, from the village of Mezquitán has been president of the ejido twice (Jikke Verhulst, 1988). In El Rancho, women working outside the house are the subject of constant gossip. In neighbouring villages where it is more common to see women working in the fields out of economic necessity, women have created their own room to

manoeuvre (Torres, 1990). Women in El Rancho who likewise need their own sources of income, generally look for economic activities that can be carried out from home, such as small trade, washing clothes for other people, buying chickens and selling them again slaughtered, cutting hair, etc.

I will first deal with the significance for women of the developments of recent years in more detail, and then present a life history in order to give an appreciation of the importance of the life cycle for women's room to manoeuvre.

The Melons: Women's Work Reinforces Housewife Ideology

The introduction of melon production gave women an opportunity to earn their own income from work on the land. However, this caused many conflicts between men and women - between husbands and wives, between fathers and daughters. And perhaps in the end this experience has reinforced the ideology that women should stay at home, which in later years became more and more the reality for women. The conflicts between men and women arose not so much because of the fact that women were working in the fields. As we have seen before, they had always done so. The conflicts arose more because of the new ways of organizing the female labour force.

Most of the women, wives and daughters, had always "helped their husbands and fathers and family members" work on the land, on family fields. Women hardly ever worked on the fields of other men. In the accounts of their experience in agriculture, women always stress that they worked "on our own fields, I hardly ever worked for others". If they worked as day labourers, they always emphasized that they accompanied their husbands, and that their reputation (good virtue) was not at stake. Doña Lupe recalls those days:

> "I always liked to help him in the fields. It is another *ambiente*. I don't like being in the house all day. And what's more, we needed the money. And if he worked in the tobacco or rice, which in those days was grown by those who had money, I joined him. I was quicker at harvesting than he was. I always finished my job first" (Fieldnotes, 09-87).

The introduction of melon production meant an enormous increase in the demand for female labour. The transplanting, weeding and the selection of the melons according to size and quality was nearly exclusively done by women. Just as many ejidatarios had been reluctant at first to start renting part of their land to Griffin and Brand, and had to be convinced to do so by somebody *de confianza*, so had fathers and husbands to be pursuaded that it was alright to give permission to their daughters and wives to work in melon production. Afraid for their good reputation, they did not want them to be unaccompanied all day. However, Griffin and Brand asked well-known inhabitants from the ejido to organize these female working groups. These men visited their brothers and *compadres* to ask them to give their wives and daughters permission to enter a work group. They stressed that they themselves would take care that the

women would be treated with respect. But even though women were thus, to a certain degree, accompanied by somebody *de confianza*, it nevertheless caused many problems between men and women. In chapter eight, I describe the case of a marriage which finally broke up because of the gossip. Not for all relationships did this have such dramatic consequences, but it was not unusual for women to be beaten by their husbands because of (or for fear) gossip. Magda, the forty year old wife of an ejidatario recalls:

> "Yes, I also worked among the melons. Many women did. But I did it only when he was away. One has to take one's chance when it presents itself, no? Later when the children were older, I didn't go anymore. They went. That was a great help as well. They always talk about the women working in the fields. I did not like them talking about me. And he also used to give me a hard life when I worked in melons" (Field notes, 09-88).

Sugarcane: Women on the Side-Line of the Farm Enterprise

Although women were active in the labour force of fruit and vegetable production, they became less involved in the management of the farm enterprise, since different aspects of the production process started to take place outside the direct sphere of the household, and thus outside the sphere of influence of women. This process was deepened with the introduction of sugarcane. In the days of fruit and vegetable production, and also in the early years of the production of sugarcane, when many farmers dedicated only a part of their land to these crops and continued to grow maize and keep cows on the other part, sugarcane did not dominate everything as it does today. In 1987, nearly 60 % of the area of the ejido stood under cane. The next year it had increased to over 80%. This is almost the maximum amount which is possible, since a great part of the other 20% contains too much salt to grow cane. It is only suitable for grazing land, and is used for this purpose. Only a very few plots of maize and vegetables are grown.

This predominance of cane has several consequences for women. They now seldom work on the land. In contrast to melons and tomatoes, sugarcane is exclusively a male crop. The most labour intensive period is the harvest. This is very hard and dirty work. There are very few women who work in the cutting of the cane, and they do so only out of the utmost necessity. They are not women from El Rancho but are ususally temporary labourers from other, poorer, regions of Mexico. The rest of the work that has to be done is highly mechanized. Since the refinery provides credit, the sowing, weeding and fertilizing is mainly done with tractors, which are hired when not owned. Unlike fruit and vegetable production, therefore, sugarcane does not offer women the opportunity to earn their own income.

Furthermore, the maize produced for home consumption in former days was stored at home, and, as we have seen, it was the women who were responsible for it. They could sell some of it, they could feed it to their chickens and pigs, and they could do a neighbour a favour. In

comparison to maize, sugarcane brings a good price but it is paid to the husbands, and women cannot always count on access to this money. Moreover it is difficult to separate the introduction of sugarcane from the replacement of the village, which was a direct consequence of the establishment of the sugar refinery.

The New Village: Nice Houses for Housewives

The old village was situated about three kilometres from the present site, along the banks of the river Rio Lindo, a river that overflowed its banks from time to time. This in itself could have been resolved, but in combination with the fact that the purity of the water was so adversely effected by the effluence discharged into it from the sugar refinery, the village became unfit to live in. The river flooded so badly in 1972 that the village had to be evacuated by the army. Soon after, a start was made on building the new village. The government provided the materials and the villagers had to bake the bricks and build the houses according to a prototype, a *casa muestra*. Apart from the houses, a primary school, a market place and a meeting room were also constructed.

This replacement fundamentally changed the nature of farming enterprises for the people of El Rancho.The continuity of their small holdings in former days had been secured by the work of women in the *solar*. This was accorded no importance by those who designed the new village, nor by the men who represented the village in the discussions with the institutions involved in the whole affair. They were obviously not aware of its significance to their families, to themselves and to their wives in particular. The only attention to women was in terms of their function as housewives, of how pleased they should be with piped water and electricity, which would alleviate so much of the housework. And of course they were. However, even the women, at the time, may not themselves have seen the full significance to them of the large gardens surrounding their old houses. Looking back on things fifteen years after the move, however, they lament their forfeiture and seem of the opinion that the advantages do not outweigh the losses. Men are generally positive about the removal. "Of course I like the new village better than the old", said Lupe. "Here we have access to all kinds of services, and since we are now living near the road, it is easy to get a ride to El Limón or Tauquíl. It is easier to arrange things". Women, although recognizing some advantages, mostly preferred life in the old village. Doña Ventura, the wife of Don Alfonso the President, was of this opinion:

> "Yes, the men like it more over here because of the road. Rapidly they go to town where they can get (she makes a gesture which signifies "booze"). Over there it was more difficult. No, I liked life better over there. I never had any problems over the chickens with the neighbours. We all had big back gardens. I sowed maize in the *solar* and I had several pigs. Here it is too small to keep pigs. And nowadays you have to

buy the maize to feed the animals. It doesn't pay anymore. In former days I sold many eggs and chickens. Now I only have a few for our own consumption" (22-09-87).

Doña Eva joined the discussion and added:

> "When we lived in the other village, we women often met each other. We worked in the fields. We used to wash clothes in the river, and we all walked in *huaraches* [a rough type of leather-thonged sandal]. Now we have wash in the stone troughs (*pilas*) that you see in our gardens and women working in the fields are seen as whores. Some still walk in *huaraches*, but others have their nice clothes and shoes. We hardly meet anymore" (25-09-87).

Given the different life worlds of men and women, it is not strange that they judge the removal of the village differently. For men not only the "booze", but also the "institutional environment" has become more readily accessible. The offices of the bank, the local departments of the ministry of agriculture and the ministry of land reform, and the offices of the farmers union have become literally and figuratively within reach: literally, since the distance has become shorter and the means of transport more accessible, and figuratively since these ministries and organizations were involved in the construction of the new village, and from the close contact that was necessary during this prolonged period of planning and rebuilding, some of the representatives of these institutions still have friendly ties with several of the villagers. They drop in to have a chat and a drink, they are invited as guests of honor to the village fiesta. So in several ways it has become easier, not so intimidating for men to find their way through the changing institutional and market environment. Women, on the other hand, lost an important source of income: the products of the *solar*. It forced them rapidly into playing a less direct role, on the side-lines of the farm enterprise, and they lost the legitimate reasons they had had to leave the house and meet other women while washing clothes in the river, and the work in the fields.

Such changes do not take place without frictions between husband and wife, and women try to make the best of it, as demonstrated by the life histories of Elia and her mother. Moreover, their histories make us appreciate the influence of the woman's life cycle on the room to manoeuvre she manages to create.

Rosa's Life History: Farmer and Farmer's Wife

Women have to find answers to the changes and problems they encounter in the wider environment, within the farm enterprise and within the realities of married life. Rosa's story about herself and her mother detail how women try to make the best of their lives. It shows what the prospects are for women at different stages in the life cycle, of the necessity to earn their own income, and the importance of children in the women's strategies to create room to manoeuvre.

Rosa is married to an ejidatario, but since he has worked in the United States for more then 14 of the 25 years that they have been married, she is the one who built up the farm enterprise with the help of her children. This is perhaps why, in comparison to the wives of other ejidatarios, she has maintained an important say over the enterprise.

Making ends meet

Rosa is the third child of a family of 11 children, of which 5 died young. She was born in 1947 in Temazcal. Her father had ejidal rights and had been a civil guard in the ejido, but had left and settled in Aguacate, where the family of Rosa's mother lived, because he was once nearly killed by two men. He thus lost his ejidal rights. Rosa then three years old. Her father made a living as *mozo*, a labourer, and he made wooden ploughs which he sold. Her mother washed, ironed and made tortillas for other people. They lived in Aguacate for about 9 years. They left because of a big fight between her parents over a mistress which her father had in Aguacate. Rosa told me the story thus,

> "My parents did not get on very well with each other. My father has always has been a *sinvergüenza* (without shame). Nowadays it is not so bad anymore, but when he was younger he made life very difficult for my mother. In Aguacate he fell in love with a woman and for quite some time they had an affair. My parents often had fights about it. My father beat my mother if she mentioned it. One day he had a knife. She also grabbed a knife from the table and she yelled at him, "You had better kill me, for if you don't kill me, I will kill you." It was terrible. When my father wanted to stab my mother, she jumped aside and she stabbed him in his hand. We were crying for both of them. My eldest sister ran off to call my grandmother. She came, and she shouted at my mother "For heavens sake what are you doing. You are scaring the hell out of your children." And she said to my father that if he did not want to give up this other woman, he had better leave. However he didn't want to leave us. That is why we left Aguacate. We went to El Limón."
>
> "My mother thought about leaving my father, but since we were still small, she had no place to go to. Where could she go, with so many small children? And renting a house was not possible either. She could not leave the children on their own, while she worked, they could burn themselves, they could cut themselves with a knife. And later, when we had grown up my father had bettered his life a bit. And in any case by then she didn't want to leave my father. She didn't want to give us a bad example."

In El Limón life did not become much easier. Rosa's father started to work as a bricklayer in the construction of irrigation canals. He wasn't paid badly, but since he drank and kept on having affairs, Rosa recalls that they were very poor.

> "Some days there was nothing to eat. My mother gave me a cup of tepid water to get rid of the feeling of hunger, and so I went to school. My sister and I were the

poorest in the school. The other children had money with them to buy tacos, sweets or a cup of juice in the break. In order not to see this, my sister and I left the classroom and sat down behind the school and told stories, sang songs and played games. To forget the hunger. Once home, our mother had boiled some rice and sometimes she also had tortillas. That was all. It was very difficult. Like I told you, my father didn't help her".

"My mother worked hard. But never away from home. My father wouldn't let her. People brought clothes to her to be washed and ironed and she made tortillas for various people. She would keep some of the dough they brought her, to make tortillas for us. She worked very hard. But when my father knew that she had earned money, he didn't want to give her any of the money he had earned. He said "you already have money, so why should I give you mine?" So to avoid this she kept mum about it. It was a hard time. It improved a bit when we started to work. My sister and I worked in houses of people who had money. I was 12 years old and I was still in school. I left home early to be able to wash the dishes and sweep the floors before going to school. In the afternoons I looked after the two children. I earned money and they gave me the left overs. That was a great help. And my mother had friends. One friend used to bring her dough to make tortillas. Half of it she could keep. And every now and then this woman gave us maize or beans. Other women gave us used clothes. That was also a great help."

Rosa was 14 years old when she left primary school, and before her 15th anniversary she met Nacho, who 'robbed' her.[14] After a month they married and settled in Las Rancho. Her married life had a difficult start:

"We married on the 5th of January. Three days later the *fiestas* started in El Limón. Nacho joined the party and stayed away for three days and nights, leaving me with his parents. He was my first boyfriend. But he had had other women. He married me because another girl had refused him. He was very much in love with her and he didn't want me, he wanted her. I felt so disappointed. He kept on playing about with other women. And once, when the children were still small, he went off with another woman to the United States. He stayed with her a good two years. He came back only because the immigration service had caught him and expelled him from the country. At first I didn't want him to live in the house. One of the children saw him coming and I locked the door. But one of the windows was open, that was how he got in. He didn't say anything, but he didn't want to leave. I locked myself in a bedroom. My parents-in-law came and said it was up to me decide. If I wanted him back, fine, but if I didn't they would support me. I was the one who had built up the farm, I had always taken care of the children. They said that they considered the house and the land to be mine. But what could I do? The children were still small, and life is difficult for a woman on her own."

"We have been married now for 25 years, and at least fourteen of these years he lived in the United States. The last seven years he has calmed down a bit. But the first years of our marriage he was hardly home. He never told me when and where he went. He just left and after a month or two I used to receive a note to tell me he had arrived well and that he did not know yet when he would return."

Although irregularly, he came back frequently enough to keep Rosa pregnant most of those years. She gave birth to twelve children, five of whom died while still babies.

Nacho sent money from the United States but since Rosa never knew when and how much he would send, she took care to have her own sources of income. Since Nacho was an ejidatario, Rosa had access to land. With the help of her father-in-law, and later of her eldest son she grew maize and beans. Apart from vegetables and fruit trees she kept chickens in the yard.

"I sold the eggs to a women who came from El Limón. Every week she came to the village to buy eggs. In this way I could maintain myself and the children. They were still small, we did not need much. Although we had no chairs to sit on. At least we had enough to eat. My parents-in-law always helped me. We got on very well. They had cows and gave me milk for the children. And my father-in-law helped me to prepare the land. Thank God I never had to work in the melons. Many women had to, out of necessity. I did not want to, because of the children. My first two children died. One was six months and the other only three weeks. When Delia, the third child, was born, I did not at first love her. I did not dare to love her, because I was afraid that she would die as well. But she lived. And Delia and Alberto were still small when the melon business began. Not even if God had wanted it could I have left them alone all day. Although you could earn good money. But we did not need much. My sister always passed on her children's clothes, and Sandra has lived with a sister of Nacho in the United States for more than a year."

With the money Nacho sent she bought cows and calves from her father-in-law, and as soon as she could she started to sell milk.

"My father-in-law, since he always had a lot of cows, said "Why don't you buy cows with the money Nacho sends you?" So first he sold me a cow with a calf, and later another cow. When Nacho went to the United states, I never knew when he would send me money. Sometimes it took a long time and in the meantime I was thrown on my own resources. I started to sell milk. With the cows and the chickens I could maintain myself and the children well."

She was able to open a bank account in the *caja popular*[15], of which Nacho was and still is unaware.

"My sister worked in the house of a woman who was the president of the *caja popular*. Once she asked me if my old man sent me money. I told her he did so she said "Then I will open an account in the *caja popular* for you". So when Nacho came

back that time, I had the cows and nearly six thousand pesos in the bank. He still does not know that I have money in the bank. Sometimes I buy clothes for the children, and then he asks me where I get the money. I tell him I buy the clothes on tick."

At the end of the sixties they had seven cows and a horse. Because of the animals, Rosa was not interested in renting land to the melon companies. In the rainy season they sowed maize and beans mainly for their own consumption, and in the dry season they used to grow chickpeas, as fodder for the cows. In 1971, Nacho came back and stayed home for several years. He started to grow melons on a small part of his land, with a *compadre* who had obtained some experience on the Griffin and Brand fields. The first year they did well, but the second year they had serious marketing problems and they decided not to continue. As Rosa said:

"I have never liked the melon business. You have to invest so much money. Nevertheless, he wanted to. I told him not to sell any cows. But he had brought money from the United States. He invested this. So I agreed. And in actual fact the first year they did very well. The second year they had problems with selling the melons. That is why they didn't carry on."

The sugarmill had just been installed. Since just over two hectares of his land had serious salt problems, Nacho decided to grow sugarcane on these plots. Says Rosa:

"That was alright by me. Those parcels were no use anyhow. And the insurance is a great help. But the land was no good, the harvest was very poor. And the refinery lot were a bunch of thieves. So after two years, he decided to forget sugarcane. Recently the refinery has been working well. But where can we leave the cows if he grows sugarcane? And selling milk brings in money daily and gives me milk for the children. Milk nowadays is very expensive. Imagine having to buy it everyday! Nowadays sugarcane pays well, but it has only one harvest a year. And they pay out the money to the men. And I never know what Nacho will do with the money. The last time Nacho went to the United States, we had just sold a cow. He went to Tauquíl to deposit this money in the bank and he met one of his old lovers there. He never came home. The two of them went off to the United States together. Instead of taking the money to the bank, he used it to go to the United States. Imagine!

After the village moved, Rosa had to sell her chickens. Every night the cows were brought from their land to the yard. And every morning after milking they were taken back again to the meadows. Since the yard of the new house was very small, they could not keep both the cows and the chickens.

"I found it hard to sell the chickens. I had more than seventy. But it was not possible to keep them. At first I didn't want to move. I wanted to stay in the old village. When everything was packed, I said to Nacho, "I'm not going. I'm staying here with the children (and she laughed). But everybody went."

She is proud of their enterprise, since she feels that it is thanks largely to her efforts that they nowadays live quite comfortably. The youngest child is now six years old. The oldest two are married and their three sons work on the farm. Nacho has calmed down. The last seven years he has been home. He works hard, the only problem is that he spends a lot of money on drink, but happily enough he is cordial when drunk. Rosa says that if he should go off again she doesn't know, but she is not sure she would have him back. Now the children are grown up she will not let him hurt her so much again.

Housewives Creating Room for Manoeuvre

I want to highlight two aspects of Rosa's history. First it is clear that both she and her mother needed an independent source of income throughout their lives, and both kept their earnings a secret from their husbands. Rosa's mother looks for sources of income within the boundaries of her house, otherwise she gets a lot of trouble from her husband. Rosa's situation is different, and quite unique in the village. Because of the many years that her husband was abroad, she was able to build up a sort of farm enterprise which assured her of a daily income: she is the one who sells the milk, she is the one who makes cheese, and she had a large number of chickens before the move. And as we have seen, changes in the farm which influence her daily income, are met with strong opposition on her part. She did not want to sell her chickens, and so she resisted the move to the new village; and she agrees with the agricultural experiments of her husband only as long as the cattle breeding part of their farm is not touched by it. She is in a strong negotiating position, since she at one stage agreed to take her husband back, and his parents were willing to support her if she had chosen not to. Through her work and her care of the children she has gained rights over the farm and the house, which he cannot and does not deny.

This leads me to the second aspect of her history which I want to highlight, that is, that a woman's prospects to negotiate space for manoeuvre with her husband increases with age and stage of the life cycle. One important aspect in this is the growing up of children. Mothers then have more possibilities to earn money themselves, and the children start helping. Moreover, because it is the mothers who mainly carry the burdens of child rearing, over the years they gain the moral support not only of their children, but of other relatives as well, as in the case of Rosa. The social identity elder women can heavily lean on is that of a "good mother". Younger women are regarded as potentially unfaithful towards their husbands, they have to be controlled, they have to be taught respect for their husband and the hierarchy within the household. While women gain moral support within the household and the wider circle of relatives and close friends, men, in this setting, seem to lose moral support during their life cycle. Children grow up well aware if it has been the case, that their mother has been the one who has always taken care of their daily needs, while their father has gone off with other

women, or has spent his money on drink. Children, both sons and daughters, tend to support their mothers, economically as well as emotionally, and not their fathers. While at the level of the community men gain prestige and can become very influential over time, their influence within the household crumbles. Physical violence against an older woman is morally quite unacceptable and women, through their children, become more and more independent from the income of the husband. The husband on the other hand becomes more and more dependent on the care of his wife and children. Elder women are outspoken, openly expressing strong criticism of their husbands, and do not lose an opportunity to make it clear to them that they are no longer their slaves. They hardly show any resemblance to the vulnerable young women with small children.

The need for an independent income, and the increasing room that women have to manoeuvre as they get older, is the case for many women of the village. However, the means Rosa had to create her own space are rather exceptional due to the fact that her husband was away for so many years. Apart from widows with land, I know of no other woman who was so able to create room for herself within the sphere of agriculture. As we have seen, in general, women have lost their influence in this arena. The case of Rosa shows that this is not a process without struggle, but the struggle is mainly confined to the boundaries of the household: A struggle over the children, over family planning, over responsibilities and the behaviour of husband and wife, over money, and over a woman's own income. Although the cultivation of sugarcane brings a good living, a woman's need for her own income continues to exist. They can never be sure whether their husbands will actually invest 'their' money in the household and education and health of their children. And because women have largely lost control over agricultural production and produce, they increasingly look for other sources of income, especially in small trade and work which can be done within the boundaries of the house, and which can be more or less easily combined with care of the children and the home. Work which in other words does not openly attack the ideology of women being housewives.[16]

Summary and Discussion

Several changes become visible in an analysis of what has happened to farm enterprises in the process of incorporation in the wider environment and to the men and women who form the core of these enterprises.

First, with the formation of the El Rancho ejido, the foundation was laid for a process which would take many years in the making: a process by which men became farmers, and women became housewives. Women also worked alongside their menfolks in agriculture, but it was only the men who initially became ejidatarios. This was the first step in formalizing the position of men as heads of households.

However, in spite of a generally accepted formal dependence on their husbands, women were gradually able to create room for manoeuvre in those first decennia after the land reform. Men on the other hand, stress the continuing misery and dependency they lived under during those early years of struggle. Their struggles were different. Men had frequently to turn to moneylenders and those who owned oxen in order to be able to plough the land, and they had scant means to influence this situation. Women faced the daily cares involved in the continuity of their households, and they obtained during those years more and more means for meeting this responsibility. Because of the new found social stability and freedom to keep chickens, pigs and other animals, their own sources of income increased. Moreover, as we have seen, they controlled the distribution of that part of the harvest which was stored at home.

It was not until the sixties that this situation fundamentally changed. The introduction of irrigated agriculture at the beginning of the sixties and the growing importance of national and international product markets, saw a growing presence of government agencies and other outside intervening parties in the valley. Farm enterprises changed profoundly: Cash crops were sown instead of crops for home consumption; the management of the farm began to demand new skills and new knowledge, not only about crops, but about the institutional and market environment, which became more and more important for the continuity of the farm. Men had always been responsible for maintaining relations with the outside world but this became increasingly important in the process of agricultural modernization. As a consequence, it is men who have gained the knowledge and experience needed to find a way through the institutional environment, and in this process have become 'farmers'. Meanwhile, the modernization of agriculture has meant women becoming marginal to the farm enterprise. Fruit and vegetable growing on a large-scale did offer women new opportunities in agriculture, but it brought many conflicts. The changes in the perception of a woman's position that this entailed caused women working on the melon fields to experience many problems, to such an extent, that melon production in the end reinforced the ideology that women should stay at home. This became even more obvious when sugarcane came along. This is almost exclusively a male crop, and nowadays women of the village rarely work on the land anymore. The removal of women from agriculture was reinforced also by the relocation of this particular village. The houses are laid out in streets and surrounded by tiny gardens, which took no account of the economic activities of the women, which had helped to provide the continuity of the household enterprise.

So, the practical consequences of agricultural modernization have led to men becoming defined as the head of household, and women as housewives. Women have lost the control they had within the farm enterprise, and in the ideal at least have become dependent on the income of their husbands. The fact that every day practice differs from the ideal means that women see themselves faced with the necessity to earn a living on the margins left to them: petty trade and low paid work at home.

No mention is made of this phenomenon in the Mexican literature. In my opinion this is due to the fact that studies of agricultural modernization do not problematize farmer and peasant households, but treat them as black boxes. And those studies which analyze the position of women in the process of agricultural modernization focus very much on women working as day labourers in the production of commercial crops (Lara, 1987; Roldan, 1982; Wilson, 1985). Feminist studies of the significance of agricultural modernization affirm the importance of problematizing the changes within households brought by external intervention. Olivia Harris (1981:59) has pointed out that the relationships between household members are not defined by the nature of the household itself, but by social, economic and ideological relations outside the unit. Different authors have stressed the negative impact on women of viricentric gender ideology[17] and the underestimating of women's work - particularly in the spheres of subsistence agriculture and domestic labour - which guide the process of planned intervention. Boserup (1970) and Rogers (1980) have argued that capitalist exploitation, combined with Eurocentric ideas about the roles and activities proper to women, led to an undermining of women's economic autonomy and to their becoming more and more defined as 'housewives'. As a matter of fact, the history of El Rancho seems to confirm this thesis. Ineke van Halsema (1991:146-8) describes a similar process. In her monograph of a south Brazilian village, one of the conclusions she draws is that incorporation of the village into the wider political and economic environment has implied that men are approached time and again as heads of households. It is exactly through their identities as heads of the family and as farmers that they continually acquire new positions and more power in relation to women. She shows that relations within the family are to a large extent constituted outside the family and that it is the position assumed by men outside the family that underpin or give them power within the family.

The debate on agricultural modernization and gender relations makes it clear that its consequences may profoundly differ from one specific setting to another. I am aware that because of the particularities of El Rancho it may be difficult to generalize my conclusions. But this was not my intention. What I have done, is elaborate in detail the relevance of differentiating between women in one specific setting. From the life history of woman in this chapter, it becomes clear that it is especially relevant to differentiate between women in terms of age, stage in the life-cycle and household composition.

The second argument developed in this chapter, in contrast to what is generally argued in the Mexican literature, is that agrarian change has not meant a unilinear growth of dependence for farmers (men) on the wider economic and political environment: periods differ in their opportunities for space to manoeuvre. While being highly dependent in one period, and perhaps rightly characterized as wage labourers on their own land, the ejidatarios have been able to regain control of their land and the production process in other times.

This has to be examined against the background of the land tenure system. Since ejido land cannot legally be sold, severe poverty and indebtedness has not led to an irreversible process

of proletarianization. However, the land tenure system is not specific to this ejido, so in itself this does not explain why El Rancho should differ from other ejidos where, according to some writers, processes of proletarianization have indeed taken place. Looking at the specific history of this ejido two features draw our attention.

The first is the ideological and political idiosyncrasies whereby ejidatarios defend their titles to land as against those defined by ejidatarios as 'outsiders'. Those living outside and considered as 'outsiders' have many difficulties in establishing their rights to land even if they have obtained those rights in a legitimate manner. Obviously the rules of the game are different for 'insiders' (sons of ejidatarios, ejidatarios themselves) than they are for 'outsiders' (*vecinos*, women, moneylenders).

The second is that ejidatarios are no longer inexperienced in dealing with outside institutions. The history of sugarcane production in the last 15 years is a good example of this. When the refinery first started to function, it provided the ejidatarios with the necessary inputs, prescribed the activities which had to be undertaken, organized the harvest and the commercialization, and finally, it set the pay rates. Ejidatarios were thus highly dependent on the refinery and had hardly anything to say about sugarcane production on their own land. However, this has changed profoundly over the years. Most of the ejidatarios agreed that there was a period during which they let the refinery set the rules of the game, but they immediately added that this only happened in the first years when they did not yet know how to cultivate cane. Once they had experience they did not allow themselves to be manipulated further. They stated that the refinery had been able to cheat farmers because many could not read or write. But farmers had organized themselves and they now have two strong farmers organizations to control the doings of the refinery, especially with regard to the weighing and fixing of the quality of the cane. The refinery still provides inputs and technical guidelines. But since these general guidelines, according to the farmers, do not take into account the different soil types, silt problems, differential access to tractors, oxen or horses, or the place of sugarcane in the total agricultural enterprise of the different farmers, nowadays they interpret these guidelines according to their own needs and plans and according to their own judgement of the labour needs of their own fields. Since prices have been high over the last few years, many farmers have no complaints about the refinery, but they often said that if they tried to mess with them again they would just stop growing sugarcane, that the land was theirs and they could always decide to grow maize again as they used to do.

Sugarcane is an example that involves large scale farming organization. But on a smaller scale ejidatarios are also very able to negotiate their involvement in the production process with surrounding institutions. When talking about the experience of a livestock credit group in the next chapter, I will return to this.

The third and last argument is that periods can be distinguished when women have had a greater or lesser chance to fulfill their obligations. However, these periods do not run in synchrony with those of men. In the decennia preceding the acceptance of irrigated agriculture

in the ejido, and before the village was uprooted, women were in a better position to help themselves with their everyday problems. The removal of the village and the coming of sugarcane caused a decline in women's duties on the farm and a consequent loss of control over farm products. Nowadays, many of the women depend heavily on their husbands income, and those who cannot depend on it, try in small ways to earn their own income. It is when outside involvement in ejidal and farm affairs increases, that women's room for manoeuvre decreases.

These changes involve a certain amount of conflict and uncertainty, and the need to come to grips with new issues and circumstances for both men and women. For men this struggle occurs on the one hand at the interface between the farm enterprise, the ejido as socio-political organization, and the market and institutional environment, and on the other at the level of the household itself, which entails a continuous process of defining and redefining the responsibilities and rights of husband and wife. For women this struggle mainly takes place at household level.

These then are the general lines that emerge from an analysis which looks at issues from the men's and women's viewpoint in the same time period and place. The differences that exist between men in terms of family composition and their social networks and the different production decisions they take based on the diverse means and opportunities at their disposal, result in a wide variety of farm enterprises, and a wide variety of farm histories. While some farmers work individually, others prefer to work together with brothers, sons and friends.

There are likewise considerable differences between the women of El Rancho, again family composition and life cycle are important. Young women with small children are far more dependent and vulnerable than older women with grown up children to support them financially and morally. Women without men have other problems and prospects, adding to the wide variety of coping strategies among women. It is this heterogeneity among a socially linked group of men and women, the individual and collective actions undertaken to meet their social, agricultural and personal responsibilities in the household, the ejido and the farm, which defines in concrete, the form which modernization of agriculture has and will take in their village. It is thus important to look carefully at the relationships between men and women in all arenas and also to examine them separately.

And account must be taken of the generalities of the battles fought as well as the particularities. These will be the subjects of the next two chapters. Chapter seven is an extended case study of a livestock credit group, where the general development package offered by the bank did not meet the individual requirements of the farmers. In order to create room for manoeuvre, the ejidatarios individually and collectively had to look for the loopholes in the system. Chapter eight is on female farmers. Because of inheritance practices, many farmer's wives on the death of their husband and on the rarer ocassion of the death of the father, take over the farming enterprise. What problems do they face and how do they manage in a man's

world? Can they counterbalance the process of women becoming increasingly defined as housewives?

Notes

1. It would be interesting also to look at this changing dynamic from the perspectives and experiences of girls and boys. However, this falls outside the scope of this thesis.

2. In chapter 8 I will focus on female farmers, who are all widows.

3. Although birth control nowadays is widely practised, and the importance of this is recognized by all women, I regret that I gathered scarcely any data on the history of birth control. It was also very difficult to get an overview of the history of physical violence. I only know that it still occurs on a wide scale, but I can't relate it to former days, or other socio-economic settings. However, it can be related to a woman's life cycle, which I try to show in this chapter.

4. At most they might tell of girl friends who made them spend their money and temporarily leave their families. But their wives and children are invisible.

5. Saskia Wieringa (1990:176-177) formulates it as follows: "Women are involved in a different way than men with what is considered 'normal' history. But events which form the most important milestones in the line given by men, have also had significant consequences for women. Womens' history is centred around the crossroads between linear mens' history and the more circular life march of women. Women relate their lives not only along the circular route or line which takes them from birth to death, but also along the more linear line of wars and dictatorships".

6. There is a very interesting story to tell about how the Agrarian Movement of the twenties and the thirties was experienced. Men and women tell rather different stories. While men stressed the politics and the battles fought, women stressed the sexual violence they were confronted with, and the fact that they were crushed between the different fighting parties. It did not matter whether the fighting men were in favour of the land reform, or against it, the women claimed that they all stole their chickens, tried to rape their daughters, and stole the few valuables that they had.

7. It should be made clear that this is not a folk concept. Men, when referring to themselves, always use the description ejidatario. However, being an ejidatario thirty years ago with rainfed agriculture, and the production of maize and beans for home consumption, implied quite other skills than those needed by an ejidatario who grows sugarcane or vegetables for the national and international market. That is why I still differentiate between 'peasants' and 'farmers'. However, in accord with the critiques of using these concepts, I do not use them for analytical but for descriptive reasons. The term 'peasants' refers to ejidatarios during the rainfed period of agriculture, and 'farmers' refer to ejidatarios in irrigated agriculture.

8. See Hans Heydra (1988) on the history of a small packing plant, cooperatively owned and managed by a group of ejidatarios in the vicinity of El Rancho. The group fell apart because of internal distrust on the one hand, and difficulty in controlling prices on the other. See also Humberto Gonzalez on the risks of price fluctuations and the problems of plagues.

9. See the work of Humberto Gonzalez of the project team (1992).

10. Legally foreigners are not entitled to buy land. To bypass these laws foreigners buy land which is officially registered in the name of a Mexican citizen. The latter is called a *prestanombre* in that he lends his name to the buyer. A *mayordomo* is a manager.

11. The sugar industry at the time was not very profitable. The Mexican State bought private refineries that were about to be closed and stimulated the extension of areas under cultivation of sugarcane. This was in order to increase foreign currency from sugar exports. (Elsa Guzmán Flores, 1992).

12. The "Confederación Nacional de Campesinos" was founded by Lazaro Cardenas. From its inception it has been strongly affiliated to the ruling party, the PRI.

13. The Confederación Nacional de Pequeños Propietarios, is, like the CNC strongly affiliated to the PRI.

14. The word *robar* 'to rob' is used in this context to mean that a young couple, without the permission of their parents, sneak out and spend nights together and so force their parents to agree to their marriage. In common parlance it is said that "the man robs the woman". However, normally women are not just victims, but co-authors of the action.

15. The *caja popular* is a special kind of bank. You get little interest on your money, but it is easy to get credit. If you have saved a certain amount, the *caja* will allow you to draw credit up to twice that amount which you then pay back on a weekly basis.

16. It would be interesting to analyze more profoundly the possibilities trade gives women to create more room for manoeuvre, the conflicts it gives rise to between husband and wife, and how these develop. However, this falls outside the scope of this thesis. In a chapter 8, I will analyze more profoundly the ways in which female farmers are able to increase their room for manoeuvre within the scope of agriculture.

17. The concept viricentrism was first used by Joke Schrijvers (1979), who used it in analogy to the concept eurocentrism. Here it refers to a way of thinking starting from and evolving around the experiences and values of men.

VII. SMALL FARMERS RESISTING REGULATIONS: A LIVESTOCK CREDIT-PROJECT AS ARENA OF NEGOTIATIONS[1)]

Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that the incorporation of farms into the wider environment does not by definition imply a decreasing capacity of the farmer to make decisions over the production process on the farm. Not because the market or the institutions are of little importance, but because the exact relations between them and the farms - the nature and the degree of incorporation - are subject to negotiation between the farmers and the representatives of this wider environment. The previous chapter, also showed, although superficially, that there are marked differences between farm enterprises, and the ways in which men go about making their farms productive.

This chapter will elaborate more profoundly on both themes. Based on a case study of the way ejidatarios influenced the outcome of a livestock-credit project, it is argued that the ejidatarios had, on the one hand, to readjust the project according to their individual needs since there exist profound differences in farm practices, and on the other that they were indeed able to do so because of the practical dynamic which the project acquired, once implemented.

The story begins at the end of 1986, when a group of ejidatarios decided to apply for credit from the National Credit Bank for Agriculture (BANRURAL) in order to buy livestock. Thus, the intervention was at the request of and because of the expressed needs of the ejidatarios. But, as shown later, the programme was designed without their participation, and it was primarily based on scientific knowledge of livestock breeding, which does not take into account regional particularities. As a result, the plan, under the "credit with technical assistance programme" did not fit with the agricultural reality in this particular village, nor with the individual particularities of the different farms. The credit was tied to very detailed instructions on the way livestock should be managed, which was uniform for all the ejidatarios. Faced with such a plan, the ejidatarios needed to find some way of assuring for themselves some freedom of action. And this they did. As it turned out, their taking control of the programme was also necessary for the success of the programme itself, although it was evident that their motive in doing so was not a concern for the success or failure of the programme, but was motivated by different interests.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. First a short account is given of the history of cattle breeding in the ejido, and the experience of each of the ejidatarios in this branch of agriculture. Next the way the credit was applied for, the different institutions involved, their competences, and their mutual historyare the focus of attention. It becomes clear that the ejidatarios invested much energy in influencing which institutions would become involved in the project. This had to do with their former experiences with the different institutions, and this forms the basis of the room to manoeuvre they finally are able to obtain. It is remarkable that they invested so much time in influencing the institutional packing of the project, while at the same time they did not invest energy at all in the formulation of the contents of the programme. Probably they are well aware of the fact that the contents of a project becomes defined in the process of implementation and not in the intentions as formulated at the start.

The chapter continues with the differences between the farms, which are the principle reason for the need for the ejidatarios to create room to manoeuvre. The project as planned by no means took account of the heterogeneity and therefore the different needs of the farmers, nor of the regional specificity of livestock breeding. The case study concludes with the actual negotiation process, in which it becomes clear how the ejidatarios were able to keep the involvement of the bank in their farming practices to an absolute minimum.

The chapter concludes with a short discussion about the consequences of this case study for a better understanding of 'planned intervention' and the importance of recognizing the differences between farm enterprises.

The context of the project: the history of cattle breeding in the ejido

The previous chapter showed that the history of cattle breeding in the ejido has been very conflictive. While the ejidatarios themselves attached high value to cattle (it is a way of accumulating capital, a way of breaking through the vicious circle of indebtedness and poverty, and is very valuable as animal traction), they were forbidden by the hacendados, before the land reform, to keep livestock and later, after the construction of the irrigation system, the local department of the Ministry of Agriculture forbade livestock-breeding within the irrigated area. The high investment made by the government in implementing the system could not be wasted by allowing irrigable land to be used for grazing, in addition to which cattle destroyed the canals which had not yet had been concreted. A former representative of the Ministry of Agriculture commented: "When officials of the Ministry of Agriculture saw cattle grazing within the irrigation system, they reported it to the *junta de ganadería* (a government cattle registry), and the cattle, no matter who owned them, were taken to Guadalajara and sold.

Since all the land of this particular ejido fell within the boundaries of the irrigation scheme, the ejidatarios saw themselves obliged to sell a great part of their herds, which they had accumulated and built up at great effort. Some of the cattle were taken to graze elsewhere. Thus by the end of the 1960s, the number of cattle had been dramatically reduced in the village.

The end of the sixties and the first years of the seventies, under the influence of the vegetable producers and the refinery, the ejidatarios gradually turned to irrigated agriculture. However, slowly but surely it became clear that a considerable part of the ejido land was not suitable for irrigation, due to an error in the construction of the irrigation system. Seventy hectares of ejido land (10% of the total) had serious drainage problems, due to which the land slowly but surely became salinated. Since it then became unusable for growing crops of any kind, in 1980 the Ministry of Agriculture gave the owners of this land permission to grow pasture. In 1981 a commercial bank gave the owners credit to buy cattle, but since the Ministry of Agriculture was hoping that the soils would eventually recuperate, they would only give permission to buy young bullocks to fatten for sale the following year. For a period of five years the farmers fattened calves. Large price fluctuations brought an end to the buying and fattening of calves for later sale and caused several of the ejidatarios serious problems in repaying the debts.

This was the experience with livestock breeding when in 1986 the idea arose to apply for new credit. This time they wanted credit to buy cows for breeding and rearing purposes in order to protect themselves from the vulnerability of price fluctuations. Only two of the nine interested ejidatarios had any experience in breeding and raising cows. One of them had as many as 20 years experience, and the other 5 years. The rest stated themselves that fattening calves is a very different activity from raising and breeding cattle, and claimed that they felt totally inexperienced. But since the land had not improved, they were also interested in getting down to business.

Applying for credit: We want to work with BANRURAL

They decided to solicit BANRURAL for the credit. This is a government bank which provides farmers with short- and medium-term loans. The ejidatarios had a long standing trajectory of working with both BANRURAL and commercial banks, and they knew perfectly well that the rules which BANRURAL sets for the credits they provide, are much more flexible than those of commercial banks. At first everything seemed to work out well. BANRURAL was interested in the whole venture, and the ejidatarios formed an official group, with a directory board. Since the bank does not work with individual farmers, this was one of their requirements. However, the situation soon became complicated, due to the structure through which the credit would be provided and the relation between the different institutions involved in it. In the end the ejidatarios got things more or less as they wished, but only after a lengthy struggle. Before I can present that struggle I must first explain something about the structure of agricultural credit in Mexico.

The institutions involved and former experiences

The ejidatarios mainly had to deal with two institutions: BANRURAL and FIRA (Fideicomisos Instituidos en Relacion con la Agricultura).[2] As explained above, BANRURAL is a government bank and has as its objective the stimulation of agricultural production. In order to ensure repayment, the bank provides technical assistance to the farmers and obliges them to use particular inputs and to follow certain procedures.

The ejidatarios already had working experience with BANRURAL: most of their maize and sorghum was grown with credit from it, and some of the farmers owned tractors, bought with credit from this bank. The bank maintains contacts with ejidatarios through a field inspector, who is assigned a certain area. In all business dealings with the bank, the ejidatarios must first approach the field inspector of their own area. In general, there arises a specific dynamic between ejidatarios and "their" field inspector, in which both parties try to come well out of it economically. Paying bribes, in cash or kind, is a perfectly normal and fundamental link in the relation between farmers and the field inspector. Without this interdependence of the field inspector and the ejidatarios, it would have sometimes proved impossible to negotiate an extension of payment, or even remission of the debt. In this case it is important to note that the new field inspector was appointed to the region in January 1987, just after the start of proceeding for the project. He was young and new to the office and still needed to prove his value. It was, therefore, very important for him to relate well to the ejidatarios, and to this credit group in particular since the president of the group was also the president of the ejido. Apart from creating an easy work environment for himself within the ejido and in relation to his new superiors, revenues were also at stake. So it was in his best interests to make the livestock project possible and a success.

BANRURAL is not an institution with money of its own. It receives money for credit programmes from two different 'second-level' government funds. FIRA is one of these. FIRA's money comes from the National Bank, and from International Banks such as the World Bank. FIRA is responsible for the distribution of this money which is intended to stimulate agricultural production in the different regions and in different sectors of production. FIRA not only provides BANRURAL with money, but also the commercial banks interested in supplying agricultural credit. The other 'second-level' government credit-fund, FICART, works only with BANRURAL and finances all its projected projects. In the present case, BANRURAL was unable to obtain funds from FICART, so solicited funding from the FIRA office.

FIRA made clear that they were willing to give the group credit, but they set two conditions. One was that the ejidatarios should accept technical assistance from them, which meant accepting a technical supervisor from FIRA for five years, and agreeing to pay part of his salary: 10% in the first year to 50% in the fifth year. Because of repeated problems over repayment, FIRA had developed its own extension department. The other condition was that they were only willing to work with the ejidatarios if a commercial bank was prepared to

function as intermediary. The regional director of FIRA explained that FIRA very seldom worked with BANRURAL (only 5% of their funds went to BANRURAL in that particular region). Officially they are not allowed to make a distinction between BANRURAL and the commercial banks, but they did everything possible to avoid working with it because of its poor records with repayments. He confided that FIRA was concerned about its own position within the credit facilitating institutions in Mexico. Because of the economic crisis they were afraid that the government would ask for higher profitability from all the institutions and they worried about every loan that was not repaid on time. BANRURAL had a bad reputation in this respect.

When FIRA demanded that the group should work through a commercial bank, BANRURAL accepted and the ejidatarios did not at the time object. As one of them explained, they hoped the commercial banks would not be interested because of their past experience with this group. The credit for fattening calves was via a commercial bank which had wanted no further dealings with them because of faulty repayment.

But FIRA found a commercial bank that was willing to enter a contract with the group. And then the ejidatarios protested loudly. They claimed that the commercial banks were only interested in cheating them: "*siempre nos están chingando, no actuan como hombres* (they always take advantage of us, they don't act like men)".

The ejidatarios again contacted their acquaintances in BANRURAL but they were unable to help. It was FIRA's money, so FIRA could arrange the credit anyway they wanted. FIRA stuck to the demand that they work with a commercial bank, and eventually the ejidatarios accepted this arrangement.

Credit via BANRURAL after all

Then luck changed for the ejidatarios. The commercial bank had to take certain measures to get the credit programme running, but for reasons unknown it did nothing for several months. It failed to make up contracts or investigate the possibilities for cattle breeding among the interested ejidatarios. The ejidatarios seized their opportunity. They again contacted the field inspector from BANRURAL to complain that nothing had yet been arranged and to remind him that BANRURAL had promised them credit. The field inspector felt obliged to do something and he contacted the commercial bank. But the ejidatarios were not happy with this bank, and made this clear at a meeting with its director. One ejidatario recalls: "I told him the truth, that men did not act that way and if he was a man he ought to do things as they should be done, and not make promises he could not fulfil!"

It became difficult for the field inspector. As explained, he was new to the job and it was important for him to build a good relationship with the group. In the end it was the field inspector who took action. He explained the whole situation to his superiors, who in turn negotiated with FIRA (which as mentioned is officially not allowed to make any difference

between BANRURAL and commercial banks), and then turned up one day at the president's house to tell him that the credit had been arranged via BANRURAL. Thus the ejidatarios got what they wanted: a loan form BANRURAL.

The Design of the Credit-Programme: Unrealistic Assumptions

When the credit was finally approved by all the institutions concerned, BANRURAL started the procedure to decide on the contents of the programme. A veterinary official of the bank investigated the potential for cattle in the ejido. The amount of credit and the restrictions under which they would work was to be based on this investigation. His report is quite clear about the possibilities, but it seems to have been written according to the textbook, rather than from any study of the actual situation in the field.

The only data collected were on the land use of the various ejidatarios. The data on the total area of land meant for cattle was accurate, but individual data for the group members were not given. The report states that in total there are 25.5 hectares available with improved grass varieties, 5.5 with maize fodder, 19 hectares with fodder from sugarcane (the top of this plant makes good cattle food) and 30 hectares of natural pasture.

On the basis of these data, the report concludes that the ejidatarios should be given credit to buy 66 cows and 3 bulls, which within three years should produce a balance of 45 fully grown cows, 3 bulls and 122 young cattle. To assure good earning capacities it was specified that the cattle should be of the "double purpose" kind.[3)]

Two aspects of the plan catch our attention. One is that the estimate of the number of cows depends only on the land available for livestock-breeding, and not on the emphasis given to livestock within the total farming plans of the different farm enterprises. The other is that the group were to start with 66 cows and end up with only 45 cows. They were thus meant to sell almost one third of their adult cows within three years to make room for young animals. However, most ejidatarios intended to end up with more fully-grown cows at the end of the three years than they bought at the beginning. To both aspects I will return later.

The report went on to designate in great detail how the cattle should be fed with the various kinds of fodder available and with concentrates. About milk and beef production the report is rather vague. It gives only the potential amount of money to be earned from milk, and says nothing about beef production. The report estimates a milk yield of 6-7 litres a day during at least 6 months a year from the first year onwards. To reach such a yield the ejidatarios would have to buy cattle with a high strain of Friesian-Holstein, since beef cattle give at the most 3-4 litres a day. The report stated that from their estimate of milk yields, the ejidatarios would be able to start repaying the credit from the first year onwards.

Finally, the report states that the ejidatarios should be given help to buy the cattle to ensure that they bought cattle of good quality, and that they should later be helped to manage the cattle and improve their pasture.

BANRURAL followed the recommendations of the report in all its detail, and allocated to each ejidatario an amount which corresponded with the area he had available for cattle. Let us assume that an ajidatario had 3 hectares of land for feeding cattle, then he ought to buy 3 * 1.94 = 5.82 units of cattle. Thus he could obtain money to buy 5 cows. Only in one aspect did the programme differ from the report. BANRURAL decided, for two reasons, that it would be better for the ejidatarios to start by buying beef cattle, instead of double-purpose cows, and then cross-breed them with bulls that produced milk cows. The first was that good double-purpose cows were difficult to find, and they would have to go to another region to buy them. The second reason was that double-purpose cows are more prone to disease in this particular climate and considering their lack of experience, BANRURAL did not trust the ejidatarios to be able to take care of the more delicate animals yet.

Thus the credit programme resulted in all ejidatarios having to buy the same kind of cattle, to feed them in the same way and to reach the same production level in the same number of years. It was uniform for all ejidatarios regardless of the individual differences in farming practices, composition of the farmers household, other activities, type of pasture, etc. Moreover, the ejidatarios claim that no study was made of the earning capacity of livestock-keeping in the village.

Creating Room for Manoeuvre

Confronted with such a programme, the ejidatarios looked for all kinds of ways to re-adjust the programme to their own needs. There were various ways open to them. First of all they could try to influence the choice of cattle to be bought. BANRURAL wanted them to accept a supervisor who would have the final word in this. Officially they had accepted this help, but from the very start this man was faced with the fact that they intended to keep his involvement as small as possible. When he arrived, most ejidatarios had already bought or promised to buy particular cattle, which according to them would fit best their farm enterprises and would best meet their future plans. The BANRURAL employee had little choice but to approve the deals already made, even when he considered the cattle no good. This happened on such a scale that another important element of the BANRURAL plan could not be implemented either. BANRURAL had proposed that three bulls should be bought for the group's use. The ejidatarios thought that BANRURAL wanted the bulls to be group property, and based on former experiences with communally owned property, they had little confidence in the success of such an arrangement. BANRURAL denied this, claiming that the bulls were to have been bought by particular ejidatarios and that they would be hired out to the others as required. However, since the ejidatarios had spent their share of the credit so quickly, this plan had to be scrapped: they had taken BANRURAL by surprise.

Other ways open for readjusting the programme to individual needs lay more in the sphere of cattle management. They had accepted a FIRA technical advisor who could give them trouble

if they deviated from the programme. From the outset, therefore, they began a sort of guerilla war against this technical advisor, and within six months had him where they wanted him: at their service in their fights with FIRA and BANRURAL. I will come back to this in more detail later. What interests me here, is why it was so important for the ejidatarios to transform the programme to such a great extent. To answer this, I must elaborate on the differences in cattle breeding practices in the context of the farm enterprises of the different ejidatarios.

Different Farms and Different Cattle breeding Practices

One of the obvious weaknesses of the BANRURAL report was that it said nothing about the differences involved in rearing and breeding the different type of cattle, and nothing about cattle breeding in relation to other farm and non-farm activities. However, in analysing the different farms, it becomes clear that livestock plays a very specific role in each of the farms, which relates to the other agricultural and non-agricultural activities that the different members of the farm household are engaged in, and to the available means of production. Because of this, not all the farmers were interested in the same kind of cattle. Some, for instance, were more interested in beef cattle since this is less labour intensive, while others were interested in milk cattle since this provided them with a daily income. So, the different ejidatarios looked for cattle which best suited the needs of their particular farm enterprise.

The following table summarizes the differences between the 11 farms, according to two criteria, 1) the importance of cattle breeding in relation to other activities, and 2) the value given to the production of milk versus the production of beef. The data were gathered more or less a year after the credit programme started, so the livestock had become an integral part of those farm enterprises which did not have cattle before the credit programme.

The resulting picture is very diverse. Within only one year of the cattle being bought, there are marked differences in the place cattle take within the different enterprises. With the advantage of hindsight, this shows us that the initial reluctance on part of the ejidatarios to all buy the same cattle, probably had to do with the differences already existing between the farms. The choice of buying one type as against another is related to the farming enterprise as a whole, and is a logical result of all the other activities in which the different members of the farm household are involved.

Now, let us have a more detailed look to all these differences. I will organize my comments around the three different categories as formulated in Table 6: A) those for whom milk production of milk is more valuable than the production of beef, B) those for whom both beef and milk are equally important, and C) those for whom beef production is more important than milk.

Table 6. Differences between 11 cattle-breeders, of which 9 belong to the credit group (numbers refer to the number of respondents)

CATTLE BREEDING			
	MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY	IMPORTANT NEXT TO OTHER ACTIVITIES	LESS IMPORTANT THAN OTHER ACTIVITIES
CATEGORY A MILK MORE IMPORTANT	2	1	1
CATEGORY B MILK AND BEEF EQUAL	1	2	
CATEGORY C BEEF MORE IMPORTANT		1	3

Source: Lex Hoefsloot, 1992.

Milk More Important

There are four ejidatarios (see table 6) who argue that the production of milk is more important than beef production. They all bought cattle of the Friesian-Holstein race with the money of the loan. Neither of them had any earlier experience with cattle breeding.

They were also alike in that all four intended in the future to move towards an equal share of milk and beef by cross-breeding their cattle with Cebu bulls. They hoped that this would produce offspring that produced both a reasonable quantity of milk and beef and that would be stronger than thoroughbred milk cows. One of them explained this in the following way:

> "You have to have the two things, milk for helping the family and beef for maintaining the cattle. You can take care of your family the whole year round with income from the milk, but the real money comes from selling the cattle for beef. For small-scale farmers maintaining the double-purpose cow is the most sensible. A big cattle farmer will choose one or the other, but on a large scale. But we cannot build the stables needed to keep only milk cows. They have to be fed better, you can't just give them sugarcane tips, they need maize fodder or alfalfa."

So the longer term plans of these farmers do not differ so much from what BANRURAL had planned. Why then did they choose to follow another strategy for realizing their plans? Why did they buy milk cows instead of the beef cattle proposed by the bank? This had to do with the immediate needs of the farmers' families, the family composition, and the means of

production available. Let us have a close look at the particularities of each of these four farm enterprises.

Two ejidatarios judged cattle breeding to be the most important economic activity they were engaged in. One of them is an ejidatario of 45 years old. He has a son of 17 who works with him, and his wife runs a small shop. He has a parcel of sugarcane, but apart from some well determined peaks of labour this crop does not involve much work. This means that he can give a considerable amount of his labour time to his cattle. He and his wife are keen to give their children a good education. One daughter is in highschool in the neighbouring town. Their eldest son however had no desire to continue in education, and their ambition for him now is to help him to become a good farmer. Buying milk cows had several advantages for them. One was that they would immediately generate a daily income, which with their school-going children they needed. The other was that milk cows are more labour intensive and require more care, and this would form a better 'practical school' for their son. This ejidatario was the only one who on the odd occasion bought magazines on breeding cows, and who initiated twice-daily milking. He was convinced that he had bought three very good cows, and wanted to prove that milking twice a day would keep the milk yield high for a much longer period.

The other ejidatario for whom cattle breeding was the most important economic activity was Don Alfonso, the president of the ejido. He is an old man and he depends completely on his grandson of 17 who lives with them. But the boy does not yet feel responsible enough to take on the whole business, and Don Alfonso, because of his community obligations, is unable to take complete control himself. So occasionally the cattle are not fed, and the calves are not separated from the cows, so they drink all the milk. However, he had decided to buy the more delicate and labour-intensive milk cows because he had no other source of income. He owns a plot of sugar-cane but because of some old debts he had had to sell the harvest for the following three years. His aim is to have a herd of double-purpose cows:

> "I want to have only double-purpose cows of 50% Cebu and 50% Jersey (another milk-producing strain). At present I only produce milk, but one gets more for beef than from milk. And these *Holandesas* are born like me: twisted all ways (*cholenques*). They aren't worth much, *Holandesas*."

One ejidataria responded that cattle were less important for her than the other economic activities in which she was engaged. She also owns a shop-cum-bar, and six hectares of sugar-cane, worked mostly by her son. Economically they did not depend on milk production, and because of poor management, their milk yields were lower than those of other milk producers. It is thus strange that she nevertheless bought the more delicate milk cows. She is the same Doña Lupe, who so capably knows her way around the local political scene (see chapter 4, and chapter 8), and perhaps this explains her choice to buy milk cows. In the whole process of getting close to Don Alfonso, the president of the ejido, she joined him when he went to look for cows. They both bought cows from the same farm. Her attitude towards the cattle is more one of business woman than farmer:

"At our place the cattle will never grow old. We buy and sell. When you find yourself a deal which looks good, you have to catch it while you can."

In her opinion cattle breeding is nothing more than good business. If the price of milk is high you buy milk cows, if beef prices are good you should sell your cattle or at least some of them. A bit more than a year after she bought the cattle, she sold them all. She was able to repay her debt to BANRURAL and make a profit.

The fourth ejidatario who responded that milk cows were the more important, claimed that his cows too equal place to the other economic activities in which he was engaged. He is a young man of 26 without a family. Besides cattle breeding he also works four hectares of sugarcane and has equal shares with a brother and his father in 1.5 hectares planted with tomatoes. He is the only one without any pastureland of his own. At the time of interviewing he was renting three hectares, but only for one year. He depends heavily on feeding them in the corral and it is, therefore, logical for him to keep milk cows. They are close at hand and can be observed most of the time so the chance of disease is less. However, he plans to cross-breed his cows with a Cebu bull to produce his own double-purpose cows, because he admits that milk cows are too delicate for the climate.

Concluding our look at these four cattle breeders, we can say that although their longer term perspective does not differ so much from the plans of the bank - they all aim for a herd of double-purpose cows in the future - their strategy for getting there is very different from the way proposed by the bank. They all started with milk and not beef cows. Each ejidatario had his or her own reasoning for this choice, ranging from the immediate need for cash income, the wish to train a son to become a good farmer, the fact that it was good business at that time, to the availability of labour and pasture.

Beef more Important than Milk

As we can see in Table 1, four ejidatarios also responded that the production of beef was more important to them than the production of milk. They subsequently bought beef cattle with their loan, as proposed by the bank. However, if we analyse cattle breeding within the context of their farms, it becomes clear that three of the four ejidatarios have no intention whatsoever to work towards a herd of double-purpose cattle. They are only interested in beef production.

All four have other important economic activities, and all but one spend little time on their herds. Let us have a brief look to each of them.

The ejidatario who said that his cattle were as important as any of the other economic activities he was engaged in, is the only ejidatarios of these four who invests a considerable amount of time on his herd. This is due to its size. With around eighty animals he is the largest cattle owner of the village. He started five years ago by buying animals with credit for buying and fattening bullocks. He was able to repay the loan without selling any cattle, since he owns 7 hectares of sugarcane and with his brother he administers a further 16 hectares. He

also owns two tractors which are always hired out with chauffeur, which is a good business. He was able to increase his herd rapidly with the help of credit. He also has some double-purpose cows but only to provide for home milk and cheese consumption. Maintaining such a big herd is difficult since he personally owns only 1 hectare of natural pasture. What he depends on is buying the rights to graze on plots where maize has been harvested or from farmers whose harvest has partly failed. But this is problematic because all land is more or less sown at the same time and for three or four months while the maize is growing he depends heavily on feeding his cattle in the corral with cane tips. The cattle become thin during those months, but nevertheless, a large herd represents a huge capital, which he can use as collateral with the bank or sell. This way of cattle breeding leaves no room for the more delicate milk cows, and he has no intention subsequently to increase the number of milk or double-purpose cows.

The other three ejidatarios who have mainly beef cattle consider the cattle as less important than their other activities. One of them is a young man with only one small daughter. His wife is not involved in the farm activities. He owns eight hectares of sugarcane and cares for another eight belonging to his mother. He owns a truck to transport cane to the refinery and although he contracted a chauffeur to drive it, both the truck and the chauffeur require his time. He has no pasture but is renting four hectares for a year. The increase in the cost of renting pasture influenced by increasing demand because of all the cattle bought with BANRURAL/FIRA credit, is becoming problematic for him. In the summer of 1988 a hectare of pasture cost more than a hectare of maize. He said:

> "I enjoy keeping animals, so when I had the opportunity to join the group, I did so. I was thinking to grow my own fodder but when they offered me the chance to rent pastureland I took it. But now I am going to look for some land to sow sorghum, to see if it works out. If it doesn't well I'll have to hire pasture for another year or sell my animals."

He motivate his choice for pure Cebu by saying:

> "They are easier to maintain whether in grassland or in the hills, while milk cows would just get thinner and thinner. Milk cows need to be kept in a stable so that you can always be there when needed. Also milking takes a lot of time and you must deliver the milk. I have a lot of other things to do in sugarcane, and I have a truck."

However, he does not exclude the possibility of having double-purpose cows in the future. Perhaps when he has grown children to help him.

The other two ejidatarios are not seriously involved in livestock keeping. One of them invests little time or inputs in his small herd. He takes care that they are healthy and that they survive. They are his savings account. When he needs the money he can sell an animal. At this moment he has other activities which are far more important to him: he has 3 hectares of sugarcane, 3 hectares of maize and he rents 10 hectares on which he grows *tomate de cascara* (a popular member of the tomato family encountered in Mexico). Growing 10 hectares of

vegetables is a capital intensive and risky enterprise, which absorbs most of his time and worries. The cattle should be seen as a basis for making this enterprise possible.

The last ejidatario is an old man who owns a taxi which he himself drives all day. In reality he is more a taxi-driver than a farmer. His sons work on the land, but he is the one who takes all the decisions regarding production. He feels that keeping milk cows is not for him: "It is useless buying delicate cows when you can't dedicate yourself to cattle breeding."

Notwithstanding the differences between these four farmers, what they have in common is that cattle breeding is only one of the economic activities they are engaged in, and in most cases cattle are considered less important than their other activities, which is why they prefer beef cattle over milk cattle. Only one of them does not exclude the possibility of becoming engaged one day in raising double-purpose cows. But certainly not in the short term, since this depends on the labour available in the farm household.

Milk and Beef Equally Important

Three ejidatarios responded that the production of milk and beef were equally important to them. All three indeed have double-purpose cows. Apart from this they have two other things in common. All three have experience in cattle breeding (between 4 and 20 years), and cattle breeding has become a well established activity within the totality of the different farm enterprises.[4] Another thing they have in common is that none of them bought cattle with the credit. Two of them are not members of the credit group since they had no intention of increasing their herds, and the third bought his own cattle and used the credit borrowed to pay off some outstanding debts.

However, it is nevertheless interesting to include them in the analysis, since in a certain sense, they have already established what BANRURAL and FIRA intended to stimulate through the credit and the technical assistance. The three farms have a very different history, and their cattle breeding practices, within the wider context of their farm households, vary profoundly. They all have found a way of working which is most appropriate for the particularities of their own enterprises. These farmers demonstrate clearly that even if different farmers aim at developing a herd of double-purpose cows, this development takes different forms, according to the idiosyncrasy of each farm household. I will compare only two of them in order to keep the story brief.

For one of them cattle breeding is the most important activity within the farm household. This is the farm which we came to know in the previous chapter, in the history of Doña Rosa. As we have seen she was the one who can largely be held responsible for the development of the herd. While her husband was working in the United States for many years, she slowly but surely built up the herd. She invested the money he sent to buy the first two cows and calves. These cows are the founders of the whole herd. They never bought another cow. With her own sources of income (the selling of milk and cheese, the raising of chickens and pigs, and what

her husband sent her) she maintained herself and the children, so that it was seldom necessary to sell any animals, and the cows became the central pillar of the household economy. Now they have 18 fully grown cows, and 25 young cattle, and a bull. Although in the last seven years, since he permanently came back from the United States, he has been in charge again of the daily care of the animals, she is perfectly capable of doing so and he admits this. She still has much influence in the decisions taken over the cattle.

That the cattle is such a central pillar in the household economy, is also reflected in the future plans they have for the development of the farm. In contrast to most of the other cattle breeders, they have a long-term strategy for improving the herd. They intend to raise the productivity of the cows through careful cross breeding. The year previous to our interviews, he had bought a bull of good stock from a big livestock owner with a good reputation. This bull was mainly of the Holstein breed but with some Cebu. With this bull they hope to raise their milk yields. He was intending in a couple of years time to buy a pure-bred Cebu bull, to give his cattle more strength, and after that he would like a bull of Swiss breed to establish a better milk production, while still producing beef. They have also clear ideas about the cows with which they want to continue breeding. They know each animal very well, since they bred and raised them themselves.

The other agricultural activities they are engaged in are related to cattle breeding: together with two sons, and one son who helps out at peak periods, they grow maize, chick-peas and pasture. The latter two crops they grow exclusively for the cattle, and the first both for home consumption and for fodder. In addition they gather sugarcane leaves, which they mill to make it suitable for fodder.

The other two ejidatarios in this category both responded that their cattle were as important as the other economic activities they were engaged in. Let me describe one of these farms in some detail. Four years previously, the ejidatario concerned had obtained personal credit from a commercial bank to buy a breed of cattle that contained a high percentage of Holstein. In the first years, he maintained this high percentage of milk strain but recently had started to cross breed with Cebu, to obtain stronger and less labour intensive cattle. He now had 15 fully-grown cows and 12 calves. His wife was not engaged in farming and his children were still small. Apart from breeding livestock he was also engaged in the production of tomatoes and was doing rather well with them, earning a lot of money. And it is in this area that he sees growth capacities:

> "One cannot expand in livestock. One reaches a certain point and can go no further. Making progress can only be achieved through hard work and in cattle breeding there is not much work to be done. You can take good care of your cattle, but that is it. You can't do more. That is why I changed to horticulture, that's better business. But then my time is not sufficient. That is why I have cross-bred my cows with Cebu: more beef, less milk, less delicate, less work."

The striking difference between these two ejidatarios is although they both have double-purpose cows, is that for the first, cattle breeding is the central activity in which both husband, wife and the children are involved. The histories of the two farms differ profoundly but for the second, cattle is something alongside the production of tomatoes, and he manages both activities himself. The time invested in one, competes directly with the time he can invest in the other.

The Mistake of a Uniform Cattle Breeding Programme

I have given this rather lengthy description of the different farms to show that in contrast to what was written in the BANRURAL report, cattle breeding activities cannot be separated from the other economic and agricultural activities undertaken within the farm enterprise, nor from the composition of the farm household and the involvement of the husband, wife and children in the farming activities. And further, it is important to recognize the immediate and the longer-term needs that farmers hope the cattle will take care of. This gives a good impression of what kind of cattle and what kind of cross-breeding strategy fits a certain farm best. This becomes very clear in the contrast between those farmers who bought milk cows with the credit and those who bought beef cows. The first were in immediate need of a daily source of income, although they recognized the difficulties of breeding the more delicate milk cows and aimed in the long-term for double-purpose cows. The 'beef' farmers were widely engaged in all kinds of other agricultural and non-agricultural activities, and saw their cattle more as a long-term investment, and for any hard times to come. They did not aspire to cross breed with milk cows.

The uniform programme proposed and executed by BANRURAL was therefore misguided and based on a misunderstanding of the agricultural reality in the village. It never would have been possible for all members of the credit-group to successfully implement the ideas of BANRURAL. Nor did they wish to. It was of great importance for everybody that the ejidatarios readjusted the programme.

How they succeeded in readjusting the programme is the subject of the rest of this chapter.

Ejidatarios Versus Officials: Readjusting the Programme

As stated earlier, BANRURAL wanted the ejidatarios to buy beef cattle and cross-breed these with a milk strain. The ejidatarios were to give three kilos of concentrates to each cow per day, and the number of animals per hectare was regulated. The group was to begin with 66 cows in total and were expected to reduce to 45 fully grown cows after three years. The credit was to be repaid within a period of 5 years, the interest only in the first year (at 68%) and interest and capital from the second year onwards.

To begin with, not all the ejidatarios bought beef-cattle. Four bought milk cows. Second, none of them intended to reduce the number of cattle they owned. Some were even thinking in terms of a personal herd of 30 or 40 animals. There has been no quarrel as yet about the second issue for it lies in the future. But over the purchase of milk cows there has been a major fight between the ejidatarios and the bank. The first repayment has also been disputed, resulting in an extension for payment of half of the interest of the first year. They will now pay that in the fifth year.

What form did these quarrels take, and how was it that the ejidatarios turned out to be the winners? Let us return to the moment when the ejidatarios received the message that the credit was to be arranged via BANRURAL.

The switch from beef to milk cattle

The ejidatarios received money to buy a fixed number of cows at 400,000 pesos each. Milk animals at that time cost 600,000 pesos and beef animals 350,000 pesos. Six of the nine members of the credit group actually bought beef cattle, two bought milk, and one used the money for purposes for which he otherwise would have had to sell some of his cattle. Apart from the amount of money available for buying the cattle, there was another factor which influenced the ejidatarios to buy beef cattle at the time; the prices for milk and beef. Prices are controlled by the government and in the Spring of 1987, milk prices were relatively low, rising less than the rate of inflation which was extremely high. Hence, it was not attractive to produce milk, less even when you had to base your milk production on three kilo of concentrates per day per cow, as advised by BANRURAL.

At the end of 1987, the price of milk rose rapidly, from 350 pesos per litre to between 700-800 pesos per litre. Hence milk production became more attractive. In addition the prices for beef had also rapidly increased, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Rise in the price paid for milk and beef in Mexico DF, expressed as a percentage of last years prices

Year	General Index	Milk	Beef
1984	88.0	68.9	48.7
1985	63.4	44.1	??
1986	101.6	??	58.1
1987	159.2	177.8	272.0

Source: José Luis Calva (1988) Crisis Agricola y Alimentario en Mexico 1982-1988, Fontamara 54, Mexico.

For the ejidatarios this meant that in January 1988, they could sell an animal for which they had paid 350,000 pesos 8 months ago, for 1 million pesos. Also with the sudden rise in beef prices, the difference between the price of a milk and a beef animal had changed in favour of beef. This meant that the ejidatarios could sell their beef cattle and buy almost the equivalent number of milk cows.

Three ejidatarios proposed this change to BANRURAL whose permission they needed. The bank would not approve the change, reasoning that the management of milk cows was too difficult to be properly executed by the ejidatarios. However, finally the ejidatarios did get the approval. How was this achieved? To answer this we must go back to the arrival of the FIRA advisor in the village. He played a decisive role in this fight.

Gaining the Loyalty of FIRA's Technical Adviser

As already explained, FIRA appointed a technical adviser and obliged the credit-group to pay part of his salary, 10% to start with and 50% by the fifth year. Officials from FIRA and BANRURAL introduced the technical adviser, let us call him Lupe, as a specialist on cattle management and maintenance of pastures, who had a degree in these subjects.

The credit group immediately expressed their disappointment. They had always wanted a veterinary surgeon as advisor. The FIRA officials explained that one was not available, but that the veterinary surgeons of ANAGSA (the insurance-company) were always at their service. The credit group had no choice but to accept him.

But with Lupe's first payment, the ejidatarios started the discussion again. In Mexico, officials are paid every 2 weeks. To get his salary from FIRA, Lupe had to present a form signed by the directorate of the credit group stating that they approved of the way he had carried out his job. So every 15 days Lupe had to collect the signatures of the 4 members of the directory board. After the first two weeks the ejidatarios refused to sign, reasoning that they were not convinced of the advisor's qualities and will to work. They made the point that they would not pay the 10% of his salary until he had proved his usefulness to them.

Two meetings were held with officials of both FIRA and BANRURAL, but the ejidatarios were firm in their decision and refused to pay. It was obvious at these meetings that the situation was out of the control of the bank officials. The ejidatarios had already spent all the credit, so the only reprisal the bank officials could take was to claim the cattle and sell them again. Obviously, that was out of the question. So the position never changed at the meetings: the ejidatarios reasoning why they would not pay, the officials claiming that they should pay.

The problem was finally solved by the technical advisor himself, when he proposed to work for FIRA for 90% only. Lupe abandoned the ejidatarios 10% until they were convinced of his utility. This decision of Lupe should be seen in the light of his personal interest in this case. Success was extremely important for him. After several years without paid work, he had got this job because of the influence of a high-ranking friend. Although his qualifications were

good, even too good for such a post, he had had some problems in his life. They had been caused, he claimed, from being too honest in his work. He had become so frustrated that he needed psychiatric help in a clinic. There he was given electric shock treatment. Since then he had never been the same again and had several times had to re-enter the clinic. This job was something of a last chance for him.

Only two weeks later, Lupe arranged a meeting for the credit group with two veterinary surgeons from ANAGSA. They came to give a lecture on some important diseases, with the intention of convincing the ejidatarios of the necessity to vaccinate their cattle. The ejidatarios, however, did not have much choice in the matter, because vaccinating was an obligation if the cattle were to be insured with ANAGSA. So the vets talked and the ejidatarios listened. Nobody had any questions. Then at the end of the meeting, Lupe recalled that none of the ejidatarios had yet arranged his insurance with ANAGSA. They still had to tell ANAGSA how many and what kind of animals they had to be insured. One of the ejidatarios said they would go to the office of ANAGSA within a week, but Lupe out of good will and to save them time and trouble, insisted on arranging it at that very moment.The ejidatarios need only to tell how many cows they wanted insured. Nobody protested.

Lupe started with the first ejidatario standing next to him. He answered hesitatingly, as did the next, also the third. Then came the president of the group, also the president of the ejido. The president answered quietly, "none". Lupe was surprised, and asked him if he was sure. He was. From then on, all the others said they did not want to insure any cattle. So in the end, Lupe was made to look quite silly.

We were also surprised, and did not understand. To us the insurance seemed very favourable. So, that same evening, talking with the president we asked him if they really did not want to insure their cattle. Of course they wanted to insure their cattle, but not in the moment chosen by "that Lupe". They would go to the office of ANAGSA when they got the opportunity. So the ejidatarios kept on fighting Lupe.

Lupe started working with enthusiasm, but because of problems with drinking, he missed a couple of early appointments with the ejidatarios. He promised to be present to observe the cows at milking time, but a few times he came too late. Hence, only 6 weeks later, the ejidatarios refused to sign his work approval again. The board of the credit group went to the office of FIRA to complain that Lupe was not showing much will to work. After some discussion, FIRA got them to sign by promising to execute better control on him. The ejidatarios were satisfied, because by this time, Lupe was already more or less crawling to them. Just by refusing to let him work with them, they had made sure that he was totally at their service.

Although they never expressed it this way, I am convinced that this was the incentive for their actions against him. In those three or four months, their way of talking about him changed completely. In the beginning they were always very negative: he was a drunk, he knew nothing about cattle breeding, he didn't show up to work, etcetera. But after the quarrels

they started to talk approvingly about him; he was of value to them, he knew his way round the institutions, he was a nice guy, and so forth. Hence, from the very start, they had been fighting for his loyalty, and they had won. His first loyalty was now always to the credit group.

The Fight over the Change of Cattle

Lupe's loyalty to the group was of great importance in the fight to get the change of cattle approved by BANRURAL. When the ejidatarios asked permission to sell their Cebu cows to buy milk cows, Lupe had been working for six months with the group. For two or three months there had been no trouble between him and the group.

After the first refusal of BANRURAL to switch from beef to milk cattle, the ejidatarios asked Lupe to solicit permission from the banks. He first went to FIRA and got approval without much discussion. Then he went to BANRURAL but the veterinary officials from BANRURAL refused to give permission. So a few days later Lupe came back to BANRURAL, but this time accompanied by the three ejidatarios who wanted the change. They started a good quarrel in the BANRURAL office. Finally BANRURAL gave in and approved. The BANRURAL official in charge explained their capitulation in the following way:

> "He (Lupe) supported them, and the bank had to accept. Or to put it this way, when FIRA accepted the change, BANRURAL had to approve also. ... The ejidatarios exerted so much pressure. The truth is that after FIRA nobody could do anything but accept."

The Extension of Payment

Only 2 months later, the ejidatarios used Lupe again. They had to make the first repayment to BANRURAL, but for some of them this was difficult, especially for the three who had bought milk cows. They needed more time. They reasoned that they were just getting used to their cows and if they had to pay right at that moment, they would have to sell some animals again. Some of the beef cattle owners were also reasoning that the bank should give them more time, because it had been only eight months since they had been given the money.[5)]

So they asked Lupe to negotiate an extension of payment for them. I do not know whether this was difficult for Lupe, but within two weeks he had arranged it. The ejidatarios were allowed to pay half of the interest of that year in the fifth year.

The involvement of the technical advisor ended some four months later when he was withdrawn by FIRA and transferred to another region to work with other groups. He was not replaced by anybody else. The director of FIRA explained to us that they had given up. They no longer wanted to be involved with the group. He stated that they would probably get their money back because of the favourable price developments, but that working with this group

only meant trouble. In his view the ejidatarios saw their cattle only as a favourable short-term deal and not as a valuable means of production for which quality needed to be guaranteed for the far future. In his opinion the group was not worth the trouble.

The Project: An Arena of Negotiations

In this case it becomes very clear that project implementation does not mean carrying out a programme as planned, but that this is a constant process of negotiation. As Bierschenk (1988, 146) states, to understand this process "one must begin with an analysis of the projects participants and other interest groups, the goals and reasons for their negotiation, resources they have at hand - in short, of their own respective projects." I would include also the images one party has of the other, and earlier experiences they have had with each other. These images and earlier experiences are of fundamental importance to understanding the conflicts which arose during the implementation of the project, and which were the subject of negotiation.

First of all the planners of the programme assumed an essentially undifferentiated group of ejidatarios. The reality turned out to be different. As we have seen it was a relatively heterogeneous and differentiated group. For each of them, agricultural reality was different: the time and means they were able to spend on livestock keeping differed greatly, and could not easily be changed because of its interdependence with all other activities of the different household members (economic as well as otherwise). The bank wanted to stimulate a uniform programme: buying beef cattle, which was supposed to be cross-bred with milk bulls, in order to reach a herd of double-purpose cows. The bank reasoned by starting with the question: What would be the easiest way of breeding cattle to reach those double-purpose cows? To them it was obvious to start with beef cows, because they are less delicate, less prone to diseases, and easier to purchase. However the ejidatarios reasoned from a different starting point: what would be economically, considering their individual circumstances, the best way to reach those "double-purpose" cows? This led to the wish to start with milk cows. While other ejidatarios agreed to buy beef cattle since they were not interested in milking their cows anyway.

Second, based on their former experiences, the ejidatarios did not want to get credit through commercial banks, but through BANRURAL. Commercial banks are said not to be interested in the wellbeing of the farmers. While the commercial banks insist on repayment of the credits with full interest, the practices of BANRURAL, and the support this bank gets from the government, make repayment regimes more flexible. The ejidatarios did everything within their power to influence the institutional framework of the credit, knowing that this framework would be more decisive for the room for manoeuvre they could finally create, than any officially designed programme.

Thirdly, the frontline personnel of both BANRURAL and FIRA turned out to be essential for the course of events at crucial moments. As we have seen, the ejidatarios invested a lot of

energy to secure for themselves the loyalty of these frontline workers. They needed someone who knew the way through the various banks, and who would defend their case. These frontline workers are in an extremely difficult position. For a positive judgement of their work they depend on the cooperation of the ejidatarios (to be able to demonstrate good work results to their superiors), but they are also the ones who have to carry out the plans of the bank, which as we have seen can sometimes be in strong contradiction to the ejidatarios' own plans. And they have to find their way in this conflictive interface. This was extremely complicated in the case of Lupe, since this job was so important for him.

In this particular case, in the end, probably both the ejidatarios and the banks will think they are right and both will be more or less satisfied with the result: The ejidatarios because they got their credit, could spend it as they wanted, and because cattle breeding turned out to be economically successful because of the favourable price developments; the banks, because they most probably will get their money back because of those same favourable price developments, even though they withdrew their assistance "because those ejidatarios are not interested in any good programme."

Notes

1. This chapter draws heavily on an article written by Lex Hoefsloot called Small Farmers Resisting Regulations: a livestock-credit programme in Western Mexico, to be published in 1992. Lex Hoefsloot is an agricultural engineer, who within the general framework of my research, carried out work related to farm practices. I am very grateful for his contribution.

2. There was one further government institution involved in this credit programme - ANAGSA (Asegurancia Nacional de Agricultura y Ganaderia S.A.) - an insurance company. Every loan from BANRURAL has to be insured with ANAGSA. In case of dramatic losses the insurance repays the farmer's debts. Thus the production is not insured, only the loan. In this particular case ANAGSA did not play an important role and is mentioned only to complete the picture of the contacts the ejidatarios are obliged to maintain with the government if they receive credit.

3. In principle, there are 2 types of livestock: milk cattle and beef cattle. The first are mainly of the Friesian-Holstein type and originate from more moderate climates such as the Netherlands, referred to in Mexico in common language as *Holandesas*. Beef cattle are mainly of the Zebu type, and originate in warm climates.

By interbreeding the two types it is possible to get a type of cow which gives both milk and beef (the 'double purpose' cow), which is better adapted to warm climates than the Friesian-Holstein type. BANRURAL defines a double-purpose cow as a crossbreed of 50% Zebu and 50% Holstein, which produces 7-8 litres of milk daily over a period of 180-210 days a year, and which weighs more or less 450 kg.

4. This is reflected for instance in the way they feed their cows compared with the former 4 ejidatarios. All three have developed a way of feeding the cattle which ensure less dependency on the input-market and less use of concentrates. While the former ejidatarios give from 3-6 kg to those cows they milk, the latter give much less. One gives none at all, and the others give 1.5 and 2.5 kg per cow per day respectively. Furthermore, they all grow maize, despite its low price on the market, for they use the stalks and leaves of the maize as fodder. The other ejidatarios did not do this.

5. FIRA had first reserved the money in February of the previous year, but the ejidatarios only received the money in May/June.

VIII. FEMALE FARMERS COPING IN A MEN'S WORLD: STRUGGLES OVER IDENTITY AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL MEANING OF LAND

Introduction

As we have seen, through inheritance, a small but not insignificant percentage of ejidatarios in El Rancho are women (17%). It is important to note that all these women are widows, and their socialization, social roles and much of their adult lives have been dominated by all those circumstances and issues looked into in preceding chapters. It should also be noted that as widows they no longer need to negotiate decisions and responsibilities with husbands, but nevertheless they still have many battles to fight, and their story is an interesting one. As I have argued, it is in the everyday sphere of interaction with husbands and children that women have become defined as 'housewives', just as in interaction with representatives of the wider environment, men have become 'farmers'. But this does not mean that when a women is widowed she is able to become a 'farmer' on the same terms as the men. Practices within the ejido, as well as those practices which govern interaction with representatives of the wider environment, lead to shared understandings about gender which exceed the realities of individual women.

A woman may be head of a household and have land which she cultivates, but this does not imply that she will be regarded as or treated as a 'farmer' by her male counterparts or by representatives of the institutions involved in the production process. Nor is she likely to find her way through the institutional apparatus or through ejido politics as easily as men. She is likely to encounter specific problems due to her lack of practical knowledge of institutional cultures and due to the fact that her social networks, built up over a lifetime, are perhaps only partially useful for solving the problems she will encounter in running her farm.

In this chapter, the central question is to what extent land gives women the opportunity to challenge existing gender ideology and practices. I will investigate this by looking closely at the ways in which women make their land productive, not so much in an economic or agricultural sense, but more in a social and ideological sense.

Women Managing a Farm

The factors that contribute to women to becoming marginal to the agricultural 'world', are precisely the factors which cause problems for women once they take charge of a farm.

First, let us consider the division of labour. In former days, men and women both worked on the land. Although there existed a certain division of labour according to gender in the field, the impression given is that this was not so strictly practised. Women tell proudly of their ability to manage a plough and oxen, an activity which is usually said to be done only by men. It is striking that when women talk about their agricultural experience, they always talk of their work in the fields. They are more than willing to show how capable they are in such work, often claiming to be better and faster than the men. The big difference between men and women, particularly among older women, should therefore not be looked for in the sphere of agricultural production, but in the sphere of maintaining relations with the outside world and institutional framework. It was mainly men who maintained contacts with the moneylender, men who rented oxen to plough the land, men who contracted labourers, or organized labour parties in order to harvest, and men who finally marketed the products.

In the process of modernization, the amount of work done in the fields by household members has diminished, while the management side has gained in importance. Nowadays, the maintenance of good relations with representatives of impinging institutions have become increasingly important for the production process. And as we have seen in the previous chapters, it is precisely in this sphere that men have become more defined as farmers, while women's access to agriculture has become more and more restricted and they find themselves confined to the domestic sphere as housewives.

One of the main problems women encounter when they become ejidatarios, is their lack of experience in finding their way in the institutional environment. They know how to grow maize, how to grow beans, they have some experience in the cultivation of vegetables, but they have almost no experience at all in the cultivation of sugarcane, nor in the practices of the refinery that provides inputs and organizes the harvest, nor in the practices of the local department of the ministry of agriculture responsible for the division of irrigation water. The experience of Doña Martina shows the problems which this leads to.[1)]

Doña Martina: Managing Cane Production

Doña Martina is a widow of 74 years of age. Fourteen years ago her husband died, followed three years later by the death of her only son. The last ten years Doña Martina has been running the farm. She herself no longer works on the land, but regularly she walks the four kilometres between her house in the village and her fields, in order to see that everything is alright. Before her son died, they used to live near the fields, but after his death she decided to move to the village. She has 5 hectares, divided in three plots. Since her son died she has

sown on one of her plots, a hectare of vegetables such as maize, beans, tomatoes, cucumber, carrots and cabbage, in a share crop agreement with an old acquaintance. This is for her own consumption needs. She provides the inputs, pays for the irrigation water and the ploughing and he organizes the work on the land. The harvest is shared equally. This arrangement causes few problems, except she sometimes doubts whether she gets all her share of the harvest. On another hectare she sows alfalfa, a highly nutritious fodder for cows. This she does on the same basis as the vegetables. Also share cropping with an old friend. The alfalfa can be harvested daily over a period of more or less eight months a year, and thus provides her with a regular income for daily household needs.

The other three hectares are planted with sugarcane. This she organizes differently. She is the one in charge and decides what work has to be done and when, and she employs a regular worker to carry out the work. She strictly follows the package of the refinery. She applies the amount and type of fertilizer the refinery advises, she irrigates according to their guide-lines, she weeds when the refinery advises weeding. She has a very sound reason to till the land this way: the refinery provides credit only for the package of measures they advise. Doña Martina pays her worker the pay rates established by the refinery for the different tasks he carries out. But it is Doña Martina who initiates it, who applies for the money and the inputs, and arranges for irrigation water. And it is in the cultivation of sugarcane that she encounters problems. I will now describe one of these many problems, and examine how she tried to resolve it.

The harvesting of sugarcane, the *zafra*, is a critical event, and an anxious time for the farmers. The sugarcane is paid according to its weight, and only partly according to its quality. The weight of sugarcane can be raised considerably by applying irrigation just before the harvest as the cane then contains more water. However, since the refinery is not interested in water, but in sugar, they forbid irrigating for a period of six weeks before the harvest. This requires a great deal of careful organizing. The refinery has field inspectors whose job it is to tell the farmers when their cane will be harvested and to see to it that indeed no irrigation is applied shortly before the harvest. In 1988, the *zafra* became even more of a headache than usual because of the enormous amount of sugarcane which had to be harvested. In the last two or three years, the area under cane had increased enormously and this year rumours went around that the refinery would not have enough capacity to process all the cane. The harvest has to be finished before the rainy season starts for the same reason that farmers are not allowed to irrigate just before the harvest. Not having one's parcel harvested is a disaster for the individual farmer, since it implies no income for the rest of that year.

Doña Martina knew about this problem, but was not too worried about it as she had been to the offices of the refinery, and the *encargado* had assured her that her cane was planned to be harvested the first half of April, nearly two months before the rainy season was due to start. Halfway through February, Doña Martina went to the offices of the SARH (the local department of the Ministry of Agriculture in charge of irrigation) to apply for the last irrigation turn.

The head of the department promised her a turn at the end of February. She asked her worker to do the job. So far, everything was running smoothly.

However, when the worker was in the middle of irrigating, the water suddenly stopped running through the canal. The field was not even half irrigated, and officially his turn should not yet have finished. He looked upstream of the canal, and he noticed that workers from one of the farmers upstream had blocked the canal, so that the water was running to their boss' field. The farmer is a very rich and influential man from the nearby village, who has the reputation of being a difficult person. The worker decides not to bring this hornets' nest about his ears, packs up, and informs Doña Martina. She of course is very angry, and immediately she goes again to the offices of the SARH, to complain about the whole matter. The *encargado*, the official responsible, promises to investigate the case, and Doña Martina returns home more or less satisfied. The next day she goes again to SARH, and the *encargado* admits that an error had been made and that as soon as possible she will get another irrigation turn. From then on, every second or third day Doña Martina shows up at the SARH office, but one day the *encargado* is not present, another day he says that at the moment it is impossible, since there is so much demand for water, the third day he says that he will discuss it with the *canalero*, the water guard of the area and so it went on. Three weeks passed, and still the land had not been irrigated. Doña Martina started to worry: there were only three weeks left to the harvest. She then went again to the offices of the refinery and explained the problem. She wanted to ask whether they could perhaps put pressure on the SARH to give her the irrigation turn she was owed, but when they heard that the sugarcane was due to be harvested within three weeks, they told her that it was too late, that she can no longer irrigate. Somewhat bothered she goes home. The harvest will not be as good as it could have been, but there is nothing further she can do about it.

Four weeks later, her sugarcane had still not been harvested. She went again to the refinery and they explained that they were a bit behind schedule, and that they had not yet tested the sugarcane on her field to see if it was 'ripe' enough to be harvested. But she should not worry. It would not take long. However, time passed and other fields nearby were harvested, but not hers. She was hesitating about applying for another irrigation turn, since by now it had been nearly four months since her cane had been irrigated, and this should be done every month. But if she irrigated now, this implied that she would have to wait another six weeks before it could be harvested. Time became urgent, within four perhaps five weeks the rains could start. She was also worried that if it was true and the refinery lacked the capacity to mill all the cane, then they could well use the argument that she had irrigated, to exclude her fields from being harvested at all that year. So, she decided not to irrigate. Finally, two weeks later her field was harvested. The yield was very low and when in September she went with all the other farmers to get paid by the refinery, it became clear that she would receive no money: the harvest did not even cover her outstanding debts.

Compromises in the Field

A male farmer, whose land borders on the land of Doña Martina, once told my partner Lex how he made sure that he got his irrigation turns, and how his cane was cut on time. He said that to make sure that these things get done, he did not go to the people in the offices. They send you from pillar to post. These kind of things had to be arranged with the *canalero*, with the water guard and the inspector, in the field. You have to make a deal with them. And he explained how he made sure he got his irrigation turn always on time and how he was able to arrange extra irrigation turns, while other farmers were not able to do so. He said:

> "I don't try to bribe the water guard. They have money enough, and the rich man who is using the same canal can always pay him more than I can. No, I don't offer him money. I take something to drink with me, (*unos refrescos, vino y hielo*), and when I meet him on my fields, I invite him to have a drink and eat some *chicharón* (crackling). We get on well together, and I think he prefers a drink (*cuba*) to money when he is working. When I meet him in town I always invite him for a drink. Sometimes I invite him to dine in the '*mariscos*' (seafood restaurants with the reputation of being brothels), but this often turns out to be very expensive. The devils always eat seafood and drinks there are very expensive. And sometimes they also want a woman - all at my expense. No that costs too much. It is better to do this only when you are with other farmers, so that you can divide the costs" (Field notes, L14-10-88/3).

When I told this to Doña Martina, she said: "Is that how he gets things done. So the men arrange things among themselves. How can a woman do anything like that? Everybody would think she was a whore!"

As a matter of fact, Doña Martina does not even know the names or the faces of the water guard and the field inspector. She has always gone to the offices. These are closer to her house, and easier to combine with the household chores, since she can go whenever it suits her.

Doña Martina's workman sighs: "I prefer to work for men. Women hardly know anything about agriculture. They are never in the field, but they want to keep a hand on it, and they never trust you. The men I work for are on the land when I am irrigating so they make sure that the water is not stolen by somebody else" (Vos, 1989).

Viricentric Practices of Agricultural Institutions

The above story shows in a nutshell some of the problems which confront women once they are in charge of a farm. Doña Martina's way of managing cane production only works in situations of relative harmony, when there is no scarcity of water nor pressure to have the cane

harvested. But in situations of crisis, she gets the worst of it. In a crisis like the situation described above, it turns out that she neither knows the right people (the water guard and the field inspector), nor uses the right means (maintaining friendly ties with them, in one way or another trying to assure their support) to get what she needs.

It should be remembered that she is already quite an elderly woman. She is not able, nor does she want to spend more time on her fields, which would be necessary if she were to develop a different management style. But it is not only her age, since younger women with land also state how difficult it is for a woman to meet the water guard in the field and arrange irrigation turns, partly because it is difficult for them to combine this with their work at home, but also because it is not suitable for a woman to meet men in the field. And even if they could regularly meet the *canalero*, the question arises as to whether in any case they would be able to develop friendly relations with him.

Here I have taken the case of the canaleros, but the same goes for the representatives of the bank or the insurance agent, or the field inspectors of the refinery. For one reason or another, it is important to maintain friendly relations with them in order to get things done. And as it is almost exclusively a man's world, it is not easy for women to become part of it.

In a neighbouring valley, one of the water guards was a woman. What she told about the practices in the field confirms how difficult it is for a women to move in this man's world. When she started to work as water guard, it soon became clear that one family ran things along one of the canals. They took water whenever they wanted, and had fenced a part of the land and the path running alongside the irrigation canal. This meant that many women from the village had to walk a long way round to fetch water or to wash clothes. The water guard visited this family to make it clear that the road along the canal belonged to the state, and was not their private property, and that they must take down the fences. But they did not give a straw. Next she went to the office in Guadalajara, and explained the problem to her superiors. Somebody at the office accompanied her on her next visit. But nothing changed. Only after threatening them with bringing in the army did they finally remove the fences. Ever since, this family have thwarted her every move. They have tried to intimidate her, have spread all kind of rumours about her, and have boycotted all her initiatives. She says:

> "Often I became very angry. I would cry from pure rage. They wanted me out of their way, so that they could continue to do whatever they wanted. But they could not buy me as easily as the former water guard. He was a young man. He was easy to manipulate. They just invited him for a drink, or to a cantina where there are women, and they could always convince him of their right. But they could not take me to a cantina. They were used to arranging things between men. I was not so easy to manipulate. You know, I think that those women who work in the cantinas have a big influence on the course of events in such a village. When men want to arrange things, they always take refuge in the cantinas. And when they become drunk they talk about what is bothering them. Of course those women advise them. If you want to know

how in reality things are arranged, you should spend your time in one of these cantinas" (Field notes, 27-04-88).

Obviously in this particular case, the former water guard in no way tried to influence existing power relations, and thus reproduced them. Not all water guards are like this, some of them feel very loyal towards small farmers because of their own backgrounds, and thus in one way or another try to intervene in their favour (Van der Zaag, 1992). However, I have no accounts whatsoever of any water guard, or any other representative of any other institution, making a stand for female farmers. They have to find ways for themselves to cope with the viricentric practices of the institutions important for the production process on their farms. Although among themselves women will complain and blame the men for the problems they encounter in being a farmer, for they treat women as nothing, they hardly ever question these practices in public. In practice, there seems to be only two options open to women. One is to go about ensuring the loyalty of men towards you, so that they take care of the management of the farm, without cheating you. The other is to keep the management in your own hands, and work the farm together with the help of sons.

Men Taking Care of Women's Farms

The most common way out for women is to leave the day to day management of their farm in the hands of men. In the case of Doña Martina it is mainly the management of her sugarcane crop which causes her the most trouble. This is the only part of her farm that she keeps the day to day management of in her own hands. She has nothing to do with the management of the other parts, which are cultivated on a share crop basis. These parcels do not cause her many worries, although she sometimes doubts whether she gets her share of the harvest, or whether the share cropper does not exaggerate the costs. Let me elaborate on this by relating the experience of Doña Teresa.

Doña Teresa: "I Thought He Was a Reliable Worker"

Teresa is 52 years old. She became a widow twelve years ago when she inherited ten hectares of land, all planted with sugarcane. Her sons were still at school, so she decided to enter in a sharecrop arrangement with a pequeño propietario from the neighbouring village. This arrangement lasted 6 years, but it caused many problems. The share cropper always had a list of costs which were difficult for Teresa to control, since she could not spend much time on her land. So when it came to dividing the harvest, she always had the feeling that she was not getting her full share. When her sons finished school, she decided to stop the sharecrop arrangement, and work the land with their help. However, both of them had a job. One was a teacher, and the other worked in the neighbouring village in an office. They did not have much

time to manage the agricultural work. Getting irrigation turns turned out to be particularly difficult: "you have to keep up with the water guard. If you don't have the time he forgets you exist and you lose your turn" she complained. Slowly but surely the yields of the sugarcane declined, until after three years the refinery told them to plough it in and start again since it no longer produced sugar. She got new credit in order to plant again. Since obviously her sons were not able to manage the cultivation of the crop, she decided to give the daily management to another ejidatario, named José. In turn for the management, he would get 30% of the harvest. She especially asked him, since he had been very successful at cultivating melons. He had his own tractor so he was able to carry out the necessary ploughing and other jobs at the appropriate time. At first it seemed to turn out well. The land was ploughed and the cane was sown. It was irrigated and fertilizer was applied and the cane germinated well. But then the melon season started, and José became more and more occupied with his own fields. He started to neglect Teresa's sugarcane. Of course she complained every now and than, and he always promised her that he would take care of it. The extent of his neglect only became obvious when the cane had to be harvested. It turned out that he had never done anything. Before cutting the cane, fire is set to the crop in order to burn the leaves, which would otherwise hinder the cutting. Normally the cane stalks contain enough moisture to prevent them getting burnt. However, Teresa's cane was so dry, that not only the leaves but cane itself was destroyed. After the first irrigation turn, José had never irrigated again. Teresa lost everything. Not only the harvest, but also the plants, which normally sprout again the next season. The only thing she was left with, was a substantial debt with the refinery. She was furious. "I held him to be a good farmer," she said. "A very good farmer. A reliable worker. But look what he did to my cane. He probably thought that since I was a woman, he could fool around with me. But he should have been wiser. I started a case against him, and the judge obliged him to pay all the debts I had with the refinery." However, she could not convince the refinery to accept her again as a *cañera*. They were not prepared to give her more credit. She had been renting out her land for four years when I last spoke to her, to a company which grows tomatoes on it.

Teresa's experience compares well with the experiences of the two women in a previous chapter, who had to defend their land titles within a men's world. The same dynamic is in operation when women want to make their land productive. Agriculture is mainly a man's affair. The terms are set by men, and women have to try to make the best out of the situation. Teresa's experience is just one of many comparable experiences. In business relations with men in the sphere of agriculture, the risk that women will turn out to be the losers is considerable. The most common way to cope with these problems is to find men who can be trusted to work the land: relatives or old family friends who feel loyalty towards you. Like Doña Martina and the two men who work her vegetable and alfalfa parcels. This has caused hardly any problems. Or another old woman who for 17 years has had the same man taking care of her fields. He has become like the son she never had. He not only cares for her fields, but also

takes her to the doctor when necessary, repairs her house and does other odd jobs for her. If possible, women prefer to have close relatives working on their fields. But even this is not without problems, as shown by the case of Doña Imelda. Her husband and his brother worked together on the land for many years. This had never caused any problems. When the husband died, Doña Imelda inherited the land. In the first instance the brother-in-law, with the help of one of Doña Imelda sons, continued to work the land. Then problems started. The husband's brother felt that he had more rights to the land than Doña Imelda, since he had always worked on it. At first the conflict remained at the level of words and comments beneath the surface. However, soon the conflict became more overt. Apart from sugarcane, they also had a parcel of sorghum. This can be harvested twice a year. The first harvest was divided as it had always been, but he wanted to appropriate the second harvest, thinking that Doña Imelda would not notice. However, she did, and when she tried to discuss it he told her to shut up saying what did a woman know about agriculture? They broke up, and now Doña Imelda manages the land herself with the help of her son.

Children's Loyalty, Lifecycle, and Room for Manoeuvre

Generally, women argue that the best way to work the land is with your sons. They have a vested interest in the land, since they will be the future owners. And moreover they will not easily cheat their own mothers.

The loyalty of sons towards their mothers is by no means a given: it is created over the many years of childhood, and women themselves play an important role in this. Having escaped from an authoritarian father, women are often soon disappointed in their husbands. Many are irresponsible in the sense that they spend the little money they earn on women and drink, or they are said to go off for years without letting their families know where they are. Women complain that they prevent them from earning their own income since they are forbidden to leave the house, and they enforce their authority with violence.[2]

As a reaction to problems with their husbands, women devote themselves to the children: they often state that whatever has happened to them, they have at least always been good mothers. For me it was quite shocking to see how children are dragged into the struggles between husband and wife. I remember that at first I was shocked that the presence of their children did not seem to inhibit them at all from blaming the difficulties they had experienced in their lives on their husbands. They never gave a thought to the fact that they were talking of the children's father. Later I got used to it.

The mother figure is widely recognized and discussed in the Mexican literature which looks at the issue from both a societal level where she is symbolized in the Virgen de Guadalupe, mother and defender of the Mexican people, and on the individual level where the importance of the "mother fixation" has been used by some as an explanation of the behaviour of Mexican

men towards women. Based on a study of social characteristics in a Mexican village, Fromm and Maccoby (1970:290) established that the mother fixation is far more common than a father fixation. The mother fixation has an important influence on the development of the social character of men. They write that "Male stories express the conflict between independence and deep fixation on the mother. If the son leaves the mother, he will be able to mature, to become independent, but he loses the mother's unconditional love and the illusion of total security. If he stays with the mother, he feels protected, but at the expense of his own strength and manliness."

Juana Armanda Alegría (1974:152-3) states "on the individual level men adore their mothers, but only their own mothers. She is the most sensible part of himself. It is curious that the Mexican man seems to have ingested the motherly image to carry it forever with him, deep inside, while at the same time she is in reach of the whole world. When a Mexican wants to offend another Mexican, he immediately refers to the mother of the other." However, just as with studies on "machismo", it is mainly discussed from the point of view of men.[3] Women's views on motherhood, the vulnerability but also the power motherhood implies for Mexican women, are hardly analysed.

In the life history of Rosa for instance (given in chapter 6), it became clear that both she and her mother were able to gain more independence from their husbands once the children had grown up. Their grown up children not only provided them economic security, but also emotional support and physical protection when necessary. And elder women use it in arguments with their husbands. More than once I was present at discussions between husband and wife, in which the wife made clear that her husband had made her suffer a lot, but now the children had grown up she would not let him do so again.

Doña Ventura, for instance, once told me that she felt very disappointed in her husband, since within a year of their marriage he started having affairs with other women, and had left her alone with the children on several occasions for long periods of time. He just took off and she did not know whether he would return again. She declared, "I was his nurse, his cook, his slave, and he just ran off with other women. And if I complained, he beat me." Her husband who was present when this was being related defended himself by saying, "But I always sent you all the money I earned!" She responded: "How could I know what money you earned." He brought his hands to his face and said: "Oh, you make me feel ashamed. But now I have bettered my life. I always tell you where I go, and I often bring you presents". "Yes", she said. "Now you have become old. But I have not forgotten how you treated me in the past. But I am not crazy anymore. If you dare to treat me badly again, I will sell the house, sell the cows, rent the land, and off I go to Rigoberto [their son] in Vallarta" (Field notes, 06-04-88).

It is quite common for adult children to economically support the household of their parents, and it is also quite common to give the money to the mother. They are well aware that if they sent it to their father, he would probably spend it on his personal pleasures and not on the household.[4] The relations mothers have with their daughters differ from relations with sons.

Ingrid van Veldhuizen (1990:45) states that when asked about it, women stated that they were far better understood by their daughters and that their economic support was more reliable. Even though daughters were not usually the ones with any income of their own, they managed to help their mothers out economically which could not always be said of sons.

However, sons meant access to the men's world of agriculture and local politics, which is indispensable for women with land. Perhaps sons are the only men that women can exert some authority over. But grown up sons are also men. Sooner or later they are likely to develop drinking habits, and they also want to establish their own independence. Although ideology is on the mothers side, it is not always easy to ensure their continuous support.

What shape 'ensuring support' from a grown up son can take in practice, is shown in the following history. Doña Lupe is the same women who in chapter four so capably managed to create solidarity from the ejido president, and who was partly successful in ensuring land for her sons. It is a somewhat extensive account, since her experience not only shows how she manages to keep enough sons at home to be able to manage her agricultural enterprise without interference from unrelated men, but her experiences also throw up questions about other relevant themes.

Doña Lupe: Ensuring Support

Lupe was still young, 32 years old, when her husband died in a road accident. She had 8 children, four sons and four daughters. At that time the eldest was 13, and the youngest two years old. She inherited the land but, since the children were so small, she saw no possibility of tilling the land herself. She left the children with her mother, and taking only the youngest two, she moved to her sister in Guadalajara to try her luck there. Half a year later her mother decided to move to San Luis Colorado, where a brother and another sister lived. Lupe decided to join them. They fared reasonably well, until Lupe's youngest son fell seriously ill. The medical costs to cure him were very high, and soon Lupe found herself in a very difficult situation. By then the sugar refinery had been functioning for several years, and since they offered medical insurance to all *cañeros*, she decided to return to the village to grow sugar cane. By then her two eldest sons were 16 and 20 years old, so she argued that with their help it should be possible to make a living of her land. When they returned the organization concerned with the removal of the village had just started. She also qualified for a house in the new village. While the government provided the materials, her two eldest sons contributed the labour and constructed the house. Once settled, she and her children managed fairly well. Together with her sons she cultivated the land, growing sugarcane maize and beans. And together with her daughters she ran the household and taking advantage of the fact that her house stood in the centre of the village, she started a small shop. Then the eldest son, who was by now 22 years old, wanted to marry. She was not happy about the idea, but since the second

son said that he could manage the farm with the help of his 13 year old brother, she agreed. Her eldest son married and moved to Guadalajara, where he found a job in a factory.

In 1976, Lupe entered a new relationship with a man.They did not marry but lived together. He was not a farmer. He worked in the sugar refinery and he also made shoes. Sometimes he helped out on the land, but Lupe and her children remained in charge of her multiple enterprise.

Her children were not very happy with their mother's remarriage. They were afraid that sooner or later the new husband would make claims on the house, the land and the shop. This was made worse when Lupe became pregnant, and gave birth to a daughter. Carlos, the second son, argued increasingly with his mother. He wanted to ensure his claims to the house and the land, since as he said, he had worked the land and had constructed the house. However Lupe argued that both the land and the house were registered in her name, and this would remain so as long as she was alive and she would decide who would inherit. Carlos decided to leave, declaring that he had no intention of working to benefit a stranger and his daughter. He was still only 20 years old but for several years had had a girlfriend four years older than himself. They decided to go and live together.

Lupe and her new daughter-in-law got on very badly, since Lupe blamed her for instigating Carlos' decision to leave. Without Carlos, not only cultivating the land, but the whole agricultural part of the enterprise became far more difficult. It was Carlos who had the contacts with the *canaleros* and representatives of the bank and sugar refinery. Since her other two sons were still too young, Lupe now had to do that herself. Certainly her shop helped. With its central location, with its beer and *cubas* (Coca Cola mixed with Mezcal), the little terrace in front of the shop had become a meeting point for men. It was here that she incidentally picked up all kinds of relevant information about her land, whether one should be irrigating, if there was much demand for water etc. And the *canalero* regularly dropped in and was always treated to a beer, and sometimes even the president of one of the farmers' unions visited her small bar.

Carlos and Terre got on well together. They were able to rent a small house in the village. He found a job as a taxi driver and she washed clothes for others and raised pigs and chickens. They had two children. One day, when these children were still small, a drama occurred.

Lupe was away, and her husband got into a fight with the youngest son, the one who had been seriously ill and who had been the reason for Lupe to return to the village. He still had not completely recovered. The boy was injured in the head during the fight. Terre saw this and afraid that something would happen to the boy, she hurried to warn Carlos. Carlos went home furious, determined to teach the man a lesson. All afternoon and all night he kept watch in front of the house, waiting till his stepfather dared to leave the house. When Lupe arrived home the following morning she realized that it was not going to be easy to find a solution to the conflict. Since she had just received payment for the cane harvest, she offered Carlos money to realize his old dream to go to the United States to earn enough money to buy a house

and a car so he could establish himself as an independent cab driver. Although the offer was very attractive, Carlos was reluctant to accept it. His mother could only pay for his journey, and what would happen to Terre and the children while he was away? His mother assured him that she would take care of them, the time had come to forget what had happened in the past, she said. Since one of her daughters had just left home, she could offer Terre work in the shop. In the meantime she would do everything possible to raise the money to send Terre and the children to join him. She convinced Carlos. He went, and Terre and the children stayed.

However, it soon became clear that Lupe had no intention of helping Terre. Although she worked in the shop and did a great deal of the work in the house, Lupe started to neglect her, and worse, she did not pay her for the work done. After a few months Terre decided to stop working for Lupe and to make a living by taking in washing, but she could not manage. Eventually she decided to work in the tomato production which was then at its peak in the valley. She did not want to, because she also knew that working for the tomato companies gave women a bad reputation. But the introduction of tomato production had given women for the first time the opportunity to find more or less permanent work and an income of their own in agriculture. They were no longer under the supervision of male family members. Women worked in teams under a *cabo* or *caba* (male or female supervisor). However, *confianza* and kinship were still important in the formation of these work teams. Parents, for instance, more readily gave permission to daughters to take part in these work groups if the *cabo* was a brother, uncle or *compadre*. Even so permission was usually only given when economic necessity was high. But the work offered new opportunities to women, and especially to single (unmarried) mothers. It was perhaps because the work teams were made up of so many single mothers that such work had a bad reputation. They were considered to be women of easy virtue.

Terre knew this, and it was why she had hesitated so long to look for work in agriculture. However, since she saw no other solution, she finally swallowed her doubts and accepted. It does not take long for gossip to start in the village. "Terre does so well these days because she lets men maintain her", was a typical comment. Terre was well aware of the stories. It hurt her, but since she had no alternative she had to carry on. To her indignation she noted that her mother-in-law also believed the gossip, without bothering to verify it. But what was worse, she wrote to Carlos to let him know what was being said. Carlos believed it, since he heard the same story from different people. He decided he did not want anything more to do with Terre, and since they were not officially married he did not feel any obligation, either towards her, or their children. Terre never received any letter or card. He simply walked out of her life. In the village her position became even more difficult. Her father forbade her to work in tomato production and she no longer knew what to do. Without work and without any help from the family she could not make a living in the village. She decided to leave for the United States, where a brother was living who was prepared to pay for her trip. She took the children with

her and went. Soon she met someone else there. She married this man and never returned to the village.

In the meantime Lupe's second husband had unexpectedly died of a heart attack. Since her daughters had by then all left home, only the two youngest sons, her daughter from her second marriage and two grandchildren, a baby and a toddler, lived with her. The older of these two sons was then 18 years old. He did not like farm work. He was more interested in cars. The other, 16 years old, was the one with the weak health. It was not easy for Lupe to keep the business going. Thus when she heard that Terre had married, she immediately wrote to Carlos with the news and tried to pursuade him to come back and work the farm. And if he was no longer interested in this then she could probably get him a job as a driver on one of the refinery trucks. This would have carried some conviction, for she had become an active member of the National Peasant Confederation, the CNC, and she had friendly relations with its head, who regularly visited her shop to have a drink with her. She wrote to Carlos that surely this man would do her the favour of finding him a job.

Carlos was not doing very well in the United States, and his dream of having his own house and car was still far away. So he decided to return to the village. He was not interested in working for his mother again but was attracted by the prospects of becoming a truck driver. Once home it soon became clear that his mother was not trying very hard to get him such a job, and since he himself did not have the necessary contacts there was nothing else to do but work on the farm of his mother. She tried to appease him by saying that the farm would one day be his and she would like him to get sufficient experience in farming. He, however, knew that his mother easily changed her mind about who would inherit the land, and had not given up his dream of becoming a driver. In the meantime it suited him to help his mother out by cultivating her land and doing all kinds of jobs in and around the house.

Finally, however, when it became clear that his youngest brother was able to help his mother, Carlos decided to return to the United States. For two years now Lupe has worked her land with the youngest son. His health now permits him to work on the land and he is not yet married. Lupe says that he will inherit.

What Does Lupe's History Show?

Lupe's main worry was to keep her sons at home so that she had help with the land. The internal management of the farm, once one or more of her sons were working on it, caused her few problems. She obviously had the authority to set the terms of the relationship. With sons women have far fewer problems over competence, control over the production process and over the distribution of the harvest. Although women have land, are ejidatarias, this does not per se provide them with the authority to set the terms of cooperation with the men working for them or sharecropping with them.

Lupe is very actively engaged in organizing male support. In the present case, it is from her sons; in the case given in chapter four, where she was trying to ensure access to land, it was from the local politicians. It is quite striking that she indeed focusses entirely on men to get things done, and never on other women. On the contrary, she can be quite ruthless to women who might stand in her way. One can see this in the treatment of her daughter-in -law whom she badly lets down. She once told me that in fact she can't get on well with women. "What's more", she said, "for the things I am engaged in, I have to relate myself more with men than with women." Since she does not behave like most other women in the village, there are often rumours flying around about her decency, and women in particular accuse her of being of easy virtue. Men generally show more clemency: "It is not easy for her, she has to be both father and mother."

Her land is the trump card with regard to her sons. She dangles the carrot of inheritance and when this does not work, as with Carlos for example who has no real agricultural ambitions, she uses other tactics, promising him that she will get him a job as a truck driver. She says she is able to do so, since she has good relations with the president of the cane producers' union. They have known each other for several years since she was secretary of the sports committee and organized union sporting and other festive events. He calls in at the shop every now and then. He has used his influence on several occasions to get things done for her. For instance he arranged a passport for Carlos, so when he returned to the United States he did not have to pay *coyotes* to cross the border illegally.

Lastly, she uses her status as ejidataria to develop relations with the directory board of the ejido. It was in this that she managed to get 4 hectares of land, registered in the name of one of her sons, and when he sold this land, she made the directory board intervene in her favour.

Obviously land implies new identities for women to draw on, *cañera*, ejidataria. They open up a whole range of entrances into the men's world, which are usually not readily accessible to women. And Lupe skilfully makes use of it. Land for Lupe means far more than just a source of income: it is a central item in cementing social and political networks in a world to which otherwise she would have no access. I will come back to that later.

Moving so actively in the men's world does not imply that she contradicts gender ideology. On the contrary, she is careful not to, at least at the verbal level. As we have seen in chapter 4, on public occasions she behaves in a very 'feminine' way, and she loves to stress that everything she does is to benefit her children, implying what a good mother she is.

A last salient feature in the account is that, although she married again, she retained control of the farm enterprise. She is very keen to stress that although her second husband might have helped her every now and then, he did not really know much about agriculture, and that it was her enterprise. Obviously giving the daily management to her second husband was no option. She probably appreciated too much what the land had brought her.

With Him, I Suffered Only Hunger. But with Another? Only God Knows!

None of the widows thought that remarrying was a serious option in coping with the problems encountered in managing their farm enterprise. Several reasons were given. One was that it would imply again falling under the authority of a husband. One women was only 38 years old when she became a widow. She suffered several very difficult years, since she had to take care of seven children the oldest of them only fourteen and the youngest two years old. She never thought of marrying again:

> "I did not want to have more children. Life is very difficult with so many children. If I now see all my children, all married and with their own families, I am still amazed that I have managed to raise them all. But I did not want to marry again. To a certain degree I was happy that I could organize my life as I wished, that I could eat what I wanted, and that there was no one who could forbid me to leave the house without permission" (Fieldnotes, 25-04-88).

Or like Maria Isabel said, when I asked her why she had never remarried:

> "My husband was poor, but he was a good man. He took good care of me and the children. I have nothing to complain about. With him I suffered only poverty. But with other men.... only God knows" (Fieldnotes, 26-04-88).

Further, the experience of Doña Andrea, one of the widows of the village with land, was often told to show the dangers of wanting to marry again. She was in her thirties when she became a widow. She fell in love with a man (without land) from a neighbouring village. They got engaged, and decided to get married after the harvest. However, when the crop was harvested, he sold it, and he used the money to marry a young girl from his own village.

And last but not least, as the case of Lupe clearly shows, remarrying often implies problems with the children over the inheritance. Another family in the village fell apart because of problems between the sons of the first marriage and the second husband. In this case also the future rights over the land were at stake.

Only two of the widows I know actually started a new relationship with a man. Neither woman married officially, but decided just to live together. Both did this under the clear understanding that they themselves, often with help of their sons, would continue to be in charge of the agricultural enterprise, and that they themselves would continue to be the ones to decide about who would inherit the land.

Women and the Socio-Political Meaning of Land

Summarizing, women with land confront many problems because of the viricentric practices at the interfaces in agriculture, which influence the division of vital resources such as water, and in sugarcane, the planning of the harvesting of the cane fields. In order to get the best of the

various resources and services one has to take part in these dynamics at the interface, and invest time in maintaining good relations with the front line workers of the different institutions. This is mostly done in the fields, or in other male dominated areas like bars and brothels, where women find it difficult to be and to go. They find several ways of coping with these problems.

One is to find a man who will work the land, and will act in ones interests and accept the responsibility of daily contacts with the institutions. As we have seen, this often causes problems. As we have seen, women are not really taken seriously as farmers and men working on their fields often take advantage and try to get the best out of it for themselves. There are different ways to do this: exaggerating the production costs supposedly made, or appropriating a bigger share of the harvest than they are entitled to. Further, when their own activities compete, the fields of the women are neglected. This solution seems to work out satisfactorily only when the men chosen have a long standing family or other relationship with her, which often has its roots in the days when her late husband was alive, a family friend maybe, who feels solidarity with the woman. Even in these relations, women sometimes feel that they are cheated, but unless this is very obvious, or if this is accompanied with questioning of the legality or morality of her ejidal rights, it is not in the woman's interests to openly question the doubts she has. She cannot afford to disturb this kind of relationship.

Another way of coping with the problems is to work the land with sons. This generally is said to be the most satisfactory way of making the land productive. Sons are probably the only 'men' over whom women have some say. However, sons are due to leave their parental home, to marry, to start their own independent life, and mothers have to develop strategies to keep them around. Schrijvers (1985) describes the same dynamic for Sri Lankan women. Sometimes this is a very conflictive process, like in the case of Lupe. Sometimes more subtle pressure is sufficient, since women have vested a lot of energy in creating solidarity with their children during the years of raising them. And more in general, as we have seen ideologically "mothers" are highly estimated in Mexico.

Remarrying is not seen as a solution. Women do not want to fall again under the authority of a husband. But if nevertheless they do start a new relation, they do not formally marry and make it very clear that the land is their business and not that of their new partner. If they do not do so problems are likely to arise.

Moreover, none of the widows has given the land to one of her sons during her lifetime. It is striking that although they themselves hardly work on the land, and often are only little involved in the practical daily management of the farm, they obviously highly appreciate having legal title to it. It gives them status and financial security. They can attend the ejido meetings, they have access and can maintain formal relations with the institutions, they have to move around in a man's world, they are able to sign for credits, receive social security if they grow sugarcane, they are the ones paid by the refinery and therefore retain control of how money will be spent, etc. This gives women an income and room to manoeuvre which they

would otherwise never have. Ann Whitehead, (1984:189-90, as quoted by Moore, 1988:72) states that a women's capacity to own things, makes them able to act as more fully operative subjects in the wider society:

> "A woman's capacity to 'own' things depends on the extent to which she is legally and actually separable from other people...the issue raised is the extent to which forms of conjugal familial and kinship relations allow her an independent existence so that she can assert rights as an individual against individuals. In many societies a woman's capacity to act in this way may be severely curtailed compared to man's. Conjugal, familial and kinship systems appear often to operate so as to construct women as a subordinate gender, such that by virtue of carrying kinship (or familial or conjugal) status women are less free to act as full subjects in relation to things, and sometimes people."

This is precisely why women with land, the ejidatarias, so highly estimate their land titles, and were always very eager to explain to me that they were owners of the land although others perhaps worked it.

However, as I have argued, there continues to exist many differences between men and women. Being ejidataria does not directly imply that the differences dissolve. Apart from being treated as farmers and ejidatorias, they also continue to be treated as "women". This causes problems, but it is also used by women. This became very clear in the chapter on how women tried to influence local decision making on the division of land in their favour. Perhaps the main gain for women in this respect is that through their land a greater social repertoire becomes available for them.

Although limited, being ejidataria means an entrance to the men's world. It offers the possibility to enter into new social relationships both within the ejido, and with the surrounding institutional environment. And it offers her a chance to deal with men on terms other than before. And as we have seen, these social networks facilitate their ability to do all kind of smaller and bigger favours for men, especially their sons, from getting them land, a passport, or to finding them a job. They can give work to other men. The favours range from offering them the chance to share-crop, to every once in a while helping them out when they need medical care (people can manipulate their rights in the social security system), or getting them credit for fertilizer, for example.[5)]

The cases clearly show that a farm is not only a productive or economic enterprise, but that it is also a socio-political, and even an ideological enterprise. Women derive multiple identities from being in charge of a farm, and it offers them the possibility to move more like full subjects in the world of local politics and of state institutions than they were able to do when still married and without control over property. And lastly, it also shows that women's strategies to cope with everyday problems are not only economic strategies but also social and political, in which the struggle over identity and gender ideology and practice is a central feature.

What can now be concluded, therefore, over the question of the degree to which land gives women the opportunity to challenge the so widely accepted gender ideology and practice that women are housewives and men are farmers; and the question of whether they in any case wish to or are conscious of doing so?

Land indeed does give women the opportunity to challenge gender ideology and practice. It gives them access to the men's world, an opportunity to take on and use new identities, and if men treat them unjustly, they have, and find, the means to fight back. The fact that many of them prefer to stay alone, and when they marry again set the terms of the marriage, shows a determination to defend the room to manoeuvre they have obtained through their land. Nevertheless, they also continue to be housewives, and as a matter of fact this also suits them well. It gives even more room to manoeuvre.

But one further remark is necessary. While widows are to a certain extent able to break with gender ideology and practices in their own life, this does not mean that this attacks gender ideology and practices in general. Both men and women appear to accept the situation of these female farmers as "exceptions to the rule", and in addition they are usually widows, so that in all, they do not therefore have much impact on the situation of married women in general.

Theoretical Implications of the Experience of Female Farmers

Three elements, which deserve more theoretical elaboration, emerge from this chapter.

The first is that neither the interaction between representatives of state institutions and female farmers, nor the interaction between female and male farmers, are gender neutral. Gender ideology and practices have an important influence on the dynamics which evolve between the actors in these encounters, and in the specific problems female farmers have in managing their farms. Thus it is not only relevant to distinguish between husband and wife when talking of a farm enterprise, as we have seen in chapter 6, but also between male and female farmers, when talking about agricultural modernization.

Further, there are marked differences between female farmers in how they try to cope with the problems they face in the daily management of the farm. These differences have to do with the availability of sons who are willing and interested in helping their mothers on the farm. With sons women encounter few problems compared to management with men who are not related to the female farmer. It is important therefore to analyze the social context of farm management. It shows that farming is not only an economic enterprise, but that it involves the maintenance of social relations.

A third point relates to the fact when women are through this entrance to the man's world which is usually closed to her, she is not treated like a man. In this men's world women still often come off as second class citizens. Doña Martina got poor treatment from the refinery and did not know how men managed to get the best out of the system. Of course neither can all

men get the best out of the system, but all the mechanisms for doing so are nevertheless open to them and this is not the case for the women many of whom would not neglect the duties of mother to spend all day building relationships with field inspectors or *canaleros* or risk their reputation as decent women by meeting them in bars or cantinas. Nevertheless, women appreciate their land very much. Notwithstanding the problems it brings, it gives women the possibility to act as fuller subjects in relation to other people, and especially men. This is partly because there is no husband anymore to act as a shield between her and the state institutions and partly because, thanks to their land, they have become ejidatarias and farmers. These identities open doors to the institutional environment which as mothers and housewives are more or less closed to them. Women make use of this not only in relation to their farms, but also to ask for all kind of other bigger and smaller favours. This leads to the recognition that land not only provides women a means of living, but also provides them new identities, and possibilities to extend their socio-political networks.

An agronomic or economic approach to the farm would completely miss the point of why land is such a valuable asset for women; and perhaps this counts for men as well.

Notes

1. In the following account, apart from using my own field data, I also make use of data gathered by Annemiek Vos, 1989.

2. Based on a historical study of court cases, Soledad Gonzales Montes and Pilar Iracheta Cenegorta (1987) show the relationship between the establishment of internal hierarchy within the household and the superiority of husband over wife, and the use of physical violence against women.

> "Although women accepted the dominant ideology over the position assigned to them, they questioned this at every opportunity by their actions. Most of the violence against them was aimed at imposing masculine authority, punishing any questioning by word or deed, in order to reaffirm the established order".

It becomes clear from their account that physical violence against women is related to their life cycle: women suffered attacks especially in the first years of marriage, when the relation between husband and wife was taking shape. This was mostly when she left the house without the permission of her husband, and often because of rumours or gossip about her fidelity. Although there are accounts of violence against elder women, they are less frequent, and mostly because of suspicions of witchcraft.

3. Exceptions are for instance the work of Stevens (1972) and Steenbeek (1985). Both argue that machismo has a feminine counterpart, which they call Marianismo, which ascribes moral superiority to women. Women within this complex find ideological justifications to create room to manoeuvre, and are not just victims.

4. Like Hanneke Renckens (1988:67), to get an image of the history of a certain family, I also used to ask about the history of the different objects present in the house, such as the refrigerator, a dining table, a gas-cooker, etc. Often it became clear that these objects belonged to the woman of the house, and had been bought with money given by their children.

5. The latter two examples need some explanation. The refinery gives all sugarcane producers several "passes" to be able to use the medical services they offer. These passes are not exclusively for the owners of the land, but also for labourers. When a non-*cañero* needs medical care, they ask a *cañero* to do him or her the favour of giving them one of their passes. Ejidatarios can also obtain credit for fertilizer without security. So ejidatarios often do non-ejidatarios a favour by getting them credit.

IX. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Actors and the Socio-Political and Symbolic Order

In this thesis I have shown how women and men, all part of a small ejido in Western Mexico, are actively engaged in struggling to manage the social constraints and conditions they encounter. We have seen that coping with the process of agricultural change and the incorporation of the village and farm enterprise into the wider economic, political and institutional environment requires new skills and knowledge. Male and female farmers are differently engaged in this process: while men develop informal ways of dealing with representatives of the wider world, women tend to interact with them more formally. Furthermore, the actions and interactions of men and women influence the specific materializations and meanings that general processes, such as modernization of agriculture and incorporation, assume within the ejido, within the households and within the lives of different women and men. In this sense, men and women make their own history.

However it is important to acknowledge that people are constrained in the choices they make. They are confronted with circumstances - material, ideological, legal as well as historical - that are beyond the scope of their influence and which exceed the particularities of the lives and the dreams of individual men and women. Normative frameworks, as organized sets of ideas often backed up by state legislation and sanctions; normative frameworks arising from shared experiences and social interaction at local level, backed up by social sanctions like gossiping, being defined as 'outsiders', etc.; and the process of uneven distribution of goods and resources, which is related to the practices of power, limit the choices social actors can make, and influence the strategies they can develop in creating room for manoeuvre. It is therefore important to localize social actors and their actions in terms of existing socio-political and symbolic frameworks.

Anil Ramdas (1988), in his book **The Struggle of the Dancers**, uses the metaphor of a dance and its dancers to underline the tension between actors and the social order. The basic steps and the rhythm of the dance (i.e., in the context of my thesis, the socio-political and symbolic order) are defined, but the individual dancers (i.e. the social actors) have the possibility to interpret the dance according to their own character, former experiences, future expectations, and their relation to the other dancers, and thus slowly but surely to change the dance.

As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, it is of little use seeking to depict a general picture of 'the' socio-political and symbolic order in Mexico, because of its fluid and non-hegemonic character. But it is relevant to describe and analyse those elements which, in specific time and place settings, enable or obstruct different social actors creating room for manoeuvre. These elements emerge from the various normative frameworks and the uneven distribution of goods and services that make up the socio-political and symbolic order. It is against this background that it becomes important to see how the relevant social actors manoeuvre, and to analyze the differences between them.

Let me try to unravel here what in El Rancho the rhythm and the steps of the dance consist of, and what makes each dancer interpret the dance differently. I will concentrate first on the dance, i.e. the normative frameworks and the uneven distribution of goods and services, and next on the dancers, i.e. the social actors.

Normative Frameworks and Uneven Distribution of Goods and Services

Seen in historical perspective (see chapters 3 and 6), the changes brought by the process of incorporation into the wider economic and institutional environment result in a rather optimistic story as told by men, and a rather negative one from the standpoint of women. Through experience, male ejidatarios, generally regarded as heads of households by intervening parties, have been able to organize, individually and collectively, a counterforce against intervention practices that fail to take account of their specific interests. Men have generally been able to profit from new economic and social opportunities. The history of sugarcane production is a good example of this: while at the beginning of the seventies the refinery controlled the production process and set the rates of pay, nowadays the sugarcane producers, by means of two farmers' organizations (whose membership of course also includes female ejidatarias, though few hold positions of leadership), have been able to gain a degree of control over their own affairs. The success of these ejidatarios is, in large measure, due to the fact that ejido land tenure and socio-political organization have prevented a process of proletarization. Officially ejido land cannot be sold, rented or mortgaged, though, in practice, many ways are found around these restrictions. In this particular ejido, a clear symbolic boundary was drawn between "insiders" and "outsiders", the former being ejidatarios and their sons, and the latter, women and vecinos from El Rancho itself, and those from outside El Rancho: money lenders, traders, representatives of government institutions, but also ejidatarios from neighbouring ejidos. The rules of the game differed profoundly for "insiders" as against "outsiders". Although in practice some ejidatarios lost their land, it was always to other "insiders". The

socio-political organization of the ejido protected "insiders" from losing their land to outsiders, such as money lenders, notwithstanding periods of severe indebtedness and dependence. This has meant that the great majority of ejidatarios have survived to learn from their experiences with the outside world, which, because of economic and agricultural change, have become ever more important in village affairs, thus legitimizing the dominance of the world view as projected by male ejidatarios in village politics and farm household organization.

Women (and here I am talking about the wives of ejidatarios) have faced a very different situation. They have not effectively been able to organize a counterforce against viricentric development practices that have ignored their interests, and in a very literal sense, they have been cut off from their original sources of income. In designing and building the new village, which brought men into contact as never before with the wider institutional environment, no account was taken, either by local government or by the ejidatarios themselves, of the economic importance of the *solar* for the continuity of the household and as a source of independence for women. In the new settlement, women could no longer keep small livestock, grow vegetables, pick fruits from their own trees, all of which gave them some income independent of their husbands. The loss of their *solares* and the further loss of control over produce, such as maize and beans, meant, with the changeover to commercial crops such as melon and sugarcane, a reduction of women's economic space and room for manoeuvre. They had some socially-recognized control over these crops when stored at home but none over the money paid to their husbands for the sale of commercial crops.

It is precisely when outside involvement in ejidal and farm affairs increases that women's room for manoeuvre decreases. Previously both men and women used to work on the land but with agricultural modernization it was the men who gained the necessary knowledge and experience to find their way through the institutional environment in order to become commercial farmers, whilst women became marginal to the farm enterprise. Fruit and vegetable growing on a large-scale did offer women new opportunities in agriculture, but at the same time it brought many conflicts between men and women. The changes in the perception of a woman's position that export agriculture entailed caused women working on the melon fields to experience many problems, to such an extent that melon production in the end reinforced the ideology that women should stay at home. This became even more obvious when sugarcane came along. This is almost exclusively a "male crop", and nowadays women work rarely on the land anymore. Agricultural modernization has therefore led to men becoming defined as heads of household, and women as housewives, dependent on the income of their husbands, though in everyday life this ideal is contradicted by the necessity of many women to earn cash in petty trade and low-paid work at home. Moreover, it is precisely because of the

changed definition of their primary function that women can be underpaid: their contribution is considered as an addition to the breadwinners salary, but actually vital for daily survival.

These, then, are the long-term developments. Three normative frameworks seem to have influenced and guided specific developments in El Rancho. The first concerns the distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders". Those defined by the political core of the ejido as outsiders, must play a game with rules and regulations other than those defined as insiders. As we have seen, the division between insiders and outsiders does not coincide with the division between inhabitants of El Rancho and non-inhabitants: wives of ejidatarios and men and women vecinos, all of them El Rancho inhabitants, are defined as outsiders and have little influence and few rights within the ejido. So too of course are the representatives of the state so perceived. They are not to be trusted and should be fleeced for as much as possible.

The second normative framework relates to gender. According to mainstream gender ideology, women are trouble makers: the idea is that if they are not supervised by men, i.e. their fathers, husbands or brothers, they will get involved in affairs and be a disgrace to the family. They should stay at home, and if they have to leave their houses for domestic chores or work in the fields out of economic necessity, then they should do so only with permission, and preferably under the escort of male relatives. It is the men who should take care of the contacts with the world outside the household, and who should provide women with the necessities of life. Often of course, as we have seen in the thesis, practice is very different, and may lead to men using physical and mental violence against women, and to women mobilizing the solidarity and support of their children.

The third normative framework revolves around verticalism and leverage. Among both men and women there exists the widespread belief that, in order to get things done, one needs the support of "influential friends". This belief is built upon previous experience and on an interpretation of how Mexican politics work. Although such political friends are not equally accessible to everybody - the dynamic of building up social networks and maintaining relations with influential men is influenced by both gender ideology and practices, and the symbolic boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders" -, and although there are also many experiences of people being let down by their influential friends, verticalism and leverage continue to be very important in individual and collective strategies of men and women coping with the changing environment.

These normative frameworks are accompanied by and influence the production and reproduction of an uneven distribution of goods and services in El Rancho. It is "male insiders" (i.e. male ejidatarios and their sons) who monopolize the front stage with regard to decision making, and who represent the village with regard to outside institutions. Hence it is them who have the best possibilities for constructing friendly ties with influential men, and for influenc-

ing public decision-making in accordance with their world views and interests. The monopolization of the front stage by "male insiders" has resulted, for example, in the fact that the opinions and the wishes of the women in the matter of the construction of the new village were never voiced or heard. As we have seen, this has had far reaching consequences for the everyday lives of women, and for the practical construction of gender relations. Another example concerns those defined as outsiders who stood no chance in the distribution of the new extension of the land which the ejido was expecting to be granted. However, it should be noted that over the years some fundamental changes have taken place, which have diminished the power of the political core of the ejido. First, the plots of the individual ejidatarios are nowadays well defined and hardly subject to discussion anymore, and second, since government and other institutions have become so overwhelmingly present in the village, the political core cannot monopolize the contacts with the outside world anymore. It is mainly in general ejido or community affairs that they still are very important, but their influence on the development of individual farms or other enterprises is quite small.

Thus far the dance: the normative frameworks and the unequal distribution of goods and services. I now turn to the dancers: the social actors.

Social Actors Creating Room for Manoeuvre

Against the above background, it becomes important to see how the social actors move. In the history chapter (6) we have already pointed to the existence of marked differences between how different men and women cope with the changing environment. These differences were explained by focussing attention on the life cycle, household composition, social networks, and the means of production. Other chapters explore further these differences by focussing on the experiences of different social actors attempting to achieve specific goals: men and women trying to get legal and actual access to land (chapters 3 and 4), a group of male farmers securing as much independence as they can in the management of their farms, notwithstanding the rules and regulations which the banks impose on them (chapter 7), and female farmers trying to assure themselves of male support in order to cope with daily farm management problems, without losing control over their land (chapter 8). These chapters reveal the actual dynamics in which the actors, men and women, are moving.

From the different case studies of individuals and groups it becomes clear that in practice there exist a wide variety of ways of coping with the normative frameworks and the unequal distribution of goods and services. Let me now summarize briefly the salient points from the

different chapters in order to analyse the similarities and differences that arise between the various categories of women and men.

Comparing men and women in their struggles for land (chapters 3 and 4), we see several similarities. For men as well as for women, the whole issue of access to land is firmly embedded in vertical relations and leverage practices. When we look at the interactions between representatives of the ejido and the state (all men), we see that, in order to influence public decision-making, ejidatarios opt to rely on one or two people to find their way through the jungle of rules and regulations. And the same is true for individual ejidatarios, men and women, within the ejido: they rely heavily on friendship ties with Don Alfonso in order to influence decisions within the ejido to their advantage. On both levels this turns out to be a risky strategy: leverage in the state institutions in the end lets the ejido down, and when Don Alfonso dies, those who had invested time and money in their relationships with him are suddenly left with nothing. Moreover, in general it is risky to place your bets on vertical relationships, since this can undermine the horizontal solidarity and local organization which is necessary for building up sufficient pressure from below to ensure that the representatives of state institutions continue to work in one's favour on the case.

Let us now turn to the differences. First, there exist marked differences in the strategies of insiders and outsiders. It is male outsiders - three *vecinos* and one man from a neighbouring village - who hope, by supporting Don Alfonso financially, to assure themselves of his political support. Those who live in El Rancho are not able to extract a receipt from Don Alfonso: they move on the edge of being outsiders and becoming insiders, and cannot risk loosing Don Alfonso's sympathy by showing a lack of trust. On the other hand, the man from the neighbouring village is without doubt an outsider, and thus is able to maintain a more formal relation with Don Alfonso: he obtains a written contract, signed by Alfonso. Later on this turns out to be his salvation: while the ejidatarios deny the claims of the *vecinos*, they have to respect the contract. The male insiders, the ejidatarios themselves, also develop strategies to assure themselves of Don Alfonso's political support. However they do not invest their own money. They allow Don Alfonso to use ejidal funds, never publically show their doubts, and are willing to participate in the occupation of the land. It is only when it becomes clear that Don Alfonso has a list of possible beneficiaries in his mind, that opposition is publically voiced and they begin to stop supporting Don Alfonso.

Second, it turns out that women in general constitute a special category of outsiders, and female *vecinas* in particular. The latter see no possibility whatsoever in building up relations with Don Alfonso. Due to mainstream gender ideology and practices, and from the perspective of the male world, they are considered absolute outsiders. The symbolic boundaries drawn up by the influential men in the ejido, the viricentric practices of decision making, the threat of

physical violence, and the lack of an accepted discourse upon which *vecinas* can establish the legitimacy of their wishes, are obstacles that are almost impossible to overcome. The only woman who is able to get her wishes heard and accepted is Doña Lupe, and she is an ejidataria and the widow of a respected member of the ejido, and consequently is able to draw upon different social identities which make her, figuratively speaking, "less female". But also in her case the social costs are high, especially vis-à-vis other women by whom she is judged not to be a decent woman. This points to the existence of a "female discourse" which carries its own sanctions.

The experiences of two other female ejidatarias, whose ejidal rights are questioned by male ejidatarios, also illustrate the importance of this division between insiders and outsiders and of building networks in the ejido. Moreover, their experiences underline the fact that, within the local arena of decision making, women's perspectives have little chance of being heard, and even less of influencing decision-making. One of the two women is eventually able to have her claims taken seriously once she has managed to bypass the local arena through organizing political pressure from above. Until now, the other woman has not succeeded in doing so, and her claims continue to have little weight in the ejido.

The chapters 7 and 8 focus on the ways in which male and female farmers cope with the problems arising from managing a farm in the context of modern agriculture (i.e. one that is highly integrated into product and labour markets, and the institutional environment). Seen against the historical development of the village, in which men have become experienced in moving within the institutional and socio-political environment, while women are situated on the sideline of agriculture, it is not surprising that the story of male farmers is quite different from that of female farmers.

Chapter 7 consists of an extended case study of a livestock credit group, of whom all but one are male farmers. The development package offered by the Agrarian Bank does not meet the individual requirements of the livestockholders, and so, individually and collectively, they look for loopholes in the system. As we have shown, the ejidatarios turn out to be very successful: they are able to outwit the two Government institutions involved in the credit programme, and in this way to create room to adapt the implementation of the programme so that it takes into account the different realities and interests of the individual livestockholders. They are able to achieve this for two reasons. First, they have a wide variety of individual and collective experiences with this Bank in particular and with government institutions in general; and are therefore perfectly aware of the fact that, when working with Banrural, it is at the point of execution of the programme where they can most influence the course of events. Second, they share a similar image of the state. A whole range of concepts, jokes and commonly-shared anecdotes exist about state institutions and their representatives which express a general lack of

confidence in them. For example, the Agrarian Bank, Banrural, is called Bandidal (a bunch of thieves); and influential representatives are named *cabrones* (he-goats, not to be trusted, but better to have them as friends). Then there are jokes against bank employees who, on the backs of the ejidatarios, are able to accumulate enough money to afford nice cars; and jokes about their former innocence, about successful and not so successful attempts of ejidatarios to claim their rights at the refinery or at the local department of the Ministry of Agriculture, and one could list many more. These experiences and the commonly shared notions on intervening organizations make the credit group strongly united in the face of the bank. At the same time, the recognition of differences amongst themselves makes the group very loosely structured at local level: everyone can do whatever he wishes with the credit. Obviously this is a satisfactory arrangement for the ejidatarios.

The story of the female farmers offers a very different picture. It shows the problems women face when they become part of a viricentric arena, namely the world related to the management of their farms. The division of basic resources such as water, and, in the case of sugarcane, the planning for the harvest of the cane fields is influenced by informal, often viricentric, practices at the interface. In order to get the best out of these various resources and services one has to take part in these social dynamics. As we have seen, this is not easy for women. One way to solve the problem is to look for a man who will take over responsibility for the daily management of the farm; but if this causes difficulties (many experiences are known of men trying to get more then their share of the harvest), the ejidataria will do it herself. However, the constraints placed upon her social interaction with her labourers immediately point to the problems that arise when a woman is the boss of a man, in an activity which is regarded as a man's responsibility and in a social setting in which women are supposed to be subordinated to men (i.e. where there exists no class difference between the woman and man to justify her superiority over him). So, in this situation women normally prefer to work with their son - or sons - the only men over whom, in this social setting, they can exert some authority. Yet, notwithstanding the problems (which are not publicly discussed but individually solved), female ejidatarias do not abdicate the formal management of their farms to others: they stay in charge. Clearly they derive a lot of satisfaction from being not only wife, mother or daughter, but also ejidataria - which carries with it a more independent social identity and high status, and opens doors for them which otherwise would remain closed.

Earlier I stressed that gender, life cycle, socio-political networks, household composition, and the unequal distribution of means of production are important for understanding the wide variety of ways of coping with the changing environment. To conclude, I want to draw attention to three salient points that arise from the foregoing summary, and which help us to deepen our understanding of heterogeneity, of the different ways of dancing. We must, first,

acknowledge the importance of previous collective and individual experiences for shaping present attitudes and capacities. Second, there is some room for manoeuvre which is opened up by making strategic use of different social identities. And third, there is the existence of dominant discourses, upon which 1) local organisation becomes possible and effective, and 2) certain claims by particular social actors are able to influence local decision-making processes, while the claims of others are not even heard. It is hardly necessary anymore to stress further that the importance of these three phenomena is especially visible when we compare the situations of women and men.

Future Lines of Action and Research: Dominant Discourses, Social Identities, and Former Experiences

What has become clear in the course of my research is the importance of previous experience, social identity, dominant discourses and the need to develop horizontal forms of organization for the process of distribution of crucial material and non-material resources, such as land, water, agricultural inputs, opportunities to earn an income, social and political networks, and the ability to get one's points of view heard in public arenas. When I now reflect on future lines of action and research that I would like to pursue, I would take these phenomena as a starting point with the objective of reflecting on them together with the social actors who have now been 'investigated'.

This would, on the one hand, improve mine and their understanding of the dynamics involved, and on the other hand, it might perhaps offer local actors, men and women, some means and alternatives of action that would ensure that their individual and collective perspectives and interests are more fully taken into account.

Notwithstanding the differences between them, on the whole I think that male ejidatarios indeed seem to have found ways of coping with the changing environment, and are able to defend their individual and collective interests, vis-à-vis the outside world as well as with regard to the gender-biased internal organization of farm enterprises, the household and village affairs. It should be noted that macro-economic developments have been favourable for the ejidatarios of El Rancho in the last few years: the prices paid by the government for sugar increased enormously from 1978 onwards, and the prices of meat and milk were also favourable. This facilitates their struggle with the outside world, and legitimizes the dominance of their view of the world in village politics and farm household organization. The weak spot is verticalism and the use of leverage which permeates individual and collective strategies. These mechanisms are fruitful under some conditions, but in other situations inhibit effective local

organization which is necessary to influence public decision-making in their favour. This reliance on *palancas* and verticalism is rationalized by reference to previous experiences and by the use of a specific discourse on the practices of Mexican decision-making. This, then, is one reason why my attention is drawn towards analysing former experiences and dominant discourses. If ejidatarios wish to have more influence on public decision-making through developing diversified and effective strategies, they would have to break down and analyse these experiences and discourses.

The second reason why I would like to develop further research along these lines concerns the experiences of women - wives of ejidatarios and vecinos as well as female ejidatarias - in El Rancho. As I see it, they have not been very effective in defending their individual and collective interests vis-à-vis those of men. With the kinds of change documented in this thesis, they have lost part of their economic and social room for manoeuvre. This has to be understood in the light of the dominant discourse on gender. "Good women" are considered to be obedient wives and responsible mothers. Women are responsible for the internal organisation of the household and the bringing up of the children. Men are supposed to provide women with the necessary means for carrying out these responsibilities. Practice often differs profoundly from this ideology, as the case of El Rancho shows, but nevertheless these ideas are used to legitimize arguments concerning rights and obligations of men and women in the arena of public decision-making. When women have other social identities - such as ejidataria, or farmer - which makes them, symbolically speaking, "less female", they are able, with effort, to open doors which otherwise would be closed to them. Furthermore the gender division of labour and responsibilities, which has become more rigid over the years, and the public/private dichotomy, make it more difficult for women to obtain practical experience and knowledge of the dynamics of public desicion-making. In this way, gender ideology and social identities influence the legitimation of public claims and the acquisition of practical experiences by women.

The latter raises two further, interrelated questions. How can dominant discourses be influenced in order to arrive at a more realistic appreciation of gender practices, especially concerning the importance of labour and income of women for the continuity of the household? And how can women acquire social identities which enable them to move in arenas which presently are hardly accessible to them?

With regard to the first question, it is important to note that among women there do exist alternative "visions of power" (Schrijvers 1985:221) or "counterpoints" (Wertheim 1964:23-37). In addition to the wide variety of jokes and anecdotes which women tell about men in ridicule of their supposed superiority and manliness, there also exist games and ceremonies in which women have a chance to voice their views on gender relations. An example of this are

the women's parties *despedidas de soltera* ('farewell to the unmarried state') organized shortly before a girl marries. Let me give a short account of one such party.

A women's party: a joke on the yoke
(from fieldnotes, October 1987)

"Tomorrow will be the *despedida de soltera* of Mona. Her friends invited me to join the party. I asked what a *despedida de soltera* consisted of. They explained that it is a small party organized by women to celebrate the coming wedding of one of their friends. In this case, Mona. They would give presents, perform some play acts, tell jokes, and have supper together. I said that I would love to join them, and moreover that I would like to participate in the play acts. Of course I could. It was not necessary to rehearse the sketch, since everybody knew it already. I wonder what kind of play it will be! They expect me the following day at five o'clock."

"At half past four I arrived. The house was full of girls and women. The only males present were under four years old. The room was nicely decorated and everybody was exited. Mona had not yet arrived. Some young women were dressing up for the play act. I joined them and asked them what part I could play. They looked around, thought a little while, and then told me that I could be the mother of the bridegroom. They explained that my role was quite easy. The play act was a skit on the wedding ceremony. The bride and groom go to church for the ceremony. The priest marries them and then just before the ceremony is concluded a woman, far advanced in pregnancy, enters the church, claiming that the groom is the father of the baby to be. I simply had to accompany the bridal couple.

I changed clothes. Using pillows I filled out my bosom, belly and buttocks. I painted my face, and sat down to enjoy the jokes and the anticipatory pleasure. At the moment Mona entered the room, the drama started. My role was indeed an easy one, although they had forgotten to tell me some rather important details of the scene: my beloved son turns out to be not only adulterous but also a drunk, and he has a giant penis (a banana) hanging out of his pants. The church ceremony is used by the priest to explain and show my future daughter-in-law the way in which the banana should be used. Of course my son is very willing to cooperate, and in this part the play reaches its hilarious culmination, since the over ripe banana doesn't survive the ceremony and breaks into two pieces. At that moment the pregnant woman enters the scene and the play ends up in complete chaos, with fighting, laughing and people dancing.

The atmosphere is set and the party continues. Food and drinks are served and many jokes are told to make clear what Mona can expect of married life: many pregnancies, problems over other women, fights over money, jealousy, violence, and drunkenness. In some jokes women are presented as being very clever and skilful in their manipulation of their husbands; in other jokes women are pictured as victims. However it does not seem to matter how women are portrayed: every joke provokes exuberant laughter from all the women present.

Finally, it is dark, and although the women are still joking and laughing, some of them start to clean up the mess. To my surprise within only a quarter of an hour the party has come to an end and the atmosphere has changed completely. Several young men drop in to pick up their girlfriends. The couples are formed, the interaction between the women is reduced to close to zero, and the lady of the house, like the other married women who have hurried home, is in a rush to prepare supper for her husband and sons. Then I realize that the party nowise has interrupted the normal daily routines between men and women: when the party started, the work in the house was already done. And the party finishes early so that the married women are on time to prepare supper for their spouses, and the unmarried women are in time for their dates with their boyfriends. Somewhat puzzled I go home. While the whole party was meant to make jokes on gender, the party obviously did not influence the gender practices of everyday life. It did not even disrupt the rhythm of that day. Even on this day the women complied with what was expected of them."

The foregoing account points to the existence of alternative visions or counterpoints to the dominant gender ideology. However, at the same time, it underlines that although women can make explicit their critique of dominant discourses (here through a drama and a "vision of female power"), such an alternative discourse is unlikely to alter everyday practices. Moreover, as I argued, they have no weight in public arenas which are mainly dominated by men. The problem then is not the non-existence of signs of resistance, but the degree of legitimation of them in the process of decision-making and distribution of scarce resources. This contrasts with the high degree of public consensus which discourses on government institutions receive. As I showed in chapter 7, such consensus facilitated the group of livestockholders from influencing the Agrarian Bank's credit programme so that the different realities and interests of the individual farmers were taken into account. This shows the force of a publically-legitimized discourse.

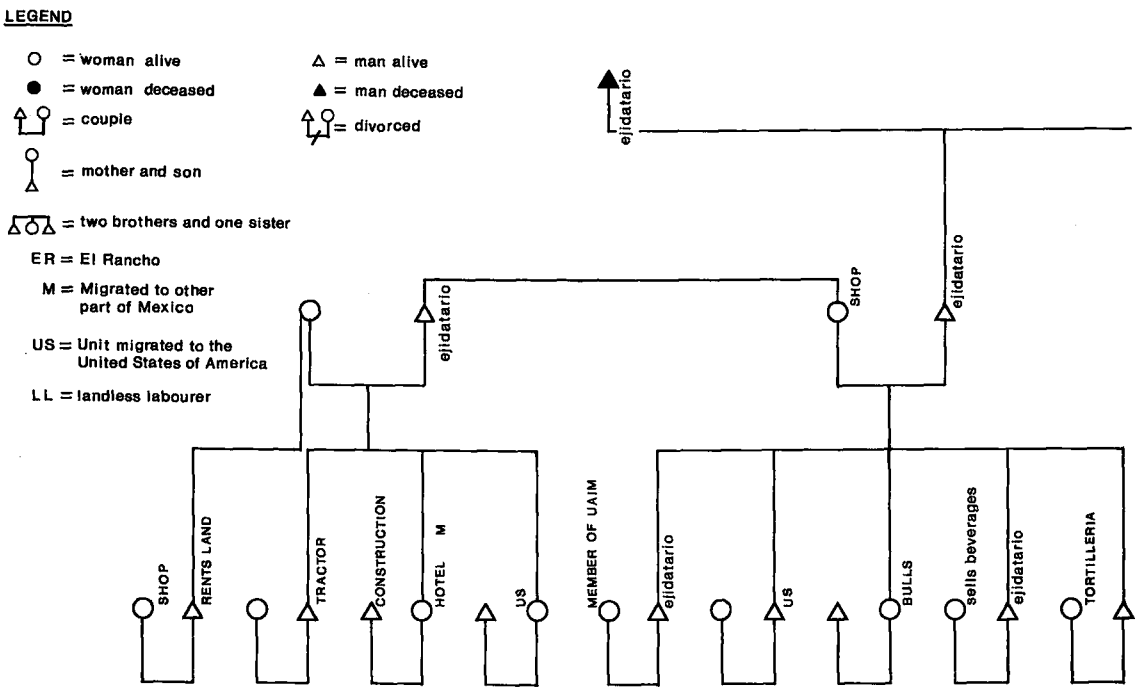
The importance of the second question - How can women acquire social identities which enable them to move in arenas which are presently hardly accessible to them? - is sufficiently

shown in the case material. Nevertheless, there are two points I would like to draw attention to. Focussing upon the issue of how different women have achieved social identities other than 'traditional' female ones, it becomes clear that identities have an ideological and a material base. It is when women become owners of an ejidal right that they become "ejidatarias" and "sugarcane farmers". The second is that social identities are socially constructed; they change over time, and their everyday constitution may differ profoundly from their ideological constitution. The same counts for dominant and alternative discourses: both are socially constructed and receive their public legitimacy within the material reality of their institutional, economic and socio-political environment - in this case, El Rancho. This is why I argue for the continued study of the processes of distribution of vital material and non-material resources, and for an analysis which explores the interrelations between the material, ideological and socio-political aspects of everyday life. By taking the perspective of the least privileged and least powerful, we may reach a fuller understanding of how social actors, men and women, master the struggles of their differentiated social worlds.

ANNEX 1

Genealogy

As stated in Chapter 2 the occupational and residential data were gather by means of 14 different genealogies. The advantage of this way of gathering such information, is that it not only offers the possibility to extract statistical data, but that it also visualizes the social structure of the village. The genealogy presented here is of two of the original founders of the ejido, who both died many years ago. It covers in total 75 persons (39 men and 36 women) living both in El Rancho or residing permanently in other areas of Mexico or the United States of America (9 of the 39 men, and 10 of the 36 women live outside El Rancho). The genealogy covers 14 (13 male, 1 female) ejidatarios. Of the 26 women living in El Rancho, 14 have sources of income other than the chickens in their *solares*. As we can see in the genealogy, the ejidatarios and the landless are related by family ties, and every person living in the village has close relatives living in the United States or other states of Mexico. As mentioned before, the village best can be characterized as different sets of interlocking extended households, through which people of different ages, sexes, occupations, and with different access to vital resources are connected. These social characteristics mean that the dynamic of village and household politics is not only to be understood in the light of the 'haves' and the 'haves-not'. Family ties, ritual kinship, intermarriage, and family hierarchy are part and parcel of the dynamic.


LEGEND
= woman alive
= woman deceased
= couple
= mother and son
= two brothers and one sister
ER = El Rancho
M = Migrated to other part of Mexico
US = Unit migrated to the United States of America
LL = landless labourer
= man alive
= man deceased
= divorced
ejidatario
ejidatario
SHOP
ejidatario
SHOP
RENTS LAND
TRACTOR
CONSTRUCTION
HOTEL M
US
MEMBER OF UAIM
ejidatario
US
BULLS
sells beverages
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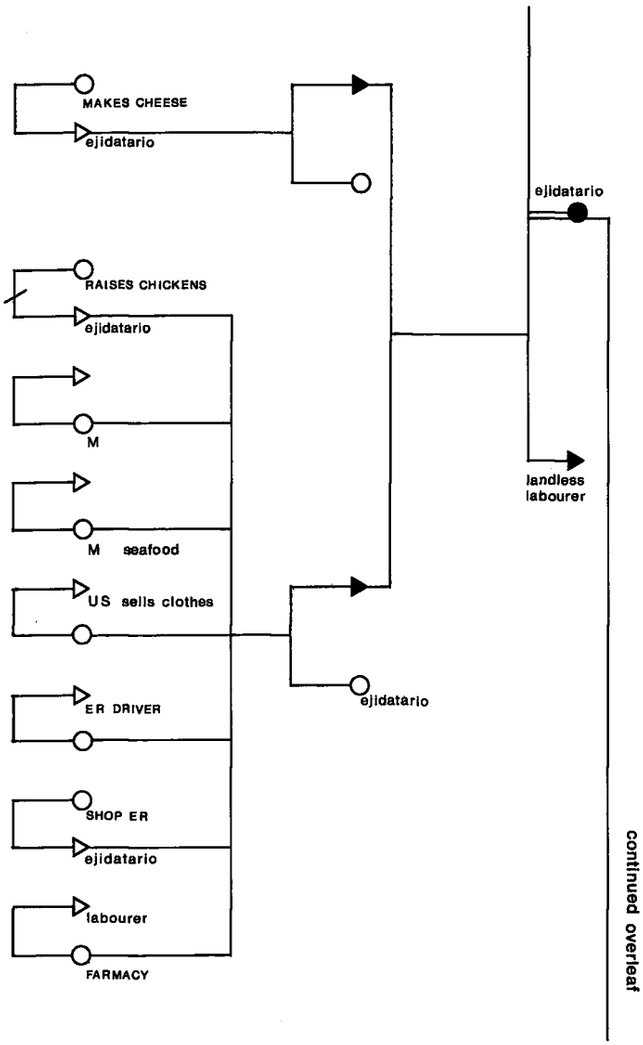
MAKES CHEESE
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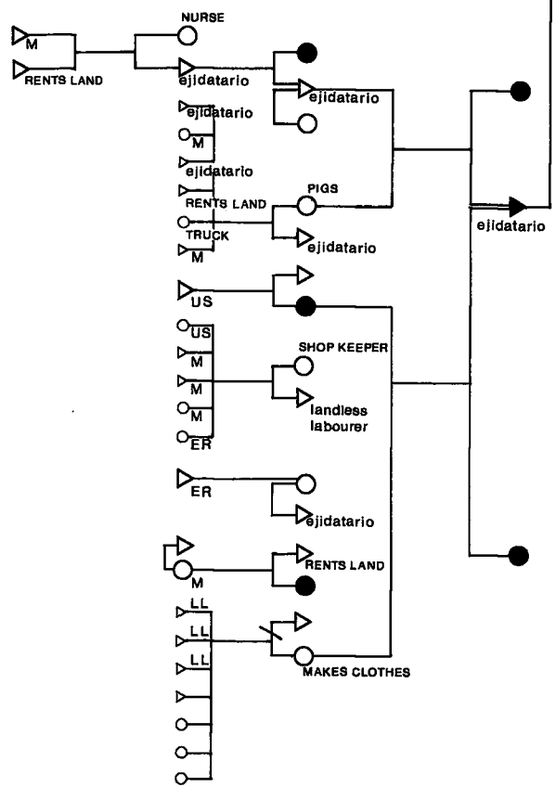
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ER
SHOP KEEPER
landless labourer
ER
ejidatario
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RENTS LAND
LL
LL
LL
MAKES CLOTHES

GLOSSARY

lista de presentes	list of people present at the meeting
actas de posesión	deed of grant
adobe	mud blocks
ambiente	atmosphere
BANRURAL	Agrarian development bank
cabeza	head, leader
cabo	overseer of a group of labourers
cabrones	literally he-goats, synonymous with sons of a bitch
cacique	political boss, deeply rooted in Mexican history
caciquismo	bossism
caja popular	local bank
canalero	water guard
cañero	farmer growing sugar-cane
casa muestra	model house
comadre/compadre	co-parents
comisariado ejidal	president of the ejido
compañero	partner or comrade
confianza	trust
corte de caja	public financial statement
coyote	metaphorically referring to someone who earns his money 'on the side'
cubas	coca cola with rum or tequila
chilares	plot with chillies
chueco	treacherous
depuración	investigation related to ejido land use and rights
ejidatarios	men and women with an ejido right
ejido	corporately organized agrarian communities
encargado	person officially in charge of something
entremetido	busy-body
esquilmos	community land generally used for ejido cattle grazing
fiesta	festival, usually religious

FIRA	a second-level government fund
fria	cold
gringa	woman from the United States
holandesas	milk cows
hombres	men
huaraches	leather-thonged sandals
humildes	humble or poor people/powerless
ingenieros	engineers; synonymous for influential representatives of state institutions, also often referred to derogatorily as "cabrones"
juicio	court case
junta de ganadería	government cattle registration office
licenciados	someone with a university degree, often used synonymously with "ingenieros"
madres solteras	unmarried mothers
mariscos	seafood restaurant with reputation of being a brothel
mayordomo	manager/administrator
mediero	sharecropper
melonero	melon grower
mozo	day labourer
mujeres	women
novenario	a wake of 9 days
padrino	godfather
palanca	leverage
patio	court-yard
peones	permanent labourers on a hacienda
pequeños propietarios	private landowners
personas de confianza	trustworthy people
pilas	stone troughs
planilla	suggestion concerning the team composition of the ejido board
plaza de toros	arena for bull fighting
prestanombre	the lending of one's name as a would-be owner to the real title holder
reforma agraria	ministry of land reform
ricos	the rich; i.e. big landowners, former hacendados, the powerful
rurales	police force in the countryside
SARH	ministry of agriculture and water resources

segundo	second; used to describe the second-in-command
sinvergüenza	without shame
solar	house plot or house garden
tiempo	time; used to describe the custom of selling maize before it is harvested
tomate de cáscara	green tomato
trámites	the paperwork necessary to arrange official affairs
vecinos	neighbours; used to describe non-ejidatario residents of a village
voz y voto	right to speak and vote
yunta	4 hectares of land

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SAMENVATTING

Deze studie handelt over de verschillende wegen die mannen en vrouwen in een plattelandsdorpje in het westen van Mexico vinden om hun bestaanszekerheid veilig te stellen, wanneer ze zich geconfronteerd zien met een proces van snelle verandering van een agrarische economie gericht op zelfvoorziening naar een agrarische economie gericht op commercialisatie van de produktie.

Door de strategieën en de handelingen van verschillende individuele en groepen sociale actoren als uitgangspunt van analyse te nemen, is het mogelijk om de interactie tussen economische, ideologische en socio-politieke factoren die het handelen van actoren beïnvloeden, op een dynamische manier te belichten zonder te vervallen in een simpele deterministische benadering. Tegelijkertijd maakt deze benadering het mogelijk om recht te doen aan de creativiteit en de capaciteiten van sociale actoren om hun eigen wegen en oplossingen te vinden, en daarmee de specifieke materialisatie van algemene processen, als landbouw modernisatie en incorporatie in de wijdere omgeving, gestalte te geven. In deze zin is dit boek een kritiek op het sterke politiek-economische determinisme, wat zo karakteristiek is voor vele van de studies die er bestaan over rurale ontwikkeling in Mexico.

Door de strategieën en handelingen van vrouwen als sociale actoren steeds te vergelijken met mannen als sociale actoren, wordt zichtbaar dat vrouwen en mannen verschillende mogelijkheden hebben en belemmeringen ondervinden voor het veilig stellen van hun bestaanszekerheid. Vrouwen hebben in de loop van de jaren aan mogelijkheden ingeboet, terwijl mannen, in hun functie als vertegenwoordigers van het boerenbedrijf en de sociale gemeenschap ten opzichte van de steeds belangrijker wordende markten en instituties, veel praktische ervaringen hebben op kunnen doen in het verdedigen van hun belangen en het vinden van nieuwe wegen voor het veilig stellen van hun bestaanszekerheid. Het vergelijken van de ervaringen en perspectieven van vrouwen met die van mannen geeft inzicht in de veranderende genderideologie en -praktijken, en de mechanismen die maken dat de interpretatie van de wereld van de mannen wel legitimiteit heeft in het proces van besluitvorming en distributie van goederen en diensten op verschillende niveaus, terwijl die van vrouwen dat niet heeft. In deze zin is de studie een kritiek op de onzichtbaarheid van vrouwen en veranderende gender relaties in veel algemene studies van processen van staatsinterventie en rurale ontwikkeling, waarin nog steeds het huishouden en het agrarisch bedrijf als zwarte doos worden behandeld.

Het dorp, dat voor deze gelegenheid El Rancho is genoemd, bestaat grotendeels uit een ejido. Ejidos komen voort uit de Mexicaanse landhervorming, die voor het grootste deel uitgevoerd werd in de jaren 30 van deze eeuw. Land van de grootgrondbezitters werd onteigend en gegeven aan groepen landloze boeren, voornamelijk mannen. In El Rancho werd het land in de eerste jaren van het bestaan van de ejido collectief beheerd, maar vanaf de jaren 50 is het land opgedeeld en bewerkt en beheert ieder lid van de ejido -de zogenaamde ejidatarios- individueel zijn of haar eigen perceel. De ejido heeft nu 80 leden, hiervan zijn er 65 mannen, 14 vrouwen en 1 groep vrouwen.

Het land is wettelijk geen privé-bezit. Het is officieel van de staat, en de ejidatarios betalen ieder jaar dan ook een symbolisch bedrag aan huur. Het land mag niet verkocht worden, evenmin mag het verhuurd worden voor periodes langer dan twee jaar, en slechts één persoon kan het erven. Deze maatregelen zijn genomen om te voorkomen dat er opnieuw processen van concentratie van land en proletarisering zullen gaan plaatsvinden. Hoewel er in de praktijk vele manieren bestaan om deze restricties te omzeilen, blijkt uit de geschiedenis van El Rancho dat er inderdaad weinig concentratie van land heeft plaatsgevonden. De percelen variëren van 5 tot 15 hectaren, maar de grote meerderheid heeft percelen van 7, 8 of 9 hectaren. Dit verschil komt voort uit het feit dat in de jaren 80 nog een uitbreiding van het ejidoland heeft plaatsgevonden. De toen nieuwe ejidatarios kregen 4 hectaren in plaats van de 8 hectaren die de oude ejidatarios hadden gekregen. Verder zijn er ejidatarios die (een gedeelte van) hun land hebben verkocht aan andere ejidatarios, aan landloze zoons van ejidatarios, of aan landarbeiders die zich al sinds jaar en dag hadden gevestigd in het dorp. Deze handel in land moet goedgekeurd en bemiddeld worden door de leiders van de ejido. Opvallend is dat er nauwelijks land in handen is gekomen van geldschieters en/of de vroegere grootgrondbezitters. Handel in land heeft eigenlijk alleen plaatsgevonden met die mensen die door de politiek invloedrijke mannen van de ejido als "een van ons" werden beschouwd. Voor buitenstaanders, zoals geldschieters, handelaren, en grootschalige agrarische ondernemers is ejido land geen koopwaar gebleken.

Het zijn deze grondbezitsverhoudingen die het mogelijk gemaakt hebben dat de ejidatarios, veelal mannen, de mogelijkheid hebben gehad om door schade en schande te leren omgaan met markten en instituties zonder hun bestaansbasis, de grond kwijt te raken. Ook perioden van grote afhankelijkheid van bijvoorbeeld de suikerrietfabriek, die in 1970 ging functioneren, van zware schulden bij geldschieters en handelaren, en van grote problemen met de verkoop van meloenen en tomaten op de Noord-Amerikaanse markt hebben niet geleid tot proletarisering van de ejidatarios. In tegendeel, uit de twee case studies van interactie tussen de ejidatarios en vertegenwoordigers van verschillende overheidsinstituties en -de hoofdstukken 3 en 7- blijkt dat de mannelijke ejidatarios zeer capabele onderhandelingspartners zijn geworden, die goed in staat zijn om individueel en collectief hun belangen te behartigen. In hoofdstuk 7 gaan de

onderhandelingen over de voorwaarden die gesteld worden door de Bank aan een krediet voor vee. De ejidatarios blijken in de praktijk van iedere dag die voorwaarden helemaal aan de eigen realiteit van hun bedrijf aan te kunnen passen. Hoofdstuk 2 gaat over een verdere uitbreiding van het ejido land. Dit is een complexe en politiek gevoelige aangelegenheid, die grotendeels op het niveau van het Ministerie van Landhervorming in de hoofdstad van de deelstaat moet worden uitgevochten. Uiteindelijk mislukt dit. Maar dit is niet zozeer te wijten aan gebrek aan capaciteiten van de ejidatarios om te onderhandelen met de vertegenwoordigers van het Ministerie van Landhervorming, alswel aan het ontbreken van een sterke horizontale organisatie op het niveau van de ejido. Om zo'n complexe zaak tot een goed einde te brengen, is het nodig om onderling de krachten te bundelen en land te bezetten, om op die manier politieke druk uit te kunnen oefenen. Zo'n horizontale organisatie was er in een zeker stadium van het proces, maar viel uit elkaar doordat men het vertrouwen verloor in de lokale leiders, die de contacten naar boven toe monopoliseerden, niet goed verslag uitbrachten, geen verantwoording aflegden over de gemaakte kosten, en via vriendjespolitiek hun positie in de ejido probeerden te consolideren. Dit soort leiderschap, de vriendjespolitiek, en het monopoliseren van de contacten met mensen hoger in de hiërarchie is een veel beschreven verschijnsel in Mexico, en heeft historische wortels in de bloeiperiode van het grootgrondbezit.

Tot zover het verhaal vanuit het perspectief en de ervaringen van mannen. Het verhaal, verteld vanuit het perspectief en de ervaringen van vrouwen, loopt er parallel aan, maar is helemaal anders van aard. Zodra het belang van verschillende instituties en markten voor de gang van zaken in de boerenbedrijven en de dorpsaangelegenheden toeneemt, nemen de mogelijkheden af die vrouwen hebben om in hun bestaanszekerheid te voorzien. Al van oudsher hebben zowel mannen als vrouwen op het land gewerkt, hoewel mannen veelal de exclusieve verantwoordelijkheid voor het onderhouden van de relaties met de omringende wereld hadden. Toen in het proces van modernisatie van de landbouw die omringende wereld steeds belangrijker werd voor het produktieproces op het bedrijf, nam de invloed van de mannen toe, terwijl vrouwen aan de zijlijn van het bedrijf kwamen te staan. Vrouwen hadden en hebben nog steeds een grote verantwoordelijkheid voor de dagelijkse zorg voor het huishouden en de opvoeding van de kinderen. Hoewel de ideologie bestaat dat mannen voor het benodigde huishoudgeld zorgen, is de realiteit in de praktijk anders: in ruim vijftig procent van de huishoudens in El Rancho zijn het de vrouwen die de verantwoordelijkheid dragen voor het grootste deel van de dagelijkse behoefte aan geld. Door de specifieke materialisatie die modernisatie van de landbouw in El Rancho heeft aangenomen, is landbouw nauwelijks meer een bron van inkomsten voor vrouwen.

Voordat de wijdere acceptatie van geïrrigeerde landbouw een feit was (voor de tweede helft van de jaren '60), werd er maïs, bonen en wat tabak voor eigen consumptie verbouwd. Verder

hielden de vrouwen rond hun huis kippen en varkens en hadden wat fruitbomen. Aan de dagelijkse behoefte van vrouwen aan geld werd voorzien door de verkoop van eieren, varkens en kleine hoeveelheden maïs en bonen, die thuis opgeslagen lagen. Verder werkten ze, gechaperonneerd door hun vader, broers of echtgenoten, tijdens het oogsten van tabak en hete pepertjes die op grotere schaal in de omgeving verbouwd werden.

In eerste instantie veranderde er niet veel voor vrouwen toen eenmaal de geïrrigeerde landbouw geïntroduceerd werd. In tegendeel, de verbouw van meloenen en tomaten voor de Noord-Amerikaanse markt die hiermee op gang kwam, bood meer mogelijkheden voor vrouwen om geld te verdienen, terwijl in de eerste jaren de produktie van maïs en bonen nauwelijks verminderde. Echter er ontstonden veel problemen omdat de arbeid van vrouwen op een nieuwe manier georganiseerd werd. Terwijl vroeger vrouwen samen met hun mannelijke familieleden op het land werkten, en er dus over hun reputatie gewaakt werd, werden er nu werkgroepen van grotendeels vrouwen georganiseerd. Dit vanuit het idee dat vrouwen het delicate werk in de meloen en tomaten produktie beter konden dan mannen, en bovendien beter gedisciplineerd waren. Deze nieuwe organisatie van de arbeid leverde veel roddels op over de reputatie van de vrouwen die voor het eerst niet gechaperonneerd op het land werkten. Huwelijken zijn er op stuk gelopen en in veel gevallen verboden mannen en vaders hun vrouwen en dochters om nog langer op het land te werken.

De ideologie dat vrouwen thuis moesten blijven werd nog verder versterkt door de introductie van suikerriet in de loop van de jaren 70. De produktie van suikerriet in het gebied is sterk gemechaniseerd, en de fabriek organiseert de oogst met behulp van laag betaalde arbeidskrachten uit andere gebieden van Mexico. Kortom, vrouwen uit El Rancho werken niet in de suikerriet produktie. In 1988 stond bijna al het land van de ejido onder suikerriet. Alleen die stukken land die niet geschikt zijn voor suikerriet worden gebruikt als weilanden voor het vee. Er worden geen bonen en nauwelijks maïs meer verbouwd. En aangezien de fabriek uitbetaalt aan de mannen, is landbouw voor vrouwen geen bron van inkomsten meer.

Er is nog een andere kant aan het verhaal van de modernisering van de landbouw in El Rancho. De bemoeienis van de overheidsinstituties met het bedrijf en het dorp, heeft mannen versterkt in hun positie op dorpsniveau. Zij hadden veelal al de verantwoordelijkheid om de contacten met de buitenwereld te onderhouden, maar door vertegenwoordigers van de verschillende instituties zijn zij ook altijd benaderd als degenen die verantwoordelijk zijn voor het de dagelijkse gang van zaken in het dorp en de bedrijven. Wat dit op het niveau van het huishouden heeft betekend, hebben we al gezien. Op het niveau van de besluitvorming in de dorpsaangelegenheden heeft dit betekend dat de ervaringen en perspectieven van vrouwen nauwelijks verwoord worden, en als ze al verwoord worden, dan wordt er nauwelijks legitimiteit aan gehecht.

Dit is heel duidelijk in de hele verplaatsing van het dorp. De suikerrietfabriek loosde zijn afval in de rivier die voor El Rancho als drinkwater diende. Daardoor werd het dorp min of meer onleefbaar gedurende 8 maanden van het jaar. Met overheidssteun is toen het hele dorp verplaatst. In het ontwerp van het nieuwe dorp is geen rekening gehouden met de specifieke wensen van vrouwen, met als gevolg dat het nieuwe dorp meer lijkt op een buitenwijk van een stad, dan een plattelandsdorpje. De huizen zijn mooi, maar de tuinen zijn erg klein. In het nieuwe dorp kunnen vrouwen geen kippen en varkens op grotere schaal meer houden. In letterlijke zin zijn zij hun vitale bestaansbronnen kwijtgeraakt.

Een ander voorbeeld van het gebrek aan invloed van de ervaringen en perspectieven van vrouwen op het besluitvormingsproces op het niveau van de gemeenschap is de moeite die vrouwen hebben om hun wettelijke rechten op grond, meestal verkregen door overerving, in de praktijk te effectueren (hoofdstuk 4). Uit verschillende verhalen blijkt dat vrouwen, ook al zijn zij wettelijk ejidatarias, door de mannelijke ejidatarios worden beschouwd als een speciaal soort buitenstaanders: landbouw is immers een verantwoordelijkheid van mannen. Voor vrouwen gelden er ander regels van het spel dan voor mannen.

Tegelijkertijd blijkt uit de ervaringen van de vrouwelijke leden van de coöperatie, dat zij hun lidmaatschap hogelijk waarderen, ondanks alle problemen die het met zich meebrengt om zich te kunnen handhaven in een sterk viricentristische omgeving. Het land biedt hun niet alleen economische zekerheid, maar het biedt hun ook een andere sociale identiteit dan de traditionele identiteiten zoals "moeder", "dochter" of "echtgenotes". Op basis van de meer onafhankelijke identiteiten van "ejidataria" of "suikerrietproducent" kunnen vrouwen contacten leggen met mensen die anders min of meer buiten hun bereik waren: lokale politici, leiders van de organisatie van suikerrietproducenten, bankpersoneel enzovoort. Behalve de nieuwe mogelijkheden die dit biedt om zich in hun bestaanszekerheid te voorzien, levert het ook een schat aan nieuwe ervaringen op. De situatie van vrouwelijke ejidatarias laat zien dat de waarde van een boerenbedrijf niet alleen vanuit een economisch en agrarisch perspectief, maar ook vanuit een ideologisch en socio-politiek perspectief moet worden bekeken.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Dorien Brunt werd op 27 augustus 1959 geboren in Oudewater. Na het behalen van het eindexamen Atheneum B in Gouda, studeerde zij Niet-Westerse Sociologie aan de Landbouwuniversiteit in Wageningen. In 1983 deed zij veldwerk in Kenia naar participatie van mannen en vrouwen in een kleinschalige autochtone irrigatie-organisatie. In 1986 behaalde zij haar doktoraalsexamen.

In 1984 werkte zij als student-assistent bij het opzetten van een nieuw onderwijselement "Vrouwen en Landbouwontwikkeling" aan de vakgroep Agrarische Sociologie van de Niet-Westerse Gebieden, LUW, en van 1987 tot begin 1992 was zij als wetenschappelijk onderzoeksmedewerkster in dienst van de Stichting voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek in de Tropen (WOTRO). In 1987 en 1988 heeft zij veldonderzoek gedaan in Mexico binnen het kader van een multidisciplinair onderzoeksproject, genaamd "Contrasting Patterns of Irrigation Organization, Peasant Strategies and Planned Intervention: Comparative Studies in Western Mexico." Het team bestond zowel uit Nederlandse als Mexicaanse onderzoekers en studenten. Eind 1989 kreeg zij een kind, en vanaf medio 1990 woont zij in Nicaragua, waar zij binnen het kader van een door DGIS gefinancierd project gericht op herbebossing en erosiebestrijding: "El Pie de Monte", Jalapa, op tijdelijke basis betrokken is bij onderzoek en actie op het gebied van veranderende gender verhoudingen.

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